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Analysis of Self-Esteem in Adolescence in the Context of Open Communication and Trust in Parents and Peers

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Abstract: *This research study examines the causal relationship between adolescents' level of self-esteem and their perception of emotional relationships in the areas of trust, communication, and emotional closeness with parents and peers within the school environment. Emotional closeness in this study is defined by the degree of openness in communication and the extent to which intimate, personal issues are shared with parents and peers. The primary aim of the research is to explore the connection between various dimensions of adolescent self-esteem (general self, family self, social self, and academic self) and their emotional and social connectedness (trust, communication, intensity of emotional closeness) with both parents and peers. An additional objective is to identify gender differences in adolescents' levels of self-esteem. The study focuses on late adolescence as defined by Berk (2013). The research employed questionnaire method including the Inventory of Parent and Peer Attachment (Armsden & Greenberg, 1987) and a modified version of the Coopersmith Self-Esteem Inventory (CSEI – Coopersmith, 2002a; modified by Korpinen, 2000). The research sample consisted of 209 adolescents aged 17 to 22 years (N♀ = 115; N♂ = 94; M age = 18.91). Significant relationships were found between dimensions of self and levels of trust and open communication with both parents and peers, as well as gender differences in self-esteem levels. Specifically, girls exhibited higher self-esteem across all dimensions (general, family, social, and academic self).*

Keywords: *Trust; Communication; Adolescent; Self-Esteem; Peers.*

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Problem

Self-esteem is generally understood as an overall evaluation of one's own worth, a positive or negative attitude toward oneself, and a relatively stable, global self-regard (Rosenberg, 1965). An alternative conceptualization of self-esteem is offered by Blatný (2003), Ďuricová & Hašková (2016), who consider it a component of self-concept, which comprises both self-esteem and self-respect, the latter reflecting a sense of personal significance. In line with this view, other scholars such as Baumeister & Vohs (2018), Baumeister, et. al. 2003, Cast & Burke (2002), and Heatherton & Wyland (2019) also define self-esteem as a part of the self-concept, where both self-esteem and self-respect serve as sources of self-evaluation. According to Coopersmith (2002), self-esteem results from how we perceive ourselves and our value, and this perception is shaped through interactions with the social environment across different domains of self-esteem. Among the most critical factors in the development and maintenance of self-esteem are family and social influences. This is supported by multiple studies (Macek, 2003; Kotlasová, 2015). Several authors emphasize the importance of both parents and peers in the formation of self-esteem (Patchin & Hinduja, 2010; Keizer et al., 2019; Aziz et al., 2021; Coopersmith, 2002a,b; Du et al., 2017; Heatherton & Wyland, 2003, 2019; Gallego et al., 2021). The quality of relationships with parents (Keizer et al., 2019) and peers (Birkeland et al., 2012) contributes to the formation of individual self-beliefs, which significantly influence the development of the self. A key role in this process is played by self-exploratory activity, largely driven by the need for self-verification (Baumeister & Vohs, 2018), which expresses one's relationship with oneself and with others and is reflected in behavior (Coopersmith, 2002a,b). Research findings consistently highlight the significance of emotionally positive relationships with parents (Ďuricová, 2005; Durkin & Ramsden, 2010) in fulfilling the need for security, care, protection, social contact, and understanding (Lim, 2015, 2020). Karunarathne (2023) emphasizes the importance of emotional bonding. The critical role of trust in the development of self-esteem has been demonstrated by Keizer et al. (2019), Boele et al. (2023) and Clarke et al. (2020). Although the nature of parent-adolescent emotional relationships evolves over time, parents remain key reference figures (Macek & Lacinová, 2018), while peers simultaneously gain greater influence (Birkeland et al., 2012). In addition to trust, open communication also plays an important role. The quality of communication is closely related to the willingness to discuss problems with parents and peers (Clarke et al., 2020), the willingness to share feelings and personal issues (Zhang et al., 2020), and the emotional connection and trust with both groups (Greenberg & Armsden, 1987). According to Rotenberg and Boulton (2013) and Jambon and

Malti (2022), trust is strengthened through social interactions. Škopová (2016) states that positive interactions with parents enhance adolescents' capacity to develop trust in social relationships. Hoy & Tschannen-Moran (2003) point to the importance of support and acceptance in adolescence, while Rotenberg (2010, 2019) highlights the difficulty of establishing interactive relationships during developmental crises in this period. Interaction is also complicated by increased sensitivity to conflict, which is more pronounced in adolescent girls (Keizer et al., 2019). The findings show greater sensitivity to conflict among girls, along with more pronounced negative expectations regarding interpersonal interactions. Research (Wilkinson, 2004; Wang et al., 2018; Salavera et al., 2022) confirms the significance of trust, communication, and emotional closeness in identity formation. The role of emotional closeness in the development of self-esteem is further supported by studies such as Rybárová & Konrádová (2013), Ruiz-Hernández et al. (2019), and Orth & Robins (2022). In this study, self-esteem is conceptualized based on the theoretical framework of Coopersmith (2002b), while relationship closeness is understood in terms of openness and sharing. The degree of openness and sharing, according to the mentioned theoretical approaches, can be considered an aspect of emotional relationship quality and, thus, a measure of emotional closeness (Armsden & Greenberg, 1987).

Objectives

1. To examine the relationship between adolescents' perceived trust and their self-esteem in relation to parents (specifically mothers and fathers).
2. To examine the relationship between adolescents' perceived trust and their self-esteem in relation to peers.
3. To examine the relationship between openness in communication and adolescents' self-esteem in relation to parents (specifically mothers and fathers).
4. To examine the relationship between openness in communication and adolescents' self-esteem in relation to peers.
5. To explore the relationship between the intensity of emotional closeness to parents (specifically to the mother and father) and the level of self-esteem.
6. To investigate gender differences in adolescents' self-esteem.

Research sample

The total research sample consisted of 256 participants. The final research group comprised 209 secondary school students aged between 17 and 22 years (M = 17.91). Of these, 115 were female and 94 were male, representing

45% females and55% males. Regarding family structure, 101 participants (48.3%) reported living in intact families, while 108 participants (51.7%) came from non-intact family environments. At the outset of the research, parental consent was obtained through school administration. Prior to test administration, psychology students were thoroughly instructed on how to administer the specific questionnaire methods. Data collection was carried out by selected psychology students who were also available to answer participants' questions during the administration. Participants were informed about the purpose of the study, confidentiality, and the voluntary nature of their participation, including their right to skip any items that made them uncomfortable due to the sensitive nature of questions about emotional closeness. Incomplete questionnaires were excluded from the final sample. The survey was conducted on school premises with the agreement of each school's management.

Research procedure

The research design was correlational-comparative. The distribution of variables was tested for normality using the Kolmogorov–Smirnov test. Since the data were not normally distributed, non-parametric tests were applied. Spearman's rank correlation coefficient was used to assess relationships between variables, and the Mann–Whitney U test was applied to evaluate gender differences in the dimensions of self-esteem.

Methods

To assess adolescents' perception of their relationships with parents and peers, the Inventory of Parent and Peer Attachment (IPPA) by Armsden & Greenberg (1987) – revised version – was used. The questionnaire includes three dimensions: Trust, Communication, and Alienation (emotional closeness). Trust reflects experiences that support trust in parents and peers, Communication assesses understanding in interactions with parents and peers, Alienation reflects experiences that threaten emotional closeness. Each subscale includes 25 items, rated on a 5-point Likert scale separately for mother, father, and peers. The original version demonstrated high reliability ($\alpha = .88$; Armsden & Greenberg, 1987). Sample items include: for parents: "I can count on my parent to support me when I need it.", for peers: "I can rely on my friends when I need help." In the present study, Cronbach's alpha ranged from .72 to .79, except for the peer alienation subscale, which showed a lower reliability (.64–.77). Since it did not meet the minimum threshold of .70, it was excluded from analysis. To measure self-esteem, a modified version of the Coopersmith Self-Esteem Inventory (CSEI) (modified by Korpinen, 2000) was used, (Self-esteem can be assessed

using standardized inventories Coopersmith, (2002a) and through general discussions of self-esteem measurement approaches Coopersmith, (2002b). This version retains the multidimensional approach of the original and measures: General Self-Esteem – overall self-evaluation (e.g., "I feel proud of what I do."), Social Self-Esteem – peer-related self-perception (e.g., "I feel accepted in peer groups."), School Self-Esteem – academic self-perception (e.g., "I am satisfied with my academic performance."), Home/Family Self-Esteem – family-related self-perception (e.g., "My parents are proud of me."). The inventory consists of 41 items distributed across four subscales: General Self (13 items), Family Self (5 items), Peer Self (5 items), School Self (18 items). Responses were rated on a 5-point Likert scale. Higher scores indicate higher levels of self-esteem. The Cronbach's alpha for the current study ranged from .67 to .81, indicating acceptable reliability for research purposes.

Table 1. Domains of Self-Esteem and Their Specific Aspects

Domain of Self-Esteem	Specific Aspects
General Self-Esteem	Experience of self-worth and personal dignity
Family Self-Esteem	Quality of relationships with parents (mother and father)
School Self-Esteem	Perceived competence (e.g., "I am capable")
Social Self-Esteem	Quality of relationships with peers

Source: Own elaboration based on Coopersmith (1967) and Amsden & Greenberg (1987)

Results and interpretation

Table 2. Descriptive Statistics: Factors of Trust, Communication, Emotional Closeness, and Domains of Self-Esteem in Adolescents in Relation to Parents and Peers (N = 209)

Variable	Mean	Median	Mode	Std. Dev.	Min	Max
Trust in Mother	37.36	37.0	36.0	3.56	27.0	48.0
Trust in Father	35.66	37.0	38.0	5.27	14.0	46.0
Trust in Peers	37.13	38.0	41.0	4.83	18.0	46.0
Communication with Mother	28.86	29.0	30.0	2.94	20.0	36.0
Communication with Father	27.33	28.0	28.0	2.95	20.0	33.0
Communication with Peers	25.72	26.0	26.0	3.44	16.0	32.0
Emotional Closeness to Mother	17.68	17.0	17.0	3.23	12.0	25.0
Emotional Closeness to Father	17.66	17.0	17.0	3.22	12.0	24.0
General Self-Esteem	47.28	48.0	44.0	9.12	25.0	65.0
School Self-Esteem	61.83	63.0	62.0	10.91	35.0	86.0
Family Self-Esteem	19.74	20.0	20.0	3.15	12.0	25.0
Social Self-Esteem	20.58	21.0	22.0	2.52	10.0	25.0

Table 3. Spearman's Rank-Order Correlation Coefficients Between Factors (Trust, Communication, Emotional Closeness) and Forms of Self-Esteem (General Self, School Self, Family Self, Social Self) (N = 209)

Variable	General Self	Family Self	Social Self	School Self
Trust in Mother (r)	0.421	0.513	0.239	0.400
Significance	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000
Communication with Mother (r)	0.280	0.207	0.223	0.278
Sign.	0.000	0.000	0.001	0.000
Closeness to Mother (r)	-0.432	-0.458	-0.218	-0.428
Significance	0.000	0.000	0.002	0.000
Trust in Father (r)	0.350	0.301	0.201	0.234
Sign.	0.000	0.000	0.004	0.001
Communication with Father (r)	0.470	0.330	0.209	0.053
Significance	0.500	0.640	0.002	0.447
Closeness to Father (r)	-0.466	-0.391	-0.327	-0.521
Sign.	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000
Trust in Peers (r)	0.167	0.133	0.365	0.154
Significance	0.016	0.054	0.000	0.270
Communication with Peers (r)	0.088	-0.026	0.257	0.022
Sign.	0.204	0.709	0.000	0.755

Note: Emotional distance from peers was not assessed in this study, as the Cronbach's alpha for the Alienation subscale (Peers section) did not meet the minimum acceptable reliability threshold of 0.70. Therefore, this subscale was excluded from the assessment of emotional closeness with peers.

Table 3 presents the correlation coefficients for the relationships between factors (communication, trust, emotional closeness) with parents and peers, and various forms of adolescents' self-esteem. Due to the non-normal distribution of the sample, Spearman's rank-order correlation coefficient was used to analyze the relationships. The results showed a statistically significant, moderately strong positive relationship between *General Self-Esteem* and *Trust in Mother* ($p < 0.001$, $r = 0.421$), as well as between *General Self-Esteem* and *Trust in Father* ($p < 0.001$, $r = 0.350$). A statistically significant, moderately strong positive relationship was also found between *Trust in Mother* and *Family Self-Esteem* ($p < 0.001$, $r = 0.513$). Furthermore, a weak but significant positive relationship was observed between *Trust in Mother* and *Social Self-Esteem* ($p < 0.001$, $r = 0.239$), and a moderately strong relationship between *Trust in Mother* and *School Self-Esteem* ($p < 0.001$, $r = 0.400$).Additional weak but significant positive relationships were found between *Trust in Father* and *Family Self-Esteem* ($p < 0.001$, $r = 0.301$), as well as *Trust in Father* and *School Self-Esteem* ($p < 0.001$, $r = 0.234$).In terms of communication, a weak but significant positive relationship was found between *Communication with Mother* and *General Self-*

Esteem ($p < 0.001$, $r = 0.280$), *Family Self-Esteem* ($p < 0.001$, $r = 0.207$), *Social Self-Esteem* ($p = 0.001$, $r = 0.223$), and *School Self-Esteem* ($p < 0.001$, $r = 0.278$). Communication with the father showed a statistically significant relationship only with *Social Self-Esteem* ($p = 0.002$, $r = 0.209$). Significant negative relationships were also found in the context of perceived *emotional closeness*. A moderately strong negative relationship was observed between *Closeness to Mother* and *General Self-Esteem* ($p < 0.001$, $r = -0.432$), *Family Self-Esteem* ($p < 0.001$, $r = -0.458$), *School Self-Esteem* ($p < 0.001$, $r = -0.428$), and a weaker but significant negative relationship with *Social Self-Esteem* ($p = 0.002$, $r = -0.218$). These findings suggest that the greater the perceived emotional distance from the mother, the lower the levels of adolescent self-esteem. Similar results were found for *Closeness to Father*, with a moderately strong negative relationship between *Closeness to Father* and *General Self-Esteem* ($p < 0.001$, $r = -0.466$), *Family Self-Esteem* ($p < 0.001$, $r = -0.391$), *Social Self-Esteem* ($p < 0.001$, $r = -0.327$), and *School Self-Esteem* ($p < 0.001$, $r = -0.521$). These results indicate that increased emotional distance from the father is also associated with lower self-esteem in adolescents. Table 3 further illustrates relationships between emotional closeness factors (*trust* and *communication*) and self-esteem domains in relation to peers. A weak but statistically significant positive correlation was found between *General Self-Esteem* and *Trust in Peers* ($p < 0.05$, $r = 0.167$), indicating that higher trust in peers is associated with higher general self-esteem. A moderately strong, significant positive relationship was also found between *Trust in Peers* and *Social Self-Esteem* ($p < 0.001$, $r = 0.365$), suggesting that stronger trust in peers is linked to higher self-esteem in the social domain. A statistically significant weak positive relationship was found between *Communication with Peers* and *Social Self-Esteem* ($p < 0.001$, $r = 0.257$), indicating that more open peer communication is associated with higher social self-esteem. Due to the fact that the *Cronbach's alpha* for the *Alienation* subscale (Peers section) did not meet the minimum reliability threshold (indicating insufficient internal consistency), this scale was excluded from the analysis of emotional closeness with peers.

Table 4. Mann–Whitney U Test: Gender Differences in Domains of Adolescent Self-Esteem (N = 209; N(M) = 94, N(F) = 115

Self-Esteem Domain	Gender	Mean Rank	Mann–Whitney U test	Z	Sig.
General Self-Esteem	M	86.15	3633.00	-3.999	0.000
	F	119.63			
Social Self-Esteem	M	88.93	3894.50	-3.415	0.001
	F	117.34			
Family Self-Esteem	M	90.41	4034.00	-3.169	0.002
	F	116.92			
School Self-Esteem	M	81.30	3177.00	-5.052	0.000
	F	123.63			

Table 4 presents gender differences in self-esteem domains among adolescents based on the Mann–Whitney U test. The results indicate statistically significant differences in *General Self-Esteem* between adolescent boys and girls ($U = 3633.00$; $Z = -3.999$; $p < 0.001$). Based on the mean ranks, girls reported higher levels of *General Self-Esteem* (MR = 119.63) compared to boys (MR = 86.15). Statistically significant differences were also found in *Social Self-Esteem*, with higher mean ranks among girls (MR = 117.34) compared to boys (MR = 88.93; $U = 3894.50$; $Z = -3.415$; $p = 0.001$). Similarly, the Mann–Whitney U test revealed a significant difference in *Family Self-Esteem* ($U = 4034.00$; $Z = -3.169$; $p < 0.01$), again with higher scores reported by girls (MR = 116.92) than boys (MR = 90.41). Finally, a statistically significant difference was observed in *School Self-Esteem* ($U = 3177.00$; $Z = -5.052$; $p < 0.001$), where girls scored higher (MR = 123.63) than boys (MR = 81.30).These findings suggest that adolescent girls tend to report higher levels of self-esteem across all measured domains (general, social, family, and school) compared to their male peers.

Discussion

The first objective of this study was to examine the relationship between adolescents' perceived trust and self-esteem in relation to their mother and father. Moderate positive correlations were found between trust in the mother and general self-esteem, family self-esteem, and school self-esteem. These findings suggest that higher levels of maternal trust are associated with stronger feelings of self-worth, more positive perceptions of maternal relationships, and greater perceived competence. In other words, trust in the mother appears to foster trust in oneself. A moderate relationship between paternal trust and self-esteem was found only for general self-esteem. Compared to paternal trust, maternal trust was more strongly associated with

all dimensions of adolescent self-esteem. This indicates that a close and trusting relationship with the mother may be especially important for positive self-perception in family and academic domains, while paternal trust appears to relate more specifically to general self-worth. These conclusions are supported by previous findings. For instance, Zhang (2020) states that emotionally warm parenting fosters self-esteem. Harter (2012) emphasizes the role of trust and open communication in the development of adolescent self-esteem. According to Gorrese and Ruggieri (2013), the relationship with the mother and trust in peers are the strongest predictors of adolescent self-esteem. Studies by Baumeister et al. (2003) and Birndorf et al. (2005) also confirm the importance of high trust and quality communication with parents. Harter (2012) further suggests that mothers typically serve as the primary emotional anchor in both childhood and adolescence, and that the perception of maternal availability, empathy, and acceptance directly contributes to the development of self-esteem (Liu et al., 2022). The second objective was to examine the relationship between adolescents' perceived trust and self-esteem in relation to peers. Our findings revealed a moderate positive correlation between trust in peers and social self-esteem, highlighting the importance of trust in forming quality peer relationships. The ability to establish trusting peer relationships appears to promote both social competence and self-esteem. This is supported by Seng et al. (2024), who found a positive relationship between self-esteem and social adaptation, partially mediated by perceived social support and peer trust. Similar causal relationships have been reported by Lim (2020), Birkeland et al. (2012, 2014), and Thompson et al. (2016), who collectively affirm the role of relationship quality in adolescent self-esteem development. The third objective focused on the relationship between openness in communication and self-esteem in relation to parents. Weak but significant correlations were observed between open communication with the mother and all dimensions of self-esteem. In contrast, communication with the father was significantly associated only with social self-esteem. These findings suggest that open communication with the mother is more strongly linked to self-esteem than communication with the father. Amato and Afifi (2006) similarly found that open parent–child communication enhances adolescent self-esteem, particularly through communication with the mother. Benson et al., (2008), as well as Pinquart (2017), also found a connection between maternal communication and adolescent self-esteem. Exploring the relationship between open communication and self-esteem in relation to peers revealed a significant link only with social self-esteem. Thus, open communication with peers is positively associated with adolescents' social self-worth. This finding aligns with the study by Wentzel et al., (2004), which

showed that support, trust, and communication with peers enhance social self-esteem and perceived self-worth (Zhang, 2020). Although our research primarily relied on the concepts of the school environment and its associations with adolescents' self-evaluation, there are alternative theoretical frameworks that provide deeper insights into the mechanisms underlying the formation of self-esteem and self-concept. The social comparison theory (Festinger, 1954) suggests that adolescents naturally compare their abilities, appearance, and social status with their peers, which influences their self-evaluation either upward (positive reinforcement) or downward (feelings of inferiority). Recent studies have empirically confirmed this concept. For example, Appel et al. (2022) and Merianos et al. (2021) demonstrated that the frequency of peer comparison significantly correlates with fluctuations in adolescents' self-esteem. This fluctuation has been particularly observed in the context of social media, which can currently be considered a highly influential environment. In the context of today's adolescent generation, the online environment plays a crucial role in shaping identity and self-esteem. Khan et al. (2016), Chernysheva (2021) point out that adolescents who are able to integrate their online and offline identities exhibit higher levels of self-esteem and better psychosocial functioning. This suggests that when young people can maintain authenticity and consistency between how they present themselves on social media and in real life, they are less prone to internal conflicts or feelings of inauthenticity, which could otherwise negatively impact their self-evaluation. Conversely, adolescents who perceive a discrepancy between their online persona (e.g., creating an idealized version of themselves) and their actual self are more likely to experience anxiety, stress, and lower self-esteem. This discrepancy may result in cognitive dissonance and reinforce the sense of "not being enough as they truly are." Thus, the integration of online and offline identities supports authenticity, which aligns with Erikson's concept of identity. In the context of interpreting these findings, it is essential to consider Erikson's (1968) psychosocial development theory, particularly the fifth developmental stage – identity versus role confusion – which is characteristic of adolescence. Erikson emphasizes that during this period, young people intensely seek answers to questions such as "Who am I?" and "What is my place in society?" Successfully resolving this developmental task leads to the formation of a stable identity and healthy self-evaluation, whereas failure may result in identity diffusion, low self-esteem, and difficulties in interpersonal relationships. Recent empirical findings support Erikson's conceptualization in the contemporary societal context. Branje et al. (2021) found that adolescents with a well-defined and coherent identity exhibit significantly higher levels of global self-esteem, whereas identity diffusion is

associated with elevated levels of anxiety and depressive symptoms. Similarly, Hatano et al. (2022) reported that emotional support from parents and peers during adolescence facilitates identity development while simultaneously enhancing feelings of self-worth and self-acceptance. Becht et al. (2021), in a longitudinal study, further observed that adolescents' identity coherence significantly predicts the stability of self-esteem during the transition to adulthood. Adolescents who develop a unified identity are more capable of managing the pressures of social media, engaging less in social comparison, and using online spaces as tools for positive self-expression and social connection. These insights underscore the notion that the school climate and a supportive classroom environment can serve as protective factors in the formation of adolescents' identity. Through secure peer relationships and open classroom communication, the process of identity exploration, as well as the development of a healthy self-image and self-esteem, is strengthened (Wilkinson, 2004). On this basis, it is possible to discuss a relational model (family-school-social media) that influences adolescents' self-evaluation and self-esteem development. Another relevant model for explaining autonomy, competence, and relatedness is Self-Determination Theory (Deci & Ryan, 2000). The authors emphasize the importance of satisfying three basic psychological needs – autonomy, competence, and relatedness – for healthy psychosocial development. Current research confirms that a school environment that supports autonomy (room for decision-making), competence (opportunities for success), and high-quality relationships (acceptance by peers and teachers) creates optimal conditions for fostering higher self-esteem. Likewise, Okur & Özekes (2020) and Garn et al. (2012) stressed that the lack of satisfaction of these needs (especially relatedness) increases the risk of self-derogation and internalizing problems. Durkin and Ramsden (2010) attribute significant importance to social interactions with peers for the development of communication skills, which are essential for effective conflict resolution and self-expression. These interactions serve as a platform for adolescents to acquire communicative and emotional strategies that help them establish themselves in social groups and strengthen their sense of belonging. Furthermore, the quality of peer relationships appears to play a crucial role in the process of social learning, as it allows adolescents to test boundaries, develop empathy, and experiment with different forms of communication. A lack of such experiences may lead to delays in emotional maturation, difficulties in forming relationships, and an increased risk of social isolation, which in turn can negatively affect their self-esteem and overall psychological well-being (Durkin & Ramsden, 2010). Another important concept contributing to the understanding of adolescents' relational bonds is

attachment theory. According to Armsden & Greenberg (1987), the quality of attachment to parents and peers is a significant predictor of psychological well-being during adolescence. Our findings emphasize the importance of supporting communication skills during adolescence, as well as fostering inclusive environments that allow adolescents to safely establish and maintain high-quality social bonds in both family and peer contexts. Karunarathne (2023) highlights that a balance in adolescents' relationships with parents and peers serves as a protective factor in shaping self-esteem and positive self-evaluation. A mismatch between the levels of attachment to parents and peers can significantly influence self-evaluation development; however, a strong and secure attachment to parents can serve as a buffer in cases where peer relationships are suboptimal, and vice versa, high-quality peer relationships may compensate for deficiencies in parental support. Our findings underscore the role of secure attachment relationships in fostering positive self-evaluation and in enabling adolescents to develop healthy social interactions (Armsden & Greenberg, 1987).

The analysis of emotional closeness to parents and self-esteem showed that greater emotional closeness to the mother was associated with higher self-esteem across all domains: general, family, school, and social. Similarly, greater closeness to the father was linked specifically to higher levels of school self-esteem. These findings are consistent with those of Laible et al., (2000), who reported that higher emotional closeness to both parents predicts greater self-esteem, better social competence, and lower depressive symptoms. In this context, Zimmerman et al. (2025) found that high self-esteem can serve as a protective factor for mental health. The study also revealed gender differences in adolescents' self-perception. Contrary to many previous studies (Birndorf et al., 2005), which found higher self-esteem levels among adolescent boys, our results showed that adolescent girls reported higher self-esteem across all domains. Although less common, these findings are supported by some studies. Lajčiaková and Briestenská (2014) note that during ages 16 to 20, adolescents, especially girls, place greater emphasis on self-acceptance and building intimacy. Durkin and Ramsden (2010) also observed that in supportive family and peer environments, girls tend to exhibit higher self-esteem than boys. One explanation may be found in Pollack's (1998) concept of "boys' hidden vulnerability," which posits that boys are socialized to be strong and suppress emotions. This internalized "boy code" may cause boys to appear confident externally while experiencing inner emotional conflict and lower self-esteem. Overall, gender differences in self-esteem may stem from differences in emotional processing and relational interactions.

Some studies have found that boys exhibit higher levels of global self-esteem than girls (Birndorf et al., 2005). The authors argue that gender-specific coping mechanisms and social expectations play an important role in this regard. Similarly, Kling et al. (1999) pointed out that gender differences in self-esteem are not universal and vary depending on specific developmental personality factors and cultural context. While traditional theories (Kling et al., 1999) suggest that adolescent boys often demonstrate higher self-esteem than girls, more recent studies, such as Bekir and Tair (2020), have shown that gender differences in self-esteem during adolescence are deeply influenced by personality traits. For example, girls who prefer nurturing parenting styles tend to report higher self-esteem, while in boys, traits such as critical thinking and impulsivity are more prominent predictors. These gender-specific differences among adolescent boys and girls may also stem from internal processes of self-acceptance and identity development (Hatano et. al. 2022). As Muk (2006) emphasizes, personal growth is a crucial factor in this process. These findings suggest that gender differences in self-esteem depend on personality, parenting style, and life circumstances, highlighting the need for an integrative approach that considers multifactorial moderators and mediators in both the family and broader contexts of self-esteem development. Despite the important findings of the present study, several limitations should be discussed. Due to lower internal consistency (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.64–0.77$) of the peer alienation subscale, this measure was not used in the research. Excluding the peer alienation subscale limits the ability to provide a comprehensive picture of adolescents' social functioning. However, this decision was necessary to ensure the psychometric reliability of the results. As a result of this limitation, it was not possible to explore an important aspect of adolescence—emotional distance in peer relationships. Nevertheless, previous studies have emphasized the significance of emotional distance in peer relationships for the formation of adolescent identity (Brown & Larson, 2009) and self-esteem development (La Greca & Harrison, 2005). The measure of emotional closeness was instead assessed through the subscales of trust and communication with peers, which demonstrated the importance of peers in the development of self-esteem in the present study. Despite the absence of the alienation subscale, the dimensions of emotional closeness were addressed using these two subscales. These indicators provided valuable information about the quality of peer relationships and their impact on adolescents' self-esteem development. The findings clearly confirmed the critical role of peer relationships in shaping a positive self-concept and suggest that trust and open communication with peers are fundamental components of emotional closeness, which is crucial for healthy

psychosocial development in adolescence. Future research could benefit from the use of focus groups, which would allow for a deeper exploration of adolescents' experiences of emotional distance within peer groups. The absence of qualitative methods that could provide richer insights into adolescents' subjective experiences of trust and communication in their interpersonal relationships is another methodological limitation of the current study. While quantitative tools such as questionnaires and scales offer valuable information about the relationships between variables and allow for the identification of statistical associations, they fail to capture the nuances of individual experiences, meanings, and contextual factors that shape these relationships (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018). Qualitative approaches, such as semi-structured interviews or focus groups, could enhance understanding of how adolescents interpret trust and communication in their relationships with parents and peers. These methods would allow for a better understanding of subjective meanings related to feelings of acceptance, honesty, and perceived value within both the school and family environments. Additionally, qualitative data could uncover dynamics that quantitative methods may not adequately capture-such as differences in experiences based on family background, parental communication styles, or specific school contexts. Future studies could therefore integrate mixed-methods approaches, combining quantitative analyses with the exploration of adolescents' individual narratives. This approach would offer deeper insights into the mechanisms influencing trust and communication and support the design of targeted intervention programs reflecting the subjective needs of adolescents. Another limitation of the study is the composition of the sample, which consisted exclusively of high school students from a single geographic and cultural setting. While such a sample allows for a precise assessment of the variables within this group, its homogeneity limits the generalizability of the findings to other populations. Values, attitudes, behavioral patterns, and perceptions of the school climate may be strongly shaped by cultural, social, and economic contexts (Hofstede, 2001; Markus & Kitayama, 1991). Given these cultural specificities, it may not be possible to directly apply the findings to adolescents in different societal environments (Triandis, & Gelfand, 2012).It is therefore necessary to interpret the results cautiously, considering these contextual factors. Future research should aim to verify the validity of the findings in more diverse populations. The use of self-report questionnaires presents another methodological limitation, as it carries the risk of response bias due to social desirability. In contexts where adolescents answer questions about their behavior, feelings, or perceptions of relationships, they may tend to adjust their responses to align with perceived expectations or socially

preferred norms (Paulhus, 2002, Harris & Orth, 2020). This phenomenon is particularly relevant in school settings, where students often face implicit or explicit pressures to behave "appropriately" and to be positively evaluated by teachers or peers (Podsakoff et al., 2003, Deci & Ryan, 2000). Social desirability bias can lead to the concealment of negative experiences, such as classroom conflicts or feelings of social exclusion. This effect may compromise the accuracy and validity of the data, as responses may reflect adolescents' perceptions of what is expected of them rather than their authentic experiences. Future studies could mitigate the influence of social desirability by combining quantitative questionnaires with qualitative interviews. Such an approach could help differentiate the extent to which observed relationships reflect adolescents' genuine experiences versus their efforts to present themselves in a positive light. In our study, correlations between perceived school climate and dimensions of adolescents' self-evaluation were analyzed, and significant associations were identified. However, from a methodological perspective, it is not possible to determine whether a more favorable school climate leads to higher self-esteem and lower self-derogation, or whether adolescents with higher self-esteem perceive their classroom environment more positively. This limitation must be taken into account when interpreting the results, as factors such as adolescents' personality traits, family background, or prior experiences may simultaneously influence their perceptions of the school environment and their self-evaluation (Rosenberg et al., 1995; Wang & Degol, 2016). To clarify causal relationships, longitudinal studies tracking the development of these variables over time or experimental designs manipulating aspects of the school environment would be appropriate. Cross-sectional research designs, such as the one used here, allow for the examination of relationships between variables at a single point in time but do not permit the determination of the directionality of these relationships or the establishment of causality. Another methodological limitation is that the study did not consider a broader spectrum of multifactorial variables, such as individual personality characteristics (Orth & Robins, 2014; Harter, 2012; Crone & Dahl, 2012) or biological factors. As noted by Blakemore and Mills (2014) and Dahl et al. (2018), intense neurobiological and hormonal changes during adolescence influence emotionality, social sensitivity, and interpersonal behavior, and neurodevelopmental processes affect adolescents' ability to regulate emotions, process social evaluations, and shape self-esteem (Steinberg, 2014). Hormonal changes, such as increased cortisol or sex hormone levels (estrogen, testosterone), may impact mood, self-perception, and the quality of social interactions (Crone & Dahl, 2012). The absence of a biological perspective

limits the comprehensiveness of understanding the determinants of self-esteem. Addressing this limitation would require experimental or quasi-experimental designs, which are not feasible with conventional questionnaire-based methods in school settings. Given the nature of the topic and research objectives, a questionnaire-based approach was chosen as it enables the efficient collection of data from a larger number of respondents in their natural school environment. This method proved to be the most appropriate for studying subjective aspects such as perceptions of trust and communication, which are closely intertwined with individual experiences and the context of adolescents' social relationships. While integrating biological variables (e.g., hormonal or neurodevelopmental factors) could provide deeper insights into the mechanisms underlying self-esteem development, conducting such research would require experimental or laboratory settings. These are logistically and ethically challenging in school environments, particularly given the age-specific characteristics of the population and the need to minimize interference in their natural context. The use of questionnaires allowed us to capture adolescents' authentic perceptions within the context of their relationships with parents and peers.

Another methodological limitation of the study is the heterogeneity of the research sample in terms of adolescents' family background (intact vs. non-intact families). The results of our study should be interpreted in the context of family structure, as the sample included adolescents from both intact and non-intact families. Several studies have emphasized that family structure represents a significant factor in the psychosocial development of adolescents. Parenting practices and the quality of interpersonal relationships may differ substantially between these family types (Amato, 2000), which can influence outcomes related to self-esteem and communication. Although the research sample included adolescents from both family structures, the study did not analyze the specific interaction between family structure and self-evaluation. Many longitudinal studies focusing on family environment and self-esteem have shown that the quality of family relationships does not always exert a direct influence on the development of self-evaluation, interpersonal relationships, or self-esteem (Krauss et al., 2024; Hu & Ai, 2016; Harris & Orth, 2020). Conversely, there is evidence from other studies suggesting that family structure (intact vs. non-intact families) significantly affects the quality of communication with parents and adolescents' self-esteem (Keshavarz & Baharudin, 2012, Boudreault-Bouchard et al., 2013). Similarly, research by Mičková and Blatný (2019) found that adolescents in families characterized by high parental warmth and consistent parenting (typical of intact families) exhibit higher levels of self-esteem. Likewise, Keizer et al. (2019) confirmed

the importance of emotional bonds with parents for stable self-esteem in early adolescence and highlighted differences according to family type. Additional research by Luo et al. (2023) reinforced that communication with parents remains a crucial factor. Farruggia et. al. (2004) reported that adolescents living in intact families demonstrate higher levels of family cohesion and satisfaction in relationships with parents, which positively translates into their self-esteem and academic performance. Similarly, Lim et al. (2015) concluded that the quality of the family environment—particularly open communication and problem-solving within the family—significantly influences adolescents' levels of self-esteem. In the case of non-intact families, there may be a greater risk of reduced emotional availability of parents and lower levels of parental control and support (Özaydın, B.B. & Soyyiğit, 2024). According to et al. Farruggia (2004), the relationship between fathers and adolescents is particularly important for the development of adolescents' self-esteem. It can be concluded that the combination of a supportive family environment and high-quality peer relationships creates optimal conditions for shaping adolescents' self-esteem and positive self-evaluation.

Conclusion

The findings of this study highlight the importance of both parents, particularly the mother, in shaping adolescent self-esteem, especially in family and academic domains, and the father in supporting social self-esteem. Maternal contributions to self-esteem appear rooted in emotional support, unconditional acceptance, and respect. Paternal influence seems to lie in fostering adolescents' social confidence and interactional competence. The analysis suggests that while neither parent is solely responsible for self-esteem development, their cooperation is essential for nurturing healthy adolescent self-worth. These results emphasize the value of trust, open communication, and emotional closeness in both family and peer relationships as key factors in promoting positive adolescent self-esteem.

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