



THE INFLUENCE OF SOCIAL FACTORS ON WOMEN'S SELF-ESTEEM

Abdullaeva Nilufar

A PhD Researcher of Fergana State University

n.abdullayevauz@gmail.com

Abstract

This article examines the influence of social factors on women's self-esteem from a social psychology perspective. Key factors such as family, gender stereotypes, media, and the professional environment are analyzed. It is argued that women's self-esteem is shaped by social norms and expectations internalized through socialization.

Keywords: Self-esteem, women, social factors, gender stereotypes, social environment.

Introduction

Self-esteem is one of the most fundamental and multifaceted psychological categories, significantly determining not only a person's inner world but also the nature of their interactions with their social environment. The level and quality of self-esteem largely determines the specifics of an individual's social behavior, their ability to successfully adapt to changing life conditions, their degree of resilience to stressful situations, as well as their overall potential for personal fulfillment and the achievement of their life goals. In the modern humanities and social sciences, self-esteem has long ceased to be perceived as a static, unchanging personality characteristic. Instead, it is viewed as a dynamic, fluid psychological construct that is constantly being formed, developed, transformed, and adjusted under the constant influence of a wide range of diverse factors—social, cultural, familial, educational, professional, and purely individual psychological. The issue of women's self-esteem occupies a special place in this broad scientific field.

This topic is especially relevant given that, throughout human history, women's self-esteem has been shaped by a powerful system of social expectations, gender norms, cultural stereotypes, and traditional notions of the "correct" female role in

society and the family. For centuries, these external regulators have significantly limited the space for women's free expression and self-determination, setting strict boundaries for what they "should" be, how they should look, behave, and what priorities they should set in life. [Andreeva, Moscow, 2011, p. 213] As a result, women's self-esteem often found itself in a dual position: on the one hand, it was fueled by approval and recognition from significant others, but on the other, it was constantly subject to criticism and correction whenever it deviated from socially prescribed standards.



¹Contemporary social transformations occurring on a global scale are radically altering this traditional picture and exerting a profound, multi-layered influence on the formation and transformation of women's identity and, consequently, self-esteem. Among the most significant factors shaping today's reality are the following:

- an unprecedented increase in media pressure, which through social networks, advertising, cinema, television and glossy magazines imposes idealized, often unattainable images of a “successful”, “beautiful” and “perfect” woman;
- a significant change in traditional family models, including an increase in single-parent families, the postponement of marriage and childbearing, the spread of



partnerships, and an increase in the proportion of women choosing a career and independence over the classic family role;

- increasing professional competition in the labor market, where women increasingly face the need to prove their competence in the face of a “glass ceiling,” gender inequality in wages, and biased attitudes toward motherhood;
- the preservation and simultaneous transformation of gender stereotypes, which, despite declared equality, continue to exert a hidden but powerful influence on women's perceptions of their capabilities, strengths, and limitations. All these processes taken together create an extremely complex and contradictory system of factors that simultaneously expand opportunities for self-realization and simultaneously increase the level of internal conflicts, anxiety, and self-doubt. Women in modern society are forced to balance between traditional expectations ("good mother," "caring wife," "keeper of the hearth") and new demands ("successful careerist," "independent personality," "ideal appearance and lifestyle"). This contradiction inevitably affects the structure and dynamics of their self-esteem, making them particularly vulnerable and changeable. [Bern, St. Petersburg, 2004, p. 97] .

In this regard, a comprehensive, interdisciplinary study of how various social factors influence the formation, maintenance, and potential transformation of women's self-esteem in modern society is of particular scientific and practical significance. Such research not only allows for a deeper understanding of the mechanisms of women's psychological adaptation in a rapidly changing world but also identifies problem areas where social institutions, media, and cultural practices exert a destructive influence, as well as identifies potential resources and areas for positive change.

The purpose of this article is to comprehensively analyze the key social factors that, in today's world, most significantly influence the formation, stabilization, and potential transformation of women's self-esteem. The focus is on both objective social realities (economic, professional, and family) and the subjective mechanisms by which women perceive and interpret them, which ultimately determine the nature and level of their self-image.



MATERIALS AND METHODS

The primary material for this study was drawn from a broad range of scholarly works and publications spanning several related disciplines: social psychology, gender studies, the sociology of personality, and cultural and feminist psychology. Specifically, we analyzed both classic seminal works that laid the foundations for understanding self-esteem as a psychological phenomenon, as well as the most relevant contemporary monographs, articles in peer-reviewed journals, and collective collections published over the past 15–20 years. Furthermore, an important part of the study's empirical base was the results of existing empirical studies presented in the contemporary scientific literature: data from quantitative surveys, longitudinal studies, qualitative interviews, meta-analyses, and cross-cultural comparisons devoted to the dynamics of self-esteem in women in various social contexts. The study material is comprehensive and interdisciplinary in nature, incorporating both theoretical concepts and models and specific empirical data obtained by various authors in different countries and sociocultural settings. This made it possible to ensure sufficient breadth of coverage of the problem and avoid excessive dependence on one scientific school or national tradition.



Methodologically, the work relies on a combination of several complementary approaches. The primary research methods were:

- a method of theoretical analysis that involved a deep and critical study of existing concepts of self-esteem, their evolution, strengths and weaknesses, as well as the identification of gaps and contradictions in existing approaches;
- a method of generalizing and systematizing scientific sources, aimed at identifying general patterns, typical trends and the most stable conclusions from a large body of literature;
- a comparative analysis of various conceptual approaches to the study of self-esteem - from classical theories (e.g., the ideas of W. James, C. Cooley, G. Mead, R. Rosenberg) to modern social constructivist, poststructuralist and intersectional interpretations. A special place in the methodology was occupied by the social constructivist approach, which was chosen as the main theoretical and methodological basis of the study. According to the provisions of this direction (in the works of P. Berger and T. Luckmann, K.J. Gergen, V. Harré and others), self-esteem is not an innate or purely internal psychological property of the individual. On the contrary, it is viewed as a dynamically constructed phenomenon that is formed, maintained and changed in the process of continuous social interaction, through the assimilation, interpretation and reproduction of cultural norms, symbols, discourses and expectations of the significant environment. Self-esteem is presented here as a product of the social construction of reality, in which the individual actively participates, yet remains largely dependent on external social structures and practices. Elements of gender analysis were additionally applied in the study, which allowed for a focus on the specific impact of social factors on women's self-esteem [**Shibutani, Moscow, 2002, p. 154**]. A gender approach made it possible to consider self-esteem not as a universal psychological characteristic, but as a gendered construct shaped by asymmetrical social expectations, patriarchal norms, media representations of femininity, and intersecting axes of inequality (class, age, ethnicity, sexual orientation, etc.). This analysis helped identify the mechanisms through which social institutions and cultural practices, either intentionally or indirectly, influence a woman's perception of her own value, competence, attractiveness, and success.

All methods used were applied in a coherent and sequential manner: first, a thorough theoretical review and systematization of the literature was conducted,



followed by a comparison of competing approaches, and finally, the findings were interpreted through the prism of social constructivist and gender perspectives. This integrated approach provided not only a descriptive but also an explanatory level of analysis, enabling a deeper understanding of why and how social factors exert such a significant and often contradictory influence on women's self-esteem in contemporary society.

RESULTS

An analysis of a vast body of scientific literature, including fundamental works in social psychology, gender studies, the sociology of personality, and related disciplines, convincingly demonstrates that the formation, dynamics, and stability of women's self-esteem are influenced by a complex, multi-layered set of interconnected social factors. These factors do not act in isolation, but rather form a unified system, with each element reinforcing or weakening the influence of the others depending on the woman's stage of life, her sociocultural context, her individual characteristics, and the historical period. As a result, self-esteem appears not as a static internal characteristic, but as a dynamic construct, constantly subject to external social influences, which can either contribute to its positive development or lead to significant distortions and decline.

One of the most fundamental and primary factors is the family, as the key institution of primary socialization. It is in the family environment, through everyday interactions with parents and siblings, through a system of rewards, punishments, evaluations, and role assignments, that a girl's (and later a woman's) deepest, often unconscious, core understandings of her own worth, significance as an individual, and place in the world are shaped. A supportive, emotionally warm, and democratic parenting style, emphasizing unconditional acceptance of the child and encouraging independence, achievement, and personal qualities (not just appearance or obedience), contributes to the development of an adequate, stable, and positive self-esteem. Such self-esteem is characterized by a realistic perception of one's strengths and weaknesses, confidence in one's abilities, and a relative independence from an excessive need for external approval. On the contrary, authoritarian, overly controlling or emotionally cold models of upbringing, constant criticism, devaluation of achievements, underestimation of the role of girls in the family (for example, through preference for boys, imposition of stereotypes



“a girl should be quiet/beautiful/useful at home”), comparison with others or direct humiliation can lead to chronically low self-esteem, deep self-doubt, increased dependence on the opinions of others, fear of rejection and a tendency to self-blame [Myasishchev, Moscow, 1995, p. 88].

Social expectations and deeply ingrained gender stereotypes, which permeate virtually all spheres of life, exert a significant, and in modern society increasingly dominant, influence on women's self-esteem. Society still often places conflicting, mutually exclusive demands on women, creating a so-called "double burden" or "double standard." On the one hand, women are expected to be highly successful professionally, financially independent, ambitious in their careers, and competitive in the labor market; on the other, they are expected to fully realize traditional family roles: ideal wife, caring mother, homemaker, and emotional support for loved ones. A woman who is unable or unwilling to fully meet all of these expectations simultaneously (for example, prioritizing her career, postponing motherhood, choosing childlessness, or pursuing unconventional relationships) often internalizes this discrepancy as a personal failure, a moral weakness, or a moral inadequacy. Such internal conflicts between imposed social “shoulds” and real personal desires lead to the accumulation of feelings of guilt, anxiety, inferiority and a significant decrease in self-esteem [Kon, Moscow, 2003, p. 176].

The media landscape plays a significant, if not decisive, role in today's world, including traditional media, advertising, glossy magazines, and, especially, social media. These channels constantly broadcast carefully constructed, retouched, and idealized images of the "successful" and "perfect" woman: flawless looks, a slender body, flawless makeup, a successful career, a happy family, a luxurious lifestyle, constant activity, and a positive attitude. Such standards are, in most cases, patently unattainable for ordinary people and create a constant backdrop for unfavorable social comparison. Women, especially young women, tend to measure themselves against these virtual standards, leading to chronic dissatisfaction with their appearance, body image, achievements, and life in general. Constant comparison of reality with the “filtered” media image strengthens the feeling of one’s own inferiority, increases the level of anxiety, contributes to the development of complexes, eating disorders and depressive states, directly undermining self-esteem [Giddens, Moscow, 2005, p. 421].



In the professional sphere, women's self-esteem is closely and directly linked to the level of social recognition of their competence, the availability of real opportunities for career advancement, equal treatment by colleagues and management, and the absence of systemic barriers. Gender inequality in pay (when women receive less for equal work), the "glass ceiling" limiting access to leadership positions, biased attitudes toward motherhood (when a woman's career after childbirth is considered "secondary"), the undervaluation of women's contributions to the team, microaggressions, and hidden discrimination—all these phenomena contribute to a growing sense of social injustice, professional inferiority, and a low subjective assessment of their own worth. Women in such conditions are more likely to experience impostor syndrome and tend to attribute their successes to external factors ("luck," "help") and failures to their own shortcomings, which further reinforces negative self-image and reduces overall self-esteem [**Butler** , **New York, 1990, p. 54**].

Ultimately, the analysis's results highlight that these social factors form a tightly interwoven network of influences, where negative aspects (stereotypes, media pressure, discrimination) mutually reinforce each other, while positive ones (family support, equal opportunities) can act as protective mechanisms. This makes women's self-esteem particularly vulnerable to the social context and confirms the need for a comprehensive, interdisciplinary approach to its study and support in modern society.

DISCUSSION

The results obtained during the analysis convincingly confirm and allow us to formulate a more general conclusion: women's self-esteem is not an isolated, purely internal psychological characteristic, but is formed under the continuous and multi-layered influence of a combination of social factors operating at different levels of the social structure—from the microsocial (family, immediate environment) to the macrosocial (cultural norms, media discourses, institutional practices of society as a whole). These factors do not simply accumulate; they interact in complex ways, mutually reinforcing, weakening, or transforming one another, making the process of self-esteem development extremely dynamic, contextually determined, and individually variable.



It is particularly important to emphasize the mechanism of gradual internalization of external social evaluations. What initially comes from outside in the form of parental comments, societal expectations, media images, professional feedback, or gender stereotypes eventually ceases to be perceived as an alien influence and becomes an integral part of the individual's internal self-image. A woman begins to perceive these external evaluations as her own beliefs about herself: "I'm not beautiful enough," "I'm not coping with the role of a mother," "I don't deserve a promotion," "I must be perfect in everything." This process of internalization, described in classical psychology as the transition from external to internal regulation, explains why social factors have such a profound and long-lasting impact on self-esteem, often persisting throughout life even after changes in external conditions [**Rubinstein, Moscow, 2009, p. 312**].

An equally significant aspect is the intense interaction and mutual influence of social factors themselves. These interactions can be both synergistic (reinforcing negativity) and compensatory (mitigating or neutralizing). For example, media standards of beauty and success, which are now spread through social media with unprecedented speed and reach, do not operate in a vacuum—they actively reinforce and legitimize traditional gender stereotypes, making them more rigid and pervasive. Idealized images of "perfect" woman on Instagram or TikTok don't just compete with reality—they redefine cultural norms, making women feel even more inadequate and, as a result, lower their self-esteem. On the other hand, the negative impact of occupational discrimination, the "glass ceiling," the gender pay gap, or the systematic undervaluing of women's contributions at work can, in certain cases, be partially or significantly offset by strong emotional support from family, close friends, partners, or a female community. A supportive family environment, where women are valued for their personal qualities, not just their achievements or appearance, can act as a buffer, protecting self-esteem from the damaging effects of external stressors. Similarly, belonging to feminist or supportive groups where gender stereotypes are discussed and deconstructed can facilitate a rethinking of imposed norms and the restoration of a more adequate self-image.

The influence of the social environment on women's self-esteem is clearly dynamic and contextual. The same factor (for example, a gender stereotype) can, in different life situations, with varying combinations of other influences, and depending on



individual resources (resilience , level of reflection, availability of social support), lead to completely different consequences—from a profound crisis of self-esteem to mobilization and increased self-confidence. This contextuality emphasizes that self-esteem is not fixed: it is constantly reconstructed through social interactions and can change, both negatively and positively, under the influence of new experiences, relationships, and cultural shifts.

Ultimately, a discussion of the obtained results allows us to assert that modern society creates an extremely complex and contradictory environment for women in terms of self-esteem . On the one hand, expanding opportunities (education, career, independence) open up new sources of positive self-esteem; on the other hand, increasing media pressure, the persistence of gender stereotypes, and institutional inequality continue to generate powerful risk factors. Understanding these mechanisms of interaction between social factors has not only theoretical but also practical significance: it points to the need for targeted work to create supportive environments (in the family, at work, in the media), deconstruct harmful stereotypes, and develop women's skills for critically perceiving external assessments. Only then will social factors be able to contribute more to strengthening, rather than undermining, women's self-esteem in a rapidly changing world [**Maslow, St. Petersburg, 2008, p. 201**].

Conclusion

The conducted research allows us to formulate the general conclusion that women's self-esteem is an extremely complex, multilayered, and dynamic socio-psychological construct that cannot be reduced to purely individual or intrapsychic processes. On the contrary, its structure, level, stability, and direction are largely determined by the cumulative and continuous influence of external social factors operating at various levels of public life. Among the most significant and consistently manifesting factors are the family conditions of upbringing and primary socialization, the system of social expectations and traditional gender roles, the powerful influence of modern media discourse (including social media, advertising, and popular culture), as well as the specifics of the professional environment with its institutional barriers and practices of recognition/non-recognition. Gender stereotypes and deeply rooted social norms play a special, decisive role in shaping self-esteem criteria and a woman's overall perception of



her own value, significance, and competence. These norms, passed down through generations and reproduced in everyday practices, discourses, and institutions, set the framework for what a woman "should" be, what she should look like, what priorities she should choose, how she should allocate time and energy between family, career, and self-realization. As a result, self-esteem criteria often take on an external, normative nature: women evaluate themselves not so much by their own internal standards as by the degree to which they meet (or fail to meet) these prescribed standards. This state of affairs makes women's self-esteem particularly sensitive to social context, subject to fluctuations depending on cultural shifts, media trends, and shifts in gender expectations.

Understanding the mechanisms through which social factors influence women's self-esteem goes far beyond purely academic interest and has significant practical implications. The findings can and should serve as the basis for developing and implementing a range of specific measures and programs aimed at strengthening the psychological well-being and personal potential of women in modern society.

In particular:

- creation and implementation of psychological support programs aimed specifically at a female audience, taking into account the gender specificity of experiences (working with feelings of guilt, impostor syndrome, dependence on external approval, physical dissatisfaction, etc.);
 - the formation of a gender-sensitive educational environment at all levels - from preschool to higher and additional education, where girls and women are taught to critically view stereotypes, develop autonomous self-esteem based on internal criteria, and recognize their rights and opportunities;
 - development of elements of social policy aimed at reducing gender inequality in the professional sphere (equal pay, overcoming the "glass ceiling", support for working mothers, combating discrimination), since economic independence and recognition at work are among the most important sources of positive self-esteem;
 - working with the media space – promoting more diverse and realistic images of femininity, supporting media literacy among women and young people, and regulating advertising that exploits insecurities and imposes unattainable standards.
- Understanding the socio-psychological mechanisms that shape women's self-esteem opens up real avenues for creating a more supportive and equitable social environment in which women can develop a stable, adequate, and autonomous self-



esteem, free from the excessive pressure of external norms and stereotypes. This, in turn, will contribute not only to increased individual psychological well-being but also to the fuller realization of women's personal and professional potential, which has long-term implications for society as a whole – achieving true gender equality, sustainable development, and social harmony. Further research in this area can focus on empirically studying the effectiveness of specific interventions and programs, as well as analyzing cross-cultural differences in the dynamics of women's self-esteem in the context of globalization and digitalization.

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