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## Gender as a moderator of self-esteem in socially adjusted and maladjusted youth

**Abstract:** The article presents the results of research into the self-esteem of adolescents. The comparative analysis conducted reveals that the self-esteem of juveniles placed in social rehabilitation institutions is higher than the self-esteem of youth attending public schools and that gender is not a statistically significant differentiating factor. The text also includes a review of empirical studies of other authors dealing with this issue, a discussion of the obtained results, and practical recommendations useful in the social rehabilitation juveniles.  
**Keywords:** self-esteem, adolescents, social rehabilitation of juveniles.

### Introduction

The development of cognitive concepts in psychology draws researchers' attention to processes occurring in human consciousness and to their role in the regulation of human behavior. This approach has also found its supporters in rehabilitation, occupied with explaining the causes of maladapted behavior in socially maladjusted youth. One of the key factors in the cognitive model of personality is self-esteem, which, as a result of the evaluation of one's "self-image" (self-concept) through the prism of respected characteristics and skills, is an important determinant of self-regulatory processes of the "I" and of social functioning. As a result, studies continue to be carried out in psychology aimed, in light of the ambiguity of earlier results, at verifying theory concerning the regulation of human behavior with particular emphasis on those who manifest adaptive difficulties. The results

of these studies are also valuable to teachers, as they help them to understand the genesis and etiology of problem behaviors that are the basis of inquiry into the organization of rehabilitative/educational efforts.

## The importance of self-esteem in the process of self-regulation, and social functioning

Self-esteem is one of the most important attributes of the 'I', and it plays a key role in the processes of self-regulation and functioning of human society. It is an important aspect within the broader concept of personality i.e. self-image, which is made up of knowledge of the self. The internal and external functioning of a man, his ability to integrate beliefs, emotions and reactions, relies on the content and valuation of this self-image creating knowledge and directly affects the adequacy of response to diverse and variable situations and behaviors that result from performed activities. Thus also, "self-esteem is part of the system of human knowledge which enables a person to know themselves, to assess their own capabilities in various spheres and to choose from their behavioral repertoire that which is appropriate in certain situations encountered in the world outside."<sup>1</sup> The concept of "self-esteem" is usually defined as a set of diverse judgments and opinions that an entity applies to its own self. These judgments and opinions apply to both current and potential properties,<sup>2</sup> because the entity assesses themselves and their properties mainly from the viewpoint of the possibility of satisfying their own needs or to meet the requirements of the environment.<sup>3</sup> In other words, it is a human self-evaluation response, affective (emotion-based) or cognitive (based on judgments), where there exists both an assessment of self-esteem and an emotional response to it,<sup>4</sup> and these are closely related. As these concepts are integral to the concept of "I", two main streams of understanding and consequent measurement can be discerned. "The first divides the "I" on the basis of content and is time related while the second describes the "I" with respect to those areas of life in which an individual is involved".<sup>5</sup> The first stream of understanding and measurement of self-esteem relies on judging the discrepancies resulting from the comparison of the "real self", represented by the properties that a person is currently characterized by, with the "ideal I", qualities the person

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<sup>1</sup> E. Furmańska, *Samoocena i samoakceptacja we wczesnej adolescencji*, "Edukacja i Dialog" 2001, No. 1, p. 24.

<sup>2</sup> H. Kulas, *Samoocena młodzieży*, WSiP, Warsaw 1986, p. 6.

<sup>3</sup> L. Niebrzydowski, *O poznawaniu i ocenie samego siebie*, Nasza Księgarnia, Warsaw 1976, p. 94.

<sup>4</sup> M. Huflejt-Łukasik, *Ja i procesy samoregulacji. Różnice między zdrowiem a zaburzeniami psychicznymi*, Wydawnictwo Naukowe "Scholar", Warsaw 2010, p. 121.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 31.

would like to have, or from comparison with “the I ought to be” – characteristics and properties resulting from recognized social rules and orders.

The second stream, in line with the concept of the multidimensional “I”, focuses on various aspects of life and assumes that a person self-assesses through a prism of experiences concerning their own behaviour in many areas of life including learning, social relations, emotions, performance, appearance and physical health.<sup>6</sup> This generalized assessment, based on competence in the highlighted areas, goes to form a global self-esteem (feeling of self-worth), and is neither a resulting assessment nor the sum of a partial self-assessments, but a generalized judgment relating to the overall vision of the self.

Generally, self-esteem can be treated as a constant trait, a current state or motif stimulating a person to act in a certain direction. It is this which determines the importance that self-esteem plays in the self-regulation processes of the ‘I’, which are understood as actions taken by a person to achieve a desired state and as behaviors ensuring a person’s development through the implementation of objectives that are in accordance with that person’s needs.<sup>7</sup> In short, this mechanism is based on the aim of most people to possess or maintain a positive self-esteem. Therefore people, regardless of their current level of self-esteem, constantly self-verify (by reflecting on the self) and try to maintain their self-esteem. What’s more, it is a need that has its origins in the real or imagined reactions of others towards us (sociometer theory),<sup>8</sup> and it is because of this that people try to behave in such a way as to ensure their acceptance and protect against the rejection of others. There are experimental studies supporting this, showing that both women and men value high self-esteem more than food, sex, alcohol, contact with friends or even money.<sup>9</sup>

The thesis concerning the importance of self-esteem for the social functioning of people is pretty much grounded in theory by numerous empirical studies and permits the generalization, according to which “on how man perceives and evaluates himself the following depend: how one reacts to tasks faced, the nature of relationships with other people, the efficacy of one’s actions, and thereby, further personal development. Self-esteem determines how a person functions in various social roles. It also influences what a man is willing or not willing to take on, what to decide on and what to refuse.”<sup>10</sup> Its influence on behavior relies, on the

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<sup>6</sup> Ibidem, p. 32.

<sup>7</sup> Ibidem, pp. 60–61.

<sup>8</sup> M.R. Leary, D.L. Downs *Interpersonal functions of the self-esteem motive: The self-esteem system as a sociometer*, [in:] *Efficacy, agency, and self-esteem*, M.H. Kernis (ed.), Plenum Press, New York 1995, pp. 123–144; M.R. Leary, A.L. Haupt, K.S. Strausser, J.T. Chokel, *Calibrating the sociometer: The relationship between interpersonal appraisals and the state self-esteem*, “*Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*” 1998, 74, pp. 1290–1299.

<sup>9</sup> B.J. Bushman, S.J. Moeller, J.Crocker, *Sweets, Sex, or Self-Esteem? Comparing the Value of Self-Esteem Boosts With Other Pleasant Rewards*, “*Journal of Personality*”, 79:5, October 2011, pp. 993–1010.

<sup>10</sup> H. Kulas, op. cit., p. 44.

one hand, on selecting events based on whether these support, increase, decrease or threaten self-esteem, and on the other hand, in motivating action aimed at securing, maintaining and increasing the sense of worth, and avoiding situations that could lower it.<sup>11</sup>

To put it more precisely, one can say that a person's relationship with themselves and the world around them depends on the level (low vs. high), relevance (undervalued versus overvalued), consistency, and stability of their self-esteem. Most researchers in fact agree that people with a high, sufficient, consistent and durable self-esteem display better adaptation to life in society and a greater sense of happiness and personal satisfaction than those who have a low, inadequate, inconsistent and unstable self-esteem, and in whom the processes of self-regulation falters.

## Gender as a differentiating factor of self-esteem

Looking at the two main mechanisms that shape self-esteem, one might be expected to find differentiation based on gender. It relates to the matter of mirroring judgments made by others and discovering one's competences through the prism of personal efficacy and effectiveness exhibited during challenges in specific areas. The source of the first approach can be found in the functioning of the reflected self as described by CH Cooley and G.H. Mead, that is, the ability to read from significant gestures, assessments formulated by others and from opinions regarding our conduct and its characteristics. Note, however, that these evaluations are subject to generalizations, and in any given culture these are reflected in current opinions and normative standards concerning, among others, the differences between women and men in terms of their attributed qualities and skills. The mirroring effect is also related to the aforementioned "sociometer" concept, according to which the variability of self-esteem is determined through interaction with significant people. The better they are (i.e. praise outweighs criticisms), the higher the self-esteem.

The competency model, in turn, takes self-esteem as dependent on current achievements and that people feel more valued when their behavior brings the desired results, that is, when they are successful in a specific endeavour. Accordingly, one can expect differences in self-esteem due to gender, because women and men differ in efficiency when performing tasks in different spheres of life.

These mechanisms can operate independently of each other, complement each other or occur simultaneously, affecting the level of self-esteem. It is not difficult to notice that the effectiveness vs. ineffectiveness of a person's behavior in a specific area, if perceived by others, is often the basis for the formulation of .....

<sup>11</sup> J. Reykowski, *Z zagadnień psychologii motywacji*, WSiP, Warsaw 1976, p. 200.

their evaluations and opinions, which in addition to, or alongside autoreflection, are taken into account by them and confirm/reinforce or undermine/lower their self-esteem.

The adoption of the above implies, therefore, the need to consider more specific aspects that make up self-esteem than just its global sense and points to the possibility of differentiation based on gender. This is confirmed by empirical studies<sup>12</sup> which report that the boys have a higher self-esteem in terms of physical appearance, athleticism, personal self-concept and self-satisfaction, than girls. Girls meanwhile rate themselves more highly in terms of moral and ethical conduct (moral-ethical self-concept) and acceptance of their behaviour by others (behavioural conduct). There were no statistically significant differences in terms of educational competence (academics), social acceptability (social acceptance) and family relationships (family). In other studies, it was found that among adolescents, men tend to have a slightly higher self-esteem overall than women<sup>13</sup>.

## Self-esteem of socially maladjusted youth

The results of empirical research on the self-esteem of people manifesting deviant behavior (including crime) tend to confirm the negative correlation between the two variables, but this connection is not always clear.

Earlier studies conducted among by S. Witkowski,<sup>14</sup> A. Bielawiec,<sup>15</sup> and B. Baran and A. Bielawiec,<sup>16</sup> show that children residing in social rehabilitation centers have a higher discrepancy between the “real I” and “ideal I” as well as a more negative “concept of the self” than unoffending youth. The uncovered discrepancy testifies to a low self-esteem and is largely derived from the negative “real I”. The occurrence of such a trend was also observed in more recent studies that indicate a lower level of self-esteem in minors when compared with their socially well-adjusted peers.<sup>17</sup> They show that the higher the level of involvement

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<sup>12</sup> B. Gentile, Sh. Grabe, B. Dolan-Pascoe, J.M. Twenge and B.E. Wells present a broad overview of research together with their own research results in the article *Gender Differences in Domain-Specific Self-Esteem: A Meta-Analysis*, “American Psychological Association” 2009, Vol. 13, No. 1, pp. 34–45.

<sup>13</sup> J.G. Bachman, P.M. O'Malley, P. Freedman-Doan, K.H. Trzesniewski, M.B. Donnellan, *Adolescent Self-esteem: Differences by Race/Ethnicity, Gender, and Age*, “Self and Identity” 2011, No. 10, pp. 445–473.

<sup>14</sup> S. Witkowski, *Z badań nad obrazem własnej osoby młodocianych przestępców*, “Acta Universitatis Vratislaviensis” nr 174, Prace Psychologiczne II, Wrocław 1973.

<sup>15</sup> A. Bielawiec, *“Pojęcie własnego ja” a plany życiowe nieletnich przestępców*, Wydawnictwo US, Szczecin 1989.

<sup>16</sup> B. Baran, A. Bielawiec, *Osobowość nieletnich przebywających w placówkach resocjalizacyjnych*, Wydawnictwo US, Szczecin 1994, pp. 17–32.

<sup>17</sup> J. Siemionow, *Niedostosowanie społeczne nieletnich. Działania, zmiana, efektywność*. Wydawnictwo “Difin”, Warsaw 2011, pp. 161–162.

in criminal activity, then the lower and more negative the self-esteem that a juvenile offender has.<sup>18</sup>

However, we know from other studies that, for example, pupils from the *Młodzieżowy Ośrodek Wychowawczy* (MOW – Youth Development Center) showed mostly over-inflated levels of self-esteem (54.5% girls and 62% boys). Differences were also noted in self-esteem based on gender. Among girls self-esteem levels were often lower (20.4%) than in boys (8.1%), and only 25% and 30% of graduate alumni from such institutions had an adequate self-esteem. Hence the author comes to the conclusion that “the self-image of those surveyed is the image of people with an immature personality and with only a dim awareness of certain traits that go to make up such an image. Young people’s knowledge about themselves is an incomplete and inaccurate knowledge. The self assessment of the subjects is most often inadequate. People with adequate self-esteem tend to accentuate the negative features of the image of their own “I”. Positive features – if they do emerge – are only there sometimes”.<sup>19</sup> The results of research on the self-esteem of juveniles in orphanages tend to lead to similar conclusions, as these pupils showed less variation between I-real and I-ideal (greater level of self-acceptance) than their peers attending a secondary technical school.<sup>20</sup>

Furthermore, studies on the self-presentation of socially maladjusted adolescents conducted among 157 MOW pupils and 103 secondary school students (technical and vocational schools) suggest that a socially maladjusted adolescent, characterized by negative self-presentation which allows the manifestation of anti-social behavior, usually does not see the need to change their self-image.<sup>21</sup> It happens that the manifestation of deviant behavior or membership of sub-cultural groups, especially if associated with different kinds of gratification, causes an increase in, or the appearance of a high (inflated) self-esteem, but it depends on position within the group, the share of social competence and the type of deviation displayed. And thus, the lowest self-esteem is shown by inhibited children (an internalised type of behaviour disorder), while the opposite, i.e. aggressive and aggressive-withdrawing children (externalised type), more often tend to over-estimate their abilities, which provides them with greater popularity in primary peer groups.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> K.St.C. Levy, *Multifactorial Self-Concept and Delinquency in Australian Adolescents*, “The Journal of Social Psychology” 1997, No. 137(3), pp. 277–283.

<sup>19</sup> M. Gaszczyńska-Pluciennik, *Obraz własnej osoby młodzieży nieprzystosowanej społecznie*, “Opieka-Wychowanie-Terapia” 2004, No. 3–4, p. 13.

<sup>20</sup> W. Wańkiewicz, *Samoocena młodzieży nieprzystosowanej społecznie w schronisku dla nieletnich*, “Opieka-Wychowanie-Terapia” 2002, No. 3, pp. 9–15.

<sup>21</sup> M. Przepióra, *Autoprezentacja młodzieży nieprzystosowanej społecznie*, “Opieka-Wychowanie-Terapia” 1997, No. 4, p. 17.

<sup>22</sup> B. Urban, *Zaburzenia w zachowaniu i przestępczość młodzieży*, Wydawnictwo UJ, Cracow 2000, pp. 136–137.

Juveniles tend to have lower self-esteem than their non-criminal peers when they begin their deviant career. However, over time some of these young people modify this picture of themselves, treating the crime committed as a way of boosting their self-esteem because such behavior often meets with the approval of the sub-cultural peer group.

## **Methodological assumptions the area and the organization of personal/research**

In order to identify the self-esteem of well-adjusted and maladjusted youth, diagnostic-verification studies were carried out at the turn of 2011/2012, which were meant to provide answers to the following research questions and to facilitate the verification of their corresponding hypotheses.

*Q0: What is the self-esteem of minors in social rehabilitation centers compared with the self-esteem of students in lower secondary and secondary schools?*

H0: Probably, the self-esteem of minors in social rehabilitation centres is lower when compared with the self-esteem of pupils in lower secondary and secondary schools and differs in terms of the hierarchy of its constituent components.

*Q1: What are the differences in the levels of self-esteem, in its various dimensions between socially dysfunctional young people and their socially well-adapted peers?*

H1: It is expected that for the majority of the defined traits of self-esteem, unadapted young people display a lower self-esteem than their morally stable peers.

*Q2: How does the hierarchy of self-esteem components differ among juveniles who are in social rehabilitation centers and school children?*

H2: Probably, as a result of differing conditions of socialization, socially unadapted young people build their self-esteem on differently structured components than lower secondary and secondary school students?

*Q3: How do the levels of self-esteem differ as a result of the gender of the young people?*

H3: There are probably differences in the level of self-esteem due to gender in both treatment groups, with the boys having a higher self-esteem than the girls within the respective components.

The study involved 103 pupils aged 13 to 18 years from three social rehabilitation centers in the West Pomeranian province and 387 students from public schools in Szczecin. In the group of young people that were non-offenders, again aged from 13 and 18 years, there were students from lower secondary schools (39.5%), secondary schools (24.5%), technical schools (25.5%) and vocational schools (10.5%), and of these 45.2% were girls and 54.8% were boys. In the selection of the sample, the proportion of pupils in different types of

schools and their level of performance in external end-of-year exams was taken into account. On this basis, all the schools were divided into three levels: with high, average and poor teaching results outcomes. Therefore, a multi-layered and multi-leveled filtering was applied, in which the sampling was based firstly on school and secondly on classroom year, where the studies were ultimately conducted.

Selection of minors to the research sample was determined in nature and qualified for the 49 pupils from a youth care center, 25 pupils from a shelter for minors and 30 wards youth care center for boys (45.6% girls and 54.4% boys).

These studies were carried out by means of the diagnostic survey method within which the Multidimensional Self-Assessment Questionnaire MSEI was used. Socially well adjusted youth personally filled out the questionnaires anonymously during group studies carried out in the classroom, whilst juveniles responded to research questions posed during one-on-one meetings that also took place in the classroom.

## Research results

The results of my own research, presented in Table 1, indicate that young socially maladjusted people, living in social rehabilitation centers have a higher level of self-esteem than students attending lower secondary and secondary schools in Szczecin. This pattern/applies to both the general self-esteem, as well as all of its sub-components that relate to significant areas of activity of human life. The greatest variation was observed in the range of moral self-acceptance ( $C = 0.47$ ,  $V = 0.14$ ), popularity ( $C = 0.39$ ,  $V = 0.30$ ), competence ( $C = 0.35$ ,  $V = 0.26$ ) and leadership ability ( $C = 0.34$ ,  $V = 0.26$ ). There was a slightly lower variation when it comes to being loved ( $C = 0.33$ ,  $V = 0.25$ ) and vitality ( $C = 0.29$ ;  $V = 0.21$ ), whilst the smallest, but still statistically significant differences, proved to be ability for self-control ( $C = 0.22$ ,  $V = 0.16$ ), physical attractiveness ( $C = 0.19$ ,  $V = 0.14$ ) general self-esteem ( $C = 0.16$ ,  $V = 0.12$ ) and internal consistency and continuity of possessed identity ( $C = 0.13$ ,  $V = 0.09$ ).

On this basis it may be accepted that the working hypothesis of the research has not been confirmed and that, contrary to the results obtained by other researchers, socially maladjusted youth show a higher level of self-esteem compared to their well-adjusted peers. It is also worth noting that in both groups the percentage of teens with low self-esteem is much higher than the percentage with high self-esteem. The exception to this rule only occurs in the assessment of leadership ability, and it is this component of self-image which is valued most highly by those minors who have problems complying with social norms.

Table 1. Levels of self-esteem in pupils attending social rehabilitation centers and in pupils attending public schools

Level Measures of self-esteem		Low		Medium		High		Total		Stat. test and measure of correlation
		L	%	L	%	L	%	L	%	
General	SRC	24	23,3	71	68,9	8	7,8	103	100	$\chi^2 = 13,8$ ; $C = ,166$
	SCHOOL	82	21,2	300	77,5	5	1,3	387	100	$p = 0,01$ ; $V = ,119$
Competencies	SRC	17	16,5	73	70,9	13	12,6	103	100	$\chi^2 = 68,9$ ; $C = ,351$
	SCHOOL	173	44,7	214	55,3	0	0	387	100	$p = 0,01$ ; $V = ,256$
Being loved	SRC	22	21,4	69	67,0	12	11,7	103	100	$\chi^2 = 59,3$ ; $C = ,329$
	SCHOOL	177	45,7	210	54,3	0	0	387	100	$p = 0,01$ ; $V = ,246$
Popularity	SRC	15	14,6	80	77,7	8	7,8	103	100	$\chi^2 = 86,6$ ; $C = ,388$
	SCHOOL	231	59,7	156	40,3	0	0	387	100	$p = 0,01$ ; $V = ,297$
Leadership abilities	SRC	16	15,5	71	68,9	16	15,5	103	100	$\chi^2 = 64,9$ ; $C = ,342$
	SCHOOL	154	39,8	231	59,7	2	0,5	387	100	$p = 0,01$ ; $V = ,257$
Self-control	SRC	30	29,1	59	57,3	14	13,6	103	100	$\chi^2 = 25,4$ ; $C = ,222$
	SCHOOL	96	24,8	282	72,9	9	2,3	387	100	$p = 0,01$ ; $V = ,161$
Moral self-acceptance	SRC	26	25,2	66	64,1	11	10,7	103	100	$\chi^2 = 142,3$ ; $C = ,474$
	SCHOOL	321	82,3	65	16,8	1	0,3	387	100	$p = 0,01$ ; $V = ,381$
Personal attractiveness	SRC	19	18,4	78	75,7	6	5,8	103	100	$\chi^2 = 19,2$ ; $C = ,194$
	SCHOOL	97	25,1	289	74,1	1	0,3	387	100	$p = 0,01$ ; $V = ,140$
Vitality	SRC	20	19,4	68	66,0	15	14,6	103	100	$\chi^2 = 44,9$ ; $C = ,290$
	SCHOOL	111	28,7	273	70,5	3	0,8	387	100	$p = 0,01$ ; $V = ,214$
Identity integration	SRC	18	17,5	73	70,9	12	11,7	103	100	$\chi^2 = 8,6$ ; $C = ,132$
	SCHOOL	118	30,5	244	63,0	25	6,5	387	100	$p = 0,05$ ; $V = ,094$
Defensive Self-esteem reinforcement	SRC	11	10,7	78	75,7	14	13,6	103	100	$\chi^2 = 10,7$ ; $C = ,146$
	SCHOOL	12	3,1	309	79,8	66	17,1	387	100	$p = 0,01$ ; $V = ,105$

Source: personal research work.

Further analysis of the components that make up self-esteem allows for their hierarchical organisation, thereby revealing new information about the differences that exist within the two compared groups. And so, when it comes to wards of social rehabilitation centres, we find that they primarily build their self-esteem, as already mentioned, through their perceived leadership skills (low (L.) 15%,

high (h.) 15%), their physical fitness and health, i.e. vitality (l. 19%, h. 15%), the competence to learn and solve problems in life (l. 16%, h. 13%) and the ability to acquire knowledge about themselves, deciding on a sense of identity integration (l. 17%, h. 12%). They value themselves to a lesser extent for popularity (l. 15%, h. 8%), being loved (l. 21%, h. 12%) and physical and sexual attractiveness (l. 18%, h. 6%). What they rated least in themselves was moral self-acceptance, i.e. the compliance of their actions with recognized values and moral standards (l. 25%, h. 10%) and the ability to self-control behaviours and emotions (l. 29% h. 14%).

Youth attending lower secondary and secondary school, which as shown above have a much lower self-esteem, build an image of their own attractiveness based on a different configuration of the distinguishing components. Most highly valued are the ability to integrate identity (n. 30% v. 6.5%), self-control (n. 25% v. 2.3%), vitality (n. 29% v. 0.8%), as well as physical and sexual attractiveness (n. 25% v. 0.3%). Their self-esteem, to a lesser extent, depends on perception of leadership in themselves (n. 40% v. 0.5%), the power to learn and solve problems in life (n. 45% v. 0%) and in the sense of being loved (n. 46% v. 0%). Meanwhile, the lowest evaluated was popularity – being liked (n. 60% v. 0%) and conformity with professed moral norms and values (n. 82% v. 0.3%). Also noteworthy is the fact that both groups of young people are differentiated by the ratio of overall self-esteem, which is in third position among students and only in eighth position among minors.

The above list allows one to recognize that although socially maladjusted young people have a high self-esteem, they build it on the basis of a different structure of constituent components than the students of lower secondary and secondary schools, which is consistent with the adopted working hypothesis. The congruities found so far confirm the accuracy of the summary of results in Table 2.

Among the boys and girls from public schools not displaying signs of demoralization, there is a greater variation in the levels of self-esteem than among adolescents living in social rehabilitation institutions. The boy students assess their following skills higher than the girls: leadership ( $U_{f-m} = 16228.0$ ;  $p = 0.05$ ), vitality ( $U_{f-m} = 15637.5$ ;  $p = 0.01$ ), competences to ensure learning and solve life problems ( $U_{f-m} = 14512.5$ ;  $p = 0.001$ ), the ability to control behavior and emotion ( $U_{f-m} = 16228.0$ ;  $p = 0.05$ ) and fidelity to professed principles and ideals ( $U_{f-m} = 15743.5$ ;  $p = 0.01$ ). Girls in turn assess, more highly than their classmates, their physical attractiveness ( $U_{f-m} = 15743.5$ ;  $p = 0.01$ ), and the ability to acquire knowledge about themselves which determines a greater sense of identity integration ( $U_{f-m} = 15877.5$ ;  $p = 0.02$ ). In terms of the remaining components of self-esteem, the differences identified among the students proved to be statistically insignificant. Given that more of the above components of self-esteem were rated higher by the boys, and with some caution due to the self-defense indicator ( $U_{f-m} = 11587.0$ ;  $p = 0.001$ ), it can be assumed that they have higher self-esteem than

girls. In contrast, in the group of socially maladjusted pupils, beyond the moral self-acceptance, which is higher in boys ( $U_{f,m} = 15743,5$ ;  $p = 0,01$ ), there were no statistically significant differences by gender.

Table 2. Self-esteem of young pupils attending social rehabilitation centers and of pupils attending public schools

Measures of Self-esteem	Sex	SR CENTRES N = 103	Comparison by SRCs and PUB. SCHOOLS			SCHOOLS N = 387
		Av. RESO level	Av. level	test U	Av. level	Average level in Schools
General	F	49,19	114,0	$U_f = 4088,5$ ; $p = 0,86$	112,1	192,2
	M	54,36	151,7	$U_m = 4858,5$ ; $p = 0,05$	128,6	193,7
	test	$U_{f-m} = 1184,0$ ; $p = 0,38$			$U_{f-m} = 18231,0$ ; $p = 0,89$	
Competencies	F	52,23	164,7	$U_f = 1708,0$ ; $p = 0,001$	98,6	170,9
	M	51,80	180,8	$U_m = 3260,5$ ; $p = 0,001$	121,0	211,4
	test	$U_{f-m} = 1305,0$ ; $p = 0,94$			$U_{f-m} = 14512,5$ ; $p = 0,001$	
Being loved	F	47,95	146,3	$U_f = 2570,0$ ; $p = 0,001$	103,5	189,4
	M	55,40	199,1	$U_m = 2206,5$ ; $p = 0,001$	116,0	196,0
	test	$U_{f-m} = 1125,5$ ; $p = 0,21$			$U_{f-m} = 17753,5$ ; $p = 0,57$	
Popularity	F	54,07	180,8	$U_f = 950,0$ ; $p = 0,001$	94,4	187,3
	M	50,26	202,7	$U_m = 2005,5$ ; $p = 0,001$	115,0	197,7
	test	$U_{f-m} = 1218,5$ ; $p = 0,52$			$U_{f-m} = 17386,0$ ; $p = 0,36$	
Leadership abilities	F	52,39	161,4	$U_f = 1862,5$ ; $p = 0,001$	99,5	180,7
	M	51,67	190,2	$U_m = 2705,0$ ; $p = 0,001$	118,4	203,2
	test	$U_{f-m} = 1297,5$ ; $p = 0,90$			$U_{f-m} = 16228,0$ ; $p = 0,05$	
Self-control	F	50,87	116,3	$U_f = 3980,0$ ; $p = 0,65$	111,5	181,9
	M	52,95	134,0	$U_m = 5849,0$ ; $p = 0,95$	133,3	202,3
	test	$U_{f-m} = 1263,0$ ; $p = 0,72$			$U_{f-m} = 16425,5$ ; $p = 0,07$	
Moral self-acceptance	F	54,26	177,4	$U_f = 1108,5$ ; $p = 0,001$	95,3	178,0
	M	50,11	193,2	$U_m = 2536,0$ ; $p = 0,001$	117,6	205,5
	test	$U_{f-m} = 1210,0$ ; $p = 0,48$			$U_{f-m} = 15743,5$ ; $p = 0,01$	
Personal attractiveness	F	52,31	131,0	$U_f = 3289,0$ ; $p = 0,03$	107,6	215,4
	M	51,74	168,8	$U_m = 3900,5$ ; $p = 0,001$	124,1	174,3
	test	$U_{f-m} = 1301,5$ ; $p = 0,92$			$U_{f-m} = 14458,5$ ; $p = 0,001$	
Vitality	F	50,55	142,8	$U_f = 2734,5$ ; $p = 0,001$	104,4	177,4
	M	53,21	164,0	$U_m = 4169,0$ ; $p = 0,001$	125,3	206,0
	test	$U_{f-m} = 1248,0$ ; $p = 0,65$			$U_{f-m} = 15637,5$ ; $p = 0,01$	

Measures of Self-esteem	Sex	SR CENTRES N = 103	Comparison by SRCs and PUB. SCHOOLS			SCHOOLS N = 387
		Av. RESO level	Av. level	test U	Av. level	Average level in Schools
Identity integration	F.	53,65	124,8	Uf = 3581,5; p = 0,14	109,2	207,3
	M	50,62	156,3	Um = 4605,5; p = 0,01	127,4	181,1
	test	Uf-m = 1238,5; p = 0,61			Uf-m = 15877,5; p = 0,02	
Defensive Self-esteem reinforcement	F.	56,00	116,7	Uf = 3960,0 ; p = 0,61	111,4	154,2
	M	48,64	81,7	Um = 2979,0; p = 0,001	147,3	225,3
	test	Uf-m = 1128,0; p = 0,21			Uf-m = 11587,0; p = 0,001	

Source: personal research.

The results obtained allow us to conclude that the working hypothesis of a higher self-esteem in boys turned out to be mostly true in relation to school youth yet almost completely false when it comes to socially maladjusted young people.

Comparing self-esteem in single gender groups, we encounter a similar trend over the whole group, which confirms that the boys living in social rehabilitation centers have generally higher self-esteem than their peers learning in lower secondary and secondary schools. This is shown by the results of the analyses when using Mann-Whitney's non-parametric significance U test, with respect to both the general and specific components of self-esteem. Only the absence of differences in the skills of self-control of emotions and behaviors ( $U_h = 5849.0$ ,  $p = 0.95$ ) deviate from this regularity.

This order presents itself in a similar way with respect to the two groups of girls. The results of the statistical tests indicate the existence of significant differences in terms of their self-esteem, and lead to the conclusion that girls residing in social rehabilitation centers usually have higher self-esteem than their peers who attend public schools. Only in terms of overall self-esteem ( $UDZ = 4088.5$ ,  $p = 0.86$ ), and (as in the boys' case) in the assessment of the ability of self-control ( $UDZ = 3980.0$ ,  $p = 0.65$ ), no significant differences were found. The analyses carried out attest even more to the falsehood of the first hypothesis of a lower self-esteem in the socially maladjusted when compared to their unoffending peers.

## Discussion of the research results and practical implications

The easiest way to interpret the results of this research is that socially maladjusted youth inflate their self-esteem because of a strong need for social approval result-

ing from rejection experienced in the past. As a result of the defense mechanism, it seeks to provide responses that present it in a better light. Conflicting with this interpretation, however, is the lack of statistically significant differences in the values of defensive self-esteem reinforcement between girls from both groups ( $U_f = 3960.0$ ,  $p = 0.61$ ) and the higher value of this variable in boys from public school when compared to that of their socially maladjusted peers ( $U_{ch} = 2979.0$ ,  $p = 0.001$ ).

When seeking another explanation, it can also be assumed, as evidenced by the results of some of the authors cited above, that the self-esteem of juveniles placed in social rehabilitation centres is not so much overstated as inadequate (unrealistic). Perhaps they evaluate their qualities and skills too highly, not because they are defending themselves in this way through the rejection of their environment, but because they cannot perceive their own defects and deficits. The credibility of this interpretation is confirmed by the difference between how minors assess their own abilities of self-control, and how they perform in practice. Previously published research on young people in this group has shown that they have significantly lower skills in this area than their socially adjusted peers,<sup>23</sup> although, as the discussed results reveal, these are evaluated as being on a similar level.

Inadequacy of self-esteem in minors can also be caused by the environment in which they live. It should be noted that many begin to perceive themselves in a better light, and thus grow in self-esteem, as a result of comparing themselves to their peers at the centers where they spend time as a result of their disorders. It should also be remembered that compliance with sub-cultural norms which represent a form of “second life” in social rehabilitation centres can be a source of self-esteem for many pupils. Such a possibility is pointed out in R. Drwał’s<sup>24</sup> studies and shows that the boys having a higher standing in the informal structure of the “second life”, the so-called “People”, have a higher self-esteem compared to the “suckers” at the bottom of this functioning hierarchy. This is due to a reversal of the assessment criteria that usually prevail in juvenile environments. Those qualities and behaviors that are usually condemned and rejected by the general public, as a result of their perceived harmfulness, are now considered to be of value.

It is also from here then that the differences in the way the compared groups structure the components of self-esteem probably stem. Perceived leadership ability by the pupils, which in a rehabilitation centres are associated with the demonstration of physical strength and cunning, and involving the manipulation of people, strengthen the sense of dealing with the difficulties, and thus raise their

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<sup>23</sup> H. Kupiec, *Samokontrola zachowań a natężenie lęku u wychowanków placówek resocjalizacyjnych*, “Resocjalizacja Polska” 2013, No. 4, pp. 243–256.

<sup>24</sup> R. Drwał, *Osobowość wychowanków zakładów poprawczych*, Ossolineum, Wrocław 1981, p. 86.

self-esteem. In turn, acceptance by peers provides a sense of belonging, which facilitates the acceptance of the deviant role defined by the subculture. This also to a large extent helps in solving problems of defining an individual's identity, which amounts to replacing it with the group identity and in this way contributes to an increase in self-esteem within sphere of identity integration. This is also supported by the "sociometer" mechanism described above as those who find themselves at the top of this informal structure/ receive appreciation, from their peers and sometimes even from their teachers, which bolsters their conviction of superiority over others. It is also not possible to discount that high self-esteem is the result of the social reintegration the minors are subjected to at the centres, but, for this to be confirmed, longitudinal research should be carried out that takes into account the presence of this factor.

It is difficult to find a convincing explanation as to why the self-esteem of minors in social rehabilitation institutions appears to be higher than that of non-demoralised youth because we are too attached to the empirically well-established thesis concerning the impact of low self-esteem on deviant behavior.<sup>25</sup> There are, however, research results that lead to entirely different conclusions when self-esteem is not treated as a homogeneous construct but as a complex and heterogeneous structure. Then it transpires that although some of its dimensions do in fact correlate positively, others correlate negatively with respect to various forms of deviance among teenagers.<sup>26</sup>

Besides this, people with a high self-esteem, whose narcissism and egotism is more frequently visible in situations where the "I" is threatened, that is, in situations where someone questions their belief in their own uniqueness, react with aggression more often than those with low self-esteem, in which we should add, these qualities appear less frequently.<sup>27</sup> Moreover, experts on this issue are of the opinion that it is difficult for us to believe that high self-esteem leads to violence, because of an already deeply rooted belief lying in our consciousness that high self-esteem is in itself a positive value. If, however, we realize that many people who see themselves in a favorable light are narcissistic self-righteous arrogant egotists, confident of their right to submit others to their will, the relationship begins to be credible. Moreover, there is convincing evidence that amongst those with such personality traits are murderers, violent attackers, rapists and perpetrators of domestic violence, and that these people are often responsible for hate motivated

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<sup>25</sup> K.St.C. Levy, op. cit., pp. 277–283.

<sup>26</sup> R. Vermeiren, J. Bogaerts, V. Ruchkin, D. Deboutte, M. Schwab-Stone, *Subtypes of self-esteem and self-concept in adolescent violent and property offenders*, "Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry" 2004, 45:2, pp. 405–411.

<sup>27</sup> R.F. Baumeister, B.J. Bushman, *Threatened Egotism, Narcissism, Self-Esteem, and Direct and Displaced Aggression: Does Self-Love or Self-Hate Lead to Violence?*, "Journal of Personality and Social Psychology" 1998, Vol. 75, No. 1, pp. 219–229.

crimes – terrorism, war, and genocide.<sup>28</sup> It is therefore possible that the factor responsible for such high self-esteem in minors may be their strong self-absorption, which makes it difficult for them to confront their own real selves and causes the displacement of any awareness of existing deficits, faults and weaknesses, and of changes that should be implemented.

This does not mean that every person with a high self-esteem is a narcissistic deviant prone to manifestations of aggression, but rather that a person who exhibits signs of demoralisation does not necessarily need to possess low self-esteem. In fact, it is only in connection with other determinants of deviance and crime that this factor threatens the emergence of such behavior. For example, if we combine high self-esteem with anxiety, which promotes the incidence of distorted and false attributes when dealing with others, we have a permanently repeating ego-threatening scenario that very often triggers the various forms of aggression observed among the socially maladjusted. Therefore, depending on the existing configuration characteristics, both those with low and with high self-esteem can exhibit abnormal behavior. This provides a further line of research taking into account a broader spectrum of personality traits and socio-cultural factors (including situational), in conjunction with a specific level of self-esteem can act as a catalyst to deviant behavior. Notwithstanding this, and in the light of empirical verifications already obtained, the question of crucial importance for educators is – ‘What recommendations relevant to the work of education can be formulated on their basis?’

Firstly, one should certainly not be trying to lower the self-esteem in minors, even if this esteem is overly high, because even in such cases they do better in adapting to life than people with low or diminished self-esteem. On the other hand, it should be noted that an inflated self-esteem causes the overestimation of abilities and the taking on of overly difficult tasks, which may consequently lead to failure and to frustration together with all the resulting negative consequences. It would seem, therefore, that work on the “realignment” of an inflated self-importance as manifested by pupils displaying behavioral disorders is worthwhile. It is possible to strive for this through mobilisation and through activities that liberate and develop inherent abilities. This is why it is important that pupils have a wide range of classes and that their tutelage includes methods that stimulate independence. These ensure a sense of agency and efficacy which as we know helps to build a high, but realistic, self-esteem,

Building self-esteem adequate to a person’s characteristics and competences can also foster self-motivation for working on self-development. This may require individual tutorials to inspire pupils to determine tasks to be undertaken and which, by their implementation and evaluation, can increase self-esteem. However,

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<sup>28</sup> R.F. Baumeister, L. Smart, J.M. Boden, *Relation of Threatened Egotism to Violence and Aggression: The Dark Side of High Self-Esteem*, “Psychological Review”, 1996, S, No. 1, pp. 5–33.

in order to reduce feelings of insecurity (caused, for example, by fear of anticipated failure) in situations where an inflated self-esteem can act as a catalyst to aggressive behavior, it is necessary to remember to use various types of positive affirmation. These depend on the pupil becoming aware of already existing resources, benefits, skills and successes, and which in practice might take the form of seeking an answer to the question – ‘What do I appreciate and like most about myself today, and what successes have I already achieved?’ The effectiveness of positive feedback is supported by the results of experiments carried out by an international team of researchers.<sup>29</sup>

It is worth remembering that in the application of the described forms of influence, the teacher acts as a counselor helping a pupil to see in themselves the resources they possess when he or she has a problem with that, and then to help them become aware of as many of the gains and losses that may occur as a result of the success or failure of a determined action. It is also important to realistically plan time, place, type and order of their action and to anticipate any difficulties that may arise in the pursuit of a designated objective. In such a situation, the teacher should, together with the pupil, weigh up the alternative ways to proceed and potential of using the widest possible range of available sources of support. However, in order that this work might bring the desired cultivating effect there is a need for systematic verification of results obtained by the pupil (evaluation). This is extremely important as it also helps in developing self-awareness in the pupil, teaches self-discipline and develops the ability to draw meaningful conclusions from both the correct and incorrect actions. It seems that in this way one can try to prevent the formation of an unrealistic, overly self-favouring image in minors that is typical for people with narcissistic personality traits and which adversely affects their relationship with their surroundings.

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<sup>29</sup> S. Thomaes, B.J. Bushman, B. Orobio de Castro, G.L. Cohen, J.J.A. Denissen, *Reducing Narcissistic Aggression by Buttressing Self-Esteem An Experimental Field Study*, “A Journal of the Association for Psychological Science” 2009, Vol. 20, No. 12, pp. 1536–1542.

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