

# Influence of age on self-description changes



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- Gemma L Sobah

*An investigation of self-descriptions in data collected from two children of different ages, and how their age influences the focal point of their self-descriptions using the findings of Rosenberg (1979)*

Abstract (166 words)

This report investigates the self-descriptions of two children in using the findings of Morris Rosenberg (1979). Rosenberg proposed that young children typically describe themselves using physical conditions, and older children/adults tend to use character and relationship qualities. The two participants took part in an semi-structured interview and the interview transcripts were coded and analysed by dividing the answers into the four categories created by Rosenberg. These were physical, character, relationships or inner. The information and data from the two participants were then compared to Rosenberg's findings. The locus of self-knowledge was also investigated briefly, which Rosenberg stated changed from outside to inner relatedness, the older the child gets. From my findings, it appears

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my data does to some extent agree with the conclusions that Rosenberg came across as with age they do seem to make less physical descriptions, but there did seem to be a change from locus of self-knowledge from the parent to the individual, as the child got older.

Introduction (289 words)The subject of identity and how we acknowledge our own has always be a matter of intense debate those in the field of child development. The many aspects of identity require that many outside aspects are considered when looking at the development of one's identity, like religious, social ethnic, cultural. for that reason, in order to develop an identity, young children should be able to consider such aspects. Maccoby (as cited in Ding and Miel 2005 p. 131) suggests that a sense of self occurs slowly and in small steps. William James (1892 as cited in Miel and Ding 2005 pp 131) thought that a sense of self is divided in two stages: the self as a subject of experience and the self as an thing of knowledge (Miel and Ding, 2005 pg. 131). So as children grow up they develop into people more capable at self-awareness and more practically involved in awareness and responses from other people in their lifes. James believed, this development takes place within childhood during interactions between cognitive aspects and social experiences as children actively use their received knowledge about themselves to change parts of their environment.

The research for this study relates to the research above due to the age of the participants and the means of the interviews. The interviews are all based on who the child see's themselves as. The way they describe themselves will be the main focus of this study. Whether they dwell solely on their physical appearance or if they go through all the categories and if their

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responses differ between the two ages. Using Rosenberg's categories, we are hoping to get a clear understanding of whether Rosenberg's and others, work is relevant and can be applied generally.

#### Method (414 words)

The design of the study was a comparison of self descriptions elicited from two young people, during semi-structured interviews. The interviewers asked two schools in Milton Keynes, one primary and one secondary to take part in the study. A number of children agreed to take part and their parents were approached for consent and consent forms were signed. Kieron Sheehly interviewed the primary school children and Peter Barnes interviewed the older children. One of the participants was a 8 year old female in primary school and the other was a 16 year old female in secondary school. Both interviews were conducted during school hours within their schools. A tape recorder was used to record the interviews and paper and a pen was used for the children to write down their individual statements. A sound recorder and a producer were present during the interviews. Microphones were used during the interviews and these were placed out of the way as to not get in the way of the interview. All children were informed at the start of the interview what was going to happen and what was being asked of them. They were also informed who would be using the recording and or what purpose. The interviews were paused while the children wrote down their statements and started again when the interviewer wanted to ask them questions. As there was a potential for outside or background noise, when the background noises began to interfere with the interview, the recording was paused and started again when it became quiet enough to carry on. The

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two interviews were conducted by staff from the Milton Keynes Open university for the purpose of this study. These were watched and their transcripts were coded and analysed according to Rosenberg's method. Self descriptions of participants were categorised by Rosenberg, into four categories (a) physical; (b) character; (c) relationships d) Inner. The children's statements were divided where a category could be acknowledged from a single statement (see Appendix 1 and 2) and if a statement could be split into more categories this was done. The percentages of each category were then calculated by way of adding up the column, dividing it by the total and this by 100. This was how each categories percentage was worked out for each child and then these results were then put into a table to show which categories had the highest or lowest percentages for each child. These were then compared and results were explained below.

#### Results (275 words)

The hypothesis in this research study was as the child got older there would be a gradual change from physical characteristics to inner and relationship characteristics whilst the locus of self-knowledge increasingly shifted from others to the self as child grew older. Self descriptions that came from "I" statements, were coded and placed into one of the four categories (see appendices 1). Table 1: Self-descriptions by the children. The Categories Percentage for Annie (8 years old) was : Physical -40% Character - 40% Relationships -20% Inner - 0% . The Categories Percentages for Kirsty (16 years old) was: Physical - 20% Character - 20% Relationships - 20% Inner - 40%. Table 1 (see appendices 5) shows us that the responses that Annie gave were quite equally divided across physical and characteristics, whilst

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Kirsty's were evenly spread over all the categories with the highest percentage being on the inner section. . This appears to support the hypothesis as there was a steady change from physical descriptive to psychological descriptive the older the children get. Annie's answers to the locus of self-knowledge questions were quite mixed. She showed outer locus of self-knowledge; her teacher knows best about her school work and performance and her mother seems to know best about her behaviour.

Although this shows support to Rosenberg's theory and hypothesis it was only using 2 participants and because of this cannot be over generalised to the wider population, which in turn limits the use of the results. Also because Annie only completed five statements and Kirsty completed 10 this could have impacted the percentage of the results due to Kirsty having more data to input into the table.

#### Discussion (682 words)

In this research study, two children were chosen. One being at primary school and the other at secondary school, although they were both females, although a larger sample would have allowed for a better analysis of the conclusions in relation to the population. Although the results appeared to support the Rosenberg's findings (Miel et al, 2010, pp. 21-22) no specific conclusion should be made from such a small sample. Piaget's theory of cognitive development also shows this, which could suggest that at about the start of the teen years there is a change from the solid process of development into the final stage of official process . This appears to be the stage at which most adolescents start to create an individual identity and are

then able to put into their own point of view and social information about what it means to become an adult and reflect with purpose, on their self consciousness.

As the children were interviewed by adults, people they did not know, they may have given different answers to what they may have said to a friend who had asked them the same questions or had a adult that they knew. They could have given biased results due to the fact they were aware it was for a study and they knew the purpose of the study. So because of this the results can't be relied upon wholly to be accurate and true.

Regardless of this the way a child describes themselves may be different depending on their level of education and upbringing. For example a child of no school education who cannot read and has limited education may not fully certain aspects of what it means to be them and therefore may give limited answers based on their knowledge and education. Also a child who has been abused or had a very negative start in life, may dwell on more emotional lead than physical lead statements due to them being hurt a lot and there state being very emotionally based.

Further still, the way in which a child describes themselves may be purely on what appears to be important to them. Kirsty tended to focus on herself as not being able to change her dress size ' I am not a size 8' (see appendices 4) and not being able to change who she is in general. This focus may be mainly on how she feels she is perceived by others around her or how she views herself, not just due to her age but due to her current circumstances.

From this study it shows that Rosenberg's first hypothesis about the locus of self-knowledge has on some accounts been shown as being correct, although the sample size was a lot smaller than Rosenberg's, also the age of the older participant being incompatible, with Rosenberg's research study. My assumption is to suggest that younger children do appear to describe themselves focusing mainly on their physical attributes and less on how they feel and their personality traits while adults concentrate mainly on their forming on relationships and the impact these have on their sense of self, although the change from physical external descriptions of the younger child to the personal and inner feelings of the older child or adult did not appear to prominent in these results. This study has pointed out the difficulty in trying to determine and discover the idea of sense of self and locus of self-knowledge, and can be used for an indicator to their inner feelings and thoughts of an person in the process of their development. These descriptions are fluid and live within the communication and changes with others and over a period of time. The locus of self-knowledge also changes by age from child to adult self. Even though the original hypothesis has been somewhat proven to be in general in agreement with the findings of Rosenberg, there are a few practical issues connected in the research of existential and definite selves. More in-depth research involving a much bigger and mixed cultural sample with categorizing results from different researchers could help to prevent some of these issues.

#### Conclusion (46 words)

In conclusion, children grow and mature at different times. The progress of developing a sense of self relies on many factors (friendship groups, parents, <https://assignbuster.com/influence-of-age-on-self-description-changes/>



peers, outer society, etc). Regardless it does appear to be clear that there is a development from physical towards psychological self descriptive.

1, 872 words

## References:

Miel, D., Ding, S (2005) Children's Personal And Social Development: *The Early Development of Identity*, . Milton Keynes. The Open University

## Appendices 1

### Category Analysis Form 1

Sex

Participant Age: :  
 P C R I  
 t: Annie 8 fem  
 ale

√ √ √ I doing  
 √ √ harry  
 potter  
 Lego  
 I love  
 rabbits,  
 guinea  
 pigs and  
 dogs  
 I think one  
 of my

hobbies is

using the

TV remote

control

I'm really

good at

maths but

get stuck

on telling

the time

I'm not

very good

at

remember

ing

					Overa
2	2	1	0	column	ll
				totals	total
					= 5

40 4 20 0 Percentag

% 0 % % es

% (column

total /

overall

total x

100)

## Coded Responses

- Physical: describing physical appearance, age, and physical qualities like flexible, sporty etc
- Character: Likes and dislikes, hobbies and interests, personal qualities and basic personality traits eg, I like to relax, I'm laid back etc
- Relationships: friends and family, social mentions, eg I like making friends
- Inner: Temperaments, moods and feelings. Eg I'm a happy person, I can get stressed easily. etc

*P C R I*      *Participan Age: Sex*  
*t: Kirsty 16 : F*

√ √ √ √ I can't  
 √ √ √ √ change  
 who I am  
 √  
 I can only  
 √  
 be my  
 best  
 I've  
 always  
 been an

individual

I'm not

size 8

I'm pretty

plain

I get on

well with

many

people

I'm

friendly

and my

friends

are like

family

I work as

hard as I

can

I may set

my goals

too high

I can only

be me

and if

someone

don't like

that I

can't

apologise

anymore

					Overa
				column	ll total
2	2	2	4	totals	= 10

Percentag

es

				(column
20	20	20	40	total /
%	%	%	%	overall
				total x
				100)

## Appendices 2

### Category Analysis Form 2

#### Coded Responses

Physical: describing physical appearance, age, and physical qualities like flexible, sporty etc

Character: Likes and dislikes, hobbies and interests, personal qualities and basic personality traits eg, I like to relax, I'm laid back etc

Relationships: friends and family, social mentions, eg I like making friends

Inner: Temperaments, moods and feelings. Understanding of self. Eg I'm a happy person, I can get stressed easily. Etc

### Appendices 3

#### Annie's Statements:

1. I like doing Harry Potter Lego, I've completed the night bus
2. I love rabbits, guinea pigs and dogs
3. I think one of my hobbies is using the TV remote control
4. I'm really good at maths and get stuck on telling the time
5. I'm not very good at remembering

### Appendices 4

#### Kirsty's statements:

1. I can't change who I am
2. I can only be my best
3. I've always been an individual
4. I am not size 8
5. I'm pretty plain
6. I get on well with many people

7. I'm friendly and my friends are like family
8. I work as hard as I can
9. I may set my goals too high
10. I can only be me and if some people don't like that, I can't apologise anymore

## Appendices 5

### Table of Results 1

	Percentag es for Annie	Percentag es for Kirsty
Physical	40	20
Character	40	20
Relationshi ps	20	20
Inner	0	40