"I Feel So Confused:"

A Longitudinal Study of Young Adolescents' Change in Self-Esteem

Margaret Zoller Booth

Bowling Green State University

boothmz@bgsu.edu

Erin Curran

University of St. Thomas

ecurran@stthomas.edu

June 16, 2010

Abstract

This paper investigates the growth of early adolescent self-esteem and self-concept as students progress through the middle level years (sixth through eighth grade). Based on mixed method longitudinal research conducted from 2004 to 2007, the study's findings suggest that this sample of 104 urban students' self-esteem changed most significantly during the sixth grade with less variability from the end of sixth grade to the end of eighth grade. While sixth grade appears to be the most dynamic regarding change in self-esteem and self-concept, students demonstrated more complexity in their analysis of their friendships at the end of eighth grade and also revealed a greater degree of differentiated selves in self-appraisals of parents and teachers. Gender differences were also found in change in self-esteem during the middle grades and in the content of self-image. Results reveal implications for middle-level school climate. (Contains 5 tables and 2 figures)

The contemporary infatuation in the Western world with self-esteem and self-concept has spawned a generation of educators and parents preoccupied with developing a healthy self-esteem in their children and adolescents. This focus on the sense of self has been significantly influenced by Erikson's (1950) theoretical framework, positioning solidly the importance of the development of self-image during adolescence. Others have focused attention on the ecological contexts of adolescents' lives, pointing to the vital reciprocal influence of the immediate environment, including school, on the development of the self (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). Combining a developmental framework with the impact of the social context, Susan Harter posits that "during adolescence there is a proliferation of selves that vary as a function of social context" (Harter, Bresnick, Bouchey, & Whitesell, 2002, p.112). According to Harter, this increasing differentiation of the self during adolescence changes as a result of the company with which adolescents find themselves (e.g. parents, teachers, peers). It would stand to reason, that this is also the case for changing ecological context.

Given the growing importance of understanding the development of the self during adolescence, Hirsch and Dubois (2000) note the absence of varied research methods to investigate the developing self, calling for creative inquiries. Varied inquiries would include mixed methods and research situated in diverse natural contexts, instead of limited lab experimentation. As a result, the primary goal of this research is to investigate the changing nature of young adolescents' self-esteem and self-concept over the course of their middle grades years. This pilot study takes a unique mixed method longitudinal approach to investigate the consistency and change in self-esteem from sixth through eighth grade and the influence that changing self-concept may have on self-esteem.

Scholarly Framework

Self-esteem and Self-concept

While definitions of self-concept and self-esteem have varied throughout the literature, they are both most commonly utilized when investigating adolescents' introspective sense of themselves. Self-concept generally refers to the perception of who "I" am, including the "domain-specific evaluation of the self" (Santrock, 2007, p. 145); whereas self-esteem normally "refers to the evaluative and affective aspects of the self-concept" (Atwater, 1996, p. 306). Self-esteem has also been viewed as a more global construct, most broadly defined as a "positive or negative attitude toward . . . the self" (Rosenberg, 1965, p. 30). While interpretations of self-esteem and its impact on student development vary among societies, the latter part of the twentieth century has seen an increase interest in understanding the link between self-esteem, self-concept, and characteristics associated with successful adolescent development, especially within educational contexts (Simmons, Rosenberg, & Rosenberg, 1973; Humphrey, Charlton, & Newton, 2004).

Researchers have set out to investigate the relationship between self-esteem and self-concept with other behaviors and attitudes (Simmons, et. al., 1973). The majority of this research has validated the assumption that high self-esteem is associated with educational achievement in the West (Marsh, Byrne, and Yeung, 1999), that ability levels may influence depressive symptoms and levels of self-esteem (Humphrey, et al, 2004), and that a positive self-concept is desirable for children's personal development (Branden, 1994).

Studies that have investigated self-esteem measures between different groups of adolescents in the United States have often focused on either ethnic, gender, or socioeconomic status differences. Results have varied (Tashakkori, 1993) as adolescents from various ethnic

backgrounds do not necessarily assign equal weight to different self-belief components. For instance, in a study of 643 African-American and White adolescents in the rural south, Tashakkori (1993) found that academic self-beliefs were not a strong predictor of self-esteem; however, self-beliefs about social standing and relationships carried more weight.

The significance of gender as an influencing variable on self-esteem and self-concept has been debated (Chung, Elias, & Schneider,1998) in the literature with Bassen and Lamb (2006) concluding that research must take into account the social context in which girls and boys are being studied. They claim that studies finding girls to be more affiliative than boys must take into account the social context (single-sex institutions, clinical environments) of those being studied. However, research in public middle schools has found these environments to be most problematic for girls' self-image (Blyth, Simmons, & Carlton-Ford, 1983; Simmons, Blyth, Van Cleave, & Bush, 1979). Studies during the 1970's and 1980's in the United States regularly found girls' self-concept more vulnerable during early adolescence (Simmons, et al., 1973). Confirming this trend, a meta-analysis investigating self-esteem research in Western industrialized countries has found that adolescent girls' self-esteem is generally moderately lower than boys' self-esteem and that this difference is greatest around 16 years of age (Kling, Hyde, Showers, & Bruswell, 1999). A study in Britain found that adolescent girls' self-esteem was negatively affected by a decline in body image and that self-esteem was lower for older rather than younger adolescents (Clay, Vignoles, & Dittmar 2005). As a result, the influence of gender remains unclear, including the intersection of gender and timing during adolescence.

Social Relationships in Early Adolescence and Self-Image

The increasing study of self-esteem and self-concept in young adolescents has initiated some analysis of the impact of contextual factors on their sense of self; however, an analysis of

literature by DuBois and Hirsch (2000) between 1984 to 1999, revealed a surprisingly small amount of studies that focus on the study of self-esteem related to a more complex analysis of the impact of contextual factors. Yet, research that has investigated the impact of various ecological contexts, such as school environments, often reveals significant influences. For instance, the investigation of middle level grade environments has been found to be a topic of consequence, as a general pattern of significant outcomes has found that, when compared to early adolescents in K-8 environments, students in middle school or junior high settings exhibit characteristics more often associated with lower self-esteem (Simmons, Burgeson, and Carlton-Ford,1987; Wigfield, Eccles, MacIver, Reuman, & Midgley, 1991), especially for girls (Blyth, et. al., 1983; Simmons et. al., 1979). The reasons for these negative ramifications are related to school transition, goodness of fit between adolescents and the school environment (Blyth,1983; Eccles et. al., 1993; Gronna, 1999; Richardson, 2000).

Yet the impact of school peers and friends on perceptions of the self has found mixed results. A longitudinal study by Fenzel (2000) studying the influences of middle school transition, found negative changes in global self-worth as a result of school and peer strain associated with mid-transition time in sixth grade. However, friendships have also been found to be an essential stabilizing factor for young adolescents (Keefe and Berndt, 1996). For instance, Bishop and Inderbitzen (1995) have found in a study of 542 ninth grade students, that having at least one reciprocal friendship was associated with higher levels of self-esteem. Nonetheless, the extent of the influence of friendships on self-esteem remains unclear.

Research with students during the first year of this same study in this paper found that the quality of the relationships that students forged with school peers and teachers significantly influenced their attitude toward school (Author, 2008). Moreover, Harter's conclusions

pertaining to adolescents' differentiated selves as a function of the type of relationship (mother, father, teacher, peer, coach) may take on even greater significance if the quality of these relationships influences adolescent well-being and student success. Furthermore, Harter et al. (2002) have also found that the rate that adolescents express contradictory attributes of themselves increases from early to later adolescence, theorizing that "a certain level of conflict among self-attributes is normative, particularly during midadolescence" (p. 117). As a result, additional research investigating the impact of relationships on sense of self is needed.

Furthermore, as a result of the complexity of the reciprocal ecological context (Bronfenbrenner, 1979) of young adolescents' lives, additional research is needed which analyzes the impact of the middle school years on young adolescents' self-esteem and self-concept. DuBois and Hirsch (2000) have developed a framework illustrating the necessity of simultaneously investigating the reciprocal influence of primary (micro) variables, individual developmental characteristics, and scoiocultural background on the development of the self. Consequently, they argue that a variety of research methods is required, including investigations that include qualitative techniques, in order to more fully comprehend the development of self-esteem during the early adolescent years (Hirsch and Dubois, 2000).

In light of the call for additional, creative investigations of self-esteem and self-concept, this study investigates whether change takes place in young adolescent self-esteem and self-concept throughout the middle grades. In particular, this study longitudinally explores patterns found in self-esteem and self concept to observe if measures found in sixth grade change or remain constant until the end of eighth grade. The researchers also apply a gender analysis to explore whether girls and boys in the middle grades experience similar trends in self-esteem and

self concept. Finally, this study explores the impact of peer and teacher relationships on self-concept and self-esteem for the young adolescents who participated in this study.

Method

Research Design

The present study was originally part of a larger longitudinal, mixed-methods project which had as its original purpose to investigate the influence of different school models (K-8 and middle school) on the socio-emotional development and achievement of young adolescents. A total of 104 sixth grade students from four schools in Cleveland Ohio (two middle schools, two K-8) were initially part of the study in the fall of 2004. Investigations with students (surveys and interviews) took place at the beginning and end of the 2004-2005 academic year in order to measure changes influenced by that year's (sixth grade) attendance in that particular school.

The first phase of research in 2004-2005 found notable self-esteem and self-concept patterns in the two different school models (Author, 2007). As a result, the original plan was to revisit the sampled students at the end of their eighth grade year to investigate whether the discovered patterns found in sixth grade continued or changed by the end of eighth grade. However, as is often the case with studies conducted in large public school systems, unexpected changes took place in the school system during the course of the study, presenting the research team with uncontrollable sampling challenges. During the 2005-2006 academic year (this sample's seventh grade year), all remaining middle schools in this municipality were converted into K-8 buildings. As a result, by the eighth grade, all of the study's students were in K-8 schools with a substantial portion of the sample redistributed to a variety of buildings.

Given the presented challenges, the research continued with a modified version of the original research plan in order to take advantage of the continued potential for learning from longitudinal adolescent research. The investigation adapted by changing the nature of the inquiry from one of a school design comparison, to an emphasis on the longitudinal development of the student sample's self-esteem and self-concept and the impact of schools in general. The resulting project, with its given limitations, is thus a pilot study with the hopes that its exploration of the changing nature of young adolescents' self-esteem and self-concept over the course of their middle level years may be the catalyst for additional research.

Site and Participant Selection

The Cleveland Municipal School District (CMSD) was originally chosen as the location for this longitudinal project as a result of the district's inclusion of both school models (K-8 and middle schools) required for the original purpose of the study. The result of using one school district sample was to minimize and more easily control for the problems associated with differing student and social contextual variables in different districts. Furthermore, a focus on low socioeconomic status, urban students permitted researchers to concentrate on schools where students may more keenly feel the positive and negative effects of differing school climates. This proved to be the case for the first year of the study (2004-2005) when significant differences were found in self-esteem between the students in the two models, especially for girls (Author, 2007).

The original convenience sample in 2004 (resulting from parental consent) included 104 students, with 42 males and 62 females (mean age = 11.5, SD = .62). However, only 40 remained in their same schools in eighth grade, with the other 64 having transferred to other schools as a result of school system reorganization. Of the 40 students remaining in their original

schools, 5 were absent on days of research, lowering the total for spring 2007 participation to only 35. As part of the qualitative inquiry, an original sub-sample of 22 students was interviewed at length in the fall 2004, but only 14 were part of this sub-sample in eighth grade (9 males and 5 females). The changing nature of this sample size undeniably presented a limitation to the study. However, it also represents the reality of conducting research in authentic environments, especially in large urban school systems (one reason for the absence of an abundance of urban public school longitudinal studies). As a result, any insights acquired, even limited, may be valuable indications for continued study.

Data Sources

A triangulated mixed methods research design was employed in this study which allowed the researcher to collect both quantitative and qualitative data simultaneously. Such a method enables the researchers to gain insight into inconsistencies as well as complementary results (Creswell, 2005). Throughout the data collection phase of the study, quantitative and qualitative sources of information were considered equally valuable.

Self-esteem was measured by surveying all of the study's participants using the *Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale* (Rosenberg, 1965). The students in the study completed the Self-Esteem scale at the very beginning of the fall of 2004 (beginning of sixth grade), the spring of 2005 (end of sixth grade) and the spring of 2007 (end of eighth grade). The Rosenberg scale consists of 10 items using a 4-point Likert scale. Previously reported test-retest reliability ranged from .82 to .88, with Cronbach's alpha for various samples ranging from .77 to .88 (Blascovich and Tomaka, 1991, p.122). Global self-esteem was investigated using two types of scoring methods which have been used in the past with this survey. Some investigators have utilized a total 40 point composite score as a dependent variable and others have combined items into a 6

point Guttman scale. Both methods of scoring have been found to be reliable, but for this piece of the larger study, researchers used the 40-point composite score as a measure of global self-esteem.

A smaller sub-group of students were interviewed using the *Simmons and Rosenberg Self-Image Index* (Simmons, et al., 1973) as a framework to get a more comprehensive analysis of the students' self-image. The Simmons and Rosenberg Self-Image Scale (Simmons, et al., 1973) is a one-on-one interview guide including five subscales: (a) self-consciousness, (b) stability of self, (c) self-esteem, (d) perceived self-image, and (e) depressive affect. While each sub-scale includes items that could result in both quantitative and qualitative analysis, only the extended answers that provided qualitative reasoning and description by students were utilized in this paper for qualitative analysis.

In addition to the above instruments, the first phase of interviews in the Fall of 2004 revealed such notable remarks by students pertaining to their peers and teachers that additional analysis was warranted of their relationships with others in the school and its impact on self-esteem in the Springs of 2005 and 2007. This was completed with the development of an inventory of school relational items (peers and teachers). In order to minimize confusion among students, this survey was structured very similarly to the self-esteem survey, as a 4-point Likert scale, including three items pertaining to friendships in school. These items were analyzed separately first and then together by summing them to produce one composite "friendship" score (one item reverse coded). Two items pertained to relationships with teachers at the school and were analyzed similarly. See table 5 for a list of relationship items.

Data Analysis

As a result of the considerable changes in the study's sample size and composition, the nature of the analysis for this study varies substantially from previous investigations with this sample of students. An analysis of the entire sample's longitudinal change in global self-esteem, self-concept, and relational perceptions was conducted. Furthermore, because prior results with this sample have repeatedly found gender differences when comparing global self-esteem or self-concept items, gender analyses was conducted for all investigations. Additionally, emphasis was placed on the qualitative interviews and observations in the data analysis phase of the study in order to offset issues related to sample attrition and the generalizability of quantitative results.

Researchers entered quantitative data from the self-esteem and self-image scales into SPSS 15.0 for longitudinal comparisons. Researchers evaluated statistical significance based on a level of significance (α) of 0.05. To determine whether students' evaluations of their own self-esteem, self-concept and peer and teacher relationships changed over the course of the middle grades, dependent t-tests were applied to summated scores. Due to the ordinal scale of the data and sample attrition, the nonparametric Wilcoxon Signed Ranks Test was used to examine aggregate responses to Likert-scale items from the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale, the Simmons and Rosenberg Self-Image Index, and the School Relational Inventory.

Qualitative data analysis was driven by a postpositivist or constructivist position, where the researchers sought *credibility* to their research as opposed to *internal validity* which concerned the quantitative aspect to the project. Based on Lincoln and Guba's techniques to increasing the credibility of findings (Merrick, 1999), the researchers included: prolonged engagement in both municipalities being studied, and triangulation of data by utilizing different sources and methods. Verbatim transcripts from several sections of the extended answers from

the *Simmons and Rosenberg Self-Image Scale* constituted the bulk of qualitative data. As a longitudinal investigation, the qualitative interview responses were first coded looking for themes found to be essential to the first wave of research. Researchers then went back to the transcripts to focus specifically on exploring how students' interview responses supported any longitudinal quantitative statistically significant differences as well as emerging similarities and differences between males and females. This iterative approach to comparing results from both data sources is one of the benefits of the mixed-methods design used here: statistical results are enhanced by the students' own words and descriptions, and then the qualitative data drives additional quantitative exploration to determine whether trends in the interview data might be seen for the larger group of students.This could only be done, however, when survey questions corresponded to interview questions; not every trend in the interview data could be further explored statistically. At each stage, a second coder independently analyzed the qualitative data in order to verify consistency and add to the credibility of the qualitative analysis.

Results

Global Self Esteem

An analysis of students' global self-esteem scores from the *Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale* revealed a significant increase in students' mean scores for global self-esteem from the Fall 2004 ($M = 30.54$, $sd = 4.36$) to the Spring 2005 ($M = 31.70$, $sd = 4.43$) [$t(68) = -2.030$, $p = .046$]; this indicates that, overall, self esteem increased from the beginning to the end of sixth grade. Furthermore, a moderate, positive relationship was found between the Fall 2004 to Spring 2005 scores ($r = .418$, $p < .001$), and again from Spring 2005 to Spring 2007 ($r = .651$, $p < .001$), indicating a relatively predictable longitudinal pattern that students with high self-esteem at the

beginning of sixth grade and the end of sixth grade were likely to have high self-esteem at the end of sixth grade and in eighth grade, respectively. While students' self-esteem scores tended to correlate from measurement period to measurement period, self-esteem scores at the end of sixth grade (Spring 2005) were more predictive of their self-esteem at the end of eighth grade (r^2 = .423) than their self-esteem scores at the beginning of sixth grade (r^2 = .174). Moreover, a significant relationship between self-esteem scores was not found from Fall 2004 to Spring 2007 (r = .207, p = .280), suggesting that a great degree of fluctuation in self-esteem may occur during this time period.

Nonparametric (Wilcoxon's Signed Ranks) statistical tests conducted on the aggregated responses to individual, rank-ordered items on the self-esteem scale (Table 1) were used to identify the aspects of self-esteem, if any, that might substantiate or provide additional insight into the self-esteem findings. The following self-esteem items yielded statistically significant changes whereby students, overall, were more likely to agree with the item at the beginning of sixth grade than at the end of sixth grade: *At times I think I am no good at all* [Z = -2.756, p = .006]*; I certainly feel useless at times* [Z = -1.985, p = .047]; *I wish I could have more respect for myself* [Z = -2.192, p = .028]; and, *I sometimes think I am a failure* [Z = -2.202, p = .028]. Each of these significant items in early sixth grade is notably negative.

To complement the above quantitative analysis, an investigation of the qualitative interviews with the sub-sample of 14 students discovered additional evidence to support the quantitative changes in global self-esteem, also finding an increase in positive self-analysis by the students over the course of sixth grade. Specifically, at different times in the interviews, students were given the opportunity to theorize what their parents, teachers, and peers might say about them [*If I met your parents (teachers, peers) what sorts of things might they tell me about*

you?]. These *reflected appraisals* resulted in their own interpretations of how these other individuals would perceive them, and thus their own reflections on their self-image. When combining all comments together from these sections (parents, teachers, and peers) the percentage of positive comments about themselves reflect a similar pattern as the change in self-esteem over the course of the three phases of the study. An analysis of the positive self-appraisals found that of the 66 total self-appraisal comments given in the fall of 2004, 71% were of a positive nature (e.g., *They would say I'm a nice person, friendly, and dependable*) . This percentage grew to 85% of the 92 self-appraisal comments in the spring of 2005, with a slight decline to 74% of the 210 self-appraisal comments in the spring of 2007. This evidence provides further support to the notion that this group, as a whole, felt less sure of themselves at the beginning of sixth grade but experienced the greatest change (increase) in self-perception throughout the sixth grade when they also experienced their highest, most positive sense of self.

Nonetheless, while the percentages of total positive comments in the spring of 2007 are similar to the fall of 2004, a slight difference did emerge in the balance of positive and negative comments per person. Whereas students were more likely to talk either all positively or all negatively about themselves in the beginning of sixth grade, they were more likely to include a combination of both evaluative comments at the end of eighth grade. For instance, in sixth grade, one girl said that her teachers would say that she, "*learns, likes to go to school and study and she likes to help the students in classroom.*" However, at the end of eighth grade, she said that most teachers would say "*she is a very good, but others would say I'm sometimes a slow learner. I lose attention too much in class.*" Likewise, a boy in sixth grade indicated that his teachers would "*say I'm cooperative, and I do my homework. They talk very good about me to my parents.*" However, this same boy in eighth grade said that his teachers would say that *"he's*

a good student but he talks to his friends." Both of these examples illustrate a more complex

self-appraisal in eighth grade, including positive tones infused with some self-critical analyses

Global Self Esteem by Gender

Descriptive differences between the longitudinal self-esteem patterns for the males and

females in the study can be identified through a visual depiction of the data (see Figure 2). An

overall, descriptive examination of self–esteem trends indicates that male self-esteem steadily

increases (although not always significantly) from the beginning of sixth grade through eighth

grade; female self-esteem, however, appears to increase from the beginning to the end of sixth

grade but then decreases (at least descriptively), nearly to its original level, by the Spring of

eighth grade (see Figure 2).

The patterns that can be identified with a visual depiction of the data are made clearer by

the presentation of statistical analyses to evaluate the shifts in self-esteem inferentially. To this

end, there were no statistically significant differences identified through the application of

independent t-tests between males and females at any point of measurement. This means that

self-esteem for boys was roughly equivalent to self-esteem for girls throughout the study. While

this result may seem surprising in light of the visual depiction of the data in Figure 2, it is likely

that the small sample in the spring of 2007 contributes greatly to this result.

In terms of the overall predictability of self-esteem by gender, the male sample yielded a

significant, positive relationship in self-esteem scores from the fall of 2004 to the spring of 2005

($r = .661$, $p < .001$, $r^2 = .436$). This statistical result suggests that males with high self-esteem at

the beginning of sixth grade tend to have high self-esteem at the end of sixth grade. This result

was not mirrored with the female sample, however. There was not a significant relationship in

self-esteem for females from the beginning to the end of sixth grade ($r = .296$, $p = .054$, $r^2 = .087$). There was, however, a statistically significant increase in self-esteem for females across the sixth grade year [$t(42) = -2.036$, $p = .048$]. These patterns suggest that self-esteem may be more variable over this time period for girls than for boys.

Similar to patterns found for the entire sample, correlational evidence indicates that boys' and girls' self-esteem at the end of sixth grade is more predictive of their self-esteem in eighth grade ($r_{boys} = .779$, $p = .039$, $r^2 = .606$; $r_{girls} = .590$, $p = .006$, $r^2 = .348$), than their self-esteem scores at the beginning of sixth grade ($r_{boys} = .275$, $p = .441$, $r^2 = .075$; $r_{girls} = .115$, $p = .527$, $r^2 = .013$). This result suggests that even though male self-esteem may not change to the extent that female self-esteem does over the sixth grade year, a self-esteem measure taken at the conclusion of sixth grade for both boys and girls may be a more reliable predictor of global self-esteem throughout early adolescence.

Nonparametric (Wilcoxon's Signed Ranks) tests conducted on the likert-scaled items for males complement the parametric quantitative analysis conducted thus far on the summated scores (see Table 1), with only two items revealing any statistically significant changes in perception. Similar to the lack of relationship in their self-esteem scores between early sixth and later eighth grade, boys were more likely to *agree* in the Fall 2004 than in the Spring 2007 with the phrase, *At times I think I am no good at all* [$Z = -1.964$, $p = .050$]. From a positive perspective, they were more likely to *agree* in Spring 2005 than in the Fall 2004 with the phrase, *I take a positive attitude toward myself* [$Z = -2.359$, $p = .018$]. These two items assist in characterizing a group of boys who, at least in some significant respects, feel more positively about themselves at the end of sixth grade than at the beginning of sixth grade; and have a more negative assessment of themselves at the beginning of sixth grade than at the end of eighth grade.

Qualitative examples illustrating this changing attitude amongst boys was found in interviews when students were asked if they ever felt like they weren't a good person. At the beginning of sixth grade, one boy said that "*sometimes I feel I'm no good, like when I do something wrong, especially at home*." However, at the end of sixth grade, this same boy said that "*I think I am a good person, but if I don't help someone, I feel guilty*." Finally, at the end of eighth grade, this same boy thought the question sounded *"evil and depressed"* and that no one would feel that way.

As for boys, no other significant changes in individual self-esteem items were found throughout the three measurement periods. These results suggest that while very specific aspects of self-esteem may improve throughout the middle school years for males, when examining self-esteem as a broad (global) construct, these individual changes may be absorbed.

An analysis of the girls' self-esteem scores reveals that their end of the sixth grade self-esteem is also more predictive of their eighth grade self-esteem than their fall scores. First, a significant positive relationship was found from spring 2005 to spring 2007 ($r = .590$, $p = .006$, $r^2 = .348$). However, no significant relationship was found between the fall 2004 and spring 2005 scores, nor for the fall 2004 and spring 2007 scores. Furthermore, no relationship was found between their self-esteem scores in the fall 2004 and spring 2005. In fact, sixth grade revealed the most substantial and significant change for girls [$t(42) = -2.04$, $p = .048$]when their average level of self-esteem significantly increased from the fall of 2004 ($M = 30.37$, $sd = 4.519$) to the spring of 2005 ($M = 32.02$, $sd = 4.44$). These results suggest that the sixth grade year may be more dynamic and variable for females in terms of self-esteem, when compared to the males.

Nonparametric (Wilcoxon's Signed Ranks) tests for females reveal some aspects in which girls feel more negatively about themselves and report less self- respect at the beginning

of sixth grade than at the end of sixth grade. Specifically, they are more likely to agree with the following two phrases in the fall 2004 as compared to the spring 2005: *At times I think I am no good at all* [Z = -2.263, p = .024]*; and, I certainly feel useless at times* [Z = -2.327, p = .020]. Furthermore, a change in self-respect is noted between early sixth grade and the end of eighth grade when in the fall 2004 they agree more with the statement, *I wish I could have more respect for myself* [Z = -3.489, p < .001] than the spring 2007. However, no significant changes in self-esteem occurred between the end of sixth grade and eighth grade data collection points, providing additional evidence that these females may have experienced more change in self-esteem throughout the sixth grade year than at any other point in middle school.

Additional support for negative feelings about themselves in the early sixth grade can also be found in interview comments. It is notable that at the beginning of sixth grade, when asked if they ever felt like they weren't a good person, the majority of girls did not want to answer the question during interviews. They either said nothing or said they couldn't respond. However, in eighth grade, one girl reflected profoundly on the question and said: "*No, I don't feel that way, but in sixth grade I think I was like that. But now I'm pretty grateful for what I have and I'm pretty happy with myself.*" This girl aptly recognizes the changes she has experienced over the last three years and is able to vocalize them because she precisely does feel more confident in herself.

The gender trends found in the self-esteem analysis for females are also reflected in the qualitative reflective appraisals (*what would your parents or teachers say about you?*). While both boys and girls emphasized positive traits over negative characteristics in all three interviews, the girls' proportion of positive comments changed more dramatically than the boys' comments and also reflects the same directional pattern as the self-esteem quantitative results.

The females' percentage of overall positive comments about themselves rose from 63% of their

46 comments in the fall 2004 to 80% of their 55 comments in spring 2005. However, this group

of girls dipped to only 20% of their 130 comments about themselves in the spring 2007. On the

other hand, boys' positive self-perceptions remained fairly stable throughout the three years of

the study, varying from 90% of their 20 comments in 2004, to 92% of their 37 comments in

2005, and down only slightly to 83% of their self-reflections in 2007. (See Table 2 for examples

of males and females mixed positive and negative self-perception comments). Therefore, the

evaluative nature of these volunteered self-appraisals complements the quantitative pattern found

with the girls who increased in their positive self-perceptions during the sixth grade but declined

in eighth.

Self Concept

Thus far, quantitative and qualitative analysis has found the greatest changes in self-

esteem for this group of young adolescents to occur during sixth grade rather than during the

time period between sixth and eighth grade. Different patterns for boys and girls were found,

with girls seemingly exhibiting greater change in their evaluation of themselves during this year.

Yet a more thorough understanding of self-esteem may be discovered by an examination of the

content of these students' self-concepts. An analysis of the changing nature of the actual content

of students' interviews begins with a comparison of the amount of talking they volunteered from

year to year. An actual word count of the interviews reveals that this group of students had much

more to say in interviews in eighth grade than they did in sixth grade as the mean number of

words per interview changed from an average of 332 words in fall 2004, to 326 in spring 2005

and 494 in spring 2007.

In addition to the change in quantity of talking, an analysis of the *content* of students' self-appraisals of their parents and teachers reveals a gradual change in the way they view their parents and teachers' perceptions of them from sixth to eighth grade. In the fall of sixth grade, all self-appraisals of parents mirrored the self-appraisals of teachers. In other words, what the students thought their parents would say about them was similar to what they thought their teachers would say. If a student thought their parents would say only kind things about their personality and behavior, they also viewed their teachers' analysis the same. This pattern continued through to the end of sixth grade. However, at the end of eighth grade, only 3 of the 14 interviewed students had similar self-appraisals for parents and teachers, with the other 11 eighth grade students now having some differentiated characteristics. The most common difference between parent and teacher self-appraisals now included negative assumed perceptions from the teachers but none from the parents. Where one girl thought her parents had only nice things to say about her, she said that while her teachers would say that she's "*a nice person,*" she would also say that she "*talks a lot, even when she's not supposed to do so*." Likewise, a male student who thought his parents might say how "*hard working and smart*" he is, his teachers would agree that he is a "*good, fine student who shows respect*" but also has a "*little trouble at work*" and sometimes he "*doesn't pay attention and acts a little goofy*."

Further qualitative analysis reveals that the differentiation occurring more in eighth grade may be the result of changing teachers' perceptions of their social behavior, rather than abilities. In 2004-2005, there was a fairly equal ratio of comments about their teachers' perceptions of them pertaining to their abilities (instrumental beliefs) and socio-emotional characteristics, with 41% of their comments about abilities and 59% about their social behavior in 2004, with 52%

and 48% respectively in 2005. However, in 2007, only 25% of the sample thought their teachers would comment about their skills, with the vast majority emphasizing social traits.

The Content of My Skills. Additional analysis of the content of self-concept was accomplished by examining the one measure of the Simmons and Rosenberg Self-Image Interview that was completed by the smaller sub-sample of interviewed students in the fall 2004, but was later included on all surveys in 2005 and 2007. This section includes a paper and pencil activity where adolescents were given a table with a list of characteristics (*smart, good-looking, truthful, athletic, well-behaved, hard-working, helpful, and funny*) that they were to rank themselves as: *very, fairly, sort of,* or *not at all*. Nonparametric (Wilcoxon's Signed Ranks) tests analyzing each item over time for the entire group, reveals a significant difference for only two items: *athletic* and *hard working*. In the fall of 2004, students were more likely to believe they were *very* athletic [$Z = -2.000, p = .046$] and *very hard working* [$Z = -2.000, p = .046$] in comparison to spring of 2007 (see Table 3). Because students were more likely to describe themselves as athletic and hardworking at the beginning of the middle grades than at the end of the middle grades, an examination into the possible influences throughout the middle grades that accounts for this negative trend was warranted.

Qualitative analysis of the interviews sheds some light on the importance of being athletic or participating in sports for these students. During the interviews, all students were asked *what they were good at*. An analysis of this one item response reveals that students included some type of sport or athletic past-time in 33% of their interviews at the beginning of sixth grade, with an increase to 100% of interviews by the end of sixth grade, but dipping to 43% by eighth grade. Furthermore, boys appear to drive the qualitative analysis with 70% of the total athletic comments coming from the males. Reflecting the same pattern as the global self-esteem

quantitative analysis, all of the students increased their confidence about their athletic selves throughout sixth grade, but then lost some of this confidence by the end of their middle school year. See Table 4 for examples of athletic comments over time.

While the quantitative statistical analysis revealed that boys agreed more strongly at the beginning of sixth grade that they were *athletic* when compared to their self-concept in eighth grade, the important point to compare to this qualitative analysis is the weakening of perceptions of athleticism *after a surge in importance at the end of sixth grade*. Several students also noted that their lack of access to sports during middle school had influenced them. They like sports but appear to be negatively influenced by the lack of opportunity provided in their schools. Thus perhaps the lack of athletic opportunities in middle school over the past three years has influenced their personal assessment of their own athletic skills/abilities.

Relationships, Self Concept and Self Esteem

Friendships. In order to investigate the influence of friends at school on student self-esteem and self-concept, an analysis was conducted of the three *friendship* items on the *School Relational Inventory*, utilizing dependent t-tests to compare global friendship scores from the end of sixth grade to the end of eighth grade. A significant difference was identified with spring 2005 scores ($M = 9.218$, $sd = 1.22$) being lower than spring 2007 scores ($M = 10.22$, $sd = 1.601$), [t (31) = -3.52, $p = .001$] for the overall sample. Furthermore, nonparametric analysis (Wilcoxon's Signed Ranks) reveals only one of the friendship items to change significantly over this time period (Table 5). In the Spring of 2005, students were more likely to agree with the statement, *I have fewer friends now than I had last year in school* than students in the Spring 2007 [$Z = -2.634$, $p = .008$]. Thus, students overall were more likely to report having fewer friends currently (than in the previous year) at the conclusion of sixth grade than at the end of eighth

grade. Furthermore, this trend was particularly true for females whose mean friendships scores rose significantly from spring 2005 (M = 9.20, sd = 1.005) to spring 2007 (M = 10.30, sd = 2.260), [t(19) = -2.979, p = .008]. Nonparametric analysis for girls also reflects the findings for the entire group's response to: *I have fewer friends now than I had last year in school* [Z = -2.078, p = .038]. The girls are more likely to report having fewer friends currently (than in the previous year) at the conclusion of sixth grade than at the end of eighth grade. Finally, an analysis of male friendship data reveals no statistically significant results, leading to the conclusion that females appear to be driving this trend of friendship insecurity in the sixth grade but become more secure with their friendships by the end of eighth grade.

The statistical analysis above reflects changes for girls but not for boys in how they have quantified, or literally counted their friendships over the course of three years. Nevertheless, a qualitative analysis of interviews from all three phases of the study reveals changes in how the students view the *quality* of those friendships, revealing a different pattern from the quantitative analysis. An analysis of the word *friend* was completed for the entire length of the interviews available for longitudinal analysis. In the fall of 2004, the word friend was primarily utilized in a positive tone with 90% of the comments being either complementary or neutral, as in, "*I'm with my friends at this school*;" and, "*I have about 5 or 6 friends and they all have really good points about them;"* and, "*There are a couple of boys who have been my friends since kindergarten*." The proportion of these types of comments decrease slightly to 82% of comments by the end of the sixth grade, with a slight increase in the number of negative or less than positive comments at this time, such as "*Most of my friends went to another school. So I wish I went there;"* and, "*Sometimes I switch off and on between three friends*."

However, what is most notable about a *friendship* analysis is the change that occurs by the end of eighth grade, where we find a qualitative difference in the way students discuss their relationships. By the end of eighth grade, the students are much more analytical about their friendships and for the first time included both positive and negative statements within a single reflection about friends. For instance, in response to asking if she had many friends, one girl consistently answered these questions negatively from year to year. However, her explanation changed qualitatively from simply saying in 2004, "*I have only a few friends;*" and then in 2005, "*Now that I've changed classes, maybe I'll have more friends*;" and finally in 2007 to "*I don't have very many friends because they like talking about things. They are often purposefully looking for problems and creating trouble. I don't like that. I'm just trying to graduate this year.*" In the past, peers were either good or bad and were either quantitatively counted as a friend or not. Now they evaluated their relationships.

This reflective analysis was more prevalent in the female interviews where we see an appreciation for the depth to their relationships and a fight for friendships. Several girls mentioned that their parents might not like their friends, but they didn't care. They were "*their friends*" and their "*parents just didn't understand*" them. Examples of other types of reflective analysis includes: "*I used to make as many friends as possible, but now I'm just concerned with a few good friends;*" and, "*I have more friends now because some of my friends left this school and then I made better friends since they left.*" Furthermore, for the first time several students contemplated the reciprocal nature of friendships, such as: "*When you go through different changes, you think about how this is going to affect my friends and family. You have to think, what will others think of you if you made that change;*" and, "*I like me for me and if you can't accept who I am, then you are just one friend I don't need.*" Consequently, by the end of eighth

grade, students were beginning to see the complex nature of friendships and how friends influence each other.

      Teachers The relational influence that teachers have on students was also explored similarly to the methods utilized with friendships. No significant differences were found for any group (entire sample, males or females) utilizing a t-test with the total teacher relationship score (see Table 5). However, nonparametric (Wilcoxon's Signed Ranks) tests found that students were more likely to agree with the statement, *My teachers know me as well or better than previous teachers,* in the spring 2007 than in the spring 2005 [$Z = -2.609$, $p = .009$]. Thus, students may feel they have better relationships with their teachers in eighth grade than at the end of sixth grade. Finally, males appear to be driving this trend as this item was significant for them [$Z = -2.428$, $p = .015$] and not for females. No significant differences were found for females on any teacher relationship items. Consequently, while females' relationships with peers appear to be more in flux than males over the course of the middle school years, males' relationships with teachers appear to be more dynamic and improve more so than females.

      Further qualitative analysis of the perceptions students believe teachers have of them, reveals both a more complete understanding of student-teacher relationships and a fuller analysis of student self-concept. An analysis was conducted of the question: *If I met your teacher(s), what kind of a person would they say you are and what sorts of things would they tell me about you?* During the sixth grade, boys envisioned their teachers as perceiving them largely from the perspective of the things they could do, their abilities and skills, or instrumental traits. Furthermore, when reflecting on their instrumental abilities, they did so only from a positive perspective. No boy ever mentioned anything they could not do. They only reported abilities in which they were successful. The percentage of these self-perceptions that were instrumental rose

from 67% in the fall 2004 to 91% in the spring of 2005. However, the percentage of instrumental traits dropped drastically at the end of eighth grade (2007) to only 35%. At the same time, their percentage of socio-emotional or social behavioral traits rose to 65%. While the instrumental traits continued to be all positive, any negative comments given were related to socio-emotional traits and not abilities.

Females, on the other hand, responded to this *teachers' perception* question with a different pattern of instrumental vs. socio-emotional responses. The females' comments about their teachers' perceptions of them always included a greater percentage of positive remarks as compared to negative remarks about themselves at all three data collection periods. However, the proportion of positive remarks steadily declined from 85% to 71% to 52%, while negative comments increased from 15% to 29% to 48%. Furthermore, when analyzing the types of comments they included, unlike the boys, girls did not emphasize their abilities, or instrumental strengths. From year to year, the females always emphasized their social selves more than their abilities, with the percentage of their social comments actually increasing from 73% (2004) to 79% (2005) to 82% (2007), with the percentage of abilities decreasing from 27%, to 21%, and finally only 18% of their teacher self-appraisals. What is more, similar to the boys in 2004 and 2005, all of the girls' comments about their instrumental strengths were positive. They too only discussed things they could do. However, in 2007 this changed, with 33% of their instrumental comments referring to things they could not do well. Consequently, throughout middle school these girls appeared to slowly develop the attitude that their teachers viewed them more negatively in eighth grade and part of the reason was because they needed to improve on both their social behaviors and skills, which in a school setting would point to academic abilities.

Discussion

This longitudinal mixed methods design, including both quantitative and qualitative analysis, contributes to Hirsch and DuBois' (2000) call for varied research designs to uncover the complexity of self-esteem and self-concept for young adolescents as they are influenced by myriad contexts in which students evaluate themselves. The reality of conducting research in a large urban school system provided challenges to the research design and therefore limitation to the generalizability of results. Nonetheless, the outcomes of this unique study, have resulted from a mixed-methods design permitting confirmability through triangulation, and therefore point to directions for further research.

As referenced earlier, many studies have found the middle school years (sixth to eighth grade) to be the most problematic for girls' development of self-esteem. A combined analysis of the developmental trends (Table 5) together with t-test and correlational analyses and qualitative interview responses reveals a picture that is much more complex than simply girls declining and boys maintaining self-esteem. A surface look at mean global self-esteem scores appears to compare early sixth and later eighth grade scores as being similar, yet statistical analysis reveals a lack of correlation between the two groups, but a strong correlation between the end of sixth and eighth grades. As a result, individual girls' self-esteem is quite dynamic throughout the middle grades, but most so during sixth. Thus, the up and down visual trend for girls in Table 5, while not statistically significant, may be symbolically appropriate of the nature of the girls' individual and group fluctuation during these middle grades.

This study's inclusion of qualitative analysis, revealing boys' more consistently positive analysis of themselves and girls more mixed positive and negative self-reflections, also mirrors the pattern found in the quantitative data. The contradictions and inconsistencies by the girls in

this study could be a manifestation of some findings noted in other prior research (Simmons, et al., 1973; Blyth and Simmons & Carlton-Ford, 1983). While most of these studies point to the negative implications for females' self-esteem during this developmental period, this study suggests that girls may simply be more sensitive to their contextual surroundings at this time and fluctuate more in self-perceptions than boys, providing further evidence for the need for continued ecologically and contextually oriented research as suggested by Bronfenbrenner (1979) or Harter (2001).

While the results in this study have found that the end of sixth to the end of eighth grade as the period with the greatest self-esteem stability for this group of students, the role that friendship plays in the development of a sense of self is complex. Qualitative analysis of interviews provides welcome assistance in analyzing the influence of friends and peers on young adolescents' self-esteem. The perceptions that these students have of their friendships appear contradictory, especially for girls, as the quantitative analysis reveals friendship scores rising quantitatively from the end of sixth grade to the end of eighth grade; however qualitative analysis shows an increase in negative comments in interviews about their friends at the end of eighth grade. Yet these negative comments at the end of eighth grade are still interwoven with positive remarks, symbolizing the greater complexity of their thought processes during this later interview. For the first time, they appear to be recognizing the grey areas in their lives. They see some peers who are not nice and who are not people they want as friends; whereas in sixth grade they may have simply been happy to be able to *count* them as friends. Consequently, even though the proportion of negative comments about *friends* may have risen at the end of eighth grade, this does not mean they feel they have less or worse friendships when compared to previous years. With the development of new cognitive skills and being able to analyze the

complexity of friendships, they may be appreciating the strength of the true good friends that they have now rather than the larger number of superficial friends they had in sixth grade. They are actually revealing more contemplative, thoughtful self-reflections.

This more complicated self-analysis of friendships at the end of eighth grade may also be the result of what appears to be a more differentiated sense of self at this time. As Harter et al. (2002) have suggested, these young adolescents appear to have developed a more differentiated sense of themselves by the end of middle school, as reflected in their more varied comments about themselves at that time when compared to sixth grade, in addition to different reported self appraisals from parents and teachers. Furthermore, the qualitative results show that this greater differentiation of the self develops more substantially with teachers' self-appraisals over the three years, suggesting a more complicated and dynamic relationship with eighth grade as compared to sixth grade teachers. As a result, directions for further research should continue to investigate, from a mixed-methods approach, the impact of others (peers and teachers) on the development of differentiated selves during the middle grades.

In addition to changing, dynamic relationships, this study has also found changes in young adolescents' inclusion of particular characteristics of one's self-concept when analyzing their self-esteem. The case in point, involving athleticism as an important trait, may contribute to understanding the relationship between content of self-image and self-esteem. This group of students simultaneously increased their level of self-esteem over the course of sixth grade and also strengthened their beliefs in their abilities (especially athleticism) during that year. This is particularly true of the boys. The qualitative analysis found that early adolescent boys tend to naturally want to define themselves in terms of their instrumental traits, whereas girls tend to focus more on their socio-emotional selves. Thus, when males experience a perceived decline in

an ability (in this case athleticism), it appears to alter their formula for self-reflection. They become less consistent in the content of their self-image and may begin to exclude that skill from their self-analysis formula as they view their ability in that skill (e.g. athletics) as declining or simply nonexistent. However, during interviews, girls were more willing to discuss both abilities and personality traits from sixth through eighth grade. If it is the case that boys tend to exclude personality and focus on instrumental traits, then future research should investigate the influence these tendencies have on global self-esteem. Further research is also needed to explore the extent to which young adolescents' perceptions of their abilities are negatively influenced by the lack of opportunity to excel at a skill they enjoy (e.g. athletics, music, art).

Finally, the unique growth found in self-esteem and the changes in self-concept found throughout sixth grade but not evidenced afterward as might be expected during eighth grade may be the result of influences from the transitions in these students' lives as other researchers have indicated (Blyth et al., 1983; Blyth,1983; Eccles et. al., 1993; Gronna, 1999; Richardson, 2000). While all of these students' bodies are transitioning, some of them transitioned into middle schools in sixth grade and others, while remaining in the same K-8 schools, transitioned into a new category of student at their school. Thus, it is possible that the beginning of sixth grade may have been influenced by a steep decline in self-esteem, only to be regained during the sixth grade school year. During the spring 2007 interviews, all students were getting ready to transition again, this time into high school. The complexity of their interview responses in eighth grade, with a mixture of positive and negative feelings about themselves and others may be the result of a unique combination of transitioning in their lives (biological, cognitive, social, and school-based), resulting in more confusion, similar to that seen at the beginning of sixth grade. One student in particular expressed his feelings of confusion quite clearly in 2007 when he said,

"I feel so confused about my feelings. I'm an honorable person and I feel good about helping those who need help, but then I get in trouble sometimes too, and sometimes I'm nasty. I feel so confused." This reflects the growth of someone who may have felt superficially good about himself in sixth grade if he had many friends or was good at sports. However, as with so many of the students in eighth grade, they recognize the complexity of their lives, themselves, and their feelings.

References

Atwater, E. (1996). *Adolescence* (4th Ed). Upper Saddle River, New Jersey: Prentice Hall.

Author (2008). Perceptions of people and place: Young adolescents' interpretation of their
schools in the United States and the United Kingdom. *Journal of Adolescent Research*,
23, 6, 722-744.

Author (2007). Middle grades' school models and their imact on early adolescent self-esteem.
Middle Grades Research Journal, *2*, 1, 73-97.

Bassen, C. and Lamb, M. (2006). Gender differences in adolescents' self-concepts of assertion
and affiliation. *European Journal of Developmental Psychology*, *3*,1,71-94.

Bishop, J.A. and Inderbitzen, H.M. (1995) Peer acceptance and friendship: An investigation of
their relation to self-esteem. *Journal of Early Adolescence*, *15*, 4, 476-489.

Blascovich, J. and Tomaka, J. (1991). Measures of self-esteem. In Robinson, J.P., Shaver, P.R. &
Wrightsman, L.S., Eds. *Measures of Personality and Social Psychological Attitudes*. San
Diego: Elsevier Academic Press (115-160).

Blyth, D.A., Simmons, R.G. and S. Carlton-Ford (1983) The adjustment of early adolescents to
school transitions. *Journal of Early Adolescence*, *3*, 105-120.

Branden, N. (1994). *Six pillars of self-esteem*. New York: Bantam.

Bronfenbrenner (1979). *The Ecology of Human Development: Experiments by Nature and
Design*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Clay, D., Vignoles, V.L., and H. Dittmar. (2005). Body image and self-esteem among adolescent
girls: Testing the influence of sociocultural factors. *Journal of Research on Adolescence*.
15, 4, 451-477.

Creswell, J. W. (2005). *Educational research: Planning, conducting, and evaluating quantitative and qualitative research*. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson Education, Inc.

Chung, H., Elias, M., & Schneider, K. (1998). Patterns of individual adjustment changes during middle school transition. *Journal of School Psychology*, *36*, 83-101.

DuBois, D.L. & Hirsch, B.J. (2000). Self-esteem in early adolescence: From stock character to marquee attraction. *Journal of Early Adolescence, 20* (1), 5-11.

Eccles, J. S., Wigfield, A., Midgley, C., MacIver, D., & Feldlaufer, H. (1993). Negative effects of traditional middle schools on students' motivation. *The Elementary School Journal, 93*, 553-574.

Erikson, E. (1950). *Childhood and Society*. Norton: New York.

Fenzel, L.M. (2000). Prospective study of changes in global self-worth and strain during the transition to middle school. *Journal of Early Adolescence. 20* (1), 93-116.

Gronna, S.S. (1999). *Effects of Grade of School Transition and School Characteristics on Eighth-Grade Achievement: A Multilevel Analysis*. Dissertation Abstracts International Section A: Humanities & Social Science, *59* (12-A, 4358).

Harter, S. (2001). *The Construction of the Self: A Developmental Perspective*. New York: The Guilford Press.

Harter, S., Bresnick, S., Bouchey, H.A., & Whitesell, N.R. (2002). The development of multiple role-related selves during adolescence. In Arnett, J.J. Ed., *Readings on Adolescence and Emerging Adulthood*. 111-119.

Hirsch, B.J. & DuBois, D.L. (2000). Self-Esteem in early adolescence revisited: A promising sequel and a casting call for future roles. *Journal of Early Adolescence*, 20, 2, 125-128.

Humphrey, N., Charlton, J. P., & Newton, I. (2004). The developmental roots of disaffection? *Educational Psychology, 24*, 579-594.

Keefe, K. & Berndt, T.J. (1996). Relations of friendship quality to self-esteem in early adolescence. *Journal of Early Adolescence*, 16 (1), 110-129.

Kling, K.C., Hyde, J.S., Showers, C.J., & Bruswell, B.N. (1999). Gender differences in self-esteem: A meta-analysis. *Psychological Bulletin*, 123, 470-500.

Marsh, H., Byrne, B., & Yeung, A. (1999). Causal ordering of academic self-concept and achievement: Reanalysis of a pioneering study and revised recommendations. *Educational Psychologist, 34*, 155-167.

Merrick, E. (1999). An exploration of quality in qualitative research: Are "reliability" and "validity" relevant? In M. Kopala & L.A. Suzuki (Eds). *Using Qualitative Methods in Psychology*. Thousand Oaks: Sage Publication.

Richardson, T.L. (2000) *Emotional Intelligence as a Mediator of Transition Trauma in Students Progressing from Elementary to Middle School*, Dissertation Abstracts International Section A: Humanities & Social Science, *61* (2-A, 448).

Rosenberg, M. (1965). *Society and the adolescent self-image*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Santrock, J. (2007). *Adolescence*, (11th Ed.). New York: McGraw Hill.

Simmons, R.G., Blyth, D.A., Van Cleave, E.F, Bush, D.M. (1979). Entry into early adolescent: The impact of school structure, puberty, and early dating on self-esteem. *American Sociological Review*. *44*, 6, pp. 948-967.

Simmons, R.G., Burgeson, R. and S. Carlton-Ford (1987). The impact of cumulative change in early adolescence. *Child Development*, *58*, 1220-1234.

Simmons, R. G., Rosenberg, F., & Rosenberg, M. (1973). Disturbance in the self-image at

  adolescence. *American Sociological Review*, *38*, 553-568.

Tashakkori, A. (1993). Gender, Ethnicity, and the Structure of Self-Esteem: An Attitude Theory

  Approach. *Journal of Social Psychology*. *133* (4), 479-488.

Wigfield, A., Eccles, J.S., MacIver, D., Reuman, D.A., and C. Midgley (1991) Transitions during

  early adolescence: Changes in children's domain-specific self-perceptions and general

  self-esteem across the transition to junior high school. *Developmental Psychology*, 27, 4,

  552-565.

Table 1. *Wilcoxon Matched-Pairs Signed-Ranks Results: Rosenberg Self Esteem Scale*

	Fall 2004 – Spring 2005		Spring 2005 – Spring 2007		Fall 2004 – Spring 2007	
	Z	*p*	*Z*	*p*	*Z*	*p*
On the whole, I'm satisfied with myself.						
Overall	-1.789	.074	.000	1.000	-.380	.704
Males	-1.411	.158	-.541	.589	.000	1.000
Females	-1.152	.250	-.707	.480	-.500	.617
At times, I think I'm no good at all.						
Overall	**-2.756**	**.006**	-.995	.320	-1.823	.068
Males	-1/589	.112	-1.081	.279	**-1.964**	**.050**
Females	**-2.263**	**.024**	-.443	.658	-.735	.462
I feel that I have a number of good qualities.						
Overall	-.321	.748	.000	1.000	-.575	.565
Males	-.165	.869	-.577	.564	.000	1.000
Females	-.294	.769	-.206	.837	-.618	.537
I am able to do things as well as most other people.						
Overall	-.754	.451	-.535	.593	-.956	.339
Males	-.428	.669	-.447	.655	-.632	.527
Females	-1.322	.186	-.333	.739	-1.602	.109
I feel I do not have much to be proud of.						
Overall	-.600	.548	-.097	.922	-1.161	.246
Males	-.707	.480	-.540	.589	-1.633	.102
Females	-.187	.851	-.366	.715	-.105	.917
I certainly feel useless at times.						
Overall	**-1.985**	**.047**	-1.006	.315	-.214	.831
Males	-.347	.729	-.302	.763	-..365	.715
Females	**-2.327**	**.020**	-1.512	.131	-.601	.548
I feel that I am a person of worth.						
Overall	-.650	.515	-.262	.794	-.140	.888
Males	-.904	.366	-.780	.435	-.302	.763
Females	.000	1.000	-.816	.414	-.432	.666
I wish I could have more respect for myself.						
Overall	**-2.192**	**.028**	-.565	.572	-1.381	.167
Males	-.944	.351	-.303	.762	-.566	.571
Females	**-3.489**	**.001**	-1.008	.313	**-2.489**	**.013**
All in all, I sometimes think that I am a failure.						
Overall	**-2.202**	**.028**	-.530	.596	-.229	.819
Males	-1.079	.280	-.425	.671	-.259	.796
Females	-1.931	.054	-.312	.755	-.081	.935
I take a positive attitude toward myself.						
Overall	-1.281	.200	-.735	.462	-1.313	.189
Males	**-2.359**	**.018**	.816	.414	-.345	.730
Females	-.106	.916	-.406	.684	-1.465	.143

Table 2. *Examples of comments others would say about them, revealing positive and negative trends.*

	Fall 2004	Spring 2005	Spring 2007
Male	He gets his work done on time and answers right most of the time. And he raises his hand after questions.	He does his work on time. Does good grades in class. He's improving. I had a B in math but now I'm averaging a low A.	He has good friends. He gets good grades and finishes his work on time.
Male	My mom would say I'm kind and I know what to do. I work really hard. My dad would say I'm a very nice child and I know how to do different things.	Mom and Dad would say he's a good boy, and he's really helpful. If you tell him to do something he'll be right there.	He does most of his chores. He mows the lawn and helps out with grandma and grandpa.
Female	Parents would say she's a nice person, but she needs to improve her talking and listen to the teacher, do her homework, do good grades, and go to college.	Mom would say she's sometimes nice but sometimes moody. She's athletic, and respectful. Dad would say a little noisy, but funny. I make him laugh.	They would say that she is very good at spelling. She likes sports and is a hard-working girl. And she likes to go to church.
Female	They'd say that she learns and likes to go to school and study. She likes to help the students in the classroom and explain things to them. But she talks a little bit too much and does not always pay attention to the teachers.	They'd say she's pretty nice and a little smart. But I talk a lot and that's bad.	Most would say I'm very good. But others would say I'm sometimes a slow learner. I loose attention too much in class. Some might say I'm not well behaved because I get bored, and then I'm not focused. I have a hard time paying attention.

Table 3. *Wilcoxon Matched-Pairs Signed-Ranks Results: Simmons and Rosenberg Self-Image*

Index

	Fall 2004 – Spring 2005		Spring 2005 – Spring 2007		Fall 2004 – Spring 2007	
What are you like?	*Z*	*p*	*Z*	*p*	*Z*	*p*
Smart						
Overall	-.707	.480	-1.069	.285	-1.732	.083
Males	-.577	.564	.000	1.000	-1.414	.157
Females	-1.342	.180	-1.414	.157	-1.000	.317
Good-looking						
Overall	-.577	.564	-1.137	.256	-.816	.414
Males	-1.000	.317	-.302	.763	.000	1.000
Females	.000	1.000	-1.634	.102	-1.000	.317
Truthful						
Overall	-.632	.527	-1.013	.311	-1.414	.157
Males	-.447	.655	.518	.518	-1.000	.317
Females	-.447	.655	-.832	.405	-1.000	.317
Athletic						
Overall	-1.413	.158	-1.476	.140	**-2.000**	**.046**
Males	-.557	.577	-1.000	.317	-1.414	.157
Females	-1.394	.163	-1.072	.284	-1.414	.157
Well-behaved						
Overall	-1.134	.257	-.688	.491	-1.732	.083
Males	.000	1.000	-.707	.480	-1.414	.157
Females	-1.134	.257	-.302	.763	-1.000	.317
Hardworking in school						
Overall	-1.561	.119	-.258	.796	**-2.000**	**.046**
Males	-.816	.414	.000	1.000	-1.414	.157
Females	-1.300	.194	-.378	.705	-1.414	.157
Helpful						
Overall	-1.265	.206	-.816	.415	-1.342	.180
Males	-.577	.564	.000	1.000	-1.342	.180
Females	-1.134	.257	-1.100	.271	.000	1.000
Funny						
Overall	.000	1.000	-.665	.506	-1.289	.197
Males	-1.000	.317	-.172	.863	-1.342	.180
Females	-1.000	.317	-1.134	.257	.000	1.000

Table 4. Sampled comments for *what are you good at* for two students, exemplifying athletic

pattern

	Fall 2004	**Spring 2005**	**Spring 2007**
One Male	I'm good at boy scouts and good at tying knots. I'm also good at swimming in mom's pool.	I am good at baseball in my neighborhood. . . . I'm also good at doing chores around the house.	I'm good at helping out people, especially helping out with my grandma and grandpa. I help my brother work on cars and engines.
One Female	I'm good at social studies, science, and ESL. At home, I'm good at washing dishes, cooking, cleaning, and chores.	I'm good at screaming outside. I'm good at playing volleyball.	There are some things I'm good at. I'm good at expressing myself, talking, English, reading, discussing problems.

Table 5. *Wilcoxon Matched-Pairs Signed-Ranks Results: School Relational Inventory, Selected*

Items

	Spring 2005 – Spring 2007	
	Z	p ≤
I have many friends at this school.		
Overall	-.245	.807
Males	-1.342	.180
Females	-.367	.714
I have at least one very good friend at this school.		
Overall	-1.732	.083
Males	-1.732	.083
Females	-1.000	.317
I have fewer friends now than I had last year in school.*		
Overall	**-2.634**	**.008**
Males	-1.634	.102
Females	**-2.078**	**.038**
My teachers know me as well or better than my teachers in previous grades.		
Overall	**-2.609**	**.009**
Males	**-2.428**	**.015**
Females	-1.487	.137
There is at least one teacher at this school whom I am able to talk to about problems		
Overall	-1.570	.116
Males	-1.294	.196
Females	-.929	.353

* Item reverse coded in creation of summated scores.

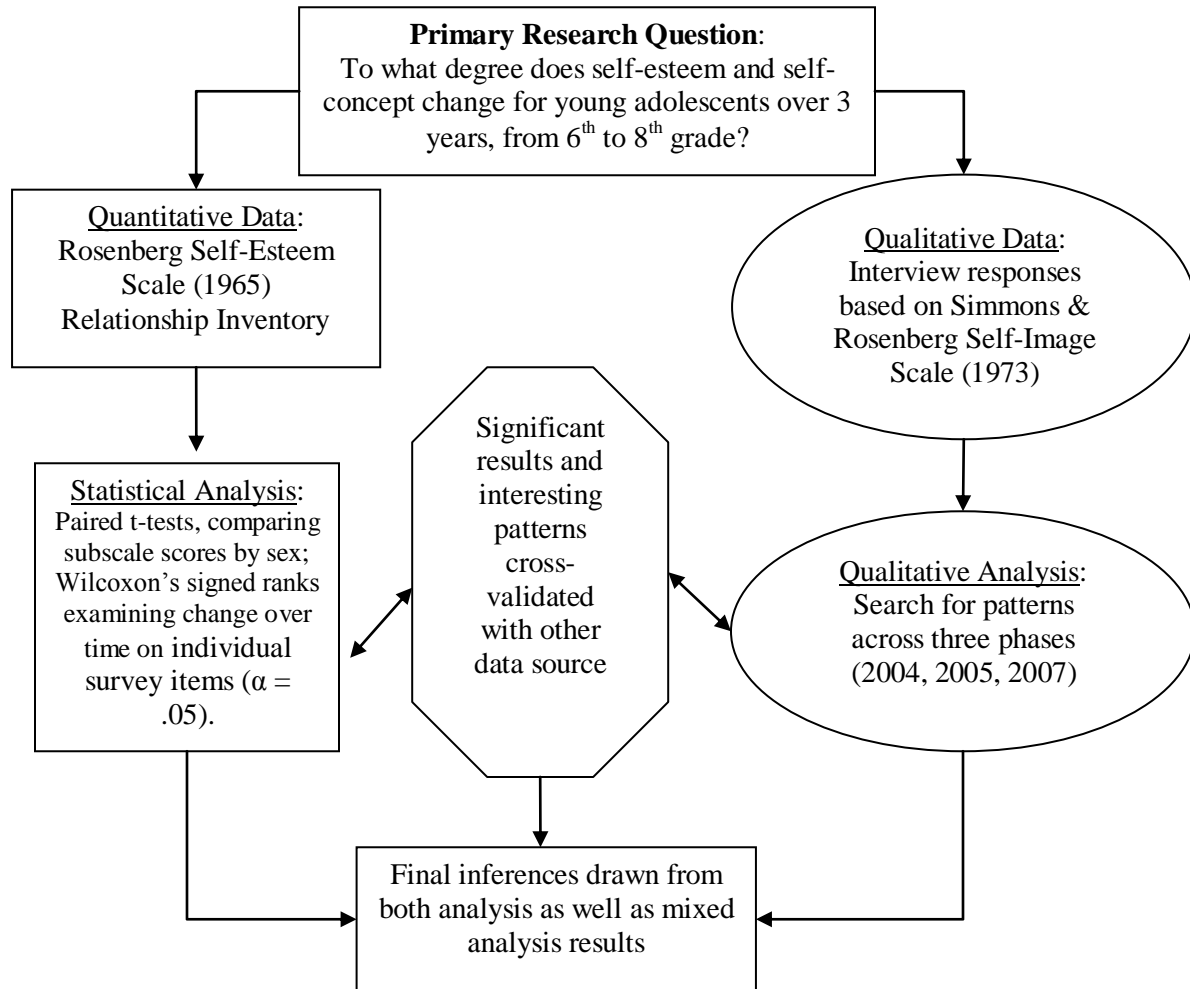Figure 1: Multistrand Concurrent Mixed Method Design used in Study.

Figure 2: Mean Global Self-esteem Comparison over Time