

COMPONENTS OF SELF-ESTEEM OF CHILDREN FROM A DEPRIVED CROSS-CULTURAL BACKGROUND

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Results gained in this exploratory study with 100 Filipino children from a deprived cross-cultural background indicate that the majority consider that their family, friends, and school to be important parts of their lives. These are aspects of the self tapped by typical Western self-esteem instruments. However, they also tended to rate as important as food, money, and clothes – things ignored by most Western instruments. As these were the areas of life which they were most likely to feel bad about, such instruments may tend to overestimate their self-esteem.

Keywords: self-esteem, children, deprived background, cross-cultural.

In recent research reviews the necessity of recognizing the multidimensional nature of self-concept has been emphasized (Byrne, 1984; Marsh & Shavelson, 1985). There are now a number of instruments which reflect this property of the self (Fleming & Courtney, 1984; Marsh & Shavelson, 1985). However, these like most other measures of self-esteem, assume that different individuals share the same components of self-esteem – typically covering areas like school, family, friends, and personal appearance.

It also has been common to assess a participant's general self-esteem by simply summing his/her self-ratings on such individual components. This is despite the view held by numerous theorists from William James to the present day that an overall self-appraisal should weight each component according to its subjective importance to the particular participant (Marsh, 1986; Wylie, 1974).

Several recent attempts to demonstrate empirically the need to weight self-esteem components in this way have been unsuccessful (Hoge & McCarthy, 1984; Marsh, 1986). However, as Marsh points out, there were methodological problems with the Hoge and McCarthy study while the components he considered were of importance to the majority of his participants. A better test of the 'weighting' hypothesis would involve self-concept components for which our participants varied considerably in their individual importance ratings. Juhasz (1985) did indeed find age and gender differences in life areas that US adolescents considered important. It would seem plausible that children from cultural backgrounds and economic circumstances

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quite different from those commonly encountered in the United States may well have very different values. Consequently their self-esteem may well be composed of quite different components to those assessed by Western measures of self-esteem. This proposition was tested in an exploratory study with children from a depressed area of the Philippines.

METHOD

The participants were 53 boys and 47 girls aged 12-13 and attending a central school in a rural city of Negros Occidental. This area of the Philippines over the last five years or so has suffered severely economically due to the low prices obtainable for its major crop, sugar. Consequently, unemployment, poverty, and malnutrition are rife.

The children filled out anonymously a modified version of the "How I See Myself" questionnaire (Juhasz, 1985), under the direction of their school principal. They were asked to answer the following questions: "What are the most important areas of your life?" "Which of these usually make you feel good?" "Which of these usually make you feel bad?" The participants were told that they could answer either in English or Cebuano (their local dialect). Most chose to do the former. The participants' responses were context analyzed by the author with assistance from his Cebuano wife when required.

RESULTS

The 100 participants listed a total of 473 life areas which were important to them (i.e., an average of 4.7 per participant). These responses were easy to classify into eight components of self-esteem which were reported by at least 20% of the participants. These components are shown in Table 1 together with the percentage of male and female participants listing that component and the consequent "important" ranking of that component.

From Table 1 it can be seen that over half of the participants considered food, money, school, friends, family, and clothes to be significant aspects of their lives. Religion and recreation (e.g., camping, disco, having fun) were also endorsed by about one quarter of the participants. There was little evidence of sex differences in the responses.

Of the participants' responses, 154 (32.6%) usually made them feel good while 119 (25.2%) usually made them feel bad. The former category typically involved relationships with family, friends, or teacher, while the latter concerned food, money, and clothes.

DISCUSSION

These results indicate that the focus of typical Western measures of self-esteem on life areas such as family, friends, and school is certainly salient for these

TABLE 1: RANKINGS AND PERCENTAGE OF MALES AND FEMALES ENDORSING THE IMPORTANCE OF SELF-ESTEEM COMPONENTS

<i>Self-esteem Components</i>	<i>Percentages</i>		<i>"Importance rankings"</i>	
	<i>Male</i>	<i>Female</i>	<i>Male</i>	<i>Female</i>
<i>Food</i>	63.2	83.0	1	1
<i>Money</i>	58.5	55.3	2	5
<i>School</i>	49.1	66.0	=5, 6	2
<i>Friends</i>	52.8	59.6	=3, 4	4
<i>Family</i>	52.8	51.1	=3, 4	6
<i>Clothes</i>	49.1	63.8	=5, 6	3
<i>Religion</i>	26.4	29.8	=7, 8	7
<i>Recreation</i>	26.4	25.5	=7, 8	8

Filipino children. These are aspects of their lives which the majority of these children consider important and about which they are generally happy. However, life areas such as food, money, and clothes which these Filipinos also rate of importance are ignored by most Western instruments. As these Filipino children tend to be unhappy with these life it may well be that such instruments would overestimate their self-esteem. It could be argued that those latter three life areas have no place in an individual's self-concept. However, James (1890) considered them part of the "material me". Indeed he included as part of the "Me" the "sum total of all that a person can call his, not only his body and his psychic powers, but his clothes and his house, his wife and children, his ancestors and friends, his reputation and work, his lands and horses and yacht and bank account" (p. 291).

James argued that we experienced the gain and loss of all such things as part of ourselves. Perhaps, we need to consider whether the salient "things" for each individual participant or, at least, the most relevant ones for particular subgroups, should be tapped by our self-esteem measuring instruments. This is particularly the case when we are dealing with participants other than from white middle class backgrounds.

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