Research Paper: Self-Esteem

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Abstract

Adolescenceself-esteem is a major part of growing up and finding who they truly are. This paper reviews research on adolescent self-esteem and how it develops through adolescence and changes over time. The research below uses questionnaires, observations, tests, and interviews with adolescence, their parents and even their teachers to gather the data. The research shows that many things contribute to self-esteem in adolescence and that over time it can change based on their surroundings, their family and their peers. The research also shows what can cause low-self esteem and things that can help overcome low self-esteem. By adolescence understanding themselves, having a successful relationship with their parents and their peers, their self-esteem will flourish.

*Keywords: self-esteem, self-concept, adolescence, self-discovery, lower, positive, peers, parents, self-determination theory, learning disabilities, autism*

Introduction

Self-esteem is defined as “an individual’s overall and specific positive and negative self-evaluation” (Feldman, 2017). Though self-esteem and self-concept go hand in hand, self-esteem is more emotionally oriented and self-concept reflects beliefs about themselves. Because self-esteem is an emotional response to one's self, lower self-esteem can lead to many issues down the road such as poor relationships, addiction and depression, and anxiety.

Depression in adolescence is becoming more and more serious. According to the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention on average, there are 123 suicides per day. And that “Based on the 2015 Youth Risk Behaviors Survey, 8.6 percent of youth in grades 9-12 reported that they had made at least one suicide attempt in the past 12 months” (Suicide Statistics, 2018). And the links with adolescent depression and their self-esteem go hand in hand.

It is important to understand why adolescents are experiencing lower self-esteem and what can be done about it, so depression rates, addiction rates lower and better relationships can be developed for them. The research below shows what can affect a lower or higher self-esteem. The research also shows how self-esteem can affect different populations. The research also shows what happens to self-esteem when adolescence experiences a traumatic event, and what can also happen to their self-esteem if they experience neurological problems such as learning disabilities and having autism. The research also shows ways that can improve adolescents and ways to overcome low self-esteem.

Diverse Populations

Self-esteem can differ among many diverse populations in adolescence such as boys and girls and different ethnic groups. In one study, researcherscompared students from New York city within five different schools that made up different backgrounds. Of the schools, the research came from “schools included: a predominantly Asian, predominantly Latino, predominantly White, and two racially heterogeneous schools with 20, 12, 42, 8, 18 % of the current subsample selected from each school respectively” (Yip, 2014). The research gathered from this study had adolescence complete surveys over the span of three years that had them answer questions about their self-esteem, anxiety and depression levels. The research showed that “regardless of ethnic background, adolescents reporting high levels of ethnic/racial discrimination and poor sleep also reported a corresponding increase in depressive symptoms and lower levels of self-esteem over time (Yip, 2014).

Another diverse population is within the two different genders. Usually, male adolescence reports a higher self-esteem than female adolescence. In one study researchers had reached participants from all over the world and pulled 100 females and 100 males from each countries sample. Participants were given a customized personality evaluation.“Participants rated the item “I see myself as someone who has high self-esteem” on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (disagree strongly) to 5 (agree strongly)” (Bleidorn, et al., 2016). After gathering all the data the research shows that it is “consistent with previous research on Western samples, we found significant gender and age differences in self-esteem: Across all nations, men had higher levels of self-esteem than women did and both genders showed age-graded increases from late adolescence to middle adulthood” (Bleidorn, et al., 2016).

Crisis/TraumaCausing Events

Many things can happen in an adolescence life that can correlate with low self-esteem. One study that took place in South Korea looked at a sexual abuse in adolescence and how it can affect their self-esteem. Participants in this study were “a total of 802 students (413 boys, 282 girls) between the 7th and 11th grade were recruited from one junior high school and one senior high school that was located in Seoul, Korea" (Kim, Park, & Park, 2017). Each participant took a questionnaire that had them answer questions about physical, emotional, sexual and any traumaticexperiences that may have happened before they turned 18. The research showed that participants that experienced childhood sexual abuse “may lead to maladaptive coping skills, disturbed self-identity, poor interpersonal skills, and lack of intimacy, as well as low self-esteem” (Kim, Park, & Park, 2017).

Another traumatic experience that could result in lower self-esteemis the loss of parents or becoming an orphan. A research study out of Ethiopiatook over 4,000 orphans for their sample size for the orphans to complete a questionnaire “based on Rosenberg’s self-esteem scale that measures the self-esteem levels of the respondents” (Erango & Ayka, 2015). The questionnaire took many things into consideration, such as the age of the child when they became an orphan, relationship with the parents when they became an orphan, and parent income. The results from the study showed that "the prevalence of low self-esteem among orphans was 59%, which is high" (Erango & Ayka, 2015).

Resiliency

There are many ways adolescence can show resiliency when it comes to having low self-esteem, one way would be to go to therapy for it. A study that took place used art therapy with orphaned adolescence, to see if it would help their self-esteem. This was a four-weekart therapy intervention that took place in Bulgaria for children ages 5 to 13. The results showed that "children showed higher self-esteem, more independence, and greater concentration" (Devidas & Mendonca, 2017).

Adolescence needs to get enough sleep to be successful in their lives, and to have better self-esteem. One study correlated that the use of social media for adolescence influenced their lack of sleep, which in turn can increase their lower self-esteem. The study "makes a novel contribution to the literature by examining how overall vs. nighttime-specific social media use and emotional investment in social media relate to sleep quality, anxiety, depression, and self-esteem in adolescents" (Woods & Scott, 2016). This study used questionnaires to see how much time adolescence were using social media and at what times were they using social media. The study then had the adolescent fill out questionnairesabout their self-esteem, anxiety, and depression, and sleep quality. The research showed that high times of social media at night, which interfered with the adolescents sleep affected their low self-esteem.

Another way adolescence can show resiliency against low self-esteem is by having a good relationship with their parents. Parents play such an important role in the lives of their children, and part of that role is helping them develop good self-esteem. A study that used questionnaires and home visits with adolescence in a two-parent household found that "there was a direct correlation between open communication between parent and child and a positive self-concept clarity. The study also found that there was a direct correlation between a lower self-concept clarity and depression and anxiety symptoms” (Dijak, et al., 2013).

Another way adolescence can try and overcome low self-esteem is by picturing their future self, and trying to work towards that. One study focused on the future-oriented self-concept. “Possible selves are believed to motivate people in acting to achieve that person they want to be in the future” (Stoddard, Pierce, & Schmidt, 2016). Researchers of this study believed that if “we can understand how adolescent envision their future, then we make interventions if need be” (Stoddard, Pierce, & Schmidt, 2016).

Neurobiology

Some adolescence posses learning disabilities which is neurological. These learning disabilities can play an important role in how they feel about themselves. One study that took place in Italy used children with an average age of 9 to do a research study on how their learning disability affected their self-esteem, depression, and anxiety. These students had learning disabilities that ranged from reading comprehension, reading decoding and mathematical learning disabilities. Two different tests were given to the students participating in the study. The first test which was the SAFA test which “aimed at assessing mental impairments in children and adolescents with age ranging from 8 to 18 years” (Rappo, 2014). The second test that was given to the students in the study was a test about their self-esteem that "consists of 25 items, positive and negative, related to the way pupils feel about themselves in the school domain" (Rappo, 2014). "On the whole, analyses revealed that children with Learning Disabilities and Mathematical Disabilities showed a higher level of depression and school anxiety as well as lower rated self-esteem at school than children with typical learning" (Rappo, 2014).

Another neurological condition that is being diagnosed more and more is children that have autism. Adolescencethat has autism face many challenges each day, one of these challenges is finding ways to have high self-esteem. "Autistic people have social and communication deficits, and experience social stigma—factors that could interfere with the development of positive social identity” (Cooper, Smith, & Russell, 2017). This study compared people that had an Autism Spectrom Disorder, and people that did not have any known disorders. Previous studies have shown that people that have autism have lower mental health issues, but this was the first study that “demonstrates that autistic people report significantly lower levels of personal self‐esteem than controls” (Cooper, Smith & Russell, 2017).

Self-determination Theory

Many things play an important role in an adolescentself-esteem. One way self-esteem can develop is through the self-determination theory. “Self-determination theory (SDT) is an empirically based, organismic theory of human behavior and personality development” (Ryan & Deci, 2017). This theory is used to see what type of social conditions is helping or hurting human growth. Within this theory, there are six mini-theories that help make up the whole theory itself. Each one of the mini-theories, help understand the human self-esteem

Authors Ryan and Deci talk about different self-esteem. Within the self-determination theory, there are two typesof self-esteem; contingent self-esteem and true self-esteem. “In *contingent* self-esteem, people’s feelings of worth are dependent upon continually meeting standards or expectations that have been introjected” (Ryan & Deci, 2017). This means that humans self-esteem can constantly change based off of different needs that need to be met, becoming a mother, different peers, or a new job. These things can change how a person sees their self-worth

In “true self-esteem, in contrast, is inherently more stable, for it is a form of feeling worthy that does not depend upon specific achievements or external indicators of worth” (Ryan & Deci, 2017). People that demonstrate true self-esteem, no matter what happens, being fired from a job, a break up in a relationship, or relationships with peers, will always know their worth and know what they have to bring to the table. Those that have “true-self esteem as self-determination theory defines it also have more stable self-esteem. They do not show the temporal fluctuations in feelings of worth that people with contingent self-esteem display” (Ryan & Deci, 2017).

Self-concept Theory

Another theory that plays an important role in developing self-esteem is the self-concept theory. Self-concept is defined as “a person’s identity or set of beliefs about what one is like an individual” (Feldman, p 249, 2017). One study had Slovenian children in early adolescence take part in a self-concept questionnaire that measured the four different domains of self-concept. "Among these domains were social self, academic self, family self, and emotional self" (Kozina, 2017). Of these adolescence 41 was made up of 4th graders and 36 were made up of 8th graders. One big differencethat came up in the study was how the 4th-grade students felt about their emotional self and how 8th-grade students had more care about their social self. This study showed that self-concept can change over time, depending on what is important to them at that time in their lives, which in turn can affect their self-esteem.

Conclusion

So many things throughout a person'slife because of the person self-esteem. As seen by the research above, self-esteem has so many variables in it. Low self-esteem can lead to depression and anxiety, which depression can lead to suicide. Low self-esteem can also lead to failing relationships, which again can lead to depression and anxiety.

Self-esteem starts in adolescence and many things in an adolescence life can lead to poor self-esteem such as, sexual abuse in their childhood, losing both parents and becoming an orphan and even relationships with peers. Other things such as social-media can lead to lower self-esteem, especially if you are spending late hours online instead of getting good sleep. Adolescents with learning dissabilites and children with autism also can show low self-esteem.

But there are many things that can help adolescents build a stronger idea of their self-worth. First, would be their relationships with their parents. By having open relationships with their parents or guardians, and a relationship with communication a child'sself-esteem can grow. Also, children receiving therapy for low self-esteem can help as well. Understanding one'ssurroundings, and one's self-worth can play greatly in helping the adolescence build up their self-esteem.

Even though there has been so much research done on self-esteem, there is always more directions that research can go. Using more research on how to overcome low self-esteem would be beneficial since it seems that more and more adolescents are developing lower self-esteem. Because there seems to be a difference in girls and boys and their self-esteem levels, more research on why girls tend to have lower self-esteem than boys of their age. Also, more research on minorities, do they only show low self-esteem when they are now living in a foreign country? Or would they still show low-self esteem if they were back in their native country?

In order to help adolescent depression decline, and suicide rates to lower it is very important to find ways to help build up humans self-esteem. Almost with anyone you ask, their goal in life is to be happy. Before they can be happy, they need to be happy with themselves which starts with knowing their self-worth and developing a good self-esteem.

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