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POTENTIAL GENDER DIFFERENCES IN PERCEPTIONS OF SELF-CONCEPT  
BETWEEN MALE AND FEMALE JUVENILE OFFENDERS

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A Project  
Presented to the  
Faculty of  
California State University,  
San Bernardino

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In Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree  
Master of Social Work

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by  
Stephanie Herrington

June 2000

POTENTIAL GENDER DIFFERENCES IN PERCEPTIONS OF SELF-CONCEPT  
BETWEEN MALE AND FEMALE JUVENILE OFFENDERS

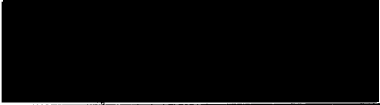
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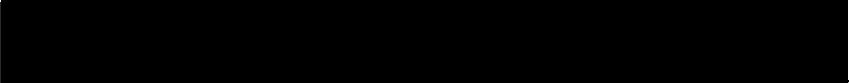
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June 2000

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## ABSTRACT

This study asked 'Do female juvenile offenders report higher or lower levels of self-concept than male juvenile offenders?' The Bracken Multidimensional Self-Concept Scale was used to assess various dimensions of self-concept in a sample of juvenile offenders. It was hypothesized that juvenile offenders would not demonstrate the disparity in global self-concept previously found in the non-offending population. Part two of the hypothesis stated there would be a gender disparity within dimensions. Availability sampling provided 9 females and 19 males between and including the ages of 14 and 18. As expected, there were no significant gender differences in self-reported levels of global self-concept among juvenile offenders. A significant result was found within the Affect dimension. Questions raised in relation to self-concept included criminal behavior and females, which dimensions of self-concept are valid, and ethnic and cultural issues.

## Acknowledgments

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## Introduction

Research on adolescence and adolescent issues in general is far less prevalent than that which is available on the adult population. This may be due in part to the difficulties encountered such as obtaining consent for the youth to participate, as well as ethical questions including the possibility that youth can be influenced or intimidated by adult researchers. However, to more adequately assess the needs of the American adolescents, and youth in a global sense, attempts must be made to overcome the stumbling blocks to research on issues pertinent to this population.

One aspect of adolescence which may impact many other important issues is that of self-concept. While there is no singularly accepted definition for self-concept at this time, Rosenberg (1979) offers a definition which seems to exemplify the key points of many prominent definitions. He describes self-concept as "...the totality of the individual's thoughts and feelings having reference to himself as an object".

From the beginning of its existence, American society has attempted to address another aspect of youth. That aspect is the issue of juvenile delinquency. This has been examined from a variety of perspectives (Day, 1997). These included moral, individual, family, and societal

perspectives. With the advent of psychology as a publically accepted phenomenon, other factors have been incorporated into discussions of juvenile delinquency. Additionally, biological considerations have been associated with juvenile delinquency.

### Problem Statement

Frequently fueled by particular political agendas, more recent societal influences such as gang culture and dual working parents have been examined in the context of juvenile delinquency. In the mid to late 1990's these discussions have increased substantially, due in large part to highly publicized incidents of large scale violence perpetrated by teens and preteens. Public outcry for assignment of responsibility for the actions of these youth has become a major issue in most arenas.

The high profile of these recent incidents overshadows evidence collected by local, state, and federal agencies which indicates that as of 1998 youth delinquency as a whole is actually at a lower level than in the past. However, of particular concern is the fact that female involvement in the juvenile justice system continues to rise. Previously, it was not uncommon for female youth to be arrested for relatively minor crimes. Recent statistics, however, seem to indicate that the trend for females to be arrested for

violent crimes is escalating (Johnson, 1998). This is in contrast to the number of male youth being arrested for violent crimes, which has remained steady.

In light of these developments perhaps it is inappropriate, as occurs in most research, for adults to make interpretations to try and explain the increases in female juvenile crime. It seems relevant to examine a possible link between juvenile delinquency and the theory of self-concept. It would also be more valid to ask how the youth in today's society view themselves and these developments. However, this project hopes to assess the relationship between juvenile delinquency and self-concept.

Moreover, the possible link between juvenile delinquency and self-concept is interesting from a gender standpoint. If, as the statistics implicate, there are significant gender issues within the framework of youth and crime, then what might the relationship be between crime, self-concept and gender?

If it is determined that there is an interrelationship between those three issues, consideration should be given to the social work implications. For example, are there changes that should be made with regard to how society approaches or views adolescent development? More specifically, what opportunities do adults have to impact

and support the development of self-concept in preteens and teens, and how can those opportunities be restructured to better benefit and nurture youth? Also relevant would be an examination of which current practices and processes (such as extracurricular programs or referrals for supplemental services) seem to benefit youth, and what could be done to make those practices and processes more universally accepted?

Perhaps most importantly, how can youth involvement with other youth be utilized to a fuller extent? And should there be more emphasis on gender considerations when developing those youth to youth interactions? Many cities and school districts are now employing programs such as peer counseling and peer conflict resolution in an attempt to address issues which are frequent precursors to delinquent behavior. These issues include fighting, truancy, and peer interaction. With the well-established importance of peer pressure and peer influence during pre-adolescence and adolescence, perhaps there are ways to enhance adult/youth problem solving strategies.

The focus of this study was to evaluate the possible link between male and female juvenile delinquency and self-concept. Specifically, the research question was as follows: Do female juvenile offenders rate their level of self-

concept higher or lower than male juvenile offenders? It was hypothesized that a survey of institutionalized youth would reveal that those youth would not demonstrate the disparities in levels of global self-concept previously exhibited between non-offending male and female adolescents. The lack of disparity might be due, in part, to the actual criminal behavior. Part two of the hypothesis, then, is that when utilizing a multidimensional view of self-concept, there may be a gender disparity within a specific dimension.

## Literature Review

Definitions of self-concept are broad and ambiguous in existing literature. Self-concept is often seen as a psychological construct related to the development of a personal sense of identity (Berger, 2000). It is also frequently associated with how one perceives one's self. From a developmental perspective, in early childhood this is usually related to physical attributes and abilities. Berger (2000) also notes that by late preschool years it is common for self-concept to include recognition of psychological tendencies as well.

Interestingly, in adolescence body image and physical attributes once again figure prominently in self-concept (Zastrow & Kirst-Ashman, 1997).

One of the most prominent issues relating to self-concept is unidimensionality versus multidimensionality. In other words, the issue would be whether or not self-concept should be viewed as a global concept or as a concept defined by numerous dimensions.

As early as the late 1800's, William James (1983) determined that a person's self-esteem is a function of his or her presumed abilities and actual accomplishments. While he acknowledged a behavioral link between self-esteem and one's own accomplishments, his singular view did not

consider the impact environmental factors could have on the enhancement or diminishment of personal accomplishments. This view failed to account for the important influences of the environment on human behavior, which by current standards is regularly accepted within the context of systems theories. Taking the concept a step further, many current systems theorists incorporate the interaction from intrapersonal, interpersonal and environmental systems when considering the effects of a personal imbalance in one of these systems on the others (Hepworth, Rooney & Larsen, 1997).

The unidimensional approach to self-concept was also criticized by Wylie (1974, 1979) when examining the construction of unidimensional instruments previously used to measure self-concept. Wylie felt that such types of instruments lent themselves to uneven weighting of various self-concept domains. There have also been questions raised as to whether global self-concept scores, when used in general practice, might be overly sensitive or insensitive to specific areas of adjustment (Bracken, 1992).

The multidimensional view of self concept, however, has been validated in many bodies of work including Marsh and Holmes (1990), Harter (1983), and Piers (1984). For example, Myers (1996) describes self-concept as being made

up of specific beliefs by which a person defines him or her self. Additionally, Markus and Nurius (1986) postulated that components of self-concept are the 'possible selves' comprised of the self we dream of becoming as well as the self we fear becoming. Along these lines it is generally accepted that there are many facets of the self. A person may perceive an academic self, a social self, an emotional self, and a physical self (Lea-Wood & Clunies-Ross, 1995). Additionally, it has been suggested that not only is self-concept multidimensional, but hierarchical as well (Bracken, 1992). By this it is meant that general self-concept constitutes the apex and then other intercorrelated dimensions construct a second foundational tier (Shavelson et al., 1976) However, what these discussions highlight is that controversy and inconsistency continue to plague discussions about, and research of, self-concept.

Many sources cite this controversy and inconsistency as complications when conducting research on self-concept. As mentioned, self-concept has been conceptualized as both a unidimensional construct, and also as multidimensional, dynamic, situation-specific, or a combination thereof (Byrd & O'Connor, 1993). This ambiguity has limited attempts to determine the true nature of the construct and of the

factors that influence it (Byrne, 1984; Michelle-Crain & Bracken, 1994; Shavelson, Hubner, & Stanton, 1976).

### Theoretical orientations of self-concept

Within the definition of self-concept, there are also several different theoretical orientations. Cognitively oriented models include Byrd and O'Connor's (1993) model. They state that mediating cognitions and information make it implausible to seek a direct correspondence between self-concept and behavior. They posit that such mediating effects could include memories of delinquent behavior, feedback from others and awareness of delinquent impulses without acting on them.

The work from Shavelson et al. (1976) presents a somewhat different perspective which features seven characteristics of self-concept. These are that self-concept is organized, multidimensional, hierarchical, stable, developmental, evaluative, and differentiable from other constructs.

As with many psychological constructs, a more recently developed model of self-concept is behaviorally aligned and contrasts with cognitive orientations. Developed by Bracken (1992), this model utilizes Shavelson's seven point model. However, Bracken proposes that behavioral, rather than cognitive, principles govern the acquisition and maintenance

of self-concept. Bracken's model is a departure from some of the cognitively oriented conceptualizations of self-concept. In his model, Bracken utilizes response patterns which are related to behavioral principals. For example, children's generalized and specific response patterns are learned directly and indirectly through three sets of circumstances. First that children learn from their successes and failures in various contexts; second, that children learn from the way others react to the children's actions. The third set of circumstances that children learn from is the manner in which other individuals model behaviors and communicate expectations. Thus, Bracken's model relies heavily on the impacts and interactions of environmental contexts.

#### Gender and non-delinquent adolescents

Gender differences within the realm of self-concept and non-delinquent adolescents generates controversy, and is complicated by far less available research for females than for males. As mentioned previously, one of the premier and enduring bodies of research on self-concept comes from Wylie in 1979. Wylie's research is one of the most comprehensive works to date, and examines many aspects of self-concept in great detail. On the issue of gender related differences in self-concept she concluded that there was no evidence for

such differences in overall self-concept at any age level. She does suggest that differences in domain-specific self-concepts might well have been clouded because unidimensional measures were the methods favored until recent years.

Conversely, several Australian studies (which were much more current) cite large gender-related differences (Marsh et al., 1984; Marsh et al., 1983) in self-concept in adolescence. This is further supported by Worrell, Roth and Gabelko (1998) who found that male adolescents outscored female adolescents in global self-concept. Consistent with these findings are some studies which suggest that upon entering adolescence, girls experience significant disruptions in self-esteem and self-concept (Knox, Funk, Elliott, & Bush, 2000).

Additional studies of non-delinquent adolescents reinforce the idea that adolescent girls suffer a loss of self-esteem, which in turn could conceivably be associated with a more negative self-concept. Orenstein (1994) cites a study by the American Association of University Women in which less than a third of adolescent girls responded positively to the statement "I am happy the way I am". This compares with half of the boys who responded positively.

The confusion on this issue continues, when considering the previously mentioned seven-point model developed by

Shavelson et al. (1976). While these researchers do not posit differences between the self-concept factors based on gender, they do present an important consideration. That is, since significant others' reinforcement contingencies differ for adolescent males and females, they feel that there can be gender differences in the structure of self-concept (Byrne & Shavelson, 1987).

One commonality of studies which either supported or refuted the suggestion of gender differences in self-concept is that on many occasions the results were held to be weak or inconclusive, due in large part to the measure used, as well as small sample sizes. Whether self-concept should be measured as a unidimensional or a multidimensional construct is once again of particular concern.

When not addressing the question of gender differences, studies examining self-concept of non-delinquent adolescents can be found, with such studies frequently attempting to strengthen the definition of the theory (Shavelson, et al., 1976). Literature specific to self-concept and juvenile delinquency, by contrast, is much more sparse.

#### Self-concept and juvenile delinquency

Additional controversy surrounds the issue of self-concept as it relates specifically to juvenile delinquency.

At question has been whether self-concept is influenced by juvenile delinquency or is an influence on juvenile delinquency. In his study on multifactorial self-concept and delinquency, Kenneth St. C. Levy (1997) hypothesized that a very negative state of self-concept can be a propellant into delinquent behavior. Consequently, his study demonstrated an inverse relationship between self-concept states and delinquency such that a more positive self-concept corresponds with a lower level of delinquency; and a more negative self-concept corresponds with a higher level of delinquency. However, that study appears somewhat ambiguous with regard to gender when examining this correlation. St. C. Levy reported only that boy's scores on the Self-report Delinquency Scale (1997) were higher. He questioned whether more frequent socialization of boys to delinquent behavior is the underlying cause. Other studies have supported this correlation between self-concept and delinquency, suggesting that self-concept fundamentally regulates an individual's life in areas including school failure and achievement, psychic stability, ego strength, and internal locus of control (Keltikangas-Jarvinen, 1990; Kawash, 1982).

Feldman & Wentzel (1990) also speculate on gender differences in that boys in particular are more vulnerable

to identifying with negative peer behavior for support, in the absence of positive family relationships. Connor (1994) concurs, adding that self-confidence and self-esteem provide a positive defense against negative peer pressure. Johnson (1998), while also reporting that research of female offenders is limited, suggests that the interaction of many factors, including the absence of positive family relationships, increases the risk for females of involvement in the juvenile justice system.

The influence of criminal justice theories on delinquency can be felt here. For example, Cohen (1955) favored a "strain" theory in which he claimed that the strain on those who could not access society's desirable values or goals could lower one's self-concept. He presumed that this was because youth experience conflict in the roles require of them by parents, peers, and teachers. Cohen proposed that delinquent behavior could provide youth with an opportunity to be consistent with cultural norms, which in turn could result in youth acquiring a certain status, and ultimately enhance their self-concept.

Similar to this is a proposition by Katz (1988). He proposed that crime could be exciting, even seductive, with the seduction resulting from the thrill associated with successful involvement in delinquent acts. Katz felt that

choosing crime satisfies the need to relieve emotional upheavals which youth encounter in moral challenges, such as when gang members reject society's expectations. Indeed, Siegal and Senna (2000) find evidence that immediate events do play an important role in adolescent misbehavior, by producing a natural "high" and other positive sensations.

Similarly, Kaplan focused on esteem enhancement in that the negative self-concept underpins delinquency (1978). He saw delinquency as a balancing response to self-concept deficiencies.

This view of a balancing response would be consistent with studies that have shown that early adolescence is a period of time in which rates of depression rise much more sharply for females than for males (Obeidallah & Felton, 1999). While recognizing that alternative sequencing is possible (such as anti-social behavior preceding depression), this research also suggests that mildly to moderately depressed females may be more at risk of engaging in anti-social behavior than males.

St. C. Levy (1997) posited that locus of control, self-concept and personal style of learning are three important factors which interrelate with one another. This interrelation along with other environmental factors lead adolescents to continually reassess their self-concept.

Where the reassessments result in low self-esteem, he and others determine that adolescents are more likely to engage in delinquent behavior (Hansen & Maynard, 1973). Levy (1997) suggests that the juvenile justice system may subconsciously confirm the idea that masculinity is a significant aspect of self-concept, thereby reinforcing socialization patterns which view legal risk-taking as a masculine status symbol.

This is reinforced by Johnson (1998) who reported that for females as well, incarceration may be viewed less as punishment and more as a "rite of passage". She elaborates that many youth may be more comfortable with the idea of going to jail than the idea of going to college, particularly if that is a paradigm they have experienced in their own families. Consequently, achieving that rite of passage could conceivably raise levels of self-concept.

#### Ethnicity and culture

This leads to an additional consideration. Specifically the consideration of culture and ethnicity upon the self-report of self-concept. Many currently used self-concept instruments place little, if any, emphasis within their information gathering on ethnic self-concept. This is of concern given the projected shifts in the ethnic make-up of the United States in particular. For example, by the year

2010 Hispanics are projected to be the second largest race/ethnic group (Census Population Report, 1996).

Ethnic self-concept, (Phinney & Chavira, 1993), which could be considered another component of overall self-concept, refers to the way subjects view themselves as ethnic group members. Phinney and Chavira determined that ethnic group members may feel disparaged by negative or discriminatory attitudes from the dominant societal group. However, the ethnic group members can still consider the positive aspects of their own group, and consequently, of themselves within that group.

This supports findings by Carpenter (2000) that self-concept is related to both cultural tightness and collectivism. She states that norms in "tight" cultures are explicit and stringently enforced. In that study collectivism referred to a cultural setting in which there is no distinction between personal and in-group goals. That view could have an impact on a questionnaire which examines self-concept from an individual perspective, especially when it involves persons from a collectivist culture.

In the case of Hispanic subjects, Goldenberg and Goldenberg (1998) state that the acculturation process, especially for recent immigrants, can complicate one's sense of self. They posit that integrating one's own ethnic

identity with the majority culture is often hazardous, slow, and conflict-laden. Additionally, traditional attitudes which encourage Hispanic males to deny or divert feelings, or remain silent may complicate self-reports of certain dimensions of self-concept.

Self-report of self-concept may be further clouded by what has been labeled self-concept confusion (Campbell & Lavalle, 1993). They state that people with low self-esteem have self-concepts which fluctuate and change from day to day, and may be contradictory and inconsistent. This could have implications if, as mentioned previously, any of the subjects are depressed.

Ultimately, a significant body of work has given consideration to the possibility of gender differences within the theory of self-concept. However, far less research is available when considering possible gender differences within the context of juvenile delinquency, and less still when assessing the possibility of a relationship between gender differences, juvenile delinquency and self-concept. This study will attempt to examine the possibility of that relationship.

## Method

### Sample

Participants were 19 male and 9 female minors, who were in custody in a Southern California Juvenile Hall detention facility at the time of administration of this instrument. 5.3% of the males were Black, 21.1% were White, 57.9% were Hispanic, and 15.8% were self-categorized as other. The female ethnicity was composed of 3.6% who classified themselves as Black, 28.6% as White, 53.6% as Hispanic, 3.6% as Native American, and 10.7% self-reported as other (see Table 1).

Table 1

### Ethnicity of sample

	Number of Males	Percentage	Number of Females	Percentage
<b>Black</b>	1	5.3	1	3.6
<b>White</b>	4	21.1	8	28.6
<b>Hispanic</b>	11	57.9	15	53.6
<b>Native American</b>	0	0.0	1	3.6
<b>Other</b>	3	15.8	3	10.7
<b>Total</b>	19	100.0	9	100.0

The 28 subjects were minors between and including the ages of 14 and 18. The mean age for females was 15.4 years of age. The mean age for the male subjects was 16.2 years

of age.

The minors demonstrated a full range of academic levels and abilities, with the majority being slightly delayed according to age expectations. This seemed due in many instances to repeated interruptions in the expected educational process, related to recidivism of detention ('Southern California' Juvenile Hall, 1999).

#### Procedure

Some of the minors at this facility were immediately disqualified from participating due to their status as "security" minors (those who were new to the facility, or who were being held on charges related to violent crimes). Others were immediately disqualified due to being on restriction for other reasons such as behavior conflicts or rule violations.

Therefore the sample was drawn from the remaining minors. Inasmuch as the study was conducted with a specific interest in gender differences, availability sampling was used to determine which female minors would participate. It was hoped that equal numbers of males and females could be procured. However, with an approximate ratio of one female to every five males, the sample was not able to be matched.

The study employed a questionnaire design which examined the possible effect of gender upon the levels of

self-concept of those 28 minors. It was possible to administer this questionnaire throughout the limited time frames during which the minors were available for participation in such activity.

The subjects were administered the Multidimensional Self Concept Scale (MSCS) on the specific units where the selected participants resided, or in the intake interview room during evening recreation hours (see appendix A). According to the Director of this Juvenile Hall, permission for participation in this study can be granted by himself for the duration of the minor's incarceration, due to the participant's status as wards of the court. However, the Director preferred the use as well of a parental consent form, (see Appendix B). This individual participation or non-participation in the study by qualified minors was at their choice, with no change in status or penalty for a minor who chose not to participate or who withdrew (see Appendix C). Following parental consent, the minors were given oral and written consent (see Appendix D) information. Those who chose to participate identified themselves only by their client identification number, previously assigned to them upon detention. Following completion of the questionnaire, the participants were then given the debriefing statement (see Appendix E).

The MSCS was administered to all participants by this investigator in the Master of Social Work department from California State University, San Bernardino.

Typical administration of this instrument in past uses has been reported at approximately 20 minutes. However, longer administration time was available, as some minors appeared to have a significantly lower reading level than others. All subjects included in this sample were able to answer the questionnaire items, even if they requested definition of some terms. Those who were unable to formulate a response to the questions even after such definition were disqualified. Record books were then turned in to the investigator, and checked for accuracy. After data were entered into the computer program, the questionnaire, teen consents and parental consents were stored in a locked cabinet.

### Instrument

The survey instrument selected was the Multidimensional Self-Concept Scale (MSCS) (Bracken, 1992). It is a 150-item clinical and research instrument that assesses self-concept in each of six domains: Social, Competence, Affect, Academic, Family, and Physical. This instrument can be either individually or group administered, which lent itself well to the juvenile hall setting. A Total Scale raw score,

which addresses global self-concept, was derived by summing raw scores from each of the six 25-item subscales.

Responses to the items were of a modified Likert format, with no neutral option. The responses were either positively or negatively worded (e.g. "I have a lot of friends" , or " My parents don't trust me").

Michelle-Crain, and Bracken (1994) reported reliability of the MSCS with coefficient alphas which exceeded .90 for all subscales at all age levels, with the exception of the Competence subscale, which has a total sample coefficient alpha of .87. The Total Scale reflects excellent internal consistency with alphas ranging from .97 to .99 for each age level and for the total sample (Multidimensional Self Concept Scale, 1992).

#### Protection of Human Subjects

As mentioned previously, informed consent procedures included agency consent, parental consent, and participant written and oral consent. A debriefing statement was utilized (see Appendix D). The debriefing statement was written in language which would be considered appropriate for the identified participants.

The confidentiality of the participants was be protected through use of the Juvenile Hall preassigned client identification numbers, which identified each

participant on their teen consent form and their survey booklet. Juvenile Hall personnel had no way of knowing which minors participated in the study and which minors did not. Probation officers also did not have access to this information, which was of particular concern to the participants. Parental consents which contained names rather than client identification numbers were stored separately from the teen consent forms and answer booklets which contained the client identification numbers.

## Results

Initial descriptive statistics were run on the demographic variable with no distinction between the male and female participants, for a total of 28 participants. Measures of central tendency, and frequency distribution were used. The raw scores examined in this analysis were for all 28 participants and the dimensions of Social, Competence, Academic, Family, Physical, and Total scores (see Table 2). Normal distributions occurred in all areas except for the Family dimension, which were negatively skewed.

Table 2

### Non-gender Specific Frequencies

	<u>Raw Scores</u>						
	Social	Competence	Affect	Academic	Family	Physical	Total
<b>Mean</b>	76.11	69.64	68.89	68.11	83.64	73.93	440.32
<b>Median</b>	75.00	69.00	72.00	67.50	88.00	75.00	436.00
<b>Std. Deviation</b>	8.14	6.30	12.75	9.23	14.54	9.26	46.61

The descriptive statistics of mean and standard deviation, for the same self-concept dimensions, were then examined from a gender-specific standpoint. Again normal distributions were demonstrated with the exception of the skewed distribution in the Family dimension scores (see

Table 3).

Table 3

Gender- Specific Frequencies

	Gender	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Social	male	19	76.37	9.27	2.13
<b>Raw Scores</b>	female	9	75.55	5.46	1.82
Competence	male	19	70.16	6.61	1.52
<b>Raw Scores</b>	female	9	68.55	5.79	1.93
Affect	male	19	72.63	11.12	2.55
<b>Raw Scores</b>	female	9	61.00	12.93	4.31
Academic	male	19	68.05	9.32	2.14
<b>Raw Scores</b>	female	9	68.22	9.59	3.20
Family	male	19	85.37	11.80	2.71
<b>Raw Scores</b>	female	9	80.00	19.44	6.48
Physical	male	19	75.68	9.57	2.20
<b>Raw Scores</b>	female	9	70.22	7.76	2.60
Total	male	19	448.26	48.40	11.10
<b>Raw Scores</b>	female	9	423.55	39.95	13.32

The primary independent variable of this study was gender. To assess the gender difference in the level of self-concept, independent t-tests were employed. Independent t-tests were conducted on the means of the seven variables shown above. That is, gender mean differences on the self-concept dimensions and on the total score of self-concept were tested. Significant gender differences were found on the Affect dimension,  $t(14) = 2.3$ ,  $p < .05$ . The dimensions of Social, Competence, Academic, Family, Physical, and Total

yielded no statistically significant results. The individual t-tests were as follows.

Social,  $t(24)=.29$ ,  $p=.77$ ; Competence,  $t(18)=.65$ ,  $p=.52$ ;  
Academic,  $t(15)=-.04$ ,  $p=.17$ ; Family,  $t(11)=.76$ ,  $p=.54$ ;  
Physical,  $t(19)=1.6$ ,  $p=.055$ ; and Total,  $t(19)=1.4$ ,  $p=.174$ .

## Discussion

The results from this study demonstrated that male and female juvenile offenders did not demonstrate the disparities in levels of overall self-concept previously exhibited between non-offending male and female adolescents (i.e. Worrell, et al., 1998). However, the fact that a significant difference was found within one of the dimensions of self-concept supports the importance of the multidimensional view. In a unidimensional orientation, this significant difference found in the Affect dimension would not have been apparent. This is particularly meaningful given that the sample size was limited.

While this study raises many important issues, several theoretical limitations must be examined. For example, the ambiguity in the definition of self-concept, and tangential terms such as self-esteem, still makes it difficult to be accurate or consistent when identifying dimensions of self-concept. This is particularly true when referencing self-concept and self-esteem. These two concepts have been seen as hierarchical, uni-directional and bi-directional.

With regard to the issue of unidimensionality versus multidimensionality, the results clearly emphasize the necessity of a multidimensional view. In a unidimensional format the difference in Affect would not have been

apparent. Furthermore, during their interaction with the instrument, the subjects in this study seemed comfortable with the multidimensional format itself. They indicated verbally that they recognized those dimensions within their own lives.

Other limitations to this study include the inadequate amount of research available with which to draw conclusions pertaining to self-concept and juvenile offenders, female offenders in particular. Even though, as stated previously, juvenile crime rates are leveling off or decreasing as a whole, this is still of concern because of the increase in certain types of crimes such as violent crime and crimes committed by females (Johnson, 1998).

An additional issue pertains to the paucity of existing literature on the cultural impact on self-report of self-concept. As shown by this admittedly small sample, juvenile offenders do not fit neatly into one mold. They are increasingly likely to be of a variety of ethnic and cultural backgrounds, some of which adhere to cultural norms which discourage expression of feelings or personal information (Goldenberg et al., 1998). Since the majority of methods currently used to create self-concept theories are self-report, the theories may need to be expanded to allow for this dynamic.

Along with theoretical limitations there are methodological limitations in this study as well. The most prominent would be the limited sample size, making generalization difficult at best. It is obvious that the difficulty obtaining access to this population hinders this area of study in general. Additionally, the processes necessary to access this population may have contributed to skewed results within scores of the Family dimension of the MSCS (see Tables 2 & 3). The only minors available to complete the questionnaire were those whose parents do attend visitation opportunities with their adolescents while they are detained and who filled out parental consents allowing their teens to participate. Consequently, it would have been interesting to note how minors whose families did not visit rated the Family dimension of their self-concept scores.

A cultural impact may have been brought to bear in the Family scores as well. Given the percentage of participants who identified themselves as of Latino ethnicity (see Table 1), it is possible that weighting should be reconsidered when configuring instruments utilizing family as a dimension of self-concept. For instance, in the case of Hispanic Americans, family membership and belonging are a great source of pride (Goldenberg et al., 1998) Ho (1987) goes

one step further by suggesting that related self-concept dimensions such as and individual's self-confidence, worth, security and identity are determined by his or her relationships with family members. Consequently the Family dimension is of greater importance to many Latinos.

Cultural implications are felt as well when addressing methodological limitations. It is possible that the significant results of the Affect dimension may be biased. Once again considering the percentage of Latino males who completed the instrument, it is possible that cultural norms and values impacted the results. This could be due to the view that Latino males traditionally resist demonstrating a wide range of affect (Goldenberg, et al., 1998). It can be further noted that the only minors who declined to participate in this study were Latino males who made that decision after clarifying that they would be answering questions that examined their feelings. Further research is needed to clarify this issue.

As mentioned previously, accuracy of self-report can be of concern. During administration of this instrument several minors, who mentioned that their families were recent immigrants, expressed an underlying distrust of the research process. They seemed unconvinced that their probation officers and juvenile hall personnel would not

have access to the answers that they gave on the instrument. The ethnicity of the examiner may have contributed to this sensitivity since the examiner was a female Caucasian.

Still another limitation refers to the concept of collectivism, discussed previously (Carpenter, 2000). It is possible that participants could have responded with greater regard for how their answer would reflect on their 'group', rather than how it reflected their own views (Deaux, Dane, & Wrightsman, 1993). Many participants in this setting were interested to know if other Latinos had participated in this study, and also asked how the other Latino participants labeled their ethnicity on the questionnaire. (Each participant was encouraged to complete ethnicity to their own specifications.)

There are other limitations with regard to constraints of survey self-reports. For example, even though the participants appeared to have adequate reading levels to comprehend the questionnaire, several seemed to become bored with the time it took to complete it. Consequently lack of motivation to answer accurately may have a factor. Motivation with regard to survey/questionnaire format is mentioned in literature as a common limitation (Cozby, Worden & Kee, 1989).

It would appear that in experiencing these limitations,

this study has actually raised some important issues relating to the future study of self-concept and juvenile delinquency.

One of the most prominent issues seems to be 'What other dimensions should be considered pivotal within a multidimensional view of self-concept?'. The debate continues, even in some of the more recent literature (Bracken, 1992). In light of some of the results and attitudes encountered in this study, perhaps ethnic self-concept should be considered one of the important dimensions (Phinney & Chavira, 1993). For example, Carpenter (2000) reported that collectivism and tightness of culture have been explored as separate predictors of self-concept.

When considering the lack of gender disparity found in all dimensions except Affect in this study, further research may be able to determine whether or not the disparity is related to an association between levels of self-concept and female juvenile offenders (Johnson, 1998). This would be consistent with theories citing self-concept as a possible catalyst for or result of delinquent behavior (St. C. Levy, 1997).

Additionally, if females are indeed committing more crimes as a means of raising levels of self-concept; or if female levels of self-concept rise as a result of

criminality, then what female adolescent needs are not being met within society?

Furthermore if, as previously mentioned, valid dimensions of self-concept are still being debated, then what impact might there be on self-concept levels if spirituality is added as an important dimension? This would be especially interesting within the juvenile offender population. Many of the subjects of this study attended services at the juvenile facility on a regular basis. What differences might there be between their scores and the scores of the youth who do not attend or profess a religious affiliation?

Finally, possible means of accessing a larger percentage of the juvenile offender population should be explored. This could facilitate an increase in relevant data and, consequently, an expansion and improvement of existing resources required to meet the needs of male and female juvenile offenders.

Espousing and furthering research in the areas mentioned provides social workers with an opportunity to champion basic social work principles and ideals. Specifically, these ideals would be supporting, empowering, and providing a voice for those groups whose needs are regularly overlooked or ignored. Those groups are often

females, ethnic minorities, and even juvenile offenders.

## Appendix A

### **Agency Consent**

In order to maintain the confidentiality of the institution where this study took place, the agency consent form is being kept on file at the Master of Social Work Department, California State University, San Bernardino.

Appendix B  
Parental Consent

Your child is being offered the opportunity to participate in a research study of juvenile offenders, during the months of April and May, 2000. The study is examining whether or not there are any differences in how teenage boys and teenage girls who are in custody feel about themselves. The purpose of this study is to determine whether there are things that could be done differently to help teens before they get into trouble, or how they can best be helped after they have gotten into trouble with the law.

The teens who participate will answer questions asking how they feel about themselves in certain situations- such as when they do something well, or if they have made a mistake. The questionnaire will take the teens about 30 minutes to complete, and will be done during evening recreation hours. The teen's names will not be linked to the questionnaire in any way.

If you give permission for your teen to participate, they will then have the opportunity to decide if they would like to participate or not, with no penalty if they decide not to. If your teen decides to participate, they are allowed to stop answering the survey at any time if they change their mind, or do not wish to continue. There will be absolutely no penalty to the teen should they do so.

This study is being conducted by Stephanie Herrington under the supervision of Dr. Rosemary McCaslin, Professor of Social Work. This study has been approved by the Institutional Review Board of California State University, San Bernardino. It is being done under the supervision of Professor Jette Warka in consultation with Dr. Rosemary McCaslin. If you have any questions, feel free to contact:

Rosemary McCaslin, Ph. D.  
Department of Social Work  
(909) 880- 5507

If you give your permission for your child to participate, please read the following paragraph and sign below.

I acknowledge that I have been informed of, and understand , the nature and purpose of this study. I understand that the information gained from my teen's participation will be kept strictly anonymous. I acknowledge that my teen's participation will be completely voluntary.

\_\_\_\_ Yes, my teen may decide whether or not they would like to participate in this study.

\_\_\_\_ No, I do not want my teen to participate in this study.

Teen's name \_\_\_\_\_

Parent or Guardian's signature \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix C

### Individual participant oral consent

"My name is Stephanie Herrington. I am doing a study on kids your age to find out how they think about themselves. This study was checked out by several adults, mostly professors (called an Institutional Review Board), to make sure that it is safe to use. Instead of asking adults to tell me what you think I am asking you to tell me. Maybe this will help adults and kids come up with ideas to help teens feel better about themselves, and to help teens become even more successful at the important things in their lives. If you decide to participate, no one will know who filled out the survey because you will only put your CID numbers on the paper- and no one else is allowed to know which number belongs to which teen. Those who decide to participate will fill out a survey (a bunch of questions) which takes about half an hour to complete. Anyone who chooses to start the survey can stop without finishing it if they want to and nothing will happen to them. It is unlikely, but if anyone feels worried or upset after they fill out the questionnaire, they can ask for a supervisor and the supervisor and I will privately help that person decide if they feel like they need counseling."

Appendix D  
**Teen- participant Consent**

You are being offered the opportunity to participate in a research study of juvenile offenders, during the months of April and May, 2000. The study is examining whether or not there are any differences in how teenage boys and teenage girls who are in custody feel about themselves. The purpose of this study is to determine whether there are things that could be done differently to help teens before they get into trouble, or how they can best be helped after they have gotten into trouble with the law.

If you decide to participate, you will answer questions asking how you feel about yourself in certain situations- such as when you do something well, or if you have made a mistake. The questionnaire will take you about 30 minutes to complete, and will be done during evening recreation hours. Since you will not put your name on the survey, no one will be able to tell which person gave which answers on the questions.

You can decide that you do or do not want to participate, with no penalty if you decide not to. If you decide to participate, you are allowed to stop answering the survey at any time if you change your mind, or do not wish to continue. There will be absolutely no penalty to the teen should you do so.

This study is being conducted by Stephanie Herrington. It is being supervised by Professor Jette Warka in consultation with Dr. Rosemary McCaslin. This study has been approved by the Institutional Review Board of California State University, San Bernardino. That means that it was checked out by several adults, mostly professors, to make sure it will not harm anyone who wants to participate. If you have any questions, put in a request for a meeting with a supervisor, who will help you contact:

Rosemary McCaslin, Ph. D.  
Department of Social Work  
(909) 880- 5507

If you choose to participate, please read the following paragraph and mark below.

I acknowledge that I have been informed of, and understand, the nature and purpose of this study. I understand that the information gained from my participation will be kept strictly confidential. I acknowledge that my participation will be completely voluntary (completely my own decision).

\_\_\_\_\_ Yes, I would like to participate in this study.

\_\_\_\_\_ No, I do not want to participate in this study.

## Appendix E

### Debriefing Statement

In the extremely unlikely event that you experience any distress or worry as a result of participating in this study, please put in a request to speak with a supervisor. He or she will contact this investigator and I will confidentially help you decide if you feel you need counseling, which we will then help you obtain.

One objective of this study is to explore how the juvenile justice system might better meet the needs of male and female minors. Another objective is to determine whether there are ways to help minors be more successful in their personal lives.

If you are interested in knowing what we learned from this study, you can ask the Director to please tell me, and I will get that information for you. That information will not be available until after May 1, 2000, so that is when you could ask for the information.

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study, you can let the Director know, and he can contact myself or my supervisor, Dr. Rosemary McCaslin at California State University, San Bernardino.

Finally, please do not tell anyone what kinds of questions you answered in this study. Some of the minors might participate in the study after you do, and their answers might hurt the study if they already know the questions.

Thank you for helping me work on this study.  
Sincerely,

Stephanie Herrington  
California State University, San Bernardino

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