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International Conference is the 12th international interdisciplinary peer reviewed conference which publishes works of the scientists as well as practitioners in the area where UBT is active in Education, Research and Development. The UBT aims to implement an integrated strategy to establish itself as an internationally competitive, research-intensive institution, committed to the transfer of knowledge and the provision of a world-class education to the most talented students from all backgrounds. It is delivering different courses in science, management and technology. This year we celebrate the 21th Years Anniversary. The main perspective of the conference is to connect scientists and practitioners from different disciplines in the same place and make them be aware of the recent advancements in different research fields, and provide them with a unique forum to share their experiences. It is also the place to support the new academic staff for doing research and publish their work in international standard level. This conference consists of sub conferences in different fields: - Management, Business and Economics - Humanities and Social Sciences (Law, Political Sciences, Media and Communications) - Computer Science and Information Systems - Mechatronics, Robotics, Energy and Systems Engineering - Architecture, Integrated Design, Spatial Planning, Civil Engineering and Infrastructure - Life Sciences and Technologies (Medicine, Nursing, Pharmaceutical Sciences, Phycology, Dentistry, and Food Science),- Art Disciplines (Integrated Design, Music, Fashion, and Art). This conference is the major scientific event of the UBT. It is organizing annually and always in cooperation with the partner universities from the region and Europe. In this case as partner universities are: University of Tirana – Faculty of Economics, University of Korca. As professional partners in this conference are: Kosova Association for Control, Automation and Systems Engineering (KA – CASE), Kosova Association for Modeling and Simulation (KA – SIM), Quality Kosova, Kosova Association for Management. This conference is sponsored by EUROSIM - The European Association of Simulation. We have to thank all Authors, partners, sponsors and also the conference organizing team making this event a real international scientific event. This year we have more application, participants and publication than last year.

Congratulation!

Edmond

Hajrizi, Rector of UBT and Chair of IC – BTI 2023

Content

6

The Impact of social media on psychological well-being and social comparison on nursing students in UBT

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Social networking sites are now essential in daily life. In the ever-evolving landscape of communication, social media has emerged as a dominant force that shapes how nursing students connect, share, and perceive ourselves and others. While these platforms offer unprecedented opportunities for virtual interaction, they also raise important questions about their influence on nursing students' psychological well-being and the phenomenon of social comparison. The aim of this study is to gain a contemporary understanding of the impact of social media on students' psychological well-being, focusing on aspects such as stress, anxiety and depression, and the phenomenon of social comparison.

Methodology: Cross-sectional survey was carried out on a sample of 128 nursing students at University for Business and Technology (UBT). Participants were recruited using a convenience sampling technique in which questionnaires were sent through a link to the targeted population. The questionnaire included information on demographics, social media use, social comparison, and a section on standard tools for Depression, Anxiety, and Stress (DASS-21), and the Iowa-Netherlands Comparison Orientation Measure (INCOM) to measure social comparison orientation. The data were analyzed by using SPSS.

Results: On this research participated 128 respondents of the online survey, 49 (38.3%) were male and 79 (61.7%) were female. The mean age was 19.8 years. Most of students were in the second year of studies 74 (57.8%). The respondents several times a day 113 (88.3%) check social media and, most of the respondents spent more than 180 minutes per day at social media. WhatsApp and Instagram were the two platforms that all participants reported to have access on them, 126 (98.4%) of respondents reported that are using Snapchat, and 125 (97.6%) of them reported to have TikTok. Level of anxiety is 15.78 which indicates "extremely severe", depression is 12.77 which indicates "severe", and the mean value of stress is 14.25 which indicates "severe", too. Psychological well-being had a negative relationship between social comparison, and social media platforms.

Conclusion: Uses of social media is widespread among nursing students and negatively affects their mental health and social comparison.

Keywords: social comparison, psychological well-being, social media, nursing, students.

The Impact of social media on Psychological Well-Being and Social Comparison on nursing students in UBT

In today's digitally connected world, social media platforms have emerged as significant tools that shape how nursing students communicate, share experiences, and perceive themselves and others. While these platforms provide avenues for virtual interaction, they also raise crucial questions about their impact on nursing students' psychological well-being and their propensity for social comparison. This exploration delves into the complex interplay between social media use, psychological well-being, and the phenomenon of social comparison among nursing students, aiming to uncover the intricacies of their digital experiences.

Nursing students find social media platforms deeply ingrained in their daily routines, providing them with the ability to instantly connect, communicate, and share moments. These platforms offer a diverse range of advantages, including facilitating academic collaboration, creating networking opportunities, and fostering community engagement. On one hand, they cultivate a sense of belonging and connection, especially valuable to students who are far from home or grappling with academic pressures. Nevertheless, the omnipresence of social media has ushered in distinct challenges to the psychological well-being of nursing students. These platforms have experienced an exponential surge in users worldwide, engaging in a myriad of online interactions on a daily basis (Kemp, 2021). While they offer unparalleled connectivity, they also

introduce novel challenges to our psychological equilibrium. Scholars have delved into the consequences of prolonged social media use on mental health, underscoring concerns such as an elevated risk of depression, anxiety, and feelings of loneliness (Primack et al., 2017; Kross et al., 2013). The allure of perpetual connectivity has the potential to blur the boundaries between personal and digital lives, which may contribute to feelings of isolation despite the illusion of social engagement (Kross et al., 2013).

A cornerstone of social media's impact on nursing students is the concept of social comparison. Festinger's social comparison theory posits that individuals evaluate their own abilities, traits, and overall well-being by comparing themselves to others (Festinger, 1954). Students often find themselves engaging in upward social comparison, comparing their achievements, appearance, and lifestyles to those of their peers. In the realm of social media, this phenomenon takes on new dimensions, as users are exposed not only to their immediate peers but also to a global network of individuals selectively presenting curated versions of their lives. The tendency to engage in upward social comparison—comparing oneself to those perceived as more successful or attractive—can give rise to feelings of inadequacy and lowered self-esteem (Vogel et al., 2014). The pervasive nature of social media allows individuals to construct a carefully curated digital identity, often emphasizing positive aspects of their lives while minimizing challenges. This digital self-presentation can lead to a phenomenon known as "selective self-presentation," where users present an idealized version of themselves. Students may feel compelled to present themselves as successful and constantly happy, neglecting the struggles and challenges that are inherent to university life. Consequently, the dissonance between this idealized online self and real-life experiences can contribute to feelings of anxiety, depression, and loneliness (Hawi & Samaha, 2020).

Moreover, the presentation of idealized lives on social media platforms can foster unrealistic nursing students' expectations and perceptions of others' happiness, leading to the "Facebook envy" phenomenon (Krasnova et al., 2013). This discrepancy between perceived virtual lives and personal experiences can fuel negative emotions and intensify the desire to project an equally idealized version of oneself online. The pressure to conform to these virtual standards may erode authentic self-expression and contribute to the phenomenon of "impression management," where students' meticulously craft their online personas (Zhao et al., 2008).

Nursing students must develop digital literacy and critical thinking skills to navigate the digital landscape effectively. Encouraging open conversations about the effects of social media, fostering self-awareness, and promoting self-compassion are crucial steps. Establishing healthy usage boundaries and embracing the imperfections of both online and offline lives can lead to a more balanced and positive digital experience. As researchers continue to explore the psychological implications of digital interactions, a growing body of literature underscores the importance of cultivating digital literacy, self-awareness, and setting healthy boundaries to mitigate potential negative effects (Vogel et al., 2014; Primack et al., 2017).

Methodology

A cross-sectional study design was used. The nursing students at University for Business and Technology (UBT) were invited to participate in the study. A Google link was sent via email to all nursing students. The research was conducted in March-April 2023. We used the convenience sampling method through a structured questionnaire on the pattern of social media use, social comparison orientation, and the effect of addictive use of social media on student well-being with the help of the DASS 21 scale, by Lovibond & Lovibond (1995). Five Point DASS-21 scores have been used to measure the Stress, Anxiety, and Depression Levels in which 1 represents "Normal", 2 represents "Mild", 3 represents "Moderate", 4 represents "Severe" and 5 represents "Extremely Severe". And, to measure social comparison orientation a questionnaire the Iowa-Netherlands Comparison Orientation Measure (INCOM), 11 items, by Gibbons and Bunk (1999), using a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree) was developed.

Results

Of the 128 respondents of the online survey, 49 (38.3%) were male and 79 (61.7%) were female. The mean age was 20.8 years. Most of students were in the second year of studies 74 (57.8%). The respondents often check social media, if we look around the table; most of the respondents are shown her/his interest to check social media several times a day 113 (88.3%) of them, and 10 (7.8%) check social media several time a week, students are dominant in our study and spend time per app on social media frequently. If we look at the spending time per app; most of the respondents 78 (60.9%) spent more than 180 minutes per day at social media, only 9 (7.1%) of the nursing students spent 30-60min per day on social media. WhatsApp and Instagram were the two platforms that all participants reported to have access on them, 126 (98.4%) of respondents reported that are using snapchat, and 125 (97.6%) of them reported to have TikTok, LinkedIn was the digital platform that was used the least by students with 32 (25.0%) of them. The descriptive characteristics of study participants are shown in Table 1.

Table1. Descriptive characteristics of the nursing students, UBT

Modalities		Nursing students N=128	%
Sex			
M		49	38.3
F		79	61.7
Age		18-25 years	
Average Age		20.8±10.7	
University year			
	First	42	32.8
	Second	74	57.8
	Final year	12	9.4
Often check social media			
Once a day		5	3.9
Several times a day		113	88.3
Once a week		0	0
Several times a week		10	7.8
Time spends per App on social media			
30-60 minutes		9	7.1
61-120 minutes		12	9.3
121-180 minutes		29	22.7
>180 minutes		78	60.9
Social Media Platforms			
Facebook		98	76.6
WhatsApp		128	100.0
Instagram		128	100.0
Snapchat		126	98.4
Twitter		57	44.5
TikTok		125	97.6
LinkedIn		32	25.0

	Variables	Frequency	Percentage
	Stress		
	Never	15	11.7
	Sometimes	59	46.1
	Often	32	25.0
	Always	22	17.2
	Total	128	100.0
	Anxiety		
10	Never	52	40.6
	Sometimes	33	25.8
	Often	33	35.8
	Always	10	7.8
	Total	128	100.0
	Depression		
	Never	57	44.5
	Sometimes	57	44.5
	Often	9	7.1
	Always	5	3.9
	Total	128	100.0
	Mean value of Stress	Mean value of Anxiety	Mean value of Depression
	Stress score: 14.25	Anxiety score: 15.78	Depression score: 12.77

Table 2. Responses on different categories and level of Depression, Anxiety, and Stress Scale among nursing students in UBT

Table 2 shows the frequency and percentage of the respondent's responses in every category of the DASS scale, and level of depression, anxiety, and stress. So, stress was reported sometimes at 59 (45.1%) of respondents. Anxiety, 52 (40.6%) of respondent's response never. Mostly, "never" and "sometimes" side category was reported by 57 (44.5%) of respondents in depression. Table 2 indicates that one category sometimes is highly marked by students in stress, and depression, and never in anxiety. The analysis from128 respondents show the mean value of depression is 12.77 which indicates "severe", the mean value of anxiety is 15.78 which indicates "extremely severe", and the mean value of stress is 14.25 which indicates "severe". The results of respondents show high level of depression, anxiety, and stress among nursing students due to extensive use of social media.

Table 3. AVE, correlations, and squared correlation coefficients

	1.	2.	3.
Psychological well-being	.54	.17	.27**
Social comparison	-.42**	.65	.05
Social Media Platforms	-.20**	.53	.07

Notes: * - p < .05. ** - p < .01. ***p < .001. The diagonal elements (bold) represent the AVE values. Upper diagonal represents squared correlations of each construct.

Finally, the results of revealed analysis that psychological well-being had a negative relationship between social comparison, and social media platforms. This implies that as students' psychological well-being increases, their tendency for social comparison decreases. Higher levels of social comparison are linked to lower levels of psychological well-being among nursing students. The squared correlation coefficient of 0.05 indicates that 5% of the variance in Social Comparison is related to Psychological Well-Being, indicating a moderate but distinct connection between these two constructs ($\beta = -.02$, p < .05, 95% CI (-.06, -.01)). The negative correlation signifies a moderate negative relationship between Social Comparison and Psychological Well-Being.

Similarly, the negative correlation coefficient of -0.20** reveals a moderate negative association between Social Media Platforms and Psychological Well-Being. As students engage more with social media, their psychological well-being tends to decrease. On the other hand, the positive correlation coefficient of 0.53 indicates a moderate positive relationship between Social Media Platforms and Social Comparison. This suggests that as social media usage increases, so does the tendency for social comparison among nursing students.

Discussion
The aim of this study is to gain a contemporary understanding of the impact of social media on students' psychological well-being, focusing on aspects such as stress, anxiety and depression, and the phenomenon of social comparison. The research endeavors to shed light on potential negative outcomes arising from extensive social media usage in the present context.
This investigation has uncovered a noteworthy insight: individuals who engage with multiple social media platforms tend to exhibit elevated scores on the Depression Anxiety and Stress Scale (DASS-21). Furthermore, the study identifies a significant and positive correlation between the number of daily social media interactions and scores on the DASS-21 subscale. Also, the students who utilize multiple social media platforms tend to exhibit higher level of

social comparison on the Iowa-Netherlands Comparison Orientation Measure (INCOM). Moreover, the study identifies a significant and negative correlation between the number of daily social media interactions and scores on the INCOM.

Previous research has frequently linked problematic social media usage with elevated levels of depression and anxiety. Individuals who perceive their own addictive behaviors, particularly those associated with online content consumption, have shown an increased likelihood of experiencing psychological distress and a decline in self-esteem (Casale, S., 2022). Notably, the correlation between depression and the perception of addiction nearly achieved significance at an alpha level of .058, although this association has not been extended to anxiety. Another study conducted on students in a private medical school yielded comparable outcomes. This study echoed findings observed among many other medical students, revealing a heightened prevalence of depression, anxiety, and stress attributed to their utilization of social media platforms (Lenhart, A., 2010). With over 70% of adolescents engaging with Social Networking Sites (SNSs), the widespread use of platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and WhatsApp among the younger demographic has been flagged for its likely correlation with increased utilization rates and an augmented risk of encountering social media-related distress. This is consistent with existing and previous research findings.

This observed significance can be attributed to research indicating that Facebook tends to create an overly positive portrayal of one's friends, thereby prompting unfavorable social comparisons. Such comparisons, in turn, elevate the likelihood of negative self-appraisal and, over extended periods, raise the vulnerability to developing depression (Blease, 2015). Moreover, investigations have demonstrated a notable rise in depression rates among adolescents and young adults, strongly linked to their patterns of social media use (Nguyen, 2022). A substantial number of individuals within this age bracket predominantly engage with various forms of social media, rendering it an opportune domain for investigating potential connections between the increasing prevalence of poorer psychological well-being. A previous study underscored that social media's impact has been linked to heightened levels of anxiety. Users' tendencies to measure relationships and gain instantaneous access to social events outside their personal sphere can foster significant anxiety, potentially leading to prolonged social anxiety (Markham, 2016). This noteworthy discovery aligns seamlessly with existing literature, as it corroborates the notion that increased usage of multiple social media platforms aligns with higher anxiety scores. These findings are likely attributed to the concept that excessive engagement with numerous platforms can contribute to intensified levels of Fear of Missing Out (FOMO), which, in turn, serves as a potential driver for elevated levels of social anxiety (Baker, 2016).

Depression among young individuals has garnered substantial attention in contemporary times, often serving as a focal point for media discussions. Within this context, various viewpoints have emerged, indicating that social media might pose a partial burden on the younger generation. The question remains a subject of ongoing debate: does online media have adverse effects on the psychological well-being of teenagers? To date, research on this subject has been somewhat limited (Griffiths, 2000). A handful of studies have illuminated a diverse range of perspectives. Some suggest that judiciously engaging with online communities can be beneficial for teenagers, while others assert that the use of social media leads to heightened levels of stress, anxiety, and sadness (Wilcox, & Stephen, 2013).

Finally, this study found that psychological well-being had a negative relationship between social comparison, and social media platforms. Research has shown that phenomenon of social comparison, self-esteem sequentially mediate the relationship between active SNS use and loneliness (Lin et al. 2020). This result is in line with our finding that perceived social support and self-esteem are closely interconnected.

In summary, the debate surrounding the interplay between social media and psychological well-being in young individuals remains complex, characterized by contrasting perspectives. While some studies suggest potential benefits, others draw attention to the risks associated with extensive social media engagement. The interplay between sleep patterns, digital addiction, and the perception of push notifications further deepens the understanding of this intricate relationship.

Conclusion

The relationship between social media and nursing students' psychological well-being and social comparison unveils layers of challenge and opportunity. By acknowledging the potential pitfalls and leveraging the benefits, nursing students can forge a balanced digital presence. We identified that every other student these days has been operating social platforms for various purposes including socializing, academic and educational purposes. By fostering a culture of digital awareness, resilience, and ethical responsibility, nursing education can prepare students to embrace the transformative potential of social media while safeguarding their mental well-being.

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Motivation-stimulation of psycho-social energies for high educational achievements in teenagers

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Abstract

Purpose:

The study builds conceptualization of stimulating psycho-social energies through the relationships between teachers and students. This incentive is essential for developing a productive and successful learning process. It also helps in the high learning achievements of students. The study includes numerous types of research about motivation, psycho-pedagogical approaches, and building teacher-student relationships.

Design/Approach/Methods:

The study builds conceptualization of stimulating psycho-social energies through the relationships between teachers and students. This incentive is essential for developing a productive and successful learning process. It also helps in the high learning achievements of students. The study includes numerous types of research about motivation, psycho-pedagogical approaches, and building teacher-student relationships.

Findings:

During the lesson, the teacher must keep the students focused and attentive. This is achieved through the enthusiasm they must display. Enthusiasm is the strength and interest of the teacher during the lesson. This enthusiasm affects students' results and involves them in the learning process. In this way, students feel more motivated. This motivation is the potential energy toward achievements.

Discussion:

This study sheds light on the importance of motivation in the learning process. This topic is of interest to policymakers and educators to build a curriculum that fosters the development of elements that stimulate psycho-social energies. Furthermore, it is essential to understand motivation's role in high academic achievement and our daily activities.

Keywords: relationships, student, teacher

Introduction

Research on motivation, especially its motivating factors, has continued for 30 years in the field of psychological studies, with the object of education and cognitive development of students. Researchers have described the ways and methods of promoting motivation as a category of behavior. They have included persistence, performance, qualities, and rigor, giving new approaches from previous theoretical models on motivation. Today's researchers believe that the achievements, beliefs, values, and goals of individuals are essential determinants of achieving results.

Over the past few decades, much has been learned about belief, value, motivated purpose, and how they develop. The aim is to provide a theoretical perspective and opportunities to present the current overview of studies on the development of values, goals, and motivated achievement. "The interest lies in how students' motivation changes during the school years. There are different ways where the motivation of students changes with the passing of school years" (Wigfield, 1994, pp. 49-78).

Due to maturity, concepts also change. In this case, the idea of skills changes, and students of different ages understand motivation differently. "These changes start very early, and can have important implications for students' motivational behavior and motivation, especially when they have to choose" (Eccls & Wigfield, 2002, pp. 109-132). Contrary to this model of differentiated values, beliefs, and goals that develop students' motivation, some researchers move on to other theoretical claims. Bandura argues that "the child's self-efficacy and efficacy are at first task-specific and gradually become more general" (Bandura, 1997).

Motivation

Learning the reasons that cause behavior has been one of the biggest drives that have led philosophers, psychologists, and other people to think about a phenomenon that prompts them to perform a specific behavior.

Motivation is the great driving force, "the energy that makes teenagers move towards the conclusions and results they want to achieve at school, relying on motivation they try to understand the behavior they display every day" (Urdan & Pajares, 2022). If they look at motivation as an internal source that guides behavior, students will be confronted with a psychological phenomenon that is very important.

Effective learning requires a lot of mental effort and a high level of motivation. The elements of motivation are related to learning, combining its use, values, and importance of completing the activity. Motivation can be integrated into the learning structure because it is necessary to organize, test, and evaluate the students' involvement and the strategies used. The main element is motivation and cognition.

Literature review

The review of the literature suggests that the current basis of psychological and pedagogical studies is broadly oriented to the methodology of building teacher-student relationships. New strategies, as the need of the moment, will contribute to increasing the quality of learning through better treatment of the action of psycho-pedagogical elements in the learning process. Many researchers have worked on the issue of motivation in the learning process through the creation of relationships between teachers and students. In the education of teachers, it is important to make them aware of the role they have in creating relationships with students, which provides teachers with information about how to act and support this relationship (O'Connor, E., & Collins, 2011). Meanwhile, many researchers believe that educators should guide policymakers and the public about the issues that need to be developed for a productive learning process (Darling-Hammond, 2006).

Learning motivation

According to Hidi and Harackiewicz, "children's interests are often specific in specific situations and become more general during growth in terms of deeper personal interests" (Hidi, Harackiewicz, 2000:70, 151-179). They have argued the development of aspects of motivation, which go from the particular to the general. Initially, the motivation is general, while during the growth of values, it becomes differentiated depending on different areas of interest. Within areas, specific student experience may lead to particular efficacy and interest, or lack thereof. As they mature, these specific interests become generalized.

The learning motivation of students is seen in the most important psychological concepts of education. Furthermore, "it has become the focus of numerous studies about education from the year 1982 to 2012" (Urdan & Pajares, 2022). This is divided into parts because learning motivation is "an important construct in terms of difficult academic achievement" (Martin, 2013, pp. 179-206).

Educational research reports learning motivation accompanied by outcomes that include persistence, curiosity, learning, and performance in lessons. These conclusions, "have a direct effect on education, where they affect the educational achievements of students" (Pintrich & De Groot, 1990, pp. 1-36).

Motivation - a psycho-pedagogical category that promotes success

The majority of teachers recognize the importance of the relationships that students build with teachers, to achieve positive results in the educational learning process. Downey (2010) points out that, teachers need to know how their daily work can be spread in the classrooms through interactions and teaching strategies, which can make a positive difference in the lives of students who are at risk of failure in lessons (Downey, 2010).

Research on the factors related to the quality of classroom teaching suggests the objective attitudes and trust of teachers in students as the most important component of the school. Their spiritual connection and personal interaction with students can bring qualitative changes. According to Downey, "the importance of teacher-student relationships cannot be exaggerated" (Downey, 2010), since teaching is at the service of students. It creates hope for skilled teachers

who can understand how students learn, what they want for successful learning, and how they will be able to harmonize this in the teaching process.

The importance of fostering motivation

It is the new approaches that promote motivation and self-motivation, safety and self-assurance, inclusiveness, organization, and other categories that create harmony in the change process. Studies with practical values are opportunities to raise the voice in the formation of new quality teaching practices, which make students capable and independent in the formation of personality through the learning process.

Motivation affects higher achievements toward success, affects the increase of personal self-efficacy, and the increase of self-esteem and self-confidence through the increase of personal competencies and the desire for evaluation in the learning environment.

Various psychologists, mainly Erick Erikson, (1968, 1980) have argued that individuals encounter different psychological needs, in different periods of their lives (Sokol, 2009). In the case of education and teaching training, the findings of psycho-pedagogical studies show that "the failure of schools to meet and fulfill the demands and needs of students, results in the decline of motivation and, as a result, of their achievements" (Eccles, Lord, & Midgley, 1991). Based on this evaluation, the motivation of students in educational training has become the main psychological approach.

Motivation begins and ends with the study of behavior. This is achieved through the personal investment that the student makes for high achievements; the priority of behavioral guidance, which focuses on eliciting thoughts from students; the way the student sees the situation to make decisions according to personal interest; the meaning of the previously perceived situation as well as motivation as a process, which is intertwined in the continuous flow of behavior (Ames, 1992). In this way, students' confidence in the efficiency of the learning process permeates their aspirations, motivation level, and involvement in teaching.

Discussion

Goal setting is an important cognitive process that affects the increase of motivation in classes. The statement can be illustrated with students, who set goals or are recommended learning objectives by teachers. They experience a sense of self-efficacy to achieve them, committing to increase the impact of their performance on achieving goals. As students work on the assigned task, they may be required to engage in other activities to achieve the objectives. They can be participation in counseling sessions; repetition of information for knowledge; effort and persistence.

Increased self-efficacy boosts motivation, improving skill development. The motivation driven by the desire to accomplish goals will depend on the characteristics of the goals, such as proximity, specificity, and difficulty. Near goals prove motivation better than distant goals. Students can judge achievement more easily. Goals provide specific performance standards, increase efficiency and motivation on demand, and "do your best!". According to Schunk, encouraging students to achieve the immediate goal increases motivation, self-efficacy, and skills more than achieving the distant goal. Schunk also showed that when students are given specific goals together with comparative information about their peers, which shows that these goals are achieved, it leads to increased skills more than when these two methods are applied in particular (Bandura & Schunk, 1981).

Goals increase self-efficacy; comparative information promotes motivation. Allowing and empowering students to design their own goals increases engagement in the process. Oriented motivation shows how involved the student is in the learning process and in showing his presentation in the learning process. By feeling the satisfaction of achievement, students will become more successful. Commitments will be seen in the context of attempts between capability and failure, to understand errors. As a result of efforts and orientation towards the best, "achievement-focused students are not threatened by failure, because it affects their efforts and not their abilities" (Martin A. J., 2003). However, the strategy of students focused on learning is positively associated with maximum achievement strategies and, on the other hand, with failure avoidance strategies.

Motivation and engagement are defined as, "the individual's energy and drive to achieve their potential and are references to the behaviors that follow from this energy and drive." (Martin A. , 2007). Motivation can be evaluated as a unit of measurement of the values of psycho-pedagogical methods to understand the involvement of students in the teaching and learning process. They have a desire for high achievement and maximum ability in learning and social interaction. At the same time, they willingly enter the path of success. For this reason, all necessary methods are used that promote psycho-social energy for high learning achievements.

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The Relationship Between Giftedness and Morality in School-Age Children

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Abstract. Giftedness and morality, are often perceived as distinct realms, yet their interaction is a compelling subject of exploration. One of the main aspects of the gifted experience is moral awareness, which is essential to the prosperity of the entire society. Giftedness is asynchronous development in which advanced cognitive abilities and heightened intensity combine to create inner experiences and awareness that are qualitatively different from the norm. Morality is a person's or society's idea of what is right or wrong, especially in regard to a person's behavior. Both guiding principles help the individual or group decide what is good or bad. The gifted cognitive complexity and certain personality trends create specific experiences and attention that separate them from others. An important function of the gifted experience is their ethical sensitivity, which is important to the welfare of the complete society. These internal characteristics of the gifted are unnoticed in maximum of the formulations of giftedness and expertise Morality is not a hypothetical concept; rather, it is the fabric and weft of how people interact with one another. The concept of morality can only be understood within its historical and cultural settings, just like the concept of giftedness. The purpose of the paper was to describe the relationship between giftedness and morality in school-age children with the explanation that morality and talent are distinct concepts, there are certain overlaps and connections that may be drawn between them. Both can be thought of as innate qualities in students. The term "giftedness" is widely used in education to describe exceptional qualities or skills that children are born with, such as high intelligence or creative talent.

Keywords: Gifted, Morality, Children.

Introduction

In the complex area of human existence, two fundamental aspects shape our journey through life: our innate gifts and talents, and the moral compass that guides our actions and decisions. These two facets, giftedness and morality, are often perceived as distinct realms, yet their interaction is a compelling subject of exploration. Giftedness, in its various forms, represents the extraordinary abilities and talents that set children apart from their peers. Whether it be exceptional intellectual prowess, artistic flair, or athletic excellence, gifted individuals possess a unique reservoir of potential that can shape their lives and impact the world around them. Leading scholars from several academic disciplines come together for the Morality, Ethics, and Gifted Minds conference to share and integrate their viewpoints on morality and high ability (talent, creativity, and/or giftedness). There should be a lot more overlap and connections between these two big areas of research than there now are. The urgent necessity for the application of smart, creative minds to the numerous ethical challenges facing the globe today is one of the many arguments for such connection-making. Another is the unsettling propensity of some of the most talented and creative individuals to create or spark those ethical conundrums. One of the main aspects of the gifted experience is moral awareness, which is essential to the prosperity of the entire society. These innate qualities of the talented are often overlooked in definitions of skill and giftedness. Giftedness is defined as asynchronous development, a phenomenological approach, which focuses on the inner world of gifted children and stresses their vulnerability in society (Silverman, 2019). Giftedness and moral growth have a complicated link. It is possible to be moral without being gifted, yet those who are gifted can also act in terribly damaging ways. Some theorists claim that moral sensitivity rises with intelligence, yet many have noticed that bright children show moral concerns earlier and more intensely than their age counterparts, (Silverman & Krege, 2015). With a solid understanding of the ethics and morals of issues connected to international politics, economy, health, religion, and the environment, gifted students have the potential to become tomorrow's world leaders. The development of the information, attitudes, and abilities required for global citizenship in the twenty-first century is accelerated by the gifted person's increased sensitivity to justice, fairness, honesty, and a sense of responsibility to act on such principles. We can help gifted students get ready to conduct good deeds with a global impact if we give them a curriculum that is sufficiently challenging and courteous, (Gibson, 2009). Researchers have looked into the intriguing phenomenon known as moral particularism, which describes how people or groups restrict their altruistic behavior to members of their preferred ethnic, religious, or regional

identity groups while having little to no remorse about demeaning or even seriously harming outsiders. On the other hand, universalist morality refers to the propensity of some people to transcend self and ethnicity, engaging in altruistic action in support of those who are far outside of their identity group because their senses of selfhood force them to view themselves as inextricably intertwined with the entirety of humanity, (Ambrose & Cross, 2009). The thorough, worldwide, and multidisciplinary research demonstrates how 21st-century globalization offers a nuanced, changing setting for the identification of ambitions and the growth of talent. The results showed that children with intellectual gifts were more capable of critical thought than youngsters with ordinary development. The findings indicate that mental age, not chronological age, is the primary variable determining the highest critical thinking performances. However, the capacity for critical thought was the same in ethical and impartial contexts. The first and the third phases of critical thinking, clarification, and assessment, especially distinguish gifted children from no gifted children, according to an analysis of the phases of critical thinking. These phases refer to the ability to understand the type of problem rapidly to assess the credibility of statements and to assess the logical strength of the actual or intended inferential relationships among statements, descriptions, questions, or other forms of representation, (Rosa et al, 2021).

DEFINITIONS OF GIFTEDNESS AND MORALITY

A gift is something you were born with. The definition of gifted is a very complex issue. Consequently, there are perhaps 100 definitions of 'giftedness' (Freeman, 2008) but there is not yet a widely accepted definition. Winstanley (2006) concluded that because gifted students were a heterogeneous group, it is not possible to have only one comprehensive definition. Additionally, there are different concepts of giftedness across cultures (Phillipson & McCann, 2007). A more widely used definition within the field of gifted education comes from the 1991 meeting of the Columbus Group, and highlights the unique needs of this population: "Giftedness is asynchronous development in which advanced cognitive abilities and heightened intensity combine to create inner experiences and awareness that are qualitatively different from the norm. This asynchrony increases with higher intellectual capacity. The uniqueness of the gifted renders them particularly vulnerable and requires modification in parenting, teaching, and counseling in order for them to develop optimally." (Columbus Group, 1991). Morality is a person's or society's idea of what is right or wrong, especially in regard to a person's behavior. Ethics are the guiding principles that help the individual or group to decide what is good or bad. Generally, the terms ethics and morality are used interchangeably, although a few different communities (academic, legal, or religious, for example) will occasionally make a distinction. Both morality and ethics loosely have to do with distinguishing the difference between "good and bad" or "right and wrong." Many people think of morality as something that's personal and normative, whereas ethics is the standards of "good and bad" distinguished by a certain community or social setting. Ethics and morals relate to "right" and "wrong" conduct. While they are sometimes used interchangeably, they are different: ethics refer to rules provided by an external source, e.g., codes of conduct in workplaces or principles in religions. Morals refer to an individual's own principles regarding right and wrong. Ethics is the term used in conjunction with business, medicine, or law. In these cases, ethics serves as a personal code of conduct for people working in those fields, and the ethics themselves are often highly debated and contentious. These connotations have helped guide the distinctions between morality and ethics, (Grannan, 2016).

2.1 MORALITY AND GIFTEDNESS LINKS

The cognitive complexity and certain personality trends of the gifted create specific experiences and attention that separate them from others. An important function of the gifted experience is their ethical sensitivity, which is important to the welfare of the complete society. These internal characteristics of the gifted are unnoticed in maximum of the formulations of giftedness and expertise. Giftedness is defined as asynchronous improvement, a phenomenological approach that specializes in the inner world of proficient children, and stresses their vulnerability in society, (Silverman, 2019). Numerous analysts in the field of character and ethical improvement have centered on connecting with highly able learners. There's a shortage of observational inquiry about with respect to ethical improvement of the skilled. A few thinks about given a comprehensive audit of the then-current writing in their article. Talented and skilled understudies frequently show tall levels of affectability, which they may coordinate to a solid sense of right and off-base and social equity. Within the classroom, they may be distracted with social, ethical, and moral issues and will regularly act on their claimed feelings in these zones, (Mustafa et al, 2021). The study's overall conclusions highlight the substantial association

between high IQ levels and strong moral development, including emotional intensity and sensitivity, empathy for others, and a preoccupation with right and evil (Cash, 2009). Highly and extraordinarily brilliant children frequently exhibit abnormally fast levels of moral development, according to researchers who examine them. Intelligence appears to correspond with strong moral thinking, according to past empirical studies (Narvaez, 1993; Tirri & Pehkonen, 2002). These authors assert that because of their premature intellectual development, the talented are assumed to have a privileged position in the development of moral reasoning. Researchers have found that intellectually gifted children seem to develop moral reasoning at a comparatively high stage earlier than their chronological peers. It is significant to note at this point that researchers who have previously studied the exceptionally and profoundly gifted have generally agreed that these children exhibit precocious interest in moral and religious issues at a young age, (Gross, 2004).

2.2 MORAL COMPETENCIES OF GIFTED STUDENTS

Morality is not a hypothetical concept; rather, it is the fabric and weft of how people interact with one another. The concept of morality can only be understood within its historical and cultural settings, just like the concept of giftedness. Additionally, morality is always relative, meaning that what is moral or gifted to me may not necessarily be moral or gifted to you. It also has the ephemerality of being excruciatingly difficult to define precisely, yet a list of qualities that someone who is morally talented may have is helpful. An important aspect of the research on the phenomenon of giftedness is the attempt to determine the personal characteristics that accompany the emergence of excellence, where the attention of researchers is drawn to the question of the moral competence of gifted persons. It is important to note that morality has a two-way connection with giftedness – the first refers to cultural morality, which implies everyday social expectations, while the second concerns the personal morality of the gifted themselves. Since gifted children show the potential to become morally responsible early on, moral sensitivity is central to the experience of gifted children and is associated with high intelligence and abstract thinking. In addition, in papers that explore the connection between morality and academic success, morality is most often conceptualized through the term "character" and operationalized through examining the dimensions of honesty, empathy, fairness, altruism, idealism, and such, (Berkowitz & Hoppe 2009). Insight into the relevant literature suggests that distinctive features of the gifted in the domain of morality were often determined in relation to the average population. The description of the moral side of a person depending on the specific domain of the manifestation of giftedness is significantly less often encountered. Namely, giftedness manifested in a certain domain does not have a general intellectual ability that is simply directed towards that domain for a substrate but has its origin in highly developed specific abilities that correspond to a given domain or base of certain knowledge, (Letić & Lungulov 2020). According to Lennick and Kiel (2011), integrity is the trademark of a moral person. When acting with integrity, a person does what they know is good; they act in accordance with their principles, values, and beliefs, speak the truth, stand for what is right, and fulfill their promises. Responsibility is another important competence of a moral person. A person willing to take responsibility for their personal choices, admit their mistakes, and serve others can be considered moral. Compassion is significant because by caring for others, a person not only conveys their respect for others but also creates a climate in which others will be compassionate towards them when it is most needed. Forgiveness refers to tolerance of mistakes and knowledge of their own imperfections, without which a person would be rigid and inflexible towards themselves and others. Forgiveness works on two levels: the first is how a person treats themselves, and the second is how they treat others, (Lennick & Kiel, 2011). Based on these theoretical assumptions and understanding of moral competence, Lennick and Kiel (2011) created a scale to examine moral competencies whose psychometric characteristics were examined and are presented in this research. With a solid understanding of the ethics and morality of issues connected to international politics, economics, health, religion, and the environment, gifted students have the potential to become tomorrow's world leaders. The development of the information, attitudes, and abilities required for global citizenship in the twenty-first century is accelerated by the gifted person's increased sensitivity to justice, fairness, honesty, and a sense of responsibility to act on such principles. We can help gifted students get ready to conduct good deeds with a global impact if we give them a curriculum that is sufficiently challenging and courteous. According to researchers, intellectually gifted children appear to reach a relatively high stage of moral reasoning earlier than their chronological peers. Other studies of moral judgment using DIT scores showed that gifted adolescents as a group scored higher than their peers. However, it seems that the relationship between apparent academic talent and moral judgment scores is more complex. The high achievers can have average to high moral judgment scores, whereas low achievers cannot be high scorers in moral judgment, (Gibson & Brown 2009).

CONCLUSION

Although morality and talent are distinct concepts, certain overlaps and connections may be drawn between them. Both can be thought of as innate qualities in students. The term "giftedness" is widely used in education to describe exceptional qualities or skills that children are born with, such as high intelligence or creative talent. Contrarily, morality concerns a person's understanding of right and evil, usually shaped by character traits and early experiences. Giftedness and morality both call for development. Students may require direction, instruction, and opportunities to realize their full potential, just as people may require moral education and guidance to develop a strong moral compass. Nonetheless, a number of studies have shown that talented kids express moral concerns more strongly and at a younger age than their classmates, and some theorists contend that moral sensitivity rises with intelligence. It has been demonstrated that gifted children are likely to have excellent moral development as adults. There are unique considerations when it comes to gifted children's asynchrony, particularly in the area of moral sensitivity. Establishing acceptable interpersonal interactions and healthy internal limits requires resolving these challenges. As a result, highly sensitive gifted kids must learn to limit their exposure to sorrow, develop coping mechanisms for their own suffering, and discern what kinds of support are beneficial to give to others. Talented kids who are driven by a sense of justice and fairness must settle underlying conflicts when people hold differing opinions or moral standards. These talented kids must learn to be accepting of others, to laugh at fools, and to know when and how to stand up for the principles they believe in. Every gifted child should have the chance to share their thoughts about the moral paradigms they form. Caring adults can encourage kids to integrate compassion and reason into morally sound decision-making while also assisting them in finding their own internal resources. In the line with such research's results, we can conclude that a central feature of the gifted experience is their moral sensitivity, which is essential to the welfare of the entire society. But, for the parents and for the teachers remains an open question yet how to manage the problems arisen from the specific ethical attitudes and values of the gifted and talented children if they are ignored or mishandled. If we accept the view that education has an important role in the process of creating social values, then we can conclude that the basic task of educators and teachers is not only to prepare young people for competitiveness in the labor market but also, their task is to prepare them for community life, i.e. to help them become good and virtuous citizens of a democratic society. A good education must find the way to the right balance between knowledge, giftedness, and values, (Gulevska, 2021).

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The No-Self Thesis: Counterarguments from Abnormal Psychology

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Abstract. The no-self thesis is said to originate in David Hume's (1739) "bundle theory of self," questioning the human self as a mere bundle of fleeting perceptions without ontological reality. In contemporary discourse, the self is sandwiched between top-down and bottom-up reductionisms: those with biological and cognitive arguments that reduce the self to a lower, ontological level, on the one hand, and those who hold cultural-linguistic constructionist positions, on the other hand, reducing the self to a higher level. In both cases, self reductionism is a prelude to complete self elimination. On these conceptions, what we call "self" may be nothing other than an unintended by-product of brain processes. Nevertheless, a cursory literature review suggests that the self firmly remains indispensable to almost every contemporary field of inquiry. Research and publications on the topic of the self have increased significantly in recent years across a number of disciplines. This paper aims to offer insights into the question of the self and its realities from the perspective of Abnormal Psychology. Although conventional Psychiatry is not directly invested in exploring the concept of "self" per se, the elaborate symptomatology and in-depth treatment of disorders in practice is indispensably linked to patients' sense of self. In fact, a wide range of psychological and psychiatric disorders nowadays are increasingly being formally re-defined in terms of the "self". Above and beyond to what has come to be known as the "new disorders of the self", relevance of the self applies to classic categories of dissociation, autism, schizophrenia, personality disorders, and more. The pathological alternatives to a healthy sense of self are abound, and no effective psychotherapeutic intervention can be imagined without the concept of self.

Keywords: self, abnormal psychology, depersonalization, personality disorders, dissociation, schizophrenia

A brief introduction to the No-Self Thesis

The no-self thesis stems from a wildly divergent pool of discourses that, when it comes to the human self, seem to converge on a common, emphatic endpoint: the self is an illusion. The no-self thesis is said to originate in Hume's (1739) "bundle theory of self," questioning self as a mere bundle of fleeting perceptions without unity, permanence, or ontological reality. Still, the idea can be found explicitly formulated in certain early schools of eastern mysticism (Gallagher, 2011). Buddhist reductionism, for example, maintains that self is an illusion and that the person is a conceptual fiction, a mere conventional convenience but ultimately not real (Siderits, 2011). Post-Hume, in the course of the subsequent 200 years of mainstream Western philosophy, the no-self thesis was mainly dismissed as untenable. Although, Humean scepticism triggered much intellectual counterarguing zeal, the tide turned in the age of modern positivist science, and particularly, with the ushering in of the era of postmodern deconstructionism. Wiley (1994) in his The Semiotic Self discusses at length the contemporary reductionist approaches to the human self. The self is sandwiched between top-down and bottom-up contemporary reductionisms: those with biological and cognitive arguments that reduce the self to a lower, ontological level, on the one hand, and those who hold cultural-linguistic constructionist positions, on the other hand, reducing the self to a higher level. In both cases, self reductionism is a prelude to complete self elimination.

In this vein of thought, it has been suggested that the term "self" has traditionally been used as a placeholder: "This is a pity for there is enough historical information available to see that the self is a linguistic trope, a yarn, a mode of talking about people and their reasons for doing things" (Berrios & Marková, 2003, p. 9). Hence, in linguistic-constructionist terms, self is a name without a reality, a sign without its signified. In narrative-constructionist terms, self is a story we choose to tell ourselves. In socio-cultural constructionist terms, self "emerges" in mirroring interactions with significant others; it is a personal and collective fiction. Its object-referent is only a construct, i.e., a concept whose boundaries depend more upon interpretation of the historical and social context than upon intrinsic value of the object of inquiry (Berrios et al, 2002). Self is an obsolete residue of "folk psychology" in need for eliminativist correction: *Just*

because-quite obviously, and in many cultures-there is a folk-metaphysical and a folk-phenomenological concept of 'the self,' and just because someone has put this concept back on the agenda, many participants automatically assume that an entity like 'the self' must actually exist and that a relevant and well-posed set of scientific and theoretical questions relates to this entity. However, there seems to be no empirical evidence and no truly convincing conceptual argument that supports the actual existence of 'a' self (Metzinger, 2011, p. 279).

Such alleged attempts to escape from the limitations of folk psychology and to remodel a scientific approach to self, entail discursive, semantic and paradigmatic transformations. Thus, "cognition" has come to replace "brain," "brain" has replaced "mind," "mind" has already somewhat replaced "self," putting other traditional concepts such as "psyche," "spirit" and "soul" into oblivion: *I emphasize extended cognition rather than extended mind because, in philosophy, discussions of the mind tend to draw heavily on commonsense intuitions or on everyday ways of thinking and talking about mental states. Such discussion of the mind is, by my lights, too wedded to pretheoretic, folk perspectives, of the sort that scientific progress has tended to overturn or radically revise in other domains (Rupert, 2022; emphasis is mine).*

On these conceptions, what we call "self" may be nothing other than an unintended by-product of brain processes. In tune with the epiphenomenological premise, human brain causes human mind, and all that is associated with it, like consciousness, self-consciousness, intentionality, rationality, agency, and more, including the sense of selfhood. In a nutshell, the eliminativist no-self thesis debunks the self, along with the conscious experience, as the trick of complex inferential processes enabled by random, synchronized neural firing. This line of thought culminates in the eliminativist conclusion that "no such things as selves exist in the world" (Metzinger, 2009; p. 9). Correspondingly, inferring a "self" entity from self-like phenomenological experiences, as has traditionally been commonplace, goes over and above empirical scope. Subject cannot be deduced from subjective experience; the self cannot be deduced from the sense of self. For Metzinger (2011), "It is a philosophical move that does not explain anything but just introduces a further unobservable property without argument or potential empirical evidence" (p. 281). In psychiatric terms, the self is not a RRUS – real, recognizable, unitary and a stable object of inquiry (Berrios et al, 2002). In the final analysis, since there is no "self," there is no such thing as the philosophical or scientific problems of the "self" (Olson, 1998). All of the self-related problems discussed in philosophy of mind, personal identity, semantics, moral psychology, cognitive psychology, epistemology, and so on, can be tackled and resolved "without using the word 'self.'" Hence, "there can be no reason, other than tradition, to continue to speak of the self." (Olson, 1998; p. 656). Ironically, Bertrand Russell (1921) had arrived to a similar conclusion pertaining to human consciousness about a hundred years ago. While endeavoring to define human mind in terms of consciousness, having found "no trace of consciousness" in humans just as in animals, Russell ultimately predicted the disappearance of the term consciousness itself, deeming it to be "mainly a trivial and unimportant outcome of linguistic habits" (Russell, 1921; p. 40). Needless to say, the science of today has not turned out favorable to such a verdict. The seemingly convoluted classic terminology of the self reality, along with today's ever-evolving contemporary scientific terms of consciousness, turn out to be not a play of words. Empirical experience teaches us that we normally are capable of a complex range of levels and features of consciousness, unless rarely, in severe abnormal cases. The choice of terms and the transient psychological paradigms we subscribe to, do not change the fact that we all ordinarily behave like having selves, except for the psychopathologically affected cases whereby a severely distorted sense of self is diagnosed (Parnas & Sass, 2001).

1.1   Not in the name of science

For all intents and purposes, the self-elimination thesis is meticulously presented as scientific in nature. Nevertheless, a closer review of the discursive arguments on offer reveals serious limitations of theoretical, philosophical and ideological nature. In particular, the psychotherapeutic and clinical practice seem to offer contrary evidence. In other words, the human self firmly remains indispensable to every contemporary field of inquiry. As Shaun Gallagher testifies in his edited *The Oxford Handbook of the Self*, research and publications on the topic of the "self" have increased significantly in recent years across a number of disciplines, including philosophy, psychology, and neuroscience (Gallagher, 2011). The self is indispensable to a range of theoretical perspectives, from the psychodynamic through to the cognitive-behavioral and more phenomenological or philosophical orientations (Kyrios et al., 2015). While social and developmental psychologists have shown interest in the development of the

"self" and identity *per se*, cognitive neuroscientists have more recently attended to brain structures and functions associated with the self (Kyrios et al., 2005). A growing scientific literature in Artificial Intelligence and sentient agency is seeking to understand and explain the role of self and consciousness in tandem with artificial intelligent agents (Arai & Takeno, 2018). Above all, the self's centrality to a wide range of pressing challenges and its resolutions becomes strikingly apparent in the case of delineating the line between psychological disorders and normal mental functioning. In an attempt to reconnect philosophical speculations on the human self back to its reality terrain of living human selfhoods, seems like our natural intuitions about self are not a whimsical preference that can be easily discarded. At times, in treading a fine line between normal and abnormal behavior, the quest for understanding the self might be more of a matter of life and death. Ironically, even Metzinger (2011) admits that the no-self argument "will always remain counterintuitive for many of us." (p. 279)

This paper aims to offer insights into the question of "self" and its realities from the perspective of abnormal psychology. Although conventional Psychiatry is not directly invested in exploring the concept of "self" *per se*, and is only keen in listing its "disorders" (Berrios, 2011), the elaborate symptomatology and in-depth treatment of disorders are indispensably linked to patients' sense of self. More recently, a wide range of psychological and psychiatric disorders are increasingly being formally re-defined in terms of the "self." This not only pertains to what has long come to be known as the "new disorders of the Self" (alienation, anomie, self-harm, etc.) commonly associated with the "dehumanization" of the individual in tandem with modern societies' industrialization and urbanization rate (Simeon & Abugel, 2006). More recently, paramount relevance of the "self" applies to classic categories of schizophrenia, dissociative identity disorder (DID), autism, anorexia nervosa, borderline personality disorders (BPDs), and more (Basten & Touyz, 2019). Unsurprisingly, the last 30 years of exploration of new techniques and latest scientific understandings in the case of schizophrenia "have encouraged researchers to reify the self further," laments Berrios and Marková (2003). On the contrary, pathological alternatives to a healthy sense of self are abound, and no effective psychotherapeutic intervention can be imagined without the concept of "self." In fact, the self has been seen as important in how we conceptualize and diagnose a disorder, including advancement of empirically-driven treatment approaches: *The concept of the self has demonstrated numerous opportunities for advancing the understanding of psychological disorder, possibly due to its capacity to integrate seemingly disparate theoretical frameworks (e.g. phenomenological, cognitive-behavioural, psychoanalytic, social-developmental, neurocognitive), and it offers opportunities for theoretical discourse and empirical investigation (Kyrios et al., 2005, p.275).*

Alienation, isolation, depersonalization, altered perceptions and states of consciousness, have for centuries served as themes for popular culture, visual arts, and have been referenced in religious texts and other traditional sources. Before the birth of modern psychiatry in the West, mental illness was conceptualized in terms of demonic possession to be treated by exorcists. The source of mental illness was seen as an alien entity (hence: *alienism*), intruding and derailing the healthy, normal self. As psychodynamic approach became popular, the explanatory model took the shape of interaction between the self parts - repressed emotional and mental content, that have been disowned and dissociated, is also rendered alien to the conscious ego or self. Studies have established several key factors said to lead to the development of a weak or fragmented sense of self. The most notable is trauma (Basten & Touyz, 2019). Following three decades of healing work with trauma patients, Fisher (2017) found himself asking "Why do they seem to be at war with them selves?" (p.1). He also closely observed how self-alienation always impeded healing and resolution (Fisher, 2017). Besides, not all self-related dysfunctional conditions are developmental in nature; self-disorders may occur in genetically high-risk individuals (Henriksen & Parnas, 2017). The indispensable role of the self in normal daily functioning has also been confirmed by a plethora of studies investigating the etiology, symptomatology and treatment of a wide range of psychological disorders including borderline personality disorders, chronic depression, eating disorders (Basten & Touyz, 2019), dissociative identity disorders (Dorahy et al., 2021), depersonalization (Simeon & Abugel, 2006), alienation (Diamond, 2018), autism (Hobson, 2011; Hodge, Rice & Reidy), Schizophrenia Spectrum Disorders (SSDs) (Parnas & Sass, 2011; Martin, Clark & Schubert, 2023), and more. An unstable sense of self over time has been associated with a range of symptoms including depression and suicidality along with reduced adaptive functioning (Dorahy et al., 2021). Other studies have also found correlations between self-disorders and social dysfunction (Henriksen & Parnas, 2017). The importance of a durable sense of self in the recovery of severe mental illnesses such as schizophrenia (Wisdom et al., 2008) has been consistently suggested. While lack of a healthy sense of self is directly linked to a wide range of pathological conditions, the quest to empirically define a healthy sense of self ensues, along with efforts to preempt the factors that condition its normal development. Stability of the sense of self over time, or diachronic unity of self, is one among many other self-related prerequisites for healthy mental and physical functioning. Basten and Touyz (2019) provide an elaborated description of numerous such indispensable "sense of self" features, including agency, continuity, coherence, completeness, authenticity, and vitality of self. These and more are part and parcel of a core, healthy functioning self, and any lack or deficiency of any one of these self-related qualities would

result in abnormal behavior, as systematically evidenced in ongoing empirical studies, past and present. In the following sections, a varied range of abnormal manifestations will be discussed, starting from the least to the most severe, with special emphasis on the role of self in its origin, diagnosis and treatment approach.

1.2   Self as The Core

Henriksen and Parnas (2017) describe the concept of "self" operative in the concept of "self-disorders," prior to discussing how this "self" may be disordered in the schizophrenia spectrum conditions. In line with the phenomenological tradition, they define "the minimal self" as "a necessary, built-in feature of phenomenal consciousness, i.e. a feature that no subjective experience can lack" (p.178). This is Zahavi's "minimal self," (2017) or the phenomenological "ipseity" or "core self" or the first-person perspective of "mineness," without which no subjective experience or typical mental state is deemed possible. The suggestion from Henriksen and Parnas (2017) is that, unlike in other "self-related" problems such as mood or personality disorders, the self-disorder in schizophrenia spectrum disorders is far more fundamental, as it threatens the uncompromisable "minimal self." From a humanistic psychology vantage point, Fisher (2017) defines "self" in terms of "innate qualities possessed by all human beings in undamaged form" (p.8): curiosity, meta-awareness, creativity, calm, courage, confidence, and commitment. He, then, projects these qualities as "an antidote to the painful experiences suffered by exiled child parts" (p.8), in other words, as therapeutic healing elements to the damaged or traumatized self. For Basten and Touyz (2019) although "Sense of self" (hereafter SOS) is a cornerstone of psychological inquiry and therapy, "yet it is poorly understood." In their paper *Sense of Self: Its Place in Personality Disturbance, Psychopathology, and Normal Experience*, Basten and Touyz provide a working definition and elaborate description of SOS and its transdiagnostic role. Drawing on a diverse range of theoretical domains including developmental psychology, identity theory, cognitive psychology, personality disorders, and psychodynamic theories, they define SOS as that "continuous experience of being a complete and authentic person who feels in control of their own activities" (p.1): *SOS can be defined as that personal, subjective awareness of one's self, which includes a sense of agency for one's own actions, a sense of continuity over time, and a sense of personal unity and wholeness, with a special affective energy or vitality (Basten & Touyz, 2019, p.1).*

The role of each of these self-related foundational psychological dispositions in both engendering and healing mental illness will keep self-evidently reappearing next in the brief introductions of various symptoms and core definitions of selected psychological disorders.

From Depersonalization to Schizophrenia

2.1   Depersonalization

Although depersonalization affects millions of people and is deemed the third most prevalent psychiatric symptom, after depression and anxiety, yet the average mental health professional is not sufficiently aware of it (Simeon & Abugel, 2006): "Patients with depersonalization symptoms are commonly told that they suffer from some kind of anxiety or depression and that what they feel is secondary to their major problem" (p.9). However, chronic depersonalization is now being recognized as a unique disorder of its own standing - depersonalization disorder, rather than a condition secondary to depressive, obsessional or psychotic states. According to DSM-4, depersonalization disorder is listed under dissociative disorders. In milder symptom manifestations, depersonalization has been found to occur "at least fleetingly," in 50-70% of the population; however, approximately 1-3% of the general population might suffer from chronic depersonalization disorder (Simeon & Abugel, 2006, p.14). Detachment or estrangement from oneself, coupled with a conscious awareness of this detachment but loss of any control over it, is the essence of depersonalization: "The patient feels that he is no longer himself, but he does not feel that he has become someone else" (Simeon & Abugel, 2006, p.11). Other key features of depersonalization disorder as listed in Simeon and Abugel (2006) are sensations of being outside one's mental processes, one's body, or parts of one's body ("Like my mind is somewhere off to the back, not inside my body," p.9); lack of affective response or apathy ("the living dead," p.10); sensations of lacking control of one's actions, including speech ("Even when I'm talking I don't feel like it is my words," p.9); feelings as if the person is living in a dream or a movie ("No longer felt like a person, but rather like some kind of 'robot-like thing,'" p.24), and so on. Some people find depersonalization so distressing that it downright incapacitates normal life, often expressed in terms like: "I have no soul;" "what is the point of killing myself, I'm already dead;" or "I'm not alive any more, nothing makes a difference" (Simeon & Abugel, 2016, p.72). Other authors, when discussing the severe personality disorders, have highlighted patient reports of alarming sense of falling apart, "splitting" process and the resultant sense of feeling fragmented and "not together." (Basten & Touyz, 2019, p.7).

Derealization

Derealization or experiencing the external world as strange or unreal, is another feature of depersonalization. In the so-called macropsia unreality syndrome objects from the external world may appear too large; or too small (in micropsia); or objects may appear too far away (in teleopsia). The unreality symptoms also involve feeling that other people seem unfamiliar or mechanical, or that the bodily self is unreal: "I sometimes smack my hand or pinch my leg just to feel something, and to know it's there" (Simeon & Abugel, 2006, p. 8). In milder cases of depersonalization, the feelings of unreality involve an involuntary, unpleasant sense of self-observation, an exaggerated hyperawareness of one's self. In severe cases of derealization, depersonalized people feel as if they are viewing themselves, as if watching a movie. In these psychological states the nature of perception changes in fundamental ways: the mind feels as though separated from the body and subjects feel as though they are outside their bodies, mere observers, losing any sense of control over their actions and thoughts and ownership over their personal to experience (Ataria, 2016). In extreme cases, the split between the observing and the acting bodily self can become an out-of-body-experience (OBE), although for most people it is not (Simeon & Abugel, 2006). For instance, "somatoparaphrenia" is one among many other OBE extreme pathological manifestations in which the subject denies ownership of his own body parts (Ataria, 2016).

Dissociation

Dissociation between different "parts" of the normal self may take different interpretational connotations. Common premise is that behind the dissociation phenomenon is the disintegration of what is normally integrated under the "minimal self." Although self dualism is customarily blamed on Descartes, the premise that the (true) self and the body are separate can be found in abundance in other sources and cultures. Thus, dissociation is a psychopathological situation in which one feels detached from one's body. The body is perceived more as an object among other objects in the world than as the core of one's individual being. The individual feels that he or she is a spectator of what the body is doing rather than a participant observer (Simeon & Abugel, 2006, pp.65-66). One explanation comes from trauma-work suggesting that under severe pressure the self dissolves into fragments. These patterns of fragmentations can be conceptualized as trauma-related procedural learning: "it is safer to adapt using a system of selves rather than becoming a fully integrated 'self.'" (Fisher, 2017, p.25). Evidence supporting this need to detach from the surroundings during trauma can be found in the testimonies of former prisoners of war (POWs), which suggest that some people resolve to become disconnected from their own bodies as an escape from ongoing traumatic experiences. In these cases, the sense of self and bodily ownership weakens, enabling the captive to create a safe distance from the traumatic event (Ataria, 2016).

The Authentic Self

The authentic self is another commonly found explanatory interpretation, for the dissociation or dichotomy between the authentic self and the false self. According to Arlow (1966, in Simeon & Abugel, 2006) the anomalous self experiences in depersonalization is a dissociation of two ego functions that are normally integrated: the observing function of the self and the experiencing or participating function of the self. Approximate versions of such a theoretical split of the self between the subjective self and objective self can be found in Kant, James, Husserl, Wittgenstein and more. In depersonalization, the participating self is partially, but not completely, repudiated. The patient is still able to maintain some sense of connection and some feeling of identification. According to one interpretation (Cattell, 1974, in Simeon & Abugel, 2006) only the unembodied self that functions as observer and controller of what the body is experiencing and doing, is the true self that "feels real". By contrast, the false self is the product of compliance with the expectations of the significant others or what one imagines these to be. As outlined in psychodynamic models, certain developmental settings tend to lead the infant to repress the true self, as in the true needs, feelings, thoughts, etc., while fostering the development of the false self in compliance with expectations of significant others. Winnicott (1965, 1971; in Basten & Touyz, 2019) was the first to use the term "false self" to describe the inner experience of a person whose unhealthy personal experiences lead them to mask their true feelings to the point where they feel disconnected from them. Hence, depersonalization may manifest as a vulnerability later in life (Simeon & Abugel, 2006).

2.2   Borderline Personality Disorders

Such an interpretation of the Authentic Self fits with certain explanations of narcissist personality behavior, which is widely seen as having at least two selves: the true self and the

false self. Vaknin (2020) has interpreted the damaged self to be the key problem with the narcissistic personality: "the remnants of the True Self are so ossified, shredded, cowed into submission and repressed-that, for all practical purposes, the True Self is dysfunctional and useless". When writing about the damaged self in narcissism, others have brought to attention the role of vitality in the "sense of self": "Although the body can function efficiently as an instrument, perform like a machine, or impress one as a statue, it then lacks life. And it is this feeling of aliveness that gives rise to the experiences of self" (Lowen, 1985, p. 8). Basten and Touyz (2019) cited numerous studies noting cases of patients suffering from chronic depression "…whose underlying pathology is essentially BPD," as characterized by lack of vitality, a sense of emptiness, flatness and directionlessness. They also cited studies with large data sets suggesting "the existence of a general factor of personality disorder or dysfunction" in BPD cases, with indications that emptiness and fragmentation of the self potentially being "that central factor;" *It is noteworthy that four of the possible nine BPD symptoms listed in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (5th ed.; DSM-5; APA, 2013) directly refer to disturbances in sense of self (Basten & Touyz, 2019, p. 2).*

Thus, another pervasive symptom of BPD directly related to the "sense of self" is what has been identified as lack of a "stable sense of self or other" (Basten & Touyz, 2019), a "sudden shifts in identity" (Leichsenring et al., 2023), or an "unstable mood and self-image" (Dell'Osso et al., 2023). Such pattern of marked instability is identified for both self identity and interpersonal relationships, on top of other affection-based problems. As with most mental disorders, the etiology of BPD is related to both genetic factors and adverse childhood experiences, hence, having a developmental perspective is most revealing. One of the early developmental tasks is to gradually learn to differentiate between self and other objects. The progression towards an integrated and stable sense of one's self and of others, developmentally establishes at a later stage, and is referred to as "self and object constancy" (Simeon & Abugel, 2006). Any challenge to self-constancy may result in severe disruption of healthy psychological functioning. This is best illustrated in the quote below from Simeon and Abugel (2006), which was the inspiration for the author to write this article: *Case studies of patients with depersonalization disorder indicate that the difficulty with constancy lies in one of three areas: differentiating self from others, self-constancy, or other-constancy. Borderline personality patient can differentiate self from others but has trouble with constancy to the self and others. Narcissistic personality patient has achieved a tenuous self-constancy that requires the stable input and presence of others to maintain it. Neurotic personality patient does not have particular difficulties in any of these areas, but they may experience depersonalization when challenged by overwhelming internal conflict. Lastly, psychotic personality patient has difficulties in all three areas (pp. 173-174).*

2.3   Dissociative Identity Disorder

While an unstable self is a core domain of BPD, identity disturbance is also one of the core features of people with severe Dissociative Identity Disorder (DID), formerly known as Multiple Personality Disorder. In fact, pathological narcissism has been compared to Dissociative Disorder (Vaknin, 2020). In addition, dissociation is a transdiagnostic phenomenon that has been noted across patients with different mental disorders (Fung, et al., 2023). Over and above pathological dissociative symptoms like depersonalization and derealization, DID involves a disruption of identity characterized by two or more distinct personality states (Dorahy et al., 2021). As a diagnostic category, DID is defined by: *...fairly well-developed personalities alternating control of the same body, at least one of which is ignorant of at least some of the states and activities of another through a process of psychogenic amnesia, or dissociation (Radden, 2011, p. 552).*

In general, dissociation is described as a disruption or discontinuity of what is normally integrated in one's cohesive personality, such as emotions, memories, motor controls, and identities (Fung, et al., 2023). Thus, this becomes a question of the level where the dissociation occurs, and at times it crosses all possible levels: thoughts, emotions, behaviors, personalities, roles, and self identities. However, before one skeptically questions its manifestation as being merely "psychological" in nature, one should recall the fact that in clinical cases such multiplicity of self is "often the source of suffering, and in this respect, it falls within some of our culture's more settled ideas of mental disorder and its treatment" (Radden, 2011, p.565). The split within the core of selfhood at times is so severe and realistic from the patient's perspective, that "without unanimous consent to treatment from all the subselves" (Radden, 2011, p.565), practitioners may run into problems. One may infer from these psychopathological cases the appalling abnormality when a normally taken for granted single, cohesive, stable "sense of self" is maximally disintegrated. Even William James has been criticized for conceding that in cases of dissociation an individual human can have more than one personal self (Martin & Barresi, 2006). The general consensus within the literature has mostly been that "a sense of being a singular and unique person is a fundamental part of the subjective experience of the self" (Basten & Touyz, 2019, p.6).

2.4   Autism

The term "autism" (etymologically, in old Greek "autos" means self-centered) was introduced by Bleuler (1911) to describe social withdrawal in adults with schizophrenia. (Tordjman et al. 2022, p.3). Clinical descriptions and controlled studies of children and adolescents with autism have shed further light on the nature and development of self-experience (Hobson, 2011). A strong case for considering autism as a disorder not only with respect to self-other relations but also to self-awareness is now being made. As with other preceding disorders referenced here so far, a clear range of self-related anomalous symptoms are revealed, on top of the core definition of autism as the disorder of self-other relations: developmentally delayed self-recognition, impaired autobiographical memory, lack of comprehension of what it means to be an "I" vis-à-vis a "you," failure to respond when one's own name is called, lack of connectedness with others, and more. In *Autism and the Self*, Hobson (2011) also enumerates clinical cases whereby autistic children fail to relate to the other person as a whole person: "the children related not to what another person had just done, but to the hand that was in the way or the foot…, or the pin that had pricked…" (p.573). Intriguingly, this is suggestive to what a relation between fragmented selves of the no-self thesis would be—autistic. No wonder, in such an unordinary "imaginative" world, persons would lack sensitivity towards the feelings of other persons. This, once they fail to perceive the latter ones as whole persons, and moreover, as uniquely authentic, feeling and knowing selves. A world without selves as integrated wholes or real persons behind the casual, social constructionist roles, would eventually result in a breakdown of any meaningful inter-personal and social relations. Parnas, Bovet, and Zahavi (2002) also pointed out that people afflicted in schizophrenic autism experience a "loss of meaning and perplexity," on top of self and self-other disturbances: *There is a unique disturbance of intentionality (e.g., loss of meaning and perplexity), there is a disturbance in the realm of self (an 'unstable first-person perspective' and other anomalous self-experiences), and finally the dimension of intersubjectivity is also fundamentally impaired (disorders of social and interpersonal functioning, inappropriate behavior). These three dimensions are inseparable: I, we, and the world belong together - and they are all afflicted in the schizophrenic autism (p.133).*

2.5   Schizophrenia Spectrum Disorders

Schizophrenia has been the primary focus of psychopathologists over the course of the last century (Sass, 2014). Drawing on empirical research, clinical experience, and phenomenological insights, Parnas and Sass (2001), in their paper Self, solipsism, and schizophrenic delusions, argue that disorders of the self represent the psychopathological core of schizophrenia. Pioneer scientists studying schizophrenia had already defined it in terms of the self, something avoided and dropped later in time with the overtaking of deterministic psychiatric practice. The concept of autism, introduced by Bleuler in 1911, was the first systematic attempt to capture the clinical essence of schizophrenia (Parnas, Bovet, & Zahavi, 2002). Bleuler (1911, in Parnas & Sass, 2001) also spoke of the "core diagnostic characteristic of schizophrenia in 'self' and 'personality' terms, and described the 'Inability to discriminate Self from not-Self in schizophrenia' as transitivism" (p.109). Another equally important pioneer scientist of schizophrenia, Kraepelin (1896, 1913 in Parnas & Sass, 2001) portrayed the core feature of schizophrenia as a disunity of consciousness, and metaphorically described it as "orchestra without a conductor" (p.102). More recently, claims are being made that defined schizophrenia in terms of typical symptoms as proof of a reductionist contemporary approach: *For example, whilst schizophrenia is currently defined only by the presence of psychotic features such as hallucinations, delusions, and disorganized or negative symptoms, these symptoms were historically considered peripheral; its core was, instead, best characterized by a loss of the innermost self (Martin, Clark & Schubert, 2023, p. 21).*

Tordjman et al. (2022) also think that Schizophrenia and Autism share social communication impairments that may rely partly on self-consciousness disorders: *schizophrenia and autism are characterized by self-consciousness disturbance with impairments in sensory integration associated with body-self disorder and impairments in psychic and bodily boundaries between the self and the other involving particularly a deficit of theory of mind, empathy and sense of agency (p.22).*

Depersonalization is listed as one optional feature among many defining the schizotypal disorders (Parnas & Sass, 2011, p. 524): *The notion of a disorder of minimal self, a disturbance of the basic, lived sense of subjectivity, offers one, highly promising, way of understanding the core features of this condition of schizophrenia and of addressing several issues of relevance to both clinical practice and scientific research on this important disorder (Parnas & Sass, 2011, p. 536).*

In schizophrenia that 'minimal self' is fragile, constantly threatened, and unstable. It seems that the normally smooth, pre-reflective sense of self loses its automaticity and transparency (Parnas & Sass, 2011). Ironically, once the disorder is studied past the typical symptoms, in its advanced, chronic stages of the disease, what is revealed is that schizophrenia is the loss of those basic self-intuitions and common sense associated with it, precisely the one that the no-self

thesis seeks to dismiss as a useless illusion: *...the entire ontological-epistemological framework of experience, normally revolving around "naïve realism" (in the Western world), is dramatically transformed (Sass 1992b; Bovet & Parnas, 1993), leading to "beliefs" that, on a purely contentual basis, are classified as the so called bizarre delusions (defined as "physically impossible"; American Psychiatric Association 1994) (Parnas & Sass, 2001, p. 110).*

Discussions and Conclusion

The diagnostic manuals in use, as well as its preceding editions, have not accommodated the concept of self to date. For instance, the concept of self was not mentioned in the diagnostic criteria for schizophrenia of either DSM-4 or lCD-10. Nevertheless, Henriksen and Parnas (2017) highlight that "disturbances of self-experience" or "self-disorders" have lately been included as a defining feature of schizophrenia in the beta-version of the ICD-11.1. Such recent acknowledgement move is much in line with founders of this diagnostic category [the pioneer psychiatrists Emil Kraepelin (1856-1926) and Eugen Bleuler (1857-1939)] both of whom "considered pathology of self as quite essential in defining schizophrenia" (Parnas & Sass, 2011, p. 523). Parnas, Bovet, and Zahavi (2002) point out how "a dramatic simplification of psychopathology that has taken place over the last decades" has led to a contemporary operationalist psychopathological practice lacking "descriptions of subtle pathology that might be useful for early, prodromal diagnosis." (p.131) A recent paradigmatic turn in favor of the concept of anomalous self-experience or "self-disorders" has in the meantime been noted by others, as the transdiagnostic role of the self has attracted both clinical and research interest. In one of their latest studies Martin, Clark and Schubert (2023) advance similar recommendations, based on their empirical evaluation of anatomical, physiological, and neurocognitive correlates of Self-Disorder (SD). Their comprehensive neurophenomenological approach to Self-Disorder as "involuntary subjective disturbances of the given experience of 'minimal self,'" (p.2) seeks to improve diagnostic and therapeutic practice. They key premise is that when the "minimal self" experience is disturbed, patients might report feeling as if they are detached from reality, are devoid of agency, or are a passenger in their body and mind (Martin, Clark & Schubert, 2023).

In the phenomenological psychiatric tradition, it is generally assumed that psychopathology, especially of schizophrenia, may help to inform us about normally tacit, taken-for-granted features and structures of experience and its conditions of possibility (Parnas & Sass, 2011). It is precisely these "taken-for-granted features and structures" of subjective experience that the no-self thesis seems to render scientifically obsolete. Take for instance the attack on "naïve realism" of folk psychology that has traditionally offered on a silver plate the "folk-phenomenological concept of 'the self'" (Metzinger, 2011, p. 279). Evidence from psychopathological cases has systematically illustrated the oddly severe consequences of suddenly losing grip of such "naïve realism": autistic symptoms have been characterized by some as a "crisis of common sense" or a "loss of natural evidence" which otherwise ensures three key dispositions of sanity: a pre-reflective sense of self, others and the world (Parnas, Bovet, & Zahavi, 2002). Or, take for instance the widely influential deconstructionist interpretation that dismisses the self as a linguistic construction or a "linguistic trope" (Berrios & Marková, 2003, p. 9). Quite on the contrary, evidence from systematically studied and recorded cases of trauma-hit patients highlight a shortage of linguistic means: "Neither client nor therapist has a language with which to explain the internal struggles being played out inside the client's mind and body" (Fisher, 2017). Self-related realities dealt with by patients rather come across as transcending the language boundaries: "'There are no words,' says a patient named Chloe, referring to the schizophrenic delusional states, 'It's like trying to explain what a bark sounds like to someone who's never heard of a dog.'" (Sass, 2014, pp. 8-9). Patients experiencing anomalous self-experience across the border of "self-disorders" testify to subjective experiences that are most certainly not linguistically constructed. The two quotations below are selected to illustrate such testimonies of phenomenological experiences that transcend any scope of language mediation:

The tragedy is that depersonalization discloses itself in a "negative form," as absence, such as inner pain after an amputation, which still tells us about something we once had, but lost. With depersonalization the individual does not know exactly what he had, but still experiences something that is "lost." That is why depersonalization can be so painfully hopeless, groundless. That is why there are no words to express because literally, there are no words in language to express it (Elena Bezubbova in Simeon & Abugel, 2006, p. 134).

The patient feels that a profound change is afflicting him, yet he cannot pinpoint what exactly is changing, because it is not a something that can be easily expressed in propositional terms (a fact that has important implications for the nature of the diagnostic interviewing). The phrasings of such complaints may range from a quite trivial "I don't feel myself" or "I am not myself" to "I am losing contact with myself," "I am turning inhuman" or "I am becoming a monster" (18-20). The patient may sense an 'inner void' or 'a lack of inner nucleus,' which is normally constitutive of his field of awareness and crucial to its very subsistence. (Parnas, Bovet, & Zahavi, 2002, p. 133).

Parnas, Bovet, and Zahavi (2002) cite empirical studies that suggest that "already from birth infants have a primitive core ability to differentiate between self and non-self, and that infants are attuned to their environment from the outset." (p.134). This is a crucial break with the long-held belief of "normal autism" in developmental psychology, holding that infants have no ability to discriminate between self and the world. Studies have also showcased how Piaget's formulations of initial developmental stages in infants, discounting self among others, engage in an active repression of specific dimensions of childhood experience (Sipiora, 1993). Propositioning a core or minimal self or proto-self in infancy is one thing; dismissing the developmental nature of that core self, is another. Gone are the days whereby one scientist finds it needful to force nature over nurture or vice versa, in order to advance a preferred theoretical framework – most contemporary theoreticians and practitioners are inclusive and open to all sources of influences. Social, developmental, linguistic, cognitive, neurochemical, genetic, cultural, even political and ideological, and more: these are all shaping influences of the self development to be reckoned with. Empirical evidence is binding over and above any transient theoretical and ideological inclinations. The no-self thesis might as well be one of those last partial attempts to forge a theoretical thesis of convenience, on the face of contrary empirical evidence.

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Metric Characteristics Of The Scale For Measuring Learning Styles In The Student Population

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Abstract. The purpose of this research was to verify the construct validity of the learning styles questionnaire in the student population. The learning styles questionnaire is based on the principles of Hony and Mumford's theory of the universal content and structure of learning styles. The research was carried out on a sample of 437, of which 145 are school children and 292 are students of social and natural sciences, aged 15–23 years. The learning styles questionnaire (Honey & Mumford, 1986) was used to measures four specific styles (pragmatists, reflectors, activists, and theorizers). Applying exploratory factor analysis, three interpretable factors were extracted, and the structure of values in two-dimensional space was checked using the Multidimensional Scaling (MDS) method. The resulting structure doesn't correspond to the expected structure according to Hony & Mumford's theory, i.e., the items were grouped into three higher-order values: theorizing style, reflective, and pragmatic-activating style. Inner consistency of the scale is α=0,88. Moderate to high correlations were obtained between items. Analysis of variance and post hoc analysis did not verify differences in the context of learning styles between dominant learning styles in secondary and higher education, as well as insignificant gender differences in the context of learning styles. The theorist's style and the reflector's style remain the dominant learning options even during studies. The findings confirm the validity of the questionnaire for the assessment of learning styles and show its applicability to the population of students and those of secondary schools for the purpose of assessing learning styles.

Keywords: learning styles, reliability, students

1 Introduction

Learning is the process of acquiring new knowledge, behaviors, skills, values, attitudes, and preferences (Gross, 2010). Some learning is triggered by a single event, and some knowledge and skills are accumulated based on repeated experiences (Schacter, Gilbert & Wegner, 2011). A person's preferred learning method is determined by their attitudes and behaviors, which lead to the definition of learning style (Honey & Mumford, 1992). Learning style is a mix of cognitive, affective, and psychological domains that indicate how students engage and react to a learning environment. Individual differences are examined in the study of learning styles: people act, think, and see the world in different ways, and they create ideas and acquire knowledge in different ways (Jung, 1921; Myers & Briggs, 1962).

Learning styles refer to the concept that individuals differ in how they study best. Learning style assessments ask people to rate what kind of information presentation they prefer, e.g., words vs. pictures, or what kind of mental activity they find more engaging, e.g., analyzing vs. listening, although assessment instruments are extremely diverse (Pashler et al., 2008). Kolb's (1976) model of experiential learning is one that has attracted much interest and application. ELM consists of an assumed four-stage learning cycle. According to the theory, different individuals may prefer

some parts of the learning cycle over others. At the beginning, students receive information from concrete experience to the new experience, continuing with the observation phase where data is extracted from the perspective. Third is abstract conceptualization, where generalizations are created to integrate observations into sound theories or principles, thus creating guidelines for action in new and complex situations. Individual differences in learning styles are explained by this process: Kolb's learning style is explained on the basis of two dimensions: they are the way a person understands and processes information. This perceived information is then classified as concrete experience or abstract conceptualization, and the processed information as active experimentation or reflective observation.

Based on Kolb's theory is the Learning Style Questionnaire (LSQ), created by Honey and Mumford (1982), followed by a revised edition in 1986. The LSQ has been applied in a variety of areas, including training and development management. It was created to report on the preferred learning styles of female management trainees and then transfer them to students in higher education. This questionnaire is self-administered and consists of 80 items that are scored 1 or 0. The statements are divided into four subgroups of 20 randomly ordered items, each of which assesses a particular learning style: activist, reflector, theoretician, and pragmatist. These subgroups are broadly equivalent to those suggested by Kolb's (1976) experiential learning model (ELM): active experimentation (activist), reflective observation (reflector), abstract conceptualization (theorist), and concrete experience (pragmatist). Each subgroup or learning style can receive a maximum possible score of 20 points (Allinson & Hayes, 1988). This instrument may be desirable for educational researchers because of its normative nature (Dunlap & Cornwell, 1994). According to the division of styles, activists: prefer to be involved in new experiences without prejudices; they are enthusiastic about new ideas; they are happy to be dominated by immediate experiences; and tend to act first, then look at the implications or consequences. Activists learn best when involved in new experiences, problems, and opportunities, when there is teamwork and difficult tasks; on the other hand, they do not prefer to listen to long lectures or even when they have to follow precise instructions. Reflectors: see the situation from different perspectives, collect data, review, analyze, and think before reaching any conclusion. They observe and listen to the views of others before presenting their own. The types who belong to this style prefer to observe individuals during work, review what has happened, and think about what they have learned from it; they do not have deadlines or short time frames to complete tasks. On the other hand, such types learn less when taking on the role of leader in front of others, are worried about deadlines, and do things without time to prepare. Theorists like to analyze, synthesize, adapt, and integrate observations into complex and logically sound theories. They value rationality and objectivity and are prone to assumptions, principles, theories, models, and basic systematic thinking. They think about problems step by step and tend to be perfectionists. Theorists learn best when they are placed in complex situations where they have to use their skills and knowledge, when they are in situations that have a clear purpose when they are offered interesting ideas, and when they have the opportunity to investigate ideas and ask questions. Theorists learn less when there are situations where the emphasis is on emotion and feeling, information is weak, and they have to do things without knowing the principles. Pragmatists: they want to try things and use concepts that can be applied in their work; they are impatient to have long discussions; they are practical and down to earth. They like to move quickly and act quickly on new ideas that appeal to them. Pragmatists learn best when there is a connection between the topic and the work and when they are given the opportunity to try out techniques that have advantages. Pragmatists learn less when they receive no visible or immediate benefit, when they are not instructed in how things are done, and when the learning is only theory.

Learning styles are variable in our case, and before being treated empirically, it is necessary to undergo the process of methodological conception. The variable changes its form before the final structure; first, it passes to the theoretical conception, then to a more simplified form such as operationalization, which is described as a logical process of selecting the most reliable and valuable indicators. From this, we say the main characteristics are: validity, which refers to the issue of whether we have really observed and measured what we wanted to observe and measure, and reliability, which refers to the accuracy of the measurement process. Errors in the measurement

process result in low reliability of the measurement process. Due to the low validity of the variable, there is a possibility that we will interpret and misunderstand the results (Osmani, 2014, fq., 128-154). Reliability refers to the consistency of a measurement technique and is concerned with the stability of data from a measurement across different characteristics or conditions. To be a reliable test, the correlation coefficient should be high. 80. The concept of validity refers to what the test or measurement strategy measures and how well it does so. Conceptually, validity seeks to answer the following question: Does the instrument or measurement approach measure what it is supposed to measure? (Marczyk, DeMatteo & Festinger, 2010).

There is limited evidence regarding the psychometric properties of the LSQ. The study by Duff & Duffy (2002), with 224 undergraduate students enrolled in business courses and 164 undergraduate students in health studies, found that exploratory factor analysis failed to support the existence of the two bipolar dimensions proposed by Kolb and the four learning styles by Honey and Mumford, and internal consistency reliability was not achieved at a satisfactory level. Research by Yousef (2012), with the participation of 1,615 students divided into two universities, examined the reliability and validity of the data. Through Cronbach's alpha, cross-correlation, and confirmatory factor analysis (CFA), the data were analyzed, and it was found that the styles questionnaire of learning (LSQ) had moderate internal consistency, inter-correlations revealed positive (weak to modest) correlations between the four learning styles, implying a lack of support for the two bipolar dimensions proposed by Kolb, and factor analysis failed to support the four learning styles described by Honey and Mumford.. On the other hand, some studies have verified the reliability and validity of the LSQ; thus, the study by Haque and Afrin (2018) among university students in Bangladesh with a sample of 238 students drawn from three universities concluded that the internal consistency and reliability of the test-retest were satisfactory and significant correlations were found between the subscales. Meanwhile, Klein et al. (2007) evaluated the psychometric properties of the LSQ using Cronbach's alpha, test-retest, correlational analysis, and factor analysis among 66 undergraduate medical students at Monash University (Hong Kong) and found that the 40-item version of the LSQ has reliability and poor validity, also research with 381 second-year students in accounting, engineering, and communication programs at the University of Hong Kong, Fung et al. (1993) examined the relatively low reliability of the four learning styles scales of a shortened version of the LSQ. Furthermore, factor analysis of the items did not reveal any coherent factor structure consistent with the underlying constructs. Mulaik (1987) has emphasized that the exploratory techniques that have been used in many studies can only make suggestions; therefore, CFA (confirmatory factor analysis) is necessary. For this reason, research is limited regarding the psychometric properties of the results produced by the LSQ.

2 Research Methodology

2.1 The research problem

The problem of this study is the question of whether the questionnaire for the assessment of learning styles confirms validity and, at the same time, whether it is applicable to the population of students and those in secondary schools.

2.2 The purpose and tasks of the research

The purpose of the research is to verify the construct validity of the questionnaire on learning styles in the student population. In order to realize the purpose of the research, several tasks were compiled, as follows:

a. To determine the reliability and validity of the questionnaire in the selected sample
b. To see if there are differences in the context of learning styles between the dominant learning styles in secondary and higher education
c. To determine the dominant learning style during studies

2.3 Populations and samples

The sample consisted of 437 subjects, 145 are school children and 292 are students of social and natural sciences. The study was conducted in September 2023. The students are aged 15–23.

2.4 Instruments

The Learning Styles Questionnaire (LSQ) by Honey & Mumford (1986) was designed to measure learning preferences in individuals. The questionnaire is available in 40 or 80 items and is designed to prompt individuals and groups to think about how they prefer to receive information and learn from their experiences. In our case, we used a questionnaire with 40 statements with 10 items for each learning style: activist, reflector, theoretician, and pragmatist, which are evaluated with 1 (if you agree, check) or 0 (if it does not agree, x).

3 Results

To measure the internal consistency of the Learning Styles Questionnaire (n = 40), Cronbah's alpha coefficient was calculated. The reliability assessment of the Learning Styles Questionnaire and the internal consistency of the eight subscales were also assessed by calculating Cronbach's alpha for the subscales. The obtained values are included in the following table.

Table 1. Analysis of the internal consistency of the learning styles questionnaire in the Albanian-speaking student population (N = 437)

	No. of items	Alpha coefficient
Scale in general	**40**	.85
The first factor	17	.83
The second factor	11	.79
The third factor	12	.81

The value of Cronbah's Alpha is 0.85 for the lower subscale because the value was expected to decrease with the reduction of items from the overall scale. Cronbach's alpha reliability of the 46-item learning styles questionnaire was 0.83. The value is considered high enough for each subtest. The value of Cronbach's alpha suggests that the items were homogeneously stable as theoretically expected when creating the Learning Styles Scale.

Table 2. Exploratory factor analysis of the learning styles questionnaire in

the Albanian student population (N = 437)

Components	Initial characteristic roots			The sums of the squared densities of the retained components		
	λ	Variance (%)	Cumulative (%)	λ	Variance (%)	Cumulative (%)
1	4,295	32,821	32,821	5,295	32,821	32,821
2	2,604	21,276	54,097	3,604	21,276	54,097
3	1,892	18,828	72,923	2,892	18,828	72,923
4	1,125	7,029	79,952			
.	.	.	.			
40	,255	0,591	100,000			

Before continuing the factor analysis, its prerequisites were tested. The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin coefficient on sample fit was quite high (KMO = 0.801), and Bartlett's test of sphericity was found to be significant ($\chi 2$ = 1592.09; p <.01). The mentioned results justify the application of factorial analysis (Fulgosi, 1984).

An exploratory factor analysis using the principal components method was applied, which yielded 3 principal components that together explain almost 55% of the total variance, of which the first has a significantly larger characteristic root. The first component represents a general factor that can be interpreted as reflector-theorizer variance (e.g., complementarity between theorizing and reflective styles). The other two components represent those latent factors that should be in the background of the two remaining styles, the activist style and the pragmatist style; that is, they represent two styles that can be considered opponents in the bipolar dimension of a higher order. The second and third components are essential factors that saturate the two learning styles of the bipolar dimension.

Table 3. Presentation of individual learning styles questionnaire items on the first, second, and third factors obtained from exploratory factor analysis (N = 437)

Item No.	F1	F2	F3	Item No.	F1	F2	F3
1	.667	.068	.141	21	.066	.337	.214
2	.665	.088	.163	22	.032	.315	.123
3	.678	.036	.173	23	.174	.453	.208
4	.749	.006	.206	24	.283	.452	.173
5	.643	−.095	.031	25	.167	.450	.270
6	.466	.111	.148	26	.120	.450	.074
7	.544	.229	.003	27	.115	.316	.061
8	.412	−.003	.069	28	.159	.390	.064
9	.520	−.065	.243	29	.078	.257	.453
10	.321	.007	.053	30	.052	.107	.398
11	.576	−.003	.294	31	.110	−.051	.410
12	.421	.118	.23	32	.173	−.079	.515
13	.408	.025	.200	33	.064	.022	.591
14	.323	.176	.050	34	.132	.082	.450
15	.481	.176	.099	35	.050	.027	.578
16	.498	.157	.073	36	−.042	.243	.674
17	.383	.141	.240	37	−.157	.191	.524
18	.065	.488	.201	38	−.045	−.012	.439
19	.149	.360	.112	39	−.075	.099	.470
20	.105	.387	.272	40	−.168	.178	.332

Legend: Saturations of primary items with factors 1, 2 and 3 are greater than 0.30.

The method used during factor extraction was Varimax rotation. The criteria for the selection of the items have been to keep the factor loading of 0.30 or higher, while the load value between <0.30 has been removed from the scale (Field, 2009). Table 3 shows the individual items of the questionnaire on individual learning styles and their saturation with the first, second, and third factors obtained from the exploratory factor analysis. The first factor refers to the relector-theorizing style, such as the participants' preference to generally give higher or lower answers, and almost all items are positively saturated with this factor (saturation above 0.30). In the second factor, items from 18 to 28 are singled out as items with higher positive saturation, and we have called this factor the activating style. Items 3, 7, 11, and 15 are positively saturated with the third component.

The scale in general, respectively the 40 items of the scale were once again subjected to item-total correlation. The z-total correlation range for the 40 items was

0.321 to 0.631 and was significant (p < .01). The results are presented in table 4.

Table 4. Item-total score correlation for the 40 items of the scale for the assessment of learning styles (N=437)

Item No	Correlation with the total score	Item No	Correlation with the total score
1	.346**	21	.404**
2	.377**	22	.362**
3	.341**	23	.414**
4	.378**	24	.398**
5	.394**	25	.398**
6	.337**	26	.331**
7	.412**	27	.431**
8	.384**	28	.354**
9	.331**	29	.353**
10	.338**	30	.329**
11	.426**	31	.341**
12	.393**	32	.384**
13	.368**	33	.462**
14	.375**	34	.488**
15	.399**	35	.398**
16	.369**	36	.397**
17	.534**	37	.358**
18	.374**	38	.390**
19	.546**	39	.631**
20	.402**	40	.492**

Intercorrelations between subscales and total score

To determine the intercorrelations between the three factors, the total score on the learning styles assessment scale was calculated. Correlational analysis proved that there were significant positive correlations between the three learning styles. Thus, it was found that two subscales, that is, the subscales for the activist style and the pragmatist style, had low but statistically significant correlations. The correlations of the three factors are presented in table 5.

Table 5. Correlations between learning styles, questionnaire factors, and correlations with the overall scale (N=437)

	Reflector-Theorist	Activist	Pragmatist	Total score
Reflector-Theorist	1	,040	,217**	,817**
Activist	,040	1	,291**	,789**
Pragmatist	,217**	,291**	1	,717**
Total score	,817**	,789**	,717**	1

40

Table 5 shows that the intercorrelations between factors, extracted through factor analysis, are significantly correlated. The extent of correlations between the subscales shows that they are relatively low in correlation, while high correlations exist with the total score of the Learning Styles Assessment Scale. These correlation values confirm that the three subscales characterize theoretically distinct dimensions. The reflective-theorizing factor correlates with the pragmatist factor (r =.217; p <.01) but not with the activating factor (r =.040; p >.05). The activation factor correlates significantly with the pragmatic factor (r =.291; p <.01).

A highly positive and significant correlation was found between the subscales and the total of the Learning Styles Assessment Scale. The total score correlates with the reflective-theorizing factor (r =.817; p <.01), with the activating factor (r =.789; <.01), and with the pragmatic factor (r =.817; p <.01). Therefore, it is concluded that all three subscales contributed to the overall result, which recommends that the 40-item Learning Styles Assessment Scale measure students' learning styles, which include three dimensions of learning: reflector-theorist, activist, and pragmatist.

4 Discussion

The factor structure of the questionnaire on learning styles for the Albanian-speaking student population is not completely equivalent to the findings of the authors of the Honey and Mumford Questionnaire. Factor analysis extracted three factors. The result from the factor loadings of the 40 items of the Learning Styles Scale on three different factors is that we obtain a three-factor scale keeping in mind all the assumptions discussed previously. Each factor was observed based on the theoretical importance of the items and the content of the items.

Correlative analysis between the factors of the questionnaire on learning styles shows the corresponding relationship between the activating factor and the pragmatist style, as well as between the reflective-theorizing style but not between the latter and the activating style. The low intercorrelations prove that the factors among themselves are qualified as separate factors with internal consistency and thematic content different from each other.

Even in spite of the reduction of factors from 4 (in the Honey & Mumford 1986 study) to 3 (in the present study), the obtained findings still confirm the validity of the questionnaire for the assessment of learning styles and show its applicability in the population of students and those of secondary schools for the purpose of assessing learning styles. The fusion of two separate styles, theorizing and reflective (Honey & Mumford 1986), into a single style that we have named "reflective-theorizing" only strengthens the degree of applicability and validity of Honey and Mumford's four-factor theory (1986). In the conducted study, it turns out that items with their own variance and latent roots are merged into a single style, within which the items that were extracted as two separate styles in Honey and Mumford's factor analysis are merged.

Based on the fact that LSQ had its origins in Kolb's theory and discussed the existence of four learning styles and the limited evidence regarding psychometric characteristics, the study in question proved the existence of three factors, showing satisfactory reliability and validity in the sample that was applied. Our findings in terms of validity and reliability are consistent with the study by Haque and Afrin (2018); however, they are not consistent with the study by Duff & Duffy (2002), where their findings do not support the model and reliability was not achieved at the level of satisfactory through applied analyses.

This study used only two samples to test the instrument's reliability and validity, yet it has various implications for researchers, educators, and those interested in broader fields. This research represents the first opportunity to assess the reliability and validity of the LSQ in educational settings in our cultural context. The findings contribute to the study of learning styles and testing instruments. The use of reliable and valid instruments is key to extracting results on which recommendations can be made and clear conclusions can be reached. In our case, the use of such an instrument to determine the learning styles of students in educational institutions would improve the quality and, at the same time, strengthen the students' abilities for higher achievements.

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