SELF-ESTEEM AND HUMAN RELATIONSHIPS

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1.   Human Emotional Life

We humans appear to be equipped with a set of predictable responses to situations. We call these the basic emotions**:** anger, fear, surprise, disgust, joy and sadness, as described in the 1970s. Over time, this list of basic emotions has been added to, subtracted from and reshaped based on the idea that human emotions are universal. This notion suggests that for any given situation, like being hit in the nose, any individual in any culture would experience something like anger. This view of emotions as largely objective is widely accepted, although there is an emerging school of thought that believes emotions to be far more subjective. Rather than six or 11 basic emotions, there is an emotion for every possible human experience. Under almost every explanation of emotions is the premise that they're a naturally occurring response to a situation. Whether this response is the result of our own evaluation or an automatic one remains to be seen. In the field of psychology, the view of the nature of emotions can be divided into two camps. Emotions are either the result of a judgment of any current situation or a perception of changes taking place within our bodies. In other words, when we experience disgust, it could be the result of a judgment about how we feel when we see vomit. Under the other view, we experience disgust because our body undergoes physiological changes like queasiness and increased skin temperature at the sight of vomit.

Over time, research has also separated other emotions that most in the scientific community believe are only experienced by humans. These higher or moral emotions are based on self-awareness, self-consciousness and ability to empathize with others. The moral emotions are pride, guilt, embarrassment and shame. Like basic emotions, moral emotions have accompanying physiological changes associated with them. But they diverge from basic emotions in that they tend to emerge after self-reflection, and they support the theory that emotions are results of judgments, rather than simply involuntary reactions to a stimulus.

Why do we experience emotions? Emotions may signal a change in our environment, a change within us or a change in both. These signals are generally

fleeting in comparison to other states of mind. As a result, emotions are distinct from moods, which can last for hours, days or even weeks. They're also distinct from personalities, the lifelong set of traits that comprise our individual, predictable reactions to situations. It would appear that the function of an emotion is to get our attention and demand a response. Psychologists have debated whether that action is an involuntary physiological reaction or the result of judgment we've made after evaluating our current situation. But why do we experience anger from a smack on the nose or shame from stealing? Here, the debate ends and scientific consensus emerges. Emotions are motivators. From an evolutionary standpoint, emotions are the agents of change and reaction. Disgust is a quick, nasty response that we experience when we encounter something that might make us sick. Anger quickly transitions us from a placid state to one where we're ready to fight; fear prompts us to flee from dangerous situations. Sadness, on the other hand, can generate the resolve needed to change the direction of one's life. Emotions can also motivate us to continue what we're doing; the experience of joy is a pleasurable one, and we're motivated to carry out the behavior that led to the emotion. Coupled with our ability to empathize with others, emotions also serve to maintain social bonds. We wear emotions outwardly, the basic emotions are all readily apparent on a person's face, so they serve as social signals. These allow us to interact with others' needs in mind rather than our own, which is the basis of society. There are plenty of examples of how emotions help further society. Imagine raising offspring without the emotional attachment associated with one's own children. The feeling of loneliness leads to the emotion of sadness, which prompts us to seek out the company of others. Higher, self-conscious emotions like shame prevent us from repeating behavior that is harmful to others, like stealing.

It would seem then that society was able to emerge as a result of our ability to experience emotions based on our interactions with others. Or did it happen the other way around? Interestingly, the social constructionist theory of emotions says that society begins to dictate the emotional response to an individual, rather than vice versa. As a person grows older, emotions develop from knee-jerk physiological reactions to predictable, conditioned responses. In this sense, the emotions of the individual are hijacked by the expectations of the society the individual lives in, making that person more suited to live peaceably in that society.

1.2. Identity and Personality

That the ancient Greek injunction ''know thyself'' continues to have currency after 2,500 years is because it communicates an idea essential to human flourishing, namely, that by achieving a clear and enduring understanding of oneself it may be possible to guide one's life choices in ways that are more consistent with one's values and goals and, hence, fulfilling. On a basic level, identity can be defined simply as "Who a person is". Conversely, we offer the definition of personality as the "enduring personal characteristics of individuals". In psychology and sociology, identity is a person's conception and expression of their individuality or group affiliations (such as national identity and cultural identity). The concept is given a great deal of attention in social psychology and is important in place identity. Identity may be defined as the distinctive characteristic belonging to any given individual, or shared by all members of a particular social category or group. Identity may be distinguished from identification; the former is a label, whereas the latter refers to the classifying act itself. Identity is thus best construed as being both relational and contextual, while the act of identification is best viewed as inherently processual. However, the formation of one's identity occurs through one's identifications with significant others (primarily with parents and other individuals during one's biographical experiences, and also with 'groups' as they are perceived).

A psychological identity relates to self-image (a person's mental model of him or herself), self-esteem, and individuality. Consequently, some researchers offer this definition: "A person's identity is defined as the totality of one's self-construal, in which how one construes oneself in the present expresses the continuity between how one construes oneself as one was in the past and how one construes oneself as one aspires to be in the future". This allows for definitions of aspects of identity, such as: "One's ethnic identity is defined as that part of the totality of one's self-construal made up of those dimensions that express the continuity between one's construal of past ancestry and one's future aspirations in relation to ethnicity". An important part of identity in psychology is gender identity, as this dictates to a significant degree how an individual views him or herself both as a person and in relation to other people, ideas and nature. Other aspects of identity, such as racial, religious, ethnic, and occupational may also be more or less significant, or significant in some situations but not in others. In cognitive psychology, the term identity refers to the capacity for self-reflection and the awareness of self.

Personality has to do with individual differences among people in behavior patterns, cognition and emotion. Personality is usually broken into components

called the Big Five, which are: openness to experience, conscientiousness, extroversion, agreeableness, and neuroticism. These components are generally stable over time and appear to be attributable to a person's genetics rather than the effects of one's environment. Some research has investigated whether the relationship between happiness and extraversion seen in adults can also be seen in children. The implications of these findings can help identify children that are more likely to experience episodes of depression and develop types of treatment that such children are likely to respond to. In both children and adults, research shows that genetics, as opposed to environmental factors, exert a greater influence on happiness levels. Personality is not believed to become stable until approximately the age of thirty, and personality constructs in children are referred to as temperament. Temperament is regarded as the precursor to personality.

1.3. Concepts of Self-Esteem

Self-esteem is a term used in psychology to reflect person's overall emotional evaluation of his or her own worth. It is a judgment of oneself as well as an attitude toward the self. Self-esteem encompasses beliefs (for example, "I am competent," "I am worthy") and emotions such as triumph, despair, pride and shame. Some define it by saying "The self-concept is what we think about the self; self-esteem, is the positive or negative evaluations of the self, as in how we feel about it." Self-esteem is also known as the evaluative dimension of the self that includes feelings of worthiness, pride and discouragement. One's self-esteem is also closely associated with self-consciousness. Self-esteem is a disposition that a person has which represents their judgments of their own worthiness. In the mid-1960s, social-learning theorists defined self-esteem as a personal worth or worthiness or as "the experience of being competent to cope with the basic challenges of life and being worthy of happiness." Other researchers suggest that self-esteem is the sum of self-confidence (a feeling of personal capacity) and self-respect (a feeling of personal worth). It exists as a consequence of the implicit judgment that every person has of their ability to face life's challenges, to understand and solve problems, and their right to achieve happiness, and be given respect.

As a social psychological construct, self-esteem is attractive because researchers have conceptualized it as an influential predictor of relevant outcomes, such as academic achievement or exercise behavior. In addition, self-esteem has also been treated as an important outcome due to its close relation with psychological well-being. Self-esteem can apply specifically to a particular dimension for example, "I

believe I am a good writer and I feel happy about that" or a global extent for example, "I believe I am a bad person, and feel bad about myself in general". Psychologists usually regard self-esteem as an enduring personality characteristic though normal, short-term variations also exist. Synonyms or near-synonyms of self-esteem include: self-worth, self-regard, self-respect, and self-integrity. Many early theories suggested that self-esteem is a basic human need or motivation. American psychologist Abraham Maslow included self-esteem in his hierarchy of needs. He described two different forms of esteem. They are the need for respect from others, and the need for self-respect, or inner self-esteem. Respect from others entails recognition, acceptance, status, and appreciation, and was believed to be more fragile and easily lost than inner self-esteem. According to Maslow, without the fulfillment of the self-esteem need, individuals will be driven to seek it and unable to grow and obtain self-actualization.

People with a healthy level of self-esteem:

- Firmly believe in certain values and principles, and are ready to defend them even when finding opposition, feeling secure enough to modify them in light of experience.
- Are able to act according to what they think to be the best choice, trusting their own judgment, and not feeling guilty when others do not like their choice.
- Do not lose time worrying excessively about what happened in the past, nor about what could happen in the future. They learn from the past and plan for the future, but live in the present intensely.
- Fully trust in their capacity to solve problems, not hesitating after failures and difficulties. They ask others for help when they need it.

Low self-esteem can result from various factors, including genetic factors, physical appearance or weight, mental health issues, socioeconomic status, peer pressure or bullying. A person with low self-esteem may show some of the following characteristics:

- Heavy self-criticism and dissatisfaction.
- Hypersensitivity to criticism with resentment against critics and feelings of being attacked.
- Chronic indecision and an exaggerated fear of mistakes.
- Excessive will to please and unwillingness to displease any petitioner.

1.4. Self-Concept

One's self-concept (also called self-construction, self-identity, or self-perspective) is a collection of beliefs about oneself that includes elements such as academic performance, gender roles and sexuality, and racial identity. Generally, self-concept embodies the answer to "Who am I?" One's self-concept is made up of self-schemas, and their past, present, and future selves. Self-concept is distinguishable from self-awareness, which refers to the extent to which self-knowledge is defined, consistent, and currently applicable to one's attitudes and dispositions. Self-concept also differs from self-esteem: self-concept is a cognitive or descriptive component of one's self (e.g. "I am a fast runner"), while self-esteem is evaluative and opinionated (e.g. "I feel good about being a fast runner"). Self-concept is made up of one's self-schemas, and interacts with self-esteem, self-knowledge, and the social self to form the self as whole. It includes the past, present, and future selves, where future selves (or possible selves) represent individuals' ideas of what they might become, what they would like to become, or what they are afraid of becoming. Possible selves may function as incentives for certain behavior. The perception people have about their past or future selves is related to the perception of their current selves. The temporal self-appraisal theory argues that people have a tendency to maintain a positive self-evaluation by distancing themselves from their negative self and paying more attention to their positive one. In addition, people have a tendency to perceive the past selfless favorably (e.g. "I'm better than I used to be") and the future self more positively (e.g. "I will be better than I am now).

Psychologists Carl Rogers was one of the first to establish the notion of self-concept. According to Rogers, everyone strives to reach an "ideal self". Rogers also hypothesized that psychologically healthy people actively move away from roles created by others' expectations, and instead look within themselves for validation. On the other hand, neurotic people have "self-concepts that do not match their experiences and they are afraid to accept their own experiences as valid, so they distort them, either to protect themselves or to win approval from others. The self-categorization theory developed by John Turner states that the self-concept consists of at least two "levels", a personal identity and a social one. In other words, one's self-evaluation relies on self-perceptions and how others perceive them. Self-concept can alternate rapidly between the personal and social identity. Children and adolescents begin integrating social identity into their own self-concept in elementary school by assessing their position among peers. By age 5, acceptance from peers has a significant impact on children's self-concept, affecting their behavior and academic success.