

# Research on the Influence of Adolescents' Self-esteem Level on Interpersonal Skills

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**Abstract:** In recent years, China has paid more and more attention to the prevention and treatment of adolescent mental health problems, and has introduced many programs to help the mental health growth of adolescents. Interpersonal communication among adolescents is a critical part of their growth and also one of the measures of mental health, which should also be focused on. The psychological state of adolescents is mostly unstable, and self-esteem levels tend to be polarized. It has been shown that self-esteem and interpersonal interaction are correlated. Therefore, this research combines both quantitative and qualitative research methods to explore the correlation between the two variables of self-esteem and interpersonal skills and to explain how self-esteem affects interpersonal skills. The results of the data analysis showed that self-esteem and interpersonal competence are significantly positively correlated; the interview results further explained how self-esteem influences interpersonal skills. These results can give adolescents some insight into interpersonal interactions and help them to better manage interpersonal relationships, as well as grow up much healthier.

**Keywords:** Self-esteem, Interpersonal skills, Adolescent.

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## 1. Introduction

Interpersonal communication is an essential and important part of adolescents' growth, and it is one of the criteria for measuring mental health. However, in reality, many adolescents do not have good interpersonal skills and often encounter many problems that cannot be solved, which even seriously affect their study and lives. The adolescent group is special in that their psychological development is relatively late, and their perception of themselves is always unclear and inaccurate, so that sometimes they are arrogant, sometimes inferior, resulting in strong and unstable emotions. In psychology, the degree of self-perception is actually the level of self-esteem of a person. The self-esteem level of adolescents is easily fluctuated by external influences, and the Sociometer Theory proposed by Leary et al. suggests that the self-esteem system is essentially a mental meter of interpersonal skills, supervising and controlling the quality of an individual's interpersonal skills [1]. So, does the level of self-esteem of adolescents affect their interpersonal skills? And how does it affect it? This study will answer these two questions in the hope of shedding some light on adolescents' interpersonal interactions.

## 2. Literature Review

The concept of self-esteem was introduced a long time ago. According to Rosenberg, self-esteem refers to the individual's perception of the ego state and the ideal ego state, a judgment of the gap between the two, and his participation in constituting the individual's ego, an important factor in the individual's self-regulation[2]. W. James, a pioneer of American functionalist psychology, defined self-esteem in the Principles of Psychology with a formula:  $\text{Self-esteem} = \text{Success} \div \text{Ambition}$ . He further explains this formula: "Self-esteem depends not only on success, but also on the significance of the success achieved to the individual; both increased success and reduced ambition can lead to high self-

esteem. Success may have many constraints and not be easy to achieve, but we can lower our expectations of work and life so that a small success may make us ecstatic." [3] Therefore, in this paper, we define self-esteem as an individual's judgment and feeling of self-competence and self-worth, which are important components of an individual's evaluation of himself or herself.

Guilford proposed a three-dimensional structure model of intelligence theory and classified the intelligence of relationship as a component of intelligence, which is an ability of individuals to communicate with others and maintain relationships, and was later equated with interpersonal skills[4]. In 1987, Gardner, a famous educational psychologist, proposed the theory of multiple intelligences, which also includes interpersonal skills, and clearly indicated that interpersonal skills is an important part of intelligence[5]. On this basis, scholar Patricia A W. pointed out that interpersonal skills are precisely emotional intelligence, including five abilities: self-awareness, control, initiative, awareness of others' needs, and communication skills[6]. Chinese scholar Wang Yingchun, based on the previous theories, specifically defined interpersonal skills as the ability of individuals to have the willingness to interact, actively participate in interactions, and demonstrate effective and appropriate interaction behaviors in the process of interpersonal interactions, so that their relationships with others are in a harmonious state[7]. In this paper, we adopt the definition of interpersonal competence as defined by scholar Wang Yingchun.

The relationship between self-esteem and interpersonal skills has been studied by some scholars in the past. For example, scholars Battistich's team [8] and Twenge, J. M. [9] have consistently concluded from the results of their research that people with high self-esteem are more popular. In general, most of the previous studies have demonstrated that self-esteem is positively correlated with interpersonal relationships, but the past studies have only been limited to explore the relationship between self-esteem and

interpersonal skills meaning that they have not explained the specific reasons why these two variables are positively correlated.

### 3. Research Methodology

#### 3.1. Questionnaire method

##### 3.1.1. Research subject

In this study, adolescents are defined as those between the ages of 14 and 17 years old; therefore, they are the target

population of this study. This research adopts online distribution of questionnaires for data collection, and the samples are from Guangdong, Hainan, and other places. A total of 129 data are collected. After eliminating invalid data, 128 valid data are obtained, with an efficiency rate of 99%. Among them, 44 are male and 84 were female; 18 are junior high school students, 18 are junior high school students, 31 are senior high school students, 20 are senior high school students, and 41 are senior high school students.

**Table 1.** Distribution of Participants

	Classification	Percentage(%)
Gender	Male	34.11
	Female	66.89
Grade	Eight grade	13.95
	Ninth grade	13.95
	Senior one	24.03
	Senior two	15.5
	Senior three	31.78

##### 3.1.2. Research tools

###### (1) Self-esteem scale

A scale originally developed by Rosenberg in 1965 to rate adolescents' general feelings about self-worth and self-acceptance is used. The scale consists of 10 items. The higher the score, the higher the level of self-esteem. The Cronbach coefficient of the self-esteem scale in this research is 0.86.

###### (2) Interpersonal skills questionnaire

The Interpersonal Skills Questionnaire (Chinese version), developed by psychologists distributed by the University of California, Los Angeles, is used. The questionnaire contains 5 dimensions of active interaction, appropriate rejection, self-expression, conflict management and emotional support, 8 questions for each dimension, and 40 questions in total. The Cronbach coefficient of the Interpersonal Competence Questionnaire in this research is 0.87.

##### 3.1.3. Methods of processing data

Use SPSS26.0 to process data.

#### 3.2. Interview method

In addition to using questionnaires to do the quantitative study, this study is supplemented by semi-structured interviews to further investigate how self-esteem affects interpersonal skills in order to improve and deepen the research. Five students who scored high on the self-esteem scale and five students who scored low on the self-esteem scale are interviewed. The interviews focused on the interpersonal experiences and strategies of the interviewees to explain why self-esteem and interpersonal skills are related.

### 4. Results

#### 4.1. Gender differences in interpersonal skills

Through the interviews, we find that there are differences in the strategies used by the genders in interpersonal communication, which may help us to understand why there are differences in the interpersonal skills of boys and girls. In the interviews, women said that friendship was very important to them and was "an integral part of a complete life", while boys did not feel this as strongly and felt that "family is more important". Girls are also richer and more passionate in language expression, which is a crucial step in interpersonal

communication, but boys are often not as good at expressing themselves and are not as refined in their use of language as girls. Perhaps these are some of the reasons for the differences in interpersonal skills between men and women.

#### 4.2. Analysis of correlation

Based on the questionnaire data, spss26.0 is used to analyze the correlation between self-esteem and interpersonal skills. The results showed that self-esteem and interpersonal skills are significantly positively correlated, with a correlation coefficient of 0.241,  $p < 0.01$ . This is consistent with the results of previous studies.

#### 4.3. Interview results

Adolescents with high self-esteem are more confident and optimistic. They are more active and comfortable in interpersonal interactions; on the contrary, adolescents with low self-esteem have low self-esteem and pessimism, often doubting their own abilities and levels, and are more passive in interpersonal interactions. In the interview, adolescents with high self-esteem expressed some opinions such as "I think I am an interested person who is easy to be liked by people around me" or "I am the more active person at parties". Adolescents with low self-esteem have expressions such as "I am usually approached by people to talk to me, but I often don't know how to respond to them, and I think about it for a long time because I worry that I will upset them" or "I don't know what to say at a party because I am afraid that my topic will be too boring and no one will respond to me". If they come to a new environment, adolescents with high self-esteem will be more proactive in finding their own circle and making friends, and often they are also the ones who take the initiative to start small talk with strangers. While adolescents with low self-esteem will feel uncomfortable and very shy, and also often avoid the opportunity to communicate with strangers.

When problems arise in interpersonal relationships, adolescents with high self-esteem will actively seek out the problem, think about countermeasures and solve the problem as soon as possible; while adolescents with low self-esteem often choose to avoid it, and they are not willing to find the key to the problem, much less seek solutions. In the interview, adolescents with high self-esteem said that if there is a

problem with a friend, solving the problem is the most important thing. They will first calm down, then try their best to solve the problems as soon as possible, rather than ignoring it. Adolescents with low self-esteem said that they “don't know what to do and hope their friend can solve the problem on his or her own” or “I don't like this, but I can't do anything about it”. This avoidant, negative mindset is often felt in interviews with adolescents with low self-esteem. They tend to “solve” problems by avoiding them, which is actually a sign of their lack of confidence in their own abilities.

Adolescents with high self-esteem know exactly what kind of people they fit in and what kind of friends they should make, so the quality of their interpersonal relationships is also high; adolescents with low self-esteem do not have an accurate and comprehensive perception of themselves, so they often have no requirements for the people they want to associate with, and the quality of their interpersonal relationships is also low. In the interview, adolescents with high self-esteem said, “Having the right friends is more important than having a lot of the wrong ones” and “I won't join any circle because I know I don't fit in some of them”. They tend to look for the circle that suits them and take the initiative to integrate. Once they find that the other party is not suitable for them, they will slowly distance them. In contrast, adolescents with low self-esteem appear to be very casual and do not have their own rules of making friends. And they often choose to condescend to themselves in interpersonal communication, they said that “if I say what I really think will make others unhappy, I will choose not to say” or “let the relationship look harmonious is the most important, my feelings are not so important”.

## 5. Discussion

This research focuses on the effects of adolescent self-esteem on adolescent interpersonal skills. It explores whether adolescents' self-esteem affects interpersonal skills, and then further investigates how adolescents' self-esteem affects interpersonal skills. First, a questionnaire survey method was used to collect 129 samples and the data results were analyzed. The results found that the two variables of adolescent self-esteem and interpersonal skills were significantly and positively correlated. Then, through the interview method, five students who presented high levels of self-esteem in the questionnaire and five students who presented low levels were interviewed in an attempt to explain the specific effects of self-esteem on interpersonal skills through the interpersonal experiences and strategies of the interviewees. The research found that adolescents with high self-esteem were more confident and optimistic, more proactive in facing problems, and more aware of themselves, all of which influenced their interpersonal skills, while the opposite was true for adolescents with low self-esteem. The results of this study are generally consistent with the results of similar previous studies, which all found that adolescents' self-esteem has a significant impact on their interpersonal skills. However, previous studies have used the interview method less

frequently to explore the relationship between the two variables. This study used the interview method in addition to the questionnaire method that has been used much frequently in previous studies, aiming to explore how adolescents' self-esteem affects their interpersonal skills through the detailed experience of the interviewees. The final results of the study were also largely consistent with the expected results.

## 6. Conclusion

The purpose of this research is to investigate the effect of adolescents' self-esteem levels on interpersonal skills and to attempt to further explain how self-esteem affects interpersonal skills. It is of certain significance to the growth of teenagers. Most of the existing studies on self-esteem and interpersonal skills have only used quantitative methods and have not further explored how self-esteem affects interpersonal competence. This research uses both quantitative and qualitative research methods to make the study more complete and comprehensive, breaking through the limitations of previous studies that only used quantitative research methods. However, there are shortcomings in this study: the sample size of the questionnaire is relatively small and the representativeness of the data is limited because of the limitations of the real situation, which may lead to the applicability of the research results is not strong. It is hoped that future studies can achieve larger sample sizes when using quantitative methods and that other research methods can be used to further investigate how self-esteem affects interpersonal skills.

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