

Impact of Engagement in People-Pleasing Behaviour and Negative Feedback on Self-Esteem

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Abstract

This case study investigates the interplay between people-pleasing tendencies, negative feedback, and self-esteem. By analyzing the experiences of individuals who habitually engage in people-pleasing and seek validation from others, this study aims to elucidate the psychological mechanisms that contribute to the adverse effects of such behavior, especially in conjunction with criticism. It examines how these elements may lead to reduced self-esteem, heightened anxiety, and challenges in establishing genuine relationships. Through an extensive review of empirical studies, this case study proposes potential strategies to alleviate the adverse effects of these dynamics and promote healthier self-perception, interpersonal relationships, and improved psychological health.

Keywords: Self-esteem, mental health, social anxiety, perfectionism, emotional regulation, interpersonal relationships, anxiety.

Introduction

People-pleasing behaviour, characterized by an intense need for approval and a tendency to avoid disapproval, is a prevalent interpersonal approach. Although often motivated by positive intentions, such behaviour can profoundly affect an individual's mental health, particularly when faced with negative feedback (Bornstein, 2010). This case study investigates the complex interplay between people-pleasing tendencies, negative feedback, and self-esteem. By analyzing the experiences of individuals who habitually engage in people-pleasing and seek validation from others, this study seeks to clarify the psychological mechanisms that contribute to the adverse effects of such behaviour, especially in conjunction with criticism. It examines how these elements may lead to reduced self-esteem, heightened anxiety, and challenges in establishing genuine relationships.

The study also explores how the perception of others shapes an individual's self-esteem and proposes strategies to mitigate the adverse effects of people-pleasing and negative feedback. The findings aim to contribute to the growing body of literature on self-esteem and mental health, offering practical insights for individuals and mental health professionals.

Case Presentation

Sarah, a 17-year-old girl, exhibits chronic low self-esteem and indecisiveness. She frequently feels inferior and incapable of meeting expectations or accomplishing tasks. Her familial environment is dysfunctional, with parents who frequently criticize each other and direct their criticism toward her. This pattern of criticism has persisted since her childhood, leading her to believe she is unworthy of love and incapable of trusting others. Sarah avoids sharing her feelings and emotions, fearing judgment and rejection.

Sarah's parents often compare her to her brother, further diminishing her self-worth. She engages in negative self-talk, avoids challenging situations, and strives for perfection to gain approval. These behaviours have led to social withdrawal, anxiety, and physical symptoms such as palpitations, sweating, and nausea. Her academic performance, social relationships, and overall well-being are significantly impacted.

Objectives

1. To explore how people-pleasing behaviours, seeking validation from others, and negative feedback influence self-esteem in individuals.
2. To understand how the perception of others shapes an individual's self-esteem.

Method

Participants

The study involved a 17-year-old girl, Sarah, who exhibits chronic people-pleasing tendencies and low self-esteem. Sarah's experiences with seeking validation and facing criticism were analyzed to understand the impact on her self-esteem.

Materials

Sorensen's Self-Esteem Scale, a widely used tool for evaluating self-esteem, was employed. The scale consists of 50 items measuring global self-worth by assessing both positive and negative feelings about the self (Sorensen, 2001).

Procedure

A rapport was established with Sarah, and her willingness to participate in the study was confirmed. She provided demographic details and completed the Sorensen's Self-Esteem Scale honestly. The collected data were analyzed to interpret the results.

Results and Interpretation

Sarah marked 34 out of 50 statements on Sorensen's Self-Esteem Scale, indicating severely low self-esteem. Her responses revealed tendencies to compare herself to others, a lack of control over her life, and an inability to reinforce boundaries. These findings align with the hypothesis that people-pleasing behaviour and negative feedback contribute to low self-esteem.

Discussion

The findings highlight the detrimental effects of people-pleasing behaviour and negative feedback on self-esteem. Sarah's experiences illustrate how chronic criticism and a lack of validation can lead to negative self-perception, anxiety, and social withdrawal. These outcomes are consistent with previous research indicating that individuals who rely on external validation are more vulnerable to low self-esteem and mental health challenges (Crocker & Park, 2004).

Sarah's perfectionism and avoidance behaviours further exacerbate her anxiety, creating a cycle of self-doubt and fear of failure. This aligns with studies linking perfectionism to heightened stress and reduced well-being (Frost et al., 1990). The study underscores the importance of addressing people-pleasing tendencies and fostering intrinsic self-worth to improve mental health outcomes.

Conclusion

This case study demonstrates the adverse effects of people-pleasing behaviour and negative feedback on self-esteem. Sarah's experiences highlight the need for interventions that promote healthier self-perception and emotional regulation. Strategies such as cognitive-behavioural therapy (CBT) and self-compassion training may help individuals like Sarah break free from the cycle of seeking external validation and develop a stronger sense of self-worth.

Future research should explore the long-term effects of people-pleasing behaviour and the efficacy of various therapeutic interventions in improving self-esteem and mental health outcomes.

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