What is the Difference Between Self-Concept and Self-Esteem?

Two psychological terms that are very commonly used interchangeably are self-concept and self-esteem, but in fact, there is a difference between the meanings of the terms.

What is Self-Concept?

“as children move through early childhood to adulthood their sense of self becomes increasingly complex but reflects changes in their cognitive and social development” (Hunter, 2003).

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AZdsCdx04to

A person’s self-concept is his knowledge about himself.

‘Who am I?’

Similar to how he can know other people, and know facts about how they tend to think, and what they enjoy doing, and what their temperament is like, he can also know these things about himself. Some people have much stronger self-concepts than others, probably because possessing a self-concept in much detail requires reflection on one's own self and behavior.

What is Self-Esteem?

Self-esteem, rather than being something that you know about yourself, is your general attitude toward yourself. Self-esteem refers to the extent to which we like accept or approve of ourselves or how much we value ourselves. Self esteem always involves a degree of evaluation and we may have either a positive or negative view of ourselves. This can vary depending on the situation and what have been going on lately, and any feedback you have gotten recently from your environment and people around you.

High self-esteem, were we have a positive view of ourselves, tends to led to;

- Confidence in our own abilities
- Self acceptance
- Not worrying about what others think
- Optimism

Low self esteem, where we have a negative view of ourselves, tends to led to

- Lack of confidence
- A wish to be/look like someone else
- Always worrying what others may think
- Pessimism
Generally, children who have warm and secure relationships with their parents/carers are more likely to have positive self concepts and high self esteem.

**Key Difference between Self-Concept and Self-Esteem**

The key difference between self-concept and self-esteem is that the addition of feelings. Self-concept is simply the informational side of things, where you know facts about what you are like. Self-esteem is how you feel about those things you know, like whether you enjoy the fact that you are talkative at parties (high self-esteem) or you think that you are annoying and need to learn to shut up sometimes (low self-esteem). There are a variety of self-esteem effects that can come from the self-concept.

**Similarities between Self-Concept and Self-Esteem**

Self-concept and self-esteem also have a lot in common though, mostly that they are reflective processes. They can be influenced not only by observing one's own self and behavior objectively, but also by observing the reactions that other people have to you and your behavior, or imagining what other people might think of you, or what you would think of yourself if you saw yourself from outside.

In addition, self-concept and self-esteem can be developed through comparing oneself to those around you, and that is a big reason that self-esteem is raised or lowered. When you see that you are better at something than somebody else, then you will probably have higher self-esteem because you see and understand your own value.

**What Can Hurt Self-Concept and Self-Esteem?**

Of course, having people inaccurately say bad things about you and your character, or make comparisons between you and people who are better than you at objective measures can both hurt self-esteem. Perhaps more interestingly, receiving rewards for doing actions can actually change your self-concept. If there is something that you enjoy doing as a hobby, and then you get a full-time job doing that activity, you are likely to not enjoy it as a hobby as much or see it as an integral part of yourself, but rather you will view yourself as somebody who does that professionally, but not for fun.

This is a general introduction to the subject of self-concept and self esteem. During the CILG session, you will explore the relevance of this to your own field of practice and share your findings with the group.