



# The Association Between Adolescent Grade Skipping/Retention and Self-Perceived Success During Adulthood



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## Introduction

- High academic performance in high school is associated with higher-paying jobs with more advancement opportunities during adulthood (Tentama, 2019).
- Students that skip grades in high school display significantly better academic achievement into adulthood compared to their peers (Park et al., 2013).
- Students that are held back a grade are significantly more likely to drop out of high school. (Jimerson 2001)
- Academic performance and teacher-perceived achievement is positively associated with self-perceived achievement and happiness in adolescents (Chen 2009).
- However, an association between grade skipping/retention and success, especially self-perceived success, during adulthood has yet to be drawn.

## Research Questions

- Is skipping or being held back a grade in high school associated with higher self-perceived success as an adult?
- Does the association between grade skipping/retention during adolescence and self-perceived success during adulthood differ for individuals based on their sex?

## Methods

### Sample

- Respondents (n=4035) were drawn from the U.S. National Longitudinal Survey of Adolescent Health (Add Health), a nationally representative sample of adolescents in Grades 7-12 who began the survey during the 1994-95 school year for Wave I and were surveyed again during adulthood in 2016-18 for Wave V.

### Measures

- Participants were asked if they “had ever skipped a grade” or “ever been held back a grade” in the education module of Wave I.
- Life satisfaction was assessed by asking participants to rank themselves on a hypothetical ladder representing where people stand in the US.
  - The top of the ladder represents people who have the highest income, education, and most respected jobs.
- Participants self-reported their sex.

## Results

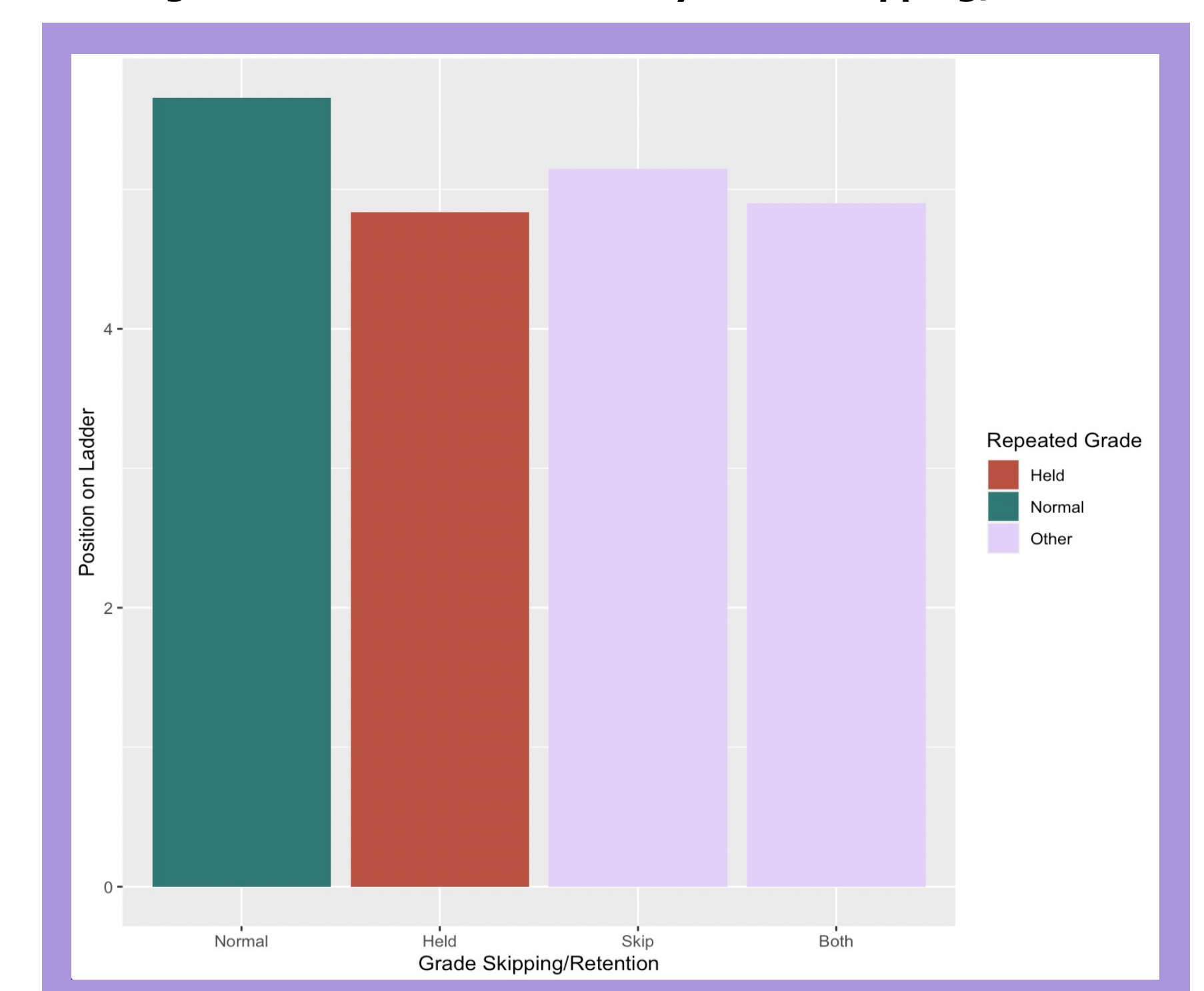
### Univariate

- 1.4% of participants had skipped a grade
- 17.0% of participants had been held back a grade
- Participants tend to rank themselves in the middle of the ladder on average, with step 5 being the most frequent response.

### Bivariate

- ANOVA analysis showed that **grade skipping and retention were significantly associated with participant’s ranking of themselves on a ladder of self-perceived success** ( $F(3,4031)=36.66$ ,  $p<0.0001$ ) (Figure 1).
- Post-hoc analysis on the individual subsets revealed that **grade retention remained significantly and negatively associated** with participants’ ranking on the ladder. However, **grade skipping was found to be not associated** with ladder position.

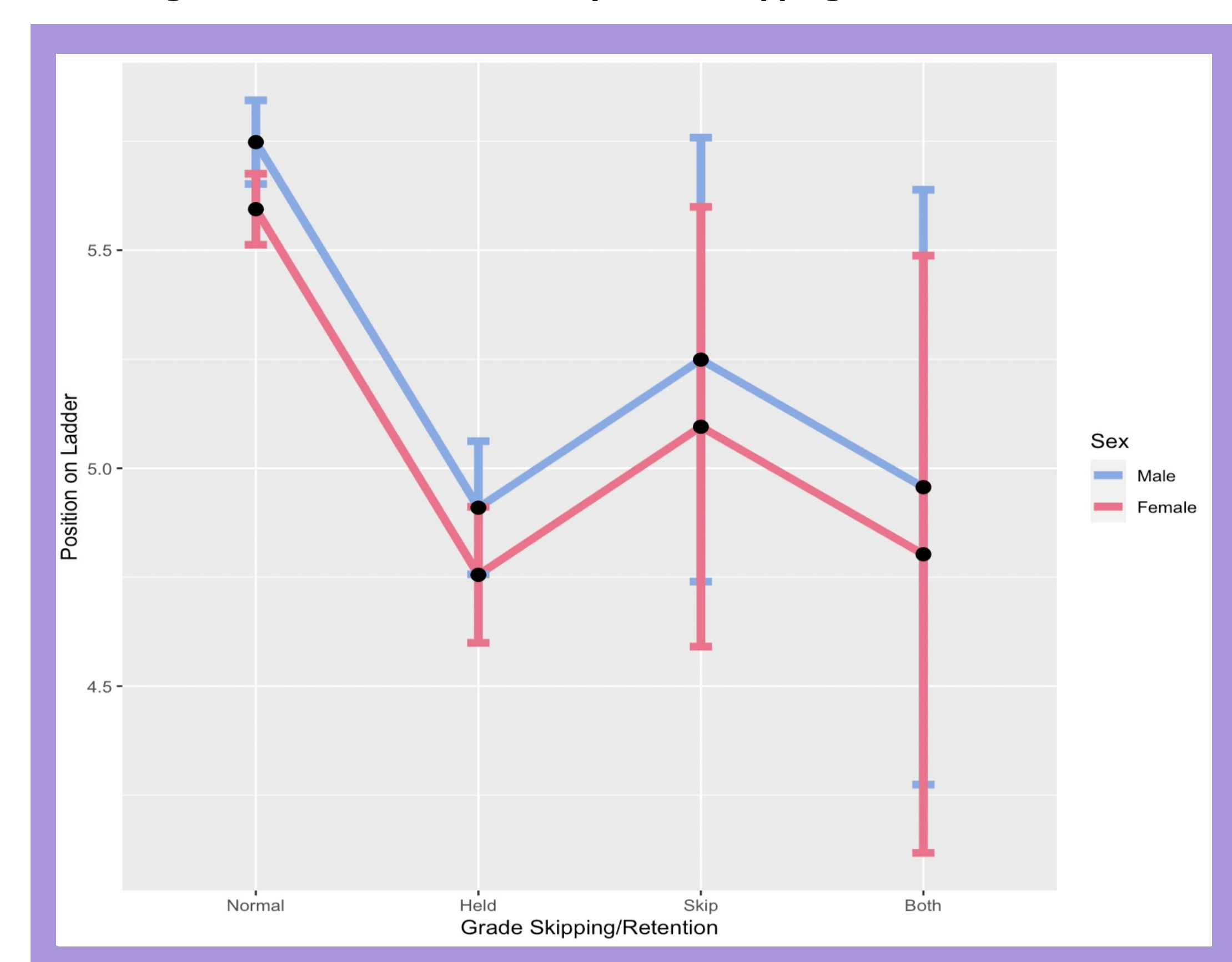
Figure 1. Position on Ladder by Grade Skipping/Retention



### Multivariate

- Multiple regression analysis reveals that that **grade retention is still significantly associated with** participant’s ranking of themselves on a ladder of self-perceived success after controlling for sex ( $B=-0.70$ ,  $p<0.0001$ ) (Figure 2).
- **Sex was found to be not significantly associated** with participants’ ranking on ladder after controlling for grade retention. ( $B=-0.12$ ,  $p>0.05$ )
- The interaction between sex and participants’ ranking on ladder was not found to be significantly associated with grade retention.

Figure 2. Position on Ladder by Grade Skipping/Retention for Both Sexes



## Discussion

- Individuals that were held back a grade in high school tend to self-report lower levels of financial and career success as an adult.
- The sex of the individual that was held back for a grade during adolescence may not affect their perception of their own success as an adult.
- Notably, the measure for success during adulthood in this study was self-reported by participants and may not reflect actual financial success as accurately as measures such as income.
- Further research is needed to determine how grade skipping and retention in high school is associated with an individual’s self-perception and career achievement during adulthood and hence what measures should be adopted to improve education for students.

Chen, S.-Y., & Lu, L. (2009). Academic correlates of Taiwanese senior high school students’ happiness. *Adolescence*, 44(176), 979–992.

Jimerson, S. R. (2001). Meta-analysis of Grade Retention Research: Implications for Practice in the 21st Century. *School Psychology Review*, 30(3), 420–437.

Park, G., Lubinski, D., & Benbow, C. P. (2013). When less is more: Effects of grade skipping on adult STEM productivity among mathematically precocious adolescents. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 105(1), 176–198.

Tentama, F., & Abdillah, M. (2019). Student employability examined from academic achievement and self-concept. *International Journal of Evaluation and Research in Education (IJERE)*, 8, 243.