

FACTORS AFFECTING SELF ESTEEM

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ABSTRACT

Self esteem comes from internal sources. When we have healthy self esteem we feel comfortable with ourselves and do not dependent on anyone else to make us feel good about ourselves. Healthy self esteem allows us to be confident and aware of our strengths and abilities. We understand that everyone has strengths and weaknesses and accept that we are not perfect.

Outside sources can have a negative influence on the internal effects of self esteem which is based on our ability to assess ourselves accurately and still be able to accept and value ourselves unconditionally (Crocker et. al., 2006). This includes being able to realistically acknowledge our strengths and limitations while accepting ourselves as worthwhile. When we have healthy self esteem we may challenge past negative experiences or messages by nurturing and caring for ourselves in ways that show we are valuable, competent, deserving and lovable (Baumeister et. al., 2005). This discussion focuses on healthy self esteem as well as low self esteem and its consequences.

Origins of Self Esteem

An image of ourselves evolves throughout our lives beginning in our childhood. We build images of ourselves based on experiences we encounter with different people in our lives. These images are shaped around how our successes and failures are treated by our family members, teachers, peers, religious leaders, and coaches (Crocker et. al., 2006). Our self esteem is created by how we are treated by others through our experiences and activities.

Self esteem is based on how we feel when we look in the mirror or talk about ourselves. Self esteem is knowing we are worthy of love and respect and accepting our limitations and boundaries (Trzesniewski et. al., 2006). Self esteem is how we see ourselves and how we feel about our achievements.

Healthy self esteem is important because it gives us the courage to try new things and the power to believe in ourselves. It leads to us respecting ourselves, even when we make mistakes. When we respect ourselves, other people usually respect us too (Olson et. al., 2007). Healthy self esteem helps us make good choices about our mind and body. It leads to us valuing our health, feelings and safety. Healthy self esteem helps us know that every part of us is worth caring for and protecting (Olson et. al., 2007).

Low Self Esteem

When we have low self esteem we need positive external experiences to counteract our negative internal feelings and thoughts. Many times the good feelings from our positive external experiences are temporary. For instance, if a high grade is earned in a course, we may temporarily feel that we deserve it. Unfortunately, when we have low self-esteem, our inner voice may punish us by criticizing our accomplishments. Teachers can benefit from identifying students with low self esteem. This can help teachers provide support to students where needed.

Low self esteem individuals tend to view life in a negative way. These negative views can result in a belief that we are worthless (Crocker, 2006). This may lead us to feel hopeless and not put forth much effort because our experiences are seen as pointless (Burke, 2008). Other symptoms of low self esteem include dislike of body image, under-eating, over-eating, and depression. Low self esteem may lead us to think that other people are better than us. This may lead us to lack assertiveness, confidence, and allow others to take advantage of us (Ogle, 2005).

There may be other disorders or illnesses we may be suffering from that are related to low self esteem. Some of these disorders and illnesses include bulimia and post-natal depression. Low self esteem may lead to us wanting to make ourselves feel better through alcohol abuse.

Causes of Low Self Esteem

There are numerous reasons why we may have low self esteem. Low self esteem can be caused by hearing a comment or experiencing an incident that has a negative impact on us mentally and emotionally. The comment or incident may only happen once, but we may tend to repeat it in our memories to the point that it affects our beliefs about ourselves. These beliefs may occur subconsciously over time to the point that we may think that they are normal.

Some of the causes of low self esteem include poor health, being bullied, lack of support from family, friends, and job loss. If we are experiencing verbal and sexual abuse and are in a violent relationship, we may think that is normal and the way we will always be treated. These reasons may lead to feelings of isolation, not feeling valued, loved or wanted (Gyura et. al., 2007). If we are overweight and are having trouble losing weight, this may lead to low self esteem.

Friends, Family, School and Work

Other causes of low self esteem include divorce, dysfunctional family, death and lack of achievement at work and at school. Low self esteem can lead to needs not being met because we feel as though we do not deserve it or are uncomfortable asking. Setting limits and disciplining children can be a problem. Unfortunately, low self-esteem can be passed from parent to child (Diamantopoulou, 2007). If we have parents who are demanding and never satisfied with us, we may think that is normal and the way we will always be treated. The child may model what is

seen as the proper behavior for a parent and in turn treat their child the same way they were treated by their parents (Diamantopoulou, 2007). This could lead to a cycle of abuse.

We may experience low self esteem at an early age because of pressure from our parents, family or friends to excel in school or a particular sport. If we do not perform well our self esteem may be negatively affected. In high school, we may experience low self esteem because we are trying to conform to stereotypes and prove our independence from our parents. In college, we may experience low self esteem because we are trying to acquire skills and find employment. Low self esteem may cause us not to complete our school assignments or tasks at work. We may provide numerous excuses for why we are not able to complete our assignments. These excuses may range from blaming other students in the classroom for making too much noise during an exam, to co-workers who did not explain the tasks completely. Blaming others for our fear of being viewed as a failure can lead to us dropping out of school or prematurely quitting our job.

Low self esteem may cause us to brag about our exploits to our family and friends at school and work. These baseless exploits may be verbalized to mask the true reality of our inabilities. Many times these exploits are eventually discovered to be false. Teachers and employers should be aware that if our self esteem is low, we may display hostility toward authority which can be a way to hide our inefficiency. Teachers also need to be aware that if our self esteem is low and we do not have much in common with our peers that we may end up avoiding school, which can lead to delinquency.

When our self esteem is low, we may have trouble saying no to friends and family. We may end up doing favors we don't want to do and end up going where we don't want to go, with

people we do not desire to accompany us. (Greenberg, 2008). Low self esteem may lead us to believe we have no control over our lives.

Conclusions

When our self esteem is high we view life in a positive way, feel confident, view difficulties as challenges, and are able to be assertive and say yes to what we want and feel and do not allow others to treat us badly (Donnellan, 2005). High self esteem allows us to believe in our self worth and, stand up for ourselves.

Low self esteem can cause us to feel like we are not important and can keep us from trying new things in our lives. It can also be responsible for us not making friends and can affect our performance at work. Low self esteem may lead to negative self talk. These negative comments can be responsible for us believing we are not able to accomplish anything. As soon as we hear negative comments, we need to tell ourselves to stop. This will reduce the power of negative self talk.

Consequences of low self esteem include depression, stress, anxiety and loneliness, problems with our job performance, academics, relationships and friendships (Hill, 2006). These consequences can lead to underachievement and increased vulnerability to drug and alcohol abuse (Zeigler-Hill., V. 2006). Negative consequences of low self esteem can lead to self destructive behavior (Gyura et. al., 2007).

When our self esteem is low we may need to write a list of all the positive things about ourselves such as our strengths and goals. Complimenting ourselves leads to positive thoughts. These compliments should be specific, not general. Focusing on the positive things about ourselves can lead to loving and accepting ourselves. The end result will be a healthy self

esteem, with a positive inner voice that will be reassuring (Sargent, 2006). We can gather support from peers and family which will allow us to know we are not powerless and need to believe in ourselves.

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