

# Effect of perception and empathy on self concept



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## Final Paper: Perception, Empathy, and the Self-Fulfilling Prophecy

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How does perception and empathy towards those we communicate with at an interpersonal level alter one's self concept and in effect change the fate of the self-fulfilling prophecy? To begin, one must first understand some of the core concepts and definitions of terms that will be utilized in this paper, such that the reader can understand the relatedness and intertwined nature of one's perception and the self-fulfilling prophecy.

Adler and Proctor define the term self-concept as, " who you think you are," in their work *Looking Out, Looking In* (2011). One's self concept can be affected by an almost infinite number of factors, some of which are: one's biological make-up (inherited disease or if an individual is generally a happy or sad person), how we believe other's see us, how other's treat us or how others have treated us in the past, how we compare ourselves to others in our social environment, our cultural backgrounds, and simply our gender; all affect who we think we are.

The concept of one's self then leads us to the discussion of the self-fulfilling prophecy. Adler and Proctor describe that a self-fulfilling prophecy, "...occurs when a person's expectations of an event, and his or her subsequent behavior based on those expectations, make the event more likely to occur than would otherwise have been true. A self-fulfilling prophecy involves four stages: 1) Holding an expectation (for yourself or for others); 2) Behaving in accordance with that expectation; 3) The expectation coming to pass; and 4) Reinforcing the original expectation" (2011).

Next, we must consider the ever so interesting concept of perception, for which Adler and Proctor describe in matters of experience where, “...each of us experiences a different reality, and failing to understand other people’s point of view can lead to problems on both practical and relational levels.... by seeing the world through other’s eyes, you can gain insights that are different – and often more valuable – than those arising out of your own experiences” (2011).

Finally, and in my opinion the most vital element of perception that can improve an interpersonal relationship is to understand and practice empathy. Empathy, “...is the ability to re-create another person’s perspective, to experience the world from the other’s point of view” (Adler and Proctor, 2011).

My first example will be based on observations of a colleague (and friend), with whom I currently work. To say that this friend was at times, the most negative person in the world may be an understatement. He would often say things like, “ nothing ever goes my way...you just get lucky...whatever, I’ll probably get fired soon anyway...they [our employer] give me the worst clients,” among many other similarly negative uses of language. Another co-worker (and also a friend) and I, would try to turn his negative attitude into more positively provoked thoughts based on several factors. We would say things to him such as, “ we are all very fortunate to have the jobs that we do in this economy...if things didn’t work out with this client, you have to move on to the next...we just started a year ago – things will get better/easier...you were hired for a reason – don’t be so hard on yourself...try to see things a little bit differently.” This was of course not the full extent of our

conversation, but this should give the reader some context as to how we would communicate with him.

More specifically, there was an instance where this “negative” friend was preparing for second meeting with a client. In our line of work, the second meeting is where we as advisors diagnose the issues we’ve uncovered regarding a client’s situation; as well as provide suggestion, recommendations, and ultimately “ask for the business.” “Asking for the business,” could be having the client transfer money from another firm to ours, or to invest the money they have with us in a more productive manner. Nevertheless, I stopped by his office to see how he was feeling going into the meeting. Not surprisingly, he had what I perceived to be a “negative” attitude towards the outcome (his mind was already focused on the future or rather his anticipated outcome three hours ahead of the present moment)! I said to him, “Frank (pseudonym), you have no control on what decision the client will make; therefore instead of thinking the client will not do what you recommend, why not feel good about the work you have already done for the client; and think in a way that you believe they *will* act on your recommendation, because you believe it is in the client’s best interest to do so? And if they don’t act now, perhaps they will act later – but nothing positive will happen if you don’t believe it will.” He then replied something in the manner of, “yeah, I guess you’re right – I’ve got nothing to lose anyway” (followed by a, “I don’t care anyway” laugh). I said, “Great you can do this – and you will. And if you’re confident in your delivery, they will act on your recommendations.” He thanked me; I walked to my desk as he closed his office door and put the finishing touches on his “mental” preparation for his

meeting. Fast forward, after he escorted his clients past my office and to the lobby where he said his good-byes; to my delightful eyes he came back to my office with a bounce in his step. He was walking differently than normal, he was standing more erect, he was smiling – a huge, very happy smile. He said to me (in our non-business, friendship-like communication style), “ bro – you’re not going to believe this.... they did everything! They’re going to bring over \$2 million from XYZ company, they want to meet with our estate planning expert; and they want me to review their \$3 million life insurance policy – oh and he thinks I can help some of the other board members of his university’s endowment fund; he took like five business cards!” I stood up out of my chair in utter excitement, and fueled by his positive attitude – gave him a “ high-five,” and said, “ *congrats* dude, I knew you could do it – now you’re in a great position to hit your year-end goal.” He thanked me for acknowledging his accomplishment, but also thanked me for my little “ pre-game” talk when I stopped by his office only a few hours earlier. He said to me, “ you were right, if I just look at these opportunities a little bit differently, perhaps I will have more success.” I said, “ You’re absolutely right.”

This was a first-hand experience whereby I saw how a change in perception was indefinitely the game-changer for my friend to perform better, and come across more confident and reassuring to his clients – which ultimately enabled him to earn their trust, and “ win” their business.

My next example is such that I consider the positive effects that the practice of Yoga has on an individual’s self-concept, their actions towards others based on their empathetic nature, and finally how all of these positive

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thoughts and actions promote a positive self-fulfilling prophecy. There is a well-known Yoga sutra that states that minds perceive differently. “ Although the same objects may be perceived by different minds, they are perceived in different ways, because those minds manifested differently.” This is exactly in line with what Adler and Proctor mean when they discuss the many factors that affect one’s self-concept; which in affect alters one’s ability to perceive a certain way. An example of which is described by Swami J. in his writings. “ Imagine that four people are sitting together, meditating on the same object, a flower, for example. One person is meditating on the beauty of the flower. A second person is meditating on the molecular structure of the flower. A third person is meditating on the subtle essence of light that forms the flower. A fourth is meditating on the primal elements, the gunas, out of which the flower manifested. The flower is the same, while the minds differ: In this example, it is not the flower which has changed. Rather, it is the nature of the four different minds that determines the way the flower is experienced. Each of the four minds in this example is operating from progressively deeper levels of being, and thus, the object perceived is experienced at its different levels of manifestation.”

The practice of Yoga allows practitioners and followers to see the world as it really is by training their bodies and minds to stay in the present moment – a very important aspect when considering one’s self-concept, as well as imploring the ability to be empathetic towards others in the present moment; a practice of mindfulness. Jeff Martens further describes this concept in his work, “ Yoga and the Mirror of Perception,” such that, “... everything else is just a projection of an imagined future or memory of the

past. It is up to us to make sure that our perceptions emerge from a fearless place of love and acceptance. This is the key to living in the eternal present where all things are possible and the world can bloom anew.” Ancient Chinese poet and philosopher, Lao Tzu, said it best, “...where we let go of what we are, we become what we might be.”

Further elaborating on the idealistic ways Yoga can help individuals realize their positive self-concept, be more empathic and ultimately have a more positive future (self-fulfilling prophecy), comes from the biographical story of Suzanne Jones, titled “ Exercise Your Empathy.” Her story has to do with how Yoga did in fact change her life, her self-concept, and how empathy towards others changed the way she views and acts towards the world (people, all things living and non-living). She writes, “...when I was in the darkest time of my life and planning my one shot at doing something right (i. e. removing myself from the world via swallowing a butt load of pain killers), I happened to stumble into a yoga class. And as I learned how to really breathe and concentrated on how to move my body in class and pay attention to how my body was feeling inside, I activated these brain regions...I exercised my empathy...because without empathy, we begin to stop being kind to ourselves. And when that happens, we begin to withdraw from others and the cycle of insidious self-destruction begins. Our brains are social organs and in isolation they begin to suffer.” (2013).

Reflecting back on my own personal experiences, as well as the two stories I shared regarding my friend/co-worker, and the story of Suzanne Jones and how Yoga and empathy changed her life, I truly believe that the intertwined nature of perception and empathy towards those we communicate with at an <https://assignbuster.com/effect-of-perception-and-empathy-on-self-concept/>

interpersonal level will not only alter one's self-concept, but have a lifetime of positive affects in changing one's fate and ensuring a positive self-fulfilling prophecy. I have supplied both observed and biographical evidence that supports this theory and hypothesis, which suggests that a change in perception and/or empathy towards others will have a positive effect on one's understanding of the self, which in turn will promote a positive self-fulfilling prophecy (cause and effect).

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