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PREVIEW

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**Cross-sectional study of self-concept and post-secondary  
aspirations of students enrolled in grades 9–12**

**Jones, Kenneth Maurice, Ed.D.**

**The University of Nebraska - Lincoln, 1992**

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300 N. Zeeb Rd.  
Ann Arbor, MI 48106

PREVIEW

**CROSS-SECTIONAL STUDY OF SELF-CONCEPT  
AND POST-SECONDARY ASPIRATIONS OF  
STUDENTS ENROLLED IN GRADES 9-12**

by

**Kenneth M. Jones**

**A DISSERTATION**

**Presented to the Faculty of**

**The Graduate College in the University of Nebraska**

**In Partial Fulfillment of Requirements**

**For the Degree of Doctor of Education**

**Major: Interdepartmental Area of Psychological  
and Cultural Studies**

**Under the Supervision of Professor Sheldon L. Stick**

**Lincoln, Nebraska**

**August, 1992**

DISSERTATION TITLE

CROSS-SECTIONAL STUDY OF SELF-CONCEPT AND POST-SECONDARY

ASPIRATIONS OF STUDENTS ENROLLED IN GRADES 9-12

BY

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GRADUATE COLLEGE  
UNIVERSITY OF NEBRASKA

CROSS-SECTIONAL STUDY OF SELF-CONCEPT  
AND POST-SECONDARY ASPIRATIONS OF  
STUDENTS ENROLLED IN GRADES 9-12

Kenneth M. Jones, Ed.D.

University of Nebraska, 1992

Advisor: Sheldon L. Stick

This cross-sectional study compared the overall mean scores of high school students who completed the Person-In-The-Mirror Questionnaire III (PIMQ-III) with their post-secondary aspirations and their primary source of influence on those aspirations. The two null hypotheses tested were: (1) No difference will exist between the students' overall mean scores and their post secondary plans, and (2) No differences will exist between the students' overall mean scores and their source of influence on those aspirations.

Two hundred forty-six high school students (ages 14-19), enrolled in grades 9-12, from a midwestern public school system, volunteered to participate in this study. The students completed a questionnaire which contained 28 forced-response items and six sections that required open responses.

Data analysis led to rejection of the first null hypothesis, which stated there would be no statistically significant differences in the PIMQ-III scores on the basis of post-secondary aspirations. The second null hypothesis was partially rejected as it related to "family-related" sources of influence and partially accepted as it pertained to "nonfamily-related" sources of influence. The findings were discussed as they related to the independent variables of gender, age, grade level, and race.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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because it took each one of you to make this "event" happen. It is my wish that my actions speak louder than my words.

PREVIEW

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# **CHAPTER ONE**

## **INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY**

### **INTRODUCTION**

"Self-concept is one of the oldest areas of social research" (Marsh, Smith, Barnes, & Butler, 1983, p. 772). It has been studied at numerous educational settings (primary through college) and among various populations of students (i.e., gifted, learning-disabled, physically-disabled, mentally retarded). As a result, there have been literally hundreds of research studies conducted in this area (Wylie, 1979). Yet researchers continue to study how self-concept affects the learning process, because low self-concept is one characteristic of students at-risk for failing school (Angeles, 1989; Cutright, 1989).

The idea of an at-risk child revolves about a discussion of learning difficulties that may not be environmentally induced. Palaich's definition (cited in Angeles, 1989, p. 3) is:

"Students at-risk are those who may not make a successful transition to adulthood. Their future could include chronic unemployment, welfare, substance abuse or even prison."

The National School Boards Association (Rosse, 1989, p. 17) stated:

"Children and youth considered to be at-risk are those who are subject to environmental, familial, or societal forces over which they have no control and which hinder their ability to learn in society."

In general, students with low self-concept along with other factors such as little or no participation in extracurricular activities, poorly educated parents, excessive absences from school, recipients of racial, cultural, or sex discrimination tend to drop out of school (Self, 1985; Wittenberg, 1988). The consensus thinking

is that such children received little or no encouragement from school and are reluctant to continue interacting in a non-rewarding environment. The prevailing sentiment is that any improvement in self-concept contributes to success in key areas of a person's life (Gorrell, 1990) such as academic achievement. In view of the potential circularity of academic success and perceptions of self, it seems that while improving an individual's self-concept may not "solve" the problem, it is a giant step forward. The "giant step" may lead toward the development of a stable self-concept, an increased self-efficacy (the feeling of competence to achieve in specific domains, e.g., academic, social, physical, vocation, etc.), or empowerment to control circumstances in one's life.

#### STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

The purpose of this cross-sectional study was to study response patterns to the Person-In-The-Mirror Questionnaire (hereafter labeled PIMQ) of selected high school students enrolled in grades 9-12 and determine if there were any relationships to post-secondary aspirations.

The results of the PIMQ were studied according to the following variables:

1. Gender.
2. Age.
3. Grade level.
4. Race.
5. Two-way interaction between gender and the other independent variables (e.g., age, grade, and race).
6. Three-way interactions among race, grade, and gender.

7. Three-way interactions among age, grade, and gender.
8. Three-way interactions among age, race, and gender.
9. Three-way interactions among age, race, and gender.

## DEFINITIONS

The terms used in this study were defined as follows:

**Self-Concept:** Self-concept is a complex and dynamic configuration of different ways of seeing oneself in relation to one's environment (Gottfredson, 1981; Markus & Wurf, 1986; Purkey, 1970).

**Significant Other:** A significant other is any person viewed by an individual as important and thereby possessing the potential to meaningfully affect the development of the individual's self-concept (McGinnis, 1972) (e.g., parents, siblings, grandparents, etc.).

**Self-Esteem:** Self-esteem pertains to the subjective component of self-concept, which involves a person's overall self-evaluation (Meggert, 1989; Gecas, 1982).

**Influenceability:** Influenceability is "any tendency of a person to change as a function of social pressure" (McGuire, in Wylie, 1979, p. 551).

**Aspiration:** "Aspiration refers to the level of education and occupation to which a person aspires" (Farmer, 1985, p. 365).

## IMPORTANCE OF THE STUDY

This study was designed to address three issues. First, it sought to provide evidence supporting or negating the stated relationship between self-concept and

personal aspirations among selected high school students. Claims have been made that a positive self-concept is needed for academic and occupational success (Clark & Hall, 1983; Super, 1963). Second, the data were expected to contribute to the body of relevant information used by educators who seek to enhance the self-concepts of students regardless of ethnicity, age, or gender differences. Third, the information was viewed as a contribution to the theory regarding the importance of self-concept on vocational choice.

### DELIMITATIONS

Because of the diversity of backgrounds represented by the participants of this study, no control was made for these potentially significant factors: level of socioeconomic background; parents' or guardian's occupation; each student's level of academic achievement; and the demographics of the respective schools.

## **CHAPTER TWO**

### **REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE**

Self-concept has been studied from a variety of contexts. Early theorists focused on an individual's self-knowledge as the central core to his or her personality (Cooley, 1902; James, 1890; Mead, 1934; Rodgers, 1951). Studies also focused on the relationship of a student's self-concept and academic achievement (Hansford & Hattie, 1982; Marsh, Byrne & Shavelson, 1988; Marsh, Parker & Barnes, 1985; Marsh, Smith & Barnes, 1985; and West, Fish & Stevens, 1980). Other investigations considered the relationship between self-concept and vocational development (Farmer, 1985; Gottfredson, 1981; Lynch & Callahan, 1988; Super, 1980; Super, 1963; and Taylor & Pryor, 1985). This chapter presents (1) an historical overview of major theoretical perspectives on self-concept; (2) reviews of selected references on self-knowledge theories that focus on cognitive aspects of self-concept; (3) a critique of the Shavelson Model of Self-Concept which appears to complement cognitive aspects of self-concept; and (4) a discussion of the literature on the relationship between self-concept and personal aspirations.

#### **HISTORICAL OVERVIEW**

James' (1890) treatise on the self is considered a "fixed reference point" regarding subsequent studies of the self (Schiebe, 1985, p. 36). In his opinion, the individual's identity is developed by his or her interaction, affiliation, or identification with particular social reference groups (reference group theory). James proposed that "in its widest sense, the self is the sum total of all that he can

call his (e.g., his body, clothing, reputation, works, etc.)" (p. 291). James further proposed that the self is a unitary structure that symbolizes the center of personality. Although he believed in the monolithic structure of the self, James advanced the idea the self had two major components. The first referred to the empirical self (the me), and the second was called pure ego (the I).

The empirical self is the aspect of self that can be observed. According to James (1890), the empirical self is made up of the spiritual me, the material me, and the social me. The spiritual me refers to the individual's emotions and desires. Schiebe (1985), was more descriptive claiming the spiritual me included "thoughts about God, the cosmos, and the mystery of one's inner life . . ." (p. 38). The material me related to the individual's body, family relationships, and possessions. Epstein (1973) and Schiebe (1985) suggested the material self focused on areas that described ownership. The final component, the social self, epitomized the individual's desire to please, be noticed, or admired by others. According to James (1890), the number of social selves an individual had was dependent upon the number of people whose opinion were held in high regard. As Kihlstrom and Cantor (1984) noted, these subcomponents of the empirical self were not different selves but different facets of the self. Epstein (1973) added the self was closely associated with one's emotions, which were linked to his or her self-esteem. As such, all components of the self were able to bring about feelings to raise or lower an individual's self-esteem. James (1890) said self-feelings (he labeled self-esteem) were the ratio of our actualities to our supposed potentialities. As a result, he developed the following formula:

$$\text{Self-Esteem} = \frac{\text{Success}}{\text{Pretensions}} \quad (\text{p. 310})$$

According to this formula, high self-esteem occurred if a person's success was perceived as being higher than or equal to his or her pretensions. On the other hand, a person whose pretensions were viewed as being greater than his or her success, would have a low self-esteem (Harter, 1987). The function of the pure ego (the I) was to perform observations of the empirical self. Schiebe (1985) opined that James saw the pure ego as "providing the sense and conviction of continuity over time for the entire stream of self" (p. 39). In other words, the pure ego provided stability for the self.

James' (1890) ideas about the self also influenced the thinking of Cooley (1902), who wrote on James' notion of the social self. In Cooley's opinion, the self did not exist in isolation. As a result, he developed the idea of the looking glass self. He suggested an individual's self was developed by his or her perceptions of other people's reactions to him or her. It should be noted that Cooley did not propose an individual would view all evaluations by others on an equal basis. He suggested an individual's knowledge and feeling about the "other" influenced acceptance or rejection of the assessment. Conceivably another person might have been perceived as unimportant, which influenced the individual's decision to disregard that person's perception.

Mead (1934, 1956) further developed the ideas of Cooley (1902) and James (1890). He believed one's self-concept was developed by his or her interactions with others. Language as seen as an integral part of the development of the self, because a person was able to establish competency to take the role of the