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An Analysis of the Self-esteem of Adolescents in Hong Kong: Configurations and Determinants

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IN HONG KONG:

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by

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The self is an important concept in understanding the behavior of adolescents because their paramount concern at this stage of personal growth is the search for a clear and stable self-definition. Literature abounds to show that adolescence is a turbulent stage of personality development. Bodily changes in primary and secondary sex characteristics trigger the abrupt transition from early childhood into the adolescent period. In a matter of months, an adolescent may grow several inches or gain some twenty pounds. Actually, besides height and weight, all parts of the body are undergoing fundamental transformations, achieving adult size and form in a rather short time (Conger, 1973). These changes are so profound that Erikson (1959) calls them the physiological revolution.

Physical maturity puts an adolescent on a par with his parents. But because of economic dependence, role expectations and long time submission, it may be difficult for him to ask for equality from them. He seeks it elsewhere. Emancipation from home begins early in childhood, but the process of emancipation is greatly accelerated during adolescence. This gives him not only an opportunity for independence but also an enlarged horizon of life experience.

Together with a sense of prowess brought about by independence, he experiences a state of anxiety. Moving gradually away from his parents'

protective umbrella, an independent adolescent has to solve many questions by his own effort. Gone are the carefree days when he could leave all the troubles to his parents.

The same glandular secretion that produces changes in external physical structure also creates internal emotional disturbances. New desires and interests surge through him. But cultural taboos and personal clumsiness usually obstruct the channelling of these interests and desires.

Bodily growth spurt, discontinuity of status, upsurges of new desires and interests, sudden enlargement of life horizon--after all these rapid transformations the adolescents find themselves in the midst of nowhere and, correspondingly, there is an ambiguity of self-definition (Rosenberg et al. 1973).

Man is not only a tool-maker. He is also a pattern-seeker (Radhakrishnan, 1967:58). He will not tolerate a continuous state of ambiguity and the resulting anxiety. In fact, many of the typical behaviors of the adolescents, such as sensitivity to others' opinions, eagerness to attract attention, the persistent effort to prove one's competence, and the search for an identity, can be seen as manifestations of the psychological propensity to confirm and enhance their self-esteem.

Despite its importance, research in this area has seldom been conducted in Hong Kong. There are a few scattered studies, such as those by Cheung (1977, 1981), Lau and Lu (1980), Lung (1982), Bond and Cheung (1983) and Cheung and Lau (1983). However, these are all confined to very limited samples. They may have heuristic value, but the findings generated by them can hardly be inferred to the entire population of adolescents in Hong Kong. Mitchell's (1969) study on pupil, parent, and school in the

mid-60s' has two chapters on students' self-esteem. His sample is a probability one, but the population is confined to Form 5 students only. As indicated in the method section of this monograph, the present study covers the entire student population of secondary schools in Hong Kong.

Besides, following the tradition in western societies, most of the studies mentioned above have been conducted to identify the determinants of self-esteem. This can be easily understood because one of the major objectives of scientific research is to look for the causes of various phenomena. However, it should be noted that delineation of pattern or description of structure is also an integral part of science and is by no means a less significant endeavor. Previous studies conducted in Hong Kong have succeeded in identifying several major variables associated with the adolescents' self-esteem. So far nothing have been done to delineate its internal structure. This constitutes the first objective of the present study. We attempt to find out the pattern of clustering among items of the self and the elements responsible for a positive or a negative self-esteem. The second objective is to follow Mitchell and others' footsteps in identifying the major determinants of self-esteem. In addition to updating their findings, we will extend the scope of analysis by considering more variables, particularly those that are related to the subjects' schooling environment. We will also introduce the sex of the subjects as a control factor, so as to see if the determinants of self-esteem vary across the gender boundary.

Sample and Data Collection

Data for this study come from an extensive questionnaire survey of a probability sample of secondary school students in Hong Kong. In early November 1982, 40 schools were chosen randomly from a total of 430 secondary schools recorded in a list provided by the Department of Education. With the help of the Department, 38 schools were willing to participate in the study. Subsequent contacts were made with individual schools to work out a time convenient for them so that we could make the field visits. At the same time, information on each form in every school was also gathered. By means of random sampling, two classes of students were selected from each school to be included in the final sample of students, thus giving a total of 76 classes that ranged from the lowest to the highest grades in the schools.

As several researchers with different interest were involved in the study on adolescent mentality, the large number of question items thus devised for practical purposes had to be grouped into two separate question-naires. The main criterion employed in the partition process was affinity in content. The two questionnaires, however, share a common set of items that serve to identify the socio-demographic characteristics of the respondents. As such, each questionnaire is a self-contained instrument for research.

Field work started in mid-December, 1982 and lasted until late January, 1983. During each school visit, two field workers were assigned to distribute the two questionnaires--Questionnaire A and Questionnaire B-- randomly to all the students in each class. The students were told to fill in the questionnaires by themselves. The field workers were on hand to help in case of doubts about specific questions. Each student, however, was asked to answer only one of the two questionnaires. At the end of the

exercise, 1,466 of Questionnaire A and 1,407 copies of Questionnaire B were collected, out of which two copies of Questionnaire A and four copies of Questionnaire B had to be discarded owing to incompleteness. In all, the final sample of respondents for Questionnaire A is 1,464 and that for Questionnaire B is 1,403. The findings reported in this article are based on data collected through Questionnaire A.

Configurations of Self-Esteem

The subject's global self-esteem is measured by nine items, formulated in a way similar to Rosenberg's scale (1979:291). In order to tap the self-esteem from different angles, four of these items are phrased in a positive way, three carrying a negative overtone, while the remaining two are more neutral. All of them are arranged in a seven-point Likert scale, from strongly agree to strongly disagree. The two items with relatively neutral meaning were later discarded because of their poor statistical association with the pool of self-perceived attributes selected to represent the subject's self-concept.

A factor analysis was run to examine the structure of the remaining seven items that were used to measure global self-esteem. As can be seen from Table 1, these items clearly cluster into two sets, except for Item 4, which is more ambivalent. Factor 1 consists of three negatively phrased items, whereas Factor 2 is made up with three positively phrased items. We decided to include Item 4 into Factor 2, partly because it is also positively phrased and partly because its factor loading on Factor 2 is 0.29, just a little bit lower than the acceptable value of 0.3.

Table 1. Rotated Factor Loadings on Global Self-Esteem Items

Items	Factor	
	I	II
1. Everybody has mertis as well as short-comings. All in all, I have more shortcomings than mertis.	0.54	0.09
2. I am no good at all.	0.67	0.09
3. All in all, I feel that I am a failure.	0.71	0.27
4. I feel that I am not worse than others.	0.23	0.29
5. If I could be reborn once again, I do not want any change at all. I would rather remain as exactly the same as I am now.	-0.04	0.43
6. On the whole, I am satisfied with myself.	0.25	0.59
7. I have great expectation on my future.	0.14	0.34

The existence of two clusters of items in the global self-esteem is contrary to our expectation, because no matter whether the items are formulated positively or negatively, they are all statements of self-evaluation at the global level. If a subject agrees to a positive statement about himself, he naturally would express disagreement to a similar statement that is negatively phrased. In other words, the statistical correlation between positive items and the negative items should be equally strong as that between the items which are phrased in the same way, provided that the direction of scoring has been taken into consideration.

In view of the clear clustering in Table 1, we suppose that the global self-esteem of our subjects is by no means a homogeneous one. We also suspect that the aspects of the self elicited by the positively phrased questions are different from those elicited by the negatively phrased ones.

In order to verify this conception, we correlated the two dimensions of the global self-esteem with a pool of self-perceived attributes intended to represent the subject's self-concept, respectively. These attributes are taken as the components of the global self-esteem. The question arises as to how those components can be identified. An individual's self-concept is composed of numerous attributes. Since the boundary of its entire population cannot be clearly delineated, the selection based on the sampling method is out of the question here. If a probability sample cannot be found, the second best alternative would be choosing the attributes which are more salient to the individual. This is theoretically sound because by definition the less salient traits can be disregarded without significant impact on the global self-esteem.

Selection of the more salient attributes relies on a previous study conducted by the senior author of this paper. Carried out in 1977, that study asked a group of secondary students, ranging from Form 1 to Form 5, to fill in twenty responses to the question of "Who Am I?". From these responses, we tabulated those that Kuhn and McPartland (1954) classified as "psychological attributes" and selected twenty four that were most frequently mentioned. They were filial piety, intelligence, sociability, code of brotherhood, optimism, consistency, readiness to help others, being bad-tempered, selfishness, susceptability to others' influences, laziness, naivety, cowardice, being restrained, being receptive to others' opinion, fondness of novelty,

playfulness, indulgence in fantasy, seeking for excitement, being taciturn, being emotional, willingness to make friends, introvertedness, and rebelliousness. Since these are all spontaneous responses, their frequency of appearance can be assumed to represent their saliency. Each of the questions measuring these attributes was provided with seven alternative responses, ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree. The alpha coefficient of the scale made up these attributes is 0.72 and the correlation coefficient between this scale and the global self-esteem is 0.51.

Table 2 lists the Pearson correlation coefficients between these psychological attributes and (1) the global self-esteem, (2) the negative dimension of global self-esteem, and (3) the positive dimension of global self-esteem, respectively. We found that these components can be grouped into six categories. The first category includes fondness of novelty, playfulness, seeking for excitement, code of brotherhood and readiness to help, all of which are significantly related to the positive dimension but not to the negative dimension of the global self-esteem. The second category includes being restrained, being taciturn, being emotional, introvertedness, indulgence in fantasy, rebelliousness, and susceptability to influences, all of which are significantly related to the negative dimension but not to the positive dimension of the global self-esteem. The third category consists of those items which are significantly related to both dimensions of the global self-esteem but the strength of their relationship is stronger with the negative dimension than with the positive dimension. These include being bad tempered, selfishness, laziness, naivety, and cowardice. The fourth category, including filial piety, consistency, willingness to make friends, also maintains a signifi-cant relationship with both dimensions of the global self-esteem but its

relationship with the positive dimension is stronger than with the negative dimension. The fifth category is composed of those items which are significantly related to both the positive and the negative dimensions and there is no considerable difference in the strength of relationship. These include intelligence, sociability, and optimism. The sixth category has only one component, i.e., valuing others' opinion, which is not significantly related to any dimension of the global self-esteem.

This pattern of distribution confirms our contention that the attributes associated with the positive statements are apparently different from those associated with the negative statements. For example, when our subjects were responding to the positive statements, what came to their mind were those attributes belonging to the first and the fourth categories. Correspondingly, when they answered the negative questions, they were more preoccupied with attributes classified as categories 2 and 3. This does not mean that in responding to the positive questions, our subjects only thought of attributes in categories 1 and 4, and nothing else. But the systematic difference in the weight of correlation between the negative and the positive dimension of the global self-esteem among different components clearly lend support to the argument that certain attributes contribute more to the positive and others to the negative dimension of the global self-esteem.

The figures in the third column of Table 2 are correlation coefficients between each of the components and the composite score of the seven items measuring global self-esteem, in which the direction of scoring for the negative items has been adjusted. They indicate what attributes have positive/negative effects on our subjects' global self-esteem. Those contri-bute to a positive self-esteem include playfulness, seeking for excitement,

filial piety, intelligence, sociability, code of brotherhood, optimism,

consistency, readiness to help, and willingness to make friends, whereas

the attributes responsible for a negative self-image include being restrained,

being taciturn, introvertedness, being bad-tempered, selfishness, laziness,

being emotional, rebelliousness, naivety, cowardice, susceptability to

influences, and indulgence in fantasy. The effect of intelligence on global

self-esteem is the strongest, while cowardice, sociability, consistency, and

optimism come next, in that order. What should be noted is the attribute of

selfishness. Several surveys carried out recently indicated that the adoles-

cents in Hong Kong, because of the pervasive influences of the commerical-

materialistic culture, have developed an egoistic mentality (HKFS, 1982;

HKUSU, 1982). Our data show that selfishness is still conceived as negative,

although its intensity is somewhat moderate.

The configurations of global self-esteem presented above were

examined separately in male and female subjects. No significant difference

was found.

Table 2. Pearson Correlation Coefficients Between Global Self-Esteem and Salient Components of the Self

Components of Self		Global Self-Esteem		
		Negative Dimension	Positive Dimension	Overall
Category 1	Fondness of Novelty	0.01*	0.11	0.07*
	Playfulness	0.02*	0.12	0.08
	Seeking for excitement	-0.03*	0.16	0.13
	Code of brotherhood	-0.05*	0.24	0.17
	Readiness to help	-0.02*	0.14	0.09
Category 2	Being restrained	0.19	-0.02*	-0.14
	Being taciturn	0.20	0.03*	-0.10
	Being emotional	0.24	-0.04*	-0.17
	Introvertedness	0.21	-0.03*	-0.16
	Indulgence in fantasy	0.19	0.05*	-0.10
	Rebelliousness	0.18	-0.06*	-0.15
	Susceptability to influences	0.29	-0.07*	-0.23
Category 3	Being bad-tempered	0.32	-0.10	-0.27
	Selfishness	0.33	-0.11	-0.26
	Laziness	0.36	-0.16	-0.32
	Naivety	0.34	-0.19	-0.32
	Cowardice	0.39	-0.19	-0.37
Category 4	Filial piety	-0.13	0.25	0.25
	Consistency	-0.21	0.34	0.33
	Willingness to make friends	-0.08	0.15	0.14
Category 5	Intelligence	-0.32	0.40	0.46
	Sociability	-0.23	0.29	0.34
	Optimism	-0.21	0.24	0.30
Category 6	Valuing others' opinions	-0.01*	0.05*	0.06*

Note: All except those with an asterisk sign are statistically significant at 0.01 level.

Determinants of Self-Esteem

Many variables have been found to have significant effects on self-esteem. Most of these variables, however, can be classified into two categories. The first is the warmth and supportiveness of the social environment in which the individual spends a significant part of his life. These include unconditional positive regard (Rogers, 1959), parental interest (Rosenberg, 1963), acceptance by mothers (Coopersmith, 1967), etc. The second is the relative standing in those areas to which the individual feels important. This category, in turn, has two dimensions, namely, the relative standing achieved by the individual himself, such as academic achievement (Skaalvik, 1983), occupational experience (Mortimer and Lorence, 1979), and task performance (Tesser and Campbell, 1980), etc. The second dimension refers to the ascriptive nature of an individual's relative standing, notably sex (Koffman and Lips, 1980), race (Hines and Berg-Cross, 1981), and birth order (Kidwell, 1982). Certainly, there are border-line cases, of which social class (Rosenberg and Pearlin, 1979) is the most conspicuous example. For the adults, it is an achieved status. For the adolescents or younger children, it is determined primarily by characteristics of their parents.

Since our subjects are school students, the family and school constitute the major social environment in which they spend a significant part of their life. The variable of relationship with family is measured by four questions: (1) I feel that my family is more harmonious than others; (2) my home is the best place in the world; (3) I have thoughts of leaving my family; (4) If I could be reborn, I would like to reborn in the same family. Each of these questions is followed by seven alternatives, arranged in a

Likert scale, from strongly agree to strongly disagree. The reliability of this scale has an alpha value of 0.62. The variable of relationship with school is also measured by four questions: (1) I like to participate in activities organised by school; (2) I always hope that the classes be ended soon; (3) I feel that what has been taught in the class is useful; (4) if possible, I would like to change to another school. These questions are also followed by seven alternatives, arranged in a Likert scale, from strongly agree to strongly disagree. The alpha coefficient of this scale is 0.35 which, taken at its face value, is low. However, although the four items are all indicants of relationship with school, they are by no means homogeneous in empirical referents. For instance, 77% of respondents indicated that what has been taught in class is useful and 51% answered that they like to participate in activities organised by school. On the other hand, however, 52% expressed the wish to change to another school and 63% responded that they always hope that the class be ended soon. As Zeller and Carmines (1980:60) stated, "alpha does not provide an optional estimate or reliability when the items that make up the composite are heterogeneous in their relation to one another ... Thus, the more the interitem correlations diverge from one another, the more the value given by alpha understates the true reliability." Of course we could delete some of the items to increae the alpha value. But by doing so we will narrow the empirical referents which the conceptual boundary of the variable is supposed to encompass. In sum, the alpha value of 0.35 represents the lower limit of reliability of the variable of relationship with school. This should be kept in mind when interpreting the related findings.

We grouped our subjects into the categories of good, moderate and

bad, in terms of their relationships with family and with school. The
relationship was defined as bad when the subject gave an average of
negative responses to the questions constituting the respective scale; the
relationship was considered as moderate when the subject indicated either
an ambivalent stance or a little bit towards the positive side; the remaining
cases (missing cases not included) were classified as maintaining a good
relationship with their family/school.

As for the category of relative standing, we correlate self-esteem
with sex, socio-economic status, birth order, academic achievement, and a
set of variables which make up our subjects' schooling environment. Socio-
economic status is measured by father's education and occupation. Family
income is abandoned as an indicator of this variable because of the exception-
ally large number of missing cases. A score of 4 is assigned to those whose
father belongs to the occupational ranking of higher-grade professionals and
their equivalents; 3 to lower-grade professionals and their equivalents; 2 to
small proprietors, lower-grade technicians and their equivalents; 1 to routine
non-manual employees, skilled, semi-skilled, or unskilled wage workers. For
father's education, a score of 4 is given to graduate training; 3 to either
university or post-secondary education; 2 to secondary education and 1 to
primary school or below. The reliability score of this scale has an alpha
value of 0.46. The socio-economic status of our subjects is classified as high
if their composite score on this scale is or above 5; as medium if their com-
posite score is 3 or 4; as low if their composite score is 2. Academic achieve-
ment is indicated by the subject's standing in his/her own class in the
semester prior to the time of data collection. Since in many schools students
are only ranked into the first tenth, the second tenth, and so forth, we can

only have a crude measurement of this variable.

Table 3 shows the effects of a set of independent variables on
global self-esteem. Some variables in the table, such as relationship with
family, relationship with school, socio-economic status, and academic
achievement have either an interval or an ordinal score. However, for the
sake of comparison with other nominal variables, all data are analysed by
analysis of variance.

First of all, it should be noted from the data in Table 3 that, except
for two categories, the mean scores of self-esteem among our subjects, no
matter how classified, are all above the theoretical average point of 28, which
means that their self-image is generally tilted towards the positive side.
This finding is particularly revealing in view of the fact that some scholars,
such as Mahler (1976) and others, have maintained that the Orients usually
have a lower score on self-esteem because of their traditional de-emphasis on
selfhood and individualism. Bond and Cheung's study (1983), which is based
on a limited sample, found neutral responding in spontaneous expressions of
self-esteem among Hong Kong Chinese.

The figures in the table also show that our subjects' self-esteem is
significantly affected by their relationship with the family and school. The
magnitude of influence remains largely the same even after sex has been
introduced as a control variable. Judging from the F values, the family
seems to have greater effect on self-esteem than school. This is consistent
with existing theory and research findings in this area and particularly with
Cheung and Lau's study (1983) which, carried out with a limited sample in
Hong Kong, indicated that the family and school correlate significantly with
self-esteem and that the family environment is more significantly related to

self-esteem than that of the classroom environment.

As for the variables indicating the individual's relative standing, their effects on self-esteem are not that clear and require some elaboration. First of all, the self-esteem of male subjects is higher than their female counterparts. The mean scores are 32.49 and 30.63, respectively. The difference is significant at .01 level. Sex differences in self-esteem are not generally detected by studies conducted in western societies. However, some recent evidence (Koffman and Lips, 1980; Skaalvik, 1983) has shown that such a difference does exist. Moreover, past research in Hong Kong (Mitchell, 1969; Cheung, 1977) consistently shows that males have a higher score on self-esteem than females, although among college students such a difference could not be found (Bond and Cheung, 1983).

The unfavorable self-perception of our female subjects reflects the favorable treatment they receive from society. Despite the rapid pace of modernization, the traditional pattern of discrimination against women, albeit in a subtle way, still persists in Hong Kong. Boys are still considered as responsible for perpetuation of ancestral lineage. If a family cannot afford to send all the children to school, it is always the boy who has the priority (Tang, 1981). Under this prevalent atmosphere of discrimination against girls, in the absence of a women liberation movement, it is conceivable that female subjects generally see themselves lower than their male counterparts.

Besides sex, birth order and socio-economic status are other major variables of ascriptive nature that indicate an individual's relative standing. For our subjects, there is no significant relationship between birth order and self-esteem. The firstborns have a mean score of 32.15, as compared to 31.25 of the middleborns and 31.93 of the lastborns. We also fail to find any

significant difference in self-esteem between the only child and others. The mean scores of these two categories are 32.67 and 31.59, respectively. Because of space limitation, all these figures about the relationship between birth order and self-esteem have not been entered into Table 3.

Research findings about such a relationship has been quite conflicting. Based on a much limited sample a few years ago, the senior author of this paper found that the firstborns have the highest score on self-esteem, the lastborns come next, and the middleborns the lowest (Cheung, 1977). Kidwell (1982) was also able to establish that middleborns have significantly lower self-esteem than firstborns and lastborns, although she failed to detect any significant difference between the latter two categories. Rosenberg (1965), on the other hand, found little association between birth order and self-esteem. However, he discovered that whether one has any siblings does make a difference. The equivocal relationship between birth order and self-esteem, both in Hong Kong and abroad, is subject to interpretation. It may be that birth order is not a major determinant of self-esteem, or that the relationship has been suppressed by other variables. In either cases, more empirical research and, perhaps, more sensitive instruments are needed before there could be any more definitive conclusion.

The effect of socio-economic status on self-esteem is significant and is in general consistent with Mitchell's (1969) finding generated about fifteen years ago. The mean scores of its high, medium and low categories are 34.19, 32.28 and 30.69, respectively. After the control variable of sex has been introduced, the relationship persists but has diminished somewhat among female subjects (singificant only at .05 level).

The effect of socio-economic status on self-esteem has for a long time been quite ambivalent but Rosenberg and Pearlin (1979) have come out to arbitrate the differences. They introduced age as a control variable and found that the association between social class and self-esteem is stronger among adults than among children and stronger among older children than among younger ones. To explain these findings, they suggested that "for the adult, social class is achieved (at least in principle), whereas for the child it is unequivocally ascribed." (p.129) It seems as first sight that this statement carries the implication that achieved status has greater effect on self-esteem than ascribed status, but what they really emphasized is that

> "If we hope to appreciate the meaning of social class ... for the child, it is essential to see social class from his viewpoint, to adopt the child's eye-view of stratification, to understand how it enters his experience and is internally processed. To the socio-logist, social class means differential prestige, respect, possessions, and power, with obvious self-esteem implica-tions. But from the child, as he looks around him in the actual world of school and neighborhood in which he lives, finds that most of the children he meets are socio-economically much like himself ... His effective inter-personal environment, which provides the primary social experiences which enter his phenomenal field, is largely a classless society, a world in which status plays little or not role." (p.147)

We quote Rosenberg's explanation at length in order to show that what he has portrayed as existing in the United States may not be true in Hong Kong. Hong Kong is one of the most crowded cities in the world. Over five and a half million residents live within a territory of some 400 square miles, most of whom concentrated in the much smaller metropolitan area. In such a densely populated city, people of different class background inevitably have frequent contacts with each other. Under this circumstance, the sense

of superiority/inferiority conferred by one's class status cannot easily be delegated to peripheral importance.

Following Rosenberg and Pearlin, we examine the relationship between socio-economic status and self-esteem by introducing age as a control variable. We devide our subjects into three groups, namely, those whose age is from 10 to 13; from 14 to 17; and from 18 to 22. The Pearson correlation coefficients between socio-economic status and self-esteem of these three groups are 0.22 ($P < 0.01$), 0.21 ($P < 0.01$), and -0.02 ($P > 0.10$), respectively. This finding points to the opposite direction as suggested by Rosenberg and Pearlin. This means that the older our sub-jects, the lesser effect of socio-economic status on self-esteem.

Since our subjects are all students, academic achievement is expected to be a major source of their sense of competence. We would therefore hypothesize that the subjects whose academic performance is better would have a higher self-esteem. Generally speaking, these two variables do have a positive relationship. However, after sex has been introduced as a control variable, such a relationship persists in males but becomes more complicated in females. It is true that the female subjects whose academic standing is lowest also have the poorest self-esteem, but those who score highest in self-esteem are ranked just next to the bottom in terms of academic achievement. In other words, academic achievement is a less significant factor in maintaining a positive self-esteem for the female subjects. This pattern of influence is also reflected by other variables indicating an individual's relative standing in achievement, such as the standard of streaming and the financial status of school. The academic quality of the private school in general is considerably lower than those that

are run, subsidized, or aided by the government. Table 3 shows that the financial status of the school has a significant impact on self-esteem only among males but not among females. The same is true for the standard of streaming.

The type of school and class our subjects attend may also have relevance to their sense of competence. The academic quality of the Chinese middle school, once commendable, has been declining very rapidly in the last decade or so. We therefore hypothesize that students attending this type of school would suffer from a lower self-esteem than their counterparts in the Anglo-Chinese school, where English is the major instructional medium. Contrary to our expectation, however, the data in Table 3 indicate that there is no difference in mean scores on self-esteem between these two types of school, both among males and females. To explain this result, we can only think of two possible reasons. Firstly, there is great variation in terms of academic quality among the Anglo-Chinese secondary schools. Although the best schools usually use English as the major instructional medium, there is still a large number of schools in this category whose academic quality is even worst than that in the Chinese middle school. Secondly, we suspect that the use of a language other than the mother tongue may have an adverse effect on self-esteem, especially among those students who can hardly master English. This counteracts the effect on self-esteem brought about by enrolling in that type of school where the academic standing is supposed to be better.

Finally, in Hong Kong, there is a tendency for brighter students to be enrolled in science classes. So we expect students in this category to have a higher self-esteem than their counterparts in arts class. In fact,

Lau and Lu (1980) study, which is based on a limited sample in Hong Kong, did establish such a relationship. The data in Table 3 indicate that this relationship also exists in our sample. The mean score for arts students is 30.83, as compared to 32.27 of the science students. However, the difference is significant only at 0.05 level. Moreover, after controlling for sex, the relationship vanishes both among males and females. This means that the original relationship is a spurious one. Science students have a higher self-esteem only because most of them are male students.

In sum, among the variables which indicate an individual's relative standing, sex and socio-economic status, both of ascriptive nature, are significantly related to our subjects' self-esteem. As for those variables which represent personal achievement, academic performance, standard of streaming and financial status of school are significantly related to self-esteem only among males. This means that the self-esteem of our female subjects is less sensitive to the effect of their relative standing in academically-related achievement. This result lends support to a recent finding by Skaalvik (1983) who discovered that, in Norway, low achieving boys tend to lower thier self-esteem, while low achieving girls do not. The pattern of this result, he suggested, seems to crystallize around the 4th grade. The explanation he gave is a sound one and is applicable to Hong Kong. In brief, he attributed this differential susceptability to the influence of academic achievement on self-esteem between the two sexes to the psychological tendency of self-enhancement. Because of the existence of this motive, self-protective mechanisms will be activated when self-esteem is threatened. One possible way of protecting self-esteem against the systematic experience of academic failure is the devaluation of school work. However, there are limitations for

Table 3. Determinants of Self-Esteem by ANOVA Controlling on Sex

Determinants of Self-Esteem Variables	Categories	All Subjects Mean Scores	All Subjects F values	Male Subjects Mean Scores	Male Subjects F values	Female Subjects Mean Scores	Female Subjects F values
Relationship with Family	Good	34.28 (N=376)		34.82 (N=190)		33.74 (N=185)	
	Moderate	31.25 (N=367)	70.23	32.29 (N=198)	26.81	30.01 (N=165)	45.18
	Bad	28.44 (N=278)		29.62 (N=132)		27.38 (N=146)	
Relationship with School	Good	35.10 (N=173)		35.20 (N=104)		34.96 (N=69)	
	Moderate	32.08 (N=434)	44.59	33.04 (N=233)	18.43	30.96 (N=200)	23.48
	Bad	29.87 (N=456)		30.77 (N=208)		29.09 (N=244)	
Sex	Male	32.49 (N=556)	21.67	–	–	–	–
	Female	30.63 (N=519)					
Socio-economic status	High	34.19 (N=68)		35.07 (N=39)		33.00 (N=29)	
	Medium	32.28 (N=367)	9.68	32.89 (N=178)	5.56	31.71 (N=188)	4.24*
	Low	30.69 (N=278)		31.34 (N=146)		29.97 (N=132)	
Academic attainment	1st to 10th in class	32.57 (N=280)		34.01 (N=127)		31.38 (N=152)	
	11th to 20th in class	32.01 (N=315)	7.42	33.30 (N=146)	4.96	30.89 (N=168)	7.27
	21st to 30th in class	31.68 (N=254)		31.76 (N=147)		31.58 (N=106)	
	31st or below in class	29.79 (N=194)		31.32 (N=112)		27.64 (N=80)	
Standard of streaming	Good	32.27 (N=293)		33.95 (N=131)		30.92 (N=161)	
	Average	31.26 (N=213)	3.32*	32.02 (N=92)	5.12	30.67 (N=119)	0.51**
	Poor	29.98 (N=56)		30.34 (N=35)		29.30 (N=20)	
Financial status of school	Gov't & aided	32.34 (N=561)		33.39 (N=328)		30.86 (N=231)	
	Private	30.77 (N=519)	15.53	31.18 (N=228)	15.89	30.44 (N=519)	0.53**
Type of school	Chinese	31.98 (N=176)		32.09 (N=80)		31.92 (N=59)	
	Anglo-Chinese	31.64 (N=748)	1.20**	32.53 (N=439)	0.21**	30.37 (N=309)	2.22**
	Mixed	30.89 (N=154)		32.81 (N=37)		30.28 (N=117)	
Section classified by instructional medium	Chinese section	30.62 (N=117)		31.31 (N=51)		30.08 (N=65)	
	English section	31.53 (N=257)	1.49**	32.91 (N=96)	1.92**	30.71 (N=151)	0.42**
Section classified by subjects	Arts class	30.83 (N=282)		32.55 (N=106)		29.79 (N=176)	
	Science class	32.27 (N=158)	2.99**	32.65 (N=133)	0.67**	30.24 (N=25)	2.45**
	Not yet divided	31.80 (N=605)		32.41 (N=306)		31.17 (N=296)	

Note: All F values without any asterisk sign are significant at 0.01 level; those with one asterisk sign are significant at 0.05 level; those with two asterisk signs are not significant.

the exercise of self-protective mechanisms, one of which is the cultural pressure towards academic achievement. Skaalvik also pointed out that the cultural pressure varies with the sex of the subjects. Traditionally, there is greater expectation to do better in school for boys than for girls. Such a cultural environment leaves more room for the female subjects to exercise their self-protective mechanism by devaluation of academic achievement.

Summary and Conclusion

As its title indicates, the objective of this article is twofold, namely, to delineate the configurations and to identify the major determinants of the global self-esteem of adolescents in Hong Kong. A factor analysis shows that the global self-esteem of our subjects is by no means unitary. Generally, it consists of a positive dimension and a negative dimension. There are indications that these are not just the two sides of the same coin, because the aspects of the self related to the positively phrased questions are different from those elicited by the negatively phrased ones. For example, some components of the self, such as being bad-tempered, selfish, lazy, naive, and coward have quite strong relationship with the negative dimension of global self-esteem, but their relationships with the positive dimension, though still significant, have been considerably reduced. This means that possessing these personality attributes could lower the subject's self-esteem, while not possessing them would not enhance the self-esteem with correspond-ing magnitudes. Similarly, filial piety and self-consistency have much stronger relationship with the positive dimension than with the negative dimension. Furthermore, some components of the self, such as fondness of novelty, playfulness, and seeking for excitement have moderate significant

relationships only with the positive dimension, while introvertedness, indulgence in fantasy and being emotional have moderate relationships only with the negative dimension of the global self-esteem. Of the 24 salient components of the self, only intelligence, sociability, and optimism have relatively equal effects on both the positive and the negative dimension of the global self-esteem.

Intelligence stands out among other items in having the strongest effect on the global self-esteem, while cowardice, sociability, consistency, laziness, and optimism come next, in that order. Generally, all these attributes are in some way related to the sense of competence, maturity, courage, and self confidence, the most sensitive areas of individual self-perception during adolescence.

The above-mentioned configurations of global self-esteem remain essentially the same among the male as well as among the female subjects.

In general, all our subjects' self-esteem is tilted slightly towards the positive side and the male subjects have a higher self-esteem than their female counterparts. Having classified the determinants of self-esteem into two broad categories, namely, warmth and supportiveness of social environ-ment and relative standing, we found the former has a greater effeect on our subjects' self-esteem than the latter. Comparing the effects of the family and school, the former clearly is more powerful in shaping individual self-esteem. These findings hold true both among males and females.

The effect on self-esteem of the variables indicating an individual's relative standing is different between males and females. For males, socio-economic status, academic achievement, financial status of school and standard of streaming are significantly related to self-esteem, at the 0.01 level.

However, for females, only socio-economic status still maintains a significant

relationship, and yet, its degree of significance has been reduced to 0.05.

All these findings suggest that female subjects have suffered from

a lower self-esteem as a result of their relatively lower standing in sex role

as compared to males. However, further disadvantages in relative standing

do not result in a further deterioration of their self-esteem. This does not

mean that their self-esteem is not sensitive to the influence of one's level of

competence. On the contrary, we have shown that perception of intelligence

is the most salient component in our subjects' global self-esteem, both for

males and for females. Since intelligence is a generalized ability which

extends beyond the purview of academic achievement, we suspect that the

female's self-esteem may be shaped by other variables of relative standing

which have not been considered in the present study. This points to a

direction for further research in this area.

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香港靑少年的自尊：形貌及決定因素

（中文摘要）

顧名思義，本文主要探討香港靑少年的自尊之形貌及其決定因素。資料源自「香港靑少年心態研究」，於八二年十二月至八三年一月間以自塡問卷方式蒐集。該研究由新昌集團葉庚年教育基金贊助，並獲中文大學香港研究中心支持。研究對象由聚類抽樣方式選出，先從全港中學名單中以隨機方式抽出四十間學校，再在每間學校中以隨機方式抽出兩班。抽出的學校當中，有兩間表示無意參與，故研究樣本實際包括三十八間學校，共七十六班，一千四百六十四人。

通過因子分析，顯示香港靑少年的自尊可以分爲正負兩方面。本文再檢視一系列足以代表自我形象的個人特質與這兩方面的關係，發覺這些特質可以歸納爲六個類別：第一類只與正面的自尊有關，包括嗜新、愛玩、喜歡找尋刺激、夠義氣、喜歡幫助人；第二類只與負面的自尊有關，包括收斂、沉默寡言、情緒化、內向、愛幻想、反叛、易受別人影響；第三類與自尊的正負兩方面都有關，但與負面的關係遠較與正面的關係爲強，包括壞脾氣、自私、懶惰、幼稚、懦弱；第四類也與自尊的正負兩方面有關，但與正面的關係遠較負面爲強，包括孝順、前後一致、喜歡交朋友；第五類與自尊的正負兩方面都有關，而且程度相去不遠，包括聰明、擅於社交、樂觀；第六類只有一項，即尊重別人意見，與自尊的正負兩方面都無顯著關係。在上述各項個人特質中，聰明與整體自尊的關係最強，懦弱次之，擅於社交、前後一致、樂觀等又其次。

本文的第二部份是找尋影響個人自尊的外在因素。根據現存理論及研究成果，此等因素大別可以歸爲兩類：第一類是個人的社會生活環境的和諧性和鼓舞性，以家庭和學校爲主；第二類是個人在重要領域裏面所處位置的高低，包括性別、社會地位、出生次序、學業狀況等。經過分析之後，本文得到下列結論：

一、自尊與家庭關係及學校關係都有很顯著的相關性，而家庭的作用比較學校爲強。

二、自尊與性別有關，一般男性比女性爲高。

三、自尊與社經地位成正比。

四、自尊與出生次序無顯著關係。

五、本文從五方面來檢視學業狀況與自尊的關係，包括班內名次、分軌後所屬班次、學校財政來源（官津或私立）、學校敎學語言（中中或英中）、學生所

修科目（理組或文組）。結果顯示，在女生當中，此五個因素與自尊均無顯著關係；在男生當中，學校教學語言及學生所修科目與自尊無關。在其餘三個因素當中，班內名次及分軌後所屬班次皆與自尊成正比，至於學校財政來源方面，則官津學生的自尊較私立學校爲高。總的來看，男生的自尊變到學業成就所影響，女生則否。