SELF-ESTEEM

I. What does it mean to hold someone or something in “high esteem”? 

- To hold…
  - …in high REGARD.
  - …of high VALUE.
  - …in high ADMIRATION.
  - …as SACRED or CHERISHABLE.

II. Is self-esteem GENETIC or LEARNED? 

- Recent studies are showing that self-confidence has a GENETIC influence:
  - …research supporting the genetic role in varying levels of self-confidence – as well as the differences of genetic influence on depression or anxiety levels between people – serves as a reminder that we do not have entire control of our level of self-esteem.
  - Example: If all seems to be going well, and you still feel low self-confidence, free-floating anxiety or depression, it may be time to seek professional help due to the fact that your genetic predisposition may be the culprit.

- ENVIRONMENT plays a large role on one’s perspective in Life.
  - Research is showing that the ability to trust, love, and resolve conflict all begin in childhood.
  - University of Minnesota study (2011)
    - Age 0 – 18 months: Our infant childhood experiences with our parent(s)/parental provider(s) predict our behavior in romantic relationships 20 years later.
      - …before our memories began... before each of us could even talk or grasp a language to describe it... our brain began to encode implicit/deep-rooted attitudes about the world around us, as well as how the people in this World treat us.
      - …if an infant is valued by their parent(s) with conscious affection and nurturance, they are more likely to develop a deep-rooted, life-long sense of healthy/functional self-worth.
      - …if an infant is neglected or abused by their parent(s), they tend to subconsciously lower their sense of self-worth in order to “fix” the paradox of why they are being neglected.
        - ...an infant is entirely dependent upon their parent(s) for survival.
        - ...if an infant is being neglected by their parent(s), they do not have the developed brain structure to comprehend something may be “wrong” with their parent(s) as the explanation of their behavior.
        - ...by instinct, the infant brain adapts to the environment around it by sustaining/engraining connections

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“consistent” in its environment and gradually loses neural connections that are not used or often stimulated (reference “synaptic pruning” in next section).

- Example: Think of the different neurological and biochemical “signals” firing through an infant when a Warm/Loving parent vs. Neglectful/Abusive parent walks into the room; influence of “bullying” on a child.

- Studies in institutionalized Romanian children have found that the length of time spent in conditions of social deprivation and neglect correlates with lower IQ and behavioral problems.

A recent study (2011), shows that early adversity even affects children's chromosomes -- prematurely shortening the chromosome tips, known as telomeres, and hastening how quickly their cells "age."

- The studies found that children exposed longer to institutional care before age 5 had significantly shorter relative telomere length (compared to that expected for their age) when they reached age 6-10.
- The telomere is designed to protect the chromosome, so accelerating how early in life telomeres lose length correlates with:
  - A shortened life span (or “accelerated cellular aging”).
  - Ability to learn.
  - Health issues later in life (i.e., cardiovascular outcomes in patients with acute coronary syndrome, colorectal cancer...
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risk).

- Ref article: Stress-Health Link

✓ Effects of DEPRESSION, ANGER or ANXIETY on the parent-child relationship:

- 1-in-5 children (U.S.) qualify as having a diagnosis of “Childhood Anxiety Disorder”:
  - …sadly, signs often go unrecognized and untreated, allowing the detrimental anxiety/emotion(s) to develop through the years, leading to self-/relationship-destruction, substance abuse, poor academic/job performance (etc.) into adulthood.
  - Example: The infant developing in an environment of hypersensitive, over-anxious/angry parent(s) will be neurologically “wired” toward an over-reactive stress response system (e.g., predisposed to increased levels of Cortisol; “always on edge”, etc.)

- To date, there’s not much to be done about modifying one’s genetic makeup and predisposed vulnerabilities (e.g., low impulse control of anger; free-floating anxiety/depression, etc.).
  - …therefore, modifying environmental or “external” factors can go a long way toward preventing unnecessary depression, anger or anxiety in the life of a child of over-reactive parents.

- Emotional stability and the ability to show self-regulation are essential elements in the parent-child relationship, especially as it relates to helping children modify their behaviors during neurological developmental years.
  - Example: For the child who may be genetically predisposed toward low self-confidence, the ability of a parent to coach/nurture the child into a mindset of self-confidence shows a measurable, life-long impact.

✓ “...GOOD NEWS!”

Studies are beginning to show that if we practice conscious awareness of our negative/detrimental habits (i.e., thru meditation, articulation through writing, verbalization with someone we trust) – we can revise our behavior and create life-long, positive habits.

- NEUROPLASTICITY (re: “SYNAPTIC PRUNING”)
  ✓ “The brain's ability to re-organize neural pathways based on new experiences.”
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- Every day an infant will experience and learn new things. As the brain grows, starting with infancy, its neurons will develop *synapses*, which link neurons-to-neurons and transmit information through one another.
- Brain development is “activity-dependent”:
  - …*every* experience excites (strengthens) neural circuits, and leaves others alone.
  - …the infant brain has been “clocked” at a pace of developing 250-500K brain cells per minute in some stages of development.
  - Example: Being held vs. Playing vs. Bedtime story
- In order to incorporate this new information into the brain for survival, the brain must re-organize the way it processes information as we grow in order to help the brain transmit information more efficiently to adapt and survive.
  - This process is called *synaptic pruning*:
    - The synapses and neurons that were *most active* during neurological development are the ones that will be *preserved* (become “thicker” connections).
      - “Neurons that fire together, wire together.”
      - …in times of stress, “old” neurological behaviors often reassert themselves (i.e., adult temper-tantrums, self-inflicted depression or anxiety, etc.).
      - …the “roots” of childhood run *deep!*
    - At birth, this growth is *uninhibited*. However, as infants reach toddler age, the brain begins to *eliminate* some synapses between neurons. (90% of brain development occurs during Ages 0-5.)
      - Birth = 200 BILLION brain cells….but very few connections.
      - Age 1 = 120 billion
      - Teenage years = 110 billion
      - Age 35 = 100 billion
      - Age 70 = 95 billion

(Source: The Science of Parenting: How today’s brain research can help you raise happy, emotionally balanced children; M. Sunderland; 2006)
What are some characteristics linked to neuroplasticity:

1. Capacity toward emotional identification and empathy.
2. Ability to learn through listening and visual observation.
3. Ability to make plans and practice newly-learned knowledge/skills.
4. Capacity to absorb basic rules of native language and dialect.
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III. When do we begin to learn the meaning of “value”? 

- Like most things…it all begins in CHILDHOOD.
  - Example: SENTIMENTAL childhood possession.
  - As children, we are taught to “take care” of our things and treat the things we care about with upkeep and respect.
  - Question: Do you maintain the same upkeep and respect for yourself as you do with your favorite material things?

- Group discussion: Why are children held in such high value in society? (Is it fair to say ALL children should be shown value?)

- Homework:
  1. Think of a time or memory in your childhood that you would define as “happy”.
  2. If possible, try to find a picture of yourself during that time frame.
  3. Scan/print a small copy of the picture (suggest 1 in. x 1 in.).
  4. Place the picture in your wallet or purse. (Somewhere you will ALWAYS SEE IT when you open your wallet or purse, and somewhere you can access it easily and privately.)
  5. Activity #1: “Compass for Life”
     a. Whatever problems you are facing today…whatever lingering doubts you have…look at the picture closely, and ask yourself:
        - Am I taking care of that child?
        - Would I want that child in this environment?
        - Would I want that child around this person?
     b. If the answer is ‘No’ to any of the questions above, then it may be time to re-assess your day-to-day personal interaction(s) and environment(s).
        - What can you control when it comes to protecting that child?
        - What can you not control? How do you cope to protect that child?
     c. Learn and re-learn a mindset of protection for the child’s health and emotional well-being.
     d. Lesson: Value your “Inner-Child”.
  6. Activity #2: “Helping Hands”
     a. Study both your hands in close detail for 1-minute – front-to-back and non-judgmentally – as if you were to try and paint a picture in your mind if your eyes were closed.
     b. Close your eyes and try to remember playing with your favorite toy when you were a child? What was it? Take your time remembering as much detail as you can.
     c. Open your eyes and take another close look at your hands.
     d. Lesson: The hands you played with as a child still exist. Therefore, the
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“Inner-Child” still exists.

IV. What are similar personality traits in people with a healthy level of self-esteem?

✓ Emotionally stable/balanced
✓ Self-respectful
✓ Self-confident (…difference between “cocky” vs. self-confident)
✓ Take care of their health and well-being.
✓ Self-motivated/ambitious (…toward creativity rather than destruction)
✓ Optimistic (…at the same time, realistic)
  ▪ Acknowledge possibility of both positive/negative outcome(s).
  ▪ “Plan for the worst, hope for the best!”
✓ Compassionate/Friendly
  ▪ Treats others as they want to be treated (a.k.a. “Golden Rule”)
  ▪ “Cooperate together, survive together.” (i.e., wars, natural disasters, etc.)
✓ Open to new experience(s)
✓ Non-judgmental/Open-minded

V. What are “red flags” signaling you may have low self-esteem?

✓ Emotional instability
✓ Lies & Self-deception
✓ Pessimism
✓ Self-judgmental (without acknowledging past successes)
  ▪ …“I can’t try to do (X), I know I will fail.”
  ▪ Remember: We learn to walk by falling down.
✓ Self-victimization
  ▪ “bad things always happen to me.”
✓ Ruminations
  ▪ Definition: Repetitively focusing on thoughts of distress, causes and consequences.
  ▪ …self-inflicting high stress (i.e., Cortisol) levels through anger, anxiety or remorse toward someone.
✓ Ashamed
  ▪ “Everyone should feel shame at certain points in Life, but no one should live ashamed.” (…effects of long-term stress on health from feelings of regret or remorse.)
  ▪ Remember: The level of regret or remorse we feel is a signal of our compassion and humanity.
  ▪ Example: Compare level of self-guilt or remorse for normal person vs. sociopath.
✓ Easily Angered & Agitated
✓ Indecisive/Follower
  ▪ “…I know I will make the wrong choice.”
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- “Other people know better than me.”
- Hypercritical/Insecure
  - ...quick to put other people down.
  - ...feel threatened by the possibility of another person being "better."
- Argumentative/Defensiveness
  - ...always try to win “Me vs. You” discussions.
  - Example: Deductive conclusions (i.e., 2+2=4) vs. Inductive inference

VI. **What can cause people to have low self-esteem?**

- **Remember:** Possibility of genetic influence on self-confidence.
- Traumatic or “Life-changing” event
  - ... “breaking” of personal ego-structure/identity.
- Day-to-day personal interactions and environments.
- Dysfunctional or distracting habits.

VII. **What are negative ways that self-esteem impacts health?**

- **Low** = Higher levels of depression and anxiety.
  - Increased levels of Cortisol in otherwise “easy”, low-stress situations.
- **Healthy** = Maximize productivity and longevity in Life.
- **Too high** = Higher levels of stress, anxiety, or anger; also, narcissism and bullying.
  - Example: “Self-inflicted” stress from “too high” of standards, such as hyper-sensitivity and obsessive maintenance of one’s reputation or image.

VIII. **What impact does fear have on our self-esteem?**

- **Existential philosophy:** “Nothing worthwhile is easy to gain.”
  - ...but everyone wants something that is worthwhile, right?!?
  - ...building a solid, healthy level of self-esteem may take a *lifetime*.
- Are you willing to **face your fears** to become the person you want to be?
- Are you willing to **re-assess** your friendship(s) and relationship(s)?
  - “Oil & Water” relationships
  - “Emotional Vampires”
  - Cocky vs. Confident friends
- Good Selfish (Health) vs. Bad Selfish (Greed)
- Influence of *externalization* and *verbalization* on reducing fear(s).
- Concept of the “Inner Critic:
  - The “inner voice” that doubts you...and holds you back.
    - ...typically the voice/reasoning of one of our parents, siblings, etc.
    - ...typically “black-or-white” or “all-or-nothing” rationale.
    - ...an endless reservoir of *motivation*. (Prove the voice that doubts you wrong!)
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IX. **What are impacts that personal choice have on influencing our self-esteem?**

- What kind of people and perspectives do you expose yourself to?
- Are you practicing awareness of your intuition in your surroundings?
  - Positive vs. Negative energy/feelings
  - What people or environments promote positive vs. negative feelings? (Try not to think about it too much…just concentrate on what emotions arise instinctively/immediately.)
- What kind of music do you listen to? (What sort of emotions stir up?)
- What do you watch on television?
- What do you spend time viewing online?
- How do you start each day?
  - … “I wake up and rush-around like crazy.” (Stress)
  - … “I wake up slowly and calmly.” (Balance)

X. **How can you build stronger self-esteem?**

- **“Know Thyself” (Self-Mastery)**
  - Across ALL philosophies and religions.
  - “Understanding oneself begins with embracing oneself.”
  - …if you understand what distracts you, you are already halfway to resolution.
  - “A problem half-stated is a problem half-solved.”
- Practice conscious awareness of your surroundings
  - When/Where do you feel calm?
  - When/Where do you feel you are out-of-balance?
- Self-improvement
- Self-respect
- Self-honesty (…lying out of fear; lies as “broken shards of glass”)
- Practice the “Golden Rule” internally and externally.
  - … each of us have an entirely unique perspective (or “angle”) on Life.
  - Concept of “Circular Perception”

XI. **What are activities that you can do to help feel better about yourself in each of the following areas?**

- **Physical:**
  - Exercise for at least 30-minutes every other day (even if it’s just a walk!).
  - Eat natural (non-processed) foods, if available and remember the importance of drinking water vs. soft-drinks, juices, etc.
- **Emotional:**
  - Externalize or verbalize your emotions…they are essential to your growth!
- **Intellectual:**
  - … challenge your mind with new things to learn!
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- …expose yourself to new people and environments that may help improve your well-being!

✓ Social:
  - …pay attention to the feelings you have related to friendships and relationships.
  - …what is in your control to change? (Are you protecting your “Inner Child”? Or making excuses for not protecting their well-being?)

✓ Spiritual:
  - …schedule moments of silence in your day to re-balance yourself.
  - …spend time somewhere quiet or in your place of worship, taking time to re-focus on breathing calmly, giving yourself time to re-group.
    - Effects of proper breathing on the “Vagus nerve” and relaxation.
  - …Meditation 101:
    - Let your thoughts wander where they may, without judgment.
    - Your heart beats, your lungs breathe, your mind thinks…they are all parts of You! (Your thoughts are not you!)
    - Main focus: Consistent, proper breathing and “active” relaxation.

Final Thought: “You are never lost, only finding your way.”

References:

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  http://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2011/05/110517091937.htm

- Learning From Mistakes Only Works After Age 12:

- Research Claims Children's Brain Function Affected By Poverty:

- Chicago Time-Lapse (VIDEOS):
  http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2012/10/30/favorite-chicago-time-lapse_n_2045895.html?utm_hp_ref=chicago#slide=1703116 (...I recommend at least video #’s 4 and 9; EVERYONE’s perspective is unique in Life, and can provide a unique way of “looking at things”...as portrayed by the unique choice of camera angles.)