

An examination of the first/second-grade form of the pictorial scale of perceived competence and social acceptance: Factor structure and stability by grade and gender across groups of economically disadvantaged children

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Abstract

We tested the structure of the Pictorial Scale of Competence and Social Acceptance (PSPCSA) across groups of first and second grade children from economically disadvantaged backgrounds. We used confirmatory factor analysis, including latent mean structures analysis, to test the fit of competing PSPCSA factor models and examined invariance across time and gender. Cohort 1 data were used to find a best fitting model. Cohorts 2 and 3 data were used for model cross-validation and invariance testing across time. Gender differences were examined with the multiple indicators, multiple causes model. We found support for a time invariant three-factor model but uncovered issues of concern related to score reliability. Consistent with the hypothesized decline in children's early optimistic bias, we found a statistically significant moderate decline in perceptions of cognitive and peer competence over time. In addition, we identified differences between boys and girls: (a) on perceptions of cognitive competence and (b) across several items within each of the PSPCSA subscales.

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Although self-evaluative cognitions play a key role on children's motivation and achievement (Dweck, 1998; Valentine, DuBois, & Cooper, 2004; Wigfield & Eccles, 2002), few psychometrically sound measures are currently available for use with young children (Davis-Kean & Sandler, 2001). Of the scales that have been developed for children in the early school years, only a handful are based on multidimensional theoretical models that are accompanied by empirical findings (e.g., Eccles, Wigfield, Harold, & Blumenfeld, 1993; Harter & Pike, 1984; Marsh, Craven, & Debus, 1991; Marsh, Craven, & Debus, 1998; Pallas, Entwisle, Alexander, & Weinstein, 1990). Among these measures, the Pictorial Scale of Perceived Competence and Social Acceptance (PSPCSA; Harter & Pike, 1984) is the oldest and most widely used. This trend of use continues to wax. In 1999, Strein and Simonson noted over 135 references and over 34 published studies using the instrument. Since that time, the *Social Sciences Citation Index* (2006) has documented that the measure has been referenced in an additional 149 journal articles. The PSPCSA's first/second-grade form for instance, has been used (a) in different cultural settings (Chae & Ceci, 2005), (b) with children exposed to violence (Baily, Hannigan, Delaney-Black, Covington, & Sokol, 2006; Ratner et al., 2006), (c) to examine aspects of positive parenting and their associations with children's socioemotional functioning (Davidov & Grusec, 2006), (d) to examine children's views of peer competence and aggressive behaviors (Cavell & Hughes, 2000; Hughes, Cavell, & Prasad-Gaur, 2001), and (e) to study developmental changes in self-concept in the first years of schooling (Bouffard, Marcoux, Vezeau, & Bordeleau, 2003).

The PSPCSA is a 4-subscale, "developmentally appropriate downward extension" (Harter & Pike, 1984, p. 1970) of a multidimensional self-concept measure for older elementary school children in grades 3–6 (Perceived Competence Scale for Children [PCSC]; Harter, 1982). The PSPCSA is a shorter, individually administered assessment that includes two separate forms, one for preschool/kindergarten (PK) and a second for first/second (FS) grade. The two forms have the same number of items, each of which is matched to a pictorial representation intended to facilitate use of the measure with preliterate children.

Both forms of the scale assess perceptions across the same subdomains (i.e., Cognitive Competence, Physical Competence, Peer Acceptance, and Maternal Acceptance) but include different sets of items that presumably reflect skill differences in competence and acceptance between the preschool and early elementary school years. However, there is no clear empirical or theoretical rationale for the selection of items in each of the subscales.

Reviews of self-concept scales for young children have consistently highlighted the PSPCSA (Byrne, 1996; Davis-Kean, 1995; Wylie, 1989), and recently it has been noted that the measure's "multiple advantages" include a multidimensional structure and appropriateness for children who may not have well-developed reading skills (Winters, Myers, & Proud, 2002, p. 1173). However, the need for independent construct validation of this measure also has been emphasized (Byrne, 1996; Sheridan, 1992), particularly because the factor structure of the two forms of the scale was established with small samples of predominately middle-class Caucasian children (Harter & Pike, 1984).

Although the structure of the PK form of the PSPCSA has been examined in recent studies (e.g., Fantuzzo, McDermott, Manz, Hampton, & Burdick, 1996; Mantzicopoulos, French, & Maller, 2004; Strein & Simonson, 1999), there is limited evidence on the dimensionality of the FS form. In addition, even though the scale has been used to investigate gender differences on self-perceptions of competence (e.g., Anderson & Adams,

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