



Perceived Social Validation and Its Impact on Self-Esteem and Emotion Regulation in Emerging Adults

Anushka Shrivastava, *Amity Institute of Psychology and Allied Sciences*
reshuanushkanurag@gmail.com

Abstract: This study examined the relationship between self-esteem and emotion regulation strategies in emerging adults, focusing on the role of perceived social validation, conceptualized as belongingness. Using a cross-sectional correlational design, data were collected from young adults through standardized self-report measures, including the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (RSES), the Emotion Regulation Questionnaire (ERQ), and the General Belongingness Scale (GBS). Perceived belongingness reflects an individual's sense of social connectedness and acceptance, while self-esteem represents overall self-worth, and emotion regulation was assessed through cognitive reappraisal and expressive suppression. The study aimed to examine whether higher perceived belongingness is associated with greater self-esteem and more adaptive emotion regulation strategies. It was expected that individuals with a stronger sense of belonging would report higher self-esteem, greater use of cognitive reappraisal, and lower reliance on expressive suppression, reflecting more adaptive emotional functioning. These findings contribute to existing literature by supporting interpersonal theories of self-esteem and highlighting the importance of social validation in shaping self-worth. The study also emphasizes the nuanced relationship between belongingness and emotion regulation, with implications for understanding emotional functioning and promoting mental well-being in emerging adults.

Keywords: *Self-Esteem, Emotion Regulation, Belongingness, Emerging Adults*

1. Introduction

In recent years, psychological research has increasingly emphasized the role of social relationships in shaping self-concept and emotional functioning, particularly during emerging adulthood. This developmental stage is characterized by identity exploration, shifting interpersonal relationships, and heightened sensitivity to social evaluation. As individuals transition from family-based validation to peer-oriented contexts, the need for acceptance and belongingness becomes especially significant. While some individuals experience enhanced well-being through social connectedness, others may experience reduced self-worth and emotional difficulty due to perceived rejection. These variations highlight the importance of perceived social validation in influencing psychological outcomes such as self-esteem and emotion regulation.

Perceived Social Validation and Self-Esteem

Perceived social validation refers to the extent to which individuals feel accepted, valued, and supported by others. Unlike objective approval, it is based on subjective interpretation of social feedback. Traditional intrapersonal theories define self-esteem as an internal evaluation of worth, with early theorists like William James describing it as the ratio of achievements to aspirations. Humanistic perspectives further emphasized inner congruence and alignment with personal values as key to healthy self-esteem.

In contrast, interpersonal theories suggest that self-esteem is shaped by social experiences. Sociometer Theory proposes that self-esteem functions as a psychological indicator of social acceptance. Individuals experience higher self-esteem when they perceive inclusion and approval, while rejection leads to lower self-worth. Empirical research supports this perspective, showing that individuals evaluate themselves more positively when they believe they possess socially valued traits. Thus, self-esteem is influenced by both internal evaluation and perceived social validation.

Perceived Social Validation and Emotion Regulation

Perceived social validation may also influence emotion regulation, which refers to the processes through which individuals monitor and modify their emotional responses. Cognitive reappraisal is considered an adaptive strategy, while expressive suppression is often associated with less adaptive outcomes.

Individuals who perceive greater belongingness may feel more secure in expressing and managing emotions, facilitating adaptive regulation. In contrast, those experiencing lower

validation may rely more on suppression or experience difficulty regulating emotions. Despite this, limited research has examined how perceived belongingness relates to specific emotion regulation strategies, particularly in emerging adults.

Emerging Adulthood and Cultural Context

Emerging adulthood, typically defined as ages 18 to 25, is marked by instability, exploration, and evolving social roles. During this period, individuals rely more on peer feedback to shape identity, increasing sensitivity to social validation.

In collectivistic contexts such as India, social relationships and interdependence are highly valued. Although young adults are increasingly exposed to individualistic influences, traditional norms emphasizing social approval remain strong. This cultural context may intensify the impact of perceived belongingness on self-esteem and emotional functioning, yet research in such settings remains limited.

1.1 Integration and Research Gap

Existing literature suggests that self-esteem and emotion regulation are influenced by both internal and social processes. However, several gaps remain. Research often examines self-esteem from either intrapersonal or interpersonal perspectives without integration. Studies on validation focus more on situational self-esteem rather than trait self-esteem. Limited research explores the link between perceived validation and specific emotion regulation strategies. Emerging adults remain underexamined despite their sensitivity to social evaluation. Additionally, there is a lack of research in collectivistic cultural contexts.

1.2 Rationale and Significance of the Study

The present study addresses these gaps by examining the relationship between perceived social validation, self-esteem, and emotion regulation strategies in emerging adults. It investigates whether higher belongingness is associated with higher self-esteem and adaptive regulation, and whether lower validation relates to reduced self-worth and maladaptive strategies.

The study contributes theoretically by integrating interpersonal self-esteem theories with emotion regulation frameworks. Practically, the findings may inform mental health interventions by emphasizing the importance of social connectedness and adaptive emotional functioning. Overall, the study aims to provide a clearer understanding of how belongingness shapes psychological well-being in emerging adulthood.

1.3 Objectives

1. To study the relationship between perceived belongingness and global self-esteem among emerging adults.
2. To study the relationship between perceived belongingness and emotion regulation strategies.
3. To study the relationship between perceived belongingness and cognitive reappraisal.
4. To study the relationship between perceived belongingness and expressive suppression.
5. To study the relationship between self-esteem and emotion regulation strategies.

1.4 Hypotheses

There will be a significant relationship between perceived belongingness and global self-esteem among emerging adults.

There will be a significant relationship between perceived belongingness and emotion regulation strategies.

Higher perceived belongingness will be significantly associated with cognitive reappraisal.

Higher perceived belongingness will be significantly negatively associated with expressive suppression.

There will be a significant relationship between self-esteem and emotion regulation strategies.

2. Methodology

2.1 Research Design

The present study employed a quantitative, cross-sectional research design to examine the relationships among perceived belongingness, self-esteem, and emotion regulation strategies. A correlational approach was used to assess associations, along with predictive analysis to examine whether perceived belongingness predicts self-esteem and emotion regulation.

2.2 Participants

The sample consisted of 230 emerging adults drawn primarily from colleges and universities in the Delhi NCR region, with 226 valid responses included in the final analysis. Participants were selected using a convenience sampling technique, allowing for accessible data collection within a relevant developmental population

Inclusion criteria

- Individuals aged 18–30 years

- Currently enrolled in a college or university
- Ability to understand English

Exclusion criteria

- Individuals below 18 or above 30 years
- Incomplete or inconsistent responses

Participation was voluntary, and informed consent was obtained prior to data collection.

2.3 Data Collection

Data were collected using self-report questionnaires administered through online platforms (Google Forms) to ensure accessibility and wider reach. Participants were provided with clear instructions regarding the purpose of the study and were assured of confidentiality and anonymity. They were encouraged to respond honestly based on their personal experiences. The average time taken to complete the questionnaires was approximately 10–15 minutes.

2.4 Measures

- **General Belongingness Scale (GBS; Malone, Pillow, & Osman, 2012):** Assesses perceived belongingness through dimensions of inclusion and rejection, indicating the extent of social connectedness and acceptance, with good reliability and validity.
- **Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (RSES; Rosenberg, 1965):** Measures global self-esteem, including self-worth, self-acceptance, and personal value, demonstrating high reliability across cultures.
- **Emotion Regulation Questionnaire (ERQ; Gross & John, 2003):** Assesses emotion regulation strategies, including cognitive reappraisal and expressive suppression, reflecting adaptive and less adaptive emotional processes, with strong psychometric properties.

2.5 Statistical Analysis

Data analysis was conducted using SPSS. Preliminary screening ensured suitability for non-parametric analysis.

Descriptive statistics (mean and standard deviation) were computed for all variables.

Pearson's Product-Moment Correlation was used to examine relationships among perceived belongingness, self-esteem, and emotion regulation strategies.

Predictive analysis was conducted to assess the role of perceived belongingness in predicting self-esteem and emotion regulation strategies.

3. Results

Case Processing Summary

The case processing summary shows that all variables, including emotion regulation, belongingness, self-esteem, and emotion regulation strategies, had 226 valid cases (100%) with no missing data (0%). This indicates a complete dataset, allowing all responses to be included in the analysis without any data exclusion.

Table 1. *Case Processing Summary*

	Valid		Cases Missing		Total	
	N	Percent	N	Percent	N	Percent
Emotion Regulation Scores	226	100.0%	0	0.0%	226	100.0%
General Belongingness Scores	226	100.0%	0	0.0%	226	100.0%
Total Self-esteem Scores	226	100.0%	0	0.0%	226	100.0%
Low Self-esteem Scores	226	100.0%	0	0.0%	226	100.0%
High Self-esteem Scores	226	100.0%	0	0.0%	226	100.0%
EQR (Reappraisal) Scores	226	100.0%	0	0.0%	226	100.0%
EQR (Suppression) Scores	226	100.0%	0	0.0%	226	100.0%

Correlation analysis

Pearson's correlation analysis revealed that emotion regulation was strongly and positively associated with both cognitive reappraisal ($r = .737$, $p < .001$) and expressive suppression ($r = .831$, $p < .001$). General belongingness was significantly negatively related to total self-esteem ($r = -.516$, $p < .001$) and positively related to high self-esteem ($r = .496$, $p < .001$). Overall, the results indicate significant associations among emotion regulation, self-esteem, and belongingness.

Table 2. *Correlation Matrix*

		Emotion Regulation Scores	General Belongingness Scores	Total Self- esteem Scores	Low Self- esteem Scores	High Self- esteem Scores	EQR (Reappraisal) Scores	EQR (Suppression) Scores
Emotion Regulation Scores	Pearson	1	.043	-.060	.024	.124	.737**	.831**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.516	.367	.715	.063	.000	.000
	N	226	226	226	226	226	226	226
General Belongingness Scores	Pearson	.043	1	-.516**	-.394**	.496**	-.268**	.283**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.516		.000	.000	.000	.000	.000
	N	226	226	226	226	226	226	226
Total Self- esteem Scores	Pearson	-.060	-.516**	1	.856**	-.876**	.193**	-.246**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.367	.000		.000	.000	.004	.000
	N	226	226	226	226	226	226	226
Low Self- esteem Scores	Pearson	.024	-.394**	.856**	1	-.499**	.223**	-.149*
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.715	.000	.000		.000	.001	.025
	N	226	226	226	226	226	226	226
High Self- esteem Scores	Pearson	.124	.496**	-.876**	-.499**	1	-.115	.273**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.063	.000	.000	.000		.085	.000
	N	226	226	226	226	226	226	226
EQR (Reappraisal) Scores	Pearson	.737**	-.268**	.193**	.223**	-.115	1	.236**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.004	.001	.085		.000
	N	226	226	226	226	226	226	226
EQR (Suppression) Scores	Pearson	.831**	.283**	-.246**	-.149*	.273**	.236**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000	.025	.000	.000	
	N	226	226	226	226	226	226	226

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

4. Discussion

The present study aimed to examine perceived social validation, operationalized as belongingness, as a predictor of self-esteem and emotion regulation strategies among emerging adults, and to assess whether belongingness and self-esteem significantly predict emotional functioning. The findings indicate that perceived belongingness is strongly related to, and predictive of, self-esteem, whereas its relationship with emotion regulation is more nuanced and operates at the level of specific strategies. This suggests that social validation plays a more important role in shaping self-worth than directly influencing overall emotional regulation.

A significant positive relationship was found between perceived belongingness and self-esteem. Individuals with higher levels of belongingness reported healthier self-esteem, including higher positive self-evaluation and lower self-doubt. Belongingness reflects a sense of social acceptance and inclusion, which may directly influence how individuals evaluate themselves. In line with Sociometer Theory, self-esteem appears to function as an internal indicator of social acceptance,

such that greater perceived belongingness enhances self-worth, whereas lower belongingness may increase vulnerability to negative self-evaluations.

Perceived belongingness did not show a significant relationship with overall emotion regulation. This suggests that social validation alone may not determine individuals' general ability to regulate emotions. Emotion regulation is influenced by multiple factors, including personality and developmental experiences. However, significant associations emerged with specific strategies, indicating that belongingness may shape how individuals regulate emotions rather than their overall regulatory capacity.

A significant relationship was found between belongingness and cognitive reappraisal. Individuals with higher belongingness may feel more secure and supported, allowing greater flexibility in reframing emotional experiences. A sense of social acceptance may facilitate adaptive emotional processing, enabling individuals to interpret stressors in more constructive ways.

Belongingness was also significantly associated with expressive suppression. Although suppression is often considered less adaptive, this finding may reflect sociocultural influences. In collectivistic contexts, regulating emotional expression is often encouraged to maintain social harmony. Thus, individuals with higher belongingness may engage in suppression as a socially appropriate behavior rather than as an indicator of emotional dysfunction.

The findings also revealed significant relationships between self-esteem and emotion regulation strategies. Higher self-esteem was associated with greater use of cognitive reappraisal and lower reliance on expressive suppression. Individuals with stronger self-worth may be more confident in processing emotions adaptively, whereas those with lower self-esteem may suppress emotional expression due to concerns about social evaluation.

Overall, the findings suggest that perceived belongingness primarily influences psychological functioning through its strong impact on self-esteem, while its role in emotion regulation appears more indirect and strategy-specific. These results highlight the importance of social validation in shaping self-worth and emphasize the role of self-esteem in emotional functioning among emerging adults.

5. Conclusion

The present study examined the relationships between perceived social validation (belongingness), self-esteem, and emotion regulation strategies among emerging adults, with a

focus on understanding whether belongingness and self-esteem predict psychological functioning. The findings revealed that perceived belongingness is significantly and positively associated with self-esteem, while its relationship with emotion regulation is more nuanced and strategy-specific. Additionally, self-esteem was found to be significantly related to emotion regulation, indicating its role in shaping emotional functioning.

Individuals with higher levels of perceived belongingness were more likely to report stronger self-worth, greater positive self-evaluation, and lower levels of self-doubt. These individuals may feel more socially accepted and valued, which contributes to a more stable and positive self-concept. In contrast, belongingness did not significantly predict overall emotion regulation, suggesting that social validation alone may not determine general emotional regulatory capacity.

However, belongingness showed significant associations with specific strategies such as cognitive reappraisal and expressive suppression, indicating that social experiences may influence how individuals regulate emotions in particular ways. Furthermore, individuals with higher self-esteem were more likely to use adaptive strategies such as cognitive reappraisal and less likely to rely on expressive suppression, highlighting the role of self-worth in emotional adjustment.

The findings suggest that perceived belongingness functions as an important interpersonal resource that supports healthier self-esteem, which in turn contributes to more adaptive emotional outcomes. These results have practical implications for mental health and educational settings, where fostering social connectedness and strengthening self-esteem may help individuals regulate emotions more effectively and maintain overall psychological well-being.

References

- Baldwin, M. W. (1994). Primed relational schemas as a source of self-evaluative reactions *Journal of Social and Clinical Psychology*, 13(4), 380–403.
- Baumeister, R. F., & Leary, M. R. (2017). The need to belong: Desire for interpersonal attachments as a fundamental human motivation. *Interpersonal Development*, 57–89.
- Brandão, T., Brites, R., Hipólito, J., & Nunes, O. (2023). Perceived emotional invalidation, emotion regulation, depression, and attachment in adults: A moderated-mediation analysis. *Current Psychology*, 42(18), 15773–15781.
- Brown, J. D. (2010). High self-esteem buffers negative feedback: Once more with feeling.

- Cognition and Emotion, 24(8), 1389–1404.
- Cocker, C., Holmes, D., & Cooper, A. (2024). Emerging adulthood as a developmental stage. In *Transitional Safeguarding* (pp. 83–104). Policy Press.
- Crocker, J., & Wolfe, C. T. (2001). Contingencies of self-worth. *Psychological Review*, 108(3), 593–623.
- Franks, D. D., & Marolla, J. (1976). Efficacious action and social approval as interacting dimensions of self-esteem. *Sociometry*, 324–341.
- Gómez-Ortiz, O., Roldán, R., Ortega-Ruiz, R., & García-López, L. J. (2018). Social anxiety and psychosocial adjustment in adolescents: Relation with peer victimization, self-esteem and emotion regulation. *Child Indicators Research*, 11(6), 1719–1736.
- Gross, J. J., Richards, J. M., & John, O. P. (2006). Emotion regulation in everyday life. In D. K. Snyder, J. Simpson, & J. N. Hughes (Eds.), *Emotion regulation in couples and families* (pp. 13–35). American Psychological Association.
- Leary, M. R. (2012). Sociometer theory. In P. A. M. Van Lange, A. W. Kruglanski, & E. T. Higgins (Eds.), *Handbook of theories of social psychology* (Vol. 2, pp. 141–159). Sage.
- MacDonald, G., Saltzman, J. L., & Leary, M. R. (2003). Social approval and trait self-esteem. *Journal of Research in Personality*, 37(2), 23–40.
- Okun, M. A., & Fournet, L. M. (1993). Academic self-esteem and perceived validity of grades: A test of self-verification theory. *Contemporary Educational Psychology*, 18(4), 414–426.
- Orth, U., & Robins, R. W. (2018). Development of self-esteem across the lifespan. In D. McAdams et al. (Eds.), *Handbook of personality development* (pp. 328–344). Guilford Press.
- Schimmel, J., Arndt, J., Pyszczynski, T., & Greenberg, J. (2001). Being accepted for who we are: Evidence that social validation of the intrinsic self reduces general defensiveness. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 80(1), 35.
- Shenk, C. E., & Fruzzetti, A. E. (2011). The impact of validating and invalidating responses on emotional reactivity. *Journal of Social and Clinical Psychology*, 30(2), 163–183.
- Surzykiewicz, J., Skalski, S. B., Sołbut, A., Rutkowski, S., & Konaszewski, K. (2022). Resilience and regulation of emotions in adolescents: Serial mediation analysis through self-esteem and perceived social support. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, 19(13), 8007.