

# The Self-Esteem among Non-Materialistic Individuals

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**Abstract.** *Self-esteem is one of the psychological aspects that humans need in order to be happy. Unfortunately, various studies have shown that a person's level of self-esteem is directly proportional to the level of materialism. Many studies have also found that materialism does not bring happiness to individuals. Therefore, the understanding of materialism needs to be resisted; one of them is by having a broad insight into various understandings or holding tightly identical non-materialist Indonesian culture. The results have shown that the three respondents who often read critical books or against general ideology (materialist) and the respondents who held their culture tightly did not associate their self-esteem with the material.*

**Keywords:** *Self-esteem, materialism, culture, knowledge*

## Introduction

There are ten psychological needs that are generally required by individuals (Vlachos & Vrechopoulos, 2012), one of which is the need for self-esteem. Self-esteem is a value or assessment that an individual attaches to himself and is expressed through an attitude towards him. Researches show that individual self-esteem is related to the level of happiness (Baumeister, Campbell, Krueger, & Vohs, 2003; Hwang & Lee, 2015; Jang & Cho, 2018; Yuki, Sato, Takemura, & Oishi, 2013). The self-esteem which is high in individuals can lead to positive feelings in the individual himself. This positive feeling makes the individual positively evaluate events in the past, making the individual see opportunities more than difficulties and increase a sense of humor (Roy F Baumeister, & Vohs, 2003). These conditions tend to give a feeling of happiness to individuals. Conversely, low self-esteem creates negative feelings which make individuals evaluate all events negatively and tend to blame themselves in the past which causes unhappy feeling (Hoffman, 1982). Mental conditions also affect the relationship of self-esteem and happiness. Children with mental retardation show lower self-esteem and higher anxiety than non-retarded children. This is due to the pessimistic attitude of the parents' children with mental retardation. Optimism is found that it can increase self-esteem and happiness (Wani, 2017).

The high or low self-esteem is directly proportional to the level of individual materialism (Li, Lu, Xia, & Guo, 2018). Materialism as means as obtaining symbolic immortality in a culture where materialism is considered a life value (Mulyono, 2011). Consumer researchers define materialism as "the importance," a consumer attaches to worldly possessions "and" the importance of places on possession and their acquisition as a necessary form of reaching the desired end states, including happiness (Richins & Dawson, 1992; Li et al., 2018). Thus it can be concluded that materialism is an understanding in which the owner of materials is very important for individuals in their efforts to achieve happiness.

Materialistic condition in the individual is supported by the increase in the production of goods and the development of global technology where people lifestyles are increasingly

narrowly to material or goods production. Li et al., (2018) state that individuals are materialistic to cover their low self-esteem. Belk and Foxall & Goldsmith state that those who are materialistic have an understanding of lower value than those who have an understanding of high values. They believe that self-esteem is influenced by dominating the economic system and ideology of materialism (Mulyono, 2011).

Individuals are able either to filter and follow the dominant understanding when they have other knowledge or another understanding, one of which is through reading. Haan (2013) states that individuals' knowledge affect their motivation and behavior at work. Furthermore, another study done by Fabrigar, Petty, Smith, & Crites (2006), find that knowledge can be the basis of individual attitude. This attitude determines their behaviour. Fabrigar's research shows that individuals tend to behave consistently relevant to their knowledge when they are in high consideration conditions before acting. Based on the findings of the study, there is a high probability of individuals with knowledge, meanwhile materialistic people do not base their self-esteem on the material.

Departing from above statements, this research is at aim to explore the concept of self-esteem according to recruited subjects who have the habit of reading critical books or against general ideology (materialism) and comparing them with the concept of self-esteem people who do not have access to the materialism supporting ideology.

Materialism is an understanding in which the individuals are very important for individuals in their efforts to achieve happiness. Strandell (2016) has argued that individuals often compensate for psychological needs that are not suitable by obtaining material wealth. This perspective is supported by Substantial empirical evidence. For example, Li et al (2018) mentions that low self-esteem individuals obtain a higher level of materialism. When people experience self-doubt, it has been proven that they increase self-esteem, self-status, and reduce self-uncertainty by gaining material wealth (Noguti &

Bokeyar, 2014). Arriving to above statements, individuals with negative self-evaluation are more likely to consume products related to status symbols to promote their self-image (Jiang, Zhang, Ke, Hawk, & Qiu, 2015; Lee & Shrum, 2013). Consequently, materialism can act as a way in which individuals protect and enhance their self-esteem.

### Literature Review

Self-esteem is a value or assessment that individual attaches to himself and it is expressed through an attitude towards him (Vlachos & Vrechopoulos, 2012). Self-esteem, can provide a positive feeling to someone (Baumeister et al., 2013).

Individual high self-esteem may lead to positive feelings to the individuals. This positive feeling makes individual positively evaluates events in the past, distinguish opportunities more than difficulties and increase a sense of humour (Baumeister et al., 2003). These conditions tend to give a feeling of happiness to individuals. On the other hand, low self-esteem creates negative feelings which make individuals evaluate all events negatively and tend to blame themselves in the past that cause individuals to be unhappy (Hoffman, 1982).

Materialism is defined as an understanding in which each individual is very important for individuals in their efforts to achieve happiness. Kasser et Al. (2004) argue that individuals often compensate for psychological needs that are not met by obtaining material wealth. This perspective is supported by substantial empirical evidence. Low self-esteem individuals obtain a higher level of materialism. When people experience self-doubt, it has been proven that they increase self-esteem, self-status, and reduce self-uncertainty by gaining material wealth (Chang & Arkin, 2002; Noguti & Bokeyar, 2014). Ultimately, individuals with negative self-evaluation are more likely to consume products related to status symbols to promote their self-image (Chaplin & John, 2007; Jiang et al., 2015; Lee & Shrum, 2013). Thus, materialism can act as a way in which individuals protect and enhance their self-esteem.

### Method

In this current study, there were three recruited subjects consisted of two male and one female. One recruited male subject and one recruited female subject lived in Madura, meanwhile one recruited male subject lived in Jogjakarta. The researcher conducted this study by direct interview via two chatting applications, namely e-mail and whatsapp. The interview session was conducted from May 20th 2018. The list of questions in the interview referred to the variable aspects of self-esteem (self-acceptance and self-esteem and materialism).

### Result and Discussion

Subject 1 is HR, a-madurese-twenty-six-year-old female lecturer. In her opinion, self-esteem is defined as the way neighbourhood community assesses her image. She is upset when she has to stand on the side of the road because she is waiting for information on where the event was held.

According to HR, people in her neighbourhood tend to judge negatively women who hang out (HR drove motorbikes) on the roadside for a long time. The community where HR lives is considered Madurese who have strong traditional values. They impose special norms for women. Every man who clusters on the side of the road, is considered normal. Yet, if women cluster at the side of the road, the community will give them negative stigma.

In addition to the norms of society, HR also links her self-esteem to how ethics treat women. According to HR, a man should know the right place and time to just get acquaintances or ask for a telephone number. This statement shows that HR values herself. Even so, the family is more important to HR than herself. The Madurese is one of the tribes who hold close family ties. The impact of this close feeling of kinship is due to the existence of *Carok* culture. It is a family culture that influences HR so that she links her self-esteem with her family.

The way HR behaves when she feels that her self-esteem is hurt done by treating the other person in the same way. HR even admits that she is willing to lie in order to repay the treatment of others who disappoint her. HR does not present the Madurese in general, so as to know and understand them, she needs to pay attention to the culture in which she lives in. The Madurese is known for the clumsiness. Assertiveness is closely related to stubbornness or lack of compromise. It is reflected in the HR who acts "eye to eye dialogue".

Despite setting strict rules or ethics to respect her, HR still realizes that she has many shortcomings in social relations. The subject also linked her self-esteem to the family's good name more than herself. Whereas HR's knowledge about understanding that is contrary to materialism is not seen. She also does not read books other than the primary books she used to teach since she is a lecturer. The conclusion is even though HR does not read books that have understanding against materialisms, but her Self-esteem is not based on material. There are other elements besides the knowledge gained from books that influence the concept of HR self-esteem, which is the culture in which she lives: Madurese culture.

Subject 2 is VQ, a-twenty-three-year-old male freelancer. VQ has the same blood ancestry as HR, which is Madurese. Self-esteem for him is related to his ability in the eyes of society. He feels his self-esteem is abused when receiving negative comments related to his ability or nature. Being silent but determined to prove that the words of people who hurt him are wrong is the way VQ behaves when his self-esteem is distracted. He does not associate his self-esteem in the material. He also does not read books but he would rather watch the action movie.

Since he is inherited Madurese blood ancestry, it means that VQ has the same culture as HR as they live in the same region. For this reason, even though VQ does not read books that contain ideas contrary to

materialism, he is not based his self-esteem on the material. Identical to HR, Madurese culture is the cause of VQ does not base his self-esteem on goods, but on capabilities and competencies.

Subject 3 is FO, a twenty four-year-old university student who is originally from Jogjakarta. The books which FO reads are in the form of critical books or against general ideology (materialism). He usually reads 2 books written by Noam Chomsky with titles "Who Rules The World and How the World Works". These books can provide an insight to the readers about how author controls people's knowledge for economic or other interests. Furthermore, these books can also attract the readers' attention that every knowledge, system or even an idea is created for several groups' interests, one of which is understanding materialism.

The influence of Noam Chomsky's book on FO's perspective can be seen through how he concepts his self-esteem. He agrees with the view Diogenes (One of figures he reads) who considers that self-esteem is probably just a human trick to look or feel valuable even though it is not empiric. He has also doubts toward the concept of self-esteem, but that does not mean he does not have it.

The four subjects show different concepts of self-esteem. Their views on self-esteem are influenced by the insights they get from books and culture they live in as culture is also a source of individual knowledge through parenting and education. This aspect shows that influence of materialism on individual self-esteem is still determined by the knowledge and culture which individuals have (Wani, 2017). Indigenous cultures in Indonesia are not materialism. Materialism comes from Greece which deal with myths and mystical things, a very closed Indonesian society in the past (Hasyem, 2012). Therefore, the community, in order to achieve self-esteem that is not based on materialism, they can do by holding on to their respective cultures tightly or broadening their horizons (Li et al., 2018).

### Conclusion

Involuntarily, materialism understanding becomes common and it is embraced by society to influence the concept of their self-esteem. So as to reduce the negative impact of materialism understanding on the individual as an unsatisfying feeling, the individuals can work against it by having broad insight and holding tightly to their culture. Therefore, individuals have a firm knowledge of how they should value and respect themselves.

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