

SELF-ESTEEM

S*elf-esteem, self-worth, self-concept,* and similar terms describe aspects of self-evaluation. Individuals seem to seek their “true” nature by searching for an identity or sense of being. Social scientists usually define the self as the combination of one’s physical appearance, memories, and sensory images. Gecas (1982) conceptualized the self as “the concept the individual has of himself as a physical, social, and spiritual or moral being” (p. 3).

Logic, theory, and research have linked high self-esteem to a host of positive behaviors and low self-esteem to maladaptive ones. As popular enthusiasm for self-esteem swelled during the 1970s and 1980s, many came to see self-esteem as a social vaccine that increases desirable behaviors and decreases negative ones. The optimistic promise of self-esteem has appeared on the covers of many popular magazines, in numerous self-help books, in personal-improvement seminars, and on the Internet (Hillman, 1992; Burns, 1993; Branden, 1994; Sorensen, 1998; Emler, 2001). The assurance is that as self-esteem is raised, desirable behavior will increase while inappropriate behavior will diminish.

The self-esteem story is entertainingly illustrated in the George Bernard Shaw play *Pygmalion*, which was later adapted into the popular Broadway musical and motion picture *My Fair Lady*. Professor Henry Higgins reshaped the self-image of Eliza Doolittle by teaching her to speak proper English, schooling her in etiquette of high society, and dressing her in stylish gowns. The reactions of acquaintances to the “new” Eliza altered her self-concept. This miraculous metamorphosis fashioned a confident young woman from a cocoon of self-disdain. She had previously viewed herself as a coarse, lower-class flower vendor on the streets of London. Later she sees herself as a lovely, desirable young lady of society.

The pioneering research testing the Pygmalion effect, as it is known, was reported in the enthusiastically received book *Pygmalion in the Classroom* (Rosenthal & Jacobson, 1968). In 1964, researchers tested all the students in an elementary school in northern California with a standard nonverbal test of intelligence. Then 20% of the students were randomly selected as experimental subjects, while the other 80% served as the control group. At the start of the school year, teachers were shown a list of the randomly assigned “bloomers” in class, students that they were told were exceptionally bright. The only difference between the so-called bloomers and other students was actually in the teachers’ minds. The average IQ scores for students in the two groups were identical.

Nothing more was said to the teachers about the bloomers during the school year. The children were retested with different versions of the same intelligence test twice the following year. The IQ gains of the bloomers at the end of the school year were extraordinary! Twenty-one percent of the bloomers in the first and second grades increased their IQs by 30 or more points, 48% increased by 20 or more points, and 78% increased by at least 10 IQ points. Although the IQs of the students in the control group had also increased a little, the difference between them and the experimental group was remarkable.

The researchers argued that the modest increase in IQ gains by the students in the control group was a “spillover effect” from the positive classroom influence of the bloomers. The researchers speculated that teachers had acted differently towards the bloomers by giving them more help, greater approval, additional opportunities, and other classroom perks, which altered the students’ self-concepts. The high self-esteem of the students was manifest in their schoolwork, including performance on the IQ test.

The Pygmalion study has been replicated literally hundreds of times by other researchers. These studies focused on elementary, junior high, and high school students of many different demographics. Unfortunately, the literature is so varied that different scholars claim to have proven or disproven the Pygmalion effect (Rosenthal, 1973; Hansford & Hattie, 1982). Researchers have analyzed the data over and over again and have been unable to identify any theoretical explanation as to why the Pygmalion effect is so inconsistent. Importantly, even when the effect of self-esteem on academic achievement appeared in some of the replications, the correlation was rather weak.

In spite of sparse evidence, the belief in the efficacy of self-esteem mobilized the California state legislature to improve the quality of life in the state by enhancing its citizens’ feelings of self-worth. In 1986 the California legislature created the Task Force to Promote Self-Esteem and Personal and Social Responsibility. The politicians, scholars, and other members of the task force were convinced that raising self-esteem would reduce crime, delinquency, drug and alcohol use, school dropouts, poor academic performance, unemployment, discrimination, out-of-wedlock births, divorce, family violence, and a host of other undesirable behaviors. In addition, increasing self-esteem was expected to increase a variety of positive behaviors, such as academic achievement, work effort, productivity, and a relatively stable family life. In other words, self-esteem was seen as a panacea for a large number of social and personal problems.

The task force produced a rather insightful manual outlining ways that parents, teachers, school officials, community leaders, and clergymen could strengthen self-esteem (California Task Force to Promote Self-Esteem and Personal and Social Responsibility, 1990). In most California counties, committees were established to launch programs to foster feelings of self-worth.

The task force also assembled a team of scholars to review the research linking self-esteem to the relevant behaviors. The findings of the study group were disappointing, as they failed to support the high hopes of the task force (Mecca, Smelser, & Vasconcellos, 1988). The correlations between self-esteem and behaviors such as academic achievement, delinquency, crime, and job performance were too weak to offer support to the theory that increasing self-esteem would affect them. Because of this lack of scientific evidence for the efficacy of self-esteem, the task force was quietly disbanded in 1995.

Although the research support is weak, the enthusiasm for self-esteem as an antidote for many social problems has been unrelenting. In response to the persistence of the self-esteem movement, the American Psychological Association commissioned a team to systematically review the vast self-esteem literature, especially its relationship to important social behaviors (Baumeister, Campbell, Kreuger, & Vohs, 2003). This team examined over 15,000 publications focusing on self-esteem and tried to make sense of the findings while considering important methodological issues concerning the measurement of self-esteem and the direction of causation.

Self-esteem poses measurement problems because it is a subjective emotional state and, as such, is difficult to accurately assess. In addition, researchers have struggled with whether self-esteem is a perception of one's entire life or if a person has different levels of self-esteem for different aspects of his or her life. For example, is it possible that a teen has very high self-esteem about athletic ability but low self-esteem about

academic talents? Or does the teen incorporate athletic and academic accomplishments into a single sense of self-esteem?

After an initial review of the studies, the research team decided to include only those that used a global measure of self-esteem. It is difficult to assess which is the cause and which is the result; success in school, sports, or other endeavors may increase self-esteem just as high self-esteem may influence such behaviors.

In the Pygmalion and similar experiments, the impact of raising self-esteem on school performance was obvious; self-esteem was systematically varied and the effects on behavior were then observed. In addition to experiments, longitudinal studies where self-esteem and academic achievement or other behaviors are measured at different points in time offer some insight into the direction of causation.

An example of such a study was conducted by Rosenberg, Schooler, and Schoenbach (1989). They compared the self-esteem of nearly 1,900 boys in the tenth grade to the boys' academic achievements when they were seniors in high school. They found that the relationship between tenth-grade self-esteem and twelfth-grade performance was not statistically significant. However, they did find a statistically significant relationship between academic achievement in the tenth grade and self-esteem as seniors, although the relationship was weak.

Most of the studies reviewed by the team were surveys where the level of self-esteem, delinquency, school achievement, or initiation of sexual behavior were all measured at the same time. Causation is difficult to determine when all of the relevant variables are measured at the same time.

This exhaustive review by the American Psychological Association concluded that the effects of self-esteem on various behaviors are very limited. For example, they found that the impact of self-esteem on youths' school performance is negligible. The association reported:

The modest correlations between self-esteem and school performance did not indicate that high self-esteem leads to good performance. Instead, high self-esteem is partly the result of good school performance. Efforts to boost the self-esteem of pupils have not been shown to improve performance and may sometimes be counterproductive. (Baumeister et al., 2003, p. 1)

In addition, it was discovered that high self-esteem had mixed results in preventing delinquent behavior. "Overall, there is some support for the traditional view that low self-esteem may predispose a person to participate in antisocial behavior" (p. 1). However, the correlations were rather weak. These findings suggest that self-esteem generally is associated with lower delinquency, but the effect is very limited.

Interestingly, the review noted that some studies such as Salmivalli, Kaukiainen, Kaistaniemi, and Lagerspetz (1999) discovered that high self-esteem appeared among both those who were perpetrators of bullying and those who defended victims. Similarly, Lobel and Levanon (1988) discovered that self-esteem was strongest in both the highest cheating and lowest cheating groups of students. Baumeister et al. (2003) speculated, "Quite possibly, the actual effect of high self-esteem *per se* is to support initiative and confident action, for good or ill" (pp. 24–25).

Surprising findings emerged concerning alcohol and drug abuse. It appears that high self-esteem facilitates teenagers' participation in behaviors like drinking and drug abuse. They also cautioned that the relationship between drinking and drug abuse is complicated, which makes it hard to draw any hard and fast conclusions.

Similar negative findings appeared concerning sexual activity. Studies revealed that teens with high self-esteem tended to have lower inhibitions and were more disposed to engage in risky behavior, including sexual activity. Researchers warn against accepting the relationship between self-esteem and sex

as fact, since “popularity could cause both high self-esteem and more sex” (Baumeister et al., 2003, pp. 33–34).

Not surprisingly, their findings indicate that high self-esteem has a strong relationship to feelings of happiness and that “low self-esteem is more likely than high to lead to depression under some circumstances” (p. 1). In other words, those who feel good about themselves sometimes tend to be happier with their lives.

A rather disturbing concern was raised by the review. The research suggested that parents, teachers, and others who have endeavored to raise self-esteem in young people may have unintentionally fostered narcissism in their children. Young people thought to have high self-esteem are actually rather self-absorbed and conceited. These narcissistic youth feel that they are so special they deserve special treatment by others and that the rules of society don’t apply to them. Narcissism is certainly not a trait parents and teachers wish to cultivate in their children.

At the conclusion of this meticulous review of the many studies, the research team suggested a low-profile approach when fostering self-esteem:

Hence, we think self-esteem should be used in a limited way as one of a cluster of factors to promote positive outcomes. It should not be an end in itself. Raising self-esteem will not by itself make young people perform better in school, obey the law, stay out of trouble, get along better with their fellows, or respect the rights of others, among many other desirable outcomes. However, it does seem appropriate to try to boost people’s self-esteem as a reward for ethical behavior and worthy achievements. Although that may sound banal, we think it will require a basic change in many self-esteem programs, which now seek to boost everyone’s self-esteem without demanding appropriate behavior first. (p. 39)

ADOLESCENT SELF-ESTEEM

Although the scientific support is weak, some social scientists, school officials, and parents are convinced that feelings of self-worth are especially important during adolescence. This is a time when teens are seeking to establish independence from their families and are struggling to discover who and what they are.

Extensive research has established that peer pressure has enormous influence during adolescence. The high school years are also a pressure-packed time when many critical decisions about education, career, and marriage are made by these somewhat insecure youth. Some assume that youth with high self-esteem will perform stronger in high school, will more often seek admittance to college, will pursue professional careers, and will establish happier and more stable marriages. Because of this concern about adolescent self-esteem, we will first review the data we have collected concerning the level of self-esteem of LDS high school students in comparison to that of other students. Then, we will explore the effect of family, religion, and school on self-esteem. Finally, remembering the concern about causation, we will examine the relationship between the self-esteem of LDS high school students, academic achievement, and delinquency.

SELF-ESTEEM AMONG LDS YOUTH

Self-esteem among LDS youth was measured using ten items from the popular Rosenberg scale (Rosenberg, 1979). This scale includes items such as, "I feel that I have a number of good qualities," or "Sometimes I feel like I am no good at all." The students' responses ranged along a five-point scale from *strongly agree* to *strongly disagree*. The answers to ten questions were summed into a measure of self-esteem.

Each year a very large national study of high school seniors, Monitoring the Future, is conducted to ascertain what the seniors plan to do following graduation (Bachman et al., 1997). The survey includes five of the ten Rosenberg self-esteem items we asked of the LDS students. We compared the responses to

these five questions of the national sample of seniors to the LDS seniors from different regions of the United States and from Great Britain and Mexico. Data from the national study collected in 1994 were used because that year was in the middle of the time frame in which we surveyed the different LDS samples. The results are presented in Table 1.

A couple of interesting findings appear. First, the LDS seniors reported somewhat lower scores on the self-esteem items than did the seniors in the national sample. Weaker self-esteem scores appeared for both the positive and negative phrasing of questions. Two alternative explanations may explain these lower self-esteem scores. One common explanation is that the gospel and the Church place very high expectations and demands on its youth, which may foster feelings of inadequacy or not measuring up. This lack of perfection impacts the teens' sense of self and is then expressed in response to the self-esteem items. This explanation is also frequently invoked to account for Utah's high rate of prescriptions for antidepressant medication.

The alternative explanation is that LDS youth are taught to be humble and avoid pride, so they might be more modest in answering questions praising themselves. This avoidance of pride guards against the narcissism that was discovered in studies reviewed by the American Psychological Association. We do not have the necessary data to test these proposed explanations. We hope it is the latter explanation. Whatever the reason(s), LDS high school seniors report somewhat lower self-worth than U.S. youth of the same age.

Another interesting item in Table 1 was the high self-esteem reported among the Mexican LDS students, especially on the positive items. As can be seen, on the three items praising the self, their scores approximate those of the national sample. Interestingly, the Mexican youth were not as confident about themselves when they responded to the two negatively phrased items. We have no reasonable explanation for this cultural difference.

Table 1. Self-Esteem of LDS High School Students in the U.S., Great Britain, and Mexico, by Gender

Self-esteem	U.S. National Sample		LDS Seniors, United States		LDS Seniors, Great Britain*		LDS Seniors, Mexico	
	Males (n = 1,154)	Females (n = 1,416)	Males (n = 372)	Females (n = 971)	Males (n = 66)	Females (n = 63)	Males (n = 179)	Females (n = 182)
I have a positive attitude about myself								
Agree	83%	78%	70%	61%	65%	44%	78%	66%
Neutral	9%	8%	20%	27%	21%	38%	12%	19%
Disagree	8%	14%	10%	12%	14%	18%	10%	15%
On the whole, I am satisfied with myself								
Agree	78%	78%	69%	63%	65%	48%	74%	34%
Neutral	12%	10%	21%	25%	21%	31%	15%	20%
Disagree	10%	12%	10%	12%	14%	21%	11%	16%
I feel that I am a person of worth at least on an equal plane with others								
Agree	88%	83%	79%	74%	62%	64%	84%	81%
Neutral	8%	10%	15%	20%	28%	30%	8%	11%
Disagree	4%	7%	6%	6%	10%	6%	8%	8%
At times I think I am no good at all								
Agree	18%	30%	26%	36%	73%	29%	34%	40%
Neutral	16%	14%	20%	24%	22%	24%	16%	16%
Disagree	66%	56%	64%	40%	5%	47%	50%	44%
I feel I do not have much to be proud of								
Agree	13%	15%	14%	11%	18%	18%	31%	25%
Neutral	14%	10%	17%	21%	23%	26%	16%	18%
Disagree	73%	75%	69%	68%	59%	56%	53%	57%

* Data based on the U.S. equivalent of a high school senior.

It should be noted that among all the samples, young men reported significantly stronger feelings of self-worth than did young women. There is intriguing research literature that shows that young women's self-perception declines dramatically during junior and senior high school. One explanation for this is the finding that girls do very well in math and science until they enter junior high, but then they fall considerably behind young men by the time they graduate from high school. It should be noted that at this time when girls' math scores are falling, their verbal skills are increasing (Tavris & Wade, 2001).

Mary Pipher, a clinical psychologist who works with young women, provides a discerning discussion of the eroding self-confidence of young women:

Some girls do well in math and continue to like it, but many who were once good at math complain that they are stupid in math. Girl after girl tells me, "I'm not good in math." My observations suggest that girls have trouble with math because math requires exactly the qualities that many junior-high girls lack—confidence, trust in one's judgment, and the ability to tolerate frustration without becoming overwhelmed. Anxiety interferes with problem solving in math. A vicious cycle develops—girls get anxious, which interferes with problem solving, and so they fail and are even more anxious and prone to self-doubt the next time around. (Pipher, 1994, p. 63)

However, feminists are convinced that sexism in school is producing this effect. They argue that girls are counseled into educational tracts that move them away from the sciences and toward nurturing disciplines. Because of the difference in self-esteem between young men and young women, we have analyzed their data separately.

In summary, we found that LDS high school seniors have lower self-esteem as measured by the Rosenberg scale than do other youth across the nation. The lower self-esteem appeared

among all three LDS samples. It also was discovered that in accord with many other studies, young men have higher self-esteem than young women.

RELIGION AND SELF-ESTEEM

Our second objective in this study of the self-esteem of LDS teens was to ascertain the relationship between religion and self-esteem. We utilized the same five dimensions of religiosity discussed in previous chapters. We related religious beliefs, private religious behavior, public religious behavior, importance of religion, and acceptance at Church to self-esteem. (The specific items are presented in Appendix A.)

Religious beliefs were measured by ten statements about traditional Christian beliefs, as well as beliefs unique to Latter-day Saint theology. Examples of the questions are “Jesus Christ is the divine Son of God,” and “Joseph Smith actually saw God the Father and Jesus Christ.”

Private religious behavior was gauged by the frequency of personal prayer, personal scripture reading, fasting, and payment of tithing.

Public religious behavior included five questions about attendance at sacrament meeting, Sunday School, priesthood or young women meeting, and participation in church activities.

Importance of religion was determined by answers to 12 questions about the role of religion in each teen’s life and how often he or she has felt the Holy Spirit. Sample questions are “My relationship with God is an important part of my life,” and “I have been guided by the Spirit with some of my problems or decisions.”

Finally, *acceptance at church* was ascertained by three questions about how the student felt he or she fit in at church. “I am well liked by members of my ward,” is an example of one of these questions. All these questions were answered with the same five-point scale used for self-esteem. The responses were

Table 2. Correlations between Measures of Religiosity and Self-Esteem

	United States		Great Britain		Mexico	
	Males (n = 721)	Females (n = 968)	Males (n = 199)	Females (n = 274)	Males (n = 814)	Females (n = 879)
Religious belief	0.205	0.303	0.038	0.158	0.133	0.193
Public religious behavior	0.214	0.308	0.070	0.064	0.222	0.232
Private religious behavior	0.298	0.380	0.116	0.189	0.266	0.330
Importance of religion	0.258	0.414	0.076	0.227	0.281	0.356
Acceptance at church	0.354	0.431	0.257	0.363	0.356	0.376

summed to compute scale scores on each of the measures of religiosity. The correlations are presented in Table 2.

Obviously self-esteem is formed from many sources, including parents, friends, teachers, religious leaders, and from experiences in the home, school, and church. Bivariate correlations were examined because they isolate the relationships between the measure of religiosity and feelings of self-worth. Perhaps the most important finding from this analysis is that all three of the samples produced strong correlations between all the dimensions of religiosity and self-esteem. All five dimensions were significantly related to feelings of self-worth in the United States and Mexico for both young men and young women. Four of the five dimensions were significant for young women in Great Britain, but for some reason only the dimension of acceptance at church was significant for British young men.

The magnitude of the correlations with *acceptance in church* was most surprising. Table 2 reveals that for every sub-sample of LDS high schools students, feelings of acceptance, warmth, and belonging in church were associated with feelings of self-esteem. On deeper reflection, this relationship is not so surprising. Church leaders, advisors, teachers of youth, and friends at church make a significant contribution to young people's self-worth, as do other members of the ward, by helping youth feel welcome and valued.

Importance of religion includes not only the salience of religion in a young person's life, but also their spiritual experiences. This dimension of religiosity also produced rather strong correlations with self-esteem for all samples except British young men. It seems that a teen's feelings about his or her relationship with God and affirming spiritual experiences authenticate feelings of personal worth.

Private religious behavior was also a strong predictor of self-esteem. One possible explanation is that those youth who engaged in personal prayer and scripture reading experienced validation of their self-worth because these activities also foster a personal relationship with their Heavenly Father.

Public religious behavior, primarily attendance at church meetings, and *religious beliefs* had significant, but somewhat weaker, correlations with self-esteem. One reason for these lower correlations found in previous research is that attendance is an inadequate measure of religiosity because young people frequently attend their meetings for nonreligious reasons, such as associating with friends or gaining parental permission to use the family car. Also, we have reported elsewhere that Latter-day Saint youth with strong religious beliefs sometimes have difficulty translating their beliefs into their daily lives (Top & Chadwick, 1998). This data suggests that teens also do not fully transfer their religious beliefs into their feelings of self-worth.

In sum, we are amazed at the powerful correlations between the various measures of religiosity and self-esteem among LDS teenagers. It is suggested that the relationship is reciprocal, with both being the cause and effect of the other. Although the effects are probably weaker than the religion and self-esteem link, feelings of self-esteem probably contribute to religiosity.

MULTIVARIATE MODELS OF SELF-ESTEEM

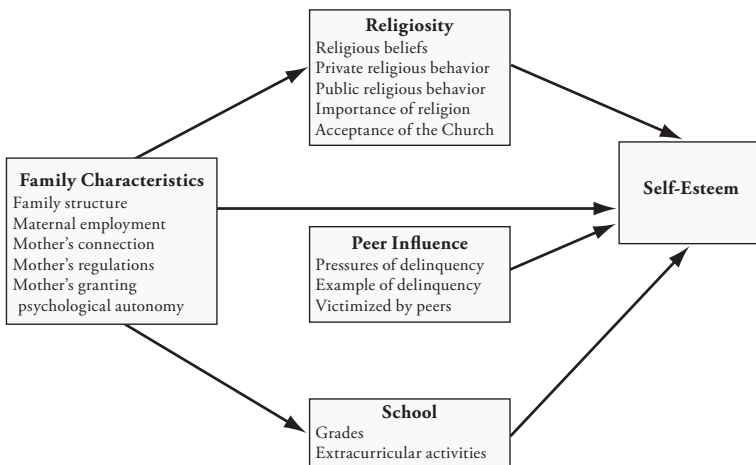
The third objective of this chapter was to test the power of religion to predict self-esteem while competing with other factors in a multivariate model. To accomplish this we used

structural equation modeling, which assesses several factors predicting self-esteem at the same time. This analysis, where religiosity competed with other variables to explain self-esteem, more closely approximates real-world conditions than do bivariate correlations.

Another advantage of structural equation modeling is that it identifies not only the direct effects of a factor on self-esteem, but also indirect effects. For example, the model will test not only whether a mother’s connection to a teen has a direct effect on self-worth, but also whether it has an indirect effect on self-esteem through private religiosity. In other words, the model will recognize that a mother has an impact on a teen’s private religiosity, which in turn is related to the teen’s self-esteem. The conceptual model we tested is presented in Figure 1 and shows potential direct and indirect relationships.

In addition to the five dimensions of religiosity, we included several family variables in the model. *Family structure* asked with whom the teen lived and identified single-parent families. *Maternal employment* ascertained whether a youth’s mother worked part time or full time outside the home. *Family process*

Figure 1. Model Predicting Self-Esteem among LDS Students



included three aspects of the parent-teenager relationship: connection, regulation, and psychological autonomy.

Mother's/father's connection involves the degree of affection, attention, and closeness the youth feels with his or her parents. It was measured by fifteen questions asking about the parents' involvement in their teens' lives. Two sample questions are "My mother makes me feel better after talking over my worries with her," and "My father makes me feel like the most important person in his life."

Mother's/father's regulation focused on the parent establishing family rules, monitoring teens' compliance, and applying appropriate discipline. Regulation was determined by six questions about parents' awareness of their teens' activities. Sample questions are "Does your mother know who your friends are?" and "My father is very strict with me."

Mother's/father's psychological autonomy is the parent's use of psychological control, such as withholding love to control a teen's thoughts, opinions, or feelings. This involves controlling thoughts rather than behavior. This factor is sometimes called "psychological control" because it is measured by ten questions about how often parents use psychologically controlling tactics. Sample questions are "My mother will avoid looking at me when I have disappointed her," and "My father says if I really cared about him, I would not do things that cause him to worry."

Two measures of school performance were added to the model. Previous research has suggested that getting good grades and participating in extracurricular activities contribute to self-esteem. Therefore, we asked the students to report their cumulative high-school grade point average (GPA). We also asked them to indicate which of eight extracurricular activities, such as sports or student government, they participated in and the number of hours devoted to these activities each week.

Peer influences included friends who engaged in delinquency, friends who pressed the students to engage in such

activities, and peers who bullied them. We assumed that delinquent friends and peer pressure to engage in delinquent behavior would contribute to lower self-esteem. The rationale was that such deviance would likely result in the disapproval of important adults, including parents, teachers, religious leaders, and even other peers, and would lower self-esteem.

Peer example was assessed by asking the teens if their friends participate in 40 different delinquent activities ranging from cheating in school to being in a gang fight. *Peer pressure* was measured by asking if friends pressured them to participate in the same 40 activities.

Victimization was the degree to which the LDS teen was bullied or victimized by his or her peers, which was thought to lower self-esteem. The measure of victimization was determined by eight questions about how often peers at school verbally or physically attacked them. Sample questions are “How often has someone picked a fight with you?” and “How often has someone forced you to engage in sexual activities?”

In the initial analysis we discovered that the responses the teens gave about their relationships with their mothers and fathers were so similar that it was statistically problematic to create independent scales. Because of this, we used the data about only one of the parents. Since more teens live with their mothers than their fathers, we used relationships with mothers in the model. We removed the father’s connection, regulation, and granting of psychological autonomy from the analysis.

We encountered another problem with importance of religion and private religious behavior. Essentially, these two dimensions of religiosity were measuring the same thing. Not surprisingly, those students who have private prayer and read their scriptures are also the ones who value the gospel and have had spiritual experiences. We therefore deleted private religious behavior from the analysis and chose to include importance of religion, knowing that private religiosity was also related to self-esteem.

Figure 2. Model Predicting Self-Esteem among LDS Young Men in the U.S.

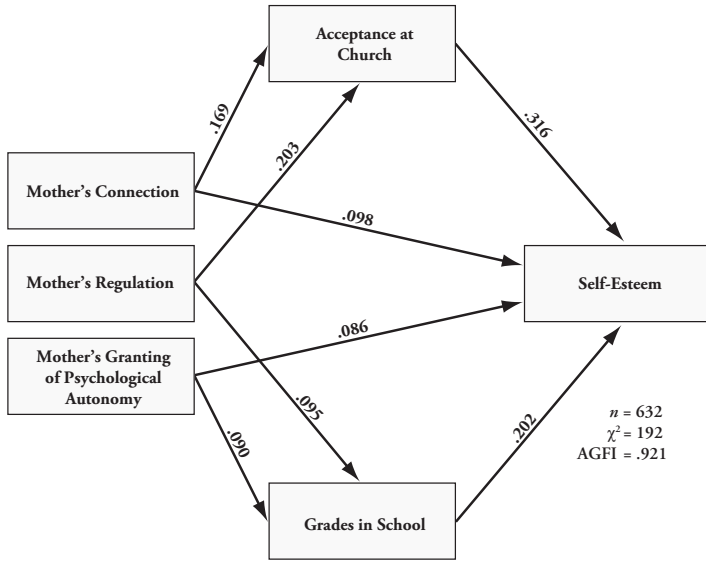


Figure 3. Model Predicting Self-Esteem among LDS Young Women in the U.S.

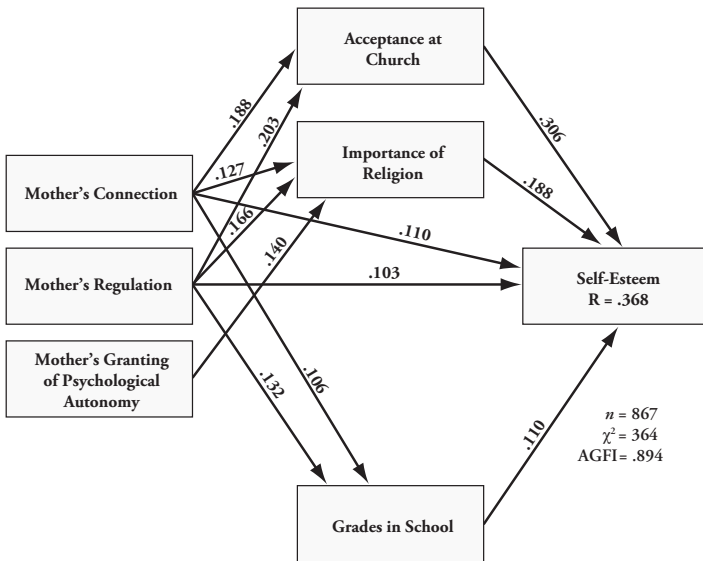


Table 3. Summary of Structural Equation Models Predicting Self-Esteem of LDS High School Students

	United States		Great Britain		Mexico	
	Males	Females	Males	Females	Males	Females
Model Characteristics						
<i>n</i>	632	867	153	224	530	571
χ^2	192	364	108	156	117	140
AGFI	0.921	0.894	0.854	0.847	0.947	0.941
Religiosity						
Acceptance	0.316	0.306	0.398	0.326	0.257	0.262
Importance	*	0.188	*	*	0.101	*
Family						
Mother's connection	*	0.11	*	0.297	0.145	0.112
Mother's regulation	0.098	0.103	*	*	0.144	0.221
Mother's granting psychological autonomy	0.086	*	*	*	0.177	—
School						
Grades	0.202	.011	0.148	0.146	0.122	*
Peers						
Victimization	*	*	*	*	*	0.108

* Not significant.

Figures 2 and 3 present the results for young men and young women in the United States. The results for the United States, Great Britain, and Mexico are summarized in Table 3.

Findings from the structural equation model show that religiosity has a powerful direct effect on self-worth for both young men and young women in the United States, Great Britain, and Mexico. Insignificant factors were trimmed from the models shown in Figures 2 and 3.

Acceptance at church produced by far the strongest link with self-esteem for both men and women. It is not surprising to find that feeling accepted is closely linked to how adolescents value themselves. What is unique for these Latter-day Saint

youth is where and with whom they feel comfortable. It is not acceptance by peers at school, but rather, it is within their wards and branches with leaders, teachers, and fellow members that acceptance has such a powerful relationship to feelings of self-worth.

In addition to the influence of acceptance at church, *importance of religion* was also significantly related to self-esteem for young women in the United States and young men in Mexico. This measure represents how teens feel about the gospel and the level of spirituality they have experienced in their lives. For these two groups, both acceptance at church and importance of religion make important independent contributions to explaining self-esteem. In the other groups, acceptance was so strong as to diminish the relationship of importance. Although acceptance has a stronger association with feelings of self-esteem, importance of religion can make a meaningful contribution, especially among youth who feel less accepted in the ward.

This analysis focused on religion's relationship to self-esteem. But it is also informative to note the contribution that school success, as measured by grades, had on self-esteem. Grades were an important predictor of self-worth among both men and women in all three countries. It is clear that approval of teachers, as well as the sense of accomplishment associated with good grades, significantly impacts the feelings of self-esteem among Latter-day Saint youth.

The structural model was created so that acceptance at church is a predictor of self-esteem. However, we recognize that the association is probably cyclical. In other words, not only does acceptance lead to strong self-esteem but, at the same time, feelings of self-worth contribute to acceptance by others at church. Theoretically, however, it seems most likely that the strongest direction of the relationship flows from acceptance to self-esteem.

Although not the primary focus of this chapter, the influence of parent-teenager relations on self-esteem should be

recognized. As mentioned earlier, because the feelings of connection, regulation, and psychological autonomy reported by the youth about their mothers and fathers were similar, we could include only the mother's data in the model. Just to make sure, we ran the model with only the fathers' data and found that the results were almost identical.

Mother's connection, the emotional ties the youth felt to their mothers, had a direct relationship with self-esteem for all three samples of young women and one sample of young men. *Mother's regulation*, the setting of rules, monitoring compliance, and administering discipline, was significantly related to self-esteem for young men and young women in the United States and Mexico.

Perhaps because the youth in the British sample were older and many of them had left home, mothers did not appear to have as much influence in children's lives, and it appears that mothers' regulation was not related to self-esteem for these young adults.

These findings are interesting because most research finds a fairly modest relationship between a parent's behavior and a teenager's self-esteem. Among LDS youth, parents' emotional connections and regulation of teens' behavior were both significant factors in understanding the teens' feelings of self-esteem.

The structural equation models also identified the indirect effects of the three parenting behaviors on the youths' self-worth. The results are presented in Table 4, which reveals that mothers' regulation makes an especially significant indirect impact on their teens' self-esteem. As can be seen in both the models in Figures 2 and 3 and in Table 4, regulation has an effect through acceptance at church, both for young men and young women in all three countries.

This same regulation makes an indirect effect through the academic grades of both young men and young women in the United States and Mexico. Parents who sit down with their teenage children and discuss family rules, such as responsibility

for helping around the home, curfews, completion of homework, and so on, score high on regulation.

These parents are also involved enough in their teens' lives to notice when the teens fail to obey the family rules. When rules are violated, these parents administer the agreed-upon discipline, usually some type of grounding, loss of privilege, or extra chores. Parents who provide this type of structure in the lives of their children help them realize the consequences of their behavior and also promote higher self-esteem.

Building self-esteem in this way is consistent with the suggestions made by the American Psychological Association team. Parents who express love and acceptance and then encourage their teens to freely express their opinions and feelings indirectly contributed to self-esteem among some of the sample of young men and young women in the three countries. But it is clear that mother's connection and psychological autonomy were not significant nearly as often as parental regulation.

Table 4. Indirect Effects of Mother's Connection, Regulation, and Psychological Autonomy

Indirect Effects	United States		Great Britain		Mexico	
	Males	Females	Males	Females	Males	Females
Mother's connections through						
Acceptance	0.169	0.188	*	*	*	*
Importance	*	0.127	*	*	0.109	*
Grades	*	*	*	*	0.113	*
Mother's regulation through						
Acceptance	0.203	0.166	0.274	0.198	0.227	0.233
Importance	*	0.203	*	*	0.306	*
Grades	0.095	0.106	*	*	0.110	0.181
Mother's granting of psychological autonomy through						
Acceptance	*	*	0.209	*	0.088	*
Importance	*	0.140	*	*	—	—
Grades	—	—	—	—	—	—

* Not significant.

CONCLUSION

The results of this complex analysis make it clear that parents and Church leaders really do matter in the lives of the youth of the Church, including how teens feel about themselves. What leaps out from the analysis is that parents and Church leaders must do more than increase young people's understanding of gospel principles. The main goal should be to make sure teens feel a spirit of love, acceptance, and warmth in the home and in the community of Saints. Parents must take the time and energy to monitor the activities of their teenage children and provide guidance in living gospel principles. Parents and Church leaders must work together to make sure youth feel welcome in seminary, institute, priesthood quorums, Scout groups, young women classes, Sunday School, sacrament meetings, and other Church-sponsored activities. Such acceptance is important in helping young people develop positive feelings about themselves.

This finding about the importance of feeling accepted adds to an earlier study that showed that young men who felt close to their priesthood leaders were more likely to serve a mission and to marry in the temple (Key to strong young men, 1984). The feelings of acceptance by adult leaders and youth peers help create a fertile seedbed for nurturing faith. Parents should work with youth leaders to help create this type of environment.

In response to the fear raised about narcissistic youth, parents and Church leaders need to help youth come to know the Savior for themselves. Youth need to feel like children of God and feel his infinite love for them. This is a personal journey of gospel internalization, rather than participation only in programs focused on outward behavior.

Ultimately, parents should help their children gain a personal testimony of who they really are, what the gospel can mean to them, and that they are loved by the Savior. Youth should be taught that as the Savior loves them, they must love

and serve others. These feelings of self-worth will prevent the arrogance and self-centeredness feared by the American Psychological Association team.

As parents work to help their teens follow this spiritual path, teens will strengthen their feelings of self-worth. This is not the way to enhanced self-esteem as embraced by the world and many pop psychologists, but it is the Lord's way. Following the Lord's way will give Latter-day Saint teens the kind of self-worth that will strengthen their confidence and character, enable them to resist temptations, and give them the desire to be caring of others.

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