
UNIT 3 IDENTITY SELF CONCEPT, SELF ESTEEM, PEER GROUP RELATIONSHIP

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3.0 INTRODUCTION

Adolescence is known to be a period of exploratory self-analysis and self-evaluation ideally culminating in the establishment of a cohesive and integrative sense of self or identity. The search for identity, during the adolescent period, is very much affected by the social world: peers, parents, schools, and neighborhoods.

Identity formation involves the successful negotiation of a variety of activities and relationships during adolescence, including school achievement, social relations with others, and development of career interests and choices, along with a great deal of exploration of different activities and roles. One's gender, ethnicity, and sexual orientation all are important to adolescents' developing identity. Integrating these experiences and characteristics into a coherent sense of self is fundamental to identity formation, and researchers have proposed different phases of the identity development process. Adolescents' focus on identity as their understanding of that childhood is ending and the adult phase of their life is about to begin.

Identity development involves two steps. First, the adolescent must break away from childhood beliefs to explore alternatives for identity in a particular area. Second, the adolescent makes a commitment as to their individual identity in that area. Some aspects of identity, especially among young adolescents, may be foreclosed. The foreclosure status is when a commitment is made without exploring alternatives.

Identity achievement during adolescence serves as a basis for our adult expectations and goals for us. As individuals enter early adulthood they use their current understanding of whom they are to develop a lifespan construct which serves as the link between the identity developed in adolescence and the adult self. The lifespan construct is an integration of an individual's past, present, and culture.

An identity crisis is a term in an epigenetic and social psychological theory in which an individual loses a sense of personal sameness and historical continuity. The term was coined by the psychologist Erik Erikson. According to Erikson, an identity crisis is a time of intensive analysis and exploration of different ways of looking at oneself.

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In Marcia's model, identity involves the adoption of 1) a sexual orientation, 2) a set of values and ideals and 3) a vocational direction. A well-developed identity gives one a sense of one's strengths, weaknesses, and individual uniqueness.

The self-concept is the accumulation of knowledge about the self, such as beliefs regarding personality traits, physical characteristics, abilities, values, goals, and roles. In adolescence, the self-concept becomes more abstract, complex, and hierarchically organised into cognitive mental representations or self-schemas, which direct the processing of self-relevant information.

Self-concept or self-identity is the sum total of a being's knowledge and understanding of his or her self. The self-concept is different from self consciousness, which is an awareness of one's self. Components of the self-concept include physical, psychological, and social attributes, which can be influenced by the individual's attitudes, habits, beliefs and ideas. These components and attributes can not be condensed to the general concepts of self-image and the self-esteem.

Self-concept refers to self-evaluation or self perception, and it represents the sum of an individual's beliefs about his or her own attributes. Self concept reflects how an adolescent evaluates himself or herself in *domains* (or areas) in which he or she considers success important. An adolescent can have a positive self-concept in some domains and a negative self-concept in others.

Adolescent egocentrism is also characterised by an imaginary audience with an increased self consciousness. They consider that their people around them especially peers observe their activities and may comment on them. They are extremely conscious of what others think of them, their appearance and everything related to themselves. This way they perceive themselves as seen by them contributing to the development of self confidence.

3.1 OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to:

- define and describe identity and identity crisis in adolescents;
- explain Marcia's identity crisis;
- analyse social development and egocentrism in adolescents; and
- explain self-concept and self-esteem during adolescence.

3.2 IDENTITY IN ADOLESCENCE

Adolescence is known to be a period of exploratory self-analysis and self-evaluation ideally culminating in the establishment of a cohesive and integrative sense of self or

identity. This process involves the exploration and testing of alternative ideas, beliefs, and behaviours, marking this period as one of both dramatic change and uncertainty. Erikson provided perhaps the most widely recognised theoretical framework for conceptualising the transformation of the self during adolescence. This framework provides for the development of a sense of one's individuality (self-sameness) and continuity with significant others.

Identity is a new way of thinking about oneself that emerges during adolescence. Identity involves a sense of self-unity, accompanied by a feeling that the self has continuity over time. A firmly established identity also provides a sense of uniqueness as a person. According to Erikson's psychosocial model of development, identity must be perceived by the individual, but also recognised and confirmed by others. Thus, the process of establishing an identity involves "Integrating into a coherent whole one's past experiences, ongoing personal changes, and society's demands and expectations for one's future"

The process of developing an identity begins with the infant's discovery of self, continues throughout childhood, and becomes the focus of adolescence. Erik Erikson, identified the goal of adolescence as achieving a coherent identity and avoiding identity confusion. Identity is multidimensional and may include physical and sexual identity, occupational goals, religious beliefs, and ethnic background. Adolescents explore these dimensions, and usually make commitments to aspects of their identity as they move into early adulthood.

Identity development begins with children's awareness that they are separate and unique individuals. First indications of this awareness are evident in infancy when children begin to recognise themselves. They recognise the reflected image as themselves. Also, the words "me," "I," and "mine" emerge very early in children's language. These findings are consistent with Erikson's psychosocial stage of autonomy versus shame and doubt, when infants establish their identity as independent persons.

During childhood, self-awareness grows and changes. Preschoolers describe themselves in terms of observable characteristics and behaviours, including physical attributes ("I have brown eyes"), preferences ("I like to ride my bike"), and competencies ("I can sing 'Itsy, Bitsy Spider'"). Between ages six and twelve, children begin to include less concrete aspects of the self in their descriptions. School-aged children talk about their feelings ("I love my dog") and how they fit into their social world ("I'm the best fielder on my team"). During Erikson's stage of initiative versus guilt children explore their skills, abilities, and attitudes and incorporate the information into their view of self.

As children edge closer and closer to adulthood, it seems they reach a point where they want to be defined by anything BUT their parents. They stop wanting to spend time with family, and may even detest being seen with their parents. "Please drop me off a block from school, Mom. I want to walk the rest of the way." These words are painful to a mother who has devoted many years of her life to meeting all of her teenage son's needs. Suddenly, he's embarrassed to be seen in the same car with her.

The process of separation from parents is a natural one. Erik Erikson was the first major psychological theorist to develop the notion of an adolescent "identity crisis." In his view, all of the earlier crystallisations of identity formed during childhood come into question during adolescence with the overwhelming combination of physical changes, increased sex drive, expanded mental abilities, and increasing and conflicting social demands. To develop a sense of identity amidst the confusion, Erikson stated

in Identity: Youth and Crisis that adolescents need to try on a variety of roles and “must often test extremes before settling on a considered course.”

At this stage, adolescents often reject their parents, and all that they stand for so that they can make a clean break from childhood as they attempt to form an identity of their own. They are hungry for role models and can be rather indiscriminate about where they find them. With their sense of identity in flux, teens will often turn to peer groups for that missing sense of belonging. This explains some of the cult-like tendencies amongst early adolescents to worship the same heroes (movie stars, singers), wear the same clothes and “rebel” against traditional authority. The interesting thing about this so-called rebellion is that it’s often actually another form of conformity — Gina wants a tattoo or a navel ring because everyone else is getting them. Everyone has platform shoes so she’ll feel like an outcast if she’s not wearing them.

At this stage of development (usually early teens), role models can make a critical difference in choices adolescents make, choices that could affect the course of their lives. At this age, teens have a strong need to idealize others, especially those who are older and more worldly, qualities they desperately want to possess. They can be as easily awed by an older (that is, 18- or 19 year-old) guy who drives a fancy car and pushes drugs, as by a sports hero who espouses clean living, hard work and dedication.

The physical, cognitive, and social changes of adolescence allow the teenager to develop the identity that will serve as a basis for their adult lives. During Erikson’s stage of identity versus role confusion, adolescents’ description of self expands to include personality traits (“I’m outgoing”) and attitudes (“I don’t like stuck-up people”). The emergence of abstract reasoning abilities allows adolescents to think about the future and experiment with different identities.

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Identity achievement during adolescence serves as a basis for our adult expectations and goals for us. As individuals enter early adulthood they use their current understanding of whom they are to develop a lifespan construct which serves as the link between the identity developed in adolescence and the adult self. The lifespan construct is an integration of an individual’s past, present, and culture.

3.3 IDENTITY CRISIS

Are you unsure of your role in life? Do you feel like you don’t know the ‘real you’? If you answer yes to the previous questions, you may be experiencing an identity crisis. Theorist Erik Erikson coined the term *identity crisis* and believed that it was one of the most important conflicts people face in development.

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Erikson described identity as “a subjective sense as well as an observable quality of personal sameness and continuity, paired with some belief in the sameness and continuity of some shared world image. As a quality of unself-conscious living, this can be gloriously obvious in a young person who has found himself as he has found his communality. In him we see emerge a unique unification of what is irreversibly given—that is, body type and temperament, giftedness and vulnerability, infantile models and acquired ideals—with the open choices provided in available roles, occupational possibilities, values offered, mentors met, friendships made, and first sexual encounters.”

In Erik Erikson’s stages of psychosocial development, the emergence of an identity crisis occurs during the teenage years in which people struggle between feelings of identity versus role confusion. Researcher James Marcia (1966, 1976, 1980) has expanded upon Erikson’s initial theory.

James Marcia argued that identity could be viewed as a structure of beliefs, abilities and past experiences regarding the self. “The better developed this structure is, the more individuals appear to be of their own strengths and weaknesses. The less developed this structure is, the more confused individuals seem to be about their own distinctiveness from others and the more they have to rely on external sources to evaluate themselves.” Identity is a dynamic, not static psychological structure. The formation of identity in adolescence sets the stage for continual changes in the content of identity through the adult years.

3.3.1 Marcia’s Identity Statuses

James Marcia refined and extended Erikson’s work on identity. In Marcia’s model, identity involves the adoption of 1) a sexual orientation, 2) a set of values and ideals and 3) a vocational direction. A well-developed identity gives on a sense of one’s strengths, weaknesses, and individual uniqueness. A person with a less well-developed identity is not able to define his or her personal strengths and weaknesses, and does not have a well articulated sense of self.

Marcia (1966) operationalised the stage progression theory of identity development proposed by Erikson by identifying four identity statuses: diffusion, foreclosure, moratorium, and achievement. Through the use of a semistructured interview, an individual could be assigned an identity status on the basis of the evidence of crisis and commitment in the domains of occupation, religion, and politics. Since its inception, Marcia’s interview has stimulated a wide range of research in the area of identity formation.

To better understand the identity formation process, Marcia conducted interviews with young people. He asked whether the participants in his study (1) had established a commitment to an occupation and ideology and (2) had experienced, or were presently experiencing, a decision making period (adolescent identity crisis). Marcia developed a framework for thinking about identity in terms of four identity statuses. It is important to note that these are NOT stages. Identity statuses should not be viewed as sub stages in a sequential or linear process.

- i) *Foreclosure:* These people have made commitments to an occupational future, but have not experienced an identity crisis. They have conformed to the expectations of others concerning their future. For example, an individual may have allowed a parent to decide what career they will pursue. These individuals have not explored a range of options (experience an “identity crisis”).

- ii) *Diffusion:* The young person has not made a commitment, and may or may not have experienced an identity crisis. He or she appears to have given up any attempt to make the commitments needed for developing a clear sense of identity as Marcia defines the term.
- iii) *Moratorium:* Individuals in moratorium are actively exploring alternative commitments, but have not yet made a decision. They are experiencing an identity crisis, but appear to be moving forward toward identity formation, making commitments.
- iv) *Achievement:* The individual has experienced an identity crisis and has made commitments necessary for building a sense of identity as described above.

The core idea is that one's sense of identity is determined largely by the choices and commitments made regarding certain personal and social traits. The work done in this paradigm considers how much one has made certain choices, and how much he or she displays a commitment to those choices. Identity involves the adoption of 1) a sexual orientation, 2) a set of values and ideals and 3) a vocational direction. A well-developed identity gives on a sense of one's strengths, weaknesses, and individual uniqueness. A person with a less well-developed identity is not able to define his or her personal strengths and weaknesses, and does not have a well articulated sense of self.

Self Assessment Questions

- 1) Discuss the following in one or two sentences:

- Identity

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- Identity crisis

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- Identity statuses

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- Role confusion

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3.4 SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

Adolescence is a time when parental influences decrease and peer influences increase. Adolescence is a time when the individual searches for her own identity. These happens by the youngsters interactions with her peers and many outsiders including her teachers, neighborhood adults and others. Same sex hero worship is quite common during this period. Also they are highly swayed and impressed by the idealism of hero's and social workers. At this age they enjoy doing work for others, and love

to serve the community. They take up examples of great pioneers and try to mould themselves like them. They may also like to imitate film heroes and try to do things like them. All these efforts contribute in a bog way to the youngsters self identity.

Adolescence begins with the physical changes that lead to sexual maturity however studies in the recent years have shown that puberty is occurring at an earlier age so also the physical development.

Adolescents experience many moods and are more prone to mood swings (Myers, 2004). The cognitive development that takes place during this time gives adolescents the ability to reason. These advancing reasoning skills allow adolescents to ponder several options and possibilities to many social situations and experiences. They are able to think more logically than when they were younger. They are also able to think hypothetically, even abstractly.

3.5 SELF CONCEPT AND SELF ESTEEM IN ADOLESCENCE

The self-concept is the accumulation of knowledge about the self, such as beliefs regarding personality traits, physical characteristics, abilities, values, goals, and roles. In adolescence, the self-concept becomes more abstract, complex, and hierarchically organised into cognitive mental representations or self-schemas, which direct the processing of self-relevant information.

Self-concept-the way in which one perceives oneself-can be divided into categories, such as personal self-concept (facts or one's own opinions about oneself, such as "I have brown eyes" or "I am attractive"); social self-concept (one's perceptions about how one is regarded by others: "people think I have a great sense of humor"); and self-ideals (what or how one would like to be: "I want to be a lawyer" or "I wish I were thinner").

Self-concept or self-identity is the sum total of a being's knowledge and understanding of his or her self. The self-concept is different from self consciousness, which is an awareness of one's self. Components of the self-concept include physical, psychological, and social attributes, which can be influenced by the individual's attitudes, habits, beliefs and ideas. These components and attributes can not be condensed to the general concepts of self-image and the self-esteem.

Self-concept refers to self-evaluation or self perception, and it represents the sum of an individual's beliefs about his or her own attributes. Self concept reflects how an adolescent evaluates himself or herself in *domains* (or areas) in which he or she considers success important. An adolescent can have a positive self-concept in some domains and a negative self-concept in others.

Teachers, administrators, and parents commonly voice concerns about students' self-esteem. Its significance is often exaggerated to the extent that low self esteem is viewed as the cause of all evil and high self-esteem as the cause of all good. Promoting high self-concept is important because it relates to academic and life success. Although the terms *self-concept* and *self-esteem* are often used interchangeably, they represent different but related constructs. *Self-concept* refers to a student's perceptions of competence or adequacy in academic and nonacademic (example, social, behavioural, and athletic) domains and is best represented by a profile of self-perceptions across domains. *Self-esteem* is a student's overall evaluation of him- or herself, including feelings of general happiness and satisfaction.

Self-concept and academic achievement: Self-concept is frequently positively correlated with academic performance, but it appears to be a consequence rather than a cause of high achievement. This is a common assumption that an individual's high academic performance results in their self concept. Whereas, the high academic performance is the result of individual's self concept.

Self-concept and aggression: Another popular assumption is that aggressive students have low self-concept and use aggression as a means of raising it.

Self-concept, depression, and use of illegal substances: Low self-concept is often considered a defining characteristic of depression, but the evidence for this is weak. Similarly, although some evidence suggests that low self-concept may be a weak risk factor for smoking in girls, the relationship between self-concept and the use of alcohol and illegal drugs has little support.

An adolescent's self-concept is dynamic, and causality is complex. That is, problems and difficulties can lower self-concept; but low self-concept can also cause problems. For adolescents, having a high academic self-concept is associated with positive academic performance and having a high physical self-concept is related to increased physical activity, for example.

3.5.1 Signs of Negative Self Concept in Adolescents

Several signs may indicate that an adolescent has a negative self-concept. These may include one or more of the following:

- Doing poorly in school;
- Having few friends;
- Putting down one self and others;
- Rejecting compliments;
- Teasing others;
- Showing excessive amounts of anger;
- Being excessively jealous;
- Appearing conceited; or
- Hesitating to try new things.

Strategies that can be used to improve an adolescent's self-concept include providing praise for accomplishments, praising effort, working with the individual to encourage improvement in areas where he or she feels deficient, and refraining from using negative feedback.

Self esteem is the one important factor required by anybody to succeed in life. It is a well proven concept that if you can build self esteem at your adolescent period it will last all through your life. Adolescence is one period in which boys and girls faces with many problems and issues. It is necessary that adolescent self esteem to be at top to face the problems faced with adolescent period. Many teenagers will have low self esteem and it is imperative to know major reasons for low self esteem and find out ways and means to combat the low self esteem. It is highly advisable to make dedicated efforts to bring up the self esteem.

There are many causes for the lack of self esteem. Let us review some of them.

- *Heredity* is a main factor for low self esteem. If the parents are introverts and they never mingle with people for fear of their inability, the chances that children have low esteem are more.
- *The living conditions:* The surrounding in which you live also affects the lack of self esteem. If the child is brought up in a poor environment without giving proper attention to make him excel in his fields or deprived of doing good activities, the low self esteem at the adolescent stage is possible.
- *Lack of proper education:* is another factor affecting the self esteem. Uneducated children will develop lack of self esteem as they will face problems in interacting with the educated of their age.
- *Physiological:* Adolescence is a period when major physical changes occur in boys and girls. The gender hormones start the functioning in full swing during this period. Many children face problems during this change unable to cope with the changes occurring in their body and behaviour.
- *Societal implications:* During the adolescent stage of a child, society put many restrictions in their behaviours and attitudes. Girls will be automatically tempted to move away from the boys and boys are restricted to mingle with girls during the period. This makes them feel that there are some things to be afraid. This will automatically make them fear in a natural interaction.
- *Fear about future:* During the late periods of adolescence, the children will seriously think about their future and in many cases they will get depressed of their future. Unemployment, dating problems, insecurity, lack of financial backgrounds and many such factors make the adolescents afraid of facing the world.
- *Diseases and other physical ailments:* These children will be thinking that they are debris in the world. These thinking processes make them to keep away from others and they can become agitated.

There are many such reasons for low self esteem of adolescents. If proper care is not given, the low self esteem gradually will lead to many physical and mental ailments. It is important to bring up the adolescents with high self esteem.

3.5.2 Egocentrism in Adolescence

An important aspect of the psychological development contributing to the adolescent period is adolescent egocentrism. According to Elkind (1967), adolescent egocentrism includes a belief system carried by adolescents that makes them consider themselves as special and unique. This feeling is accompanied by the acquisition of many new psychological abilities.

Adolescent egocentrism is also characterised by an imaginary audience with an increased self consciousness. They consider that their people around them especially peers observe their activities and may comment on them. They are extremely conscious of what others think of them, their appearance and everything related to them selves. This way they perceive themselves as seen by them contributing to the development of self confidence.

Self Assessment Questions

1) Discuss the following in one or two sentences:

- Self concept

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- Self esteem

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- Adolescent egocentrism

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- Negative self-concept

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3.6 LET US SUM UP

Adolescence is known to be a period of exploratory self-analysis and self-evaluation ideally culminating in the establishment of a cohesive and integrative sense of self or identity. The search for identity, during the adolescent period, is very much affected by the social world: peers, parents, schools, and neighborhoods.

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3.7 UNIT END QUESTIONS

- 1) Define identity, self concept and self esteem.
- 2) In what ways the peer group relationship contributes to development of self esteem, self concept and identity?
- 3) What is Marcia’s concept of self?
- 4) What is social identity?
- 5) How is identity crisis resolved?

3.8 SUGGESTED READINGS

David Pruitt, M.D (2000). *Your Adolescent: Emotional, Behavioural, and Cognitive Development from Early Adolescence Through the Teen Years*, Imprint: Harper Paperbacks, NY

Burns, R. B. (1979). “The self-concept in theory, measurement, development and behaviour.” London: