

"The self: Identifying possible means toward developing one's identity and self-reliant"

'A man has as many social selves as there are individuals who recognize him' says William James, The Harvard Psychologist in the nineteenth century, who is believed to be one of the most significant philosophers the United States has ever introduced to the world (Perry, 1935). Differentiating between the self as "I, the subjective knower, and the self as Me, the object that is known", James presented the foundation of modern self-concept (Dooley, 1975).

James introduced a new pattern for discussing matters that had been concealed by symbols such as psyche, mind, and ego. He examined the dimensions of the 'empirical self' which includes the 'material self, the social self, and the spiritual self' (James, 1878-1899). James's theory of the self-concept reveals man's personal experience in relation to the rest of the world around him. James' concept of the self remains the primary notion in self-theory to this day.



(William James, 1842-1910)

The relationship between self-concept to achievement and achievement to attitudes has already been confirmed, therefore, it is reasonable to expect that self-concept is related to attitudes. In his definition of the "value expressive function of the classificatory theory of attitudes" Katz explores this relationship (Katz, 1960). This theory sheds light on the principles of the self-concept psychology which emphasizes the significance of self-expression, self-realization, and self-development.

In spite of the fact that a general perspective on the self-concept aspects has been reached, several principal questions are left unanswered. For example, what exactly does 'self' mean? Is self-concept best defined in an extensive cognitive self-system, or in behavioral terms? What does the idea of self-concept has to offer clinical practice? And finally how do age, race, gender, and cultural values shape one's self-concept? (Baumeister 1999)

Introduction:

Background

The self-concept theory was first introduced by Rene Descartes (1596-1650). Descartes proposed that a person's existence depends upon his perception. Also, Sigmund Freud, one of the most well-known psychologists of all time, proposed three principal aspects of the self to be Id (the unorganized part of the personality structure that contains a human's basic instincts), ego or the 'I' and the superego (an individual's conscience (Freud, 1923).

The concept of the self has been long studied within the psychological practice throughout the century following William James. Self-concept has been examined by numerous researchers who emphasized on the role of both 'internal characteristics and external influences' on shaping one's self-concept; therefore, revealing the self-concept to be composed of multiple elements (Myers 2009). A great deal of conducted research on the self has targeted the cognitive structure as well as the related critical components of self-esteem. Generally, the self-concept has been identified as incorporating the ways an individual sees oneself in association with others as well as how one depicts oneself in isolation.

There are different implications to the concept of the self when being explored in different cultures. For example, in an individualism culture versus collectivism, individuals have entirely different perspectives on the self-concept. In collectivist cultures, individuals would have self-concepts with more social components while the culture of individualism, found in the US, Canada, Australia and most of Europe, views people as independent units and emphasizes on a range of self-oriented values and skills, such as 'self-sufficiency, self-competence, self-direction, self-regulation, and self-responsibility' in order to support independent living (Somech, 2009). However, the collectivistic norm in cultures, such as Japan, Korea and most of Africa, defines people as 'interdependent individuals' in order to emphasis on group-oriented values and skills that contribute to effectively filling roles within the family (Cha et al., 1994)

Target audience

This paper will examine different dimensions to the concept of the self and interpretation of its various means. This study targets the public audience and analyzes distinct values of recognizing the genuine need to explore the actual self-concept.

Definitions, Categories and general means

The self-constructed beliefs that an individual holds about oneself and the responses of others establish the idea of the self-concept. More precisely, a self-concept is widely a reflection of the reactions of others toward one. The self has been categorized to have six central domains including: 'competence, social, affect, academic, family, and physical' (Bochner, 1994). The self-concept, also referred to as self-identity or self-perspective, is mainly a selection of beliefs about oneself that includes elements such as academic achievement, sexuality, and racial status (Wilson et al., 2012). So, the answer to 'Who I am' is basically incorporated in One's self-concept. During early life, one's self-concept is very general and basic as an individual gets older these self-perceptions become much more detailed and precise (Wilson et al., 2001)

The notion proposed by Hazel Markus in 1977 demonstrated that ‘the processing of self-reliant information is guided by the beliefs people have about themselves’. She also defined the self to be made up of cognitive molecules called ‘self-schemas’.



(Hazel Markus conceptualized the 'self-schema', 1977)

According to Markus, Self-concept is made up of one's self-schema that unite with self-knowledge and the social self to form a unique self as whole. Self-schema include the past, present, and possible selves that serve as individuals' ideas of what they may become, what they prefer to become, or what they refuse to become (Markus, 1977).

The importance of teaching and caring about the self-concept

Exploring all theoretical and applied aspects of self-concept offers a balanced synthesis of the vast body of related information and could help identify possible facts on the subject of self-concept that has accumulated for years. The need for a positive evaluation of self involves a person's feelings, actions, and inclinations throughout life, therefore, emphasizing on the seriousness of effectively teaching the concept of the self.

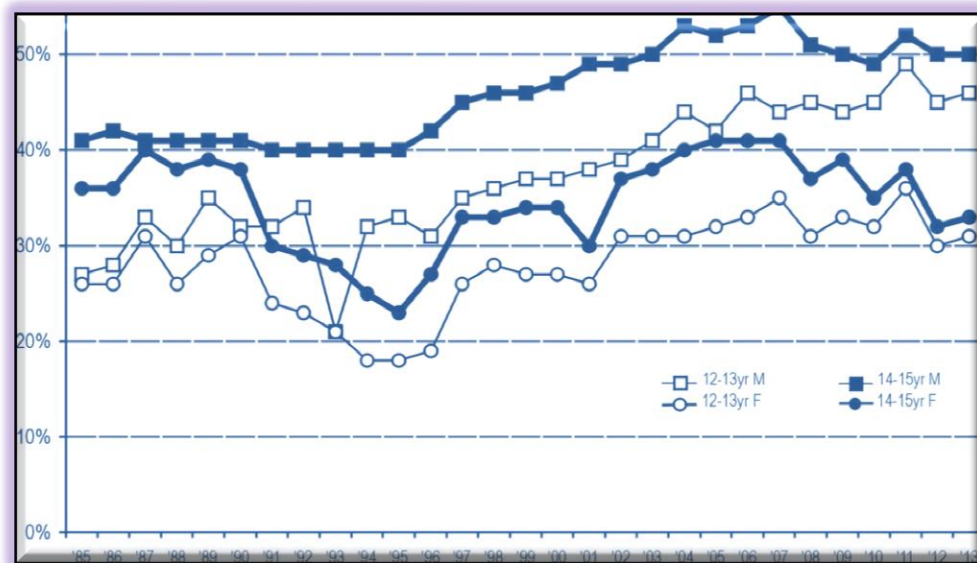


Feelings of self-doubt and anxiety can diminish self-perspective

School experiences play an important role in the development of self-perceptions during childhood and adolescence and can have lasting dominant outcomes on a child's self-identity. For example, Individuals with learning disabilities are especially exposed to low self-concept (NCSL, 2005). Numerous findings have linked learning disability with low self-concept and concluding that students who experience difficulties in learning will often struggle with academic challenges that results in having low self-esteem (Thompson, 2002).

Almost everyone recognizes the ever existing challenge of raising knowledgeable and caring children. However, not many care to notice that each element of this challenge can be enhanced by thoughtful and organized attention to children's social and emotional learning. Surely, experience and research show that stimulating social and emotional development in children is absolutely crucial in order to achieve the goals associated with systematic education. Every day more and more educators are realizing that children's social and emotional development should be precisely promoted and

encouraged in schools, which requires coordinated detailed strategy to be followed by both the teachers and parents in order to reach the ultimate goal which is nurturing children's self-concept from early age. When it comes to social and emotional development of their students, today's educational instructors agree on one issue and that is when schools promote students' social and emotional skills, the academic achievement of children increases and they become more productive and responsible as a result of more enjoyable and rewarding teaching environment (NCSL, 2005).



(SHEU, 2005)

(Promoting social and emotional development in the schooling system. 'Percentage of students scoring in highest levels of self-confidence scores'1985-2013. 12-15 years old male and female).

An organized supporting school environment and extracurricular activities can provide students with social and emotional learning. Under such circumstances, educators help students to build their social and emotional skills through professionally instructed disciplines all year long.

Moreover, caring in particular is the key to constructing meaningful relationships that are dynamic and beneficial. Parents can care for their children by giving them the sense that they are understood and respected no matter what their capabilities are. Caring is the ultimate reward of living in a society that believes all its individuals to be of equal importance giving them identical opportunities to give back to the community (SHEU, 2005). The idea of caring is the value that is largely believed to be the security blanket in adult life, rooted in the social and emotional development of childhood.

A Research Conducted in 2003 on examining the self-concept of students with learning disability

The subject of a research that was conducted in 2003 in several schools in the United States was that “For Which Students with Learning Disabilities Are Self-Concept Interventions Effective”? Students subject to this study were both male and female ranging from elementary to middle school. Results of these school-based interventions were analyzed in order to help boost the self-concept of students who have difficulties learning (Cohen college press, 1999).



Caring about emotional well-being of children is crucial in shaping their future characteristics

As earlier studies had discussed, the investigation confirmed that students’ self-concepts and their academic achievement are directly related, therefore, for those students with learning disability academic challenges that they come across lowers their self-confidence.

Researchers investigated students with learning disability who participated in self-concept interventions and compared them to other students with the same condition who were not receiving any intervention.

Intervention categories examining the concept of the self were as: Therapeutic counseling sessions designed to focus on boosting students’ self-concept. Mediated: Interventions engaged educators and parents to help them find ways to promote students’ self-concept. Also, Physical sessions, such as variety of sports, fitness, and dance programs were suggested to engage the students in social activities. Art workshops were instructed as well to help boost students’ self-confidence.

The experiment’s target groups, who benefited the most from these interventions and experienced a boost in their self- confidence, were the students who started the self-concept workshops with low self-concept. This group experienced a significant increase of self-concept compared to the students that had a good self-concept prior to the experiment. Moreover, middle school children with low self-concept were the group benefiting the most from the self-concept workshops.

Different classes of intervention targeted different students (age and grade level) while promoting increased academic skills helped boost self-concept of elementary school students the most, therapeutic counseling sessions seemed to be more helpful to middle school children.

The research conclusion

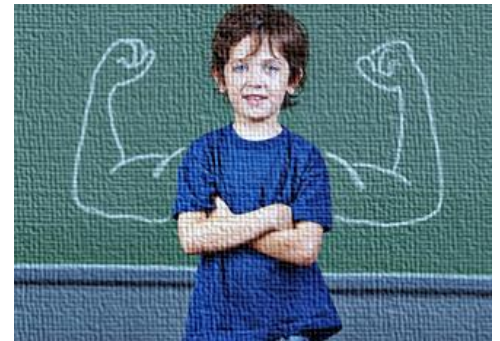
The study outcome illustrated that those who benefited the most from the sequence of conducted interventions were the students with significant low self-concept. On the other hand, the interventions had little effect on students with high, average or unknown levels of self-concept.

Therefore, the data suggests that the researchers should recognize individual needs prior to performing the experiments and not to expect the same results based on the regular description of people dealing with learning disability.

In spite of having extremely good results on the self-concept of student with learning disability, these self-concept interventions may have the opposite effect for the same group of children who do not struggle with low self-concept. For example, students with learning disability who have high levels of self-concept usually act out more in the classroom and avoid situations that threaten their ego. Consequently, improper high self-concept can have the opposite results on students having difficulty learning, discouraging them while dealing with every day academic challenges.

My opinion on this research

The research explained in this paper explores different ways that could be arranged to examine one's levels of self-confidence. Also, various options towards gaining more self-confidence are presented depending on every individual needs and characteristics. This study focuses on a specific group of students of elementary to middle school levels and focuses on students with learning disabilities and presents data collected on how each range responded to different types of interventions. However, there are other unfortunate facts that students experience throughout their childhood who do not necessarily have difficulties learning in the first place but as the case goes on it can and most of the time will cause damages to the shaping one's characteristics that could last way beyond childhood. Of the most important challenges that today's children, mostly children with learning disability, face on a regular basis is the fact of bullying, the apparent phenomena that many children experience outside home and mainly in school. It is crucial for parents to understand that bullying is not a normal part of growing up but quite an important subject that requires parents' involvement in their children's life and to



Recognizing the challenges today's children face would have tremendous effects on their self-concept.

make sure that children are living a healthy stress free childhood. Taking into consideration these types of behavior that is mainly directed toward the most vulnerable, students with learning disability, and conducting seminars and workshops on how to prevent bullying and how to seek consult while being the victim of bullying would be extremely helpful to understand the facts that could help boost one's level of self-concept.

Overall conclusion:

The self-concept theory suggests several assumptions about the nature of this concept, such as the self-concept is learned, referring to the idea that as an individual grows older his/her concept of the self develops and becomes more detailed and specific; therefore, the self-concept becomes the result of social and constructive growth. Also, the self-concept can be organized in a sense that regardless of how many various perceptions one can hold, there will be a one solid view that helps creating one organized self-concept. Finally, one's self-concept is active and dynamic in a way that an active self explains the role of motivational and behavioral tendencies that guide one's behavior (Myers, 2009).

As discussed in this paper, the self-concept can be defined as incorporation of the ways an individual sees oneself in association with others as well as how one depicts oneself in isolation. As an individual matures, his perception of the self develops accordingly. In other words, during childhood, children start to develop their self-concept as their abilities and values that define them. Therefore, school experiences play an important role in the development of self-perceptions during childhood and adolescence and can have lasting dominant outcomes on a child's self-identity (Wilson et al., 2001). Both the educators and parents must be informed of seriousness of children social and emotional development and be willing to commit to students' emotional well-being. In order to achieve this goal, workshops and sessions can be conducted that assess every individual's need appropriately and offer them the unique solution, such as therapeutic consultation, art therapy or involvement in sport, for those individuals with low self-concept.

Lastly, In order to commit to having a healthy emotional state, we should attempt to recognize our strengths, weaknesses, and potential. The ability to love and accept ourselves as we truly are can help us improve and develop any aspects of our actual self. Additionally, the ability to take responsibility for our choices and actions would help us to be the best we can.

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