Name: _____ Class: _____

Self-Concept
By Saul McLeod
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Because most people identify as separate from other people, they have what we call some "concept" of themselves. Self-concept refers to how people "think about, evaluate, or perceive" themselves. Psychologist Carl Rogers split the idea of self-concept into three different components including self-image, self-esteem and ideal self. In this text, Saul McLeod explains these ideas in more detail. As you read, take notes on what affects a person's self-concept, and how one's self-concept can change over time.

[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)
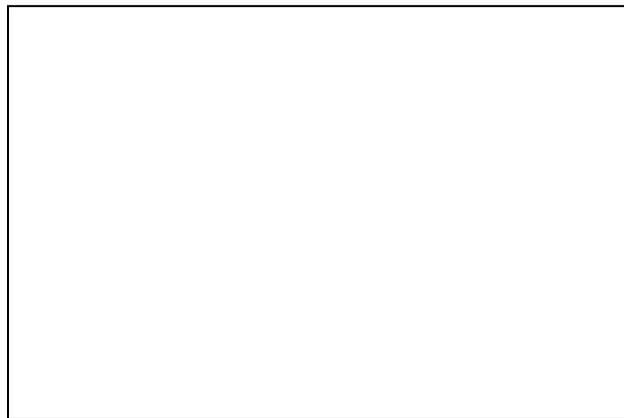
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Self Image

What you see in yourself

This does not necessarily have to reflect reality. Indeed a person with anorexia 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 aspects of oneself such as gregarious, impatient, 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
- 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 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 -- e.g. prisoner, mental hospital 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.[1] 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

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1. 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.

Text-Dependent Questions

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

1. How does the Mr. Clean/Mr. Dirty experiment contribute to the central idea of self-esteem? [RI.2]
   A. The participants who were seated with Mr. Dirty performed better in their job interview than the participants who were seated with Mr. Clean.
   B. The participants who were seated with Mr. Clean performed better in their job interview than the participants who were seated with Mr. Dirty.
   C. The participants who were seated with Mr. Clean enjoyed increased self-esteem.
   D. The participants who were seated with Mr. Dirty enjoyed increased self-esteem.

2. PART A: According to the text's theories, which of the following provides the best example of what a young person might respond with when asked the question, "Who are you?" [RI.3]
   A. I am anxious
   B. I have brown eyes
   C. I am a student
   D. I am a human being

3. PART B: Which detail from the text best supports the answer to Part A? [RI.1]
   A. "...responses could be divided into two major groups." (Paragraph 5)
   B. "These were social roles (external or objective aspects of oneself such as son, teacher, friend) and personality traits (internal or affective aspects of oneself such as gregarious, impatient, humorous)." (Paragraph 5)
   C. "We are all social beings whose behavior is shaped to some extent by the roles we play." (Paragraph 6)
   D. "Typically young people describe themselves more in terms of personal traits..." (Paragraph 7)

4. PART A: What does the word "existential" most closely mean as it is used in paragraph 6? [RI.4]
   A. Relating to religion
   B. Relating to external traits
   C. Relating to spirituality
   D. Relating to existence

5. PART B: Which detail from the text best supports the answer to Part A? [RI.1]
   A. "He asked people to answer the question 'Who Am I?' in 20 different ways." (Paragraph 5)
   B. "...help us to know what is expected of us in various situations." (Paragraph 6)
   C. "These are a third dimension of our self-descriptions." (Paragraph 6)
   D. "'I'm a child of the universe' to 'I'm a human being'" (Paragraph 6)

6.   Explain the relationship between "self image" and "ideal self." What can result from   [RI.3] this relationship?

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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. If someone asked, who are you? How would you respond?

2. What makes you who you are? Use evidence from this text, your own experience, and other art, literature, or history in your answer.