

**SELF EMPOWERMENT THROUGH KNOWLEDGE: THE MULTIDIMENSIONAL
EFFECTS OF AFFIRMATIONS ON CHILDREN**

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Abstract

Sometimes children have low self-esteem due to their experiences of being embarrassed or criticized in the classroom. However, there are also other factors that can lead to a low level of confidence. This energy can produce societies where children have high rates of self-harm and suicide. Since self-esteem must begin with the “self”, the goal of this project was to see the effects that saying affirmations have on a child’s self-perception. The results found that children can empower themselves to feel more confident.

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INTRODUCTION

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to explore the impact that affirmations have on students' self-perception. It is a basic human desire to have a positive self-view. Therefore, anything that threatens one's self-esteem will be met with resistance (Cascio, O'Donnell, Tinney, Lieberman, Taylor, Strecher, & Falk, 2016). If students don't feel good about themselves, it can impact their desire to engage in academics, or other activities that allow them to express their highest potential.

As an independent educator, the author has worked with many students who are highly self-critical to the point of not wanting to try to engage with the learning material. This lack of interest stems from being in classroom environments where the students were criticized in some way that either embarrassed them or challenged their self-esteem over a long period of time. In some cases, the students were removed from the traditional school system in order to rebuild their inner resolve. Mindfulness and self-esteem builders have been implemented into the author's curriculum. Therefore, there is a desire to explore if students can help themselves by affirming their own inherent worth and talent.

Context

The author of this does not work in a traditional school setting and only teaches individual learners and small groups of students. Therefore, the focus is on students from a variety of educational backgrounds. Some students are homeschooled by their parents, teachers, or tutors, some students are homeschooled via a virtual public or private school, and others attend a traditional school. The method or location of schooling is not the topic of concern, the

focus is on the student's personal relationship with themselves and how that is manifested into their world.

Statement of the Problem

The problem is that students are often trained to base their self-worth on their academic performance, popularity, or opinions of others as opposed to embracing their inherent value as a human being. This can lead to negative feelings about life and one's ability to find one's place. It can also lead to embracing a false identity that one cannot sustain.

Rationale

Deficits in self-esteem can cause adolescents to experience depression, hopelessness, and suicidal tendencies (Overholser, Adams, Lehnert, & Brinkman 1995). In fact, hospitalizations for self-harm incidents become increasingly common in adolescents ages 12 and up (Hawton, Saunders, & O'Connor, 2012). This can have a great impact on the quality of one's life for years to come.

On the other hand, affirmations can remind students of their inner strength and resources so that they can focus on their ability to transcend problems and threats (Cascio, O'Donnell, Tinney, Lieberman, Taylor, Strecher, & Falk, 2016). This can help to improve one's emotional well-being.

Prior Interventions

Many have studied the correlation between self-esteem and school performance. There have even been studies on the effects that self-esteem programs have upon students. Yet the paradigm where this takes place is based on conformity, rigid assumptions, and viewing academic assessment scores as the sole indicator of intelligence.

For example, Covington (1989) asserts that “bright students typically hold themselves in higher regard and perform better than do students who are less bright. Thus, self-esteem might be simply a byproduct of ability status...” (p.75). Statements like this fail to define what criteria were used to determine if someone is bright or not. It also disregards the fact that everyone has unique gifts and talents that can be brought to light if they are given a supportive environment to cultivate that. In other words, a student can be very bright and have high abilities yet, perhaps their abilities are not recognized in the traditional classroom due to the structure of the organization.

Research Questions

1. What effect does saying daily affirmations have on one's self-perception?
2. What effect does saying daily affirmations have on one's motivation to learn?

Significance of the Study

While many schools offer self-esteem curriculum, there's a flaw in expecting the validation of oneself to come from a program implemented by an external source that is not equipped to handle the depth of the individual. In fact, it has been observed that many school-based self-esteem programs have superficial activities that don't address self-esteem at a conceptual level (Scott, Murray, Mertens, & Dustin, 1996).

It is important for adolescents to cultivate an authentic sense of self-esteem. This should be based on who they truly are as a being, as opposed to being based on how well he or she aligns with societal expectations. It could be stated that schools and their programs offer a type of conditional self-esteem. Gatto (1992) argues that students are not taught to look within because they are taught that certified officials tell them what they are worth based on their report cards, grades, and tests. Therefore, there's room to explore methods that are more holistically

motivated as opposed to having the foundation of cultivating self-esteem to conform to academic rigidity.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

There is a lot of research on schools and self-esteem, the psychology of positive thinking, adolescent self-perception, and the reasons why suicide is a leading cause of death among adolescents. All of this can be synthesized into finding solutions to improve children's emotional well-being. The topic of inquiry is to explore the impact that affirmations have on students' self-perception and academic motivation. There is also a question if the traditional school system (also referred to as the educational industrial complex) has a negative impact on the self-esteem of many students due to its inherent structure. The author explores if this can be mitigated by promoting the self-empowering action of affirming one's talents, value, and worth. The organization of this literature review is thematic. Because this research blends many perspectives related to the overall topic; the literature must be organized by theme.

The Educational Industrial Complex

Gatto (1992) notes that there is a high rate of student suicide, and he attributes this to being in a state of social crisis that has many facets. One aspect of the crisis is that children are miserable because they are forced to participate in anti-life school systems (Gatto, 1992). This system, or educational industrial complex is similar to the military complex (Brightman, H. J., & Gutmore, D., 2002).

Gatto argues that teachers care about their students, but the system itself is psychopathic because it doesn't care about the whole being, it just cares about moving through the daily gongs; or bells that moves one from class to class (1992). Brightman and Gutmore (2002) affirm that

teachers are not making policy decisions, and it's leading to “consumptive criminality” where vendors, or the industry of education is taking priority over the well-being of the students. If students are forced to conform to an absurd, anti-life system, that minimizes one's humanity because the structure is focused on prioritizing military routine and profits; then what type of emotional or psychological effects does that have?

The lack of recognition for one's innate value as a human being can even be found in studies that are supposed to help teachers and students. Covington (1989) poses the question if there is an association between school performance and self-esteem. He asserts that students with higher academic abilities perform better and might have higher self-esteem (Covington, 1989). Yet does this perspective encourage students to love and value themselves unconditionally? Or is it more aligned to seeing students as robots, or performers who are applauded for their ability to regurgitate information in the prescribed manner?

Gatto (1992) states that the type of self-esteem promoted in schools is conditional because one's self-worth is based on how they are evaluated, scored, and judged by others. His point is that this does not promote confidence. Furthermore, schools can't promote true confidence because confident people can't be forced to conform (Gatto, 1992) yet, the very system requires conformity in order to uphold the structure. Knowing that this system is in place, what can be done to help students empower themselves? Can the use of affirmations take the focus from approval from others in the form of test scores, evaluations, teacher praise, and conformity, and put the power back into the hands of the individual?

Adolescent Self- Harm

Adolescent Self- Harm If we don't consider the effects that the educational industrial complex has on children, we cannot get an accurate assessment on why adolescent self-harm is

so prevalent. In fact, suicide is the second leading cause of death in adolescents worldwide (Hawton, Saunders, O'Connor, 2012). There are a lot of factors for this including genetic tendencies, the media, and family situations.

However, culture and society are factors as well (Hawton, Saunders, O'Connor, 2012). The educational system falls under the category of society and culture. Having low self-esteem is also a factor (Overholser, Adams, Lehnert, Brinkman, 1995). But what if one's low self-esteem is caused by the educational environment? One solution for suicide prevention is to have therapy address one's self-esteem (Overholser, Adams, Lehnert, Brinkman, 1995). Yet what would happen if self-esteem was addressed before therapy was needed? This connects to the topic of what is the effect of empowering students with affirmations so that they have one tool to help build their own self-worth.

The Psychology of Affirmations

Affirmations are successful because they help people widen their perspective and decrease negative emotions (Cascio, O'Donnell, , Tinney, Lieberman, Taylor, Strecher, & Falk, 2016). When affirmations are used, people can focus on their inner light that is bigger than any threats to their psychological well-being (Cascio, O'Donnell, , Tinney, Lieberman, Taylor, Strecher, & Falk, 2016). If students are stressed by life, peers, school evaluations or other factors, affirmations could be a source of protection and positivity.

Yet in some cases, they may only be effective if they are used before a drop in self-esteem has occurred. This is because affirmations might make some people feel worse if what they are affirming is not in line with their own self-image (Wood, Perunovic, & Lee, 2009). If someone is repeating a phrase that they don't actually believe, it might start to generate negative thoughts around why they don't believe it. Or, it could cause them to compare themselves to 5

others in a negative way (Wood, Perunovic, & Lee, 2009). Therefore, a guideline would be for students to only use affirmations that they feel comfortable with.

Summary

Multiple authors note that there is a high rate of youth suicide (Gatto, 1992; Hawton, Saunders, & O'Connor, 2012). Yet the reason for it is not conclusive. Gatto (1992) suggests that students in general are miserable because they are forced to go to school and learn in unnatural ways. He suggests that the system is to blame and not the teachers (Gatto, 1992), and this sentiment is echoed by Brightman and Gutmore (2002) who propose that the industrialization of education is causing problems.

It is also noted that a lack of self-esteem can pre-dispose someone to want to commit self-harm (Overholser, Adams, Lehnert, Brinkman, 1995), yet there are many other societal factors. Gatto (1992) states that schools cannot promote true confidence because they teach conditional self-esteem that's based on how one is valued and rated by others. But what would happen if students were taught that their own self-worth, self-respect, and self-esteem shouldn't be based on their grades, or how they are evaluated by others?

There are many belief systems that espouse the interconnectedness of everything. Therefore, when educational decisions are made, there is also a need to see the big picture in terms of how societal systems of control are interconnected, which leads to people feeling powerless, which leads to a loss of self-esteem, which can lead to self-harm tendencies. One way to encourage true self-esteem is by using affirmations. Affirmations are shown to help people decrease their negative emotions and find a sense of inner resilience (Cascio, O'Donnell, , Tinney, Lieberman, Taylor, Strecher, & Falk, 2016).

METHODOLOGY

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to explore the impact that affirmations have on students' self-perception and academic motivation. It is a basic human desire to have a positive self-view. Therefore, anything that threatens one's self-esteem will be met with resistance (Cascio, O'Donnell, Tinney, Lieberman, Taylor, Strecher, & Falk, 2016). If students don't feel good about themselves, it can impact their desire to engage in academics, or other activities that allow them to express their highest potential. As an independent educator, the author has worked with many students who are highly self-critical to the point of not wanting to try to engage with the learning material. This lack of interest stems from being in classroom environments where the students were criticized in some way that either embarrassed them or challenged their self-esteem over a long period of time. In some cases, the students were removed from the traditional school system in order to rebuild their inner resolve. Mindfulness and self-esteem builders have been implemented into the author's curriculum. Therefore, there is a desire to explore if students can help themselves by affirming their own inherent worth and talent.

Study Population

The population consisted of human beings on Earth that are between the ages of 5-12 and who attend school in any manner. This includes those who attend a traditional school, a homeschool, a virtual public school, or who are privately tutored.

Population Justification

The intent was to obtain information that might be useful in supporting children who live on Earth. Narrowing in on socioeconomic status, racial constructs, and neurological diversity is not in alignment with the author's purpose of building unified cooperation. Therefore, the focus

was ages 5-12, which is also known as the K-8 milestone. This is a time of a lot of change, development, and interaction with peers (NorthShore University HealthSystem, n.d.). As children move into puberty and become teenagers it can be difficult for them to maintain their self-esteem (NorthShore University HealthSystem, n.d.) therefore it makes sense to apply a helpful measure before negative self-messages become amplified.

Intervention

The students sang or recited a list of affirmations each day (see Appendix A). The student was provided with a copy of the affirmations and a song (SandZ Academy, 2018). It was important for the student to choose which method was most resonate for him or her.

Intervention Plan

This supportive measure is meant for home use. Therefore, it required parental support and implementation. The goal was to have students sing along with an affirmation song; or simply say the affirmations each morning for two weeks. The choice to sing or speak depended on the student's preference, but the affirmations will be the same.

The first step was for the parent to give the student a survey which will assess his or her self-esteem. The following step was to use the provided video link to sing the affirmations each morning. The alternative was to use the provided list of affirmations to recite them each day. The process of saying or singing the affirmations once a day continued for 14 days, or two weeks. At the end of the time, the parents administered another survey to the student.

Sources of Data

The data comes from responses to two surveys that the students were given. The first survey was given before the student began saying affirmations. The second survey was given

after the student had completed saying the affirmations once a day for 14 days (or at whatever point in time the student stops).

Instrumentation

The sources were the participants. They began by completing a survey which was modeled after the Rosenberg Self-Esteem scale. This scale asks the participants to rate how they feel about certain statements such as, “I feel that I'm a person of worth, at least on an equal plane with others” (Rosenberg, 1989) and “I feel I do not have much to be proud of” (Rosenberg, 1989). The rating choices are strongly agree, agree, disagree, and strongly disagree. Each answer is assigned a numerical value. This scale was chosen because it is the most commonly used self-esteem survey in research (University of Maryland Department of Sociology, 2021). Also, even though the intent is to obtain qualitative data, it might be helpful to have a way to measure quantitative data.

The participants completed the survey twice – once before saying the affirmations daily and once after saying the affirmations daily. The answers were compared. The second survey had additional questions to see how often they completed the affirmations, if they had any challenges with saying the affirmations, if they have any other comments about their self-esteem, and if they had any suggestions on how the process could be improved.

Research Procedure

This study did not take place in a school environment. The tasks took place under the guidance of each child's parent or guardian. Therefore, the researcher gained permission from parents who allowed their children to participate, and who were willing to facilitate the process.

Soliciting Participants

The researcher recruited participants by reaching out to her personal and extended network of parents and educators. This network consists of subscribers to the researcher's educational newsletter, as well as teacher and homeschooler interest groups and clubs.

Additionally, social media was used. This option allows researchers to reach a wider segment of people than what is usually available (Gelinas, Pierce, Winker, Cohen, Lynch, Bierer, 2017).

Informed Consent

The researcher required parents to virtually sign a consent form before submitting any information to the researcher. The consent was given via an online tool for acquiring digital signatures. The form informed “ the subject about his or her rights, the purpose of the study, the procedures to be undergone, the potential risks and/or benefits of participation..” (Nijhawan, Janodia, Muddukrishna, Bhat, Bairy, Udupa, & Musmade, 2013, p.135).

Data Collection Procedures

The first step was to create a web page that explained the research and the process. If a parent chose to participate, they were directed to the consent form to virtually sign. After that was completed, they were directed to survey page that asked the parent to provide their email address, as well as their child’s gender, age, country, and grade. This form also contained a modified version of the Rosenberg Self-Esteem scale. The instructions were for the students to respond to the questions.

Once that was completed, the participants were directed to a web page which contained the list of affirmations and the affirmation song; as well as instructions and guidance for the rest of the process.

After 14 days, parents were sent a link to have their child complete the final survey. This final survey is the same as the first survey, along with space to answer additional questions that allows the participant to provide their thoughts on the overall process. All of the data collection took place virtually.

Ethical Considerations

It is important to be an ethical and trustworthy person. This requires having a personal value system and living by it. Being ethical also requires communicating honestly, transparently, and with the intent of harmlessness. It is the belief of the researcher that it would be difficult to have ethical research practices if one is not an ethical person. That is because if one doesn't have the habit of embodying personal integrity, then completing research is not likely to change that. A possible reason is that people repeat the behaviors they are accustomed to (Albarracín and Wyer, 2000). Yet, one's intention or motivation can be a key predictor in how one will behave (Nilsen, Roback, Broström, & Ellström, 2012).

It is important to have ethical research practices because conducting research puts one in a default position of leadership over those in their circle of influence; or those who would be influenced by reading the research or participating in it. To live in a civilized society, there must be leaders who are motivated by a heart's desire to be of service to others, as opposed to having the motivation of being in power over others. Intentionally harming others, manipulating their perception or consent, or acting with self-motivation is not compatible with living in a peaceful and civilized world. The world that we live in can be no greater than the consciousness of the people who inhabit it. This is reflected in the reflections of Helbing and Johansson (2010) who noted that societal standards, and cooperation with them, is of utmost importance to society

because it helps to reduce conflict and uncertainty, while providing the means for a civilization to self-organize.

Considerations During Intervention

The researcher does not use the word intervention to describe her work, in fact, she refers to herself as a reading harmonizer as opposed to a reading interventionist. That is because the intent is never to superimpose her will upon others, control outcomes, or take away from her students' rights to be seen as individuals capable of knowing themselves well enough to express what is helpful and what is not helpful for them. Using the word intervention in association with her work takes away from that sentiment because interventionists mindsets can lead to iatrogenic harm. Illich sees iatrogenesis as a structural issue because (on the medical level) it “undermines people's agency and competence to deal with their own disease” (Peer and Shabir, 2018). The researcher believes this has a much wider application throughout society. Therefore, this will be referred to as a measure, procedure, or harmonizer.

The belief that this is an appropriate measure comes from personal inquiry, not from research. Yet, the research reviewed is in harmony with the intent. Gatto (1992) suggests that the educational system does not care about the whole being of its students because it just cares about moving through the requirements. If that is the case, then the question becomes how can one teach the students to care for themselves as a whole being; as opposed to relying on others to do this? Gatto (1992) also states that schools produce conditional self-esteem because one is taught to see their worth in terms of how they are scored and evaluated by others. The researcher wonders what would happen if students were taught to value themselves unconditionally, while

they are existing in this system that Gatto describes. Thus, logic and creativity led to the inquiry of the effect of students saying daily affirmations.

This is an important line of inquiry because suicide is the second leading cause of death in adolescences (Hawton, Saunders, O'Connor, 2012) . Furthermore, having low self-esteem can be a factor that leads one towards that outcome (Overholser, Adams, Lehnert, Brinkman, 1995). Moreover, it is known that affirmations help people to decrease negative emotions (Cascio, O'Donnell, Tinney, Lieberman, Taylor, Strecher, & Falk, 2016) and help mitigate any threats to one's psychological well-being (Cascio, O'Donnell, , Tinney, Lieberman, Taylor, Strecher, & Falk, 2016) therefore this is seen as an appropriate attempt at bringing harmony.

Considerations of Researcher Bias

The researcher did not conduct the study using students that she instructs in order to avoid biases, feelings of pressure, or being seen as unprofessional due to soliciting students for external projects. The researcher involvement is with the results that are submitted virtually. This means that involvement with the participants is minimal.

The results are based on what was submitted. There was a commitment to interpret what the results actually said, as opposed to using deceptive measures to make them say something else. The researcher is aware that statistics can be made to say whatever someone wants them to say. Or, as Velleman (2017) puts it, statistics can be wielded to mislead. Therefore, from the perspective of the researcher, it is not about naming procedures and protocols, it's about a personal commitment to integrity.

Furthermore, if there are blind spots and hidden biases, that can only be revealed after completing the work. Sometimes people must do things, learn from them, and adjust as opposed to trying to control everything from the beginning. The researcher asserts that the need to be

overly controlling comes from fear. Shallenberger (2015) notes that people are afraid of making mistakes due to societal conditioning, yet mistakes are necessary in order to advance scientific discovery.

There is no intent to be biased with this research. Yet one would be naive to not recognize that the researcher could not predict everything. The solution was to remain flexible so that any adjustments could be made, yet firm in the commitment to integrity. The source of that sentiment is collective wisdom.

DATA ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

This section provides information on the data that was analyzed and the results it produced.

Data Analysis Procedure

The Rosenberg Self Esteem Scale comes with a score system. Higher scores indicate a higher level of self-esteem (University of Maryland Department of Sociology, 2021). Using the data from the students who completed both surveys, the scores were tallied up from the first survey and then the second survey. Comments from the parents and the participants were also placed in a chart to review. The ages of the students who originally agreed to participate and the ones who completed the final survey were also noted for future use and process improvements.

Seven families agreed to participate. Between these seven families there were 10 children. One child did not continue because it wasn't in alignment with their personality. Another child did not continue because they could not understand the survey questions. Five other children did not give a reason for stopping the process. The results analyzed were based on the three children who completed both surveys.

Validity and Reliability

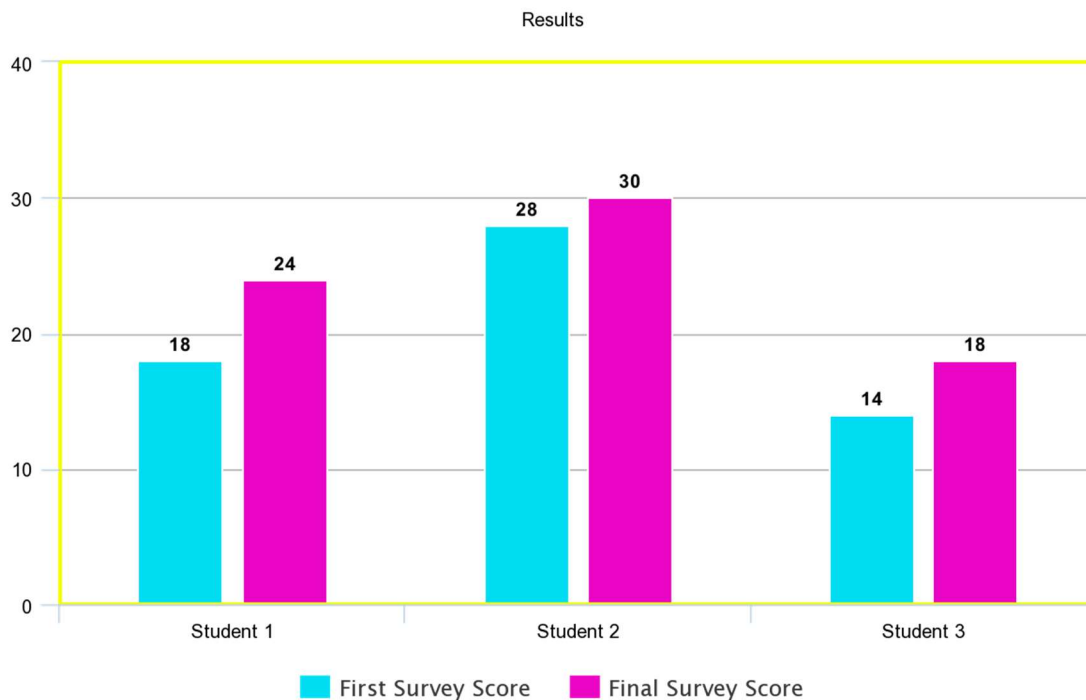
The researcher has analyzed the responses that the participants gave to the survey questions. Each participant received the same instructions and the same surveys. The results from each survey consist of a numerical value based on a scale that is commonly used in social science research (University of Maryland Department of Sociology, 2021) and comments from the participants. The reliability is correlated to the honesty in the self-reporting process. The participants were assured that they would not be judged for their answers, and they gave their answers privately while in the comfort of their homes. This might lead to an increased level of accuracy as concerns about retaliation or consequences have been shown to skew self-reporting data (Center for Health and Safety Culture, 2011).

Results

The purpose is to focus on the totality of the experience so the scores for each question are not being analyzed. Instead, what is presented is an overview that's focused on personal experience over numerical data.

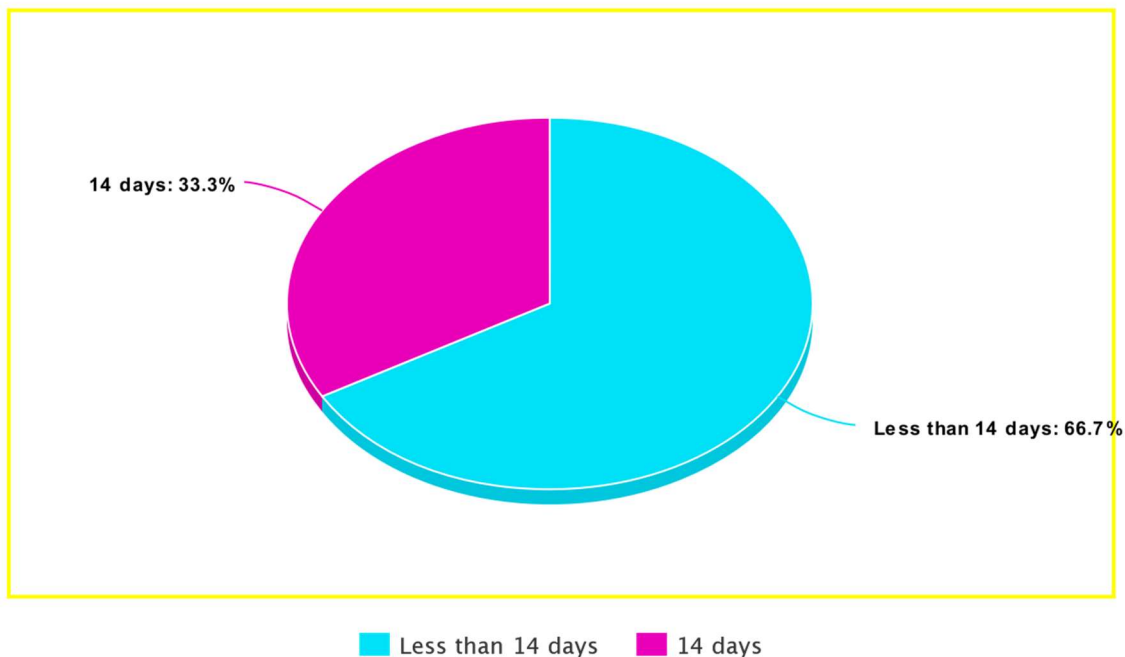
Descriptive Findings

The survey used has the highest possible score of 30. As previously noted, higher scores indicate a higher level of self-esteem (University of Maryland Department of Sociology, 2021). The first survey was taken before the harmonizer began. The final survey was taken after the student said the affirmations over a period of time.



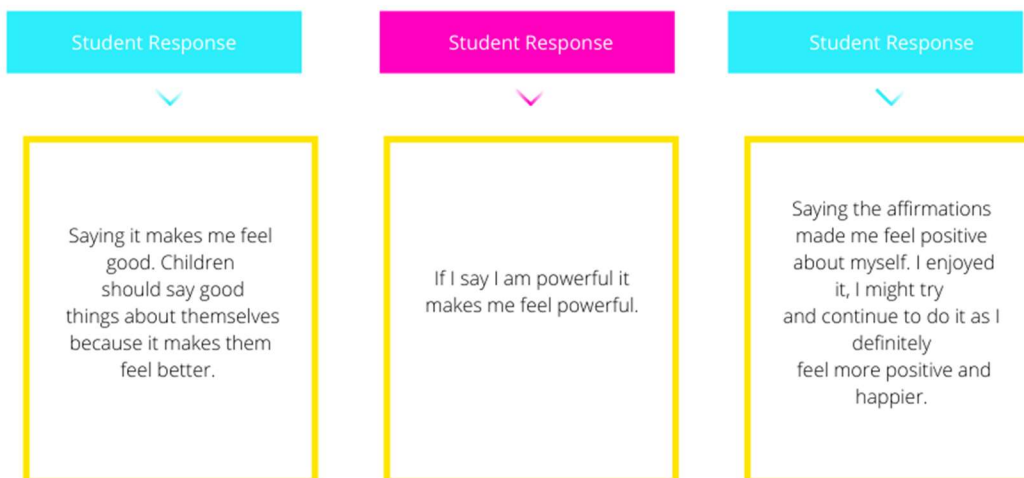
The final survey inquired as to whether the student said the affirmations for the entire 14-day period, or less than 14-days.

How many days did the student say the affirmations?



One parent reported that over the two-week period, their child became less argumentative and more confident and easy going. However, it is also important to consider the experience of the participants in their own words.

How did saying the affirmations make you feel?



DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Outcome Analysis

What effect does saying daily affirmations have on one's self-perception was answered by the scores of the self-esteem scale, and by the students themselves. All the students showed an increase in scores based on the Rosenberg Self-Esteem scale. Even if the student did not say the affirmations for 14 days, there was still an increase. Finally, the student comments reveal that the students found the process to be beneficial.

The question to whether affirmations impact academic outcome was beyond the scope of this research. It could be included in a future study by conducting the study over a longer time period and/or adding questions to the survey that address this aspect.

Learning Themes

It would be convenient to acquire participants using a classroom of students that a researcher has access to. However, that could also put students under pressure that they don't want to be under. Even if consent is obtained, there could still be a feeling of needing to comply or perform in a certain way to avoid consequences. That aspect, plus the question of professionalism in terms of soliciting students for outside projects, is why the researcher chose to recruit families who had no previous teacher-student with the researcher.

However, if this approach is taken, there needs to be more time to acquire participants. Due to the scheduling between the course that introduced the project and the course where it was to be completed, there was about two weeks to recruit participants. This eliminated some potential sources who were willing to help by putting the request in their newsletter, but they were not able to due to the time restrictions.

Implications

Saying affirmations can be beneficial for some adolescents. However, this data was not collected to improve mainstream education. It was collected to bring awareness to the importance of teaching students to empower themselves as opposed to relying on systems and structures that promote what Gatto (1992) referred to as conditional self-esteem.

What effect these affirmations have on their multidimensional presence could be explored further. After knowing how affirmations effect self-perception, one could inquire as to what do the students do with that self-perception in terms of if they feel comfortable speaking their truth even if it's not popular, how do they treat others who are different from them, and

what kind of impact do they think they can leave on the world. Of course, how this effects academic performance could also be studied but the researcher finds this to be less important.

Limitations

The low sample size is a limitation of this study. Gathering participants took place over a two-week period. Having more time to obtain participants would likely lead to a larger population sample and variety of responses. Another limitation was ensuring that the children could understand the survey questions. Some of the wording of the Rosenberg Self Esteem Scale was simplified while leaving the meaning the same; yet there was still the issue of a child leaving the study due to not understanding the questions. The researcher feels that in the future, parents should be given more guidance to know that it would be acceptable to explain the meaning and then have the child answer.

Some may suggest that conducting this virtually was a limitation because there was no way to ensure that the students said the affirmations daily. However, how many days the affirmations were said was a follow up question. Self-report studies are also sometimes seen as unfavorable. However, according to Mosher and Miethe (2015), self-report studies are usually used with youth; for example, The National Youth Survey and the National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health. Paulhus and Vazire (2007) note that the logic behind self-report studies is that if you want to know what someone is like, just ask them. Furthermore, the self-report method is the most commonly used mode of assessment in the psychological field. (Paulhus and Vazire, 2007). In the future, this study could be conducted in a classroom under the supervision of an educator or researcher, but that was not this researcher's intent.

Conclusion

There are many belief systems that espouse the interconnectedness of our existence. If everything and everyone is connected, that means that society should change the way we view life. Instead of compartmentalizing everything, one can choose to look at the whole.

When educational decisions are made, there is also a need to see the big picture in terms of how societal systems of control are interconnected, which leads to people feeling powerless, which leads to a loss of self-esteem, which can lead to self-harm tendencies. The current system works for some students, but at the same time, suicide is the second leading cause of death in adolescents worldwide (Hawton, Saunders, O'Connor, 2012). What is being overlooked? Why are children so unhappy? And who gets left behind when the quest to implement endless technology, achieve certain test scores, and put people on a pre-prescribed life path takes priority over recognizing the innate value and worth of every human being?

What would happen if students were taught that their own self-worth, self-respect, and self-esteem shouldn't be based on their grades, or how they are evaluated by others? This study showed that students can feel powerful, positive, and good about themselves without external validation and dangling carrots of the potential for external validation.

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Appendix A

List of Affirmations

- I have purpose.
- I am a good person.
- My life has meaning.
- I am here for a reason.
- I am important.
- I am intelligent.
- I love who I am.
- I am filled with love.
- I change the world.
- I welcome change.
- I welcome challenges.
- Challenges help me grow.
- I'll be okay no matter what.
- I am worthy of your love.
- I am worthy of your respect.
- I am worthy of your patience.
- I am worthy of your time.
- I have the power to make my life what I want it to be.
- I am unique.
- I make each day better than yesterday.
- It's okay if someone doesn't like me, because I know that a lot of people love me.
- I have a great personality, so no one's opinion will ever define me.
- I have integrity.
- I am creative.
- I am well protected.
- I can learn anything.
- I work when it's time to work.
- I play when it's time to play.
- I keep trying until I win.
- I am patient.
- I am powerful.
- I am truthful.
- I am respectful.
- I am beautiful.
- I am helpful.

- I am a hard worker.
- I'm a problem solver.
- I'm a winner.
- I am improving every single day.
- I am improving in every single way.
- I love to learn.
- I have respect for the people around me.
- I finish what I start.
- I will never give up.