

## Introduction

**Self-efficacy is one's belief in their ability to achieve a specific goal.**

- Self-efficacy develops through practice, modeling, and emotional states, etc. (Bandura, 1977).

**Children who feel high self-efficacy generally see better outcomes**, including better peer relationships and academic motivation (Bandura, et al. 1996; Bandura et al, 2003).

**Previous research has mostly explored adolescents' self-efficacy**—an age group which is in the crucial stage of identity development—but **not middle school children**, who are just entering the stage of identity construction (Marcia, 1980).

**The purpose of this study is to examine self-efficacy and adjustment in middle-school children.**

## Method

**Participants:** 195 middle-school girls ( $n = 94$ ) and boys ( $n = 101$ ) were solicited from a university-affiliate school in south Florida ( $M$  age = 12.01 years)

**Materials and Procedure:** Research assistants held one-on-one interviews with children

- **Self-efficacy** was measured in three domains.
  - **Body-image:** "Feeling good looking is \_\_\_\_\_ for me."
  - **Sports:** "Throwing a ball is \_\_\_\_\_ for me."
  - **Popularity:** "Having a lot of friends is \_\_\_\_\_ for me."
- **Depression** (Kovacs, 1977); 10-items
- **Self-esteem** (Harter, 1985); 6-items

## Research Question 1:

Is there a gender difference in body-image, sports, and popularity self-efficacy?

Table 1. Means, standard deviations, and independent samples  $t$ -tests for females and males.

	Females ( $n = 94$ )	Males ( $n = 101$ )	$t$ -test
Body-Image Self-Efficacy <sup>†</sup>	3.21 (.68)	3.04 (.76)	$t(193) = 1.65, p = .10$
Sports Self-Efficacy*	3.01 (.73)	3.35 (.60)	$t(193) = -2.82, p < .01$
Popularity Self-Efficacy	3.29 (.56)	3.32 (.61)	$t(193) = -0.35, p = .72$
Self-Esteem	3.60 (.43)	3.56 (.47)	$t(193) = 0.65, p = .51$
Depression	1.20 (.19)	1.20 (.19)	$t(193) = 0.19, p = .85$

Note. An asterisk (\*) indicates a statistically significant difference between groups at  $p < .05$ . A dagger (†) indicates an effect approaching significance,  $†p < .10$ .

## Research Question 2:

For boys and girls separately, is there a correlation between self-efficacy and well-being?

Table 2. Correlations between all measures

	Body-Image Self-Efficacy	Sports Self-Efficacy	Popularity Self-Efficacy	Self-Esteem	Depression
Body-Image Self-Efficacy	--	.15	.51***	.22*	-.25*
Sports Self-Efficacy	.45***	--	.45***	.26*	-.25*
Popularity Self-Efficacy	.62***	.49***	--	.23*	-.35***
Self-Esteem	.23*	.09	.18 <sup>†</sup>	--	-.40***
Depression	-.31**	-.38***	-.42***	-.41***	--

Note: Correlations for girls can be seen above the diagonal. Correlations for boys can be seen below the diagonal. <sup>†</sup> $p < .10$ . \* $p < .05$ . \*\* $p < .01$ . \*\*\* $p < .001$ .

## Results

**RQ1:** A series of independent samples  $t$ -tests were computed to examine gender differences in all measures.

- Boys reported higher sports self-efficacy than girls.
- Girls reported slightly higher body-image self-efficacy than boys.
- There were no gender differences in popularity self-efficacy, self-esteem, or depression.

**RQ2:** Correlations between all measures were run separately for boys and girls. Specific correlations can be seen in Table 2.

- All three self-efficacies are positively associated with self-esteem, **but for girls only**.
- Boys develop high self-esteem when they exhibited **high body image-self efficacy, but not sports- or popularity self-efficacy** (although this effect is trending.)

## Discussion

Results make it clear that boys and girls derive self-efficacy in different domains. This could be for a variety of reasons including embodying expectations from others or through skill building.

- For instance, **sports performance might be rewarded differently for boys and girls**, as school sports tend to be male dominated, therefore increasing the reward for female performance.
- Moreover, it is possible that **females may turn to social acceptance and gratification more often than males do**, which would explain why only one self-efficacy domain was associated with self-esteem for boys.

Future research could look into additional self-efficacy domains to determine whether gender plays a role in an increased need for external gratification.