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Self Esteem in Pre-Teen Girls

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Self Esteem in Pre-Teen Girls

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Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Science in Education

School of Education and Counseling Psychology

Dominican University of California

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Signature Sheet

This thesis, written under the direction of the candidate's thesis advisor and approved by the chair of the master's program, has been presented to and accepted by the Faculty of Education in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Science. The content and research methodologies presented in this paper represent the work of the candidate alone.

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April 1, 2014

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Abstract

Low self-esteem in young girls is on the rise. A review of the literature reveals that low self-esteem has been linked to addictions including drinking, drug abuse, bullying, disordered eating, cutting, depression, promiscuity, and suicide. What are the issues facing preteen girls today that have led to such rampant and widespread negative thought patterns and destructive behavior in their teen years?

This study employs a qualitative approach. Information was gathered from a purposive sample from two professionals. Data were gathered from their responses to a questionnaire that addressed contemporary issues that young girls face regarding self-esteem.

Results indicated that young girls face many issues with self-esteem that include familial, social, and academic factors. As a result young girls are abusing themselves, beginning in the preteen years. If self-esteem is not improved for these girls they will carry these destructive behaviors into adulthood, leading to a cycle of destructive behavior.

Chapter 1 Introduction

I watch the news every day. Each day I see a story about a young girl committing suicide, a preteen getting bullied, and a young girl with an eating disorder. What is the cause of all of these negative consequences in our youth? As a result of low self-esteem, I have known several close friends that have battled an eating disorder that took years to resolve. They had to learn that their self-esteem was not dependent on what a boy thought of them, the negative or thoughtless comments received by family, peers, and teachers, or how they looked on the outside. They had to learn to stop comparing themselves to women with unrealistic body types in magazines and on TV. Later while working as a nanny, then a teacher's aide and finally a teacher, I observed the same patterns developing in the young girls with whom I worked.

Statement of the Problem

The same issues that existed for girls thirty years ago persist today - low self-confidence, insecurity, unhealthy behavior, pressure from school and parents, and comparisons to others in the media. Pressure is coming down on girls about how to look, act, and think. I observed eight-year-old girls, whether I was taking care of small children or teaching, worrying about what they were eating and what clothes they were wearing-- were they wearing the *right brand* of clothes? Girls this young started wearing make up; young girls worrying about what they eat and how they look. During these precious preteen years one would hope that they would be experiencing the joys of childhood.

Boys the same age do not appear to be struggling with the same issues. What is causing this low self-esteem in young girls? Society wants young girls to grow up to be strong women with strong identities; uninfluenced by peer pressure and what the outside world thinks. Young

girls today are attempting to make themselves look like the girls and women they see on TV, in magazines, and in music videos. In the interest of a healthy, productive society we need young girls to grow up to be women that have a true sense of self, an unwavering identity. When the times get tough, which they will, preteen girls need to learn how to bend, not break. Pre-teen girls are the future mothers and leaders.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this study is to examine the effects of low self-esteem of preteen girls today. Low self-esteem in young girls is on the rise. A review of the literature reveals that low self-esteem has been linked to addictions including drinking, drug abuse, bullying, disordered eating, cutting, depression, promiscuity, and suicide. The focus of this study is to examine why low self-esteem is on the rise and how it is affecting preteen-girls.

Research Question

What are the issues that preteen girls face today? Before research can begin it is vital to understand the definition of “preteen” and “self-esteem.” Merriam-Webster defines preteen as “a boy or girl who is 11 or 12 years old” (Merriam Webster, 2014, para 1).

The National Association of Self Esteem (NASE) defines self-esteem as a concept that is founded on “the premise that it is strongly connected to a sense of competence and worthiness and the relationship between the two as one lives life” (Merriam Webster, 2014, para 1). The NASE explains that the worthiness component of self-esteem is often misunderstood as simply feeling good about oneself, when it actually is tied to whether or not a person lives up to certain fundamental human values, such as finding meanings that foster human growth and making commitments to them in a way that leads to a sense of integrity and satisfaction. Furthermore, the

NASE clarifies that a “sense of competence is having the conviction that one is generally capable of producing desired results, having confidence in the efficacy of our mind and our ability to think, as well as to make appropriate choices and decisions.” (Reasoner, 2010 para 1-3).

Worthiness might be considered the psychological facet of self-esteem, while competence might be considered the behavioral or sociological aspect of self-esteem. Finally, the NASE states that “self-esteem stems from the experience of living consciously and might be viewed as a person’s overall judgment of himself or herself pertaining to self-competence and self-worth based on reality” (Reasoner, 2010 para 1-3).

Theoretical Rationale

The American Association of University Women (AAUW) and Greenberg-Lake (1994) conducted the first national survey to connect the relationship of the significant drop in self-esteem experienced by pre-adolescent and adolescent American girls to what they learn in the classroom. The Analysis Group published the results in 1991, which piqued America’s attention and has had a major impact on continuing research in this area (AAUW & Greenberg-Lake, 1994).

The poll result brought the issue of equity for girls to the spotlight and has increased recognition in the U.S. education reform agenda. Later gender equity provisions were written into “Goals 2000: Educate America,” the federal education reform act passed in 1994, and the status quo agrees that these initiatives were influenced by AAUW’s significant research. The research poignantly notes that new awareness comes not a minute too soon. “For the 23 million schoolgirls in grades K–12 of our nation’s classrooms, change is clearly overdue. In an increasingly technological society, we can no longer afford to let our schools side-line-girls and discourage their achievement” (AAUW & Greenberg-Lake, 1994, p. 5). This study highlights

how girls begin first grade with similar skills and drive compared to boys. By the time girls finish high school, most have experienced an unequal loss of confidence in their academic abilities. Contemporary media helps quash girls' self-esteem by stripping them of their power and stereotyping their roles.

Unintentionally, schools collude in the process by systematically cheating girls of classroom attention, by stressing competitive—rather than cooperative—learning, by presenting texts and lessons devoid of women as role models, and by reinforcing negative stereotypes about girls' abilities. Unconsciously, teachers and school counselors also dampen girls' aspirations, particularly in math and science. (AAUW & Greenberg-Lake, 1994, p.5).

Many girls consequently become women who set their sights lower and achieve less than they should. This research further emphasizes the detrimental loss to our society when losing the achievements they would have made if only they'd been encouraged rather than discouraged. Another implication of the research is how society jeopardizes girls' ability to grow into responsible citizens and parents with the skills to challenge and nurture their own children. "Changing this pattern is not just a matter of fairness but one of economic urgency. By the year 2005, women will make up 48 percent of the nation's workforce. If we continue to compromise the education of half our work force, America will lose its competitive edge" (AAUW & Greenberg-Lake, 1994, p. 5).

For more than a century, the AAUW has worked to promote equity and education for women and girls. The findings from this study were clear: "girls' low self-esteem and consequently lower aspirations are problems that schools can—and must—help solve. And if we

are to meet the pressing need for an increasingly skilled work force, we must solve the problem now” (AAUW & Greenberg-Lake, 1994, p. 5-6).

Assumptions

My assumption is that low-self esteem, prevalent among pre-teen girls, is directly related to traditional media, peer pressure and social media.

Background and Need

In 1972 there was a groundbreaking initiative, Title IX of the Education Amendments. It protects people from discrimination based on sex in education programs or activities that receive Federal financial assistance. Title IX states that: “No person in the United States shall, on the basis of sex, be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any education program or activity receiving Federal financial assistance” (U.S. Department of Education, 1998).

The United States Department of Education (ED) to this day holds an Office for Civil Rights, with 12 enforcement offices throughout the nation and a headquarters office in Washington, D.C., to enforce Title IX. This legislation is important to this study as it addresses differences of treatment that women received versus men. The legislation recognized the inequities that existed between women and men and paved the way for change.

There is much research that supports the need for further exploration and research on the topic of developing self-esteem in young girls. The New York University Lagone Medical Center recognizes,

“As girls grow and develop, their overall sense of self-esteem and personal worth grows and changes, too. Self-esteem is about how confident we feel about our talents and

abilities, not just how others may perceive us. Girls with high self-esteem feel secure about themselves, regardless of how smart or successful others say they are. These girls express their feelings, make positive choices, and care about others.” (Gurian, 2012, para 1).

NYU reports, that women are now “graduating from colleges and universities in record numbers and holding key positions in industry, medicine, government and virtually all areas of the workforce, one might assume that girls today grow up having confidence in their ability to fulfill their aspirations” (Gurian, 2012, para 1). Yet, NYU points out that along with their newfound opportunities and freedom of choice, girls continue to face particular pressures on their self-esteem. Gurian claims that starting in the preteen years, there is a shift in focus for girls. Their appearance and their changing bodies too often begin to define their worth. For an overwhelming majority of girls, self-esteem becomes too closely tied to how they look and their physical attributes; girls feel they can't measure up to unrealistic society standards. “Teenage girls react differently than boys to "stressors" in life, especially stress in their personal relationships—a tendency that accounts in part for the higher levels of depression in girls” (Gurian, 2012, para 1). Also, Gurian claims that:

“the media, including television, movies, videos, song lyrics, magazines, the Internet, video games and advertisements, all too often portray girls and women in a sexual manner—revealing clothing, body posture and facial expressions. These images become the models of femininity that girls—from a very early age—learn to emulate. Girls are constantly barraged by this message: Women in our society are valued above all else based on their physical attractiveness” (Gurian, 2012, para 4).

The sexualization of girls in all forms of media is a “broad and increasing problem and is harmful to girls' self-image and healthy development,” according to a 2007 report by the American Psychological Association Task Force (Gurian, 2012, para 4). Sexualization is defined as occurring when a person's value comes only from her or his sexual appeal or behavior, to the exclusion of other characteristics, and when a person is sexually objectified, e.g., made into a thing for another's sexual use. The APA Task Force Report states that sexualization is harmful to girls in many ways.

Chapter 2 Review of the Literature

Introduction

Self-esteem in young girls is a complex issue. Much of the current research points to many variables including family narrative interaction styles, body image, objectified body consciousness, media influence, formation of intimate friendships, social skills, parenting, school connectedness, and tendency towards depressive symptoms. Although there is an increasing awareness of low self-esteem in young girls it continues to persist and is increasing according to research and current news.

Historical Context

There is a long and documented history of inequities and discrimination that has existed for women. Since the last century much has occurred from earning the right to vote to becoming a pivotal part of the work force. Women hold high positions in government, Fortune 500 companies, and universities. Yet, we have not had a woman hold the presidential office. There is no denying that society as a whole strives for equality, yet equality has not been achieved.

Since women are now graduating from colleges and universities in record numbers and holding key positions in industry, medicine, government and virtually all areas of the workforce, one might assume that girls today grow up having confidence in their ability to fulfill their aspirations. But along with their newfound opportunities and freedom of choice, girls continue to face particular pressures on their self-esteem. (Gurian, 2012, para 1).

Review of Academic Research

Family Narrative Interaction With Girls

Bohanel, Marin, Fivush, and Duke (2006) indicated three narrative interaction styles that describe the extent to which families discuss or fail to discuss their past in integrated and validating ways. Specifically, conversations with a coordinated perspectives incorporated information from all members and were related to higher self-esteem, especially in girls. "Family narrative interaction may be an important site for children's developing sense of self, both as individuals and as members of the family. Moreover, these processes may be particularly critical in early adolescence, when children are just beginning to construct coherent life narratives and are forming more mature and enduring concepts of self" (p. 43). The two major objectives are to explore and describe patterns of family narrative interaction and relate these patterns to children's sense of self as measured by self-esteem and locus of control.

The study was a longitudinal project on family functioning and child well-being. Forty middle-class two parent families were recruited through advertisements and summer sports camps and approximately 80% of families contacted agreed to participate. Of the 40 families 33 were identified as dual earner and seven as single earner. All of the families had a child between the ages of 9 and 12, 20 with sons and 20 with daughters. Thirty of the families were traditional nuclear families, 8 were blended, and 2 were extended families. A total of 29 families self-identified as Caucasian, 6 as African, or African American, and 5 as mixed race. One of the four researchers visited each family in their home and asked them to discuss a positive and negative event that they had experienced together as a family.

Once the families chose the events, they were asked to discuss the events in a natural manner as possible, as though it had come up in conversation. The researcher either then left the

room or moved to a not easily seen corner of the room to minimize his or her influence on the conversation. The Rosenberg Self-Esteem scale and the Children's Nowicki Strickland Internal-External (CNSIE) scale for ages 9-18 was used. The researchers developed five global dimensions along which the narrative interactions varied: collaborative, child centered, parallel, facilitated-moderated and disharmonious. The researchers set up tables to relay the information.

The results yielded three types of family narrative interaction style--a coordinated perspective, an individual perspective, and an imposed perspective--and these styles were consistent across family reminiscing about both highly positive and negative experiences. Coordinated perspective talking during family reminiscing is significantly related to self-esteem for girls but not boys. Families using a coordinated interaction narrative style teach their children that they are a part of a unified, cohesive family whose members understand and work through positive and negative experiences together. Previous literature has suggested that there are gender differences in what contributes to girls' and boys' sense of self (Openshaw, 1984; Ryan, 1993; as cited in Bohanel, Marin, Fivush, and Duke, 2006). Specific to identity, girls value relatedness and connectedness, whereas boys value autonomy and independence.

The second narrative interaction style identified was an individual perspective style. Families who predominantly use this narrative interaction style attempt to elicit information from their children by the use of questions: most often, each family member takes a turn telling his or her own individual story and point of view. Children of these families are not exposed to a cohesive, unitary collaborative narrative, but individual turn taking. The individual perspective narrative interaction style and children's external locus of control was related to gender. The individual perspective style was significantly related to boys' external locus of control but not girls'.

The third narrative interaction style identified was an imposed perspective style. Families who use an imposed perspective typically contain one parent who dominates the family conversation, often to the point that the parent ignores other family members' opinions. These parents are not simply providing more structure for their children during these narrative interactions; in many cases, these narratives resemble a parental lecture with complaints and put-downs offered by multiple family members, none of which is likely welcomed by other members of the family. Families using this style appear to be both controlling and unsupportive; they do not acknowledge children's individual viewpoints, and they certainly do not strive to create shared meaning through a coordinated perspective. The researchers found that this style is unrelated to self-esteem and locus of control. However, the researchers noted that the imposed perspective was relatively rare in the families that participated and the lack of relation to children's sense of self may be due to the low occurrence and little variability in this interaction style in the sample. This study reveals how various family narratives play a role in self-esteem of preteens as well as noting the difference that exist between boys and girls.

Dieting: A Risk Factor

Sinton and Birch (2005) researched whether disordered eating in adolescence, particularly in female populations, and if increases in rates of dieting mirror increases in the growing rates of eating disorders in females. Dieting, also increase the likelihood of over-eating and greater weight gain over time. Girls as young as 5 years old report an awareness of dieting practices (Abramovitz & Birch, 2000; as cited in Sinton and Birch, 2005) and girls in middle childhood report engaging in dieting behaviors or wanting to lose weight. There are both individual characteristic and family environmental experiences during childhood that are related to child eating behaviors and attitudes. The negative effects of early self-initiated dieting have been

described yet Sinton and Birch, (2005), wanting to document the predictors of the early emergence of dieting. The goal of the study was to examine the contribution of weight status to the early emergence of dieting in preadolescent girls, independently and in combination with psychological variables previously identified as predictors of adolescent eating pathology (Polivy & Herman, 2002; Stice, 2002; p. 347; as cited in Sinton and Birch, 2005).

The study tested a longitudinal model predicting the emergence of dieting in girls at the age of nine years using data from the same girls measured at 5 and 7. Participants were from Pennsylvania and were part of a longitudinal study. There were 197 five-year-old girls and their parents, of whom 192 families were reassessed 2 years later when girls were 7 years old. A third assessment with 183 families was conducted 2 years later when girls were 9 years old. Eligibility requirements included living with biological parents, the absence of severe food allergies, or chronic medical problems affecting food intake, and the absence of dietary restrictions involving animal products.

The girls visited the lab in waves known as "camp visits" during the summer with 6 girls visiting the lab on a typical data collection day. Each girl was individually interviewed. Mothers also participated by completing questionnaires assessing each mother's own weight concerns, body satisfaction, eating behaviors, and child feeding practices, along with questions about the mother's marital experiences, psychological functioning, and parenting attitudes. The researchers used tables to report their findings. The researcher used quantitative and qualitative data.

Weight status at the age of 5 years is a critical factor related to the emergence of dieting in young girls. A combination of individual and family characteristics measured at ages 5 and 7 can predict the emergence of dieting in girls at age 9 providing support for the recent arguments for a multifactorial and multivariate approach within eating disorder research. The current findings

were consistent with Byely, Archibald, Graber, and Brooks-Gunn (2000, p. 351; as cited in Sinton and Birch, 2005) who reported a similar significant and unique contribution of weight status to the prediction of girls' problematic dieting and the relationship of higher percent body fat in adolescent females with the risk for chronic eating problems. This study is connected to my research in that it identifies correlations to eating disorders, which are consistent with low self-esteem in young girls.

A Measure Of Objectified Body Consciousness For Preadolescent and Adolescent Youth

Lindberg, Hyde, and McKinley (2006) examine the effects of objectified body consciousness (OBC) in relation to disordered eating pertaining to youth. OBC is on the rise among adolescent girls. OBC is the tendency to view oneself as an object to be looked at and evaluated by others. Girls with high OBC have a potential vulnerability factor for depression and disordered eating, disorders in which woman are overrepresented. The researchers state that the theories driving the research report that women experience sexual objectification as they progress through adolescence.

The researchers' goal was to develop an age-appropriate measure to allow study of OBC development during preadolescence and adolescence and to report and discuss initial findings about the correlates of OBC in preadolescence. The researchers explain that previous research has documented the development of related constructs, such as self-consciousness, body dissatisfaction, and eating pathologies (Jones, 2004; Rankin, Gibbons, & Gerrard, 2004; Stice, 2001; Stice & Whitenton, 2002; p. 67; as cited in Lindberg, Hyde, and McKinley, 2006). Yet Lindberg, Hyde, and McKinley claim that basic questions remain unanswered. Of most importance -- how does OBC develop? The researchers stated that a full understanding of OBC

would require studying children before OBC is believed to emerge (prepuberty) and tracking the development of OBC through adolescence.

Participants in the main sample were 319 children (164) girls and their mothers who are part of the ongoing, longitudinal Wisconsin Study of Families and Work. Data for the study was collected when children had just completed fifth grade. Children's mean age at the time of assessment was 11.2 years (range 10-12). All families in the study were originally from Milwaukee or Madison areas of Wisconsin. The majority of the children were White (90%), with 4% African American, 2% Hispanic, 2% American Indian, and 1% Asian American. Children and mothers each received \$25 for their participation. Signed parental consent and child assent were obtained for all child participants. Participants in the main sample completed requested instructions on a laptop computer during an in-home visit, which lasted approximately one hour. Children in the test-retest sample were tested at their after-school or summer campsite. They completed the OBC-Youth and measures of attitudes toward appearance and public self-consciousness. The authors displayed study results throughout four independent tables. The researcher used quantitative data (Lindberg, Hyde, and McKinley, 2006).

Girls reported significantly more body surveillance compared to boys. This finding supports a main theory of OBC (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997; as cited in Lindberg, Hyde, and McKinley, 2006) that OBC is uniquely and more pervasively a phenomenon among females. What stands out is that this difference has emerged by age 11. No differences were found between boys and girls in their ratings of body shame or body esteem. Both pubertal development and BMI were strongly related to body shame. The researchers state that these findings are consistent with the notion that pubertal changes take girls further from their body ideal and thus create body dissatisfaction. This research supports previous research that shows

more dissatisfaction among early -than late-maturing girls (Graber, 1994, p.74; as cited in Lindberg, Hyde, and McKinley, 2006). This study relates in that it identifies two factors related to body shame for preteen girls. This study identifies factors related in the development of low self-esteem.

Popular Culture Linked to Negative Behavior

Comulada, Rotheram-Borus, Carey, Poris, Lord, and Mayfield, (2011) explore established links between popular culture and negative behaviors in teens including the glamorization of tobacco and teen smoking (Strasburger, 2010, p. 263; as cited in Comulada, Rotheram-Borus, Carey, Poris, Lord, and Mayfield, 2011). Behavioral attitudes and social norms that tweens are developing, partially through popular culture, may influence their behavioral intentions.

The purpose of the study is to identify negative effects of popular culture on tweens. The researchers hypothesized that based on the level of engagement in behaviors that link tweens to popular culture, that tweens can be categorized by the major pathway that links them to popular culture. They further hypothesize that high levels of engagement in linkage behaviors will be associated with tweens' less positive perceptions about themselves, more materialistic values and positive feelings about substance use.

The study is based on secondary data analysis of a marketing survey conducted in December 2001 by The Family Room. Paper and pencil surveys were administered to 4002 children in grades 4 – 8, ages 8 - 14 years. Parental consent and youth assent were obtained. The children were surveyed in classrooms in 49 schools across 36 states. A stratified sampling scheme was used to choose as representative sample of children nationwide with respect to all major socioeconomic indicators. The researchers used a scale for the questions on the survey,

thus using quantitative data (Rotheram-Borus, 2001, p.265; as cited in Comulada, Rotheram-Borus, Carey, Poris, Lord, and Mayfield, 2011).

Tweens who engaged in higher levels of behaviors that linked them to popular culture reported less positive perceptions about themselves compared to less assimilated tweens and shared a number of strong values that they endorsed: having a lot of money, being able to do things their own way, being good-looking, having a boyfriend or girlfriend, and keeping up with the latest styles. The findings showed that gaming and trendy tweens worried considerably more about fitting in. The researchers raise the concern that tweens wanting to "fit in" may be easily influenced by peers to engage in deviant behaviors such as substance abuse (Rotheram-Borus, 2001, p.272; as cited in Comulada, Rotheram-Borus, Carey, Poris, Lord, and Mayfield, 2011). The researchers point out that youth in the tween age are still living at home and thus family structure and relationships may impact their adaptation. This study is relevant to my research as it explores the effect of popular culture on pre-teens.

Body Image

Petrie, Greenleaf, and Martin (2010) state that over the last 20 years, body image concerns have become an issue of concern in children and adolescents in the US and other western cultures. The purpose of the study is to identify the factors involved in body dissatisfaction. The study discusses how consistent with sociocultural theories of disordered eating and body image were developed based on the experiences of men and women in the US and other western societies (Capri, 2005; Policy and Herman 2002; Stice 1994, p. 632; as cited in Petrie, Greenleaf, and Martin, 2010). Low levels of body satisfaction would be expected to lead to clinical and subclinical eating disorders, dietary restraint, depressive symptoms, and binge eating. Furthermore, dietary restriction and binge eating have been linked directly to onset of obesity,

and obesity in childhood and adolescence to cardiovascular disease risk factors in adulthood as well as increased mortality (Ruiz et al. 2009; p. 632; as cited in Petrie, Greenleaf, and Martin, 2010).

This study examines biopsychosocial and physical factors that have been hypothesized to influence the development of body satisfaction. Participants included 659 female and 629 male middle school students who were drawn from six middle schools that comprised a suburban school district in Texas. The girls mean age was 12.38 years. The study utilized the 7-item body factor from the Body Parts Satisfaction Scale-Revised (Petrie et al. 2002, p. 634; as cited in Petrie, Greenleaf, and Martin, 2010), which measures girls' and women's levels of satisfaction by focusing on specific body areas. BMI was recorded as well as a five-item Pubertal Development Scale that measured the physical and pubertal development. The researchers also employed the 5-item Physical Appearance Comparison Scale, the Physical Self-Concept Scale, and the 10-item general self-esteem scale. The authors organized the information in tables and used quantitative information.

Results indicated that the biological variables body composition was a significant and unique predictor. Lower BMIs were related to more body satisfaction though, consistent with past research (Halliwell & Harvey, 2006; McCabe & Ricciardelli, 2005, p. 640; as cited in Petrie, Greenleaf, and Martin, 2010) The strength of the relationships was almost twice that for girls as boys. Of the variables tested in the study, BMI, pressures, self-esteem, and physical self-concept were consistent predictors of body satisfaction across the girls and the boys. This study supports the notion that lower BMIs, pressures, self-esteem and self-concept effect body satisfaction in a significant manner, especially for girls.

Reality Television Predicts Both Positive and Negative Outcomes for Adolescent Girls

Ferguson, Salmond and Modi (2013) assess the influence of media, specifically reality television, on adolescent behavior. Reality television has become increasingly popular among young girls and adults. This research explores the effects of reality television viewing for adolescent girls.

The authors predicted that frequent viewing of reality television may be linked to historic personality traits, self-esteem, focus on appearance, relational aggression, expectations of respect in relationships, becoming famous, and compromise for fame. The objective of the study was to assess the influence of media, specifically reality television, on adolescent behavior. The researchers wanted to explore whether there were positive or negative associations with reality television viewership by adolescent girls. The researchers hypothesized there would be negative influences of reality television use on adolescent girls.

A total of 1141 preteen and adolescent girls (age 11-17) answered questions related to their reality television viewing, personality, self-esteem, relational aggression, appearance focus, and desire for fame. The girls were recruited with an online survey. They participated in the Real to Me survey research project of the Girl Scout Research Institute. The sample is nonrandom. Regarding ethnicity, 68.4% of girls identified as white American, 14% as African American, 6% as Asian American, 1.8% as Native American, 13.2% as Hispanic, and 2.7% as other. The girls were permitted to select more than one ethnic category thus the numbers equal more than 100%. The authors presented findings in tables followed by a discussion of the results. The authors used quantitative data (Ferguson, Salmond and Modi, 2013).

The findings revealed that the “influence of reality television on adolescent behavior is complex and potentially related to the adolescents' intended uses and gratifications for using

reality television” (Ferguson, Salmond, & Modi, 2013, p.1175). Reality television viewing was positively related to increased self-esteem and expectations of respect in dating relationships. However, watching reality television also was related to an increased focus on appearance and willingness to compromise other values for fame. Reality television viewing did not predict relational aggression. This study relates to my research on self-esteem in preteen girls in that it reveals both positive and negative effects that the media has on preteen and adolescent girls. Reality television has a wide spectrum of "plots" therefore a further detailed study of what types of reality television the girls are watching is imperative in determining the source of positive correlations and/or negative correlations.

Shyness, Friendship Quality, and Adjustment During Middle School

In 1999 Fordman and Stevenson-Hinde (1999), published their findings on the degree to which continued shyness into middle childhood is indicative of concurrent problems and subsequent disorders. "Adjustment problems of an internalizing nature, such as low self-esteem, loneliness, and anxiety may occur. Special significance has, however, been ascribed to preadolescent friendship as a means of validating self- worth and buffering against loneliness and anxiety" (Fordman & Stevenson-Hinde, 1999, p.757).

Clinical and applied developmental psychologists have long suggested that extremely shy and withdrawn children may be "at risk" for later difficulties (Caspi, Elder & Bem, 1988; as cited in Fordman and Stevenson-Hinde (1999). In addition, research suggests that shy children participate in verbal interaction relatively infrequently and exhibit poor communicative competence; and that quiet, less talkative children are viewed as less approachable by peers, less socially competent, and less desirable social partners (Evans, 1993; as cited in Fordman and Stevenson-Hinde (1999). According to Rogers (Rogers, 1951; as cited in Fordman and

Stevenson-Hinde (1999) "a lack of positive regard from significant others results in a sense of worthlessness, and Weiss (1974) argued that not having anyone with whom to disclose intimate aspects of oneself evokes a sense of isolation and loneliness" (Fordman & Stevenson-Hinde, 1999, p.758). The purpose of this study was to examine associations between shyness, perceptions of friendship quality, and how adjustment relates to internalizing problems. Their hypothesis: "a good quality best friendship should be favorable to adjustment outcomes, whereas friendships in which children experience few positive features and/or high levels of conflict/betrayal should not, and that the associations should strengthen with age" (Fordman & Stevenson-Hinde, 1999, p.759).

Fifty children participated, 24 boys, 26 girls. All participants were Caucasian. The participants were recruited through local play groups, by leaders asking to suggest in confidence children who were "confident" and children who were "shy," with effort made to recruit as many shy children as possible (Fordman & Stevenson-Hinde, 1999). The mean age of the children was 9 years and 5 months. If the mother agreed to participate, she was then interviewed at home and completed several questionnaires, including six items concerning her child's initial approach/withdrawal to unfamiliar people, adapted by a temperament questionnaire (McDevitt & Carey, 1978; as cited in Fordman and Stevenson-Hinde (1999). The researchers also observed the children at their home on two different occasions and observed "shyness." The children were also interviewed by the researchers. The authors used both qualitative and quantitative data.

The researchers found that the links between factors such as shyness, friendship quality, and adjustment are "bidirectional and become mutually reinforcing" (Fordman & Stevenson-Hinde, 1999, p.766). Other research claims that many factors, including shyness, loneliness, self-esteem, and anxiety, are related to difficulties in the formation and maintenance of friendships

(Dunstan & Nieuwoudt, 1994, p.766; as cited in Fordman and Stevenson-Hinde (1999). They also point out that it is possible that children with high self-esteem may be more intimate, helpful, and affectionate with others, and thus develop better quality friendships. The researchers also found that "within the context of the current body of knowledge, the most plausible explanation for the striking age-specific pattern of relations is that as shy behavior comes more salient during middle childhood, it becomes more strongly linked to low self-worth and trait anxiety, and in turn indirectly to internalizing problems such as loneliness" (Fordman & Stevenson-Hinde, 1999, p.765). This body of research provides valuable insight as it reveals yet another layer of complexity to self-esteem in young children. Shyness leads to low self-esteem, which leads to the internalizing of problems yet naturally confident children more easily develop friendships thus creating a higher level of self-esteem.

The Role of Social Skills and School Connectedness in Preadolescent Depressive Symptoms

Ross, Shochet and Bellair (2010), explored whether school connectedness reduces deficits in social skills in influencing depressive symptoms in preadolescent children. Depression is on the rise among children. Rates of childhood depression are reported between 0.4% and 2.5% (Birmaher et al., 1996, p.269) and it is an important predictor of future mental health, adjustment, and developmental problems. Research has also provided evidence for the prospective importance of social skills in relation to childhood depression (Ross, Shochet & Bellair, 2010, p.269).

The researchers hypothesized that school connectedness is an important proximal variable for depressive symptoms in the preadolescent age range (grades 6 and 7) and that it mediates the influence of social skills in predicting depressive symptoms. The hypothesis was examined for the sample as a whole, "as typically gender differences in depressive symptoms are

not apparent in this age range" (Hankin, Wetter, & Cheely, 2008, p.271; as cited in Ross, Shochet and Bellair, 2010). The participants included 127 sixth and seventh-grade students, 43 boys and 84 girls that were enrolled in a coeducational Catholic primary school. The researchers employed the Children's Depression Inventory (CDI), a 27-item self-report measure of depressive symptomatology in children and adolescents. They also utilized the Psychological Sense of School Membership Scale (PSSM), an 18-item measure of school connectedness. Lastly, they used the Children's Self-Report Social Skills Scale (CS), a 21-item questionnaire measure of children's perceptions of their social skills. The students were administered the questionnaires in combined class groups. The authors used both qualitative and quantitative data.

The hypothesized role of school connectedness as a mediator between social skills and depressive symptoms was supported through a partial mediation effect. The results demonstrated that "school connectedness may be as strong a correlate of depressive symptoms in preadolescent, upper primary school children, as has previously been reported in high school adolescents" (Ross, Shochet and Bellair, 2010, p. 273).

Integration of Structured Expressive Activities Within a Humanistic Group Play Therapy for adolescents.

Bratton, Ceballos, and Ferebee (2009) explore building confidence and resilience in preadolescents through the integration of structured activities within a play therapy format. The authors claim that preadolescence is a time of monumental developmental changes that can lead to a confusing and sometimes destructive time for this age group. "Increases in youth violence underscore the consequences of ignoring the social -emotional needs of preteens, particularly

those who view themselves as different and not fitting in with their peers " (Packman & Bratton, 2003; as cited in Bratton, Ceballos, and Ferebee, 2009).

Adolescent children have a strong need and desire to fit in with their peers. The authors state that play therapy has gained recognition as a credible developmentally responsive model for a spectrum of emotional and behavioral problems in children (Akos & Martin, 2003; Flahive & Ray, 2007; Gerrity & DeLucia-Waack, 2007; Kulic, Horne, & Dagley, 2004, Milson, Akos & Thompson, 2004, p.252; as cited in Bratton, Ceballos, and Ferebee, 2009). Bratton, Ceballos, and Ferebee (2009) note, that according to Gladding, (2005; as cited in Bratton, Ceballos, and Ferebee (2009) the use of expressive arts can be beneficial as a therapy intervention because it consists of a non-intimidating forum to explore and participate in self-expression, active participation, imagination and mind-body connection. The authors assert that the integration of expressive activities in play groups with preadolescents encourages them to reach more deeply into their own resources, and enables them to handle future challenges more effectively. The authors compiled extensive research to inform how best to form and conduct the group play participants. The authors used qualitative data.

The researchers conclude that:

...allowing time for unstructured play is invaluable in providing spontaneous opportunities to respond to the inevitable discord that arises during group and to experiment with more satisfying ways of resolving conflicts and relating to peers. Intimate relationships formed during group can provide foundation for the development of healthy relationships into adulthood. Finally, the self-creative process awakened during therapy can continue long after group members leave

the group setting, providing internal resources for meeting life's challenges that lie ahead. (Bratton, Ceballos, & Ferebee, 2009, p.270)

This body of research is relevant to the topic of self-esteem in young girls as it identifies the tumultuous years of preadolescence and provides sound solutions to providing a safe and structured environment for adolescents to explore themselves as well as negotiate conflict; thus setting a further solid foundation for inevitable future conflict that may otherwise effect the adolescents' self esteem negatively.

Effects of a Parent Education Program on Parents and Their Preadolescent Children

Huhn and Zimpfer (1989) discuss the benefits of prevention in regard to parent education. They believe prevention programs typically improve parenting skills and their attitudes toward their children. The authors assert that parent involvement and education can help combat drug abuse and early sexual behavior. Huhn and Zimpfer state, "Added to the social problems presented by substance abuse and sexuality are the many internal problems faced by the developing adolescent in our society" (Huhn & Zimpfer, 1989, p.311).

The purpose of the study is to assess the effect of the parent education program on adolescents. The results revealed that the parent education program had only a limited effect on the participants' children. The effect on the children was found to be minimal because the program is primarily directed at parents, and its effect on children occurs as a result of change in the parents. The impact is likely therefore to be delayed (Huhn & Zimpfer, 1989, p. 316).

Preadolescents did improve in their self-esteem at school and in academic matters when tested at the conclusion of the program. This study highlights the important role that parents play in affecting their children's self esteem positively or negatively. This study reveals that additional

research should be conducted regarding parent education programs and the effect on their adolescent children.

Statistical Information

Anita Gurian, PhD, from NYU, reports some statistics regarding when and why girls' self-esteem declines:

- Among 5-12th grade girls, 59 percent in one survey were dissatisfied with their body shape.
- Of girls in that same age group, 47 percent said they wanted to lose weight because of photos they saw in magazines.
- Girls' ages 10 and 12 (tweens) are confronted with "teen" issues, such as dating and sex, at increasingly earlier ages. Among 8–12-year olds, 73 percent dress like teens and talk like teens.
- Girls ages 8–12 are more worried about being teased and made fun of than they are about being attacked with a weapon or being kidnapped.
- Between 5th and 9th grade, gifted girls, perceiving that smarts aren't sexy, often hide or downplay their accomplishments.
- Girls and boys enjoy and succeed in science equally in 4th grade, but by 8th grade girls' interest and participation drops.
- By age 15, girls are twice as likely as boys to become depressed.

(Gurian, 2012, para 3).

DoSomething.org is the country's largest not-for-profit for young people and social change. They have 2,215,655 members whom passionately work for causes they care about. These issues include self-esteem, bullying, animal cruelty, homelessness, and cancer to name a few.

DoSomething.org proudly boasts that they spearheaded national campaigns so that 13- to 25-year-olds could make an impact. They claim over 2.4 million people took action through DoSomething.org in 2012. Below they report eleven facts about teens and self esteem:

- About 20 percent of teens will experience depression before they reach adulthood.
- Teen girls that have a negative view of themselves are four times more likely to take part in activities with boys that they've ended up regretting later.
- The top wish among all teen girls is for their parents to communicate better with them. This includes frequent and more open conversations.
- 7 in 10 girls believe that they are not good enough or don't measure up in some way, including their looks, performance in school and relationships with friends and family members.
- Low self-esteem is a thinking disorder in which an individual views him/herself as inadequate, unworthy, unlovable, and/or incompetent. Once formed, this negative view of self permeates every thought, producing faulty assumptions and ongoing self-defeating behavior.
- Among high school students, 44 percent of girls and 15 percent of guys are attempting to lose weight.
- 75 percent of girls with low self-esteem reported engaging in negative activities like cutting, bullying, smoking, drinking, or disordered eating. This compares to 25 percent of girls with high self-esteem.

A girl's self-esteem is more strongly related to how she *views* her own body shape and body weight, than how much she *actually* weighs.

(DoSomething.org, 2010).

Summary

Contemporary scholarly research, various organizations, and professionals have all provided evidence that low self-esteem is on the rise in young girls. However, there is inconsistent information and gaps in research along with an escalating and exponentially growing problem that continues into the girls' adult lives.

Chapter 3 Method

Introduction

This study employs a qualitative approach. Information was evaluated by gathering data from a questionnaire completed by two professionals.

Ethical Standards

This paper adheres to ethical standards in the treatment of human subjects in research as articulated by the American Psychological Association (2010). Additionally, the research proposal was reviewed by the Dominican University of California Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects (IRBPHS), approved, and assigned number 9087.

Access and Permissions

Questionnaire participants were informed of the purpose of the study and willingly agreed to complete the questionnaire with the understanding that anything they said could be used in this thesis under confidentiality but not anonymity.

Data Gathering Strategies

The primary data gathering strategy employed in this research was an extensive review of the existing literature as well as analysis of the questionnaires completed by the field experts.

Data Analysis Approach

Data was collected via the questionnaires that were administered to the two field experts in the field of counseling and life coaching. The qualitative data was analyzed and reported in Chapter 4 Findings.

Chapter 4 Findings

Description of Site, Individuals, Data

Research was collected from two professionals in the field. One, is a Licensed Marriage and Family Therapist (MFT) with a master’s degree in counseling who has been in practice six years with an emphasis in working with young girls. The other is a Life Coach who holds a college associates degree, CPC – Certified Professional Coach through the iPEC (International Professional Excellence in Coaching), which is an accredited school with the ICF (international Coaching Federation, ELI-MP (Energy Leadership Master Practitioner). The Life Coach has over 1600 professional hours as a professional coach, which will translate to MCC (master certified coach) within the next five months. Both professionals completed the questionnaire and submitted a digital copy.

Responses

| <u>Research Questions</u> | <u>Professional 1 (MFT)</u> | <u>Professional 2 (Life Coach)</u> |
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| Q1. Is low self-esteem common among young girls? | A1. Low self-esteem has become much more common among young girls in the past 20 years and seems to be occurring at an even younger age. In my experience, it is rare to meet a young girl who does not struggle with self-esteem issues in some way. | A1. Very common. In fact most girls by the time they are in high school suffer from some form of low self-esteem, which is expressed in many different ways. Wither it is through self image issues, acting out, emotionally numbing or self destructive behavior, statically 62% of young girls suffer from low self-esteem. |
| Q2. Based on your professional experience, is low self-esteem on the rise? | A2. I would definitely say that low self-esteem seems to be on the rise, as evidenced by higher incidences of eating disorders, depression, and anxiety in prepubescent girls. In my experience, not only is low self-esteem more prevalent, but it also seems to be starting at a younger age. | A2. Yes, very much so. Today there is an enormous amount of social influence that wasn’t there even just 10 years ago. With dysfunctional modern TV shows like Jersey Shore & Teen Mom, magazine models promoting size 0 clothes, violent video games, 24/7 cyber bullying, gay violence, high-school shootings; kids today are bombarded with toxic influences that are shaping their susceptible belief systems. Did you know that the average child has seen over 16,000 simulated murders by the age of 18? Children are very impressionable and what they see, play, watch and read has a huge impact on how they view themselves and the world. Children naturally compare themselves to other and more than anything they want to fit in, to be cool and accepted by their peers. If however, they struggle being accepted because they aren’t a size 0, come from a poor or abusive home or are the target of internet bullying; their self-esteem takes a massive blow. Now days with the internet, children can’t run away from bullies. It follows them home and is there for the whole school to see. And because they can’t get away from it, it amplifies the effects of low-self esteem. |

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| <p>Q3. What are some of the negative effects or consequences of girls with low self-esteem?</p> | <p>A3. Negative effects of girls with low self-esteem include increased risk for depression, anxiety, eating disorders, and other mental health issues. Girls with low self-esteem are also more likely to engage in self-harming behaviors, sexual promiscuity, and excessive use of drugs and alcohol.</p> | <p>A3. Some of the worst consequences of low self-esteem are when it turns into self-abusive behaviors such as cutting, suicide, eating disorders, drugs or depression. 75% of girls with low self-esteem engage in one or more of these self-abusive behaviors. In many cases these destructive behaviors plague these girls for most of their adult lives until treatment is issued. I personally was a child with low-self esteem and struggled with every one of the destructive behaviors I had mentioned. My self-abusive behavior followed me into my early 20's where I finally received the help I needed. Low Self-esteem in fueled by toxic thoughts and feelings of inadequacy, worthlessness and hopelessness. All of which left unchallenged can lead our influential youth down the dark road to suicide.</p> |
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| <p>Q4. Have you observed any common shared experiences, personality traits, physical characteristics, or family dynamics found in young girls with low self-esteem? If, so please explain.</p> | <p>A4. A couple commonalities I have noticed in girls with low self-esteem include a history of sexual abuse, absence of a father figure, general lack of parental presence throughout childhood, presence of domestic violence in the home, and an absence of cohesive family structure.</p> | <p>A4. Of course each case is different; however, what I have found to be the biggest thread in common has been family dynamics. Abusive or absent parents are what I find to be the biggest contributors. When I talk about abuse and absent, I am referring to it in all forms both intentional and unintentional. Abuse can be mental, emotional or physical and can be expressed reactively through anger or emotion, or unintentionally through shaming or disappointment. A good example of this would be if a parent constantly expressed disappointment in the child's academics or is constantly shaming them for not doing better or being better. This type of abuse has devastating impacts on the child's self-worth. Having an absent parent can have similar affects. Even if the parents are unintentionally absent because they are working all the time to feed the family. This absence could cause the child to feel unworthy of his parent's time, or that they don't care about their overall wellbeing. If they do not feel accepted by their own parents it makes it very difficult for them to feel any different with their peers.</p> |
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| <p>Q5. ave you observed social media playing a role in low self-esteem in young girls? If, so please explain.</p> | <p>A5. Social media seems to be playing a huge role in self-esteem. It has made bullying so much easier to execute and more difficult to escape. In the past, a certain group might bully a girl at school but she could go home and escape that environment. These days, the bullying follows these girls everywhere and they become immediately aware of things that are being said about them. The bullying has become inescapable.</p> | <p>A5. Yes, yes and triple yes! Cyber bullying as I mentioned earlier plays a huge roll in a child's overall self-esteem. Between the public humiliation and the inability to escape, it can really push them over the emotional edge. Another negative impact social media plays is it gives people an unrealistic viewpoint into other's lives. We post, tweet, snap and vine all the cool things we do, awesome places we go and every smiling picture we can think of. We delete bad pictures and typically don't air our dirty laundry so that the world only sees how cool we are. Now, multiply this effect by hundreds or thousands of friends and all you see looking down your newsfeed is how happy and how much fun everyone else is having. And if you are already struggling with low self-esteem this amplifies the affects because they begin to ask themselves, "whats wrong with me" "why am I not that happy" "I never get invited to things" "everyone else has more fun than me," etc. What isn't being thought about are that, these are just fleeting moments in people's lives, moments of happiness and joy but are not viewed that way. Rather they are viewed as if it was the whole truth.</p> |
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| <p>Q6. Have you observed media such as television and magazines play a role in low self-esteem in young girls? If, so please explain.</p> | <p>A6. Media has always played a role in the self-esteem of girls/women of all ages. Magazines and television are constantly telling girls what they should look like, who they should be, and what should be important to them. We are told how to wear our hair, what size we should be, how to get/keep a guy, and what sex and/or intimacy should look like. These days, the majority of models and actresses have a very specific body type and we are taught that they are the beauty ideal. I have had many female teenage clients who have unrealistic goals when it comes to their bodies and how they look in general. They believe that if they cannot achieve this very specific beauty ideal, they are not beautiful. Unfortunately, the women they are seeing in magazines and on TV are airbrushed and often unhealthy. These girls are set up to be unhappy with themselves and often find themselves going to extremes to meet these unrealistic beauty ideals.</p> | <p>A6. Yes, As I mentioned before, media plays a huge roll in a child's self-esteem. Children's social icons are coming to them through celebrities like Miley Cyrus or Justin Beber who are rich and famous but also doing drugs, crashing cars and acting rebellious. Children aim to be cool and look to dress, act and be like their icons. Now-a-days you have shows like Jersey Shore where getting drunk, having sex and violence is 'cool' or Teen Mom, where you can be famous if you get pregnant as a teenager. Where I think the biggest negative impact the media plays with low self-esteem are girls who are struggling with self-image issues. They compare themselves to every model who is sickly thin and abuse themselves mentally and emotionally because they don't look like that. I have worked with many girls who hate themselves because of their weight. They are teased by other kids who also are under the influence that being a size 0 is how all girls should look. Everywhere they turn they are bombarded with ads to be more skinny, magazine covers of ½ naked skinny women, tv celebrities and movie stars who are thin and pointing to the same thought "there must be something wrong with me because I don't look like that".</p> |
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| <p>Q7. What does low self-esteem look like in young girls today?</p> | <p>A7. Low self-esteem often comes across in 2 ways – either the girl who is acting out and bullying others, or the girl who is quiet and withdrawn. In either girl, their insecurities run their lives and determine their actions and their beliefs about themselves.</p> | <p>A7. Depression, being emotionally withdrawn, not caring (giving up), drugs, rebelling, and isolation are just a few ways low self-esteem can be expressed. When referring to my emotional intelligence scale, they would be acting out of 1st or 2nd gear. 1st gear would be introverted and expressed with the attitude of hopelessness, worthlessness, apathy, numbness, shame guilt, or martyr mindset. 2nd gear would be more extroverted: anger, blame, judgment, criticism, violence, and negative/rebellious attitude.</p> |
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| <p>Q8. Do you see parents playing a role in the self-esteem levels of girls today?</p> | <p>A8. Parents definitely play a role in the self-esteem of girls today. Absent or neglectful parents teach these girls that they are not even worth their parents' presence and/or attention. Parents who suffer from their own self-esteem/body issues model these characteristics for their children. If my mom hates her own body, or doesn't accept herself, why should I accept myself? Women of all ages are concerned with their weight and pay attention to what the media says we should look like. It is also common for mothers and fathers to make comments about their daughters weight and appearance... and in my experience these comments are not usually positive.</p> | <p>A8. HUGE. I once heard this statistic that 70% of teacher say that self-esteem should be taught at home and 73% of parents think it should be taught at school... with those mindsets no wonder kids have no clue! I personally think it should be taught both at home and at school however, parents have the greatest impact on a child's self-esteem. If taught at a early age to love and accept yourself no matter what others think or say, children would put so much value on what others think. However, parents are products of their enjoyment just the same as kids are, so when a parent suffers from self-esteem issues (which MANY DO) then they are passing those same insecurities along to their children.</p> |
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| <p>Q9. Have you observed parents helping or hindering self-esteem in their daughters?</p> | <p>A9. I have observed parents both helping and hindering self-esteem in their daughters. This can be done directly through specific comments that are made, as well as through modeling and indirect comments or attitudes toward their daughters' appearance and/or weight.</p> | <p>A9. Yes. When a parent has a food addiction, insecurities or self-esteem issues themselves these unconsciously get passed along to the child. Monkey see monkey do. Children are observant and mimic their parents. I have had 8 & 11 year old clients who are dieting and obsessed about calories because their mother's unconsciously fussed over how big their hips were getting, how many calories they were eating and judged themselves for every sweet they ate. The children just assumed this is what they were suppose to do and since being skinny is the 'cool' thing to do, they became obsessed themselves. Another example was a pair of sisters I worked with 14 & 12 who constantly referred to themselves as stupid or doing something stupid. When I asked where that language came from, both separately told me, that's the word mom always used.</p> |
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| <p>Q10. Have you observed boys having an effect regarding young girls' self-esteem?</p> | <p>A10. Yes, I see a lot of girls/teens struggling with eating disorders. It is common for me to hear that some of the reasons these girls began dieting to begin with stemmed from comments boyfriends or males in general had made to them about their weight and/or body shape. Girls at that age are so eager to please boys that they are willing to do anything to make these boys happy.</p> | <p>A10. Yes. I do feel that being accepted by the opposite sex plays a roll especially in High School. In my opinion however, I think they play less as the primary cause and more of validating evidence. I do however, feel that if a girl who already has low self esteem all of a sudden starts getting lots of attention because she is willing to experiment more with boys only to be used, or humiliated can have a devastating impact on their overall self worth. But again, this would be in addition to and for their already low self-esteem.</p> |
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| <p>Q11. What traits have you observed in young girls that represent positive self esteem?</p> | <p>A11. Young girls with positive self-esteem are often less connected to social media and put less importance on the media in general. They often play sports and have positive social outlets. They spend more time with their families and have healthy relationships with their parents. In general, their focus in life revolves around school and other interests, as oppose to looks and popularity.</p> | <p>A11. Confidence, laughter, joy and happiness are a few traits I have observed with higher levels of self-esteem. Having a healthy level of self-esteem, a child is more resilient (able to bounce back faster emotionally), less likely to take things too personally and more willing to try new things.</p> |
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| <p>Q12. As a professional, what is your strategy for building self-esteem in young girls? Please describe.</p> | <p>A12. When working toward building self-esteem in young girls, I usually use modeling, teach positive self-talk, and work toward increasing their interests and widening their world-view. As a young therapist, I feel modeling self-esteem and self-acceptance is very important for these young girls. Through sharing my own experiences and being open with my own self-esteem and acceptance, these girls are able to see a more positive and healthy way a woman can relate to herself. I also help draw awareness to how often these girls speak negatively to themselves, teach them the affect this can have, and offer an alternate way of speaking to themselves. Finally, I work toward widening these girls' world views, including offering alternative explanations for things, getting them involved in other interests/sports, and encouraging them to focus on the future - what they want their lives to look like and who they want to be. This often leads to instilling hope and creating goals to work toward. The focus becomes much more positive.</p> | <p>A12. The first step is to acknowledge the child's emotions with empathy and understanding. As adults we tend to forget the troubles of children or down-play them in comparison to what we struggle with; completely invalidating their feelings. The child needs to feel heard and understood before we can make any movement. Next we begin to identify the source of their pain and dismantle toxic beliefs. I teach them "Mind-Fu" (kung-fu for the mind) and use different tools and techniques depending on their age. With younger children we play games and use analogies that they can comprehend. The older the child is, the more in-depth we can go.</p> |
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| <p>Q13. Are you aware of community resources that are available to young girls (such as workshops) that teach the building blocks of positive self-esteem?</p> | <p>A13. I am not aware of any community resources but if you know of any I would love to hear about them!</p> | <p>A13. I know that a lot of organized religion offers many different teen events. Boys & girls club offers things from time to time. Here are some other references: http://www.girlselfesteemprogram.com/Home_Page.php http://www.ngcproject.org/program/girls-self-esteem-program http://groups.psychologytoday.com/rms/prof_results.php?city=Sacramento&spec=260</p> |
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| <p>Q14. Are there any further comments you would like to add?</p> | <p>A14. Self-esteem is a huge issue in women of all ages and low self-esteem leads to so many psychological and life issues. Thank you for making this the focus of your thesis. I hope you go on to work in this field and make a difference in how we can work together to increase self-acceptance in young girls.</p> | <p>A14. I personally think that if more children are taught to love and accept themselves through both family and schools the world would be a more enjoyable place for all. You would see less sexual exploitation, eating disorders, suicides and violence, all of which are fueled because of low self-esteem. Realistically however, the only way we can guarantee that more children are learning about the effects of low self-esteem is if it is taught through-out school. Not just one class, but multiple classes on self-awareness, toxic thinking, self-esteem and emotional intelligence. This would ensure that ALL children are learning the impact their thoughts, feelings and emotions are having on their lives.</p> |
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Chapter 5 Discussion

Summary of Major Findings

Family dynamics, family narrative styles, peer pressure, school connectedness, social media, physical self-concept and the cyclical nature of negative self-esteem are all significant factors related to low self-esteem in preteen girls. The major finding of this study reveals that there is limited research on self-esteem in preteen girls and as a result we are missing a crucial opportunity with a short window to address the issues preteens face. By the time the young girls reach the teenage years many destructive behaviors are already well into the negative and spiraling cycle. Contemporary scholarly research is not reflective of what is currently taking place as evidenced by professionals, currently in the field, who contributed to the study.

Comparison of Findings to the Literature

Parents' interaction and narrative styles, objectified body consciousness, and peer pressure are congruent with the contemporary research literature. The research literature is limited in its findings regarding perpetuating negative body image from mother to preteen daughter and the influence of the media particularly in the last decade. The research is also limited in regard to the discussion of the cyclical nature of low self-esteem being perpetuated by the young girls themselves.

The scholarly research reveals that family dynamics are related to self-esteem in young girls. The coordinated perspective is significantly related to self-esteem for girls but not boys. Families using a coordinated interaction narrative style teach their children that they are a part of a unified, cohesive family whose members understand and work through positive and negative experiences together. The Life Coach also reported that family dynamics were the number one

factor she observed related to low self-esteem. She explained how the most significant thread affecting young girls' self-esteem is abusive or absent parents. She clarifies that this comes in many forms. A parent that is literally absent is significant as well as a parent that is unintentionally absent due to working all of the time to support the family. Additionally, the Life Coach emphasizes that not only can low self-esteem be triggered in young girls through parents that mentally, emotionally, and physically abuse; parents also negatively affect self-esteem in their young daughters when one continuously shames or expresses disappointment in their child.

Contemporary scholarly research does not reflect the rapidly growing problem of low self-esteem amongst preteen girls. The MFT clearly states that low self-esteem has become much more common among young girls in the past 20 years and seems to be occurring at an even younger age. She shares from her experience that it is rare to meet a young girl who does not struggle with self-esteem issues in some way. The Life Coach states that “most” girls, by the time they are in high-school, suffer from some form of low self-esteem, which is expressed in many different ways. It may be through self image issues, acting out, emotionally numbing or self destructive behavior. She claims that statistically, 62% of young girls suffer from low self-esteem.

Scholarly research reports that lower BMIs, pressures, self-esteem and self-concept effect body satisfaction in a significant manner, especially for girls. Yet, it underestimates the significance of the cyclical generational nature of low self-esteem. The contributing Life Coach shares how parents that have food addiction, insecurities, or low self-esteem issues often unconsciously pass along their negative behavior to their daughters. She likens it to “monkey see monkey do.” She explains how children are exceptionally observant and they mimic their

parents. She provided two examples of this negative cycle from her own client base. As a result there are cyclical and generational cycles of negative self-esteem in young girls.

Scholarly research is also limited in regard to the discussion of the cyclical nature of low self-esteem being perpetuated amongst young girls themselves. The contributing MFT explains how self-esteem often comes across in two ways – either the girl who is acting out and bullying others, or the girl who is quiet and withdrawn. It is important to note the rampant cycle that is occurring: the girl who is the victim of bullying may in turn develop low self-esteem, which manifests with her becoming quiet or withdrawn, or, she may become a bully herself, thus perpetuating the cycle. The MFT notes that in either girl, their insecurities run their lives and determine their actions and their beliefs about themselves.

Limitations/Gaps in the Research

This study is limited in that there were only two contributing professionals, one geographical location, and information could not be generalized based on limitations of time and access of people.

Implications for Future Research

There is a need for additional research. Previous research samples have been too isolated and not expansive enough therefore there has been a misrepresentation of the rampant low self-esteem in young girls that has exponentially increased in the last decade as evidenced by the professionals.

Future studies should include the following research questions: What are the building blocks that comprise self-confidence and a positive self-esteem in young girls? What does the curriculum look like? What elements lead to positive self-esteem in preteen girls? Once the variables of low self-esteem are identified with more clarity researchers need to ask the

questions: what does healthy self-esteem look like in young girls? What are the elements that comprise healthy self-esteem that set the future for lifelong self-esteem? Is it parents' involvement in their lives? Possibly support of a stable church or religious structure? Sports activities with peers that build self-confidence? Is it academic success that builds confidence in young girls? Or is does it involve relating to peers of the same age group, that builds unwavering confidence? We know positive self-esteem is multifaceted as evidenced by all the varying dynamics (family dynamics, family narrative styles, peer pressure, school connectedness, social media, physical self-concept and the cyclical nature of negative self esteem) that cause low self-esteem.

Overall Significance of the Study

The ground roots need to be watered and set early during the preteen years before entering the teenage years. If we do not intervene in the preteen years to build positive self-esteem the young girls enter high school with negative thought processes and behaviors learned through a variety of influences including mimicking their parents' destructive low self-esteem patterns and behavior, or peer pressure, and media influences.

Additional research is vital. Preteens need support. The contributing MFT was not able to list any community resources available to young girls. The Life Coach was able to list a few including the Boys & Girls Club, local church programs, and a few other references including:

The National Girls Self Esteem Program

http://www.girlselfesteemprogram.com/Home_Page.php

The National Girls Collaborative Project <http://www.ngcproject.org/program/girls-self-esteem-program>

Psychology Today Therapy Groups

http://groups.psychologytoday.com/rms/prof_results.php?city=Sacramento&spec=260.

This study has brought to surface the immense need for simple support systems; girls mentoring girls during the preteen years where the focus is building and maintaining positive healthy self-esteem. The key finding and action is to intervene in the preteen years before the negative thought processes and destructive behaviors are deeply embedded, as they are in teenagers and adults. The solution involves women helping women. There is also a need for self-esteem curriculum in the schools. Classes may include self-awareness, self-esteem, emotional intelligence, communication, and combating toxic thinking. Parents (mothers) would benefit from the same programs but for adults—therefore reducing negative generational low self-esteem.

About the Author

Carrie Jacob McCormick became interested in the topic of low self-esteem in young girls a result of years of working with young girls in a professional and personal setting and observing the devastating effects of low self-esteem that begin in the preteen years and often continue and worsen in adulthood. Through her experience as a nanny, tutor, and teacher she became aware of the commonality across situations of girls that have low self-esteem. The awareness fostered her interest in pursuing her master's degree. Carrie's intention is to spearhead interest and effort in establishing local nonprofits in fostering positive self image and self-esteem in pre-teen girls before the extreme and significant need that occurs in the girls' teenage years.

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