Mental Health Nursing: Self-Concept Disorders

By Mary B. Knutson, RN, MS, FCP

A Definition of Self-concept

- All notions, beliefs, and convictions that constitute an individual's knowledge of self and influence relationships with others

- Self-esteem is a person's personal judgment of his or her own worth, based on how well behavior matches up with self-ideal
  - Threatened in adolescence when self-concepts change and self-decisions made
- Low self-esteem indicates self-rejection and self-hate (a conscious or unconscious process) expressed in direct or indirect ways

Identity Diffusion

- Identity Diffusion- Failure to integrate various childhood identifications into a harmonious adult psychosocial identity

- Personality Fusion- A person's attempt to establish a sense of self by fusing with, attaching to, or belonging to someone else

Depersonalization

- A feeling of unreality and alienation from oneself
  - Subjective experience of the partial or total disruption of one's ego
  - Disintegration and disorientation of one's self-concept

Ego Defense Mechanisms

- Fantasy
- Dissociation
- Isolation
- Projection
- Displacement
- Splitting
- Turning anger against self
- Acting out

Developmental Influences

- Interpersonal and cultural experiences that generate positive feelings and a sense of worth

- Perceived competence in areas valued by the individual and society

- Self-actualization, or the implementation and realization of a person's true potential

Self-concept Development

- Gradual process beginning in infancy with self-differentiation
- Influenced by:
    - Significant others
    - Cultural and socialization practices
    - Self-perceptions

Continuum of Self-concept Responses

- **Adaptive Responses:**

  Self-actualization ⇐ Positive self-concept

  ⇐ Low self-esteem ⇒

- **Maladaptive Responses:**

  Identity Diffusion ⇒ Depersonalization

Self-concept Terminology

- **Body Image**: sum of the conscious and unconscious attitudes the individual has toward his body
- **Self-ideal**: individual's perception of how one should behave based on certain personal standards
- **Self-esteem**: individual's personal judgment of his own worth obtained by analyzing how well his behavior conforms to his self-ideal

Terminology (continued)

- **Role Performance**: sets of socially expected behavior patterns associated with social groups

- **Personal identity**: awareness of "being oneself" as derived from self-observation and judgment

- **Healthy personality**: able to perceive oneself and the world accurately, having insight to inner peace

Identity Diffusion Behaviors

- Absence of moral code
- Contradictory personality traits
- Exploitive interpersonal relationships
- Feelings of emptiness
- Fluctuating feelings about self
- Gender confusion
- High degree of anxiety
- Inability to empathize with others
- Lack of authenticity
- Problems of intimacy

Nursing Care

- Self-concept is intimately related to states of anxiety and depression, problems in relationships, acting out, and self-destructive behavior

- Maladaptive responses to integrity of self-system can be seen in all nursing settings
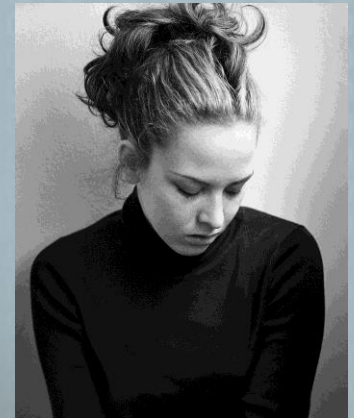
Predisposing Factors

- Response to parents' self-hate
- Parental rejection, internalization of failure
- Unrealistic self-ideals
- Role strain, ambiguity, work or sexual role conflict
- Precipitating stressors include emotional trauma
- Role strain –developmental, situational, or health-illness transitions

Alleviating Factors

- Sports or outdoor activities, hobbies and crafts, expressive arts, health and self-care, education or training, work, vocation, job, or position, special aptitudes, intelligence, imagination and creativity, and interpersonal relationships

- Social supports to point out positive aspects of individual, and increase self-awareness

Medical Diagnosis

- Identity problem
- Dissociative amnesia
- Dissociative fugue
- Dissociative identity disorder (multiple personality disorder)
- Depersonalization disorder
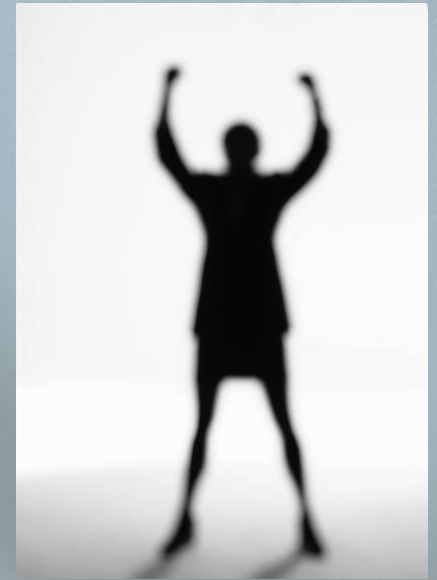
Nursing Care

- Assess subjective and objective responses
- Assessment begins with observing pt's appearance, eating, sleeping, and hygiene habits
- Compare pt responses to questions with his/her behavior and affective response
- Recognize defense mechanisms

■ *People with negative self-concepts believe their illnesses have a greater negative impact on their lives, less hope for the future, and are more anxious about their illness*
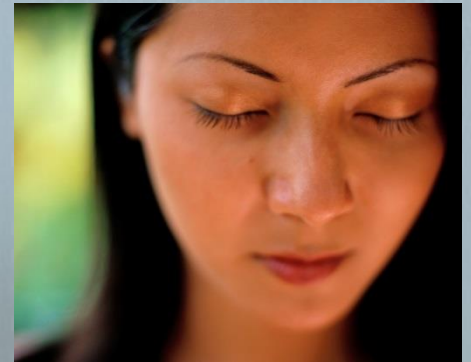
Examples: Nursing Diagnosis

- Body image disturbance related to CVA as e/b not accepting of body limitations
- Self-esteem disturbance r/t overly high ideals e/b depressed mood and withdrawal from activities
- Role performance, altered r/t incongruency of cultural and self-role expectations about aging e/b self-criticism and frustration
- Personal identity disturbance r/t drug toxicity e/b confusion and loss of impulse control

Implementation

- Establish an open, trusting relationship
- Work with pt's ego strength as it is
- ⇧ participation in therapeutic process
- May need interventions relating to anxiety as well

Nursing Interventions

- Level 1- Expanded self-awareness (using accepting attitude and ⇧ activity)
- Level 2- Self-exploration (examine feelings, behavior, beliefs, and current stressful situation)
  - Respond with empathy, not sympathy
  - Group or family therapy can be helpful
- Level 3- Self-evaluation of faulty perceptions (exploring solutions and goals)
- Level 4- Realistic planning
- Level 5- Commitment to action

Evaluation

- **Patient Outcome/Goal**
  - Patient will obtain the maximum level of self-actualization to realize one's potential

- **Nursing Evaluation**
  - Was nursing care adequate, effective, appropriate, efficient, and flexible?

References

- Stuart, G. & Laraia, M. (2005). Principles & practice of psychiatric nursing (8th Ed.). St. Louis: Elsevier Mosby

- Stuart, G. & Sundeen, S. (1995). Principles & practice of psychiatric nursing (5th Ed.). St. Louis: Mosby