



Self Concept

Learning Outcomes

Students should be able to:

- Explain the term self-concept
- Demonstrate knowledge and understanding of how the following factors may affect self-concept
 - age;
 - appearance;
 - culture and ethnicity;
 - disability;
 - education;
 - employment;
 - gender;
 - relationships;
 - sexual orientation; and
 - unemployment;
- evaluate how these factors may influence an individual's self-concept.

Self-concept

Self-concept is the view an individual has of himself or herself. It changes as an individual passes through the life stages and experiences different life changes. Self-concept is based on how an individual values or thinks of himself or herself and on what others think of the individual.

Some individuals view themselves positively in all aspects of their lives and feel confident, loved and valued. These individuals tend to have a positive self-concept. Other individuals may think they are not clever or successful, feel unimportant, undervalued, and lack confidence. These individuals tend to have a negative self-concept.

Factors influencing self-concept

- *Age*
- *Disability*
- *Sexual orientation*
- *Culture and Ethnicity*
- *Relationships*
- *Employment and Unemployment*
- *Appearance*
- *Education*
- *Gender*

Age

As individuals get older, their self-concepts grow and change. Young children will tend to describe themselves in terms of their physical characteristics, for example, a girl or boy, short or tall, what they are good at and their interests. Adolescents may refer to relationships and their likes and dislikes when asked to describe their self-concepts. When describing their self-concepts adults may refer to the quality of their lives and their personality. Self-concept changes with age as the individual passes through the life stages and experiences a range of life changes.

Age may have a positive effect on an individual's self-concept. An individual may have a sense of achievement about what he or she has achieved in life. They may have a sense of pride in achievements to date, for example, promotion in their work, life changes such as marriage or becoming a parent, owning their own home or having travelled to a number of different countries.

A young person may feel they have a long life ahead of them and have time to achieve much more.

On the other hand, age may have a negative effect on an individual's self-concept. Some older individuals may have a negative self-concept as they may experience a sense of regret due to missed opportunities or a lack of achievement in their life. Older individuals may experience a loss of purpose and feel useless or a burden. Some individuals may be resentful of the physical signs of ageing. Age may also have a negative effect on the self-concepts of younger people who may feel resentful that their age restricts their opportunities, for example, getting a job or gaining admission to a nightclub or activities at a gym.

Appearance

The appearance or the physical characteristics of individuals, such as their height, weight, hair, eye and skin colour, can have a major effect on their self-concepts. It can influence how others view an individual and their reaction to them or behaviour towards them, which in turn can influence the way an individual thinks of himself or herself. Appearance is often of particular importance to adolescents and young people and has a strong influence on their self-concepts as they often compare themselves to the ideal images portrayed in the media. For example to well-known celebrities such as the Kardashians or to role models such as David Beckham.

Appearance may have a positive effect on an individual's self-concept, as if people are happy with the way they look, they feel attractive. Others will react in a positive way to them and this will increase their confidence leading to a positive self-concept. Adolescents and young people who think their appearance matches that of their role model or of their ideal image tend to have a positive self-concept.

On the other hand, an individual may be unhappy with their appearance, for example, he/she may think they are too fat or too thin, have a long nose, scarring, disfigurement and so do not match their ideal image. As a result they may feel unattractive and this may result in a lack of confidence and so have a negative effect on the individual's self-concept. Individuals may also be teased or bullied due to their appearance, which further decreases their self-esteem.

Activity

Read the following articles on children who have been bullied due to their appearance and take part in a class discussion on how this may have affected their self-concept.

<https://www.theguardian.com/education/2015/oct/19/appearance-bullying-children-facial-disfigurements-body-image>

<http://www.mirror.co.uk/news/uk-news/half-teens-bullied-school-way-2246489>

Culture and ethnicity

Culture refers to the way of life of a particular society or a group within the wider society and includes aspects such as dress, language, practices and beliefs, for example, in some cultures alcohol is forbidden. Ethnicity refers to belonging to a particular group that shares aspects of culture such as language or beliefs. This group of individuals is known as an ethnic group, for example, Travellers are an ethnic group in Northern Ireland.

Activity

Watch the following YouTube video clips on different cultures, Chinese culture and traditions documentary on <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uWA4S-wNSg> and Polish Culture on <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uWA4S-wNSgs>

Compare the customs and traditions with your own.

Culture and ethnicity can have a positive effect on an individual's self-concept as it gives him or her a sense of belonging through being a member of a group of people who share the same beliefs and customs. This sense of belonging is strengthened when the individual takes part in celebrations associated with that culture, for example Chinese New Year, St. Patrick's Day or July 12th celebrations. Being part of a group with shared values and beliefs can make an individual feel valued, confident and give them a sense of pride. In some cases, culture and ethnicity can contribute to an individual having a negative self-concept. Individuals who have immigrated may feel isolated in the new country and lack a sense of belonging. In some cases, they may be frightened to show or celebrate their culture, for example wearing their normal clothing. As a result, an individual may feel

isolated and lonely, which may have a negative effect on their self-concept. An individual may also be discriminated against due to their culture, for example may have difficulty getting a job, may receive a low wage and in some cases experience verbal and physical abuse. These actions can result in an individual feeling worthless; losing confidence, feeling frightened and angry which can result in negative self-concept.

Activity

Watch the You Tube video 'Jose Vs Joe Who Gets a Job' on <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PR7SG2C7IVU> and discuss in class how his experience would affect his self-concept.

Disability

A disability is a long-term physical or mental condition, which affects an individual's ability to carry out the activities of daily living. Activities of daily living are things an individual normally does in daily living such as washing, dressing, preparing meals, toileting and leisure. There are several types of disability. Physical disability affects individuals' movement and co-ordination of the body. Learning disability reduces individuals' intellectual ability and they find it more difficult to understand information and may experience difficulty carrying out the activities of daily living. Sensory disability affects individuals' sense organs and sight and hearing are most commonly affected.

Activity

- (a) Watch the following You Tube clips to increase your understanding of the different types of disability.

'LIKE EVERYONE ELSE' Learning Disability Awareness on <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Q2PIizndq-g>

'JUST ASK' Sensory Disability Awareness Film on <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LU0dQXJ-YQM>

'TALK TO ME' Physical Disability Awareness on https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CL8GMxRW_5Y

- (b) Write down the names of celebrities or famous people who have a disability. How many were you able to name? How many were your fellow pupils able to name?

Having a disability may affect the self-concept of an individual in various ways. The individual may feel different and less able than others resulting in a lack of confidence. He /she may feel isolated if unable to take part in activities and as a result may have difficulty forming and maintaining friendships. Attending a mainstream school with other children in the area may not be possible for a disabled child causing isolation outside of school as other children in their area go to a mainstream school. Adults with disabilities may find it harder to gain suitable employment leading to feelings of a lack of purpose and independence. Other individuals may feel angry, frustrated and resent their disability. One of the main issues is the attitude of others to individuals with disabilities who often only see the disability and not the person. These are some of the reasons why an individual with a disability may have a negative self-concept.

On the other hand, many individuals with disabilities have a positive self-concept, lead full and independent lives, and do not allow their disability to hold them back. This was illustrated in the Summer Paralympics in Rio where a number of local competitors including Michael McKillop, Bethany Firth and Jason Smyth from Northern Ireland all won medals. Many individuals with a disability lead independent lives, have full time jobs and enjoy a wide range of leisure activities.

Activity

Watch the following You Tube clips on celebrities and famous people with a disability and discuss in class how their disability may have affected their self-concept.

'Famous Disabled People' on <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=paj6bA3ktMs> and 'Celebrities with Disabilities' on <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=t6EEy-sAfeM>

'Disability the Truth' on <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MJ4JOomkyNI>

Education

Most children and young people spend at least twelve to fourteen years in a formal education system in this country and many progress to college or university, so it is not surprising that this factor has a significant impact on an individual's self-concept. Whilst in school or college individuals meet a wide range of other people and

get opportunities to take part in a wide range of activities. Many friendships are formed during an individual's time at school or college and these can influence an individual's self-concept. The expectations of teachers and others can also impact on an individual's self-concept.

Activity

Consider your own educational experiences to date and consider how they have influenced your self-concept.

An individual may have positive educational experiences, for example, good relationships with staff and other pupils and have a wide range of friends in school or college. This will create a sense of belonging and the individual will feel valued. Positive feedback from staff and success in examinations will result in a sense of pride and achievement increasing an individual's confidence. Overall education will have a positive effect on the individual's self-concept.

Activity

Take part in a class discussion and make notes on how education may have a negative effect on an individual's self-concept.

Employment

Employment means an individual has paid work. Unemployment means an individual would like to get a job but is unable to find work. A significant number of people are currently unemployed in Northern Ireland. Employment can have a positive effect on an individual's self-concept as they will have a sense of purpose and independence. If an individual has a well-paid job then he/she will be able to pay household bills and not worry about debt. An individual may enjoy good relationships and form friendships with work colleagues resulting in a sense of belonging. Feelings of being valued in the work place give an individual a sense of satisfaction and increased confidence, which contributes to positive self-esteem. However, employment can also contribute to negative self-concept. An individual may be bullied or discriminated against in the workplace resulting in feelings of anger, fear and anxiety, which can reduce self-worth and result in a negative self-concept. Some individuals may be overqualified for their job, for example, many young graduates who cannot find suitable employment may be working in supermarkets or call centres where basic or no

qualifications are needed and the pay and working conditions are poor. These individuals often feel undervalued and have little or no job satisfaction, which in turn has a negative effect on self-concept.

Gender

Gender refers to the expected activities and behaviours that a society considers appropriate for males and females. Males and females have expected roles in society also known as gender roles, and whilst these have become less different over time, gender role differences still exist. These roles are also known as gender stereotypes- a widely held and often simple idea of the role of a male or female.

Activity

Watch the You Tube video 'Gender Roles in Society' on <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zTMqB7qjQ0Q>

Children become aware quite young of their expected gender role, for example, girls are usually bought toys such as dolls, prams, kitchens, irons, ironing boards and dressing up outfits such as a nurse's costume. This prepares them for society's expectations not only of the female gender role as carer of children and the home but also for a mainly female career as a nurse.

Activity

- Take part in a class discussion and make notes on the expected gender role of males.
- Draw up a list of occupations and beside each write down which gender is most likely to follow that career.

Gender may have a positive effect on an individual's self-concept as he/she may have a sense of satisfaction with their expected male/female gender role and associated expectations. For example, a female may feel a sense of achievement and pride in caring for children and the home, the expected gender role of a female. A man may also have a sense of pride and satisfaction in his expected gender role as being the provider and looking after his family.

On the other hand, an individual may resent the expectations associated with their gender role. For example, some males may resent the expectation that they should be strong and not show their emotions, for example, the idea that 'big boys don't

cry'. Others may experience a lack of satisfaction, for example, a female may resent the fact that she is expected to do most of the household tasks and a male may resent the expectation that he should go out to work whereas he would prefer to remain at home caring for the children. Although illegal, individuals may be discriminated against due to their gender and this can result in a loss of confidence and a negative self-concept.

Relationships

Relationships have a very important influence on self-concept. An individual forms various relationships as he/she passes through the various life stages. In infancy the main relationships are with parents (or main carers) and other family members. During childhood and adolescence a range of different relationships form, for example with friends in class or fellow team members in sports. In adulthood, an individual will develop further relationships, for example with work colleagues or an intimate/sexual relationship. Every relationship will affect an individual's self-concept.

Relationships can have a positive influence on an individual's self-concept. An individual will feel loved and valued when he/she has healthy relationships with others. He/she will feel cared for and supported, as the individual will have someone to share his or her worries and concerns with. Individuals, who have good relationships experience a sense of belonging, feel confident contributing to a positive self-concept.

Unfortunately, not all relationships have a positive effect on self-concept. Relationships may break down causing an individual to feel unhappy, angry, guilty, betrayed or isolated and lonely. Some relationships may be unhealthy or abusive resulting in an individual losing confidence and feeling undervalued and unloved which will have a negative impact on self-concept. In such relationships, an individual often has little support and may feel isolated and alone.

Sexual orientation

Sexual orientation is a person's sexual identity. An individual may be attracted to people of the opposite gender (heterosexual), attracted to people of the same gender (homosexual) or attracted to people of both genders (bisexual). The term gay is often used to describe a homosexual man, attracted to other males and lesbian to describe a homosexual woman attracted to other females.

Heterosexual individuals are often described as being straight. In recent years, there has been considerable media coverage on sexual orientation in particular in relation to rights of homosexuals.

Watch the You Tube video 'Gay Rights: Britain's Changing Attitudes' on https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_jEM6PS_Q10 and take part in a class discussion on how attitudes to homosexuality have changed since the 1950s and the potential impact on individuals' self-concepts.

An individual who is confident about their sexual orientation (heterosexual, homosexual or bisexual) will have a clear sense of identity and have a clear sense of who they are. Acceptance of an individual's sexual orientation by family and friends will result in feelings of being valued and accepted resulting in a positive-concept.

Whilst homosexuality is becoming more acceptable many individuals still experience discrimination based on their sexual orientation. Some homosexuals may feel confused and not have a clear sense of identity resulting in a lack of confidence. Some may be teased or bullied because of their sexual orientation. In some cases, homosexuals may feel a sense of shame and be unwilling to be honest about their sexual orientation. Family members or friends with traditional values and views may not accept an individual who is homosexual resulting in a breakdown in relationships and feelings of anger, rejection and isolation. As a result of these factors, an individual's sexual orientation may contribute to a negative self-concept.

Unemployment

Activity

Watch the You Tube video: 'The effects of unemployment on the unemployed' on <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Q5cH2gWUbBw>

An individual who is unemployed may lack a sense of purpose and identity and experience a loss of confidence and long-term unemployment can result in feelings of despair and even depression. Feelings of a lack of independence are common, as the individual will depend on state benefits. Worry and anxiety about paying bills is common amongst the unemployed. Feelings of shame and guilt about

not being able to provide for one's family may be experienced, for example an unemployed father may feel he is letting his family down are common. Unemployment can have a significant negative effect on an individual's self-concept.

Sample exam questions

1. Explain what is meant by self-concept.
4 lines/ 2 marks
2. Abidin, aged 34, moved from Malaysia to Northern Ireland to study at university. He completed his degree and is now manager of a large transport company.

Explain how each of the following factors may have a positive effect on Abidin's self-concept.

Age

4 lines/2marks

Culture and ethnicity

4 lines/2 marks

3. Describe how each of the following factors may negatively affect an individual's self-concept.

Appearance

6 lines/3 marks

Sexual orientation

6 lines/ 3 marks

Unemployment

6 lines/3 marks

4. Molly has a good relationship with her children and grandchildren. Discuss how these relationships may positively affect Molly's self-concept.
6 lines/3 marks
5. Use the following headings to describe how employment may affect an individual's self-concept'.

Positive effect on an individual's self-concept

6 lines/3 marks

Negative effect on an individual's self-concept

6 lines/3 marks

6. Evaluate how education, disability and gender may affect an individual's self-concept.
1.5 pages/9 marks

