Self-Concept

I am what I am!

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

The Evolving Self Concept

Developmental Change in Self-Concept

Preschoolers	School-Age Children	Adolescents
Possessions	Emotions	Attitudes
Physical characteristics	Social groups	Personality traits
Preferences	Comparisons with peers	Beliefs vary with the setting
Competencies		Future oriented

"I like cars and trucks." — "I'm the best goalie in my class." — "I'm quiet and shy at school."

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Self-Awareness

- **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.
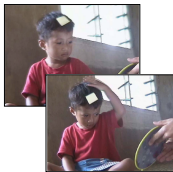
Other evidence of self-awareness by age 2

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

What are you looking at!

- **Adolescent egocentrism**: teens belief that they are the focus of other's thinking 24/7.
  - If you know that others can think. We tend to think
  - They are…
  - looking at us!

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 science? What specific job?)
    - Shadow someone.
  - **Implementation**: "OK, you're hired."

Change and Stability in Self-Esteem

- Self-esteem is **highest** in the preschool years and very **unitary**.
- Drops and **differentiates** 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, fully 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
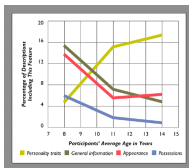
Robert Selman's theory of Role Taking

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.

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.