CULTURE AND ADOLESCENTS' CONCERNS ON SEXUALITY

VOLUME FOUR
SELF ESTEEM

By

GIRLS' POWER INITIATIVE
(GPI) NIGERIA

"towards an empowered womanhood"

Calabar/Benin
NIGERIA

Edited and Introduced by
BENE E. MADUNAGU

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GPI ADDRESSES:

SOUTH EAST CENTRE:
44 Ekpo Abasi Street
P. O. Box 3663 UNICAL Post
Office, Calabar, Nigeria
Tel: (234) 87 - 230929
Fax (only): (234) 87 - 236298
E-mail: gpi @ fordwa . linkserve . org

SOUTH-WEST CENTRE:
No 2 Hudson Lane
Off 85 Akpakpava Street by
Dawson Junction
P. O. Box 7400, Benin City
Tel/FAX (234) 52-255162
FAX only: (234) 52-250668
E-mail: gpibn @ alpha . linkserve . com

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PREFACE

Culture And Adolescents' Concerns on Sexuality is presented in four volumes:

Volume One:	ASSERTIVENESS
Volume Two:	SELF IDENTITY
Volume Three:	BODY IMAGE
Volume Four:	SELF ESTEEM

This volume, the fourth, is on Self Esteem.

In our society females go through life, from childhood through adolescence to adulthood constantly reminded of being second-class human beings. There may not be a single female in our society that has not been told "Don't you know you are just a girl?"; "Oh you are just a girl, so you cannot do certain things". "Leave it, it is a man's job" etc. Such messages, leave long-lasting self-doubts and low self-appreciation in girls as they grow up. Females make the most strenuous contributions to the growth and development of family and community. But these are not recognised or valued; and women grow up internalising the feeling that they make no family or social contribution and are there to be protected and taken care of by men. The harsh economic realities of recent times have forced women into more areas of work than before for the up-keep of their families. Not even this development has changed the age - long prejudices against females in our

society. Thus females grow up with very low perception of themselves.

However, life experiences have shown how women, when given the opportunity, excel in various professions traditionally considered to be reserved for men. Even women who are considered "successful" by men's standards still get put-down by their male colleagues. Such acts rekindle the in-built low self esteem in women. Where women become conscious of themselves and their rights as human beings, they grow out of the cloak of low self esteem, and they find life fulfilment. Such woman are also able to compete with their male counterparts.. Poverty also induces low esteem in people, making them feel unfit, and unfulfilled. This happens to both males and females. Thus low self esteem has both gender and class dimensions. Eliminating low self esteem therefore requires gender equality and equity as well as social justice. This publication is to assist in reducing gender based low self esteem.

BENE E. MADUNAGU
Chairperson
GPI Executive Board
September, 1999

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The catalyst for this publication has been the experiences shared by girls trained in the GPI programme. Low self esteem among adolescent girls, the lack of appreciation and acknowledgement of its existence and impact on the lives of girls and women stimulated the need for this publication. My thanks therefore go to all the GPI girls - present as well as those who have graduated. I also appreciate the assistance of GPI facilitators in making the girls bring out the misconceptions they hold about themselves as girls.

The experiences shared by the girls could not in themselves have transformed to this publication which aims at assisting other girls to develop high self esteem without the work of the editorial committee made up of Diana Ibok, Assumpta Ekpenyong, Imoh Bernard, Victoria Edet and Eka Bassey. The work of this committee was further reviewed by Imoh Bernard. Diana Ibok worked as the secretary of the committee and proof-read the manuscript. Inyene Regan Emah typed the manuscript.

My thanks go to all of them and also to our colleagues ir South West zone of GPI.

BENE E. MADUNAGU

DEDICATION

This book on Self-Esteem is dedicated to all Nigerian adolescent girls oppressed through gender and class injustices.

SELF ESTEEM

INTRODUCTION

Do you want to feel more confident and behave assertively? Do you want to be strong to defend what you know is good for you? Do you want to feel good about yourself? Do you want to be proud of your body and the way you look? Do you want to like yourself better?

If the answer to some or all of this questions is yes, you have no other option than choose to read this publication.

You will learn how to feel good about yourself and how you react to others in the world around you.

You will learn how to recognise passive behaviour to assist you to take action and change what you do not want.

You will learn how to stop others from pushing you around.

You will learn how to affirm your rights. This pamphlet will show you how to become a more likeable and admirable person, by opening your eyes and mind to the various stereotypes in the society. It will help you overcome the impact of prejudices that make you have low self esteem.

Above all, you will learn how to shake off the myths that held you down right from childhood. It will help you realise how capable you are and how you can increase your positive qualities and improve on your weaknesses.

SELF- ESTEEM

(1) The main goal of this publication is; To introduce to the readers the meaning of self esteem.
In the following chapters, we attempt to define the concept of self esteem and identify the factors that contribute to high self esteem and low self esteem.

(2)To assist readers to identify their own strengths and weaknesses as human beings and to learn to appreciate their strengths to develop high self esteem.

(3) To assist readers to communicate positive perception of themselves.

(4)To assist readers to understand that they deserve to be treated with respect.

(5) To assist readers to clearly and tactfully communicate to others what they need and expect same from others.

(6) Above all, to assist young girls overcome gender-based and socially-imposed low value of themselves and seek to prevent such violations of their rights as human beings.

CHAPTER ONE

DEFINITION OF SELF ESTEEM

Take a few minutes to ponder over the following questions ;

How do you feel when you do well in your tests?

How do you feel when you fail exams?

How do you feel if someone tells you how nice you look in your new dress?

What of when a trusted friend tells you how good looking you are?

How do you feel, if your friends constantly tell you, you are too short or too tall or ugly?

Hear this! When you feel happy, sad ,powerless, low, unwanted, empowered or high, these kinds of feelings all make up self esteem.

Self esteem refers to the way we feel about ourselves and how we handle the world. Here is an example to explain this: "I had the opportunity of getting on stage to speak to the public without being shy. It was because of this organisation that I became bold and firm to express myself. Thanks to GPI."

Gloria

13 years old

Self esteem is also expressed in how one thinks about one's own character, and abilities. Self esteem is an everyday lifelong state of mind. It is simply the measure of how much we like and approve of ourselves.

"Through my GPI experiences, I became a counsellor in my class. Everyone in my school knows me as a GPI girl. They usually come with questions about their reproductive health and human rights issues. Initially, they said GPI corrupts girls but with my GPI knowledge, I was determined to make them reason differently. I usually educate them in class and they are now convinced that GPI does not corrupt girls, rather GPI educates girls to know more about themselves as female children.

I became a teacher, and counsellor in my school. All my friends usually bring questions about their reproductive health and how they can behave assertively, how they can communicate assertively, and I let them know more about friendship and love and also how they can take care of themselves during menstruation.

They love me and through the information I provide they stopped making negative comments about GPI. Some of them are now members of GPI. I have therefore grown up to be very happy knowing how valuable I am as a human being".

Precious
15 years

Questions:

- Have you ever found yourself educating your friends or peers with correct information?
- How did you feel thereafter?

The feeling that followed this can be described as self esteem.

Thus such feeling of high spirit following a positive achievement is described as high self esteem.

Do you think that the girl in question would have had the attention of her friends if she was insulting because she lacked good communication skills or proud because she was better informed?

As we grow up and learn simple ideas about who we are and what we are, each of us also learn strong social messages about what we should be and what we should not be like. None of the ideal standards by which we judge ourselves was with us at birth. Just as no one comes to the world with any idea whatsoever, so no one knows what it means to be a good girl or boy. We had to be taught to believe we should behave in a certain way and have specific principles and standards by which we judge ourselves. Thus our behaviours will vary from culture to culture and even from individual to individual within the same culture.

Therefore, having self esteem is simply an individual thing, it has to do with how an individual feels within and the impact of social messages. For example, if you see yourself as an important person no matter what people say or do will not affect that feeling of importance. But on the other hand, if you see yourself as

someone that is useless, then what people say or do could affect the way you behave or think.

Self-esteem is a part of everyone - female or male.

We want self esteem because it increases our chances of finding happiness in life and makes it possible to cope with challenges; like, when we fail examinations or when our desires and expectations are not met. Our level of self esteem can affect almost everything we do, how we think, and what we say. In other words, it can affect how we see the world and our place in it and also how others in the world see and treat us. It can affect the choices and decisions we make in our lives. It can even affect our ability to give and receive love and affection or to achieve high social status or to develop our talents to their fullest. It can prevent us from benefitting from life opportunities.

TYPES OF SELF-ESTEEM

1. Low self-esteem
2. High self-esteem

Low self-esteem: This is when one feels inferior or worthless or not valuable or when one feels she is not brilliant enough to contribute anything to the society. Low-self esteem is re-enforced by negative social messages.

Low self-esteem is seen in girls who grow up in poverty with constant criticisms and without love. These girls grow up being fearful and may want to hide in their shells forever, so as to avoid

being hurt in life. Frequent negative comments also have damaging effects on one's mind. Living in poverty and feeling dejected, not being in school, but watching their peers go to school are also conditions that contribute to low self-esteem. Some of the effects of low self-esteem are ;

* Lack of self confidence
* Poor performance in schools or other aspects of life.
* Unhappy personal life/feels disliked and unwanted
* Lack of self satisfaction/distorted views of self/look down on one's self.
* Inability to tackle new challenges/avoids new experiences

FEELING SATISFIED ABOUT YOURSELF

Self-esteem is your self-image or how you feel about yourself. Self-esteem is made up of the FEELINGS you have about yourself. It is basically unconscious and not easily reportable. These feelings may be positive or negative. Our behaviour and thinking are reflections of our self-esteem. Self-esteem is about feeling SATISFIED. When basic needs are fulfilled, one feels satisfied.

Do you do, have or experience some or all of these?

1. Find excuses for refusing to change.
2. Blame others for your failure
3. Easily influenced.
4. Always glad when others fail
5. Continually wish you could change your physical appearance

6. Avoid new experiences.
Then you are showing signs of low self-esteem.

These four conditions of self-esteem, below constitute the name given to the four feelings that everyone experiences. When people say they feel "great" or "good" or "satisfied" they are experiencing one of these four feelings. People with low self-esteem have difficulty feeling one or more of the four feelings.

1. **Sense of Connectiveness:** In order to have high self-esteem, we must be in a position to gain satisfaction from the people, places or things that we are connected to. This might be the people who are important and influential in our lives, groups who represent important values, such as people of the same ethnic group, class, team or sex or institutions, objects, places or activities we feel are important. The value of these connections must be acknowledged by the people who are important to us.

2. **Sense of Uniqueness:** In order to have high self-esteem, we must acknowledge and respect the qualities and characteristics about ourselves that are special and different, and we must receive confirmation from other people that those qualities and characteristics are important and good.

3. **Sense of Power:** In order to have high self-esteem, we need to have the competence to do what we must, the resources required to effectively express the competence, and the opportunity to use our competence to influence important circumstances of our lives.

4. **Sense of Models:** In order to have high-self-esteem, we must be able to refer to human, philosophical and operational

models to help us make sense of the world. We use these reference points to help us to set our own goals, values, personal standards and ideals.

FACTORS THAT CONTRIBUTE TO LOW SELF-ESTEEM

1. When people criticise you
2. When you are rejected
3. When people look down on you
4. Discouragement from poor performance at school
5. Poverty
6. Being constantly reminded of beng a girl and incapable of learning and knowing.
7. Giving-up easily.
8. Being afraid of making mistakes.
9. Thinking negatively about yourself.

HIGH SELF-ESTEEM: This is when one feels she is important, accepts her weaknesses, criticisms and also sees her strengths as achievement and still regards other people's feelings. Do you do, have or experience some or all of these situations? Does any of this fit your personality?

1. One who does not give up easily even after failure but persist to learn from mistakes.
2. One who is willing to take risks
3. A person who knows who she is and feels valued for her unique self, feels encouraged to have what she wants and pursues it despite obstacles.

4. Accepts criticism
5. Be proud of yourself
6. Tolerate frustration
7. Always honest and open about her feelings
8. Always happy for other people's successes.

Then you are showing signs of high self-esteem.

FACTORS THAT CONTRIBUTE TO HIGH SELF-ESTEEM

1. Always having positive thoughts about yourself.
2. Accepting your body as it is
3. Looking for and tackling new challenges with excitement.
4. Accepting and appreciating constructive criticisms.
5. Giving self credit when it is due and being happy for others successes.
6. Not giving up easily even after failing but persist to learn from her mistakes.
7. Encouraging self to have what you want and pursue it despite obstacles.
8. Standing tall even though you are short.
9. Having positive thoughts of yourself.

During a GPI discussion session, the girls were asked to make a list of 5 things they do not like about themselves. Some of the responses were;

* I like everything about myself
* I like everything about myself
* I like everything about myself

* I like everything about myself
* I like everything about myself

Mfon, 15 years

* I don't like my short nose
* I don't like my tiny legs
* I don't like my big breast
* I don't like my dark complexion
* I don't like my scanty hair.

Mercy, 17 years

Mfon gives an example of one with high self-esteem.

Mercy gives an example of one with low self esteem.

HOW TO IMPROVE YOUR SELF-ESTEEM

- Don't give up easily
- Have self confidence
- Accept challenges
- Take risks and try new things
- Think positively about yourself
- Praise yourself when you achieve something
- Trust your judgement and love yourself.

HOW TO HELP A FRIEND DEVELOP HER SELF-ESTEEM

* Encourage her and take her for counselling
* Give her positive compliments about parts of her body she does not like.
* Don't put her down by condemning her when she makes mistakes
* Encourage her to develop a new talent
* Do not impress your opinion on her.
* Encourage her not to hide her feelings from others.
* Teach her how to be bold and assertive

* Do not laugh at her
* Assist when necessary
* Be patient with her faults and weakness: remember nobody is perfect.!

WHY IS SELF-ESTEEM IMPORTANT?

Below are some reasons why self-esteem is important

- It would make an individual love his or herself better and serve humanity better too.
- It would assist an individual to be able to face challenges.
- One would be able and willing to take risks by trying out new things.
- It would make the individual develop positive thoughts about one's self.
- It would make the individual become effective, and capable, productive and loveable.
- It would make her set her goals and achieve them.
- It is useful for developing ones talents.
- It helps an individual respect another, and receive respect.
- It helps one know her rights as a girl.

Could you add on to this list from your personal experiences?

ACTIVITIES (I)

* Make a list of 5 things you like about your body?
* Add three things you do well.
* Add three things you do not do well.

ACTIVITIES (II)

CIRCLE THE WORD THAT DESCRIBES YOU

Honest	Patient	Careful
Smart	Stupid	Fat

Lazy	Shy	Attractive
Helpful	Selfish	Leader
Neat	Thin	Planner
Athletic	Ugly	Serving
Loving	Too tall	Stubborn
Graceful	Pretty	Rough
Determined	Kind	Sluggish
Mannerly	Curious	Musical
Failure	Forceful	Reliable
Critical	Unloving	Artistic
Helpless	Dishonest	Talkative
Fashionable	Beautiful	Talented
Gentle	Important	Level-headed
Too fat	Basket mouth	Too short
Dullard	Brilliant	Intelligent

Check through the words you have circled, If they are negative, then you still have to work on your self -esteem.

ACTIVITIES (III)

- Why is self-esteem important?
- What factors influence our self-esteem?
- What can we do to raise our self-esteem and the self-esteem of others we care about?

CONCLUSION

We have seen that self esteem is the good feeling or bad feeling you experience about yourself. When you feel bad about

your self, you make bad decisions, like dropping out of school, smoking and even using drugs or alcohol. You also become an easy victim of violence. When you feel good about yourself, it is easier to make decisions that are good for you. Note that even with good self-esteem you might dislike certain things about yourself or regret things you have done. But if you accept your weaknesses, as part of growing up then you will feel good about yourself and feel more comfortable with other people. People will also want to be friends with you if you have a good attitude. Secondly, with good self-esteem, people will like you for being different. So feel good about your differences, other people will feel good about them too.

GLOSSARY

Prejudices:-	Preconceived opinion
Myths:-	Social / Traditional story usually involving supernatural or imaginary perceptions.
Tactfully:-	Have the skill in dealing with others especially in delicate situations.
Concept:-	General idea or notion
Ponder:-	Think over; consider
Affirm: -	Assert, state as a fact convincingly
Counsellor:-	Adviser; Person giving professional guidance on personal problems
Inferior:-	Lower in quality

Confirmation:-	Provide support for the truth or correctness of a thing
Challenges:-	Taking part in demanding or difficult task.

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WHAT IS GIRLS' POWER INITIATIVE?

Girls' Power Initiative (GPI) is a non-governmental, not-for-profit development organisation that equips adolescent girls between the ages of 10 - 18 with sexuality, human rights, reproductive health/rights information; leadership, economic and other life skills to cope with growing-up, thus laying the basis for ensuring the enjoyment of healthy sexuality, womanhood and social justice for future generations of Nigerian women.

OBJECTIVES

- Building and increasing the capacity of Nigerian adolescent girls to articulate and critically analyse issues that impact on their health and enjoyment of human rights.
- Increasing the access of adolescent girls in Nigeria to comprehensive and non-judgmental information on health, human rights and sexuality from a gender perspective.
- Developing the capacity of adolescent girls to overcome gender prejudices and grow into self-assured active women involved on equal basis with men in development.
- Increasing the number of informed and gender sensitive adolescent girls towards decreasing the gender gap in social, political and economic sectors.
- Sensitising the public and creating awareness towards the elimination of gender prejudices to build gender equality.
- Building the foundation for the creation of a gender/activist institute in Nigeria.

VISION

A strong and empowered feminist institution with critical consciousness and capacity for analysis on social and gender prejudices, committed to managing and educating girls into healthy, self-reliant, productive and confident women for the achievement of positive changes and transformation of patriarchal values in Nigeria.

GPI TEAM

National

Bene E. Madunagu	-	*Chairperson Executive Board*
Assumpta Ekpenyong	-	*Programme Officer*
Kunle Akisanya	-	*Accountant*
Grace Osakue	-	*Member, Executive Board*

South West

Grace Osakue	-	*Coordinator*
Leo Igunbor	-	*Office Manager*
Fatima Ikoghode	-	*Facilitator*
Abies Lawani	-	*Facilitator*
Iyen - Oghogho Ohonba	-	*Facilitator*
Nkiru Ndukuba	-	*Research Assistant*
Ese Amadasun	-	*Computer Operator*
Patience Ojeigbo	-	*'Typist*
Ify Nnaneme	-	*Library Assistant*
Scholastica Aihumekeokhai	-	*Accounting Assistant*
Austin Uzorma	-	*Night Watchman*
Musa Sunday	-	Night Watchman

South East

Bene E. Madunagu	-	*Co-ordinator*
Paul Johnson	-	*Office Manager*
Ofonasaha Ekpoudom	-	*Personal Assistant/Facilitator*
Eka Bassey	-	*Senior Facilitator*
Imoh Patrick Bernard	-	*Facilitator I*
Victoria Effiom Edet	-	*Facilitator II*
Caroline Nelson Edom	-	*Facilitator*
Owoidoho Okon Utak	-	*Accounting Assist. /Facilitator*
Felicia Eteanwan Eso	-	*Facilitator*
Diana Isaac Ibok	-	*Reseach Asst./Facilitator*
Iquo Etim Nkuda	-	*Accounting Asst./Facilitator*
Arit Etim Okon	-	*Secretarial Assistant*
Iyene Regan Emah	-	*Computer Operator*
Maris Idowu Arabu	-	*Computer Operator*
James Eni Ibor	-	*Operations and Security Officer*
Ubong Ekon Andy	-	*Operations and Security Officer*
Margaret Afangideh	-	*Library Assistant*