

Research Paper

## Relationship between Self-Esteem, Self Actualization, and Social Connectedness in Young Adults

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### ABSTRACT

The present study examined the relationships among self-esteem, self-actualization, and social connectedness in a sample of young adults residing in Navi Mumbai, India. Drawing on Maslow's (1954) hierarchy of needs and related theoretical frameworks in humanistic and positive psychology, it was hypothesized that self-esteem would demonstrate statistically significant positive correlations with both self-actualization and social connectedness. A quantitative, correlational, cross-sectional design was employed, and data were collected from 204 participants (102 males, 102 females) aged 18 to 25 years using three validated instruments: the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (RSES; Rosenberg, 1965), the Short Index of Self-Actualization (SISA; Jones & Crandall, 1986), and the Social Connectedness Scale-Revised (SCS-R; Lee & Robbins, 1995). Spearman rank-order correlations revealed weak, non-significant negative associations between self-esteem and self-actualization ( $\rho = -.097$ ,  $p = .166$ ) and between self-esteem and social connectedness ( $\rho = -.107$ ,  $p = .128$ ), leading to the retention of both null hypotheses. Independent-samples t-tests indicated no statistically significant gender differences on any of the three measured variables. These results challenge theoretical assumptions derived from humanistic and social psychology regarding the role of self-esteem as a facilitator of personal growth and social belonging. Possible explanations, including ceiling effects, sampling constraints, and the nature of contingent self-esteem, are discussed alongside directions for future research.

**Keywords:** *Self-Esteem, Self-Actualization, Social Connectedness, Young Adults, Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, Humanistic Psychology*

The identification of psychological factors that contribute to human well-being and flourishing has long been a central concern of psychological inquiry. Among the constructs most frequently implicated in theories of optimal functioning, self-esteem, self-actualization, and social connectedness occupy positions of considerable theoretical importance. Each has been associated independently with a range of positive psychological outcomes, and collectively, they represent three interrelated dimensions of the broader landscape of mental health and subjective well-being.

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Self-esteem, defined broadly as an individual's overall evaluation of their own worth and competence (Rosenberg, 1965), has been examined extensively in both clinical and non-clinical populations. High self-esteem has been reliably linked to lower rates of anxiety and depression, greater resilience, and more adaptive interpersonal functioning (Orth & Robins, 2014). Self-actualization, the apex of Maslow's (1943, 1954) motivational hierarchy, refers to the ongoing process of realizing one's full potential and living with a sense of purpose and authenticity. Individuals oriented toward self-actualization tend to demonstrate higher life satisfaction, greater psychological flexibility, and a sustained commitment to personal growth (Kaufman, 2018). Social connectedness, conceptualized as the subjective sense of belonging and closeness in relation to others (Lee & Robbins, 1995), serves as a protective factor against loneliness, psychological distress, and a range of stress-related health outcomes.

Despite the documented importance of each of these constructs, the existing literature has examined them largely in isolation or in pairwise combinations. Studies addressing self-esteem and well-being, or social support and mental health, are abundant; however, research simultaneously examining the role of self-esteem in predicting or correlating with both self-actualization and social connectedness within a unified sample is sparse. This gap is particularly notable with respect to young adults, a population undergoing substantial developmental transitions related to identity formation, interpersonal network establishment, and the consolidation of long-term personal goals (Arnett, 2000).

The present study was undertaken to address this gap by examining the relationships among self-esteem, self-actualization, and social connectedness in a sample of young adults aged 18 to 25 years residing in urban and semi-urban areas of Navi Mumbai, India. The study treats self-esteem as the independent variable and self-actualization and social connectedness as dependent variables, testing whether self-worth functions as a meaningful correlate of personal growth orientation and perceived social belonging in this specific population.

### ***Research Objectives***

The present study was designed to address the following objectives:

1. To examine the relationship between self-esteem and self-actualization among young adults aged 18 to 25.
2. To examine the relationship between self-esteem and social connectedness among young adults aged 18 to 25.
3. To assess whether statistically significant gender differences exist on measures of self-esteem, self-actualization, and social connectedness.

### ***Hypotheses***

#### **Null Hypotheses**

- H01: There will be no statistically significant relationship between self-esteem and self-actualization.
- H02: There will be no statistically significant relationship between self-esteem and social connectedness.

#### **Alternate Hypotheses**

- H11: There will be a statistically significant positive relationship between self-esteem and self-actualization.
- H12: There will be a statistically significant positive relationship between self-esteem and social connectedness.

## REVIEW OF LITERATURE

### *Self-Esteem: Development and Consequences*

Self-esteem is understood as a person's overall subjective appraisal of their own value, competence, and acceptability (Rosenberg, 1965). It is not a fixed attribute but rather a dynamic psychological disposition that develops through cumulative interpersonal experience, beginning in infancy through the quality of attachment with primary caregivers and continuing to evolve throughout adolescence and adulthood (Harter, 1999).

In middle childhood, peer comparisons and academic performance begin to exert notable influence on children's developing sense of competence and worth. During adolescence, the developmental salience of peer acceptance, social identity formation, and body image renders self-esteem particularly susceptible to fluctuation (Harter, 1999). In adulthood, self-esteem tends to stabilize and becomes increasingly tied to occupational achievement, relational quality, and perceived purposefulness.

Orth and Robins (2014) reviewed longitudinal evidence on self-esteem development across the life course and identified three robust patterns. Self-esteem rises from adolescence, reaches its peak during middle adulthood, and declines in later life. Despite this developmental trajectory, self-esteem demonstrates considerable rank-order stability, meaning that individuals' relative standing within the distribution tends to persist over time. Furthermore, higher self-esteem consistently predicted more favorable outcomes across multiple domains of functioning, including interpersonal relationships, occupational success, and physical health.

Ummet (2015) investigated predictors of self-esteem in a sample of 342 Turkish university students and found that satisfaction of the psychological needs for autonomy and relatedness significantly predicted self-esteem, with autonomy emerging as the strongest predictor. Interestingly, perceived competence did not contribute independently to self-esteem, a finding that challenges longstanding assumptions within the literature. Positive parenting practices and higher family income were also positively associated with self-esteem, while neglectful parenting was linked to lower self-worth.

The consequences of low self-esteem are well-documented. Individuals with chronically low self-esteem are at elevated risk for anxiety disorders, depression, disordered eating, and difficulties in forming and sustaining healthy interpersonal relationships (Sowislo & Orth, 2013).

Fear of rejection and a tendency toward people-pleasing behaviors are commonly observed in this group, as are patterns of self-critical thinking and negative self-attribution.

### *Self-Actualization: Theoretical and Empirical Foundations*

Self-actualization occupies the highest tier of Maslow's (1943, 1954) motivational hierarchy, representing the desire to realize one's fullest potential through creativity, learning, and authentic living. According to the model, this growth-oriented need becomes most salient only after the lower-order deficiency needs, physiological, safety, love and belonging, and esteem, have been adequately satisfied.

Kaufman (2018) undertook a systematic empirical examination of Maslow's self-actualization construct using contemporary measures of personality and well-being. Findings indicated that individuals scoring higher on self-actualizing tendencies were characterized

by growth motivation, openness to experience, and concern for others beyond the self. These tendencies were significantly associated with greater life satisfaction, a sense of personal growth, and psychological autonomy. Kaufman's work provided contemporary empirical grounding for Maslow's largely theoretical model while acknowledging that the correlational design precluded definitive causal conclusions.

Humanistic theorists have argued that high self-esteem constitutes a necessary, though perhaps insufficient, condition for self-actualization (Maslow, 1954; Rogers, 1961). The logic underlying this argument is that individuals who harbor persistent self-doubt or feelings of inadequacy are likely to remain preoccupied with esteem-related concerns rather than directing psychological resources toward higher-order growth goals. A stable positive self-regard, in this view, provides the motivational foundation from which self-actualizing tendencies can emerge.

In cases where self-actualization is not pursued or is actively thwarted, individuals may experience a sense of stagnation, chronic boredom, or the persistent feeling that their potential remains unrealized, even when material and relational needs are otherwise satisfied (Maslow, 1968).

### ***Social Connectedness: Conceptualization and Correlates***

Social connectedness refers to the subjective experience of closeness, belonging, and meaningful integration with others (Lee & Robbins, 1995). It is distinguished from the mere presence of social contacts by its emphasis on the perceived depth and authenticity of interpersonal bonds. Baumeister and Leary (1995) proposed the need-to-belong hypothesis, arguing that humans possess a fundamental, biologically grounded drive to form and maintain positive, stable interpersonal relationships, and that chronic failure to satisfy this need produces significant psychological distress.

Lee and Robbins (1998) investigated the relationship between social connectedness and trait anxiety in a sample of college women. Social connectedness was negatively related to trait anxiety, and this relationship remained significant even after accounting for social support and collective self-esteem. Women with low connectedness showed no compensatory increase in motivation to establish new social bonds, a pattern the authors attributed to diminished interpersonal trust. The study also suggested that social connectedness functions as a perceptual lens through which individuals interpret and respond to social stimuli.

In a subsequent investigation, Lee and Robbins (2011) examined gender differences in the determinants of social connectedness among college students. Although overall levels of connectedness were comparable between men and women, the relational processes through which connectedness was achieved differed by gender. Women's connectedness was more strongly associated with physical intimacy and reliable alliance, whereas men's connectedness was more closely tied to social comparison and affirmations of competence. Furthermore, loneliness showed a substantially stronger association with low connectedness for women (67%) than for men (24%), suggesting that the functional meaning of social belonging may differ across gender groups.

Healthy social connectedness has been associated with reduced risk of depression and anxiety, improved ability to manage stress, and greater overall life satisfaction (Cacioppo & Hawkley, 2003). Conversely, social isolation and perceived loneliness have been linked to accelerated cognitive decline, immune dysregulation, and elevated mortality risk.

### ***The Interrelationship Among the Three Constructs***

The theoretical relationships among self-esteem, self-actualization, and social connectedness have been articulated across multiple frameworks. Within Maslow's (1954) model, the sequential positioning of esteem needs immediately below self-actualization implies that sufficient self-regard is a precondition for growth-oriented motivation. Self-Determination Theory (Deci & Ryan, 2000) similarly posits that the satisfaction of the needs for competence and relatedness, constructs with substantial conceptual overlap with self-esteem and social connectedness, respectively, is essential for autonomous motivation and psychological growth.

The sociometer model proposed by Leary and Baumeister (2000) offers an additional perspective on the self-esteem and social connectedness relationship. According to this model, self-esteem functions as an internal monitor of social acceptance and belonging, rising in response to inclusion and declining in response to rejection or exclusion. Higher self-esteem, in this account, signals adequate social belonging and facilitates confident social engagement, whereas lower self-esteem signals social threat and may activate self-protective withdrawal that further undermines connectedness.

### ***Identified Gaps in the Literature***

Despite the theoretical and empirical groundwork laid by the studies reviewed above, a significant gap persists in the literature. No published study has simultaneously examined the correlational relationships among self-esteem, self-actualization, and social connectedness as a unified constellation of constructs within a young adult sample. Studies have addressed pairwise or individual relationships, but the broader interplay, particularly the role of self-esteem as a common antecedent or correlate of both personal growth orientation and perceived social belonging, has not been directly investigated. The present study was designed to address this gap.

## **THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

### ***Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs***

The theoretical foundation of the present study rests primarily on Maslow's (1943, 1954) hierarchical model of human motivation. Maslow proposed that human needs are organized across five levels, arranged from the most basic to the most advanced: physiological needs, safety needs, love and belonging needs, esteem needs, and self-actualization needs. Lower-order deficiency needs must be reasonably satisfied before higher-order growth needs gain motivational prominence.

The placement of esteem needs directly below self-actualization needs provides a direct theoretical basis for the primary hypothesis of the current investigation. The model implies that a stable sense of self-worth provides the psychological security and confidence necessary for the emergence of self-actualizing tendencies. This hierarchical relationship has been the subject of both substantial empirical support and ongoing critique, with some researchers arguing that the strict sequential ordering of need fulfillment does not hold across all individuals or cultural contexts (Wahba & Bridwell, 1976; Tay & Diener, 2011).

### ***Positive Psychology and Eudaimonic Well-Being***

Positive psychology, as articulated by Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi (2000), provides a complementary theoretical lens. This perspective emphasizes the scientific study of human flourishing and the conditions that enable individuals to live meaningful, engaged, and purposeful lives. Self-actualization aligns closely with the construct of eudaimonic well-

being, which refers to the realization of one's potential, the pursuit of meaningful goals, and the experience of personal growth (Ryan & Deci, 2001). Positive psychology further emphasizes the centrality of positive relationships and social connectedness as foundational components of well-being, providing additional theoretical support for the inclusion of social connectedness as a dependent variable in the current study.

### ***Social Psychology and the Need to Belong***

Baumeister and Leary's (1995) need-to-belong theory offers a third theoretical pillar. The theory holds that human beings possess an innate motivation to establish and maintain at least a minimal number of meaningful interpersonal relationships, and that chronic deprivation of this need produces adverse effects across psychological, behavioral, and physiological domains. This framework grounds social connectedness as a fundamental psychological variable with consequences extending well beyond mere subjective comfort. It also situates self-esteem as a potential facilitator of belonging, insofar as positive self-regard may reduce the social anxiety and interpersonal avoidance that obstruct the formation of meaningful bonds.

## **METHODOLOGY**

### ***Research Design***

The study employed a quantitative, correlational, cross-sectional research design. A quantitative approach was selected because the study's primary objective, examining the strength and direction of relationships among psychological constructs, is best served through the systematic collection of numerical data and the application of inferential statistical procedures. A correlational design was appropriate given that self-esteem, self-actualization, and social connectedness are naturally occurring variables that do not lend themselves to experimental manipulation. The cross-sectional design permitted simultaneous measurement of all variables within a single data collection phase, providing a useful though temporally limited picture of their interrelationships.

### ***Research Setting***

Data collection took place in Vashi, a suburb within the Navi Mumbai metropolitan region of Maharashtra, India. The setting encompasses a mixed urban and semi-urban population, with participants drawn from educational institutions, professional environments, and community networks within this geographic area.

### ***Participants***

The target population comprised young adults aged 18 to 25 years residing in the Navi Mumbai area. This age range was selected on the basis of its developmental significance: young adulthood is a period of active identity formation, the consolidation of self-concept, and the establishment of both occupational and social networks (Arnett, 2000). A total of 204 participants were included in the final sample, consisting of 102 males and 102 females. Participants were recruited through a self-selection sampling strategy augmented by snowball sampling, wherein initial participants were invited to refer other eligible individuals within their social networks. Inclusion criteria required participants to be aged 18 to 25 years, to possess sufficient proficiency in English to complete the survey instruments, and to provide informed consent prior to participation. Exclusion criteria encompassed individuals unable to comprehend the English-language items, those with known cognitive impairments such as dementia or specific learning disabilities, and those with diagnosed severe mental health conditions including major depressive disorder, bipolar disorder, psychotic spectrum disorders, personality disorders, and trauma-related conditions.

### ***Instruments***

1. **Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (RSES):** Self-esteem was measured using the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (Rosenberg, 1965), a 10-item self-report measure widely recognized as the standard instrument for assessing global self-worth. Participants rated each item on a 4-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 4 (Strongly Agree). The RSES has demonstrated strong psychometric properties across diverse populations and cultural contexts. Internal consistency, as measured by Cronbach's alpha, typically ranges from .80 to .90, and the scale has shown robust convergent validity with related self-concept measures as well as discriminant validity with measures of anxiety and depression (Blascovich & Tomaka, 1991).
2. **Short Index of Self-Actualization (SISA):** Self-actualization was assessed using the Short Index of Self-Actualization (Jones & Crandall, 1986), a 15-item measure derived from the longer Personal Orientation Inventory (POI; Shostrom, 1964). Participants responded to each item on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree). The SISA has demonstrated acceptable internal consistency (Cronbach's alpha exceeding .70 across reported studies) and good concurrent validity through its significant positive correlations with the full-length POI. Criterion validity has been supported by meaningful associations between SISA scores and theoretically related constructs including self-esteem and rational behavior (Jones & Crandall, 1986).
3. **Social Connectedness Scale-Revised (SCS-R):** Social connectedness was measured using the Social Connectedness Scale-Revised (Lee & Robbins, 1995), a 20-item scale assessing the subjective sense of belonging, closeness, and integration within one's social environment. Participants rated items on a 6-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 6 (Strongly Agree). The SCS-R has consistently demonstrated excellent internal consistency (Cronbach's alpha > .90 across multiple studies), strong construct validity evidenced by positive correlations with social support measures, and convergent validity reflected in its negative correlation with loneliness (Lee & Robbins, 1995).

### ***Procedure***

Data were collected via an online survey administered through Google Forms. Participants accessed the survey through a shared link. Upon entry, they were presented with an introductory page providing a general overview of the study purpose without disclosing specific hypotheses, in order to minimize demand characteristics and reduce the likelihood of hypothesis-guided responding. This page also included a formal informed consent form specifying the voluntary nature of participation and the right to withdraw at any time without penalty.

Following consent, participants completed a brief demographic questionnaire before proceeding to the three standardized scales administered in the following order: RSES, SISA, and SCS-R. Upon completion, participants were directed to a debriefing page that disclosed the study's full purpose, expressed gratitude for their participation, and provided contact information for psychological support services. All collected data were stored on a password-protected server, with participant anonymity maintained throughout.

### ***Data Analysis***

Data were analyzed using IBM SPSS Statistics software. Preliminary analyses consisted of descriptive statistics, including means, medians, modes, and standard deviations, to

characterize the distribution of scores on each scale. Frequency histograms were examined to assess distributional shape and to identify any notable skewness or outliers.

Independent-samples t-tests were conducted to evaluate gender differences on each of the three measures. Because normality could not be confirmed for all variables, non-parametric Spearman rank-order correlation coefficients (rho) were computed to assess the strength and direction of the associations between self-esteem and self-actualization, and between self-esteem and social connectedness. All significance tests were conducted at the  $\alpha = .01$  level (two-tailed).

### ***Ethical Considerations***

All participants provided electronic informed consent before beginning the survey. Participation was entirely voluntary, and participants were informed of their right to discontinue at any point. Responses were collected anonymously, and no personally identifying information was retained beyond basic demographic data. The instruments employed are standardized psychological measures with established non-harmful profiles. A debriefing page with access to support resources was provided to all participants upon completion of the survey.

## **RESULTS**

### ***Descriptive Statistics***

Descriptive analyses yielded the following summary statistics. On the RSES, the sample mean was  $M = 25.69$  ( $Mdn = 26.00$ ,  $SD$  reported by gender; see Table 1), with the distribution appearing approximately symmetric and slightly negatively skewed, indicating a concentration of scores at the higher end of the scale. This pattern is consistent with a ceiling effect and suggests that the sample as a whole reported relatively high levels of self-esteem. On the SISA, the mean was  $M = 39.84$  ( $Mdn = 39.00$ ), with a slightly positive skew, indicating that scores were more densely distributed at the lower-to-middle range, with fewer participants attaining higher self-actualization scores. On the SCS-R, the mean was  $M = 74.43$  ( $Mdn = 73.00$ ), with the distribution approximating normality and exhibiting only mild positive skew.

### ***Gender Comparisons***

Independent-samples t-tests were conducted to examine whether males and females differed significantly on self-esteem, self-actualization, or social connectedness. Results are presented in Table 1.

***Table 1 Gender-Wise Comparisons on Self-Esteem, Self-Actualization, and Social Connectedness***

| Scale | Gender | N   | Mean  | SD     | df  | t      | Sig level |
|-------|--------|-----|-------|--------|-----|--------|-----------|
| RSES  | Male   | 102 | 25.95 | 2.209  | 202 | 1.799  | NS        |
|       | Female | 102 | 25.43 | 1.906  | 202 | 1.799  | NS        |
| SIAS  | Male   | 102 | 39.23 | 5.664  | 202 | -1.543 | NS        |
|       | Female | 102 | 40.46 | 5.769  | 202 | -1.543 | NS        |
| SCS-R | Male   | 102 | 73.57 | 9.913  | 202 | -1.001 | NS        |
|       | Female | 102 | 75.28 | 14.192 | 202 | -1.001 | NS        |

*Note.* NS = not significant at  $p < .05$ .

## Relationship between Self-Esteem, Self Actualization, and Social Connectedness in Young Adults

No statistically significant gender difference was found on the RSES,  $t(202) = 1.799$ ,  $p > .05$ , with males ( $M = 25.95$ ,  $SD = 2.21$ ) reporting marginally higher self-esteem than females ( $M = 25.43$ ,  $SD = 1.91$ ). On the SISA, females ( $M = 40.46$ ,  $SD = 5.77$ ) scored slightly higher than males ( $M = 39.23$ ,  $SD = 5.66$ ), though this difference was also non-significant,  $t(202) = -1.543$ ,  $p > .05$ . On the SCS-R, females ( $M = 75.28$ ,  $SD = 14.19$ ) reported slightly higher social connectedness than males ( $M = 73.57$ ,  $SD = 9.91$ ), and this difference again did not reach statistical significance,  $t(202) = -1.001$ ,  $p > .05$ .

### Correlation Analysis

Spearman rank-order correlations between self-esteem and the two dependent variables are presented in Table 2.

**Table 2 Spearman Rank Correlations Between Self-Esteem and Dependent Variables ( $N = 204$ )**

| Spearman's rho | Self Esteem          | Correlation Coefficient | 1.000 |
|----------------|----------------------|-------------------------|-------|
|                |                      | Sig (2 tailed)          | .     |
|                |                      | N                       | 204   |
|                | Self Actualization   | Correlation Coefficient | -.097 |
|                |                      | Sig (2 tailed)          | .166  |
|                |                      | N                       | 204   |
|                | Social Connectedness | Correlation Coefficient | -.107 |
|                |                      | Sig (2 tailed)          | .128  |
|                |                      | N                       | 204   |
|                | Gender               | Correlation Coefficient | -.118 |
|                |                      | Sig (2 tailed)          | .094  |
|                |                      | N                       | 204   |

*Note.* Two-tailed test. Significance threshold:  $p < .01$ .

The Spearman correlation between self-esteem (RSES) and self-actualization (SISA) was  $\rho = -.097$  ( $p = .166$ ). As the obtained p-value exceeded the significance threshold of  $\alpha = .01$ , this correlation was not statistically significant. Accordingly,  $H_{01}$  was retained. The Spearman correlation between self-esteem (RSES) and social connectedness (SCS-R) was  $\rho = -.107$  ( $p = .128$ ), also failing to reach significance at the  $\alpha = .01$  level.  $H_{02}$  was therefore retained. Both correlations were weak in magnitude and negative in direction, indicating that self-esteem shared no meaningful linear relationship with either self-actualization or social connectedness in this sample.

## DISCUSSION

### 1. Absence of Gender Differences

The t-test results revealed no statistically significant gender differences on any of the three measured variables, a finding consistent with prior literature. Ummet (2015) similarly reported no significant effect of gender on self-esteem in a sample of Turkish university students, suggesting that overall self-esteem levels tend to be comparable across genders in young adult populations even when the specific psychosocial determinants of self-esteem may vary. Lee and Robbins (2011) reported comparable overall levels of social connectedness among college-aged men and women, with differences arising in the relational pathways through which connectedness was achieved rather than in aggregate scores. The present data corroborate these findings and suggest that, at least at the level of

mean scores, broad gender generalizations regarding self-esteem, self-actualization, and social connectedness are not warranted in young adult samples.

From an applied standpoint, this finding suggests that psychological interventions targeting these constructs in young adult populations need not be fundamentally differentiated by gender in terms of core content, though gender-sensitive approaches to delivery may remain contextually appropriate.

## **2. Non-Significant Correlations and Their Interpretation**

The most consequential finding of the present study was the failure to obtain statistically significant positive correlations between self-esteem and either self-actualization or social connectedness. Both correlations were weak and directionally negative, a result that stands in contrast to predictions derived from Maslow's (1954) hierarchical model, positive psychology frameworks, and sociometer theory (Leary & Baumeister, 2000).

Several possible explanations merit consideration. First, the distributional characteristics of the self-esteem data are relevant. The RSES scores in this sample showed a ceiling effect, with responses concentrated at the higher end of the scale. This restriction of range in the independent variable likely attenuated any true underlying correlations with the dependent variables. In a sample with greater variance in self-esteem, the pattern of associations might differ.

Second, these findings may reflect the operation of contingent versus non-contingent self-esteem, a distinction emphasized within Self-Determination Theory (Deci & Ryan, 2000; Kernis, 2003). Contingent self-esteem, which fluctuates in response to performance outcomes and social approval, may not support the kind of stable psychological security theorized to underlie growth motivation and confident social engagement. If participants in the present sample reported high but contingent self-esteem, elevated RSES scores would not necessarily translate into self-actualizing behavior or deeper social belonging. This possibility cannot be assessed with the current data but represents a substantive area for future inquiry.

Third, it is possible that the relationships among these constructs are more complex than simple bivariate associations can capture. Mediating variables such as intrinsic motivation, attachment security, or psychological need satisfaction may be necessary to fully characterize the pathways through which self-esteem relates to personal growth and social belonging. The absence of significant direct correlations does not preclude the existence of indirect relationships operating through such intermediary variables.

Fourth, cultural and contextual factors specific to the study population may have moderated the hypothesized associations. Research conducted in Western populations, from which much of the theoretical literature is drawn, may not generalize without modification to young adults in urban Indian settings where social norms regarding self-presentation, community obligation, and achievement differ in potentially relevant ways.

## **3. Theoretical Implications**

The absence of a significant positive correlation between self-esteem and self-actualization challenges Maslow's (1954) hierarchical model as a predictive framework. The model implies that a healthy esteem level should be associated with, if not directly predictive of, greater self-actualization. The current data do not support this implication. However, this

finding should be interpreted with caution. Maslow (1968) himself acknowledged that self-actualization does not depend strictly on the resolution of all lower-order needs and that the hierarchical model represents a general tendency rather than a universal law. Contemporary scholars such as Kaufman (2018) have argued for a reconceptualization of self-actualization as a set of dispositional tendencies that can manifest across varying need-fulfillment profiles, rather than as a discrete stage accessed only after lower needs are fully resolved.

The non-significant correlation between self-esteem and social connectedness is similarly inconsistent with sociometer theory's prediction that higher self-esteem should facilitate social engagement and belonging (Leary & Baumeister, 2000). It also diverges from the finding by Lee and Robbins (1998) that high social connectedness was associated with higher self-esteem in their sample. The contradiction may reflect differences in sample composition, measurement timing, or the specific dimensions of social connectedness and self-esteem captured by the respective instruments.

#### **4. Consistency with Prior Findings**

Although the main correlational hypotheses were not supported, several findings are consistent with the existing literature. The absence of gender differences in self-esteem corroborates.

Ummeet (2015), who found no significant gender effect in a comparable student sample. The absence of gender differences in social connectedness aligns with Lee and Robbins (2011), who reported similar aggregate connectedness scores for men and women despite differences in the relational processes involved. The descriptive finding that the sample as a whole reported relatively high self-esteem is consistent with Orth and Robins (2014), who noted that self-esteem tends to be relatively stable and positioned at moderate-to-high levels in young adult populations.

#### ***Limitations***

The cross-sectional design constitutes the most significant methodological limitation of the present study. Because data were collected at a single time point, it is not possible to establish temporal precedence or to distinguish directional effects from bidirectional or spurious relationships. Longitudinal designs would be necessary to address questions of causality.

The exclusive reliance on self-report measures introduces the possibility of multiple forms of bias, including social desirability bias, acquiescence bias, and shared method variance. Participants may have provided responses they perceived as normatively appropriate rather than accurately reflecting their psychological states, particularly on items related to self-esteem and social connectedness.

The study was conducted using a non-probability sample drawn from a geographically circumscribed area, which limits the generalizability of findings to other populations, age groups, and cultural contexts. The sample was also restricted to individuals with sufficient English proficiency, which may have introduced selection bias.

Finally, the study did not account for potentially important confounding variables including socioeconomic status, educational level, family structure, personality traits, or the occurrence of significant life events. The omission of these variables may have obscured

relationships among the constructs of interest or contributed to the non-significant pattern of results.

## **CONCLUSION**

The present study examined the relationships among self-esteem, self-actualization, and social connectedness in a sample of 204 young adults aged 18 to 25 residing in Navi Mumbai, India. Statistical analyses yielded weak, non-significant negative correlations between self-esteem and self-actualization ( $\rho = -.097$ ,  $p = .166$ ) and between self-esteem and social connectedness ( $\rho = -.107$ ,  $p = .128$ ), resulting in the retention of both null hypotheses. Independent-samples t-tests revealed no significant gender differences on any of the three measured variables. These results diverge from the theoretical expectations derived from Maslow's (1954) hierarchical model, positive psychology, and sociometer theory, and they suggest that, within this sample, self-esteem functions as a relatively independent psychological construct that does not straightforwardly predict either growth orientation or perceived social belonging. The findings should not be taken as evidence against the importance of self-esteem to psychological well-being more broadly; rather, they point to the need for greater conceptual specificity regarding the conditions under which self-esteem translates into self-actualizing behavior and social integration. Future research should employ longitudinal designs to address questions of temporal ordering, mixed-methods approaches to understand participants' subjective experiences of these constructs, and samples that are more geographically and culturally diverse. Incorporating measures of self-esteem quality, particularly the distinction between stable and contingent self-esteem, may prove especially valuable in clarifying the relationships.

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### **Conflict of Interest**

The author(s) declared no conflict of interest.

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