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REISS, Stanley Melvin, 1930-  
DIMENSIONS OF SELF-CONCEPT AND ACHIEVE-  
MENT IN BRIGHT ELEVENTH-GRADE MALE  
STUDENTS.

The University of Nebraska, Ph.D., 1966  
Education, psychology

University Microfilms, Inc., Ann Arbor, Michigan

DIMENSIONS OF SELF-CONCEPT AND ACHIEVEMENT  
IN BRIGHT ELEVENTH-GRADE MALE STUDENTS

by

Stanley Melvin Reiss

A THESIS

Presented to the Faculty of  
The Graduate College in the University of Nebraska  
In Partial Fulfillment of Requirements  
For the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy  
Department of Educational Psychology and Measurements

Under the Supervision of Dr. Howard E. Tempero

Lincoln, Nebraska

1966

TITLE

DIMENSIONS OF SELF-CONCEPT AND ACHIEVEMENT IN

BRIGHT ELEVENTH-GRADE MALE STUDENTS

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## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The writer wishes to express his gratitude to his adviser, Dr. Howard E. Tempero, who gave so generously of his time and talents throughout the completion of this study. Dr. Marshall S. Hiskey and Dr. Mary A. Krider, members of the Reading Committee, contributed many valuable suggestions and comments which are gratefully acknowledged.

An expression of appreciation is extended to Dr. Rudy L. Fredstrom, Assistant Superintendent in Charge of Curriculum and Instructional Improvement; Mr. Julius A. Humann, Director of Guidance, Pupil Accounting, Research and Special Education; and to all the personnel of the Lincoln Public Schools who helped in gathering the data.

The writer is grateful to Dr. Charles O. Neidt and Dr. Douglas D. Sjogren for their advice regarding the statistical procedures. Many thanks are due to Dr. Edwin A. Rautio for his invaluable assistance through all phases of this investigation.

It is with particular pleasure that the writer acknowledges the patient understanding, encouragement, and support of his wife, Evelyn.

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PREVIEW

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PREVIEW

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

It is a matter of concern to educators and of prime interest to society that the potential abilities of all school children be developed to the fullest. The increasing interest in academic achievement, which was intensified by the successful launching of the Russian Sputnik and the pressures exerted by the scientific community, has focused attention on the underachievement of the more able student. One of our greatest national resources is the intellectual potential of children now in school. It is the achievers in this group who will be expected to contribute to the leadership and development of our society. The bright student who is an underachiever presents an obvious challenge that must be met by the school if it is to fulfill its obligations to the student and to society.

Although potential talent should not be wasted, it was reported by Frerichs (1964) that four out of ten students in the fifth grade will not complete a secondary education. According to Bowman (1960), 40 to 45 percent of the high school students leave school before graduation. It is widely recognized today that a secondary school education is essential if our young citizens are to play meaningful and productive roles in the complex affairs of society.

Wolfe (1960) reported that 40 percent of the high school students who rank in the top third in general intellectual ability do not enter

college. Of those in the top third entering college, nearly 40 percent graduate. Wedemeyer (1953) found that 29 percent of college students in the top decile of intelligence fail to attain significant achievement in scholarship because of emotional, educational, personal, financial, or other problems.

A conference concerning the identification of academically talented students in secondary schools reported that 15 to 25 percent of the gifted students in most school systems are underachievers, and that in some schools the incidence is higher (National Education Association, 1958). The results of an investigation by the New York City Board of Education (1959) involving 4,900 bright high school students indicated that 54 percent of the boys and 33 percent of the girls had scholastic averages which, midway through high school, were so poor that their admission to college was questionable. In one California high school where 7 percent of the students were regarded as gifted, 42 percent of these were found to be underachievers, falling below the top third in scholastic rank (Alter, 1953). Six percent of the students fell in the lowest third in scholastic rank and were considered to be severe underachievers. In another investigation conducted at a private secondary school, Gowan (1955) reported that 12 percent of the students were gifted and 9 percent of these were underachievers. In similar research at a suburban high school, Wilbar (1954) found that 2 percent of the pupils were gifted and 16 percent of these were underachievers.

The percentages reported by these investigators indicate that a large proportion of capable students are not doing school work at a level commensurate with their ability and that many do not graduate

from high school or enter college. The ever-increasing need for knowledge and progress in the physical and social sciences has placed a premium on the adequate utilization of talent and intellectual ability. Those students whose academic performance lags far behind their intellectual ability represent a tremendous loss, not only in terms of the possible contributions to society but also in terms of personal fulfillment and satisfaction.

Because of the increasing concern about the bright student who does not demonstrate a level of achievement that reflects his intellectual potential, various factors related to underachievement have been investigated. Among these are emotionality, socio-economic level, parental attitudes, and goal orientation. The focus of the present investigation was to explore the relationship between self-concept and underachievement of bright male high school juniors and to determine whether there is a specific grade level at which a marked increase in measured underachievement can be shown.

#### Statement of the Problem

The two major purposes of this study were:

1. To determine whether differences exist between bright underachieving and bright achieving eleventh-grade boys in the following five areas: (a) self-concept; (b) ideal self-concept; (c) discrepancy between self-concept and ideal self-concept; (d) self-acceptance; and (e) their perceptions of how the average member of their peer group views himself in terms of (1) self-concept, (2) ideal self-concept, (3) discrepancy

between self-concept and ideal self-concept, and  
(4) self-acceptance.

2. To determine whether there is a specific grade level at which underachievement begins for bright under-achieving eleventh-grade boys.

### Hypotheses

To study these objectives a research design was suggested which included nine null hypotheses.

1. There is no significant difference between the self-concepts of bright underachieving and bright achieving eleventh-grade boys.
2. There is no significant difference between the ideal self-concepts of bright underachieving and bright achieving eleventh-grade boys.
3. There is no significant difference in the discrepancy between the self-concepts and the ideal self-concepts of bright underachieving and bright achieving eleventh-grade boys.
4. There is no significant difference between the degree of self-acceptance of bright underachieving and bright achieving eleventh-grade boys.
5. There is no significant difference between the peer self-concepts of bright underachieving and bright achieving eleventh-grade boys.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Hypotheses 5 through 8 refer to the subject's perception of how the average member of his peer group perceives himself.

6. There is no significant difference between the peer ideal self-concepts of bright underachieving and bright achieving eleventh-grade boys.

7. There is no significant difference in the discrepancy between the peer self-concepts and the peer ideal self-concepts of bright underachieving and bright achieving eleventh-grade boys.

8. There is no significant difference between the degree of peer self-acceptance of bright underachieving and bright achieving eleventh-grade boys.

9. There is no specific grade level at which academic underachievement begins for bright underachieving eleventh-grade boys.

#### Definition of Terms

A bright underachiever is a student who has an IQ of 110 or more on a group intelligence test given in tenth grade and has a cumulative grade-point average of 5.00 or larger (on a 7-point scale with 1 representing the highest grade and 7 the lowest) in tenth and the first half of eleventh grade.

A bright achiever is a student who has an IQ of 110 or more on a group intelligence test given in tenth grade and has a cumulative grade-point average of 3.00 or smaller in tenth and the first half of eleventh grade.

Self-concept refers to the characteristic way an individual perceives himself in relation to his environment.

Ideal self-concept refers to the kind of person an individual wishes to be, as distinguished from how he perceives he is.

Discrepancy between self-concept and ideal self-concept refers to the gap between an individual's characteristic perception of himself as he is and the way he wishes to be.

Self-acceptance refers to the degree to which an individual accepts or rejects aspects of his self-concept.

Peer self-concept refers to an individual's perception of how the average member of his peer group characteristically perceives himself in relation to his environment.

Peer ideal self-concept refers to an individual's perception of how the average member of his peer group wishes to be, as distinguished from how he perceives he is.

Peer self-concept and peer ideal self-concept discrepancy refers to an individual's perception of the gap that the average member of his peer group perceives between the way he is and the way he wishes to be.

Peer self-acceptance refers to an individual's perception of the degree to which the average member of his peer group accepts or rejects aspects of his peer self-concept.



## CHAPTER II

### REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

The review of the literature for this study has been divided into three sections. The first section surveys some of the theoretical constructs related to the self-concept; the second is concerned with the experimental evidence that has attempted to relate the self-concept to achievement; and the third considers the research involving the onset of underachievement.

#### Theory

In recent years the self-concept has achieved increasing importance in psychological thought. Many social scientists support the contention that human behavior is greatly influenced by an individual's view of himself in relation to his environment. It is often maintained that this self-view tends to determine what an individual experiences and how he experiences it. The self-concept has a vital effect upon what a person selects to perceive and what meaning he gives to this perception. This, in turn, can largely determine what an individual learns and how he behaves.

The role of the self-concept has also been emphasized in the integration of personality and the attainment of mental health and psychological adjustment. Stagner (1948, p. 184) felt that it is ". . . the unifying factor running through all our emotional experiences, habits, memories, traits, and values." Allport (1961) considered the concept

of the self as the more or less central core or integrating factor of personality. Cattell (1950) also felt that it plays a crucial role in the formation and integration of the personality. Anderson (1952, p. 236) stated that "the pattern of life of every individual is a living out of his self-image" while Murphy (1947) proposed that no part of behavior is free of the self.

Jersild (1952) indicated that the self-concept is a key factor in mental health. He felt that self-understanding and self-acceptance are essential for achieving mental health and that the main task of education is to help the developing individual understand and accept himself. Concurring with Jersild, Olson and Wattenberg (1955, p. 105) emphasized the importance of the self-concept in mental health when they said:

. . . mental health is dependent upon the strength of the ego, the wholeness of the self-concept. As psychoanalysts gained more experience with children as contrasted with adult neurotics, they have more and more stressed understanding of ego psychology. Meanwhile, the proponents of client-centered counseling, led by Carl Rogers, have found their work consisting largely of helping clients gain a self-concept which leads to inner harmony.

In their discussion of the "adequate personality," Combs and Snygg (1959, p. 248) stressed the importance of the self-concept. Individuals with adequate personalities were described as those who: "(1) perceive themselves in essentially positive ways, (2) are capable of acceptance of self and others, and (3) perceive themselves as closely identified with others." This approach is similar to that of Kelly (1962) who contended that the "fully functioning personality" thinks well of himself and others, and also appreciates his "stake"

in others. According to McQuitty (1950), the "integrated personality" is one in which the various perceptions of the self are seen as characteristic of similar categories of attitudes and behavior in other people. This individual thus finds it possible to accept all of his own interpretations of both inner and outer reality, including perceptions of himself.

Rogers (1947, p. 364) defined the well-adjusted individual as one who is able to accept into his personality organization all perceptions, including those related to his self-concept. He described this individual as follows:

It would appear then that when all of the ways in which the individual perceives himself--all perceptions of the qualities, abilities, impulses, and attitudes of the person, and all perceptions of himself in relation to others--are accepted into the organized conscious concept of the self, then this achievement is accompanied by feelings of comfort and freedom from tension which are experienced as psychological adjustment.

Snygg and Combs (1949, p. 136) adapted Rogers' definition to their phenomenological approach and described the well-adjusted person in terms of the adequacy of his self organization. According to their definition, "a phenomenal self is adequate in the degree to which it is capable of accepting into its organization any and all aspects of reality." McQuitty (1950, p. 473) offered the following definition in estimating psychological adjustment: "Maximum psychological adjustment exists when all of an individual's subjective opinions of himself are entirely acceptable to him." This definition is intended for a subjective clinical evaluation. It is an indirect attempt to estimate the degree to which the concept of the self is integrated.

Maslow (1962, p. 36), who developed a theory of motivation with the concept of the self as its cornerstone, felt as Rogers did that:

No psychological health is possible unless this essential inner core of the person (the self) is fundamentally accepted, loved, and respected by others and by himself. . . .

Although there are a number of different definitions of the self-concept, it is often considered to be the central aspect of personality, consisting of a number of organized, defined ideas, or objects, each with a corresponding attitude indicating its adequacy to the individual who is looking at and judging himself. Raimy (1943), who first defined the self-concept in 1943 and again in 1948, said that it is ". . . the more or less organized perceptual object resulting from present and past self-observation. . . . (it is) the map which each person consults in order to understand himself, especially during moments of crisis or choice (1948, pp. 154-155)." To Strang (1964, p. 102), the self-concept is ". . . the individual's way of perceiving his present status, abilities, and roles." Perkins (1958a, p. 204) defined it ". . . as those perceptions, beliefs, feelings, attitudes, and values which the individual views as part or characteristic of himself." Rogers (1951, pp. 136-137) provided the following definition:

The self-concept, or self-structure, may be thought of as an organized configuration of perceptions of the self which are admissible to awareness. It is composed of such elements as the perceptions of one's characteristics and abilities; the percepts and concepts of the self in relation to others and to the environment; the value qualities which are perceived as associated with experiences and objects; and goals and ideals which are perceived as having positive or negative valence.

Combs (1962, p. 51), in defining the self-concept, distinguished between it and the self-report:

We mean by the self-concept, the ways in which an individual characteristically sees himself. This is the way he "feels" about himself. The self-report, on the other hand, refers to the way in which an individual describes himself when he is asked to do so. These are by no means identical.

Anderson (1952, pp. 227-228) described the self-concept or self-image as follows:

Every one has an image or a concept of himself as a unique person or self, different from every other self. This concept pertains to one's self both as a physical person and as a psychological person--i.e., each one has a physical self-image and a psychological self-image. . . .

The self-concept or image is composed of many parts, and each part is conceived of as having both structure and function or as having both anatomy and physiology. Every organ or member that is conceived of as doing a specific job is included in the individual's physical self-image. Organs are also given different values, depending on the conceived functional value of each one. . . .

It is likewise true that every character trait that carries with it the implication of a result to be obtained through its use is a part of the psychological self-image. Every portion of the psychological self-image thus also has both anatomy and physiology, structure and function. As in a physical area, so in the psychological, there is a hierarchy of traits, some having great value in the individual's conceptual thinking and others having less.

Strang (1957, pp. 68-72) postulated four main dimensions of the self as the individual perceives it:

1. The Basic Self-Concept, or the individual's perception of his abilities and his status and roles in the outer world. This is his concept of the kind of person he thinks he is.
2. The Transitory Perception of Self, or the self-perception which the individual holds at the present time. This view may be lacking in perspective and may be influenced by the mood at the moment or by some recent experience.

3. The Social Self. This is the self as the person thinks others see it. This concept may not correspond with other people's perceptions of him.
4. The Ideal Self. This is the kind of person the individual hopes to be or would like to be.

Strang described some of the possible influences of the social self upon the adolescent's behavior. If he feels that others think he is "dumb" or socially unacceptable, he will tend to view himself in these negative ways. However, if his parents, teachers, and peers have realistically emphasized the positive aspects of his personality and behavior, he will tend to perceive himself more favorably.

A large discrepancy between the way a person perceives himself and the way he wishes to be is thought to be related to maladjustment. Strang, for example, noted that (p. 72):

This (ideal self) may be realistic, too low or too high, depending upon the individual's level of aspiration in relation to his ability and opportunities for self-realization. If the ideal self is set too low, it may be destructive of self-esteem as the individual compares himself with others who have higher aspirations and have achieved much more. If the ideal self is set at an unrealistically high level, he may experience continuous frustration and be more subject to feelings of depression than if there were less discrepancy between the self-perception and the ideal self.

The relationship between possible maladjustment and a large gap between the self-concept and the ideal self-concept was also expressed by Bower and Tashnovian (1955, p. 201) when they stated:

. . . it is possible that a large discrepancy between the ideal or wanted self and actual self may indicate self-dissatisfaction; this may be operationally visible in the individual as an increase in tension or anxiety. It would be hypothesized that a healthy relationship would be found in an individual who can mediate, with awareness and comfort, between the goals of the wanted self and the reality testing of the conceived self.

According to Horney (1950), everyone develops a sense of self which integrates the personality and supplies positive striving in interpersonal relationships. In the neurotic individual, however, this sense of self is "idealized" at the expense of an accurate appraisal of one's abilities and goals. The idealized image becomes a dictator that demands fulfillment regardless of the cost. Thus the real self becomes engaged in a neurotic effort to maintain an exaggerated and unrealistic image of the self. Horney pointed out that the more uncertain an individual is of his basic worth, the more likely he is to construct inner requirements which are so unrealistic that they cannot be satisfied. The pupil, for example, who could readily obtain a B in his course work with ordinary effort is only able to accept himself as an A student. Afraid of being unmasked as something less than his ideal for himself, he may find that he is not able to study at all, giving suitable excuses.

Although each person's self-concept is unique and individual, it is generally maintained that it develops through the interaction of growth processes and personal-social development--the interaction of the person with others within his total environment. The self-concept is influenced by the quality of these social relationships; first with the family and then with others, such as relatives, teachers, peers, and the general community. Individuals learn who and what they are through their experiences, particularly with people. It is through these experiences and relationships that the developing individual attempts to answer the following questions: "Who am I?" "What am I?"



"How can I handle the environment to satisfy my needs?" "What makes me acceptable or unacceptable?"

Mead (1934, pp. 135, 164) is among those who emphasized social interaction as the primary factor in the development of the self:

The self . . . arises in the process of social experience and activity, that is, develops in the given individual as a result of his relations to that process as a whole and to other individuals within that process. . . .

The process out of which the self arises is a social process which implies interaction of the individuals in the group, implies the pre-existence of the group.

Hilgard (1949, p. 379) noted the influence of social interaction when he stated:

The self is thus a product of interpersonal influences, but the question remains whether the end-product is also interpersonal in its expression. Does the self have meaning only as it is reflected in behavior involving other people, either actually or symbolically? Is it true that you can describe a self only according to the ways in which other selves react to it? I am inclined to believe that the self, as a social product, has full meaning only when expressed in social interaction.

The impact of interpersonal relationships on the development of the self-concept was also underscored by Sullivan (1947, pp. 9-10, 21) who said that "the self (is) made up of reflected appraisals . . . it is built largely of personal symbolic elements learned in contact with other significant people." He maintained that the child's earliest self-appraisal is in terms of what other significant people think and feel about him. The feelings and attitudes of these significant people can be communicated to the child through empathy during the early stages of his life and through language later on. Gradually he is able to perceive expressions of approval and disapproval and