

## Rediscovering Rogers's Self Theory and Personality

Nik Ahmad Hisham Ismail

Institute of Education, International Islamic University Malaysia (IIUM)

Phone No: +603 6196 4000

nikahmad@iium.edu.my

Mustafa Tekke (Corresponding author)

Turkey

Institute of Education, International Islamic University Malaysia (IIUM)

Phone No: +60188730772

mustafatekke@gmail.com

### Abstract

This study examined the self theory of Carl Rogers in depth. There are some important concepts illuminated well, considering one's personality development. Its main focus was positive regard, self-worth and actualizing tendency, proposed by Rogers. To explain them in brief, positive regard was studied through self-image, ideal self and congruence. Self-worth is described as conditional and unconditional to cope with challenges in life, tolerate failures and sadness at times. Actualizing tendency was expounded into fully functioning or self-actualizing. These all concepts indicated that having a tendency on human behavior and concentrating on the capacity of individuals to think intentionally and soundly, to control their biological urges, are significantly main elements to evaluate one's self. Therefore, in the humanistic perspective, individuals have the opportunity and will to change their states of mind and behavior. This study might be a guide to some certain aspect of self related studies for other researchers to benefit accordingly and also to develop a new scale related to self using Rogers's theory.

**Keywords:** Rogers, personality, self, positive regard, actualizing tendency

### Introduction

The paper presents the theory of Carl Roger's self. Rogers (1902-1987) pioneered humanistic psychotherapy and was the one of first therapist to focus on 'a person-centered' (Rogers, 1951) approach. The self became the core of study of personality as viewed by Rogers. Therefore, in order to actualize, enhance and maintain the self, Rogers (1959) believed that people are encouraged by an innate tendency which is the one basic motive of self. His entire theory is thus

developed on actualizing tendency (Schultz & Schultz, 2013).

To briefly give a short biography of Rogers, he was given an opportunity to initiate a counseling center at the University of Chicago in 1944. He then published 'Client-Centered Therapy' (1951), in which he described the theory that highlights his approach to understanding human relationships. A decade later he wrote on 'Becoming a Person' (1961), a combination of papers on a group of issues concerning his

basic approach to understanding self growth and development. Rogers tried to point out the revolutionary effect of his person-centered approach on more particularly psychotherapy, education, and family life. He, furthermore, argued the implications of his approach for the emergence of a new type of self-empowered person (Rogers & Sanford, 1984).

In this paper, we systematically review and evaluate Rogerian self theory, and suggest directions for research that might further advance the empirically based psychology of personality (i.e., Ismail & Tekke, 2015). We believe that this article is helpful as a valuable reference, and guide to some certain aspect of self related studies for researchers.

### *Carl Rogers Self Theory*

The most important contribution of Rogers to personality science: his self theory. His main professional focus was the process of psychotherapy. Rogers committed himself to understanding how personality change can come about. The process of change or of becoming was his greatest concern (McLeod, 2007).

Rogers' personality theory is basically focusing on the notion of self or self-concept. The self-concept is defined in a wide way as the individual's tendency to act in ways which actualize himself, lead to his differentiation and a group of experiences, accordingly, are differentiated and symbolized in conscious awareness as self experiences, the sum of which

establishes the individual's self concept. In terms of his investigation on the concept of self, it is central to the client-centered theory of therapy and personality. A method which he frequently used for this purpose was the Q-technique (Stephenson, 1953) and Q-sort of self (Butler & Haigh, 1954) adapted for the study of self.

To Rogers, healthy persons are individuals who can assimilate experiences into their self-structure (Cervone & Pervin, 2008). To some extent, they explained that individuals are open to experiences: a congruence between self and experience and in contrast, the neurotic ones do not fit organismic experience; they are in a position to deny awareness of significant sensory and emotional experiences. There are some following terms which Rogers exploited in his self theory.

*Real-self (self-image).* It includes the influence of our body image intrinsically. How we see ourselves, which is very important to good psychological health. In other words, we might perceive ourselves as a beautiful or ugly, good or bad person. Self-image has directly an affect on how a person feels, thinks and acts in the world. Rogers (1954) identified the 'real self' is initiated by the actualizing tendency, follows organismic valuing, needs and receives positive regard and self-regard. It is described that you will become successful, if everything continues well for you. Rogers believed that we all own a real self. The real self of course is related to inner personality. It's the self that feels most true to what and who we really are. It may not be perfect, but it's the part of us that feels most real (Grice, 2007).

*Ideal self.* It briefly represents our strivings to achieve in our goals or ideals. In other words, it is our dynamic ambitions and goals. This may not be valid for childhood is not the ideal self in our teens or late twenties and so forth (McLeod, 2007). To the extent that our society is divergent from the actualizing tendency, and 'we are forced to live with conditions of worth that are out of step with organismic valuing, and receive only conditional positive regard and self-regard, we develop instead an ideal self' (Boeree, 2006, Incongruity, para. 2) as shown in Figure 1.

By ideal, Rogers (1961) suggested there are some things situated beyond our reachable that might result from the gap between the real self and the ideal self (Boeree, 2006). In fact, this self is borne out of influences outside of us. It is the self that holds values absorbed from others; a culmination of all those things that we think we should be, and that we feel others think we should be. Holding the values of others is not a conscious decision, but rather, a process of osmosis, to the extent that Rogers highlighted free choice is dominant in his personality theory. It refers individuals are responsible for what happens to them and stop attributing their actions from outside forces (Derlega, Winstead, & Jones, 2005; Singer, 1984).

*Fully-functioning person.* If people are able to operate their valuing processes fully, they will certainly begin to experience self movement and growth toward realization of their potentials. This shows that the person who are able be self-actualize, are called fully functioning person (Rogers, 1961). According to Roger's terminology, they will be moving

toward becoming fully functioning persons. Fully functioning person, for Rogers, are well balanced, well adjusted and interesting to know (McLeod, 2007). Rogers, in his later writings, extended and amplified his view of the fully functioning person (1961) to emerging person (1975).

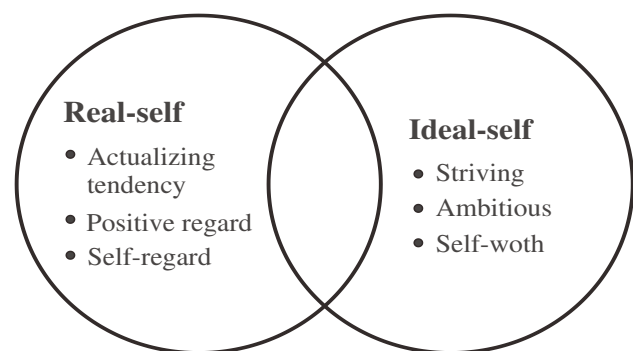


Figure 1. Rogers' Self Theory.

Shaded area represents the congruency between real-self and ideal-self

*The conditions of worth and self-worth.* The individual learns to similarly differentiate his or her self-experiences as the individual experiences other people's differences of the individual's self-experiences as unequally worthy of positive regards (Nelson-Jones, 2000). This is called a condition of worth which condition which determines an individual's assessment of positive self-regards. According to Rogers, conditions of worth are caused by experiences of conditional regard. Furthermore, the conditions of worth may take it impossible for an individual to simultaneously satisfy both the need for positive self-regard and the needs of the total organism as explained by an organismic valuing process (Anderson, 1998).

For Rogers (1959), a person who has high self-worth, cope with challenges in life, tolerate failures and sadness at times, and is open with people. An individual with self-worth may keep away from challenges in life, not tolerate that life can be troublesome and distressing at times. Rogers highlighted the importance of early childhood experience by mother and father in order to affect positively the feelings of self-worth. Interaction with outer environment will be effect on self-worth as child grows older (McLeod, 2007).

In fact, self worth as inherent in one's being. If one follows a suboptimal conceptual system, then the development of self and the definition of self would follow the same system (Myers et al., 1991). In other words, self would be defined and measured on the basis of external factors that are tenuous and transient in nature. In this view, identity is alienated from its inherent value (Myers, 1988). Self within the optimal conceptual system is seen as multidimensional and self worth is inherent in one's being. Self is seen within a holistic system designed to foster peace and harmony within and between people (Myers, 1988).

Sevig (1993) described people who have successfully attached feelings of self worth associated to the part of self. People are more tolerant and accepting of others who do not threaten this newfound sense of self. She explained further that self worth is innate in existence; therefore, 'irrelevant factors' (e.g., race, gender, age, religion, physical ability) have no relevance in determining worth.

According to Frankl (1992), the meaning of one's life may modify, but the need for meaning is always there. Baumeister (1991) discussed the search for meaning covers four basic needs. One of them is self-worth, to believe that one is a worthy person with desirable characteristics. The other three basic needs are a sense of purpose in life, sense of self efficacy and value. Self-worth is existence within personal meaning, that is an accompanying sense of fulfillment.

*Congruence.* With unconditional positive regard, the self-concept carries no conditions of worth, there is congruence between the true self and experience, and the person is psychologically healthy. According to Rogers (1959), the closer the person's self image and self-ideal are each other, the more congruent or consistent and the higher person's sense of self-worth, as shown in Figure 2.

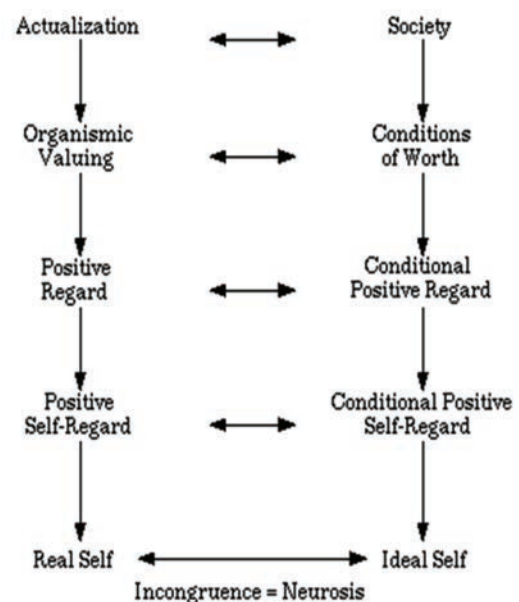


Figure 2. Actualizing Tendency. Adapted from "Personality theories: Carl Rogers." by C. G. Boeree, 2006, retrieved February 13, 2013, from <http://webpace.ship.edu/cgboer/rogers.html>.

Incongruent behaviors result from incongruence (Rogers, 1961). To the extent, behaviors which are consistent with the self-concept are truthfully symbolized, those which are inconsistent with conditions of worth are either denied or distorted completely to awareness (Nooraini, 2014).

Experience incongruence indicates a basic inconsistency in the self. When this occurs, Rogers (1956) assumed that anxiety is the result of a discrepancy between experience and the perception of the self. Then, a person tends to engage in defensive process. In this regard, defensive act occurs due to that a person experiences threatening. In fact, Rogers argued that defensive act is not against driving forces in the id, against 'a loss of a consistent, integrated sense of the self' (Cervone & Pervin, 2008).

*Actualizing tendency.* Understanding the personality, according to humanist psychologist, is very much different from psychoanalysis and behaviorist psychologists. Personality is a process of the acquisition of an increasingly accurate self-concept rather than a description of developmental stages and tasks. Rogers (1951) mainly focused this concept on his varied and prolonged experience with troubled individuals in therapy. To Rogers, the studies, together with his clinical experience, suggested that there is a directional tendency in each of us to grow, to seek new and varied experiences. It is stated by him that "the organism has one basic tendency and striving -to actualize, maintain, and enhance the experiencing organism" (Rogers, 1951, p.487).

The actualizing tendency has two distincts: The psychological and the biological aspect. The

psychological approach means the development of potentials that make us view human beings more worthwhile. The biological approach involves drives to satisfy our important basic needs, the need for food, water, and air. In Rogers's argument as similar as Maslow's work, people are all basically good and creative. He believed that the actualizing tendency is selective and constructive; it is a directional tendency. People develop their innate goodness, if society acts toward them in an encouraging and supportive way. In other words, when a strong self-concept or external environment supports the valuing process, they become constructive. Rogers believed that they must be in a state of congruence in order to achieve self-actualization for a person. This indicates that self-actualization occurs when a individual's ideal self (who would like to be) is congruent with the his self-image (actual behaviour). Rogers describes a person who is actualizing the self as a fully functioning person (McLeod, 2007).

## Conclusion

Rogers (1959), a well-known Western personality theorist, described personality as a structured, consistent prototype of understanding of the 'I' and 'myself' who is influenced by previous experiences. It can be decided from the perspective of personality theorists that defining personality is a difficult task. Personality theorists have presented many characteristics, descriptions, and definitions of personality that helps to develop comprehensive frameworks for personality types. With this reasoning, the



personality framework of this study is basically centered on Rogers's self theory in order to partially understand the aspect of positive regard, self-worth and, fully functioning or self-actualizing.

For Rogerian personality theory, according to Cervone and Pervin (2008), he disagreed strongly with significant points of Freudian hypothesis: its delineation of people as controlled by unconscious forces and instead, Rogers' claim that personality is determined by early life experiences; for example, adult psychologically repressed conflicts in the past. They stressed conscious perceptions of the present and interpersonal encounters experienced over the course of life. Therefore, Rogers's self theory is likely consistent with traits are what make us who we are; they are generally permanent parts of individual evidenced by the consistency in our associations.

Psychologists like Rogers and Maslow felt existing (psychodynamic) hypotheses neglected to satisfactorily address issues like the significance of behavior, positive regard, self-

worth, self-actualizing, and the healthy growth. In any case, the outcome was not just new varieties on psychodynamic hypothesis, but instead showing the holistic concepts of Rogers's theory in general. Humanistic psychologists attempt to see individuals' lives as those individuals would see them. They have a tendency to have an optimistic point of view on human behavior and concentrate on the capacity of individuals to think intentionally and soundly, to control their biological urges, and to accomplish their maximum capacity. In the humanistic perspective, individuals are in charge of their lives and activities and have the opportunity and will to change their states of mind and behavior. Rogers turned out to be understood for their humanistic theories.

Finally, as for limitation of the study, it focused on the self theory of Rogers from various perspective. It might be better idea to review relevant self theories to come out with more promising result. In any case, this review will be a perfect guide for future researchers in a position to develop a new scale related to self-theory of Rogers.

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