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Self-Concept Theory

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How Do You See Yourself?

Self-concept, strictly defined, is the totality of our beliefs, preferences, opinions and attitudes organized in a systematic manner, towards our personal existence. Simply put, it is how we think of ourselves and how we should think, behave and act out our various life roles.

The self is perhaps the most complex unit to study in psychology. Each of us have different personality, traits, abilities and preferences that sometimes we cannot understand what is really going on inside of us. While we may not be able to exactly explain why we think this way, or why do we behave in that manner, the self-concept theory is a good foundational knowledge on the importance of our perceptions towards our personal existence.



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History of the Self-Concept Theory

In order for us to study this theory, we need to know first the history of the development of self-concept theory. The earliest milestone in the self-concept theory is that of Rene Descartes, who proposed that a person's existence depended on how he perceives so. Sigmund Freud, one of the most prominent psychologists, proposed many theories that talk about our internal mental processes. His theory holds that we have 3 main aspects within us, the id (pleasure-oriented), ego (balance between id and superego) and the superego (conscience-driven)

which may influence the way we think of ourselves.

Aspects of Self-Concept Theory

The self-concept theory holds many assumptions about our personal judgment towards our selves. Here are some of them:

1. Self-concept is learned.

One of the very basic assumptions of this theory is that no person is born with a self-concept. Self-concept is believed to develop as a person grows old. This means that our perceptions towards our selves can be shaped and can be altered, and can also be affected by environmental factors. In this sense, self-concept is actually a product of socialization and development. A person may have a perception of himself different from what other people thinks of him. For example, an individual feels that he is generous while others see him as a selfish person.

2. Self-Concept is organized.

A person may have numerous views of himself. He may think that he is kind, patient, loving and caring, or selfish, cruel, rude and stubborn. No matter how many different perceptions you have on yourself, still, there is one perception that facilitates all of these insights, causing one organized self-concept. When a person believes something that is congruent to his self-concept, it is more likely that he would resist changing that belief. He tends to stick to his present view of himself for quite a long time, and changing this perception of his self may take too long, but change is feasible.

3. Lastly, self-concept is dynamic.

As a person faces different situations and new challenges in his life, his insight towards himself may constantly change depending on the way he responds to such life changes. We see things depending on our self-concept. We behave according to how we see ourselves in a situation. Therefore, self-concept is a continuous development wherein we tend to let go of the things and ideas that are not congruent to our self-concept, and we hold on to those that we think are helpful in building a more favorable perception of our personal existence.

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