The Self Concept and Its Relevance to the Counseling Relationship

James Edward Murray
Loyola University Chicago

Follow this and additional works at: https://ecommons.luc.edu/luc_theses

Part of the Education Commons

Recommended Citation

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by the Theses and Dissertations at Loyola eCommons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Master's Theses by an authorized administrator of Loyola eCommons. For more information, please contact ecommons@luc.edu.

This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-Noncommercial-No Derivative Works 3.0 License.
Copyright © 1967 James Edward Murray
THE SELF CONCEPT AND ITS RELEVANCE
TO THE COUNSELING RELATIONSHIP

by

James E. Murray

A Thesis Submitted to the Faculty of the Graduate School
of Loyola University in Partial Fulfillment of
the Requirements for the Degree of
Master of Arts
June
1967
APPROVAL SHEET

The thesis submitted by James E. Murray has been read and approved by the director of the thesis. Furthermore, the final copies have been examined by the director and the signature which appears below verifies the fact that any necessary changes have been incorporated, and that the thesis is now given final approval with reference to content and form.

The thesis is therefore accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts.

[Signature]

Date: May 26, 1969

Signature of Adviser: [Signature]
LIFE

James Edward Murray was born in Chicago, Illinois, October 22, 1930. He graduated from Lane Technical High School in June, 1948, and received a Bachelor of Education degree from Chicago Teachers College in February, 1961. At this time he entered the Chicago Public School system as a teacher and joined the staff of the Chicago Boys Clubs.

The author entered Loyola University as a graduate student in Guidance and Counseling in September, 1965, while working as a Unit Supervisor in a basic literacy training unit of the Chicago JOBS (Job Opportunities Through Better Skills) Project. At present, he is Director of Program Analysis for the JOBS NOW Project.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The author is indebted to Dr. Richard J. Robertson of the Central Counseling Service whose address before the Chicago JOBS Project kindled my interest in this research. I am also grateful to the faculty of Loyola University, in particular to Dr. Roberta Christie, whose class instruction provided both subject matter and the personal impetus I needed.

I wish to express my gratitude to the W. Clement and Jessie V. Stone Foundation Scholarship Program for its assistance, without which my graduate studies and this research would not have been possible.

A special thanks must be extended to Mr. Joseph Ehrenberg, Jr., whose association with me encouraged personal insights which assisted me in an objective evaluation and acceptance of myself.

The author cannot adequately express the importance of the understanding and forebearance of his wife, Marilyn E. Murray.
TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIFE ...................................................................................... ii
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS .......................................................... iii
INTRODUCTION ....................................................................... 1

CHAPTER

I. THE SELF-CONCEPT IN PERSPECTIVE ......................... 3
II. BEHAVIOR AND THE SELF-CONCEPT ......................... 13
III. ASSOCIATION OF THE SELF-CONCEPT, BEHAVIOR, AND THE HELPING RELATIONSHIP .......... 23
IV. COMMENTARIES ON CHAPTERS I, II, AND III: CONSIDERATIONS USEFUL IN THE HELPING RELATIONSHIP ...................................................... 34

BIBLIOGRAPHY ..................................................................... 37
INTRODUCTION

Pursuing an in-depth investigation into the self-concept and the implications such an exploration has for the counselor and the counselees with whom he relates is to discover a multifaceted concept with dimensions overlapping many behavioral sciences.

Initially, one must consider what the self-concept means to the numerous authorities involved in either the practice of counseling or research in the field. Equally important is to conceptualize the utility or operational value, within the framework of the counseling relationship, such an understanding affords.

Of fundamental concern, therefore, are several basic and vital questions to which this paper will be addressed:

1. What is the self?
2. How may the self-concept be identified?
3. What factors impart a uniqueness to the self-concept?
4. In what way is the self-concept affected by experience?
5. How do we gather, organize, and, perhaps, categorize the countless facts directly and indirectly
related to an understanding of the self-concept?

6. How does the self-concept affect a person's behavior?

7. In what way can the counselor exploit the knowledge of the self-concept and utilize it in a viable manner?

8. Is a knowledge of a counselee's self-concept useful to those involved in a helping relationship with him?

Finally, the paper will offer some commentary in an attempt, primarily, to synthesize the insights into the self-concept that this research has brought forth and, in part, to present an evaluation and assessment of the material.
CHAPTER I

THE SELF-CONCEPT IN PERSPECTIVE

This research is designed to extract a maximum of information as to how, in fact, the self-concept should be understood and to elucidate the possible implications this phenomenon has for the counselor. I submit, however, that as one becomes immersed in such an undertaking, one must avoid the tendency to overemphasize the importance of the self-concept or to assign an exaggerated value or meaning to it at the expense of other concerns that are, perhaps, closer to a particular counseling situation and more relevant to advancement therein.

The concept of self, Brammer and Shostrom contend, should be viewed as a learned, steadily developing phenomenon. They caution against the temptation to consider the concept of self as a "man within a man" or to use this concept as a "universal explanation for motivation."\(^1\)

Robert E. Nixon suggests that growth of self-awareness tends to run parallel to growth and maturation of the physical body.\(^2\) He is reminding us of the fact that the self-concept


becomes more evident as maturation progresses. Unlike physical growth, however, the period of growth and development of the self-concept may be considerably longer.

As the literature is studied, an essential consideration in terms of the number of self-concepts assumed by the person, emerges. Wrenn states that in all probability a person has "many self-concepts, not just one." He has a self-concept for each situation in which he finds himself. The impression given by Nixon is one of man conceiving of himself as being at a particular level of ability, with various degrees of interest in a broad range of social, intellectual, physical, emotional, and spiritual situations with which he is confronted.

In an article in the Journal of Abnormal and Social Psychology, Ira Friedman states "that investigations of the self-concept might become even more fruitful by an extension which includes an evaluation of qualities existing outside awareness." Depending on the prejudices of the investigators or whether or not their personal orientation includes a consideration of unconscious motives as forces influencing the organism, one would usually expect some measure of concern for and an accounting of influences beyond the level of conscious

---


awareness. There are authors, such as Herrick, who contend that ".....the primary factors which determine patterns of performance are inside the organism, not in the environment." At the expense of possibly misinterpreting Herrick, but in the interest of pursuing the self-concept phenomenon, I submit that man may begin life with certain inherent dispositions which will remain dormant until acted upon by particular environmental experiences. Such experiences tend to precipitate one's innate potentialities and, thereby, contribute directly to the individual's view of himself (self-concept). At the simplest level, the self-concept is defined as a group of "spontaneous self-references"—what a person says about himself: "I am....." Such unsolicited references may be considered to be indicative of the person's self-concept. Yet, we must remember that these references may not necessarily reveal the individual's actual sentiment concerning himself. It is my feeling that he may choose a particular facade or experiment with the projection of such deceptive measures while entertaining quite different notions about himself in order to allay any possible loss of self-esteem or to defend himself against an apparent threat to the ego by projecting an image which he feels will be most expedient.


Professional opinion as to the precise meaning of the self-concept varies considerably. However, there is some measure of agreement among most on the ongoing personal dynamics related to the evolution and assimilation of this concept within the person. This is emphasized in the writing of William E. Amos. It is his feeling that an individual's "self-concept may be defined as the continuous and progressive derivation of meaning from experience. It might include all a person's views as part or characteristic of himself." 7

The growth and development of this self-image is a product of the interaction of psychological and sociological factors which come to bear on the person. 8 As a consequence, we can anticipate that, "...consequently, the self-concept changes as new experiences are perceived or assimilated." 9

As we reflect on the foregoing, several pertinent details begin to formulate. The individual's cognitive processes and emotional development, and the way in which these influence his perception of his personal-social experiences, are recognized as instrumental in the structuring of the self-concept.

9 Amos, loc. sit.
We can imagine the self as an outgrowth of a person's past experiences and the kinds of experiences he is having at any moment. We might consider the individual as learning about himself and constructing attitudes from what he learns. Cronback reminds us that "a person shapes a self-concept out of his experiences, in which he puts together his knowledge of what he is and how he compared to others."\textsuperscript{10} The self-concept, then, is profoundly imbedded and uniquely individualistic without being an entity developing separately from the total growth and development of the individual.

The person is an entity to the extent that he alone has had touch with all of his experiences. These impart a certain individuality to him. "In the final analysis, the individual must know for himself the totality that he is."\textsuperscript{11} Seemingly paradoxical, yet irrefutably true, is the fact that the individual's developmental experiences are in a field shared by many others but are, also, uniquely significant to him and his perceptual field.

The unpredictable pattern of day to day experiences and development of a self-concept therefrom preclude an accurate or meaningful prediction of the ultimate make-up of the self-


concept. "...no two growers will achieve precisely the same ends." An interesting description as to the direction the self-concept takes as it unfolds is found in two divergent views: the genetic and the ontogenetic.

The genetic view proposes a vertical development beginning at conception and continuing through old age. The intervening stages have clearly defined characteristics or developmental tasks with which each is identified. This relates closely to the theory that the person is a closed system. In contrast, the ontogenetic view suggests that development proceeds along a horizontal continuum between two poles. This corresponds to the theory that a person is an open system in which, rather than a series of somewhat predictable stages in development occurring, development is a product of the previous experiences that have acted to condition a person's behavior.

In a conceptualization which gives a position to the self, relative to the total personality, Jung asserts that we consider the self as "the midpoint of personality around which all of the other systems are constellated." Jung further considers the self as life's goal, dependent for development

upon the complete development of other components of the personality. He has given the self a central position in which its complete actualization, as well as its stability, is more dependent upon total personality development, rather than inextricably united with it.\(^\text{15}\)

In his book, James C. Coleman expressed agreement with the foregoing, and, in particular with Jung as he expands the notion of the self's central position. The self is defined by Coleman as the nucleus of a person's ability to organize and adjust.\(^\text{16}\)

Gardner Murphy refers to the self as a person's "perception and conception of his whole being..." or the "individual as known to the individual."\(^\text{17}\)

Three emotional developments "useful in understanding the development of the self," are referred to in a book entitled Child Psychology by Arthur T. Jersild: affection, anxiety (threats against the self), and compassion (expression of self-fulfillment).\(^\text{18}\) Garrison declares that the person not only learns more about himself as he matures but that this "conglomeration of learning," or self-knowledge is what we

\(^{15}\text{Ibid.}, \ p. \ 87.}\)

\(^{16}\text{Coleman, Abnormal Psychology and Modern Life (2nd ed.; Chicago: Scott, Foresman, and Company, 1956), p. 64.}\)

\(^{17}\text{Hall and Lindzey, loc. cit., p. 58.}\)

consider to be, in fact, the self-concept. In Garrison's opinion, the concept of self is essentially a pattern of attitudes. Garrison further explains that adolescents depend largely on the reaction of their peers toward them for self-concept. He believes that the self-concept emerges directly from the behavior of others toward the individual and indirectly from physical and mental attributes of the individual himself.

We are now considering the self-concept as a product of interacting forces or social and emotional influences on one's perception of himself within his environment.

The self is, in terms of the foregoing, a composite of thoughts, feelings, and attitudes which constitute the individual's awareness of himself. Jersild points out that in maturity the self also includes the ideas, hopes, and values comprising the individual's philosophy of life. We, therefore, are led to the conclusion that the self, while clearly differentiated from the total psychological make-up of the person, encompasses several very personal aspects of the individual's total emotional and psychological complex.

There is the feeling among many that there is not only a distinction in the mode of the self-concept for each person, but that these factors predispose the person to a development of this phenomenon. Jersild submits, "that which we call the

Garrison, loc. cit., p. 147. 20 Ibid., p. 203.
21Jersild, loc. cit., p. 179.
self comes into being as the child, with all his inborn capacities and tendencies and all that is inherent in his make-up, comes to grips with the experiences of life." Again, life's experiences are considered for both their catalytic and precursive influences. In terms of growth and development, these experiences lay the ground work for the existential manner in which the person will subjectively interpret his experiences and, subsequently, view himself in relation to these.

"There are vast differences between separate self organizations...." Some are more complex containing many more elements. Some become more realistic, more stable, and highly integrated. 23

C. Judson Herrick refers to a publication by his brother expressing a position which he supports. This view is that man has a social self in which he tends to project feelings and experiences into others and then proceeds to act in the light of these. These reactions cause the self to be in a constant state of change in order to embrace new elements which will modify the social self and the feelings and type of reactions subsequently employed by the person. 24

---

22 Ibid.
24 C. Judson Herrick, loc. cit., p. 190.
The biologist, Herrick explains, has a concept of self which has an operational meaning that tends to lend support to the person's experiences and his subjective interpretations of these as influencing factors in the growth and development of the self: "I experience myself in action as immediately as I experience things with which I act...." He adds that, in his opinion, the knower cannot merge with the known without losing his identity. The normal developing infant, for example, uses personal pronouns—"I, me, etc., implying the acquisition of the idea of self as a separate entity.

Allport refers to those things which are "central to our sense of existence" as the "proprium." Allport feels that the proprium is "a mere synonym for self." That is, that the self-image is part of the proprium and that the image of self has two parts—the individual's regard for his abilities and status and the way he would like to become or "his aspirations for himself."

---

25 Ibid., p. 207
26 Ibid.
CHAPTER II

BEHAVIOR AND THE SELF-CONCEPT

Man apparently has a capacity for self-awareness. That is, he can be conscious of himself as he believes he exists relative to other members of society. This capacity allows him to conceptualize this model of himself and to react to a broad range of stimuli in a manner consistent with his concept of self. Man's capacity includes the ability to connect the past self with the future self. 28

The concept of self may become so ingrained and occupy so much of a central place as to be affected by, as well as effecting, the multitude of predisposing factors and underlying causes to which man's behavior is attributed.

The usefulness of the self-concept in facilitating the interpretation and understanding of behavior has been developed in an article by Richard M. Brandt appearing in the Mental Hygiene periodical. 29 In it, Brandt states that the self is becoming recognized as a very useful concept in exploring behavior. Other authors also feel the self-concept is of

28Nixon, loc. cit., p. 32.

principal importance in explaining behavior. As an example, consider the position taken by Clarence Leuba. He states that the confidence a person has of achieving his "ideals" depends on his self-concept. He will be anxious and frustrated if he feels unable to do this.30

Among most authorities, there is agreement that the degree to which the individual's behavior corresponds to his concept of himself is a valid means of assessing his adjustment. When a person is not acting in accordance with his self-concept "we might say he is maladjusted."31 In such cases, when the individual perceives and conceptualizes a particular concept of self, but perceives subsequent experiences to be dissimilar, his awareness of threat, and, therefore, his level of anxiety and defensiveness will be high.

Glanz believes that "the most deeply held value pattern is the concept of the self as a person--the self-concept: This is me; this I believe."32 Ann Marie Walsh feels that the individual will be "faithful to this picture of himself, good or bad."33 Furthermore, in a study in which attitudes and

31 Brammer and Shostrom, loc. cit., p. 41.
feelings toward one's self were compared to feelings toward others, Elizabeth T. Sheerer discovered that the attitudes one holds toward one's self are related to the attitudes toward others. We can anticipate, therefore, behavior to be in keeping with and indicative of the concept one has of himself.

In an extension of a theme presented by Allport, to which I referred in Chapter I, Buckheimer and Balogh direct our attention to the self structure as the organized core of personality which we attempt to protect. Any threat to it, they say, is a threat to the individual's very center of existence.

Studies of normal adjustment and the self-concept indicate a tendency for normal persons to see themselves as they would like to be—reflecting positive attitudes toward the self. The psychoneurotic group is most often characterized by dissatisfaction and negative attitudes toward the self.

In his book, entitled *Educational Psychology*, Lee J. Cronback reminds us that insecurity in the child develops when a child's experiences are devoid of acceptance and affection. He further notes that the attitudes a child has toward himself

---


35 Buckheimer and Balogh, loc. cit., p. 71.

36 Friedman, loc. cit., p. 613.
(his concept of himself) reflects how others treat him.37

Seldon found that the self-concept of delinquent boys was faulty more often than in nondelinquent boys. Their levels of aspiration were also lower.38 That is, to some extent, the delinquent boys seemed to aspire to a level of behavior commensurate with the concept they had of themselves.

Consider the notion of the adequate personality as one in which the self is well-integrated, in the sense that successive subjective descriptions of self can be absorbed into the person's self-perception and influence his interpretations of reality.39

The counselor must assume the individual's frame of reference to be very close to reality and must constantly try to determine what the individual is trying to say and what meaning it has for him. Brammer and Shostrom suggest that by being empathetic, accepting, and permissive, no threat to the self-concept is introduced. Concern should not be for the direction the client is going, but for a relationship where he can freely and safely move in exploring his own feelings.40

37Cronback, loc. sit., p. 110.


40Brammer and Shostrom, loc. sit.
In these terms it is recommended that the counselor's initial verbal and non-verbal communications be directed toward this type of interpersonal relationship with the client. Once this rapport is established the counselor and client have a setting in which they can collaborate in the explorations necessary for the client to acquire the talent and proficiency to solve problems and to make decisions freely.

Research has produced a synthesis of theories which suggests that low achievers see themselves as inadequate, helpless, and, perhaps, worthless. These individuals see themselves as "having to be on the defensive in order to maintain their integrity." In terms of a disposition toward pursuing further academic challenges and, indeed, in terms of the contentment and satisfaction that often is a by-product of such scholastic accomplishments and acts to motivate those involved, the self-concepts of underachievers are not only inadequate, but "crippling."\(^4^1\) The research investigation done by Walsh has revealed a proneness among "bright low achievers," when involved in doll play and when compared to adequate achievers, to depict more frequently the boy doll as not free to pursue his own interests, not free to express his feelings, not accepted as a member of the family, inadequate in responding to environmental stimuli, and unable to identify with the male role.\(^4^2\)

\(^{4^1}\) Ann Marie Walsh, loc. cit., pp. 6-13.

\(^{4^2}\) Ibid., p. 27.
Self-ratings are given some consideration as a means of identifying the self-concept. "One of the most widely accepted beliefs among psychologists today is that discrepancy between self-concept and objective reality is a common feature or maladjustment."  

Garrison tells us that a "child or adolescent with a good self-concept has a sort of built-in insulator against juvenile delinquency." Otherwise, security and acceptance come from the gang and protection of the ego with involvement in the gang episodes. For purposes of decision making, problem solving, and the freedom necessary in order for the individual to explore and consider unencumbered, possible alternatives, a child must be "accepted, approved, respected, and liked for what he is" in order to develop self-acceptance and be free to venture.

Findings indicate no difference between delinquent and non-delinquent boys in estimating their academic ability or social ability. Hurlock, however, states that children tend to overestimate the socially desirable traits and to underestimate the undesirable traits.

---

44 Garrison, loc. cit., p. 189.
45 Jersild, loc. cit., p. 183.
46 Amos, loc. cit., p. 41.
That individuals tend to enhance their self-esteem and to judge themselves slightly above in favorable qualities is discussed by C. William Huntley. (In the statement of the problem in his research article, Huntley refers to the striving for self-esteem as a universal attribute of human nature.) He confronts us with the notion that certain forms of expressive behavior are only partially recognized and that there is an upward shift toward favorable self-judgements. When there is complete recognition, modesty apparently tempers the self-judgement so that they are relatively conservative. However, Huntley adds, the strivings for self-esteem requires that the individual judge himself slightly above average.48

In terms of the significance these techniques have for the counselor who is attempting to understand and predict behavior, as well as helping clients to control behavior, Bernard Chodorkoff, in an article appearing in the Journal of Abnormal and Social Psychology, hypothesized that a better adjustment was evident when there was a greater agreement between self-descriptions and objective descriptions. He reminds us that the more inaccurate and faulty the individual's perception of himself, and the more inaccurate and faulty the

---

individual's perception of himself and his environment, the more inadequate is his personal adjustment. 49

Some authorities express the opinion that one cannot say that a deficiency of self-esteem is the cause or effect of an unstable self-concept. Yet, Brownfain's findings indicate that those with a high level of self-esteem have a stable self-concept and are free of inferiority feelings, better liked by others, see themselves more as they believe others see them, accept and value themselves highly, and feel secure about themselves. 50

We are reminded by Clarence Leuba of the goal directed behavior of most adults "fulfillment of one's over-all self-concept." 51

As was mentioned in Chapter I, threats to one's perception of self or his self-concept may elicit defense mechanisms which will allow a secure and stable ego identity. It is also true that because of "... our need to regard ourselves highly ... we distort or deny all evidence" that we are not what our self-concepts suggest. 52 Both Ben N. Ard and Lee J. Cronbach,

---

50 Brownfain, loc. cit., pp. 605-606.
51 Leuba, loc. cit., p. 4.
whose works are referred to throughout this paper, agree that decisions based on distorted perceptions or coming from the individual who harbors buried doubts will be distorted and invalid and will not satisfy our needs."\(^{53}\) The priority given to the self-esteem within man's value system is expanded by Huntley when he quotes Hoppe as indicating that man seldom "jeopardizes his self-esteem by selecting a goal too high for realization, though he tries to keep his level of aspiration as high as possible." There is, as Huntley suggests, "an upward tendency of the ego."\(^{54}\)

In Chapter I, some of the possible underlying causes and predisposing factors of a person's tendency to project a facade and/or to assume a defensive mode of behavior were first mentioned. In terms of a broader and more in-depth consideration of the possible implications this might have in terms of the individual's psyche, Jersild says that instead of being "spontaneous," there will be times when his strategies conflict with his natural inclinations. "He may rationalize the position he has taken, yet, inevitably what emerges is a 'distortion of the self, a kind of pseudo-identity.'"\(^{55}\)

\(^{53}\)Ibid.  
\(^{54}\)Huntley, loc. sit., p. 399.  
\(^{55}\)Jersild, loc. sit., p. 364.
example of this is the alcoholic, who in defense must deny that he is either a worthless kind of a person or a pathological one. He supports his denial by attempting to drink in a controlled manner. 56

CHAPTER III

ASSOCIATION OF THE SELF-CONCEPT, BEHAVIOR, AND THE HELPING RELATIONSHIP

In order to provide the continuity and cohesiveness necessary to assure readability and the logical development of the reader's thoughts, it is this writer's intention to transcend the subject matter of the preceding chapter in a manner that will produce more profound ideas relative to the counseling relationship and present the self-concept in a broader perspective. More profound and comprehensive facts worthy of consideration and, hopefully, applicable in a counseling relationship will be enlarged. Particulars as to the relevance of the self-concept to the range of interests, needs, concerns, and goals manifested by the client in a counseling setting will evolve. Many of the comments made throughout this chapter will be references to subject matter in relation to the conduct of the counselor in the counseling relationship.

It is not the intention of this paper to present an extensive treatise on counseling techniques; however, this chapter in particular must act to remind us that the nature of the counseling relationship is such that knowledge of the self-
concept will only be as valuable as the counselor's ability to use it skillfully.

There are several very fundamental and essential conditions for counseling to be adeptly initiated, skillfully conducted, and successfully concluded. For example, there should be a clear understanding that a collaborative relationship should exist and should be communicated to the client. However, "the problems, the issues, the solutions, the plans arising out of counseling....must be the free and responsible choices of the counselee."\(^{57}\)

Counseling should be client-centered and not counselor-centered or problem-centered.\(^{58}\)

Harms and Schreiber tell us that the counselor's professional relationship derives its strength from a "..... permissive relationship, an understanding of the individual involved, an appreciation of his values and goals, and a respect for his worth and dignity as a human being," as well as his right to self-determination.

Carl R. Rogers advocates a "caring relationship" in which acceptance by the therapist, he feels, will lead to acceptance, or more correctly, the ability and desire to accept by the client.\(^{59}\) The stage for the development of a soundly

\(^{57}\)Glanz, loc. cit., p. 98. \(^{58}\)Ibid.

\(^{59}\)Harms and Schreiber, loc. cit., p. 370.
structured self is set when the counselor accepts the values of another while not necessarily approving of them. Therefore, we can consider acceptance and security in conjunction with the reflective techniques employed by Rogerians, as agents for creating a climate conducive to the development, and, in particular, the awareness of self.

C. Gilbert Wrenn discovered an increasing awareness of the self-concept phenomenon in counseling.

Rogers suggests that in the closing stages of therapy, "re-education" is an observable factor with which satisfactory progress can be identified. Hadley contends that counselors may need to utilize more direct methods than the Rogerian proponents would employ in order for re-education to occur.

When Bugenthal and Zeland investigated the self-concept in counseling, they advanced an opinion in support of individuals such as Gordon Allport and Gardner Murphy. Behavior, they say, is determined primarily by one's phenomenal field, and, in particular, that aspect of the field which is the individual's concept of himself. Rogers refers to the

61 Wrenn, loc. cit., p. 108.
63 Hall and Lindsey, loc. cit., p. 316.
phenomenal field as the totality of experience and the self as
the differentiated "I" or "me" part of the field. 64

Jersild offers a very candid explanation of the origin
of anxiety when he says that anxiety arises when an experience
threatens the "neurotic solution" built up from a "superstruc-
ture of ideas, concepts, habits, and attitudes" in an attempt
to protect the self from harm. 65 Sullivan believes that indi-
viduals, in order to avoid or minimize anxiety, develop various
protective measures. These measures "form the self-system
which sanctions certain forms of behavior (the good-me self)
and forbids (the bad-me self)." It tends to "gloss over" what
the person really is and what his self-system says he is. 66
(This protective or behavior selecting function appears to
overlap a common misunderstanding of the ego--the system that
selects a pattern of behavior that had proved expedient in the
past.) On the topic of defense mechanisms, Buckheimer and
Ballogh consider as quite normal the adoption of such mental
processes that are built up around the self and excited into
play by any situation offering a threat to the integrity of
the self. However, they caution us of the dangers of such
defense mechanisms becoming a means of escapism (denial of

64 Ibid., p. 478.
65 Jersild, loc. cit., p. 366.
66 Hall and Lindsey, loc. cit., p. 139.
reality), fantasy (construct situations as you would like them
to be), compensation (substitute for a real or imaginary prob-
lem), introjection (internalizing a problem), projection
transfer blame to others), reaction (excluding from conscious-
ness undesirable thoughts), displacement (transferring feeling
to another object), etc. It is their feeling that such
mechanisms do not allow a "realistic coping with the problem."67
We, therefore, are confronted with mental processes that tend
to conceal situations rather than to allow us to confront them.

Some specific methodology applicable to the counseling
situation is offered by Carl R. Rogers. He declares that the
"therapist, by reacting to the client's feelings and attitudes
rather than to the objects of his feelings and attitudes,"
assists the client in liberating and bringing into focus his
own self, making it easier for the client to perceive his self
and to react to it.68 Related to this is a precaution advanced
by Rogers against focusing on the reorganization of the self
too early. Instead, he suggests an indirect approach of
concentrating on the reorganization of the phenomenal field.
The validity of such considerations must emerge from one's
commitment to the belief that the self-concept is a function of
the interaction of self with the total environment.

67 Buckheimer and Ballogh, loc. cit., p. 86.
68 Melvin H. Marx (ed.), Psychological Theory (New York:
In an article appearing in The American Psychologist, Rogers refers to adjustment as an "internal affair, rather than upon external reality." He relates the self-concept to the adjustment process when he says that "it would appear that when all of the ways in which the individual perceives himself ... all perceptions of himself in relation to others--are accepted into the organized conscious concept of the self," then comfort and freedom from tension is experienced as "psychological adjustment." 69 Rather closely associated with this is the fact that people are much more interested in their futures than in their pasts. Therefore, the individual's past may be of little value to him. Only if the ego is served might an individual "engage in a repetition of a successful act." 70 Here, again, is a consideration for the counselor at an operational level. Implicit in these statements is a rather compelling argument for the counselor to relate to the client in terms of the present, rather than attempting to affect adjustment by utilizing possible causal factors from the client's past.

As one explores the behavioral dynamics surrounding the self and directly or indirectly involved in molding the self-concept, the terms "ego" and "self" tend to denote similar

69 Rogers, loc. cit., p. 471.

meanings. Clear delineation is sometimes difficult. Allport informs us that the ego has been considered as knower, object of knowledge, organizer, primordeal rationalizer, etc.

Bertocci candidly draws a sharp distinction between the "ego" and "self." The hypothesis suggested by Bertocci embodies serving, reimbursing, perceiving, wanting, feeling, and thinking as implicit in the word "self." The self, Bertocci tells us, knows that it exists and therefore, in this sense, is the object of knowledge and the knower. The ego is known, "but is never the knower." Within this frame of reference, it is my opinion that the counselor must consider the person's self as knowing itself (concept of self) in terms of awareness of the existence of certain features with which the self is associated. The ego, however, must be thought of as something that cannot conceive of its existence in the same sense. Instead, the ego manifests itself and thereby asserts or demonstrates its existence each time that it assists the person to select a course of action that has proved useful to the person in a climate of similar stimuli. The process of selecting behavior (ego function) assists the self by providing a pattern of behavior consistent with the concept of the self.

An extremely insightful and thought provoking statement regarding the behavior of the self as a function of the way the

---

self perceives itself within the framework of its gradually evolving, ever changing constitution is also presented by Bertocci. He states that every self senses, feels, needs, perceives, and thinks about the stimuli which impinge upon it, it relates them in various ways, but always with some uniqueness to its own developing conception of itself. 72

Brownfain reminds us that when an individual evaluates himself, he invariably refers to a "system of central meanings that he has about himself" and his relationship to the environment which we call the self-concept. 73 Yet, unaided introspection will invariably produce a distorted view of the self. 74

The role of the self or one's concept of self in precipitating extreme behavior is alluded to in an article by Robert Elliot Fitch. The author, in an article appearing in Time, stated that the self "that is sick of self succumbs to self-analysis, self-pity, self-hate, and finally the obsession to be rid of self." 75

An interesting adjunct to other considerations this paper has given to the interrelationship of general behavior

72 Bertocci, loc. sit., p. 98.
73 Brownfain, loc. sit., p. 597.
and the self-concept are the findings of a study conducted in order to relate an organic problem such as Basal Metabolism Rate (BMR) to personality traits. Low BMR tends to produce an oxygen deficiency with an ensuing "phenomenon of a schizophrenic order." It was found that neurosis appeared in those with a high BMR or hyperactive behavior. Low BMR or hyperactivity appeared most prevalent among psychotic individuals.76

When confronting the adolescent, the counselor is reminded to consider the period of adolescence is characterized by organic changes, particularly in the endocrine system (e.g., thymus, adrenals, thyroid, ovaries, gonads, etc.). This new endocrine balance during pubescence and the mental maturity that also occurs fosters an egocentric nature.77 Notwithstanding these alterations, it is imperative that "the adolescent develop a realistic self-concept in order to lead a stable and useful life."78 He must learn to accept his own capabilities and shape his aspirations accordingly.

Bugenthal and Zelan employed, as a means of investigating the self-concept, and to reveal responses characteristic of groups, a questionnaire consisting of one simple question,


77 Garrison, loc. cit., p. 197.

78 Ibid., p. 27.
"Who Are You?" They felt that this question allowed "a free field of responses to be structured along lines most expressive of the client's needs and...current situation." Contrasting groups were told to write three answers and the personal and depersonalized responses were categorized. Older men tended to give occupational, non-individualized references, or favorably affectively toned self-references, while mature women tended to substitute family status for the occupational references of their male counterparts.

In terms of other techniques of diagnostic significance, John M. Hadley asks clients to answer such questions as, "What sort of impression do you make on people? Are you a good person, or are you rather disagreeable at times?" The answers give some idea of the individual's own concept of himself. In response to the question, "Can you tell the kind of person you think you are?", neurotics more frequently brought in the social sphere with such answers as, "I always try to be nice," or, "Others think I'm stuck-up and don't like me." Psychotics often impart a feeling of impatience by answering, "I don't know," or they display an inability to view themselves: ".....my old man could answer that....."  

Havighurst, Robinson, and Dorr tell us that some individuals may harbor "unconscious resistance" to recognizing the nature of the ideal self. We may be sure, he tells us, "that an individual will not report an ideal which is repugnant to him, nor will he report a set of ideals which he has not thought about at all. He adds that a marked change in the ideal self of the maturing adolescent can occur through association with those who have more prestige, appear more powerful, and are better able to get the desirable things in life. Boys and girls tend to combine qualities of parents with these other attractive unattainable but coveted possessions." 81

CHAPTER IV

COMMENTARIES ON CHAPTERS I, II, AND III: CONSIDERATIONS USEFUL IN THE HELPING RELATIONSHIP

After reflecting on the review of the literature that was done for this thesis and the many opinions brought forth in the previous chapters, I am not prepared to offer, with unrelenting conviction, the self-concept as an indispensable panacea or as a phenomenon to be considered paramount and foremost by the counselor in a helping relationship. In terms of the counselor's obligation to the client, however, I suggest that the counselor consider both the on-going experiences of the human organism as agents in exercising an influence on the self-concept, and, the behavior exhibited by the person as indicative of the individual's changing or changeable perception of himself. Think of the individual self-concept as being very near the surface of and included in his perception of reality and conscious awareness. As such, consider the self-concept as a basis for the individual's behavior.

Implicit in some of the information offered in this paper is a cautious reminder for one to be rather conservative about the emphasis given the self-concept. It is difficult,
or indeed, impossible, to consider all factors influencing behavior or to assign a hierarchical value to them. Notwithstanding this, let us try to appreciate those approaches or techniques in the counseling relationship that may necessarily focus on factors seemingly remote in terms of a relationship to the concept of self. Yet, if the counselor and counselee are successful in coping with a problem and the solution is within the client's perceptual field and conscious awareness, an alteration of the counselee's concept of himself may occur which may help to sustain him in his newly acquired role. This more than justifies the interest and concerted effort directed to the client's total perceptual field and to any methods that will facilitate the remodeling of a self-concept.

I believe that most of us would agree that the individual must have faith in himself. We must, therefore, look to the self-concept in counseling as something more than a simple means of assessing the individual's feelings about himself. Instead, the self-concept should be viewed as a possible means of fostering personal worth as well as feelings of confidence and contentment.

Many of the authors referred to in this thesis, direct our attention to the diagnostic value of the self-concept. Indeed, the value of such a consideration cannot be dismissed too lightly. Self-ratings, unsolicited self-references, general behavior, and responses to structured questions all have
utility. We must, however, not channel any less attention to the importance of assisting the client to understand his total perceptual field containing the many pertinent and influencing variables. Such perceptions, hopefully, will lead him to a better understanding and control of his self-concept as well as a willingness to accept his strengths and weaknesses.
BIBLIOGRAPHY


McQuitty, Louis L. "A Measure of Personality Integration in Relation to the Concept of Self," Journal of Personality, 18 (June, 1950), pp. 461-482.


