
| RESEARCH ARTICLE

Influence of Childhood Emotions on Self-awareness and Growth Based on Satir's Iceberg Theory

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| ABSTRACT

The purpose of this paper is to analyze and study the causes of childhood emotions and the effects of such emotions on the growth process by combing through relevant literature with Satir's iceberg theory as a guide. Through comparative analysis, the effects of negative and positive behavior on children are discussed and argued separately. The results suggest that education received in childhood that adopts a critical and skeptical approach is positively associated with self-deprecation in the child's self-awareness and has a negative effect on future development that is difficult to eliminate. The results of the study have practical implications for how emotion management and education in childhood should be approached in schools and at home nowadays.

| KEYWORDS

Satir's iceberg theory, self-awareness, growth, education.

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1. Introduction

Emotions are representations of complex human mental activity and are expressed as positive and negative emotions. In recent years, emotions and accompanying self-awareness and behavior have become a major focus of research as a predictor of development in children aged 0 to 12. Good emotion management is important for children to build good interpersonal relationships and achieve academic growth and physically and mentally healthy growth, and research on childhood emotions also provides a feasible path for school and family education.

2. Individual Behavior

Different schools of psychology have given different interpretations of individual human behavior. The French philosopher Sartre believed that "existence precedes essence". According to him, when evaluating a person, it is the actions rather than the identity that are to be evaluated because the essence of a person is defined through actions, and "man is nothing else but the sum of his actions". This gave birth to behavioral psychology, one of the major branches of modern psychology. Later, the contemporary American psychologist Maslow disagreed with behaviorism's use of the results of animal behavior research to explain the complexities of human behavior and therefore decided to create a new psychological orientation that would emphasize the value of positive psychological development and personal growth. He divided human needs into five categories, namely, physiological needs, safety needs, social needs, esteem needs, and self-actualization needs, in order from lower to higher levels. The theories of the hierarchy of needs and self-actualization proposed by him have formed the core of humanistic psychology. Nowadays, Maslow's hierarchy of needs has been the most widely used theory in organizational motivation.

The iceberg model is an important theory and tool in Satir's family therapy. According to the iceberg model, if the "self" is an iceberg, then "individual behavior", the explicit, exposed part, is only the tip of the iceberg, which is above the surface of the water and can be observed from the outside, whereas the huge iceberg underwater is the "inner" that is hidden, suppressed, and easily ignored. Satir believed that an individual's interaction with the outside contains seven levels of experience, including the individual's

behavior, coping, feelings, perceptions, expectations, yearnings, and self. The true inner "self" can be uncovered through an in-depth exploration of individual behavior, as shown in Figure 1.

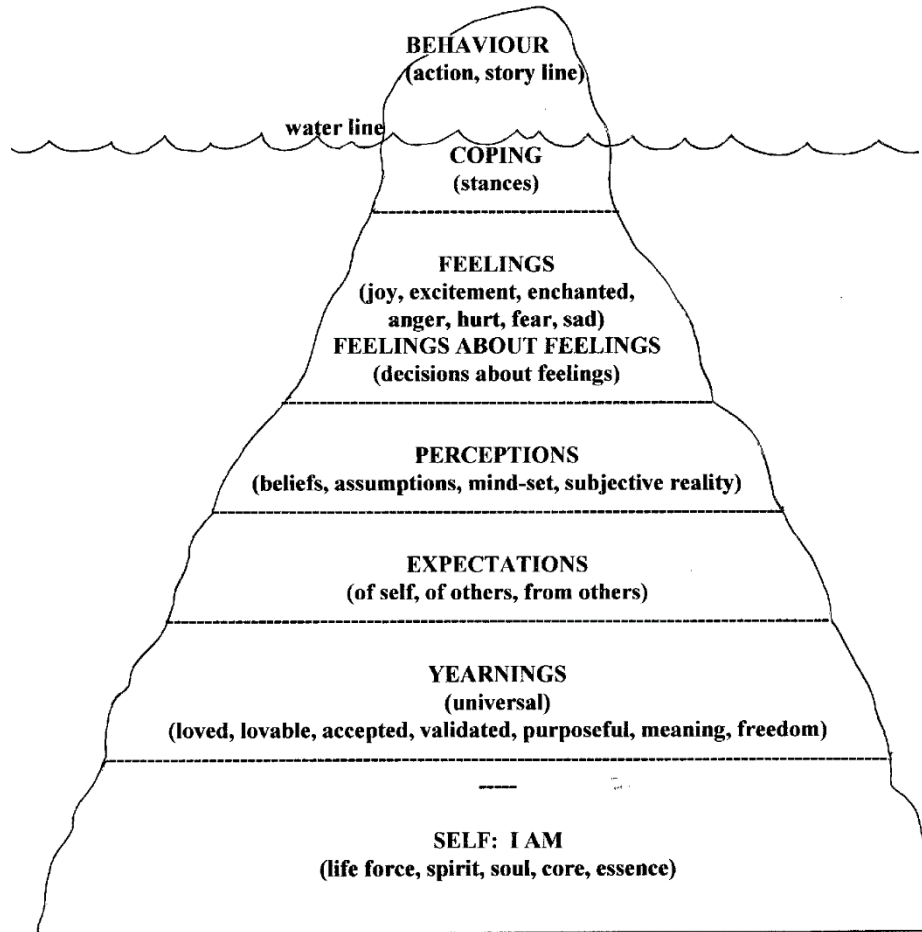


Figure 1

We can conclude as follows from the above theoretical review. Sartre believed that one's behavior defines one and that society and others evaluate the individual based on the behavior, while Maslow explained human behavior in light of the inner drive of human beings. From the perspective of Satir's iceberg model, while the former focuses on the surface of the iceberg and the latter on the underwater root, both still reach similar conclusions. Maslow's hierarchy of needs indicates that one's ultimate goal is to maximize self-worth, and an individual's behavior ultimately determines how others and society define the individual. How to align one's behavior with the social and individual reflection of self-worth is both the ultimate goal of personal growth and the essence and purpose of education.

3. Emotions, Self-awareness, and Individual Behavior

As is known to all, throughout life, self-cognition grows as an individual explores the world, and the individual's perception of the world and behavior affects the individual's self-cognition.

Further combing through Satir's iceberg model, we can conclude that the definition of the self is the basis of all explicit behavior and, subsequently, the individual's interactions with the world, including the individual's yearnings for and expectations of the world and feedback from the world, further generate the individual's perceptions through the learning of knowledge and interaction with the surroundings. The interactions between the individual perceptions and the world result in affirmation or deprecation as well as emotional feelings, which are in turn reflected in the individual's behavior, thus forming the tip of the iceberg above the surface of the water.

Therefore, an individual's behavior is not static. Accordingly, each layer of the iceberg beneath the surface is not static, and interaction and feedback exist between each layer and its adjacent upper and lower layers until the individual achieves the maximum self-worth within the scope of the individual's ability and cognition. There are two limitations. One is the individual's

ability, and the other is the individual's cognition. In the interaction between the individual and the world, the ability and cognition determine the individual's behavior, and feedback from the world, in turn, influences the individual's abilities and cognition.

Since individual behavior can be categorized into positive and negative behavior, the seven-level individual experience reflects both the positive and negative aspects accordingly and demonstrates their interactions (see Figure 2).

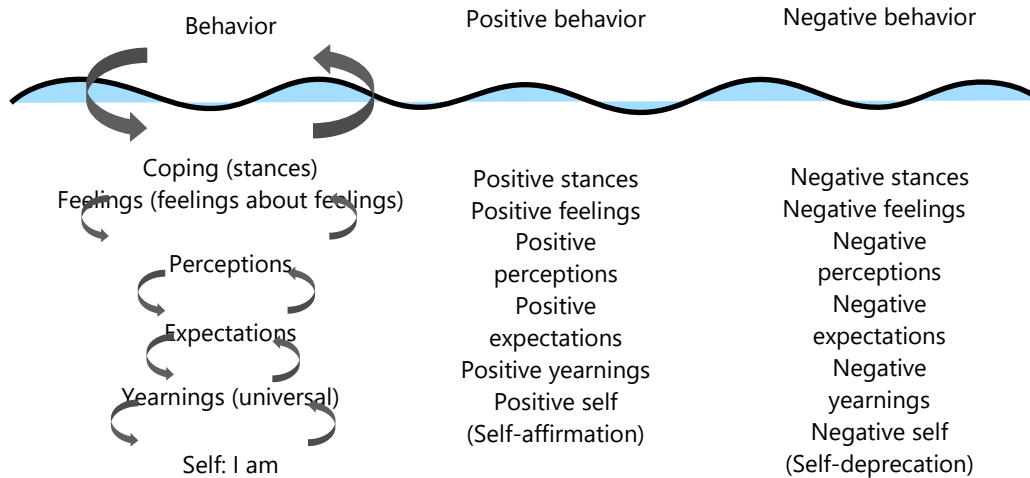


Figure 2

According to Satir's theory, the lower layer of the iceberg the content belongs to, the more difficult it is for us to identify and change. Nevertheless, it can be adjusted through the individual's explicit emotional expression and feedback, and this adjustment will be transmitted layer by layer to the deepest layer of the individual, i.e., self-affirmation or self-deprecation. Therefore, to produce positive behavior, positive responses should be adopted to adjust the individual's attitude in response to the individual's emotional expression, which in turn is transmitted to the individual's self-cognition.

In his monograph *Social Psychology*, psychologist David Myers wrote that one of the goals of psychology is to judge a person's mental activity by behavior and predict and change the behavior. As described earlier in this paper, individual behavior is constantly adjusted in the individual's interaction with the world until the individual achieves the maximum self-worth within the scope of the individual's ability and cognition. Therefore, the feedback from the external world to the individual will always influence the behavior adjustment of the individual so that the individual can achieve maximum self-worth within the scope of the individual's self-cognition. When we see a stone, we cannot tell whether the stone is a rich green emerald or an ordinary rock inside. Additionally, we need to encourage individuals to foster an open attitude and to maintain open communication so that we can discover their inner self layer by layer, understand their motivations, and therefore influence their behaviors.

Many studies of individual behavior show that every living individual has an instinct to seek benefit and avoid harm and that individual behavior reacts instinctively to external feedback based on the positive or negative outcome it receives. When an individual receives positive feedback on the behavior, this encouragement will be cascaded down to self-cognition. When an individual's behavior receives negative feedback, this response can lead to one of the possible outcomes: defiant behavior when the individual's cognition and ability exceed those of the object, or increased self-protection or camouflage when the individual's cognition and ability are weaker than those of the object. This point can be proved by countless examples in biology. Therefore, in Satir's seven-layer iceberg, the deeper layer the communication with or feedback to the individual involves, the gentler attitude and sufficient protection should be adopted; otherwise, the constant struggle between the two forces of external attack and self-protection will cause the individual's behavior to become difficult to judge and predict.

However, it is worth noting that if an individual's inherently negative behavior still receives positive feedback, it will reinforce the negative behavior, which is an undesirable consequence. To clarify, the positive attitude and response we adopt is a positive response to the individual's self-protective stance and a way to provide the individual with a sense of security and thus bring out the individual's inner self, rather than an encouragement of the behavior itself. All individual behavior has a development process from small to large and from weak to strong. We should provide positive guidance and encouragement when the negative behavior is still insignificant so that we can find out the hidden self-cognition behind the behavior at an early stage and thus make adjustments and corrections at the root.

4. Implications for Children's Education

By sorting out the complex relationship between children's emotions, self-awareness, and individual behaviors from the perspective of Satir's iceberg model, we learn that the theory has important implications for children's development as well as family and school education. Erikson also emphasized the importance of external education in his eight-stage theory of self-awareness development, arguing that whether each stage of self-awareness can be successfully passed is determined by the environment and that educational failure at any age can create obstacles to a person's lifelong development. The cultivation of rational attitudes and positive emotions is especially important during childhood. The external emotional feedback and attitudes that an individual receives during childhood affect self-awareness and self-cognition, both of which are essential to the individual's behavior and are the root cause of why the individual's attitude toward the world is positive or negative. The childhood period from 0 to 12 years old is a critical stage for self-awareness when trust, autonomy, initiative, and industry should be developed, which will have a fundamental effect on the individual's self-cognition and behavior in the individual's growth. Therefore, parents, schools, society, and other participants in all aspects of a child's development should pay more attention to the development of self-awareness during childhood. At this stage, an affirmative and encouraging attitude should be adopted in communication with the child to maintain the child's open stance and further understand and adjust the child's self-cognition. By doing so, we seek to align each individual's behavior with the social and individual reflection of self-worth, thus enabling each individual to continuously transcend one's limitations and realize maximum self-worth for both society and the individual.

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