An evaluation of self-acceptance in adults

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Abstract

Contemporary research on individual differences in unconditional self-acceptance indicates that low unconditional self-acceptance is detrimental to well-being and, in some cases, could lead to mental health issues and mental disorders. Within this study a sample of adults (N=62; M=39.67) was investigated in order to observe the level of their unconditional self-acceptance and the relation between: self-acceptance and gender; self-acceptance and study level. The correlation with age was also discussed. Correlation between obtained scores and the probability of the occurrence of some disorders was discussed. Social implications also were highlighted for the studied sample.

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1. Introduction

The term "self esteem" was first used in 1890 by William James in his Principles of Psychology, where he suggested that the self-esteem is of two kinds: self-satisfaction and dissatisfaction. As a logical relation, the self-esteem arises from the self-evaluation, a good level of self-esteem being related to self-acceptance.

The “looking-glass self” theory assumes that self-esteem is not just a personal assessment, but also anticipates the others assessments about an individual. One’s “self” grows out of society's interpersonal interactions and the perceptions of others. People shape themselves based on other people's perception, this conducting the people to reinforce other people's perspectives on themselves (Cooley, 1902). In this regard the self-esteem acts like a social measurement, as a leveled perception that one has about his social acceptance and valorization: one can be satisfied because he feels valued, conversely, one’s self esteem decrease when he don’t feel socially valued.

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Albert Ellis and Carl Rogers indicated that self-worth conditioning is related to psychological distress, but unconditional self-acceptance promotes the personal adjustment and well-being (according to Flett et al., 2003). Moreover, there are studies suggesting that people with a very high self-esteem are vulnerable individuals because commonly they are characterized by conditional self-acceptance, which implies an excessive focus on evaluation and comparisons with other people. These individuals are characterized also by perfectionism, as a requirement made to themselves by their cognitions. Evidence from other studies suggests that perfectionism has consistently been associated with maladaptive cognition and vulnerability to the experience of failure in achievement contexts (Hall et al., 2009).

Trying to explain this paradox (both high and low self-esteem are dysfunctional), Ellis (1962, 1994) suggests that the presence of any level of self-esteem reflects an overall assessment process of oneself, which is irrational and thus maladaptive. Irrationality overall assessment process is unable to determine a realistic value of a human being.

Different authors suggest that there are individual differences regarding the level to which a person anticipates that interpersonal acceptance is conditional or unconditional. The degree to one’s social environment is characterized by highly conditional acceptance represents an important indicator to self-esteem problems and mental health issues (e.g., anxiety, depression, low acceptance feeling and believes) (Baldwin & Sinclair, 1996). Studies were conducted also on the relation between irrational thoughts/attitudes and physical education activities (Lupu, 2011).

Contemporary research on individual differences in unconditional self-acceptance indicates that low unconditional self-acceptance is detrimental to well-being and, in some cases, could lead to some mental disorders. There are also differences in terms of age suggesting that, for instance, for the high school students the perceived well-being/mental health is predicted by the level of attachment with colleagues, professors, homework overload and extra activities overload (Chraif & Anitei, 2012).

2. Research Methodology

2.1. Purpose of the research

Within this study a sample of 62 adults was investigated in order to determine the level of their unconditional self-acceptance and the relation between: self-acceptance and gender; self-acceptance and study level. The correlation with age was also observed.

2.2. Instruments

Unconditional Self-Acceptance Questionnaire (USAQ) was used together with basic info questionnaire referring to subjects’ personal details: age, gender, study level. The variation of self-acceptance for the studied sample is represented and discussed.

The USAQ is a scale starting from the individual self-esteem – a major component of cognitive schema related to the “self” concept. A high score on USAQ indicates a high self-acceptance.

2.3. Participants

The USAQ has been applied on 62 participants, 30 men and 32 women, aged between 23 and 67 years old (M = 39.67; SD = 8.77). Out of 62 subjects, 24 graduated high school and 38 graduated universities.
2.4. Procedure

The instrument was administered by instructed operators, to groups of subjects, according to instructions. The subjects were told about the purpose of the research, and that the information they will provide will be secured and they are free to participate into the research.

3. Results

Statistical analysis has been conducted in Excel and SPSS. The paper presents only partial results (for the USAQ).

3.1. Findings

An interesting similarity was found between the two genders. Using Excel worksheet, the analysis was conducted by statistical functions and graphs. Two different variables were used, one at a time: gender and study level (school). The subjects obtained scores between 43 and 107 (males: 43 – 107; females 48 - 105) – Fig. 1 and 2. The medium scores both by sample and by genders were over 80 (84.34 in women and 80.36 in men).

Out of 32 women, 13 obtained scores which reflects a low and very low unconditional self-acceptance, while out of 30 men, 12 obtained scores reflecting a low and very low unconditional self-acceptance.

![Fig. 1. Unconditional self-acceptance in women](image1)

![Fig. 2. Unconditional self-acceptance in men](image2)
Making a correlation between the study level and USAQ for the studied sample, the results indicated that there are some consistent differences in men, between those who graduated high-school and those who graduated universities (Fig. 3).

Fig. 3. Unconditional self-acceptance variation with the study level in women

Fig. 4. Unconditional self-acceptance variation with the study level in men
4. Conclusions

The medium score for the entire sample indicates a low unconditioned self-acceptance. By genders, the scores are in the same area, indicating for most of the subjects a low unconditional self-acceptance. For further studies we suggest an analysis between USAQ scores and the probability of the occurrence of some disorders.

An interesting result indicates for the studied sample that men who graduated university studies are more inclined to be self-critical than those who graduated from high-school. For the women the results indicate the same dynamics.

References


