

A Brief History of Self Esteem

Self-esteem became an everyday term in the 1960s as a central component of the self-help movement. The concept is woven into the fabric of American culture and is highly valued in education, youth work and social work.

The self esteem theory predicts that only those who feel good about themselves will do well, that those with low self-esteem will do poorly, and that raising self-esteem will improve performance.

In the late 1980s the state of California funded an educational initiative to cure low self-esteem, bolstering the idea that raising

self-esteem would solve multiple personal and societal ills.

Interestingly, its [three year study](#) reported great disappointment in their findings. There was a very low association between self-esteem and its presumed consequences. The response to their results was not to ask if they had it wrong but to try and find more evidence to support their theory.

Years have passed. More evidence has been found and it only confirms the original *disappointing results*.

- Americans don't actually have low self-esteem. They have unusually high self-esteem.

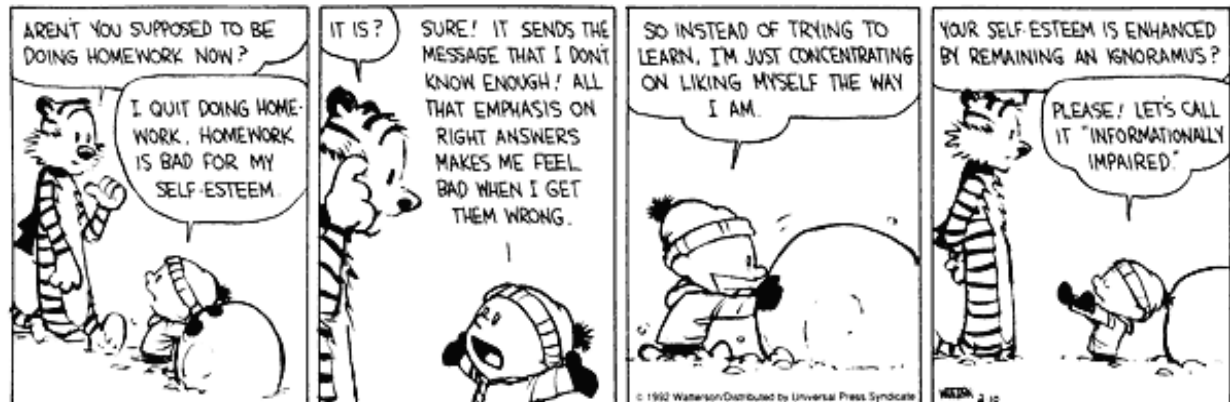
- Raising a student's self-esteem makes no difference in performance.
- High self-esteem does not prevent high risk behavior. If anything, it fosters it. ([Bullies](#) and racists are some of those with the highest self-esteem.)
- Low self-esteem does not hinder academic achievement.
- Researchers found only three benefits to high self-esteem: enhanced initiative, increased happiness and lower rates of bulimia.

Unfortunately, the brief history of self-esteem looks like it will continue. This myth dies hard.

I'm Sooo... Good!

A 1989 study of math skills compared students in eight different countries. American students ranked lowest in mathematical competence and Korean students ranked highest.

The researchers also asked students to rate themselves at math. The Americans rated themselves highest, while the Koreans rated themselves lowest.



Dictionary: Self-esteem

1. A realistic respect for, or favorable impression of, oneself.
2. An exaggeratedly favorable impression of oneself.

Thesaurus: Self-esteem

Conceit, confidence, dignity, egotism, morale, narcissism, self-assurance, self-content, self-regard, self-respect, self-satisfaction, vanity.



A [study](#) of college students from 1982 to 2006 revealed a 30% rise in narcissism (an inflated sense of self; feeling entitled to better treatment than others).

I Am Awesome!

American Idol auditions draw thousands of people with exaggerated self-esteem. They line



up thinking they are among the most musically gifted on the planet and are shocked when they get rejected. Sometimes the truth hurts.

Similarly, many youth are graduating from an educational system that rewards mediocre efforts with generous praise. Teachers, coaches and youth workers delude young people about their abilities by treating everyone as "gifted." It's no surprise that American youth have an exaggerated sense of self-esteem.

Getting picked last for a ball team has some advantages if you really are no good at it. You might just accept the truth and move on to something you can do well instead!

The Christian word for over-blown self-esteem is pride. In

the past, Christians were more concerned about dealing with pride than with low self-esteem. Helping young people recognize "[they have sinned and fallen short](#)" was the priority over ego building.

The falsehood at the base of the self-esteem movement is well intentioned and compelling. However, it is still a lie.

We must "[speak the truth in love](#)". Often that means giving encouragement to youth, but at times it means pointing out their failures and weaknesses.

It also means calling pride a sin, not a virtue.

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WHAT MATTERS MOST IS HOW YOU SEE YOURSELF



...UNTIL YOU GET MAULLED BY A BADGER BECAUSE YOU THOUGHT YOU WERE A LION