



Maternal childrearing attitudes and behavioral academic self-esteem in preschool children
by Ruth Cox McGann

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Science in
Home Economics

Montana State University

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Abstract:

The purpose of this study was to investigate the relationships between maternal childrearing attitudes and self-esteem in four to five year old preschool children attending a university based preschool or day care in rural southwestern Montana. The factors of: (a) maternal childrearing attitudes towards acceptance, strictness, democratic practices, training for independence, positive methods of control, and specific methods of control; and (b) child's sex, were examined in relation to the total Behavioral Academic Self-Esteem (BASE) score measures of self-esteem. The study also examined the relationship between responses of mothers of male children and mothers of female children to a 17-item Mother's Questionnaire (a modified version of the Parent Attitude Research Instrument).

Mothers (N=51) of four to five year old preschool children who attended either Montana State University's Child Development Center or Associated Students of MSU Day Care Center completed a 17-item questionnaire designed to measure maternal attitudes toward childrearing. The teachers of these children (N=51) completed a self-esteem rating scale (BASE). Correlational studies were conducted between maternal attitude measures and total BASE score measures of self-esteem. Maternal response patterns and total BASE score measures of self-esteem were tested for homogeneity with respect to sex.

Results indicated that: (a) there was a significant relationship between maternal childrearing attitude subscale measures of acceptance, positive methods of control, and total BASE score measures of self-esteem; (b) there were no sex-based differences in total BASE scores; and (c) mothers of female children did respond differently than mothers of male children to one questionnaire item designed to measure maternal attitudes towards acceptance. These results suggest that the relationship between certain maternal childrearing attitudes and self-esteem measures may vary according to the age and sex of the sample, and that there were no sex based differences in self-esteem measures in this sample of preschool children.

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IN PRESCHOOL CHILDREN

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APPROVAL

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This thesis has been read by each member of the thesis committee and has been found to be satisfactory regarding content, English usage, format, citations, bibliographic style, and consistency, and is ready for submission to the College of Graduate Studies.

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to investigate the relationships between maternal childrearing attitudes and self-esteem in four to five year old preschool children attending a university based preschool or day care in rural southwestern Montana. The factors of: (a) maternal childrearing attitudes towards acceptance, strictness, democratic practices, training for independence, positive methods of control, and specific methods of control; and (b) child's sex, were examined in relation to the total Behavioral Academic Self-Esteem (BASE) score measures of self-esteem. The study also examined the relationship between responses of mothers of male children and mothers of female children to a 17-item Mother's Questionnaire (a modified version of the Parent Attitude Research Instrument).

Mothers (N=51) of four to five year old preschool children who attended either Montana State University's Child Development Center or Associated Students of MSU Day Care Center completed a 17-item questionnaire designed to measure maternal attitudes toward childrearing. The teachers of these children (N=51) completed a self-esteem rating scale (BASE). Correlational studies were conducted between maternal attitude measures and total BASE score measures of self-esteem. Maternal response patterns and total BASE score measures of self-esteem were tested for homogeneity with respect to sex.

Results indicated that: (a) there was a significant relationship between maternal childrearing attitude subscale measures of acceptance, positive methods of control, and total BASE score measures of self-esteem; (b) there were no sex-based differences in total BASE scores; and (c) mothers of female children did respond differently than mothers of male children to one questionnaire item designed to measure maternal attitudes towards acceptance. These results suggest that the relationship between certain maternal childrearing attitudes and self-esteem measures may vary according to the age and sex of the sample, and that there were no sex based differences in self-esteem measures in this sample of preschool children.

CHAPTER 1

MATERNAL CHILDREARING ATTITUDES AND BEHAVIORAL
ACADEMIC SELF-ESTEEM IN PRESCHOOL CHILDREN

Introduction

The achievement of a positive self-esteem is generally considered a desired developmental outcome for children in our society. Recent research has elucidated several of the factors found to be related to the development of positive self-esteem in children. This study will focus on a few of those identified factors. More specifically, the purpose of this study is to provide insight into the relationship between maternal childrearing attitudes and self-esteem in preschool children.

Statement of the Problem

The achievement of a favorable self-attitude, or a positive self-esteem, is regarded by a number of theorists and researchers as being extremely important to the effective functioning of the individual within our society (Coopersmith, 1967; Erikson, 1958; Maslow, 1954; Rogers, 1954).

The experiences that children encounter during the early years of their lives are regarded as being significantly related to the development of self-concept and the evaluative aspect of self-concept,

which is self-esteem (Bloom, 1964; McNelly, 1972; Wylie, 1961; Yamamoto, 1972). A number of researchers concur that it is during the preschool years that children begin to: (a) view themselves as separate persons, (b) judge their self worth, and (c) place value on themselves as individuals (Blazer, 1981; Burns, Boals, & Pruett, 1987; Butler, 1969; Coopersmith, 1967; Gordon, 1968; Mills, 1984; Monte, 1987; Schwartz, 1966). It is also during the preschool years that children's self-perceptions are less firmly established and more likely to be responsive to intervention (Rubin, 1978).

Mills (1984) submitted that the task of developing a positive self-concept during the earlier formative years of a child's life is so important that it should not be left to chance or incidental teaching. Furthermore, he suggested that parents and teachers should be cognizant of the methods and procedures that help young children acquire positive self-concepts.

A number of researchers have suggested that parents play a critical role in the formation of their child's self-esteem (Clarke-Stewart, 1977; Mills, 1984; Samuels, 1977) and, in fact, may exert the original and perhaps the most powerful influence on the child's developing self-concept and self-esteem (Champion, 1973; Hanson & Maynard, 1973; Gordon, 1968).

Recent research has begun to elucidate specific parental practices and attitudes toward childrearing as being correlated with high self-esteem levels in specific populations of children (Atlas, 1973; Clarke-Stewart, 1977; Coopersmith, 1967; Elrod & Crase, 1980; Flynn, 1979; Graybill, 1978; Growe, 1980; Medinnus & Curtis, 1963; Quadri & Kaleem,

1971; Schwartz, 1967; Sears, 1970; Wylie, 1961). However, the majority of this research has involved children between 6 and 15 years of age (Blanton, 1985). Very little research pertaining to self-esteem and the correlates of positive self-esteem formation has been conducted with the preschool aged population (ages three to five). Blanton (1987) and Hughes (1984) cited similar reasons to explain the lack of research in this area. The primary reason cited is lack of psychometrically sound research instruments. Not until recently have adequate measurement tools been made available to study self-esteem in the preschool aged population. Coopersmith and Gilbert's (1982) Behavioral Academic Self-Esteem Scale (BASE) was identified by Hughes (1984) as the instrument of choice for assessing self-esteem levels in preschool populations (ages four through five years of age).

Following an extensive review of the literature on self-esteem and the correlates of positive self-esteem formation in children, both Blanton (1987) and Blazer (1981) found Coopersmith's (1967) study of the antecedents of self-esteem to be the most definitive. In fact, Blanton (1987) described Coopersmith's work as "the quintessential research" (p. 23) in the area of parenting characteristics as correlates of high self-esteem in children.

Coopersmith's (1967) original study looked at a variety of factors that were related to the formation of high self-esteem in 10 to 12 year old boys. He used a number of different research methods to help him ascertain which variables were positively associated with high self-esteem levels in this population group. One of the methods he used was a modified Parent Attitude Research Instrument developed by Schaefer

and Bell (1958). Based on Coopersmith's research findings, there were specific maternal attitudes that were positively associated with high self-esteem levels in 10 to 12 year old boys. Both the maternal attitudes identified by Coopersmith (1967) and his conceptual framework will be utilized in this study.

In summary, there is evidence to suggest that: (a) self-esteem is an important developmental outcome for children, (b) the early childhood preschool years are an important period for laying the foundation for the development of positive self-esteem, (c) parents play a critical role in the formation of positive self-esteem, (d) efforts to facilitate the development of a positive self-esteem may have a greater impact during the earlier years in a child's life, (e) efforts to facilitate the development of positive self-esteem should not be left to chance, (f) specific parental attitudes have been found to be correlated with positive self-esteem in school aged children 6 to 15 years of age, and (g) very little research has been performed correlating parental attitudes and characteristics with positive self-esteem in preschool children four to five years of age.

Rationale

There is evidence to suggest a relationship between the experiences and attitudes children encounter during the early years of their lives and the formation of positive self-esteem. In view of this information, it seems particularly salient that parents and teachers be aware of: (a) existing levels of self-esteem within any population of preschool children, (b) factors that influence the formation of

positive self-esteem within this population, and (c) methods that may enhance the formation of positive self-esteem, as well as methods that may remediate low levels of self-esteem within this population group.

Thus, the purposes of this study are to: (a) ascertain and describe prevailing maternal attitudes toward childrearing with a defined population of mothers of preschool children four to five years of age, utilizing those questions taken from the Parent Attitude Research Instrument (Schaefer & Bell, 1958) that Coopersmith (1967) found to be positively associated with high self-esteem in 10-12 year old boys; (b) ascertain and describe prevailing levels of self-esteem within this same defined preschool age population of four and five year old children, utilizing preschool teacher ratings of self-esteem based on total scores obtained from the Behavioral Academic Self-Esteem rating scale (Coopersmith & Gilberts, 1982); (c) ascertain what correlations may exist between the maternal attitude measures and the measures of self-esteem within this population of four to five year old preschool children and their mothers; and, in addition, compare and contrast mother-son and mother-daughter outcomes.

Conceptual Framework

In order to better understand which antecedent conditions in a child's life correlate with the development of high self-esteem, the conceptual framework formulated by Stanley Coopersmith (1967) will be utilized in this study. For the purposes of this study, self-esteem will be defined as the evaluative aspect of the more global construct of self-concept (Coopersmith, 1967).

Coopersmith (1967) reviewed all of the major theoretical contexts from which self-esteem could be viewed (Adler, 1927; Cooley, 1922; Erikson, 1958; Hartmann, 1958; Rosenberg, 1965; Sullivan, 1953); he concluded that there was no single theoretical context in which self-esteem could be viewed as a unified theory. Cotton (1983) came to a similar conclusion. She stated, "The vast amount of intradisciplinary literature on self-esteem is marked by widely disparate vocabularies, theoretical constructs and research paradigms" (p. 122).

Thus, without a single comprehensive theoretical framework from which to view self-esteem, Coopersmith (1967) formulated a theoretical framework from which to conceptualize and delineate the major conditions and experiences (antecedents) that seem to be associated with the development of positive and negative self-esteem. He based his framework on the view of previous theorists, support from the empirical literature, and his own research findings. He proposed that the specific determining variables of self-esteem be classified under the four principle concepts of (a) successes, (b) values, (c) aspirations, and (d) defenses.

Based on this framework, Coopersmith (1967) suggested that the degree of self-esteem individuals actually express would reflect the extent to which their successes approach their aspirations in areas of performance that are personally valued. The defenses would act to define and interpret what is truly valued, the actual level of aspiration, and what is regarded as successful. Thus, to achieve a positive self-evaluation, individuals would have to reach a level of performance in valued areas that meet or exceed their aspirations, and

they would have to diminish and reject the derogatory implications of any differences or deficiencies.

Each of Coopersmith's four principle concepts will be reviewed. In addition, each of these four concepts and how they relate to the antecedent parent attitudes and practices associated with the formation of positive self-esteem within each major concept category will be discussed. The subjective and behavioral manifestations of self-esteem, as described by Coopersmith (1982) in his BASE will also be reviewed, as well as how they relate to the four principle concepts Coopersmith (1967) identified in his theoretical framework.

Successes

There are four different types of experience that may be used to define success. Each provides its own criteria for judging whether an individual has attained the valued objective, but all provide a sense of increased self-esteem when they are attained. Coopersmith (1967) defined the four sources of self-esteem and the four criteria for defining success in each major areas as follows: "(a) significance--the acceptance, attention and affection of others; (b) power--the ability to control self, and influence and control others; (c) competence--the successful performance in meeting demands for achievement; and (d) virtue--adherence to moral and ethical standards" (p. 38).

It is possible for an individual to achieve high self-esteem by notable attainment in any of these four areas. However, the individual must value that area in order to feel successful. Coopersmith (1967)

emphasized the importance of the individual's immediate interpersonal environment in influencing this self-judgment. He particularly emphasized the importance of the family, school, and/or peers.

Success in the Area of Significance

Success in the area of significance is measured by the concern, attention, and love that is expressed by others. The number of significant individuals and the frequency with which these individuals express acceptance, warmth, interest, and affection provide the basis for favorable self-appraisal. Accepting parents, in particular, have an enhancing effect on self-esteem. By showing their support, encouragement, interest, affection, comradeship, relatively mild yet rational discipline, and indulgent attitude toward training for independence and assertiveness, accepting parents engender a sense of importance (Coopersmith, 1967).

Success in the Area of Power

Success in the area of power is measured by individuals' abilities to control their own behavior or that of others. The individuals' power is determined by the recognition and respect they receive from others. The actual power of children will vary with their age and maturity, and helpful parents will permit greater power as children manifest greater ability and maturity of judgment. The effect of such parental recognition is to provide children with a sense of appreciation for their views and improves their ability to resist pressure to conform. Such treatment is likely to develop within

children a sense of poise, leadership, independence, autonomy, and control over self and others (Coopersmith, 1967).

Success in the Area of Competence

Success in the area of competence is marked by high levels of performance, with the level and tasks varying with age. Coopersmith (1967) supported and expanded on White's (1959) proposal that from infancy onward children experience a biologically given and pleasurable sense of efficacy that accompanies their encounters with the environment, and this becomes the basis for intrinsic motivation toward further levels of competence. White further stressed the importance of children's spontaneous activity in deriving feelings of efficacy and suggested that the experiences following independent achievement may be highly reinforcing in their own right and do not depend upon external agents. White's formulation does not deny the general importance of social approval and disapproval, but proposes that there are innate sources of satisfaction that accompany mastery of the environment, and that they are independent of extrinsic social rewards and punishment. Coopersmith proposed that parents can support their children's sense of efficacy by providing the conditions for its development. Coopersmith also felt that independence training should increase the likelihood that children will take a more active role in their encounters with the environment and may result in more frequent feelings of competence.

Success in the Area of Virtue

Success in the area of virtue is marked by adherence to one's own moral, ethical, and religious principles. Parents initially establish these basic guiding principles, which children eventually internalize. Children will likely develop a positive self-attitude if they adhere to those ethical and religious principles which they have internalized (Coopersmith, 1967).

Values

Coopersmith (1967) also theorized there was a relationship between individuals' values and their sense of success. He hypothesized that individuals differed in the importance they attached to the various successes in their lives. He attributed these differences to differing internalized values persons acquired from their parents and other significant people in their lives. Coopersmith surmised that accepting and respectful treatment is more likely to result in more flexible values and greater acceptance of the values that the parents espouse and express.

Aspirations

The relationship between aspiration and esteem has received little study; yet, Coopersmith (1967) suggested that when the gap between individuals' levels of aspiration and performance is large, they will likely have lowered self-esteem.

Defenses

The relationship between individuals' defense mechanisms and self-esteem was also addressed by Coopersmith (1967). Individuals differ in the manner in which they interpret and handle distressing and ambiguous situations. The manner in which individuals deal with threat and uncertainty represents their way of defending themselves against anxiety or, more specifically, defending their self-esteem against devaluation. Coopersmith suggested that there are a wide range of defenses that can be employed, ranging from massive repressions to redefinitions and rationalizations. He also suggested that characteristic defenses are learned in much the same way as other behaviors, and that the individual will use the defenses similar to those used by persons in their immediate environment that are emotionally close to them. In other words, Coopersmith felt it is the models, particularly the parents or cultural heroes, who provide the effective ways of dealing with anxiety. He contended that these models contribute indirectly to the development of self-esteem by establishing limits and actions that define and interpret events. These models set bounds upon uncertainty and reduce their personal threat of failure. High self-esteem itself provides some form of defense against anxiety, by increasing the likelihood that the individual will feel capable of dealing with adversity. Thus, individuals with the expectation of success are less likely to feel threatened at the onset.

In summary, having formulated his theoretical framework, Coopersmith (1967) conducted research on parental attitudes and

behaviors and their relationship to the formation of self-esteem in children. Based on these correlations, Coopersmith, through factor analysis, identified the parental attitudes and behaviors that appeared to be most relevant to the formation of self-esteem. These attitudes and behaviors are presented under four major categories. The first dimension is acceptance; the second, permissiveness-punishment; the third, democratic practices; and the fourth, training for independence. A discussion of how each of these major dimensions of parental attitudes and behaviors relates to Coopersmith's theoretical framework follows.

Parental Attitudes and Behaviors Associated with the Formation of Self-Esteem

Acceptance

Coopersmith (1967) found that parental attitudes and behaviors that demonstrated acceptance were positively related to the formation of positive self-esteem, whereas parental attitudes and behaviors that demonstrated rejection were negatively related to the formation of low self-esteem.

Mothers of children with high and medium self-esteem demonstrated acceptance by manifesting greater interest, concern, and availability and expressed the importance of participating in congenial joint activities. Coopersmith (1967) suggested that children interpret this interest and concern as an indication of their significance. Thus, the children come to regard themselves favorably. In view of his

theoretical framework, Coopersmith interpreted this sense of significance as a form of success.

Permissiveness and Control

Permissiveness. Parental attitudes and behaviors that demonstrated strictness in training, setting high standards of conduct, and consistent enforcement of rules were positively related to the formation of positive self-esteem in children. General parental permissiveness was negatively correlated with positive self-esteem (Coopersmith, 1967).

Coopersmith (1967) attempted to interpret this information in view of his theoretical framework by relating it to his concepts of successes and defenses. He suggested that "firmer management would result in more effective inner controls and greater confidence in a person's definition of a situation" (p. 187). He submitted that when parents establish rules and enforce them, they are presenting their child with a definition of reality and a firm set of beliefs regarding the order of the world. Parents are communicating that there are preferred methods of expressing respect and appreciation, preferred resolutions for dealing with aggression, and preferred answers for the meaning, source, and resolution of failure. He suggested that these preferred forms of behavior all serve to diminish doubt and anxiety in children and help these children interpret the world so as to maximize their successes and minimize their anxieties. When these preferred methods of behavior are internalized and applied to problematic situations, they are referred to as controls and defenses. Coopersmith

also suggested there may be increased interaction between mothers and children when rules are imposed as well as consistently enforced. Increased interaction, or sense of significance, may be interpreted by children as another form of success.

Control. Coopersmith (1967) found that maternal attitudes and behavior that demonstrated (a) careful enforcement of standards and rules, (b) the use of reward as the preferred method of controlling behavior, (c) the use of management techniques other than harsh physical treatment or the loss of love when rules were violated, and (d) the importance of fathers sharing the discipline responsibilities with mothers, were positively related to the formation of high self-esteem in children. Lack of rule enforcement and harsh methods of physical punishment or withdrawal of love were associated with low self-esteem.

In view of his theoretical framework, Coopersmith (1967) interpreted these findings in the following manner. The child interprets parental limits and demands as expressions of concern (significance). The external regulations contribute to the formation of the child's inner controls (power over self). Mild punishment was interpreted in the context of other attentive and respectful treatment and did not assume any positive or negative significance. However, lack of rule enforcement and harsh methods of control were interpreted by the child as indicating a lack of parental interest, concern, and respect, all of which result in lowered self-esteem.

Democratic Practices

Parental attitudes and practices that demonstrated the following democratic childrearing practices were found to be positively related to the formation of high self-esteem: (a) extensive and closely defined lists of rules that are strictly enforced, (b) respectful parental treatment within these established limits that recognizes the rights and the opinions of the child and is noncoercive, and (c) parental treatment that allows a certain degree of latitude within the established limits and permits the child to enter discussions as a significant participant. Conversely, few and poorly defined limits, harsh autocratic methods of control, and lack of respect were associated with the formation of low self-esteem in children (Coopersmith, 1967).

Coopersmith (1967) interpreted this information in view of his theoretical framework as follows. When parents establish their authority and treat children respectfully within a clearly defined environment, children are better able to form inner controls and to develop standards that help them judge their competence and progress. However, when parents fail to establish their authority, treat children disrespectfully, and do not clearly define their environment, then children are likely to feel uncertain about their successes and competencies and feel insignificant and powerless.

Training for Independence

Parental attitudes and behaviors that indicate the child does not have rights to physical or psychological privacy are negatively related

to the formation of self-esteem in children. These attitudes and behaviors represent an invasion of the child's privacy and imply parental refusal to recognize the child's distinctness as a person. Being reared under such conditions results in dependency on others, especially dependency on others for self-evaluation (Coopersmith, 1967). The relationship between self-esteem and dependency cannot be easily placed within the framework of the four major theoretical concepts. The curvilinear relationship between self-esteem and dependency suggests that the variable associated with training for dependency is "certainty of esteem" (Coopersmith, 1967, p. 231). Coopersmith defined "certainty of esteem" as meaning the individual's conviction that their self-appraisal is a reliable estimate of their worthiness, adequacy, and significance. Coopersmith hypothesized that dependent individuals are unsure, not necessarily demeaning of their worth. These dependent individuals are often nagged by doubts of their true worth in the broader, less explored, and protected areas of achievement and social performance. Coopersmith attributed this to being reared in an environment conducive to dependency, which provides no basis for testing personal adequacy and leaves the individual uncertain of his worth. Coopersmith suggested that parents who restricted their children's freedom and limited their children's explorations prevented them from determining their own sense of personal adequacy. Instead, these children developed an extreme reliance upon other persons' definitions of their self-worth, and usually lacked stable external frames of reference.

Coopersmith (1967) also explained the relationship between independence training and self-esteem. He hypothesized that training children to be independent results in a more certain judgment of their self-worth. Both high and low self-esteem individuals have been given latitude to explore, to move outside the family circle, to develop private worlds of their own, and to free themselves from reliance on others. Individuals with high self-esteem had experiences of success and acceptance. However, individuals with low self-esteem appear to have had minimal successes and support.

Subjective and Behavioral Manifestations of Self-Esteem in Children

The following section discusses the subjective and behavioral manifestations of self-esteem and how they relate back to Coopersmith's conceptual framework.

Coopersmith (1967) suggested that self-attitudes may be conscious or unconscious. These attitudes carry positive and negative affective connotations and are intertwined with intellectual and motivational processes. Individuals need not be aware of their attitudes towards themselves, but they will nonetheless be expressed in their voices, postures, gestures, and performances.

Based on his research findings, Coopersmith (1967) outlined the subjective and behavioral expressions common in high self-esteem children. In general, Coopersmith found that children with high self-esteem display the following characteristics: self-acceptance, self-respect, self-confidence, self-trust, courage to express independent

opinions and convictions, creativity, active participation in groups and new experiences, have less anxiety and self-consciousness, and have less difficulty forming friendships. Later, Coopersmith and Gilberts (1982) developed the Behavioral Academic Self-Esteem (BASE) rating scale to measure global self-esteem based on specific behavioral manifestations of these designated characteristics.

Coopersmith (1967) interpreted how the subjective and behavioral characteristics common to children with high levels of self-esteem fit into his conceptual framework in several ways. First, he suggested that positive self-attitudes lay the foundation for a stable anxiety-free performance by generating the expectation that one's efforts will be followed by success, and that one's judgment is worthy of self-trust. This, in turn, increases the likelihood of exploratory and independent behavior. He concluded that it is the individual's self-trust that provides an effective defense against the insidious negative appraisals of others, and thereby immunizes the individual against rapid and frequent alterations in self-esteem. Secondly, in relation to values, Coopersmith suggested that persons with high self-esteem apparently accept their personal judgment as guides, and are not as concerned about the values declared by others within their social frame of reference. Finally, in relation to aspirations, Coopersmith suggested that persons with high self-esteem have a greater ratio of successes to failures, and that these successes lead to the expectation of more successes, thereby further increasing the high self-esteem individual's chances of success and the sense of significance associated with success.

Nominal Definitions

The various terms utilized in this study are defined in the following manner:

- (1) Self-esteem: "The evaluation which individuals make and customarily maintain with regard to the self. It expresses an attitude of approval or disapproval, and indicates the extent to which individuals believe themselves to be capable, significant, successful, and worthy. It is a personal judgment of worthiness that is expressed in the attitudes individuals hold toward themselves" (Coopersmith, 1967, p. 4).
- (2) Self-concept: The purely descriptive characteristics or domains that relate to the self (Hughes, 1984). "Self-concept refers to the more global perceptions an individual has about the self" (Blanton, 1985, p. 5).
- (3) Acceptance: "The unconditional love and approval of the child" (Coopersmith, 1967, p. 166).
- (4) Permissiveness: "Characteristically the demands and the firmness of management procedures employed by parents in regulating and satisfying the requirements of their children. It refers to how the child's world is structured with rules and demands" (Coopersmith, 1967, p. 183).
- (5) Strictness: "A clearly defined, structured, and enforced set of demands" (Coopersmith, 1967, p. 184).

- (6) Positive techniques: "Those techniques used to regulate behavior, which include rewards, praise, and support of the desired activity" (Coopersmith, 1967, p. 190).
- (7) Negative techniques: "Those techniques used to regulate behavior, which include physical punishment, isolation, and withdrawal of love" (Coopersmith, 1967, p. 190).
- (8) Democratic childrearing policies: "Clearly established policies that permit the greatest possible latitude in individual behavior, within which discussion, disagreement, and deviation are permitted without punishment or coercion. Policies must be justified, and members must be given voice and choice on issues that affect their welfare and privileges. Freedom within the established limits and the right to participate in ongoing dialogue within those limits and without penalty is the benchmark of the democratic family" (Coopersmith, 1967, pp. 202-203).
- (9) Independence: "Freedom from influence or control of others for judgments of esteem. This definition implies psychological differentiation from others, not lack of awareness, concern, or interest in other individuals" (Coopersmith, 1967, p. 217).
- (10) Preschool children: Children between the ages of three and five.
- (11) Behavior Academic Self-Esteem: Defined as a global measure of self-esteem that is reflected by those subjective and behavioral traits identified by Coopersmith (1967, 1982) as being displayed by children with high levels of self-esteem. (Refer to Appendix B for a listing of these traits.)

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

A literature review was conducted to provide insight into three basic questions:

- (1) Is positive self-esteem important to the effective functioning of the individual?
- (2) Is there a relationship between the early years of the individual's life and the formation of positive self-esteem?
- (3) Is there a relationship between parental childrearing attitudes and behaviors and the formation of positive self-esteem in children, and, in particular, preschool children between three and five years of age?

The Relationship Between Positive Self-Esteem
and Effective Functioning

A number of theorists and clinicians have long regarded the achievement of a favorable attitude toward oneself as being significantly related to personal satisfaction and effective functioning (Adler, 1927; Coopersmith, 1967; Erikson, 1963; Hartmann, 1958; Maslow, 1954; Rogers, 1954; Sullivan, 1953).

The attitude persons hold toward themselves is called self-esteem (Coopersmith, 1967). This attitude is a personal judgment of worthiness and indicates the extent to which individuals believe

themselves to be capable, significant, and worthy. Coopersmith assumed that self attitudes carry affective loadings and have motivational consequences in relation to achievement. Coopersmith also found that persons with high self-esteem appear to be personally effective, poised, and competent. These individuals are capable of creative action, experience less anxiety and demonstrate a greater ability to deal with anxiety, and are more able to move directly and realistically toward personal goals. High self-esteem has also been positively correlated with academic achievement (McCandles, 1967; Ozehasky, 1967; Purkey, 1970). In addition, children with positive self-images show more direction, have a clearer idea of their goals and how to achieve them, and can more easily modify methods of achieving their goals if success is not initially achieved (Hawkes, 1968).

Perhaps Brandon (1969) best summarized the importance of positive self-esteem to the effective functioning of the individual:

There is no value judgment more important to man, no factor more decisive to his psychological development and motivation, than the estimate he passes on himself. The nature of this self-evaluation has a profound effect on man's thinking processes, desires, values and goals. It is the single most significant key to his behavior. (p. 104)

Conversely, the consequences of low self-esteem are less desirable. Persons with low self-esteem are less likely to resist pressures to conform, whereas persons with high self-esteem maintain a fairly constant image of their capabilities and distinctness as a person (Janis, 1954). Children and adults with poor self-esteem are more anxious, less well adjusted, less popular, less effective in groups, less honest with themselves, less curious and more defensive

(McCandles, 1967). Feelings of helplessness and powerlessness to improve their situation; inability to give and receive love; low resistance to pressures to conform; emotional states characterized by self-doubt; and ambivalences in moving toward personal goals are all additional consequences of low self-esteem (Wylie, 1961, 1974). Wylie also found that the majority of persons who seek psychological help acknowledge they suffer from feelings of inadequacy and unworthiness.

The Relationship Between the Early Years of Life and the Formation of Positive Self-Esteem

Many child development specialists agree that the early childhood years are a vitally important period for the formation of the child's self-concept and the evaluative aspect of self-concept, which is self-esteem (Bloom, 1964; McCandles, 1967; McNelly, 1972; Wylie, 1961; Yamamoto, 1972). In fact, Kohut (1972) has postulated that a sensitive period exists for the development of healthy self-esteem regulation. He speculated that the particular circumstances which surround the early formation of the self may influence healthy or pathological self-esteem regulation in later years. He stated that the structure of the self-esteem regulation system is set down early during the initial period of intrapsychic development.

Additional support for the importance of the early years, more specifically the first five to seven years in a child's life, to the formation of self-esteem has been found by several researchers. Schwartz (1966) concluded that individual basic personality attributes and self-concept are established by age five. She also suggested that

the nature of the parent-child interaction, with both parent and child as contributing partners, is the key to the development of the child's self-concept. Butler (1969) hypothesized that by three years of age children are beginning to view themselves as separate and distinct from others. He felt that acceptance of the child at this crucial stage of development was vital to the development of a positive image of self-worth, and was the core precipitator of future behavior. Burns et al. (1987) concluded that the crystallization of self-concept appears to occur in the early school years between kindergarten and second grade. Monte (1987), addressing the ordering of events in self-concept/self-esteem development, suggested that between the ages of four and six, children consolidate and refine the perceptions of bodily self and self-identity. Monte also suggested it was during this time that children begin the consideration of self-valuation and/or self-esteem.

Theoretical support attesting to the importance of the early years as being highly influential in the formation of self-esteem has been found by Blazer (1981) in the writings of Adler (1927), Erickson (1950), and Rogers (1959). Blazer (1981) cited these authors as being in agreement with the premise that parent-child interactions during infancy and early childhood are of crucial importance to the child's developing view of self. Coopersmith (1967) also concluded that sometime preceding middle childhood, individuals arrive at appraisals of their self-worth and this appraisal remains fairly stable and enduring over several years.

The stability of the self-concept from early childhood to adulthood has also been studied. Samuels (1977) found moderate

stability of the self-concept from early childhood to young adulthood. Gordon (1968) suggested that the self-concept formulated during the early years in a child's life is not static, but does have considerable resistance to change. Rubin (1978), using a sample of 380 children 9 through 15 years of age, found that self-esteem measures became more stable as the children grew older. He concluded that children's self-perceptions appear less firmly established and may be more responsive to intervention at earlier ages in development.

The relationship between self-concept, self-esteem and academic readiness and achievement has also received considerable study. A positive correlation between positive self-esteem and academic achievement was found by McCandles (1967), Ozehasky (1967), and Purkey (1970). A positive relationship between self-concept measures and measures of kindergarten readiness was also found by Mills (1984). Based on his findings, he concluded that: (a) the task of developing positive self-concepts during the earlier formative years should not be left to chance and incidental teaching, (b) self-concepts are formed during the early years of children's lives and are determined to a large extent by their parents, (c) parents should be made aware of their important role in the development of their children's self concepts, (d) programs for young children should include the development of positive self-concepts as a major goal, and (e) there should be a harmonious relationship between home and school in order to provide consistent reinforcement of the methods and procedures which help young children acquire positive self-concepts. Gordon (1968)

suggested that what children learn about themselves and their world prior to first grade will largely determine their success in school.

Thus, it appears that (a) the foundations for the development of self-esteem are being laid during the early years of a child's life, (b) the experiences that occur during this period may have a significant effect on the formation of self-esteem, (c) efforts to facilitate the development of positive self-esteem may have a greater impact during the earlier years in a child's life, and (d) efforts to facilitate the development of positive self-esteem should not be left to chance and incidental teaching.

The Relationship Between Parental Attitudes Toward Childrearing and the Formation of Positive Self-Esteem in Children

Many experts agree that parents play a significant role in the formation of a child's self-esteem (Clarke-Stewart, 1977; Samuels, 1977). Some child development authorities have generally accepted the premise that parents exert the original and perhaps most significant influence on the child's present and future emotional health (Champion, 1973). Gordon (1968) concluded that the family is the primary influence for maintaining or changing children's behaviors and attitudes toward themselves and their environment. He felt the family affects children's feelings of personal adequacy and provides the first models for behavior. Hansen and Maynard (1973) hypothesized that parents are the most significant others in the child's environment and, because of this, the child sees the parents as being capable of promoting or diminishing self-worth. Clarke-Stewart (1977) conducted a

thorough review of longitudinal and cross-sectional research on the influence of the family on children's development from birth through nine years of age. She concluded that parents are vital in laying the foundation for children's feelings of competence and self-worth. Similar conclusions were drawn by Purkey (1970) and Thomas (1973) in their attempts to identify parental and home factors which enhanced children's self-concept and positively affected their school achievement. Piers and Harris (1964) suggested that parental attitudes may be the most significant influence in the development of the child's self-concept.

More specifically, the relationship between parental attitudes, personality adjustment, self-concept and self-esteem of children has been studied by several researchers. Quadri and Kaleem (1973) found that those parents who scored higher on measures of acceptance had children who exhibited better adjustment and greater self-esteem in comparison to rejecting and overprotective parents. Sewell, Mussen and Harris (1955) and Zemlich and Watson (1953) all found positive relationships between parental acceptance and self-esteem in children. Atlas (1972) studied the relationship between maternal childrearing practices and self-concept in 96 sixth grade children. He utilized both a questionnaire and interview format to determine maternal and paternal childrearing practices and a questionnaire format to determine self-concept scores in the children. Based on the analysis of his data, Atlas found that high self-esteem scores in the sixth grade population were positively correlated with the following parental childrearing practices: (a) parental warmth; (b) clearly defined

limits of acceptable and unacceptable behavior; (c) a positive approach to discipline, which utilized praise and reward; and (d) consistency in their behaviors and childrearing practices. Schwartz (1966) compared mothers' attitudes toward childrearing, using the Interview Schedule devised by Sears, Maccoby and Levin (1957) and her own self-concept measure, the Behavioral Rating Scale. Subjects included 40 preschool and kindergarten children and their mothers. She found the following maternal characteristics had positive correlations with high self-esteem in preschool aged children: (a) perceiving the child as an individual, (b) high self-esteem, (c) acceptance toward the child, (d) affection and warmth, (e) satisfaction with her current role, (f) an appropriate intensity of interaction with the child, and (g) an adequate family emotional climate. Schwartz concluded that the nature of the parent-child interaction was the key to self-concept and the development of self-esteem in children. Wylie (1961), following a thorough review of the self-concept literature, identified several parental behaviors that were related to the formation of a positive self-concept in children. Parents: (a) provided reinforcement of acceptable behaviors, (b) provided standards of conduct, (c) provided realistic views of the child's abilities and limitations, and (d) provided feedback regarding behaviors. Olowu (1983) also found a positive correlation between parenting attitudes and childrearing practices and self-concept in adolescents. Olowu (1983) had over 686 adolescents complete a tool designed to rate their parents' childrearing techniques and attitude towards them. In addition, he had the adolescents complete a culture-fair self-concept scale. Olowu

found that self-concept ratings correlated at the .001 level with childrearing technique ratings. Olowu concluded that childrearing practices are very highly related and crucial to the child's self-concept. He felt that the child's self-concept is learned and most of what is learned comes from the parents. Because a child has such a physical, emotional, and social dependence on the parents, the parents are extremely influential in the child's learning about self.

Following an extensive review of the literature on self-esteem, Blazer (1981) and Blanton (1985) found Coopersmith's (1967) study regarding the antecedents of self-esteem to be one of the most definitive. Coopersmith attempted to assess the effects of selected parental characteristics and specific parental childrearing attitudes and behaviors on the formation of self-esteem in children. He attempted to determine the antecedent conditions that were significantly associated with the formation of self-esteem in children. His findings were based on a series of assessments and interviews of 85 white, middle-class, 10 to 12 year old boys and their mothers. He utilized the following tools to obtain information on mother-child interactions and parental attitudes: (a) Parent Attitude Research Instrument (Schaefer & Bell, 1957), (b) Mother's Questionnaire (Coopersmith, 1967), (c) Self-Esteem Inventory (Coopersmith, 1967), (d) Behavior Rating Form (Coopersmith, 1967), and (e) Subject's Questionnaire (Coopersmith, 1967). Table 1 summarizes Coopersmith's findings regarding specific parental attitudes and behaviors and other antecedent conditions that he found to be associated with the formation of high, medium, and low self-esteem in preadolescent boys. Even

though there were certain antecedent conditions that were identified as being significantly associated with the formation of high self-esteem, Coopersmith (1967) was quick to point out that "there are virtually no patterns of behavior or attitudes that are common to all children with high self-esteem" (p. 237). Coopersmith suggested that perhaps a combination of the conditions listed are required for the development of high self-esteem. In particular, the two possible combinations that should result in the highest and most stable levels of self-esteem are: (a) a high self-esteem model, and (b) respectful and accepting pattern of treatment.

Corroboration for Coopersmith's (1967) findings, regarding the value of parental warmth and acceptance, especially during early and middle childhood, was found by Sears (1970). Sears found both parental warmth and acceptance to be significantly correlated with the formation of positive self-esteem for both boys and girls. Other factors that Sears identified as being significantly associated with high self-esteem for both sexes include: (a) small family size, (b) early ordinal position in the family, and (c) high reading and math achievement. For boys only, high self-concept was associated with low father dominance in husband-wife relations. In both sexes, femininity was associated with poor self-concept. Sears utilized information obtained from both parents through interviews, which were coded and gave measures of parents' childrearing attitudes and practices, obtained when the children studied were age five (Sears, Maccoby & Levin, 1957). In 1970, Sears again studied these same children, now

Table 1. Summary of parental attitudes and behaviors and other antecedent conditions that are significantly associated with the formation of high, medium, and low self-esteem in preadolescent boys.

High Self-Esteem Group	Medium Self-Esteem Group	Low Self-Esteem Group
<p><i>Parental Attitudes and Behaviors:</i></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Acceptance 2) Strictness in training 3) High standards for conduct 4) Consistent enforcement of rules 5) Use of reward vs. punishment as the preferred method of controlling behavior 6) Use of management techniques such as isolation, denial, and restraint vs. harsh physical punishment or withdrawal of love as a means of enforcing rule infractions 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Acceptance 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Rejection 2) Permissiveness 3) Lack of standards for conduct 4) Lack of and inconsistent enforcement of rules 5) More frequent use of punishment as a method of controlling behavior 6) Use of harsh physical punishment and withdrawal of love as a means of enforcing rule infractions

