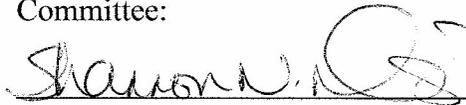


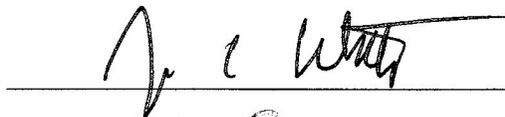
SELF-ESTEEM: FROM ADOLESCENCE TO ADULTHOOD

by

Irna May Connor
A Thesis
Submitted to the
Graduate Faculty
of
George Mason University
in Partial Fulfillment of
The Requirements for the Degree
of
Master of Arts
Sociology

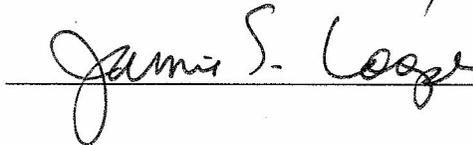
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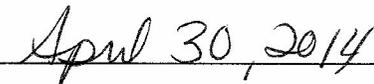
 Director





 Department Chairperson

 Dean, College of Humanities and Social Sciences

Date:  Spring Semester 2014
George Mason University
Fairfax, VA

Self-Esteem: From Adolescence to Adulthood

A Thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts at George Mason University

by

Irna May Connor
Bachelor of Arts
George Mason University, 2012

Director: Shannon N. Davis, Professor
Department of Sociology

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DEDICATION

This is dedicated to my family, who has supported me throughout my life.

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First and foremost, I would like to thank my outstanding and supportive mentor and chair for my thesis, Dr. Shannon N. Davis, who, had it not been for her, this thesis would not have been written. I would also like to thank my committee members Dr. Gregory Guagnano and Dr. James C. Witte for their support and taking the time to read and review my proposal and final draft.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

Body Mass Index BMI
National Longitudinal Survey of Youth NLSY

ABSTRACT

SELF-ESTEEM: FROM ADOLESCENCE TO ADULTHOOD

Irna May Connor, M.A.

George Mason University, 2014

Thesis Director: Dr. Shannon N. Davis

The purpose of this thesis was to examine how self-esteem changes over time due to significant life events and to what extent do social origins play a role in these changes. Using data from the National Longitudinal Study of Youth (N=693), latent growth curve modeling was used to assess how these factors influence self-esteem from adolescence to adulthood. Three goals were examined in this thesis: to test whether change in self-esteem over time can be explained with one trajectory, to test how significant life events affect self-esteem, and to test how social origins affect self-esteem over time. Findings provide some insight into how self-esteem is affected and suggestions for future research.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

For social scientists who study it, there are multiple ideas and conflicting positions on what self-esteem is and how it affects our behaviors, attitudes, and experiences over time (Guindon 2010, Trzesniewski et al. 2003). While we have made some progress in studying self-worth, there are other questions that need to be answered, such as: is self-esteem a state-like characteristic, or does it act more--like personality--a stable trait? How does self-esteem develop over time? How do social origins affect one's self-esteem over time? Do significant life events affect self-esteem and if so, how?

Although there are different ways in which to study self-esteem, the generally-accepted definition is that self-esteem is a construct that is both affected by external forces and affects our actions and how we view life events (Guindon 2010). Self-esteem is an important social indicator that affects both micro-level social interactions and society itself. Individuals are both influenced by and influence society and social structure. According to Stets and Burke (2003), there is a reciprocal relationship between self and society, in that:

The self influences society through the actions of individuals thereby creating groups, organizations, networks and institutions. And, reciprocally, society influences the self through its shared language and meanings that enable a person to take the role of the other, engage in social interaction, and reflect upon oneself as an object (p. 128).

High self-esteem has been associated with happiness (Diener and Diener 1995), creativity (Goldsmith and Matherly 1988), academic achievement (Davies and Brember 1999; Hansford and Hattie 1982), and better work performance (Brockner 1983). Self-esteem can affect and is affected by the micro-level interactions in our daily lives with our families, in the workplace, and in other social settings (Keefe and Berndt 1996). Additionally, self-esteem can also be affected by group affiliations (Stets and Burke 2000). Therefore, if researchers determine what factors affect individuals' self-esteem, if our self-esteem affects our social interactions, and if society is made up of rules or "patterned regularities that characterize most human action" (Stryker 1980:65), then individuals with healthy self-esteem can affect these patterns that structure society and the action of others, to their benefit.

My research studies how early influences affect individuals' self-esteem and how it develops in the early part of life. Specifically, my research attempts to answer what role social origins play and how self-esteem changes over time from adolescence to early adulthood. To test for influences by social origin, defined as traits that are identified early on in the respondent's life and remain relatively stable throughout time, I look at the respondent's mother's characteristics (i.e. age of mother at birth of first child,) and the child's characteristics (i.e. race, sex) to see if this has an effect on the child's self-esteem throughout the time period I have examined. To track changes in self-esteem, I analyze adolescent self-esteem throughout the established time period and examine any changes. In addition I also look at major significant events during the respondent's early life, after childhood and before middle adulthood (i.e. attending college, getting married,

employment status, first child). In this thesis, I begin chapter two with an analysis of what is already known about factors that contribute to self-esteem. In the third chapter, I describe the dataset I use as well as my analytic strategy. Chapter four discusses the results of the analysis, and chapter five presents a discussion of the findings as well as implications for future research.

CHAPTER TWO

This chapter gives a background on previous literature on self-esteem, to include variables that affect self-esteem, the trajectory of self-esteem development, and significant life events that can affect or are affected by self-esteem. I begin with theoretical frameworks I will use to situate my research.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

There are different theoretical perspectives which explain how self-esteem is constructed. The main theoretical framework in which I am engaging this research is through symbolic interactionism, which places emphasis on the relationships we have among one another, and how, through interaction via the use of symbols and language, we derive meaning and are able to interpret our surroundings and contribute to society. I am specifically using Herbert Blumer's three premises of symbolic interaction: that human beings act towards things based on the meaning we have of that thing, that this meaning is based on the interaction we have with each other, and most importantly, that these meanings are derived through an interpretive process (Blumer 1969:2). How this relates to my research question is that self-esteem is a trait that is influenced by external factors, to include our interactions with one another. Therefore, individuals' self-esteem is perceived based on their interactions with others through reflexivity.

One of the ways in which individuals view themselves and create their identity is through the different roles they hold in society. Therefore, identity theory will be used to frame the multiple roles we pick up as we grow (Stets and Burke 2000). In adolescence, individuals may have only a few roles, such as daughter, student, and sister, but by adulthood they have added more roles to themselves, which help to shape their identity, such as wife, mother, teacher, and volunteer.

Lastly, another way in which individuals' identities are developed is through the categories and groups they belong to, also called social identity theory (Hogg and Abrams 1988). Individuals may see themselves in specific racial categories, for example. "Specifically, self-esteem is enhanced by evaluating the in-group and the out-group on dimensions that lead the in-group to be judged positively and the out-group to be judged negatively" (Stets and Burke 2000:225). If individuals strongly associate with these groups, this sense of belonging can positively affect our self-esteem.

TRAJECTORY OF SELF-ESTEEM DEVELOPMENT

There have been a few attempts made at capturing self-esteem over the lifespan using both cross-sectional and longitudinal data. Results are varied, some showing some stability in self-esteem over time, (Trzesniewski et al. 2003), while others showing changes in response to significant life events (Orth et al. 2010; Rhodes et al. 2004). Still, others showed different results when determining some sort of normative trajectory when looking at different samples (Pullmann et al. 2009).

In a meta-analysis of over 86 published articles, Trzesniewski and his colleagues (2003) studied self-esteem over the lifespan. Overall, they were able to note a general

trajectory of self-esteem, where it is high in childhood, declines in adolescence, begins to rise again throughout adulthood and peak, and eventually decline again in old age (2003). They note that “this curvilinear trend holds for men and women, for U.S. and non-U.S. participants, and for different self-esteem scales” (2003:160).

In another study, Orth and his colleagues (2010) conducted a latent growth curve analysis to examine the self-esteem of individuals age 25 to 104 through the Americans’ Changing Lives study. This panel study included self-esteem measured during 4 waves. They found results similar to Trzesniewski et al (2003), noting a regular trajectory among participants over their lives. Specifically, respondent’s race, sex, and educational attainment, or time invariant covariates, were all significant, modeled both separately and altogether, and found significant differences between black and white respondents, male and female respondents, and different levels of education (measured as a continuous variable), over various periods in the life span trajectory (2010).

The main similarity for studies looking at self-esteem over the lifespan is that they all found that self-esteem appears to follow a quadratic trend: self-esteem is relatively low and unstable during pre-adolescence (Eccles et al. 2006; Robins and Trzesniewski 2005; Trzesniewski et al 2003), begins to stabilize and increase throughout adolescence and into adulthood (Orth et al. 2010), peaks in late adulthood, and declines as individuals reach old age, both using panel study data (Orth et al. 2010; Rhodes et al. 2004; Trzesniewski et al. 2003) and cross-sectional data (McMullin and Cairney 2004, Pullmann et al. 2009; Robins et al. 2002; Trzesniewski et al. 2003).

Some authors argue this trend is due to both social and biological development. Adolescence brings with it hormonal changes that can influence behavior, as well as physical changes that can make teenagers self-conscious about their bodies (Eccles et al. 2006; Trzesniewski et al. 2003). Adolescence is also a time for exploration and experimentation, as well as becoming less dependent on their parents and striking out into the world as an emerging adult. This would explain the initial dip in self-esteem during adolescence.

By adulthood, individuals have reached milestones in their lives, such as getting an education or starting a new career, and these attainments often boost their self-esteem, hence the rise in self-esteem throughout adulthood (Robins and Trzesniewski 2005). Lastly, as people reach old age, some authors interpret the decline in self-esteem is due to changes in roles, such as being retired, relationships changes, such as losing a friend or loved one, and decreases in health (Trzesniewski et al. 2002).

The above explanation is consistent with identity theory, where individuals' roles in life help to define who they are. In adolescence, we either do not have many roles, or are trying to figure out what our roles are. As we develop into adulthood, we have attained more roles and have a better understanding of how we function in them. By old age, our roles in life have changed again, for instance, from being employed to being retired, while at the same time, losing roles we formally had, such as husband, friend, and pet owner.

PREDICTORS OF SELF-ESTEEM

There are a number of factors that appear to influence individuals' self-esteem at different points in their life, to include patterns within each predictor, as well as variations on the general pattern. These predictors are categorized as social origins, significant life events, and other predictors of self-esteem.

Social Origins Predictors of Self-Esteem

Social origins, traits that were ascribed at birth and help define who individuals are, resonate with social identity theory especially because these traits individuals are born with often coincide with categories society puts us in. In other words, "once in society, people derive their identity or sense of self largely from the social categories to which they belong" (Stets and Burke 2000:225). In this research, I look at race and ethnicity, and gender as social origins predictors.

Race and Ethnicity

Previous research is generally consistent, showing that African American females consistently appear to have higher self-esteem compared with white females (Caldwell et al. 1997; Perrin et al. 2010; Turnage 2005). Turnage (2005) believes that ethnic identity may have something to do with their high self-esteem: "to enhance and protect her global self-esteem, the picture an African American female carries of herself must include cultural information" (2005:30). Her hypothesis was validated through her findings that suggest "the results of the test of correlation revealed that Ethnic Identity Achievement was positively and significantly ($r=.40$, $p<.001$) correlated with Global Self-Esteem" (2005:37). Additionally, Perrin and his associates (2005:451) argue "the encouragement

of self-confidence, self-determination, and self-esteem among many youth in the African American community as a means to counteract the negative and hostile images and contexts they encounter in their environments" contribute to positive global self-esteem.

Bachman et al. (2011) found similar results, noting that not only do African Americans consistently scored highest on self-esteem when compared to Whites, Asian Americans and Hispanic adolescents, but also that Asian Americans consistently have the lowest self-esteem scores in the their 18-year study, attributing this finding possibly to cultural differences.

Gender

While self-esteem is generally high during childhood, by adolescence there is a gender gap, where males tend to have higher self-esteem than females (Kling et al. 1999; Robins et al. 2002; Robins and Trzesniewski 2005). Robins and his associates (2002) found in their study that adolescent males' self-esteem were twice as high as adolescent females. Some point to the "maturational changes associated with puberty to social-contextual factors associated with the differential treatment of boys and girls in the classroom or gender differences in body image ideals" (Robins and Trzesniewski 2005:160) as a reason for this gender gap. For both males and females, self-esteem tends to rise again once adolescents reach adulthood, particularly middle adulthood reaching its peak between age 40 and 50, and then declining in old age (Robins et al. 2002). In adolescence, "self-esteem of girls and boys of all ethnicities declined, except for Latino boys, whose self-esteem increased slightly during adolescence and then dropped during early adulthood" (Robins et al. 2002:430). Even when interacting with race, Bachman et

al. (2011) found that females consistently score lower than males on self-esteem for White, Asian-American and Hispanic groups even after controlling for GPA and college plans.

Significant Life Events

Life course transitions have been known to influence the social development of adolescents and adults, and can affect both their mental and physical health. Additionally, Elder and Giele (2009) state that “transitions not only entail changes in status, but in accordance with life course theory, also lead to changes in individuals’ internal states” (2009:141). In other words, life course transitions affect the space and roles in people’s lives, and also affect their mental capacities, attitudes, and identity; more specifically noted here, one’s self-esteem. Significant life events also correspond to identity theory, in that as we pick up roles throughout life, these roles in turn define who we are.

There have been varied findings with regard to the significance of self-esteem on the life course trajectory. However, it has also been noted that significant life events can affect well-being, both positively (Sampson and Laub 2003), or negatively (Joiner, Katz and Lew 1999). Still, there are other studies that show no significant changes in self-esteem when adding significant life events (Murrell, Meeks and Walker 1991; Orth, Robins and Meier 2009). However, there are a few significant life events of note that have been shown to influence self-esteem, either directly or indirectly.

Educational attainment and employment status. There have been few studies that look at the relationship of educational attainment, such as receiving a college degree, and self-esteem. Bachman and O’Malley (1986) found that self-esteem had a small positive

impact on whether students furthered their education 5 years after graduating from high school, although their sample was homogenous, only looking at white males.

Much of the literature that looks at educational attainment and self-esteem is linked to employment. While self-esteem is not measured directly, Winefield et al. (1991) looked at individuals who have dropped out of school for employment and found a causal connection between employment status and psychological well-being, where those who were employed and satisfied in their job had the highest self-esteem, compared to those who were either unemployed or employed but not satisfied in their job.

Somewhat related to this topic are drop outs, or those who did not finish school. Bennett (2010) studied a sample of students in a university business studies department and noted that self-esteem appeared to moderate the relationship of receiving low grades and dropping out of school. When it comes to school attainment, employment status and its relationship to self-esteem, the literature appears limited, although it can be suggested that if positive self-esteem is related to attaining an educational degree or having a job, then having these qualities can increase self-esteem.

Marriage. There is limited literature on the effects of self-esteem on marriage, or if marriage increases self-esteem. However, many social scientists who study family would argue that rather than look at marital status, marital satisfaction may be a more accurate predictor of psychological outcomes, such as self-esteem (Rutter 2010). Weissman (1987) found that unhappy married couples were 25 times more likely to become depressed than happy married couples, which is shown to correlate with low self-esteem (Kernis 2006). Alternatively, with regard to gender, despite whether the wife is content,

husbands are consistently more psychologically well-off than their unmarried counterparts, regardless of the quality of the marriage (Waite and Gallagher 2000).

Therefore, I argue that positive psychological effects directly follow, to include higher self-esteem.

Parenthood. The relationship between self-esteem and becoming a new parent is not looked at directly in much of the literature, however other psychological symptoms that are highly correlated with self-esteem are. Parenthood is associated with post-partum depression, and depression is negatively correlated with high self-esteem (Kernis 2006:25). In a study by Simpson et al. (2003), new mothers who received deficient spousal support were especially prone to depressive symptoms, which is associated with low self-esteem. Alternatively, one study showed that women who reported low self-esteem were at risk to become depressed one year later, or after a significant stressor, such as becoming a new mother, occurred (Brown et al. 1986).

Like the idea of focusing on relationship quality rather than marital status, some researchers would say that looking at the trajectory of marital transitions may be an important way to study stability and change in these relationships. Meadows et al. (2008) noticed that with single mothers, those who experienced multiple marital transitions (and therefore, more instability) were unhealthier than those who experienced a single transition. This could include psychological distress, such as depression, or low self-esteem.

Other Predictors of Self-Esteem

Family characteristics

Previous research has studied the effects of family on self-esteem, and overall, family characteristics are significant influencers. Dubois and his associates (1996) found that when looking at multiple factors that influence adolescent self-esteem to include peers, body image and school, family contributed 18% to an adolescent's self-esteem. Specifically, the family variable was measured by items such as "I am happy about how much my family likes me," "I am too much trouble to my family," and "I feel good about how much my family cares about my ideas" (1996:554). In this specific study, it appears that family support and a sense of belonging in one's family affect adolescent self-esteem.

Other studies looking at family and self-esteem look at parental influences (Cashwell 1995; Conte et al. 1996; Demo et al. 1987; Killeen 1993; Openshaw et al. 1984), and mother-child or father-child relationships (Conte et al. 1996; Goldberg 1994), all showing that family and the relationships that people hold with family members, are significant predictors of self-esteem.

What seems to be lacking in the literature is the transmission of parent self-esteem to child self-esteem. Openshaw and her associates (1984) looked at self-esteem factors within the parent-child relationship from two angles: parent appraisal and parent modeling of self-esteem. They found that adolescent self-esteem is more susceptible to their parent's appraisal than modeling after their parent's self-esteem. In another study looking at parent and adolescent self-esteem, Demo et al. (1987) looked at how

relationship quality affect the self-esteem of both parent and adolescent, noting that those relationships with perceptions of high support and strong communication resulted in high self-esteem for both parties. In addition, frequent social interaction is important in that “reflected appraisals are mutually transmitted as parents and their children interact in daily social encounters” (1987:713).

While there is limited research in the transmittal of parent self-esteem to child/adolescent self-esteem, what I can argue for is that because there are several studies showing evidence of other parent characteristics being transmitted to their children, the same should hold true for self-esteem. Other research has shown that behavior, such as dieting habits (Hill and Franklin 1998; Smolak et al. 1999), mental illness, such as depression (Killeen and Forehand 1998), and beliefs, such as gender role attitudes (Carine and Janssens 1998) and gender ideology (Davis 2007) are transmitted from parent to child, specifically mother to child. According to symbolic interactionism, we learn how to socialize by taking the role of the other (Mead 1934), so if children are modeling themselves after their parents, they will imitate these characteristics, and self-esteem of the parent should have a similar effect. In other words, children will model their self-esteem after their parent’s self-esteem.

Body mass index

Overall, there seems to be mixed findings supporting a relationship between BMI and self-esteem among U.S. adolescents (Mirza et al. 2005). Some research on the relationship between body mass index (BMI) and self-esteem shows no correlation between BMI and self-esteem (Erickson et al. 2000; Gortmaker et al. 1993; Guinn et al.

1997; Pastore et al. 1996; Perrin et al. 2010; Swallen et al. 2005; Wadden et al. 1984), while others show an inverse relationship (Biro et al. 2006; Brown et al. 1998; French et al. 1996).

Other research has found some support for the relationship between BMI and self-esteem. Viner et al. (2006) found that BMI affects self-esteem in obese males but not for obese female adolescents. With females, and regardless of race, both black and white girls had higher self-esteem with lower BMI scores, but overall, self-esteem still remained higher for black girls than for white girls (Biro et al. 2006; Brown et al. 1998). Guinn and his colleagues (1997:522) observe that “the minimal influence of body fatness suggests that self-esteem is not dependent on weight or fatness alone,” and propose that multiple factors in addition to high BMI may contribute to low self-esteem, but BMI independent of other factors does not predict self-esteem.

Strauss (2000) is one of the few who did see an association between obese female adolescents and their self-esteem, showing that their self-esteem scores decreased over a 4-year period than their non-obese counterparts. However, he does admit that this association remains speculative at best, saying that “other factors associated with obesity, such as decreased levels of physical activity, increased levels of depression, or poorer home environments, may contribute to lower self-esteem levels in obese adolescents” (2000:5). In other words, obesity may be positively correlated with other variables that decrease self-esteem.

THE PRESENT STUDY

Although there have been previous longitudinal studies on self-esteem over the lifespan, my research is more narrow in scope, focusing on the transition from adolescence to adulthood. While previous research has studied either only adolescence (Bachman et al. 2011; Dubois et al. 1996; Openshaw et al. 1984) or adulthood (Orth et al. 2010), or has focused mainly on the trajectory of self-esteem over the lifespan (Robins et al. 2002; Trzesniewski et al. 2003), my research bridges the gap, looking at self-esteem from adolescence to adulthood, studying both time-invariant covariates and time-varying covariates. In other words, my research looks at the social origins that influence self-esteem, such as race and gender, as well as factors that vary over time. Therefore I have three main goals for this research: to test whether change in self-esteem over time can be explained with one trajectory from adolescence to adulthood; to test how significant life events affect self-esteem from adolescence to adulthood; to test how social origins affect self-esteem over time from adolescence to adulthood.

The next chapter focuses specifically on the data I analyze as well as my analytic strategy.

CHAPTER THREE

RESEARCH METHODS

The National Longitudinal Survey of Youth Young Adult Cohort

The NLSY79 is a nationally-represented and generalizable sample of individuals who are interviewed on a biennial basis when they were first surveyed in 1979. I looked at the female respondents from this sample and matched them to the respondents in the sample described below.

The NLSY79 Children and Young Adult Cohort

The NLSY79 Children and Young Adult Cohort are the children of the female respondents from the NLSY79, and were first interviewed when most of the children were 10 years old, in an attempt to gather data on child-specific information. The NLSY79 Children and Young Adult Cohort has been interviewed from 1994 up until 2012 on a biennial basis, when the respondents were in their early 30's. Because I want to focus on adolescents as a starting point, I looked at respondents who were born in 1981 starting at age 15 and track their trajectory from that survey year onward.

Outcome Variable

The NLSY79 cohort Young Adult Sample uses a modified version of the Rosenberg Self-esteem Scale, which is a 10-item questionnaire of various statements and using a 4-point scale, where the respondent can answer if they strongly agree, agree, disagree, or strongly disagree (Rosenberg 1965). Items were recoded to reflect a higher

score equates higher self-esteem. Previous research has shown the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale to have high internal reliability, with a Cronbach Alpha ranging from 0.81 to 0.85 (Davis 2007). Survey years 1996, 1998, 2002, 2004, and 2008 were used in this study because they had higher response rates, whereas survey years 2000, 2006, and 2010 had low response rates on the self-esteem questions (less than 45 youth responded in each of those years).

Trzesniewski et al. (2001) notes changes in self-esteem during adolescence, where there is a drop in self-esteem, and as respondents go through adulthood, there is a steady increase. If respondents follow this trajectory, this would support the claim that self-esteem should be treated as a trait, however, if self-esteem diverts from this trajectory, this may indicate that self-esteem is more state-like and affected by other social factors or significant life events.

Independent Variables: Time Invariant Traits

Time invariant traits here are characterized as social origins, or traits that are identified early on in the respondent's life and remain relatively stable throughout the time period studied. These include the mother's characteristics and the respondent's sex and race.

Age of mother at birth of first child: This variable was used once to measure the effects of age on mother's parenting and other socio-economic factors ultimately influencing her child's well-being. I used the question: "Age of respondent at first birth" for the mother.

Respondent's race. Respondent's race was self-described within the constraints of the answer choices: Black, Hispanic, or non-black, non-Hispanic." They may choose more

than one race depending on which answer choices best describe them. Only the 1994 race variable was used. The variable was dummy-coded to Black, Hispanic, and non-Black, non-Hispanic. Non-Black, non-Hispanic was the reference category.

Respondent's gender. Gender was self-described as either male or female (female=1, male=0). Only the 1994 sex variable was used.

Mother's self-esteem. Mother's self-esteem was measured using the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale, as described above. Self-esteem was assessed in 1980, before the mother's child was born.

Independent Variables: Time Variant Traits

Time variant traits were used at every year the survey was taken in order to capture significant life events, as well as other variables that have been known to affect self-esteem across development. These are variables that can vary at each time period. The significant life events were dummy-coded as 0 (event did not occur) or 1 (event occurred) at each of the intervals measured. Other time variant traits were measured as continuous variables.

Significant Life Events

Educational attainment. To check if the respondent has attained a high school or college degree, I used the questions "Has Respondent received an academic degree since date of last interview" at each time point to track the educational attainment significant life event. This variable was designated a 0 or 1 to determine if the respondent has reached this milestone and was tracked at every survey year included in the analysis. This variable was available when the respondents were 23 and 27 years old only.

Employment. To check if the respondent is currently employed, I used the questions “Employed or active in military.” This variable was designated a 0 or 1 to determine if the respondent has reached this milestone and was tracked at every survey year included in the analysis. In 2008, this question was not asked, so instead I used the question “number of hours worked,” where anyone who has worked 1 hour or more was designated having met the milestone (1), while those who did not work any hours was designated as not having met the milestone (0).

Married: The married variable was tracked using the item “Date Respondent married partner at date of last interview” and was designated a 0 or 1 to determine if the respondent has reached this milestone. This variable was tracked every survey year.

Parenthood: The parenthood variable was tracked using the item questions “Number of biological children Respondent has had since date of last interview,” for survey years 1996 and 1998 and “Has Respondent had any biological children since date of last interview” for survey years 2002, 2004, and 2008, and was designated a 0 or 1 to determine if the respondent has reached this milestone. This variable was tracked every survey year included in the analysis.

Other Time Variant Variables

Body mass index. BMI was calculated using the respondent’s height and weight, which were measured by the interviewers. The following formula was used to calculate BMI:

$$\frac{\text{weight (lbs)}}{(\text{height}^2 \text{ (in)})} \times 703.$$

BMI is a continuous variable and was tracked every survey year that is included in the analysis.

ANALYTIC PLAN AND TECHNIQUE

Since I am looking at several influences of self-esteem, and I study self-esteem over time, I used a sophisticated statistical model “to better understand dynamic, reciprocal, causal influences” (Robins and Trzesniewski, 2005). Running multiple regressions would not be appropriate here because a regression would not capture nested sources of variability such as the longitudinal measurements of individuals I am looking at in my proposed research (Snijders and Bosker 2012). Regression also assumes the variables analyzed are independent, when in actuality variables are often related, especially in the social sciences which looks at the effects of social context in individual behavior. Therefore, the analytic technique I have decided to use is a latent growth curve model (LGM).

Figure 1 illustrates the final model, while Table 1 describes where my variables are depicted in the model. With this analytic technique, I hoped to answer the following questions:

What is the initial level of self-esteem? Since I am studying individuals as they develop from adolescence to adulthood, the initial level of self-esteem was at age 15, where I began to track the trajectory of self-esteem. To answer this question, I looked at the intercept of the model, which gives us the average self-esteem for 15-year olds. The intercept is important to know because it also provides a constant level of self-esteem; in other words, it shows us what an individual’s self-esteem would be at each time period measured if there were no growth, shown by the lines connecting the intercept to the DVs, or, self-esteem measured at each time point.

Figure 1. Final model used for the time-varying (TV) and time-invariant (TI) covariate effects on self-esteem.

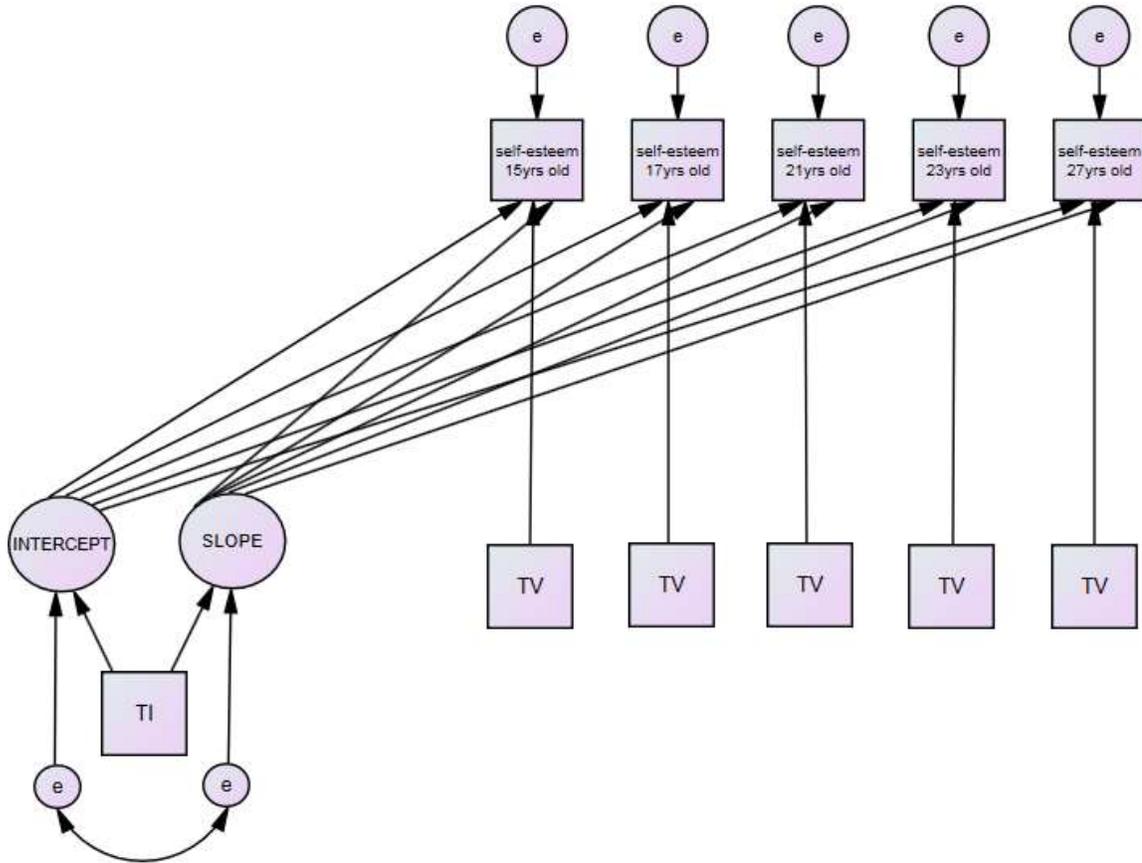


Table 1. Variables used in final model.

Dependent Variable (DV)	Time Invariant-Covariates (TI)	Time Varying-Covariates (TV)
Self-Esteem	Race Gender Age of mother at birth of first child Mother's Self-esteem	Body Mass Index Educational Attainment Employment Marital Status (Married) Parenthood

What happens to self-esteem over time? Is the growth linear (meaning a steady increase or decrease over time) or curvilinear (meaning that there are rises and dips in self-esteem

over time)? To answer these questions, I looked at the slope, which measures the average growth (growth here meaning change, not necessarily positive) of self-esteem from adolescence to adulthood.

Time invariant (TI) variables influence both the intercept and the slope, meaning that they can influence the initial level of self-esteem as well as the rate at which self-esteem changes over time. This is depicted by the lines that connect the TI box to the intercept and slope ovals. For example, I argue that an individual's race affects an individual's self-esteem at age 15, as well as the rate of change of self-esteem.

The time varying (TV) variables influence the dependent variable at each time period measured. These are variables are either significant life events (measured as a categorical variable of whether or not an event occurred) or other predictor variables (measured as a continuous variable) measured at each time period. For an example of a significant life event, I argue that getting married influences an individual's self-esteem during that specific time period.

The next chapter discusses the results of my analysis, to include how self-esteem changes over time, how social origins affect self-esteem throughout this transition, and whether significant life events affect individual's self-esteem as they move from adolescence to adulthood.

CHAPTER FOUR

RESULTS

In this chapter, I present descriptive statistics, model fit, and how the time-varying and time-invariant variables influenced self-esteem both initially and across time over the 12-year period being studied, specifically when the respondents were 15, 17, 21, 23 and 27 years old.

Descriptive Statistics

Table 2 represents the means, standard deviations and minimum and maximum values for all the variables in the analysis. Hispanic respondents represented 19.3% of the sample, Black respondents represented 28.0% of the sample, non-Hispanic, non-Black respondents represented 37.3% of the sample. Males represented 50.1% of the sample while females represented 49.9% of the sample. Among the mother characteristics, mothers' average self-esteem score was 20.55, while the average age of the mothers at the birth of her first child was 17.29.

When looking at the time-varying characteristics, among the 15-year olds, the average BMI was 22.508, 0.4% of the sample had new births since the date of the last interview, 12.8% of the sample was employed, and zero respondents received a degree since the date of last interview.

Table 2. Descriptive statistics (n=693)

Origin of family variables	Mean	Std deviation	Min	Max
Female	.500	.500	0	1
Race/ethnicity				
Black	.279	.449	0	1
Hispanic	.193	.395	0	1
Maternal self-esteem (1980)	20.55	6.527	9	30
Age of mother at birth of first child	17.29	38.866	14	24
Time-varying characteristics variables				
Age 15				
Body Mass Index (BMI)	22.508	4.367	14.28	48.68
Number of new births since DLI	.004	.065	0	1
Currently employed	.128	.334	0	1
Received degree since DLI	---	---	---	---
Age 17				
Body Mass Index (BMI)	23.746	5.075	11.16	50.18
Number of new births since DLI	.026	.159	0	1
Currently employed	.194	.396	0	1
Received degree since DLI	---	---	---	---
Age 21				
Body Mass Index (BMI)	25.610	5.600	15.55	47.46
Number of new births since DLI	.109	.312	0	1
Currently employed	.226	.418	0	1
Received degree since DLI	---	---	---	---
Age 23				
Body Mass Index (BMI)	26.515	5.668	16.31	57.39
Number of new births since DLI	.099	.299	0	1
Currently employed	.292	.455	0	1
Received degree since DLI	.034	.182	0	1
Age 27				
Body Mass Index (BMI)	28.023	6.413	16.98	59.71
Number of new births since DLI	.115	.319	0	1
Currently employed	.469	.499	0	1
Received degree since DLI	.037	.190	0	1
Married	.016	.125	0	1

^areference category is white; ^bDLI = date of last interview

Among the 17-year olds, the average BMI was 23.746, 2.6% of the sample had new births since the date of the last interview, 12.8% of the sample was employed, and zero respondents received a degree since the date of last interview.

Among the 21-year olds, the average BMI was 25.610, 10.9% of the sample had new births since the date of the last interview, 22.6% of the sample was employed, and zero respondents received a degree since the date of last interview.

Among the 23-year olds, the average BMI was 26.515, 9.9% of the sample had new births since the date of the last interview, 29.2% of the sample was employed, and 3.4% of the sample received a degree since the date of last interview.

Lastly, among 27-year olds, the average BMI was 28.023, 11.5% of the sample had new births since the date of the last interview, 46.9% of the sample was employed, 3.7% of the sample received a degree since the date of last interview, and 1.6% of the respondents got married since the date of the last interview.

Analysis

To check for initial trajectory of self-esteem, I first examined the unconditional model, which looks only at self-esteem over the 5 time points measured without predictor variables. Previous literature (Robins and Trzesniewski 2005; Trzesniewski et al. 2002), indicates a linear trajectory for the 12-year time period, starting when the respondents are 15 and ending when the respondents are 27, however, I also checked for a quadratic and cubic trajectory, in case self-esteem did not follow a linear course. The model fit for the unconditional linear model is good (TLI: 0.9, CFI: 0.978, RMSEA: 0.30). A quadratic unconditional model was also fitted, but showed a worse fit (TLI: 0.934, CFI: 0.956, RMSEA: 0.043) compared to the linear model. Likewise, the cubic unconditional model also indicated a worse fit (TLI: 0.913, CFI: 0.942, RMSEA: 0.049) than the linear model. As a result, the linear unconditional model was retained for the analysis. The intercept for this unconditional model was 31.584 with a slope of 1.342, meaning that self-esteem for 15-year olds have an average score of 31.584 (out of 40 maximum points) which increases over time, with an average increase in self-esteem score of 1.342 points each

time they were surveyed. In other words, and without looking at any other indicators, during adolescence, many 15-year olds have a level of self-esteem that starts at about the same initial starting point, which then changes steadily into adulthood. There was a significant estimate ($p < .001$) for the covariance between the intercept and slope (covariance of slope and intercept = 0.468), indicating that 15-year olds reporting higher initial levels of self-esteem tended to report a steeper change in self-esteem over time.

Adding Predictor Variables

Next I added the time-varying and time-invariant covariates. The model no longer had a good fit to the data (TLI: -0.049, CFI: 0.096, RMSEA: 0.103) after adding these variables. The intercept for the full model was 32.860 with a slope of -0.324, with the slope no longer being significant after the covariates were added to the model ($p = 0.820$), suggesting that these covariates influence the initial level of self-esteem among 15-year olds, but not self-esteem growth over time. There was a significant estimate ($p < .001$) for the covariance between the intercept and slope (covariance of slope and intercept = -0.506), indicating that after adding time-invariant and time-varying covariates, 15-year olds reporting higher initial levels of self-esteem tended to report a weaker change in self-esteem over time.

Influence of social origins and transitions into young adulthood on self-esteem trajectories

After examining the initial trajectory of self-esteem along this 12-year time period, I modeled how social origins and significant life events affect self-esteem over time. Figure 1 depicts the relationship among social origins, or time-invariant covariates

(TI) and self-esteem. Among the social origin variables, I modeled whether the respondent's race, gender, and mother's characteristics influenced self-esteem (age of mother at birth of first child and mother's self-esteem score the year before the respondent was born). Among the significant life events, I modeled whether the respondent was employed, received a degree, got married, and had a child since the date of the last interview affected their self-esteem. I also modeled whether the respondent's BMI affected their self-esteem the year of the interview. Figure 1 depicts the relationship among significant life events, or time-variant covariates (TV) and self-esteem.

Social origins' effect on initial levels of self-esteem

To see whether social origins affected self-esteem, I first looked at the intercept in this model, which indicates how social origins affect the initial levels of self-esteem, in this case, how social origins affects self-esteem for 15-year olds (Table 3). There were few social origin factors that contributed to respondents' self-esteem. Hispanic respondents reported lower initial levels of self-esteem compared to their non-Black, non-Hispanic counterparts. In addition, the age when the respondent's mother had their first child also appears to affect self-esteem such that older mothers at birth have children with initial lower levels of self-esteem. At the same time, being Black did not appear to influence the initial levels of self-esteem, nor does gender. The mother's self-esteem also does not appear to significantly influence the initial levels of self-esteem of her child.

Table 3. Estimates of the influence of family origin and time-varying characteristics on self-esteem trajectories.

Influences on the intercept growth factor		Standardized	Unstandardized		
Female		.014	.086		
Race/ethnicity ^a					
Black		.003	.024		
Hispanic		-.105 [†]	-.817 [†]		
Maternal self-esteem (1980)		.014	.007		
Age of mother at birth of first child		-.151*	-.012*		
Influences on linear growth factor		Standardized	Unstandardized		
Female		-.025	-.128		
Race/ethnicity					
Black		.112	.629		
Hispanic		.146	.933		
Maternal self-esteem (1980)		-.063	-.024		
Age of mother at birth of first child		.171 [†]	.011 [†]		
Time-varying influences on self-esteem		Estimate on self-esteem age 15		Estimate on self-esteem age 17	
		Standardized	Unstandardized	Standardized	Unstandardized
Body Mass Index (BMI)		-.060 [†]	-.056 [†]	-.026	-.022
Number of new births since DLI ^b		.032	1.945	-.044	-1.169
Currently employed		.027	.333	.026	.272
Received degree since DLI		---	---	---	---
Time-varying influences on self-esteem		Estimate on self-esteem age 21		Estimate on self-esteem age 23	
		Standardized	Unstandardized	Standardized	Unstandardized
Body Mass Index (BMI)		-.020	-.015	-.044	-.032
Number of new births since DLI		.069	.941	.021	.295
Currently employed		.119	1.212	.149**	1.348**
Received degree since DLI		---	---	.035	.654
Time-varying influences on self-esteem		Estimate on self-esteem age 27			
		Standardized	Unstandardized		
Body Mass Index (BMI)		-.017	-.011		
Number of new births since DLI		-.004	-.052		
Currently employed		.093*	.813*		
Received degree since DLI		.064	1.470		
Married		.013	.460		

$\chi^2=2915.904$ with 350 degrees of freedom; TLI: -.049; CFI: .096; RMSEA: .103

^areference category is white; ^bDLI = date of last interview

[†] p<0.10; *p<0.05; **p<0.001

Next, I looked to see how social origins affect the rate of change of self-esteem. I did this by examining the slope, which shows how time-invariant (TI) covariates affect the rate at which self-esteem changes over time. The only factor which appeared to have

significant influence on the rate of change of self-esteem was the age of the mother at the birth of her first child. Older first-time mothers appear to influence her child's self-esteem such that for every year older the mother is when she has her first child, the child's self-esteem score increases by 0.011 per year observed on average. Of the time invariant covariates, gender, race and the self-esteem of the mother do not appear to influence the rate at which self-esteem changes over time.

Significant Life Events

Of the significant life events, only two emerged as significant. There was a weak relationship between BMI and self-esteem when the respondents were 15-years old, indicating that higher BMI is associated with lower self-esteem among 15-year olds.

Whether or not someone was employed was also a significant life event when the respondents were 23 and 27, indicating that those who were employed at the time of the interview had higher self-esteem than those who were not employed.

Lastly, of the time varying-covariates, getting married, having a child and obtaining a degree did not appear to influence self-esteem among any of the survey years represented.

The following chapter discusses the interpretation of my findings to include a summary of findings, self-esteem trajectories, social origins effect on self-esteem, significant life events on self-esteem, implications on the theoretical frameworks used, study limitations and methodological considerations, future considerations and recommendations, and finally, general implications of the study itself.

CHAPTER FIVE

DISCUSSION

Summary of Findings

This thesis examined the role social origins play in the construction of adolescent self-esteem and how self-esteem changes over time from adolescence to early adulthood. Specifically, I had three goals in mind: to test whether change in self-esteem over time can be explained with one trajectory, to test how significant life events affect self-esteem, and to test how social origins affect self-esteem over time.

Self-esteem Trajectories

After examining several trajectories (linear, quadratic, and cubic changes), self-esteem from age 15 to 27 can best be explained through a linear trajectory without considering other factors. This means that self-esteem increases at a steady rate over time, as opposed to increasing more steeply or decreasing over time. This is consistent with the literature, which states that self-esteem is typically low in adolescence and increases into adulthood (Robins and Trzesniewski 2005; Trzesniewski et al. 2002). However, once predictors were added to the model, the trajectory produced a poor fit to the model. In other words, looking at self-esteem among this cohort from adolescence to adulthood without any other variables showed most people following a similar trajectory, in that most people at age 15 start with similar levels of self-esteem and also change at

about the same rate over time. However, once I looked at other factors that could influence self-esteem and added them to the model, these factors changed both the initial level of self-esteem for 15-year olds, as well as the growth of self-esteem as this cohort aged over time. This shows that social origin factors influence self-esteem among 15-year olds.

In addition, the slope also changed once these predictors were added, with the rate of change no longer being a significant influence of self-esteem. This means that, whereas looking at self-esteem alone showed a significant influence in self-esteem change over time, adding these predictors no longer impacts growth of self-esteem as this cohort moves from adolescence into adulthood. This could potentially show that self-esteem is a diverse trait among individuals over time, showing a more state-like characteristic rather than a stable trait. Conley (1984), who studies personality stability, argues that self-esteem lacks long-term stability and is strongly influenced by a person's environment. Leary and Baumeister (2000) describe self-esteem as a barometer, saying that an individual's self-esteem varies depending on the beliefs of those around them. Therefore, self-esteem is highly reactive to social interactions and is constantly changing in reaction to external feedback.

Social Origins Effect on Self-esteem

Some of the social origins predictors were found to influence initial levels of self-esteem. With regard to race, the results show that Hispanic respondents have lower initial levels of self-esteem than their non-Black, non-Hispanic respondents. It is surprising that Black respondents did not show significant differences in initial levels of

self-esteem to non-Black, non-Hispanic respondents since the literature appears to be strong in this regard (Bachman et al 2011; Caldwell et al 1997; Perrin et al 1997; Turnage 2005). Something to consider is that many studies looking at race and self-esteem were either cross-sectional (Caldwell et al 1997; Turnage 2005) or looked only at adolescents over time (Bachman et al 2011; Perrin et al 1997), whereas this study focuses on the transition from adolescence to adulthood; perhaps the added variables in play with this particular model rendered being Black as no longer influential to respondent self-esteem.

Of the social origin predictors, the mother characteristics produced varying results. The age at which the mother had her first child did appear to influence self-esteem, showing that older mothers tend to have children whose self-esteem was initially lower at age 15, but gradually increased over time. However, some research indicates that the age of the mother at the birth of her first child is not necessarily associated with child behavioral, social, and cognitive outcomes, but that other factors associated with maternal age is what is impacting child outcomes. Cooksey (1997) found a negative correlation between maternal age and her child's reading comprehension scores, but that relationship weakened once other predictors (such as mother's employment status, existence of siblings, and home environment) were controlled for. Levine et al (2007) suggest existing variables not related to maternal age affects child outcomes. They argue that "background factors such as poverty that select women into early childbearing" are indicators researchers should be looking at when examining effects of child outcomes (2007:106). Other research shows no correlation between maternal age and child outcomes (Geronimus, Korenman, and Hillemeier 1994; Turley 2003). What this

suggests is that instead of looking at the age of the mother at the birth of her first child as a correlate of self-esteem, other maternal factors should be examined instead.

The other mother characteristic examined was the mother's self-esteem. Mother's self-esteem did not predict initial levels of her child's self-esteem. Self-esteem here then does not act like other social characteristics that have been shown to transmit to children through their mothers, such as dieting habits (Hill and Franklin 1998; Smolak et al. 1999), which may suggest that self-esteem acts more like a state-like characteristic versus a personality trait.

These interesting findings with regard to the mother's characteristics influencing her child's self-esteem also speak to Demo et al.'s (1987) suggestion that it is the quality of relationship that the child has with their mother that influences their self-esteem, rather than the mother's self-esteem itself. Children who had mothers who participated more in their lives had higher self-esteem (1987:709). Dubois et al (1996) found similar results in their findings of social support and self-esteem, indicating an association between greater amounts of support and higher self-esteem.

Significant Life Events Effect on Self-esteem

Testing for significant life events or time-varying events produced varying results. Being employed at age 23 and 27 were significant influencers of self-esteem, showing that being employed is associated with having higher self-esteem. This may be explained by those who have gone to college in this cohort would have found employment after they graduate, most likely after age 22 for a traditional college student. In addition, it is also possible that those who did not go to college and instead joined the workforce after

graduating high school are now in a stable job by this time. Feeling independent from their parents at least financially could explain why being employed at 23 and 27 results in higher self-esteem.

However, this does not explain why having attained a degree was not a significant predictor of self-esteem for 23-year olds or 27-year olds. One explanation could be that having a college degree leads to better employment opportunities, higher wages for respondents and higher socioeconomic status (SES), resulting in higher self-esteem. Twenge and Campell (2002) conducted a meta-analysis looking at the association between SES and self-esteem and found that those with higher SES report higher self-esteem among adults. Perhaps examining the relationship between having a college degree and being employed could shed light on why employment by itself was a significant predictor of self-esteem, but degree by itself was not.

Another explanation to the nonsignificance of attaining a degree could be due to the specific variable that I used. While attaining a degree is a major significant life event, how much education the respondent has attained instead could paint a broader picture of how educational attainment impacts self-esteem. The current variable does not account for whether the respondent has graduated from high school, nor does it consider whether the respondent is enrolled in a university. Completing courses, learning new skills, and enhancing your social network while in school could also impact self-esteem.

Although there is little previous research on the influence of life events on self-esteem, some researchers indicate that it may not be the significant life event that affects self-esteem, but the amount of social support one receives during life events (Rutter

2010; Waite and Gallagher 2000). This distinction could explain why simply looking at whether someone got married or had a child was not a significant influence to self-esteem. Instead, more research could be examined to see how social support during a significant life event affects self-esteem. For example, adding another aspect to the married variable such as “How supported do you feel in your marriage?” could potentially show that marital status alone does not influence self-esteem, but that the amount of support an individual receives impacts self-esteem more (Rutter 2010; Weissman 1987).

Body mass index was also looked at as a time-varying event. Only the 15-year old time period was significant, indicating that respondents with higher BMI have lower self-esteem. Because there were no other significant findings for this factor for the other time periods, it is hard to determine if BMI continues to have an inverse relationship with self-esteem over time. The inverse relationship for this time point confirms some research stated earlier which showed adolescents with higher BMI having lower self-esteem than their normal-weight counterparts (Strauss 2000). This finding may contribute to research that suggests an association between BMI and body image (Erickson et al 2000; Guinn et al 1997; Olivardia et al 2004; Perrin et al 2010; Turnage 2005). Grogan (1999) suspects that as individuals age, their perception of the ideal body shape also changes over time, departing from the thin ideal found in youth. In addition, individuals also become more realistic in their expectations of their own body size, making BMI less influential over time. As a result, BMI no longer plays a role in influencing self-esteem.

Theoretical Framework Implications

This thesis also considered several theoretical frameworks in order to get a better understanding of how self-esteem is constructed by individuals. Symbolic interactionism could explain why there were few significant findings among the significant life events. There is more to significant life events than just experiencing it; as human beings, individuals must also attach meaning to the event, and to do that, simply asking individuals if they had a child since the date of the last interview is insufficient in capturing meaning and reflexivity to the significant life event. Blumer (1969) would argue that more needs to be captured during this event, including how the individual feels about it, and how they interpret it in their lives.

Identity theory explains how the different roles we hold in society influences how we view ourselves. I posited that these roles, such as father, spouse, and college graduate, would influence respondent self-esteem. The lack of findings regarding the influence of social roles on self-esteem in this research indicates perhaps that there is more to self-esteem than just the roles individuals play in their lives; our roles feed into our identities and influence how we interact with each other. Thoits (2001) argues that the more roles we hold, the higher our psychological well-being. Furthermore, roles and well-being have a reciprocal nature, in that greater psychological well-being also makes us more confident to take on more roles. The more roles we have, the better our understanding of our identity, therefore identity theory would explain the lack of findings between significant life events and self-esteem is due to the respondents not having a firm grasp of their identity, resulting in a weak relationship between their identity and their self-esteem.

Finally, social identity theory was used to try to explain how social origins could help influence our self-esteem in that the groups we belong to, such as race and sex, impact how we feel about ourselves. Stets and Burke (2000) explain that those who belong in the out-group could feel that they are being judged negatively compared to those in the in-group. In this research, Hispanics showed lower self-esteem than the non-Hispanic, non-Black group. Social identity theory would argue that Hispanics may feel that they are in the out-group and judged negatively. This in turn could explain why Hispanics have lower initial levels of self-esteem.

Study Limitations and Methodological Considerations

This study had several limitations. First, the mothers of the children in this study were young mothers, who had their first child between the ages of 14 and 24. These young mothers carry social characteristics that are different from the other mothers in the sample that had their children later in life. Levine et al (2007) found similar results as Cooksey (1997) in that when examining young mothers and child outcomes, school variables mathematics and reading comprehension scores became nonsignificant after controlling for background and demographic characteristics, and concluding that “a large proportion of the unadjusted teen parenting effect appears attributable to maternal background factors” (Levine et al 2007:114). Therefore, I surmise that examining the children of older mothers in my study would produce different results. In addition, since these are the children of only young mothers, this sample may not be fully representative of the national population.

One limitation in my study is that I was not able to use all the years self-esteem was measured from the NLSY for this cohort. Specifically, survey years 2000, 2006 and 2010 were omitted due to the low response rates for self-esteem. Therefore I could not examine changes in my time-varying covariates consecutively over the survey years to note any patterns, especially with significant life events such as being married and obtaining a degree. More data could have further examined whether significant life events influences self-esteem.

Another limitation in this study is that the NLSY uses an abbreviated version of the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale. Their version uses only the global self-esteem items, and is limited to 10 questions. The full scale is 60 questions and includes many dimensions of self-esteem. Perhaps using this modified version limits the scope in which we can capture self-esteem, hence the non-significant findings.

Future Considerations and Recommendations

Below I present suggestions for future consideration. Because there were very few significant time-varying covariates, my first suggestion would be to look at other facets of these significant life events, rather than only that the events occurred. For example, when looking at whether the respondent got married since the date of the last interview, future research could also look at marital satisfaction. This would give a better understanding of how getting married influences self-esteem through the quality of the new relationship rather than simply the marital status.

Similarly, for the significant life event of whether the respondent had a child since the date of the last interview, rather than noting the new addition to the family, future

research could ask how much support they received during the first year of having their child. The same idea could be applied to the married variable.

Another recommendation would be to use a different longitudinal dataset that follows both the mother and child to compare to the results of this study. It is possible that the exclusion of several survey years, in addition to using only the children of young mothers, limits the scope of my study, and using a dataset that includes both could counterbalance the limitations in my own findings.

One last recommendation would be use a different method of analysis which may capture an aspect of self-esteem that my research did not. Hierarchical Linear Modeling (HLM) is similar to latent growth curve modeling, except that in addition to examining time-varying and time-invariant covariates, HLM also examines how group effects (in this case, the child's family) influence the child's self-esteem over time. In HLM, three aspects of the child is examined: how self-esteem changes over time (to include influences of significant life events), how self-esteem at the individual level (child) compares to other children, and lastly how family affects self-esteem. Using HLM could delineate how children nested within families affect self-esteem as well as increasing the scope of the study to include the child's siblings, an aspect not studied in this thesis.

Study Implications

The present study has made original contributions to self-esteem research by looking at how social origins and significant life events influences self-esteem from adolescence to adulthood. While there has been some research on the influence of race and sex on self-esteem, there has been little to no research on significant life events. This

study has produced some initial results of how significant life events affect self-esteem and suggests some direction for future research.

Self-esteem continues to be a characteristic that affects and is affected by many factors. Individual self-esteem is affected by primary socialization, usually within our families, as well as group affiliation, and more importantly, the interactions we have with each other on a daily basis. The ability to better predict self-esteem over time can help adolescents and adults strive for healthier self-esteem, while contributing to the patterns that govern human action, to the benefit of both the individual and society.

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BIOGRAPHY

Irna May Connor graduated from Montgomery Blair High School in Silver Spring, MD, in 1999. She received her Bachelor of Arts in Psychology from the University of Maryland, College Park, in 2003. Upon her commission as an officer for the United States Air Force in 2003, she went on to serve her country for 7 years before enrolling in George Mason University's Sociology Undergraduate Program in 2010, graduating in the spring of 2012. She was immediately accepted into the Sociology Graduate Program and received her Master of Arts in Sociology from George Mason University in 2014.