

## AN OVERVIEW OF SELF THEORY

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Of all the perceptions we experience in the course of living, perhaps none has more profound significance than the perceptions we hold regarding our own personal existence - our view of who we are and how we fit into the world. This internal view of personal existence is called "self."

Self may be defined as the totality of a complex and dynamic system of learned beliefs which each individual holds to be true about his or her personal existence and which gives consistency to his or her personality. The following propositions are corollaries of this definition.

1. The self, a hypothetical construct, can be inferred from evidence, but it is different from self-report which is what an individual is willing and able, or can be tricked or forced, into stating about oneself.
2. Central to all perception is the individual's self. Things are not just perceived, they are perceived in relation to one's self.
3. Self is at the very heart of human personality. No two people have the same personality and no two have the same self.
4. The maintenance, protection, and enhancement of the self may be the basic motive for behavior.
5. The self typically takes precedence over the physical body. Individuals often sacrifice physical comfort and safety for psychological satisfaction.
6. The self is characterized by internal organization, harmony, and orderliness; it is not a hodge-podge of mental states.
7. The self is a continuous process. In healthy individuals there is a constant assimilation of new ideas and expulsion of old ideas throughout life.
8. Self enhancement appears to require both self-regard and regard from others. It is difficult for individuals to retain self-esteem in the face of the dis-esteem of others.
9. The self is formed as a result of perceived experience. Interactions with other people heavily influence the self.
10. The self is a "gyrocompass" for living. Individuals strive to behave in ways that are in keeping with their self.
11. The self requires consistency, stability, and resists change. If the self changed readily, the person would lack a personality.
12. The more central a particular belief is to the self the more resistant it is to change.
13. At the heart of self is personal awareness, the self-as-doer, the "I", which is distinct from the self-as-object, the various "me's". The self is more than the sum total of all the

“me’s,” it is also the ability to reflect on past events, analyze present information, and shape future experience.

14. If a new perception to the individual seems consistent with those already incorporated in the self it is accepted and internalized easily. However, if it is inconsistent, it meets resistance and is likely to be rejected. If it has no relationship to the self, it is generally ignored.
15. Perceived failure and success generalize throughout the self. When one ability is important and highly regarded, failure lowers evaluations in other areas as well. Conversely, success in a prized area raises evaluations in other, seemingly unrelated areas.
16. The self continuously guards itself against loss of self esteem, for it is this loss that produces feelings of anxiety. Chronic feelings of anxiety are characteristic of low self esteem.
17. If the self must constantly defend itself, growth opportunities are restricted.
18. The individual experiences different aspects of his or her self at different times with varying degrees of clarity or accuracy.
19. Any experience which is inconsistent with the self may be perceived as a threat, and the more of these experiences there are, the more rigidly the self is organized to maintain integrity. When a person is unable to get rid of perceived inconsistencies, psychological problems arise.
20. Because the self does not appear to be instinctive, but is a social product developed through experience, it possesses relatively boundless potential for actualization.
21. Understanding one’s self is a necessary factor in coping with life and fulfilling one’s potential.
22. The self is that part of consciousness that constantly speaks internally, often in innuendo, half-truths, and falsehoods.
23. Self and language are linked; changing internal language can change the self.