

아동의 자아개념과 자아존중감

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Children's Self-Concept and Self-Esteem

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I. INTRODUCTION

The self-concept is considered to be basic in all behavior. Concepts of the self potentially affect every thought, feeling, word, and behavior we have. All attitudes are important determinants, but attitudes concerning the self are much more basic than those in which the individual is less ego-involved and, therefore, correspondingly more potent in determining behavior. The impact of self-concept requires neither our understanding nor our consent. It works its way within us with or without our knowledge (Branden, 1994; Mouly, 1973).

Furthermore, researchers agree that early childhood is the critical period in development of self-concept (Felker, 1974; Harter, 1990). Although self-concept can be changed throughout the life span, it is more difficult to change as one gets older. According to Felker (1974), the influence of self-concept in determining a child's behavior occurs in three different ways. First, the child tends to behave in a way that will be consistent with how he feels about himself. His self-concept affects his social interactions,

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value systems, choice of activities. Second, his self-concept will determine how he perceives and evaluates experiences. Third, the self-concept affects a child's expectations, which in turn influence the way others will see him. For example, when a boy views himself as incompetent, that is the way he tends to behave, and the way he will be treated by others. Thus the self-concept does not change easily because of this self-fulfilling prophecy.

Based upon the above mentioned importance of early childhood in development of self-concept, it is worthwhile to review some literature concerning the self-concept and self-esteem, focusing on how to foster positive self-concept and improve self-esteem among children. In addition, this paper discusses how self-concept differs from self-esteem, how self-concept develops and maintains itself, and how self-esteem is related to childrearing practices and achievement.

II . REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Definitions of Self-Concept and Self-Esteem

Investigators have not always made clear distinctions between self-esteem and self-concept, sometimes using the terms interchangeably or not precisely defining them (Santrock, 1995). Santrock argues that self-esteem is the global evaluative dimension of the self. Self-esteem is also referred to as self-worth or self-image. In contrast, self-concept refers to domain-specific evaluations of the self. Children can make self-evaluations in many domains of their lives-academic, athletic, appearance, and so on.

Coopersmith (1967) defines self-concept as "the totality of perceptions a person has about himself which are most vital to the individual himself and that seem to that individual to be 'me' at all times and places." Self-esteem is defined as "the evaluation which the individual makes and customarily maintains with regard to himself." It expresses an attitude of approval or disapproval and indicates the extent to which the individual believes in himself to be capable, significant, successful, and worthy.

In The Six Pillars of Self-Esteem Branden (1995) notes that self-esteem has two interrelated components. One is a sense of basic confidence in the face of life's challenges: self-efficacy. The other is a sense of being worthy of happiness: self-respect. Self-concept is who and what one consciously and subconsciously thinks one is - one's physical and psychological traits, assets and liabilities, possibilities and limitations,

strengths and weaknesses.

Wylie (1961) also supports differentiation of the self-concept and self-esteem in her classic book The Self-Concept, in which she states that the self-concept is composed of a number of metadimensions such as clarity, certainty, stability, realism and self-esteem.

In sum, the definitions of self-esteem may be somewhat different, but they are similar in many aspects. All definitions indicate that self-esteem is a subjective, evaluative dimension which determines the individual's characteristic perception of personal worth. It is susceptible to change while self-concept is quite stable and resistant to change.

Development and Maintenance of the Self-Concept

One's self-concept primarily develops from interaction with parents, valued adults, and peers. Valued adults—grandparents, relatives, teachers, or counselors—also play an important role in fostering a healthy self-concept. It should be emphasized that adults need to be valued by the child, or the impact on self-development will be minimal. Also, the peer group can have great impact during the adolescent years when peer influence often outweighs parental influence.

One is not born with a self-concept...The young child is relatively neutral at first as to the kind of self-concept he develops, but he becomes progressively less free in his choice of the experiences he assimilates or of the interpretation he places upon them in order that they may be assimilated without conflict, as he begins to perceive order in his environment. The most important thing he discovers is himself. At first, he cannot distinguish between himself and the rest of his environment. Soon he discovers his nose and the rest of his body; eventually he recognizes his voice. But he also recognizes that the words good, bad, cute, etc., are attributed to him as a person. Gradually, he develops a picture of himself which he then strives to maintain and protect by ordering his behavior accordingly. Because one's self-concept tends to continue developing in the direction in which it started, early childhood is the critical period in development of the self-structure (Mouly, 1973).

Investigators agree that one's self-concept tends to maintain and protect present self-concept (Branden, 1995; Felker, 1974; Mouly, 1973; Pietrofesa et al., 1978). According to Felker (1974), the influence of self-concept in determining a child's behavior occurs in

three different ways. First, a child tends to behave in a way that will be consistent with how he feels about himself. His self-concept affects his social interactions, value systems, choice of activities. Second, his self-concept will determine how he perceives and evaluates experiences. Third, the self-concept affects a child's expectations, which in turn influence the way others will see him. For example, when a child views himself as smart, that is the way he tends to behave, and the way he will be treated by others. Thus the self-concept does not change easily because of this self-fulfilling prophecy.

Similarly, one's self-concept tends to reinforce itself through selective perception (Pietrofesa et al., 1978). A child selects from an experience that which reinforces the self-concept already developed and rejects that which might be contrary to present feelings or beliefs. Selective perception and defensive, or distortive mechanisms are used to reinforce and protect present self-image and maintain self-consistency. For instance, the child who sees himself as incompetent, behaves in that fashion, selects those occurrences which support that belief, and discards or distorts any encounters which contradict that belief.

In sum, one's self-concept develops from interaction with parents, valued adults, and peers. Furthermore, the self-concept is quite stable and resistant to change because it tends to maintain and reinforce present self-concept through selective perception and self-fulfilling prophecy.

Developmental Transitions in Self-Concept of Children

Following is a description of five major transitions in the self-concept that occur over the span of development by Phillips and Zigler (1980). These transitions encompass fundamental changes in the ways children think about themselves in how they feel about themselves, and in what sources of self-knowledge they place their faith in. As we shall see, the transitions have implications for the ways in which parents and teachers can most beneficially interact with children at different points along the developmental progression.

Nature of Content Young children tend to view themselves in terms of relatively specific and concrete features. For example, "I have freckles," "I can rollerskate." Older children, on the other hand, view themselves in terms of underlying personality traits and beliefs reflecting an inner world of thoughts and feelings: For example, "I want to be a good person," "I'm friendly."

Content Themes The salient content of the self-concept reflects different themes at different ages, depending on the important developmental tasks a child is grappling with. For example, references to gender are common among adolescents who are highly concerned with issues of sexuality. Major transition points, such as the shift from preschool to elementary school or from being an only child to having a younger sibling, also call long-standing assumptions about oneself into question and provoke reassessments and reorganizations of the self-concept.

Evaluative Feelings Young children's overall feelings of self-esteem tend to be quite positive and uncritical, whereas children at later stages of development are more self-critical and less satisfied with their current self-concepts.

The Ideal Self-Concept With increasing maturity, children's ideal self-concepts come to represent less of a playful fantasy and more of understanding of the adult society's judgments of appropriate behavior and of valued work. They incorporate higher standards of conduct and aspire to more ambitious goals. Consequently, when they compare their present behaviors and achievements to these more demanding ideals, the potential to fall short increases. The impact, over the course of development, is a widening gap between children's ideal and current self-concepts (Harter, 1990).

Sources of Self-Knowledge Whereas young children are disposed to believe that true knowledge about themselves is vested in adults, older children are far less inclined to depend upon their parents and teachers. They rely far more upon their own judgments and peers during the adolescent years.

Measuring Self-Concept and Self-Esteem of Children

Measuring self-concept and self-esteem hasn't always been easy (Yardley, 1987). Recently, different measures have been developed to assess self-perceptions of children and adolescents.

Susan Harter's Self-Perception Profile for Children (1985) taps five specific domains of self-concept - scholastic competence, athletic competence, social acceptance, physical appearance, and behavioral conduct - plus general self-worth. Harter's scale does an excellent job of separating children's self-evaluations in different skill domains, and when

general self-worth is assessed, questions focus on the overall self evaluations rather than in specific skill domains.

The Self-Perception Profile for Children is designed to be used with third-grade through sixth-grade children. Harter also has developed a separate scale for adolescents, recognizing important developmental changes in self-perceptions. The Self-Perception Profile for Adolescents (Harter, 1989) taps eight domains—scholastic competence, athletic competence, social acceptance, physical appearance, behavioral conduct, close friendship, romantic appeal, and job competence—plus global self-worth. Thus, the adolescent version has three skill domains not present in the children's version—job competence, romantic appeal, and close friendship.

Parent-Child Relationships and Self-Esteem

In the most extensive investigation of parent-child relationships and self-esteem, a measure of self-esteem was given to elementary school boys, and the boys and their mothers were interviewed about their family relationships (Coopersmith, 1967). Based on these assessments, the following parenting attributes were associated with boys' high self-esteem:

- Expression of affection
- Concern about the child's problems
- Harmony in the home
- Participation in joint family activities
- Availability to give competent, organized help to the boys when they need it
- Setting clear and fair rules
- Abiding by these rules
- Allowing the children freedom within well-prescribed limits

It seems that these parenting attributes can be summarized as providing parental acceptance and discipline within well-prescribed limits.

In addition, the models that parents provide are considered to be important, too (Branden, 1995). Parents with positive self-concept provide the model for self-acceptance and the feeling that life is worthwhile. These parents treat their children with respect and acceptance and provide them with encouragement and support. Parents with high

self-esteem are better able to establish limits for children and enforce them consistently. Because they have a strong sense of self, they are not threatened by a child who wants to be different. These parents can give their children freedom to explore and to express their opinions and individuality. When they punish, they are likely to make it straightforward and clear, rather than use harsh treatment or withhold love.

Hamachek (1971) also emphasizes the modeling role of parents and teachers, stating that we must understand that we teach what we are, not just what we say.

We teach our own self-concepts far more than we teach our deas. If we as teachers, either to our children or to our students, are to facilitate growth and learning through self-esteem enhancement, we must understand that anything we do or say could significantly change a child's attitude about himself for better or for worse. Further, we must understand the implications of our role as persons who are imortant or "significant" to children if we are to utilize that role properly (Hamachek, 1971).

Increasing Children's Self-Esteem

Following are four ways children's self-esteem can be improved :

1. Identifying the causes of low self-esteem and the domains of competence important to the self
2. emotional support and social approval
3. achievement
4. coping

Identifying children's sources of self-esteem and the domains of competence important to the self is critical to improving self-esteem. Harter (1990) points out that the self-esteem enhancement programs of the 1960s, in which self-esteem itself was the target and individuals were encouraged to simply feel good about themselves, were ineffective. Rather, Harter believes that intervention must occur at the level of the causes of self-esteem if the child's self-esteem is to improve significantly. Children have the highest self-esteem when they perform competently in domains important to the self. Therefore, children should be encouraged to identify and focus on areas of competence and strengths.

Emotional support and social approval from others also powerfully influence children's self-esteem (Harter, 1990). Philips and Zigler (1980) argue that a child should always be

respected and loved, regardless of the behavior he engages in. They suggest to regularly reinforce desirable behaviors and try to catch him engaging in appropriate behaviors and respond to them. In fact, parents of children with positive self-concepts spend more time praising and supporting children in desired behaviors than in punishing negative behaviors (Coopersmith, 1967). In the classroom, rewarding a child for positive behaviors such as following directions and sharing toys is generally more beneficial than punishing disruptive behaviors. It is important to praise the behavior, not the child. For example, we had better say, "I am happy to see you share toys." rather than "You are a good boy."

When children violate rules and punishment is required, procedures that avoid the use of corporal punishment, degrading remarks, or withdrawal of love enhance positive self-concept development. These methods include such moderate actions as restraint, denial of a desired activity, or separation from the instigating situation.

Achievement also can improve children's self-esteem (Bednar, Wells, & Peterson, 1989). Children develop higher self-esteem because they know the important tasks to achieve goals, and they have experienced performing them or similar behaviors. For example, the straightforward teaching of real skills to children often results in increased achievement and thus, in enhanced self-esteem. It is also important to structure for success and provide a minimum of failure as a way of capitalizing on strengths. This can best be accomplished by breaking a behavior down into small steps, and teach each step and reinforce consistently before the next step is introduced. Because it provides frequent reinforcers this shaping technique can be helpful in motivating a child to master tasks.

Equally important is the adult's response to children's experiences with failure. Children's self-esteems are very vulnerable to adult criticism. Care should be taken to avoid humiliating or ridiculing them. Sensitivity to their feelings and continued acceptance in the face of failure are crucial. Adults must also be careful to provide a child with supportive explanations when she fails. A child's understanding of the causes of her failures often has a larger impact upon subsequent self-confidence than the number of failures compared to successes (Dweck, 1976). Such explanations as "You cannot do this." communicate to the child that she is incompetent and incapable of improvement. In contrast, such comments as "You can do better if you try harder." or "That task really was a hard one." encourage future efforts. Whereas the first approach tends to elicit a self-defeating orientation to task, the second instills self-confidence and

preserves self-esteem.

Finally, self-esteem often increases when children face a problem and try to cope with it rather than avoid it (Bednar, Wells, & Peterson, 1989). If coping rather than avoidance prevails, children often face problems realistically, honestly, and nondefensively. This produces favorable self-evaluative thoughts and raises self-esteem.

III. SUMMARY

How a child thinks and feels about himself influences how he behaves and what he becomes. Indeed, how we feel about ourselves and others is closely related to the relationships we had with our own mothers and fathers, and other significant teachers and friends in our lives. The influence that parents and teachers can have on the lives of children is enormous. Furthermore, the self-concept is resistant to change because it tends to continue in the direction in which it started.

Research is telling us that healthy and happy children who value themselves and others are likely to come from environments in which the parents or teachers respect and care for children, each other, and themselves; where there are firm rules which are consistently enforced; and where there are high standards for behavior and performance which children are expected to live up to. Accordingly, parents and teachers are suggested to pay more attention to fostering positive self-concept and to enhancing self-esteem among children and ourselves.

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