



Esteem

by Rodney Martin

Esteem

Esteem today refers to 'high respect' but originally this word in Latin *aestimare* meant 'to appraise or value' (also the source of *estimate*). It came to English from French *estimer* in the early 1400s as *estymment* (also the source of *aim* from French *esmer*). The meaning 'high respect or regard' appeared first in 1611 in the King James Bible (Preface).

The development of self-esteem, positive or negative, has a significant influence on a person's life and can be influenced from many quarters. Essentially it is related to the original meaning of the word – how do we estimate the value of ourselves?

To the extent that we value ourselves as a reflection of how others value us, family members and teachers carry a great influence. Family teaches us the extent to which we are loved and teachers the extent to which we can be learners and valued participants within groups outside the family.

Any Jane Austen novel gives insight into the esteem in society towards girls and women of that period. Women depended on having a

husband of means to determine their position in society and opportunities in life. Young girls would have taken this on board.

Today, society displays more gender equity in its estimate of the value of girls in education, literary roles, career opportunities and relationships, and it is a changing landscape.

In spite of greater equity, girls (and boys) are still subject to negative forces in the development of their self-esteem. These forces include, for example, the disintegration of families and bullying (including the existence of new technology that enables bullying and isolation to greater extremes).

The new Early Childhood Education curriculum 'Being, Belonging and Becoming' is perhaps a recent move in the right direction in Australia. It hits the nerve centre of the development of positive self-esteem in children. But parents, the source of a child's first experiences of love, and therefore estimates of their value as people, remain the prime key.