International Journal of Linguistics Applied Psychology and Technology
https://ijlapt.strjournals.com/index.php/ijlapt
Vol. 4 No. 5(May) (2026)
ISSN(O): 3048-4529

A Conceptual Review of Self-Fulfilling Prophecy to Enhance Youths' Self-Confidence

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Abstract

A self-fulfilling prophecy (SFP) is a psychological phenomenon where an individual's beliefs and expectations about themselves or others affect subsequent behaviour in such a way that those beliefs are confirmed. This conceptual review integrates the theoretical and empirical literature on SFP and explores the potential of applying it to the enhancement of youth self-confidence. It traces the concept's origins from Merton's seminal definition to Rosenthal and Jacobson's seminal Pygmalion in the Classroom study and subsequent research on expectancy effects in educational settings. The review then discusses the reciprocal relation between SFP and self-confidence and analyses the psychological processes (behavioural mediation, expectancy confirmation, self-efficacy and self-verification) through which expectancies are transformed into self-fulfilling outcomes. Special focus is given to the developmental context of adolescence, a time of normative declines in self-esteem and heightened sensitivity to social feedback. The review differentiates between externally mediated prophecies (e.g., teacher expectations, parental beliefs, stereotype threat) and self-initiated prophecies (e.g., self-efficacy beliefs, growth mindsets) and proposes a conceptual model integrating these pathways. Implications for parents, educators and youth practitioners are discussed including strategies to develop positive interpersonal expectations, create mastery experiences, encourage positive self-talk, and design confidence enhancing interventions. The review concludes with research limitations, future directions, and recommendations for ethical and evidence-based practice in using SFP to facilitate youth confidence development.

Keywords: *adolescent development, expectancy effects, self-confidence, self-efficacy, self-fulfilling prophecy, youth intervention*

1. Introduction

For centuries, philosophers, psychologists and educators have asked how beliefs affect outcomes. Central to this inquiry is the self-fulfilling prophecy (SFP), a phenomenon in which a false definition of a situation, once taken as true, evokes new behaviour that makes the initially false conception come true. SFP is one of the most influential concepts in social psychology and has profound implications for education [1], organisational behaviour, clinical practice and personal development.

One of the most significant of the many areas in which SFP functions is its relationship with youth self-confidence. Adolescence is a time of dramatic developmental change during which self-esteem [2] and self-concept fluctuate greatly. Research shows that self-esteem and academic self-concept [3] tend to decrease at the onset of early adolescence but then level off

gradually. Self-esteem typically changes from a downward trend to a slight upward trend over time. Low and declining self-esteem predicts poor psychological outcomes during this time, and it is an urgent priority for researchers and practitioners to understand the mechanisms that can support or undermine youth confidence.

This conceptual review addresses an important gap in existing literature. While SFP has been extensively studied in classroom settings, especially concerning teacher expectations and student academic achievement, less systematic attention has been given to how SFP principles can be intentionally used to build youths' self-confidence. This review aims to fill this gap by (a) synthesising the theoretical and empirical foundations of SFP, (b) examining the bidirectional association between SFP and self-confidence, (c) identifying the psychological processes mediating this association, and (d) proposing a conceptual framework and practical suggestions to implement SFP principles in confidence-boosting interventions for youth.

The central research question of this review is: How can the concept of self-fulfilling prophecy be theoretically understood and practically applied to enhance the self-confidence of young people in developmental, educational and interpersonal contexts? In answering this question, the review aims to be a resource for educators, parents, mental health professionals, and youth practitioners who want to use the power of positive expectations in their work with young people.

2. The Origins and Concept of Self-Fulfilling Prophecy

2.1 Merton's Original Formulation

The term "self-fulfilling prophecy" was coined by sociologist [4] to describe a process whereby a false definition of a situation, by virtue of being defined as true, brings about a new behaviour which makes the original false conception come true. Merton was primarily interested in the ways that social stereotypes and public beliefs could generate the very outcomes that were predicted, often with deleterious social effects. His formulation stresses the importance of the way in which reality is perceived. If people believe in something and act on it, whether that belief is true, the actions they take may change the situation they are in, and the false belief can become true.

This basic definition sets SFP apart as a phenomenon of socially constructed belief, rather than as wishful thinking or successful prediction. Fei and Abdullah [1] summarised the SFP as the way in which 'people's thoughts or expectations about a future event can influence their behaviour and ultimately result in that event being realised'. Merton's formulation served as a foundation for later empirical studies of interpersonal expectancy effects, especially in educational and organisational settings.

2.2 The Pygmalion Effect and the Rosenthal-Jacobson Study

The most famous empirical demonstration of SFP was the 1968 study Pygmalion in the classroom [5]. The study was conducted in a public elementary school, and students took an intelligence test first. Then teachers were told that about 20 percent of their students had been identified as "growth spurters"—children who showed extraordinary potential for intellectual

growth and could be expected to bloom academically during the year. In fact, there was no test, the students who were selected were randomly selected, and it had nothing to do with their actual test performance.

When they re-tested the students eight months later, they found that the randomly selected "spurter" group had indeed made significantly greater intellectual gains than their peers. What seemed to happen was that the teachers' expectations had become self-fulfilling prophecies: teachers who thought that certain students were on the verge of blooming probably treated them differently—perhaps by giving them more encouragement, challenging them with higher-level material, or giving them more positive feedback—and these differential treatments allowed the students to fulfil the prophecy.

Later, Rosenthal [6] more formally defined the Pygmalion effect as "the phenomenon whereby one person's expectation for another person's behaviour comes to serve as a self-fulfilling prophecy". This definition captured the interpersonal nature of expectancy effects: the expectations of one person (a teacher, parent, manager, or coach) about another person's potential can influence that person's behaviour and outcomes through subtle processes of social interaction.

2.3 The Golem, Galatea, and Other Related Effects

Several related expectancy effects identified in the SFP literature are relevant to understanding confidence enhancement. The Pygmalion effect (positive expectations that lead to an increase in performance) has a negative counterpart known as the Golem effect [7], where low or negative expectations lead to a decrement in performance. If teachers, parents or peers convey the expectation that a young person is unlikely to succeed, then this belief can become a self-fulfilling prophecy of underachievement and diminished self-regard.

A related phenomenon is the Galatea effect, the idea that a person's expectations of how they will do affect their performance. Whereas Pygmalion is about expectations being placed on a person by others, Galatea is about expectations placed on oneself. The belief that 'I can succeed' becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy of success. As Fei and Abdullah point out, "what external sources think of a person ultimately shapes who they are and how they act," but the beliefs individuals have about themselves are equally, if not more, consequential.

The Rosenthal effect is sometimes used interchangeably with Pygmalion and specifically refers to the recipient internalised the expectations of a perceived authority figure. Finally, stereotype threat [8] is a specific case of a negative SFP, in which the anxiety that is caused by the fear of confirming a negative stereotype about a group impairs performance, confirming the stereotype that caused the anxiety.

Together, these related constructs demonstrate the bidirectionality of expectancy effects, such that positive and affirmative expectations tend to produce positive self-fulfilling outcomes, and negative or diminishing expectations tend to produce negative ones. This duality makes SFP a "double-edged sword" with profound implications for the development of youth confidence.

3. Empirical Evidence for Self-Fulfilling Prophecy Effects

3.1 The Controversy Surrounding Pygmalion

The original Pygmalion study, although widely influential, has not been without controversy. The evidence available does not provide much support for the conclusion that teacher expectations powerfully and pervasively shape student IQ. Even if you take Rosenthal and Jacobson's [5] findings at face value, the study found weak, fragile and fleeting self-fulfilling prophecies, rather than the powerful and pervasive ones it has often been cited as showing. Moreover, the most contentious assertion (that the IQ of students can be modified by teacher expectations) is at best weakly supported.

This scepticism has been echoed by subsequent meta-analyses and attempts at replication. If you believe the advocates, it is very small (frequently 0, never consistently much higher than a Pearson correlation coefficient of 0.2). Similarly, the evidence for stereotype threat, a phenomenon long thought to be robust, has itself been called into question. Key findings have failed to replicate and meta-analyses suggest the effects are smaller or more variable than originally thought – if they exist at all.

3.2 What Evidence Does Show

These controversies notwithstanding, the totality of evidence does point to several important conclusions. First, self-fulfilling prophecies do happen, and this used to be a controversial claim. Second, the effects are small, fragile and fleeting, rather than large and enduring. Third, the effects are strongest under certain conditions, particularly when teachers and students have had repeated contact over time, when expectations are consistently maintained, and when students are in earlier grades.

Recent methodologically sound studies have added evidence supporting the existence of SFP effects. To address endogeneity concerns the researchers used student fixed effects and instrumental variables strategies. The researchers found that for fourth to eighth graders, higher exogenously determined teacher expectations do increase test scores, with larger impacts for students in earlier grades. These results indicate that the effects of SFPs are real and meaningful, though not as powerful as early enthusiasts claimed.

Furthermore, the three-stage model [9] of classroom SFP, (a) teachers form expectations, (b) teachers treat students differently based on these expectations, and (c) students respond to this treatment in expectancy confirming ways remains a useful framework for understanding expectancy processes. The model stresses that SFP is not a simple cause-effect relation but a complex chain of social and psychological events.

3.3 Mediating Mechanisms

Understanding how SFP works is arguably more important for intervention design than arguing about the exact size of its effects. Interpersonal expectations have been shown to lead to self-fulfilling outcomes by means of several mediating mechanisms:

The behavioural mediation is the path of least resistance. When a teacher believes that a

student has potential, then more challenging material, more positive feedback, more instructional time, and a warmer classroom climate are given. In contrast, teachers with low expectations may teach easier material, use drill-type instruction, and offer less encouragement.

Cognitive mediation is the internalisation of others' expectations by the target. When young people believe that significant others have confidence in them, then their expectations and efficacy of self are enhanced, which then increases motivation, effort and persistence. This cognitive pathway is important for understanding the relationship between SFP and self-confidence: it is the belief in their own capability of the target that is the proximal determinant of performance.

The mediation of motivation is via effort and involvement. High expectations make people stick with things when the going gets tough, invest more time and energy in tasks, and employ more adaptive coping strategies when faced with challenges.

The fourth pathway is the self-verification [10] processes. Research examining mothers' beliefs about their adolescents' educational outcomes has found that mothers' beliefs had a significant indirect effect on adolescents' academic attainment, mediated by adolescents' own educational aspirations. This suggests that SFP effects are partly because young people's own aspirations are influenced by the beliefs of others, which they then self-verify through their own achievements.

4. Developmental Trajectories and Challenges

4.1 Defining Self-Confidence

Self-confidence is a multifaceted construct comprising global self-esteem (one's overall sense of self-worth) and domain-specific self-concepts (beliefs about one's competence in specific domains such as academics, social relationships, or athletic performance). In this review, self-confidence is defined as a person's belief in his/her ability to successfully perform tasks, deal with challenges, and achieve desired results (this is very similar to Bandura's definition of self-efficacy).

The importance of both global and domain-specific self-esteem has been noted, but research emphasises the value of looking at domain-specific self-concepts together with global self-confidence. A young person might be globally confident but question their mathematics ability or vice versa. Hence, interventions to boost self-confidence need to be considered both general and specifically.

4.2 Developmental Trends in Adolescence

Adolescence is also a period of vulnerability to self-esteem. Longitudinal studies following students from grade 5 through grade 8 have shown considerable rank-order stability for self-esteem, but also considerable mean-level change. More specifically, the pattern of self-esteem is characterised by an initial decline in early adolescence, followed by a levelling off and then an increase. The pattern shifts from an early decrease to a small increase as adolescents move through middle school.

These developmental patterns are not the same for all young people; there is considerable interindividual variability in trajectories of change. While some adolescents have stable high self-esteem, others have moderate or low trajectories and still others have declining trajectories that put them at risk for adverse outcomes. Low self-esteem in adolescence is associated with depression, anxiety, stress and lower life satisfaction.

These normative declines reflect several factors. Middle school brings new academic and social demands, increased peer comparison, more critical self-evaluation and greater sensitivity to social feedback. Add to this the pubertal changes, the search for identity, and the development of abstract reasoning, and you have a time of increased self-consciousness and concern about evaluation.

4.3 The Role of Significant Others

Adolescent self-confidence is highly dependent on the social context, particularly on the expectations and feedback from parents, teachers, and peers. On the individual level, Lavrijsen et al. [11] reported that teachers' attention to students and pressure related to social or achievement issues predicted changes in self-esteem. Students who perceived their teachers as caring had more positive trajectories of self-esteem.

Also, parental expectations affect adolescents' academic self-concept and career aspirations [12]. In the Taiwanese context, research showed that students whose fathers and mothers had expectations for them to earn doctoral degrees had significantly higher math achievement than those whose parents had expected them to complete only high school or college. The effect of parents' expectations (5-6%) was sizable but smaller than the effect of students owns educational aspirations (8%).

The results are consistent with the SFP literature: young people tend to internalise the expectations of significant others and perform at a higher level when these expectations are high and when communicated effectively through warmth, support, encouragement and the provision of challenging opportunities. Conversely, low expectations, communicated through neglect, criticism, or diminished opportunity, can become self-fulfilling prophecies of underachievement and low self-worth.

5. The Bidirectional Relationship Between SFP and Self-Confidence

5.1 How SFP Affects Self-Confidence

The mechanisms by which SFP influences self-confidence run through interpersonal, intrapersonal, and social-structural pathways. An understanding of these pathways is necessary to design effective interventions.

(a) Interpersonal track (Pygmalion) -- If teachers, parents or mentors communicate high expectations, young people receive strong messages about what they can achieve. These messages shape young people's self-perceptions via reflected appraisals, the process through which individuals form self-view based on how they think others see them important. This internalisation of expectations of perceived authority figures is highlighted in research on the Rosenthal effect [13]. With repeated positive feedback over time, stable self-belief develops

that guide behaviour across situations.

(b) Intrapersonal route (Galatea) -- Perhaps the most direct influence on young people's confidence and performance is their own expectations of their abilities. The Galatea effect [14] illustrates the self-fulfilling prophecy (SFP) nature of belief: people who think they can succeed are more likely to work hard, persist against difficulties, and perform better. Low self-expectations, on the other hand, lead to less effort, early disengagement and underperformance that confirms the initial expectation.

(c) Stereotype threat (social-structural pathway) -- Negative social stereotypes can act as pervasive self-fulfilling prophecies for youth belonging to stereotyped groups, regardless of whether those groups are defined by race, gender, socioeconomic status, or other factors. Simply being aware of a negative stereotype about one's group can impair performance, even if the person does not consciously endorse the stereotype. The anxiety, distraction and cognitive load of stereotype threat become self-fulfilling: poorer performance confirms the stereotype, which increases its threat in future encounters.

5.2 How Self-Confidence Affects SFP

SFP and self-confidence are not unidirectional; they are a feedback loop in which self-confidence influences the chance that expectations become self-fulfilling. More self-confidence in young people is more resistant to negative expectations of others. But when an authority figure expresses low expectations, a confident young person can interpret this as the adult's misperception, instead of taking it as an assessment of their value. On the other hand, young people who have fragile or low self-confidence are more vulnerable to negative expectancy effects.

Research on self-efficacy as a moderating factor of SFP effects has demonstrated that young people's confidence beliefs can either amplify or counteract expectancy effects. People with strong self-belief are more likely to act in ways that confirm the high expectations and to resist the pull of the low expectations. In contrast, if self-belief is weak, people are more vulnerable to the expectations of others, good or bad.

This bidirectional relationship can result in virtuous cycles (high expectations → high self-confidence → high performance → expectations confirmed → high expectations maintained) or vicious cycles (low expectations → low self-confidence → poor performance → expectations confirmed → low expectations maintained). The main difficulty for practitioners who wish to employ SFP principles to boost youth confidence is figuring out how to start and sustain virtuous cycles.

5.3 A Conceptual Model

Figure 1 (conceptual) shows a synthesised model of the SFP–self-confidence association derived from the literature review. The model suggests that there are four main sources of expectancy effects [15]: external expectations from significant others (Pygmalion), self-expectations (Galatea), stereotype threat (social-structural expectations), and prior performance (behavioural feedback). These sources converge on a set of mediating processes

including cognitive (self-efficacy, aspirations), motivational (effort, persistence), and behavioural (strategy use, engagement) processes that influence actual performance and subsequent self-perceptions. Feedback loops are happening at many levels. Results feed back into expectations of self and others.

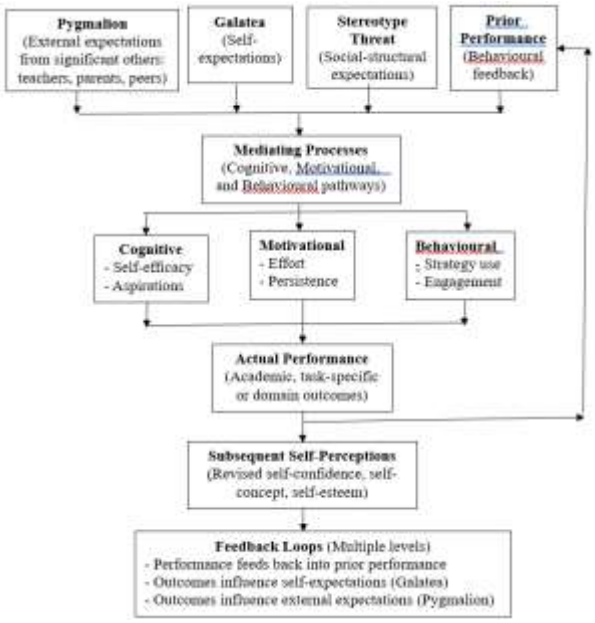

Figure 1: Sources of Expectancy Effects

The model identifies several leverage points for intervention. Practitioners can work on shaping external expectations (e.g., training teachers to communicate high expectations), enhancing self-expectations (e.g., goal setting and self-talk interventions), reducing stereotype threat (e.g., identity-safe environments and growth mindset messaging), and creating opportunities for mastery experiences that provide behavioural evidence of competence.

6. Using SFP to Enhance Youth Self-Confidence

6.1 For Parnts

Parents are one of the most important sources of expectations for young people. Research on mother–adolescent expectancy effects has found that parents' perceptions of their children's educational outcomes influence adolescents' attainment via the adolescents' own aspirations, with effects observable over six-year spans. This points to several practical strategies for parents:

First, parents need to convey realistic yet high expectations for their children's abilities and futures. The operative word is realistic, though – wild, unrealistic expectations can create anxiety and frustration, rather than confidence. The best expectations are those that push us but are still achievable – within Vygotsky's zone of proximal development [16].

The second is for parents to set expectations through supportive behaviours and no pressure. Warmth, encouragement, and the provision of resources and opportunities to convey

high expectations are far more effective than criticism, comparison, or conditional regard in communicating expectations.

Thirdly, parents need to be self-confident. Children learn as much from what their parents do as from what their parents say. Parents who tackle challenges with confidence, work through difficulties, and have positive self-talk provide powerful role models for their children.

Fourth, parents should catch children doing things right and give specific, genuine praise. Research shows that positive feedback should be specific ("You worked really hard on that mathematics problem and figured it out") rather than global ("You are so smart") and should focus on effort and strategies rather than fixed traits.

6.2 For Teachers

Teachers have a unique role in the SFP process because they spend extended periods of time with students and their expectations may build up over years of schooling. Tracking systems have been pointed to as potential sources of self-fulfilling prophecies, in that students assigned to lower tracking often internalise the low expectations that come with their placement.

Effective strategies for teachers include:

(a) Making initial expectations realistic -- It may seem obvious, but research shows that teacher expectations are often based on extraneous factors like race, socioeconomic status, and gender, rather than actual performance. Teachers must be aware of these biases and try to adjust their expectations to the abilities of their students.

(b) Expectations need to be communicated clearly -- In his early work, Rosenthal [6] cited several specific teacher behaviours that communicated high expectations. These included more smiling, more eye contact, leaning forward, asking more difficult questions, giving more wait time to respond, and giving more specific praise for correct answers.

(c) Mastery experiences -- Bandura's theory of self-efficacy [17] says that the most powerful source of confidence is direct experience of success. Teachers should design learning activities to ensure that all students experience success and are appropriately challenged.

(d) Fostering a growth mindset -- When students recognise that their intelligence and ability can change, they are more likely to stick with difficult work and less likely to see difficulty as a sign of low ability. Interventions aimed at fostering a growth mindset have been found to enhance academic outcomes, especially for students from stereotyped groups.

(e) By using attributional feedback -- How teachers account for students' successes and failures matters. If we attribute success to effort and strategy ("You worked hard and found a good approach"), we incentivise students to keep putting in the effort. It's more productive to blame failure on a lack of effort ("You didn't try hard enough") than on low ability ("You're just not good at this"), which can be a self-fulfilling prophecy of helplessness.

6.3 For Youth Practitioners

Counsellors, social workers, coaches, youth group leaders work with young people in settings that are often less formal than school but no less influential. The following SFP-based

strategies are of relevance:

(a) Strengths Based Approaches -- Positive psychology interventions that focus on identifying and using character strengths have been shown to improve self-esteem and resilience among at-risk youth. Programs that help young people find their strengths – creativity, kindness, perseverance, or leadership – give them a base of positive self-regard on which to build.

(b) Setting goals and monitoring self -- When young people set specific, challenging goals and monitor progress toward those goals, they create opportunities for success experiences that build confidence. The process of self-monitoring also corrects overly negative self-assessments.

(c) Training in positive self-talk -- Many young people, especially those who are low in confidence, spend time telling themselves negative things that reinforce low expectations (“I cannot do this”, “I am going to fail”). Teaching young people to identify and replace negative self-talk with realistic, positive alternatives can turn the odds from self-defeating to self-fulfilling prophecies of success.

(d) Peer support and role models -- Adolescence is a time when social comparison is especially salient. Exposure to peers modelling confidence and adaptive coping-whether in formal peer mentoring or through positive classroom norms-provides vicarious experiences of success to build self-efficacy.

6.4 Intervention Evidence

Promising evidence comes from recent intervention research showing that the principles of SFP can be successfully translated into practice. A positive psychology group counselling program for at-risk youth was found to significantly improve self-esteem, emotional control and resilience of 20 participants with post-test scores statistically significant over pre-test scores. The program's focus was on the positive aspects such as personal strengths and virtues and not on the negative aspects.

Similarly, an online mindfulness-based intervention program [18] for adolescents with low to moderate self-esteem was found to significantly improve self-esteem, mindfulness, and resilience over an eight-week period, with effects sustained at three-month follow-up. Participants rated the program high on satisfaction with 76.9 percent indicating the highest level of satisfaction.

A short school-based HERO (Hope, Efficacy, Resilience, Optimism) intervention [19] for final year female students showed preliminary efficacy in improving psychological capital and reducing mental health symptomology. The intervention, which aims to build positive psychological resources, provides an efficient low-cost intervention that could be scaled across educational settings.

These interventions have things in common. They aim to build positive beliefs about the self and the future, they offer opportunities for experiences of success, and they teach skills for coping with negative thoughts and emotions. SFP can explain these characteristics. Positive self-beliefs, reinforced by successful experiences and adaptive coping skills, become self-fulfilling prophecies of continued success and confidence.

7. Limitations and Future Directions

7.1 Theoretical Limitations

The theoretical limitations of SFP literature restrict its application for the development of youth confidence. First, there is a lot of debate on the size and the universality of SFP effects. SFP clearly occurs, but effects are generally minor and the conditions for larger effects are not fully understood. As such, practitioners should see SFP as one of many factors that affect youth confidence, not a magic bullet.

Second, a large body of SFP research has examined teacher expectations and academic outcomes and relatively little has examined other types of expectations (e.g., parental, peer, self) and other domains (e.g., social confidence, athletic confidence, creative confidence). Whether findings generalise across domains is an open question.

Third, the existing theoretical models are helpful but often static rather than dynamic. The SFP process is a linear sequence of events, but the recursive, feedback-driven nature of expectancy effects as they unfold over developmental time is not adequately captured.

7.2 Empirical Gaps

Future research should address several empirical gaps. First, there are no studies on SFP effects on self-confidence during the entire period of adolescence. Most studies are two or three years long at most, and there are unanswered questions about cumulative effects and long-term trajectories.

Second, there is little empirical research on the intersection of SFP with other established interventions that build confidence, such as cognitive-behavioral therapy, positive psychology, and social-emotional learning [20]. It would be helpful to know how SFP principles could be incorporated into existing evidence-based programs.

Third, little research exists on SFP among diverse populations including youth from different cultural backgrounds, socioeconomic strata, and ability levels. Culture influences the way expectations are communicated and feedback is interpreted, and what works in one environment may not work in another.

Fourth, the role of technology and digital environments in expectancy effects is underexplored. Young people are getting more feedback from digital sources (social media, educational apps, online communities) that can create their own brand of self-fulfilling prophecy.

7.3 Practical Considerations and Ethical Concerns

The use of the principles of the SFP to build confidence in youth raises many practical and ethical questions. The most important concern is the risk of Pygmalion without Galatea—instances in which well-intentioned adults have high expectations, but youth do not internalise them because the expectations are not communicated credibly, consistently, or with appropriate support.

Another worry is the danger of high expectations. Raising expectations without raising

support and resources can lead to young people feeling more pressure, anxiety, and self-criticism rather than increased confidence. Practitioners need to set expectations that are challenging but achievable, and ensure young people have the tools and support to meet them.

Differential applications of the SFP principles also exist. Teachers' expectations have been shown to be influenced by demographic factors such as race and socioeconomic status. Practitioners need to be aware of implicit biases that may lead to systematically lower expectations of some groups of young people.

Finally, practitioners need to be aware of the limits of individual-level intervention. While the principles of SFP can be applied effectively at the interpersonal level, some of the most powerful expectancy effects operate at the societal level, particularly stereotype threat. Structural change may be as necessary to deal with these effects as interventions at the level of the individual.

8. Conclusion

This conceptual review has traced the trajectory of self-fulfilling prophecy from its genesis in the sociological theorising of Merton, to the controversial but influential Pygmalion study by Rosenthal and Jacobson, to contemporary research on expectancy effects in educational and developmental contexts. The review shows that while the size of effects of SPPs may be more modest than early proponents claimed, the phenomenon is real, replicable, and meaningful, especially when viewed as one component of a complex system of influences on youth development.

SFP and youth self-confidence have a reciprocal, two-way relationship. Young people's self-perceptions are shaped by reflected appraisals of external expectations from significant others; self-expectations influence behaviour via motivational and cognitive pathways; and actual outcomes feedback to confirm or disconfirm initial expectations. This dynamic system can operate as a virtuous cycle of rising confidence and achievement or a vicious cycle of diminished expectations and underachievement.

The practical implication is evident: that deliberate, evidence-based use of SFP principles can enhance youth self-confidence. This means parents should have high but realistic expectations, communicate in supportive ways, model confident approaches to challenges, and give specific, authentic praise. For teachers, this means setting accurate expectations, communicating them effectively, creating mastery experiences, fostering growth mindsets, and using attributional feedback constructively. That is, for youth practitioners, utilising strengths-based approaches, supporting goal setting and self-monitoring, teaching positive self-talk and utilising peer support and modelling.

Recent intervention research provides promising evidence that these principles can be translated into effective practice. Positive psychology programs and mindfulness-based interventions and brief school-based psychological capital interventions have all been promising in improving self-esteem, resilience and optimism in young people, the authors said. What they have in common is that they help young people develop positive beliefs about themselves and their future, backed up by successful experiences and adaptive coping skills—

beliefs that become self-fulfilling prophecies of continued growth and achievement.

But practitioners must approach SFP with humility and caution. The effects are usually small, they depend on supportive contexts, they can backfire when expectations are unrealistic or unsupported, and they are affected by structural factors that may be beyond individual control. In addition, practitioners must be careful not to apply SFP principles differentially, so that all youth, regardless of race, gender, socioeconomic status, or ability, are exposed to the positive expectations that can guide their development.

Future research should address the empirical gaps identified in the present review: longitudinal studies tracking SFP-confidence dynamics across adolescence; investigations of SFP in diverse domains beyond the academic; integration with other evidence-based interventions; cross-cultural studies of expectancy communication; and exploration of digital environments as new contexts for expectancy effects. Theoretically, greater attention needs to be paid to the recursive, dynamic nature of expectancy processes and to the development of culturally sensitive models of SFP.

Finally, the self-fulfilling prophecy is a useful conceptual lens to understand (and intervene in) the development of youth self-confidence. SFP principles are not the answer to all problems, but they do give parents, educators, and practitioners a practical guide for creating environments in which young people can thrive. The power of belief, other people's beliefs about us and our beliefs about ourselves, are real. If used constructively, this power can become a self-fulfilling prophecy of confidence, competence and well-being for the young people in our care.

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