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Article

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**The impact of attention deficit / hyperactivity disorder on an individual's self esteem****<sup>1</sup>Avinash Chauhan****Post graduate, Amity Institute of Applied psychology and Allied sciences, Amity  
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**Abstract**

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A neurodevelopmental illness that affects children, Attention Deficit Hyperactivity illness (ADHD) is typified by symptoms such as impulsivity, hyperactivity, and inattention. But its effects are much more profound, frequently leaving people feeling overburdened and alienated. Many people with ADHD experience low self-esteem, which is made worse by society criticism and ignorance. Since they frequently think of themselves as square pegs in round holes, this internal conflict can lead to feelings of inadequacy.

There are three forms of ADHD: inattentive, impulsive/hyperactive, and mixed. The precise causes are still being investigated, but neurological and genetic factors are important. Self-esteem theories that emphasize the impact of ADHD on interpersonal interactions and self-worth include the sociometer theory and the self-determination theory. In the end, cultivating compassion, acceptance, and encouragement can aid in releasing the enormous potential that people with ADHD, enabling them to flourish in spite of their difficulties

*Keywords:* Attention Deficit Hyperactivity illness, Hyperactivity, Inattention, Intervention, Self-esteem, Systemic reform

## Introduction

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Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder or ADHD is often defined as the neuro developmental disorder which develops in children during their childhood or early adolescence period. It is commonly marked by the presence of symptoms such as excessive motor activity, impulsiveness, hyperactivity and inattention. But in reality, it is so much more than that. ADHD isn't always about a kid who is unable to sit down quietly, stay still and continues to bounce around. It's effect on an individual's internal world is much more deeply rooted. Viewing it through a more humane lens and studying the people suffering from it shows us that a lot of times Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder entails feeling completely overwhelmed by the environment and their surroundings. It means experiencing a lack of normalcy in your life because of your inability to do things like other normal human beings and feeling like you don't belong. Sometimes, people forget that individuals diagnosed with ADHD had never chosen to be impulsive, disorganised or forgetful. Lack of knowledge, compassion and acceptance from others makes it even harder for them to instil a sense of normalcy in their lives. Living with a disorder like this one is not easy. It's like living with internal voices who constantly reprimand you and remind you of your shortcomings. Limited or no tolerance of their symptoms and criticism from society further deepens this sense of not being enough and worthy. With constant judgement and insensitivity shown towards them by most of the people - they are in a constant battle with their self - esteem. Various studies and researches indicate that most of the individuals suffering from ADHD have a really low self - esteem. Reading some of the experiences penned down by people who are diagnosed with it themselves gives us a glimpse into their world and makes us realise that they mostly end up feeling like a square shaped peg trying to fit in a round hole. No amount of judgement and cajoling can make them fit into it or change their shape. They're not being lazy by being disorganised nor do they have a plain expression on their face because they're inconsiderate. It's simply because their mind unlike normal people, is trying to process ten things at the same time. But those diagnosed with ADHD are not defined by their psychological symptoms. They're much more than that and are really intelligent, creative and capable individuals. With a little patience, acceptance, kindness and understanding we can unlock the door to the endless potential residing within them. They're underestimated most of the times because their minds work differently than ours but without the unnecessary restrictions people place on them and sans the false beliefs - they can achieve incredible things in their own unique way.

It takes a lot of work on the part of the individual suffering from ADHD to come to terms and accept that that they're not being ineffectual, stupid, crazy or lazy but there's just something different about their neurobiology which further leads to the difficulties and hurdles they've been facing in their attempt to live rewarding, respectful, meaningful and effective lives. Since ADHD develops when children are young and vulnerable, their point of view about it is very different from adults who get diagnosed with it at a much later stage in their lives. Kids view themselves through the eyes of those around them. Their parents, caregivers, peers, teachers and immediate family members contribute to the way they look at and feel about themselves. They're tender hearted and want to be accepted by children their age and they need to be loved

unconditionally and supported by their parents. In order to seek this acceptance from their peers they want to be like them but when they see their friends and children their age successfully accomplish task and, do the things they have difficulty in accomplishing - a part of themselves feels crushed. They end up feeling that there's something genuinely wrong with them. The hardships one goes through because of growing up with ADHD really does leave a deep imprint in their lives and most importantly, harms and lessens their level of self - esteem. The low self -esteem seeps into their daily interactions and prevents them from approaching someone to become their friend. Not only that, it also makes them feel less than others at work, school, college or any social set up. Since they're unable to take that leap of faith due to their low self - esteem - they're often limited and unable to progress further in forming bonds or in their field of interest. Children who grow up with ADHD, facing a lot of criticism from society or their loved ones in childhood - internalize the negative voices which surround them. These negative voices hold them back from placing much value on their decisions, ideas and opinions. It gives way to the belief that they're not good enough. This belief tends to grow and deepen its roots over time, making individuals diagnosed with ADHD see it as a personal flaw. Stanley Coopersmith's Self - Esteem Theory states that self - esteem stems from early childhood experience. It builds on a foundation of unconditional love, security and unwavering trust. It is impacted by life progress and both - negative and positive moments. As the childhood of kids growing up with ADHD is different, they find it difficult to fit in and understand and explain their struggles to others their age. Their sense of security is impacted by this as well since they can't bring themselves to trust their capabilities enough.

There are basically three types of ADHD. The first one is the combined type of ADHD. It's the most common one out of the three types. It is mainly characterized by inattention, hyperactive and extremely impulsive behaviours along with distractibility. The second one is the - impulsive/hyperactive type. It's the least common category of ADHD which individuals experience. Its main features are hyperactive and impulsive behaviour patterns with an absence of distractibility and inattention. The third and last type is the distractible and inattentive type whose key symptoms are distractibility and inattention minus the hyperactivity. Despite being one of the most researched topics in child mental health, the exact cause of ADHD still can't be determined. But the existing evidence suggests that it's genetic. Since it's a brain - based disorder, it's biologically characterized by low levels of a neurotransmitter called dopamine. Brain imaging scans have also brought to notice that the children who have ADHD displaying low brain metabolism in the areas of movement, attention, social judgement and control.

There are three main theories of self - esteem namely: self - determination theory, terror management theory and lastly, sociometer theory. Terror Management Theory was found by Sheldon Solomon and Jeff Greenberg which explored the part that death plays in our life. They suggested that close bonds, deep personal relationships, worldviews about things lying on the cultural spectrum and self - esteem function in a way to manage potential existential terror which is an outcome of our human and innate awareness of the inevitable nature of death. The

self - determination theory states that intrinsic motivation makes its appearance in children early on before the knowledge of death and evolution of life seeps in. It tries to convey that a tendency to grow and change for better is inherent in human beings. Human beings are wired in a way that when their psychological needs of autonomy, competence and connection are met and fulfilled they themselves step towards becoming more self - determined. It was introduced by Richard Ryan and Edward Deci in the year 1985. Sociometer Theory given by Mark Leary and later explored further by Ellis and Kirkpatrick defines self - esteem as a gauge or measure of interpersonal bonds. It helps them determine whether they're valued in their relationships and accepted by their family, friends and peers for who they are. Based on studies, ADHD affects 1 to 7% of people who belong to the age category of 18 years and below. The symptoms generally start showing up when the child turns 6 or 12 years old. ADHD affects the life of an individual with great intensity. It creates difficulty while pursuing academics, in relationships, at the place of work and causes the individual such great suffering that they feel isolated and often withdraw into their shell. Their inability to do things that are considered to be a norm by the society hits their self - esteem really hard, often making their belief in themselves and their capabilities fall apart. Having a poor self - image is one of the most prominent results of having ADHD. Therefore, the concept of self - esteem and Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder go hand in hand because they interfere with and contribute to each other significantly. In ways more than one. Emotionally unfulfilling bonds and social interactions which aren't rewarded cause the suffering individuals to withdraw themselves, further deteriorating their symptoms.

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### Literature review

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**Swords, Heary and Hennessy (2011)** conducted a research experiment to study how children perceive peers suffering from ADHD and depression. The sample for the study consisted of 595 school kids belonging to different age groups from early childhood to the later stages of adolescence. They answered a booklet containing questions regarding what their outlook and behaviour would be like in response to peers diagnosed with ADHD and depression. The results indicated that gender and age of the subjects played a major role in determining their answers and the responsibility that they would have to handle because of their friend's condition also influenced their answers greatly. The study concluded that the type of mental health disease an individual had played a major role in determining how their friendships with other students would look like.

**Saneei, Bahrami and Haghegh (2011)** conducted a research study to explore whether anxiety and self - esteem is something that children diagnosed with ADHD struggle more with as compared to normal children or not with the help of "Draw - A - Person Test". To conduct this experiment, they took a sample of 30 children suffering from ADHD by following the multi - cluster sampling method. The children were selected from the psychiatric clinics located in the state of Isfahan in Iran. Another sample group consisting of 30 normal children from the public schools located in Isfahan were also taken by following the same sampling method. The results brought to notice that there are significant differences in the performances of both the groups, especially in the characteristic revolving around size and line. It was also noted that specific aspects of the drawings made by children with ADHD were extremely meaningful and conveyed a lot.

**Houck, Kendall, Miller, Moller and Gail (2011)** conducted a research experiment to study the self -concept of children and adolescents diagnosed with ADHD. The study began by addressing how little importance has been paid to how the behavioural symptoms experienced by patients of ADHD impacts their self - esteem and more specifically in terms of their ethnicity, gender and age. A sample of one hundred and forty - five adolescents and children with ADHD along with their mothers was taken. Caucasian, African Americans and Hispanic Americans were equally represented through the sample. A Child Behaviour Checklist was used as a means to assess the severity of the ADHD symptoms. The Piers - Harris Children's Self - Concept Scale was taken to measure the self - concept of all the children and adolescents. The results brought to notice how more internalising behaviour problems served as an indicator to and predicted a lower level of self - concept. There were no noticeable differences found between the different ethnic groups who were a part of the study on the self - concept scores and behaviour problems. But post - hoc analyses highlighted how Caucasian children diagnosed with ADHD had a lower self - concept as compared to those belonging to the African American or Hispanic ethnicities. The findings of the study indicated how there is a real need to study the self - concept of children and adolescents who are suffering from ADHD. Specially, the ones who are older in age and also have comorbid conditions related to depression and anxiety.

**Park, Oh, Suk, Song and Im (2012)** conducted a research experiment to study how the parenting of children who were diagnosed with ADHD played a major role in their social and emotional development and in turn affected their level of self - esteem. The study designed followed by the researchers was a descriptive and cross - sectional survey. A sample of one hundred and twenty - four pairs of mothers and their kids diagnosed with ADHD were taken into consideration. All the data was collected through the various questionnaires. The results brought to notice how an affectionate parenting style and comorbid condition being experienced by the child were the most important determining factors impacting the self - esteem of the individual. A rejecting parenting style was an important indicator when it came to social competence. The study concluded by highlighting that high level of affectionate parenting styles practiced by mothers and the non - comorbid symptoms of the kids contributed to a higher level of overall self - esteem in all of them. High level of the rejecting parenting style practiced by mothers of children with ADHD led to lower social competence in them. The findings of the particular study brought to notice how parenting style and attitude are one of the most significant factors contributing to a healthy emotional and social development in children diagnosed with ADHD.

**Tse (2012)** conducted a research study to find out how ADHD students can be assisted to live a fulfilling college life by bringing to notice the factors which impact their level of self - esteem and social skills and in turn, ends up affecting their lives, academic achievements and over all careers. A mixed method approach was used by the researcher which combined both - quantitative and qualitative research methods. A sample of eighty - eight participants was taken out of which forty - four were students diagnosed with ADHD and the other 44 were students who weren't diagnosed with ADHD. All the participants were from community and private universities. As a part of the quantitative research - all the participants filled in three survey

questionnaires which were: The Rosenberg Self - Esteem Scale, the Profile Information form and the Social Interaction Anxiety Scale Survey Schedule. MANOVA and the T - Test were used to analyse the significance of self - esteem and social skills in students diagnosed with ADHD as compared to the students who weren't diagnosed with it. Eight major themes emerged when the interview data obtained from the qualitative study were analysed. These eight themes were - Self Esteem, College accommodation, diagnosis and childhood experiences, family support, medication, social skills, professions and goals and ADHD symptoms. The results obtained through the MANOVA and T - Test also highlighted the students diagnosed with ADHD had poor social skills and low self - esteem as compared to the non - ADHD students. The themes which emerged brought to notice that the symptoms that an individual diagnosed with ADHD experiences affect the individual's social skills and self - esteem in a big way which in turn ends up impacting their academic achievement and the social interactions that they're a part of.

**Green and Rabiner (2012)** conducted a research experiment on college students suffering from ADHD. The findings of their research indicated that college students diagnosed with ADHD who get to experience comparatively less success in the academic sphere and greater emotional and psychological difficulties as compared to the other students is because of their high alcohol and drug intake. However, the conclusions which were drawn from the research are fairly limited as a small sample has been taken and it's not fully representative of the population of students who are diagnosed with ADHD. The study also highlighted how there is a lack of studies which focus on the medication, accommodations in the academic sphere and the effectiveness of treatments of the psychosocial kind. There is a need for better understanding of college students with ADHD in order to come up with interventions which can be implemented and developed to exceed their success and enhance it further.

**Chou, Liu, Yang, Yen and Fan Hu (2014)** conducted a research study in Taiwan to understand how the involvement of bullying relates to adolescents who are suffering from ADHD. A sample of 287 adolescents who were diagnosed with ADHD was taken. The level of involvement of bullying, family characteristics, their unique ADHD symptoms and both, the behavioural - approach and inhibition system along with comorbidity which is a result of the psychiatric characteristics were taken into account. Analysing the results brought to notice that a large chunk of adolescents suffering from ADHD experienced bullying. A few reasons which have a correlation with them being a subject of bullying were - less emotionally fulfilling family bonds, young age coupled with autism spectrum disorder and a high score on the BIS and BAS tests.

**Gagliano, Lamberti, Siracusano, Ciuffo, Boncoddò, Maggio, Rosina, Cedro and Germano (2014)** conducted a research study to analyse how do children suffering from ADHD compare to children suffering from Epilepsy in terms of their self - esteem and the stress level experienced by their parents. The study included a sample of 65 individuals who were children belonging to the age bracket of 9-12 years old. Conner's Parent Rating Scales (Revised version), Multidimensional Self Concept Scale and Parent Stress Index were used to conduct the experiment. Significant and important differences were found in the Academic, Social and Competence areas related to self - esteem between children suffering from Epilepsy and

ADHD. It was found that the parents of children who were diagnosed with ADHD experienced higher stress overall as compared to the other group. The study concluded by highlighting how important it is to evaluate how impactful are the aspects of getting diagnosed with ADHD both - for the children and their parents so that a multimodal treatment can be suggested for both of them separately.

**Qureshi, Hume, Knight and Cook (2014)** conducted a research experiment to study the self - esteem of individuals who were suffering from ADHD. They stated that, growing up with ADHD means that an individual often lives their life surrounded by negative messages about their capabilities. The unpleasant outcomes of this negative messaging are felt throughout the different stages of life. The support from services often abandons the diagnosed adults and further worsens their self - image. The following study analysed twelve databases to gain an insight into what are the immediate needs of the suffering individuals and what can be done to support them in a better way. The 13 research articles explored and studied in depth by them were of both - cross sectional and interventional type. Through their research, they came to the conclusion that ADHD is closely related to lower self -esteem. However, these difficulties faced by them concerning their low self - esteem levels can be worked upon and remedied with the help of psychotherapy.

**Yen, Chou, Liu, Yang and Hu (2014)** conducted a research study to examined how internet addiction is associated with depression, various kinds of anxiety and most importantly self - esteem in adolescents with ADHD. A sample of two hundred and eighty - seven individuals belonging to the age bracket of 11 to 18 years, who were diagnosed with Attention Deficit/ Hyperactivity Disorder were taken. The level of internet addiction was measured by using the Chen Internet Addiction Scale. The depression and anxiety symptoms along with the self

esteem of the individual were measured by using the Taiwanese version of MASC which stands for the Multidimensional Anxiety Scale for Children, the Rosenberg Self - Esteem Scale and the Center for Epidemiological Studies Depression Scale. The results brought to notice that a high - level somatic discomfort score on the Center for Epidemiological Studies Depression Scale and a high level of physical symptoms and a low harm avoidance score on the Multidimensional Anxiety Scale for Children Taiwanese version, and low level of self -esteem score on the Rosenberg Self - Esteem Scale were associated and showed a strong correlation with symptoms of Internet addiction. The study concluded by highlighting that the intervention and prevention programs to manage internet addiction amongst adolescents diagnosed with ADHD must consider important factors like self - esteem, anxiety and depression.

**Kurman, Yakar, Angel and Katz (2015)** conducted a research experiment to study the academic self - evaluation and both forms of self - esteem - implicit and explicit in children with ADHD. They tried to investigate how this impacts the working of different parenting styles. The three different styles of parenting are authoritative, permissive and authoritarian parenting. The sample for the study included 35 children who don't have ADHD and 43 children who were diagnosed with ADHD. The experiment entailed the two groups to fill out the perceived parenting style and self - concept questionnaires. They also filled out a test which was made to measure unacknowledged self - esteem, it was named as an Implicit Association

Test. The results indicated that children with ADHD had lower levels of self - esteem. It was also found that authoritarian parenting style leads to even lower levels of self - esteem in children suffering from ADHD. The results brought to notice that higher levels of self - esteem were found in the authoritative parenting style as compared to the permissive parenting style in the control group consisting of non - ADHD children but the same was not the case with children with ADHD. Parents play a really important role in the child's life and specially in the life of an individual suffering from ADHD. Therefore, it is of utmost importance to promote more strategies revolving around responsiveness in parents specially in their case. It facilitates their treatment and contributes to a higher level of self - esteem.

**Becker, Mehari, Langberg and Evans (2016)** conducted research to study peer victimization faced by young adolescents who've been diagnosed with ADHD, how it affects their self -esteem and how it is associated with internalised symptoms. The peer victimization being studied in their research was of three kinds - reputational, physical and relational. The internalised symptoms being taken into account were self - esteem, anxiety and depression. The sample for the current study consisted of 11-15 years old middle school students who were suffering from ADHD. 131 one of them were selected as the participants for the research. The results showed that while both the female and male participants experienced intense anxiety because of physical and relational victimization, males reported internalising physical victimization a little more. Whereas relational victimization was noted much more in the female participants. It was noted that young adults diagnosed with ADHD often experience victimization and as a result of it - they end up internalising its impact.

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### **Methodology**

The majority of the papers in this study came from peer-reviewed scientific journals, and electronic databases were extensively searched. However, some online resources were included to provide the complete scope of the topic. The reference list of each relevant article was manually reviewed to identify potentially qualifying materials that were overlooked by electronic database searches.

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### **Discussion**

Rosenberg defines self - esteem as the aggregate of an individual's feelings, emotions and thoughts about herself or himself as an object. According to the research articles and journals reviewed during the course of accumulating more knowledge about how an individual's self - esteem is impacted by the Attention Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder - a lot of new findings and observations were found. Based on these findings it can be stated, that an individual's self - esteem is an amalgamation of their feelings and thoughts about themselves and in the case of individuals diagnosed with ADHD, it is impacted by several other factors as well. According to the "Looking Glass" theory given by Charles Horton Cooley - human beings view themselves the way they think the other people in their life perceive them to be. This is especially true in the case of individuals with ADHD. There are a variety of factors contributing to the way a human being perceives herself or himself. These include - familial relations, inter personal bonds, friendships, bullying, academic competence, social competence, self - efficacy,



physical appearance, athletic abilities, childhood experiences, family environment, support, loneliness and therapeutic intervention to name a few prominent ones. Analysing various research experiments and research studies helps in building an understanding about the self-esteem of individual who is suffering from ADHD. A study conducted by Swords, Heary and Hennessy (2011) on how children perceive peers suffering from ADHD and depression revealed that the type of mental health disease an individual had played a major role in determining how their friendships with other students would look like. Another research experiment conducted to study the self-concept of children and adolescents diagnosed with ADHD highlighted how there is a real need to study the self-concept of children and adolescents who are suffering from ADHD. Specially, the ones who are older in age and also have comorbid conditions related to depression and anxiety. A research experiment was conducted to study how the parenting of children who were diagnosed with ADHD played a major role in their social and emotional development and in turn affected their level of self-esteem. It highlighted that high level of affectionate parenting styles practiced by mothers and the non-comorbid symptoms of the kids contributed to a higher level of overall self-esteem in all of them. High level of the rejecting parenting style practiced by mothers of children with ADHD led to lower social competence in them. The findings of the particular study brought to notice how parenting style and attitude are one of the most significant factors contributing to a healthy emotional and social development in children diagnosed with ADHD. In another research study conducted by Tse in 2012 conducted to find out how ADHD students can be assisted to live a fulfilling college life by bringing to notice the factors which impact their level of self-esteem and social skills and in turn, ends up affecting their lives, academic achievements and over all careers. Eight major themes emerged when the interview data obtained from the qualitative study were analysed. These eight themes were - Self Esteem, College accommodation, diagnosis and childhood experiences, family support, medication, social skills, professions and goals and ADHD symptoms. The results obtained through the MANOVA and T-Test also highlighted the students diagnosed with ADHD had poor social skills and low self-esteem as compared to the non-ADHD students. The themes which emerged brought to notice that the symptoms that an individual diagnosed with ADHD experiences affect the individual's social skills and self-esteem in a big way which in turn ends up impacting their academic achievement and the social interactions that they're a part of. A research experiment was conducted by Chou, Liu, Yang, Yen and Fan Hu in 2014, in Taiwan to understand how the involvement of bullying relates to adolescents who are suffering from ADHD. Analysing the results brought to notice that a large chunk of adolescents suffering from ADHD experienced bullying. A few reasons which have a correlation with them being a subject of bullying were - less emotionally fulfilling family bonds, young age coupled with autism spectrum disorder and a high score on the BIS and BAS tests. Another study's results brought to notice that higher levels of self-esteem were found in the authoritative parenting style as compared to the permissive parenting style in the control group consisting of non-ADHD children but the same was not the case with children with ADHD. Parents play a really important role in the child's life and specially in the life of an individual suffering from ADHD. Therefore, it is of utmost importance to promote more strategies revolving around responsiveness in parents specially in their case. It facilitates their treatment and contributes to a higher level of self-esteem. The friendship experiences of adolescents who have been

diagnosed with ADHD were analysed and three main themes emerged after analysing the answers given by all the participants. The first theme was that all the adolescents with ADHD who were a part of the study reported experiencing loneliness, conflicting friendships in early adolescence and childhood and chronic peer rejection. According to theme two, all the participants reported that were friendless for a part of their adolescent years. The third and final theme highlighted that when they transitioned and went to high - school they could finally find similar peers with whom they could develop and nurture strong, deep and close

### **Conclusion**

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Upon analysing the findings of various research studies, it can be concluded that the presence of ADHD definitely impacts an individual's self - esteem because it completely changes the way a person perceives themselves. The hardships one goes through because of growing up with ADHD really does leave a deep imprint in their lives and most importantly, harms and lessens their level of self - esteem. Children who suffer from it, grow up facing a lot of criticism from society or their loved ones in childhood - internalize the negative voices which surround them. These negative voices hold them back from placing much value on their decisions, ideas and opinions. It gives way to the belief that they're not good enough. This belief tends to grow and deepen its roots over time, making individuals diagnosed with ADHD see it as a personal flaw. On the basis of all the research findings, it can be concluded that while it is increasingly difficult for individuals to nurture and develop a high level of self - esteem due to the behavioural, emotional and psychological symptoms that they experience but the whole process can definitely be facilitated by unconditional positive regard, support, heartfelt empathy, understanding, warmth and reassurance from their parents, teachers, friends, siblings and their close ones' side. Because an individual's self - esteem resembles a mosaic painting in which colourful pieces of glass come together to make it whole, the same way various fragments in the form of point of views, experiences, thoughts, feelings and emotions of both – us and the people surrounding us, come together to form our self - esteem.

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