

Self-concept in adolescent depression

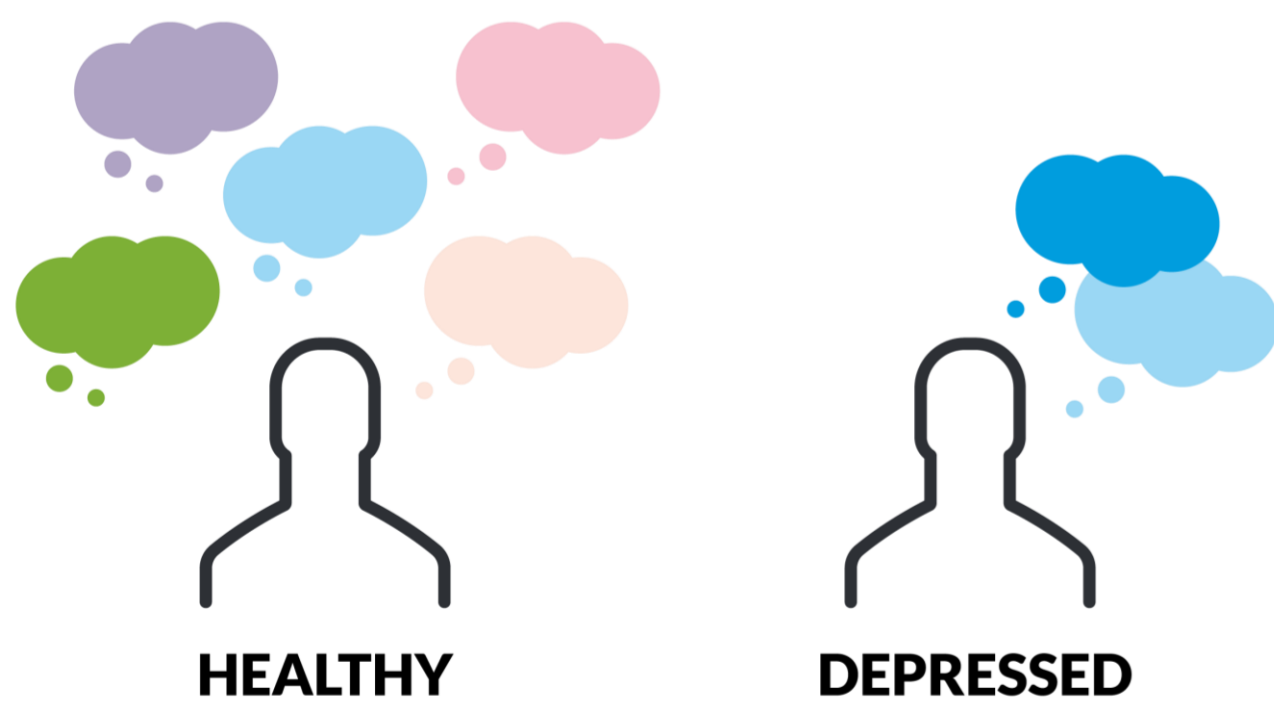
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Introduction



Self-concept, is a general construct; made up of perceptions which an individual has about themselves, which defines who an individual is¹. Recent research has identified a negative self-concept as a significant feature of adolescent depression², however, the influence of mood upon the specific content of an adolescent self-concept is unknown.

An important characteristic of self-concept is that it can have different elements or 'facets' e.g. physical, social, relationships³ and individuals can have variable numbers of facets⁴. Individuals with low mood tend to have both poorly defined and fewer facets compared to individuals with higher mood ratings. However this has not been examined in adolescents.



To better understand adolescent depression, it is critical to understand the content and structure of self-concept as this may have a central role in the emergence of depression during adolescence; it may account for both the rise in the prevalence of depression during this life stage (as the self-concept emerges) and the heightened risk of relapse when depression emerges in the adolescent years

Methods

Participants

Adolescents (13-18 years) were recruited from a secondary school in Corby (N = 207). 62% identified as female, 38% as male. The majority of participants identified as White British (79%).

Measures

- Self-reported depression symptoms:** Mood and Feelings Questionnaire (MFQ)⁵. Scores were used to identify community groups as 'low' (MFQ score below 12), 'moderate' (MFQ score between 12-27) and 'high' (MFQ score of 27 and above) symptoms of depression.
- Self-concept:** Twenty Statements Test (TST)⁶. Participants asked to generate as many statements as possible by responding to the question "I am..."

Data coding

To assess facets of self-concept, a novel coding scheme was devised examining the content of statements (Figure 1). This was informed by 4 sub-sets of data (consisting of 150 statements successively). Similar themed statements were grouped together by two independent researchers. Differences of code and definitions of each facet was discussed.

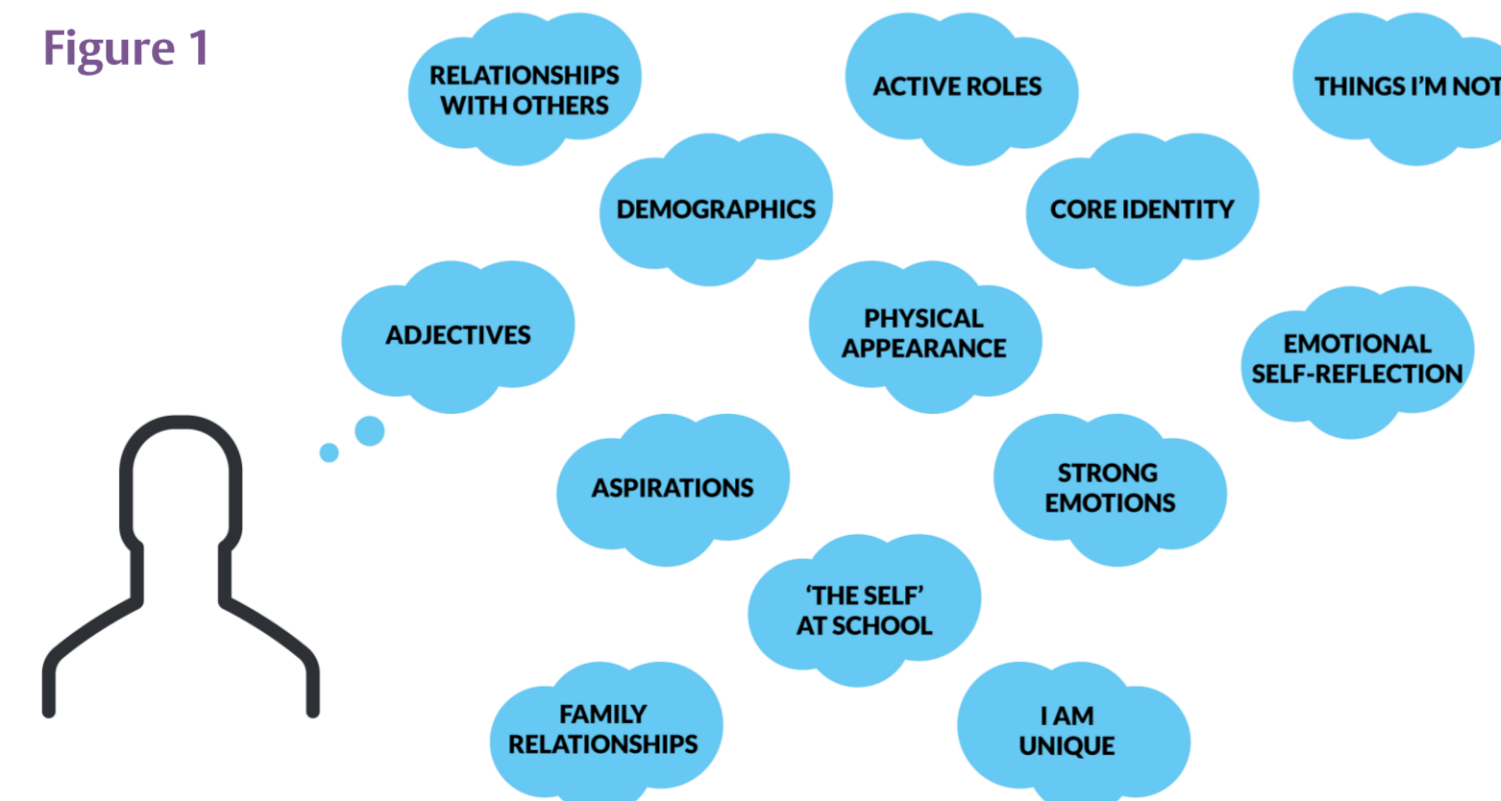


Figure 1. Coding scheme

Reliability

- Reliability**
- Two independent researchers coded a random sub-set of 250 statements, as expected there was strong agreement (89.8% agreement, $k = 0.864$).
 - Two Independent judges blind to the hypothesis also coded statements. Agreement was excellent; (90.8%, $k = .886$ 92.7% $k = .911$ respectively.)

Results

Number of statements generated by TST.

A total of 2076 statements were collected (M = 10.03, SD = 5.18). Descriptive statistics are shown in Table 1

Table 1

Mean number of statements given by gender, age and depression symptoms

| | | N | Mean |
|---------------------|----------|-----|-------|
| Gender | Female | 127 | 10.72 |
| | Male | 80 | 8.93 |
| Age | 13 | 39 | 9.95 |
| | 14 | 47 | 12.36 |
| | 15 | 45 | 10.24 |
| | 16 | 31 | 8.61 |
| | 17 | 36 | 9.03 |
| Depression Symptoms | Low | 119 | 9.51 |
| | Moderate | 42 | 11.00 |
| | Elevated | 46 | 10.48 |

- Females gave significantly more statements than males.
- 14 year olds gave significantly more statements than 16, 17 and 18 year olds.
- 15 year olds gave significantly more statements than 18 year olds
- There was no significant correlation between number of statements and depression symptoms ($r = .200, p = .125$).

Facet content

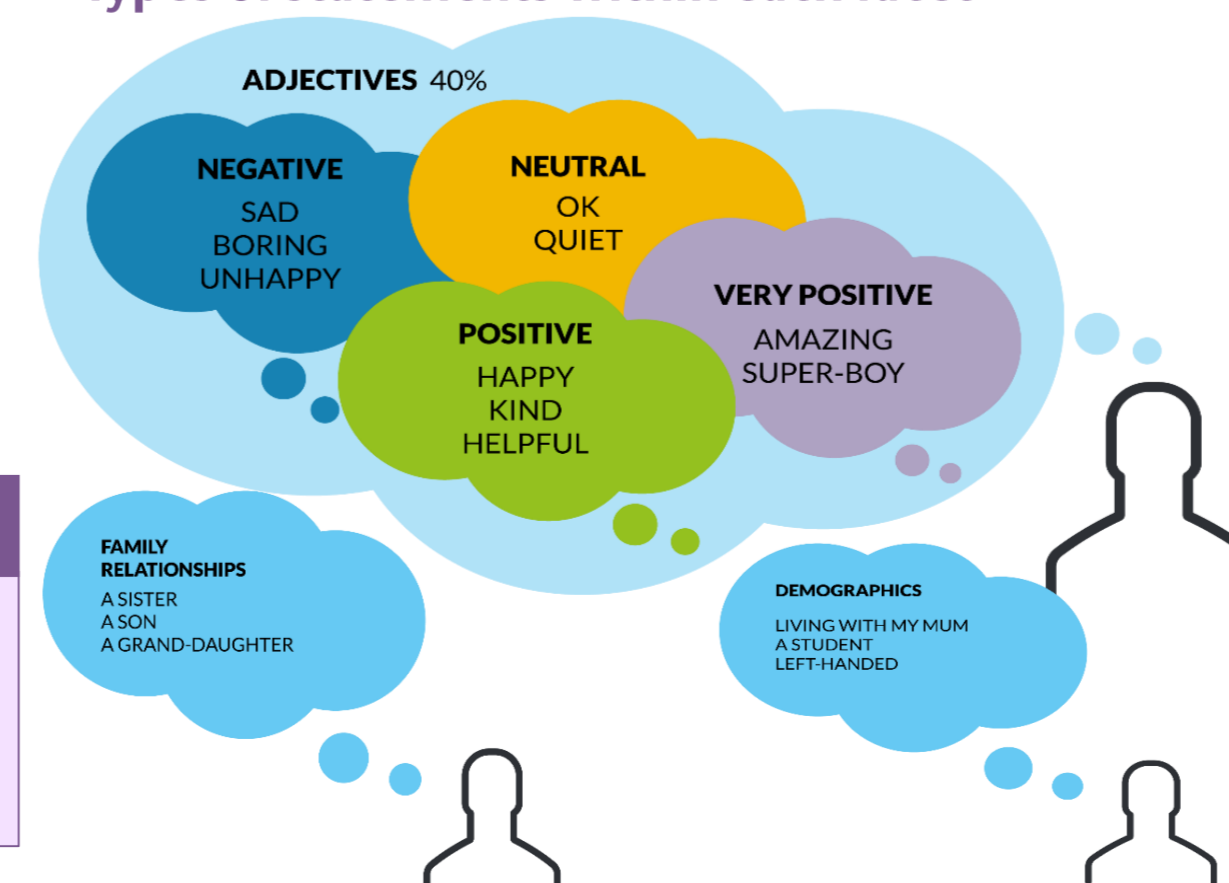
Three major facets of self-concept were overwhelmingly the most dominant across gender and age and depression severity as shown in Table 2.

Table 2

Percentage of statements in each major facet of self-concept.

| Facets | Gender | | Age | | Depression Symptoms | | |
|----------------------|--------|--------|-------|-------|---------------------|----------|----------|
| | Male | Female | 13-15 | 16-18 | Low | Moderate | Elevated |
| Adjectives | 43% | 41% | 41% | 42% | 44% | 41% | 35% |
| Family relationships | 15% | 16% | 14% | 19% | 16% | 14% | 16% |
| Demographics | 17% | 14% | 15% | 15% | 16% | 14% | 14% |

Types of statements within each facet



Adjectives: Sub-categories

Statements within the adjective facet were further divided into sub-categories as shown in Table 3.

Table 3

Percentage of statements in sub-categories

| Sub-Categories | Depression Symptoms | | |
|----------------|---------------------|----------|----------|
| | Low | Moderate | Elevated |
| Very Positive | 3% | 3% | 3% |
| Positive | 73% | 60% | 46% |
| Neutral | 14% | 12% | 11% |
| Negative | 10% | 25% | 40% |

Frequency of facets and depression symptoms

Number of facets was not significantly correlated with depression symptoms ($r = .117, p = .093$)

Discussion

This research proposes a novel measure of adolescent self-concept, and suggests facets remain consistent and stable across adolescence regardless of depression severity. Additionally, multiple facets of self-concept do not seem to offer a psychological buffer in relation to psychological well-being, contrary to the hypothesis and theory⁴.

Our future PhD research will validate this coding scheme within a different demographic and also control for preservation of facets which may account for the lack of relationships between the number of facets and depression symptoms.

Reflection Space

Please take a post-it and add your comments or observations here.

Research Aims

- To examine facets of self-concept in adolescents and to assess the influence of low mood.
- To examine the effect of mood upon the associations between number of facets of self-concept and depression symptoms

References

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