

University of Nevada, Reno

**Self-Esteem and Actual, Reflected, and Self-Appraisals of Swimmers in Early  
Adolescence**

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in  
Counseling and Educational Psychology / Education

by

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THE GRADUATE SCHOOL

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prepared under our supervision by

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## Abstract

This study was an exploration of the relationship among appraisals (actual, reflected, and self-) and how this relationship might bear some association with early adolescent swimmers' self-appraisals (or self-perceptions) in the domains of scholastic competence, athletic competence, and physical appearance, as well as their global self-worth. A clear pattern, consistent across all domains of inquiry, emerged regarding variability among the adolescents' self-appraisals, their reflected appraisals of their parents and coaches, and the actual appraisals of their parents and coaches. First, as the level of competence/adequacy increased, variability among appraisals decreased. Similarly, lower competence/adequacy scores were associated with more discrepant appraisals. Second, a lower level of global self-worth was associated not only with lower mean scores in each of the three domains, but also greater variability among the actual, reflected, and self-appraisals specific to each domain. Finally, online administration of the Self-Perception Profile for Adolescents resulted in findings consistent with the traditional paper and pencil administration of the instrument, which offers support for both the reliability of the instrument and the potential benefits of internet research. This study offers support for symbolic interactionist theory and has important implications for the role of the evaluations of others in the development of individuals' self-perceptions regarding their competence/adequacy in various domains and their global self-esteem.

## Dedication

“Education is not merely a matter of training the mind. Training makes for efficiency, but it does not bring about completeness. A mind that has merely been trained is the continuation of the past and such a mind can never discover the new. That is why, to find out what is right education, we will have to inquire into the whole significance of living” (Krishnamurti).

Delving into the whole significance of living becomes almost a necessity when a doctoral student completes a ‘little’ PhD with a not-so-little dissertation. Neither a literature review nor statistical significance can reveal the true experience of this process. The training and efficiency stem from practice and experience, but discovering the new comes from the personal journey, the late nights, the sleep deprivation, the doubt, hope, inspiration, love, support, friendship, and realization that we are not alone. Were it not for the wisdom and the insight of my beloved, mentors, philosophers, researchers, theorists, teachers, students, musicians, and all my loved ones, especially children, swimmers, families, confidantes, friends, even delightful acquaintances, this dissertation might truly have been a continuation of the past. Instead, this paper has totally been an inquiry into the whole significance of living in the world, at this particular time, with these particular people, an inquiry that extends beyond the analysis and discussion. This paper is dedicated to you, the people in my small circle of life, for you have been an integral part of this process, a process of discovering the new. It has also been a process that I could not have endured without you; to you, I express my deepest thanks and gratitude.

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This study was inspired by the work of others; it was also made possible with the help of others. It began at the University of Arizona and at Pepperdine University with a cohort of amazing instructors and professors who nurtured a budding interest in the social sciences. These devoted mentors challenged me to explore the theoretical foundations that had conveniently been left in the library for me to discover. It continued early in my doctoral program at the University of Nevada, Reno, when it was advised that “there is no such thing as a free lunch”. Thank you, Dr. Cleb Maddux, for ceaselessly demonstrating your passion and dedication to educating others.

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## Table of Contents

Abstract .....	i
Dedication .....	ii
Acknowledgements .....	iii
Table of Contents .....	iv
List of Tables .....	vii
List of Figures .....	viii
Chapter One – Introduction .....	1
Statement of the Problem .....	1
Purpose of the Study.....	9
Research Questions .....	12
Measures .....	12
Contributions of the Study .....	15
Glossary .....	17
Chapter Two – Review of the Literature .....	19
Introduction .....	19
Self-concept and Self-esteem: Related, but Distinct .....	20
Defining and Identifying Factors in Self-Esteem .....	22
Levels of Self-Esteem .....	33
The Problems with Self-Esteem: Consequences, Complexity, and Uncertainty.....	40
Appraisals Research .....	44
A Gap in Appraisals Research .....	49

Closing the Gap: The Current Study .....	53
Conclusion.....	54
Chapter Three –Method .....	58
Research Purpose and Questions .....	58
Participants .....	60
Measures .....	62
Procedures .....	70
Data Analysis .....	75
Chapter Four – Results .....	81
General Findings .....	82
Actual, Reflected, and Self-Appraisals by Domain of Competence/Adequacy .....	88
Actual, Reflected, and Self-Appraisals for each Domain of Competence/Adequacy by Level of Global Self-Worth .....	83
Chapter Five – Discussion .....	97
Summary of Findings and Contributions.....	99
The Method .....	99
Correlations .....	101
Physical Appearance .....	103
Major Findings .....	104
Implications for Further Study .....	105
Limitations of the Study .....	106
The Looking-Glass Self .....	107
References .....	110

Appendix A Recruitment Letter .....	118
Appendix B Parent/Swimmer Invitation to Participate Letter .....	120
Appendix C Coach Invitation to Participate Letter .....	123
Appendix D Descriptives for Actual, Reflected, and Self-Appraisals by Competence/Adequacy Level.....	125
Appendix E Descriptives for Actual, Reflected, and Self-Appraisals for each Domain of Competence/Adequacy by Level of Global Self-Worth .....	126

## List of Tables

Table 1. GPA and Subscale Means .....	83
Table 2. Correlations Between Domain of Competence/Adequacy and Global Self-Worth Means .....	85
Table 3. Correlations Among Appraisals by Domain of Competence/Adequacy .....	87
Table 4. Domain Competence/Adequacy Mean Scores by Level of Global Self-Worth .....	94

## List of Figures

Figure 1. Frequencies for Actual, Reflected, and Self-Appraisals Scores by Scholastic Competence Level .....	89
Figure 2. Frequencies for Actual, Reflected, and Self-Appraisals Scores by Athletic Competence Level .....	90
Figure 3. Frequencies for Actual, Reflected, and Self-Appraisals Scores by Physical Appearance Level .....	91
Figure 4. Frequencies for Actual, Reflected, and Self-Appraisals of Scholastic Competence by Level of Global Self-Worth.....	94
Figure 5. Frequencies for Actual, Reflected, and Self-Appraisals of Athletic Competence by Level of Global Self-Worth.....	95
Figure 6. Frequencies for Actual, Reflected, and Self-Appraisals of Physical Appearance by Level of Global Self-Worth.....	96

## CHAPTER I

### Introduction

#### *Statement of the Problem*

The notion of the self in human experience has been a critical topic for exploration across a myriad of disciplines and cultures throughout the world for centuries. While the investigation of self has yielded a variety of theories, terms, and concepts, particularly in psychology and sociology over the past century, self-esteem is one construct that has received considerable attention from researchers, educators, parents, and more recently, the general public. Despite such interest, the concept of self-esteem, also referred to as self-worth, defies common understanding, as research findings suggest that this is a topic of great complexity, one in need of a richer understanding.

Self-worth is defined by Harter (1999b) as “the overall evaluation of one’s worth or value as a person” (p. 5). From this definition, it might be assumed that the higher one’s self-esteem, the better, and to some extent, this is the case. For instance, decades of research reveal a host of negative correlates of low self-esteem. Examples include, but are not limited to: a lack of academic and social success (Coopersmith, 1967); occurrences of school and gang violence (Sorenson, 2001); tendencies toward depression and anxiety, and negative evaluations of one’s physical appearance (Harter, 1993, 2000); diminished confidence in the self (Baumeister, Bushman, & Campbell, 2000); preoccupation with approval from others and social distractibility (Harter, Stocker, & Robinson, 1996); susceptibility to persuasion or influence by others (Baumeister, 1998); uncertainty and instability regarding self-knowledge (Campbell, 1990; Campbell & Lavalley, 1993); interference with learning, physical and substance abuse, and criminal

and violent behavior (California Task Force, 1990). These findings alone make it essential to continue research in this area, since these correlations could have devastating consequences for individuals and communities alike.

In contrast to the more deleterious issues that have been associated with low self-esteem, the factors linked with a more positive evaluation of one's worth or value as a person, also known as high self-esteem, typically indicate that individuals in this category are on a path to success and happiness. Self-esteem has been negatively correlated with both social anxiety and depression (Baumeister, 1998). High self-esteem specifically has been linked with "enhanced initiative and pleasant feelings" (Baumeister, Campbell, Krueger, & Vohs, 2003, p.1), academic achievement, health, popularity, and personal success (Gecas & Burke, 1995). Individuals with high self-esteem have been observed to be more persistent when confronted with failure. They tend to exhibit more extensive knowledge about themselves, such that they express more certainty, clarity, and consistency (over time) in their self-ratings (i.e., ideas about themselves) (Baumeister, 1998).

While consistently negative factors have been associated with low self-esteem and high self-esteem has generally been described in terms of positive characteristics, a review of the literature reveals that there is more to the evaluation of one's worth as a person, or one's self-esteem, than a mere dichotomy between positive and negative attributes. What the literature instead reveals is a complex and multidimensional construct, with liabilities and consequences for individuals at all but the highest and most stable level. For individuals with medium self-esteem, for example, Coopersmith (1959, 1967) noted discrepancies between subjective attitudes toward oneself and the behavioral

ratings of an individual by another. Furthermore, Coopersmith (1967) examined independence training, which refers to parental practices of indulgence and protectiveness. Specifically, he explored the relationship between independence training that children received from their parents (e.g., whether or not children should be protected from a job that is too difficult for them and setting goals) and the children's self-esteem. He found that parents of children with medium self-esteem tended to be rated by interviewers as the highest in "protective stance" and anxiety over their child spending the night away. These parents were also the least likely to show high aspirations for their children, exert pressure to perform, or think that their children should have physical and/or psychological privacy. Additionally, children with medium self-esteem were observed to be dependent on others for their self-evaluations and also seemed uncertain of their worth. Coopersmith concluded that the uncertainty and instability observed in adolescents with medium self-esteem were likely the result not of independence training, but of dependency training, and hence a lack of differentiation, or independence, from their parents.

Similarly, current research shows that there is more to high self-esteem than success and happiness. Recent findings suggest that high self-esteem is actually a heterogeneous category. While many individuals with high self-esteem do exhibit positive characteristics commonly associated with this level of self-esteem, another group of individuals with positive self-attitudes exhibits aggression when their favorable views of themselves are threatened. According to Baumeister et al. (2000), these particular individuals score high on self-esteem, but their self-esteem is unstable (i.e., participants have a high degree of variability between self-esteem scores over time). In a subsequent

review of the literature on self-esteem, Baumeister et al. (2003) suggested that the findings of aggressive tendencies for individuals with overly inflated self-views also indicate that this high, albeit unstable self-esteem may be based on indiscriminate praise from others, without corresponding improvements in ethical behavior and/or accomplishments. From a similar perspective, Harter (1999b) suggested that efforts to promote self-esteem in the absence of genuine achievement might lead to inflated self-esteem and actually undermine an individual's sense of self. Given such findings, our understanding of the troublesome implications of low, medium, and unstable high self-esteem is of pressing importance for researchers, educators, parents, and even the general public.

Even a brief review of research findings on self-esteem demonstrates the complex nature of this construct and highlights the importance of advancing our understanding in this area. Moreover, while each level of self-esteem has unique characteristics and features, at least one common thread is apparent, and this is the issue of self-knowledge. Coopersmith defined self-esteem as “the evaluation which the individual makes and customarily maintains with regard to himself: it expresses an attitude of approval or disapproval and indicates the extent to which an individual believes himself to be capable, significant, successful, and worthy” (1967, p. 4). Individuals with low, medium, and even high, but unstable self-esteem appear to exhibit less certainty regarding their beliefs about themselves. From exaggerated self-views to preoccupation with approval from others, individuals in these categories seem to have varying degrees of deficit when it comes to a solid knowledge base about their capacities and their worth. In sharp contrast, those with stable, high self-esteem generally show assuredness when it comes to

self-knowledge, particularly of their own capabilities, significance, success, and worth. A new examination of the origins of self-esteem might be instrumental in furthering our knowledge of the connection between individuals' beliefs about themselves (i.e., their self-knowledge) and their self-esteem. With this, we might extend our grasp of a concept that has been studied for over a century and is yet to be fully understood.

In 1902, C.H. Cooley presented a theory based on the assumption that the self does not exist without others. The idea that society is the interaction between, or reciprocal influence of individuals who derive meaning or symbols through their interactions with one another became known as symbolic interactionism (Stryker & Statham, 1985), of which Cooley's ideas were an integral part. He suggested that "Our ideals of personal character are built up out of thoughts and sentiments developed by social intercourse, and very largely by imagining how our selves would appear in the minds of persons we look up to" (Cooley, 1902, p. 211). For Cooley, the self and others are not mutually exclusive social entities; rather, the self is a product of one's imagination actively constructing knowledge about the self from the materials that his or her social experience provides. Thus, Cooley suggested that an individual's self-idea has three principle elements: (a) his imagination of his appearance to another person, (b) his imagination of the other person's judgment of his appearance, and (c) some corresponding feeling such as pride or humiliation. While Cooley did not use the term self-esteem in his definition, it can be seen from his depiction of the self-idea that the third element, or correspondent feeling (i.e., pride or humiliation) one has about oneself, is analogous to both Harter's evaluation of one's worth or value as a person (1999b) and to Coopersmith's description of the evaluative attitude of approval or disapproval one has regarding oneself (1967).

According to Cooley, the origins of one's self-esteem are one's own perceptions (i.e., one's imagination of how they appear to others and what others' judgments of this appearance are perceived to be), and these perceptions stem exclusively from one's social interactions with others.

Cooley's theory has stimulated research that examines what are known as actual, reflected, and self-appraisals. Actual appraisals refer to how significant others (eg., parents, teachers, and/or coaches) rate an individual, typically with regard to the individual's behavior, personal attributes (eg., physical appearance), and/or competence in various domains, such as athletic or scholastic competence (Cole, Maxwell, & Martin, 1997; Felson, 1985, 1989, 1993; Felson & Reed, 1986; Hergovich, Sirsch, & Felinger, 2002; Hoffman, Cole, Martin, Tram, & Seroczynski, 2000). Reflected appraisals, on the other hand, are an individual's perceptions of significant others' beliefs regarding his or her behavior, personal attributes, and/or competence (Bouchey & Harter, 2005). In other words, reflected appraisals pertain to what children think others think of their abilities or attributes. Self-appraisals refer to how an individual rates his or her own abilities or attributes (Bouchey & Harter, 2005; Felson, 1985; Harter, 1988; Hergovich et al., 2002; Hoffman et al., 2000).

Unfortunately, there is a body of research on appraisals that has been based predominantly on a modification of Cooley's theory, one that asserts that an individual's perception of the responses of others toward him reflects the actual responses of others. With the addition of this postulate, first introduced by Kinch (1963), a number of researchers (Cole et al., 1997; Cook & Douglas, 1998; Felson, 1985; 1989; 1993; Hergovich et al., 2002; Kinch, 1963; Shrauger & Schoeneman, 1979) over the past few

decades have assumed that “symbolic interactionism implies that there should be at least some accuracy in persons’ perceptions of how others see them” (Felson, 1985, p. 72). In other words, it has been presumed that one’s self-appraisal stems directly from their reflected appraisal. It has also been believed that one’s reflected appraisal is a result and purportedly an accurate reflection of the actual, or ‘professed’ responses of others toward the individual. Thus, the empirical focus of researchers who subscribe to the idea that individuals accurately perceive how they are viewed by others has often been on direct connections or correlations between the actual appraisals of parents and/or teachers and the reflected and self-appraisals of children and early adolescents (Cole et al., 1997; Cook & Douglas, 1998; Felson, 1985, 1989; 1993; Felson & Reed, 1986; Hergovich et al., 2002; Shrauger & Schoeneman, 1979).

Findings based on the assumption of accuracy of appraisals have been inconsistent, often demonstrating only weak correlations, especially between the actual appraisals of others and the reflected and/or self-appraisals of children and adolescents (Felson, 1989, 1993; Shrauger & Schoeneman, 1979). Failure to demonstrate the accuracy of respondents’ perceptions through high correlations between actual, reflected, and self-appraisals has led to several conclusions. First is the idea that “children have only vague conceptions of how they are viewed by others” (Felson, 1989, p. 971). Next, Gecas and Burke (1995) suggested that research on the appraisal process has failed to show that people’s ideas regarding themselves are a reflection of the appraisals of others. Finally, Shrauger & Schoeneman (1979) surmised that there is no apparent evidence that self-evaluations are influenced by the feedback of others.

Research and conclusions rooted in the assumption of accuracy between appraisals seem to oversimplify the reflected appraisal process. An emphasis on accuracy assumes that the actual appraisals of others are accurate assessments of an individual's competence and/or adequacy in a particular domain (eg., academic) and that these appraisals are being communicated and perceived as such. According to Cooley, however, self-esteem stems from our imagination of how others view and judge us, not necessarily from our accurate assessment and/or internalization of how others report that they view and judge us. For instance, in a sample of 6<sup>th</sup>-8<sup>th</sup> grade children and adolescents, Hoffman et al. (2000) found that negative views of oneself were correlated with depressive symptoms, regardless of whether or not these views were commensurate with or discrepant from the appraisals of others. This finding implicates not only a link between an individual's self-views and affect, but also the role of perception, not accuracy, in an examination of individuals' beliefs about themselves. As Helper (1958) pointed out, it's "possible that children's reports are actually more valid as measures of parental evaluations than ratings by the parents themselves" (p. 193). Rather than being indicative of an individual's lack of ability to understand how others view him, weak correlations between appraisals might be indicative of how the appraisals of others may be perceived differently, resulting in some degree of discrepancy between actual, reflected, and self-appraisals. The actual appraisals of others could vary from person to person and/or from situation to situation, and be of a positive or negative nature. All of these factors regarding actual appraisals could influence an individual's reflected and self-appraisals (i.e., their imagination of how they appear to others and how they imagine others judge this appearance), the certainty of their self-knowledge, and hence their self-

esteem. This research (Cole et al., 1997; Cook & Douglas, 1998; Felson, 1985, 1989; 1993; Felson & Reed, 1986; Hergovich et al., 2002; Kinch, 1963; Shrauger & Schoeneman, 1979) and its conclusions contradict not only Cooley's theory, but also the body of literature that implicates the roles of social interaction and perception in self-esteem and perceptions of ability (Baumeister, 1998; Baumeister et al., 2003; Bohrnstedt & Felson, 1983; Brown, 1993; Cooley, 1902, 1916; Epstein, 1973; Harter, 1990, 1993, 1999a, 1999b; Harter et al., 1996; Hoffman et al., 2000; Kinch, 1963; Kramer, 1991; Lord, Eccles, & McCarthy, 1994; Marsh & Shavelson, 1985; Mead, 1956; Pekrun, 1990; Rosenberg, 1986; Swann, 1985, 1999).

#### *Purpose of the Study*

The purpose of this exploratory study is to address the gap that exists in the literature by taking a new look at the relationships that exist among the actual, reflected, and self-appraisals of adolescents and their parents and coaches regarding scholastic competence, athletic competence, and physical appearance. It will also investigate implications these relationships might have not only for adolescents' self-appraisals on these distinct dimensions, but also for adolescents' global self-esteem, or self-worth. This study will examine appraisals (actual, reflected, and self-) and self-esteem with a sample of early adolescent student-athletes (ages 12-15) and their parents and coaches. Actual, reflected, and self-appraisals will be assessed in several domains common to research on appraisals and self-esteem, including scholastic competence (Bouchey & Harter, 2005; Cole et al., 1997; Felson, 1989; Felson & Reed, 1986; Hergovich et al., 2002; Hoffman et al., 2000), athletic competence (Cole et al., 1997; Felson, 1989; Felson & Reed, 1986; Hergovich et

al., 2002; Hoffman et al., 2000) and physical appearance (Cole et al., 1997; Felson, 1985, 1989; Felson & Reed, 1986; Hergovich et al., 2002; Hoffman et al., 2000).

Previous research on appraisals has centered on the notion that an individual's perception of the responses of others toward the individual reflects the actual responses of others (Cole et al., 1997; Cook & Douglas, 1998; Felson, 1985; 1989; 1993; Hergovich et al., 2002; Kinch, 1963; Shrauger & Schoeneman, 1979). In particular, it has been suggested that in order to validate the symbolic interactionist position, investigators must demonstrate congruence between self-appraisals and actual appraisals, and also between reflected appraisals and actual appraisals (Shrauger & Schoeneman, 1979). Results, however, have often shown low correlations between self- and actual appraisals and/or between reflected and actual appraisals (Bledsoe & Wiggins, 1973; Cook & Douglas, 1998; Felson, 1985, 1989, 1993; Helper, 1958; Shrauger & Schoeneman, 1979). To date, researchers have only speculated about the implications of low correlations between appraisals. They have yet to examine on an empirical level, how the degree of correlation or variation among appraisals might be related to an individual's level of self-esteem.

Cooley's original work theorized that the self does not exist without others. According to Cooley (1902), self-esteem in particular is the feeling generated by one's imagination of both his appearance to others and how others judge this appearance. Cooley's emphasis on the significant roles that social interaction and perception play in an individual's self-esteem has received substantial empirical support in the literature (Baumeister, 1998; Baumeister et al., 2003; Bohrnstedt & Felson, 1983; Brown, 1993; Cooley, 1902, 1916; Epstein, 1973; Harter, 1990, 1993, 1999a, 1999b; Harter et al., 1996; Hoffman et al., 2000; Kinch, 1963; Lord et al., 1994; Markus & Wurf, 1987; Marsh &

Shavelson, 1985; Mead, 1956; Pekrun, 1990; Rosenberg, 1986; Swann, 1985, 1999). For example, the literature suggests that individuals' ideas about themselves stem from their perceptions of their social interactions with others. Baumeister et al. (2003) posited that self-esteem is actually a perception rather than a reality. According to these researchers, an individual's level of self-esteem refers to his beliefs about himself, not necessarily the actual or supposed evaluations that are given by others or derived by objective indices, such as tests of intelligence. In addition to the link between self-esteem and an individual's beliefs about himself is also the relationship between the degree of certainty of these beliefs, or one's self-knowledge, and self-esteem (Campbell & Lavelle, 1993). It would appear then, that accuracy of one's perceptions regarding how they are viewed by others is neither necessary to validate symbolic interactionist theory nor informative for understanding self-esteem, especially in terms of actual, reflected, and self-appraisals. Rather, it seems plausible that reflected and self-appraisals are as Cooley suggested, the product of an individual's perception. If this is the case, it would follow that reflected and self-appraisals may or may not 'accurately' reflect, or necessarily correlate with, the actual appraisals of others. There might even be some relationship between how much variability or consistency there is among actual, reflected, and self-appraisals and an individual's level of self-appraisal on a particular dimension and/or his self-esteem in general. With this, the purpose of the current study is to investigate the relationships that exist among the actual, reflected, and self-appraisals of adolescents and their parents and coaches regarding scholastic competence, athletic competence, and physical appearance as well as what implications these relationships might have for adolescents' self-appraisals on these distinct dimensions, as well as for their global self-esteem.

*Research Questions:*

- 1) Is there a relationship between the degree of variability among actual, reflected, and self-appraisals of adolescents and their parents and coaches regarding Scholastic Competence, Athletic Competence, and/or Physical Appearance and adolescents' Global Self-Worth?
- 2) What is the relationship among the actual, reflected, and self-appraisals of adolescents and their parents regarding Scholastic Competence? Is there a relationship between the degree of variability among these appraisals and adolescents' self-appraisal of Scholastic Competence? How is the self-appraisal of Scholastic Competence related to Global Self-Worth?
- 3) What is the relationship among the actual, reflected, and self-appraisals of adolescents and their parents and coaches regarding Athletic Competence? Is there a relationship between the degree of variability among these appraisals and adolescents' self-appraisal of Athletic Competence? How is the self-appraisal of Scholastic Competence related to Global Self-Worth?
- 4) What is the relationship among the actual, reflected, and self-appraisals of adolescents and their parents and coaches regarding Physical Appearance? Is there a relationship between the degree of variability among these appraisals and adolescents' self-appraisal of Physical Appearance? How is the self-appraisal of Scholastic Competence related to Global Self-Worth?

*Measures*

What follows is a description, preceded by a brief overview, of the measures to be used in this study. These measures include assessments of the reflected and self-

appraisals and self-esteem of adolescents, as well as the actual appraisals of their parents and coaches.

- ✓ Self-appraisals and self-esteem, adolescents – adapted for use in this study from The Self-Perception Profile for Adolescents (Harter, 1988).
- ✓ Reflected appraisals, adolescents – adapted for use in this study from the What Others Think About Me scale (Bouchey & Harter, 2005) and the What I am Like scale of the Self-Perception Profile for Adolescents (Harter, 1988).
- ✓ Actual appraisals, parents – adapted for use in this study from the Teacher’s Rating Scale of the Child’s Actual Behavior, a subscale of the Self-Perception Profile for Adolescents (Harter, 1988).
- ✓ Actual appraisals, coaches – adapted for use in this study from the Teacher’s Rating Scale of the Child’s Actual Behavior, a subscale of the Self-Perception Profile for Adolescents (Harter, 1988).

*Self-Appraisals and Self-Esteem, Adolescents* – The Self-Perception Profile for Adolescents (Harter, 1988) will be used to assess adolescents’ self-appraisals of Scholastic Competence, Athletic Competence, and Physical Appearance as well as their self-esteem (Global Self-Worth). This measure is a widely used instrument (Wichstrom, 1995) aimed at tapping adolescents’ domain-specific judgments of their competence or adequacy (self-appraisals) in eight separate domains (Scholastic Competence, Social Acceptance, Athletic Competence, Physical Appearance, Job Competence, Romantic Appeal, Behavioral Conduct, and Close Friendship), as well as their global perception of their worth, or self-esteem (Global Self-Worth) (Harter, 1988). For this study, only the Scholastic Competence, Athletic Competence, Physical Appearance, and Global Self-

Worth subscales, each consisting of five items, will be used in administering this questionnaire, entitled *What I am Like* (Harter, 1988).

*Reflected Appraisals of Parents and Coaches, Adolescents* – Adolescents' reflected appraisals of significant others' (mother, father, coach) beliefs about the adolescents' competence/adequacy in the specific domains of scholastic and athletic competence and physical appearance will be measured with a scale entitled *What Others Think About Me*. Reflected appraisals of global self-worth are not assessed since the items pertaining to global self-worth do not lend themselves to translation into attributes that an objective observer can rate. A 15-item scale (also five items per domain) adapted for the present study, this measure was originally adapted from the *What I am Like* questionnaire of the *Self-Perception Profile for Adolescents* (Harter, 1988) and used by Bouchey and Harter (2005) to examine early adolescents' reflected appraisals of their parents, teachers, and classmates regarding the adolescents' competence in various academic areas.

*Actual Appraisals, Parents* – Parents' actual appraisals of their adolescent's competence or adequacy will be assessed with the *Parent's Rating Scale of the Child's Actual Behavior*. This measure is adapted from the *Teacher's Rating Scale of the Student's Actual Behavior* subscale of the *Self-Perception Profile for Adolescents*, which parallels the *Self-Perception Profile for Adolescents* and assesses the teacher's independent judgment of an adolescent's adequacy in each of the eight domains. In contrast to the five-item subscales that comprise each domain on the *Self-Perception Profile for Adolescents*, however, the teacher's scale has just two items per domain. According to Harter (1988), previous experience with teachers' ratings suggests that highly reliable judgments can be obtained with only two items per subscale. For this

study, the parent's rating scale will assess parents' actual appraisals of their children in the domains of Scholastic Competence, Athletic Competence, and Physical Appearance only. Actual appraisals of global self-worth are not assessed since the items pertaining to global self-worth do not lend themselves to translation into attributes that an objective observer can rate (Harter, 1988). Each parent will complete this 6-item scale (two items per domain) individually.

*Actual Appraisals, Coaches* – The coach's actual appraisals of his or her swimmer's competence or adequacy will be assessed with the Coach's Rating Scale of the Swimmer's Actual Behavior. Actual appraisals of coaches will be limited to athletic competence and physical appearance only, as actual appraisals of scholastic competence are deemed more appropriate for individuals who are likely more familiar with the adolescent in the academic arena, such as parents or teachers. Again, actual appraisals of global self-worth are not assessed since the items pertaining to global self-worth do not lend themselves to translation into attributes that an objective observer can rate. This measure is a 4-item scale (two items per domain), also adapted from the Teacher's Rating Scale of the Student's Actual Behavior subscale of the Self-Perception Profile for Adolescents (Harter, 1988).

#### *Contributions of the Study*

If two vital aspects of self-esteem pertain not to accuracy, but to an individual's social interactions and to his perception of these interactions, then examining the relationship between appraisals and the implications that this relationship has for self-appraisals and self-esteem could provide valuable information for researchers, educators, parents, and individuals. While the sources of self-knowledge may surely extend beyond social

interaction and perception (eg., objective measures), research suggests that they are key facets of self-esteem. The degree of certainty that individuals have about themselves then, might be reflected in the degree to which actual, reflected, and self-appraisals vary. If this is the case, the current study could offer an advanced understanding of the intricate relationship between the human self and others with whom the self interacts and from whom the self develops.

It has been found that individuals with high self-esteem are less likely to experience social anxiety and depression (Baumeister, 1998). Individuals with genuinely high self-esteem appear to have well-established beliefs (i.e., self-knowledge) about their capabilities, significance, success, and worth. In addition, they are more apt to have higher academic achievement, better health, greater popularity, and increased personal success (Gecas & Burke, 1995). In sharp contrast, research on self-esteem also reveals a plethora of negative consequences for individuals with low self-esteem, ranging from a lack of academic and social success to criminal and violent behavior (Baumeister, 1998; Baumeister, et al, 2000; California Task Force, 1990); Campbell & Lavalley, 1993; Coopersmith, 1967; Harter, 2000; Harter et al., 1996; Sorenson, 2001). Individuals with low self-esteem seem to have self-knowledge that is contradictory and uncertain (Campbell & Lavalley, 1993). These consequences could have serious implications for schools and communities alike. Moreover, individuals with low self-esteem are not alone when it comes to the potentially perilous consequences associated with uncertainty, discrepancy, or a lack of stability in the evaluation of one's worth as a person. No less disconcerting, although perhaps less precarious, is the finding that individuals with medium self-esteem exhibited dependence on others for their self-evaluations and some

uncertainty regarding their worth (Coopersmith, 1967). Likewise, individuals with unstable high self-esteem (or overly inflated self-views) have displayed aggressive tendencies when their self-views are challenged (Baumeister et al., 2000). In light of the negative correlates associated with low, medium, and unstable high self-esteem, extending our knowledge of this construct is of paramount importance. Findings from this study could clarify our understanding of the connection between self-knowledge and self-esteem. Specifically, this study could have implications for children and adolescents' social interactions with others and the subsequent perceptions, self-knowledge, and evaluations of self-worth that stem from these interactions.

### *Glossary*

Actual appraisals – how significant others (eg., parents, teachers, and/or coaches) view or rate an individual, often regarding his or her behavior, personal attributes (eg., physical appearance), and/or competence in various domains, such as athletic or scholastic competence (Cole et al., 1997; Felson, 1985, 1989, 1993; Felson & Reed, 1986; Harter, 1988; Hergovich et al., 2002; Hoffman et al., 2000). For example, an actual appraisal of a father regarding his child's scholastic competence would be his response to the question, "How smart do you think your child is" (Felson, 1989)?

Reflected appraisals – an individual's perceptions of significant others' beliefs regarding the individual's behavior, personal attributes, and/or competence (Bouchey & Harter, 2005). In other words, reflected appraisals pertain to what individuals think others think of their abilities or attributes. For example, Bouchey and Harter (2005) had early adolescents respond to statements such as, "(My Mother) believes I am smart for my age".

Self-appraisals – Also known as self-perceptions (Harter, 1988) and self-evaluations (Helper, 1958), self-appraisals refer to how individuals rate their own abilities or attributes (Bouchey & Harter, 2005; Felson, 1985; Harter, 1988; Hergovich et al., 2002; Hoffman et al., 2000), for example, “How smart do you think you are” (Felson & Reed, 1986)?

Self-esteem – used synonymously with self-worth in this study, which Harter (1999) defines as “the overall evaluation of one’s worth or value as a person” (p. 5), or the overall value that an individual places on himself as a person (Harter, 1990). Self-esteem is measured in this study on a fourth scale, the Global Self-Worth scale of the Self-Perception Profile for Adolescents (Harter, 1988).

Domains of competence / adequacy – areas in which individuals have evaluative judgments regarding themselves, such as Scholastic Competence, Athletic Competence, Physical Appearance, Social Acceptance, Behavioral Conduct, and Global Self-Worth (Harter, 1988). The three domains of competence / adequacy to be explored in this study are Scholastic Competence, Athletic Competence, and Physical Appearance.

## CHAPTER II

### Review of Literature

#### *Introduction*

Among the countless terms and concepts employed by researchers and theorists to describe various aspects of the human self, such as self-concept, self-idea, self-regulation, self-consistency, self-verification, and self-determination, is a term that captivates scientists and lay people alike. In 2001 alone, a literature review yielded over 15,000 publications with this concept in the abstract (Baumeister et al., 2003). Intimidating as this may be, given the depth and breadth of this topic, the literature offers a strong knowledge base from which to evolve our understanding. This concept has proven difficult to define and perhaps even more challenging to measure. Many feel compelled to understand it, while others question its merit and supposed benefits. Whether or not a high or low level of this concept causes or is caused by an individual's life experiences is yet to be determined, but over a century of research has fruitfully produced theories and explored questions regarding its antecedents, consequences, and correlates. While scores of questions remain, so too does interest in understanding this, the concept of self-esteem.

The purpose of this study is to examine the relationships that exist among the actual, reflected, and self-appraisals of adolescents and their parents and coaches regarding scholastic competence, athletic competence, and physical appearance as well as what implications these relationships might have not only for adolescents' self-appraisals on these distinct dimensions, but also for the adolescents' global self-esteem (i.e., self-worth). As will be discussed, current research on self-esteem suggests that it is comprised of an individual's feelings of competence in various domains of experience (eg.,

scholastic, athletic, social, etc.) as well as his feelings of worth as a person. Research findings indicate a close relationship between the degree of certainty regarding an individual's beliefs about himself (i.e., self-knowledge) and his level of self-esteem. This relationship has been demonstrated through various measures of individuals' ratings of themselves and also by the degree of congruence between individuals' subjective attitudes toward themselves and the behavioral ratings they receive from others (Coopersmith, 1959, 1967). A substantial body of research suggests that the sources of self-knowledge are rooted in social interaction and individuals' perceptions of how they are viewed by others. For example, research shows that high self-esteem is associated with perceived support from others and a belief that one's worth is not contingent upon meeting the standards of others (Harter, 1999b). Given such findings, it is the aim of the current study to examine the relationships that exist among actual, reflected, and self-appraisals and how these relationships might be tied to an individual's self-appraisal or self-evaluation in a variety of domain-specific areas (eg., scholastic competence) and/or the individual's global self-esteem.

*Self-concept and self-esteem: Related, but distinct*

It has been suggested that self-esteem, also noted as the most popular aspect of self-concept, has been studied to the point that these two terms have virtually been used synonymously (Gecas & Burke, 1995). A review of the literature clearly supports this claim. For example, in one contemporary textbook, under the term 'sense of self', both self-concept and self-esteem are defined together as "perceptions, beliefs, judgments, and feelings about oneself" (Ormrod, 2006, p. G-7). While this definition does address facets of each term, it does not acknowledge important distinctions that have been made

between them in the literature. Further, such distinctions indicate that the treatment of self-concept and self-esteem in research should also be made distinct.

Two fundamental differences separate self-concept from self-esteem. The first difference has to do with the scope of experience described by each term. For example, self-concept is often defined in a broad manner, signifying that it encompasses the whole of one's thoughts and feelings having reference to oneself as an object (Rosenberg, 1986), or that it pertains to the organization of qualities that an individual attributes to himself (Kinch, 1963). Self-esteem, on the other hand, is generally considered to be a component or a dimension of self-concept (Campbell, 1990; Epstein, 1973; Rosenberg, 1986). Second, self-concept is typically referred to in more cognitive terms, while self-esteem introduces an affective component to one's concept of self, although self-esteem is rarely viewed as exclusively affective in nature. For example, Baumeister (1998) suggests that self-esteem consists of both cognitive and affective components. Nonetheless, Rosenberg's (1986) depiction of self-concept as largely a cognitive structure and self-esteem as an affective dimension of self-concept seems to embody both of these distinctions between self-concept and self-esteem (i.e., scope and whether one is more affective or more cognitive).

Other examples of these related, but distinct terms are also evident in the literature. Ellis and Davis (1982) suggest that the self-concept is a form of cognition about the self. Similarly, self-concept has been described as a cognitive schema charged with organizing an individual's abstract and concrete memories (Campbell, 1990), as well as regulating and guiding behavior (Markus & Wurf, 1987). According to Campbell (1990), self-esteem plays an important affective and evaluative role in this cognitive schema. Another

perspective portrays the self-concept as a self-theory, whose purpose it is to effectively structure the data of an individual's experiences. To this, it is added that the self-concept also maintains self-esteem and that emotion is of central importance in this aim (Epstein, 1973). In yet another textbook, O'Donnell, Reeve, and Smith (2007) define self-concept as a "set of beliefs the individual uses to mentally represent or understand his or her sense of self" (p. 517) and self-esteem as "trust applied to oneself; an attitude that one is worthy of a positive or a negative self-evaluation" (p. 517). So, while self-concept and self-esteem have frequently been used interchangeably in the literature, they appear to have underlying differences and thus will not be used interchangeably in the current study. A closer examination of self-esteem, from how it is defined to the factors associated with it, reveals the unique nature and complexity of this dimension of self-concept.

#### *Defining and identifying factors in self-esteem*

As with many other psychological concepts that cannot be seen or touched, operationally defining and pinpointing specific factors involved in self-esteem have been problematic tasks for researchers. According to Harter (1983), self-esteem is rarely clearly defined and often assumed to be self-evident. Wylie (1974, 1989) has pointed to issues of vague and ambiguous theorizing in this area of study. Be that as it may, each definition or factor offered here represents an important piece of the puzzle that is self-esteem, and makes a contribution toward enriching our understanding of this multifaceted and somewhat elusive topic.

One of the earlier and more prominent examinations of self-esteem is that of William James. Several aspects of James' view of self-esteem are pertinent, not only to current research on self-esteem, but also to the present study. First, James (1999) described self-

esteem in terms of a ratio. The numerator of the ratio entails our actualities, or our accomplishments and successes, while the denominator is comprised of our supposed potentialities, pretensions, or aspirations for success. For James, high self-esteem occurs when an individual's perceived successes outweigh their pretensions, while low self-esteem comes about when an individual's pretensions exceed their successes. It's important to note however, that according to James, an individual's pretensions are only significant to their self-esteem in areas deemed important by the individual. In other words, self-esteem is positively impacted only by success in a domain of importance and negatively impacted only if success is not achieved in an area of importance. Conversely, if an individual fails to achieve success in a domain for which he or she does not care or believe that success is important, self-esteem will not be diminished (Harter, 1999b, 2000). With this, it was James' (1999) contention that self-esteem can be increased in one of two ways: either by increasing one's successes or decreasing the degree to which one attributes importance to various domains (i.e., lowering pretensions). "To give up pretensions is as blessed a relief as to get them gratified" (James, 1950, p. 311).

It has been suggested that the role of achievement is implicit in James' concept of self-esteem (Harter, 1983). This idea that there is a connection between self-esteem and success and failure in different areas of an individual's life plays a prominent role in current self-esteem research. For example, Harter's Self-Perception Profile for Adolescents measures global self-esteem, or self-worth, as well as adolescents' beliefs about their competence in eight different domains, from Scholastic Competence to Close Friendship. Harter's research has shown that individuals' perceptions of their competence in domains of importance are highly predictive of self-esteem (1988). Strong validation

of this aspect of James' formulation of self-esteem offers tremendous heuristic value in continued research in this area. Therefore, in its examination of self-esteem, the present study will make use of this vital information by addressing adolescent student-athletes' perceptions of competence in specific domains, to include scholastic competence, athletic competence, and physical appearance.

According to James, our "self-feeling in the world depends entirely on what we back ourselves to be and do" (1950, p. 310). At the same time, his focus on the feelings or emotions that individuals experience with respect to how they define themselves introduces another aspect of James' view of self-esteem relevant to both contemporary research and the current study. James believed that there is more to self-esteem than simply the compilation of an individual's ratios measuring out their accomplishments, divided by their pretensions (James, 1950; Harter, 1983). While he recognized the role of achievement, he also believed that our self-feelings, like self-esteem, pride, conceit, vanity, humility, shame, and confusion, are independent of the "objective reasons we may have for satisfaction or discontent" (James, 1950, p. 306). This part of James' description of self-esteem is important because it acknowledges a component of self-esteem that is distinct from one's perception of competence, such that one's feelings of worth and his perceptions of competence might coincide, and they might not. Additionally, this aspect of self-esteem and its implications for an individual have received considerable theoretical and empirical support.

The connection between self-esteem and affect has been addressed in the literature, although Harter (1983) contested that not enough attention has been given to the specific role of affect in self-esteem. According to Brown (1993), self-esteem is actually rooted in

affective processes, as opposed to cognitive judgments that an individual might make about his or her competence. Brown makes a distinction between the more cognitive self-evaluations individuals derive from their performances and their feelings of personal worth. He defines high self-esteem as a global liking for oneself, independent of an individual's beliefs about particular attributes they possess. Campbell (1990) describes self-esteem in terms of the critical role it plays as an affective and evaluative component of the self-concept. Campbell recommends that when the self is viewed as an object of evaluation, self-esteem is the self-reflexive attitude one has pertaining to how one feels regarding this evaluation.

The relationship between self-esteem and affect, specifically between low self-esteem and depression (Harter, 1993, 1999b) and between high self-esteem and happiness (Baumeister et al., 2003; Coopersmith, 1967), has also been addressed empirically. For example, the finding that individuals with high self-esteem are significantly happier and less likely to be depressed indicates a strong relationship between self-esteem and affect (Baumeister et al., 2003). Similarly, with observed correlations of .72-.80 between self-worth and affect (on a continuum from cheerful to depressed) among older children and adolescents, Harter concluded that self-esteem is highly related to affect. Additionally, Harter found that 80 percent of a clinical sample of inpatient adolescents with psychiatric diagnoses of depression had concomitant low self-worth (1999b). While these findings obviously don't illuminate a causal link between self-esteem and affect, they do lend support for the idea that there is more to self-esteem than an individual's perception of competence.

The emotional or feeling aspect of self-esteem that was integral to William James' definition and has been supported in the literature is also a significant aspect of the current study. It was mentioned previously that Harter's Self-Perception Profile for Adolescents measures adolescents' beliefs about their competence or adequacy in eight separate domains (1988). The Self-Perception Profile for Adolescents also measures global self-worth, defined by Harter (1990) as the extent to which an individual likes himself as a person, likes the way he is leading his life, and is happy with the way his is. When examining the self-evaluations that individuals make about themselves, Harter advocates a multidimensional or profile approach. According to Harter, separating an individual's domain-specific judgments of competence from their global judgment of self-worth helps clarify how particular competencies are related to an individual's self-esteem. Further, Harter has found that individuals who have different profiles across several domains could all have high self-esteem, while individuals who have similar profiles across several domains might actually have different levels of self-esteem (Harter, 1993). These findings seem to support James' notion that importance is a key factor in whether or not an individual's competence in a particular domain has an impact on their self-esteem. Harter's findings also bolster James' idea that the feelings an individual has about him or herself are independent of their accomplishments. With these issues in mind, the current study will examine both competencies and global self-worth in early adolescents.

William James defined self-esteem in terms of a ratio of actualities to supposed potentialities, and stressed that self-esteem also has a feeling component. Perhaps the affective component of self-esteem was even more central to C.H. Cooley's theory.

Cooley's theory became part of the theoretical foundation for symbolic interactionism, the idea that society is the interaction between, or reciprocal influence of individuals who derive meaning or symbols through their interactions with one another (Stryker & Statham, 1985). The self, according to Cooley, can be identified only through one's subjective feelings (Epstein, 1973). Cooley (1902) suggested that an individual's self-idea has three principle elements: (a) his imagination of his appearance to another person, (b) his imagination of the other person's judgment of his appearance, and (c) some corresponding feeling such as pride or humiliation. It can be seen from Cooley's depiction of the third element, that one's self-esteem, or the feeling (i.e., pride or humiliation) one has about oneself is reminiscent of the affective component of self-esteem emphasized by James.

Cooley's affective orientation toward the self expands an evolving definition of self-esteem. With an emphasis on the subjective aspects of an individual's social experience (i.e., one's feelings regarding how they imagine they are viewed by others) (Stryker & Statham, 1985), he begins to address the sources of self-knowledge, or the beliefs that an individual has regarding particular attributes he possesses (Brown, 1993). Aside from an individual's experiences with success and failure in different domains (James, 1950), these sources, which include social interaction and perception, might be critical to self-esteem. First, Cooley's theory is based on the assumption that the self does not exist without others. "Self and society are twin-born; we know one as immediately as we know the other, and the notion of a separate and independent ego is an illusion" (1916, p. 5). For Cooley, the self and others are not mutually exclusive social entities; rather, the self is a product of one's imagination actively constructing knowledge about the self from the

materials that his or her social experience provides. Second, self-esteem is defined by Cooley not only in terms of one's social interactions with others, but also one's own perceptions. This is evident in the first two elements of Cooley's self-idea (i.e., one's imagination of how they appear to others and what others' judgments of this appearance are perceived to be).

There is a burgeoning literature that implicates the roles of social interaction and perception in the human self and subsequently, self-esteem, just as Cooley described (Baumeister, 1998; Baumeister et al., 2003; Bohrnstedt & Felson, 1983; Brown, 1993; Cooley, 1902, 1916; Coopersmith, 1967; Epstein, 1973; Harter, 1990, 1993, 1999a, 1999b; Harter et al., 1996; Hoffman et al., 2000; Kinch, 1963; Kramer, 1991; Lord et al., 1994; Marsh & Shavelson, Mead, 1956; Pekrun, 1990; Rosenberg, 1986; Swann, 1985, 1999). For instance, Bohrnstedt & Felson (1983) observed stronger correlations between perceptions of popularity, academic ability, and athletic ability, and self-esteem in a sample of 6<sup>th</sup>-8<sup>th</sup> grade boys than between their actual popularity, grades, and basketball skills, and self-esteem. Likewise, the researchers observed similar results in their sample of 6<sup>th</sup>-8<sup>th</sup> grade girls, who demonstrated higher correlations between perceived popularity and academic ability, and self-esteem than between their actual popularity and grades, and self-esteem.

From the idea that selfhood cannot be achieved in solitude (Baumeister, 1998) to the notion that individuals' conceptions of themselves emerge from social interaction and in turn, direct individuals' behavior (Kinch, 1963), the link between social interaction and development of the self is particularly salient. For example, Mead (1956), also a proponent of symbolic interactionist theory, explained that the appearance of the self is

an outgrowth of one's social experience exclusively, such that the self only exists as a result of its relationship with another self. "The self...is essentially a social structure, and it arises in social experience" (p. 204). It was not conceivable to Mead therefore, that a self could emerge outside of social experience. Compared to Cooley's more affective orientation toward the self, Mead's cognitive approach (Howard, 1995; Stryker & Statham, 1985) portrays the self as being comprised of the internalized social attitudes of the group to which an individual belongs, termed by Mead as the *generalized other* (Mead, 1956).

Validation for the relationship between social interaction and the self can be seen in the self-esteem literature. Rosenberg (1986), who defines self-esteem as a positive or negative attitude toward the self, such that one feels worth or self-rejection, theorized that an individual's very sense of self derives specifically from the espousal of attitudes that others have regarding the individual. Through his extensive research on self-esteem, social class, and minority status, Rosenberg found that minority group children do not have lower self-esteem than children in the dominant group, as had been previously thought. Instead, what he found is that children see themselves, not in relation to the total society, but in relation to those around them (i.e., school and neighborhood). With these findings, Rosenberg concluded that most influential in the process of self-esteem development are those others whose judgment is respected and opinion is valued. Elaborating on Mead's ideas, Rosenberg suggested that "we are more or less unconsciously seeing ourselves as we think others who are important to us and whose opinion we trust see us" (p. 97).

According to Cooley, “what does not come by heredity comes by communication and intercourse; and the more closely we look the more apparent it is that separateness is an illusion of the eye and community the inner truth” (1916, p. 9). Rosenberg’s (1986) conclusion that we see ourselves as others see us offers support for the idea that there is a strong connection between our social interactions with others and our views of ourselves. Other investigators suggest similar sources of self-knowledge. For example, Swann contends that in order to understand ourselves, “we must scrutinize the relationships that sustain our conceptions of who we are” (1999, p. 39). According to Swann, two basic components of self-esteem are an individual’s feelings of being loved and his feelings of being competent. A chief source of self-knowledge regarding these feelings is the treatment we receive from others, in that we notice how others react to us and translate these reactions into corresponding self-views (1985, 1999).

It has been observed that to at least some degree, self-knowledge (i.e., beliefs about oneself) stems from social interaction. Cooley (1902) emphasized that self-esteem is the product of how an individual perceives his appearance to others and how others judge this appearance. In her empirical investigation of the idea that the self emerges from an individual’s relationships with caregivers and socializing agents (eg., teachers), Harter (1990, 1993, 1999a, 1999b) observed a strong positive correlation (.50-.65) between perceived support from significant others and self-worth in adolescents. In other words, individuals who reported the most support also reported the highest self-esteem (1999a). Harter explained that perceptions of support are actually more predictive of self-esteem than objective indices. These findings are consistent with those of Lord et al. (1994), who found that in a sample of junior high school students, perceived support from parents

regarding the adolescents' need for autonomy and involvement in family decisions was associated with both increases in the participants' self-esteem and positive transitions to junior high school. Declines in self-esteem through the transition to junior high school, on the other hand, were associated with the perception that parents were not attuned to the needs of the adolescents. Bledsoe & Wiggins (1973) reported similar findings for a sample of adolescents in the 9<sup>th</sup> grade, whose ratings of themselves as 'misunderstood' by their parents corresponded to lower ratings of themselves in areas such as physical appearance, physical and academic adequacy, emotions, and interpersonal relations. Additionally, Pekrun (1990) found that while early adolescents' beliefs about their academic abilities were more greatly influenced by their school-related achievements and evaluations, the strongest influence on their self-esteem was whether or not they perceived emotional and instrumental support from their parents.

In addition to perceived support, approval from others is another factor related to social interaction and self-esteem. In 1996, Harter et al. investigated the perceived directionality of the relationship between approval and self-esteem. With a sample of early adolescents, the researchers asked the participants which orientation they subscribe to among the following choices: a) self-worth is based on approval from others, b) self-worth precedes approval, or c) there is no connection between self-worth and approval from others. Over half of the participants responded with an adherence to the idea that self-worth (i.e., self-esteem) is based on approval from others. Not coincidentally, these subjects also reported lower self-esteem, greater fluctuations in self-esteem, greater fluctuations in and preoccupation with peer approval, greater social distractibility, and lower peer support than either of the other two groups.

Based on these findings, Harter (1999a) speculated that one precursor to the notion that approval from others precedes self-esteem rather than the other way around might be that significant others have offered inconsistent feedback, or have fluctuated in their approval and disapproval of an individual. Next, it was conjectured that individuals who believe that self-esteem is contingent upon approval from others might have received or perceived support that is conditional. So, in contrast to support being given to the individual as a person, support or approval is based on the individual meeting standards that are set, not by them, but by others (eg., their parents or peers). Harter's research shows that as conditional support increases, an individual's overall worth (i.e., self-esteem) decreases. According to Harter (1999b), support for children that is conditional, meaning support that specifies behavior contingencies, likely undermines self-esteem. Harter et al. (1996) suggested that approval that validates the self, especially in early and middle childhood, might be a critical precursor of high self-esteem. Similarly, one of the antecedent conditions of high self-esteem that Coopersmith (1967) found in his research was acceptance of a child by parents, such that support and value of the child is ascribed, regardless of ability.

Previous research on self-esteem indicates that it is comprised of an individual's feelings of competence (James, 1950; Harter, 1988). Indeed, research has shown that individuals' perceptions of competence in domains of importance are highly predictive of self-esteem (Harter, 1988). That self-esteem is closely associated with affect is also supported in the literature (Baumeister et al., 2003; Brown, 1993; Campbell, 1990; Cooley, 1902; Coopersmith, 1967; Harter, 1993, 1999b; James, 1950). According to Cooley, self-esteem is the correspondent feeling that an individual has about himself.

This feeling stems from social interaction and how an individual imagines, or perceives, he is viewed and judged by others. Findings presented on perceived support (Harter, 1990, 1993, 1999; Lord et al., 1994; Pekrun, 1990) and the role of approval in self-esteem (Harter et al., 1996) support Cooley's theoretical stance that the sources of individuals' feelings and beliefs about themselves (i.e., their self-knowledge) are generated and impacted by social interactions with others and individuals' perceptions of these experiences. Particularly noteworthy are the findings that perceptions of support were observed to be more predictive of self-esteem than objective indices.

Defining self-esteem in terms of individuals' beliefs or perceptions of competence and their worth as a person seems relatively clear. Based on strong support from the literature, it also seems evident that individuals' beliefs about themselves are the result of their own perception and social interaction with others. Research that purportedly stems from Cooley's theory, however, has arrived at several different conclusions. For example, it was surmised that there is no apparent indication that self-evaluations are influenced by the feedback of others (Shrauger & Schoeneman, 1979). Evidence already provided refutes such a conclusion. Additionally, research on various levels of self-esteem points not only to the urgency of having a better understanding of self-esteem, but also to the idea that there is a complex relationship between self-esteem and the evaluations of others.

### *Levels of self-esteem*

Stanley Coopersmith (1959, 1967) examined self-esteem with several aims, one of which was to delineate different types, or levels, of self-esteem. According to Coopersmith, self-esteem is "...the evaluation which the individual makes and

customarily maintains with regard to himself: it expresses an attitude of approval or disapproval and indicates the extent to which the individual believes himself to be capable, significant, successful, and worthy” (Coopersmith 1967, p. 4). While Coopersmith (1959) conceded that self-esteem is a particularly difficult topic to address empirically, he tried to understand it in terms of the relationship between individuals’ subjective experiences, or their attitudes toward themselves, and behavior ratings of them according to other individuals, such as teachers.

Coopersmith’s research and self-esteem measure have been criticized on several different accounts. First is the view that Coopersmith’s conceptual definition of self-esteem is too general to readily lend itself to a precise operational definition (Harter, 1983). Harter also takes issue with Coopersmith’s unidimensional view of self-esteem, or his belief that self-esteem is more global in nature. According to Coopersmith, children do make distinctions about their competence across different domains, but such distinctions are made within the context of a general appraisal of their worth. “Self-esteem is not something separate from school performance...” (2002, p. 1). On the contrary, Harter advocates the multidimensional approach to self-esteem that was mentioned earlier, and this approach has received considerable validation in Harter’s research (Harter, 1983, 1988, 1990, 1993, 1999b). She argues that children make important evaluative distinctions about their competence and that separating these domain-specific judgments from an individual’s global judgment of self-worth is useful for understanding how particular competencies and an individual’s self-esteem are related (1983, 1990). Finally, methodological flaws described by Wylie (1974), from issues of sample size to problems with Coopersmith’s measures, led to the conclusion that

Coopersmith's Self-Esteem Inventory (SEI) is not the instrument of choice for studying self-concept in children. Notwithstanding Wylie's evaluation, reliability and validity data that support use of the SEI have also been reported (Coopersmith, 2002; Johnson, 1976; Mitchell, 1985). Taking these criticisms into account, it can be seen that Coopersmith's research nonetheless draws further attention to the idea that children's beliefs about themselves are based largely on their interactions with other individuals in their lives (Coopersmith, 2002); it also offers important insight into the specific levels of self-esteem.

Two indispensable features of Coopersmith's research on self-esteem inform the current study. First, Coopersmith examined self-esteem, not just in terms of an individual's subjective attitudes toward himself, but also in terms of others' behavioral evaluations of the individual. Coopersmith hypothesized that psychological health is indicated by a correspondence between the subjective and behavioral perspectives. In other words, subjective experiences for a psychologically healthy individual, that is an individual with High-High self-esteem (i.e., high subjective attitude and high behavioral ratings), are commensurate with how others rate the behavior of this individual. This is important because it addresses self-esteem as a concept that is related to the evaluations given by others and offers direct comparison between an individual's subjective experience and the behavior ratings of a significant other. The second aspect of Coopersmith's research pertinent to this study is his idea that a discrepancy between subjective and behavioral perspectives is indicative of a lack of psychological health (Coopersmith, 1967). As Coopersmith and other investigators have shown, discrepancies of various sorts, from an individual's beliefs about himself to inconsistent feedback from

others and a lack of perceived support and/or approval, have all been associated with lower levels of self-esteem.

In his research, Coopersmith established five different levels of self-esteem (High-High, Low-High, High-Low, Medium-Medium, and Low-Low), the characteristics of which have been corroborated by other findings (1959, 1967). First, he described individuals with High-High self-esteem (i.e., high subjective attitudes and high behavioral ratings). These individuals were observed by Coopersmith to be happier and more socially and academically successful than individuals at other levels. A similar composite of individuals with high self-esteem is evident in current research as well. High self-esteem has been associated with “enhanced initiative and pleasant feelings” (Baumeister et al., 2003, p.1), academic achievement, health, popularity, and personal success (Gecas & Burke, 1995). Individuals with high self-esteem have been observed to be more persistent when confronted with failure and they tend to exhibit more extensive knowledge about themselves, such that they express more certainty, clarity, and consistency (over time) in their self-ratings (i.e., ideas about themselves) (Baumeister, 1998; Campbell, 1990). Moreover, high self-esteem is closely associated with perceptions of competence (Bohrnstedt & Felson, 1983; Harter, 1988) as well as perceived support (Harter, 1990, 1993, 1999; Lord et al., 1994; Pekrun, 1990) and unconditional approval (Harter et al., 1996).

Individuals at other levels of self-esteem are notably less well off. Those in the Low-High and High-Low categories for example, were observed by Coopersmith to exhibit incongruities between their attitudes and behaviors. According to Coopersmith, such inconsistencies are considered to reflect a less integrated and healthy personality.

Specifically, in light of the low subjective attitudes, high achievement needs, and high anxiety measures that contrast the high behavioral ratings and academic success of children with Low-High self-esteem, Coopersmith suggested that these individuals might be working to meet the absolute standards of others (1959, 1967). This idea seems compatible with the notion of conditionality, described earlier by Harter (1999b) as the extent to which an individual feels that support is based on meeting the expectations of others. Also, the finding that individuals in the Low-High category of self-esteem had high behavioral ratings and the highest reported measure of IQ (122) seems to support James' (1950) idea that one's feeling of worth is independent of one's competence.

Another example of disparity between subjective and behavioral evaluations in self-esteem and a chief reason why high self-esteem is now considered to be a heterogeneous category (Baumeister et al., 2003) can be seen in individuals with High-Low self-esteem. Participants in this category, referred to by Coopersmith as defensive, demonstrated positive self-regard, in spite of low academic performance and low behavior ratings given by others (i.e., teachers). Coopersmith suggested that defensive reactions of individuals with this level of self-esteem were associated with uncertain self-esteem. Interestingly, this profile is similar to the unstable high self-esteem described by others in more contemporary research (Baumeister et al., 2000; Baumeister, Smart, and Boden, 1996), where links between aggression and high self-esteem have been observed. Baumeister et al., (1996) explained that when aggressive behavior is associated with high self-esteem, the high self-esteem is likely based on inflated and unstable beliefs about oneself. When others challenge these beliefs, often the individual experiences an ego threat, which sometimes results in aggression or violence (Baumeister et al., 2000). In addition, the

strength of an ego threat is increased by the degree to which an individual is dependent on evaluations from others and the extent to which the individual's beliefs are unstable or uncertain (Baumeister et al., 1996). Akin to Coopersmith's description of individuals with High-Low self-esteem as defensive, Baumeister et al. (1996) proposed that individuals with positive but uncertain self-views might be more prone to eliciting defensive responses to ego threats than individuals with other levels of self-esteem.

Unlike the discrepancies between subjective and behavioral perspectives observed in individuals with Low-High and High-Low self-esteem, individuals with Medium-Medium self-esteem appear to have subjective attitudes toward themselves that correspond to their behavioral ratings by teachers; yet, uncertainty appears at this level of self-esteem as well (Coopersmith, 1967). Coopersmith described individuals with Medium self-esteem as 'average typical' individuals who appear relatively content, and who have moderate capacities and achievements. In addition to these characteristics, Coopersmith also investigated independence training that early adolescents received from their parents (e.g., parents' views regarding whether or not children should be protected from a job that is too difficult for them, have physical and psychological privacy, have goals set for them, and so on). Coopersmith hypothesized that dependence is produced by conditions that provide neither clear nor stable evaluations for children. Under these conditions children would likely be uncertain of their own attitudes and thus require reassurance and appraisal from others. Confirming this hypothesis, what Coopersmith found was that children with Medium self-esteem were the most dependent on others for their self-evaluations and seemed uncertain of their worth. With this he concluded that, at least in terms of their preparation for independence, the attributes of uncertainty and

instability observed in adolescents with Medium self-esteem were likely the result of dependency training, and hence a lack of differentiation, or independence, from their parents.

Correspondence between subjective and behavioral perspectives is characteristic of individuals with Low-Low self-esteem, just as it is of individuals with Medium self-esteem. In contrast to the relative contentment present in Medium self-esteem though, individuals at this fifth level of self-esteem display low self-evaluations, high anxiety and tension, low achievement need, and low achievement motivation, along with low behavioral ratings and a lack of academic and social success (Coopersmith, 1959, 1967). Current research on self-esteem reveals a similar pattern of hazardous correlations with low self-esteem, from occurrences of school and gang violence (Sorenson, 2001) to tendencies toward depression (Harter, 1993, 2000). In addition, the uncertainty and instability of self-knowledge that seems to exist in the previous three levels (Medium, High-Low, and Low-High) is especially prominent at this level (Baumeister, 1998; Baumeister et al., 2000; Campbell, 1990; Campbell & Lavelle, 1993). According to Baumeister (1999), the conviction that individuals with high self-esteem possess regarding themselves is missing in individuals with low self-esteem. For example, Campbell (1990) found that a lack of confidence in self-ratings; less temporal stability in trait ratings over a 2-month interval; less congruence between general beliefs about oneself and beliefs about one's situation-specific behavior; and less internal consistency (measured by self-rated confidence and reaction time in response to pairs of opposite traits) in self-ratings were all associated with lower self-esteem. From these findings,

Campbell concluded that individuals with low self-esteem have less clearly defined ideas about who and what they are.

*The problems with self-esteem: consequences, complexity, and uncertainty*

Sorenson (2001) asserts that among mental health problems, low self-esteem negatively affects millions of people and is the most misunderstood and ignored. The range of negative correlates of low self-esteem, from a lack of academic and social success to uncertainty regarding self-knowledge, substance abuse, and depression impacts children, adults, families, schools, and communities. Not only that, Coopersmith's (1959, 1967) depiction of the various levels of self-esteem as well as other research findings reveal that negative consequences are associated, not just with low, but with every level of self-esteem except for High-High self-esteem, making this an especially important topic to understand more fully. An examination of how self-esteem is defined and of the different levels of self-esteem also demonstrates how complex this construct is.

Self-esteem is generally considered to be a component of the self-concept (Campbell, 1990; Epstein, 1973; Gecas & Burke, 1995; Rosenberg, 1986). It's been defined in terms of a ratio between one's accomplishments or successes and their supposed potentialities or aspirations for success (James, 1950; Harter, 1983). In addition to competence (James, 1950; Harter, 1983; Swann, 1999), self-esteem has also been described in terms of affect or one's feeling regarding oneself, including pride or mortification (Cooley, 1902; James, 1950). Attitudes of approval or disapproval toward oneself (Coopersmith, 1967), feelings of worth or self-rejection (Brown, 1993; California Task Force, 1990; O'Donnell et al., 2007; Rosenberg, 1986), liking for oneself (Brown, 1993; Harter, 1990), and feeling that

one is loved (Brown, 1993; Swann, 1999) are also commonly associated with this construct. According to the definitions given, one might assume that the higher one's level of self-esteem, the better, and to some extent, this is the case, but evidence of discrepant levels of self-esteem (Low-High and High-Low) and other literature in this area suggest that this assumption requires further consideration.

In 1990, the California Task Force to Promote Self-Esteem and Personal and Social Responsibility published its findings and recommendations for action regarding the perils associated with and the importance of raising low self-esteem in children. The Task Force offered a comprehensive report aimed at addressing social problems, such as poverty, crime, child abuse and teenage pregnancy, through building self-esteem, defined in the publication as the appreciation of one's worth and importance and the strength of character to be accountable for oneself and act responsibly toward others. According to the Task Force, "the lack of self-esteem is central to most personal and social ills plaguing our state and nation..." and "self-esteem is the likeliest candidate for a social vaccine" (p. 4).

While the self-esteem movement, of which the California Task Force was an integral part, intended to arm children with high self-esteem, questions arose regarding whether or not there is any research evidence to suggest that efforts to boost self-esteem through school programs or therapeutic interventions actually result in positive benefits to individuals (Baumeister et al., 2003). For example, Harter (1999b) found that the impact of an adolescent's negative perceptions of competence and lack of parental support was not overcome by additional support offered from special adults (eg., teachers, counselors, or volunteers). According to Harter, this finding was an indication that in addition to

providing support, specific interventions aimed at helping an individual improve competence in particular domains might be more productive in enhancing self-worth. This finding also highlights the idea that both perceptions of competence and feelings of self-worth are important aspects of self-esteem, such that aims to raise self-esteem must address both. Similarly, Baumeister et al. (2003) made a clear distinction between the self-esteem that is directly tied to achievement and self-esteem that is associated with the unconditional positive regard given to a child, independent of achievement. These researchers recommended that when it comes to achievement, self-esteem and the praise given by others to boost it should be directly linked to self-improvement and socially desirable behavior.

It has been theorized that an overemphasis on positive outcomes such as high self-esteem might interfere with the goals of building skills toward genuine achievement. Moreover, it has been suggested that efforts to promote high self-esteem might inadvertently lead to the inflated self-esteem (Harter, 1999b) characteristic of the high unstable or High-Low self-esteem described earlier (Baumeister et al., 2003; Coopersmith, 1959, 1967). Genuinely High self-esteem, in contrast, is associated with congruence between positive subjective and positive behavioral perspectives (Coopersmith, 1959, 1967), perceptions of competence (Bohrnstedt & Felson, 1983; Harter, 1988), perceived support (Harter, 1990, 1993, 1999; Lord et al., 1994; Pekrun, 1990), unconditional approval (Harter et al., 1996), and more extensive knowledge about oneself (i.e., ideas about oneself) (Baumeister, 1998; Campbell, 1990). It would appear then, that efforts to enhance self-esteem must specifically address issues related to

perceptions of competence and/or issues specific to one's feelings of self-worth, such as approval and support.

While researchers have yet to determine whether or not self-esteem is a cause or a consequence of success, failure, or any other life experience or circumstance, a review of the literature outlines potentially detrimental consequences for individuals at any level but stable high self-esteem. For this reason alone, continued research on this topic is essential. It also shows that self-esteem is complex, given the intricate relationship between an individual and others and the heterogeneous nature of its discrepant levels that render the 'more is better' philosophy virtually untenable. In other words, there is more to self-esteem than 'high' self-esteem. Finally, a review of the literature on self-esteem reveals that common to all levels of self-esteem except for High-High self-esteem is some degree of uncertainty in an individual's beliefs about his competence and/or his worth.

According to Coopersmith, a discrepancy between subjective and behavioral perspectives is indicative of a lack of psychological health, as can be seen in descriptions of individuals with Low-High and High-Low self-esteem. Specifically, at both the Low-High and High-Low levels of self-esteem, the incongruence between individuals' subjective attitudes toward themselves, whether low or inflated, and the behavioral ratings given about them by their teachers seems to reflect an individual's lack of certainty regarding their perceptions of competence, their feelings of worth, or both. In addition, when it came to independence training, Coopersmith observed that individuals with medium self-esteem were the most dependent on others for their self-evaluations, also representative of a lack of certainty regarding their worth. Further, individuals with

low self-esteem exhibit a lack of conviction, certainty, and consistency in their self-knowledge or beliefs about themselves (Baumeister, 1999; Baumeister et al., 2000; Campbell, 1990; Campbell & Lavelle, 1993). These findings parallel those of Harter et al. (1996), who found that adolescents who adhered to the position that one's self-esteem is based on the approval they receive from others also reported lower self-esteem and greater fluctuations in self-esteem than individuals who either believed that self-esteem precedes approval from others or that there is no connection between self-esteem and approval from others.

A new examination of the origins of self-esteem could give us a better understanding of the relationship between the degree of certainty regarding one's beliefs about oneself and one's level of self-esteem. Cooley's theory in particular, with its emphasis on social interaction and the perception of the individual, might provide clues regarding the implications of an individual's interactions with others and this individual's self-esteem. For example, according to Cooley (1902), the self doesn't exist without others. One's self-esteem is the product of one's imagination or perception of his appearance to others and how others judge this appearance. Given the evidence in the literature on individuals with high self-esteem, it would appear that through their interactions with others, these individuals perceive that they are both competent and worthy. On the other hand, it might be that for individuals with lower or discrepant levels of self-esteem, their social interactions are such that their perceptions of competence and worth are less certain.

#### *Appraisals research*

Research inspired by Cooley's theory has explored the relationships between what are known as actual, reflected, and self-appraisals. Actual appraisals refer to how significant

others (eg., parents, teachers, and/or coaches) view or rate an individual, typically with regard to the individual's behavior, personal attributes (eg., physical appearance), and/or competence in various domains, such as athletic or scholastic competence (Cole et al., 1997; Felson, 1985, 1989, 1993; Felson & Reed, 1986; Harter, 1988; Hergovich et al., 2002; Hoffman et al., 2000). Reflected appraisals, on the other hand, are an individual's perceptions of significant others' beliefs regarding his or her behavior, personal attributes, and/or competence (Bouchev & Harter, 2005). In other words, reflected appraisals pertain to what individuals think others think of their abilities or attributes. Self-appraisals refer to how individuals rate their own abilities or attributes (Bouchev & Harter, 2005; Felson, 1985; Harter, 1988; Hergovich et al., 2002; Hoffman et al., 2000).

The research on appraisals generally purports to be based on Cooley's theory and the ideas of symbolic interactionism, but for a number of investigators (Cole et al., 1997; Cook & Douglas, 1998; Felson, 1985, 1989, 1993; Hergovich et al., 2002; Kinch, 1963; Shrauger & Schoeneman, 1979), this research has also been based on a modification of Cooley's theory, first introduced by Kinch (1963). Kinch's own theory of self-concept was founded on the premise that an individual's conception of himself is rooted in his interaction with others. Kinch hypothesized that the self-concept is based on one's perception of how others respond to him, that the self-concept functions to direct one's behavior, and that an individual's perception of the responses of others toward him reflects the actual responses of others. This third postulate in Kinch's formulation of self-concept is pertinent to the current study for two reasons. First, when examining the development of an individual's ideas about himself, this proposition shifted the focus away from the emphasis that Cooley placed on the role of one's own imagination, or

perception, and onto the actual or supposed responses of others. “Reflected appraisals should not just be figments of the imagination” (Felson, 1985, p. 72). Second, this modification of Cooley’s theory provided a new basis for research on appraisals, in that researchers came to assume that an individual’s perception of how others respond to him *should* reflect the actual responses of others. As the self-esteem literature clearly indicates, however, it is an individual’s perceptions that are closely linked to his self-esteem, as in perceptions of support (Harter, 1990, 1993, 1999a; Lord et al., 1994; Pekrun, 1990). Individuals’ perceptions, in some instances, are even more predictive of self-esteem than objective indices, as in perceptions of competence (Bohrnstedt & Felson, 1983; Harter, 1988).

With the addition of Kinch’s postulate, researchers (Cole et al., 1997; Cook & Douglas, 1998; Felson, 1985, 1989, 1993; Hergovich et al., 2002; Kinch, 1963; Shrauger & Schoeneman, 1979) have assumed that “symbolic interactionism implies that there should be at least some accuracy in persons’ perceptions of how others see them” (Felson, 1985, p. 72). Specifically, in order to validate the symbolic interactionist position, it was advised that investigators must demonstrate relationships between a) the actual appraisals of others and children’s reflected appraisals of others, b) children’s reflected appraisals of others and children’s self-appraisals, and c) the actual appraisals of others and children’s self-appraisals (Shrauger & Schoeneman, 1979). Thus, the empirical focus of researchers who subscribe to the idea that individuals accurately perceive how they are viewed by others has often been on direct connections or correlations between the various forms of appraisal, including the actual appraisals of significant others (i.e., parents and/or teachers) and the reflected and self-appraisals of

children and early adolescents (Cole et al., 1997; Cook & Douglas, 1998; Felson, 1985, 1989, 1993; Felson & Reed, 1986; Hergovich et al., 2002; Shrauger & Schoeneman, 1979). While research based on this assumption of accuracy has yielded results indicating some degree of relationship between these different appraisals, findings have generally been inconsistent, often demonstrating only weak correlations (Shrauger & Schoeneman, 1979).

One common assumption in appraisals research that stems from Kinch's postulate of accuracy has been that significant others' actual appraisals directly affect an individual's reflected appraisals, which in turn affect the individual's self-appraisals (AA > RA > SA). Using this proposed model, researchers have thus explored the effects of actual appraisals on reflected appraisals and reflected appraisals on self-appraisals, in addition to investigating mediating effects that appraisals, particularly reflected appraisals, might have (Felson, 1989; Hergovich et al., 2002). For example, Felson (1989) used longitudinal data for children in the fourth through eighth grades to examine the effects that parents' actual appraisals have on children's self-appraisals, and also to explore the possibility that reflected appraisals mediate these effects. Through interviews, he assessed the participants' self-appraisals, their reflected appraisals of each of their parents, and the actual appraisals of each of their parents in three different domains, including physical attractiveness, academic ability, and athletic ability. Felson's results showed that the actual appraisals of parents had an impact on children's self-appraisals and that children's reflected appraisals of their parents affected their own self-appraisals, but any mediating effects that reflected appraisals may have between actual and self-appraisals were not found.

In a similar study conducted by Hergovich et al. (2002), the relationship between self-appraisals, reflected appraisals, and actual appraisals was examined in a sample of early adolescents, with a mean age of 12 years. The investigators obtained the self-appraisals of participants as well as their reflected appraisals of their mothers, fathers, and teachers, along with the actual appraisals of the participants' mothers, fathers, and teachers in a range of domains, from physical abilities and physical appearance to mathematics. Among the hypotheses examined was again, the postulate that the relationship between the actual appraisals of others and the participants' self-appraisals would be mediated by the participants' reflected appraisals of their parents and teachers. Consistent with Felson's (1989) findings, this particular hypothesis was not supported. Hergovich et al. (2002) did find, however, that children's reflected appraisals had a greater impact on self-appraisals than did the actual appraisals of their mothers, fathers, and teachers.

The findings of Felson (1989) and Hergovich et al. (2002) that actual appraisals do affect self-appraisals have been substantiated by other studies (Cole et al., 1997; Felson & Reed, 1986). In addition, Felson (1989) and Hergovich et al. (2002) found a significantly stronger relationship between reflected and self-appraisals than between actual and self-appraisals, and other investigators have reported modest to strong correlations between reflected and self-appraisals as well (Cook & Douglas, 1998; Felson, 1985; Shrauger & Schoeneman, 1979). It is also clear, however, that the findings of appraisals research based on accuracy and the notion that relationships must exist between actual and reflected, reflected and self-, and actual and self-appraisals, with reflected appraisals mediating actual and self-appraisals, have been less promising. For example, not only has there been considerably less support for the relationship between

actual and self-appraisals than for reflected and self-appraisals (Shrauger & Schoeneman, 1979), but the hypothesis that reflected appraisals mediate actual and self-appraisals has not been supported (Felson, 1989; Hergovich et al., 2002). Also, only modest to partial support has been offered for the hypothesis that a relationship exists between actual and reflected appraisals (Cook & Douglas, 1998; Felson, 1985).

*A gap in appraisals research*

Inconsistent findings and weak correlations between appraisals (eg., actual and reflected) have resulted in several conclusions that appear to leave a gap in this research. First is the conclusion that “children have only vague conceptions of how they are viewed by others” (Felson, 1989, p. 971). Researchers who have been unable to establish that relationships necessarily exist between actual and reflected and/or between actual and self-appraisals have deduced that “young people do not know much about how they are perceived by their parents” (Cook & Douglas, 1998, p. 306). Reflected appraisals, however, are an individual’s perceptions of significant others’ beliefs regarding his or her behavior, personal attributes, and/or competence (Bouchey & Harter, 2005). They do not refer to an individual’s ability to guess how a significant other is going to respond to the statement, “This individual does well at schoolwork” (Harter, 1988), as several investigators have suggested (Felson, 1989; Hergovich et al., 2002). Reflected appraisals are not about children guessing what others think about them; rather, reflected appraisals are about how individuals perceive the array of messages given by others.

The conclusion that children are not accurate regarding how they are viewed by others also raises the issue of discrepancy between one appraisal and another. Appraisals research based on Kinch’s assumption that an individual’s perception of others’

responses reflects the actual responses of others seems to assume that the actual response of others is an accurate assessment of an individual's competence and that this assessment is being communicated and perceived as such. So, if there is a discrepancy observed between two appraisals, actual and reflected for example, it is believed that it is the individual who is mistaken, not the other whose 'actual' response is supposedly the accurate response.

In other appraisals research as well, the discrepancy between the actual appraisals of teachers and peers and the self-appraisals of participants was used as a measure for what were referred to as cognitive errors, or an individual's underestimations of his competencies. Cole, Martin, Peeke, Serocynski, and Hoffman (1998) investigated perceptions of competence and depressive symptoms in children and early adolescents and found that depression scores were predictive of an increase in participants' tendencies to underestimate their competencies. While this is an important finding because it shows a relationship between discrepant appraisals and depression, other findings indicate that regardless of whether or not there is a discrepancy between an individual's reflected or self-appraisals and the actual appraisals of others, there are notable consequences for the individual, in which case accuracy would not even be relevant. For example, similar to the study conducted by Cole et al. (1998), Hoffman et al. (2000) conducted a 2-year, longitudinal study with two cohorts of children and adolescents to investigate perceived competence and depressive symptoms. The investigators compared the actual appraisals of parents, teachers, and peers to participants' negative self-appraisals and found that negative self-views, regardless of whether they are commensurate with or discrepant from others' appraisals, are

comparably related to depression. According to Hoffman et al. (2000), negative self-appraisals appear to predispose children to depressive outcomes regardless of whether their appraisals represent cognitive errors or the internalization of negative evaluations from others.

Appraisals research that focuses on accuracy between actual and reflected or self-appraisals attributes a discrepancy among these appraisals to a cognitive error on the part of the child. In other appraisals research and the self-esteem literature, however, discrepancies between either an individual's subjective experience and the behavioral rating of another person or an individual's self-appraisal and the actual appraisal of another person have been indicative of some disturbance for the child, such as depressive outcomes and/or lower levels of self-esteem (Cole et al., 1998; Coopersmith, 1959, 1967; Hoffman et al., 2000). For Coopersmith (1959, 1967), a discrepancy between subjective and behavioral ratings is indicative of a disturbance in psychological health. According to Coopersmith, individuals with High-Low self-esteem demonstrate positive self-regard, but they also exhibit defensive reactions and score low in both academic performance and behavior ratings given by others (i.e., teachers). Such a discrepancy represents a potential liability for an individual aside from whether or not the individual has misconceived notions about his abilities, competence, success, significance, or worth. Coopersmith did not interpret a discrepancy as an indication that an individual is inaccurate in his perceptions of how he is viewed by others. Instead, Coopersmith suggested that certainty of self-esteem refers to an individual's conviction that their self-appraisal is a reliable estimate of their adequacy and worth (1967). Furthermore, individuals with low, medium, and even high, but unstable self-esteem seem to exhibit less certainty regarding their

beliefs about themselves. Based on the research provided here, it seems possible that positive and certain beliefs about oneself might be related to a concomitant level of consistency among actual, reflected, and self-appraisals.

Along with the idea that children are not very accurate in their perceptions of how they are viewed by others is the conclusion that the reflected appraisals process has failed to show that people's ideas about themselves are a reflection of the appraisals of others (Gecas & Burke, 1995). According to Gecas and Burke (1995), the research has not adequately demonstrated that people's self-concepts are a reflection of the conceptions held by others, including significant others. While this would certainly appear to be the case, given the inconsistent findings of the appraisals research based on accuracy, it also seems possible that people's ideas about themselves might be a reflection of the degree to which actual, reflected, and self-appraisals vary or show consistency.

Finally, it has been surmised that there is no apparent evidence that self-evaluations are influenced by the feedback of others (Shrauger & Schoeneman, 1979). As Baumeister (1999) points out, however, while individuals' self-ratings may not necessarily align with how others rate them, self-ratings do match with how individuals believe others rate them. This is an important point that suggests that actual, reflected, and self-appraisals are not a function of accuracy, but of perception or imagination, as Cooley theorized. According to Cooley (1902), an individual's feelings about himself stem from how he perceives he is viewed and judged by others, not necessarily from his accurate perception of how others report that they view and judge him. The role of an individual's perception in the self-esteem literature has received substantial support (Bohrnstedt & Felson, 1983; Harter, 1988, 1990, 1993, 1999a; Lord et al., 1994; Pekrun, 1990). There is also a strong

body of literature suggesting the decisive influence of others' opinions, expectations, and views on the self-appraisals of individuals (Baumeister, 1998; Darley & Fazio, 1980; Felson, 1985, 1989; Harter et al., 1996; Kramer, 1991; Lord et al., 1994; Markus & Nurius, 1986; Pekrun, 1990; Rosenberg, 1986; Swann, 1985, 1997, 1999). "Every word, facial expression, gesture, or action on the part of the parent gives the child some message about his worth" (Satir, 1972, p. 25). With this, it is the aim of the current study to take a new look at actual, reflected, and self-appraisals and investigate what the relationship is among these appraisals and whether or not this relationship has implications for self-appraisals of competence/adequacy in specific areas (eg., scholastic & athletic competence and physical appearance) and/or for self-esteem in general.

*Closing the gap: the current study*

The current study is an attempt to address the gap that exists in the research on appraisals. Based on the self-esteem literature and on Cooley's theory, this study emphasizes the role of perception, not accuracy, in appraisals. The following research questions will be explored with a sample of early adolescent student-athletes and their parents and coaches:

- 1) Is there a relationship between the degree of variability among actual, reflected, and self-appraisals of adolescents and their parents and coaches regarding Scholastic Competence, Athletic Competence, and/or Physical Appearance and adolescents' Global Self-Worth?
- 2) What is the relationship among the actual, reflected, and self-appraisals of adolescents and their parents regarding Scholastic Competence? Is there a relationship between the degree of variability among these appraisals and

adolescents' self-appraisal of Scholastic Competence? How is the self-appraisal of Scholastic Competence related to Global Self-Worth?

- 3) What is the relationship among the actual, reflected, and self-appraisals of adolescents and their parents and coaches regarding Athletic Competence? Is there a relationship between the degree of variability among these appraisals and adolescents' self-appraisal of Athletic Competence? How is the self-appraisal of Scholastic Competence related to Global Self-Worth?
- 4) What is the relationship among the actual, reflected, and self-appraisals of adolescents and their parents and coaches regarding Physical Appearance? Is there a relationship between the degree of variability among these appraisals and adolescents' self-appraisal of Physical Appearance? How is the self-appraisal of Scholastic Competence related to Global Self-Worth?

### *Conclusion*

Among the countless terms and concepts employed by researchers and theorists to describe various aspects of the human self is a term that is yet to be fully understood. This term is known as self-esteem. Current research on self-esteem suggests that it is comprised of an individual's feelings of competence in various domains of experience (eg., scholastic, athletic, social, etc.) as well as his feelings of worth as a person. Research findings also indicate a close relationship between the degree of certainty regarding an individual's beliefs about himself (i.e., self-knowledge) and his level of self-esteem. This relationship has been demonstrated through various measures of individuals' ratings of themselves (Baumeister, 1999; Baumeister et al., 2000; Campbell, 1990; Campbell & Lavalley, 1993) and also by the degree of congruence between individuals' subjective

attitudes toward themselves and the behavioral ratings they receive from others (Coopersmith 1959, 1967). A substantial body of research suggests that the sources of this self-knowledge are rooted in social interaction and individuals' perceptions of how they are viewed by others.

For C.H. Cooley (1902), an individual's ideas, beliefs, and feelings about himself come from (a) his imagination of his appearance to another person, (b) his imagination of the other person's judgment of his appearance, and (c) some corresponding feeling such as pride or humiliation. Research stimulated by Cooley's theory has explored the relationships between what are known as actual, reflected, and self-appraisals. Actual appraisals refer to how significant others view or rate an individual, typically with regard to the individual's behavior, personal attributes (eg., physical appearance), and/or competence in various domains, such as athletic or academic competence (Cole et al., 1997; Felson, 1985, 1989, 1993; Felson & Reed, 1986; Harter, 1988; Hergovich et al., 2002; Hoffman et al., 2000). Reflected appraisals are an individual's perceptions of significant others' beliefs regarding his or her behavior, personal attributes, and/or competence (Bouchey & Harter, 2005). Self-appraisals refer to how individuals rate their own abilities or attributes (Bouchey & Harter, 2005; Felson, 1985; Harter, 1988; Hergovich et al., 2002; Hoffman et al., 2000). Unfortunately, research that has purportedly been based on Cooley's theory has emphasized the role of accuracy regarding an individual's perception of the responses of others toward the individual. In this research, it has been assumed that an individual's perception of the response of others toward the individual does and should reflect the actual responses of others (Cole

et al., 1997; Cook & Douglas, 1998; Felson, 1985; 1989; 1993; Hergovich et al., 2002; Kinch, 1963; Shrauger & Schoeneman, 1979).

Inconsistent findings by researchers who emphasize accuracy have led to the conclusion that “children have only vague conceptions of how they are viewed by others” (Felson, 1989, p. 971). Other literature on appraisals and self-esteem, however, provides evidence for the idea that an individual’s perception, not his level of accuracy, is of primary importance in understanding both appraisals and self-esteem. With this, the current study emphasizes the role of perception, not accuracy, in advancing our understanding of whatever relationship might exist between appraisals and self-esteem. In addition, this study does not adhere to the assumption that the accuracy of one’s perceptions regarding how others view him is necessary to validate symbolic interactionist theory. Instead, this study purports that reflected and self-appraisals are the product of an individual’s perception. These appraisals may or may not ‘accurately’ reflect, or necessarily correlate with the actual appraisals of others.

The literature suggests that individuals’ ideas about themselves stem from their perceptions of their social interactions with others. Research findings have also shown that there is a relationship between the certainty of one’s self-knowledge and self-esteem. From these findings, it stands to reason that there might be a relationship between the degree to which actual, reflected, and self-appraisals vary and an adolescent’s self-appraisal on a particular dimension or even her self-esteem. If this is the case, researchers, educators, parents, and individuals could gain a deeper understanding of the intricate relationship between the human self and others, with whom this self interacts and from whom this self develops. It’s been estimated that low self-esteem negatively

affects millions of people (Sorenson, 2001) and is associated with a range of negative correlates that impact children, adults, families, schools, and communities. This range of consequences varies from a lack of academic and social success to uncertainty regarding self-knowledge, substance abuse, and depression. Additionally, research findings reveal that negative consequences are associated, not just with low, but with every level of self-esteem except for High-High self-esteem, making this an especially important topic to more fully comprehend.

## CHAPTER III

### Method

#### *Research Purpose & Questions*

According to C.H. Cooley (1902), an individual's feelings about himself stem from how he perceives he is viewed and judged by others. In 1963, however, Kinch's formalization of the interactionist view of the self, of which Cooley's ideas are a fundamental aspect, resulted in the postulate that an "individual's perception of the responses of others toward him reflects the actual responses of others toward him" (p. 482). Ensuing research on actual, reflected, and self-appraisals that stems from Kinch's view has assumed that an individual's perception of the responses of others toward him reflects or should reflect the actual responses of others (Cole et al., 1997; Cook & Douglas, 1998; Felson, 1985; 1989; 1993; Hergovich et al., 2002; Kinch, 1963; Shrauger & Schoeneman, 1979). Based on this proposition regarding the role of accuracy, investigators have attempted to demonstrate that linear relationships exist between the appraisals. For example, it has been asserted that actual appraisals directly affect reflected appraisals, which in turn affect self-appraisals. Inconsistent findings, particularly between the actual appraisals of others and the reflected and/or self-appraisals of children and adolescents have led researchers to question whether or not self-appraisals are influenced by the feedback of others (Shrauger & Schoeneman, 1979). Moreover, it has been concluded that children's perceptions of others' appraisals of them are inaccurate (Felson, 1985).

C.H. Cooley (1902) theorized, however, that the origins of one's self-esteem are one's own perceptions regarding how they appear to others and what others' judgments of this

appearance happen to be. Research pertaining to self-knowledge (i.e., beliefs about oneself) and subsequently, self-esteem and self-appraisals of competence in various domains, has demonstrated the instrumental role of both perception and social interaction in this process. For example, discrepancies between appraisals and uncertain self-knowledge have been linked to lower levels of self-esteem (Coopersmith 1959, 1967; Campbell & Lavalley, 1993). The purpose of this exploratory study is to take a new look at appraisals, not in terms of accuracy, but in terms of the relationships that exist among actual, reflected, and self-appraisals, specifically consistency (eg., consistently high or consistently low) and variability. This study will examine the implications that these relationships could have for both adolescents' self-appraisals in the domains of scholastic competence, athletic competence, and physical appearance, and adolescents' global self-worth (i.e., self-esteem).

Research Question 1: Is there a relationship between the degree of variability among actual, reflected, and self-appraisals of adolescents and their parents and coaches regarding Scholastic Competence, Athletic Competence, and/or Physical Appearance and adolescents' Global Self-Worth?

Research Question 2: What is the relationship among the actual, reflected, and self-appraisals of adolescents and their parents regarding Scholastic Competence? Is there a relationship between the degree of variability among these appraisals and adolescents' self-appraisal of Scholastic Competence? How is the self-appraisal of Scholastic Competence related to Global Self-Worth?

Research Question 3: What is the relationship among the actual, reflected, and self-appraisals of adolescents and their parents and coaches regarding Athletic Competence?

Is there a relationship between the degree of variability among these appraisals and adolescents' self-appraisal of Athletic Competence? How is the self-appraisal of Scholastic Competence related to Global Self-Worth?

Research Question 4: What is the relationship among the actual, reflected, and self-appraisals of adolescents and their parents and coaches regarding Physical Appearance?

Is there a relationship between the degree of variability among these appraisals and adolescents' self-appraisal of Physical Appearance? How is the self-appraisal of Scholastic Competence related to Global Self-Worth?

### *Participants*

Participants were 248 volunteers (62 swimmers and their mothers, fathers, and coaches) recruited from USA Swimming competitive age group programs (USA Swimming is the National Governing Body for the sport of swimming in the United States) throughout the United States. Representing swim teams from 23 states, swimmer participants were 12-15-year-old ( $M = 13.2$ ) male and female early adolescents. A variety of criteria have been used to determine the onset of adolescence, from pubertal changes to maturation of an individual's sexual feelings. According to Ellis and Davis (1982), however, adolescence appears to be more age-related than age-specific. By this, it is meant that the particular changes that an individual is undergoing tend to be more significant than the age itself. This might account for the slight variation that exists in the literature regarding the lower end of the spectrum for adolescence or early adolescence, which ranges from age 11 (Bouchey & Harter, 2005) to age 13 (Ellis & Davis, 1982). For Harter (1999b), early adolescence begins around age 12, just after middle to late childhood (ages 8-11), and is marked by specific physical, cognitive, and social changes

that signify this developmental transition. Age 15 was selected at the high end of this age range because age 16 seems to be more representative of middle adolescence (Harter, 1999b) and its concomitant changes, like the reorganization of the self-concept reported by Ellis & Davis (1982). The sample was composed of 58% females (n = 36) and 41% males (n = 26), similar to that of the figures reported for athlete members of USA Swimming in 2008 (Females = 58.2%; Males = 41.8%) (USA Swimming, n.d.). Participation for swimmers, coaches, and parents in this study was completely voluntary and no incentives to participate were given. All participants were treated in accordance with both the ethical principles and requirements for applying these principles established by the Collaborative IRB Training Initiative (CITI).

While no family demographics are available for the participants, two important factors, both unique to this study, indicate the likelihood that the sample consisted of predominantly Caucasian individuals. First, the sample consists solely of athlete members of USA Swimming. In 2008, 44% of the 257,180 athlete members of USA Swimming were Caucasian, with less than 10% of athletes representing non-white categories, such as African American, Hispanic, or Asian, and 43% of athletes declining to respond to elective questions pertaining to ethnic background. Second, a central requisite for participation in this study was use of a computer and access to the internet. Among the variables cited by Best & Krueger (2004) as distinguishing individuals who have internet connections from those who do not is ethnicity; individuals with internet connection tend to be White. Further, the probability that the participants were primarily Caucasian has two notable applications in this study. Firstly, in addition to pivotal theoretical and practical considerations previously mentioned, considering that the norm samples for

Harter's Self-Perception Profile for Adolescents were comprised of 90% Caucasian participants (1988) and nearly half or more athlete members of USA Swimming are Caucasian suggests that this measure is especially appropriate for the present study. In the second place, the probability that the present sample is predominantly Caucasian indicates the degree to which the current results can be generalized beyond the swimming community or any other community consisting of predominantly Caucasian individuals.

### *Measures*

In the present study, self-report questionnaires, formatted for the World Wide Web and administered online, were used to assess the self-appraisals, self-esteem, and reflected appraisals of adolescents, as well as the actual appraisals of their parents and coaches.

*Self-Appraisals and Self-Esteem, Adolescents.* The Self-Perception Profile for Adolescents was used in this study to assess both self-appraisals and self-esteem of adolescent participants. The Self-Perception Profile for Adolescents is a widely used measure (Wichstrom, 1995), specifically designed to tap adolescents' domain-specific judgments of their competence (i.e., self-appraisals) as well as their global perception of their worth (i.e., self-esteem) (Harter, 1988). Harter suggests that offering separate measures of perceived competence in various domains in addition to an independent measure of one's global self-esteem provides a more differentiated profile of an individual than instruments that yield only a single score of self-esteem (1988). This multidimensional approach has received further support in the literature (Merrell, 1999; Trent, Russell, & Cooney, 1994). According to Thomson and Zand (2002), for example, current researchers view this multidimensional approach as more adequate than the

unidimensional view of self that has been endorsed by other researchers in this area. The Self-Perception Profile for Adolescents can be administered to either groups or individuals. In the current study, this questionnaire was formatted for the web and administered to individuals online.

Considered by Harter (1988) to be an upward extension of her original Self-Perception Profile for Children, which measures Scholastic Competence, Athletic Competence, Physical Appearance, Social Acceptance, Behavioral Conduct, and Global Self-Worth (Harter, 1985), the Self-Perception Profile for Adolescents has three additional domains (Job Competence, Close Friendship, and Romantic Appeal) aimed at reflecting the expanding concerns of adolescents. With a total of eight separate domains and a Global Self-Worth subscale, this questionnaire, entitled What I am Like consists of a total of 45 items, five for each subscale. The present study utilized the Scholastic Competence, Athletic Competence, Physical Appearance, and Global Self-Worth subscales only, thus reducing the total number of questionnaire items to 20 (five items per domain).

Each item on the questionnaire was a statement that presented two groups of teenagers who differ on a certain characteristic relevant to a particular subscale. For example, on the Scholastic Competence subscale, one item distinguished between teenagers who do very well at classwork and teenagers who don't do very well at classwork. Respondents were first asked to decide which teenager they are more like. Then respondents were asked to indicate whether this was Really True or Sort of True for them. According to Harter (1988), this structured alternative format that offers four possible responses (two for the positively worded description and two for the negatively worded description) to adolescents is more likely to yield accurate self-appraisals than the traditional two-choice

formats used in other measures, such as Coopersmith's Self-Esteem Inventory (2002). Formats that offer only two alternatives, for example 'Like Me' and 'Unlike Me' (Coopersmith, 2002), are believed to pull for socially desirable responses (Harter, 1988). In addition, within each subscale several items present the positively worded description first, while the remaining items present the negatively worded description first, and then items are recoded so that higher numbers consistently represent positive self-appraisals (Thomson & Zand, 2002). Individual items were scored with a number 1, 2, 3, or 4, such that a score of 1 indicated the least adequate self-appraisal and a score of 4 indicated the most adequate self-appraisal, or self-judgment.

The Self-Perception Profile for Adolescents was normed on four samples of adolescents, predominantly Caucasian, from grades 8-11. According to Merrell (1999), the lack of a nationwide sample appears to be a limitation of the instrument. Support for the construct validity of the Self-Perception Profile for Adolescents that was reported by Wichstrom (1995) seems to corroborate the construct validity also found in Harter's original measure, the Self-Perception Profile for Children (Muris, 2003). Internal consistency reliabilities for the subscales range from .74-.92. Factor analysis of the eight specific domains reveals that each domain is distinct, with substantial factor loadings, and minimal cross loadings of only .08 to .12. In particular, both the Scholastic and Athletic Competence factors have been substantially replicated elsewhere (Worrell, 1997). The Global Self-Worth subscale is not included in Harter's factor analysis since it is believed that this subscale is qualitatively different than the eight domain-specific subscales.

Specific analysis of Global Self-Worth has been conducted with correlations between the various domains and self-esteem. Particularly noteworthy is the correlation between

physical appearance and self-esteem. For the four norm samples, correlations between Physical Appearance and Global Self-Worth range from .66 to .73, while no correlations between other subscales and self-esteem exceed .59 (Harter, 1988). For instance, the correlation between Scholastic Competence and Global Self-Worth ranges from .36 to .54, while Athletic Competence correlates with Global Self-Worth the least of all the domains (.30-.38).

Gender differences on the Self-Perception Profile for Adolescents are also notable. Among the norm samples, females scored lower than males by an average of .2 on Global Self-Worth, .4 on Physical Appearance, and .5 on Athletic Competence, while males and females scored about the same on Scholastic Competence (Female  $M = 2.87$ ; Male  $M = 2.86$ ) (Harter, 1988). Other researchers have observed similar gender differences, with females again scoring lower than males on Global Self-Worth (Hagborg, 1993; Trent et al, 1994), Physical Appearance (Trent et al., 1994), and Athletic Competence (Hagborg, 1993; Todd & Kent, 2003; Trent et al., 1994). Females, however, are not uniformly observed to score lower than males on the Self-Perception Profile for Adolescents. For example, Todd & Kent (2003) found that females scored higher than males on Global Self-Worth, but this difference was not significant.

Germane to the current study are findings regarding Athletic Competence. In addition to the finding that females scored lower than males in Athletic Competence, Todd & Kent (2003) found that in their sample of male athletes, mean Athletic Competence scores were notably higher than the mean Athletic Competence scores for males reported by Hagborg (1993), who examined a general student sample (Athlete Athletic Competence Score,  $M = 3.25$ ; General Student Athletic Competence Score,  $M = 2.84$ ).

According to Todd and Kent (2003), while these results are from two different studies, this disparity suggests that athletes demonstrate higher Athletic Competence than the general population. Given that the sample for the current study is a student-athlete sample, it's plausible that Athletic Competence scores might also be higher, particularly for males, which might have some impact on how these particular results might generalize to the non-athlete population.

Permission to use and administer the Scholastic Competence, Athletic Competence, Physical Appearance, and Global Self-Worth subscales (each in its entirety) of the Self-Perception Profile for Adolescents (Harter, 1988), formatted for individual administration online, was granted by Susan Harter, Ph.D., of the University of Denver.

*Reflected Appraisals of Parents and Coaches, Adolescents.* Adolescents' assessments of significant others' (mother, father, coach) beliefs about their Scholastic Competence, Athletic Competence, and Physical Appearance were measured with a 15-item scale (five items per domain) adapted from the What I am Like subscale of the Self-Perception Profile for Adolescents (Harter, 1988) and the What Others Think About Me scale used by Bouchev & Harter (2005). Bouchev and Harter (2005) used the What Others Think About Me scale to assess adolescents' beliefs regarding significant others' (mother, father, classmates, teacher) beliefs about the adolescents' scholastic competence in two specific areas, including Math/Science and English/Social Studies. Reliabilities (Cronbach's alpha) were acceptable, ranging from .69 to .75.

In the same format used by Bouchev and Harter (2005), the What Others Think About Me scale in the present study addressed Scholastic Competence (not specific to any one subject), Athletic Competence, and Physical Appearance and was formatted for the web

and administered to individuals online. Adolescents gave their reflected appraisals of each parent for all three domains and gave reflected appraisals of their coaches for Athletic Competence and Physical Appearance only. Reflected appraisals of others regarding one's Scholastic Competence were deemed more appropriate for those others more likely to be familiar with the adolescent in the academic arena, such as a parent or teacher.

Using the same four-point rating scale as the Self-Perception Profile for Adolescents, each subscale item yielded a reflected appraisal regarding the same topic addressed on the respective subscale item of the Self-Perception Profile for Adolescents. For example, to the statement “(My Mother) believes I am able to learn new athletic activities”, the adolescent responded with one of the following choices: Very True, Sort of True, Not Very True, or Not at All True. The subscale item on the Self-Perception Profile for Adolescents that corresponds to this reflected appraisal refers to those teenagers who “think they could do well at just about any new athletic activity” and those who “are afraid they might not do well at a new athletic activity” (Harter, 1988).

Similar to the Self-Perception Profile for Adolescents, some items on the What Others Think About Me scale present a positively worded description, while the remaining items present a negatively worded description, and items are thus recoded so that higher numbers consistently represent positive reflected appraisals. Individual items were again scored with a number 1, 2, 3, or 4, such that a score of 1 indicated the least adequate reflected appraisal and a score of 4 indicated the most adequate reflected-appraisal. Permission to adapt and administer the What Others Think About Me (Bouchey &

Harter, 2005) scale in this study was granted by Heather Bouchey, Ph.D., of the University of Vermont.

Demographic information requested of the adolescents included their age and gender. Objective indices, including current GPA and personal best times in their three best events (eg., 50 yard Freestyle) were also compiled for use in future analyses of this data set. The total estimated time for adolescents to complete both questionnaires (What I am Like and What Others Think About Me) and provide demographic information was approximately 10-15 minutes.

*Actual Appraisals, Parents.* Actual appraisals of parents (mother and father) regarding their adolescent participant's scholastic and athletic competence and physical appearance were assessed with the Parent's Rating Scale of the Child's Actual Behavior. Adapted from the Teacher's Rating Scale of the Student's Actual Behavior subscale of the Self-Perception Profile for Adolescents, which asks a teacher to rate their student on each of the eight specific domains (eg., Scholastic Competence, Close Friendship, etc.) (Harter, 1988), this 6-item scale addressed Scholastic Competence, Athletic Competence, and Physical Appearance only, with two items per domain. According to Harter (1988), previous experience with teachers' ratings suggests that highly reliable judgments can be obtained with only two items per subscale. In the current study, this questionnaire was formatted for the web, administered to parents individually online, and was estimated to take less than 5 minutes to complete.

The parents' rating scale parallels the Self-Perception Profile for Adolescents, both in its presentation of two different individuals and choice format and also in terms of the themes addressed for each domain. For example, pertaining to Physical Appearance,

parents were asked to decide whether their child was more like an individual who “is good-looking” or an individual who “is not good-looking”, and then choose whether this was Really True or Sort of True for them. On the Self-Perception Profile for Adolescents, this same item was presented to adolescents who decided which teenagers they were more like between teenagers who “really like their looks” and teenagers who “wish they looked different”.

As with the Self-Perception Profile for Adolescents and the What Others Think About Me scales, some items on the Parent’s Rating scale are worded positively, while others are worded negatively, and items are recoded so that higher numbers consistently represent positive actual appraisals. Individual items on this scale were also scored with a number 1, 2, 3, or 4, such that a score of 1 indicated the least adequate actual appraisal and a score of 4 indicated the most adequate actual appraisal.

Permission to adapt the Teacher’s Rating Scale of the Child’s Behavior subscale of the Self-Perception Profile for Adolescents (Harter, 1988) for parents and administer the questionnaire, formatted for individual administration online, was granted by Susan Harter, Ph.D., of the University of Denver.

*Actual Appraisals, Coaches.* The actual appraisals of coaches regarding their swimmers’ athletic competence and physical appearance were assessed with the Coach’s Rating Scale of the Swimmer’s Actual Behavior. Also adapted from the Teacher’s Rating Scale of the Student’s Actual Behavior subscale of the Self-Perception Profile for Adolescents (Harter, 1988), this 4-item scale addresses Athletic Competence and Physical Appearance only, with the same two items per domain that are on the Parent’s Rating scale. In the current study, this questionnaire was formatted for the web,

administered to coaches online, and was estimated to take less than 5 minutes to complete.

Permission to adapt the Teacher's Rating Scale of the Child's Behavior subscale of the Self-Perception Profile for Adolescents (Harter, 1988) for coaches and administer the questionnaire, formatted for individual administration online, was granted by Susan Harter, Ph.D., of the University of Denver.

### *Procedures*

Participants for this study were recruited in several ways, with a single aim of obtaining a random and representative sample of 12-15-year-old early adolescent members of USA Swimming. In 2008, this age group accounted for 38.9% of the total membership of USA Swimming. The first and least fruitful means of recruiting volunteers entailed sending a Recruitment Letter (see Appendix E), via electronic mail to the Chairperson and/or Secretary of every region, also known as a Local Swim Committee (LSC), of which there are 59 in USA Swimming. The letter provided a brief introduction to the researcher and a description of the project. In addition, a request was made to have the Parent/Swimmer Invitation to Participate Letter (see Appendix F) attached in each email, posted to the LSC's website. Email addresses for LSC contacts were obtained individually from either USA Swimming's public listing of contact information for each LSC or the LSC's website itself. No estimate is available of how many emails were actually received in LSC Chairperson/Secretary Inboxes versus how many emails were received in their Spam or Junk folders and probably never seen.

A second and more productive means of recruiting volunteers involved sending the Recruitment Letter (see Appendix E), also via electronic mail, to a random sample of

1,500 coaches of USA Swimming teams in the United States. In addition, coaches were asked to post to their team's website and/or forward to their team's membership, the Parent/Swimmer Invitation to Participate Letter (see Appendix F) that was attached in each email. Email addresses for coaches were obtained individually from either USA Swimming's public listing of contact information for each swim team by LSC, or the team's website itself. No estimate is available of how many emails were actually received in coaches' Inboxes versus how many emails were received in coaches' Spam or Junk folders and likely not seen. Less than 5% of the emails sent to coaches were returned to the researcher, labeled 'Undeliverable', suggesting that USA Swimming's listing of coach contact information is both accurate and current.

A third method for recruiting volunteers for the study involved posting the Parent/Swimmer Invitation to Participate Letter, addressing parents and 12-15-year-old swimmers of all abilities, on the websites of USA Swimming (<http://www.usaswimming.org/>) and Swimming World Magazine (<http://www.swimmingworldmagazine.com/>). In terms of response rate, this method proved to be comparable to sending recruiting letters to coaches. Permission to post the Parent/Swimmer Invitation to Participate Letter was granted by each organization.

The Parent/Swimmer Invitation to Participate Letter was written to currently registered swimmers (12-15-year-olds of all abilities) and parents. The letter included a brief introduction to the researcher, the purpose of the study, the fact that participation was completely voluntary and that it could be withdrawn at any time without penalty, directions for contacting the researcher to volunteer, and a description of the procedures for participation. Specifically, the description of procedures for participation included an

explanation of precautions taken by the researcher to secure the privacy and confidentiality of each participant. For example, all information provided was transmitted directly to the researcher using a Secure Socket Layer (SSL). An SSL allowed secure connections across the internet by coding, or encrypting the information until it arrived in the researcher's private email account, for which only she had the password. An additional measure taken to assure the privacy of each participant pertained to how each questionnaire was formatted (with Hypertext Preprocessor, or PHP scripting language) for use online. No survey responses were cached, or remembered by the computer on which the survey was completed and submitted. What this means is that once a survey was submitted, if any individual, including the participant, tried to return to the survey using the back button or the computer's history, the computer recalled the page from the server only, and reloaded an empty page, thus not revealing any responses given by a participant. Finally, in the Parent/Swimmer Invitation to Participate Letter, participants were asked not to discuss their responses with their fellow participants (adolescents, parents, and coaches) until after all questionnaires had been submitted, and even then, only if each person felt comfortable sharing their responses. Potential participants were told that neither direct benefit nor harm or personal discomfort were expected to result from their participation in this study. Contact information for the Office of Human Research Protection was provided in the letter as well.

Swimmers and parents interested in participating in the study were asked to email the researcher, at which time the participant who initiated contact (i.e., a parent or a swimmer) was sent, via electronic mail, a reply from the researcher that included an expression of appreciation for volunteering, as well as the code numbers and links to the

questionnaires for each participant in the family (i.e., mother, father, and swimmer). Code numbers were all 5-digit numbers, the first three numbers representing the participant triad of swimmer, parents, and coach, with the last two numbers representing the individual participant within the triad (eg., Mother, 10; Father, 20, Swimmer, 31 for Female or 32 for Male; and Coach, 40). Replies also included a request for the name of the swimmer's coach and swim team so that the coach could be invited to participate in the study as well. The researcher received and responded to, via electronic mail, over 500 inquiries about the study, with 239 of these individuals (either a parent or a swimmer) volunteering their families to participate. A total of 324 questionnaires were submitted, of which 62 complete data sets, comprised of questionnaires from a swimmer, his or her parents, and his or her coach, were derived.

In order to obtain their respective questionnaires, participants were given the option of either clicking on the link that was provided in their email or copying and pasting the link directly into their web browser. Upon choosing either option, parents for example, were brought to the Parent's Rating Scale of the Child's Actual Behavior, which contained a space for their code number, instructions for completing the questionnaire, and a note of gratitude for participating in the study. For each of the 6 items on the questionnaire, parents were asked first to decide whether they felt their child was more like the teenagers described on the left or the right side of each statement (eg., "this individual is good at sports" or "this individual is not that good at sports"). Then, by clicking the appropriate radio button (two on each side), they were to indicate whether the statement they had chosen was Really True or Sort of True for them. It is believed that because radio buttons allow only one response to be given for each item, the use of radio buttons

in this study helped prevent a participant from incorrectly giving more than one response to an item, which has previously been reported to be problematic with the paper and pencil version of this questionnaire (Wichstrom, 1995). After all items were answered, parents were instructed to submit their surveys. It is estimated that each parent's rating scale took less than 5 minutes to complete and submit.

When adolescent participants arrived at their link, they too were instructed to enter the code number given to them by the researcher and proceed to provide demographic information, including their age, gender, current GPA, and personal best times in their three best events (eg., 50 yard Freestyle). Next, the questionnaire offered a brief set of instructions for completing the What I am Like scale and a note of gratitude for participating in the study. For each of the 20 items on the questionnaire, the adolescent clicked the response that best described what they were like. Finally, a similarly brief set of instructions for completing the What Others Think About Me scale was supplied. For this scale, participants chose the reflected appraisal that best described how they believed each significant other (mother, father, coach) viewed the adolescents' competence or adequacy regarding scholastic competence and/or athletic competence, and physical appearance. Again, radio buttons were utilized for each item on each scale, as adolescent participants chose one of four options (Very True, Sort of True, Not Very True, or Very True). It is estimated that questionnaires took approximately 10-15 minutes for adolescents to complete and submit.

After questionnaires for a swimmer and his or her parents were received, the adolescent's coach was sent the Coach Invitation to Participate Letter (see Appendix G), via electronic mail. The coaches' letter was similar to the Parent/Swimmer Invitation to

Participate Letter, in that it included a brief introduction to the researcher, the purpose of the study, the fact that participation was completely voluntary and that it could be withdrawn at any time without penalty, and a description of the procedures for participation. The coaches' letter was different in that it identified the particular swimmer who had participated in the study so that the coach knew which swimmer he or she would be appraising for. Once a coach accepted the invitation to participate in the study, the researcher sent a reply that included an expression of appreciation for participating, as well as the coach's code number and link to the questionnaire. Upon either clicking on the link that was provided in the reply or copying and pasting the link directly into the web browser, the participant coach was directed to the Coach's Rating Scale of the Swimmer's Actual Behavior survey. Just as swimmers and parents had been instructed to do so previously, coaches were asked to enter their code number in the space provided, were given instructions for completing the questionnaire, and were offered a note of gratitude for participating in the study. For each of the 4 items on the questionnaire, coaches were asked first to decide whether they felt their swimmer is more like the teenagers described on the left or the right side of each statement (eg., "this individual is good at sports" or "this individual is not that good at sports"). Then, by clicking the appropriate radio button (two on each side), coaches indicated whether the statement they had chosen was Really True or Sort of True for them. After all items answered, coaches were instructed to submit their surveys. It is estimated that the coach's rating scale took less than 5 minutes to complete and submit.

### *Data Analysis*

The purpose of the current exploratory study is to address a disparity that exists in the current literature on both self-esteem and appraisals (actual, reflected, and self-) of adolescents. Cooley (1902) emphasized the roles of an individual's perceptions and social interaction in the development of one's self-idea (i.e., self-esteem or self-worth). Subsequent research has emphasized, however, that an individual's perception of the responses of others toward him reflects the actual responses of others (Kinch, 1963). Unfortunately, this emphasis on accuracy has resulted in studies that seek to establish a linear relationship between actual appraisals, reflected appraisals, and self-appraisals (i.e.,  $AA > RA > SA$ ). A lack of consistent findings has predictably but mistakenly led researchers to question whether or not self-appraisals are even influenced by the feedback of others (Shrauger & Schoeneman, 1979). It's been suggested that research on the appraisal process has failed to show that people's ideas regarding themselves are a reflection of the appraisals of others (Gecas & Burke, 1995). According to Felson (1989), "children have only vague conceptions of how they are viewed by others" (p. 971).

Research on self-esteem shows quite clearly, however, that such conclusions are simply unsustainable. For example, Rosenberg (1986) theorized that an individual's very sense of self derives specifically from the espousal of attitudes that others have regarding the individual. Specifically, high self-esteem is associated with perceived support from others and a belief that one's worth is not contingent upon meeting the standards of others (Harter, 1999b). In contrast, lower levels of self-esteem have been associated with diminished confidence in the self (Baumeister, Bushman, & Campbell, 2000); preoccupation with approval from others and social distractibility (Harter, Stocker, & Robinson, 1996); susceptibility to persuasion or influence by others (Baumeister, 1998);

uncertainty and instability regarding self-knowledge (Campbell, 1990; Campbell & Lavalley, 1993); and discrepancies between subjective attitudes toward oneself and the behavioral ratings of an individual by another (Coopersmith, 1959, 1967). It would appear that an individual's level of self-esteem refers to his beliefs about himself, not necessarily the actual or supposed evaluations that are given by others. In addition to the link between self-esteem and an individual's beliefs about himself is also the relationship between self-esteem and the degree of certainty of these beliefs (Campbell & Lavalley, 1993). Therefore, perhaps a more informative means of advancing our understanding of appraisals and self-esteem is in terms of variability, not in terms of accuracy.

The current study does not subscribe to the idea that an individual's perception of the responses of others toward him reflects the actual responses of others, necessarily. An individual's perception of the responses of others toward him might reflect the actual responses of others, in which case there would be a strong correlation, and they might not, in which case there would be a weak correlation. Rather than being indicative of some cognitive error on the part of the child, a weak correlation could be representative of uncertainty or discrepancy in terms of appraisals and/or self-knowledge, and thus self-esteem. It is therefore not assumed that children's conceptions of how they are viewed by others are somehow vague or derived through error, particularly in light of the evidence pointing to the key roles of both perception and social interaction in self-esteem. Instead, the current study will investigate how much variability exists among actual, reflected, and self-appraisals and whether or not this variability is related to an adolescent's self-appraisal in a particular domain or to their self-esteem. It is hypothesized that the degree of variability among appraisals might be indicative of an individual's degree of certainty

regarding their competence or adequacy in a particular domain or in their overall evaluation of their worth or value as a person (i.e., self-esteem) (Harter, 1999b).

The process of exploring variability among appraisals and self-esteem will begin with the actual appraisals of parents and coaches, and the reflected and self-appraisals and self-esteem (Global Self-Worth) of adolescents, all of which will be assessed on measures that utilize 4-point Likert-type scales. The measures yield a series of scores for each adolescent participant. For example, in the domain of Scholastic Competence, there will be 19 scores (5 Self-Appraisals, 5 Reflected Appraisals of Mother, 5 Reflected Appraisals of Father, 2 Actual Appraisals from Mother, and 2 Actual Appraisals from Father), while in each of the domains of Athletic Competence and Physical Appearance there will be 26 scores (5 Self-Appraisals, 5 Reflected Appraisals of Mother, 5 Reflected Appraisals of Father, 5 Reflected Appraisals of Coach, 2 Actual Appraisals from Mother, 2 Actual Appraisals from Father, and 2 Actual Appraisals from Coach). In addition, there will also be 5 scores for questions pertaining to Global Self-Worth. So, for each adolescent, a total of 76 scores, all ranging from 1-4, will be generated from the swimmer, parent, and coach questionnaires.

As is customary for measures such as the Self-Perception Profile for Adolescents (Harter, 1988), scale and subscale means and standard deviations will be derived on each dimension and for each type of appraisal (eg., Reflected Appraisals, Mother, Scholastic Competence).

With the present study's focus on variability among appraisals, standard deviations at first appear to be an opportune place to begin analyzing data. According to Sprinthall (2000), standard deviation is "the absolute heart and soul of the variability concept" (p.

46). At the same time, the ordinal nature of the data yielded in this study violates the assumptions of a normal distribution. The issue of whether or not a 4-point Likert-type scale meets the assumptions of a normal distribution is beyond the scope of this paper. While this topic certainly warrants further investigation in and of itself, especially given the extent to which research in the Social Sciences relies on measures constructed with such scales, according to Sprinthall (2000), since the standard deviation is only ever computed with reference to the mean, its calculation demands the use of interval or ratio data. Given this limitation, an exploration of nonparametric methods for examining the relationships among actual, reflected, and self-appraisals was conducted but did not reveal a method that would adequately address this study's questions of variability. At the same time, the concept of variability, or dispersion, according to Sprinthall (2000), can also be clarified through the use of graphs. A frequency distribution, for example, allows a researcher to see general trends or tendencies. For this exploratory study, frequency distributions will be used for just this purpose. It is believed that a graphic depiction of the data from this study will show whether or not there is a relationship between the degree of variability among actual, reflected, and self-appraisals of adolescents and their parents and coaches regarding a domain of competence / adequacy (Scholastic Competence, Athletic Competence, and Physical Appearance) and the adolescent's self-appraisal in that area and/or the adolescent's self-esteem, independent of means, standard deviations, variance, and kurtosis.

Frequency distributions will first be used to explore the relationship between the degree of variability among actual, reflected, and self-appraisals of adolescents and their parents and coaches regarding Scholastic Competence, Athletic Competence, and

Physical Appearance and adolescents' Global Self-Worth. Adolescent participants will thus be divided into groups according to their mean score on the Global Self-Worth subscale (eg., 1., 2., 3., or 4). For each group, frequency distributions comprised of all actual, reflected, and self-appraisals for each of the domains of competence / adequacy will be compiled so that distributions for each level of self-esteem on each dimension (eg., Global Self-Worth 2 / Scholastic Competence) can be compared to see if any trends emerge. Frequency distributions will also be used to depict the relationship between the degree of variability among actual, reflected, and self-appraisals of adolescents and their parents and coaches and an adolescent's level of competence / adequacy in a particular domain. In similar fashion, adolescent participants will be divided into groups according to their mean score on the dimensions of Scholastic Competence, Athletic Competence, and Physical Appearance (eg., 1., 2., 3., or 4). For each group, frequency distributions comprised of all actual, reflected, and self-appraisals pertinent to that domain will be gathered and again, compared to see if any tendencies come to light.

In addition to the primary focus on variability in this study, potential gender differences and commonalities will also be explored. While the sample size ( $N = 62$ ) for this study does not lend itself to a full analysis of all gender variations that might exist, GPA and subscale means (i.e., Scholastic Competence, Athletic Competence, Physical Appearance, and Global Self-Worth) for males and females will be reported and discussed. Additionally, correlations among specific domains (Scholastic Competence, Athletic Competence, and Physical Appearance) and self-worth will also be addressed.

## CHAPTER IV

### Results

Previous research seems to point to the observation that for individuals with any level of self-esteem other than stable high self-esteem, some degree of uncertainty and/or instability regarding their self-knowledge is common (Campbell, 1990; Campbell & Lavelle, 1993; Coopersmith, 1959, 1967). Other research (Baumeister, 1998; Baumeister et al., 2003; Bohrnstedt & Felson, 1983; Brown, 1993; Cooley, 1902, 1916; Epstein, 1973; Harter, 1990, 1993, 1999a, 1999b; Harter et al., 1996; Hoffman et al., 2000; Kinch, 1963; Kramer, 1991; Lord, Eccles, & McCarthy, 1994; Marsh & Shavelson, 1985; Mead, 1956; Pekrun, 1990; Rosenberg, 1986; Swann, 1985, 1999) directs attention toward the key roles of both perception and social interaction in the process of acquiring one's self-knowledge, and ultimately one's self-esteem. Social interaction has to do with an individual's interactions with others. Perception has to do with the individual's own imagination or his own interpretation of these experiences. Whether or not this perception matches that of the actual appraisals given by others might be indicative of something other than cognitive error on the part of the child. When appraisals vary, for example, we might see a disturbance in an individual's level of competence/adequacy or self-worth. The aim of this study was to explore whether or not variability among actual, reflected, and self-appraisals might be related to one's level of self-worth or his self-appraisal in a particular domain, just as certainty of self-knowledge has been associated with level of self-esteem. This objective was achieved by examining adolescents' self-esteem, particularly in light of the variability that might exist between their self-appraisals, their reflected appraisals of their parents and coaches, and the actual appraisals of their parents

and coaches, in the domains of Scholastic Competence, Athletic Competence, and Physical Appearance.

### *General Findings*

GPA and subscale mean scores for the sample can be found in Table 1. Here it can be seen that participants in this study scored higher than Harter's (1988) norm samples across all dimensions, including Scholastic Competence (Sample:  $M = 3.36$ ; Norm Samples:  $M = 2.88$ ), Athletic Competence (Sample:  $M = 3.12$ ; Norm Samples:  $M = 2.71$ ), Physical Appearance (Sample:  $M = 3.04$ ; Norm Samples:  $M = 2.66$ ), and Global Self-Worth (Sample:  $M = 3.37$ ; Norm Samples:  $M = 2.98$ ). This finding indicates that individuals in this particular sample rate themselves as more scholastically and athletically competent as well as more adequate in terms of physical appearance and self-worth.

It can also be seen in Table 1 that males ( $n = 26$ ) scored higher than females ( $n = 36$ ) on Athletic Competence (Males:  $M = 3.18$ ; Females:  $M = 3.08$ ). This discrepancy is lower, however, than findings by Harter (1988), who observed an average gender difference of .5 in her norm samples. On the other hand, the mean score for males is consistent with the mean of 3.25 found by Todd & Kent (2003) in another athlete sample. Noteworthy here is the support that this particular finding offers for Todd & Kent's (2003) hypothesis that athletes have higher athletic competence than the general population. As they note, Hagborg's (1993) general student sample scored a 2.84 for athletic competence, which is actually more compatible with Harter's (1988) norm samples mean of 2.71.

Males also scored higher than females on both Physical Appearance (Males:  $M = 3.22$ ; Females:  $M = 2.90$ ), and Global Self-Worth (Males:  $M = 3.38$ ; Females:  $M = 3.36$ ). For Physical Appearance, this finding represents the greatest divergence between the genders and is consistent with the average .4 difference observed by Harter (1988). Not only that, the Physical Appearance score for females was the lowest mean of all subscales for both genders. In contrast, the difference between males and females in Global Self-Worth is the smallest gender difference for this sample and is also slighter than the difference of .2 in Harter's norm samples (1988). As mentioned previously, other researchers have also observed similar gender differences, with females again scoring lower than males on Athletic Competence (Hagborg, 1993; Todd & Kent, 2003; Trent et al., 1994), Physical Appearance (Trent et al., 1994), and Global Self-Worth (Hagborg, 1993; Trent et al, 1994). On the other hand, females outscored males on both GPA (Females:  $M = 3.82$ ; Males:  $M = 3.70$ ) and Scholastic Competence (Females:  $M = 3.38$ ; Males:  $M = 3.32$ ). The gender difference for males and females regarding Scholastic Competence departs slightly from the negligible difference observed by Harter (Female  $M = 2.87$ ; Male  $M = 2.86$ ) (1988).

Table 1

*GPA and Subscale Means*

	Sample (N = 62)	Male (n = 26)	Female (n = 36)
GPA	3.76	3.70	3.82
Scholastic	3.36	3.32	3.38
Athletic	3.12	3.18	3.08
Physical Appearance	3.04	3.22	2.90
Global Self-Worth	3.37	3.38	3.36

Correlations between each of the domains and self-worth are shown in Table 2. Here, it can be seen that the correlation between Scholastic Competence and Global Self-Worth ( $r = .432$ ,  $p < .01$ ) is within the range of correlations ( $r = .34 - .54$ ) observed by Harter (1999). The greatest and only real disparity between males and females in terms of correlations can be seen in this relationship between Scholastic Competence and Global Self-Worth (Males:  $r = .361$ ; Females:  $r = .522$ ,  $p < .01$ ). Remember that females scored higher than males on Scholastic Competence; this modest difference does not seem to explain, however, the difference in correlation. It is conjectured here that this difference might be attributed to the role of importance in a particular domain. According to Harter (1999), the relationship between one's self-worth and his level of competence/adequacy in a particular domain is at least to some degree a function of how important that domain is to the individual.

Next, the correlation between Athletic Competence and Global Self-Worth ( $r = .258$ ,  $p < .05$ ) is lower for this sample than samples of both Harter ( $r = .33$ ) and other countries ( $r = .30$ ), but is nonetheless within the range of correlations ( $r = .23 - .42$ ) offered by Harter (1999). This figure is also the lowest of all the correlations for this sample. Harter reports (1999) that Athletic Competence consistently displays the lowest relationship to Global Self-Worth, and it would appear that this is the case for this sample of athletes as well.

Finally, Table 2 also shows that Physical Appearance is more closely associated with Global Self-Worth ( $r = .651$ ,  $p < .01$ ) than any other dimension. In addition to this correlation being compatible with that of Harter's samples ( $r = .65$ ) (1999), it should be noted that this finding is substantiated in the literature (Harter, 1988, 1999). From this, Harter has inferred that attractiveness is especially important to an individual's sense of

self-worth (1988); this inference might also be made for the present sample. Finally, while only three subscales from the Self-Perception Profile for Adolescents were used in this study, Physical Appearance has consistently been found to be more closely associated with Global Self-Worth than the remaining domains, which include the Social Acceptance, Job Competence, Romantic Appeal, Behavioral Conduct, and Close Friendship subscales. At the same time, while Physical Appearance does appear to offer some degree of predictability when it comes to global self-worth ( $r^2 = .42$ ), there is another 58% of the variability in global self-worth attributable to other factors as well, further highlighting the complexity of this topic.

Table 2

*Correlations Between Domain of Competence/Adequacy and Global Self-Worth Means*

	Sample (N = 62)	Male (n = 26)	Female (n = 36)
Scholastic Competence & Global Self-Worth	.432**	.361	.522**
Athletic Competence & Global Self-Worth	.258*	.261	.255
Physical Appearance & Global Self-Worth	.651**	.658*	.673**

(\* $p < .05$  / \*\* $p < .01$ )

Correlations among the various appraisals, for example, reflected and self-appraisals regarding a particular domain of competence or adequacy can be seen in Table 3. Several observations can be gleaned from this table. First, correlations are highest for reflected and self-appraisals and lowest for any correlation that includes actual appraisals on both the Scholastic Competence and Athletic Competence domains. This finding corroborates the findings of Shrauger & Schoeneman (1979), who, in their literature review on appraisals, noted that unlike the modest to strong correlations that have been shown

between reflected and self-appraisals, there seems to be much less agreement between actual appraisals and self-appraisals.

Specific to appraisals of Scholastic Competence, there was considerably more agreement between appraisals relative to fathers than to mothers. The correlation between self-appraisals and reflected appraisals of mothers ( $r = .674, p < .01$ ) is slightly higher than the same correlation for fathers ( $r = .666, p < .01$ ), but the introduction of actual appraisals seems to reverse the direction of this trend. The correlations between actual appraisals and self-appraisals (Mothers:  $r = .232$ ; Fathers:  $r = .601, p < .01$ ) and between actual appraisals and reflected appraisals (Mothers:  $r = .135$ ; Fathers:  $r = .369, p < .01$ ) dropped markedly for mothers, but remained somewhat consistent for fathers. In fact, the correlation between self-appraisals and actual appraisals of fathers regarding Scholastic Competence is the highest among all correlations involving actual appraisals and it also represents the greatest difference between parents and coaches in terms of actual appraisals and how these correlate to adolescents' reflected or self-appraisals.

For Athletic Competence, on the other hand, a different pattern emerges. In general, there seems to be more agreement among appraisals of athletic competence. Specifically, the correlation between self-appraisals and reflected appraisals of fathers ( $r = .753, p < .01$ ) regarding athletic competence is moderately higher than that of mothers ( $r = .735, p < .01$ ) and coaches ( $r = .678, p < .01$ ). There is both stronger and more consistent agreement for mothers, however, when it comes to actual appraisals and self-appraisals (Mothers:  $r = .519, p < .01$ ; Fathers:  $r = .286, p < .05$ ; Coaches:  $r = .305, p < .05$ ) and also actual appraisals and reflected appraisals (Mothers:  $r = .584, p < .01$ ; Fathers:  $r = .413, p < .01$ ; Coaches:  $r = .374, p < .01$ ) of athletic competence. Also, except for the correlation

between self-appraisals and fathers' actual appraisals of Athletic Competence ( $r = .286$ ,  $p < .05$ ), there appears to be more agreement among appraisals involving parents than appraisals involving coaches.

Correlations among appraisals regarding the domain of Physical Appearance are generally lower but they appear to vary less than the correlations among appraisals for Scholastic and Athletic Competence. It is also clear that for Physical Appearance, the strength of agreement moves in yet a third direction, this time toward appraisals that involve coaches. For example, for correlations that entail adolescents' self-appraisals and either their reflected appraisals (Mothers:  $r = .321$ ,  $p < .05$ ; Fathers:  $r = .291$ ,  $p < .05$ ; Coaches:  $r = .409$ ,  $p < .01$ ) or the actual appraisals of others (Mothers:  $r = .211$ ; Fathers:  $r = .399$ ,  $p < .01$ ; Coaches:  $r = .444$ ,  $p < .01$ ), correlations are the strongest for coaches. Actual appraisals of mothers, on the other hand, show the weakest correlations, with both self-appraisals (see above) and reflected appraisals (Mothers:  $r = .283$ ,  $p < .05$ ; Fathers:  $r = .380$ ,  $p < .01$ ; Coaches:  $r = .366$ ,  $p < .01$ ).

Table 3

*Correlations Among Appraisals by Domain of Competence/Adequacy*

	Scholastic Competence	Athletic Competence	Physical Appearance
Self- & Reflected, Mother	.674**	.735**	.321*
Self- & Reflected, Father	.666**	.753**	.291*
Self- & Reflected, Coach	---	.678**	.409**
Self- & Actual, Mother	.232	.519**	.211
Self- & Actual, Father	.601**	.286*	.399**
Self- & Actual, Coach	---	.305*	.444**
Reflected & Actual, Mother	.136	.584**	.283*
Reflected & Actual, Father	.369**	.413**	.380**
Reflected & Actual, Coach	---	.374**	.366**

(\*  $p < .05$  / \*\* $p < .01$ )

*Actual, Reflected, and Self-Appraisals by Domain of Competence/Adequacy Level*

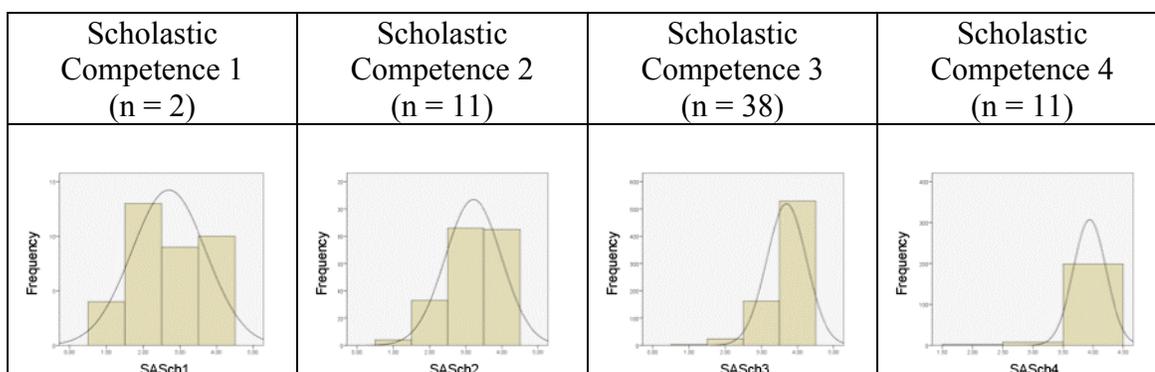
The correlations that exist between the different types of appraisal show some relationships to be stronger than others, similar to findings in previous research. The central question of this study, however, pertains to the degree of variability among all the appraisals (actual, reflected, and self-). This study sought to investigate the relationship between variability among appraisals regarding a specific domain and an adolescent's self-appraisal in that domain. Frequency distributions were used to illustrate the relationship between the degree of variability among adolescents', parents', and coaches' appraisals (actual, reflected, and self-) and the adolescents' level of competence in a particular area (eg., Scholastic Competence, Athletic Competence, and Physical Appearance). For each domain, participants were divided into four groups based on their mean score in that domain. In other words, participants whose mean scores were indicative of the least adequate self-appraisal, those that ranged from 1 – 1.8, comprised the group representing a level of 1, participants whose means scores ranged from 2 – 2.8 comprised level 2, participants whose means scores ranged from 3 – 3.8 encompassed level 3, and participants with mean scores of 4, indicating the most adequate self-appraisal, were grouped in level 4. Such a grouping of participants provides an excellent basis for comparison.

Figure 1 shows the first of several pivotal findings regarding the relationship between variability among appraisals and level of competence/adequacy in various domains. Specifically, Figure 1 illustrates that as the level of Scholastic Competence increases from 1 to 4, variability among actual, reflected, and self-appraisals regarding competence in this area decreases. This can be seen in the histogram that represents the compilation of

all appraisals given regarding Scholastic Competence (on a scale of 1-4). This finding is also demonstrated by the shape of the frequency distribution curve for appraisals at each level of Scholastic Competence. These curves can be understood in terms of kurtosis, that is, how flat or how peaked each curve is. For example, when the scores in a distribution are more varied, as can be seen at Level 1 of Scholastic Competence, the frequency distribution curve is said to be platykurtic, or more flat (Sprinthall, 2000). As the level of Scholastic Competence increases with each graph, however, the curve becomes more peaked, or leptokurtic, indicating a decrease in the dispersion or variability of appraisals scores. Additional information regarding the variability of appraisals by level of competence/adequacy can be viewed in Appendix H. This appendix shows that as the mean level of competence increases on all three dimensions of competence/adequacy, the standard deviation and variance decrease in consistently uniform fashion; equally steady increases in kurtosis values indicate that the variability among appraisals scores decreases as level of competence/adequacy increases.

Figure 1

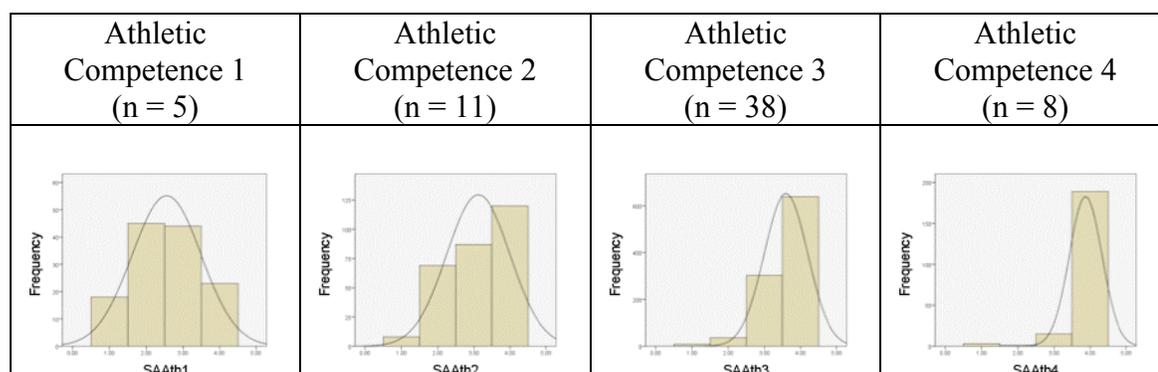
*Frequencies for Actual, Reflected, and Self-Appraisals Scores by Scholastic Competence Level (SASch)*



A similar pattern of decreasing variability with increase in mean score can be seen in Figure 2, which represents actual, reflected, and self-appraisals regarding Athletic Competence. Just as with Scholastic Competence, when it comes to Athletic Competence, variability among actual, reflected, and self-appraisals is greatest for individuals with a Scholastic Competence mean score of 1., whereas this variability greatly diminishes at the highest level of Athletic Competence. Here, a second important finding is revealed. In conjunction with Figure 1, Figure 2 clearly demonstrates that a lower competence/adequacy score is associated with discrepant appraisals, meaning that the parents', coaches, and swimmers' appraisals of the adolescents' competence/adequacy vary considerably. Likewise, appraisals again appear to become more consistent and decisively less discrepant as one goes up the levels of Athletic Competence.

Figure 2

*Frequencies for Actual, Reflected, and Self-Appraisals by Athletic Competence Level (SAAth)*

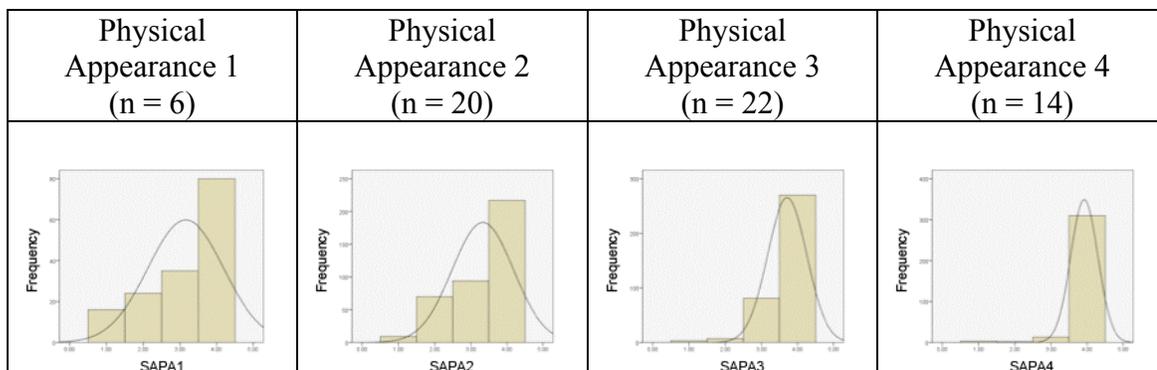


Frequencies of appraisals regarding Physical Appearance can be seen in Figure 3, which exhibits a third important finding in the current study. The pattern of increasing

variability among appraisals as the level of competence/adequacy decreases is stable across all three domains of inquiry. While there appears to be a greater discrepancy among appraisals on Level 1 of Physical Appearance than on Level 1 of either Scholastic or Athletic Competence, as seen in the histograms for this Level of each domain, the frequency polygons for all three domains, at all levels, closely resemble one another. Moreover, the direction in which variability among appraisals either increase or decrease bears a consistently inverse relationship; that is, as variability increases, level of competence/adequacy decreases and as variability decreases, level of competence/adequacy increases.

Figure 3

*Frequencies for Actual, Reflected, and Self-Appraisals by Physical Appearance Level (SAPA)*



*Actual, Reflected, and Self-Appraisals for each Domain of Competence/Adequacy by Level of Global Self-Worth*

It would appear that there is an inverse relationship between the degree of variability among appraisals (actual, reflected, and self-) and an adolescent's level of competence in a particular domain. In other words, as variability increases, level of

competence/adequacy decreases and as variability decreases, level of competence/adequacy increases. Another fundamental question in this study concerns whether or not there a relationship between the degree of variability among actual, reflected, and self-appraisals of adolescents and their parents and coaches regarding Scholastic Competence, Athletic Competence, and/or Physical Appearance and adolescents' Global Self-Worth? The method of inquiry for addressing this question also entailed the use of frequency distributions. This time, however, participants were divided according to their level of Global Self-Worth, not their level of competence/adequacy on a specific dimension (eg., Athletic Competence). Given that participants in this study scored no lower than a mean of 2 on the Global Self-Worth subscale of the Self-Perception Profile for Adolescents, division into groups for this analysis resulted in three groups. Specifically, participants whose mean scores were indicative of the lowest level of self-worth, those that ranged from 2 – 2.8 comprised level 2, participants whose means scores ranged from 3 – 3.8 encompassed level 3, and participants with mean scores of 4, indicating the highest level of self-worth, were grouped in level 4. Again, such a grouping of participants provides a basis for comparison. Compared to the 2.98 average mean score of Harter's (1988) norm samples, the fact that no participants scored a mean of 1 on Global Self-Worth seems compatible with previous research using this instrument. For each Global Self-Worth group, participants' actual, reflected, and self-appraisals in each domain were then compiled into frequency distributions. For example, for each level of Global Self-Worth (i.e., 2, 3, or 4), participants' appraisals regarding Scholastic Competence were compiled. This same procedure was followed for the domains of Athletic Competence and Physical Appearance.

For individuals who had a mean score of 2 on the Global Self-Worth scale, the emerging pattern of decreasing variability among appraisals with increasing mean score reveals itself again in the domain of Scholastic Competence, as can be seen in Figure 4. This figure shows that as the level of Global Self-Worth increases from 2 to 4, variability among actual, reflected, and self-appraisals regarding competence in this area decreases. This finding is reflected in both the histograms and frequency distribution curves for each group (i.e., Global Self-Worth 2, and so on). For example, once more the shape of the curve shifts from a flatter, more platykurtic curve, to a more leptokurtic, or peaked curve, showing a concomitant change in the amount of dispersion of scores. To further this examination, Scholastic Competence mean scores were also calculated for each group of participants based on their Global Self-Worth score. As can be seen in Table 4, in addition to a lower self-worth score being associated with more variability among appraisals, lower self-worth for participants in this study is also associated with a lower score in the domain of Scholastic Competence. According to Table 4, as self-worth increases, so too does level of Scholastic Competence (Self-Worth 2 / Scholastic Competence,  $M = 2.84$ ; Self-Worth 3 / Scholastic Competence,  $M = 3.38$ ; Self-Worth 4 / Scholastic Competence,  $M = 3.61$ ). The Scholastic Competence mean of 2.84 for individuals with lower self-worth is below the sample mean of 3.36 for this domain. As with the descriptives for actual, reflected, and self-appraisals by domain of competence/adequacy in Appendix H, additional information regarding the variability of appraisals on each domain by level of Global Self-Worth can be viewed in Appendix I. This appendix shows that as the mean level of self-worth increases, the standard deviation and variance of appraisals scores on each dimension decrease in an unwavering

manner; comparable and steady increases in kurtosis values indicate that the variability among appraisals regarding Scholastic Competence, Athletic Competence, and Physical Appearance decreases as the level of self-worth increases.

Figure 4

*Frequencies for Actual, Reflected, and Self-Appraisals of Scholastic Competence by Level of Global Self-Worth*

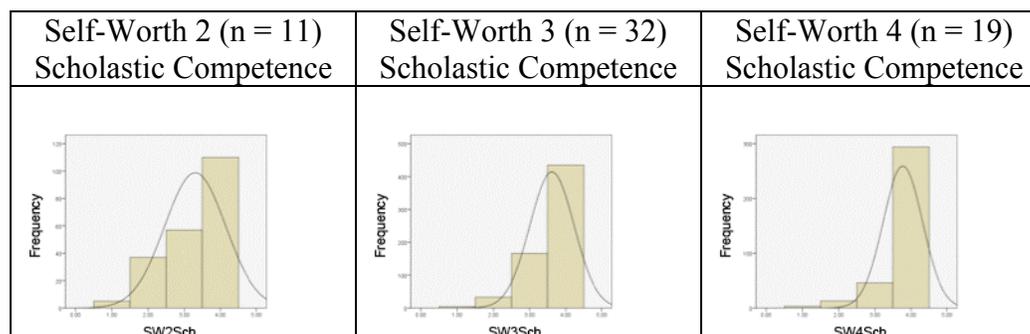


Table 4

*Domain of Competence/Adequacy Sample Mean Scores by Level of Global Self-Worth*

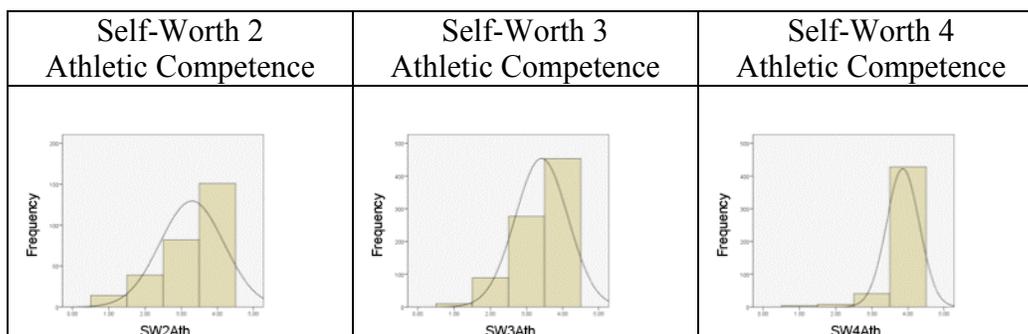
Domain of Competence/Adequacy Sample Mean Scores by Global Self-Worth Level			
	Scholastic Competence	Athletic Competence	Physical Appearance
Global Self-Worth 2	2.84	2.96	2.44
Global Self-Worth 3	3.38	3.03	2.80
Global Self-Worth 4	3.61	3.37	3.77

An investigation of the relationship between the degree of variability among actual, reflected, and self-appraisals of adolescents and their parents and coaches regarding specific domains and adolescents' Global Self-Worth continues with a look at Athletic

Competence. Figure 5 depicts the frequency distributions for actual, reflected, and self-appraisals of Athletic Competence by the participants' level of Global Self-Worth. Consistent with Figure 4 relative to Scholastic Competence, it can be seen that as self-worth increases, variability of appraisals regarding Athletic Competence decreases. Figure 5 also, however, illuminates the finding that lower self-worth is associated with discrepant appraisals of athletic competence and that higher self-worth is related to consistently high appraisals of competence on this domain. Table 4 provides supplemental data regarding self-worth and athletic competence; as self-worth increases, Athletic Competence also increases (Self-Worth 2 / Athletic Competence,  $M = 2.96$ ; Self-Worth 3 / Athletic Competence,  $M = 3.03$ ; Self-Worth 4 / Athletic Competence,  $M = 3.37$ ). Also noteworthy is the observation that for individuals who scored lower than 4 on self-worth, their mean scores for Athletic Competence fell below the sample mean of 3.12.

Figure 5

*Frequencies for Actual, Reflected, and Self-Appraisals of Athletic Competence by Level of Global Self-Worth*

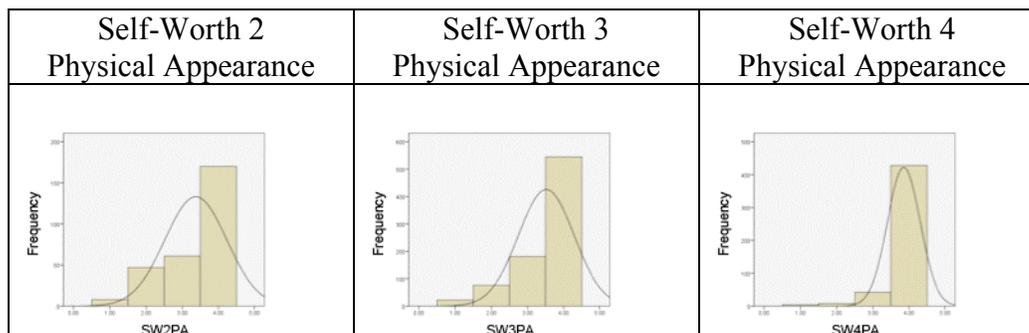


According to Figure 6, diminishing self-worth is also associated with increasing variability among appraisals regarding one's physical appearance. As this figure reveals,

in addition to the relationship between variability among appraisals and competence/adequacy in specific domains, the association between variability among appraisals in a particular domain and one's self-worth also reflects a consistently inverse relationship. In other words, as variability among appraisals increases, level of self-worth decreases and as variability decreases, level of self-worth increases. Finally, Table 4 also demonstrates that for adolescents who scored a 2 or 3 on Global Self-Worth, their Physical Appearance scores (Self-Worth 2 / Physical Appearance,  $M = 2.44$ ; Self-Worth 3 / Physical Appearance,  $M = 2.80$ ) were notably lower than the sample mean of 3.04. In sharp contrast, on all three domains of competence/adequacy, adolescents who scored 4 on self-worth had competence/adequacy scores above or well above the sample means.

Figure 6

*Frequencies for Actual, Reflected, and Self-Appraisals of Physical Appearance by Level of Global Self-Worth*



## CHAPTER V

### Discussion

Self-worth, or self-esteem, is defined by Harter (1999b) as “the overall evaluation of one’s worth or value as a person” (p. 5). Research pertaining to this and related constructs (eg., actual, reflected, and self-appraisals) has yet to fully elucidate this area of inquiry and the literature has even been contradictory at times. The heuristic value of this research, however, cannot be underestimated, as it has provided a wealth of knowledge from which to proceed with our exploration of this complex topic. First, previous research on self-esteem has consistently shown low self-worth to be associated with a myriad of negative correlates, from depressed affect (Harter, 1999b) to interference with learning, physical and substance abuse, and criminal and violent behavior (California Task Force, 1990). On the other hand, high self-esteem has been tied to decidedly more positive attributes, such as academic achievement, health, popularity, and personal success (Gecas & Burke, 1995). Second, the self-esteem literature seems to further indicate that for individuals with any level of self-esteem other than stable high self-esteem, some degree of uncertainty and/or instability regarding their self-knowledge is common (Campbell, 1990; Campbell & Lavalley, 1993; Coopersmith, 1959, 1967). The perilous nature of the multitudinous factors associated with lower levels of self-esteem makes this a topic worthy of further exploration, and our findings could be invaluable to educators, parents, and the general public.

Finally, C.H. Cooley (1902) emphasized the roles of both perception and social interaction in the formation of an individual’s self-idea, or his self-worth. Substantial empirical and theoretical support for the relevance of these factors has been offered

(Baumeister, 1998; Baumeister et al., 2003; Bohrnstedt & Felson, 1983; Brown, 1993; Epstein, 1973; Harter, 1990, 1993, 1999a, 1999b; Harter et al., 1996; Hoffman et al., 2000; Kinch, 1963; Lord et al., 1994; Markus & Wurf, 1987; Marsh & Shavelson, 1985; Mead, 1956; Pekrun, 1990; Rosenberg, 1986; Swann, 1985, 1999). Other research has purportedly examined Cooley's ideas about the self through an examination of the relationship between actual, reflected, and self-appraisals (Cole et al., 1997; Cook & Douglas, 1998; Felson, 1985, 1989; 1993; Felson & Reed, 1986; Hergovich et al., 2002; Kinch, 1963; Shrauger & Schoeneman, 1979). Despite these efforts, it has repeatedly been concluded that the appraisal process has failed to show that people's ideas regarding themselves are a reflection of the appraisals of others (Gecas & Burke, 1995). The appraisal process may certainly have failed to show that people's ideas regarding themselves are 'accurate' reflections of the appraisals of others. To argue, however, that the influence of others' (eg., parents) actual appraisals on one's self-views is contingent upon whether the individual has accurately interpreted the signals (Cook & Douglas, 1998) runs counter to Cooley's basic premise that our self-idea is a product of our own imagination. According to Cooley (1902), our self-idea stems from how we imagine we appear to others and how we imagine these others judge this appearance. Explaining a lack of correlation between actual, reflected, and self-appraisals by suggesting that it is representative of a cognitive error on the part of the child does not inform our understanding of self-esteem. A fresh examination of the appraisals process, on the other hand, holds the promise of revealing a richer understanding of how dynamic human self-esteem really is. This is particularly so in terms of perception and individuals' social interactions with others.

The current exploratory study set out to take a new and closer look at both the appraisal process and self-esteem. With this, the actual appraisals of parents and coaches and the reflected and self-appraisals of early adolescents, and the relationship between these appraisals and the adolescents' levels of competence/adequacy in a variety of domains (eg., Scholastic Competence, Athletic Competence, and Physical Appearance) and Global Self-Worth were examined with a sample of 62 participant sets (parents, coaches, and swimmers) from USA Swimming. All measures for this study were self-report questionnaires formatted for the World Wide Web and administered online. Specifically, adolescents' self-appraisals (referred to by Harter as self-perceptions) of their Scholastic Competence, Athletic Competence, and Physical Appearance as well as their Global Self-Worth were measured with the appropriate subscales of the Self-Perception Profile for Adolescents, entitled What I am Like (Harter, 1988). The adolescents' reflected appraisals of their parents and coaches regarding Scholastic Competence, Athletic Competence, and Physical Appearance were assessed with an adaptation of the What Others Think About Me scale (Bouchey & Harter, 2005). Similarly, parents' and coaches' actual appraisals of the adolescents' Scholastic Competence, Athletic Competence, and Physical Appearance were evaluated with the Parent's Rating Scale of the Child's Actual Behavior and the Coach's Rating Scale of the Swimmer's Actual Behavior, respectively. Parent and coach surveys were both adaptations of Harter's (1988) Teacher's Rating Scale of the Student's Actual Behavior subscale of the Self-Perception Profile for Adolescents.

### *Summary of Findings and Contributions*

#### *The Method*

The first of several noteworthy findings from this study pertains to the method itself, from the current sample to the measures utilized and the procedure followed. Specifically, while the current sample is relatively small, its composition in terms of gender is virtually identical to that of USA Swimming's athlete membership in 2008 (Sample: Females = 58% / Males = 41% ; USA Swimming: Females = 58.2% / Males = 41.8%) (USA Swimming, n.d.). So, at least as far as gender is concerned, the current sample appears to be representative of the population from which it was drawn. Additionally, it has been hypothesized that athletes have higher athletic competence than the general population (Todd & Kent's, 2003), and for this sample, this is certainly the case. Along with higher athletic competence, participants in this study rated themselves as more competent or adequate than Harter's norm samples (1998) on all dimensions, including self-worth, which suggests a potential difference between athlete and non-athlete samples beyond athletics. The correlations between each domain and Global Self-Worth were, however, consistent with the correlations observed by Harter (1988) in her norm samples. This observation provides evidence for the reliability of the Self-Perception Profile for Adolescents. Another factor that might contribute to this corroboration is the fact mentioned earlier that it is likely that the current sample is predominantly Caucasian, similar to Harter's norm samples (1988). Finally, gender differences for each of the domains of competence/adequacy and Global Self-Worth in the current sample are also consistent with those found by Harter (1988), again bearing upon the reliability of the measures used for this study.

With respect to the procedure, the current study offers unique contributions to research in the social sciences. While the procedure implemented for this study is by no means

free from limitations, addressed later, all measures were formatted for the World Wide Web and were administered individually online. Among the advantages of this type of format are its time and cost efficiency as well as its increased ability to reach a wider segment of the population. Further, the paper and pencil version of the Self-Perception Profile for Adolescents, with its structured alternative format, meaning there are four possible responses (two for the positively worded description and two for the negatively worded description) to each statement, has been reported to be problematic in terms of participants incorrectly giving more than one response to an item (Wichstrom, 1995). The use of radio buttons in the online version, on the other hand, is believed to have helped prevent this potential participant error because it allows only one response to be given per item. Finally, while there has been some question about whether internet-based findings differ from those obtained with other methods, the degree to which the current results are consistent with previous research using the Self-Perception Profile for Adolescents seems to dispel the myth that findings derived from internet-based research and traditional methods are somehow different (Gosling, Vazire, Srivastava, & John, 2004).

### *Correlations*

The next area of discovery for this study comes from the correlations among appraisals for each domain of competence/adequacy. Except for the domain of Physical Appearance, toward which we shall turn our attention shortly, the correlations are highest for reflected and self-appraisals and generally lower for correlations that include actual appraisals. This finding supports previous appraisals research that has also shown less agreement between actual appraisals and self-appraisals than the modest to strong correlations observed between reflected and self-appraisals (Shrauger & Schoeneman,

1979). Unlike earlier research, though, this finding is not construed as being suggestive that adolescents have equivocal ideas about how they are viewed by others. Instead, such a finding seems to highlight the role of an individual's perception regarding appraisals, considering that correlations between reflected and self-appraisals were higher than those between actual and self- or actual and reflected appraisals. Moreover, the observation that correlations involving actual appraisals were generally lower than those incorporating reflected and self-appraisals does not lend support for Kinch's (1963) postulate described earlier. According to Kinch, an individual's perception of the responses of others toward him reflects the actual responses of others. The finding that reflected and self-appraisals are more closely aligned than appraisals that involve the actual responses of others suggests that there is a more dynamic process at work.

An examination of the correlations among appraisals for each domain of competence/adequacy uncovers other curious findings. Regarding the appraisals of others (i.e., actual and reflected appraisals of mothers, fathers, and coaches), there are stronger and more consistent correlations for mothers along the Athletic Competence domain, for fathers along the Scholastic Competence dimension, and for coaches in the realm of Physical Appearance. Interestingly, these associations do not appear to be as we might expect them to be. For example, it might be presumed that the correlation between appraisals of athletic competence would be the highest for athletes and their coaches, given the level of expertise of coaches regarding their sport. This does not seem to be the case in this study, however. One general explanation for this finding might pertain to barriers to communication, as Felson (1985; 1993) has pointed out. In other words, it might be that the level of involvement and/or emotional investment of significant others

(eg., parents and/or coaches) in a particular domain impacts the degree to which genuine communication or feedback regarding an individual's competence is given. This involvement may in turn exert an influence on the degree to which actual, reflected, and self-appraisals are linked with one another.

### *Physical Appearance*

For several reasons, the domain of Physical Appearance is a facet of the current study that warrants careful consideration of its own. First, Physical Appearance has been shown to be more closely associated with Global Self-Worth than any other domain (eg., Scholastic Competence, Social Acceptance, etc.) (Harter, 1988; 1999b). The correlations between Physical Appearance and Global Self-Worth for both males and females in this study substantiate this observation. Harter has inferred that attractiveness is especially important to an individual's sense of self-worth (1988). Further, according to Harter (1999), Physical Appearance is qualitatively different from the other areas because it is constantly on display, whereas competence in other areas is not only less obvious but more context-specific. Bowker (2006) adds that the direct relationship between physical appearance and self-esteem for both boys and girls provides evidence of the enduring emphasis that society places on physical appearance. Second, the greatest divergence between the genders in any domain in this study pertains to Physical Appearance. Moreover, the mean Physical Appearance score for females was the lowest mean of all subscales for both genders, indicating particular significance that Physical Appearance has for females. Third, Physical Appearance was the only domain for which parent and coach participants and potential participants expressed concern regarding giving actual appraisals. This concern was expressed in only three cases. In all three cases, either the

participants chose not to respond to items specific to Physical Appearance or chose not to participate in the study at all. Such concern over giving actual appraisals of Physical Appearance again seems to highlight the magnitude of this dimension. Although these findings could conceivably implicate Physical Appearance as a limitation of this study, this domain is accepted as a central element and a reality of any investigation of self-esteem.

### *Major Findings*

As each of the four research questions in this study indicates, the relationship between the degree of variability among actual, reflected, and self-appraisals of adolescents and their parents and coaches and adolescents' self-appraisals or self-perceptions of Scholastic Competence, Athletic Competence, Physical Appearance, and Global Self-Worth was explored. This inquiry yielded some dramatic findings; every relationship was uniformly consistent in its trend. First is the observation that as the level of competence or adequacy in a particular domain increased, the variability among actual, reflected, and self-appraisals relative to that area of competence decreased. This inverse relationship is evident for Global Self-Worth as well. Specifically, as the level of Global Self-Worth increased, variability among actual, reflected, and self-appraisals regarding each of the three domains decreased. Next, this study demonstrates that a lower competence/adequacy score in each domain is associated with more discrepant appraisals. A lower level of Global Self-Worth is also associated with more discrepant appraisals regarding Scholastic Competence, Athletic Competence, and Physical Appearance. Third, the pattern of increasing variability among appraisals as the level of competence/adequacy decreases is stable across all three domains of inquiry. Again, this

trend applies to the levels of Global Self-Worth as well, in that as the level of Global Self-Worth decreased, the variability among appraisals regarding Scholastic Competence, Athletic Competence, and Physical Appearance increased. Finally, in this study it was also seen that there is a positive correlation between an individual's level of Global Self-Worth and his mean score on each domain of competence/adequacy; as Global Self-Worth increases, so too did an individual's scores on all three domains.

#### *Implications for Further Study*

Findings from this study establish a new direction for research on appraisals and self-esteem. If such a consistent and obvious trend toward decreasing variability among appraisals with increasing level of competence/adequacy in a variety of domains as well as Global Self-Worth is apparent in a small sample of athletes with above-average mean scores, expanding this inquiry to the greater population of early adolescents could provide even more valuable information. Further study might also examine both younger and older children to see if this same trend exists in either of these groups or is unique to early adolescence. It's been suggested that symbolic interactionism implies that there must be some accuracy in persons' perceptions of how others see them (Felson, 1985). It has further been concluded that weak correlations between reflected and actual appraisals are an indication that respondents are inaccurate in guessing what significant others think of them (Felson, 1993).

An examination of the current findings suggests that an emphasis on accuracy is neither a proper application of Cooley's theory nor does it have relevance in a study of self-esteem. From the findings in this study, it is recommended that it would behoove researchers to continue looking at the vital roles of both individuals' own perceptions and

their social interactions with others in the development of their self-esteem. Examining the appraisal process and its relationship to self-esteem might require that we continue to investigate appraisals in terms of variability, not accuracy, because there appears to be a notable movement toward a lower level of competence or adequacy as variability increases. It should be noted here too, that lower mean scores in areas of competence/adequacy or self-esteem were not associated with concomitant low appraisals as one might intuit. Instead, lower mean scores were related to an array or a variety of appraisals.

This study implicates the gravity of variability as far as self-perceptions and self-esteem are concerned. Adolescents who have lower scores on Scholastic Competence, Athletic Competence, Physical Appearance, and Global Self-Worth appear to be experiencing a discrepancy when it comes to their own and others' evaluations of their competence in these areas. According to Coopersmith, subjective experiences for a psychologically healthy individual, that is an individual with high self-esteem, are commensurate with how others rate this individual. In stark and disconcerting contrast, Coopersmith also suggested that a discrepancy between subjective and behavioral perspectives is indicative of a lack of psychological health (Coopersmith, 1967). The results from this study appear to be a graphic illustration of this disturbance.

#### *Limitations of the Study*

The current study makes contributions to our understanding of appraisals and self-esteem. Through the online research design that was formulated and utilized, this study also stands to inform the evolution of the research process in the social sciences. At the same time, this study is not without limitations. For example, in spite of the ability to

recruit volunteers through the Worldwide Web, response rate was quite poor for this study; the recruitment and data collection process continued for more than fifteen months and was labor intensive.

It's important to note too that while demographic information is not available for this study, there are several indications that generalizability of the results might be somewhat limited. In addition to the modest sample size, USA Swimming is comprised of at least 44% Caucasian athletes (with less than 10% representing nonwhite categories). Also, according to Best & Krueger (2004), the prerequisite that each participant have use of a computer and access to the internet suggests that they are likely to be white. Any additional differences (eg., socioeconomic status) between those individuals who own a computer and have internet access and those who do not cannot be ignored. Finally, while the correlations between the various domains and Global Self-Worth were consistent with Harter's (1998) norm samples, the fact that the adolescent participants scored considerably higher than Harter's norm samples on all dimensions suggests that there might be some differences between athlete and non-athlete samples. Generalizability of these results, then, might be limited to a predominantly Caucasian athlete population. Further research with more diverse samples could provide a more thorough understanding of the greater population of early adolescents.

### *The Looking-Glass Self*

Our incredible knowledge base about self-esteem has not been limited to our understanding of the differences between high and low levels of self-esteem, uncertainty of knowledge pertaining to the self, or the roles of perception and social interaction. In addition to Coopersmith's admonition that a discrepancy between subjective and

behavioral perspectives indicates a lack of psychological health, other researchers have highlighted some important findings that this study seems to validate.

An important example is the examination of the looking-glass orientation, the idea that self-esteem follows from the approval of others rather than preceding the approval of others. In their probing investigation of the looking-glass orientation, Harter et al. (1996) pointed to developmental histories of individuals that might have been characterized by greater disapproval or inconsistent or fluctuating approval that was based on the demands of key others. It seems at least possible that findings from this study might be a reflection of the inconsistent or variable approval to which Harter referred.

This study provides evidence for the idea that self-evaluations are indeed influenced by the feedback of others. In the domains of Scholastic Competence, Athletic Competence, Physical Appearance, and Global Self-Worth, as the level of competence or adequacy in each area decreased, the variability among appraisals increased. Genuinely high self-esteem has been associated with congruence between positive subjective and behavioral perspectives (Coopersmith, 1959, 1967), perceptions of competence (Bohrnstedt & Felson, 1983; Harter, 1988), perceived support (Harter, 1990, 1993, 1999; Lord et al., 1994; Pekrun, 1990), unconditional approval (Harter et al., 1996), and more extensive knowledge about oneself (i.e., ideas about oneself) (Baumeister, 1998; Campbell, 1990). The current examination of actual, reflected, and self-appraisals through a new lens, one that focuses on the perception of the child and not his ability to accurately guess the responses of others, reveals that variability could be hazardous to the development of self-esteem. As Cooley originally theorized, it would appear that self-evaluations are inextricably associated with the feedback of others. "What does not come

by heredity comes by communication and intercourse; and the more closely we look the more apparent it is that separateness is an illusion of the eye and community the inner truth” (Cooley, 1916, p. 9).

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Appendix A  
Recruitment Letter to Coaches and USA Swimming Teams

Dear USA Swimming Coach,

Hello! My name is Sharon Weiss, Head Coach of Lakeridge Swim Team, and Doctoral Candidate in Counseling and Educational Psychology at the University of Nevada, Reno. I am writing to you today to ask for your help in recruiting currently registered 12-15-year old swimmers of all abilities on your swim team for my doctoral dissertation study on swimmers' beliefs about what they are like. I have attached an invitation letter (Parent/Swimmer Invitation to Participate Letter) and would appreciate it if you would put it on your team website and/or in your team newsletter at your earliest convenience. In addition to posting the letter, you or the primary coach of swimmers from your team who choose to participate, will also be invited to participate in the study. Thank you in advance for your help and assistance in this endeavor.

The purpose of my study is to take a look at how swimmers see themselves and how they think others see them in certain areas, such as athletics, and also to look at the beliefs of parents and coaches regarding their swimmers in these areas. What I hope to learn from this study is more about how different people's ideas might be related, which could help researchers, educators, parents, and coaches have a better understanding of young people's ideas about themselves.

All individuals who agree to participate (swimmers, parents, and coaches) in this study will be asked to fill out online-questionnaires, estimated to take approximately 20-25 minutes for swimmers and 5 minutes each for parents and coaches. Every participant's right to privacy will be respected at all times throughout this study. The identity of all participants and the information provided by these participants will not be made public. Answers to survey questions will be sent directly to my private email address, for which only I have the password. The information will be transmitted using a Secure Socket Layer (SSL), which allows secure connections across the internet. All participant information will be kept strictly confidential and no information that may identify any participant will ever be published or shared with anyone, including other participants. Once information is received, any and all identifying information regarding participants (like names that help match swimmer, parent, and coach questionnaires) will be replaced with code numbers and destroyed immediately.

All procedures for this study, from recruitment to data collection and analysis, are in accordance with my current certification with the Collaborative IRB Training Initiative (CITI), which sets forth the ethical principles and guidelines for research with human subjects. Participation of swimmers, parents, and coaches in this study is entirely voluntary and participants may withdraw their participation at any time, without penalty or consequence. I do not expect any direct benefit to participants as a result of their involvement in this study. I do, however, hope that in addition to the possibility that individuals would gain a sense of satisfaction in knowing that they made a contribution to

the understanding of human development, the information participants provide will help researchers, educators, parents, and coaches have a better understanding of individuals' beliefs about themselves. It is anticipated that this study does not present any possibility of harm or personal discomfort to participants. You may ask about your rights as a research subject or you may report (anonymously if you so choose) any comments, concerns, or complaints to the University of Nevada, Reno Social Behavioral Institutional Review Board, telephone number (775) 327-2368, or by addressing a letter to the Chair of the Board, c/o UNR Office of Human Research Protection, 205 Ross Hall / 331, University of Nevada, Reno, Reno, Nevada, 89557.

Again, I thank you for posting the attached Parent/Swimmer Invitation to Participate Letter on your team's website and/or in your team's newsletter this month and for assisting me in my doctoral dissertation study. If you have any questions, please feel free to ask them.

If you or any swimmer on your team just competed in US Olympic Trials, congratulations! Enjoy the rest of your summer and good luck at the remainder of your summer championship meets.

Sincerely,

Sharon M. Weiss, M.A.  
Head Coach  
Lakeridge Swim Team, Reno, NV  
Doctoral Candidate  
Counseling & Educational Psychology  
University of Nevada, Reno  
Reno, NV 89557  
Email: [sharonaw@sbcglobal.net](mailto:sharonaw@sbcglobal.net)

Contact information for questions regarding this study:  
UNR, Office of Human Research Protection  
205 Ross Hall / 331  
University of Nevada, Reno  
Reno, NV 89557  
(775) 327-2368  
(775) 327-2369 FAX

Appendix B  
Parent/Swimmer Invitation to Participate Letter

Dear Parents and Swimmers,

Hello! My name is Sharon Weiss, Head Coach of Lakeridge Swim Team, and Doctoral Candidate in Counseling and Educational Psychology at the University of Nevada, Reno. I'd like to invite you to participate in my doctoral dissertation study on swimmers' beliefs about what they are like and what they think others think they are like. It's a privilege to contribute to the existing knowledge base in this key area of research with early adolescents and contribute to the sport of swimming at the same time. Thank you in advance for your participation.

Since 1971, I have had the great fortune of being involved in competitive swimming, first on the age group level, then the collegiate level at the University of Arizona, private swim instruction, age group coaching in USA Swimming (since 1986), and finally as a swim parent (from 1992 to present). In the past several years, I have had the opportunity to learn more about human growth and development in my doctoral program at the University of Nevada, Reno. During my time both in the classroom and on deck, I have developed a special interest in understanding young people's ideas about themselves.

The purpose of my study is to take a look at how early adolescent swimmers (ages 12-15) see themselves and how they think others see them in certain areas, such as athletics, and also to look at the beliefs of parents and coaches regarding their swimmers in these areas. What I hope to learn from this study is more about how different people's ideas might be related, which could help researchers, educators, parents, and coaches have a better understanding of young people's beliefs about themselves.

All individuals who agree to participate (swimmers, parents, and coaches) in this study will be asked to fill out their own online-questionnaires, estimated to take approximately 15 minutes for swimmers and less than 5 minutes each for parents and coaches.

Parents, specific information I will ask of your child, in addition to their questionnaire responses, will include their age, gender, current GPA, and current Best Times in their three best events. If they don't have best times yet, they will simply put 'NT' for No Time in the space provided. If they do have best times, but don't have them recorded, these times can be found in the USA Swimming database at <http://www.usaswimming.org/usasweb/DesktopDefault.aspx> (see Times/Time Standards). No other information about your child will be requested at any time. Again, all information used to help me match swimmer, parent, and coach questionnaires, like names, will be destroyed immediately upon receiving questionnaires, with only code number being used for the remainder of the study, and no information will ever be published or shared with anyone, including other participants.

Every participant's right to privacy will be respected at all times throughout this study. You will not be personally identified in any reports or publications that may result from this study. To assure the confidentiality of the information obtained in this study as well as protect the privacy of each participant, questionnaires are formatted (with Hypertext Preprocessor, or PHP scripting language) for use online. No questionnaire responses or information will be cached, or remembered by the computer on which the survey is completed and submitted. What this means is that once a survey is submitted, if any individual tries to return to the survey using the back button or the computer's history, the computer will recall the page from the server only, and reload an empty page, thus not revealing any responses given by a participant. Therefore, computer cookies will not be used and at no time will IP addresses be collected or forwarded with survey responses. Next, all the information that you provide will be sent directly to me, using what is called a Secure Socket Layer (SSL). This means that all the information you give is secretly coded (encrypted) until it arrives safely in my private email, and I am the only one with the password. All of your responses will be kept strictly confidential and no information that may identify you will ever be published or shared with anyone other than myself, including other participants. Once I receive your questionnaires, all information I use to identify you, for example, names that help match swimmer, parents, and coach questionnaires, will be replaced with participants' code numbers and destroyed immediately.

For all parts of this study, from recruiting volunteers to collecting and analyzing data, I will honor and obey my certification for conducting research with human subjects. Your participation is completely voluntary and you may withdraw your participation at any time, without penalty or consequence. I do not expect any direct benefit to you as a result of your involvement in this study. I do, however, hope that in addition to the possibility that you may have a sense of satisfaction in knowing that you made a contribution to the understanding of human development, the information that you provide will help researchers, educators, parents, and coaches have a better understanding of individuals' beliefs about themselves.

While there may be unknown and/or unforeseeable risks associated with your participation in this study, I do not anticipate that participants will experience any harm or personal discomfort from their involvement in this study. The questionnaires used in this study are among the most commonly used questionnaires in research with early adolescents and have been administered to a wide range of early adolescents and adults. The time commitment of 15 minutes for the swimmers, on the other hand, might be experienced as an inconvenience. This potential risk has been minimized in two ways. First, instead of administering one of the questionnaires (What I am Like) in its entirety, only those items that have to do specifically with this study (beliefs about academics, athletics, and physical appearance) have been used, thus reducing the number of questionnaire items from 45 down to 20. Second, the time factor for swimmers has also been addressed by offering the questionnaires online. Online administration is estimated to take less time than the traditional paper and pencil method. In addition, filling out questionnaires online will also offer more privacy and confidentiality for participants

than the more common group administration in the classroom setting, also reducing any potential risk that questionnaire responses would be seen by anyone other than the researcher. Finally, all participants are asked not discuss their responses with each other, unless each participant feels comfortable doing so, and then, only after all questionnaire responses have been submitted.

You may ask about your rights as a research subject or you may report (anonymously if you so choose) any comments, concerns, or complaints to the University of Nevada, Reno Social Behavioral Institutional Review Board, telephone number (775) 327-2368, or by addressing a letter to the Chair of the Board, c/o UNR Office of Human Research Protection, 205 Ross Hall / 331, University of Nevada, Reno, Reno, Nevada, 89557.

If you would like to participate in this study, simply email me, Sharon Weiss, at [sharonaw@sbcglobal.net](mailto:sharonaw@sbcglobal.net) and let me know you're interested. If you have any questions, please feel free to ask them. Thank you again for considering participation in my doctoral dissertation study.

Sincerely,

Sharon M. Weiss, M.A.  
Head Coach, Lakeridge Swim Team, Reno, NV  
Doctoral Candidate, Counseling & Educational Psychology  
University of Nevada, Reno  
Reno, NV 89557  
Email: [sharonaw@sbcglobal.net](mailto:sharonaw@sbcglobal.net)

Appendix C  
Coach Invitation to Participate Letter

Dear USA Swimming Coach,

Hello! My name is Sharon Weiss, Head Coach of Lakeridge Swim Team, and Doctoral Candidate in Counseling and Educational Psychology at the University of Nevada, Reno. I am writing to you today because one of your swimmers, \_\_\_\_\_, has agreed to participate in my doctoral dissertation study on swimmers' beliefs about what they are like and I'd like to invite you to share your ideas about what this swimmer is like as well. Thank you in advance for your consideration.

Since 1971, I have had the great fortune of being involved in competitive swimming, first on the age group and collegiate levels, then as a swim instructor, next as a coach in USA Swimming (since 1986), and finally as a swim parent (from 1992 to present). In the past several years, I have also had the wonderful opportunity to learn more about human growth and development in my doctoral program at the University of Nevada, Reno. During my time both in the classroom and on deck, I have developed a special interest in understanding young people's beliefs about themselves.

The purpose of my study is to take a look at how swimmers see themselves and how they think others see them in certain areas, such as athletics, and also to look at the beliefs of parents and coaches regarding their swimmers in these areas. What I hope to learn from this study is more about how different people's ideas might be related, which could help researchers, educators, parents, and coaches have a better understanding of young people's ideas about themselves.

All individuals who agree to participate (swimmers, parents, and coaches) in this study will be asked to fill out their own online-questionnaires, estimated to take approximately 10-15 minutes for swimmers and less than 5 minutes each for parents and coaches.

Every participant's right to privacy will be respected at all times throughout this study. You will not be personally identified in any reports or publications that may result from this study. To assure the confidentiality of the information obtained in this study as well as protect the privacy of each participant, questionnaires are formatted (with Hypertext Preprocessor, or PHP scripting language) for use online. No questionnaire responses or information will be cached, or remembered by the computer on which the survey is completed and submitted. What this means is that once a survey is submitted, if any individual tries to return to the survey using the back button or the computer's history, the computer will recall the page from the server only, and reload an empty page, thus not revealing any responses given by a participant. Therefore, computer cookies will not be used and at no time will IP addresses be collected or forwarded with survey responses. Next, all the information that you provide will be sent directly to me, using what is called a Secure Socket Layer (SSL). This means that all the information you give is secretly coded (encrypted) until it arrives safely in my private email, and I am the only one with

the password. All of your responses will be kept strictly confidential and no information that may identify you will ever be published or shared with anyone other than myself, including other participants. Once I receive your questionnaires, all information I use to identify you, for example, names that help match swimmer, parents, and coach questionnaires, will be replaced with participants' code numbers and destroyed immediately.

For all parts of this study, from recruiting volunteers to collecting and analyzing data, I will honor and obey my certification for conducting research with human subjects. Your participation is completely voluntary and you may withdraw your participation at any time, without penalty or consequence. I do not expect any direct benefit to you as a result of your involvement in this study. I do, however, hope that in addition to the possibility that you may have a sense of satisfaction in knowing that you made a contribution to the understanding of human development, the information that you provide will help researchers, educators, parents, and coaches have a better understanding of individuals' beliefs about themselves.

It is anticipated that this study does not present any possibility of harm or personal discomfort to participants. If any unforeseeable issues or questions do arise, however, or you have questions about your rights as a research subject or would like to report (anonymously if you so choose) any comments, concerns, or complaints, please contact the University of Nevada, Reno Social Behavioral Institutional Review Board, telephone number (775) 327-2368, or by addressing a letter to the Chair of the Board, c/o UNR Office of Human Research Protection, 205 Ross Hall / 331, University of Nevada, Reno, Reno, Nevada, 89557.

If you would like to participate in this study, simply email me, Sharon Weiss, at [sharonaw@sbcglobal.net](mailto:sharonaw@sbcglobal.net) and let me know you're interested. If you have any questions, please feel free to ask them. Thank you again for considering participation in my doctoral dissertation study.

Sincerely,

Sharon M. Weiss, M.A.  
Head Coach  
Lakeridge Swim Team, Reno, NV  
Doctoral Candidate  
Counseling & Educational Psychology  
University of Nevada, Reno  
Reno, NV 89557  
Email: [sharonaw@sbcglobal.net](mailto:sharonaw@sbcglobal.net)

Appendix D  
Descriptives for Actual, Reflected, and Self-Appraisals by Competence/Adequacy Level

Scholastic Competence Level	Mean	Standard Deviation	Variance	Kurtosis
SASch1	2.69	1.01	1.02	-1.15
SASch2	3.21	.78	.60	-.31
SASch3	3.70	.55	.30	3.04
SASch4	3.94	.27	.07	28.74
Athletic Competence Level	Mean	Standard Deviation	Variance	Kurtosis
SAAth1	2.55	1.01	.94	-.88
SAAth2	3.12	.78	.88	-.92
SAAth3	3.60	.55	.60	2.04
SAAth4	3.88	.27	.45	23.33
Physical Appearance Level	Mean	Standard Deviation	Variance	Kurtosis
SAPA1	3.15	1.03	1.07	-.517
SAPA2	3.33	.85	.72	-.36
SAPA3	3.71	.54	.30	4.95
SAPA4	3.92	.37	.14	37.20

Appendix E  
 Descriptives for Actual, Reflected, and Self-Appraisals for each Domain of  
 Competence/Adequacy by Level of Global Self-Worth

Scholastic Competence by				
Global Self-Worth Level	Mean	Standard Deviation	Variance	Kurtosis
SW2Sch	3.30	.84	.71	-.38
SW3Sch	3.62	.61	.38	1.95
SW4Sch	3.77	.55	.30	7.23
Athletic Competence by				
Global Self-Worth Level	Mean	Standard Deviation	Variance	Kurtosis
SW2Ath	3.30	.88	.78	.15
SW3Ath	3.42	.73	.53	.27
SW4Ath	3.86	.45	.21	15.97
Physical Appearance by				
Global Self-Worth Level	Mean	Standard Deviation	Variance	Kurtosis
SW2PA	3.37	.86	.73	-.04
SW3PA	3.52	.77	.56	1.57
SW4PA	3.85	.46	.21	15.70