

The Self-Concept Revisited

Or a Theory of a Theory

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Is there a need for a self-concept in psychology? Almost from the beginning, the field has been divided on this question. From a behavioristic viewpoint, the self-concept has an aura of mysticism about it, appearing not far removed from the concept of a soul. One can neither see a self-concept, nor touch it, and no one has succeeded as yet in adequately defining it as a hypothetical construct. Definitions that are offered tend to lack meaningful referents or to be circular. Thus, the self has been defined in terms of the "I" or the "me," or both, or as the individual's reactions to himself. Some authors, apparently having despaired of providing an adequate definition, dispense with the matter by an appeal to common sense and by asserting that everyone knows he has a self as surely as he knows what belongs to him and what does not. Allport (1955), in an attempt to make afresh start, coined a new word, the "proprium," which he defined as "all the regions of our life that we regard as peculiarly ours [p. 40]." The difficulty here is that one cannot identify the proprium until one identifies what people regard as essentially theirs, which, in effect, requires identification of the self. One occasionally detects a note of authoritative assertiveness in place of logical analysis when an author feels certain he knows what the self is, but finds it a slippery concept whose adequate definition is irritatingly elusive. Thus, Sullivan (1953) stated,

When I talk about the self-system, I want it clearly understood that I am talking about a dynamism which comes

to be enormously important in understanding interpersonal relations. This dynamism is an explanatory conception; it is not a thing, a region, or what not, such as superegos, egos, ids, and so on [p. 167].

It is encouraging to know that a dynamism, unlike an ego, is a concept that can be understood without, specifying its referents.

If the self is not a thing and cannot be defined as a concept, then perhaps it can be dispensed with altogether. It is noteworthy that Allport, one of the proponents of the self-concept, essentially agrees with this conclusion. He noted that everything that has been explained by reference to a self concept can be explained as well without it, and the only advantage in retaining the word is that it draws attention to important areas of psychology that otherwise would be ignored. He stated,

If the horizons of psychology were more spacious than they are I venture to suggest that theories of personality would not need the concept of self or of ego except in certain compound forms, such as self-knowledge, self-image, ego-enhancement, ego-extension [Allport, 1955, p. 56].

Despite the above arguments, there are a number of behavioral scientists, representing a variety of schools of thought, who believe that the self-concept is not only a useful explanatory construct, but a necessary one. Included among these are James, Cooly,

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Mead, Lecky, Sullivan, Hilgard, Snygg and Combs, and Rogers. To make matters more interesting, those self-theorists identified as phenomenologists consider the self-concept to be the most central concept in all of psychology, as it provides the only perspective from which an individual's behavior can be understood. From such a position, behavioristic attempts to develop an objective, scientific psychology that does not include a self concept can represent nothing more than a futile exercise in mimicking the physical sciences.

Although there is disagreement about the value of the self-concept as an explanatory concept, there can be no argument but that the subjective feeling state of having a self is an important empirical phenomenon that warrants study in its own right. Like many other phenomena, the subjective feeling of self tends to be taken for granted until it is absent. When the latter involuntarily occurs, the individual reports an overwhelming feeling of terror. This is well illustrated in the following description by Lauretta Bender (1950) of the reactions of a schizophrenic girl on meeting her psychiatrist:

Ruth, a five year old, approached the psychiatrist with "Are you the bogey man? Are you going to fight my mother? Are you the same mother? Are you the same father? Are you going to be another mother?" and finally screaming in terror, "I am afraid I am going to be someone else" [p. 135].

Granting that there need be no argument about the existence of a feeling state of having a self, the issue remains as to whether there must be divergent viewpoints on the value of the self-concept as an explanatory construct. Is psychology destined to remain with two schools of thought, a subjective one in which the self-concept is central, and an objective one in which it is superfluous? Hopefully, it is possible to integrate the two approaches within a broader framework. It is the aim of this article to do just this. I submit that the difficulty has been that the self-concept is not really a selfconcept at all, but something similar. When the proper concept is substituted for the self-concept, the pieces of the jigsaw puzzle that thus far have eluded assembly will be found to fit neatly into place and form a picture that should be satisfactory to behaviorists and phenomenologists alike. Let me anticipate that, as with many integrations of familiar material, you probably will react to the solution, once presented, as absurdly self-evident.

The Nature of the Self-Concept

THE SELF-CONCEPT AS VIEWED BY OTHERS

As a beginning, it will be helpful to consider the views of others on the nature of the self-concept. Perhaps its identity can then be determined by establishing a composite photograph.

William James (1910), one of the first psychologists to have written extensively on the self, identified two fundamentally different approaches, one in which the self is regarded as a knower, or has an executive function, and the other in which it is regarded as an object of what is known. James saw no value to the self as a knower for understanding behavior and felt that it should be banished to the realm of philosophy. The self as an object of knowledge he identified as consisting of whatever the individual views as belonging to himself. This includes a material self, a social self, and a spiritual self. The material self is an extended self which contains, in addition to the individual's own body, his family and possessions. The social self includes the views others hold of the individual. The spiritual self includes the individual's emotions and desires. All aspects of the self are capable of evoking feelings of heightened self-esteem and well being, or lowered self-esteem and dissatisfaction. James, apparently, viewed the self as having a unity as well as being differentiated, and as being intimately associated with emotions as mediated through self-esteem.

Cooley (1902) defined the self as "that which is designated in common speech by the pronouns of the first person singular, 'I,' 'me,' 'my,' 'mine,' and 'myself' [p. 1361]." He noted that what is labeled by the individual as self produces stronger emotions than what is labeled an non-self, and that it is only through subjective feelings that the self can be identified. He believed that the feeling state is produced by the belief that one has control over events, or by cognitive discrimination, such as in noting that one's own body is different from other people's bodies. He introduced the concept of the "looking-glass self," which refers to an individual perceiving himself in the way that others perceive him. Cooley, apparently, assumed greater prevalence of this process than the poet, Robert Burns (1897, p. 43), who, upon observing the twitching and squirming of a genteel woman to an undetected louse crawling on her in church, wrote:

O wad some Power the giftie gie us
 To see oursel's as ithers see us!
 It wad frae monie a blunder free us,
 an' foolish notion.
 What airs in dress an' gait wad lea'e us,
 an ev'n devotion!

George Mead (1934) expanded upon Cooley's looking-glass self. He noted that the self-concept arises in social interaction as an outgrowth of the individual's concern about how others react to him. In order to anticipate other people's reactions so that he can behave accordingly, the individual learns to perceive the world as they do. By incorporating estimates of how the "generalized other" would respond to certain actions, the individual acquires a source of internal regulation that serves to guide and stabilize his behavior in the absence of external pressures. According to Mead, there are as many selves as there are social roles. Some of the roles are relatively broad and of considerable significance for the individual, whereas others are specific to particular situations, and of little significance as personality variables.

For Sullivan (1953), as for Cooley and Mead, the self arises out of social interaction. However, unlike Cooley and Mead, Sullivan emphasized the interaction of the child with significant others, particularly the mother figure, rather than with society at large. Sullivan identified the self-system as "an organization of educative experience called into being by the necessity to avoid or to minimize incidents of anxiety [p. 165]." Elaborating on this, he noted that the child internalizes those values and prohibitions that facilitate the achievement of satisfaction in ways that are approved of by significant others. Subsystems of approved-of and disapproved-of tendencies are organized within frameworks of "the good me" and "the bad me." It is evident that, for Sullivan, the need to avoid unpleasant affect is a major function of the self system.

Lecky (1945) identified the self-concept as the nucleus of the personality. He defined personality, in turn, as an "organization of values that are consistent with one another [p. 160]." The organization of the personality is considered to be dynamic, as it involves a continuous assimilation of new ideas and rejection or modification of old ideas. It is assumed that all concepts are organized within a unified system, whose preservation is essential. The self-concept, as the nucleus of the personality, plays a key role in determining what concepts are acceptable for

assimilation into the overall personality organization. There is one major motive, the striving for unity. A threat to the organization of the personality produces feelings of distress.

The views of Snygg and Combs (1949) are similar to those of Lecky. They defined the self concept as "those parts of the phenomenal field which the individual has differentiated as definite and fairly stable characteristics of himself [p. 112]." Thus, they viewed the self-concept as the nucleus of a broader organization which contains incidental and changeable as well as stable personality characteristics.

Hilgard (1949), in a Presidential Address to the APA, identified three types of evidence that provide support for the concept of an inferred self. These are continuity of motivational patterns, genotypical patterning of motives, and the interpersonal nature of important human motives. The continuity of motivational patterns refers to people regarding themselves as essentially the same people they were a year ago, despite superficial changes. The genotypical patterning of motives refers to the observation that different actions can satisfy the same motive, and that certain motives can be substituted for others. Hilgard also noted that the existence of defense mechanisms provides strong evidence for a self-concept, as in order for there to be a defense mechanism, there has to be some aspect of the self that requires being defended. Unfortunately, despite having made an interesting case for postulating a self-concept, Hilgard made no attempt to identify it.

Rogers (1951) defined the self as "an organized, fluid, but consistent conceptual pattern of perceptions of characteristics and relationships of the 'I' or the 'me,' together with values attached to these concepts [p. 498]." He stated that the self-concept includes only those characteristics of the individual that he is aware of and over which he believes he exercises control. There is a basic need to maintain and enhance the self. Threat to the organization of the self-concept produces anxiety. If the threat cannot be defended against, catastrophic disorganization follows. His views have, obviously, a great deal in common with those of Lecky and Snygg and Combs.

Allport (1955), as already noted, preferred the term *proprium* to *self*. The *proprium* consists of those aspects of the individual which he regards as of central importance, and which contribute to a sense of inward unity. The *proprium* thus draws attention to the importance of what others regard as ego involvement. Accordingly, it is not surprising that a theme in

Allport's writing is that research in psychology is often trivial because subjects are not sufficiently ego-involved. The proprium has the following eight attributes: (a) awareness of a bodily self, (b) a sense of continuity over time, (c) ego enhancement, or a need for self-esteem, (d) ego extension, or the identification of the self beyond the borders of the body, (e) rational process, or the synthesis of inner needs with outer reality, (f) self-image, or the person's perception and evaluation of himself as an object of knowledge, (g) the self as knower, or as executive agent, (h) "propriate striving," or the motivation to increase rather than decrease tension, and to expand awareness and seek out challenges. In a later work, Allport (1961), in apparent agreement with James, decided that the self as knower did not belong in the realm of psychology.

Sarbin (1952) noted that behavior is organized around cognitive structures. One such important structure is the structure of the self. Like other structures, the self is hierarchically organized, and is subject to change, usually in the direction from lower order to higher order constructs. Among the substructures of the self are empirical selves, including a somatic self and a social self. An "I" or "Pure Ego" is represented as the cross section of the individual's total cognitive organization, including his different empirical selves, at a moment in time.

Having reviewed a variety of positions on the nature of the self-concept, we are now in a position to summarize the characteristics that others have attributed to it. These include the following:

1. It is a subsystem of internally consistent, hierarchically organized concepts contained within a broader conceptual system.
2. It contains different empirical selves, such as a body self, a spiritual self, and a social self.
3. It is a dynamic organization that changes with experience. It appears to seek out change and exhibits a tendency to assimilate increasing amounts of information, thereby manifesting something like a growth principle. As Hilgard (1949) noted, it is characterized more aptly as integrative than integrated.
4. It develops out of experience, particularly out of social interaction with significant others.
5. It is essential for the functioning of the individual that the organization of the self-concept be maintained. When the organization of the self concept is threatened, the individual experiences anxiety, and attempts to defend himself against the threat. If the

defense is unsuccessful, stress mounts and is followed ultimately by total disorganization.

6. There is a basic need for self-esteem which relates to all aspects of the self-system, and, in comparison to which, almost all other needs are subordinate.

7. The self-concept has at least two basic functions. First, it organizes the data of experience, particularly experience involving social interaction, into predictable sequences of action and reaction. Second, the self-concept facilitates attempts to fulfill needs while avoiding disapproval and anxiety.

IDENTIFICATION OF THE SELF-CONCEPT AS A SELF-THEORY

Having laid out the pieces of the jigsaw puzzle, it should now be possible to determine the nature of the overall picture. Or, for those who prefer riddles, the problem can be presented as follows: What is it that consists of concepts that are hierarchically organized and internally consistent; that assimilates knowledge, yet, itself, is an object of knowledge; that is dynamic, but must maintain a degree of stability; that is unified and differentiated at the same time: that is necessary for solving problems in the real world; and that is subject to sudden collapse, producing total disorganization when this occurs? The answer, by now, should be evident. In case it is not, I submit that *the self-concept is a self-theory*. It is a theory that the individual has unwittingly constructed about himself as an experiencing, functioning individual, and it is part of a broader theory which he holds with respect to his entire range of significant experience. Accordingly, there are major postulate systems for *the nature of the world, for the nature of the self, and for their interaction*. Like most theories, the self theory is a conceptual tool for accomplishing a purpose. The most fundamental purpose of the self theory is to *optimize the pleasure/pain balance of the individual over the course of a lifetime*. Two other basic functions, not unrelated to the first, are to *facilitate the maintenance of self-esteem*, and to *organize the data of experience in a manner that can be coped with effectively*. These functions were derived from the assumption that, at its most basic level, human behavior is organized biologically according to a pleasure/pain principle, and from an analysis of the conditions that produce total, sudden disorganization of the personality, as in acute schizophrenia.

The position I am advocating has obviously much in common with Kelley's (1955) view that the individual, as he goes about the business of attempting to

solve the problems of everyday living, proceeds in a manner similar to that of the scientist who is attempting to solve more impersonal problems. Both continuously make and test hypotheses and revise their concepts accordingly. Both organize their observations into schemata which then are organized into a network of broader schemata called theories. If experience were not so arranged, it would be impossible to behave effectively in a complex world with innumerable conflicting demands. Further, without such a system, the individual would be overwhelmed by innumerable isolated details that would have to be recalled to guide behavior.

While Kelley does not postulate a self-concept, given the value of a distinction between self and non-self it can be surmised that a universal higher order postulate in an individual's overall conceptual system is that the data of experience can be organized into a self-system and a world system. Not only are the cues for differentiating self and nonself ubiquitous and salient to the point that they are normally impossible to ignore, but there are overwhelming advantages to making the distinction. For one, to act within a world of shared reality, it is necessary to distinguish what is subjective from what is common experience. Second, the distinction between self and nonself is useful for the individual to exercise control of his behavior. Third, for humans to live harmoniously in social communities, it is necessary to have a concept of responsibility, and such a concept would be meaningless without a distinction between self and nonself. It is thus apparent that in everyday living, as well as in science, it is important to distinguish the subjective world of self from the objective world of nonself. However, where man, the scientist, needs the distinction to study the objective world for its own sake, for man, the human being, the distinction is important only to the extent that it contributes to the satisfaction of his personal needs and happiness. Thus, the theory I am proposing differs from Kelly's theory in that Kelly assigns little significance to emotion, while in the present theory emotion occupies a position of central importance.

Structure of the Self-Theory

ATTRIBUTES IN COMMON WITH ALL THEORIES

All theories can be evaluated by the degree to which they are extensive, parsimonious, empirically valid, internally consistent, testable, and useful. Accordingly, it should be of interest to examine

self-theories of individuals with respect to each of these attributes.

Extensivity

All other things being equal, the more extensive a theory, the better the theory. This holds for an individual's self-theory as well as for other theories. An individual with an extensive self-theory will have concepts available for coping with a wide variety of situations. He will be aware of more facets of his feelings, abilities, and personality characteristics than an individual with a narrow self-theory. Accordingly, he should be more flexible and open to new experience. A person with a narrow self-theory will experience life in a relatively simplified fashion. Things for him should tend to be black or white, and he characteristically should exhibit repression and rigidity.

Good theories are expansive. They become more differentiated and extensive as additional data are made available. Poor theories are not only restricted, they are restrictive. Put otherwise, an individual with a narrow self-theory will tend to avoid drawing inferences that disturb the stability he has achieved through limiting his ways of construing the world and himself.

There are at least three reasons why individuals may have excessively restricted self-theories. One is that the individual lacks the cognitive capacity to differentiate and generalize adequately, as in the case of children and mental defectives. A second is that under stress, all theories tend to become restricted as this protects the theory against disorganization. Thus, individuals who are highly threatened, particularly if they have a low threshold for disorganization, can be expected to have restricted self-theories. It should be considered that individuals who, at one time, were highly anxious and learned to react to threat by restricting their self-theories may continue to react to minor threats with constriction, even though they no longer are highly anxious. As the self-theory is derived from experience, it follows that the diversity of experience that an individual is exposed to is a critical factor in determining the complexity and range of his self-theory. It can be expected that the person whose self-theory is narrow because of limited exposure will not be as resistant to change as the person who is defending against anxiety and disorganization.

Parsimony

Holding other factors constant, the more parsimonious a theory, the better the theory. Parsimony is

achieved by a theory having both broad, integrative postulates and an efficiently organized set of subpostulates. A theory totally lacking in parsimony would require a separate postulate for each item of behavior to be predicted. Such a theory, in fact, would be an absence of theory. Within the realm of personality, an individual with a self-theory low in parsimony would lack stability. As the result of an absence of general guiding principles, or values, his behavior would be completely situationally determined. The opposite would be expected of an individual with a parsimonious self theory. He would exhibit stability as a consequence of the presence of basic values, or highly general postulates, and, at the same time, would be flexible and discriminating due to the contribution of lower order postulates.

Of considerable interest is the situation in which parsimony is achieved at the sacrifice of other requirements, such as empirical validity or testability. This is well illustrated in cases of paranoia, where a single untestable postulate is used to account for a wide variety of conflicting evidence. Thus, a paranoid individual with delusions of persecution may see in a friendly gesture an attempt to deceive him. Obviously, an unqualified postulate that attempts to explain too much is a bad postulate.

Empirical Validity

Higher order postulates assimilate lower order constructs that are generalizations derived from experience. Given that the theory is essentially an inductive one, how is it possible for it to fail to represent reality? For one, inferences extend beyond data, and the process of inference may be incorrect. Second, much human learning is based on vicarious, rather than direct, experience. That is, the child is taught values, attitudes, and consequences of actions independent of its direct experiences. When vicarious experience conflicts with direct experience, it is the latter that may lose out, depending on circumstances. Sullivan (1953) and Rogers (1951) both emphasized the manner in which significant others use the child's dependence upon them to teach the child to misrepresent his own experience. Thus, if labeling anger toward a mother or sibling is reacted to with withdrawal of affection, the child may learn to not label the emotion for what it is, and may even learn to substitute the word love for hate, if this is a precondition for acceptance. Finally, it should be noted that experience, whether direct or vicarious, is not the only factor that determines whether a concept will be assimilated into an individual's self theory. Among other factors that have to be considered are a need for

internal consistency and a need to maintain the organization of the self system. To satisfy these other conditions, it is at times necessary to sacrifice empirical validity.

No theory, whether a scientific theory or a self theory, is ever completely valid. The most that can be hoped for is that it will be self-correcting. Accordingly, a more important question than why some self-theories are low in validity is why some theories are not self-correcting. One reason is that when the organization of a self-theory is under stress, it becomes important for the individual to defend whatever organization exists and to avoid jeopardizing it by attempting to assimilate new information. Thus, individuals who are in a state of high stress or anxiety can be expected to avoid assimilating new information. Second, a self theory may not be self-correcting because of repression. If an individual has learned to reduce anxiety by failing to make certain observations or to use certain labels, he has, in effect, shut himself off from having experiences that could correct his faulty concepts. That is, repression insulates the individual from the corrective experiences necessary for him to change his invalid concepts.

I have observed elsewhere, in a discussion of research on anxiety in parachuting conducted by Fenz and myself (Epstein, 1967), that maximum reality awareness is not always desirable. In order for mastery of anxiety to proceed at an optimal rate, it is necessary for awareness of threat to be paced properly. It is by attending to new aspects of a stressful situation as old aspects are mastered that the individual ultimately masters the entire situation. If there is no selective shutting out to begin with, the individual may be overwhelmed with anxiety and disorganization will occur. This observation is consistent with the conclusion that the self-theory can assimilate data only up to a certain rate without provoking excessive anxiety. Accordingly, an effective defense system is one that allows awareness of reality to progress according to the rate at which it can be assimilated. This can be contrasted with an inadequate defense system which has an all-or-none quality, either shutting out awareness of reality completely, or allowing the individual to be overwhelmed.

Internal Consistency

The most effective way to destroy a theory is to demonstrate contradictions within its own postulate system. Case histories of schizophrenics demonstrate that total disorganization of the self-theory may be brought about by the emergence into awareness of some aspect of the self previously denied, such as

homosexual impulses or feelings of hostility to a loved one (cf. Kaplan, 1964). Apparently, it is not the inconsistency itself that produces the disorganization, but *awareness* of the inconsistency. An individual's self-theory can contain considerable inconsistency even with regard to relatively basic postulates without the individual experiencing stress, as long as he is able to deny the inconsistency. Of course, such inconsistency represents a potential source of stress and disorganization, as there is always the possibility that conditions will arise where denial is no longer possible.

Testability

A self-theory, if it is to be useful in coping with real events, must, like a scientific theory, be testable. As previously noted, a good self-theory is one that increases in validity with increasing experience. It is obvious that concepts that are not testable cannot be improved by experience. The question may be raised as to why, then, should individuals entertain concepts that are not open to testing. The answer is that such concepts are protected from invalidation. It is assumed that the disconfirmation of a concept in the self-theory produces anxiety; the more significant the concept for maintaining the self-theory, the greater the anxiety. Individuals who have reason to suspect that reality may invalidate a postulate important to their self theory will thus have strong motivation to insulate that concept from the test of reality. Put otherwise, under certain circumstances, illusion may be preferable to reality, and when this is so, the individual will avoid subjecting his concepts to testing. In less dramatic ways, all people, to some extent, shield their significant concepts from being invalidated, as all people are motivated to avoid anxiety.

Usefulness

A self-theory does not exist for its own sake but, like other theories, is developed for the purpose of solving problems. It has already been noted that the basic functions of the self-theory are to maintain a favorable pleasure/pain balance, to maintain self-esteem, and to assimilate the data of experience. A good self-theory is one that carries out these functions effectively, while a poor self-theory does so inadequately. A failure of the self-theory to carry out any one of its functions places it under stress, and if the stress is great enough, the theory ultimately collapses. The corresponding subjective experience is a state of disorganization. Case histories of schizophrenics (cf. Kaplan, 1964) support the above analysis by indicating that states of mounting stress and ultimate disorganization often are preceded by unas-

similable experiences, feelings of failure and inadequacy, or a prolonged period of unhappiness with no hope for the future. Collapse of a self-theory under stress, although it is a consequence of maladaptation, can, in itself, be adaptive as it provides an opportunity for a more effective reorganization. The terror and incapacity that follow the collapse of the self-structure in schizophrenia, as well as the desperate need schizophrenics exhibit to establish a new structure, even if an unrealistic one, provide strong evidence for the importance of a self-theory in human behavior.

THE NATURE OF THE POSTULATES

Postulates Inferred from the Structure of a Self-Theory

Given the assumption that individuals have self theories which contain postulates that direct their behavior, it follows that if an individual's behavior is to be understood, it is necessary to reconstruct his postulate system. How is one to undertake this task? It is assumed that there are certain domains in which all people have postulates and other domains in which some people have postulates. Some of the more general domains can be identified by an analysis of the functions of the self-theory, namely, the maintenance of a favorable pleasure/ pain balance, the assimilation of the data of experience, and the maintenance of self-esteem. Accordingly, it can be surmised that every individual will have postulates that are assessments of where he stands on each of these variables. Organized under these postulates will be a hierarchical arrangement of postulates of lesser generality. For example, under a postulate evaluating overall self-esteem, there will be second-order postulates relating to general competence, moral self-approval, power, and love worthiness. These postulates are presumably common to all people, at least in Western society. Lower order postulates organized under competence include assessments of general mental and physical ability. The lowest order postulates under competence include assessments of specific abilities. As one moves from lower order to higher order postulates, the postulates become increasingly important to the maintenance of the individual's self-theory. It is assumed that the sum of the appraisals of the individual's ability to derive pleasure from life, to assimilate experience, and to maintain self-esteem determines the overall stability of his self-theory. Thus, a self-theory under minimum stress would be expected to contain higher order postulates such as the following: "I am basically a worthwhile human being"; "I know where I am going and what is ex-

pected of me"; "I expect to lead a happy life"; "I am a highly competent person"; "I like myself and consider myself to be a decent person"; "People who matter to me care a great deal about me." The corresponding postulate system for someone with a self-theory under a great deal of stress, and therefore subject to disorganization, might read as follows: "I am a worthless human being"; "Life is meaningless, and has nothing to offer me"; "I will never know happiness"; "I am incompetent, a total failure"; "I am a despicable human being"; "No one whom I respect could ever care for me."

Postulates Inferred from Emotions

One approach to identifying the concepts that organize an individual's experience is to ask him about them. Rogers and his colleagues (cf. Rogers & Dymond, 1954) have used a p-soot technique in which individuals rate themselves on self-descriptive statements by distributing them in a quasinormal distribution. Kelley (1955) analyzed the concepts that individuals employ to identify likenesses and differences among triads of people they are asked to compare, such as mother, teacher, and close friend. Both approaches require the individual to be able to identify consciously the concepts he uses. Neither approach is satisfactory from the viewpoint proposed here, which assumes that individuals are not necessarily aware of the significant postulates in their self-theories. Fortunately, the relationship between emotion and cognition provides an indirect means of identifying an individual's significant concepts. There are two ways in which emotions can be used to infer cognitions. One follows from the assumption that human emotions, at least for the main part, depend on interpretation of events (cf. Arnold, 1960; Epstein, 1967, 1972; Lazarus, 1966; Schachter, 1964). Thus, if I make the interpretation that someone has wronged me and deserves to be punished, I feel anger. If I interpret a situation as one that is threatening, and that I would like to escape from, I feel fear. If I make the interpretation that I am deprived of love or the satisfaction of some other need vital to my happiness, and have no hope that it will ever be fulfilled, I feel depressed. If I make the interpretation that love, or something else important to me, is being given to someone else instead of me, I feel jealousy. The point I wish to make is that, as each emotion implies an underlying cognition, by knowing a person's emotional dispositions, it should be possible to reconstruct some of his major postulates. This, of course, presupposes sufficiently detailed knowledge about the relationship of cognition to emotion, an area that has been receiving increasing attention.

The second, and probably more fruitful way of using emotions to infer postulates, follows from the assumption that for an emotion to occur, a postulate of significance to the individual must be implicated. It is assumed further that negative emotions arise when any of the functions of the self-theory is interfered with or is threatened. Included are threats to the assimilative capacity of the self-system, to self-esteem, and to a favorable pleasure / pain balance. Positive emotions occur when any of these functions are facilitated or when it is anticipated that they will be. It is assumed that the stronger the positive or negative emotion, the more significant is the postulate that is implicated for maintaining a function of the self-theory of the individual. Thus, if a woman is found to register strong anticipatory anxiety before a beauty contest and considerable unhappiness after not winning it, but little reaction before and after failing an important examination, it can be inferred that, within her self-system, beauty is more important than academic achievement. This, of course, may appear to be self-evident, but the point is that if one were to ask her, she might well report having the opposite values. I believe that a systematic study of emotions in everyday life, including the situations that produce the emotions, provides a promising approach for advancing knowledge of human behavior, in general, and one that can be used effectively by individuals to advance their own self-knowledge. My students and I have recently begun a research program in which people keep records of their emotions on a day-to-day basis on specially constructed forms over a protracted period of time. Although the data have not yet been formally analyzed, preliminary results are dramatically exciting. Not only does the technique provide interesting new information on the relationship between emotions and underlying implicit cognitions, in general, but we have observed that awareness of such relationships in their own data by individuals can be highly therapeutic.

THE EMPIRICAL SELVES

In considering the structure of an individual's postulate system, I have thus far discussed the nature of some general postulates that relate to the overall self-system. However, as noted earlier, the self-system is differentiated as well as integrated. It follows that, in considering structure, it is necessary to consider the subsystems, or different empirical selves, which retain a degree of independence despite being influenced by as well as influencing the generic self-system. Thus, the same overall level of self-esteem may be achieved by high appraisal of the body self and low appraisal of the inferred inner self, as by

the reverse. Further, in order to examine the development of the self system, it is necessary to consider the sequential emergence of the subsystems of a body self, an inferred inner self, and a moral self.

By the body self, I mean the individual's biological self, his possessions, and those individuals, groups, and symbols he identifies with. The inferred inner self refers to all aspects of the individual's psychological self, or personality. It includes the individual's cognitions, conscious and unconscious, that relate to his abilities, traits, wishes, fears, and other motivational and emotional dispositions. Expressed otherwise, the inferred inner self represents the bulk of the self-theory. It includes the moral self, which is a subdivision that contains the self-evaluative reactions of the individual, including an overall appraisal of himself as a worthwhile human being as well as evaluative reactions to individual aspects of himself.

Time will not permit a systematic discussion of the postulates with reference to the different subsystems of the self. My aim, for the moment, is simply to note one of the directions in which a more extensive analysis would have to proceed.

Developmental Aspects of the Self-Theory

DEVELOPMENT OF A BODY SELF

For the child to learn that he has a body self requires a relatively simple act of concept formation in which he must recognize that his own body is a subset of one in a broader set of all human bodies. The level of abstract thinking that is required apparently lies within the capacity of the chimpanzee. In a series of interesting experiments, Gallup (1968) demonstrated that after a few exposures to a mirror, a chimpanzee exhibited self directed as opposed to other-directed behavior to the mirror. That is, the chimpanzee reacted as if he recognized that the mirror image was a representation of himself and that it was not another chimpanzee. Lower order animals, children below the age of 10 months, and older mental defectives exhibit other-directed behavior in response to a mirror (Gallup, 1968).

An example of how direct the training that one has a body self like other body selves can be was provided by a recent visit of my two-year-old niece. Donna was seated at the dining room table with the entire family. In order to occupy her, her mother would say something such as, "Where is Aunt Alice? Point to Aunt Alice," after which Donna would point and everyone would applaud. Having made the rounds several times, and all errors having long since

been eliminated, to liven things up, someone said, "Point to Donna; where is Donna?" This turned out to be not so simple a task. Donna looked around the table, could find no Donna, and began to point randomly. At this point, the mother said, "You know who Donna is. Point to the little girl everyone calls Donna," whereupon Donna, with an apparent flash of insight, unhesitatingly pointed to herself. Such a task is as clearly an example of training in concept formation as if one were to use blocks with labels on them.

The body self is, of course, not learned only by direct training. It can be assumed that it is inferred from a variety of cues which are capable of indicating that one has characteristics in common with other people, yet differs from them, just as they differ from one another. Thus, it is evident to the child that he has hands and feet that look more like other people's than like those of the dog or cat who inhabit the same household. Although there are parts of one that one cannot see, such as eyes and nose, there are mirrors, and even without mirrors it does not take much of an inference to recognize that if one corresponds to people in all ways one can see, one probably corresponds to them in ways that one cannot see. Moreover, what cannot be seen can be detected by other senses, or otherwise inferred. Thus, one can identify the nose by touch, and the presence of two eyes can be inferred by opening and closing one at a time. In addition to evidence that one has a body like other people's, there is also evidence that one's body is uniquely one's own. Among the factors that contribute to this conclusion are: (a) *saliency* - it hurts more when one's own arm is pinched than when someone else's is; (b) *continuity* - no one's body is with one as much as one's own; (c) *control* - one can make one's own limbs respond to one's wishes more easily and dependably than anyone else's; and (d) *double sensation* - when one touches oneself, the part doing the touching and the part being touched receive sensation, whereas when one touches someone else, only the part doing the touching receives sensation.

Not only are there a multitude of cues available to support the inference of a body self, but there is also strong reinforcement for formulating the concept. For one, there is social approval and disapproval to consider. A child who thought he was something he was not, such as a boy who thought he was a dog, would be subjected to untold ridicule. Second, the distinction between self and non-self is necessary if experience is to be organized into a stable and predictable system. Third, the distinction is necessary for exercising effective control.

DEVELOPMENT OF AN INFERRED INNER SELF

Once a body self has been developed, it facilitates the development of an inferred inner self, which is assumed to proceed in an analogous manner. While the level of conceptual ability required for the development of the inferred inner self can be assumed to be greater than that for the body self, as the elements are more abstract, the level of inference is still not very great.

Just as it is evident that some people are short and others tall, that some have loud voices and others soft voices, and that some wear their hair short and others long, it is evident that people differ in behavioral characteristics, such as friendliness, aggressiveness, and helpfulness. In identifying people physically, one does not add up their separate characteristics, but recognizes a configuration. It is assumed that the same is true for identifying people's personalities. Now, if one recognizes that people have stable patterns of underlying personality attributes inferred from their repetitive behavior, then there is as much reason to assume that people have a personality identity as that they have a body identity. It follows, if others have personality identities and if one is a person, that one must have a personality identity also. Other sources for inferring an inner self include a feeling of continuity of experience, ego involvement, awareness of the need to defend some inner aspect of one's being against threat, awareness of underlying motives that need not be expressed, awareness of a tendency to automatically evaluate oneself, and awareness of emotions associated with self-esteem. All of these imply the existence of an inner self that is different from the body self, invisible to the perception of others, yet very real.

Consider the experience that an individual has when his self-esteem is severely injured, such as when he is humiliated in the presence of people he wishes to impress. Such an experience is apt to be acutely distressing, to prevent the individual from sleeping nights, and to reverberate for months, years, and possibly a lifetime. Where in the body does the hurt reside? Since it cannot be located in the body self, such experiences suggest the existence of some nonphysical aspect of the self that is more significant than the body self. The same argument can be made for positive experiences. When an individual has a feeling of joy because he has accomplished something important to him, where in the body self does the pleasurable feeling reside? Unlike pleasant physical stimulation, it cannot be attributed to the body

self. Accordingly, it suggests the existence of a non-physical self. Given the existence of a body image, the proclivity of people to think in concrete imagery, and the observation that there is something within the body that appears to have an identity of its own, it is not surprising that it is conceptualized as a spiritual homunculus rather than as a hierarchical organization of concepts that assimilates experience and guides behavior. This accounts for why belief in a soul has been so prevalent throughout human history.

The question may be raised as to what conditions impede the development of an inferred inner self. It can be assumed that one such condition is an absence of a feeling of control, as such a feeling provides one of the important sources for inferring an inner self. Further, since the inferred inner self has as its functions assimilating the data of experience, maintaining a favorable pleasure/pain balance, and maintaining self-esteem, it follows that any conditions that prevent the individual from achieving these functions should impede the development of an inferred inner self. Under certain circumstances, an inferred inner self might be a detriment to the individual as it could contribute to an unfavorable pleasure/pain balance. Consider the case of a child who is unconsciously, if not consciously, hated and who, if he were to internalize the values of significant others, would hate himself. Consider, further, that the only attention he could hope to obtain would be when he failed in something. We are considering a situation in which the self-system, were it to develop, would have to be turned against the welfare of the individual, contributing to low self-esteem and to an unfavorable pleasure/pain balance. It is hypothesized that under such circumstances, if extreme enough, a self system would not develop at all, while under less extreme circumstances, the development of a restricted or distorted self-system would occur.

DEVELOPMENT OF A MORAL SELF

The body self and the inferred inner self developed because of their utility as conceptual tools for organizing the data of experience: They would value even in a world in which individuals did not judge each other, and in which there was no reason to seek approval and avoid disapproval. The moral self, on the other hand, is presumed to develop only because of the need to obtain approval and to avoid disapproval. The child initially labels behavior that pleases him as good and behavior that displeases him as bad, much in the way that he labels sweet tasting food as good and bitter tasting food as bad. Up to this point, he has no moral self; his only concern is with

his own pleasure. This state of affairs, obviously, does not last very long. In order to fit into a society, he must be, taught to take into account the wishes of others. The parents, as the carriers of the culture, have the task of redefining what is good and what is bad, so that the child will feel that he is good when his behavior coincides with socially accepted mores and that he is bad when it does not. Whether they do so consciously or unconsciously, directly or indirectly, parents tend to withhold affection following behavior they disapprove of, and to bestow affection following behavior they approve of. Before long, the child receives the message that, operationally defined, good means what the parents approve of and bad means what the parents disapprove of. Further, good is associated with a feeling of being loved, and bad with a feeling of being unworthy of love. The child is now able to avoid open conflict with and disapproval from others, as he has internalized the parents' values and can correct himself. He has become his own evaluator, feeling pleased with himself and lovable when he behaves according to his internalized standards, and guilt ridden and unworthy of love when he violates these standards. Thus, he has developed a moral self which appears to him to have an identity of its own as it is not under his conscious control.

A problem which warrants special consideration in any treatment of the moral self is the existence of intense, irrational self-betittlement or self-hatred. It is known, for example, that people confess to serious crimes they could not have committed, and that in every mental hospital there are patients who complain of being the most despicable individuals who ever existed and who do not deserve to live. Freud accounted for this phenomenon by attributing it to hostility turned inward. More specifically, he believed the depressed person has unacceptable hostile feelings toward a figure who denied him love, either purposely or unintentionally. By identifying with, or internalizing, this lost love object, the individual maintains the relationship, in a sense, and can then acceptably express his hostility toward the other person by directing it at himself. Its very complexity makes me doubt the generality of this explanation. I would like to suggest a simpler one, which rests on the assumption that a sudden drop in self-esteem is more distressing than a chronically low level of self-esteem. If this is true, then individuals who anticipate that their self-esteem will be lowered by others will tend to chronically devalue themselves in order to prevent a greater discomfort. In more dramatic cases, such as in psychotic depression, I believe that Freud is correct in assuming that an uncon-

scious component is also involved. My explanation, however, is that the unacceptable feelings, which need not necessarily be hostile, produce an anticipation of disapproval or loss of love from a significant other. However, the internalized values of the significant other define the individual's own values. Accordingly, the individual withdraws approval from himself and treats himself as unworthy of love. Further, by retaining his self-evaluation at a low level, he is saved from concern over the greater pain of having it further lowered. This can account for why depressed people resist efforts to increase their self-esteem.

I believe the mechanism just described is of highly general significance, and can account for the relative stability of people's self-esteem if it is assumed that there are two fundamental tendencies that work in opposition to each other, thereby affecting a balance. One tendency is for the individual to wish to raise his self-esteem, as high self-esteem feels good. The other is for the individual to wish to avoid a drop in self-esteem, as a drop in self-esteem feels particularly bad. Accordingly, the individual avoids evaluating himself unrealistically highly, as this would expose him to decreases in self-esteem. As a result, it can be expected that even under the most favorable circumstances, self-esteem will tend to increase only gradually.

Implications

What is accomplished by the statement that the self-concept is identified more properly as a self-theory? Does it contribute anything more than Sullivan's statement that the self is not an ego or an id, but a dynamism? I believe it solves a number of problems that could not be resolved by previous theories of the self, and that it has other significant implications as well.

1. By recognizing that individuals have implicit theories about themselves as functioning individuals, it is possible to assimilate the views of phenomenologists on the nature of the self-concept into a broader framework that should be acceptable to all psychologists. When the self-concept is redefined as a self-theory, it can no longer be dismissed as unscientific, or as a reincarnation of the soul, unless one is also willing to dismiss theory, in general, as unscientific.

2. The recognition that the self-theory is a theory solves the problem of how the self can be both the subject and object of what is known. All theories contain knowledge, yet influence the acquisition of

new knowledge. Expressed otherwise, theories influence, as well as are influenced by, the acquisition of data. Accordingly, there is no need to banish the executive function of the self to philosophy, as James and Allport have exhorted us to do. The executive self can live comfortably within psychology and even make highly respectable contributions to it, as long as it is willing to renounce its previous confused notions about being a self-concept, and recognize that it is, in fact, one important attribute of a self-theory.

3. The concept of an inherent growth principle, postulated according to acts of faith and goodwill by phenomenologists and humanists, becomes comprehensible once it is recognized that individuals have self-theories, for it is a characteristic of theories, at least good ones, to increase in scope with exposure to new data.

4. The relationship of emotion to the self-system, identified as a cognitive structure, is elucidated when it is recognized that the self-theory is a working theory whose most general function is to make life livable, meaning emotionally satisfying. Thus, the self-theory, as described, does not exist apart from the emotions, and to a large extent the opposite is also true.

5. The recognition that an individual's self theory, like any other theory, is a hierarchically organized conceptual system for solving problems, can explain its total disorganization when a basic postulate is invalidated, or when, for some other reason, the theory is incapable of fulfilling its functions. It also indicates that drastic disorganization can serve a constructive function, as it permits drastic reorganization.

6. The need for people to defend desperately certain concepts or values, no matter how unrealistic they are, can be comprehended readily once it is recognized that a self-theory is necessary in order to function, and that any theory is better than none.

In conclusion, I have presented a theory which attempts to incorporate phenomenological views on the self-concept within an objective framework. Assuming that what I have said is essentially true, it has broad implications for an understanding of human behavior. If the theory of a theory that I have presented does not rate highly, in your judgment, on the attributes by which all theories can be judged, namely, extensivity, parsimony, empirical validity, internal consistency, testability, and usefulness. I can but hope that it at least has had heuristic value, and has stimulated your thinking about your own assumptions.

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