A NEPALESE INVESTIGATION OF THE ANTECEDENTS OF SELF-ESTEEM

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We investigated the antecedents of self-esteem in a sample of 398 Nepalese secondary school students by correlating possible antecedent variables with scores on facets of self-esteem from an instrument based on the Shavelson, Hubner, and Stanton model of self-esteem. Family structural and status variables showed weak relationships with self-esteem, whereas family psychological variables showed significant relationships with the family facet of self-esteem and with global self-esteem. However, previous school grade was, overall, the strongest predictor of self-esteem.

Keywords: self-esteem, secondary school students, family structure, status, Nepal.

Although numerous researchers have focused on possible antecedents of self-esteem, the evidence is not clear-cut, which Wylie (1979) attributed to the poor quality of research instruments utilized. In particular, she suggested that significant correlates with specific components of self-esteem are being lost when items are combined to give a total score. However, much clearer results have been obtained in recent studies where unproved instrumentation, particularly measures based on the Shavelson, Hubner, and Stanton (1976) hierarchical, multifaceted model of self-esteem, was used.

Literature Review

Gender

Wylie (1979) concluded that there is no evidence for gender differences in overall self-concept at any age level. Marsh, Parker, and Barnes (1985) applied the Self Description Questionnaire (SDQ) and found large gender differences in the self-facets of *physical abilities* (favoring boys) and *reading* (favoring girls). In accord with Wylie's view, there was little or no gender effect on the summed responses to all SDQ items, that is, general self-esteem. Fleming and Whalen (1990) obtained similar findings when using another instrument based on the Shavelson et al. (1976) model.

Home Environment

While it has long been believed that a child's home environment has a major influence on the development of their self-esteem, research has been hampered by lack of clarification of the former variable. However, Song (1982) demonstrated that the *home environment* can be divided into three major facets: *family structure*, which involves birth order and number of children in the home; *social status*, which includes father's occupation, parents' education, and the ability to afford further education; and *family psychological characteristics*, which includes types of rewards and punishment, level of encouragement, and educational activities and interests. Song and Hattie (1984), using structural equation modeling and another instrument based on the Shavelson et al. (1976) self-esteem model, reported no support for the commonly held view that home environment exerts a direct influence on academic achievement. Over four samples of 2,297 Korean adolescents, Song and Hattie found self-esteem to be a mediating variable in the relationship between home environment and academic achievement. Their indicators of social status indirectly affected self-esteem via family psychological characteristics, and they concluded, as have other researchers (e.g., Brookover, LePere, Hamachek, Thomas, & Erickson, 1965; Coopersmith, 1967), that home environment variables are more strongly related to academic self-esteem than to general self-esteem.

Academic Achievement

Hansford and Hattie (1982) conducted a meta-analysis of the self-esteem–academic achievement relationship and reported a correlation between achievement and general self-esteem of .21, rising to .42 for the connection between achievement and academic self-esteem. This finding has been supported in subsequent studies involving instruments based on the Shavelson et al. (1976) model (Fleming & Whalen, 1990; Marsh et al., 1985; Song & Hattie, 1984).

50

Aims of the Present Study

Few of the studies carried out in this area have been conducted in non-Western cultures and, to our knowledge, in only two of these (Song & Hattie, 1984; Watkins, Regmi, & Alfon, 1990) have improved instruments based on the Shavelson et al. (1976) model been utilized.

In this paper, we investigated the correlates of self-esteem of Nepalese children based on one such instrument. Nepal is an economically depressed, mainly agriculturally based country with relatively low levels of literacy and tertiary education. Although contact with tourists is common, Nepal is still essentially a traditional society little affected by the West, and the Hindu religion predominates. Nepal, like many other Third World countries, is a family-oriented society where women are placed on a pedestal but have far more obligations and fewer real powers than men.

In a previous study of Nepalese college students, Watkins et al. (1990) found no significant correlations between any facets of self-esteem and either birth order or family size. Parental education was significantly correlated with self-esteem, with fathers' education being significantly related to both social and mathematics facets of self-esteem but mother's education only with the latter. University grades were also significantly correlated with both total and mathematics self-esteem. Nepalese girls tended to gain lower scores than boys did on total self, mathematics, and physical ability facets.

We extended the above study by investigating Nepalese school—rather than college—students and considering the possible antecedents of family psychological characteristics, such as perceived quality of family relationships and degree of parental permissiveness in child-rearing.

Method

Participants were 398 (196 male, 202 female; M_{age} = 16 years) Nepalese final year secondary school students. The schools' language of instruction was English.

Self-esteem was measured using an instrument developed by Song and Hattie (1984), based on the Shavelson et al. (1976) model of self-concept. This measure has five items tapping each of seven first order dimensions (see Table 1). We found clear second-order factors of academic and nonacademic self-esteem, which had Cronbach's internal consistency coefficient alphas of .81 and .69, respectively. The total self-esteem scale, comprising all 35 items, had an alpha level of .84 in this study.

Participants were asked to indicate their last year's school grade (coded First Division = 1, Second Division = 2, 3rd Division = 3); socioeconomic status (coded rich = 1, average = 2, poor = 3); total number of family members; extent of parents' education (from 1 = illiterate to 6 = doctoral

degree); permissiveness of parents (from permissive = 1 to strict = 3); quality of family relationships (from warm = 1 to cold = 3); birth order; and gender (coded male = 1, female = 2).

Product moment correlations and multiple regression analyses were obtained via SPSS-X (Hull & Nie, 1984). Significance was set at $p < .01$.

Results

Correlations between the possible antecedents and facets of self-esteem are shown in Table 1, where it can be seen that no significant relationships were found between any of the self-esteem facets and family size, family socioeconomic status, extent of father's and mother's education, birth order, and gender. School grades correlated relatively strongly with all academic facets of self-esteem and with total self-esteem. Parental permissiveness and quality of family relationships correlated significantly particularly with the family facet of self-esteem.

Table 2 shows the results of regressing total self-esteem on the antecedents.

Table 2. *Significant Beta Weights From Multiple Regression of Total Self-Esteem on Antecedent Variables*

Antecedents	β
School grades	-.26
Father's permissiveness	-.13
Quality of family relationships	-.11

The obtained multiple R value was .32 ($p < .001$). The only antecedent variables contributing significantly to the prediction of total self-esteem were the previous year's school grade, father's permissiveness, and the quality of family relationships.

Conclusion

Our results generally support the previous Nepalese research of Watkins et al. (1990), in that family structural variables, such as family size, socioeconomic status, and birth order, were not significantly related to the development of positive self-esteem; however, as Watkins et al. predicted, family psychological variables, such as warm family relationships and a relatively permissive attitude to child-rearing, contributed to predicting positive self-esteem. Once again, academic achievement (here represented by the previous year's school grades) made the biggest contribution to self-esteem. No significant correlations with gender were found. However, unlike Watkins et al., the self-esteem instrument did not separate out mathematics and verbal facets of self-esteem, which are the most liable to produce significant gender correlates. Once again, the importance of

Table 1. *Correlations Between Self-Esteem Facets and Possible Antecedent Variables*

Antecedent variables	Class	Achievement	Mobility	Friends	Family	Emotional	Physical	Academic	Nonacademic	Total
					Self-esteem facets					
School grades	-.27*	-.28*	-.19*	-.02	-.03	-.17*	.09	-.31*	-.06	-.26*
Socioeconomic status	-.07	-.08	-.12	-.05	-.03	-.08	-.04	-.09	-.07	-.09
Family size	.07	.05	.02	-.08	-.05	.03	-.04	.06	-.08	.01
Father's education level	-.01	-.04	.03	-.09	-.03	-.05	-.12	-.01	-.10	-.05
Mother's education level	.05	.05	.11	-.06	.09	-.02	-.04	.08	.00	.02
Father's permissiveness	-.12	-.06	-.19*	.06	-.13*	.00	-.08	-.14*	-.08	-.18*
Mother's permissiveness	-.11	.00	-.05	.05	-.17*	-.02	-.10	-.06	-.11	-.12
Quality of family relationships	-.13	-.12	.00	-.11	-.24*	-.08	-.10	-.15*	-.29*	-.13*
Birth order	-.02	-.04	.01	.04	-.06	.02	-.07	-.02	-.06	-.02
Gender	.00	-.09	.00	.08	.11	.03	-.12	-.04	.05	-.01

Note. * $p < .01$.

considering particular facets of self-esteem as well as overall self-esteem was evident, as the family psychological variables and school grades were most strongly related to the relevant facet of self-esteem.

As emphasized by Wylie (1979), correlational studies of possible antecedents of self-esteem should not be interpreted in causal terms. However, we argue that such exploratory investigations of correlations are useful—probably essential—before embarking on intensive qualitative or longitudinal causal modeling research, with the inherent commitment to time and money. Thus, we suggest that future researchers using such sophisticated methods and more representative samples in Nepal, could include academic achievement family psychological characteristics, and, perhaps, gender as possible antecedents of self-esteem. Further, our findings highlight the need to utilize more sophisticated measures of self-esteem, such as those based on the Shavelson et al. (1976) model.

54

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