

## **5. SELF-ESTEEM AND PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT III**

**5.1 Self-Esteem:** Self-esteem is a term used in psychology to reflect a 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. Smith and Mackie 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, prides 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, Morris Rosenberg and social-learning theorists defined self-esteem as a personal worth or worthiness. Nathaniel Branden in 1969 defined self-esteem as "the experience of being competent to cope with the basic challenges of life and being worthy of happiness." According to Branden, 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 (Hagger et al. 1998) In addition, self-esteem has also been treated as an important outcome due to its close relation with psychological well-being (Marsh 1989).

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 ("trait" self-esteem), though normal, short-term variations ("state" self-esteem) also exist. Synonyms or near-synonyms of self-esteem include: self-worth, self-regard, self-respect, and self-integrity.

### **5.2 Development**

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Experiences in a person's life are a major source of self-esteem development. The positive or negative life experiences one has, creates attitudes toward the self which can be favorable and develop positive feelings of self-worth, or can be unfavorable and develop negative feelings of self-worth. In the early years of a

child's life, parents are the most significant influence on self-esteem and the main source of positive and/or negative experiences a child will have. The emphasis of unconditional love, in parenting how-to books, represents the importance of a child developing a stable sense of being cared for and respected. These feelings translate into later effects of self-esteem as the child grows older.

During the school years, academic achievement is a significant contributor to self-esteem development. A student consistently achieving success or consistently failing, strongly affects their individual self-esteem. Social experiences are another important contributor. As children go through school they begin to understand and recognize differences between themselves and their classmates. Using social comparisons, children assess whether they did better or worse than classmates in different activities.

These comparisons play an important role in shaping the child's self-esteem and influence the positive or negative feelings they have about themselves. As children go through adolescence peer influence becomes much more important, as adolescents make appraisals of themselves based on their relationships with close friends. Successful relationships among friends are very important to the development of high self-esteem for children. Social acceptance brings about confidence and produces high self-esteem, whereas rejection from peers and loneliness brings about self-doubts and produces low self-esteem.

Parenting style can also play a crucial role in self-esteem development. Students in elementary school who have high self-esteem tend to have parents who are caring, supportive adults who set clear standards for their child and allow them to voice their opinion in decision making. Although studies thus far have reported only a correlation of warm, supportive parenting styles and children having high self-esteem it could easily be thought of as having some causal effect in self-esteem development.

Childhood experiences that contribute to healthy self-esteem include being listened to, being spoken to respectfully, receiving appropriate attention and affection and having accomplishments recognized and mistakes or failures acknowledged and accepted. Experiences that contribute to low self-esteem include being harshly criticized, being physically, sexually or emotionally abused, being ignored, ridiculed or teased or being expected to be "perfect" all the time.

### **Longitudinal study**

A study done by Ruth Yasemin Erol and Ulrich Orth from the University of Basel examined the development of self-esteem in adolescence and young adulthood. The aim of the study was to determine the trajectory of self-esteem development; as in when does self-esteem development occur in life and in what

direction. Another aspect of the study was to discover potential modifiers to individual differences in self-esteem development after recording trajectories. It was expected that self-esteem development would continuously increase during adolescence and young adulthood as per previous studies' results.

Erol and Orth found that self-esteem increases moderately through adolescence and continues to increase in young adulthood at a slower rate. A high sense of mastery, low risk taking and better overall health predicted higher self-esteem in participants at each age level. Emotionally stable, extroverted and conscientious participants experienced higher self-esteem as well.

An individual's sense of mastery proved to be an important moderator of self-esteem trajectory for all participants. In the case of ethnicity playing a role in self-esteem differences, Hispanics had a lower rating of self-esteem in adolescence than Blacks and Whites but then increased to having a stronger, higher self-esteem than Whites by the age of 30. This study showed no results depicting a significant difference between self-esteem trajectories of men and women. The findings of this research, in regards to self-esteem trajectory, is consistent with what is known about the life span development of self-esteem. Erol and Orth's study documents the importance of adolescence as a possible critical period for self-esteem development. This studies results can lend itself to the implementation of self-esteem improvement interventions in young children.

### **Self-evaluation**

Self-esteem requires "a self-evaluation process in which individuals compare their description of themselves as they are (Real Self) with their description of themselves as they would like to become (Ideal Self) and as they fear becoming (Dreaded Self)." Self-esteem depends on living up to one's ideals.

Self-evaluation is important because the subject is able to assess what they know, what they do not know and what they would like to know. They begin to recognize their own strengths and weaknesses, and will be able to set goals that they know they can attain with the new knowledge they have about themselves.

### **Development**

There are four levels of self-evaluation development in relation to the Real Self, Ideal Self, and the Dreaded Self. The Real, Ideal, and Dreaded Selves develop in a sequential pattern on cognitive levels (moral judgment stages, ego development stages, and self-understanding).

1. Individuals describe their *Real*, *Ideal*, and *Dreaded Selves* with stereotypical labels, such as "nice" or "bad". Individuals describe their *Ideal* and *Real*

*Selves* in terms of disposition for action or as behavioral habits.

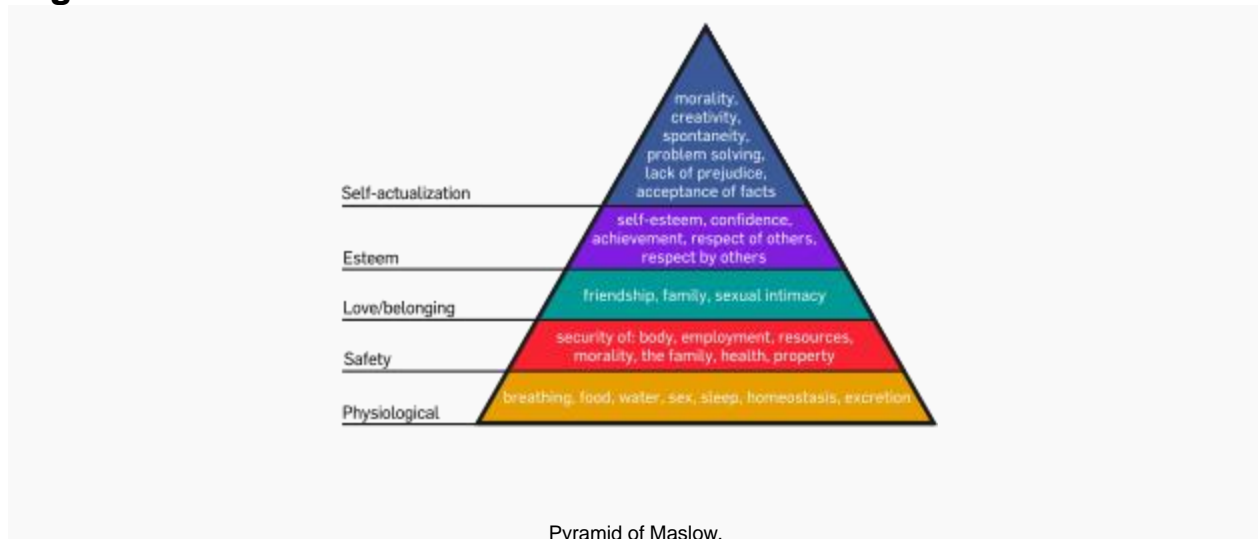
The *Dreaded Self* is often described as being unsuccessful or as having bad habits

2. Individuals describe their *Ideal* and *Real Selves* in terms of traits that are based in attitudes as well as actions. *The Dreaded Self* are often described as have failed to meet social expectations or as self-centered.
3. Individuals describe their *Ideal* and *Real Selves* as having a unified identity or character. Descriptions of the *Dreaded Self* focus on a failure to live up to one's ideals or role expectations often because of real world problems

Development brings with it increasingly complicated and encompassing moral demands. As individuals develop their depiction of their *Dreaded Selves* become increasingly more realistic and more plausible.

### 5.3 Types:

#### High



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.
- Consider themselves equal in dignity to others, rather than inferior or superior, while accepting differences in certain talents, personal prestige or financial standing.
- Take for granted that they are an interesting and valuable person for others, at least for those with whom they have a friendship.
- Resist manipulation, collaborate with others only if it seems appropriate and convenient.
- Admit and accept different internal feelings and drives, either positive or negative, revealing those drives to others only when they choose.
- Are able to enjoy a great variety of activities.
- Are sensitive to feelings and needs of others; respect generally accepted social rules, and claim no right or desire to prosper at others' expense.
- Can work toward finding solutions and voice discontent without belittling themselves or others when challenges arise.

### **Secure vs. defensive**

A person can have a high self-esteem and hold it confidently where they do not need reassurance from others to maintain their positive self view, whereas others with defensive, high self-esteem may still report positive self-evaluations on the Rosenberg Scale, as all high self-esteem individuals do; however, their positive self-views are fragile and vulnerable to criticism. Defensive high self-esteem individuals internalize subconscious self-doubts and insecurities causing them to react very negatively to any criticism they may receive. There is a need for constant positive feedback from others for these individuals to maintain their feelings of self-worth. The necessity of repeated praise can be associated with boastful, arrogant behavior or sometimes even aggressive and hostile feelings toward anyone who questions the individual's self-worth, an example of threatened egotism.

### **Implicit, explicit, narcissism, and threatened egotism**

Implicit self-esteem refers to a person's disposition to evaluate themselves positively or negatively in a spontaneous, automatic, or unconscious manner. It contrasts with explicit self-esteem, which entails more conscious and reflective self-evaluation. Both explicit self-esteem and implicit self-esteem are subtypes of self-esteem proper.

Narcissism is a disposition people may have that represents an excessive love for one's self. It is characterized by an inflated view of self-worth. Individuals who score high on Narcissism measures, Robert Raskin's *40 Item True or False Test*,

would likely select true to such statements as "If I ruled the world, it would be a much better place."<sup>1</sup> There is only a moderate correlation between narcissism and self-esteem that is to say that an individual can have high self-esteem but low narcissism or can be a conceited, obnoxious person and score high self-esteem and high narcissism.

Threatened egotism is characterized as a response to criticism that threatens the ego of narcissists; they often react in a hostile and aggressive manner.

## **Low**

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.
- *Perfectionism*, which can lead to frustration when perfection is not achieved.
- *Neurotic guilt*, dwelling on and/or exaggerating the magnitude of past mistakes.
- *Floating hostility* and general defensiveness and irritability without any proximate cause.
- *Pessimism* and a general negative outlook.
- *Envy*, invidiousness, or general resentment.
- Sees temporary setbacks as permanent, intolerable conditions.

When given negative feedback, individuals with low self-esteem often take it personally, and can be devastated by it. This damage can be much more severe if the feedback is harsh or directly criticizes the individual's worth, moral character, achievements, etc. Individuals with low self-esteem are very critical of themselves and depend on the approval and praise of others for their own evaluation of self-worthiness. They believe that a person's approval of them is dependent on their performance, whether it be academic, relationship, etc. People with low self-esteem view their likeability in terms of successes: others will accept them if they succeed but will not if they fail.