

# The formation of the self concept



Critically compare and contrast two theories that have been used to explain the formation of the self concept. Use relevant research to illustrate your answer.

Self schemas allows us to build a self- concept of one self, this is often a cognitive aspect of the self. This generally refers to. “ the totality of a complex, organized, and dynamic system of learned beliefs, attitudes and opinions that each person holds to be true about his or her personal existence” (Purkey, 1988).

When referring to self concept, we automatically think who am i? this is the way a person see and define themselves, for example would you define yourself from a list of characteristics; I am smart, pretty, visual or would u refer yourself as your gender, occupation, position in society and so on. This shows its important to understand who you are. How a person feels about who they are is known as self esteem. Franken (1994) states that “ there is a great deal of research which shows that the self-concept is, perhaps, the basis for all motivated behaviour. It is the self-concept that gives rise to possible selves, and it is possible selves that create the motivation for behaviour.” (p. 443) Franken (1994) also suggests that self-concept is related to self-esteem in that “ people who have good self-esteem have a clearly differentiated self-concept.... When people know themselves they can maximize outcomes because they know what they can and cannot do” (p. 439). Self concept is developed and maintained by what others tell us and us reflecting on what they say and what we do. However this does not happen over night but a life long process, this helps young adults in planning their career and future based on their abilities and personal skills based on their

critical phase during adolescence and the beginning of adulthood. According to Erik Erikson (1968), the self is developed through what he calls the stage theory of ego development.

Psychologists such as social, personality and educational focus on self concept, there is numerous amounts of studies and theories that can help explain the formation of self concept. . There are six self concept theories, control theory of social role theory, self-regulation, self-discrepancy theory, social comparison theory, self-evaluation maintenance model and social identity theory. this essay will comparing and contrasting two of these theories, the social identity theory and social comparison theory, in order to explain the formation of social concept. Finally it will also explore some of the key strength and weaknesses while looking at similarities and differences between the two theories.

Social identity theory was developed to understand the psychological reason behind discrimination in inter-groups by Tajfel and Turner (1979). Tajfel et al (1971) attempted to identify the minimal conditions that would lead members of one group to discriminate in favour of the in-group to which they belonged and against another out-group. Social identity is the individual's self-concept derived from perceived membership of social groups (Hogg & Vaughan, 2002). To explain this, it shows that a person sees positive self esteem when a person is part of a team or group, so in this case people sense of self concept is based on ' us' rather than ' I'.

Festinger (1954) developed a social comparison theory which evaluates one's abilities and opinion by comparing themselves to others based on

cognitive and physical abilities. This suggests that others around us help conclude a self- concept of one self by comparing oneself to another person. This gives a positive self esteem when considering how we differ. Festinger's early work focused on individuals comparing their opinions with those of others. For example when we see peers performance it is natural to compare ourselves to them, we just cannot resist this reaction (Gilborn & other, 1995; Staple & Suls, 2004). Already there is similarities between the two theories which can be seen.

Both theories focus on the implications for Group Formation and Societal Structures. People tend move out of groups that fail to satisfy their drive for self-evaluation and conform into groups of similar opinions and abilities, as them. However the social identity theory endeavours to understand inter-group relations real societal contexts (Tajfel 1978; Tajfel & Turner 1979). Hogg and Abrams (1988) argues that people find their self concept within the categories of which they belong to. Tajfel and Turner (1979) identify particulary important three variables that was found in ingroup favoritism. 1) The extent to which individuals identify with an in-group to internalize that group membership as an aspect of their self-concept. 2) The extent to which the prevailing context provides ground for comparison between groups. 3) The perceived relevance of the comparison group, which itself will be shaped by the relative and absolute status of the in-group. The examples (minimal group studies) of Turner and Tajfel (1986) showed that the basic act of individuals categorizing themselves as group members was sufficient to lead them to display in-group favouritism. The idea that humans all categorize each other, sometimes subconsciously. According to social identify theory

people tend to themselves and others in specific social categories, based on gender, age, background, religion and so on. This has practical application in many organisations in such regards to policies and regulations. For example the sex discrimination act 1975 and equal opportunity act 1995. However at the same time categorising can have negative application in society as it can create a division and conflict in groups as one may think their better than the other. For example religion is one of the biggest world divider. This can also arise questions, ' why do people in groups discriminate against each other?' this can challenge by psychologist. However people also display an out-group homogeneity bias (Brauer, 2001). This suggests that people generally view members of out- group being more similar to one another than members of in-group. This can be expressed by identifying people as " White," " Asian" and " Black" not realising each of these ethnic group contains sub-groups.

Another similarity of social comparison theory and social identity theory is self concept is based of other peoples' judgements. Other people's judgements helps us think well of ourselves. Sociologist Charles H. Cooley(1902) came up with a idea known as ' the looking glass self'. This describes we using others' perceptions of us as a mirror to influence how we perceive ourselves. George Herbert Mead(1934) looks further into this concept, states what defines our self - concept is not how other see us but the way we imagine how they see us. This can be explain as people fear to take in criticisms, however freely accept praises and meditate on the compliments. Therefore we may over estimate positive judgments, inflating our images (Shrauger & Schoeneman, 1979).

Social comparison and social identity is not the only way that makes up our self-concept but it is also our daily experience. Ozer & Bandura,(1990) found women feel less vulnerable, less anxious and more in control after figuring out the psychological skill needed to repel against sexual assaults. This helps us understand that realistic tasks can be undertaken to succeed is a positive self-esteem and feeling competent. Self-esteem comes from hard-earned achievement not only from telling someone they are doing well and how good a person is.

Culture is another factor that influences self-concept which contrasts within both theories. Social comparison theory is mainly focused on individualism. Identity is self-contained rather than group identification in individualist countries. This applies to those in western culture. Social identity theory focuses on collective self. Eastern countries such as Asia and Africa place a greater value on collectivism. According to Heine & others (1999) people have less need for positive self-regard, instead they are more self-critical. Kashima & Kashima (1998, 2003) found that in collectivist countries people use the terms 'I' less when speaking. For example a person might say 'went to the zoo' rather than 'I went to the zoo'. This is because of their group identities.

Self-esteem is another factor which can be threatening to one's self if it is low. Stereotyping, discrimination and prejudiced views play a big role on self-concept and self-esteem. Self-esteem is based on two factors; 1) personal identity and 2) group identity (Tajfel & Turner, 1986). Association with the right in-group helps build self-esteem however at the same time threats within in-group can be more damaging than someone from the outer group

being prejudice. Self fulfilling prophecy is the most damaging ways of maintaining prejudice belief even though it is invisible. This is when an individual lives upon the label given to them. Labelling is a judgement made on self identity and behaviour on an individual by description and categories by people who are significant others; someone who has authority or in school it would be the teachers in this case For example, the ethnic minority are being called too thick to go into higher education as they do not have the cultural values. From this we can see that social comparison theory does not examine self esteem in the same terms as the social identity theory.

To conclude, most research shows similarities between social comparison theory and social identity approach, there is a big difference which is not clarified. The theories differ when explaining how the self is formed. Social comparison theory looks at how 'self' is compared to 'other individual' whereas social identity approach looks as how 'self' is compare to 'social groups'.