

Self-esteem issues and negative personal identity can be very problematic for people no matter age, race, gender, or sexuality. The negative effects of low self-esteem and a negative personal identity have the potential to reduce the quality of life dramatically of an individual suffering from these afflictions. People who suffer from low self-esteem often have trouble trying new things because of their increased self-doubt. These individuals also have low resilience to challenges presented in front of them because they do not have the confidence or courage that they can handle the task at hand. They may not feel the need to fully take care of themselves. Young people in particular are prone to suffering from low self-esteem because they are still forming a sense of identity and self-worth. Places such as middle schools and high schools can sometimes feel like you are falling into a sink hole. To counteract the negative effects that low self-esteem can have on individuals, young people must challenge their own assumptions of what other people think about them to regain confidence and not suffer the results of low self-esteem.

The way that I viewed myself in middle school and my first two years of high school (pre covid) was a lot lower than the way that I view myself now. During this time, I did not have a lot of confidence in myself for several reasons. In my head there was a hierarchy of popularity that held incredible significance to me. In this hierarchy, I was in the middle of the spectrum. I was not popular, but I was also not at the bottom where the weird kids resided. The perception of my lower position on the spectrum of popularity carried real weight and it lowered my self-esteem significantly. I presumed that other people glanced at me and concluded that I did not meet the high standard that only popular people could live up to. I assumed people did not think the way I looked or how I acted was cool. I thought that they thought that the way I interacted with them was uncool and weird. Another reason for my decreased level of confidence was my perception

program. The classes I took were honors, but they were not the really tough classes my peers were taking, and they made sure to pick fun of me.

When I was in 8<sup>th</sup> grade, I was taking all honors courses, except English. My friends would poke fun at me for taking a “regular” class and I would laugh along with them. The toll that this had on me was not huge, but it did lower my confidence in my abilities as a student slightly and this weighed into my overall lower self-esteem during this time. This combined with the perception of my rank on the popularity hierarchy resulted in myself not being able to gain a lot of confidence in myself and my abilities. I thought everything I did was subpar, and I was not at the level of my classmates. This lower perception of myself affected my confidence in my physical abilities and my social skills. I did not think I was adequately physically fit at the time and even to this day I find it hard to talk to people I respect because I think I do not have the adequate social skills to have a successful conversation with them. In other words, I think that they will think that I was bad at conversation, and they will look down on me for that.

Charles Cooley was the first person to coin the term the looking glass self. The concept of the looking glass self, according to Cooley, is that the ideas and feelings people have about themselves are developed in response to their perception and internalization of how others perceive and judge them. For example, let us say there is a teenage boy trying out for the basketball team. He comes into the first day of tryouts nervous and unsure of his abilities. During tryouts, he notices the coaches paying more attention to him and he sees a few players pointing at him and talking amongst themselves. He interprets this as a sign that the coaches and other players are impressed with his skills and that he would add value to the team. Because of this, he is motivated to play as best as possible so he can join the team. He entered the tryout nervous and

himself as a skilled basketball player.

In this example the teenage boy's perception of himself was altered based on how he thought others viewed him. The important distinction to take away from this is that people's assumptions about how other people perceive them can be accurate, but more importantly they can be incredibly inaccurate as well. For example, when a dancer is performing, she may look at the crowd's reaction and see that they are clapping and smiling. She interprets this as them thinking that she is a good dancer. However, in reality, everybody in the crowd thinks she is a bad dancer, they are only being respectful. The interpretation of somebody's assumptions to how other people think of them is highly unreliable and can skew their personal reality far from the objective truth.

The way I thought others perceived me in middle school and high school had no sound evidence or relevance to the objective truth of what they actually thought about me. I shouldn't have based my self-worth off my assumption of how other people thought about me because those assumptions could have been completely inaccurate. When my friends made fun of me for taking easier classes than they were, I interpreted this as them thinking that I am actually less intelligent and cannot handle the workload of a higher-level class. Knowing what I know today, the assumption I made of my friends thinking I was less intelligent was completely false because they explained to me that it was false a few years ago. Even though my assumptions of my friend's beliefs towards my intelligence were wrong, it still had a dramatic impact on my self-esteem and overall ability to reach my full potential in school at that time. Understanding Cooley's concept allows people to realize the mechanism behind how their self-image and self-

of self is realized.

The negative effects that come with low self-esteem have a dramatic impact on people's mental health. Charles Cooley's concept of the looking glass mirror explains how people sometimes allow inaccurate interpretations of other people's views and feelings towards them decrease their self-esteem. In middle school and high school, my full potential was not reached because I allowed false assumptions about my intelligence and my popularity, diminish my confidence. This newfound lens can allow people to challenge these inaccurate assumptions and realize that what they assume other people think of them could be false. Along with this, practicing increased self-worth and self-appreciation can allow people to build their self-esteem and become confident with their abilities and actions to reach their full potential.