

**The Experience of Self-Esteem in Women With
Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder**

Lynette Maree Bartlett

BA, University of New England

Grad.Dip.Couns., Charles Sturt University

Master of Counselling (Honours)

Thesis

School of Health

University of New England

January 2005

ABSTRACT

This exploratory qualitative study examines the experience of self-esteem in women diagnosed in adulthood with Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder. The seven participants explain in their own words how self and self-worth have been influenced by their families, upbringing, education, peers, work, religion, and social experiences, as well as by the difficulties they have encountered in living with undiagnosed Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder. The participants all reported certain similarities in their life experiences, such as feelings of low self-esteem, poor school performance, associated anxiety and depression, negative family of origin experiences, Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder symptoms and self-sabotaging tendencies. However, the question of whether Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder was cause or effect of a sense of low self-esteem was complicated by the relationship experiences of the participants. More detailed research is needed to clarify the issues identified in this study.

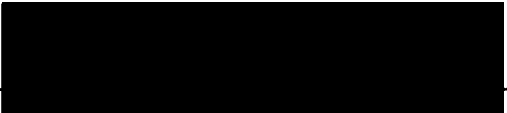
CANDIDATE'S CERTIFICATION

I certify that the substance of this thesis has not already been submitted for any degree and is not currently being submitted for any other degree or qualification.

I certify that this thesis is entirely my own work and that all sources used in its preparation have been acknowledged.

Signature: _____

Date: _____



27th January, 2005

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Abstract	i
Candidate's Certification	ii
Table of Contents	iii
List of Figures	vi
Acknowledgements	vii
Chapter 1	1
Introduction and Literature Review	1
Introduction	1
History of AD/HD	2
Neurophysiology of AD/HD	5
Comorbidity	7
Adolescents and AD/HD	8
Women and AD/HD	11
Self-esteem	13
Significance of this Study	17
Chapter Outlines	18
Chapter 2	20
Research Design	20
Choice of Qualitative Research	20
Informants	21
Parameters for Inclusion	22
Procedure	24
Data Analysis	25
Scope of this Research	27
Chapter 3	28
Individual Profiles of the Sample	28
Patricia: Introduction	28
Self-esteem	29
Influences on self-esteem	31
Spouse and children	32
Parental upbringing and family system	32
Significant others	34
Social, peers and relationships	34
Education, occupation and functionality	35
Summary	39
Laura: Introduction	39
AD/HD and familial diagnosis	40
Treatments	40
Medication	41
Self-esteem	42
Friends and social sources of self-esteem	43
Family of origin and self-esteem	44
Other factors and self-esteem: Drug dependence	47
Education, occupation and self-esteem	48
Partner, child and self-esteem	50
Parental upbringing, family system and AD/HD	51
Social, peers, relationships and AD/HD	52

	Education, occupation, functionality and AD/HD	52
	Personality, comorbidity and AD/HD	53
	Comorbid disorders	53
	Personality traits	55
	Depersonalisation	55
	Summary	56
Antoinette:	Introduction	56
	Treatments	57
	Self-esteem	58
	Religion	58
	Friends and social sources of self-esteem	59
	Family of origin and self-esteem	60
	Education, occupation and self-esteem	61
	Spouse, children and self-esteem	62
	Other factors and self-esteem	63
	Parental upbringing and family system	64
	Significant others	64
	Social, peers and relationships	65
	Education, occupation and AD/HD	65
	Personality, comorbidity and AD/HD	66
	Summary	67
Samantha:	Introduction	68
	Self-esteem	70
	Religion and self-esteem	71
	Influences on self-esteem	72
	Family of origin and self-esteem	73
	Education, occupation and self-esteem	74
	Spouse, children and self-esteem	75
	Other factors	77
	Parental upbringing and family system	78
	Social, peers and relationships	79
	Education, occupation and functionality	79
	Personality and comorbidity	80
	Summary	82
Tina:	Introduction	82
	Self-esteem	83
	Religion	84
	Friends and social support	84
	Occupation	85
	Parental upbringing and family system	85
	Education, occupation and functionality	87
	Social, peers and relationships	87
	Personality and comorbidity	88
	Summary	89
Amanda:	Introduction	90
	Treatment	91
	Self-esteem	91

	Influences on self-esteem	92
	Family of origin and self-esteem	93
	Friends and social sources of self-esteem	94
	Education, occupation and self-esteem	95
	Other factors and self-esteem	98
	Parental upbringing, family system and AD/HD	99
	Education, occupation, functionality and AD/HD	99
	Social, peers, relationships and AD/HD	100
	Personality and comorbidity	101
	Summary	102
Jane:	Introduction	102
	Treatment	103
	Self-esteem and AD/HD	104
	Religion or spiritual sources of self-esteem	105
	Friends and social sources of self-esteem	105
	Family of origin and self-esteem	106
	Education, occupation and self-esteem	109
	Spouse, children and self-esteem	109
	Other factors and self-esteem	110
	Parental upbringing, family system and AD/HD	111
	Social, peers, relationships and AD/HD	112
	Education, occupation, functionality and AD/HD	112
	Personality, comorbidity and AD/HD	113
	Summary	115
	Conclusion	116
Chapter 4:	Themes, Similarities and Differences in the Stories of the Informants	117
	Diagnosis as adults	117
	AD/HD symptoms	119
	Low self-esteem	122
	Comorbidity	124
	Poor school performance	126
	Negative family of origin experience	128
	Self-sabotage and coping strategies	130
	Living with AD/HD	132
	Define themselves in relation to AD/HD	134
	Conclusion	136
Chapter 5:	Conclusion	138
	Implications for further research	142
	References	147
Appendices:	Appendix 1 Advertisement for participants	156
	Appendix 2 Plain language statement for participants	157
	Appendix 3 Consent form	158
	Appendix 4 Analysis grid	159

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 2.1	Recursive biopsychosocial-enviro-skills model	26
------------	---	----

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to gratefully acknowledge the generous help, support and encouragement of Ms. Frances MacKay and Professor Victor Minichiello. Without their guidance, this undertaking would not have come to fruition. I would also like to thank Associate Professor Margot Schofield for helping me to gain Ethics Committee approval for this project and for her encouragement at the outset of my study. Thank you very much to John and Felicia for the great amount of time they have spent helping me with computer problems and formatting, and thank you Peter for your critique, your insight, your help and support. Lastly, but importantly, thank you to the seven women who courageously allowed me to share their life experiences.