A holistic self-identity model

Jacquelyne R. Joens

University of Northern Iowa

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A holistic self-identity model

Abstract
Parents, educators, business leaders, political leaders, and mental health professionals all appreciate the impact positive self-esteem has on a person's ability to strive and grow. Self-esteem is a complex, multifaceted component of human existence. It is possible to identify and observe the result of a healthy self-esteem or even the outcome of a damaged self-esteem, but the term self-esteem may be antiquated and no longer exemplary of a complete picture of self. This paper examines research and attempts to define a multi-dimensional model of self-esteem, a Holistic Self-Identity Model, which will help to bring into focus the concept of self-identity and its relationship with human development.
A HOLISTIC SELF-IDENTITY MODEL

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Jacquelyne R. Joens

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Linda Nebbe

Date Approved

Advisor/Director of Research Paper

John K. Smith

Date Received

Head, Department of Educational Leadership, Counseling, and Postsecondary Education
Holistic Self-Identity Model

Abstract
Parents, educators, business leaders, political leaders, and mental health professionals all appreciate the impact positive self-esteem has on a person’s ability to strive and grow. Self-esteem is a complex, multifaceted component of human existence. It is possible to identify and observe the result of a healthy self-esteem or even the outcome of a damaged self-esteem, but the term self-esteem may be antiquated and no longer exemplary of a complete picture of self. This paper examines research and attempts to define a multi-dimensional model of self-esteem, a Holistic Self-Identity Model, which will help to bring into focus the concept of self-identity and its relationship with human development.
The Concept of Self-Identity

Since the beginning of the twentieth century when Psychology was becoming recognized as a respected science in the world of academia, the role of self-beliefs and how they influence human behavior have been of primary interest to the science (Pajares & Schunk, 2001). The concept of self has evolved from a one-dimensional construct used to define a person's self-perceptions to a multifaceted, complex entity. Contemporary theorists have now moved from a more concrete concept of self-perception to the more modern idea that how a person perceives his or herself in one area of life may be unrelated to the way in which he or she views self in another area. Based on the work published in the late 1980's through the late 1990's by Herbert W. Marsh and Richard J. Shavelson, Pajares and Schunk (2001) explain that there is a difference between the "self-perceptions that one has about oneself as an individual and that involve the totality of one's self-knowledge and the self-perceptions that one has in regards to specific areas or domains in one's life" (Pajares & Schunk, 2001, p. 242). By leaving the more concrete concept of self-esteem behind, further discussion may be better served by describing the culmination of self-knowledge and self-perception using the term self-identity.

The concept of self-identity appears so complex on the surface that determining its impact on people can leave parents, educators, business leaders, political leaders, and mental health professionals scratching their heads in wonder.
It seems relatively easy to identify the results of having a positive self-identity. The personality traits exemplified by a person enjoying a positive self-identity can be observed and the corresponding consequences are almost tangible. If a person experiences a realistic confidence in his or her mind and values, he or she will exude a security in self and respond more appropriately to life's opportunities and challenges. This confidence seems to almost search for the challenge and stimulation of meaningful and demanding goals. If these goals are achieved, the successful attempt in turn serves to further reinforce a more positive view of self.

Likewise is the obvious outcome of a negative self-identity. If a person is feeling vulnerable in the area of self-identity, failure of a task may further reinforce this negative outlook. In his book, *The Feeling Good Handbook*, Burns (1999) illustrates the concept of how the development of a positive self-identity is as if a person accepts the fact that he or she is a human with imperfections. Burns describes self-identity as “one of the most powerful forces in the universe” (Burns, 1999, p.115). He believes that healthy self-identity will lead, “to joy, to productivity, to intimacy” (Burns, 1999, p.115). Burns further explains that self-identity can be viewed as unconditional or something that a person does not deserve but rather is entitled. Burns challenges a person who suffers from low self-identity not to focus on success or failure as the defining factor in who he or she is. Rather, Burns encourages *unconditional self-love* and accepting the fact that no person is perfect. Burns believes a person can become more fulfilled by
focusing on the lessons learned and knowledge gained, rather than focusing on personal shortcomings.

This idea of unconditional self-love has also been explored by Ruiz (2004). The basis of Ruiz’s philosophy is founded on principles practiced by The Toltec Empire of 10th Century A.D. Central Mexico (Toltecs, 2005). Ruiz explains,

We are born in truth, but we grow up believing in lies. One of the biggest lies in the story of humanity is the lie of our imperfection. It’s just a story, but we believe it, and we use the story to judge ourselves, to punish ourselves, and to justify our mistakes. We humans have no idea what we really are, but we know what we are not. We create an image of perfection, a story about what we should be, and we begin to search for a false image (Ruiz & Mills, 2004, p. 42).

Ruiz (2004) challenges a person to accept his or her flaws as truth. When a person lives with this type of honesty, life will be more fulfilling because he or she is then living in the awareness that life is in harmony with truth (Ruiz & Mills, 2004).

When living in truth how a person processes life’s challenges, information, and experiences in relationship to his or her self becomes paramount to unconditional self-love. If a person chooses to allow his or her self-identity to suffer or die, and not allow the possession of tarnishes or imperfections in his or her self, misunderstanding of his or her self-identity will orbit around feeding on more
self-doubt. This results in the lack of confidence needed in handling life’s challenges. This circle of damaging one’s self-identity continues in an almost self-perpetrating existence.

With unconditional self-love necessary for a positive or healthy self-identity, a person needs to fall in love with him or herself. To do this he or she must identify the components of self that are lovable. This will require defining the components of self that matter in the overall picture of a healthy self-identity. For those inspired to identify, the pieces present a multi-faceted image and the complete picture of self-identity becomes a challenge to identify. To begin the process of defining self-identity, it may be prudent to start by examining the potential components of self-identity and the possible corresponding positive or negative outcomes.

The Structure of Self-Identity

For decades, researchers have searched for clues as to the nature of the complete structure of self-esteem or self-identity. As previously mentioned, the results of a negative self-identity are observable. These outcomes can be seen throughout society in many different ways. Societal ills seem to almost drive the desire for defining the concept of self-identity. There are a growing number of mental health issues which plague the United States’ population, further fueling the urgency to understand the concept of self-identity and its components (Elliot, Cunningham, Linder, Colangelo & Gross, 2005; Ferguson, 2005; Frank &
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**Age and Gender**

As a possible rebound of the women's movement of the 1960's and 1970's, there has been a more contemporary view and appreciation emerging of the value in differences between genders (Schaef, 1992). More recent research has been examining the differences between males and females and how these differences play a formative role in human development across the human life span. By reviewing some recent statistics regarding a few of these differences, it is possible to begin to see the roles gender and age play in defining self-identity.

It has been found that approximately 45 percent of girls in elementary school say that they are “good at lots of things” (Littman, 1999, p. vii). In middle school the percentage drops to 29 percent and even further in high school to 23 percent. Although boys also experience a decline, it isn’t quite as drastic. In elementary school approximately 55 percent of boys believe they are good at many things which then drops to roughly 42 percent by high school. These declining figures are also evident in measuring if children feel “happy with the way I am”
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(Littman, 1999, p. vii). In elementary school, 60 percent of girls are happy with themselves while 67 percent of the boys express similar feelings. These numbers change to 37 percent of middle school girls and 29 percent of high school girls. By comparison, boys that are happy with the way they are drops to approximately 46 percent by high school (Littman, 1999, p. vii).

The impact of poor self-identity may also show up in the form of premature injury or death. Nearly 10 percent of teen girls suffer from anorexia, with 6 percent of these dying from complications from the disorder (Littman, 1999, p. vii). It was discovered that 34 percent of ninth grade girls consider suicide while 18 percent of boys of the same age group considered the same form of escape from life stressors (Littman, 1999, p. viii). It is estimated that approximately 1 percent of the United States’ population self-harms. Of this 1 percent, 97 percent are females (Martinson, 1998). These numbers are a staggering representation of the nation’s youth not finding value within self and further serve to illustrate the differences between genders in dealing with life’s stressors.

The differences in self-identity aren’t only limited to the pre-adolescent and adolescent years. Erikson (1998) outlined the value of recognizing life stages and how people experience change over the years. As a person ages and lives his or her life, priorities change. Life experiences serve as perception filters, and the view of how a person fits into the world may change over a lifetime. Erikson suggests that as people live and learn, experiences are evaluated and value is
placed on them. To move to the next stage of development, a person builds on the continually growing base of knowledge acquired (Erikson & Erikson, 1998).

**Internal versus External**

With the subjects of age and gender come another dimension of self needing to be examined, *internal* versus *external* feedback on the value of self. In her study examining body image dissatisfaction between boys and girls, Jones (2004) found that there is a difference between the way teenaged girls judge physical appearance and how teenaged boys judge their appearance. Jones found that boys look internally for a measure to judge body image, namely muscular structure. Girls, on the other hand, held a stronger value in the opinion of external factors such as peers and cultural values (Jones, 2004). In essence, the value a person places on his or her *locus of information* has a direct impact on how the boy or girl perceives his or her self-worth.

There have also been studies conducted which have focused on the concept of how internal and external factors play in establishing self-identity in adults. Strauss (2005) discovered that adults in the work place put a high value on peer and supervisor evaluation and assessment. She further outlined that employees who exhibit a high level of self-esteem are viewed more favorably in productivity and at a higher level by peers and supervisors. It was determined that both internal and external factors play a role in establishing self-worth, specifically to the self-worth domain in question (Strauss, 2005).
Parker and Crocker (2005) also conclude that there is a distinct difference in internal and external factors of self-worth in adults. Parker and Crocker (2005) contend that internal factors of self-worth may hold a more stable or secure position in the formation of self-identity, where external factors and any occurring threats to a person's ego regarding these self-identity domains, may hold a more delicate stance regarding a person's sense of self (Park & Crocker, 2005). Both internal and external factors play a significant role in the establishment and reinforcement of self-identity. These internal and external factors impact self-identity to different degrees throughout the human life cycle as well as in different ways depending on a person's gender (Park & Crocker, 2005; Jones, 2004; & Strauss, 2005). The factors which drive the need for internal or external locus of information of self-identity may be in part due to what is learned through a person's spirituality, values, and culture.

**Spirituality, Values, and Culture**

In her work, Satir emphasized that no learning is single-level (Satir, 1972). She argued that it is not only what a person is learning but also how he or she is being taught that makes a difference in how the person views himself or herself. As so many parents can attest to, it is not always what is said, but what is observed that plays an instrumental role in teaching life lessons. Satir believed that in order to promote healthy learning in children, it was critical that parents understood what was needed to be taught (Satir, 1972).
Satir (1972) identified four major categories of life values which parents need to understand in order to successfully teach children what they need to know. The first is helping a child to learn about him or herself. The next area is learning about others. The third area of understanding is learning about the person's place in the world. The forth and final theme needing understanding is for a person to learn about God or his or her spirituality. Satir was firm in her conviction that these four fundamental pieces are necessary to promote healthy growth and development in every person. If the necessity of these four factors of life values needing to be understood is a given, it could then be concluded that any missing piece or pieces will result in the person feeling a void in his or her self-identity.

A similar concept is outlined by Riso and Hudson (1999) in their work with personality identification. They believe that people are driven by an inner restlessness, like something is missing inside. Through their work, Riso and Hudson encourage the reader to explore themselves through the process of using an Enneagram. The Enneagram has been developed from spiritual wisdom derived from many ancient traditions and cultures and is used to promote self-reflection and the development of self-knowledge (Riso & Hudson, 1999). These authors encourage a practice of self-observation and developing an understanding of what a person's life experiences mean. They believe that this mindful awareness is necessary for living life with purposeful meaning.
The idea of self-examination and learning is also reflected in a study regarding internal and external domains of self-worth. Park and Crocker (2005) conclude that, "the importance of self-esteem lies not only in whether it is high or low but also in what people believe they need to be or do to have worth and value" (Park & Crocker, 2005). This conclusion brings into consideration the need for people to identify personal values, principles, beliefs, and convictions. Park and Crocker (2005) argue that these domains of self seem to have a direct relationship with the strength of a person's internal sense of self-worth and thus how vulnerable self becomes if threatened. If a person believes in his or her convictions and values, there will be confidence and certainty that will serve the individual in a positive, supportive way. This in turn will translate into strength and further conviction in beliefs about self, the world, and self's place in the world. If the internal source of self-worth is strong, it appears that a stronger foundation in overall self-identity may be realized. Then, making external threats to a person's ego will be less traumatic or permanently damaging (Park & Crocker, 2005).

Another way to view this idea would be to appreciate the importance of identifying meaning-in-life. In a study conducted by Steger and Frazier (2005), it was concluded that people who make an effort to define and nurture meaning-in-life, experience a greater association between religion and personal well-being. Their findings support the idea that recognizing meaning-in-life is a significant, compulsory factor in establishing personal well-being. They further report that,
"These results also indicate that religious persons’ greater sense of meaning is in turn associated with greater positive regard for their lives and selves" (Steger & Frazier, 2005).

Steger and Frazier (2005) made further observations regarding religious matters and their intersection with issues pertaining to culture; that religion and ethnicity are very closely related. They point out the importance of counselors remembering that spirituality in some cultures holds a stronger weight than in other cultures, and being multiculturally aware is critically important in the counseling profession. They further direct that since meaning-in-life is important in establishing a person’s well-being, a counselor would be well advised to establish counseling interventions aimed at helping non-religious clients find a level of personal meaning-in-life (Steger & Frazier, 2005). Meaning-in-life establishes a foundation of a value system which in turn provides a stable measure of conviction and meaning, giving a person a more secure and stable position for internal self-identity.

The importance of being a culturally aware counselor is also supported in the work by Schmitt and Allik (2005). In their research on measuring self-esteem in 53 countries, it was determined that subcomponents of self-esteem (defined as self-competence and self-liking) varied across cultures. Schmitt and Allik (2005) conclude that there seems to be a difference in the impact self-esteem domains have on self-identity between cultures which are considered individualistic and
those cultures which are considered to be more collective in nature. Regardless of the cultural type, differences between cultures present a component of self-identity which warrants consideration.

**Intellect, Aptitude, and Emotionality**

Culture, spirituality, and personal values are not the only components of the human psyche that are studied in relationship to self. Researchers often times focus on how self-identity or self-worth relates to a person's intellect, emotionality, and academic abilities (Kohn, 1994; Pajares & Schunk, 2001; & Shokrai, 2004). In a study on self-efficacy and performance, where self-efficacy is defined as the “levels of confidence individuals have in their ability to execute certain courses of action, or achieve specific outcomes” (Lane, Lane, & Kyprianou, 2004), the authors conclude that although self-esteem doesn’t directly relate to performance there is a relationship between self-esteem and perceived efficacy expectations. Lane, Lane, and Kyprianou (2004) deduce that self-esteem may be a product of self-efficacy, which does show to have an impact on performance. Their conclusions suggest that by encouraging students to view their past performance and accomplishments in a positive way, self-efficacy will be enhanced. This enhancement of efficacy will result in an ultimate improvement of self-identity.

In a separate study, Lane, Lane, and Kyprianou (2004) find that the level of confidence that a person has in his or her ability and performance is derived from
the "cognitive appraisal of previous performance" (Lane et al., 2004). They further recognize the likely role emotional intelligence factors play in the development of confidence in a person’s ability and performance.

The concept of how confidence is derived from cognitive appraisal of previous performance and ability was further supported in a study conducted by Heine, Lehman, Markus, and Kitayama (1999). These authors argue that the importance North American Culture emphasizes on feeling good as the measure of a positive self-esteem is rather narrow in scope. North Americans view of self is overly positive, in other words North Americans need to attain perfection of performance. This overly positive view results in a conflict with the North American cultural values of being independent and self-sufficient since a person often times is unable to attain or maintain perfection by him or herself. If, a person is less than good, then he or she isn’t self-sufficient or independent and is then lacking in some way. The authors contrast this mode of thinking to that of the Japanese culture which doesn’t focus on individual inadequacies as anything more than a learning opportunity for bettering oneself. It is socially acceptable to identify a person’s shortcomings, for the individual will then have the opportunity to learn and become a better member of the whole group. This in turn, provides for the individual to grow and reach better harmony with self in a supportive societal structure.
The Japanese culture encourages individuals to be self-critical and self-improving for the betterment of society as a whole (Heine et al., 1999). In other words, it is socially acceptable to be imperfect, for the person will learn and become a better member of the group in the long run. In North American culture a person is ashamed if he or she is deficient in any way. Rather than viewing this as an opportunity for learning, growth, and improvement; North American culture views this as a time for shame. This shame in turn, will have a direct impact on the ultimate outcome of a poor self-identity.

Sirin and Rogers-Sirin (2004) further build on this idea of increasing one’s knowledge base in their study which conveys the importance that confidence levels play in academic performance. They challenge that if a student learns honest coping skills and strategies for successfully negotiating through existing barriers to education success, he or she will then feel more confident and purposeful in his or her pursuits of academics. (Sirin & Rogers-Sirin, 2004).

Rather than ignoring potential problems, facing realities of life by learning appropriate coping strategies appear to empower individuals. With these tools in hand, a person may become more confident in his or her pursuits. In keeping with the study comparing Japanese and North American cultural views (Heine, Lehman, Markus, & Kitayama, 1999), it is then logical to assume that if a person is encouraged to embrace areas of his or her self that need examination and
improvement - the realities of life - then he or she will be more confident and self-assured when tackling future problems or obstacles.

*Reality versus Fantasy*

In her book, *Peoplemaking*, Satir states, “The human brain is a marvelous computer, constantly working to put things together and to make sense of them. Like a computer, the brain doesn’t know what it doesn’t know; it can only use what is already there” (Satir, 1972). How a person processes life’s events and his or her fit into the real world becomes an important piece in the self-identity picture.

There is a growing interest in how perceptions of one’s self fit into the reality of the world or the reality of a person’s life. In a study on middle-class African American adolescents (Sirin & Rogers-Sirin, 2004), it was concluded that academic performance cannot simply be explained by students being engaged in learning or in how good the students feel about themselves. Rather, a student’s perception of his or her educational future must be nurtured. With any attempt to improve academic improvement, “students need to receive guidance about their education and occupational futures that is grounded in the sociocultural, economic, and historical reality of their lives” (Sirin & Rogers-Sirin, 2004). A student must believe there is relevance in what he or she is doing academically, in order to find equilibrium between his or her purpose and meaning. This balance
will help to create stability and enable the student to make sense of the current purpose of his or her pursuits.

Branden (1995) also supports the idea of living in a reality-based way. He emphasizes that the importance of living consciously versus unconsciously is not based on degrees of intelligence but rather it is critical that a person is aware and living in conjunction with his or her environment. In his book, *The Six Pillars of Self-Esteem*, Branden states,

> To live consciously means to seek to be aware of everything that bears on our actions, purposes, values, and goals—to the best of our ability, whatever that ability may be—and to behave in accordance with that which we see and know (1995, p. 69).

He emphasizes that “living consciously means more than seeing and knowing; it means acting on what one sees and knows” (Branden, 1995, p. 69). How a person accepts his or her place in the realities of his or her environment becomes instrumental in developing a positive outlook on self-identity.

*Physical Appearance and Ability*

The concept of reality versus fantasy or living consciously may be well served when discussing body image and self-identity. In a study done by Jones (2004), she reports that there is a relationship between social comparisons and internalized appearance ideals and the impact on body dissatisfaction for adolescent boys and girls. When boys reached the ages of between 13 and 15,
they become mostly dissatisfied with internalized factors of body image, such as muscularity ideals. Girls, on the other hand, experience body image dissatisfaction throughout adolescent years. Older girls, say high school age, illustrate a greater dissatisfaction with body image because of being embedded in an appearance culture (Jones, 2004). Jones specifically identifies that girls are concerned about body mass index (BMI) measures and the role appearance plays in social circles. Both of these areas are considered to be externalized appearance values versus the internalized appearance values boys hold in regard. By judging the acceptability of her body solely on the basis of external factors, a young girl is bound to have a lower self-identity than if she put value in an area that she has control over such as muscle mass.

Jones suggests that greater attention should be given in the area of helping girls understand how appearance conversations contribute to potentially lowering acceptance of body image. These conversations turn an internalization of body image into an external source of approval and acceptance. Jones argues that “the success of interventions during adolescence may be enhanced if these characteristics of peer appearance culture are more consistently integrated into strategies for change” (Jones, 2004, p. 834). It is quite possible that by focusing on the acceptance of body image in the construct of internal control of being the best one can be, rather than on being the best of them all, will serve to improve
living consciously and ultimately improve the acceptance of body image, thus improving self-identity.

Socioeconomic, Societal Status, and Interpersonal Relationships

There also appears to be a relationship between self-identity and societal groups with which a person associates. In a study done comparing domain-specific self-esteem to intergroup discrimination, researchers discovered that there is a relationship between self-esteem and discrimination (Hunter, Cox, O'Brien, Stirnger, Boyes, Banks, 2005). Specifically, they determined that “certain forms of self-esteem can both affect and be affected by diverse (and meaningful forms of) intergroup discrimination” (Hunter et al., 2005). The groups in this study were identified as in-groups and out-groups based on the number of members of each group. To be a member of the in-group, the participant would be in the group with the largest number of members.

There was an increase in domain-specific self-identity judged to be more important to the in-group, following the display of this bias by the in-group (Hunter et al., 2005). For example, if the in-group had a bias towards mathematical ability, then a subject who succeeds in mathematical tasks would believe he or she was more in, thus he or she will exhibit a higher self-identity. The reverse also is true. If a subject wasn’t successful in a domain defined by the in-group as being valuable, the subject’s self-identity will be lower.
It appears that those factors which serve to be judged by society as being highly desirable are likely to have an affect on the corresponding domains of self-identity. This position is further supported in a study concerned with evaluating a link between domain specific self-identity and intergroup evaluation (Hunter, O'Brien, & Grocott, 1999). In this study, the “components of self relevant (and meaningful) to social category membership” (Hunter et al., 1999) are those aspects of self-identity that are vulnerable in relationship to importance of the ingroup.

Sirin and Rogers-Sirin (2004) further explore the idea that outside relationships play a factor in domain-specific self-identity in a study which explored psychological and parental factors in relation to academic performance. The results from this study indicate that strong parent-adolescent relationships are directly related to positive school outcomes (Sirin & Rogers-Sirin, 2004). In other words, if the parents have a positive, attached relationship to his or her child, the child perceives a greater sense of personal ability. The positive relationship with parents has a direct impact on a child’s self-identity or belief in his or her ability.

*Human Development*

Erikson built on Freud’s ideas and expanded the concept of human development to incorporate the necessity of “establishing equilibrium between ourselves and our social world” (Corey, 2005).
“Luckily, healing always calls for a holistic attitude that does not argue with established facts but, above all, attempts to include them in a wider context of some enlightening quality. On the basis of case-historical and life-historical experience, therefore, I can only begin with the assumption that a human being’s existence depends at every moment on three processes of organization that must complement each other. There is, in whatever order, the biological process of the hierarchic organization of organ systems constituting a body (soma); there is the psychic process organizing individual experience by ego synthesis (psyche); and there is the communal process of the cultural organization of the interdependence of persons (ethos) (Erikson & Erikson, 1998).

In Erikson’s view, personality development is based on moving forward through different crises experienced as a person lives and grows. It is the process of traversing through these crises, at each developmental stage that provides for further human growth. If a person faces a crisis at a certain developmental level and successfully negotiates through, he or she can then move on to the next developmental level self-confident and prepared to face further life crises (Erikson & Erikson, 1998).

What becomes important to define, however, is what successful means. If a person believes that although a more desirable outcome could have been achieved at the time of the crisis but he or she learned valuable lessons that will afford them
an increase in wisdom, this in turn will help them through the next life-challenge. If the person values the lessons more than the crisis itself, he or she will then pass through the crisis successfully. If, on the other hand, a person views a more desirable outcome as the only measure of success and holds the lessons in a valueless state, he or she will view this journey as a failure and his or her self-identity will be tarnished (Erikson & Erikson, 1998).

To help reinforce the idea of equilibrium between a person and his or her world, it then appears to be critical to consider human development issues and how personality can be changed and impacted throughout a life span. Erikson points out that unique human strengths emerge from the different stages of life (Erikson & Erikson, 1998). Each developmental stage Erikson identifies then becomes a step in the process of building on a person’s knowledge and experiential base. If, for whatever the reason, a person is unable to complete a successful negotiation of a specific stage, or gain the knowledge afforded by the experience, it stands to reason that his or her self-confidence level could then be shaken. These unsuccessful attempts, if recognized and processed, could be readdressed, evaluated, and this knowledge could then be realized. With this knowledge, a person would be afforded the opportunity to continue on a more self-confident path, knowing he or she is capable of successfully dealing with life crises and storing up knowledge as the journey continues.
Satir further supports this idea of a necessary life equilibrium in her theory of the construct of people (Satir & Baldwin, 1983). Satir embraced the philosophy that there are three different factors that influence human development. The first factor is the “unchangeable genetic endowments that determine an individual’s physical, intellectual, emotional, and temperamental potential” (Satir & Baldwin, 1983, p. 169). Next are the longitudinal influences which “are the result of all the learning an individual acquires” (Satir & Baldwin, 1983, p. 169). Satir believed that the sum of a person’s learning experiences over a lifetime determine his or her thoughts, feelings, and behaviors at any given point in time (Satir & Baldwin, 1983). The final factor is that of a constant interaction of body and mind. Satir argues that for a person to experience a positive well-being he or she must strive for a balance or equilibrium between “physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual” (Satir & Baldwin, 1983, p. 168) elements of his or her self-image, as each exerts a constant influence on his or her life.

Conclusion: A Holistic Self-Identity

It seems the term self-esteem is an oversimplification of an outdated concept. Historically self-esteem has been viewed as an individual part of the human body, either being healthy or injured. If it is influenced in a positive or negative way the results will be a change in how an individual feels about himself or herself. However, when the concept of self-esteem is reviewed, studied, and examined the term self-identity functions better at describing the concept of how a person views
himself or herself. Self-identity, by nature, implies the need for identifying the entire makeup of the individual. The very spirit of this term is process oriented. It suggests a journey rather than a destination or state of being.

When evaluating self-identity this author believes that the life processes or human development philosophies of Erikson and Satir must be taken into account. At every stage of development it becomes critical that a person find balance in all areas of his or her life, in other words a holistic balance. This holistic balance or equilibrium can be obtained by examination, reflection, and challenging beliefs and ideas experienced at every stage of life. To challenge these ideas or beliefs does not encourage denial of presence but rather acceptance of what is real or what is true. Challenge introduces the possible need for reframing perceived knowledge in a more developmentally appropriate, realistic way. By identifying, learning, and accepting balance between reality and beliefs, a person will create a stronger opportunity of obtaining a harmonizing equilibrium in life and growth in a healthy and thriving holistic self-identity.

As the reviewed studies suggest the components of self-identity are vast in number and fluid in nature (see Figure 1). A person is a complex, ever-changing being. He or she experiences life at different stages, with different perceptions, and reaches different conclusions. All of these factors will come into play when adapting beliefs about self-identity. A person needs to be aware of his or her place in the world and what drives the inner feelings of the values they possess.
A comparison of internal versus external factors must be made. A person must identify if more value is being placed on external feedback sources or if the person is looking within his or her own locus of control for direction on feedback of individual value. A decision must be made on the value of feedback when deciding how it reflects on self-identity.

Figure 1. A holistic model of self-identity - evaluated at every stage of human development.
Francis Bacon (1561-1626) said, “Knowledge itself is power” (Bartlett's Familiar Quotations, 2005). In the case of self-identity, the power attained from self-examination and discovery results in a person building confidence that is needed to traverse the challenges of life. Successful living implies finding a balance between what is real (truth) and what has been fantasized (the other messages learned or taught throughout life). Feeling good about one’s self-identity is a consequence which comes from the knowledge that living in the truth of the here and now and being comfortable with self-knowledge provides for the confidence needed to move forward successfully through the journey of life.

Given the nature of human development and the cognitive abilities present at each stage, it is safe to conclude a model of self-identity is fluid and multidimensional in nature. People move through life facing crises and passing on to the next stage of development. If successfully traversed and integrated, the experience becomes part of the individual’s pool of knowledge. If success is not perceived or lessons learned considered of value, then the flexibility to readdress an earlier stage will be needed. Movement between stages must allow for fluidity of motion, not chronologically but emotionally and intellectually. A person must be capable of moving back to reexamine areas where equilibrium has been missed, thus improving the fit with self and reality. Self-examination and understanding becomes the catalysts needed to find this equilibrium.
A Holistic Model of Self-Identity must provide for knowledge learned from previous levels of development to be used in such a way as to allow the individual to live life in a reality-based environment. A person must learn how to filter stories told him or her through a filter of truth; only holding on to concepts that bring congruency between beliefs and reality. The stories that don’t fit with reality must be challenged and reexamined. Then an intellectual and emotional equilibrium can be reached regarding self-identity and how he or she fits into the world.

Gender roles and gender assignments also are significant factors in a person’s knowledge base and fit into the world. Different genders have different physical abilities and values placed on them. This area also couples with intellect and emotionality in needing to fit into what is real. If a person believes his or her abilities are above what they actually are, a comfortable fit with reality will not exist. If on the other hand, a person can accept shortcomings not as failure but rather as an illustration of opportunities for growth, the person will be living honestly and in harmony with the reality of the world. Abilities and perceptions must be examined and evaluated honestly before equilibrium with reality can be established.

Spirituality, values, and culture also play vital roles in establishing equilibrium of self-identity in relationship to reality. Fundamentally, every person journeys to fill the mystery of the meaning-of-life. Each person needs to be of value and
understand how he or she fits into the world as a valued member of society. This understanding of value must be in agreement with reality. Knowledge of value is obtained through life’s journey by learning about family, heritage, personal history, beliefs, and how all of these fit into the world and fit with the beliefs held about self’s place in the world. Peace of mind can be established when peace of meaning is obtained.

Fundamentally, holistic self-identity is the examination of all components of self at every stage of life. With each passing stage, a person must be willing and able to process knowledge gained and determine if equilibrium exists with self-identity and the truth. If a problem with this balance is experienced, then pieces must be reexamined, not ignored. Incongruity with reality results in a person feeling unsettled in his or her self-identity. This state will result in a person feeling less than, not valuing him or herself, creating a void in his or her self-identity until equilibrium can once again be established.

If self-examination is ongoing and honest, a person can then hope to reach a peaceful equilibrium with his or her world, at every stage of his or her life. The result will be feelings of self-knowledge and understanding with a positive self-identity which will encompass all areas of life. A true, reality based, holistic self-identity can then be experienced.
References


Yahoo Education. (December, 2005). Bartlett's Familiar Quotations [Data File].

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