A Review of Factors Related to Self-Concept Clarity

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Keywords: Self-concept clarity, Literature review, Depression, Self-esteem, Social comparison, Psychological health

Abstract: This study is a review of factors related to self-concept clarity. After reviewing empirical studies, four highly recognized correlations are found: Self-concept clarity positively predicts self-esteem, Social comparison negatively predicts self-concept clarity, Negative emotions are negatively correlated with self-concept clarity, and Depression was negatively correlated with self-concept clarity. In addition, some correlations proved by empirical studies but not highly cited are also sorted out in the seventh part of this paper.

1. Introduction

Since Campbell (1996) first proposed self-concept clarity(SCC), there has been a certain amount of research on SCC in China. In order to find the universally verified correlation among numerous researches, a literature review is written to summarize SCC. Jiang Yu (2014) believes that the two basic features of self-concept are content and structure. Early researches on self-concept were mainly about content. James(1890) was the first to study self-concept. In his opinion, the self which consists of material self, social self, spiritual self and pure self has a hierarchical structure. It is based on the physical self. The social self is higher than the material self, and the spiritual self is at the highest level. Subsequently, with the efforts of many scholars, two theoretical models of self-concept were discovered: the one-dimensional model of Rosenberg (1979) and the multidimensional and multi-level model of Shabvekson (1976). There are mainly five types of self-concept structure: self-complexity, self-concept differentiation, self-concept differentiation, self-disharmony and SCC. Among them, the SCC proposed by Campbell(1996) has gradually become an important explanation of the self-concept structure. Different from the other four, SCC emphasizes the internal consistency of self-concept, which is essentially a holistic consideration.

SCC (Campbell, 1996) refers to the extent to which self-beliefs are clearly and confidently defined, internally consistent and stable. Campbell (1996) designed a 12-item scale that showed good reliability with an internal consistency coefficient of 0.85-0.86, a reliability coefficient of 0.70 and a retest reliability coefficient of 0.79. This scale has good reliability and validity in Chinese adolescents (Liu Qingqi et al., 2017; Niu Gengfeng et al., 2016). Related factors of SCC will be discussed in the following sections.

2. Scc Positively Predicts Self-Esteem

Self-concept clarity can positively predict self-esteem. More documents also support the claim.

The first empirical research that explored the correlation between SCC and self-esteem was from Campbell (1996). The research recruited college students in introductory psychology classes and took a total of 1544 samples in the three experiments to find the relationship between SCC and self-esteem. Every participant was asked to complete a series of personality tests. It is concluded that SCC is positively correlated with self-esteem.

Later, more people joined the research on the relationship between the two. Guo Zhigang (2019) conducted a questionnaire survey on 129 college students in order to explore the mediating role of SCC on the impact of explicit self-esteem on mental health. It was found that SCC was positively correlated with explicit self-esteem.

Not only Guo but, Lee-Flynn also found a similar result. Lee-Flynn(2011) investigated how self-

esteem and SCC are implicated in the stress process both in the short and long term. 178 participants from stepfamily unions completed 2-year follow-up interviews. Results showed a buffering effect that SCC had on depressive symptoms with low self-esteem.

A Chinese scholar Xu Hailing (2007) investigated the relationship between SCC, self-esteem, and psychological adjustment. Two questionnaires are used: the clarity questionnaire by Campbell et al. (1996) and the self-esteem scale compiled by Rosenberg. One hundred and twenty students from a university completed questionnaires. The results showed that a significant positive correlation between self-esteem and SCC exists.

Similarly, Liang Ningjian et al., (2009) explored the relationship between explicit self-esteem, implicit self-esteem, SCC, and depression among college students. One hundred and ninety-one students from a university were selected. The individual implicit self-esteem is measured by the self-esteem scale compiled by Rosenberg with INQUISIT software. Two scales are being used: the SCC scale by Campbell et al. (1996), and the self-revised scale which is used to assess depressive symptoms. It is concluded that explicit self-esteem is positively correlated with SCC, and implicit self-esteem moderates the relationship between explicit self-esteem and SCC.

3. Social Comparison Negatively Predicts Scc

As for social comparison, some researchers prefer the narrower definition, upward social comparison, while others prefer social comparison. The study will introduce two of them separately.

3.1 Upward Social Comparison is Negatively Correlated with Scc

Upward social comparison negatively predicts SCC.

Niu Gengfeng (2016) explored the influence of adolescents' use of social networking sites and social comparison on SCC and its mechanism. 697 middle school students were asked to complete three questionnaires: the Scale for Social Networking Site Use Intensity, the Iowa, Netherlands Comparison Orientation Measure, and the SCC Scale. Results showed that the social comparison tendency is significantly negatively correlated with SCC, which has a correlation coefficient of -0.29(p<0.01).

Liu Qingqi et al. (2017) aimed to examine the mediating roles of upward social comparison in the effects of passive use of social network sites on self-esteem and SCC. A sample of 1208 undergraduate students was recruited for the study to complete self-report questionnaires measuring their passive use of social network sites, upward social comparison on social network sites, self-esteem, SCC, and optimism. The results showed that passive use of social network sites could negatively predict SCC through upward social comparison.

To explore the effects of passive use of social network sites on loneliness and its mechanism of action, Xia Zhang, Jiayi Lin and Jijia Zhang (2020) recruited 538 undergraduate students. They completed the SCC scale (Campbell et al.,1996; revised by Niu Gengfeng et al., 2016), Passive SNS use Scale, Ascending Social Comparison Scale, and loneliness Scale. Correlation analysis showed that upward social comparison was negatively correlated with SCC. The indirect effects of passive SNS use → upward social comparison → SCC → loneliness were significant.

3.2 Social Comparison is Negatively Correlated with Scc

Su Yuanyuan(2020)explored the relationships among college students' social comparison tendency, SCC, relational self-construct, and social withdrawal. Four scales of "social comparison, SCC, relational self-construct, and Nelson Chinese Version of the Social Withdrawal Scale were used in the study. The results of correlation analysis showed that social comparison significantly negatively predicted SCC.

To explore the correlation among social comparison orientation, passive social network use behavior, SCC, and subjective well-being. Wang Shuxin(2020) distributed a paper version questionnaire and online questionnaire to 524 young and middle-aged people who are mainstream users of social networks. The questionnaire is surveillance operation scale, Iowa - Dutch society

tends to scale, SCC scale, and subjective well-being scale. The results show that social comparison orientation has a significant negative correlation with SCC.

Butzer and Kuiper(2006) recruited 166 undergraduates who passed measures for each construct to find the importance of SCC, intolerance of uncertainty, anxiety, and depression in motivating social comparison. The result indicated that higher SCC was related to a lower frequency of general and upward social comparisons.

Vartanian and Dey (2013) examined the associations among SCC and appearance-related social comparison tendencies. They recruited 278 undergraduate female students who completed the SCC Scale, Sociocultural Attitudes Toward Appearance Questionnaire-3, Upward and Downward Appearance Comparison Scale, and Body Dissatisfaction subscale of the Eating Disorder Inventory. The researcher found that SCC was negatively associated with appearance-related social comparison tendencies.

4. Scc and Psychological Health

Three of the study support the conclusion of Campbell (1996), which can prove that negative emotions negative predict self-concept clarity.

The first research that explored the correlation between SCC and negative emotions was Campbell(1996) who used The Positive and Negative Affect Schedule (PANAS; Watson, Clark, & Tellegen, 1988) to test the correlation between SCC and schedules. The final results showed that the correlation between clarity and NA (negative affectivity) was substantially negative. And the correlation between clarity and PA(positive affectivity) was substantially positive.

Similarly, Jiang Yu (2014) attempted to explore the relationship between SCC, self-esteem, and mental toughness in the context of Chinese culture from the perspective of individual subjectivity. Forty items of the SCC scale by Campbell(1996) were used as the original scale, and convenient sampling was adopted. In April 2013, a total of 561 students from a high school and two universities in Taiyuan city, Shanxi Province participated in the relevant assessment. It was found that there was a significant positive correlation between SCC and mental toughness, suggesting that SCC is a protective factor of mental toughness in coping with life events such as stress and adversity.

Wang Shuxin(2020) aimed to find the relationship between social comparison orientation and SCC. Paper-based and online questionnaires were used on 524 young and middle-aged people who are mainstream users of social networks. Four questionnaires were used: Surveillance operation scale, Iowa - Dutch society tends to scale, SCC scale, and subjective well-being scale. The results show that there is a significant positive correlation between self-concept and positive emotions and a significant negative correlation between self-concept and negative emotions.

Zhu Dan(2014) intends to explore the influence of SCC on mental health by investigating the relationship between SCC and mental health. Four hundred and four undergraduates and postgraduates from Nanjing Normal University, Southeast University, and Nanjing University were selected using convenient sampling. Three questionnaires were used: the self-clarity questionnaire, the defense style questionnaire, and the symptom self-rating scale. As for the symptom self-rating scale, only five negative dimensions that are closely related to self-esteem and SCC were selected. The results showed that SCC was negatively correlated with depression, interpersonal sensitivity, anxiety, hostility, and paranoia.

5. Scc and Depression

All the studies here support the correlation that Campbell(1996) verified. Hence, depression negatively predicts self-concept clarity.

The origin of the investigation of the correlation between depression and SCC came from Campbell(1996) who used the Baker Depression Scale (BDI) to explore the relationship between SCC and depression. The final data showed a negative correlation between SCC and BDI scale (average r=-.49), which proved the hypothesis.

In order to explore the relationship between passive SNS use and SCC and depression, Yang Xiujuan, Zhang Chenyan, Zhou Zongkui and Fan Cuiying(2017) recruited 1205 college students that completed passive SNS use Scale, SCC Scale, and Depression Scale. The results showed that the correlation coefficient between SCC and depression was -0.36, indicating a negative correlation between SCC and depression.

Another research by Ding Qian, Zhang Yongxin, Zhang Chenyan, Du Hongqin and Zhou Zongkui (2016) presented a similar conclusion. This research aimed at exploring the correlation between adolescents' use of social networking sites, social comparison, SCC, and depression. Seven hundred middle school students completed the social network use intensity questionnaire, Social Comparison Tendency Scale, SCC scale, and flow center depression Scale. Correlation analysis showed that SCC negatively predicted adolescent depression.

Xiang Guangcan, Chen Hong, Wang Yanli and Li Qingqing (2021) concluded a similar result in their research that faces the participants from Hubei, Hebei, Zhejiang, Jiangxi, Chongqing, and Sichuan provinces, a total of 2,792 adolescents. Three scales (The SCC Scale, the life satisfaction Scale, and the positive and negative emotions Scale) were used to explore the different development modes of SCC of adolescents and compare the differences in subjective well-being of different types of adolescents. It found that the higher the development level of SCC is, the stronger the subjective well-being experience is. According to the self-theory of happiness, symptoms of anxiety and depression are likely to occur when the ideal self and the real self are inconsistent. Thus it will reduce subjective well-being (cited in Xiang Guangcan, Chen Hong, Wang Yanli & Li Qingqing, 2021). Therefore, the positive correlation of subjective well-being also reflects the negative correlation of anxiety and depressive symptoms to a certain extent.

Erica B. Slotter & Courtney M. Walsh(2017) got the same conclusion in their researches. To explore the relationship between positive emotions and SCC, 75 undergraduate heterosexual dating couples, one hundred and forty-nine adults (88 women) from the US participated, eighty-nine writing samples got involved. "The researcher concluded that among individuals who experienced low levels of positive emotions after a role transition, greater self-change predicted reduced self-concept clarity. Among individuals who experienced higher levels of positive emotionality, this association did not emerge. " (Erica B. Slotter & Courtney M. Walsh, 2017)

6. Conclusions

We have presented evidence that SCC positively predicts self-esteem. And social comparison negatively predicts self-concept clarity. Also, negative emotions negatively predict self-concept clarity. Depression is negatively predicted with self-concept clarity.

7. Deficiency and Prospect

This paper innovatively starts from the factors related to self-concept clarity, tries to classify and integrate the factors, and summarizes the potential classification of the factors related to self-concept clarity.

Due to the limit of time, this study still has some deficiencies. The first is that the number of papers searched is less, the paper-reading is more inclined to Chinese literature and less foreign literature search. The other is that there is no precise understanding of some concepts involved in the research. There is only a simple correlation without a further conceived mechanism.

Self-concept clarity of research are thriving, Campbell, in 1996 the first designed to verify the relationship between self-concept clarity study began, then more researchers engaged in this field, this new concept in nearly 20 years of hone is firmly established. It has become a more accurate way of understanding oneself. Here are my suggestions on the application of self-concept clarity.

The correlation between self-concept clarity and mental health and other factors is relatively easy to obtain. But it is more recommend to find the actual mechanism behind the correlation and formulate more detailed measures. Firstly, in many studies, the influence of some factors on self-concept clarity is the result of a psychological process. Therefore, the focus of practice should not

be on the adjustment of self-concept clarity, but on the cause of it. There is no such concern for experiments where partial self-concept clarity is a dependent variable. There are many factors that can positively or negatively affect the clarity of self-concept, and the author also felt this in the process of literature review. Therefore, there is an urgent need to distinguish the true mechanism. Secondly, after the direct causes and mechanisms are found, self is a highly personalized concept, and the corresponding psychological intervention is not only theoretical, but also expected to fall into some practical behaviors. For example, a male high school student is addicted to online novels, resulting in low self-concept clarity. After a change in his home, he began to indulge in online novels. He has his own requirements in mind, but because he often fails to meet them, he paralyzes himself by reading novels. He often feels that he has no way out in the future and starts to lag behind in his study. The high school student's self-concept is not clear, which can be regarded as having a low self-concept clarity. At present, a certain amount of research has proved that online novel reading can negatively predict self-concept clarity. When it came to the psychological counseling, the counselor's suggestions should not be theoretical, for example, tell him the reason for his future is not clear. The counselor should give more detailed advice, like lowering his expectations for a while and trying to do something simple, like catch up on a missed class or two. When suggestions to improve self-concept clarity are precise enough, it will be helpful enough for people who needs help. Generic and abstract suggestions can only improve part of the problem in general.

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