

LAB EXERCISE #9

SELF-CONCEPT

The self-concept refers to individuals' ideas about who they are and how they fit in with the world around them. A growing awareness of self as a separate entity is a pivotal element of socioemotional development. Developmental psychologists speak of the major task of a toddler as separating self from parents. The "No" typical of a two year old represents the toddler's attempt to assert independence from parents. Erikson termed this struggle "autonomy v. shame/doubt."

The development of the self-concept occurs in stages like many other areas of development. An infant's exploration of his/her body represents the first stage in which the infant begins to recognize his/her physical separateness. Think about how much pleasure infants get from staring in the mirror. At first, it is the joy of seeing another face that looks similar to theirs and not like an adult. Eventually, though, they begin to recognize that the face is their own. They then enjoy staring at themselves in the mirror.

As infants become toddlers and are able to explore their environment, they begin to recognize their separateness. They use their own names and become insistent about being addressed by the correct name. Some may even create their own names and may respond only to those names. They use "I" and "me" to refer to themselves.

They begin to make value judgements about their own behavior ("good girl, bad boy"). By age three most children recognize parental and societal standards of behavior and are able to evaluate their own behavior according to those standards. (Recognize that they may also create their own standards which may not match our adult standards.)

Caregivers and parents can help to develop this autonomy/independence in toddlers. By choosing tasks carefully, adults can help the child to develop a sense of accomplishment and pride.

The self-concept continues to develop as children grow older. Children discover more about themselves and how they fit into the larger world. The self-concept expands to include physical, cognitive, and social components. Much of this development occurs in peer groups. In the Exercise #11, we will explore issues related to peer groups.

In this exercise, you will observe toddlers for the development of their self-concept. Part of this observation will focus on the adults in the center since adults are an integral part of the development of a child's self-concept. Again, self-concept is something which we cannot see directly. Sometimes we can ask questions that give us information about a child's self-concept. However, we are sometimes not completely honest with ourselves and so we must look at such information with a cautious eye. When discussing self-concept, we mostly infer it from our observations. When you are observing this week, be cautious about making judgements early and on the basis of one observation. Keeping this caution in mind, we can sometimes learn a great deal from a single observation.

Before beginning this exercise, review the observation guidelines of the first week.

ACTIVITY

You will need to take some extra paper with you this week for recording this observation.

Choose 3-4 children of different ages and genders. Observe each for 4-5 minutes during your time at the center. Try to make sure that the child is interacting in some way with some adult (not you.)

Repeat with each child so that you observe each for 8-10 minutes total.

Describe the setting and the situation. What is going on? Who is involved?

Do the caregivers facilitate the toddler's attempts to "do it myself" ?

What communication, verbal and nonverbal, does the caregiver use? (Be aware that nonverbal communication can be stronger than verbal and that children are very sensitive to such communication.)

LAB REPORT PART B QUESTIONS

Based on your observations, describe how each of the children you observed view themselves.

Discuss the quality of interaction between the caregivers and the children you observed. How much attention? Is it undivided?

What else could the center workers do to enhance the development of the self-concept? Consider safety issues. These are often in conflict with a desire to help the child develop.

4. Create an activity for toddlers that would help develop their self-concept.