

R E P O R T R E S U M E S

ED 011 395

CG 000 091

SELF ESTEEM BECAUSE OF COLLEGIATE ADMISSION AND EDUCATION.

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FUB DATE 23 MAR 67

GRANT OEG-1-6-061819-2240

EDRS PRICE MF-\$0.09 HC-\$0.64 16F.

DESCRIPTORS- \*COLLEGE STUDENTS, \*STUDENT DEVELOPMENT,  
\*ADMISSION CRITERIA, \*SELF ESTEEM, SELF CONCEPT, STUDENT  
COLLEGE RELATIONSHIP, CAMBRIDGE

THE AUTHOR FEELS THAT SELF-ESTEEM CAN BE BOTH A PREDICTOR AND A CRITERION OF COLLEGE SUCCESS. THE CONCEPT OF SELF CONSISTS OF SELF-CONCEPTION, IMPRESSIONS WHICH AN INDIVIDUAL ATTRIBUTES TO HIMSELF, AND SELF-CONSISTENCY, THE CORRESPONDENCE BETWEEN THE PERSON'S IDEAL PICTURE OF HIMSELF AND THE PERCEPTION OF HIS REAL SELF. IN THE PROCESS OF THE ATTAINMENT OF IDENTITY BY MEANS OF CHOICE, A PERSON BECOMES MORE AWARE THAT HIS LINKAGE OF PREFERENCE AND GROUP MEMBERSHIP IS ACTUALLY EMBEDDED WITHIN THE FORMATION OF HIS SELF-CONCEPT. THROUGH MODIFICATION OF THE SELF-CONCEPT, A PERSON IS MADE PROGRESSIVELY AWARE OF HIS OWN RESPONSIBILITY FOR CHOICE. A SUCCESSFUL EXPERIENCE FOR THE COLLEGE AND THE STUDENT EXISTS WHEN DISCONTINUITIES INHERENT IN THE COLLEGE EXPERIENCE BECOME INTEGRATED INTO THE STUDENT'S PERSONALITY WITHOUT LOSS OF SELF-ESTEEM. THE CRITERION OF SELF-ESTEEM IN COLLEGIATE EDUCATION SHOULD BE MEASURED IN RELATION TO THE SELF-ESTEEM WHICH THE STUDENT CONTINUES TO MANIFEST DURING HIS EDUCATION. SUGGESTIONS FOR USING THE PREDICTIVE QUALITIES OF SELF-ESTEEM IN COLLEGE ADMISSIONS ARE GIVEN. ELEMENTS OF THE TRANSPOSITION OF SELF-ESTEEM FROM THE PRECOLLEGE DISCONTINUITY TO THE COLLEGIATE CONTINUITY ARE KNOWLEDGE, PREPARATION, LEARNING CAPACITY, MOTIVATION, AND INITIATIVE. THIS PAPER WAS PREPARED FOR THE SYMPOSIUM, "SELF-ESTEEM--PREDICTOR OR CRITERION OF COLLEGE SUCCESS," AMERICAN PERSONNEL AND GUIDANCE ASSOCIATION MEETINGS (DALLAS, MARCH 21-23, 1967). (FS)

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Project Report No. 5

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This paper was supported in part by Grant No. OEG-1-6-061819-2240  
of the United States Office of Education under terms of the  
Vocational Education Act of 1963.

Graduate School of Education  
Harvard University

March, 1967

ED011395

CG 000 091

SELF ESTEEM BECAUSE OF COLLEGIATE  
ADMISSION AND EDUCATION<sup>1</sup>

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Self Esteem: Predictor and Criterion  
in Collegiate Education

I am grateful for the opportunity to participate in this symposium on self esteem in relation to collegiate admission and education. I am personally persuaded that the concept of self esteem is one of the most important results, if not the most important result, which we educators can help our students to realize. I make this statement in face of the disquieting, sometimes distressing, upheavals which erupt these days so frequently in our streets, ivied halls, battlefields, industries, and homes.

Although my responsibility in this symposium is just to consider self esteem in college prediction, after further delineating the concept of self esteem itself, I will first discuss self esteem as predictor and criterion of college success before I consider the prediction of self esteem upon college admissions. Self esteem is a psychological characteristic which can actually be both a predictor and a criterion of college success. Self esteem in areas of prior living other than college is more likely to be associated during

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<sup>1</sup>Speech for symposium: "Self Esteem: Predictor or Criterion of College Success?" ACPA Commission IX, during APGA Convention, Dallas, Texas, 20-23 March 1967. I am indebted to my colleague, Dr. Robert P. O'Hara, for discussions of this topic during its origination and revision. Dr. O'Hara also edited the paper.

transition through the discontinuity of college admissions with self esteem during college education itself. In short, prior self esteem is most likely both to facilitate entry upon the discontinuity of college admission and to predict later self esteem during the subsequent harmonization of collegiate education with the continuity of personality. On the other hand, self esteem is itself realizable during collegiate education. Therefore, the attainment of self esteem through collegiate education can also be an important criterion of college success.

The concept of self esteem has been difficult for me to grasp. Hence my presentation of the concept will be limited to a presently incomplete comprehension which forces me to portray the almost temporal sequence in which my impressions arose. However, after I have attempted even that partial delineation and evaluation of self esteem, I shall then analyze further (1) why I think that self esteem can be both a predictor and a criterion in the collegiate context and (2) what might be done about using the predictive qualities of self esteem in college admissions. In this sequence I believe I can retain the necessary personal nature of self esteem while dealing with its public manifestations in ways such that something can be done about it both prior to college entry and during collegiate education.

#### Preference, Self Concept, Choosing, and Self Esteem

During my research career, I first became interested in educational and vocational preferences. When educational and vocational preferences became manifested in one or another educational or

vocational group I considered preferences to be choices. This paradigm remained consistent with my then understanding of science and permitted me to evolve studies which focussed on more and more of the predictive variables which bore the variance of later group memberships. In that paradigm, preference is presumed to be central and to carry the membership from predicted to realized phases. In the course of my study of later group memberships, I discovered that group memberships are generally more related to value variables than to expressed preference variables and that both kinds of variable are in turn more related to later group memberships than are aptitude variables.

A preference presumes a desire; a membership, a presence among "them." The transposition of preference into desire can be mediated by the self concept. The concept of self has two dimensions, self conceptions and self consistency.

The self conceptions dimension of self concept consists of impressions which an individual attributes to himself. Self conceptions presume relationships. Therefore, they are statements which relate the self to other referents: people, things, or ideas. Self conceptions may also involve statements of degree in further denoting the referred to relationship. Thus a self conception may take the form, "I exceed the outdoor interests of 90 percent of males in the United States."

A second dimension of self concept is that of consistency. A person tends to form an ideal picture of himself. The person in turn

knows what he considers himself to be. Consistency refers to the correspondence between these two separate impressions. Some persons grow in their capacity to recognize the sources of their ideals. Such persons are able to attribute impression of themselves to another person. Thus it is frequently possible to elicit statements about self which can be attributed to parents, teachers, and other significant figures in a person's previous or desired social circles. In education and vocation, we are interested of course in what kind of an impression one can be given beforehand by means of book and arranged experience which tend to form an impression of a possible later period of study or career.

Both the kinds of self conceptions and the consistencies among various personal sources for self impressions have proved useful forms in which to study scientifically the mediation of preference and later group membership. However, any kind of scientific study necessarily treats only the states and properties of what may essentially be a process. (Life is essentially absent from science even though life processes can be studied scientifically.) Actually the attainment of identity by means of choice, as can be the case in collegiate education, can be a reasonably discernible process. In this process, it can become progressively more possible for a person in passing from one social discontinuity to another to become more aware that his linkage of preference and group membership is actually embedded within the formation of his self concept. The self concept in turn is conceivable as a set of characteristics which are both possessed and

modified. Modification is a process of harmonization of the attained in prior discontinuities with the desired and the attainable in future discontinuities. Individual participation is possible in modification of self concept during the incorporation of new discontinuity into prior personal continuity provided a person becomes progressively aware of his own responsibility for choice. This responsibility comes from the practice during awareness of choosing while progressing through social discontinuities.

In choosing during awareness, a person acts towards a future discontinuity as if he can attain some things in that future; in short, he engages in decision-making. Presumably, in decision-making, the things which can be determined in the future discontinuity are those which the person desires. In order to get what he wants, the person must engage in anticipatory action about the future discontinuity. In anticipation, phases of exploration, crystallization, choice, and clarification become possible with regard to the future discontinuity. Upon beginning the activity required to get what he wants in that formerly future but now present discontinuity, the person has an opportunity to enter upon phases of induction, reformation, and integration of thought in action with regard to the relevant goal evolvment and attainment. In these phases of incorporating a fresh discontinuity into prior personal continuities during accommodation to desire under requirement for productivity, the person experiences chance for harmonization of the ideal and real parts of his self images. The ideal can move to reality; reality can be moved to the ideal; both can move toward each other; either can crumble, dissolve, and/or be reformed.

The accommodation of anticipation under requirement for accomplishment places a test upon choosing. In this test, self esteem is in a critical phase. Self esteem can be viewed as the positive forms of self regard expressed in relation to the various kinds of self conceptions which the person holds. However, in the movement toward a desired goal in a future social discontinuity under guidance of personal initiative, the maintenance of positive self regard in former continuities comes into issue. Thus the introduction of personal responsibility under expectation of personal initiative introduces a further modifying effect upon self concept in which colleges are extremely interested in relation to the collegiate social discontinuity. Colleges are interested in such self esteem within the self concept in two regards. A college expects self esteem to exist upon application for admissions, that is, the college expects self esteem to exist while the applicant contemplates the potential discontinuity of college entrance. A college also expects incorporation of collegiate experience into the area of self esteem during the person's period of study at the college, that is, a college expects to create a harmonization of its particular social discontinuity with a student's personal continuity. Thus colleges want self esteem in order that they may add their particular collegiate experience to the person's self esteem. If colleges are successful in both of these expectations, collegiate education contributes to self growth of students. Otherwise, collegiate education is not likely to contribute to self growth.



Self Esteem as Predictor and Criterion  
of College Success

I give the conception of personal initiative the swing position in my discussion of self esteem during the incorporation of discontinuity in collegiate admissions and education into personality. I do so because there are two negative conditions of self esteem which collegiate institutions should expect. One negative condition of self esteem occurs when there is an absence of positive self regard. In this condition there is an abandonment of self to "them." This is the condition characterizing so much of the nihilism and alleged alienation of modern time. There is such an absence of self in personality during this state of existence that "they" leave essentially no area for self expression.

A second condition of negative self esteem occurs in selfishness. In selfishness, there is an absence of control upon initiative which results in an absence of responsibility to others during the practice of initiative. This extreme independence prevents understanding of interdependence in the human condition. Collaborative activity becomes negligible, teaching difficult.

Collegiate education is another instance of collaborative activity which we arrange for the late adolescent and young adult. In collegiate collaborative activity, there are institutional arrangements which the student is expected (1) to accept in anticipating them as a discontinuity and (2) to profit from in accommodating to them while making the discontinuity a part of the continuity of his personality. On the other hand there are personal desires which the student

attempts to satisfy during his college experience. A successful experience for the college and the student is one in which the discontinuities inherent in the college experience (the institutional requirements and standards) become integrated into the student's personality without loss of self esteem. This statement does not mean that the student's goals and even his values might not change during his college education. In fact, colleges ordinarily hope that these conditions of maturation and intellectual development actually do occur. What the statement does mean though is that the person still maintains a positive attitude toward himself; his self esteem remains high. Thus the criterion of self esteem in collegiate education should be measured in relation to the self esteem (or satisfaction) which the student continues to manifest during his education. The criterion involves expectation that self esteem remain positive and high but that the expression of self esteem moves from one area to another during incorporation of the discontinuity of college admission. This is a new criterion in behavioral sciences. It stresses acceptance of circumstance, not mere performance in circumstance. At the same time, we cannot ignore performance. We actually want acceptance based on mastery of concept, not on abandonment to desire. In short, we want both desire and accountability.

College admissions is a time when the college meets its applicants in seeming condition of anticipation with regard to the discontinuity inherent in future college attendance. If the person wants to incorporate the discontinuity of college into his personality and

elects to include later college attendance in his area for personal initiative he hopes that the college of his choice will enhance his self esteem. The college admissions officer must then move in relation to such applicants knowing both that he must satisfy certain institutional requirements of his employer, the college, and that he is dealing with prospective students in seeming condition of aspiration for his college. The college admissions officer should recognize that he must make an institutional decision but that he is dealing with students as if they have made a personal decision which includes his college as a means to their ends. It then becomes possible for the admissions officer to use this seeming data about personal decisions for his ends in getting institutional quotas filled. However, the sensitive admissions officer treats this seeming personal data both knowing the hope which lies behind it and the potential agony associated with his rejection of request for admission. An admissions officer who operates in this manner in relation to the incorporation of his collegiate discontinuity into the personalities of his applicants has opportunity (1) to use self esteem as a predictor; (2) to encourage its expression in his college in which it will in turn become a criterion of his success with the students; and (3) to treat the applicants he must disappoint with appropriate empathy for their potential discouragement.

#### The Prediction of Self Esteem

I have noted that the college admissions officer should want to

use self esteem as a predictor of the self esteem which he hopes prospective students will manifest during their collegiate experience. However, the self esteem which is involved in prediction is different from the self esteem involved in the collegiate education itself. In collegiate education, self esteem is both specific to the college experience itself and general to the next phases of living which collegiate education is supposed to aid students to anticipate. At time of college admissions on the other hand, self esteem is both specific to prior events of the applicant's life which may or may not have been a part of his practice of initiative during self development and general to collegiate education. The admissions officer therefore tries to assess self esteem in the latter circumstance in order to estimate its transposition to the former circumstance. What are the elements of this transposition?

One element of the transposition of self esteem from the pre-collegiate discontinuity to the collegiate experience of continuity is knowledge of the collegiate situation. Knowledge includes both the institution's capacity to formalize and express what it wants from students and the student's prior acquisition and consideration of such statements. Ordinarily this is not a very clear area of knowledge. Colleges tend to blame students but not many colleges are really able, or worse willing, to formulate what they want in students in very specific terms. In addition, what is shared is not ordinarily reality oriented; it is intended to attract applicants, not to perfect their understanding.

A second element in the transposition of self esteem from the pre-collegiate to the collegiate situation is that of prior preparation and ease of accommodation to new circumstance. If the student can fulfill a college's requirements without over investment of time in study at college, he is likely to keep his self esteem. Therefore, the college should attend to both kind and amount of prior preparation and to the learning rates which applicants have shown in the past. Harmonization of institutional and personal desires depends on striking an adequate balance between these forces which will be at play against maintenance of college attendance within the area of self esteem.

A third element in the transposition of self esteem from the pre-collegiate to the collegiate situation is that of motivation. It is a certainty that a student's anticipation of the discontinuity inherent in college life and living will be incomplete. The essential incompleteness of anticipation in this discontinuity will bring the student into periods of discouragement. Admissions officers would do well to assess both the areas in which knowledge and prior qualification are incomplete or weak in an applicant's anticipation of the discontinuity of admission to his college and to assess the applicant's willingness to endure change in himself while at college rather than to forsake college without change in self. Such capability for endurance presupposes that the discontinuity of college admissions can be incorporated into the continuity of personality.

Finally, initiative, or "agency" as I have taken to calling it, remains a fourth element in the transposition of self esteem from

the pre-collegiate discontinuity to the collegiate continuity. If a person possesses a "sense of agency" he has confidence in his capacity to affect his environment, while incorporating social discontinuities into personal continuities. With agency, an applicant acts toward the college as a result as if he can make something of collegiate resources in relation to his personal goals.

Self Esteem: Governor of Excellence in Education

The enumerated elements for the transposition of self esteem from the pre-collegiate discontinuity to the collegiate continuity are knowledge, preparation and learning capacity, motivation, and agency. Obviously all of these elements have been present in the practice of college admissions and education for a long time. I have merely tried to give them coherence during this presentation. Furthermore, I have tried to give centrality to the role of initiative or "agency" in the incorporation of social discontinuity into personal continuities during education. Agency is a condition which guidance programs attempt both to spark and to breathe into flame.

Agency is a personal characteristic vitally needed in any society. Agency is a characteristic vitally needed in these United States today. The Negro wants opportunity for himself; the majority responsibility from the Negro. Both conditions are possible if agency is present in those who aspire. I have attempted to show how colleges can contribute to this emergence and cultivation if they are so inclined. If colleges are not so inclined, I fear for the existence of our present social order.

Commentary of E. Matthews upon hearing the paper  
when delivered on 3/22/67\*

What if the quality within sense of agency that is the most critical or pivotal is risk-taking capacity? What if risk-taking capacity may be inversely related to certain kinds of fear and/or anxiety? What if sense of esteem or self-confidence are not highly developed or even absent prior to risk-taking behavior? What if risk-taking behavior is the avenue toward sense of agency?

I guess I am starting to understand the presence of fear, anxiety, and feelings of inferiority in some kind of relationship to the size and importance of "enduringness" of the risk-taking behavior. This would surely open up new understandings of sense of agency.

For instance, suppose that the personally-determined type and level of esteem sought demands a certain type of risk-taking behavior and the resultant personality consequence is the presence of sense of agency. Then, we are able to see more clearly the enabling possibility of behavior which the world considers neurotic, inadequate, inaccurate, and/or a product of a person's imagination. In a nutshell, your concept permits possession of certain competencies and large order insecurities simultaneously.\*\*

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\*I presume upon Dr. Matthews' good nature when I attach this privately shared comment. I do so because it is important to me to have my readers forge potential linkages between my concept of agency and my colleague's (Wallace Fletcher) concept of entrepreneurial behavior. Matthews makes clear that a link is risk-taking with regard to one's sense of agency.

\*\*And so we come to a concept whereby it is possible to imagine positive mental health. (D.V.T.)