

SELF-CONCEPT AND COMMUNICATION

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Abstract

Human beings are gregarious, and to be accomplished in sharing information amongst fellow beings is a guarantee of reputation and success. In the present world, where communication skills are superior to other life skills, the need of research in the domain of the formers is highly needed to understand all the aspects of it. Communication is generally considered natural to all human beings, and has been taken either lightly or for granted till recently. Researchers, having felt its criticality in the present technology driven world, are keener to understand its nature minutely. Self-concept is a way, how one opines oneself with respect to gender, talent, likes, dislikes, age, race, culture, physical features etc. Self-concept cannot be compulsorily a result of intra communication; it is largely determined by the environment and people around us. One's self-concept bear upon one's communicative behavior immensely. This research paper analyses the topic very meticulously and insightfully to tell how practically the idea of self-concept affect communication. Additionally, it tells about the volatile nature of the self-concept, which sometimes may or may not be based on reality. One's self-concept can be placed on a continuum that ranges from "healthy" or "strong" to "unhealthy" or "poor". Creating realistic goal statements designed to improve one's self-concept can increase motivation to communicate.

Self-concept is the opinion one holds about oneself. Psychologists, Carl Rogers and Abraham Maslow, were the first to establish the notion of self-concept. It includes opinions about one's physical features, talent, likes, dislikes social class, age, culture, race, self-talk, personality, academic performance, gender role etc. Generally, self-concept embodies the answer to "who am I?" Self-concept is a cognitive or descriptive component (e.g. I am a fast runner). Self-awareness is the consciousness of one's existence and degree to which one understands oneself personally, on the other hand, self-concept is an image or memories that one has about oneself. Self-image (what you see in yourself) and Self-esteem and Self-worth (the extent to which you value yourself), and ideal self (what you would like to be) are three components of self-concept, according to Carl Rogers. Communication is the crux of human life, and needs to be well understood to have a successful and meaningful existence. Communication

is sharing information with a positive feedback by mutually understood verbal and non-verbal means. To understand the nature of it, one needs to observe all the components of it meticulously, so that it can be understood in a right perspective, to be used in a more refined way.

Self-concept and communication are inextricably connected and the study of this relation is very interesting and intelligent. One's identity arises from one's personal experience in dealing or communicating with society. What one is, comes maximum from the persons with whom one talks. Though one could create self-concept by intrapersonal communication, yet the large chunk of it comes from the interpersonal communication. A friend, a teacher, an acquaintance or even self could contribute to, how one views oneself. It has been noticed that when one grows older, one's self-concept, which is based on the beliefs and perceptions of self and others, affects the role one plays in society. These beliefs and perceptions are reflected in the way one communicates with people around.

One may see oneself as attractive or unattractive, smart or stupid, witty or humorous and so on so forth. Every characteristic, one thinks, one has, goes into the formation of one's self-concept. One decides these things about oneself, being based on one's experiences and the feedback, one has received from others. For example Tom and Tude are neighbors, and beautiful and ugly respectively. Tom always gets compliments about his physical beauty, and Tude always gets vilification about the same. This has resulted in particular types of completely distinct self-concepts, which are clearly felt in their communication. Whenever they meet or play, Tom, having got a positive self-concept, communicates very confidently and clearly, whereas, Tude is tight tongue and often less eloquent.

The self-concept of talent and intelligence is equally important in shaping one's communication. Talent and intelligence are special abilities that allow one to communicate differently and ably. The people marked talented and intelligent, have better communication skills than termed otherwise. This is certainly the result of the accolade, praise and positive feedback, which paves the way for a very positive self-concept. On the other hand those, who are lagging a little behind from the above mentioned, generally, get less kudos and praise are inarticulate and tongue-tied. A survey was done by me on some talented and talented students in mechanical engineering class of B Tech 1st year, and the result was that they were very good at communication as well. This was the result of the positive feedback they got from interlocutors, and that attributed confidence and spontaneity in their utterances.

One's self-concept toward a culture also tends to affect one's communication a lot. Culture refers to a sense of typical socially acquired knowledge, regarding food, language, values, clothes etc. Some participants in communication take their culture either much refined or much better than the cultures of interlocutors, and it affects the communication vastly. Before the independence of South Africa, the Negroes, who would feel themselves culturally inferior to the White, could not exchange information efficiently with them. On the other hand, the White assuming greatness of their culture had always an upper hand in communication with the Negroes. Everybody takes their culture either better or inferior to the culture of the conversationalist and thinks sometimes that the ways of one's culture are the natural order of things and other cultures are less evolved and vice-versa is also valid. Although one thinks that freewill governs one's actions, most of times it does not. One's culture is a stern taskmaster. It imposes its rules of behavior on one from the moment one is born. One learns, when to speak up and when to keep quiet. One learns where to put one's hands during a meal, which table utensils to use or not use. One learns how to address people in a manner, which pose is censored and

what is praised. As a consequence, this communicative behavior is learned so well that it sinks to a subconscious level, and when one interacts with others, one operates on a sort of automatic pilot. Moreover, people have a natural tendency to feel attacking and defensive inculcated by the idea of self-concept and culture, while dealing with the people of other cultures. This decides extensively the type of words, sentences, gestures, tones of the communication between them.

The self-concept of race refers to how one's conscious membership in a particular race affects interaction with folks with his and different races. The racial self-concept is more of a factor in the United States for Asian American, African American, and Latin Americans than for European Americans. And one can easily feel the differences in the communication of these people with unique racial self-concept in different environments, i.e. when they converse with the people of the same race or to the people of other races.

The self-concept of gender role means that communication between members of different cultures is affected by how different societies view the roles of men and women, and it affects communication a lot. Dr. Pat Heim in her video, "The Invisible Rules: Men, Women and Teams," indicates that each gender is a "culture" in itself, raised with invisible rules of conduct instinctively known to all adult members of that gender. Therefore, men and women behave according to two separate sets of rules about what is "right". Consequently, behavior that seems natural and appropriate to one gender culture can seem baffling and wrong to others. When one works with somebody of the opposite gender and he or she does something that seems a bit strange, one often becomes intolerant and defensive. One does not realize that men and women come from different cultures, even if they are raised in the same homes, educated in the same schools and live in the same country. When it comes to communication women tend to more rule specific with peers as compares to men in the same company. Women are often more expressive and intuitive in their communication. Hall published an observational study on non-verbal differences, and in her study, she noted women as smiling and laughing more, as well as having a better understanding of others' nonverbal cues, and men, on the other hand, were found to be less expressive, to suppress their emotions. Mcquiston and Morris also noted that a major difference in men and women's nonverbal communication, and concluded that men tended to show body language linked to dominance, like eye-contact and interpersonal distance more than women.

The Social identity-concept factor refers to the level of society that a person is born into and results in a typical kind of self-concept which generally shifts to a special twist in his communication. In India, when people of low class communicate with the people of high class, their tone, vocabulary, expression, accent is changed. The same people, when talk to the people of their class, use different tone, expression, accent, and vocabulary. In some cases, people who feel below others socially, do not choose to converse in a group setting instead; he or she may choose to stay quiet. This kind of situations often result from the fact that he or she may have a feeling of getting recognized of their low strata from their style, contents and accent, and this could lead to inequality if he or she were to say something.

The self-concept of age refers to how members of different age groups, with a typical age bound self-concept, communicate with others. Their communicative behavior will be different at different ages, and their culture can make further changes even in that age specific communication. In old terms, this might be thought of in terms of generation gap. Though, the old age loses speed, clarity of sounds, coherence, assertiveness etc., yet insight, choice of appropriate words etc. become the hallmarks of this age communication. More hierarchical cultures like China, Thailand, and Cambodia pay great deference and respect to their elders with

due respect to the utterances, and take their elders' opinions into account when making life changing decisions. Cultures like the United States are less mindful of their elders and less likely to take their advice into account when making important decisions.

The role identity self-concept refers to the different roles; a person plays in his or her life including their roles as a husband or wife, father, mother, employer or employee and so on so forth. A male employer communicates quite differently at his office by being very formal with his boss, customer and colleagues. The same person communicates differently with his peers by being informal and uses abbreviations, slangs, ungrammatical structures etc. The communication by the same person is different at home. So the role identity self-concept makes one to change the contents of communication accordingly.

Self-esteem or self-worth refers to the extent to which one likes, accepts or approves of oneself. One may have either positive or negative view of oneself. Those, who have very high self-esteem self-concepts, can communicate with anyone, at any time, and nothing makes them feel out of place, and they thrive in all social settings. People having high self-esteem communicate more openly and use appropriate vocabulary very assertively with perfect gestures and postures. If an employee's self-concept about his reputation in the office is high, he will approach each task with self-confidence, and it will have a great impact on his communication as well. A lecturer with a self-concept of high worth will communicate the contents confidently, leaving a great impression on the students. Conversely, the people with negative self-esteem, generally, tend to bungle communication even in the most favorable situations. Suppose, one makes this statements, "I don't know, I don't think, I have ability to learn this software". This is an indication of one's ineptness to learn a certain skill and through statements one has communicated negative feelings about oneself. A person with negative self-concept experiences self-defeating emotions, frequently. Such a person wants to withdraw into a shell. This person seems to feel that he or she is not worthy of the company of others. Low self-esteem or negative view of one tends to lack of confidence. The ELT and EFL classes' students, who have a negative view about their communication in the language often, tend to commit errors. Self-images and self-worth does not necessarily have to reflect reality. A thin person may have belief that he is fat. A person's self-image and self-worth is affected by factors, such as parental influences, acquaintances, feedback etc.

Role of feedback in self-concept is of utmost importance. One's self-concept is also a reaction of how others see one and respond to one. Suppose, one is constantly told one's smartness and hard work; this would definitely enhance one's morale and make oneself feel a unique person, and its result will be visible in the communication of that person clearly. If one is told that one is a good speaker. After hearing this several times, one will definitely inculcate a stronger sense of confidence, and automatically become better in this field. Other people's comment can validate, reinforce or alter one's perceptions of who one is and what one can do. The more positive comments one receives, the more positive self-concept one have. Conversely, negative comments destroy self-esteem and develop a negative self-concept, which scathes all the aspects of personality of which communication is an important part.

Our self-concept can be placed on a continuum that ranges from "healthy" or "strong" to "unhealthy" or "poor". Creating realistic goal statements designed to improve our self-concept can increase motivation to communicate. It's important to remember that our self-concept isn't formed in an instant; neither can it change in an instant. Therefore, we must set realistic goals for ourselves and not mentally beat ourselves up if we don't meet them.

To sum up, it can be said that communication, which is the crux of one's meaningful existence on this planet, needs to be understood from all perspectives, to help one to have a much better life. Self –concept determines and affects one's communication with the choice of all contents, such as word, tone, structure, meaning and non-verbal parts. One's self -concept is mostly decided by one's social, gender, geographical, linguistic aspects. Positive self-concept allows one to open to new ideas and new experiences, and is a great boost to be articulate and its vice-verse is also true .Communication with others greatly depends upon how one takes oneself when he faces himself, and the people around. For example a person who is homosexual may communicate well with other homosexual and the same feel odd or obstructed with homophobic. The person may try to hide who he or she really based upon internal shame felt. One's self-concept is ever- changing and creating realistic goal statements designed to improve our self-concept can increase motivation to communicate

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