

# Putting Research to Work for Military Families



Focus:  
Civilian

## The Development of Multiple Domains of Child and Adolescent Self-Concept: A Cohort Sequential Longitudinal Design

Cole, D. A., Maxwell, S. E., Martin, J. M., Peeke, L. G., Seroczynski, A. D., Tram, J. M., ... Maschman, T. (2001). The development of multiple domains of child and adolescent self-concept: A cohort sequential longitudinal design. *Child Development, 72*(6), 1723-1746. doi:10.1111/1467-8624.00375

**SUMMARY:** Elementary through high school students participated in 12 waves of data collection over six years to assess the development of self-concept in social, developmental, and educational transitions. Positive changes in academic competence, social acceptance, and sports competence were seen from 3rd to 6th grade. There was a decline during the transition to middle school, but there was improvement in most areas during the transition into high school.

### KEY FINDINGS:

- Moderate to strong positive changes in self-perceived academic competence, social acceptance, and sports competence were seen between 3rd and 6th grades.
- Self-perceived physical attractiveness declined over middle childhood for females, but not males.
- Males' and females' perceptions of their conduct steadily diminished between 3rd and 6th grades.
- Children's self-concepts became increasingly stable from 3rd to 6th grade, dropped during the transition to middle school, and then became increasingly stable in high school.

### IMPLICATIONS FOR MILITARY PROFESSIONALS:

Military professionals could:

- Facilitate workshops for military parents about common issues children encounter as they transition to different developmental periods
- Help develop modules or activities to inform staff of best practices in educational learning activities to best serve children during different development periods

### IMPLICATIONS FOR PROGRAMS:

Programs could:

- Disseminate information to families about changes in self-concept their children may encounter as they transition between grades, particularly from elementary to middle school.
- Offer additional supportive programs for children during key transitional periods to help them maintain a positive self-concept.

### IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICIES:

Policies could:

- Recommend professional development to increase their awareness of changes in self-concept among middle school children and teach strategies to enhance youth's wellbeing
- Promote the development of structured leisure activities for military families at installations

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## METHODS

- Two cohorts of children and adolescents (the younger starting in 3rd, the older in 6th grade) participated in the study from nine public elementary schools in a midsize Midwestern city. Recruitment rates and methods were not reported.
- Each cohort of children had data gathered 12 times over six years, every six months in their school classrooms.
- Participants completed measures of self-concept, and parents contributed demographic information.
- At least 40% of the students participated at each data collection.

## PARTICIPANTS

- One thousand nine hundred twenty students participated (51% boys) in total.
- Average age for younger cohort at start of study was 8.96 years (SD = 0.61 years) and average age for older cohort at start of study was 12.01 years (SD = 0.66 years).
- Thirty-seven percent of the youth had at least one parent who was previously or currently divorced.
- Racial/ethnic composition for the participants was 57% White, 38% Black, 3% Latino/Latina.

## LIMITATIONS

- The sample was from a limited number of schools and these results may not generalize to other schools.
- The high school data were derived from only one cohort, which limits the generalizeability of the findings.
- There was no measure of cognitive functioning and ability, both of which may be impacting the changes in self-concept during key developmental periods.

## AVENUES FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Future research could:

- Gather additional data that include assessments of school performance and cognitive ability to see how these changes relate to academic outcomes
- Collect data from teachers and parents about children's and youth's functioning
- Compare and contrast how self-concepts may change during different developmental periods across different racial/ethnic groups

## ASSESSING RESEARCH THAT WORKS



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