Essay on self concept in psychology

Experience, Failure

A Discussion

Self Concept in Psychology: A Discussion

Just as a person has opinion about those around them, they also have perceptions about their own self. This opinion about one's self is generally known as self-concept. Self-concept is not a predefined view and, as with most perceptions, develops overtime as a result of external influences. It includes an organized, dynamic and complex network of acquired beliefs, opinions and attitudes towards an individual personal existence. Cosden, Brown and Elliot describe self-concept as ' domain specific self-perceptions', while self-esteem is differentiated as ' one's overall sense of self-worth' . Self-concept is often also identified as self-identity, self-construction and self-perspective .

There are several aspect that contribute to the overall self-concept. These factors may include academic and non-academic performance in schools, gender and sexual orientation, racial and cultural background, as well as quality of parenting received. In 1986, Albert Bandura proposed theorized that human behavior is influenced by three main inter-related factors, namely: a) Personal, b) Behavioral, and c) Environmental . Bandura's Social Cognitive Theory is, at its base, a theory of learning through observation. How a person views reality is greatly determined through the influence of these factors.

According to the theory, a person relies on their personal experiences and the behavior that they observe in others, to form a view or perception of reality. A person would need to first realize that their behavior is changing as well as the impact this change will have on their lives, if the impact of these

observations and experiences is to be positive and motivational. Further, the person would need to customize the model that is being followed so that it better addressed their own situation and then imitate the behavior of the model. Whether a person continues to adhere to the adapted action depends on the success of the change to address their issues once the adaptation has been made.

Festinger's Social Comparison Theory first proposed that humans adapt their behavior after drawing comparisons with peers or those with whom they interact at a social level . Different forms of appraisals in various contexts are used in the social comparison theory wherein a person compares one's self against related factors. Three kinds of appraisals make up the social comparison theory, namely: a) self-evaluation, b) self-improvement, and c) self-enhancement.

In self-evaluation, an individual analyses their own status when compared to others with regards to skills and attributes that are expected of them on a social level. Self-improvement involves the learning of means and ways of improving a skill or attribute that an individual deems to be lacking in comparison to others. Self-enhancement, on the other hand, is an individual comparing skills and attributes to those they consider inferior in order to enhance or maintain self-esteem . The individual generally compares with those who are within the same demographic group.

In the case of Downward Social Comparison, instead of comparing themselves to a person considered to be of an ideal body shape, the comparison is made with someone who is deemed to be inferior. Such a comparison can lead a person to be happier about their own intelligence,

body weight and shape, background and overall competence. However, considering the competitive nature of the world today, it is unlikely that a person would be exposed to positive influencers. For example, body image or how one views their own body to be, which is a major part of self-concept, is greatly influenced by what a person sees being portrayed as the ideal body. Muscular, chiseled bodies for men, and tall, thin bodies for women are the ideals propagated by the media. Hence, people are more likely to compare themselves to these common views of perfection rather than comparing themselves to someone who is, for example, obese. Hence, the Upward Social Comparison theory, wherein they will compare themselves to those who are considered to be better or ideals, not only in the case of physical appearance but other attributes as well, is a more common decider of self-concept. An upward comparison would lead people to feel dissatisfied with their self and hence have a negative self-concept.

Bandura also developed the theory of Self-Efficacy . Perceived self-efficacy is outlined as a person's beliefs regarding their capabilities to supply selected levels of performance that exercise influence over events that have an effect on their lives. Self-efficacy beliefs confirm the manner in which individuals feel, think, inspire themselves and behave. Such beliefs generate these various effects through four major processes. They embody cognitive, psychological feature, emotional and decision making processes.

A strong sense of efficacy enhances human accomplishment and private well-being in several ways. Individuals with high assurance in their capabilities approach tough tasks as challenges to be conquered instead of as threats to be evaded. This degree of efficacious approach encourages

intrinsic interest and deep engrossment in activities. They set themselves difficult goals and maintain sturdy commitment to them. They increase and maintain their efforts when faced with the prospect of failure. They promptly regain their sense of efficacy after encountering failures or hardships. They attribute failure to deficient effort or deficient information and skills that are available. They approach threatening scenarios with assurance that they will exercise power over them. Such motivating efficacious approach generates a sense of personal achievement, lowers stress and reduces vulnerability to depression.

In distinction, those who doubt their capabilities turn away from tough tasks that they deem personal threats. They encounter low aspirations and weak commitment to the goals they prefer to pursue. Once challenged with tough tasks, they linger over their personal deficiencies, on the obstacles they are going to encounter, and every type of adverse outcomes instead of focus on the way to perform with success. They slacken their efforts quit up quickly within the face of difficulties. They recovery of their sense of efficacy is very gradual following failure or setbacks. As a result, they perceive deficient performance as deficient ability and it does not need a lot of failure for them to lose belief in their capabilities. They fall simple victim to worry and depression.

As stated earlier, an individual's self-concept is not inborn, or predetermined. It is acquired through one's interactions with family, peers, and other members of the society. It is even molded by the things that we see being promoted as acceptable standards, whether it is pertaining to the currently perceived ideal of beauty, or the degree of financial well being one must

attain to be deemed successful or level of social interactions one must have to be considered popular. These external influencers all contribute in shaping a person's self-concept. As the external environment that we live in changes, so does the influence that these factors have on self-concept.

For example, after completing graduation, one may get a job that does not pay well but gives them the opportunity to learn. It may be difficult to manage finances and the person may be putting in too many hours at work, leaving little time for social interactions or even personal time. At this point, one might have the self-concept of being a ' struggler'. However, after a few years, the person acquires sufficient experience and moves on to a better designation with a much higher pay. He or she buys a nice car, moves into a bigger apartment, has assistants at the office to handle a substantial part of the work and, hence, can spare the time to spend time with family and friends. At this point, the self-concept may have changed to being ' successful'. While the ' struggler' may have suffered from low self-worth, high levels of stress and even bordered on depression, the ' successful' person with a positive self-concept is more likely to be happier and more content with life. As such, self-concept is constantly evolving and changing as a person faces new challenges in life. It is bound to change in tandem with changing circumstances and environments.

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