

## THE EFFECT OF NEGATIVELY WORDED MEASURES OF SELF-ESTEEM ON CHILDREN

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Low self-esteem in learning disabled or emotionally disturbed children has been reported as a result of their failures in various social and educational settings (e.g., Conley, Ghavami, Vonohlen, & Foulkes, 2007). To verify such a decline, a number of self-esteem scales have been used in research. These usually utilize positive and negative items. For example, the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (RSES; Rosenberg, 1965) has five positive descriptions and five negative descriptions.

However, it is not known how children who tend to evaluate themselves negatively will feel when completing self-esteem measurement, particularly on items that require the child to evaluate whether or not a negative description is accurate. The use of these items for children with low self-esteem may result in subjective discomfort and subsequently enhance the child's negative self-concepts. If this is true, self-esteem measurements involving both positive and negative self-descriptions would have to be reconsidered. In the present study, we examined how self-esteem measurement involving negative self-descriptions affects healthy children. The children's self-esteem was measured using the RSES.

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Thirty-eight fifth-grade elementary school children (19 girls and 19 boys; 10- or 11-year-olds) were asked to rate the subjective discomfort they felt while completing the RSES on a 5-point scale with 1 = *It was enjoyable*; 2 = *It was slightly enjoyable*; 3 = *It was not enjoyable, but not unpleasant either*; 4 = *It was slightly unpleasant*; 5 = *It was unpleasant*.

The total self-esteem score was calculated by adding the positive self-evaluation scores to the inverse of the negative self-evaluation scores. Statistical analysis indicated a significant negative correlation between self-esteem scores and self-reported discomfort experienced during self-esteem measurement ( $r = -.50, p < .01$ ). Thus, children with lower self-esteem reported greater discomfort during self-esteem measurement. The result suggests that self-esteem measurement may not be a pleasant experience for children with low self-esteem. Therefore, if possible, it is desirable to avoid self-esteem measurements with many negative descriptions, at least in educational settings. Instead of such self-esteem measurements, the present result suggests the use of measurements with only positive items, or with free descriptions of only one's own positive aspects for children with possibly lower self-esteem. However, we need further evidence to confirm that children do not necessarily experience discomfort during self-esteem measurement with only positive descriptions.

*Keywords:* self-esteem measurement, learning disabled, emotionally disturbed, self-concept, subjective discomfort, Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale, negative wording.

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