Self-Confidence in Moroccan Women: Understanding and Implications

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A Capstone Paper Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of

MASTER OF SCIENCE

Applied Community Development Sequence

Department of Politics and Government

ILLINOIS STATE UNIVERSITY

2017

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Abstract

This research seeks to explore the theory outlined in the article "Supplemental material for age and gender differences in self-esteem—A cross-cultural window," which states that women in developing countries are more likely than women in developed countries to have high levels of self-confidence. An observational study was conducted by the author on 30 women in the town of Imouzzer Kandar, Morocco. Based on this very limited sample size, results suggest that these women do, generally, have high rates of self-confidence. Morocco-specific cultural influences are examined, as well as results found in other studies and the author's personal experiences in the Moroccan community.

Acknowledgements

First, I would like to thank my capstone advisor Dr. Michaelene Cox, who was a crucial help to me as I wrote this paper. Dr. Cox always gave me prompt, insightful feedback on my thoughts and drafts, despite the continental divide between us. I'm very grateful for her assistance and the time she put into this project. I would also like to thank Illinois State's Stevenson Center for not only giving me the opportunity to pursue a Masters, but helping me go all the way to Morocco to do so. I also owe a debt to the people I've met here in Imouzzer Kandar, Morocco, particularly the women I've worked with in the Women's Center. They've been nothing but accepting and kind to me, and they made this research possible. My husband Caleb Griffin has also played an important role in keeping me motivated and letting me bounce ideas off him. Lastly, I would like to thank the two Moroccan street cats we've adopted, Zbib and Hlib, for their role in sitting on my lap while I was working, thereby inspiring me not to get up but to keep on writing.

INTRODUCTION

High self-esteem is a trait that can have a lasting effect on an individual's life. It can mean doing well in an interview, or impressing the person you'll spend your life with. More than that, high self-esteem is correlated with happiness. It could be argued, then, that self-esteem is directly correlated with a person's life satisfaction and general well-being. Despite all these benefits and the significance of self-esteem, however, there is still much that isn't fully understood about this trait. Researchers have found that it is a complicated subject with a vast number of influencing factors. One factor which is nearly universally agreed upon, however, is that gender is a determinate of self-esteem levels.

It has widely been considered that women, on the whole, have a lower sense of self-esteem than men. However, recent research has shown that while this is generally true, the gap between male and female self-esteem is widest in developed, wealthy nations—the nations where the bulk of academic research is conducted. In developing nations, women tend to have higher confidence levels in relation to men (Bleidorn, Arslan, Denissen, Rentfrow, Gebauer & Potter 2015). This study has shown that there is a weakness in our understanding of self-esteem. It seems that there is more to learn about self-esteem, especially in the countries where research is less frequently conducted.

There is also some debate as to the effect that age has on self-esteem. Much of the literature suggests that age is strongly correlated with self-esteem, particularly adolescence. Again, however, the vast bulk of studies on the subject have been conducted in the Western world, which means that the negative correlation adolescence has with self-esteem could be inherently due to adolescence as a period of development, as is generally assumed, or to the youth culture in the West. Many of the academic assumptions that have been made might not

necessarily extend to the developing world, where much less research has been conducted. This

paper seeks to fill a part of this knowledge gap by answering the question as to whether or not

women in Morocco fit the theory of self-confidence as outlined by Bleidorn et. al, as well as

briefly examining the effect of age on self-esteem in a non-Western culture.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Bleidorn et. al's recent study on self-esteem has shown that women in developing

countries generally have higher rates of self-esteem than women in developed countries. To

understand why this might be, it is important to have a comprehensive grasp on the many facets

of this complicated and much-studied human trait. The existing literature suggests that there are

many factors to consider in cases of self-esteem, including the variety of different methods used

by researchers to measure the trait, its importance and relevance to the individual and society,

and the more external elements that effect self-esteem, particularly age, gender, and culture.

The Measurement of Self-Esteem and its Importance

The concept of self-esteem is a difficult one to measure. It can encompass many different

facets of life, and be interpreted many different ways. It has also been one of the most popularly

studied topics in the social sciences (Bleidorn, et. al 2015). How, then, is it measured? In the

majority of cases, it is self-reported by study participants through a series of questions

(Lundeberg, Fox & Punccohar 1994; Ross, Scott & Bruce 2012). While these self-analyses often

suit studies on an individual basis, they also leave much open to the interpretation of said

participants. For example, participants might be reluctant to honestly assess such direct

statements as "I feel good about myself," or "I feel confident that I understand things," as asked

by Heatherton and Polivy, if they are under the impression that a healthy, well-adjusted

individual does feel good about themselves and does understand things. It might be difficult to admit to themselves in such blunt terms if they do not feel that they measure up to these standards.

With this weakness in mind, other studies observe participants and note behaviors that might indicate self-esteem or a lack thereof (Demo 1985). Others use a combination of both direct observation and self-assessment methods (Coopersmith 1959), and still others use implicit tests, meant to gauge how subjects subconsciously feel about themselves. There is debate as to how successful these methods are, and it has been claimed that implicit and explicit tests contradict each other in some cases (Bosson, Swann & Pennebaker 2000). There is also a type of self-assessment measurement method which is designed to analyze self-confidence that varies over a short period of time, although it is not generally widely used (Heatherton & Polivy 1991).

It has also been noted that in some cases, while trying to measure self-esteem, it might be mistaken for other traits (Scheier, Carver & Bridges 1994). Symptoms of high self-esteem which are often measured in studies, such as positive self-image and the ability to lead a group, may instead only be narcissism or extroversion at play (Baumeister, Campbell, Kreuger & Vohs 2003). Therefore, in some cases these studies might not be studying self-esteem at all, but something else altogether. Even when correctly identified, the literature argues that self-esteem is difficult to accurately study because of its complexity. Self-esteem can fluctuate dramatically on a short timeline, potentially making some studies ungeneralizable, and this facet is generally not taken into account during studies (Baumeister et. al 2003). Its relationship with life events and personality traits will vary so widely person by person that it may never be understood fully (Owens 1994). The way that self-esteem is defined and measured can have a huge impact on the

results of a study, as results can differ so widely. It is important to know the potential problems with self-esteem studies in moving forward.

There is an ongoing academic discussion as to the origins of self-esteem. Some claim that a person's self-esteem is more or less innate and unchangeable, whether because of traits that people are born with (Jacoby 2017) or because of the socio-economic circumstances that they are raised in (Ryan & Grolnick 1986). Others believe that this is an oversimplification, and that self-esteem is more nuanced and less predictable than something that is simply inherent in a person; high or low self-esteem is not a guaranteed result of any given environment (Camp, Finlay & Lyons 2002).

Self-esteem in children has been studied thoroughly while searching for the beginnings of self-esteem, and results have shown that whatever its origin, self-esteem in children can be indicative of several traits that will influence their future. Low self-esteem in children can be a potential predictor of depression (Robins, Donnellan, Widaman & Conger 2010), and the unhealthy internalization of problems (Leeuwis, Koot, Creemers & Lier 2015). Low self-esteem has been found to be more detrimental to children's development than attachment issues and substance usage (Greger, Myhre, Klockner & Jozefiak 2017).

Regardless of measurement method or origin, many studies have found that self-esteem is an important trait in a variety of different realms of life, not only childhood. Even those studies that have been critical of exaggerating the effects of self-esteem and its methods of study have found that there are areas where self-esteem is undeniably beneficial, such as promoting personal happiness (Baumeister et. al 2003).

A majority of studies have found more definitively promising results in regards to self-esteem. Individuals with high levels of self-esteem tend to be more motivated in life (Benabou & Tirole 2005), for example, and have greater success in school (Ferkany 2008). Encouraging students by lifting their self-esteem has been proven to be a more effective tactic in raising student grades than other forms of encouragement (Yeager, Walton & Cohen 2013), and individuals with high self-esteem tend to perform better in positions of leadership and management (Ireland & Hitt 1992). Students who are entering the workforce out of school are also more likely to find a job if they have confidence in their own job-finding abilities (Rothwell 2009).

Self-confidence has also proven to be an important factor in finding romance (Roberts, Little, Lyndon, Havlicek, Roberts & Wright 2009). Additionally, individuals with high self-esteem have been found to have healthier coping mechanisms after relationships end, and are able to move on to new relationships more successfully (Girodo, Dotzenroth, Stein 1981). In short, high levels of self-esteem are beneficial in many different walks of life.

Given the variety of perks that come with high self-esteem, it should come as no surprise that there is also a body of research on how to change self-esteem. In the short-term, self-esteem can be increased by many different methods, including specific types of physical exercise (Yigiter & Hardee 2017), music, and other creative outlets (Culp 2016). There is also research which indicates that activities such as these can improve self-esteem not only in the short term, but long term as well, if they are conducted correctly (Elavsky, McAuley, Motl, Konopack, Marquez, Hu, Jerome & Diener 2005).

There are also, of course, potential downsides to having high levels of self-esteem. People with high self-esteem are less likely to be persuaded by others into changing their

thoughts or behavior, for better or worse (Cox & Bauer 1964). Individual attempts to improve

self-esteem can also undermine one's own mental and physical health in the long term (Park &

Crocker 2004). Furthermore, some common assumptions about the benefits of high self-esteem

have not held up under study. It has commonly been thought that people with low self-esteem are

more likely to be violent, for example, but research has not found a correlation between the two

(Bushman, Baumeister 1998).

People are also more likely to take risks when they are self-confident (Chuang, Cheng,

Chang & Chieng 2013). People with high levels of self-esteem have been found to engage in

risky sexual behavior, for example (Elliott, Easterling & Knox 2016). However, a willingness to

take risks, while inherently linked to potential danger and loss, is also a trait of entrepreneurs and

highly successful people (Sullivan 2009) including, in one study, the most successful business

executives (MacCrimmon & Wehrung 1990). Therefore, while there are possible pitfalls in store

for people who are willing to take risks, there are also potential high benefits that people who are

not risk-takers will miss out on.

It must also be noted that some studies have found that self-esteem is not an important

variable at all, particularly in the field of academic achievement (Jenaabadi 2014). Making

concentrated efforts to improve self-esteem may even be harmful if people focus on it too

singularly or at the cost of other things in their lives (Crocker & Park 2004; Purkey 1970). Low

self-esteem is also often correlated with depression, and in some cases trying to correct low self-

esteem might mean ignoring the overarching problem of depression—or making it worse

(Kiwoong & Tse-Chuan 2017).

Despite these potential drawbacks, the vast bulk of the existing literature on self-esteem

indicates that self-esteem is important, and that high self-esteem generally improves the quality

of a person's life. This paper will then argue that overall the benefits of high self-esteem outweigh the drawbacks, making it a desirable trait on the whole.

External Factors and their Effect on Self-Esteem in a Western Context

Age. Age is a primary, predictable factor in a person's self-esteem. Overall, self-esteem gradually rises throughout a person's life, with drop-offs during adolescence and old age (Orth, Trzesniewski & Robins 2010). Perhaps the most important aspect of age in regards to this study is how steeply rates of self-esteem drop as children enter adolescence (Huang 2010). Adolescence is a time of growth and decision-making, and marks a child's first few steps into adulthood and self-governance. As such, it follows that this will be when their self-esteem is first tested, and how they react to these tests may shape their futures (Urdan & Pajares 2006). Naturally there is a wide range of factors that can affect an adolescent's self-esteem, including the student's home life and parental behavior (Gecas 1972). These factors can have a significant impact, but with or without them, adolescence alone is an important time period for children's self-esteem.

It could also be assumed that some of this age difference comes from maturation and past accomplishments, or that what a person has accomplished in their life will impact their self-esteem. It seems that a person who has met all of their life goals ought to have higher levels of self-confidence than someone who has accomplished very little. While this may be true in some cases, it has been found that generally self-esteem "is best modeled as a cause rather than a consequence of life outcomes" (Orth, Robins and Widaman 2017). Life successes to date, then, might inspire people to further achievement but should not be considered a result of high self-esteem.

Gender. Another very prominent factor in self-esteem is that it seems to affect genders differently. Males tends to be more confident in their knowledge and scholastic abilities than females, even when both groups have had equal amounts of education (Ross et. al 2012). Another study found that both men and women tended towards overconfidence, but men did so at a higher rate (Lundeberg et. al 1994). It's not only academia, however. At the same time, women tend to display lower levels of self-confidence across the board in all areas of achievement (Lenney 1977).

It is also important to note that the role of gender in an individual's self-esteem remains a complex issue. There are many variables that can contribute to the gender disparity, particularly the type of task that men and women and engaged in, their age, and so on (Lirgg 1991). One study, for example, found that if a woman anticipates being the "token" female—or the only female in a room full of males—she will be less confident and comfortable in the group, and will expect to be stereotyped. Token males do not experience this same dip in confidence (Cohen, Swim 1995).

The literature has different explanations for what causes this gendered difference in self-esteem and self-confidence. The discrepancy might be partially due to the fact that men and women rank their own self-efficacy differently; women are much more likely to view themselves as unqualified or unfit for a task than men are (Pajares 2002), a phenomena sometimes known as the "confidence gap." This necessarily ties into self-esteem, as individuals' self-perceived ability to achieve will alter how they feel about themselves. Some studies have also shown that women are simply less likely to enter fields or engage in activities that are perceived as being highly competitive, which could be due either to a lack of confidence or simply a dislike of competition (Colbeck, Cabrera & Terenzini 2001).

Other studies have found that determinants of gendered self-esteem might be more deeply rooted in the subconscious. Students tended to perceive each other, and themselves, more favorably when they fit their assigned gender stereotypes (Spence, Helmreich, & Stapp 1975). Similarly, a slightly more recent study found that men and women draw their senses of self-worth from different places: independence and separation for males, and interdependence and cooperation for females. Both gender groups had some level of defensive reaction when they failed to perform well in tasks designed for their stereotypical gender (Josephs, Markus, Tafarodi 1992). While these studies' relevance and relatability may be changing with Americans' perception of gender, they underscore the fact that people's perceptions of gender can have a striking influence on self-esteem, and may be deeply ingrained.

Culture. The culture a person is raised in will have a significant impact on their values and understanding of the world, and so it follows that culture is another significant facet of self-esteem. There are clearly traits that effect self-esteem that inherently vary with culture (Diener & Diener 2009; Watkins & Gerong 1997). Individuals will not necessarily have higher or lower levels of self-esteem based on the culture they live in; rather, the values of a certain culture will dictate how certain traits influence individual's self-esteem. For example, one study has found that a participant's sense of individualism will have a drastically different effect on their self-esteem depending on whether or not they live in a country that highly values individualism (Markus & Kitayama 1991). Similarly, Diener & Diener found that being financially secure has a greater effect on individuals' self-confidence in low-income countries than in wealthy countries (2009).

Developed and developing countries. The vast majority of these studies on self-esteem have been conducted in wealthy, developed countries. The values and lifestyles in these

countries could potentially have a very significant impact on results—concepts and experiences like adolescence are different in many non-developed or impoverished countries. Even the studies that have included multi-cultural angles have often merely compared a small sample of "others" to a much larger sample of participants from highly developed nations (Bleidorn et. al 2015).

Therefore, while there has been a significant amount of research conducted on self-esteem and the effects of gender, age, and even culture, this information might not pertain to a significant part of the world's population. This represents a significant knowledge gap when it comes to our understanding of self-esteem. Learning more about self-esteem in non-Western countries could contribute greatly to the existing knowledge on the subject. Most importantly, more information could reveal whether some traits such as gender and age are inherently connected to self-esteem, or whether these factors play a purely cultural role.

One of the few studies that has focused on developing and impoverished countries has shown that women in developing countries tend to report higher rates of self-confidence than their female counterparts in wealthy, developed nations (Bleidorn et. al 2015). This is an interesting find, as in many ways it goes against some of the prevailing theories in the field as to why women generally have lower self-confidence and self-esteem than men. If women are inherently more likely to view themselves as unqualified or unfit for a task, as Pajares has suggested, shouldn't women in developed countries, with their increased access to trainings and education and the internet, be more confident than those in countries where such knowledge is not as readily available? In regard to knowledge, many women in wealthy and developed countries have more technical qualifications than their peers in poor countries. So why are the confidence rates the way that they are?

The answer that Bleidorn et. al suggest fits more closely with Cohen and Swim's "token woman" theory. After an exhaustive study of just under one million participants, male and female, from all over the world, Bleidorn et. al theorize that the root of the problem is that women in wealthy, developed nations are constantly comparing themselves to men. Women in developing countries, where tasks and day to day situations are much more divided along lines of gender, however, do not. The theory, then, is that women in nations where they work alongside men will have lower self-esteem than women in countries who work only among other women.

Bleidorn et. al also suggest that beauty standards might play a role. Western women are generally held to more exacting beauty standards than women in the developing world, and this has been shown to reduce self-confidence and self-esteem. Other studies have agreed with these findings (Irving 1990). Weight gain, for example, is much more likely to decrease a woman's self-confidence in a country with Western ideals than in a country with different standards of beauty (Dijkstra, Barelds & Brummen-Girigori 2015).

These theories of confidence and self-esteem based on gender, age and culture deserve investigating. Globally, there is a wide range of developing to developed nations, as well as a variety of different types of gendered work, age and cultural expectations, and so on, on a country-by-country basis. Morocco is officially classified as a developing nation by the World Bank (ISI), and therefore should follow Bleidorn et. al's theory of having women with higher levels of confidence than Western women. However, no studies have yet been conducted on Morocco specifically.

Self-Esteem in Morocco

Studying Morocco has the potential to yield interesting results. Morocco is in a rare position; the country is extremely close to Europe, and has close ties with the developed countries there. Morocco is also heavily involved with the Middle East, as it shares a religion and many aspects of culture with that area. Finally, Morocco is also a member of the African Union, and is striving to form closer bonds with its sub-Saharan neighbors. Morocco is beset with a unique combination of social and economic influences, and it would be interesting to inspect the results those might have on Morocco's women. This paper seeks to fill this knowledge gap by examining levels of self-confidence in Moroccan women.

Religion. Other factors may also be at play in Morocco which must be taken into consideration, particularly the importance of religion in people's daily lives. The population is 99 percent Sunni Muslim (World Factbook 2017), and studies have shown that religion, too, can influence self-esteem. Overall, religiosity is positively correlated with self-esteem (Sherkat & Reed 1992), although there are complexities involved. A very religious person, for example, is more likely to have high self-esteem than a moderately religious person (Krause 1995). It can be difficult to gauge an individual person's level of religious intensity, although it can be assumed that a significant amount of people in this religious country are influenced to varying degrees by their religiosity. The literature has not made any distinctions in type of religion (Islam, Christianity, etc.), and speaks only to religiosity in general.

Ethnicity. There are also ethnic differences in Morocco to consider. The population of Morocco is mostly Arab-Tamazight, with three different primary Tamazight groups: Tashelheight, Tassusight, and Tarafight. Depending on the location in Morocco, either Tamazights or Arabs could be considered an ethnic and cultural minority. Being an ethnic

minority can have an impact on self-esteem, for better or for worse. A person who is a member

of an ethnic minority may experience lowered self-esteem if they are one of very few minorities

within a majority population, but if this individual comes from an ethnic community with a

strong sense of identity, or if the broader community is perceived as being multicultural and

supportive, self-esteem is increased (Verkuten & Thus 2004). Additionally, ethnic minorities

who have made a concentrated effort to fit in and understand the majority culture do not

experience a decrease in self-esteem (Ferrari, Ranieri, Barni & Rosnati 2015). These studies have

been conducted in America and abroad, suggesting that the results are applicable on a global

level. There is a chance, then, that ethnic identification might play a role in levels of self-esteem

in Morocco.

   Shame. Another factor that may be more specifically assigned to Morocco is the

Moroccan concept of shame verses guilt. Generally speaking, Morocco is a "shame" society as

opposed to a "guilt" society, meaning that good behavior generally comes more from fear of

outside reproach than in an effort to appease personal morals, according to *Morocco World News*

columnist Larbi Arbaoui. One study agrees that shame is highly prevalent in Morocco, but

cautions that naturally guilt exists in the society as well and it is a mistake to oversimplify the

idea of shame verses guilt (Hermans 1999). This study goes on to add that it is often the Western

perception of Moroccan culture that perpetuates the idea that Moroccans feel only shame and not

guilt.

   Another author states that Morocco uses the concepts of shame and honor heavily in their

society to regulate good and bad behavior and control the population (Crivello 2008). The author

states that this cultural shame is most often used to regulate women and their behavior, often

through the lens of religion. This thought is countered in another article which states that women

adhering to Islamic religious standards are not inherently being controlled. Depending on the woman and her situation, it may even be the opposite. A woman may be asserting her space and her self-esteem through actions like wearing the hijab (Fayyaz & Kamal 2014).

Clearly, the concept of shame is complex in Morocco, but the literature indicates that it does play a role to some extent. The relationship between shame and self-esteem has also been researched extensively, and results suggest that the two are closely related. Shame has such a concrete effect on a person that it not only damages self-esteem and self-image, but causes a chemical change in the brain (Gruenewald, Kemeny, Aziz & Fahey 2004). Some people are born with a higher preposition to feel shame, but almost anyone can feel it, and it consistently has damaging effects on people's self-esteem (Gilbert & Procter 2006). While the degree of shame that is prevalent in Morocco is up for debate, it does exist, and is another relatively unique aspect of Moroccan culture that should be considered during research.

Conclusion

Overall, the significant amount of literature on the topic of self-esteem generally indicates that while it comes with its share of complexities, it can improve people's lives in a variety of ways, and is a desirable trait. Self-esteem varies with age, gender, and culture, although in many cases the available research has only been conducted on developed, wealthy nations and cannot truly be generalized globally. While this paper is too specific to truly fill the gap in the literature, it will ideally serve as a springboard to assist future research regarding the theory that women in developing countries have high rates of self-esteem. This paper will focus exclusively on Morocco, which, while a developing country that falls under Bleidorn et. al's criteria, cannot represent all developing countries. However, it may still provide valuable insights into self-confidence as it is affected by gender, culture, and age. Data suggests that

factors such as religion, ethnic groups, and cultural shame must be taken into consideration while so doing.

METHODOLOGY

Data was gathered using a behavioral checklist, similar to the one utilized in David Demo's article "The Measurement of Self-Esteem: Refining our Methods." There are flaws with this method of data collection—it is entirely dependent on the observer, for example, including any potential biases the observer may have. There is also the risk that the chosen indicators will be insufficient or inaccurate, which could lead to incomplete or inaccurate results. However, in Demo's study, when this checklist was filled in by peers of the subjects, the author expressed that this method of testing indicates "impressive convergent validity." Additionally, this method does not share some of the weaknesses that others might; potentially inaccurate self-perceptions will not influence the data, for example.

As discussed in the literature review, there are many complications that come with attempting to measure self-esteem, and there are many schools of thought on how to best go about gathering this data. This paper is limited in its methods to some extent by the language barrier present in Morocco. This language barrier makes it difficult for the author to conduct interviews with accuracy. Similarly, implicit testing also relies heavily on language. External peer observation, then, should be the most accurate method of evaluation given the circumstances. While additional methods of data collection would increase the accuracy of the results, the potential for misunderstandings is high. Therefore, this paper will utilize only the one technique of data collection.

The full list of self-esteem indicators is as follows:

Positive Indicators

Maintains eye contact during conversations with peers
Initiates friendly contact with others
Is comfortable interacting with a range of different people
Willingness to undertake new tasks
Asks questions when things aren't understood
Accepts corrections or contradictory opinions easily
Ability to make decisions and choices confidently for themselves
Takes satisfaction in good work without deprecating or exaggerating the accomplishment
At ease when addressing small groups
Negative Indicators
Is verbally self-deprecating
Appears uncomfortable addressing small groups
Does not express views or opinions, especially when asked
Has difficulty maintaining eye contact with peers
Regularly looks to others for approval, especially in relatively small decisions or tasks
Speaks hesitantly (native tongue)
Unwilling to take initiative or attempt new things
Gives excuses for failures or mistakes
Automatically assumes a submissive stance (verbal, physical) when in a group
Relies excessively on social cues from others regarding how to act among peers

After observations have been made, the number of observed negative traits will be subtracted from the positive traits, and the resulting number will be divided by ten. This will give each subject a score ranging from -5 to 5. A score of -5 would indicate that the subject met every requirement for low self-esteem and none of the requirements for high self-esteem, and the

reverse is true for a score of exactly 5. Observations began in April of 2017 and continued

through September 2017.

Thirty female subjects were chosen from the town of Imouzzer Kandar, which is located

in the Fes-Meknes region of the country. As all women are from the town or the area

immediately surrounding it, they cannot accurately represent all Moroccan women. Imouzzer

Kandar is approximately in the middle of the wealth spectrum in Morocco; its wealth is not on

par with major cities in Morocco, but it is also much wealthier than many small villages in the

country. The town is also split nearly equally between Tamazights and Arabs, which is not

representative of everywhere in the country. Additionally, in many cases the women observed

were those who are more willing to take risks and become involved in the community than many

women might be, as in many cases they made the active choice to attend classes or spend time

with foreigners. Therefore, while this sample size might be indicative of wider trends in

Morocco, it cannot be considered an accurate representation at face value.

These 30 women were selected based on the amount of time spent with the author; that is,

they are the 30 women who the author was able to observe the most in the approximately five-

month span of time. However, not all 30 subjects were observed continuously throughout this

time frame, and some were observed more frequently than others. To compensate for this, five

randomly selected days of observation were selected from each participant, in order to keep the

potential number of responses per participant the same. These observations were made in a range

of social settings, from an informal classroom setting to a picnic. While in his study Demo had

peers observe the subjects, the observations in this study were conducted by the author, who is

known to all participants on friendly terms. Being on friendly terms should, hopefully, negate

some of the potential for discomfort that can come with meeting new people or spending time

around unknown persons that might skew the observations. There is also the chance that this

friendliness might skew the observations in favor of high self-esteem indicators, but it follows

that individuals who are at ease, as they should be in the presence of someone they are friendly

with, are more representative of their true selves.

Not using peers for the observations as Demo did will likely have some effect on the

results, as it seems undeniable that peers will view each other differently than an outsider (the

author) would. However, peers were not used in this case as it is very likely that peers observing

each other would have been obvious to one another, thereby ensuring that the subjects would not

be acting as they naturally would and skewing the results. Additionally, explaining the idea

behind the observations in a non-native language to these peer observers might easily have led to

confusion or misunderstandings, and peer observers might have evaluated each other by very

different standards depending on how they understood the assignment. In this study, subjects

were not aware of actively being observed so that they might be seen in their most natural state.

To preserve confidentiality and privacy, the names of all subjects have been changed.

In the literature on the topic of self-esteem, gender and age are both shown to be highly

correlated with self-perception. While the primary focus of this research is to observe self-esteem

based on gender, approximate age is also noted. This will provide some indication as to whether

adolescence represents a natural decrease in self-esteem, as Western-based literature suggests, or

whether it is more based in culture than it has been given credit for previously.

The chosen indicators were selected based on their relevance. Some of these traits

(initiates friendly contact with others, expresses opinions, gives excuses for failures or mistakes,

assumes a submissive stance in group situations, is self-deprecating, does not express views or

opinions) have been taken directly from Demo's study of self-esteem. This paper will work

under the assumption that these traits have been established determinants of self-esteem levels, as Demo and other scholars have utilized them in past research.

Other indicators, while heavily influenced by Demo's checklist, have been altered slightly to better fit the Moroccan culture. Indicators such as "maintains eye contact" have been changed to the more specific "maintains eye contact with peers," as in many cases in Moroccan culture it is disrespectful for a young person to hold eye contact with an elder. Similarly, the "speaks hesitantly" trait has been specified as "speaks hesitantly in native language," as many Moroccans will generally be speaking to the study's primary observer in English, which is a less comfortable, less known language for them.

Several indicators are new, and were not used in Demo's research. These were written with Tafarodi and Swann's breakdown of self-esteem in mind: self-esteem is inherently composed of self-competence and self-liking (Tafarodi & Swann 2001). Indicators like "at ease when addressing small groups" are, ideally, testing these traits. If people feel competent and like themselves to a certain degree, they should have very few problems speaking to a small group (note the "small" descriptor, as addressing large groups is a common phobia). Similarly, relying excessively on social cues from others suggests that the individual does not trust enough in their own competence in a social situation.

Granted, there is a long list of potential indicators that could be utilized in an observational study such as this. However, watching for these 20 traits in girls and women of various ages and in various situations should be sufficient to gain an understanding of the answer to the question: Do females in Morocco show high rates of self-esteem, thereby conforming with Bleidorn et. al's theory of women in developing countries?

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Name of participant	Calculated confidence score	Approximate age
Subject 1	3.4	18 – 29
Subject 2	3.2	60+
Subject 3	3.2	30 – 59
Subject 4	3.2	18 – 29
Subject 5	2.9	12 – 17
Subject 6	2.8	30 – 59
Subject 7	2.6	18 – 29
Subject 8	2.6	18 – 29
Subject 9	2.5	18 – 29
Subject 10	2.3	12 – 17
Subject 11	2.2	30 – 59
Subject 12	2.1	12 – 17
Subject 13	1.8	60+
Subject 14	1.7	60+
Subject 15	1.2	30 – 59
Subject 16	1.1	12 – 17
Subject 17	1.1	12 – 17
Subject 18	0.8	18 – 29
Subject 19	0.7	12 – 17
Subject 20	0.5	18 – 29

Subject 21	0.4	12 – 17
Subject 22	0.3	12 – 17
Subject 23	0.3	12 – 17
Subject 24	0.2	12 – 17
Subject 25	0	12 – 17
Subject 26	0	18 – 29
Subject 27	-0.1	30 – 59
Subject 28	-0.1	12 – 17
Subject 29	-0.1	12 – 17
Subject 30	-1.2	18 – 29

These results have been ranked from high to low rates of self-esteem. Approximate age ranges have also been included, as age is such a prominent indicator of self-esteem and confidence in Western research. The selected age ranges were chosen primarily in order to isolate adolescence (defined here as ages 12 – 17), although mid and upper ranges were also included in order to best understand the data. There are thirteen observations of girls aged 12-17, nine observations of women aged 18-29, five of women aged 30-59, and three of women 60 or older. The majority of women who interact with the observer on a regular basis are between the ages of approximately 12 – 25, which can be seen in the data.

The first thing to note from this data is that the majority of the entries (80%) are greater than zero, indicating that most of the women observed are self-confident to varying degrees. The absolute value of the highest number present is greater than the lowest number, which also indicates a general tilt towards high self-esteem rather than low. Additionally, the majority of the

adolescents observed tend to be in the lower half of the spectrum (about 77% of the total number

of adolescents) while the adults tend to score higher, which agrees with the theory that

adolescents generally have lower self-esteem than adults.

The women represented who are 60 or older are all in the mid-high range of women with

high self-esteem, which does not necessarily fit with Orth's theory of a decrease in self-esteem

during old age (Orth et. al 2010), although there are so few older women represented in this

study that generalizations cannot effectively be made. It is also possible that there is a cultural

element at play here. In Orth et. el's paper, it is argued that individuals in the United States begin

losing self-confidence around age 60 partly because they feel that they are losing their ability to

contribute to society and do the things they used to do.

In the United States, people's usefulness is generally measured in a more black and white

way than it is in Morocco. Employment and eventually retirement, for example, are usually

straightforward and part of a structured system in America. The informal economy, or any form

of work that is unprotected by a regulatory framework, makes up only five to ten percent of the

United States' GDP (Nightingale & Wandner 2011). In contrast, 43 percent of Morocco's GDP

is its informal economy (Othmane & Mama 2016). While this is just one example of the

workforce difference between the two countries, it is relatively easy to imagine that leaving the

workforce in America is a more defined event that could leave a person feeling aimless

afterwards, especially if they have worked their whole life.

In Morocco, the attitude towards employment is different. As can be seen from these

statistics, the significance of the informal economy suggests that working in Morocco is more

flexible. It is not the same environment as the U.S., where a person might work for one company

their entire lives and then stop completely after retirement. There is much more self-employment

in Morocco, and more informal work opportunities that might come and go over a short period of

time rather than lasting forty years. In this way, it seems possible that older Moroccans might be

less likely to evaluate their contributions to society based on their formal employment.

These observations were also conducted exclusively on women, who are overall less

likely than men to be employed outside the home in Morocco. There is also a notable difference

between the home lives of older Moroccans verses older Americans. In America, one third of

older Americans who are not in a designated home or a hospital live alone (Institute on Aging

2017). In contrast, 96 percent of elderly Moroccans live with their families (El Masaiti 2017).

Keeping the insignificant sample size in mind, this could hypothetically be another reason that

older Americans might have more difficulty with self-esteem than older Moroccans; loneliness,

which could easily come from living alone as many older Americans do, is strongly correlated

with low levels of self-esteem (Bednar 2000).

The situation of older adults is just one example of the many differences between

Moroccan culture and Western culture, where most literary research is conducted. The fact that

Moroccan adolescents generally have lower self-esteem than older women indicates that the age

range of adolescence itself may be intrinsically linked to rates of self-esteem, not only culture.

Perhaps some elements of adolescence naturally accompany lower self-esteem, regardless of

culture. While culture does shape how young people around the world experience adolescence, it

does not seem to be more important to self-perception than the transitive years between

childhood and adulthood themselves as understood by this small sample. To make a

generalization based on a very small sample, it could be said that these growing years come with

inherent self-doubts that will have an impact on individuals' self-esteem, unrelated to their

culture. Further thoughts on this can be found in the informal observations section.

These results also support the primary theory that women in developing countries have high rates of self-esteem and self-confidence. While these observations do not pinpoint the reason behind the rates of confidence—is it due to the cultural separation of genders, as Bleidorn et. al suggest, or something else?—they do show that they exist. This is despite some of Morocco's more unique facets, such as high levels of awareness of the very nearby and prominent Western European cultures. Spain, for example, is a mere eight miles away, and tourism (primarily originating in Europe) represents almost 18% of Morocco's total GDP and 16 percent of all jobs in Morocco (Tourism Council 2015).

Additionally, the French legacy of colonialization still has a prominent foothold in Morocco, as French remains the language of bureaucracy and is a requirement for many professional jobs in the country. Then, of course, there is the prominence of American films and television present in Morocco. In Morocco, there is no shortage of awareness of Western gender norms and other cultural aspects. Assuming Bleidorn et. al's theory of developing countries is the reason behind the generally high levels of self-esteem present in this study, we can assume that the prevalence of Western culture in Morocco has not changed Morocco's own cultural gender norms. This study does, however, only represent one town in Morocco. The observer has noted that in Morocco's larger cities—Fes, Meknes, Rabat, Marrakech, etc.—many women tend more towards Western clothing styles, Western products and so on.

Informal observations pertaining to results

The observer found that, overall, gender roles were relatively traditional and not often crossed in Imouzzer Kandar, Morocco. This corresponds with the overarching theory of this paper that men and women usually remain in different spheres in developing countries. This does seem to be changing with the times, however. A generation ago, women were generally

discouraged from seeking an education, particularly in rural areas. Recently, there has been a

push for girls' education, and it is not uncommon for a mother in her fifties or sixties to be

illiterate while her daughter might have a college degree. There have also been new initiatives to

assist older women with no formal education in finding jobs, which was previously an arena for

men. For example, a women's development center in Imouzzer Kandar was recently awarded a

grant from the Middle-East Partnership Initiative (MEPI) designed to educate women in soft

skills and provide trainings and work opportunities for them.

Times are changing, and gender roles and expectations in Morocco are changing with

them. However, there are still many gendered social norms that remain in place. Women are still

expected to spend the majority of their time in the home, and the streets and public spaces are

often considered a male domain. In several instances, girls have reported that their parents have

forbidden them from going to public spaces like cafes. Because these spaces are so male-

dominated, girls and women who frequent them, especially in small towns, tend to earn bad

reputations because of the still-present social norms.

It is also a given that boys will be *besslin*—troublemakers. It is very common for girls to

experience street harassment such as catcalling and having boys follow them. The community-

prescribed solution to this problem is often for girls to not travel alone, or, better still, to have a

brother or male family member around to protect them. The burden of prevention is placed more

on the girls' shoulders than their male counterparts, who are the ones causing the problems.

Therefore, while significant strides have been made for women's progress and equality in

academia and the workforce, there are still very prevalent social norms that draw a clear line

between men and women.

In the literature review, it was suggested that the ethnic identity of minorities might play a role in self-esteem. In Imouzzer Kandar there is a significant proportion of the population that identifies as Tamazight, and a smaller percentage that identifies as Arab. The majority of the women observed in this study, for example, had Tamazight roots; this was primarily identified by which language they chose to use when they spoke amongst themselves. While the observer for this paper has not seen any overt tension between Tamazight and Arabs in Imouzzer, particularly among the observed subjects, Tamazight individuals have expressed anti-Arab sentiment in private settings. There have also been several Tamazight cultural events, and Tamazight is often spoken in public settings instead of Arabic. Across all of Morocco, the Tamazights are a minority. In Imouzzer Kandar, however, it is the Arabs who represent the minority. Although Arab and Tamazight people currently coexist peacefully and much of Morocco has mixed Arab-Tamazight heritage, there is an old history of conflict and discrimination between them. That, combined with the sometimes distinctly-drawn ethnic lines in Imouzzer Kandar might have some effect on individuals' self-esteem, although it is not investigated in this paper.

The literature also suggests that religion might have an effect on self-esteem. The general population of Imouzzer Kandar expresses religious devotion openly, from wearing religious clothing to praying in public places. There are also indicators that members of the community do not necessarily adhere to the state religion of Islam. For example, there are two functioning liquor stores in Imouzzer Kandar, although the consumption of alcohol is forbidden under Islam. Religious involvement likely has an effect on a signification proportion of people's lives in Imouzzer Kandar, and by extension their self-esteem, but it must also be considered that not everyone in the town considers themselves religious.

It was also suggested that shame might have an impact on self-esteem, and that shame is especially prevalent in Morocco. In a study on shame in Morocco, one author argued that shame was used more to control women than to control men (Crivello 2008). This observer found that shame and shaming was not an immediately prominent part of Moroccan culture, but it does exist. There also may be some credence to Crivello's observation on the differences in how shame is used with man and women. In the above examples, shame (or the thought of earning a shameful reputation) is used to keep girls from going to cafes, but there is not a similar sense of shame against the boys who harass girls on the street. This may be in part because girls are encouraged to spend so much more time at home and with their families, while boys spend more time with their peers. It follows that young boys would not be particularly likely to shame each other for behaviors such as street harassment, but a family that cares about a girl's reputation might be able to use shame as a form of social control often, since these girls spend so much of their time with said families. In this way, it is possible that shame does play a role in self-esteem, particularly the self-esteem of girls.

Age also plays a role in gendered confidence in Morocco. These observations, while not specifically indicated in the data, are worth noting. Younger girls generally spend significant amounts of time in the same schools as their male peers, and young working women also likely spend most of their day around men. On the other hand are the older women, who tend to be established as the head of their household, where the men are often away for most of the day. There are also many young women who are not employed, more than there are employed young women. This is partly due to the currently poor job prospects for young people in Morocco, and partly due to individual families' desires to keep young women at home. These young women generally spend most of their day in the house, assisting their mother in cleaning, cooking, and

maintaining the home. They, like older Moroccan women, do not have much exposure to men, especially non-relatives, in their daily lives.

Whether or not it is directly related to how often these girls and women find themselves sharing a social sphere with men, there is a notable difference between ages. Adolescent girls are more likely to do things with their peers, and will often confer with each other or look to one another for guidance. Older women, particularly those who run a household, do not do the same. Decisions regarding the home fall to them, and as the head of the house, they do not confer with others the way younger girls do. Conferring with others is not inherently a trait of someone who does not have faith in themselves, but the ability of an individual to confidently make decisions that will affect other people does seem to indicate high self-esteem.

With these factors in mind, being around the opposite gender did seem to have an effect on the confidence of the younger girls in particular. For example, in one instance many of the younger girls were interested in playing basketball until they learned that boys would also be playing. While they may or may not have been completely explicit in their reasonings, they expressed that they didn't want to play with the boys because they would ignore them on the court and not be likely to share the ball with them. If this reasoning is true, it could also correspond with Bleidorn's theory that women in developing countries have higher self-esteem because they are unlikely to compare themselves to men. The girls didn't dislike the idea of playing with the boys because they were comparing themselves unfavorably to them; instead, they just didn't relish the thought of never getting the ball.

We could also imagine that the hypothetical reality was that the girls didn't want to play basketball with the boys because they didn't like the thought of their skills being compared, despite the reason they had explicitly given. If this were the case, Bleidorn's theory might

suggest that this is because these girls spend more time with boys in the classroom, etc., much as girls do in Western societies. If these girls are used to comparing themselves academically to boys, perhaps this trend has carried over into the athletic sphere as well. It could also simply be explained as the result of adolescence and the slightly lower self-esteem that comes with it. It is important not to underestimate the complexity of self-esteem and its many sources and causes.

LIMITATIONS

While the results of this study and subsequent informal observations are interesting, it should of course be noted that the sample size is very small. A population of 30 women, especially considering they come from the same town, cannot be generalized to all of Morocco. Similarly, if these women are split by age groups, there are only around 13 representatives of the adolescent 12-17 age range, for example, which is an even smaller population. Generalizing based on this sample is not recommended, but the trends are worth noting nevertheless.

As has been mentioned, this sample of women all came from the same city in Morocco, called Imouzzer Kandar. Imouzzer Kandar is a relatively large town by local standards, with a population of around 15,000. Because of this, it may not accurately represent women's lives in either small villages or large cities, where the local cultures may be different. Additionally, Imouzzer Kandar is a wealthy, well-developed town compared to many of the small surrounding villages, but is less wealthy and less developed than nearby cities such as Fes and Meknes. As such, it likely does not accurately represent the economic disparities in Morocco and the effects they may have on self-confidence and culture.

Other limitations might be found in the indicators used (see Appendix A). Some indicators were split so that one action indicated high self-esteem and its opposite indicated low

self-esteem, such as "maintains eye contact" and "has difficulty maintaining eye contact."

However, it may be the case that these factors are not as equal as they were designed to be. In

this case, it seems to be much more common for people to maintain eye contact that to be unable

to do so. Keeping "has difficulty maintaining eye contact" as an indicator of poor self-esteem

may still be valid, but in future studies perhaps "maintains eye contact" should not be included,

as it seems to be a better indicator of normal behavior than of high self-esteem.

Because each individual observation is based on five separate observed occurrences, each

one represents a high percentage of the total. If one of the randomly selected five occurrences

were to happen on a day when a subject was feeling particularly low and not like themselves, for

example, it would skew the results in a way that might not necessarily represent that person, and

represents a potential weakness.

There are also a few alternate explanations to this dataset that should be considered. First,

in several cases this sample is self-selected. Many of the observed women, particularly the

adolescent group, are individuals who chose to interact with the observer by attending classes

and other social events. It is possible that these people already tended towards high self-esteem,

which is why they felt comfortable putting themselves out there, attending classes and interacting

with foreigners. A study that found a way to observe the women and girls who preferred to spend

their time in other ways would be more indicative of the entire population.

Having a non-native Moroccan as the observer might also have had an effect on results.

Consciously or unconsciously, the observed women and girls may not have acted entirely like

themselves in the presence of a foreigner, whether that registered itself as curiosity and

friendliness or avoidance. It is also possible that the foreigner element had no effect. Given that

non-tourist foreigners are rare in Imouzzer Kandar, though, it should be considered that

participants might have acted out of the ordinary towards the observer, one way or another. A significant proportion of the observations made were done during face-to-face interactions between the observer and the participants, so if this theory is true, it may have had a noticeable effect on the results.

COMPARISON TO OTHER STUDIES

For the most part, other academic studies on the subject of self-esteem use multiple methods of data collection (Coopersmith 1959; Demo 1985). As noted previously, while using multiple methods of data collection is a valuable, effective way to garner a more reliable dataset, it was not convenient for this study due to language differences and the chance for misunderstanding. However, this study is also not the only one of its kind to use only one method of data collection (Heatherton & Polivy 1991; Ross, Scott & Bruce 2012), and these studies have contributed significantly to the body of literature.

This study was heavily influenced both by Bleidorn et. al's theory and by Demo's method of observed indicators that represent levels of high or low self-esteem. While the population that Demo observed was children instead of women in a developing country, the indicators used in the Demo study proved to be useful in this drastically different setting. The often-referenced Bleidorn et. al study took a different form than this paper and was conducted on a much wider spectrum, but the results of both this study and Bleidorn et. al's generally correlate. Bleidorn et. al's theory of women's self-confidence and observations of the general lack of academic knowledge about the developing world inspired this study, despite the differences in scope and measurement methods between the two studies.

While there are relatively few studies conducted exclusively in Morocco, particularly observational studies, there was one such study that met those exact parameters (Crivello 2008). Crivello, too, was interested in the gender dynamic in Morocco, and had similar findings to this paper in regard to the gender divide in the country. Crivello believed that the majority of the gender divide could be attributed to the utilization of 'shame culture' in Morocco. This paper does not share Crivello's emphasis on shame, but it is worth noting that many of the informal observations provided in this paper correlate with Crivello's own.

CONCLUSION

Bleidorn et. al's theory of self-esteem in women, especially women in developing nations, is an important one, as it explores a complex topic as it relates to an underserved population. As still relatively little research is conducted in developing countries, further research could be crucial in developing a complete understanding of self-esteem, its effects, and how it differs based on culture and location. The general lack of research conducted in the developing world is an especially significant gap in the knowledge, as it represents a very large population of people who are not fully understood. Projecting research conducted in the developed world onto these populations is an oversimplification that needs correcting.

This study in particular can be considered an indicator in support of Bleidorn et. al's theory. Keeping the limitations of this study in mind, the numbers suggest that women in Morocco, a developing country, tend towards relatively high confidence in a range of different scenarios. It also appears as though adolescence might be inherently linked to slightly lower levels of self-esteem, regardless of culture, as has been suggested in other studies (Orth et. al 2010). There are, however, imperfections in this study, and more research could add to the existing literature significantly. If this paper has been successful, it will serve as an indicator for

future studies of the research possibilities in the developing world, as Bleidorn et. al's theory

continues to be expanded upon and studied.

Author's experiences in Morocco

Living in a Moroccan community while conducting this research not only made this

paper possible, but had a significant influence on my own perceptions and understanding of the

topic. Particularly in the beginning, it felt hypocritical of me to be evaluating the self-esteem of

other women when I personally felt so unsure of myself in this new culture. I struggled with the

language, with cultural norms, and knowing how to act like myself when it was so difficult to

communicate and understand what was happening around me. In a way, my own self-esteem was

at its lowest while I was trying to gauge the self-esteem of others.

It was the women around me who I spent time with that slowly made me feel confident

living in Morocco. They were patient with my mistakes, taught me about the culture, and

laughed with me when I confused the words "cow" and "pancake" (which are very similar in

Moroccan Arabic, in my defense). I was sent to Morocco to work with these women, but they

also served as my teachers in all things Moroccan and as the participants in my study. Needless

to say, these women were, and still are, key to my life in Morocco as I gradually made friends

and began to feel as if I had a place in my community. I knew my neighbors, and the

storekeepers, and I had friends who I could invite over in my poor Arabic. All the while, I was

thinking about self-esteem not only because it pertained to my own feelings, but because it was

the subject of my research. I discovered that for me, self-esteem came once I felt at home.

My self-esteem also grew as my communication skills did. As my Arabic improved and I

was better able to speak and understand the people in my community, I became more confident.

In that sense, I had to work for this improved sense of self. Studying Arabic was difficult, and exposing my own language limitations by trying to converse with people was more difficult still. But as time passed, I improved, and things became easier. This paper does not go into any depth on the idea of working to gain better self-esteem, although it has become an idea that interests me. In many cases, of course, the answer to improving self-esteem is not as simple as trying to learn the dominant language in the area where you live. In this way, I was lucky that I had such a straightforward option to improve my own self-esteem, despite occasional pitfalls and Moroccan neighbors being very blunt with their opinion of my Arabic.

It was, and occasionally still is, hard living in a foreign country. But in doing so, I have become much more aware of how external factors can influence my own self-perception. It gave me a much different understanding of self-esteem and self-confidence than I have had in America. Being in a vulnerable state myself while writing a paper on the subject made the experience much more real and personal for me. It also made me fully appreciate how important it is to have sympathetic people around you. My supportive Moroccan friends and neighbors have made my Moroccan experience the positive one that it has been, and I would like to take this opportunity to thank them again for their kindness, support, and in making this research possible.

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