

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Class: \_\_\_\_\_

# Self-Concept

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2008

*Self-concept refers to how people "think about, evaluate, or perceive" themselves. Psychologist Carl Rogers splits the idea of self-concept into three different components, namely self-image, self-esteem, and ideal self. In this text, Saul McLeod explains each of these ideas in more detail. As you read, take notes on how self-image, self-esteem, and ideal self are different from one another.*

- [1] The term self-concept is a general term used to refer to how someone thinks about, evaluates or perceives themselves. To be aware of oneself is to have a concept of oneself. [...]

Carl Rogers (1959) believes that the self-concept has three different components:

- The view you have of yourself (Self-image)
- How much value you place on yourself (Self-esteem or self-worth)
- What you wish you were really like (Ideal self)



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## Self-Image

### *What you see in yourself*

This does not necessarily have to reflect reality. Indeed a person with anorexia<sup>1</sup> who is thin may have a self-image in which the person believes they are fat. A person's self-image is affected by many factors, such as parental influences, friends, the media etc.

Kuhn (1960) investigated the self-image by using *The Twenty Statements Test*.

- [5] He asked people to answer the question "Who Am I?" in 20 different ways. He found that the responses could be divided into two major groups. These were *social roles* (external or objective aspects of oneself such as son, teacher, friend) and *personality traits* (internal or affective<sup>2</sup> aspects of oneself such as gregarious,<sup>3</sup> impatient,

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1. a type of eating disorder

humorous).

The list of answers to the question “Who Am I?” probably include examples of each of the following four types of responses:

**1. Physical Description:** I’m tall, have blue eyes... etc.

**2. Social Roles:** We are all social beings whose behavior is shaped to some extent by the roles we play. Such roles as student, housewife, or member of the football team not only help others to recognize us but also help us to know what is expected of us in various situations.

**3. Personal Traits:** These are a third dimension of our self-descriptions. “I’m impulsive... I’m generous... I tend to worry a lot...” etc.

**4. Existential Statements** (abstract ones): These can range from “I’m a child of the universe” to “I’m a human being” to “I’m a spiritual being...” etc.

Typically young people describe themselves more in terms of personal traits, whereas older people feel defined to a greater extent by their social roles.

## Self-Esteem & Self-Worth

### *The extent to which you value 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 a negative view of ourselves.

**HIGH SELF-ESTEEM** i.e. we have a positive view of ourselves. This tends to lead to:

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

[10] **LOW SELF-ESTEEM** i.e. we have a negative view of ourselves. This tends to lead to:

- Lack of confidence

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2. relating to moods, feelings, and attitudes
  3. **Gregarious** (*adjective*) enjoying the company of other people

- Desire to be/look like someone else
- Always worrying what others might think
- Pessimism

There are several ways of measuring self-esteem. For example, Harrill Self-Esteem Inventory is a questionnaire comprising 15 statements about a range of interest. Another example is the Thematic Apperception Test (TAT), which is a neutral cartoon given to the participant who then has to devise a story about what's going on.

Morse and Gergen (1970) showed that in uncertain or anxiety-arousing situations our self-esteem may change rapidly. Participants were waiting for a job interview in a waiting room. They were sat with another candidate (a confederate<sup>4</sup> of the experimenter) in one of two conditions:

1. *Mr. Clean* - dressed in smart suit, carrying a briefcase opened to reveal a slide rule and books.

2. *Mr. Dirty* - dressed in an old T-shirt and jeans, slouched over a cheap sex novel.

Self-esteem of participants with Mr. Dirty increased, whilst those with Mr. Clean decreased! No mention was made of how this affected subjects' performance in interview. Level of self-esteem affects performance at numerous tasks though (Coopersmith, 1967), so one could expect Mr. Dirty's subjects to perform better than Mr. Clean's.

Even though self-esteem might fluctuate, there are times when we continue to believe good things about ourselves even when evidence to the contrary exists. This is known as the perseverance effect.

- [15] Miller and Ross (1975) showed that people who believed they had socially desirable characteristics continued in this belief even when the experimenters tried to get them to believe the opposite. Does the same thing happen with bad things if we have low self-esteem? Maybe not, perhaps with very low self-esteem all we believe about ourselves might be bad.

Argyle (2008) believes there are 4 major factors that influence self-esteem.

**1. THE REACTION OF OTHERS.** If people admire us, flatter us, seek out our company, listen attentively and agree with us we tend to develop a positive self-image. If they avoid us, neglect us, or tell us things about ourselves that we don't want to hear, we develop a negative self-image.

**2. COMPARISON WITH OTHERS.** If the people we compare ourselves with (our reference group) appear to be more successful, happier, richer, or better looking than ourselves we tend to develop a negative self-image, BUT if they are less successful than us, our image will be positive.

**3. SOCIAL ROLES.** Some social roles carry prestige — e.g. doctor, airline pilot, TV presenter, premiership footballer — and this promotes self-esteem. Other roles carry stigma<sup>5</sup> — e.g. prisoner, mental hospital

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4. a person who helps someone else do something

patient, refuse collector, or unemployed person.

**4. IDENTIFICATION.** Roles aren't just "out there." They also become part of our personality, i.e. we identify with the positions we occupy, the roles we play, and the groups we belong to.

But just as important as all these factors is the influence of our parents (See Coopersmith's research.)

## Ideal Self

### *What you'd like to be*

If there is a mismatch between how you see yourself (e.g. your self-image) and what you'd like to be (e.g. your ideal self) then this is likely to affect how much you value yourself. Therefore, there is an intimate relationship between self-image, ego-ideal and self-esteem. Humanistic psychologists study this using the Q-Sort Method.

A person's ideal self may not be consistent with what actually happens in life and experiences of the person. Hence, a difference may exist between a person's ideal self and actual experience. This is called incongruence.

- [20] Where a person's ideal self and actual experience are consistent or very similar, a state of congruence exists. Rarely, if ever, does a total state of congruence exist; all people experience a certain amount of incongruence. The development of congruence is dependent on unconditional positive regard.<sup>6</sup> Rogers believed that for a person to achieve self-actualization they must be in a state of congruence.

Michael Argyle (2008) says there are four major factors which influence its development:

- The ways in which others (particularly significant others) react to us
- How we think we compare to others
- Our social roles
- The extent to which we identify with other people

## References

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Baumeister, R. F. (Ed.) (1999). *The Self in Social Psychology*. Philadelphia, PA: Psychology Press (Taylor & Francis).

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5. **Stigma** (*noun*) a mark of disgrace or dishonor
  6. Unconditional positive regard (UPR) is a term credited to humanistic psychologist Carl Rogers and is used in client-centered therapy. Practicing unconditional positive regard means accepting and respecting others as they are without judgment or evaluation.

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## Text-Dependent Questions

**Directions:** For the following questions, choose the best answer or respond in complete sentences.

1. PART A: Which sentence best describes the central idea of the passage?
  - A. The notions of self-image, self-esteem, and the ideal self all contribute to a person's understanding of themselves.
  - B. By understanding the concepts of self-image, self-esteem, and ideal self, people can lead happier, more successful lives.
  - C. Any difference between self-image and the ideal self can produce incongruence, so people should try their best to get rid of this entirely.
  - D. Self-concept is essential for humans to understand their status in a complex society.
  
2. PART B: Which of the following paragraphs best supports the answer to Part A?
  - A. Paragraphs 1-2
  - B. Paragraphs 9-10
  - C. Paragraph 16
  - D. Paragraphs 18-19
  
3. How do paragraphs 12-13 contribute to the development of ideas in the passage?
  - A. The Mr. Clean and Mr. Dirty experiment proved that how well people perform in situations such as interviews is highly dependent on their self-esteem.
  - B. The Mr. Clean and Mr. Dirty experiment demonstrated that the perseverance effect only applies to a small fraction of the human population.
  - C. The Mr. Clean and Mr. Dirty experiment showed how self-esteem can be influenced by external factors such as uncertainty or how they compare to others.
  - D. The Mr. Clean and Mr. Dirty experiment led researchers to conclude that people can protect their self-esteem by practicing unconditional positivity.
  
4. What connection does the author draw between self-esteem and ideal self?

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## Discussion Questions

**Directions:** Brainstorm your answers to the following questions in the space provided. Be prepared to share your original ideas in a class discussion.

1. Answer the question "Who Am I?" in at least 10 different ways. How many of your responses fall into each of the four categories outlined in paragraph 6? Which of your responses do you consider most important to your self-image?
2. Which concepts from the text are most convincing to you? Which do you find less convincing? Overall, do you agree with Carl Rogers' analysis of how we view and understand ourselves? Why or why not? Use evidence from this text, your own experience, and other art, literature, or history in your answer.
3. Based on your own experiences, is it possible for someone to have good self-esteem without making comparisons with other people? In other words, is it necessary to feel better than other people in order for someone to have good self-esteem? Why or why not?