The Use of Early Recollections and Encouragement in the Enhancement of Adolescent Female Self-Esteem

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Abstract

As detrimental behaviors are at a high among adolescent females, it is important to understand the connection between the development of self-esteem and individual identity in order to explore potential options to intervene and decrease detrimental behaviors. The literature review examines the approach addressing low self-esteem through the Adlerian techniques of Early Recollections and Encouragement. This examination discusses how Early Recollections and Encouragement work and the process that must occur for them to be effective. It explains the developmental process of self-esteem and the external impact from peers, family, and media. The paper also describes the developmental process of identity and the influence from parents, culture, and female sexuality. The literature review expounds upon the success and limitations from using these Adlerian techniques in addressing low self-esteem in female adolescents in relation to decreasing harmful behaviors.
The Use of Early Recollections and Encouragement in the Enhancement of Adolescent Female Self-Esteem:

Teenagers struggle through the process of figuring out their identity in adolescence. Teen girls face an array of issues from self-mutilation, eating disorders, sexual promiscuity, and rejection from peers. The eating disorder of anorexia nervosa among adolescent girls ranges from .3-3.7%. “The associated risks to health, and high mortality and suicide rates place anorexia nervosa among the greatest mental health concerns for young people” (Goldstein, Peters, Baillie, McVeagh, Minshall, & Fitzjames, 2011, p. 29). Recent studies from Centers for Disease Control and Prevention reveal that each year approximately 30% of adolescents sincerely consider attempting suicide, while 2.7-10% make attempts (Muehlenkamp, Ertelt, Miller, & Claes, 2010). Heath, Schaub, Holly, & Nixon, (as cited in Muehlenkamp et al. 2010) state that “the prevalence of non-suicidal self-injury among community-based adolescents consistently range between 13% and 28%, and rates as high as 68% are found among adolescent psychiatric inpatients” (p.148).

All of these problems tie into issues of self-esteem. Incorporating different therapeutic techniques in the treatment of adolescents can drastically improve adolescents’ self-esteem and previously stated behaviors. Observations of the various types of therapy available have determined that certain therapeutic approaches are more effective than others, depending on the issues being treated. The following review will explore the impact of the Adlerian techniques of Encouragement and Early Recollections on self-esteem in adolescent females.

It is important to have a firm understanding of Early Recollections and Encouragement in order to determine their effectiveness. First, these concepts will be further explained as to their key principles and elements, what the goals of Early Recollections and Encouragement aspire to bring about, and the process that must occur for them to be effective. Second, the development of
what impacts the development of self-esteem will be expounded upon. Self-esteem develops and changes in response to three contributing external factors that include: one’s parents, peers, and culture. All three will be more fully explored. Thirdly, the concept of adolescent females will also be further clarified. Adolescent girls focus on establishing their identity while dealing with many changes in this period of life. Due to conflicting interpersonal and intrapersonal views, females struggle to find balance in establishing their own identity in context with the world around them and their current phase of life. The internal dissention that develops as a result of the impact of social and cultural forces, parenting arrangements, and sexuality will be discussed.

**Adlerian Psychology Overview**

Adlerian psychology emerged from the association of Alfred Adler and Sigmund Freud. Adlerian therapy consists of an integrative perspective. When analyzing Adlerian therapy, many of the concepts and methods overlap with several other psychotherapy systems (Dinkmeyer & Sperry, 2000). One of the key components of Adlerian therapy remains the “focus on collaboration and mutuality between therapist and client” (Dinkmeyer & Sperry, 2000, p. 19). Previous to this approach many therapeutic approaches recognized the therapist as the expert, mutuality allows the client to be placed into a more empowering role (Dinkmeyer & Sperry, 2000).

Another important aspect of Adlerian therapy involves the belief that mental health symptoms actually serve the purpose of safeguarding the client’s self-esteem (Dinkmeyer & Sperry, 2000). “Adler believed that uncovering this neurotic safeguarding was the most important component of psychotherapy. He noted that this uncovering process takes place in a step-by-step, incremental fashion through encouragement, re-education, and reorientation” (Dinkmeyer & Sperry, 2000, p. 22).
One additional core component of Adlerian therapy entails social interest. Adler referred to social interest as community feeling.

Community feeling means above all a struggle for a communal form that must be thought of as eternally applicable, such as, say, could be thought of when humanity has attained its goal of perfection. It is not a question of any present-day community or society, or of political or religious forms. On the contrary, the goal that is best suited for perfection must be a goal that stands for an ideal society amongst all mankind, the ultimate fulfillment of evolution… Our ideal of community feeling as the final form of humanity… is a regulative ideal, a goal that gives us our direction. (Adler, 1964, p. 275-276)

Social interest illuminates this concept in the form of human interaction. Social interest occurs in the form of social belonging in the realm of community (Mosak & Maniaci, 1999). Striving for the greater good of the community summarizes the meaning of social interest.

The concept of social interest integrates strongly with the concept of striving, another important Adlerian concept. Striving occurs in two different forms. The first form of striving occurs in the form of “striving for superiority in line with social interest and the second is striving for personal superiority” (Griffiths & Powers, 2007, p. 56). Adlerian therapy views this type of movement as either moving on the vertical or horizontal plane. When individuals move on the vertical plane they tend to be more competitive as they compare themselves to others and try to get ahead in life. Those on the horizontal plane flow with social interest in promoting the greatest amount of good for the most people. While vertical striving promotes safeguarding attitudes and isolating behaviors, horizontal striving increases confidence, growth, and solidarity with others (Griffiths & Powers, 2007).
Often the clients’ striving and movement reflect their fictional goal. “We all develop in early childhood a fictional image of what we need to be like to be safe, to be superior, to belong. The actualization of this functional image becomes the central goal of the lifestyle” (Dinkmeyer & Sperry, 2000, p. 35). These beliefs develop from childhood assessment from the world all around. Even though children possess excellent observation skills of their surroundings, they lack in the ability to accurately decipher their observations. Children do their best to seek out ways of feeling significant and live their lives according to the behaviors and thoughts they believe will guide them to their goal (Dinkmeyer & Sperry, 2000).

The all-encompassing analysis of clients’ entirety refers to their lifestyle. The basis of their lifestyle relies on their private logic, life plan. It is powered by the fictional goal that they have established for themselves (Dinkmeyer & Sperry, 2000). The lifestyle was seen by Adler “as a unifying principle which organized all drives, strivings, tendencies, and aspirations into a unified pattern that could be apprehended by a trained observer” (Shulman & Mosak, 1988, p. 2). Lifestyle develops through learning and observing one’s life experiences (Shulman & Mosak, 1988). In Adlerian psychology, lifestyle would be equivalent to what other psychological schools of thought refer to as personality, but also places emphasis on movement (Griffith & Powers, 1987).

In individual psychology the style of living is meant, in brief, to refer to the person’s characteristic way of operating in the social field; the basic convictions concerning self, others, and the world activity maintained in the person’s schema of biased apperception; and the person’s self-created goal of perfection or self-ideal. (Griffith & Powers, 1987, p. 63)

This information establishes the core of clients’ thought process and behaviors.
Adlerian therapy has four main goals. The first goal strives to establish an empathic relationship between clients and the therapist in hopes to help the clients feel understood. The second goal attempts to help clients understand their feelings and beliefs as well as their goals and objectives in helping them understand their lifestyle. The third goal tries to empower clients to develop insight into understanding their mistaken beliefs as well as self-defeating behaviors. The last goal strives to help clients consider alternative solutions to the problem behaviors or conditions and help clients become dedicated to change (Dinkmeyer & Sperry, 2000).

The process in which the Adlerian therapist typically collects information occurs in the process of the lifestyle assessment. A lifestyle assessment collects information from several significant areas. One of the first areas in which data is collected has to do with the family constellation. The therapist gathers and analyzes information concerning sibling relationships, such as competition between siblings, birth order, social roles, factors that influence birth order, and the different roles played. These different aspects reveal information about the thought process that clients have developed about themselves as to their present state. It additionally reveals how they believe they should be, as well as how those around them currently behave and how the world around them should be (Shulman & Mosak, 1988).

The lifestyle assessment also includes the family values and the effects of these values on sibling traits. All families have a set of values. Families convey these values through words and actions teaching children to decipher good behavior from bad. Children then either take on these values as their own or see them as contradictory and rebel against these family values. Either way, these values help set the foundation for individuals’ core values (Shulman & Mosak, 1988). Collecting background information about clients’ lives provides crucial information because
“Adler noted that humans are socially embedded and cannot be understood apart from their social context” (Watts & Carlson, 1999, p. 3).

Generally therapists tend to collect similar information in the process of completing a lifestyle assessment, but not all therapists use the exact same process. The information collected during a lifestyle analysis differs depending on the therapist. Different therapists place value on different aspects of information they collect. Some therapists want to collect as much information as possible so they can have more insight into the clients’ private logic. Other therapists only collect certain limited information and throughout the process collect additional background information as they see fit.

After the data has been collected in a lifestyle assessment, the next step consists of processing the data. Processing the data involves the therapist going through the information collected and looking for patterns in thought or behavior. Identifying these patterns begins the process of helping therapists begin to coach their clients in identifying skewed beliefs the clients have about themselves, others, and the world around them. After processing the data, the therapist guides clients into the process of formulating hypotheses. Once the therapist has identified patterns, the therapist formulates hypotheses about clients’ private logic and shares these hypotheses as suggestions to the clients, allowing the clients to either confirm or deny these suggested possibilities. After the hypotheses have been formulated, this brings the process into the fourth step, which consists of developing an integrated representation of clients’ lifestyles, identifying clients’ goals, basic life attitudes, and mistaken beliefs (Watkins, 1992).

Therapists have an assortment of techniques to choose from when working with their clients in the process of overcoming their mistaken beliefs. Since Adlerian therapy has an eclectic nature, this makes it difficult to narrow down the processes used to a specific list (Watts...
& Carlson, 1999). A few of the more well-known techniques associated with Adlerian psychology would include: The Question, in which clients share how their life would be different if they didn’t have their current symptoms; “The Empty Chair”, which means clients speak to an empty chair visualizing someone whom they need to experience reconciliation with and then speak to the chair as if speaking to that person to resolve the situation; and The Double Bind, which occurs when the therapist confronts clients with the illogic of their beliefs (Carlson, Watts, & Maniacci, 2006). This brief list highlights a few of the more well-known techniques, excluding Early Recollections and Encouragement which will be further expanded upon in the next section.

**Early Recollections and Encouragement**

The therapeutic process has many different techniques available for use. In order to determine the effectiveness of different techniques for specific situations a firm understanding of different techniques is required. Two concepts that will be reviewed include the use of Early Recollections and the concept of Encouragement within the context of Adlerian therapy.

**Early Recollections**

The key concepts and principles must be understood in determining the effectiveness of the use of Early Recollections. The fundamental understanding of Early Recollection goals must be comprehended. It is also important for the therapist to understand the promotion of growth towards the desired goal through the use of Early Recollections.

**The definition of early recollections.** “Early Recollections are stories of events that a person says occurred before he or she was 10 years of age” (Mosak & Di Pietro, 2006, p. 1). Early Recollections consist of memories that individuals recall from their childhood, where individuals see these memories in their mind’s eye, as if it were still occurring in that moment.
While individuals share their childhood story and believe their memory to be completely accurate, in reality errors exist within the story. People remember only bits and pieces of exact moments from their childhood, so their mind creates fillers to make the memory flow in a more complete story-like fashion. Since individuals experience so much during their childhood, it would be impossible to remember every situation encountered. So individuals’ minds subconsciously only remember situations relevant in promoting their private logic (Mosak & Di Pietro, 2006). These subconscious fillers provide the most insight into their private logic. Private logic consists of the guiding principles they use to navigate their life.

Even though individuals encounter countless situations in their childhood, research reveals that, typically, individuals only retain images from a few situations, usually between six and ten (Powers & Griffith, 1987). Adlerian psychology “assumes that we retain these particular memories in order to maintain an orientation through time, to rehearse our understanding of the fundamental issues of life, and to provide ourselves with reminders of the reliability of our convictions” (Powers & Griffith, 1987, p. 185).

The significance of these memories reveal “basic convictions, especially to the extent that they are blessed and private, are best maintained and expressed through metaphor, and best illustrated by the seemingly unassailable certainties of private experience” (Powers & Griffith, 1987, p. 186). Alfred Adler stated: “the most important information in a memory was what was expressed, not what was repressed” (Shulman & Mosak, 1988, p. 62).

**Early recollection goals.** Collecting Early Recollections fulfills the purpose of grasping an understanding of clients’ private logic. Private logic is “deeply established personal beliefs or constructs” (Carlson, Watts, & Maniaci, 2006, p. 12). Private logic is developed through childhood and “children are expert observers but make many mistakes in interpreting what they
From the conclusions made by Carlson, Watts, Maniacci, (2006) and Dreiaks, (1964) it can be deduced that since all individuals make mistakes in the interpretations of situations from their childhood, and because these misinterpretations stick with them into adulthood in their private logic, these mistakes can then surface through the use of Early Recollections and reveal their own private logic. This means that Early Recollections can reveal mistakes in the way individuals think about themselves and the world around them.

Ansbacher and Ansbacher (1956) explain:

Among all psychological expressions, some of the most revealing are the individual’s memories. His memories are the reminders he carries about with him of his own limit and of the meaning of circumstances. There are no “chance memories”: out of the incalculable number of impressions which meet an individual, he chooses to remember only those which he feels, however darkly, to have a bearing on his situation. Thus his memories represent his “story of My Life”; a story he repeats to himself to warn him or comfort him, to keep him concentrated on his goal, and to prepare him by means of past experience, so that he will meet the future with an already tested style of action. (p. 351)

Adler realized the significance of the memories that individuals remember from their childhood. Adler understood the importance of the therapist’s ability to collect these memories in order to understand the inner-workings of clients’ minds and purpose of behaviors.

While there are many different indicators that need to be observed by the therapist in the process of collecting Early Recollections, five categories of key importance include: context, content, gender, movement, and evaluation (Powers & Griffith, 1987).

According to Mosak, “in the most general sense, the context of any recollection is the world itself, which presents itself as an ambiguous stimulus to which the recollection stands as a
record of projective responses” (as cited in Powers & Griffith, 1987 p. 188). This includes the situation of the family background when individuals first experienced these challenges as well as the age of clients in their memory.

In regards to content it is “important to pay attention to every detail included in the recollections…The more extraneous a detail seems to the narrative, the more important it is likely to be to the narrator” (Powers & Griffith, 1987, p. 189). If clients share a detailed explanation of an object in their memory, in most cases that object represents something significant, most likely metaphorically.

Powers & Griffith (1987) discuss the importance of gender in Early Recollections:

Some clients include only persons of the same sex among the characters appearing in their recollections. Some reverse this, and tell stories with only members of the same sex present. Some relate stories of good men and bad women. Others reverse this, and portray noble woman suffering in a world of evil men. (p. 189)

Understanding how individuals view others around themselves proves significance because gender plays one of the most significant issues in social life. The therapist’s ability to understand individuals’ outlook on gender provides additional insight into clients’ private logic.

Everything a person does is movement. “Movement is meant to include all thought, feeling, and physical activity…Movement connotes the understanding of human beings as always in process, moving away from the felt minus toward a subjectively-conceived fictional plus position, away from the intolerable feelings of worthlessness” (Powers & Griffith, 2007, p. 70). When reviewing individuals’ Early Recollections it is crucial to note “who moves, and how, in what direction, and with what effect” (Griffith, & Powers, 1987, p. 189). By observing this, the therapist is able to examine the effectiveness versus ineffectiveness, the relative position, the
degree of inactivity and initiative, the extent of participation and cooperation, and the sensory appropriation of experience in regards to the movement (Powers & Griffith, 1987).

Evaluation refers to the inquiry of individuals’ feelings in connection to Early Recollections. “Feelings are the index to evaluation, the key to an understanding of subjectivity…To say how I feel about something is to indicate where I stand with respect to it” (1987, p. 191). Furthermore, identifying feelings conveys insight as to how individuals may respond to the situation associated with the feelings and with whom they may be willing to sympathize (Power & Griffith, 1987).

The above represents a few of the key categories important to observe in the process of interpretation.

**Early recollections’ promotion of growth.** Depending on what individuals deal with in their lives and strive towards in regards to their goals, Early Recollections can help promote growth once individuals comes to terms with the mistaken beliefs they use to guide their life. By identifying these mistaken beliefs, individuals then have the ability to learn how they allow these beliefs to hinder the way that they live and perceive the world around them. Individuals can then take control of these beliefs and transform them into something that helps to promote and improve the way they live. Additionally, Early Recollections can then be used to gauge the progress clients’ make in therapy.

People act in accordance with their Early Recollections, and one of the ways a therapist can judge if a client is making progress in therapy is by a change in his or her ERs. A change will occur in the ER that shifts the meaning of the recollection and indicates the person’s new perspective of the world. (Mosak & Di Pietro, 2006, p. 14)
The therapist’s job includes listening to Early Recollections with the utmost empathy in order to pick up on the hidden meanings that drive these memories.

**Encouragement**

In determining the effectiveness of Encouragement, the key concepts and principles must be understood. Secondly, it is important to understand and recognize the goals of Encouragement. Thirdly, the promotion of growth by Encouragement through the therapeutic relationship must be understood.

**The definition of encouragement.** Encouragement plays a significant role at the core of Adlerian therapy. It is believed to be “both an attitude and a way of being with clients” (Carlson, Watts, & Maniacci, 2006, p. 39). Many of the problems clients face develop from discouragement. Discouragement results from individuals being unable to have faith in their own strengths. “The encouraged person is usually willing to rely on self to meet the tasks of life and is willing to rely on self in assuming risk if one either does not know the consequences or faces potentially negative consequences” (Mosak & Maniacci, 1999, p. 148).

A therapist encourages clients through behaviors such as “reassuring clients; active listening; reflective feelings; paraphrasing; collaborative goal setting; acknowledging clients’ efforts; recognizing clients’ strengths and competencies; and other statements that emphasize the egalitarian, optimistic, and growth oriented nature of the relationship” (Carlson, Watts, & Maniacci 2006, p. 75). The therapist conveys the message through these approaches that the therapist values what clients share. These behaviors demonstrated by the therapist conveys the message that the therapist is genuinely listening to clients and values clients’ input towards the goals being strived towards. “Perhaps the most important facet of encouragement lies in the overall communication of optimism and belief in the human potential that all people have”
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(Watts & Carlson, 1999, p. 35.) When a therapist conveys the message of hope it can help motivate clients to continue to persevere and keep trying (Watts & Carlson, 1999).

**Encouragement goals.** Through these different Encouragement approaches, a therapist conveys to clients that the therapist has faith in them and can see positive attributes in the clients’ lives. “Encouragement helps clients believe in themselves and develop self-efficacy and the can-do spirit. Encouragement creates a positive self-fulfilling prophecy that may provide the necessary momentum to move a client toward goal resolution” (Watts & Carlson, 1999, p. 35). Sometimes clients need others to point out the positives in their life before they are able to see and acknowledge it on their own. Dinkmeyer, Dinkmeyer, & Sperry (1987) stated:

Encouragement focuses on helping counselees become aware of their worth. By encouraging them, you help your counselees recognize their own strengths and assets, so they become aware of the power they have to make decisions and choices.…. Encouragement focuses on beliefs and self-perceptions…. In a mistake –centered culture like ours, this approach violates norms by ignoring deficits and stressing assets. The counselor is concerned with changing the client’s negative self-concept and anticipations. (as cited in Carlson, Watts, & Maniacci, 2006, p. 74)

The previous clearly iterates that the use of Encouragement helps clients reach the goal of empowerment. Through Encouragement clients will begin to foster the idea that they possess the ability to determine what they do, how they think, and what they feel.

**Promotion of growth through encouragement.** The concept then flows into how Encouragement promotes growth for clients in a therapeutic relationship. When discouraged clients enter a therapeutic relationship, they will display their inadequacy. “A completely discouraged individual gives up entirely: he feels that he has no chance to succeed in any way, be
it by useful or useless means” (Dreikurs, 1964, p. 63). Growth in Encouragement can be measured as clients begin to develop faith in themselves and begin to positively put effort into their lives and decisions. Encouragement develops as:

Part of the relationship from the beginning. The whole process of attending closely to verbal and nonverbal messages, focusing on the client’s concerns, and being sensitive to both verbalized and implied feelings is encouraging. For some people, it may be the first caring, congruent, close human relationship they have ever experienced. (Dinkmeyer & Sperry, 2000, p. 81)

The process of change resulting from Encouragement may not always be a quick and easy change, but the process of change occurs in a steady manner over the course of time and become more identifiable.

**Early Recollections and Encouragement Summary**

Early Recollections and Encouragement, when used in the proper context, can be extremely effective. When a skilled therapist collects stories of clients’ pasts and effectively pulls out important details, the therapist becomes equipped to guide the clients into realizing they live their lives according to mistaken beliefs that they have about themselves and the world around them. Recognizing these mistaken beliefs enables the therapist to assist clients in the process of correcting these beliefs. By using the technique of Encouragement, a skilled therapist possesses the ability to identify clients’ strengths and instill confidence/faith in clients in regards to the outlook that clients have about themselves and their abilities.

**Self-Esteem**

The developmental process of self-esteem must be understood. The definition of self-esteem refers to “an important psychological barometer of personal well-being” (De Bruyn &
Van Den Boom, 2005, p. 558). The external contributing factors that individuals face on a daily basis impact their self-esteem. “Self-esteem refers to our feelings about our inside qualities. This includes our worth as human beings, sense of purpose in life and how lovable we think we are” (Johnston Pawel, 2001, p.5).

Stanley Coopersmith, who did extensive study on the self-concept in childhood “observed that there are four basic components of self-esteem” (Brendtro, Brokenleg, & Van Bockern, 2002, p. 44). These components consist of significance, competence, power, and virtue. Significance refers to the affection, attention, and acceptance individuals receive from others. Competence implies the ability to develop a mastery over their environment by means of success. Power signifies individuals’ abilities to be in control of their behavior in order to gain respect from others. Virtue refers to individuals’ worthiness. Based on the values of the culture, others determine individuals’ level of virtue (Brendtro, et al. 2002). Fostering these components in children will instill positive growth in their self-esteem as they grow older.

Unfortunately, instilment of these components falls short in the development of many children. In regards to significance “modern children desperately pursue artificial belongings because this need is not fulfilled by families, school, and neighborhoods” (Brendtro, et al., 2002, p. 48). By not instilling these components in childhood it sets the stage for lower self-esteem in adolescence.

“Young children have relatively high self-esteem, which gradually declines over the course of childhood…Self-esteem continues to decline during adolescence” (Robins & Trzensniewski, 2005, 159). Concerns originate from this idea because adolescents and young adults with lower self-esteem tend to have a higher risk for lower scores in important life domains (Yasemin, Erol, & Orth, 2005). According to Trzensniewski (as cited in Yasemin, Erol,
& Orth, 2005), results show “that low self-esteem during adolescence predicts poorer mental and physical health, worse economic well-being, and higher levels of criminal activity in young adulthood” (p. 607).

While many external factors attribute to low self-esteem among adolescents, this next section will more thoroughly explore three of those major factors: the effects of interactions with peers, relations with parents, and the overriding beliefs and values communicated by culture at large.

**Peers’ Impact on Self-Esteem**

Everyone compares themselves to others at one time or another. Comparing behavior begins in early childhood and continues through adulthood. Commonly individuals compare themselves to others in regards to appearance, physical belongings, as well as social status. Perhaps the biggest comparisons occur amongst individuals’ peers.

Research has found that most individuals have the tendency to “rate themselves as being higher than the average or generalized other on positive attributes and lower on negative attributes” (Suls, et al., 2002, p. 252). These beliefs stem from individuals’ own biases because it would be literally impossible for the majority of the population to actually be better than average. The bias that individuals believe to be better than average, causes their self-esteem to increase (Suls, Lemos, & Steward, 2002). This bias can also be reversed to support the notion that individuals with low self-esteem will rank themselves as less average than others.

Adlerian Psychology further explores these ideas through the concept of striving on either the vertical or horizontal plane. When people strive on the vertical plane, they look at themselves in comparison to others as being either above or below them (Carlson, Watts, & Maniaci,
2006). The vertical striving concept supplements the already stated evidence of individuals’ inborn behavior to compare themselves to others.

Intertwined with the concept of deriving self-esteem from comparing themselves with their peers comes the notion of acceptance from peers. “Links have been found between social preference and self-esteem” (De Bruyn & Van Den Boom, 2005, p. 558). This means that individuals considered popular, meaning that many like them, tend to have a higher degree of self-esteem as opposed to those peers reject. The information deduces that because individuals believe themselves to be popular, and therefore more likeable, they then encounter more affection, feel wanted and acceptance and thus results in a higher self-esteem (De Bruyn & Van Den Boom, 2005).

**Parents’ Impact on Self-Esteem**

While individuals spend a great deal of their life with their peers, the amount of time they spend with their parents and the effect this has on their self-esteem must also be taken into consideration. Research shows that “parents are the primary source of influence for the future attainment of youth” (Wang, Peterson, & Morphey, 2007, p. 99). Supporting the idea further, Arbona and Power (2003) claim that “research generally supports the view that secure attachment with parents in infancy, childhood, and adolescence is linked with positive representations of the self, including high levels of self-esteem and self-efficacy” (p. 49). Parents provide the primary influence in the adolescence period of life. Because of the strong influence of parents, one must understand the different areas that contribute to parental influence.

Through a study of data collected from the National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health in 1994, which consisted of information collected from 80 high schools and 50 middle schools with a national representative of 20,745 adolescents, an investigation determined the key
factors of parental influence on adolescents’ self-esteem (Bulanda & Mujumdar, 2009). In the study, the researchers focused on the impact of parent availability, parent involvement, and quality of relationship on adolescents’ self-esteem.

The process of beginning to figure out individuals’ identity begins in adolescence and exploring independence plays a significant role. Studies note that even as adolescents may be seeking to spend less time with their parents, adolescents still desire to know that their parents remain available to them. According to Hofferth and Sandberg, Muller and Kerbow, and Young (as cited in Bulanda & Mujumdar, 2009):

Some research does indicate parents’ physical presence/availability during mealtime and in the evening hours is associated with fewer problems. It is possible that the simple availability of a parent reflects an available source of support and/or a potential source of guidance for adolescents…. The availability of support allows adolescents to meet the challenges of their life stage without added anxieties, thereby contributing to overall greater self-efficacy and less depression. (p. 205)

The results from the study showed that parental availability considerably impacts adolescents’ self-esteem. The presence of parents reaffirms adolescents’ faith in themselves, helping them to realize that they remain either equipped to face their life circumstances or that they have the resources available to assist them through the situations they encounter.

The second area of which parents significantly influence adolescents occurs through parental involvement. Safford (as cited in Bulanda & Mujumdar, 2009) affirms that “parental involvement are positively linked to several child outcomes, including better academic achievement, fewer behavior problems, and less depression and anxiety” (p. 204). When parents put effort into spending time with their children it further conveys the message of importance to
adolescents. Adolescents will then feel significant and will increase their self-esteem. The findings of the study further defend the information because it illustrates that the incorporation of “instrumental and recreational modes of involvement benefit the psychological well-being of their adolescent children…. The interaction affect reveals an apparent synergistic parental relationship where adolescent self-esteem is exponentially higher when concurrent levels of mother and father involvements are high” (Bulanda & Mujumdar, 2009, p.210).

The third and final area of significance in regards to affecting adolescents’ self-esteem results from the quality of the relationship. Adolescents encounter a great deal of stress in this period of their life. It remains “reasonable to expect parents to serve as a significant source of support during this period…Indicators of parental support are predictive of some measures of adolescent psychological well-being” (Bulanda & Mujumdar, 2009, p. 204). When adolescents feel that they have a support system in which they receive advice and encouragement, it helps them to realize that they do not exist alone in the situations they encounter. “A significant interaction in parents’ relationship quality with children suggests the positive correlation with self-esteem remains positive and grows stronger when the relationship quality with each parent is high” (Bulanda & Mujumdar, 2009, p. 210). This clearly identifies the importance of a quality adolescent-parent relationship and the positive effect that their relationship has on adolescents’ self-esteem.

The information establishes that parents potentially have the largest influence in the development of an adolescent’s self-esteem. When children in developmental time of life feel that their parents remain available, involved, and the relationship exists in quality manner then, according to the study, children will have higher self-esteem. If parents tend to be unavailable,
uninvolved, and the relationship quality exists in a subpar manner then, according to the study, children will have lower self-esteem.

Consistent with the previous studies, additional findings from Hall-Lande, Eisenberg, Christenson, and Neumark-Sztainer (2007) “reported that for girls, family connectedness was the only protective factor that influenced the relationship between social isolation and suicide attempts” (p. 274). Recently a study conducted by the University of Washington assessed the relationship between low self-esteem, family support, and the impact on suicidal behavior. The study focused on teenagers ages 14-21 and 62% consisted of females from an ethnically diverse background. The study concluded that adolescent girls have a need to feel nurtured and supported by their parents. The results indicate that “adolescents with higher levels of family support also had significantly higher levels of self-esteem” (Hall-Lande, et al. 2009, p. 165).

A final study conducted in a public school of 110 participants, which included 55 females, assessed levels of self-esteem and loneliness in relationship to attachment styles with parents. The students participated in an assessment by completing the Coopersmith Self-Esteem Inventory and UCLA Loneliness scales. The results of the study showed that 87% of the adolescents had high self-esteem, while two thirds of them reported heightened levels of loneliness (Dhal, Bhatia, Sharma, & Gupta, 2007). More specifically,

…early adolescents reported higher self-esteem as compared to later adolescent, which is partially in keeping with previous research that a decline in self-esteem in girls sets in around the age of 11 years, and reaches a low point between the ages 12-13 years due to certain developmental changes. (Dhal, et al. 2007, p. 63)

The research additionally found that while the majority of the participants identified secure attachment in their relationships with their parents, a large portion of the participants also
produced results determining that they have low self-esteem in relationship to being preoccupied with a fearful attachment style with their parents. These findings deduce that typically adolescents who come from homes that exude a presence of love and acceptance receive imparted feelings of acceptance and capability, which results in higher levels of self-esteem (Dhal, et al., 2007).

The study confirmed a strong connection between low self-esteem and loneliness by stating that “individuals with low self-esteem are likely to feel rejected and disapproving of others, in addition they may lack self-confidence and social skills” (Dhal, et al. 2007, p. 63). These results occur due to the lack of attachment that adolescents experience with their parents thus negatively affecting their self-esteem and causing a ripple effect into other areas of their life and social interaction abilities.

**Cultural Media Impacts on Self-Esteem**

The last area to be explored in the development of self-esteem exists in the form of cultural impact. Culture can be defined as “learned and shared human patterns or models for living; day-to-day living patterns. These patterns and models pervade all aspects of human social interaction. Culture is mankind's primary adaptive mechanism” (Damen, 1987, p. 367). Culture engulfs a vast array of individuals’ lives which would be much too large to fully expand on and explore in this paper. So this paper will explore cultural impact in the form of cultural media. Cultural media infiltrates individuals’ lives on a daily basis in the forms television, radio, bill boards, magazines, the internet, etc. For women the bombardment of media conveys the message that women need to be beautiful according to the standards defined by media.

Today’s society creates the message that in order to be beautiful, people must look a certain way (Clay, Vignoles, & Dittmar, 2005). Typically the standard of appearance exists in an
unrealistic and unattainable form. These messages result in women comparing themselves to others. The comparison instigates the mental thoughts and beliefs in women of inadequacy, which results in lower self-esteem. These core beliefs of the ideal female body image originate in women “because they have been socialized to believe that appearance is an important basis for self-evaluation and evaluation of others” (Clay, Vignoles, & Dittmar, 2005, p. 452).

Previous researchers argue that “there is now growing empirical support for the proposition that idealized portrayals of women in the Western media have a negative impact upon how adolescent girls and adult women see themselves” (Clay, et al. 2005, p. 453). According to a survey completed by Colditz (as cited in Clay, et al. 2005) of 500 girls ages 9-16, “nearly 70% believed magazine pictures influenced their idea of the ideal body shape, and 47% of the same sample wished to lose weight as a result” (p. 453).

The information further conveys the idea that the images to which females expose themselves can have an effect on the way they think about themselves and the world around them. This means that unrealistic images of women can affect the way women feel about themselves in regards to their body image. This in turn creates negative feelings about their body image and can lead to eating disorders or depression as women try to imitate these unrealistic images. Stice, Schupak-Neuberg, Shaw, and Stein (as cited in Clay, Vignoles, & Dittmar, 2005) “found that among young college women, greater media exposure was linked directly with more eating disorder symptoms and indirectly-through stronger internalization of the ideal-body stereotype-with greater body dissatisfaction” (p. 456).

Another study exposed adolescent girls to different size models and then had the girls rank their feelings about themselves. The study found that “viewing ultra-thin or average size models led to decreases in both body satisfaction and self-esteem in adolescent girls aged 11-16
with changes in self-esteem fully mediated by changes in body satisfaction” (Clay, et al. 2005, p. 468). The study shows that not only viewing ultra-thin models but also average sized models can cause females to feel less content in regards to the way they look. The study also indicated that inadequate beliefs about themselves do no only result due to the size of the models. These beliefs stemmed additionally from the glamorized appearance of these models which further decreased self-esteem (Clay, et al. 2005). Females have the ability to be very observant of those around them and get caught up in the need to compare themselves to one another. Since they already compare themselves with their peers whom they see physically, it makes sense that they would compare themselves also with those portrayed through the different media avenues.

**Self-Esteem Summary**

Overall studies have deduced that self-esteem tends to decline more for females than males in the period of adolescence (Yasemin, Erol, & Orth, 2011). Yasemin, Erol, and Orth states that studies show that females deal with a great deal of pressure in regards to influences impacting their self-esteem. Females’ views of themselves, both now and in the future, have the potential to be affected positively and negatively by peers, parents, and cultural media.

It can be argued that females spend a great deal of time comparing themselves to their peers. The more they feel accepted by their peers, the higher their self-esteem will be. In the homes, studies have argued, adolescents with higher self-estees tend to have parents available, engaged in their teenagers’ lives, and have a higher quality relationship. Additionally, culture in the form of media impacts self-esteem because of the high tendency of teens to compare themselves with those with whom they interact with on a regular basis. The comparison also happens with what they see portrayed in media as believed to be ideal by culture. When
individuals cannot meet the ideals portrayed through media, they begin to feel less about themselves.

**Female Adolescent Identity Development**

The developmental process of identity in adolescent girls remains to be the final area that needs to be further understood. Identity development in adolescent girls must be taken into consideration because of the interpersonal and intrapersonal dissonance they encounter as they seek to establish their identity. During this phase of female adolescence, their views on their roles in life drastically change. The change occurs due to the external impact of social and cultural forces, parenting manner, and female sexuality.

The process of forming identity develops over time as a result of multiple life experiences, but primarily begins in the phase of adolescence. The four key components to identity formation occur in the manner of identity achievement, moratorium, foreclosure, and identity diffusion (Adams & Jones, 1983). “An individual who has achieved an identity has made a self-defined commitment following a period of questioning and searching (crises)” (Adams & Jones, 1983, p. 249). Typically adolescents have not reached this point. They tend to be at the other end of the spectrum where they question everything. “Most studies that have examined the developmental process in identity formation have concluded that the critical period for identity formation change is in the 18-21-year-old age range” (Adam & Jones, 1983, p. 249). The study explains that between the ages of 18-21 adolescents actually begin to understand and determine their identity. Up until this point there tends to be a lot of questions and confusion.

According to Erikson (1980) “adolescence becomes the relevant time in the life span to integrate past partial identifications into a cohesive sense of self that is the accrued confidence that one’s ability to maintain inner sameness and continuity is matched by the sameness and
continuity of one’s meaning for others” (p. 94). Female adolescents, in the process of trying to develop their identity attempt to maintain a balance between interpersonal and intrapersonal dimensions into their identity (Lytle, Bakken, & Romig, 1997).

Until the phase of adolescents, females live a care-free life where they express themselves more openly and tend to be more on the “receiving from others” side of life. Upon entering adolescence, females become aware of the expectations that society places on females, and struggle with obtaining balance between their own desires, which contrasts society’s expectations of female characteristics and responsibilities. Blos (as cited in Ollech & McCarthy, 1997) observed adolescents and found “that the fledgling ego ideal of childhood had to be relinquished and a new, more mature form had to be created, based on ideals of adult behaviors” (p. 72).

Erickson explains identity as “a means of construing and organizing the self that is pursued according to one’s desires and strengths; that is not passively appropriated and that is informed by stability, both in one’s own eyes and in the eyes of others” (as cited in Ollech & McCarthy, 1997, p. 74). Developing identity in adolescents occurs in an intentional manner. Female adolescents put a lot of thought into the impact of outside sources in the process of determining their role in life.

Social and Cultural Forces

Over the course of time society has established gender roles and expectations. In today’s society “the reproduction of mothering crystallizes the split between what is considered feminine and masculine and determines how we define and subjectively experience gender roles” (Ollech & McCarthy, 1997, p. 67). Society creates dissonance in the outlook on gender roles through the expectation of mothers being the primary care givers of children. These roles illustrate the power
differentiation between men and women, in which it highlights that men have the power. The overvaluation of men increases the devaluation of women (Ollech & McCarthy, 1997). From this concept the belief emerges that “males hold the power and prerogative to project on females what they find repugnant in themselves and to define females accordingly” (Ollech & McCarthy, 1997). Stereotyping that occurs from gender-roles creates fear of social segregation and rejection in women, which worsens the difficulties of attaining a stable well-adjusted identity (Lytie, Bakken, & Romig, 1997).

Society further reinforces these gender-role stereotypes through cultural beliefs and attitudes that uphold the perception that interpersonal characteristics equal weakness. Society typically links these less desirable traits to females (Archer, 1992). Societal beliefs further support the gender-role differences as males attempt to shun behaviors that associate with feminine labels.

Additionally, “females are culturally defined by their bodies, and girls’ reproductive capacity forms the foundation of their identity” (Ollech & McCarthy, 1997, p. 67). The aspect that females remain forever linked to their reproductive capacity further constructs society’s beliefs about women and their role. When women attempt to break these socially constructed roles, men look down upon them for stepping out of the role designated for females, and at times, other females ostracize them for not meeting the definition of being feminine.

The imposing social and cultural beliefs cause female adolescents to begin to determine how they fit into female gender roles. These imposing beliefs also dictate how their previous and current beliefs and desires encourage movement or hinder it and thus must be suppressed.

Social and cultural forces in the form of peers and media also play a significant role in adolescent girls’ identity development. Due to imposing beliefs created by culture, many
adolescent girls fall into the idea that their worth in their identity exists based on their appearance. “According to the Youth Risk Behavior Survey results for 2005, 45% of high school students were trying to lose weight” (Ata, Ludden, & Lally, 2007, p. 1024). This transpires from adolescents’ falling for the idea that their appearance determines their value. Rierdan and Koff (1997) state that body image relates to how adolescents feel about and perceive their changing bodies in relationship to physiology, psychological factors, and society. Cultural pressure floods adolescent girls’ lives in a rapid pace on a regular basis penetrating their minds with the idea that obtaining the ideal body image determines their identity.

Since adolescent girls have such a strong desire to fit in with their peers “they often turn to the media to help them deal with issues associated with their changing bodies and identities. In various forms, the mass media transmit messages to adolescents regarding the desirability and undesirability of physical attributes” (Rierdan & Koff, 2007, p. 1025). The vicious cycle continues because girls tend to look at social media as their guide for attaining the ideal body. This typically results in lower body satisfaction because their body does not match up to the images to which they measure themselves, which impedes their identity development.

Adolescent girls not only become subject to influences by social media to look a certain way, but they also deal with an ever surmounting influx of peer pressure. Pressure may not always be in a direct form, but typically makes a significant impact on individuals. “Pressures from friends to conform to the stereotypical ideal can either be direct or indirect.” (Rierdan & Koff, 2007, p. 1027). This can come in the form of teasing or criticism about individuals’ weight or a friend voicing a concern about their weight.

In a recent study completed in 2007, Ata, Ludden, and Lally conducted a study to determine how external pressures and internal perceptions combined with cultural pressures link
with adolescent body perceptions and self-identity. The study included three schools in the Northeast United States, with adolescents ages 13 to 19, where 56.5% of the participants were females (Rierdan & Koff, 2007). The results of the study revealed that adolescent girls have significantly higher negative “feelings toward specific body parts and functions…their discrepancy between the actual and ideal figures for females was significantly larger, indicating their desire to be smaller than they actually are” (Rierdan & Koff, 2007, p. 1030). Further findings exposed “females reported higher peer support, teasing from family about weight, pressure from friends and family to lose weight, and media pressure” (Rierdan & Koff, 2007, p. 1030). These results indicate that social and cultural influences play a large role in adolescent girls’ determining their satisfaction with their body image, which impacts their process of determining their self-identity. As adolescents continue in the process of figuring out their identity, they continue to struggle with these external forces, which hinders their developmental process.

**Parenting Influences**

An additional outside source that plays a significant role in influencing the development of identity for female adolescents transpires from their parental interactions and the roles their parents display. This stems out of the expectations of society. Today’s society has constructed the notion that life revolves around the expectations of males and the belief applies within the family unit as well. “Families are structured according to male convenience and preference, then these cultural preferences facilitate female adolescents’ anxiety about maintaining a self-image of competence and accomplishment” (Ollech & McCarthy, 1997, p. 68).

As female adolescents entering this stage of identity development, they believe that they need to cater to the preferences of males, which causes additional stress. They believe they need
to measure up to these expectations or else they have failed. Female adolescents not only believe that they need to cater towards the male preferences, but treat males as their primary focus, resulting in putting their own desires as secondary (Ollech & McCarthy, 1997).

Female adolescents learn the expectations set out before them by observing their parents. According to Westkott (as cited in Ollech & McCarthy, 1997), female adolescents are taught to nurture males from their fathers, and in contrast, are often sought out for emotional needs by their mothers, thus implying that they should seek to have their emotional needs met by other females (p. 68). These concepts convey the message to female adolescents that they have a specific role they need to fulfill, and when they achieve the role they derive value.

Female adolescents typically learn their roles from their parents through observations. Female adolescents notice that their mothers obtain value from their fathers when they nurture them and begin to apply these lessons to their own lives in order to meet the family expectations.

From a study conducted on rural female students that consisted of sophomores, juniors, and seniors, the “research sample indicated that the primary parental factors associated with advanced identity formation include child-rearing style in which mothers encourage independence and autonomy while minimally controlling their daughter’s behavior and fathers discipline their daughters fairly” (Adams & Jones, 1983, p. 255). When mothers encourage these characteristics/behaviors, female adolescents then have increased confidence in themselves. Increased confidence encourages autonomy which invites adolescents into the process of identity development.

Another study with 655 adolescent participants, in grades 9 through 12, assessed the linkage between several structural and interpersonal family variables in relationship to different self-concept variables, one of those being identity development. The study revealed that the
female participants who claimed to have family support had higher levels of son/daughter identity salience which helps to determine their identity (Hoelter & Harper, 1987). Although for some adolescents dating has intervened in the roles that family typically plays because they both possess characteristics of intimacy. This makes it important to realize that “these results may suggest that some minimum degree of support from an intimate group is needed by adolescents and that dating can compensate for a lack of this kind of support within the family” (Hoelter & Harper, 1987, p. 136). As adolescents become further engaged in their dating relationships, they further derive their self-concept from that relationship and the impact of family reduces. Other findings from the study reveal that different family structures affect family support, which affects identity development (Hoelter & Harper, 1987). Families who may be dealing with divorce, sickness, or death in the family may not be able to give as much support to their adolescents as traditional families not dealing with these different life circumstances.

Female Sexuality

Just as parenting arrangements stem from cultural and social forces, so does the final outside force which contributes to the development of adolescent female identity in the form of female sexuality. During this phase of adolescence, sexuality begins to become apparent. “During adolescence, sexuality becomes enlivened and redefined according to preoedipal, oedipal, latency, and adolescent experience with the environment and internal and external objects” (Ollech & McCarthy, 1997, p. 74). Female adolescents continue to observe their surroundings and the society with which they interact, and begin to notice the way society responds to sexuality. They then begin taking on the characteristics of how they believe sexuality should be displayed.
Female adolescents face a double standard from their male counterparts as they encounter this phase of life in understanding their sexuality. While males receive encouragement to have sexual encounters without adverse consequences, girls run the risk of being labeled unfavorable sexual names whether they engage in sexual activities or not (Tolman, Spencer, Reynoso-Rosen, & Porche, 2003). These sexual labels serve the purpose of limiting and controlling sexual behaviors in females and reminding them of their cultural role as they navigate their identity as a sexual being (Rahami & Liston, 2009). Females face an ongoing dilemma of deciphering the contradictory messages they regularly encounter. While females encounter messages from a variety of sources: churches, parents, and some authority figures tell girls to keep themselves pure, while music, movies, the fashion and entertainment industries, and some peers tell girls they need to look sexy and be cool. Although the first set (churches, parents, and authority figures) preaches abstinence only, the second set (music, movies, fashion, and peer pressure) creates a hypersexualized social context. (Tolman, Spencer, Reynoso-Rosen, & Porche, 2003, p. 517)

These mixed messages can be rather confusing, making the process of identity-development even more difficult for female adolescents in relationship to understanding their female sexuality.

As stated previously females do a great deal of comparing themselves to others. As media floods their minds with ads about sexuality, female adolescents decipher what the culture expects of them and then apply these expectations to their lives. Although some fight for equal rights for females, in the grand scheme of things, males still hold a great deal of power. Power causes female adolescents to adopt the idea of striving for other’s wants and expectations in regards to
their sexuality, thus putting their own desires on hold, in hopes of obtaining acceptance and approval.

**Female Adolescents’ Identity Development Summary**

According to a study completed by Brown and Gilligan (as cited in Ollech & McCarthy, 1997):

Female adolescents have been found to silence themselves in order to avoid conflict and anger, on the basis of their belief that disruptive noncomplacent behavior will lead to disapproval and abandonment. A by-product of this self-disavowal has been the lack of belief in one’s own opinions and an inability to articulate one’s experience….about their thoughts and feelings that adolescent girls previously answered in a definitive and opinionated manner. (p. 76)

The belief, which affects female adolescents’ development of identity, has been set in place by the gender roles that have been established by society and culture. This belief strengthens as females observe the roles taken by their parents, which helps to solidify the stigma attached to the concept of female sexuality.

Female adolescents engulf a difficult time of life as they decipher their way through the internal and external beliefs and expectations placed upon them in the process of determining their identity. Female adolescents encounter the age-old struggle of gender-roles. They must determine how they will allow these roles to define them or how they will live outside of these roles construed by society. Female adolescents deal with the messages conveyed by media and decipher through the mixed messages being sent as they sort through the process of acceptance with their peers.
In addition to the social and cultural influences, female adolescents decipher through the messages being conveyed at home while establishing their identity. Family structures often revolve around the males. The family structure conveys the message for females to cater to the males. Learning these behaviors occur by observing their parents. The link between parental support and healthy development of self-identity has high significance. This occurs because when adolescents feel encouraged they will more likely venture out and explore their options because they know that have support from others.

While dealing with the previous external complications the final complication female adolescents encounter while developing their identity comes in the form of female sexuality. They encounter many physical changes and try to decipher their new roles with these changes. Different external influences convey different messages as to how to behave sexually and who they should be. Distinguishing the different messages becomes quite complicated as it ties in with their desire to be accepted by their peers while combines with the messages conveyed by culture. It is a struggle to not get caught up in the negative labels associated with different choices, which further complicates the process of identity development.

**Final Summary**

**Connections Between Identity Development and Self-Esteem**

Research shows substantial connections between female adolescents’ identity development and self-esteem. As stated previously, when females reach the adolescent phase of life, they suppress their authenticity in hopes of measuring up to external expectations of who they should be and how they should act in order to gain acceptance. It is important to note that “many classic works in the social science have recognized that relationships provide a foundation for development” (Impett, Sorsoli, Schooler, Henson, & Tolman, 2008, p. 723). The
dilemma encountered here, according to Erikson (as cited in Impett, Sorsoli, Schooler, Hensen, & Tolman, 2008) is that “only after adolescents have established an individual identity can they work to establish intimate relationships with others” (p. 723). This identifies the problem that while female adolescents crave authentic relationships with others they tend to diminish their true authenticity, which then limits the authenticity of their present relationships.

Research reveals that female adolescents’ identity development can be evaluated by the authenticity in their relationships. The more authentic female adolescents’ relationships appear, which stems from the security they have in their identity, the higher their self-esteem will be.

Impett, et al.’s study (2008) determines that typically girls’ self-esteem dropped about twice as much as boys’ self-esteem in early adolescence. After the initial decrease in self-esteem, because self-esteem can constantly change, their study reveals that after age 13, “many girls show a steady increase in self-esteem over the course of adolescence and young adulthood” (Impett, et al., 2008, p. 722). With the typical scenario being played out by the majority of female adolescents, the study shows great importance in determining the significant underlying factors in the steady increase in female adolescents’ self-esteem.

A study conducted over a five year period at an urban northeastern middle school using three testing intervals found that as female adolescents’ relationship authenticity and confidence in identity increased so did their self-esteem. The study contrasts those whose relationship authenticity did not change; neither did their self-esteem. The findings from the study were very significant as they noted that their findings were 99% accurate (Impett, et al., 2008). The precision shows that as female adolescents progress in their development of identity, they tend to be less constrained in their actions due to external expectations. This results in higher self-esteem because they feel less pressured to live up to external expectations. Female adolescents with a
higher sense of identity feel capable to speak their minds and tend to be less hindered with the need to meet other’s expectations.

**Early Recollections Connection to Self-Esteem**

Research has found that using the Adlerian technique of Early Recollections tends to be beneficial in both revealing mistaken beliefs and strengths of adolescents. Early Recollections can be used in developing adolescents’ identity.

As stated by Adler (as cited in Shifron & Bettner 2003) “very many of the expressions of adolescence are the outcomes of the desire to prove manhood and womanhood, to show independence, and to experience equality with adults” (p. 335). This reiterates the concept of adolescents attempting to live up to the external expectations of what it means to be men or women. While developing ideas about adulthood, children make mistakes in the process. Their mistakes continue to guide the way they live into adolescence. Through the use of Early Recollections “mistakes in his style of life may reveal themselves that have been previously unobserved. For almost every child adolescence means one thing above all else- he must prove that he is no longer a child” (Shifron & Bettner, 2003, p. 335). But in the process of proving they are no longer children, individuals believe they must measure up to the expectations set before them by society and culture.

It has been determined that “using early memories as a tool to identify one’s creative abilities and strengths is very effective…. It enables teachers and counselors to focus on the positive rather than the negative and to emphasize the pluses rather than the minuses” (Shifron & Bettner, 2003, p. 338). The significance of these abilities allows the helping professional to narrow down and focus on specific root issues instead of just focusing on symptoms. When children have the ability to identify their strengths, it increases their possibility of enhancing a
more positive self-image (Shifron & Bettner, 2003). This is significant because it will help children continue in the process of developing their identity and increase their self-esteem.

The process of collecting Early Recollections gives the “counselor clues about the direction of the client’s strivings and the ways the client gains significance” (Lingga & Kottman, 1991, p. 256). Adolescents most desire to feel significant. Individuals early in life interpret life experiences to gain significance from others based on their interactions with others. When individuals cannot achieve positive ways to obtain significance, they become discouraged. The use of Early Recollections allows counselors to gain insight into clients guiding principles. Understanding these guiding principles allows the therapist to understand the manner in which clients are striving to gain significance. This understanding allows the therapist to help clients become aware of how their belief system may be skewed. By making the connection between their mistaken beliefs as guiding principles in an unhealthy manner, they have the ability to work through these beliefs and alter the way they see and think about themselves and those around them. When done in a healthy manner, individuals can learn to find significance in ways which do not cause them to become dependent on others and learn to value and appreciate themselves.

**Encouragement Connection to Self-Esteem**

The Adlerian concept of Encouragement and its impact on increasing identity development and self-esteem in female adolescents, connects with the previous concept of Early Recollections. Frequently, symptoms exhibited in individuals have been developed subconsciously as coping mechanisms to protect themselves from others. “The patient unknowingly selects certain symptoms and develops them until they impress him consciously as real obstacles” (Ansbacher & Ansbacher, 1956, p. 265). Through the use of Early Recollections these mistaken beliefs that clients utilize to create safe-guarding behaviors can be identified.
Through the combinational use of Early Recollections and Encouragement the therapist and client can ideally reduce and eliminate these beliefs from clients’ thought processes and behaviors.

“Lack of self-esteem produces dysfunctional behavior. One’s self-esteem can be enhanced through the encouragement process” (Dinkmeyer, 1972, p. 177). This reiterates the idea that all acting out behavior stems from feelings of discouragement. Self-esteem does not remain stagnant. Self-esteem has the ability to change for better or for worse depending on individuals’ beliefs. The Encouragement process allows the counselor to focus on clients’ beliefs and perceptions about themselves and others. These beliefs and perceptions reveal clients’ beliefs and the purposes associated with the behavior. Identifying these beliefs allows the counselor to further understand how clients strive to be significant because all behavior has social meaning according to clients’ own unique perceptions (Dinkmeyer, 1972).

It has been found that the use of Encouragement in a therapeutic setting promotes change. “As the counselee feels accepted, he develops a feeling of personal adequacy and responsibility for his course of action, which facilitates the motivation to change” (Dinkmeyer, 1972, p. 180). By focusing on clients’ strengths, the professional helper has the ability to encourage them to acknowledge and claim their strengths. Acknowledging and claiming their strengths shifts their focus onto these areas of their life. This promotes the growth of identity development in adolescence.

Revealing insight “involves making the counselee aware of why he chooses to function as he does. Developing in him a full awareness of the element of choice can be most encouraging” (Dinkmeyer, 1972, p. 180). For example, adolescents who live their lives less authentically due to external pressures can come to the realization that they have choices as to
how they live. Realizing these choices empowers them to live more authentic lives. Empowerment leads to an increase in their self-esteem.

“Through the counselor’s focusing on the counselee’s assets and his anticipation of success, the counselee grows more secure” (Dinkmeyer, 1972, p. 181). This further demonstrates that Encouragement promotes growth in adolescents’ self-identity, promoting confidence in themselves and boosting their self-esteem. Early Recollections and the use of Encouragement compliment each other when being used with the same client because both techniques work towards the same goal of promoting the strengths of clients. This endorses growth in identity development and increased self-esteem.

Limitations of Findings

There has not been very much research completed on Adlerian psychology due to its idiographic nature. The lack of research creates a downfall in evaluating the success of Adlerian techniques. The techniques of Early Recollections and Encouragement compose the life style analysis where therapists gather data from clients, draw their own conclusions, and then evaluate possible conclusions with the client (Magner-Harris, Riordan, Kern, & Curlette, 1979). This creates difficulty in gauging the accuracy because the Adlerian school of thought involves a good deal of hunch making that then needs to be deciphered. Additionally, there have not been very many studies directly studying the correlation between the use of Encouragement and Early Recollections in relationship to directly impacting female adolescent self-esteem. While many articles exist promoting the value of using Encouragement and Early Recollections in identifying mistaken beliefs, from which discouragement stems, there have not been any studies directly studying the value of using these Adlerian techniques in the process of increasing self-esteem amongst female adolescents.
Another limitation found from the research occurs in the process of evaluation used in the studies completed. In many of the studies, the measurement process was self-administered. When self-administered testing occurs, it creates room for error because individuals tend to evaluate themselves in their minds’ eye. They view themselves how they want to see themselves, which causes accuracy to become questionable. Self-administered can especially put testing done by adolescents into the questionable category because adolescents constantly seek approval from others. Due to adolescents seeking approval from others, it would make sense for adolescents to evaluate themselves as to how they desire to be so that they perceive that they belong with their peers. On the other end of the spectrum if individual feels discouraged they would evaluate themselves as worse than others. Adolescents experience a vast array of emotions during the developmental period. So when adolescents feel something, it can be expressed more passionately in either a positive or negative manner because, teens focus on the here and now and want instant gratification.

Additionally, some of the sample populations used within some of the studies were rather small. When studies focus on such small populations it eliminates additional variables that may come into play when assessing a larger population (Dhal, Bhatia, Sharma, & Gupta, 2007). For instance, some of the variables eliminated include race, economic status, age, and cultural beliefs on different topics. When overlooking these areas it causes the findings to be more limited and creates room for error.

A further limitation to the studies conducted exists in the time frame in which they took place. Some of the studies were deciphered after such a short period of time that they didn’t allow enough time for different variables to surface (Clay, Vignoles, & Dittmar, 2005). For instance, when looking at the parent children relationships in regards to impact on the children’s
self-esteem, the study looked at how the parenting style impacted the children’s self-esteem, but did not take into consideration how, over time, the parenting style may have been influenced by the children’s behavior and self-esteem. Another limitation of the study done on parenting relationships with adolescents in relationship to self-esteem is that the study only focused on traditional nuclear families. In today’s society a traditional nuclear family does not constitute the norm. Many other types of families need to be taken into consideration, such as families with single/divorced parents, step-parents, same-sex parents and cohabitation. All types of families need to be taken into consideration when looking at parental involvement, availability, and the roles that parents play in the family structure. It makes sense that children who come from home environments in which the parents provide a supportive and encouraging atmosphere would have higher self-esteem because of the confidence that has already been instilled in them.

Authors’ Findings and Outcomes

Even though limited statistical data exists supporting the success rates of Adlerian therapy techniques, this researcher believes that the use of the techniques of Early Recollections and Encouragement, would at minimal, when used correctly, increase self-esteem in female adolescents. Since a large volume of research exists indicating that low self-esteem stems from discouragement, it can be argued that the opposite of discouragement is Encouragement and when used would increase one’s self-esteem.

This researcher believes significant connections exist between the development of self-identity and self-esteem. Since adolescents go through a great deal of change in this period of their life, it can be argued that they have a great number of questions to sort through in determining their identity. When they receive responses in a negative manner, it decreases their feelings of significance and causes them to feel discouraged, which decreases their self-esteem.
How individuals determine how they obtain significance taps into their private logic. Private logic can then be revealed through the use of Early Recollections. Uncovering these guiding beliefs allows the therapist to intervene, identify with clients, and transform the client’s mistaken beliefs into rational beliefs. The process supports the belief that Early Recollections can help in the process of increasing self-esteem.

The information currently known benefits parents of female adolescents in understanding the role that parents play in the process of promoting healthy development of self-esteem and self-identity. This information helps parents realize the proactive steps that can be taken with their adolescents.

**Author’s Suggestions for Further Research**

This researcher believes several areas should have further studies completed to definitively provide answers as to whether the use of Adlerian techniques significantly increases the self-esteem in female adolescents. Further research should be completed on female adolescents who participate in Adlerian therapy. Limited statistical information currently exists providing how many individuals receive Adlerian therapy in any given time period, which makes it difficult to determine the success rates. In addition to the area of statistical data, there should be further research deciphering the different reasons why female adolescents obtain therapy. While great evidence exists that many adolescents struggle with low self-esteem, little public data exists revealing the nature of the problems that one addresses in therapy due to the private manner of therapy.

Additionally longer studies should be completed regarding female adolescent self-esteem. Since some of the studies were completed over such a short period of time, the findings could easily be manipulated. If a longer time frame were incorporated, then the study could provide
more concrete evidence. Furthermore research should be completed on larger populations. Since some of the sample groups were so small, it removed the variable of diversity. When studies use small sample populations, typically the majority of such a small population has a similar background. Small sample populations cause the results to be congruent because it removes the diversity aspect of the population. To obtain more accurate results, a more diverse population needs to be studied.

Another area that should be further studied would be the comparisons between the success rates of Adlerian therapy and the success rates of other therapeutic approaches. This information would be quite enlightening because many overlapping elements exist between Adlerian psychology and several other schools of thought. Comparing the success rates that have been found by using cognitive-behavioral therapy and Experiential therapy would provide insight into potential success rates of Adlerian therapy due to overlapping principles.

This researcher believes that by expanding on research in the mentioned areas it would provide greater overall clarification in determining the success of using Adlerian therapy in the form of Early Recollections and Encouragement in the process of increasing female adolescents’ self-esteem.
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