

# Aggressive Behavior as a Predictor of Self-Concept: A Study with a Sample of Spanish Compulsory Secondary Education Students\*

## El Comportamiento Agresivo como Predictor del Autoconcepto: Estudio con una Muestra de Estudiantes Españoles de Educación Secundaria Obligatoria

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**Abstract.** This study analyzed the relationship between aggressive behavior and self-concept in a sample of 2,022 Spanish students (51.09% males) of Compulsory Secondary Education, ranging in age from 12 to 16 years. Aggressive behavior was assessed using the *Teenage Inventory of Social Skills* (TISS), and self-concept was assessed with the *Self-Description Questionnaire II* (SDQ-II). Logistic regression analyses showed that adolescents with aggressive behavior were more likely to perceive their relationship with their parents as negative, show little interest in verbal activities, be less sincere, and have lower self-esteem than their non-aggressive peers. Furthermore, despite models varied according to sex and grade, in most cases adolescents with high aggressive behavior also showed a higher probability of perceiving their relation with peers of the same sex in a negative way, being less interested in school domains and showing higher emotional instability than their non-aggressive counterparts. Non-expected results were obtained regarding the perceptions about interactions with peers of the opposite sex and physical appearance. Results are discussed attending to their practical implications.

**Keywords:** adolescence, aggressive behavior, secondary education, self-concept.

**Resumen.** Este estudio analizó la relación entre la conducta agresiva y el autoconcepto en una muestra de 2.022 estudiantes españoles (51,09% varones) de Educación Secundaria Obligatoria (ESO) de 12 a 16 años. La conducta agresiva fue evaluada con el *Teenage Inventory of Social Skills* (TISS) y el autoconcepto mediante el *Self-Description Questionnaire II* (SDQ-II). Los análisis de regresión logística mostraron que los adolescentes con comportamientos agresivos presentaron mayor probabilidad de percibir las relaciones con sus padres como negativas, mostrarse poco interesados por las tareas verbales, ser menos sinceros y tener una autoestima más baja. Asimismo, pese a que los modelos variaron en función del sexo y el curso, en la mayoría de los casos los estudiantes con alta conducta agresiva también presentaron una mayor probabilidad de percibir de forma negativa sus relaciones con los compañeros del mismo sexo, estar menos interesados por las materias escolares y ser emocionalmente más inestables que sus compañeros no agresivos. Se obtuvieron resultados inesperados en cuanto a las relaciones con los compañeros del sexo opuesto y a la percepción de atractivo físico. Los resultados son analizados atendiendo a sus implicaciones prácticas.

**Palabras clave:** adolescencia, autoconcepto, conducta agresiva, educación secundaria.

Adolescence is a developmental stage characterized by important physical, cognitive and social changes. In some cases, those changes can contribute to the emergence of externalizing problems, such as aggressive

behavior to peers (Estevez, Murgui, Musitu, & Moreno, 2008a; Verona, Javdani, & Sprague, 2011). However, changes during adolescence have not only an influence on adolescents' social behavior, but also on their way of perceiving themselves, that is, in their self-concept (Gonzalez-Pienda, Nuñez, Gonzalez-Pumariega, & Garcia, 1997). Both variables, aggressive behavior and self-concept, are considered as key factors for personal, social and academic adjustment for adolescents (Estevez, Musitu, & Herrero, 2005; Marcus, 2007; Marsh, Craven, & McInerney, 2003;

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Pastor, Balaguer, & Garcia-Merita, 2006). Therefore, the present study attempts to increase the knowledge about the relation between aggressive behavior to peers and self-concept in Spanish students of Secondary School Education. Thus, aggressive behavior is defined as any behavior that implies using coercive methods to hurt other peers in specific situations and to satisfy perpetrator's own interests (Torregrosa et al., in press; Trianes, 2000) and self-concept is defined as one's own perception of oneself. As stated by Shavelson, Hubner and Stanton (1976), a person's perception of him/herself is formed through his/her experience and is influenced by environmental reinforcement and the feedback of significant others.

Next, some reasons that stress the importance of the study of aggressive behavior and self-concept in adolescence are mentioned. Subsequently, attention is focused on those studies that analyze the relation between the aforementioned constructs. Finally, the shortages in previous research, which motivated the present study, are pointed out.

### ***Aggressive behavior in Compulsory Secondary Education students***

Recently, not only researchers but also professionals of Psychology, Education and allied disciplines have focused on aggressive behavior in adolescence (Dodge, Coie, & Lynam, 2006). Thus, among other reasons, the special attention paid to aggressive behavior is due to its high prevalence during that developmental stage (e.g., Diaz-Aguado, Martinez-Arias, & Martin-Seoane, 2004; Ingles et al., 2008) and the negative consequences related to such behavior. In this sense, aggressive behavior in adolescence has been significantly related to: (a) low levels of physical health (Saab & Klinger, 2010) and high consumption of legal and illegal drugs (Ingles et al., 2007); (b) low levels of emotional well-being (Saab & Klinger, 2010), and high levels of perceived stress, depressive symptoms and low life satisfaction (Estevez et al., 2005; Estevez, Murgui, & Musitu, 2008; Herrero, Estevez, & Musitu, 2006); (c) deficit in social skills (Ingles, Hidalgo, Mendez, & Inderbitzen, 2003), which in turn is related to a higher probability of being rejected and withdrawn by peers, low levels of parental support and an offensive parent-adolescents communication (e.g. Estevez et al., 2005; Ingles, Delgado, Garcia-Fernandez, Ruiz-Esteban, & Diaz-Herrero, 2010); and (d) several school problems, such as, for example, low academic performance (e.g. Jimerson & Ferguson, 2007; Loveland, Lounsbury, Welsh, & Buboltz, 2007; Torregrosa et al., in press), early school dropout (e.g., Farmer et al., 2003), negative attitudes to study, and conflictive relations with teachers (Estevez et al., 2008a; Herrero et al., 2006).

### ***Self-concept in Compulsory Secondary Education students***

Self-concept is influenced by the evaluation made by significant others (Shavelson et al., 1976). As interactions with peers get special importance in adolescence (Rubin, Bukowski, & Parker, 2006), it seems undeniable that the opinion adolescents keep about themselves could be really damaged in this period of life (Harter, 2006). Furthermore, the study of self-concept has been broadly tackled from different areas of Psychology, due to its relation with individuals' behavior. Thus, it has been confirmed the influence of certain family variables (e.g. parental communication or parental implication) on students' family and academic self-concepts in adolescence (Cava, Musitu, & Murgui, 2006; Gonzalez-Pianda et al., 2002; Musitu, Estevez, & Emler, 2007). Academic and aptitudinal variables have also shown their influence on self-concept. In this line, causal attributions and academic aptitudes have an influence on adolescents' academic self-concept (Gonzalez-Pianda et al., 2002). However, self-concept is not only influenced by other variables but it also has an influence on several behaviors, such as, for example, authority rejection or school violence (Cava et al., 2006; Musitu et al., 2007) and academic performance (Gonzalez-Pianda et al., 2002). In the same sense, correlational studies support the relationship between self-concept and socio-educational variables as, for example, peers' group acceptance, and certain physical and psychological health behaviors (Garaigordobil, Cruz, & Perez, 2003; Garaigordobil, Dura, & Perez, 2005; Rodriguez, Goñi, & Ruiz de Azua, 2006).

### ***Self-concept and aggressive behavior in adolescence***

There are numerous studies focusing on the relationship between self-concept and aggressive behavior in adolescence (Dodge et al., 2006). However, measures used to assess such constructs are varied, which makes the comparison of results provided by previous empirical evidence difficult. Therefore, this paper will only review those research studies conducted with the Self-Description Questionnaire II (SDQ-II; Marsh, 1992), which is one of the most used measures to assess self-concept and has one of best psychometric properties in adolescent population (see Guerin, Marsh, & Famose, 2003, for revision). Studies that used SDQ-II highlighted the existence of a significant relationship between self-concept domains and aggressive behavior. In that sense, Marsh, Parada and Ayotte (2004) found, in a sample of 903 Canadian students of 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grade (12-14 years old), that aggressive behavior was significant and negatively related to physical, family, academic, social and emotional self-concepts. Such results were consistent with those

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