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## Self-Image as a Predictor of Success in Career - An Analysis in the Field of Sciences

Elena Ancuța Santi<sup>a\*</sup>, Gabriel Gorghiu<sup>b</sup>

\* Corresponding author: Elena Ancuța Santi, santi.anca@yahoo.ro

<sup>a</sup>Teacher Training Department, Valahia University Targoviste, Romania, santi.anca@yahoo.ro

<sup>b</sup>Teacher Training Department, Valahia University Targoviste, Romania, ggorghiu@gmail.com

### Abstract

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The human potential represents the highest point which can be reached by an individual in his/her development and requires the activation of all bio-psycho-physical resources. Among the factors that converge in the maximal development of the individual, it can be included the *self-image*, which may influence the success in life and the failure of personal actions.

The self-image is a fundamental psychological structure and is involved in the holistic development of the personality, which is constructed through social interactions of the individual, through the internalization of models and experiences.

In this respect, the present paper highlights a number of components of the self-image that can be found in the psychological portrait of science specialists. The students who think to a career in the field of sciences tend to design at the level of self-image, specific features of this field, identifying so with their models in the psychological plan. For each person, it is important to choose a profession that meets their needs and expectations. The self-image is one of the factors that make the correspondence between desires and possibilities of accomplishment, but also of the success in carrier and life.

The study was done based on the feedback offered by the secondary students to a specific questionnaire applied after the implementation of inquire-based science teaching modules, developed in the frame of the European FP7 Project entitled: “*PROFILES - Professional Reflection Oriented Focus on Inquiry-based Learning and Education through Science*”.

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**Keywords:** Self-image; self-esteem; psychological portrait; students' feedback; PROFILES Project.



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## 1. Introduction

Each person has a mental image on its own person, a representation - at his psychic level - of its individual particularities, built based on the convictions gathered in its subconscious mind, from the experiences he has had, from the lived successes or failures, from certain faiths, from others' reactions and attitudes related to him/her.

The *self*-concept represents a multidimensional model, summing up the way a person self-appreciates its abilities, talents, physical aspect and social presence (Byrne, 1996). Its construction begins very early during childhood and has a dynamic character, grows richer and becomes complex in the course of the life. The *self*-concept includes very different elements, from the global image on one's own image, to the subjective perception, strongly determined situationally, related to an isolated behavior (Boncu, & Ceobanu, 2013).

## 2. The Psychological self-structure

The *self*-concept was used initially by W. James around 1890, representing the unit reuniting two realities: one subjective, interior - the *psychological self* (*I*), and one objective (from the outside) – the *social self* (*me*).

The psychanalyst theories (S. Freud, A. Freud, C. Rogers) consider that the *self* (*Id*) represents the center of the human personality, which assures the dynamic and permanent integration of the information on oneself, on the others and on the entire world, contributing to the shaping of the feeling of identity, continuity and unity of one's own existence (Țuțu, 2008); *self* is a social product involved in interpersonal relations. Rogers claims that there is a fundamental human need to have a positive image both from others and from oneself (Purkey, 1988). The *self-concept* is generally used to refer to the conscious reflection of one's own being or identity, as an object separated from the others related to the environment.

In the process of self-formation, three components are interpenetrated: *physical* or *corporeal self*, *psychological* or *spiritual self* and *social self*. The *physical* or *corporeal self* is the image on one's body's internal environment, the image on one's physical constitution, the affective experiences connected to those mentioned above, the bio-physiological needs and the association to corresponding value judgements (*beautiful-ugly, pleasant-unpleasant, strong-weak, man-woman*). This is the first *self* which begins and develops during the ontogenesis. The *psychological self* reflects the image on one's own internal psychical organization, the affective experiences related to that, the self-realization or self-improvement needs which will to act, and the association with the following value judgements: *capable-incapable, talented-untalented, good-bad*. The *social self* offers the image on one's own place and role in the society, the interiorized social value system, motives or status needs, social feelings which will to interact and get integrated, and the association with value judgements such as: *appreciated-persecuted, integrated-marginalized, accomplished-frustrated, liked-hated* (Golu, 2009).

M. Zlate (2002) speaks about the inner psychological structure of the *self*, including:

- The *subjective self*, representing the individual's self-image;
- The *reflected self*, which is the self-image reflected in others, depending on their opinions;

- The *authentic self*, different from the masks worn or the roles played by the individual and the one that the individual could have if he/she were to actualize the unique being carried inside him;
- The *ideal self*, what one wants to be or appear in order to answer expectations, to be accepted by the others and face the pressures exerted by the people around the individual. The ideal self is a projection of one's self-image.

The discrepancies between those facets of one's self are correlated to various psychic vulnerabilities, negative psychological states, and physical discomfort.

### 3. The self-image

One of the main subjective forms of manifestation of the *self* is the *self-image*, formed from the interaction and inter-conditioning of external and internal factors, respectively of the following three components: *physical self-image*, *psychic self-image* and *social self-image* (Golu, 2009). The *self-image* is a combination between the sum of *self-perceptions* (physical, cognitive, emotional, social and spiritual features) or the way a person perceives his/herself (*self-knowledge*), but also the representation that others have about us, the way we are seen, appreciated and accepted by our fellows. The content of one's *self-image* refers to our whole being, to those features by which we differ from others and which we refer to our *personal self*, different from *you* and *him/her*. M. Zlate (2002) defines the *self-image* as the sum of the individual's representations, ideas, beliefs about his/her own internalized personality. The crystallization of one's *self-image* begins between at the age of 6 and 8, yet its organization takes place during one's adolescence.

Depending on our perception, at a certain moment of our development, on what we wish to be or what we could be, we can distinguish several hypostases of our *self*: *actual self*, *ideal self* and *future self*. The *actual self* represents the way the person perceives his own physical, cognitive, emotional, social and spiritual features at a certain moment. The dimensions of the *actual self* are:

- *physical self (what I think about my body);*
- *cognitive self (what I think about the way I think, memorize etc.);*
- *emotional self (what I think about my emotions and feelings);*
- *social self (how I think others see me);*
- *spiritual self (what I believe important and representing a value for me).*

Between the structure of the *self* and the profile of the *self-image*, there is a close interdependence: the *self-image* derives from the subjective, aware and synthetic image of the *self*, situated in a certain context, and this image, once constituted, can influence, in its turn, the structure and the functioning of one's self (Craiovan, & Diră, 2012). Maltz (1999) argues that all the actions, feelings and behaviours of an individual always agree with his/her personal image, namely our *self-image* influences our behaviours, which strongly calls for the construction of a realistic and correct *self-image*.

In the content of the *self-image*, one can find characteristic aspects, such as: image of our body and physical and psychic qualities we are aware of; social identity (name, age, residence, family, profession, economic status etc.); way of understanding what we do, feel and think at a certain moment, by relating that to certain value- and attitude-landmarks we are aware of as being characteristic of ourselves; the representations we have about our position in society and about the roles

played in relevant life situations and circumstances; feelings to ourselves, to others and to the significant events and situations we are or have been involved in; the physical and psychosocial area bearing the mark of our will's options, of our actions and of our personality (Craiovan & Dîră, 2012).

The *self-image* represents a central *self-regulation* mechanism of the personality system, a filter for the passage and for the comparison of the individual's own internal requirements (needs, desires, aspirations and aims of his/her activity) and external requirements, conditioning the concrete way of acting in each particular circumstance and situation (Golu, 2009). One's self-image takes shape progressively and changes continually throughout one's life.

#### **4. The Self-Esteem**

The *self-esteem* is defined as the value the individual attributes to his/her own person (Rosenberg & al., 1995); it is the evaluative component of the *self-knowledge* (Salmela-Aro & Nurmi, 2007). This concept is very often correlated to professional success (Salmela-Aro & Nurmi, 2007; McCullough, Ashbridge & Pegg, 1994; Chiu, 1990). The level of one's *self-esteem* strongly influences one's performances in all domains, people with a high *self-esteem* trust their own possibilities more, are more in command of themselves and succeed better, which later contributes to the consolidation of their good opinion about themselves; a low level of *self-esteem* is correlated to the increase in the number of failures, which determines, in its turn, the shaping of a negative vision on one's own person, the loss of one's *self-esteem* (Iluț, 2001). The *self-esteem* is a quality that perseveres in time, a fact that gives it a special importance in the human personality structuring process.

#### **5. Methodology**

The present research has aimed to identify the way that the *self-image* contributes to the choice of a profession, detect the features making up the psychological portrait of the specialist in the area of Sciences and the way the students project on the level of their *self-image*, those features specific for a professional in the desired career (real self + future self = ideal self). The applied questionnaire aimed to highlight how students perceive themselves, on a personal level, individually, and how a specialist in the area is perceived by the students (physical and psychological portrait, but also his/her character). The research sample consisted of 529 upper secondary students, aged between 15 and 19 years old, all of them being gathered in a group who answered to a *Motivational Learning Environment (MoLE)* questionnaire (*MoLE*), with the view of evaluating their gains on scientific literacy, the research being based on the implementation of a model of science instruction, taking into account the effects of important variables of innovative and motivational learning environments on students' outcome (Bolte, 2006).

#### **6. Results and discussions**

As result of the applied questionnaires, a series of features have been emphasized, offering the possibility to group them into three categories:

-particular features concerning the *self-image* (*beautiful, attractive, educated, smart, self-possessed, resourceful, respected, popular*);

-features related to the *cognitive and emotional profile* (*intelligent, eloquent, creative, open, imaginative, empathetic*);

-features that refer to *character*- useful also for modelling the future career (*ambitious, tenacious, courageous, orderly, sensitive, authoritarian, strong, insistent*).

In terms of *self-image*, the subjects assigned special importance to the following features: *educated* and *smart*; they give low importance to *self-possessed, beautiful* and *popular*. This means that at the level of the *self-image*, students intellectual component stresses, but less on the social or relational levels (fig. 1).

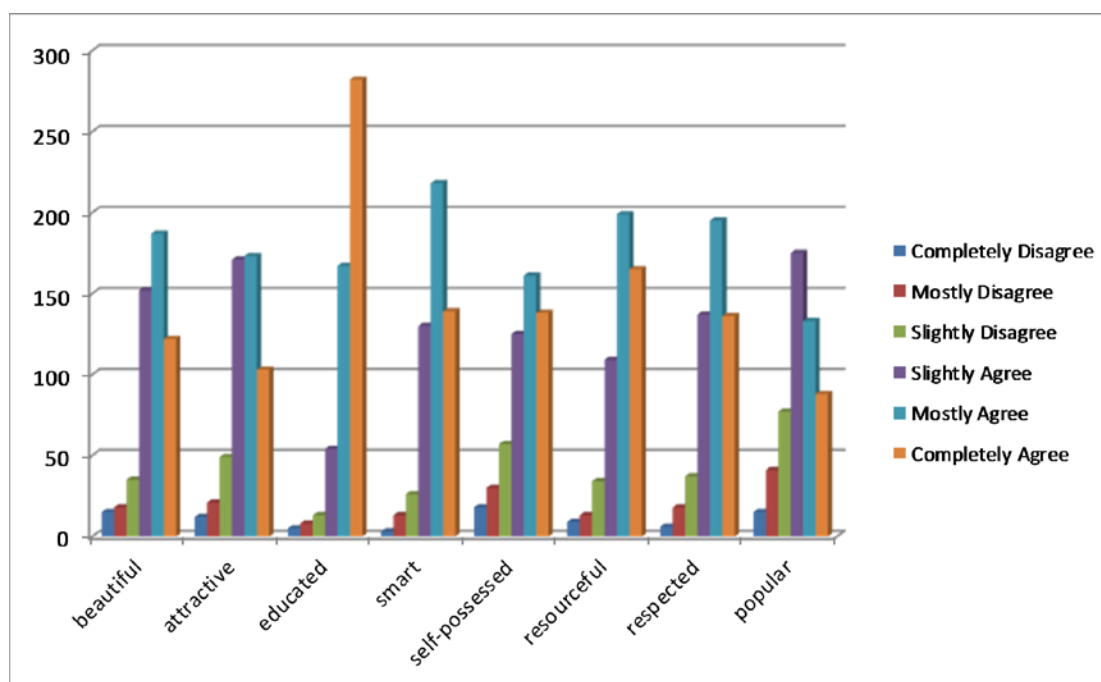


Fig. 1. Pattern related to the self-image

In connection with the cognitive and emotional profile, the students' stance is oriented on high features such as: intelligent, creative, open, imaginative, which shows that they know very well and recognize in the structure of their personality important traits in terms of cognitive and emotional development (fig. 2.).

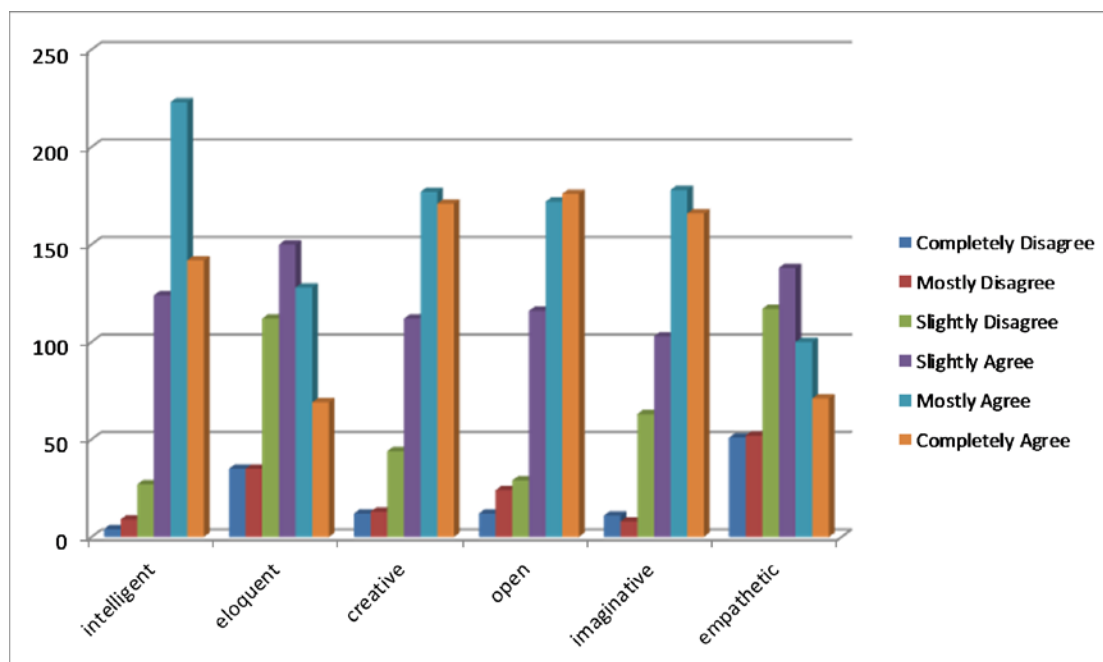


Fig. 2. Patterns of cognitive and emotional profile

Students consider that ambition, diligence and sensitivity are traits that define them best and those represent the motivating factors on choosing the desired career. In opposition, authoritarian and insistent features are found, receiving so a negative connotation in the students' minds (fig. 3).

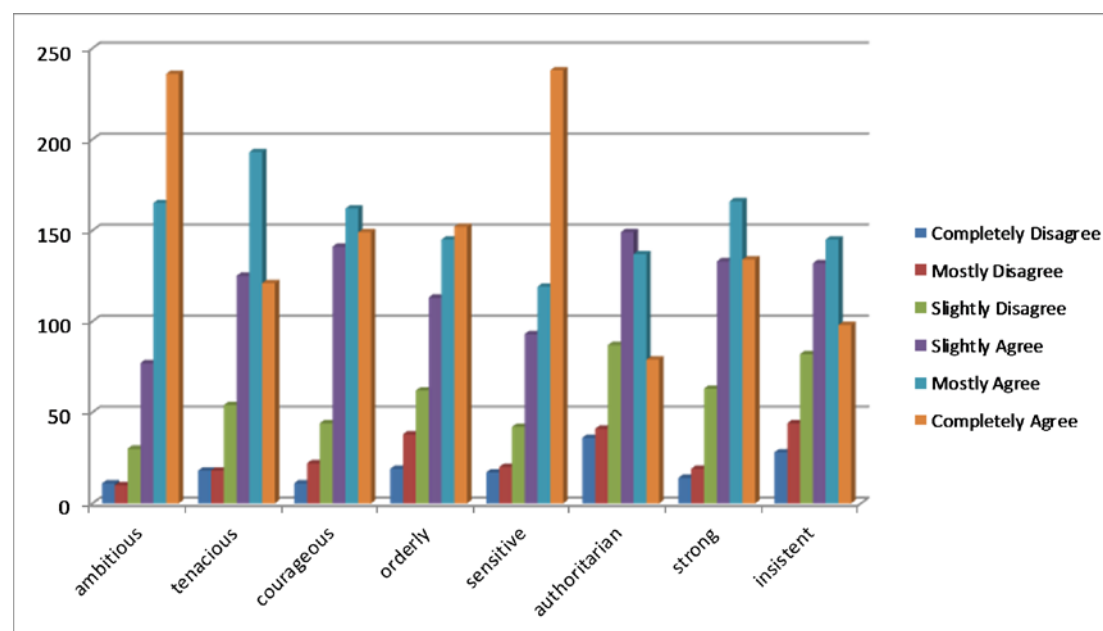


Fig. 3. Patterns related to character features

## 7. Conclusions

The career success is a target we all tend to. Any professional success acknowledged by individuals and society can be considered an accomplishment. Obtaining professional success or success in life is very much related to the *self-knowledge*, to the real valorization of one's own person, to the measure of how well one's *self-image* and one's actual possibilities of accomplishment overlap together. Iluț

(2001) states that the individual has a paradox in front of him: although we have all the conditions to know ourselves as well as possible, because nothing is closer to us (ontologically and epistemically) than our own being, at the same time nothing is dearer to us than this being, which can distort our perception in the favour of a positive image. The relation between the *self-perceived*, the *self-desired* and the *ideal self* is objectivized as well concerning the choice of one's career.

Regarding the presented study, the research has highlighted the fact that the individuals who had a positive *self-image* on their own person and identified in the researcher's psychological portrait features specific and necessary for such a career in this area, projecting themselves, on the level of their ideal or desired self, within the boundaries of that profile, realizing an overlapping of their own personality features over the researcher's psychological, characterial and even physical profile. This research is relevant because it highlights important aspects for the people in charge of training the students for a career in the research area: the subjects have a psychical representation formed about the specific features of the persons in the professional proposed sphere, and the identification at the mental level with their "models" develops specific skills, opens clear horizons on choosing one's career (discovery of one's vocation), motivationally supports one throughout the trajectory of the entire specialized training. The students identified in the sphere of their own personality mainly those desirable features that compose the researcher's psychological and characterial portrait.

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