Self-Concept

The attitudes, behaviors, and values that a person believes make him or her unique.

I am what I am!

The Evolving Self Concept

• Most embarrassing moments: “That’s when I discovered I had a post-it on my head.”
• Mirror task suggests that we have self between 18 and 24 months.

Self-Awareness

• Camera hogs (although not so good on tape).
• Pronouns (Me, I, and the ubiquitous, all important…)
• MINE!!!! (Levine)

Other evidence of self-awareness by age 2

• Adolescent egocentrism: teen belief that they are the focus of other’s thinking 247.
• If you knew that others can think, We tend to think
• They are…
• looking at us!

What are you looking at!

Adolescent egocentrism leads to:

• Imaginary audience: belief that everyone is watching.
  • “I’m an actor in the soap that is my life, and everybody is tuning in.”
• Personal Fable: belief that our experience is unique.
  • “You can’t know what I’m going through! No one can! Don’t you understand? I broke a nail!”
• Illusion of invulnerability: belief that misfortune won’t happen to us.
The Search for Identity

- Remember Freud, Erickson? (crises/stages)
- Should remember James Marcia (who updated and simplified their theories for today).
- He operationalized the concepts of psychosocial theory (crisis and commitment) and developed the Identity Status Interview.
- He discovered four distinct patterns in identity achievement.

Pattern 1: Diffusion

- The individual has not yet experienced an identity crisis or exploration nor made any personal commitment to a vocation or set of beliefs.
- Identity confusion can encompass a variety of different behavior patterns ranging from an “aimless drifting,” to a manipulative selfishness, to a morbid self-preoccupation.
- Some identity diffused individuals avoid anxiety, exploration, and confrontation by means of alcohol or drugs.

Pattern 2: Foreclosure

- Most frequently observed identity status during adolescence (“Go with the flow.”)
- Have not yet experienced crisis/exploration but have made commitments to goals, values, and beliefs.
- Usually these commitments emerge from an identification with parents or significant others.
- Importantly these individuals are committed to goals and values, an occupation, and a personal ideology but these are not their own.

Pattern 3: Moratorium

- Moratorium: time of delay granted to an individual who is not yet ready to meet an obligation or make a commitment.
- A period of many unresolved questions.
- The individual is in an active struggle to find answers, to search, to explore, to try on different roles. “Checking out the options.”
- Moratorium is an essential and necessary prerequisite for identity achievement.

Pattern 4: Achievement

“After an individual has experienced a psychological moratorium and has explored identity issues and crises and, as a result, has begun to develop more permanent personal commitments, he or she has achieved an identity.”

James Marcia

Ethnic Identity

- Ethnic identity: identification with a particular group’s customs, traditions, culture, and heritage.
- After adolescent egocentrism, we realize we are part of something bigger than just ourselves.
- Adolescents who identify strongly with a particular group tend to be better adjusted.
Storm and Stress

- The search for identity does not produce as much storm & stress as you might think.
- Well over 65% of teens report that they are happy at home, and they admire their parents.
- Yes, your parents no longer dress you, and there will always be struggles about when and how much responsibility/autonomy the growing teen will have.
- By and large, it all works out.

What am I going to do?

- Part of establishing an identity is identifying a career, which also takes different stages:
  - Crystallization: hypothetical ideas about what we might be good for (eg. People always stare at me, maybe I should be in the performing arts)
  - Specification: Learn more, get real, get job description (eg. What sport? What sciences? What specific job?)
  - Stochastic model
  - Implementation: “OK, you’re hired.”

Change and Stability in Self-Esteem

- Self-esteem is highest in the preschool years and very unitary.
- Drops and differentiations during the elementary school years, due to social comparisons.
- Self-esteem stabilizes and during adolescence, though it sometimes drops during school transitions (due to renewed social comparisons).
- But where does it come from?

Sources of Self-Esteem

- Value: what you value determines how happy you are.
  - If you value academics, sports your success will determine your esteem.
  - If not successful, may change values.
  - Why? Other sources…

Another source of Self Esteem

- Parents
  - Children have higher self-esteem when parents are nurturing and involved (feel loved).
  - Also establish rules concerning discipline (“Rules say you care” says the book).
  - Dirty little secret: it’s also hereditary.

Social Comparison

- Comparisons with others (particularly peers) is the other big source of self esteem.
- Big-fish in little pond syndrome.
- Gifted classes: Bad for average smarties.
Children with High Self-Esteem (Nuttall)

- make friends easily.
- show enthusiasm for new activities.
- be cooperative and follow age-appropriate rules.
- control their behavior.
- play by themselves and with other children.
- like to be creative and have their own ideas.
- be happy, full of energy, and talk to others without much encouragement.

Children with Low Self Esteem say:

- "I can't do anything well."
- "I know I can't do it."
- "I know that I will fail."
- "I don't like me. I wish I were someone else."
- Pretty negative huh!

Consequences of Low Self-Esteem

- More likely to have problems with peers.
- Prone to psychological disorders and depression.
- Anti-social.
- Do poorly in school.

Describing Others

- Developmental changes parallel changes in description of self.
- At 6 or 7, very concrete and behavioral; gradually becomes more abstract.

Changes in Description

Robert Selman's theory of Role Taking

Includes 5 stages in the development of understanding what others think.

- Undifferentiated: 3-6 years
- Social-Informational: 4-9 years
- Self-Reflective: 7-12 years
- Third Person: 10-15 years
- Societal: 15+

Example: Folger's Crystals
• **Prejudice**: negative view of others based on group membership.
  • Preschool children often are most prejudiced; declines with age.
  • Why?
  • If told better, think other are worse.

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**Get rid of Prejudice**

• When groups mix (CONTACT!).
• Work together (COMMON GOALS).
• See other members of group as people rather than Stereotypes.
• If you don’t have contact, prejudice is almost unavoidable.