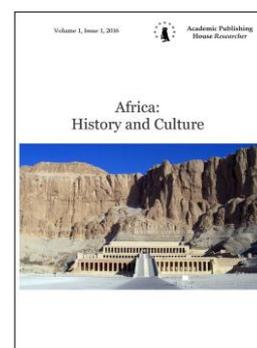




Published in the Slovak Republic  
Africa: History and Culture  
Has been issued since 2016.  
E-ISSN: 2500-3771  
2017, 2(1): 29-32

DOI: 10.13187/ahc.2017.1.29

[www.ejournal48.com](http://www.ejournal48.com)



## Call for Self-Esteem Interventions in Africa: A Brief Look at Gaps

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### Abstract

Self-esteem is a sociocultural concept that looks at the evaluation of one's self or the value one places on his or her life, whether positive or negative. High self and low self-esteem have different characteristic features. This paper looks at current issues regarding self-esteem and existing interventions that have emerged so far. Future studies will need to advance interventions with a focus on African cultural factors. They should also look at the role of gender, physical appearance, parenting and other demographic factors on self-esteem.

**Keywords:** Africa, socio-culture, current issues, gender, interventions, self-esteem.

### 1. Introduction

Self-esteem is a psychological concept that looks at the individual and their evaluation of their selves (Orth, Robins, 2014). Self-esteem is the summary judgment of everything a person can assess about himself or herself including; who one is, what one does, what one has, the different levels in how one appears and to whom and to what one is attached (Balley, 2003). Brown and Marshall (2006) instigated that the concept of self-esteem is used in different ways. These uses include the global self-esteem, the state self-esteem (feeling of self-worth) and self-evaluations.

Brown and Marshall (2006) referred to the global self-esteem as the personality variable that represent the way people generally feel about themselves. They referred to the state self-esteem as the self-evaluative emotion reactions to different events, that are experiences that either threaten or boost self-esteem. For example, feeling proud or feeling humiliated or ashamed. The last construct of self-esteem, they proposed is self-evaluation of which they defined it as the way people evaluate their various abilities and attributes. Though these three uses of the term may seem conceptually distinct, they are highly interrelated.

High self-esteem refers to a highly favourable global evaluation of the self, whereas low self-esteem refers to an unfavourable meaning of the self (Baumeister et al., 2003). Baumeister et al. (2003) added that people with high self-esteem are likely to set higher aspirations, persevere in the face of early failure and less likely to surrender to paralyzing feelings of incompetence and self-doubt.

High self-esteem may raise the confidence to tackle difficult problems and enable people to develop satisfaction from progress and success in tackling the difficult problems. In contrast, low self-esteem people feel worse about themselves when they fail (Brown, 2010).

Reports gathered in a research by Trzesniewski et al. (2006) found out that, adolescents with low self-esteem were at increased risk for poor mental and physical health as adults and had worse

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economic prospects than adolescents with high self-esteem. They found out that, they were 2.13 times more likely to leave school and were less likely to attend universities.

Self-esteem varies across cultures especially on age and gender. In a systematic cross-cultural study, cultural differences affecting self-esteem varied on socioeconomic, sociodemographic, gender-equality, and cultural value indicators (Bleidorn et al., 2016).

## 2. Discussion

### Sociodemographic Indicators and Self Esteem

Bleidorn et al. (2016) reported from their research, aimed at investigating age and gender differences in self-esteem, that, males consistently reported higher self-esteem than females. Again, a study by Atindabila et al. (2012) among adolescents in Ghana indicated a significant difference between gender and self-esteem. Hence, it was reported that, male adolescents had higher self-esteem than was seen in female adolescents.

Fortman (2006) examined the effects of body image on self- efficacy, self-esteem and academic performances. In his result, the self-esteem scores of women on the Rosenberg Self Esteem Scale were substantially correlated with their Body Esteem Scale and the Objected Body Consciousness Scale. These correlation coefficients showed that body image is strongly associated with both general self-efficacy and self-esteem in women. However, body image in men was neither associated with measures of self- assessments. On the other hand, Bhardwaj and Agrwal (2013) reported different results from their research which examined the gender differences in pre-adolescents' self-esteem. In their findings, the general self-esteem of females was found to be higher than that of males, which is entirely different from earlier reports reviewed.

In the early years of students' education, academic achievement plays essential roles in the development of the self-esteem of children. The successes or failure of students in academic performances greatly affect their evaluations of their self. Also, another factor that has become a chief contributor in the self-esteem of children is their subjective social experiences (Crocker et al., 2002). According to Bhardwaj and Agrwal (2013), children's good and bad experiences has tendencies of creating attitudes towards the self which can be favourable and develop positive feelings of self-worth, or in the opposite sense could be unfavourable and develop negative feelings of self-worth.

One other factor that influences self-esteem is one's satisfaction with physical appearances, explicitly one's body type. Bruce (2016) reported that male and female adolescent students with mesomorphic body type, who preferred their bodies, had high self-esteem compared to male and female adolescent students with ectomorphic body type. Body dissatisfaction may sometimes result in depressive symptoms and strive in keeping interpersonal relationships (Bittle et al., 2001). It is obvious that, adolescents who suffer from poor body image and dissatisfaction of their body/physical appearances during this period become more vulnerable to low self-esteem.

### Interventions for Self Esteem: African Socio-Cultural Indicators Matter

According to Orth, Robins and Widaman (2011), the promotion of self-esteem and the prevention of low self-esteem is widely perceived as an important societal goal that's merits widespread interventions to boost self-esteem levels in the population. Efforts to boost self-esteem in schools, homes and elsewhere would be well adjusted, if they resulted in significant improvements in how people get along with others in the African context (Baumeister et al., 2003; Bleidorn et al., 2016).

Such interventions will allow participants to discover themselves as members of a bigger environment with multiplicity of factors (Bleidorn et al., 2016). For example, academic performance was found to relate positively with self-esteem among junior high school students in Ghana where students received equivalent exposure of corporal punishment (Nyarko, 2017). To study self-esteem of students in Ghana will also require the study of the nature of punishment and social appraisal of self.

Kipp and Weiss (2012) emphasised that, a group setting can afford an ease of sharing common struggles and the possibility of seeing the issue from another perspective. Social influences are much stronger during this period, and adolescents frequently look to each other for support and guidance. According to Emler (2001) the most apparent message from suggestions of the determinants of self-esteem programs envisioned to raise low self-esteem, particularly on

childhood and early adolescence, is to modify the behaviour of parents. Acceptance and approval from parents together with practices such as making time for children, taking an interest in them, encouraging initiative in them are actions that can help change children's belief about themselves.

It is noteworthy that self-esteem develops and increases with age, declines after it reaches its maximum at about age 50 to 60 years (Orth et al., 2015; Orth, Robins, 2014). Age in this regard is also influenced by socio-cultural factors like household variables, work, relationships, and health (Orth et al., 2015). Intervention programs intended to raise low self-esteem should focus on developing competence, training in particular patterns of behaviour and modifying existing behaviour. Self-help activities, physical exercises, recreational activities, group based programs, peer-tutoring and whole family programs should consider the African socio-cultural variables to make it significant (Emler, 2001).

### 3. Conclusion

Self-esteem is an important part of human development. Those with low self-esteem are faced with various challenges. As researchers and practitioners work to develop interventions to help those with low self-esteem in Africa, the cultural and social frameworks of local settings ought to be taken into consideration. This will make interventions ecologically valid and effective to support those with challenges. This study has implications for education, policy and research.

### 4. Conflicts of Interest

The author declares the work has no conflicts of interest.

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