

Children's Self-concept and Identity Formation

Course: Child and Adolescent Growth and Development (Educ201)

I. Self-concept

A. Definitions

- **Self-concept** can be defined as the view one has of his/herself and his/her abilities.
- The term refers to how someone thinks about, evaluates, or perceives themselves. To be aware of oneself is to have a concept of oneself.
- "It is—the individual's belief about himself or herself, including the person's attributes and who and what the self is" – **Baumeister (1999)**.
- It is a sense of oneself. The definitions and images one associates with his or her being which differentiates him/her from others.
- Sex, age, height, personality, and likes & dislikes are all part of self-concept.

Six Specific Domains Related to Self-concept by Bracken (1992)

1. **Social** – the ability to interact with others.
2. **Competence** – ability to meet basic needs.
3. **Affect** – awareness of emotional states.
4. **Physical** – feelings about looks, health, physical condition, and overall appearance.
5. **Academic** – success or failure in school.
6. **Family** – how well one functions within the family unit.

B. Development of Self-concept

- A child's self-concept begins to develop at birth. It begins with how adults respond to them. Parents and caregivers create a positive emotional bond with infants through warm and caring interactions with a lot of eye contact and touch. This bond promotes children's healthy self-concept and serves as the basis of children's relationships with others.
- The ability of children to interact successfully with their environment promotes a healthy and positive self-concept which empowers them to feel competent, try new things, and strive for success. It is a responsibility of parents to help build a **positive self-concept in our children**.

Fast Fact: > * **Children with a positive self-concept** have a "can do" attitude. They become confident in their ability to complete tasks without help, or with minimal help.

- **Children with a negative self-concept** have a "can't do" attitude. They become frustrated easily and give up on difficult tasks. They may exhibit behavior problems if "naughty" or "bad" is a part of their self-concept.
- With age, children construct increasingly complex and multifaceted understandings of who they are. In the early years, self-perceptions are fairly simplistic and concrete (e.g., "I have brown eyes"). In adolescence, they begin to wrestle with who they ultimately want to become as human beings.

D. Aspects of Development according to M. Lewis (1990)

Lewis suggests development involves two main steps: a sense of separateness and an increasing sense of self-awareness.

1. **The Existential Self**
 - The sense of being separate and distinct from others and the awareness of the constancy of the self.
 - Arises as young as two to three months old (e.g., the child smiles and someone smiles back).
2. **The Categorical Self**
 - Realizing that they exist as separate beings, they become aware of being "objects" in the world. They identify into categories such as age, gender, size, or skill.

E. Components of Self-concept by Carl Rogers (1959)

Rogers asserted there are three components: **self-image, self-esteem, and ideal self.**

1. Self-image

- The view you have of yourself. This does not necessarily reflect reality (e.g., a person with anorexia who is thin may have a self-image of being fat).
- **The Twenty Statements Test (TST)** by Kuhn (1960) is often used to elicit these descriptions. Responses are categorized into:
 1. **Physical Description** (e.g., "I am tall")
 2. **Social Roles** (e.g., student, daughter)
 3. **Personal Traits** (e.g., "I'm impulsive")
 4. **Existential Statements** (e.g., "I am a human being")

2. Self-esteem or Self-worth

- The extent to which an individual accepts or approves of their self; the degree of evaluation.
- **High Self-esteem:** Leads to confidence, self-acceptance, and optimism.
- **Low Self-esteem:** Leads to lack of confidence, wanting to be like someone else, and pessimism.

Factors Influencing Self-esteem (Michael Argyle, 2008):

- Reaction of Others
- Comparison with Others
- Social Roles
- Identification (identifying with positions we occupy)

3. Ideal Self

- Perception of what or who one would like to be.
- **Congruence:** When self-image and ideal self are consistent. This leads to self-actualization.
- **Incongruence:** When there is a gap between the self-image and the ideal self.

II. Identity and Identity Formation

A. Identity

Psychologists define identity as the process of finding our "true self." It is a combination of behaviors, preferences, thoughts, talents, and beliefs. It includes a sense of personal continuity and uniqueness.

B. Theories on Identity Formation

1. **Erikson's View:**
 - **Identity vs. Role Confusion:** Adolescents must decide on their own identity—who they are and where they are going.
 - **Psychological Moratorium:** A period where adolescents experiment with many roles.
 2. **James Marcia's Four Statuses of Identity:**
 - Based on two factors: **Identity Crisis** (exploration) and **Identity Commitment** (investment in a choice).
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