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Nonviolence Education and Youth Self-Esteem

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Nonviolence Education and Youth Self-Esteem

Jenlyn Furey

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Abstract

In the present study the self-esteem of fifth grade students (N=135) was examined. Eleven classes from four schools in the same school district received a self-esteem survey. One of the eleven classes received nonviolence education. Participant scores on a self-esteem Likert rating scale were analyzed. Differences between female students in the nonviolence class and female students in the other ten classes were found. Age, gender and school differences were also examined. Gender differences were found for three of the five rating scale questions, with females scoring higher for two questions. Age differences existed on one question, with older students showing higher self-esteem. Recommendations for future research include a longitudinal study of student self-esteem in a nonviolence class.

Nonviolence Education and Youth Self-Esteem

Self-esteem is a topic of interest in the fields of Psychology and Education. While most laypersons seem to have an understanding of the concept, there has been limited consistency in defining self-esteem. An extensive review of the literature led Guindon (2002) to produce the following definition: "The attitudinal, evaluative component of the self; the affective judgments placed on the self-concept consisting of feelings of worth and acceptance, which are developed and maintained as a consequence of awareness of competence, sense of achievement, and feedback from the external world."

Recently, researchers have questioned the importance of self-esteem. Swann et al. (2007) examined whether people's self-views matter, and found a strong relationship between self-esteem and important social outcomes. American and South Korean students identified self-esteem as the top psychological need met in events that were especially satisfying to them (Sheldon et al., 2001). While high self-esteem is certainly desirable, the avoidance of low-self esteem is particularly important. A 2008 study reported that low self-esteem predicted subsequent levels of depression (Orth, Robins, & Roberts).

Self-esteem is especially of interest in the field of education. The school experience is a significant determinant of student's self-esteem (Scott &Murray, 1996). A ten-step system was suggested by Canfield (1991) to improve students' self-esteem. This system included unconditional positive regard from teachers. The governor of California appointed The California Task Force to Promote Self-Esteem and Personal and Social Responsibility (1990), encouraging the community to adopt self-esteem boosting programs. While these methods emphasize self-esteem as an important cause of achievement, other research stresses the opposite; self-esteem is the result of achievement. Baumeister (2001) found that "encouraging

people to feel good about themselves when they haven't earned it" poses problems. Using panel data from the National Educational Longitudinal study, Ross & Broh (2000) observed that self-esteem was not a cause of academic achievement, but that academic achievement predicted student self-esteem.

Teachers, understanding the importance of self-esteem, have invested their time in self-esteem boosting programs with little success. A constructive alternative would be for teachers to incorporate educational curriculum that has the built-in consequence of enhancing student self-esteem. In this research, such an alternative is examined. Kingian nonviolence education, which focuses on Martin Luther King Jr.'s "Six Principles of Nonviolence" from his book *Stride Toward Freedom* (1958) teaches methods of conflict reconciliation and social change. As a result of learning important problem-solving skills, students who have been trained in nonviolence may also experience increased self-esteem. Lazarus (1993) found that self-esteem is increased when individuals face a problem and try to cope with it, rather than avoid it. Nonviolence education provides students with powerful coping abilities that may result in improved self-esteem.

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Much attention has been given to understanding gender differences in self-esteem. A meta-analysis by Gentile et al. (2009) showed that males scored significantly higher than females on the personal self and self-satisfaction scales, which are very similar to global self-esteem. Quatman & Watson (2001) explored adolescent self-esteem, finding boys to have higher global self-esteem. In the present study, gender effects were examined closely, along with an interaction effect for gender and nonviolence training.

Another variable that has been examined with self-esteem is relative age. In his book *Outliers: The Story of Success*, (2009) Malcolm Gladwell discussed the role that kindergarten cut-off dates play in children's school success. He reported that, "The small initial advantage that

the child born in the early part of the year has over the child born at the end of the year persists. It locks children into patterns of achievement and underachievement, encouragement and discouragement, that stretch on and on for years." It is alarming to teachers and parents that an arbitrarily chosen cut-off date may have a strong influence on children's self-esteem. A recent study demonstrated empirically that relative age is indeed associated with self-esteem. Developmental differences between younger and older students in the first grade translate into differences in achievement and self-esteem several years later. In the study, the youngest students in each grade displayed the lowest self-esteem, and the oldest students showed the highest self-esteem (Thompson et al., 2004). The present study examines a group of fifth grade students' age in months in relation to self-esteem. The overall purpose of this research is to gain insight on the association between nonviolence education, gender, and relative age and the self-esteem of fifth grade students.

<div align="center">Method</div>

Participants

Participants were fifth grade students (79 females, 56 males; N=135) from the four elementary schools in the South Kingstown district in Rhode Island. Participants ranged in age from 10 to 11years. Of the school district's twelve fifth grade classes, eleven classes had participating students. Of the eleven participating classes, one class (identified as Class 10) received nonviolence education.

Materials

A nine item self-esteem questionnaire was created (See Appendix A) which included two demographic items, two open-ended qualitative items, and five Likert scale items assessing self-esteem. The rating scale statements were similar to the statements on Rosenberg's Self-Esteem

Scale (Rosenberg, 1965), and included three positive statements and two negative statements. Participants could choose Strongly Disagree, Disagree, Agree, or Strongly Agree for each item. Ratings on the negative statements were reverse coded in the analysis. This allowed the researcher to consistently interpret high ratings as high self-esteem and low ratings as low self-esteem. An additional questionnaire was created for students in the nonviolence class, including one Likert scale item and three open ended qualitative items (See Appendix B). Consent forms were created for the students, parents, principals, and the superintendent of the school district (See Appendix D-G). A word search puzzle was provided as an alternative activity for every student (See Appendix C).

Procedure

Active consent forms were sent home to the parents of each fifth grade student. After a week the researcher administered self-esteem surveys to each class individually. The researcher took the following steps to ensure confidentiality when collecting data: Word search puzzles were administered to all students as an alternative activity. Teachers identified which students had active parent consent, and the researcher gave those students child consent forms. Next, the researcher read aloud the child consent form and asked participants to sign the form and leave it face up on the desk if they wanted to complete the survey. The researcher then exchanged self-esteem surveys for signed child consent forms. Participants were given 10 to 15 minutes to complete the survey. Once each student completed the survey the researcher collected it face-down. Following the self-esteem survey, Class 10 participants were given the option to complete a supplementary four-item questionnaire about nonviolence education.

Results

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Responses on the self-esteem survey were recorded and analyzed. Of the initial 147 surveys, ten were omitted from the analysis due to incomplete data. Two outliers were omitted because of birth dates significantly different from the norm. The number of surveys analyzed after removing incomplete and outliers was 135 (79 females and 56 males). Ratings on each item were transformed to scores from one to four. The data was analyzed with 1 representing very low self-esteem, 2 representing average to low self-esteem, 3 representing average to high self esteem, and 4 representing very high self esteem.

As shown in Table 1 the students seem to have high self-esteem overall. Ratings for Questions 5-9 were significantly correlated at the .05 level or .01 level, an indication that the questions measure the same concept (self-esteem). No significant differences were found between schools on the rating scale questions. A One-Way Analysis of Variance found no significant differences between schools using each student's summed ratings as the dependent variable and the schools as the factor, $F_{(3, 131)} = .614$, $p > .05$.

Every female student in the nonviolence class gave the highest rating possible on Question 9. A Mann-Whitney Test compared female students in Class 10 with all other female students, finding a marginally significant difference for Question 6 (p=.063) and a significant difference for Question 9 (p=.023). In the nonviolence questionnaire 15 of the 17 students said that they felt more confident in their ability to solve problems after being trained in nonviolence.

As shown in Figure 1, older students reported being more willing to try new things. A T-Test found no differences between male and female summed ratings, $t(133) = .473$, $p > .05$. Individual questions revealed some significant differences. On Questions 6, $t(133) = -2.366$, $p < .05$, with males scoring higher. Significant gender differences were found on Question 7,

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t(133) = 2.04, p<.05, with females scoring higher. Significant gender differences were also found on Question 9, *t*(133) =3.426, p<.01, with females scoring higher.

Discussion

This correlational study investigated the self-esteem of 135 fifth grade students, examining differences between students in a class that receives nonviolence education and classes that do not. The mean scores of each class give a good indication that self-esteem is high in fifth grade students in the South Kingstown School District. Another notable point is that the schools did not differ significantly overall in self-esteem scores. Although the summed ratings showed no significant differences, some differences existed in individual rating scale questions. The interaction between gender and the nonviolence education factor was examined. Female students in the nonviolence class had significantly higher ratings than female students in the other classes for Question 9, "I can do anything if I put my mind to it." The responses in the nonviolence questionnaire indicate that nonviolence education improved problem-solving skills for the majority of students (88%). As discussed previously, learning to cope with problems rather than avoiding problems leads to increased self-esteem (Lazarus, 1993).

The significant difference of student's age in months on Question 8, "I don't like to try new things because I could be bad at them" supports current research that younger students have lower self-esteem when compared with older students in the same grade. Relative age effects should be examined more closely in future research, by comparing same-age students in fifth and sixth grade groups. This will give a more clear indication of relative age effects of self-esteem.

Significant between-group differences in gender were found for three of the five rating scale questions. Although past research has indicated that males tend to have higher self-esteem, two of the three significant gender differences showed higher female ratings. Future research

could explore longitudinal gender differences in South Kingstown School District students from fourth to seventh grade.

There is a possibility that at least some participants reported inflated levels of self-esteem, due to social desirability. Raskin et al. (1991) found that social desirability may be a confounding variable in measurement of self-esteem. According to Guindon (2002), paper and pencil self-reports are the most reliable method of understanding self-esteem levels. Future self-esteem research should use similar assessment methods, but focus on longitudinal effects of nonviolence education, gender, and relative age.

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Appendix A
Survey

Do not put your name on this survey. Please fill out the information below.

1. Male or Female: _____

2. Birthday: _____

Please respond to the following questions honestly. There is no right or wrong answer.

3. What is the best thing you have learned in fifth grade?

4. What do you want to be when you grow up?

Read each statement on the left and decide whether you strongly disagree, disagree, agree, or strongly agree. Next to each statement please put an X in one of the boxes.

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
5. I can do things as well as most people my age.				
6. Sometimes I feel like I'm not good at anything.				
7. I deserve to be loved and respected.				
8. I don't like to try new things because I could be bad at them.				
9. I can do anything if I put my mind to it.				

Appendix B

Questions about Nonviolence Training

1. How much has your nonviolence training helped you so far this year with conflicts or problems? Please check the box that you agree with the most:

It has not helped at all	It has helped a little bit	It has helped a lot	It has been extremely helpful

2. Do you feel more confident in your ability to solve problems? Why or why not?

3. What have you learned this year during your nonviolence training that you know you will continue to use or think about next year?

4. Do you view yourself differently because you have been trained in nonviolence? Explain.

Appendix C

Word Search

PROCEED	HEAVILY	CABBAGE	JEALOUS	TERRITORY
CREATURE	SCENE	PERSONAL	NATURE	PARDON

```
G  J  L  H  G  Z  M  Y  M  K  Y  M  E  R  U  T  A  E  R  C
B  M  D  E  W  K  Z  D  Q  L  L  U  M  G  I  O  W  O  G  T
F  B  Q  F  M  J  O  N  P  X  D  P  O  W  R  E  P  N  C  B
Y  I  Z  K  N  Y  D  E  S  V  U  R  L  X  Y  X  C  V  Y  E
N  L  O  G  P  T  R  C  K  C  J  O  B  F  Z  R  A  O  M  U
Z  A  P  E  B  S  E  X  H  F  E  C  P  U  P  Y  B  K  G  N
M  X  K  F  O  N  V  E  M  A  A  E  M  U  J  U  B  Y  C  T
E  I  P  N  E  W  A  Q  D  G  L  E  N  E  C  C  A  R  D  B
H  R  A  K  I  V  X  D  P  H  O  D  Z  H  C  Z  G  W  M  P
C  L  V  P  I  J  J  H  P  T  U  E  I  T  U  W  E  J  X  J
L  Q  V  L  Q  B  U  Z  M  U  S  V  W  U  K  O  R  T  A  L
X  Q  Y  S  U  R  V  F  J  X  Z  V  S  R  Q  H  H  T  Y  N
I  G  B  Q  J  Z  E  Q  F  G  N  G  C  V  T  J  B  I  A  C
A  O  Z  V  F  H  H  D  Z  G  T  C  J  L  V  O  M  P  N  G
V  D  U  G  T  E  R  R  I  T  O  R  Y  K  T  M  I  F  T  E
F  F  H  P  C  E  M  G  I  U  R  U  W  Y  H  X  S  H  P  O
A  W  Q  W  H  L  X  W  H  A  R  G  P  A  R  D  O  N  P  Q
J  S  Y  K  F  B  D  T  Q  L  L  T  O  K  B  P  I  J  S  T
D  K  R  Q  I  K  E  T  L  S  H  E  Q  J  M  K  R  C  D  G
C  W  T  K  D  E  S  P  N  A  T  U  R  E  Z  I  W  C  H  S
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Appendix D

Informed Consent for Self Esteem Survey

My Name is Jenlyn Furey. I'm a student at the University of Rhode Island, and I am doing a study to find out more about how fifth graders think.

If you agree to be a part of this study here is what will happen: You will be given a survey to fill out, and you can use a pen or pencil to answer the questions. There is no right or wrong answer. You do not have to fill out a survey if you don't want to. If you start filling out a survey and change your mind you can stop at any time.

Do not put your name on the survey, and please keep your eyes on your own survey. No one will know which survey you filled out because you are not putting your name on it. When you are finished answering the questions please flip over your survey until everyone is finished. There are 7 questions on the survey and it should take about 5 to 10 minutes to fill out.

Signing this paper means that you have read this form and that you want to be in the study. If you do not want to be in the study then do not sign this paper.

Signature of Participant: _____ Date:_____

Signature of Investigator: _____ Date:_____

Appendix E
Parent/Guardian Permission for Self-Esteem Survey

March 2, 2009

Dear Parent or Guardian,

Your child will be given the option to participate in an anonymous survey in class. Each of the twelve 5th grade classes in the South Kingstown School District have been asked to participate in self esteem research by giving students the option to fill out an anonymous survey. The study is being done by Jenlyn Furey, a senior at the University of Rhode Island. Superintendent Robert Hicks has approved the study. It is being supervised by URI Professor Charles Collyer.

Doing this paper and pencil survey will cause little or no risk to your child. The survey is voluntary and completely anonymous. It includes seven items; two open-ended questions and five questions which will be answered on a rating scale. The survey will provide no immediate benefits to students, but will provide valuable information about the self-esteem of 5th grade students in the South Kingstown School District**. Please return this form by Friday, March 6th only if you give permission for your child to take part in this survey.**

In case of comment or complaint please contact the office of the Vice President for Research & Economic Development, Dr. Peter Alfonso, 70 Lower College Road, Suite 2, University of Rhode Island, Kingston, Rhode Island, telephone: (401) 874-4328.

I have read this form and I give my child permission to participate in the survey:

Parent/Guardian Signature: _____   Date: _____

Child's Name: _____

Appendix F

The University of Rhode Island
Department of Psychology
10 Chafee Road
Nonviolence Education Impact on Youth Self Esteem

A request has been made to include your school in the research project described below. The researcher is Jenlyn Furey and she will explain the project to you in detail. Please feel free to ask questions. If you have more questions later, Jenlyn Furey will discuss them with you, and may be reached at 978-726-6763 or the email address jenlynfurey@mail.uri.edu.

Description of the project:
This study will examine self esteem of the fifth grade students in the South Kingstown School District.

What will be done:
This study will involve up to 300 students enrolled in the fifth grade in the South Kingstown School District. Students who participate will fill out a short seven item survey. The survey includes two open-ended questions and five rating scale items. The open-ended questions are general and the rating scale questions focus on self esteem. The time required of students to complete this survey should be no more than 5-10 minutes. The researcher will administer the survey to each fifth grade class at a time that is convenient for the teacher.

Risks or discomfort:
This study has minimal risks and students are not expected to experience significant discomfort as a result of participating. The survey will be given during school hours, and so may cause students to miss class instruction.

Benefits of this study:
Although there will be no direct benefit to you for taking part in this study, it may provide updated information about the self esteem of local fifth grade students. The researcher will also explore significant differences in self esteem between a fifth grade class in Wakefield Elementary School that offers nonviolence education and the eleven classes that do not. The major benefit of this study is an updated understanding of local fifth grade students' self esteem.

Confidentiality:
The surveys will be anonymous, using identifying numbers for students instead of names. Each child will be informed that his or her answers will be kept anonymous and confidential. Each class's survey results will be identified as either a class that receives nonviolence education or a class that does not. No student names will be revealed.

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Appendix F cont'd

Decision to quit at any time:
Each student will choose whether he or she wants to participate in the survey. Students will be informed that they do not have to participate in this study. They will also be told that if they change their mind they may quit at any time.

Rights and Complaints:
If you are not satisfied with the way this study is performed, you may discuss your complaints with Jenlyn Furey and/or her faculty supervisor, Professor Charles Collyer, 401-258-9834, collier@uri.edu. In addition, you may contact the office of the Vice President for Research & Economic Development, Dr. Peter Alfonso, 70 Lower College Road, Suite 2, University of Rhode Island, Kingston, Rhode Island, telephone: (401) 874-4328.

You have read the Consent Form. Your questions have been answered. Your signature on this form means that you understand the information and you agree to participate in this study.

_____   _____
Signature of School Principal   Signature of Researcher

_____   _____
Typed/printed Name   Typed/printed name

_____   _____
Date   Date

Appendix G

The University of Rhode Island
Department of Psychology
10 Chafee Road
Nonviolence Education Impact on Youth Self Esteem

A request has been made to include the fifth grade classes from Wakefield Elementary School, Peace Dale Elementary School, Matunuck School, and West Kingston Elementary School in the research project described below. The researcher is Jenlyn Furey and she will explain the project to you in detail. Please feel free to ask questions. If you have more questions later, Jenlyn Furey will discuss them with you, and may be reached at 978-726-6763 or the email address jenlynfurey@mail.uri.edu.

Description of the project:
This study will examine the self esteem of the fifth grade students in the South Kingstown School District.

What will be done:
This study will involve up to 300 students enrolled in the fifth grade in the South Kingstown School District. Students who participate will fill out a short seven item survey. The survey includes two open-ended questions and five rating scale items. The open-ended questions are general and the rating scale questions focus on self esteem. The time required of students to complete this survey should be no more than 5-10 minutes. One class from Wakefield Elementary will be given four additional questions regarding the nonviolence education they received throughout the year. The researcher will administer the survey to each fifth grade class at a time that is convenient for the teacher.

Risks or discomfort:
This study has minimal risks and students are not expected to experience significant discomfort as a result of participating. The survey will be given during school hours, and so may cause students to miss class instruction.

Benefits of this study:
Although there will be no direct benefit to you for taking part in this study, it may provide updated information about the self esteem of local fifth grade students. The researcher will also explore significant differences in self esteem between a fifth grade class in Wakefield Elementary School that offers nonviolence education and the eleven classes that do not. The major benefit of this study is an updated understanding of local fifth grade students' self esteem.

Confidentiality:
The surveys will be anonymous, using identifying numbers for students instead of names. Each child will be informed that his or her answers will be kept anonymous and confidential. Consent forms will be given to each child and to the parents or guardians of each child. Each class's survey results will be identified as either a class that receives nonviolence education or a class that does not. No student names will be revealed.

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Appendix G cont'd

Decision to quit at any time:
Each student will choose whether he or she wants to participate in the survey. Students will be informed that they do not have to participate in this study. They will also be told that if they change their mind they may quit at any time.

Rights and Complaints:
If you are not satisfied with the way this study is performed, you may discuss your complaints with Jenlyn Furey and/or her faculty supervisor, Professor Charles Collyer, 401-258-9834, collyer@uri.edu. In addition, you may contact the office of the Vice President for Research & Economic Development, Dr. Peter Alfonso, 70 Lower College Road, Suite 2, University of Rhode Island, Kingston, Rhode Island, telephone: (401) 874-4328.

You have read the Consent Form. Your questions have been answered. Your signature on this form means that you understand the information and you agree to participate in this study.

_____   _____
Signature of South Kingstown   Signature of Researcher
School District Superintendent

_____   _____
Typed/printed Name   Typed/printed name

_____   _____
Date   Date

Table 1

Mean Self-Esteem Scores of Each Fifth Grade Class

	Q5	Q6	Q7	Q8	Q9
Class 1					
M	3.444	3	3.556	3.667	4
SD	.726	.866	1.014	.707	0
Class 2					
M	3.37	3.27	3.5	3.5	3.636
SD	.492	.827	.598	.598	.492
Class 3					
M	3.5	3.25	3.75	3.25	3.25
SD	.577	.957	.5	.5	.957
Class 4					
M	3.375	3.835	3.875	3.5	3.625
SD	.518	.835	.354	.535	.518
Class 5					
M	3.438	3.313	3.75	3.563	3.563
SD	.629	.704	.447	.512	.512
Class 6					
M	3.417	3.583	3.5	3.167	3.417
SD	.669	.669	.674	.835	.515

Table 1 cont'd

Mean Self-Esteem Scores of Each Fifth Grade Class

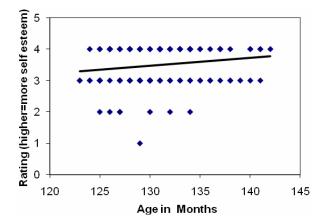|	Q5	Q6	Q7	Q8	Q9
Class 7					
M	3.273	2.455	3.636	3.273	3.09
SD	.0647	.934	.674	.647	.944
Class 8					
M	3.25	2.875	3	3.5	3.25
SD	.463	.641	.926	.756	.463
Class 9					
M	3.091	3	3.727	3.364	3.545
SD	.831	.775	.467	.505	.522
Class 10					
M	3.353	2.824	3.353	3.353	3.588
SD	.786	.636	.786	.786	1.004
Class 11					
M	3.412	3.294	3.294	3.882	3.706
SD	.712	.772	.772	.332	.470

Figure 1.

Figure 1 Caption

Student's age in months and self-esteem ratings on Question 8, "I don't like to try new things because I could be bad at them." Older student's ratings indicate that they are more willing to try new things than younger students.