

Stress and Identity: Influential Factors to the Self-Concept

Within society, individuals have specific identities that are important to who they are as individuals. How an individual views themselves is largely important to their self-concept. A self-concept is an individual's understanding about themselves, including the roles they take and the characteristics they have. Identities are largely dependent on the social environments and contexts in which they occur and can be influenced based on relationships with others (Burke, 1991; Thoits, 1991; Tuthill, 2023). Stress is typically viewed as a temporary psychological state that results from some external event that results in a state of worry. Stress and identity are two concepts that are largely connected and impact one another. Stress can influence the self-concept based on the combination of identities and incongruence over identities.

Salience, as it relates to identities, means the importance of one identity over another. When considering multiple identities, an individual may have one identity that is more important to themselves. Stress can accrue as individuals struggle to determine the more salient identity and the identity that most reflects their self-concept. The unique combination of different identities can result in differential exposure to stressors (Tuthill, 2023). However, all identities are still important to the individual as they accept and deal with these stressors. While having two unique stressors adding to individual stress, may sound more challenging, the combination can be helpful in dealing with these stressors (Meyer, 2010). Another way salient identities relate to stress is the appraisals to stressors. A more important identity that is causing more stressors will lose its importance to the individual (Kiecolt, 1994). As an identity faces more stress, it will lose its place within the individual's self-concept. Resilience relates to the coping

mechanisms an individual has in place to deal with stressors and re-instate identities (Meyer, 2010). Mastery is slightly similar in meaning how an individual feels they have control over identities (Burke, 1991). Building these skills is helpful in all areas of identity to build and maintain the important identities that overall contribute to an individual's self-concept.

Another factor that affects an individual's self-concept is incongruence in opinions over their identities. This means that an individual may view themselves as being in a particular role or having a particular identity, but their behavior does not show, or others do not view them in that identity. This incongruence in identity and action creates a state of stress in an individual. Burke (1991) found an individual will try to change their behavior to match how they view themselves to relieve them of this stress. Going further, when an individual is denied entrance into a social group based on an identity, they hold salient, stress increases (Albuja et al., 2019). By this, Albuja et al. (2019) means that if other individuals do not believe someone to be in a group, this will cause stress to that individual. To deal with the stress being caused by this incongruence, individuals will attempt to change their behavior. Changing roles, which in turn changes identities is a way individuals work to relieve the stress they face (Kiecolt, 1994). While other's views of our identities relate to how we understand them, Thoits (1991) believed the subjective meanings associated behind identities were important in understanding how they relate to an individual. Rather than making assumptions from viewing from the outside world, it is helpful to understand what meaning could be associated with a given identity for that individual.

In conclusion, stress can affect an individual's identity in several ways. Having multiple important identities and dealing with differences in opinions over identities are just some of these factors. How individuals manage stress and these difference assumptions about identity can be helpful to maintaining the self-concept they have come to believe. Understanding these factors and the implications they may have on our view of ourselves can be beneficial in helping us create and maintain our identity.

References

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