Self-Evaluations of Competence and Worth in Adulthood

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Theoretical Orientation and Objectives

Previous theory and research on personal self-evaluation has generally focused on an extremely general and abstract dimension, usually termed self-esteem. The ambiguity of this global concept has led to very little solid research establishing sizable and dependable relationships between self-evaluation and important social-structural circumstances, attitudinal correlates, or consequences for subsequent conduct. Even where some more specific aspect of self-evaluation (such as "competence" or "self-acceptance") has been tapped in an empirical study, the researcher often simply equates this particular dimension with general self-esteem. Thus the literature now contains apparently discrepant and contradictory findings, relating diverse versions of self-esteem to important social and individual variables, especially regarding the development of self-esteem over the course of the life cycle.

Our purpose here is to offer a more differentiated theoretical approach to self-evaluation, in which four qualitatively different dimensions are distinguished: competence, self-determination, unity, and moral worth. We will then turn to analysis of empirical evidence from a recent survey to show how two of these evaluative dimensions (competence and moral worth) have quite different patterns of relation to life-cycle stage. Finally, we will attempt

to show the differential impact on the senses of competence and moral worth of three of the social-structural parameters that have most often been suggested as crucial to all forms of self-conception development over the life cycle: sex, ethnic group, and socioeconomic status.

Background

Self-esteem (defined as the most global and general evaluative dimension of self-conception) has been a continuing element of major importance throughout the development of the philosophy of consciousness, humanistic psychology, and the symbolic interactionist branch of sociology. William James, James Baldwin, and George Herbert Mead brought philosophical perspectives to the early study of reflexive evaluation. Adler, Horney, Fromm, Rogers, Sarbin, Sullivan, Maslow, and Coopersmith are among the strongest of the psychological contributors. Sociological analysis more and more frequently in recent years has dealt with the relation of self-esteem to social structure and social interaction.

Regardless of theoretical persuasion, the essential element in each of these conceptualizations is that individuals develop a generalized and pervasive evaluative self-assessment, abstracted from the indefinitely large number of "identity fragments" concerning any of the person's self-conceived characteristics, attributes, memberships, identifications, roles, values, beliefs,

abilities, problems, goals, etc. Many of these more concrete aspects of self-conception have been discussed and analyzed in other writings.

SYSTEM PROBLEM	SYSTEMIC SENSE OF SELF	INTERACTIVE SYMBOLIC REWARD
Adaptation	COMPETENCE	Approval
Goal-attainment	SELF-DETERMINATION	Response/Gratification
Integration	UNITY	Acceptance
Pattern maintenance	MORAL WORTH	Respect

As an alternative approach, however, four "systemic senses of self" have been proposed as *intermediate in level of generality* between the particular identity fragments and the most global form, self-esteem. In brief, Gordon proposed that a distinct dimension of self-evaluation corresponds to each of the "system problems" that every person (as a functioning system) must face. Further, Gordon has asserted that each of these four "systemic senses of self" is engendered, supported, and maintained by one of four distinct forms of social reward. Specifically, it is argued that the sense of *competence* is nurtured by social approval for valued performance; the sense of *self-determination* is engendered and maintained by social responsiveness and direct consummatory gratification; the sense of *unity* derives' from social acceptance; and the sense of *moral worth* emerges from expressions of respect in relation to generalized cultural-value ethics. Thus the theoretical orientation guiding this analysis assumes the correspondence as shown in the table below. This theoretical approach formulates an individual's level of

global self-esteem as largely determined by his particular current positions on these more specific dimensions, combined with the relative weight he assigns to each.

Hypothesized Determinants of the Various Self-Evaluations

Theory and research on the development of self-conceptions have generally focused on direct interactive rewards *or* on social-structural circumstances. Such elements as family composition, ethnic group, socioeconomic status, occupational situation, or condition as a labeled "deviant" are presumed to shape and control the pattern of interactive rewards, and at only one particular stage in the life cycle. Childhood has received much more attention than has adolescence and socialization to particular occupations, while self-conception changes in middle age and old age have received least attention of all. The books by Bühler, Erikson and Lidz are preeminent among the very few that attempt to deal with the different stages of the life cycle. Even these comprehensive works presume to characterize developmental patterns typical only of contemporary, urban, white middle- or upper-middle-class Americans. Gordon's recent effort at integration and social-psychological reformulation of these and other authors' ideas on life-cycle stages is no exception to this restricted perspective (see Table 10-1).

Present Objective

Our primary goal is to ascertain the unique and combined effects on selected dimensions of self-evaluation of three major structural characteristics (sex, ethnic group, and socioeconomic status) in combination with lifecycle stage. No research has yet been conducted on the immensely complicated interconnections of social characteristics and life-cycle stage as these operate through explicitly measured interactive sanctions to raise or lower self-evaluations among an adequate sample of persons. A study of the relation of leisure and mental health, done in Houston, Texas, in 1969, was designed to provide representative sampling with regard to sex, ethnic group, and occupational status as well as age. The survey interview measured two of the four systemic senses of self-outlined above: competence and moral worth.

Thus, the specific objective of the present analysis is to portray the levels of sensed moral worth and several forms of sensed competence in groups currently at different stages in the life cycle. In addition, the unique and combined impact of sex, ethnic group, socioeconomic status and life-cycle stage in determining the level of each aspect of self-evaluation will be assessed. Before offering detailed rationales and hypotheses, the Houston study will be described.

The Leisure Mental-Health and Life-Cycle Survey

A structured interview concerning leisure activities, value preferences, social attitudes, and various aspects of mental health was administered to a sample of adults in Houston, Texas, during the period of November 1969 to February 1970. The interview guide and sampling plan were designed by Dr. Sally Hacker, a sociologist trained by the Committee on Human Development at the University of Chicago and now teaching at Drake University. The National Opinion Besearch Center recruited and trained the interviewers, pretested the interview guide, selected the sample, supervised the field work, coded the interviews, and processed the data to the point of providing initial frequency distributions.

Study Design

The sample included 1,441 persons and was stratified according to sex, ethnicity, family occupational status level, and age group. The latter three dimensions require elaboration.

Ethnicity. Respondents were drawn from Houston's three major ethnic groups—Anglo, black, and Mexican American. It should be noted that interviewers were matched with respondents as regards ethnicity, an important procedure that is frequently advocated but rarely accomplished.

Family occupational status level. After the interviewers had obtained information from the respondent concerning the current and previous

occupations of all working members of the family, the family itself was designated as being of "lower" or "higher" occupational status. Occupations requiring little formal training were defined as "lower status," and generally included operative, semiskilled, laboring, and service jobs. Skilled crafts, clerical, sales, professional, and managerial occupations were generally defined as "higher status," depending upon the specific nature of the work. It should be noted that this procedure provided enough "higher-status" cases for analysis in the minority samples, but had the effect of over-representing "lower-status" Anglo respondents in comparison to what would have been found in a strictly random sample of Houston adults. This overrepresentation of lower-status families among the Anglos was increased by matching Anglo neighborhoods as closely as possible to minority neighborhoods on the basis of socioeconomic indicators from the 1960 census.

Age group and life-cycle stage. Approximately two hundred forty respondents were chosen for each of six age groups (20 to 29, 30 to 39, 40 to 54, 55 to 64, 65 to 74, 75 to 94 years). This procedure obviously resulted in an overrepresentation of people in older age groups, but it had the benefit of providing enough cases to permit analysis of the life situations of these persons, which were of great theoretical and humane interest. For purposes of analysis, these six age groups were collapsed into five categories more closely approximating the life-cycle stages proposed by one of the present authors:

Table 10-1. Stage Developmental Model of the Ideal-Typical Life Cycle in Contemporary, Urban, Middle-Class America—Giving Approximate Ages, the Most Significant Other Persons, and the Major Dilemmas of Value-Theme Differentiation and Integration

| | LIFE-CYCLE STAGE | APPROXIMATE AGES | MOST SIGNIFICANT OTHERS | MAJOR DILEMMA OF VALUE-THEME DIFFERENTIATION AND INTEGRATION |
				Security/Challenge
1.	Infancy	0-12 months	mother	Affective gratification/ sensorimotor experiencing
2.	Early childhood	1-2 years	mother, father	Compliance/self-control
3.	Oedipal period	3-5 years	father, mother, siblings, playmates	Expressivity/ instrumentality
4.	Later childhood	6-11 years	parents, same sex peers, teachers	Peer relationships/evaluated abilities
5.	Early adolescence	12-15 ys	parents, same sex peers, opposite sex peers, teachers	Acceptance/achievement
6.	Later adolescence	16-20 years	same sex peers, opposite sex peers, parents, teachers, loved one, wife or husband	Intimacy/autonomy
7.	Young adulthood	21-29 years	loved one, husband or wife, children, employers, friends	Connection/self-determination
8.	Early maturity	30-44 years	wife or husband, children, superiors, colleagues, friends, parents	Stability/accomplishment
9.	Full	45 to	wife or husband,	Dignity/control

	maturity	retirement age	children, colleagues, friends, younger associates	
10.	Old age	Retirement age to death	remaining family, long-term friends, neighbors	Meaningful integration/autonomy

AGE GROUP	LIFE-CYCLE STAGE	NUMBER OF RESPONDENTS
20-29	7. Young adult	248
30-44	8. Early maturity	308
45-64	9. Full maturity	425
65-74	10. Old age	242
75-94	11. Very old age	218
Total sample		1,441

These chronologically defined groups are taken to represent (in at least a rough way) the periods of (7) job and family connection establishment, (8) occupational and child-raising accomplishment, (9) occupational leveling off and empty nest period, (10) the role-relinquishment period, and (11) the period of physical decline. More detailed treatment should use these sociological-stage positions directly rather than using the less complex but also less valid approach through chronological age.

Taken together, the four dimensions (sex, ethnicity, status level, and age group) yielded seventy-two cells, each containing about twenty respondents. While the quotas were fully met for the Anglo and black samples, Mexican-

Americans are slightly underrepresented because of difficulties in locating a sufficient number of older, higher-status Mexican-Americans.

After census tracts were drawn on the basis of ethnicity and indicators of socioeconomic status, block sampling was used to locate individuals within the quota requirements. The total sample of 1,441 persons is not intended to represent Houston as a whole nor all of contemporary urban America. It does, however, adequately represent each of the seventy-two cells of the design, and has the important advantage of providing sufficient cases in all of the empirically sparse but theoretically interesting cells. This claimed representativeness is of course only within the context of Houston, but this city itself typifies the kind of dynamic and rapidly changing urban center in which questions of leisure and psychological well-being are becoming quite pressing.

Self-Evaluation Dimensions

The study included a wide range of relatively specific self-evaluation dimensions. The following measures were included:

1. Leisure competence index

2. Work skills self-rating

3. Self-rated intelligence

4. Self-satisfaction rating

Leisure Competence Index

One major segment of the study had to do with a broad range of activities in the home or in leisure pursuits outside the home and away from the regular course of work. Specific interview items enabled the respondent to rate his skill regarding seventeen different leisure activities. The scale included the responses: "not good," "average," and "good," which were evaluated numerically from one for the least competent-appearing answer to three for the most competent answer, and then combined into a leisure-competence index by the indicator-mean procedure. Using this procedure the mean of the scores of the seventeen indicators was computed and then multiplied by ten, rounded to remove decimal fractions, and then reduced by ten so as to produce a final range of scores between zero and twenty. Where any of the seventeen indicators were unanswered, the averaging procedure simply increased slightly the proportional contribution of the other indicators. A minimum of twelve of the seventeen indicators, however, was required for a respondent to have a leisure-competence score. The resulting score is taken as a measure of competence in the sphere of personal expressivity (our definition of leisure).

The seventeen competence items and their part-whole correlations with

the leisure-competence index were:

.58   Skill at understanding and discussing local or national problems.

.57   Skill at trip planning-making reservations, buying tickets, figuring route, etc.

.57   Skill at sports for someone your age.

.56   Skill at leading or speaking out at clubs or organizations.

.55   Skill at being a good follower, getting work done, encouraging others in clubs and organizations.

.52   Skill in camping, fishing, hiking, or any outing in the country or at the beach.

.50   Knowledge about art or music.

.50   Skill at drawing, singing, playing an instrument.

.48   Skill at talking with people, being sociable.

.48   Skill at dancing.

.47   Knowledge about players, performers, or teams in the world of sports.

.38   Skill at sewing, mending, decorating, fixing, building, or working in the yard.

.38   Skill at cooking, baking, barbecuing for family or friends. (Intended as a measure of "party" or "gourmet" cooking expressivity.)

.37   Skill at being a drinking companion.

.31   Skill at housework.

.27   Skill at managing the needs of your family.

.24   Skill at finding satisfying things to do when alone.

Work Skills Self-Rating

The respondent was also asked to rate himself on work skills by the question: "In terms of getting or holding a job now, would you say your work

or job skills are excellent, good, fair, or poor?" This single item is taken to represent instrumental competence. The overall distribution for the sample was:

work skills rating	
26%	excellent
33%	good
20%	fair
21%	poor
100%	

(1,419) (Twenty-two gave no answer to this interview question.)

Self-Rated Intelligence

The respondents rated their general intelligence on a four-point scale, ranging from "not very high" through "about average" and "pretty high" to "very high." The following distribution resulted:

self-rated intelligence	
7%	very high
12%	pretty high
71%	about average
10%	not very high
100%	

(1,426) (Fifteen gave no answer to this question.)

Self-Satisfaction Rating—A Weak Version of "Moral Worth"

Finally, the interview contained the question: *"How do you feel about yourself as a person*—pretty good, just okay, could be better, or not so good?" Although quite vague and indirect, this item is the only one in the interview that is at all concerned with the dimension of moral worth (being "good" rather than "good at" something). The distribution of responses to this admittedly slim moral-worth item was:

self-satisfaction rating

47%	pretty good
23%	just okay
28%	could be better
2%	not so good
100%	

(1,440) (One respondent gave no answer.)

The responses to each of the single-item measures were assigned the numerical value 1, 2, 3 or 4, with the most favorable-to-self response receiving the highest value, and the same was done with the quartile groups on the leisure-competence index. Our analyses were carried out on the correlations of these four-point scales with each other and with the independent variables.

Table 10-2. Correlations of Four Self-Evaluations with Mental-Health Measures

and with Each Other

MENTAL-HEALTH MEASURES	LEISURE COMPETENCE INDEX	SELF-RATED INTELLIGENCE	SELF-RATED WORK SKILLS	SENSE OF SELF-SATISFACTION
Positive Affect Score	.32***	.10***	.07**	.03
Negative Affect Score	-.10***	-.08**	-.14***	- .22***
Twenty-two Item Symptom Score	- .23***	-.15***	-.24***	-.28***
Anxiety Items Score	-.17***	-.13***	-.18***	-.28***
Depressed Items Score	-.22***	-.10***	-.25***	-.16***
Somatic Items Score	-.12***	-.04	-.12***	-.16***
Self-rated Happiness	.22***	.13***	.18***	.24***
Self-evaluation *Intercorrelations:*				
Leisure Competence	1.00	.41***	.37***	.15***
Self-rated Intelligence	.41***	1.00	.21***	.16***

Work Skills	.37***	.21***	1.00	.11***
Self-satisfaction	.15***	.16***	11***	1.00
Average Intercorrelation	.31	.26	.23	.14

note: See Technical Appendix for discussion of the mental-health measures and of our construct validation procedures.

Three asterisks indicate statistical significance beyond the .001 level, two asterisks indicate significance beyond the .01 level and one asterisk designates the .05 level of confidence that a given correlation was not produced by chance sampling fluctuation from a population in which there is actually a zero correlation between the variables. It should be noted that samples as large as ours (1,441) will show these levels of "statistical significance" on correlations yielding very little predictive or explanatory power.

We used the logic of four-way analysis of variance on the dependent variables, even though it is explicitly recognized that these scales do not meet the assumption of an equal interval between any pair of adjacent points. Any measurement error introduced by the restricted score range and by unequal intervals tends to *understate* magnitudes of relationship and inferred probabilities in the statistical analyses that follow, and are thus conservative in nature. We can assume that improved measurement of the variables would produce results at least as strong as the present ones. The power and parsimony of these multivariate procedures are simply felt to outweigh doubts about the measurement levels.

The interested reader will find information on the construct validation of our measures in the Technical Appendix to this chapter.

Inspection of the inter-correlations of these four scores (presented at the bottom of Table 10-2 reveals that they are tapping quite distinct and different facets of self-evaluation. The leisure-competence index shows the strongest relationships to the others, especially with the other forms of competence (+.41 with self-rated intelligence and +.37 with work skills). Self-satisfaction has a consistent positive but very weak relation to the forms of competence (+.11 with work skills, +.15 with leisure competence and +.16 with self-rated intelligence). We will report our findings at first for the four self-conceptions separately, and then will focus on a combined instrumental/expressive competence measure as contrasted with the self-satisfaction dimension.

Hypotheses

For each of the dependent variables (leisure-competence index, work-skills rating, self-rated intelligence, and sense of self-satisfaction), specific predictions can be made in relation to life-cycle stage and each of the social-structural variables (sex, ethnicity, and occupational status). However, the major thrust of the present paper is directed to analysis of the unique and combined impact of lifecycle stage and the other three independent variables when they are simultaneously brought into relation with each of the self-evaluations in turn.

The necessity and wisdom of this combined and interactive approach was demonstrated by one of the very few studies that related age to some form of self-evaluation, and simultaneously took into account additional factors that theoretically should condition the relationship. Kaplan and Pokorny[22] reviewed a number of studies that had indicated a negative association between age and "self-derogation" (suggested as stemming in part from lessened feelings of role inadequacy as burdensome roles are relinquished). Other studies showed no relationship between age and self-derogation, while still others found a *positive* pattern of association. Using the Rosenberg[36] self-attitude items, Kaplan and Pokorny demonstrated that the older respondents (sixty or above) evidenced *less* self-derogation than did younger respondents in a survey of five hundred adults living in Houston, but only if the respondents were free from one or more of the following disturbing influences:

> Aging was observed to be associated with lower self-derogation where the Ss: (1) reported no recent life experiences requiring behavioral adaptation; (2) reported no disparity between their current and hoped for standard of living; (3) reported that as children they were not afraid of being left alone; and (4) were living with their spouses in independent households. However, for Ss characterized by the complementary circumstances, either no relationship between self-attitude and aging was observed or there was a nonsignificant tendency for the older Ss to be more self-derogatory than the younger Ss. [Pp. 248-249]

Thus we gain further support for the general prediction that the direction and strength of any relationship between age and self-evaluation

will be conditional upon the life circumstances of the persons, especially as these circumstances effect the flows of social rewards.

Furthermore, although Kaplan and Pokorny followed Rosenberg in using a single general dimension of self-evaluation, close inspection of their data suggests that age will be differently related to different *aspects* of self-evaluation. In particular, those aspects reflecting sensed *competence* are expected to be less favorable among the older respondents (especially p. 224 and Table 1) ,

Thus, beyond the general hypothesis that life-cycle stage and each of the three social characteristics will be appreciably related to each of the self-evaluations, we will test the following more specific hypotheses derived from the above considerations and from our previous theoretical work:

> 1. *Life cycle stage* and *sex* will be the most important predictors of self-evaluations that have strong physiological components (leisure competence and work skills); the general form of the relation between age and these forms of competence will be negative, and males will score higher than females.

> 2. *Occupational status* and *ethnic group* will have greater impact than life-cycle stage and sex in the areas of self-rated intelligence and self-satisfaction.

> 3. Life-cycle stage will generally relate more strongly than will sex to the various dimensions of self-evaluation.

4. Each of these hypothesized relations is derived from the fundamental idea that the various aspects of self-evaluation are engendered, maintained, and increased or decreased according to the flows of particular interactive sanctions from significant others, while these reward flows are in turn structured by the role relations associated with gender, ethnicity, socioeconomic status and, especially, the shifting matrix of stage in the life cycle.

Findings and Interpretations

Overall Age Trends

Before testing our three specific hypotheses, we must demonstrate that, in fact, the different aspects of self-evaluation do have distinct patterns of difference and trend among the groups at different stages in the life cycle.

Figure 10-1 displays the mean scores on each of the four self-evaluations for the five life-cycle stages. It should be clearly noted that these are age comparisons of *different cohorts* of persons assessed at the *same time, not changes* in given individuals as they move through their life cycles. Longitudinal data would, of course, be necessary for an adequate test of theory concerning how social-structural factors relate to changes or "development" in self-evaluation. Comparative cohort analysis of cross-sectional data from a single survey provides only a weak approximation to

the inference of change over time. However, we can use these data to test hypotheses such as ours concerning life-cycle-stage differences (rather than change in given individuals). This form of comparative analysis does not require the assumption that older cohorts were (when young) similar to those now young.

The data supports our general hypothesis that life-cycle stage will be a very important predictor of those self-evaluations having implicit physiological components. Two self-evaluations are distinctly less favorable among the older groups: leisure competence correlates -.34*** with life-cycle stage (numerically represented by the digits 1-5), and self-rated, work-skills goodness correlates -.29***. The over-sixty-five respondents (and especially those over seventy-five) much more frequently report poor physical health than do the younger respondents; consequently, less favorable leisure-competence and work-skills self-assessment among the older respondents very likely reflect the impact of functional impairment related to physical condition. The other two self-evaluations show essentially no appreciable relation to life-cycle stage: satisfaction correlates +.08** with age, self-rated intelligence stands at -.04. The fact that two self-evaluations show negative associations with age while two others show small but positive association with age supports our contention that aspects of self-conception should be measured and analyzed separately, rather than being combined into a single dimension labeled "self-esteem." This idea is given further support by the

following analyses, which demonstrate that the different self-evaluation dimensions are rather differently related to the social-structural characteristics.
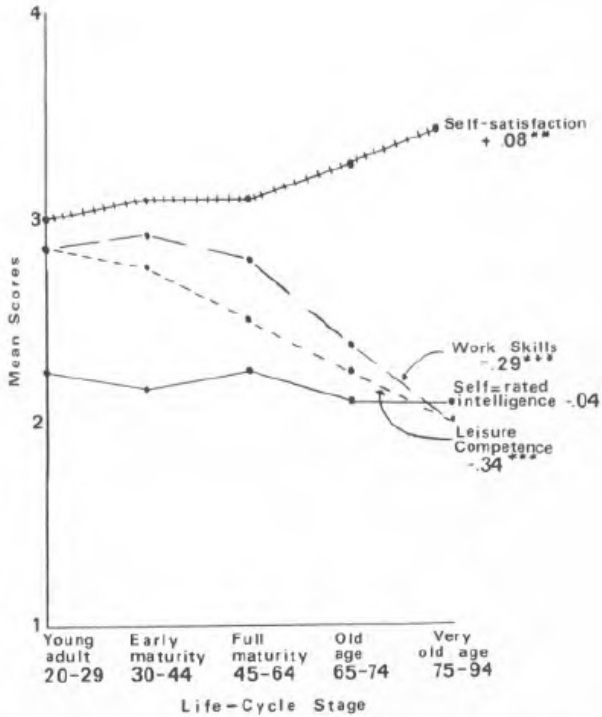

Figure 10-1.
Four Dimensions of Self-Evaluation by Life-cycle Stage

Testing Hypothesis 1

Our first specific hypothesis asserted that life-cycle stage and sex would be stronger predictors of leisure and work-skill competence than would ethnic group and occupational status. In addition to the above-mentioned idea about physiological impairment and age, this assertion was based on the ideas that women in our society (and especially older women) often have been socialized to think that the ability to support themselves economically is not a prime component of their major roles. Further, women had probably not been socialized to high objective levels of either work-skill competence or leisure competence. In short, we felt that women have very generally been socialized more for social-emotional concerns than for competence (even in leisure activity), and would not feel that competence was vital to their sense of personal worth.

Examination of our data generally supports our argument regarding the importance of lifecycle stage and sex, especially regarding self-rated work skills. Both life-cycle stage and sex are significantly and moderately strongly related to both leisure competence and work skills. Just as predicted, life-cycle stage is significantly and appreciably negatively related both to work-skills goodness (-.29***) and leisure competence (-.34***). What was not anticipated, however, was the fact that in relation to leisure competence, ethnic group and occupational status were more important than was sex. Veblen's assertion that socioeconomic status and leisure competence are related seems to be valid, even far below the leisure class. Here are the rank

orderings of the independent variables, with strength of predictive power assessed by the unique percentage of the variance in the dependent variable associated with each independent variable (*** p = < .001):

WORK-SKILLS GOODNESS		LEISURE COMPETENCE	
	%		*%*
Life-cycle stage	10.5***	Life-cycle stage	9.6***
Sex	5.5***	Ethnic group	4.9***
Occupational status	3.5***	Occupational status	3.3***
Ethnic group	3.0***	Sex	3.0***
Total variance "explained" (including numerous small interaction effects)	28%	Total variance "explained"	25%

The less-than-predicted importance of sex in shaping the level of self-reported leisure competence suggests that women *are* expected to be competent in expressive activity (leisure), while less demands are made on women for instrumental competence.

As predicted by hypothesis 1, life-cycle stage and sex contribute the most explanatory power for work-skill ratings; this data is presented graphically in Figure 10-2. The male-female curves are almost identical in shape, with males showing a consistently higher level of reported work skills
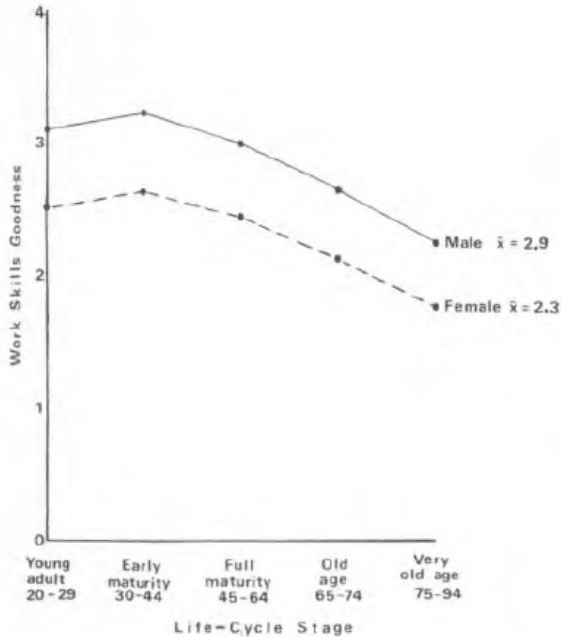
across all life-cycle stages.

Figure 10-2.
Work Skill Goodness of Life-cycle Stage and Sex

These data seem consistent with socialization to male-female roles, and probably represent a realistic appraisal by each group. For both men and women, those over sixty-five, and especially those over seventy-five, rate their work skills lower on the average than do the younger respondents.

Continued employment is very rare among these aged respondents, and the combined effect of the symbolic act of retirement, the unavoidable comparisons with younger persons and an actual decline in functional capacity associated with physical impairment may account for much of the gap in self-rated work-skills.

As Figure 10-3 reveals, the two strongest predictors for leisure competence are life-cycle stage and ethnicity. For all ethnic groups, there is a lower average leisure-competence score for each successive life-cycle stage.

The same relative position between ethnic groups is maintained across all life-cycle stages: Blacks consistently rank themselves the highest on leisure competence (x = 2.8), followed by Anglos (x = 2.4), and then by the Mexican-Americans (x = 2.2). This pattern might be a result of several factors. First, the sample selection procedures produced a set of Anglos who are relatively low in education, occupation, and income (in comparison with Houston's total Anglo population), while the black and Mexican-American samples more often included "successes." Second, recent efforts to engender ethnic pride among blacks may be an important factor in producing their high scores. Third, a high score may be a reflection of compensatory overstatement. Fourth, of necessity, black lower-class and working-class cultures have long stressed competence in expressive leisure activities since instrumental work success was so thoroughly blocked.
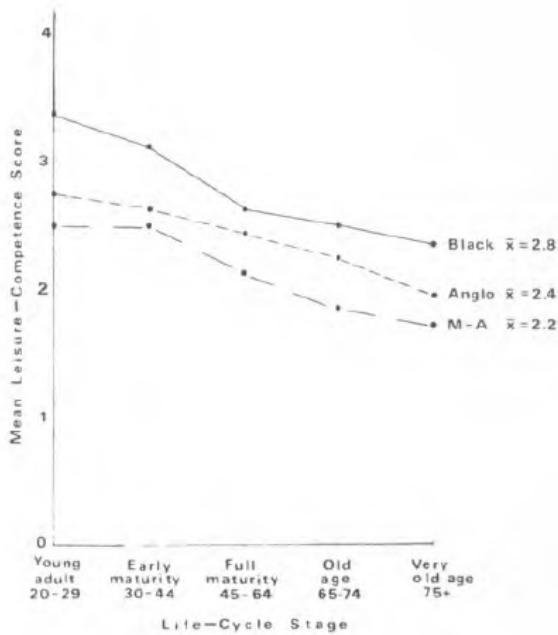
Figure 10-3.
Leisure Competence by Life-cycle Stage and Ethnic Group

Thus, on the basis of these findings we may conclude that (as predicted) life-cycle stage, sex, ethnicity, and occupational status level are all related to self-rated leisure and work-skills competence. Second, age is *negatively* related to both of these competence self-evaluations. Finally, while age is of primary importance in relation to both of these performance self-evaluations, sex is one of the top two variables only for work-skill competence.

Testing Hypothesis 2

Our second specific hypothesis stated that occupational status and ethnic-group membership will have greater impact in the areas of self-rated intelligence and self-satisfaction than will life-cycle stage and sex. Since these areas involve less overt physical components and less specific sex-role socialization than was the case in the performance realm, occupational position (as a broad indicator of socioeconomic status) and ethnicity should be more influential in shaping the levels of these particular self-evaluations.

Examination of the data partially supports this hypothesis. Ethnicity contributes to both ratings, but occupational status is influential only for self-rated intelligence. Life-cycle stage and sex are not important in predicting either self-rated intelligence or self-satisfaction. Here are the rank orderings of the independent variables, and the percent of the variance in the dependent variable associated with each independent variable:

SELF-RATED INTELLIGENCE		SELF-SATISFACTION	
	%		%
Occupational status	2.4***	Ethnic group	2.6***
Ethnic group	2.4***	Life-cycle stage	.6*
Life-cycle stage	.4	Sex	.3*
Sex	.3*	Occupational status	.1
Total variance "explained"	11%	Total Variance "explained"	.8%
(including numerous small			

interaction effects)

The total "explained variance" figures for self-rated intelligence and for self-satisfaction are considerably lower than for leisure and work-skill competence. Following our practice of structuring the discussion around the two most important independent variables, Figures 10-4 and 10-5 present ethnic and occupational-skill-group means in relation to self-rated intelligence, and ethnic-group and life-cycle-stage means for self-satisfaction. Several points are worth noting in these data. The phenomena of blacks reporting somewhat more favorable self-evaluations than do other ethnic groups is seen in relation to both self-rated intelligence and self-satisfaction. These data reinforce the idea of successful attempts to develop pride among blacks. Anglos are third in self-satisfaction ratings in all of the five life-cycle stages and second in self-rated intelligence. This finding supports the idea that the Anglos in our sample may be suffering a sense of relative deprivation in relation to the wider reference group of Houston Anglos. Another important feature is the lack of any downward trend among the life stages in self-satisfaction rankings; in fact, there is a very slight upward trend (+.08**, see Figure 10-2). The lack of importance of life-cycle stages to self-rated intelligence supports the earlier argument: if active physical performance is not directly involved in the aspect of self-evaluation being rated, age is not a crucial factor.
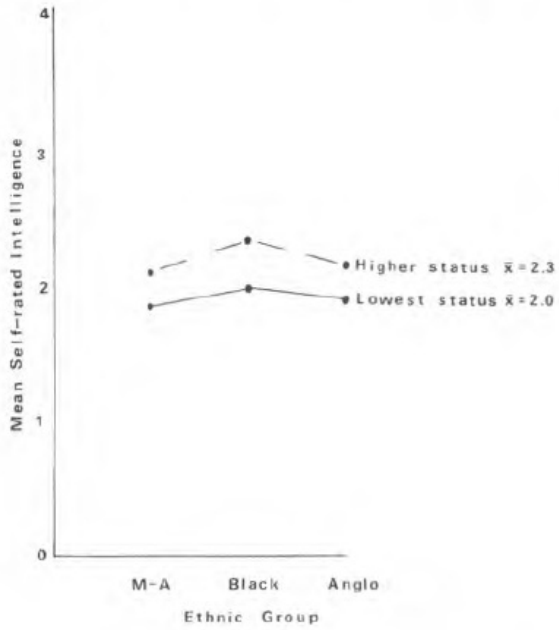
Figure 10-4.
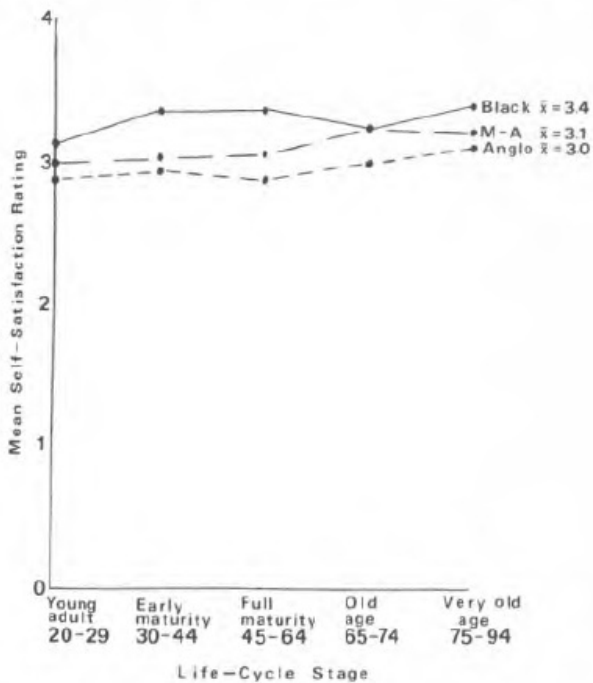Self-Rated Intelligence by Occupational Status and Ethnic Group

Figure 10-5.
Self-Satisfaction by Ethnic Group and Life-cycle Stage

We may conclude that regarding self-rated intelligence, occupational status and ethnic group are the most important determinants, thus partially confirming our second hypothesis. Regarding self-satisfaction, however, ethnic group is most important—as predicted—while occupational status is unrelated.

Testing Hypothesis 3

Our third specific hypothesis asserted that life-cycle stage will generally relate more strongly to the various dimensions of self-evaluation than will sex. The data already presented support this hypothesis. Life-cycle stage was found to be appreciably more important than sex in predicting leisure competence and work-skills competence and slightly stronger regarding self-rated intellectual ability and self-satisfaction. Thus, all four outcomes were in the predicted direction, but large differences were found for two of the four self-evaluations we are considering. This differential relation of sex to the two pairs of self-evaluations probably is a reflection of the fact that our culture has not mandated performance competence for females, but still expects them to be "good" and at least moderately intelligent.

Life-cycle Stage and Performance Competence

In the preceding analysis we have presented data for each of four aspects of self-evaluation as related to life-cycle stage, sex, occupational status, and ethnicity. Following such an analysis, we arrive at a logical justification to combine two aspects of self-conception (work-skills competence and leisure competence) into one index of performance competence. Both of these represent self-ratings of abilities necessary in performing instrumental and expressive activities. Weighting the two

performance components equally and then averaging, a performance-competence index score (with a possible range from 0-30) was assigned to each respondent.

Figure 10-6 displays the average performance-competence scores for the respondents classified into groups defined by the combination of ethnicity, sex, and life-cycle stage. Occupational-status comparisons were ignored in this figure so that the patterns would not be blurred by too much detail; for numerical analysis, however, the status comparison was preserved.

Life-cycle stage. The general finding is quite clear and strong: *the older the person, the lower the self-rated performance competence.* At the extremes this pattern is very pronounced; older Mexican-American women averaged about 4.0 on our 0-30 scale, while young adult black males scored more than six times higher (24.1). The age trends were generally quite similar across the sex and ethnic-group comparisons: young adults (twenty to twenty-nine) and those in early maturity (thirty to forty-four) scored quite high on this measure of self-conceived performance-competence. Those in full maturity (forty-five to sixty-four) scored distinctly lower, and those in the two older age groups (sixty-five to seventy-four, seventy-five to ninety-four) scored very much lower (except for the very old black males). Without regard to sex, ethnic group, or occupational status, the mean performance-competence scores from youngest to oldest life-cycle stages were 18.8, 16.2, 12.8, and 9.7.

Even after introducing the other three factors, life-cycle stage still was associated with 14.4 percent of the variance in performance-competence self-evaluation. In almost every instance, the greatest difference can be observed between those fully mature and those over sixty-five, or between the old and very old. This pattern of results provides empirical support for the sociological generalization that *role loss* in old age (such as retirement, widowhood, loss of friends and relatives through death and residence relocation, withdrawal from active organizational participation, and invalidism) produces great personal stress and reduced life satisfaction.
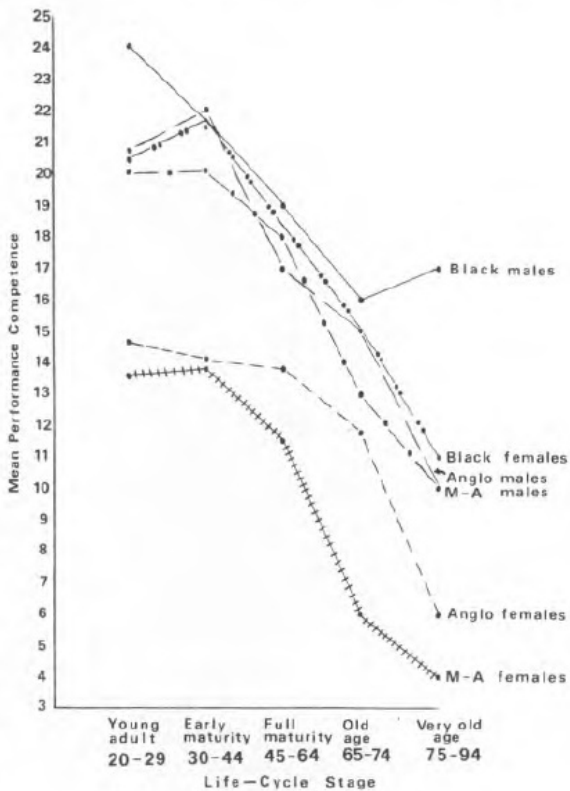
Figure 10-6.
Performance Competence by Sex, Ethnic Group, and Life-cycle Stage

A four-way analysis of variance in the performance-competence scores using life-cycle stage, ethnicity, sex, and occupational-skill level as independent variables resulted in a rather substantial total explained variance of 36 percent:

LEISURE COMPETENCE INDEX

Life-cycle stage	14.4%***
Sex	6.0%***
Ethnicity	5.7%***
Occupational status	5.0%***
Ethnic and status	.9%***
Total variance "explained" (including various small interaction effects)	36%

Ethnic groups and sex. The only appreciable interaction among the independent variables in relation to performance competence occurred between ethnic groups and sex. Even before introduction of the other factors, ethnic group showed a clear relation to performance evaluation (Mexican-Americans averaged 12.9, Anglos = 14.4, and blacks = 18.3), accounting for a unique 5.7 percent of the variance. Sex was also significantly related to performance competence (females averaged 12.9, males = 17.6), accounting for an additional 6.0 percent of the variance. In particular, the Mexican-American females and the Anglo females scored very low—the other ethnic/sex groups were much closer together in height of score pattern.

Black males and females scored consistently higher than all other groups, with the one exception of Anglo males in early maturity (thirty to

forty-four) matching the score level of black females and scoring slightly higher than black males. Black females in early maturity (thirty to forty-four) scored higher in performance competence than every group except the young black males. This seems to be rather striking evidence of the impact of women in a particular subculture assuming responsible instrumental roles and frequently functioning as heads of households. These black women scored at levels comparable to the three male groups and well above the two other female groups. In contrast, the Anglo females show much lower performance-competence levels, and the Mexican-American women (traditionally confined to the home and supported in decision-making dependency) score below every other group at every stage in the life cycle.

Conclusions and Prospects

This analysis has used a differentiated approach to self-evaluation in order to attempt resolution of an apparent contradiction in the literature concerning the relation of global "self-esteem" to age or stage in the life cycle. One previous approach has made progress toward this resolution through tracing out the social circumstances under which this general relation seems to be positive, negative, or flat. The present paper builds upon this "conditional relationship" strategy, but then goes on to distinguish "performance competence" self-evaluations from forms of "self-acceptance" evaluation, following the logic of one of the author's previous theoretical

work.'' Both general and specific hypotheses were formulated predicting different relations of age or life-cycle stage to competence self-evaluation as compared to self-acceptance, and regarding the relations of each form of self-evaluation to sex, ethnic group, and socioeconomic status.

Empirical data from the Houston Leisure and Mental Health Study were used to test these hypotheses and to develop a first-approximation estimate of the relative and combined effects of sex, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, and age group on each of the four distinct self-evaluations.

The results of this double-differentiation analysis strategy were quite clear:

1. Leisure competence, work-skills competence (and a recombined performance-competence index) were negatively related to age in our sample, and stood in complex relation with the other "conditioning" independent variables. Together, the four independent variables "explained" a relatively high proportion of the variance in the competence self-evaluations.

2. As predicted, however, the self-acceptance (moral-worth) measure was more weakly and *positively* related to age, while self-rated intelligence showed no correlation with age at all. Again, specific unique and combined effects were discovered when the social-structural variables were taken into account, but the total explanatory power was much lower

regarding self-acceptance and self-rated intelligence than was the case for the two forms of competence.

These findings demonstrated the importance of differentiating sub-dimensions of self-evaluation, and demand further analysis of the impact on the different self-evaluations of particular social events and of life-cycle stage (marriage, parenthood, divorce, empty nest, retirement, widowhood, invalidism, etc.), all nested within the macrosocial-structural parameters.

Technical Appendix

Construct Validation of Four Dimensions of Self-Evaluation

Construct validation was shown by Cronbach and Meehl in their pioneering article to be the essential feature in any attempt to validate a particular measurement procedure regarding a theoretically interesting but non-observable property. Other forms of validation, such as known-groups discrimination, prediction of a criterion outcome, and the naively popular "face validity" assessment, are desirable but often impossible alternatives in dealing with self-conceptions, since it is logically impossible to define an overt criterion for dimensions of self-conception against which a particular operational procedure could be validated. The most important assessment remains the way in which the scores (derived from the operationalization procedure), actually relate to scores on *other* theoretically relevant variables.

Mental functioning is theoretically relevant. Data collected in the Houston survey provided several measures of mental health, and we chose to use some of these measures to validate the construct of the four dimensions of self-evaluation. We examined the relationship of these dimensions with the Affect Balance Scale, the Twenty-two Item Symptom Report Scale, and a self-report by the respondent of happiness.

Affect Balance Scale. Bradburn developed the Affect Balance Scale with which to tap a respondent's affective state at a particular time. Bradburn clearly sets out the principle that positive affect and negative affect are distinct entities rather than opposite poles of the same dimension. This assertion is borne out in our sample, in which the positive-affect and negative-affect scores are completely uncorrelated (-.01).

All four measured dimensions of self-evaluation show the expected direction of positive correlation with high positive-affect scores and negative relation with the negative-affect scores. The low levels of correlation, however, show that the dimensions of self-evaluation we have tapped are by no means simple, internalized views of the respondent's happiness with the state of affairs of the world in general.

The strength of the correlations with positive-affect range from +.32 with leisure competence to an essentially zero relationship with self-

satisfaction (+ .03), suggesting a close relationship of positive feelings to social participation, as Bradburn suggests. The relationships between the four self-evaluation dimensions and negative-affect score are somewhat stronger than their relations with the positive-affect score, the strongest associations being with the variables of work skills (-.14) and self-satisfaction (-.22). The closer connection of self-conception to negative rather than positive affect probably stems from the American cultural prescription that a cheerful presentation of self is most socially desirable.

Twenty-two Item Symptom Report. Langner and his colleagues developed a scale based on predominantly psychosomatic- and neurotic-symptom reports by the respondent. These include a number of physiological symptoms, such as frequent headaches, heart beating hard, poor appetite, shortness of breath, etc., and an approximately equal number of more clearly psychological items, such as reports of being the "worrying type," being nervous often, being restless, feeling that nothing goes right, and wondering about the worthwhileness of activities. This type of symptom report scale is very similar to the psychosomatic or "nervousness" scales developed in the American soldier research during World War II and forms of symptom reports used more recently by Morris Rosenberg in his attempt to validate his direct self-esteem scale. Rosenberg has shown that in his sample of some 5,000 high school students, a rather straightforward self-esteem scale correlated approximately -.44 with psychosomatic symptom reports (using

the Epsilon measure calculated from Rosenberg's Table 3). Our finding of consistent negative correlations ranging from -.15 for self-rated intelligence to -.28 for sense of self-satisfaction is rather convincing evidence that our measures are in fact tapping important psychological dimensions, since these relations are predicted by many forms of theory. A study by Kaplan and Pokorny showing an association of similar magnitude and direction between an anxiety symptom report and self-derogation offers additional basis for these claims.

Symptom factor scores. A factor analysis of the twenty-two symptoms indicated three major factors: anxiety, depression, and somatic complaints. A score was created by weighting the most important symptoms of each factor by the factor loading of that item, and then taking a rounded mean score of these products. Each respondent thus received a weighted score for each of the three specific symptom groups in addition to the total twenty-two symptom score.

The correlations of these scores with the four self-conceptions (Figure 10-2) confirm again, by direction and magnitude, the validity of the measurements as variables relevant to mental functioning. The depression-symptom syndrome has the strongest negative associations with self-rated leisure and work competence (-.22, -.25). The anxiety-symptom syndrome relates most strongly to self-satisfaction (-.28). The somatic symptoms show

the weakest associations of the three symptom groups.

Self-rating of happiness. The respondents were asked to rate their happiness by the question: "All things considered, how happy would you say you are right now—very happy, pretty happy, or not too happy?" Again, the correlations with the four measured aspects of self-conception are not large, but are all in the predicted direction (+.13 to +.24).

This diverse range of predicted correlations (with negative-affect, positive-affect, twenty-two-item symptom scale, anxiety, depression, somatic-symptoms, and level of self-rated happiness) forms a fairly persuasive picture of the construct validity of the four measured dimensions of self-conception.

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Notes