Academic Self-Handicapping and its Correlates in Early Adolescence

Tehniyat Naveed & Jennifer Henderlong Corpus Reed College

PRESENT STUDY

- Schooling contexts emphasize social comparison between adolescents, which can lead to immense psychological and social stress.
- Some students cope with this stress by adopting self-handicapping (SH) strategies whereby they obscure the relationship between their actual performance and inferred ability in order to provide an excuse for poor performance (Fiske & Taylor, 1991).
- Very limited research has examined SH in younger students (for exceptions see Kimble et al., 1998; Rappo et al., 2017).
- The present study focused on examining the characteristics and predictors of SH in a sample of early adolescents (5th·8th graders) using qualitative and quantitative methodology.
- Specifically, the three research questions asked were:
 - Are there gender, age, and achievement differences in SH among early adolescents?
 - 2. Do theory of intelligence (TOI) and school anxiety predict academic SH in early adolescence?
 - 3. How do students who engage in high levels of SH experience school?

HYPOTHESES

- 1. Higher levels of SH for:
 - Boys versus Girls
 - Older (7th/8th grade) versus Younger (5th/6th grade) students
 - · Lower performing students
- 2. Entity (fixed) TOI and school anxiety → Higher levels of SH

METHODS

• Participants for this study were drawn from a pre-existing dataset (*Corpus et al., 2016*), which included children from two K-8 parochial schools.

To address Research Questions 1 and 2 (Quantitative):

 Survey data from 149 5th to 8th graders were used for this research, which included students' gender, age, GPA, school-related anxiety (*Miserandino*, 1996), TOI (*Dweck*, 1999), and SH (*Urdan et al.*, 1998).

To address Research Question 3 (Qualitative):

- Interview transcripts were available for 35 students, which focused on students' academic self perceptions and school-related anxieties.
- Teachers' narrative report-card comments were available for 54 students, which were coded to capture teachers' perceptions of students' preparation for class, academic performance, classroom participation, and personality attributes.
- Students were divided into high vs. low SH at the median and their results on the coding schemes were compared.

QUANTITATIVE ANALYSES

Research Question 1: Gender, Age, and Achievement Differences

- There were no gender differences in SH.
- Older students reported more SH (M = 1.47) than younger students (M = 1.27). F(1, 141) = 7.87, p < .01, $n^2 = .53$.
- The expected negative correlation between SH and GPA was found (r = -.21, p < .05), with GPA explaining 4.2% of the variance in self-handicapping

Research Question 2: TOI and Anxiety as Predictors of SH

- There was no relationship between TOI and SH (r = .05, ns).
- As predicted, there was a positive relationship between anxiety and SH (r = .16, p < .05).

Table 1 presents the correlations among all study variables.

Mean, standard deviation and Pearson's Correlation Matrix for Measured Variables

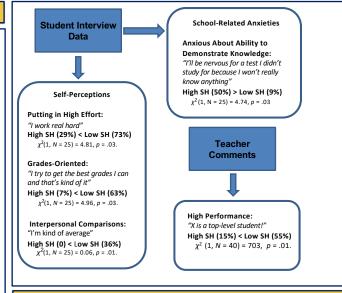
Variable	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. Age	-					
2. Gender	-0.01					
3. GPA	-0.11	-0.19*				
4. Anxiety	-0.18*	-0.03	-0.11			
5. Theory of intelligence	-0.28*	-0.11	-0.18	0.23*		
6. Self-handicapping	0.22*	0.09	-0.21*	0.16*	0.05	-
Mean	.49	.44	3.14	2.01	2.45	1.39
SD	.50	.50	0.70	1	1.10	0.49

QUALITATIVE ANALYSES

Research Question 3: How High SH Students Experience School

- Thematic analysis was used to code and interpret teacher comments and students' interview responses.
- Coding was done while blind to SH scores.
- Figure 1 presents the key differences between students high versus low in SH that
 emerged from the thematic analysis.





DISCUSSION

- Self-Handicapping (SH) was more common among 7th/8th graders versus 5th/6th graders, and among lower performing versus higher performing students.
- High SH students described themselves in ways that conveyed their lack of interest and
 effort regarding their schoolwork. These self-presentations are in line with what is
 known about SH (Covington, 1984).
- Teachers perceived high SH students as exhibiting weaker academic performance than low SH students.
- Perhaps the most notable finding of the current study is the positive relationship between academic SH and school-related anxiety, reflected in both quantitative and qualitative analyses. Students appear to engage in SH, at least in part, because they are afraid of not being able to master the material.

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