

**THE MEDIATING EFFECT OF SELF-CONCEPT IN THE  
RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN ATTACHMENT,  
SOCIAL SUPPORT AND GLOBAL  
SELF-WORTH AMONG  
ADOLESCENTS**



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## DECLARATION

I hereby declare that the material in this study is the result of my own work except for quotations, excerpts, equations, summaries and references, which have been duly acknowledged.

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## ABSTRACT

Previous studies have posed different roles of self-concept, attachment, and social support to adolescents' global self-worth. But, little known about the relatively significant for each of the variance they may share. The present study starts from the premise to identify the mediating role of self-concept in the relationships between social support and global self-worth among adolescents. Further, this study aims to determine whether adolescents' global self-worth can be predicted through perceived attachment and social support from the parents, peers, and teachers. A self-report survey was administrated to a group of adolescents (N=594) with age ranging from 13 to 18 years; selected using the purposive cluster sampling technique. The locations of the current research were conducted at three main districts of Sabah (Kota Kinabalu, Sandakan, and Tawau). Four scales were used for data collection: The Revised Inventory of Parent and Peer Attachment (IPPA-R; Gullone & Robinson, 2005), Psychological Sense of School Membership (PSSM) (Goodenow, 1993), Social Support Scale for Children and Adolescent (SSSCA) and Self-Perception Profile for Adolescents (SPPA) developed by Harter (2012). PLS-SEM was used as a data analysis technique in the study. The finding showed significant complete mediation role of self-concept between the relationship of teacher support and global self-worth. Additionally, the result also showed significant partial mediation role of self-concept between the influences of parent and peers support on global self-worth among adolescents. Results were discussed with respect to potential mechanisms through which self-concept, attachment, social support and global self-worth may operate. The implications of the study and recommendation for future research are presented.

## **ABSTRAK**

### **PERANAN PENGANTARA KONSEP KENDIRI DALAM HUBUNGAN ANTARA PERAPATAN, SOKONGAN SOSIAL DAN HARGA DIRI GLOBAL DI KALANGAN REMAJA**

*Kajian lepas telah memaparkan peranan yang berbeza antara konsep sendiri, perapatan, dan sokongan sosial terhadap harga diri global dalam konteks remaja. Tetapi, sedikit diketahui tentang pengaruh yang ketara bagi setiap varian yang dikongsikan. Objektif kajian ini adalah untuk mengenalpasti peranan pengantara konsep sendiri dalam hubungan antara perapatan, sokongan sosial dan harga diri global di kalangan remaja. Di samping itu, kajian ini juga bertujuan untuk menentukan sama ada harga diri global remaja boleh diramalkan melalui perapatan dan sokongan sosial jika dilihat dari pihak ibu bapa, rakan sebaya, dan guru. Tinjauan laporan telah diedarkan kepada sekumpulan remaja (N = 594) dengan usia antara 13 hingga 18 tahun; dipilih dengan menggunakan teknik persampelan bertujuan. Kajian ini dijalankan di tiga daerah utama Sabah iaitu, Kota Kinabalu, Sandakan, dan Tawau. Terdapat empat skala digunakan untuk pengumpulan data iaitu: Revised Inventory of Parent and Peer Attachment (IPPA-R; Gullone & Robinson, 2005), Psychological Sense of School Membership (PSSM) (Goodenow, 1993), Social Support Scale for Adolescent (SSSA) dan Self-Perception Profile for Adolescents (SPPA) oleh Harter (2012). PLS-SEM diperkenalkan sebagai teknik analisis data dalam kajian ini. Dapatan kajian menunjukkan peranan pengantaraan lengkap konsep sendiri antara hubungan sokongan guru dan harga diri global. Selain itu, keputusan kajian juga menunjukkan peranan pengantaraan separa konsep sendiri antara pengaruh sokongan sosial dari ibu bapa dan rakan-rakan ke atas harga diri global di kalangan remaja. Hasil dapatan berkenaan dengan mekanisme yang berpotensi di antara konstruk konsep sendiri, perapatan, sokongan sosial dan harga diri global dibincangkan. Implikasi kajian dan cadangan kajian lanjutan juga dibentangkan.*

# LIST OF CONTENTS

	Page
<b>TITLE</b>	i
<b>DECLARATION</b>	ii
<b>CERTIFICATION</b>	iii
<b>ACKNOWLEDGMENT</b>	iv
<b>ABSTRACT</b>	v
<b>ABSTRAK</b>	vi
<b>LIST OF CONTENTS</b>	vii
<b>LIST OF TABLES</b>	xiii
<b>LIST OF FIGURES</b>	xv
<b>LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS</b>	xvi
<b>LIST OF APPENDICES</b>	xvii
<b>CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION</b>	
1.0 Introduction	1
1.1 Research Background	5
1.1.1 Self-Concept and Global Self-Worth	6
1.1.2 Attachment and Social Support	9
1.2 Problem Statement	12
1.3 Research Question	22
1.4 Research Objective	23
1.5 Rationale of Study	24
1.6 Conceptual and Operational Definitions	26
1.6.1 Attachment	26
1.6.2 School Belongingness	27
1.6.3 Social Support	27
1.6.4 Self-Concept	28
1.6.5 Global Self-Worth	29
1.7 Chapter Summary	30



## **CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW**

2.0	Introduction	31
2.1	Self-Concept and Self-Esteem (Global Self-Worth)	32
2.2	Social Support	38
2.3	The Important of Parent Attachment and Parent Support on Self-Concept and Global Self-Worth (Model 1)	41
2.4	The Important of Peer Attachment and Peer Support on Self-Concept and Global Self-Worth (Model 2)	46
2.5	The Important of School Belongingness and Teacher Support on Self-Concept and Global Self-Worth (Model 3)	49
2.6	Self-Concept as Mediator	53
2.7	Theory and Model	55
	2.7.1 Symbolic Interaction Theory	55
	2.7.2 Expectancy-Value Theory	56
	2.7.3 Self-Perceptions in Adolescence	58
2.8	Theoretical Framework	62
2.9	Research Framework	64
2.10	Hypotheses	64
2.11	Chapter Summary	66

## **CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY**

3.0	Introduction	68
3.1	Research Methodology	68
	3.1.1 Research Paradigm	68
	3.1.2 Research Design	69
	3.1.3 Research Process	69
3.2	Data Collection	70
	3.2.1 Location	70
	3.2.2 Population	71
	3.2.3 Sample Size	72
	3.2.4 Sampling Technique	73
	3.2.5 Ethical Considerations	74
3.3	Research Instruments	74

3.3.1	Demographic Profile	75
3.3.2	Revised Inventory of Parent and Peer Attachment (IPPA-R)	76
3.3.3	Psychological Sense of School Membership (PSSM)	77
3.3.4	Social Support Scale for Adolescence (SSSA)	78
3.3.5	Self-Perception Profile for Adolescents (SPPA)	80
3.4	Procedures	81
3.4.1	Pretest	81
3.4.2	Pilot Study	84
3.4.3	Actual Study	86
3.5	Common Method Variance (CMV)	88
3.6	Data Analysis: Partial Least Square (PLS-SEM)	89
3.6.1	Procedure of Evaluating Reflective Measurement Model	90
3.6.1.1	Reliability of Internal Consistency of Reflective Construct	90
3.6.1.2	Reliability of Indicator Reliability of Reflective Construct	91
3.6.1.3	Convergent Validity of Reflective Construct	91
3.6.1.4	Discriminant Validity of Reflective Construct	91
3.6.2	Procedure of Evaluating Reflective Structural Model	92
3.6.2.1	Collinearity Assessment	92
3.6.2.2	Path Coefficients	92
3.6.2.3	Coefficient of Determination ( $R^2$ )	93
3.6.2.4	Effect Size ( $f^2$ )	93
3.6.2.5	Blindfolding and Predictive Relevance ( $Q^2$ )	94
3.6.2.6	Effect Size ( $q^2$ )	94
3.6.2.7	Mediation Analysis	94
3.7	Chapter Summary	95

## **CHAPTER 4: RESULT**

4.0	Introduction	97
4.1	Assessment of Measurement Model	97
4.1.1	Reliability of Internal Consistency of Reflective Construct	98
4.1.2	Reliability of Indicator Reliability of Reflective Construct	100
4.1.3	Convergent Validity of Reflective Construct	101
4.1.4	Discriminant Validity of Reflective Construct	104

4.2	Assessment of Second Order Construct	107
4.2.1	Reliability of Internal Consistency of Second Order Construct	110
4.2.2	Convergent Validity of Second Order Construct	111
4.2.3	Discriminant Validity of Second Order Construct	112
4.2.4	Summary of Reflective Measurement Model	114
4.3	Assessment of Structural Model	116
4.3.1	Effect Size	117
4.3.2	Blindfolding and Predictive Relevance ( $Q^2$ )	120
4.3.3	Effect Size ( $q^2$ )	120
4.3.4	Hypotheses Testing (Direct Effect)	122
4.3.4.1	H1: Parent attachment has positive influence on parent support	122
4.3.4.2	H2: Peer attachment has positive influence on peer support	122
4.3.4.3	H3: School belongingness has positive influence on teacher support	123
4.3.4.4	H4 (a): Parent support has positive influence on self-concept	123
4.3.4.5	H4 (b): Peer support has positive influence on self-concept	123
4.3.4.6	H4 (c): Teacher support has positive influence on self-concept	123
4.3.4.7	H5 (a): Parent support has positive influence on global self-worth	124
4.3.4.8	H5 (b): Peer support has positive influence on global self-worth	124
4.3.4.9	H5 (c): Teacher support has positive influence on global self-worth	124
4.3.4.10	H6: Self-concept has positive influence on global self-worth	125
4.3.5	Hypotheses Testing (Mediating Effect)	128
4.3.5.1	H7 (a): The relationship between parent support and global self-worth is mediated by self-concept	129

4.3.5.2	H7 (b): The relationship between peer support and global self-worth is mediated by self-concept	130
4.3.5.3	H7 (c): The relationship between teacher support and global self-worth is mediated by self-concept	131
4.4	Chapter Summary	133
<b>CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION</b>		
5.0	Introduction	134
5.1	Hypothesis Testing (Direct effect)	134
5.1.1	H1: Parent attachment has positive influence on parent support	135
5.1.2	H2: Peer attachment has positive influence on peer support	135
5.1.3	H3: School belongingness has positive influence on teacher support	136
5.1.4	H4 (a): Parent support has positive influence on self-concept	137
5.1.5	H4 (b): Peer support has positive influence on self-concept	138
5.1.6	H4 (c): Teacher support has positive influence on self-concept	139
5.1.7	H5 (a): Parent support has positive influence on global self-worth	140
5.1.8	H5 (b): Peer support has positive influence on global self-worth	140
5.1.9	H5 (c): Teacher support has positive influence on global self-worth	141
5.1.10	H6: Self-concept has positive influence on global self-worth	142
5.2	Hypotheses Testing (Mediating Effect)	143
5.2.1	H7 (a): The relationship between parent support and global self-worth is partially mediated by self-concept	144

5.2.2	H7 (b): The relationship between peer support and global self-worth is partially mediated by self-concept	148
5.2.3	H7 (c): The relationship between teacher support and global self-worth is fully mediated by self-concept	150
5.3	Developing Mediation Model	151
5.4	Chapter Summary	153
<b>CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSION</b>		
6.0	Introduction	154
6.1	Implications	154
6.2	Limitations	158
6.3	Recommendations	160
6.4	Conclusion	161
<b>REFERENCES</b>		145



**UMS**  
UNIVERSITI MALAYSIA SABAH

## LIST OF TABLES

	Page	
3.1	Population of Secondary Students in Sabah	72
3.2	Sample Size with Different Confidence Levels	72
3.3	Demographic Profile of Respondent	75
3.4	Sub-scale in Revised Inventory of Parent and Peer Attachment (IPPA-R)	77
3.5	Sub-scale in Psychological Sense of School Membership (PSSM)	78
3.6	Sub-scale in Social Support Scale for Adolescence (SSSA)	80
3.7	Sub-scale in Self-Perception Profile for Adolescents (SPPA)	81
3.8	Summary of Major Constructs, Number of Item and Sources after Pre-Test	83
3.9	Instruments Reliability	86
3.10	Types of Mediation	95
4.1	Types of Key Construct	98
4.2	Reliability Statistics	99
4.3	Descriptive Statistics and Average Variance Extracted (AVE) Value of All Constructs	102
4.4	Convergent Validity of First Order Construct	103
4.5	Cross-Loadings Analysis of First Order Construct	104
4.6	Discriminant Validity of First Order Construct	107
4.7	Summary of Reliability Statistics and Internal Consistency of First Order Constructs and Second Order Construct	111
4.8	Cross-Loadings Analysis of Second Order Construct	113
4.9	Discriminant Validity of Second Order Construct	114
4.10	Summary for Reflective Measurement Models	115

4.11	The Extended Paths with the Three Social Support Constructs and Self-Concept Construct	118
4.12	The Extended Paths with the Three Social Support Constructs and Global Self-Worth Construct	119
4.13	Summary of Path Coefficients, T-value, VIF, $R^2$ value, $f^2$ effect size, $Q^2$ value, and $q^2$ effect size for All Hypothesised Paths	126
4.14	Summary of Hypotheses Testing for Direct Effect	127
4.15	Significance Analysis of the Direct and Indirect Effects	132
4.16	Summary of Hypotheses Testing for Mediating Effects	132



UMMS  
UNIVERSITI MALAYSIA SABAH

## LIST OF FIGURES

		Page
2.1	Theoretical Framework	63
2.2	Research Framework	64
3.1	Research Process	70
5.1	Research Model	152

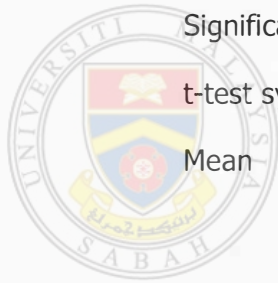


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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

<b>IPPA-R</b>	Revised Inventory of Parent and Peer Attachment
<b>PSSM</b>	Psychological Sense of School Membership
<b>SSSA</b>	Social Support Scale for Adolescence
<b>SPPA</b>	Self-Perception Profile for Adolescents
<b>PLS</b>	Partial Least Square
<b>SEM</b>	Structural Equation Modeling
<b>SPSS</b>	Statistical Package for Social Science
<b>df</b>	Degree of freedom
<b>N</b>	Number of participant
<b>S.D</b>	Standard Deviation
<b>Sig.</b>	Significant
<b>t</b>	t-test symbol
$\bar{x}$	Mean



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## LIST OF APPENDICES

- Appendix A Proceeding and Publication
- Appendix B Approval Letters
- Appendix C Questionnaires
- Appendix D Result Output



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# CHAPTER 1

## INTRODUCTION

### 1.0 Introduction

Adolescence is a transition period between childhood and adulthood that has recently attracted widespread among the researchers, especially in the field of childhood and adolescence development. For decades, psychologists have been attempting to define adolescence by using ages. However, it is arduous to categorise between child and adolescent; or adolescent between adult, taking into consideration of the involving of complex physiology and psychosocial development processes from childhood to adulthood (Ernst, Daniele, and Frantz, 2011). Of course, it is not easy for adolescents to know when they have made the transition to adulthood. In our society, the adolescents considered legally become adult at different ages which depend on the perspectives of their parents. For example, some of the parents might think that their children officially become an adult either when they are on the armed services, allow to taking or buying a drink or cigarette legally, driving, voting or get married. However, some of the adolescents think they are mature as adults, and over evaluate their competence thus affected their behaviours.

The definitions of adolescence are varying widely by institution or research field. For example, adolescence is defined as the period of age 11 to 21 by The Maternal Child Health Bureau (MCHB), or 12 to 24 by The World Health Organization (WHO). Yet, the psychologists consider that adolescence starts at age 12 to 18 years, which divided into three phases, such as early adolescence (age 12 to 14 years), middle adolescence (age 14 to 16 years), and late adolescence (age 16 to 18 years) (Persike and Seiffge-Krenke, 2011; Sontage et al., 2011). In present study, the selected respondents are between the ages of 13 to 18 years

which is also among the secondary students. The period of adolescence is where the adolescents are more likely to swing back and forth between happiness and sadness, overconfidence and self-doubt, dependence and independence. This period is a necessary part for the adolescents to go through the processes of mood swings, conflicts with parents and rebel against their parents' values in order for them to make the transition to adulthood. However, adolescence needs not to be a time of "storm and stress" which the contemporary theorists no longer see adolescents as "troubles or problem maker" (Buchanan and Hughes, 2009).

Some theorists seeing adolescence as a period when biological, cognitive, social and emotional functioning is reorganized (Smetana, 2011). This is because during the period of adolescence, teenagers tend to feel confusing with the conflicts they have with others or themselves, and sometimes they need a proper guidance from the perspectives of their parents or teachers. Therefore, the period of adolescence is a critical stage where the significant adults such as parents and teachers to work together in order to understand the different perspectives from their children. Additionally, there is crucial need that parents and teachers should try to identify how do the adolescents perceived their own perceptions (especially in term of academic performance, social and behavioural competence), rather than just giving negative comments and asking the child to follow all the command without any further explanation or consideration of the child's feeling.

The transition from primary school to secondary school and the dramatic changes of development process from child to adolescent have affected their relationship with their parents and teachers, failed to dealing the changes will led to poor academic performance (Hill and Tyson, 2009). For instance, some of the parents and teacher may wonder why majority of the secondary school students dropped in their academic performance compared to previous progress? Why the adolescents tend to have social and behavioural problems in school? Why some of the high school students excel in their schoolwork and social skills whereas others fail to achieve? All these phenomena can be explained by the different perspectives of adolescents' self-perceptions, such as each individual may perceived differently in particular subjects or domains, and of course the value they place on doing well

are critical predictors of their social and life achievement (Bouchey and Harter, 2005). As adolescents proceeding through their educational journeys experience, a natural development from childhood to adolescence are a complex process when the adolescents need to maximise their academic performance and develop a sense of self-concept or global self-worth by acquiring important social skills.

The transition from primary to secondary school is a crucial moment in the development of adolescence because the adolescents is generally characterized by physical and psychical changes (Rosenberg, 1979) as well as shifts in their social environment, and encounter new peers and teachers who may uphold new or different expectations (Harter, 1996). Many researchers have examined children's experiences as they move from primary school to secondary school. They found that transition to the new school setting often is accompanied by a decline in grades and the participation in school activities (Hill & Tyson, 2009). Students may also experience a drop in self-perceptions in different domains which will increase the like hood of psychological distress such as depression or anxiety (Crosnoe, 2011; Rudolph & Flynn, 2007). Moreover, completing high school is one of the most critical developmental tasks facing by adolescents because it is a trajectory for them to continue study in college or university, or involve in professional field or career. The consequences of dropping out are most likely to exhibit problem behaviours, including delinquency, criminal, substance abuse, and self-injury or suicide (Donovan and Wells, 2007).

Yet, it has been found that the adolescents are also tend to have maladaptive emotional outcomes, such as negative perceptions of self-worth which is associated with variety of social and life adjustment difficulties including school failure, difficulties in social competence, or behavioural conduct (Wald and Losen, 2007). Although there is a general downward trend associated with adolescence (Ellis, Marsh, and Craven, 2005), not all the adolescents are equally affected by it, while some might experience changes as threatening, others might take the opportunity for their own personal development (Ladd, 2009). So, how do they develop self-concept? Do adolescents' beliefs about what others think of them direct their own self-concept and global self-worth? Do attachment and social

support from significant others (such as, parents, teachers and peers) predict adolescents' self-concept in different domains? Is there any mediating effect of self-concept between attachment and social support from significant others and global self-worth among adolescents?

To better understand the mental health of adolescents, we should turn to the construct of social supports as one of the influences that affect the lives of adolescents. Social support has been shown to be positively related to various adjustment outcomes such as academic and behavioural outcomes (Malecki and Demaray, 2002, 2006; Weinstein, 2005; Benner and Mistry, 2007; Wentzel, Filisetti, and Looney, 2007), prosocial outcomes (Wentzel, Battle, Russell, and Looney, 2010; Wentzel et al., 2007; Jackson and Warren, 2000). Conversely, social support also been shown to be negatively related to some maladjustment such as social-emotional problems (Arnett, 2010; Feldman, 2008; Puskar, Ren, Bernado, Haley, and Stark, 2008), and behaviour problems (Meehan, Hughes, and Cavell, 2003; German, Gonzales, and Dunka, 2009). Therefore, the role of social support from significant others (such as parents, peers, teachers) as socializes of adolescents' achievement belief in academic, social and behavioral is very important, especially in the prediction of adolescents' self-concept and global self-worth.

Hence, the addressed issues will be focused on current study and will be test by a theoretically based mediation model of the relations among adolescents' perceptions of parent and peer attachment, school belonging, and social support regarding their own self-concept and global self-worth. Thus, the researcher expected that the findings of the present study are able to indicate the potential mechanisms by which perceived attachment, school belonging and social support from significant others (parents, peers, and teachers) would predict the most on adolescents' self-concept in term of scholastic competence, social competence, and behavioural conduct. And in turn, the mediating role of self-concept is best predicting the influences of social support on adolescents' global self-worth. Of course, the results of the present study are expected to represent the generalisation of the phenomena that have been emphasized above with large non-specialised population of school-aged adolescents.

## 1.1 Research Background

During 20<sup>th</sup> century, when psychology began drawing attention from other fields, it became one of the significant field among other academic disciplines. During that period, people were interested in discussing the role of self-beliefs in human conduct. The topic became popular when the chapter "The consciousness of self" first written by William James in year 1890. However, the eminent psychoanalysts such as Sigmund Freud and Carl Jung who believe the concept of "id, ego and superego" were disagree with William James and criticised his ideas on self-processes. Later Erik Erikson (1950) focused on adolescent's development of their ego identity. Next, the ideas of behaviourism about self-study proposed by John Watson and B. F. Skinner take part when the efforts of James, psychoanalysts, and other proponents of self-study cannot withstand for scientific inquiry. After that, a group of psychologists called for renewed attention to inner experience and internal processes of the self-beliefs (e.g., Maslow, 1954).

During the 1960s and 1970s, psychologists and educators began to realised the significations of positive self-esteem in student's performance. Researchers have evidence that students' self-esteem is a main contributing factor of academic performance. Through the years, humanistic psychology also emphasis in enhancing student's self-esteem. But, the humanistic research had found uneven results on the relationship between self-esteem and academic achievement. As a consequence, during 1980s, psychologists and educators turned their focus in examining how student's cognitive and information processing affected their academic performance. Unfortunately, the studies were failed to cover the importance of students' self-beliefs toward academic performance. Thus, the ideas or concepts of enhancing students' positive self-beliefs have once again become the important subject to be studied.

Today, educational psychologists tend to focus on the issues regarding to human functioning and students' self-concept and sense of global self-worth after a thorough analysis of self-knowledge related to theories and academic motivation for the Handbook of Educational Psychology written by Sandra Graham and Bernard Weiner (1996). Graham & Weiner (1996) believed that student that have

positive self-beliefs will be able to motivate themselves positively and performed better in their academic achievement. Additionally, current conceptions of self-belief have been especially divided in research with self-enhancement orientation and research with skill development orientation (Pajares and Schunk, 2001). Researchers with self-enhancement orientation have evidence that self-concept is a main root of student achievement, where psychologists and educators should focused in nurturing students' self-esteem. By enhancing students' self-esteem, unquestionably students' academic performance will be increased. Conversely, researchers with skill development orientation argue that self-concept is a consequence rather than a cause of academic achievement, where psychologists and educators should put effort in increasing student's academic competence. They believe that by enhancing students' academic competence naturally students' self-esteem will be increased.

#### **1.1.1 Self-Concept and Global Self-Worth**

Current interest of the study is self-concept, which is a construct with a long ancestry. William James (1981) was one of the first writers to use the term "self-esteem", which he described as how individuals feel about themselves depends on the success with which they accomplish those things they wish to accomplish (p. 310). James also argued that self-esteem may be raised or lowered by either succeeding or failure in one's certain aims (as cited in Pajares and Schunk, 2001). Next, self-concept has typically been defined by Coopersmith and Feldman (1974) as consisting of "beliefs, hypotheses, and assumptions that the individual has about him or herself". As such, James also conceptualized self-concept as an individual's representation of all of his or her self-knowledge. Combs (1962) argued that an individual's self-concept is "what an individual believes he is" (p. 62).

On the other hand, Cooley (1902) used the metaphor of the self as mirror, or "looking-glass self" to illustrate the idea that individuals' sense of self is primarily formed as a result of their perceptions of how others perceive them. The present study agreed with this conception of self that emphasized on the importance of social comparisons in the development of self-concept. Similarly, Coopersmith