

# CHAPTER 1

## INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Background of Study

Literature serves as a powerful medium for expressing the complexities of human experience. Through its narratives, characters, and conflicts, it mirrors the psychological, social, and emotional dimensions of life. More than simply offering entertainment or aesthetic value, literature provides a reflective space where readers can delve into the psychological depth of its characters and contemplate the deeper meaning of human existence. Therefore, analyzing literary works often involves diverse lenses, one of which is the psychological perspective

One of the most significant elements in narrative fiction is conflict, particularly internal conflict, which serves as a driving force in both character development and plot progression. Internal conflict refers to the psychological struggle that takes place within a character's mind, often rooted in unresolved trauma, guilt, shame, identity confusion, or emotional distress. It is through these inner battles that characters are challenged to confront themselves, navigate moral dilemmas, or question their beliefs and choices. These conflicts often reflect broader existential questions, such as the search for meaning, the fear of failure, or the longing for acceptance.

This type of conflict not only serves as a trigger for character transformation, but also offers a lens through which readers can examine universal human experiences. When a character wrestles with guilt, self-doubt, or the burden of past decisions, readers are invited to empathize and reflect on their own emotional lives. Through this, literature transcends the boundaries of fiction, creating a space for psychological insight and moral contemplation.

As Cuddon (2013) states, internal conflict is a fundamental component in generating narrative tension and presenting a convincing portrayal of the complexities of the human mind. Without internal conflict, characters risk becoming flat or purely reactive; with it, they gain psychological dimension and emotional realism. In many cases, the plot itself is shaped less by external events than by how a character internally processes how they grieve, resist, rationalize, or eventually grow. Therefore, internal conflict functions as the emotional and philosophical core of many powerful literary works, deepening our understanding of both the story and the human condition.

To deepen the analysis of internal conflict in literary characters, this study applies Carl Rogers' humanistic psychology, which provides insight into the emotional struggles and inner dynamics that shape a character's behavior. Rogers' (2004) theory emphasizes that psychological conflict often arises from the gap between the real self and the ideal self. The real self is who the person truly is and the ideal self is who they aspire or feel pressured to become. When this gap is wide, individuals experience internal tension in the form of self-esteem, anxiety, or a sense of failure. This incongruence between the real self and the ideal self is a key component of a character's emotional conflict, influencing their actions and perceptions.

Through this lens, internal conflict in literature can be understood not only as a challenge but also as an opportunity for growth. Characters like Eddie in *Mitch Cullin's People You Meet in Heaven* experience deep emotional struggles and a longing for meaning, the symptoms of incongruence between the real self and the ideal self.



their real and ideal self. By examining how Eddie confronts these emotions, the analysis highlights the way internal conflict drives the narrative and shapes his character development.

Rogers (2004) asserts that psychological well-being depends on achieving congruence between the real and ideal self. In literature, this is reflected in characters who undergo self-reflection, confront their emotional pain, and gradually move toward self-acceptance. Instead of repressing or avoiding their struggles, they engage with their emotions honestly and compassionately, allowing transformation to occur. Eddie's journey in the novel illustrates this process, as his encounters in the afterlife guide him toward understanding his past, forgiving himself and others, and discovering the value of his life.

By using Rogers' framework to analyze both the emergence of internal conflict and the process of resolution, this approach provides a holistic understanding of a character's psychological depth. It demonstrates that literature not only portrays the burden of emotional struggle but also illuminates the human capacity for healing, growth, and self-actualization.

Mitch Albom's novel *The Five People You Meet in Heaven* tells the emotional story of Eddie, an elderly maintenance worker at Ruby Pier, an amusement park by the sea. On the surface, Eddie's life appears routine and insignificant. He lives alone, feels trapped in a job he never chose, and carries a deep sense of disappointment, guilt, and regret. Believing that his life lacks meaning and has had little impact on others, Eddie views himself as a failure. However, everything changes after his sudden death while attempting to save a young girl from a falling ride. In the afterlife, Eddie meets five individuals who help him uncover the hidden significance of his actions and the deeper purpose behind the events he experienced.

Throughout his journey in heaven, Eddie's internal struggles slowly come to the surface. He is haunted by painful memories from the war, guilt over mistakes he believes he made, and a constant feeling that his life was useless. These emotional burdens reflect deeper psychological conflicts that influenced the way he lived and saw himself. Using Freud's psychoanalytic theory, we can understand these struggles as the result of inner tension between Eddie's desires, guilt, and moral conscience. His past was filled with things he never fully faced, and those repressed feelings shaped much of his pain.

At the same time, Eddie's journey also shows his emotional growth. As he listens to the lessons each person in heaven gives him, he begins to see that his life had purpose, even if he did not realize it. This aligns with Carl Rogers' humanistic theory, which focuses on healing, growth, and becoming one's true self. Eddie slowly begins to accept himself, forgive others, and find peace. He learns that his quiet acts of care, his sacrifices, and even his pain had meaning. In this way, the novel shows both the



Eddie carried during his life and the healing process he goes through a powerful story of reflection, forgiveness, and self-understanding. In his background, this study focuses on analyzing the internal conflict of the main character, Eddie, in Mitch Albom's novel *The Five People You Meet in Heaven*. This research examines both the psychological struggles Eddie faces in resolving these conflicts, using Carl Rogers' humanistic psychology as a theoretical framework.

By focusing on both the emergence of conflict and its resolution through the lens of Rogers' humanistic theory, this study provides a comprehensive understanding of Eddie's psychological transformation. It highlights how literature can mirror real human emotions, personal growth, and the search for meaning, while also revealing the power of storytelling as a reflection of the human mind and its journey toward reconciliation.

### 1.2 Identification of the Problem

After reading the novel *The Five People You Meet in Heaven* by Mitch Albom, the writer has found several problems related to the main character:

1. The impact of unresolved childhood trauma on the psychological well-being of the main character.
2. The role of fate and interconnectedness in shaping an individual's life path.
3. The portrayal of grief, loss, and the emotional aftermath of war on a veteran's identity.
4. The representation of heaven as a space for reflection, redemption, and emotional reconciliation.

### 1.3 Scope of the Problem

In this study, the writer focuses solely on analyzing internal conflicts experienced by the main character and the resolution of each conflict without examining the psychological development of other characters in depth. The analysis of internal conflict and the conflict resolution is approached through Carl Rogers' humanistic psychology, emphasizing self-concept, the gap between the real self and the ideal self, and the process of self-actualization.

Through this focused scope, the study aims to explore the psychological dynamics of the main character by identifying the roots of his internal conflict and examining the transformative journey toward emotional healing and self-acceptance.

### 1.4 Research Question

Based on the research title, the following questions reflect the analysis in the novel, as follows:

1. What are the internal conflicts experienced by the main character in Mitch Albom's *The Five People You Meet in Heaven*?
2. How do the conflicts resolve?

### 1.5 Objective of the Study

The purpose of the writer based on the above problem as follows:

1. To identify the internal conflicts experienced by the main character, Eddie, in Mitch Albom's *The Five People You Meet in Heaven* and how the conflict presented, using Carl Rogers' humanistic theory.
2. To examine how Eddie's internal conflict is resolved in the narrative through the lens of Carl Rogers' humanistic theory.



### Chapter

The writing is organized into five chapters. The First Chapter introduces the background of the study, problem identification, problem objectives, and chapter outline. The Second Chapter, the literature studies and the theoretical framework. The Third Chapter details analyzing the novel, including data collection, data analysis, and The Fourth Chapter presents the core analysis, focusing on the

main character's conflicts, and the way the main character solved their problem. The final chapter, the Fifth, provides conclusions and recommendations, summarizing the entire study.



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## CHAPTER II

### LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter will discuss the differences in previous research objects using the same approach.

#### 2.1 Previous Studies

This chapter presents other researches that require analysis of the study, including literature reviews from researchers related to these topics and objects. They are by Muhammad Hafidz Hilmawan (2018), Kalaiselvi P., Monika M., Meenambiga S., Aarthi I., and Vidhya T. (2022), and Murtafi'atul Fitriani (2024).

First, a thesis titled "A Psychoanalysis of Eddie in Mitch Albom's *The Five People You Meet in Heaven*" by Hilmawan (2018) who analyzes the character of Eddie in the novel as an individual facing various psychological conflicts. This study aims to identify and understand the root causes of these issues and how Eddie's spiritual journey after death helps him resolve these conflicts.

The research employs Sigmund Freud's psychoanalytic approach. The data is collected through an in-depth reading of the novel's narrative and dialogues, particularly those related to Eddie's past, in order to analyze the sources of his psychological struggles. Eddie's journey in heaven, where he encounters five different individuals, is interpreted as a process of healing from these psychological conflicts.

Second, A study by Kalaiselvi et al (2022), entitled "Psychological Problem in Mitch Albom's *The Five People You Meet in Heaven*", offers a psychoanalytic interpretation of the main character Eddie's internal struggles using the framework of Sigmund Freud's theory. This article serves as a valuable reference for understanding the psychological dimensions embedded within Mitch Albom's narrative.

The authors identify that Eddie experiences various forms of psychological distress, including anxiety, feelings of worthlessness, and depression. These issues are rooted in a lifetime of emotional hardship, beginning with a strained paternal relationship, compounded by wartime trauma and the loss of loved ones. The article argues that Eddie's encounters in heaven symbolize a psychological journey of regression revisiting the past in order to uncover and resolve unresolved inner conflicts.

Furthermore, the authors interpret the novel's depiction of heaven as a metaphorical representation of psychological healing through reflection and meaning-making. Each person Eddie meets in the afterlife facilitates a deeper understanding of events from his life that were previously misunderstood or emotionally repressed. Through this process, Eddie gradually revises his self-perception, comes to terms with past trauma, and achieves inner peace. This reading aligns closely with Freudian concepts of the unconscious and defense mechanisms.

Lastly, the thesis titled "The Main Character's Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder in



ext Person You Meet in Heaven" by Fitriani (2024) analyzes the  
; disorder experienced by the main character in novel using  
ich and PTSD theory by Gerald C. Davison. This study aims to  
racter's post-traumatic stress disorder events and symptoms by  
son's perspective on post- traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). The  
qualitative method with data collection techniques that include  
epth reading, and textual analysis. The primary data source is The

Next Person You Meet in Heaven, while secondary sources consist of the author's biography, e-books, and other references supporting the analysis. The findings indicate that the novel emphasizes three traumatic experiences in Annie's life: a threat of death, severe injury, and a danger to her physical integrity. Additionally, it explores Annie's PTSD symptoms, which include re-experiencing the trauma, avoidance behaviors, and heightened arousal.

In conclusion, the mentioned studies provide valuable insights into the psychological dimensions and character development found in Mitch Albom's works, particularly through the lens of psychoanalytic and psychological approaches. Each one contributes a different focus ranging from Freud's structural theory of the psyche to trauma theory and general psychological analysis, highlighting the complexity of Eddie's inner life and its representation in *The Five People You Meet in Heaven*. However, while previous research has predominantly focused on identifying psychological conflicts or trauma symptoms, this study seeks to extend the discussion by examining not only the internal conflict but also the process of conflict resolution through Carl Rogers' humanistic perspective. By tracing both the struggles he faces and the path toward their resolution, the research highlights Eddie's journey of psychological transformation and emotional growth throughout the narrative.

## 2.2 Theoretical Background

Literary psychology is an approach to analyzing literature by exploring the psychological dimensions within it. As Endraswara (2008) explains, literary works emerge from the author's inner world, making literature a reflection of the human psyche. Readers, in turn, interpret literary texts through their own mental and emotional experiences, creating a dynamic interaction between text and psychology.

According to Endraswara, as cited in Menderop (2010), literary psychology bridges the fields of psychology and literature. Its strength lies in its attention to the psychological aspects of human life, especially the way literature portrays the workings of the human mind. Literature doesn't just express the writer's personal experiences; it often captures the emotional and mental realities of others as well. Authors frequently draw inspiration from their surroundings and incorporate shared human experiences into their stories.

Rene Wellek and Austin Warren, as cited by Ratna (2004), highlight three psychological models that are largely centered around three main elements: the author, the literary work, and the reader. Most literary psychological analyses tend to focus either on the psychological condition of the author or on the psychological content embedded in the text itself.

In short, literary psychology is a way to understand literature by paying close attention to the psychological aspects of characters, themes, and narratives. It assumes



...ary work lies a reflection of psychological realities, either direct or  
:hological elements are conveyed through the structure of the text,  
nt, and emotional tone. Studying literature from a psychological  
deep insight into mental processes, emotional conflict, and human  
valuable tool for exploring the complexities of life through fiction.

...e psychological elements within a literary work, this study first  
as an analytical foundation. Structuralism allows the researcher to

examine the intrinsic elements of the text in order to determine the types of conflicts the protagonist experiences and how these conflicts are presented within the narrative structure. Through this approach, the story's events and character interactions can be systematically mapped, providing a clear basis for further psychological interpretation.

After identifying the internal conflicts and their narrative structure, this study employs Carl Rogers' humanistic theory (Rogers, 2004) to analyze the protagonist's psychological struggles and the process of resolving them. Rogers' framework emphasizes personal growth, self-concept, and the journey toward self-acceptance, offering a meaningful lens to understand both the experience of conflict and the path toward emotional healing. By combining structuralist analysis with a humanistic psychological perspective, this study aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of Eddie's inner journey and character transformation.

psychological struggles and understanding the process of emotional healing in fictional characters.

### **A. Structuralism Theory**

Structuralism is an approach that views and interprets literary works based on the structure of the work itself. This analysis emphasizes the intrinsic elements of the literary work and explores how they relate to and influence one another. The structuralist approach seeks to analyze the relationships among the elements within a literary work as an integrated whole. Often referred to as the intrinsic approach, it focuses on examining the internal components of a literary text that can be systematically developed and interpreted (Wellek & Warren, 2014). Through structural analysis, a literary work can be explored in greater depth and detail, allowing for a comprehensive understanding of its formal aspects and the broader meanings they generate.

Structuralism views a text as a coherent structure. It is an approach that considers a literary work as an autonomous entity, focusing on the internal elements that construct and shape it (Hawkes, 2003). Structuralism examines the structure of a literary work as an integrated and unified whole, meaning that its elements cannot stand independently outside the structure itself. Teeuw (1991) states that the purpose of structural analysis is to uncover and explain, as thoroughly as possible, the interrelation and interconnectedness of all elements and aspects of a literary work that together produce a unified meaning. A literary work is a totality, a complete and artistic whole. This totality consists of elements that are closely related to and mutually reinforce one another. Structural analysis should not be limited to merely identifying specific elements within a fictional work; more importantly, it must demonstrate how these elements are interrelated and what contributions they make to the aesthetic goals and overall meaning of the work (Nurgiyantoro, 2010).

After understanding that the structuralist approach views a literary work as a



ous structure, the next step is to examine the intrinsic elements that structuralism emphasizes that meaning in literature does not exist in ated through the relationship between various elements within the structuralist analysis typically focuses on intrinsic elements such as e, and setting (Stanton, 1965). Each of these components plays a the overall meaning and cohesion of the narrative. For instance, merely act within the story they also drive the conflict and reflect

thematic concerns. Plot determines the order and intensity of events. Theme conveys the central message and setting provides the temporal and spatial context that shapes atmosphere and supports the conflict. By closely analyzing these elements, we gain insight into how the structure of a literary work supports its deeper meaning.

The following sections will explore each of these elements in detail from a structuralist perspective.

## **1. Character and Characterization**

### **a. Major and Minor Characters**

In the structure of a novel, major characters are those who occupy a central role in the development of the plot. They are often the focus of the main conflict and typically undergo significant changes or internal growth throughout the story. These characters are usually written with psychological depth and complexity, allowing readers to observe their inner struggles, motivations, and transformations. The protagonist and antagonist are generally classified as major characters (Nurgiyantoro, 2010).

Minor characters, on the other hand, play a supporting role. Although not central to the story's main conflict, they contribute to its progression by influencing the development of major characters or providing important context and contrast. Minor characters may appear intermittently throughout the narrative, but they serve to enrich the story's world and support the themes being developed (Stanton, 1965).

### **b. Protagonist and Antagonist Character**

The protagonist is typically the character who embodies the core values or ideals of the story and is usually portrayed as the central figure whose journey drives the narrative. The antagonist, conversely, is the character who opposes or creates conflict for the protagonist, initiating struggles that form the basis of the plot (Abrams, 1999). The interaction between protagonist and antagonist is fundamental to the narrative's conflict and resolution.

### **c. Characterization**

Characterization refers to the naming, construction, and development of characters within a narrative. It plays a vital role in shaping the structure of a literary work, as characters are often central to the unfolding of conflict and thematic expression. According to Abrams, as cited in Nurgiyantoro (2010), characters are "the persons presented in a dramatic or narrative work, interpreted by the reader as possessing particular moral, intellectual, and emotional qualities." These qualities are conveyed through dialogue, actions, and behavior. From this perspective, a character can be defined as an agent who carries the events of the story and reflects its central concerns.

## **2. Plot**

In literary analysis, plot refers to the organized sequence of events that shape the structure of a story. It is not merely a chronological listing of actions, but a structured sequence that emphasizes causality, conflict, and consequence. Plot functions as the backbone of the narrative, giving coherence to events and meaning to the characters' actions.



defines plot as "a story that shows how events are interconnected by unfolding from a beginning through a middle to an end." This highlights not only what happens, but also why and how events occur to produce emotional engagement. Similarly, Nurgiyantoro (2010) emphasizes

that plot is the central structural element of a literary work, comprising a series of logically connected events bound together by conflict and change. He identifies five key stages of plot development:

1. Exposition – introduces characters, background, and setting.
2. Rising Action – builds conflict and complications.
3. Climax – reaches the point of greatest tension or turning.
4. Falling Action – presents the consequences of the climax.
5. Resolution – resolves the central conflict.

In this structure, conflict functions as the dynamic core of the plot. The plot is not static but constantly shaped by the emotional, moral, or physical challenges faced by the characters (Freytag, 1894).

### **3. Theme**

The theme represents the central idea or underlying message of a literary work. It serves as a unifying thread that ties together the characters, conflicts, and events. A theme may be explicitly stated or implied through characterization, plot progression, and symbolism. According to Satinem (2019), the theme functions as the “soul” of a story, providing coherence and depth to its elements.

In structuralist analysis, the theme emerges from the interaction of intrinsic elements, especially character and plot. A well-crafted narrative often contains a central theme supported by secondary themes that provide nuance and additional layers of interpretation (Nurgiyantoro, 2010).

### **4. Setting**

Setting refers to the time and place where the story occurs, including the historical period, geographical location, atmosphere, and social context. The setting functions not only as the backdrop for the plot but also as an active component that shapes the behavior of characters and influences the tone and mood of the narrative (Stanton, 1965).

A carefully constructed setting can reinforce the theme, create symbolic meaning, or reflect the psychological state of characters. In structuralist analysis, setting is considered one of the intrinsic elements that interacts with character, plot, and theme to create a coherent literary structure (Teeuw, 1991).

## **B. Humanistic Psychology by Carl Rogers**

Humanistic psychology, rather than viewing individuals as being shaped primarily by hidden drives or early trauma, it emphasize personal growth, free will, and the innate human desire to achieve fulfillment. This shift in focus marks a transition from pathology-based models to strength-based approaches that center on self-awareness and potential. Among the key figures of this movement is Carl Rogers, whose ideas have significantly shaped how we understand human motivation and identity.



Humanistic psychology emerged as a response to the limitations of both behaviorism. Rather than focusing on pathology, Carl Rogers' theory centers on how people perceive themselves and their world. Rogers' theory centers on how people perceive themselves and their world. Rogers' theory centers on how people perceive themselves and their world. Rogers' theory centers on how people perceive themselves and their world. Rogers' theory centers on how people perceive themselves and their world.

positive change, provided that the right psychological environment is present (Rogers 2020).

One of Rogers' core assumptions is that individuals naturally strive toward becoming their fully functioning self, a state characterized by openness to experience, trust in one's own feelings, a sense of autonomy, and a continuous pursuit of growth. However, for this potential to be realized, individuals must receive unconditional positive regard, genuine acceptance and support that is not dependent on meeting specific expectations or conditions. When people are valued simply for who they are, they feel free to explore their true feelings, take psychological risks, and integrate different parts of the self into a coherent and healthy identity (Rogers 2020).

This theoretical outlook had a profound impact on the field of psychotherapy. Rogers (2020) pioneered the client-centered approach, also known as person-centered therapy, which emphasizes the importance of creating a therapeutic climate rooted in three essential conditions: *empathy* (understanding the client's perspective), *genuineness* (the therapist being authentic and transparent), and *unconditional positive regard* (nonjudgmental acceptance). These conditions are believed to provide the psychological safety necessary for clients to process inner conflicts, challenge limiting beliefs, and ultimately move toward self-directed growth and healing.

Carl Rogers revolutionized personality theory by shifting the focus from deterministic models of psychoanalysis and behaviorism to an optimistic, growth-oriented view of human nature (Rogers 2004). He argued that behavior is guided by how individuals interpret their experiences, making each person the foremost expert on their inner world. Rogers' model (2004) rests on four closely linked ideas: self-concept, unconditional positive regard, congruence versus incongruence, and the fully functioning person. Together, these concepts explain how people form a sense of self, respond to their environment, and move toward psychological health.

## 1. Self-Concept

Self-concept is a foundational construct in Carl Rogers' humanistic theory and plays a vital role in understanding human behavior, motivation, and psychological well-being. According to Rogers (2004), the self-concept refers to the organized, consistent, and conscious set of beliefs and perceptions that a person holds about themselves. It explains one's understanding of who they are, what they value, how they relate to others, and how they interpret their place in the world.

Rather than being fixed or static, Rogers (2004) viewed self-concept as a fluid and evolving psychological structure, shaped continuously by life experiences and social interactions. Every individual develops a self-concept through the process of self-perception, which begins early in childhood and continues throughout life. This process is deeply influenced by feedback from others, societal expectations, cultural values, and the individual's perception of their own behavior and emotions.



### Structure of Self-Concept

Self-concept consists of two primary components (Rogers and 1959):

1. The Real Self is the individual's actual perception of themselves, the traits, abilities, emotions, behaviors, and values they recognize as part of their current experience. It includes how people see themselves in relation to the world and reflects their lived reality. The real self is influenced by the individual's personal history, self-awareness, and ongoing experiences.
2. The Ideal Self represents the person an individual strives to become or believes they should be. It is shaped by internalized societal standards, cultural ideals, and expectations from family, peers, and other influential figures. The ideal self often includes aspirational qualities or roles that reflect how the individual believes they ought to behave, think, or feel in order to be worthy of acceptance and approval.

The relationship between the real self and the ideal self is central to Rogers' understanding of psychological functioning. When there is a high degree of congruence are more likely to experience authenticity, emotional balance, and a sense of self-worth. This alignment allows individuals to live more fully, with less internal conflict, and encourage psychological resilience.

On the contrary, a significant gap between the real self and the ideal self can result in emotional discomfort, anxiety, low self-esteem, and confusion about one's identity (Rogers 2020). In such cases, the individual may struggle with internal conflict, feel as though they are failing to live up to their own expectations, or experience a disconnect between their lived experiences and their perceived "ought self." This incongruence can be worsened by conditions of worth, messages received during development that suggest an individual is only valued if they meet certain standards or behave in particular ways.

According to Rogers (2004), self-concept is both stable and dynamic. While individuals seek consistency in their self-perception, new experiences especially those involving positive affirmation or emotional injury can alter the self-concept over time. In therapy, the goal is often to help individuals reduce incongruence by stimulating self-acceptance and encouraging exploration of the real self in a safe, nonjudgmental environment.

Ultimately, self-concept plays a critical role in psychological development and well-being, serving as the lens through which individuals understand their identity and their place in the world.

### **Development of Self-Concept**

The formation of self-concept begins in early childhood, emerging as children develop an awareness of themselves as distinct beings separate from others. According to Rogers (2004), this self-perception evolves continuously over time, shaped by an individual's experiences, relationships, and cultural context. The early stages of self-concept development are particularly formative,



as the foundational beliefs about the self are established during interactions with caregivers and social environments.

Several key factors influence the development of self-concept (Rogers in Lecky 1951):

**1) Social Interaction**

Feedback from others plays a critical role in shaping how individuals see themselves. Positive interactions can reinforce a stable and affirming self-image. In contrast, repeated experiences of criticism, neglect, or rejection can alter one's self-perception, potentially leading to feelings of inadequacy or low self-worth. Rogers (2020) emphasized that the self-concept is largely constructed through a process of reflection on how individuals interpret the reactions and attitudes of others toward them.

**2) Parental Influence and Unconditional Positive Regard**

Among all social relationships, the bond with primary caregivers is especially influential in the early formation of self-concept. Rogers (2020) argued that unconditional positive regard is essential for healthy psychological development. When children perceive that their worth is depending on meeting certain standards or conditions, they internalize "conditions of worth," which can lead to incongruence between the real self and the ideal self. In contrast, children who are accepted for who they are are more likely to build a self-concept based on authenticity and self-compassion.

**3) Cultural and Societal Norms**

Broader sociocultural values also play a significant role in shaping the self-concept, particularly the ideal self. Expectations surrounding intelligence, beauty, gender roles, success, and morality are often internalized as standard for self-worth. While some of these ideals can serve as motivation for growth, they can also force unrealistic standards that cause tension between an individual's actual self and who they believe they should be. This societal pressure can contribute to chronic incongruence, especially if the person feels unable to meet these idealized standards.

In sum, the development of self-concept is a complex, interactive process, deeply set in one's relational and cultural environment. A supportive, accepting, and nonjudgmental environment is critical to encouraging a coherent and positive self-view, which in turn becomes the foundation for emotional well-being and personal growth throughout the lifespan.

**c. Psychological Functions of Self-Concept**



From being a passive self-perception, the self-concept is actively aiding psychological functioning and personal development. Its core role (Rogers 2020):

**Guidance**

The self-concept acts as an internal compass through which individuals interpret their experiences and make life choices. It provides a coherent framework for understanding "who I am," enabling people to evaluate

their actions, make judgments, and determine appropriate responses in line with their perceived identity. This function facilitates consistency in behavior and supports the formation of long-term goals and values.

## 2) Emotional Regulation

A stable and positive self-concept can serve as a psychological shield against stress and hardship. When individuals have a strong sense of self-worth, they are better equipped to manage negative emotions, cope with failures, and recover from setbacks. This regulatory function helps preserve psychological balance and supports resilience in the face of life's challenges (Rogers 2020).

## 3) Motivation and Self-Consistency

People are naturally motivated to maintain consistency between their behaviors and their self-concept. According to self-consistency theory (Rogers in Lecky 1951) individuals are driven to act in ways that reinforce their self-image. When behavior aligns with self-perception, it leads to feelings of authenticity and self-acceptance. On the contrary, when actions or experiences contradict the self-concept, individuals may experience inner conflict, discomfort, or disorientation.

However, the self-concept also has defensive dimensions, especially when it is threatened by experiences that do not align with one's ideal self. When a person receives conditional positive regard they may begin to alter or deny aspects of themselves that are inconsistent with those conditions. This alteration is a psychological defense aimed at preserving the integrity of the self-concept. Although it can temporarily protect the ego from anxiety or shame, it undermines authenticity and can result in emotional repression, inner conflict, and low self-esteem over time.

Rogers (2020) emphasized that psychological growth is only possible when individuals are able to integrate all aspects of their experience including those that may be uncomfortable or inconsistent with their ideal self into their self-concept. This integration process is facilitated by environments that offer unconditional positive regard, allowing individuals to feel safe in acknowledging and accepting their full emotional reality.

### d. The Role of Self-Concept in Personal Growth

**Personal growth** is deeply connected to the development and alignment of the self-concept. A central aim of psychological maturity is the **reduction of incongruence**, the psychological tension that arises when there is a significant incompatibility between the **real self** and the ideal self. According to Rogers (1959), this misalignment often leads to anxiety, low self-esteem, and



stress. **Supportive environments** play a crucial role in helping address this incongruence. When people are provided with empathy, and **unconditional positive regard**, they feel safe enough to accept aspects of themselves they may have previously denied or they become more honest and compassionate with themselves, they adjust either their self-perception or their ideal standards, leading to **congruence** and psychological integration (Rogers 2004).

This process of aligning the real self and the ideal self contributes to the individual's movement toward becoming what Rogers described as a **fully functioning person**, someone who is open to experience, lives in the present moment, trusts their inner guidance, and engages in continual self-growth. Rather than stick up to external expectations or fixed ideals, the individual learns to **value their authentic experience** and respond to life with flexibility and creativity.

Therefore, the role of self-concept extends beyond self-perception; it is a dynamic psychological structure that can either facilitate or restrain emotional well-being and self-actualization. Personal growth is most likely to occur when the individual experiences a supportive relational context that encourages **self-exploration, acceptance, and psychological congruence**.

## 2. Unconditional Positive Regard

Rogers (2004) defined unconditional positive regard as a form of acceptance and affection that is given freely and without conditions, regardless of an individual's behavior, achievements, or conformity to expectations. This kind of nonjudgmental support plays a critical role in the formation of a healthy self-concept and emotional well-being.

Every individual possesses an innate drive toward self-actualization, but the fulfillment of this potential depends heavily on the quality of the interpersonal environment especially during early developmental years. When caregivers, such as parents, offer love and acceptance unconditionally, children are more likely to accept all aspects of their experience and develop a stable and positive sense of self. This atmosphere of psychological safety enables them to explore their thoughts and feelings without fear of rejection, encouraging openness, emotional authenticity, and resilience.

In contrast, when affection is offered only under certain conditions such as behaving "properly" or meeting specific expectations, individuals learn to associate love and approval with performance rather than inherent worth. Rogers termed this "conditional positive regard", and he argued that it leads to the internalization of conditions of worth when a person believes that one is only valuable or lovable when certain standards are met. As a result, individuals may begin to deny or alter their true feelings to preserve relationships or avoid disapproval, resulting in incongruence between the real and ideal self and blocking the process of self-actualization.

Over time, the need to maintain the approval of others can lead to chronic self-criticism, emotional suppression, and a dependency on external validation. This undermines personal growth and may cause psychological individuals become increasingly estranged from their authentic



### and Incongruence

arl Rogers' humanistic theory, the concepts of congruence and are essential for understanding the development of psychological and internal conflict. Rogers (2004) describe the relationship between self-concept and their actual lived experiences. The greater the

alignment between these aspects, the healthier and more authentic the individual becomes. On the contrary, a significant incompatibility leads to emotional distress and internal disintegration.

#### **a. Congruence**

Congruence refers to a state of psychological alignment in which an individual's self-concept is consistent with their actual experiences, emotions, and behaviors. According to Rogers (2020) congruence is fundamental to psychological well-being and personal authenticity. It signifies that the way individuals perceive themselves is in harmony with how they actually think, feel, and behave in real life.

In a congruent state, there is minimal alteration between what a person experiences and how they interpret or express it. Such individuals are able to acknowledge and accept a full range of emotions without resorting to denial, suppression, or self-deception. Rather than hiding or reshaping their feelings to conform to external expectations, they recognize these internal experiences as valid components of their identity.

Congruent individuals typically (Rogers 2020):

- 1) Recognize and validate their emotions without shame or judgment, even when those emotions are difficult or uncomfortable.
- 2) Make decisions that reflect their personal beliefs and values, rather than succumbing to external pressures or social expectations.
- 3) Experience psychological stability, as there is little internal conflict between their self-image and their lived reality.
- 4) Develop meaningful and authentic relationships, built on honesty, openness, and mutual respect.
- 5) Show openness to new experiences, demonstrating flexibility, growth, and an adaptive attitude toward life.

Rogers (2020) emphasized that congruence is not a static state, but a continuous process of alignment that can deepen over time as individuals gain greater self-awareness and self-acceptance.

Ultimately, congruence is not about perfection, but about honesty and integration, the ability to accept oneself fully, live in accordance with one's inner values, and grow toward becoming a more whole, balanced, and fully functioning person.

#### **b. Incongruence**

Incongruence, as defined in Carl Rogers' humanistic theory, is to a psychological state in which there is a noticeable misalignment between an individual's self-concept and their actual experiences, thoughts, feelings, or behaviors (Rogers 2020). In this state, people are not fully in touch with who they truly are. Instead, they deny, alter, or suppress certain internal experiences in order to create a self-image that conforms to external expectations or



internalized ideals. This inner conflict often develops in response to conditional positive regard, a relational dynamic in which individuals receive approval, love, or acceptance only when they meet specific expectations or behave in prescribed ways. Over time, individuals may begin to reject or hide aspects of themselves that are perceived as undesirable or unacceptable, gradually creating a split between their real self and their ideal self.

Common expressions of incongruence include (Rogers 2020):

- 1) Denial of personal feelings, particularly emotions like fear, anger, or sadness that may have been discouraged in childhood or social contexts.
- 2) Alteration of experiences, such as interpreting failure as success, in order to avoid feelings of inadequacy or shame.
- 3) Pursuit of an unrealistic ideal self, based on social, cultural, or parental expectations rather than genuine self-defined values or goals.
- 4) Psychological consequences of incongruence can be significant and may manifest as:
  - 5) Anxiety and emotional tension, resulting from the ongoing effort to suppress or deny one's true emotions.
  - 6) Low self-esteem, stemming from the constant failure to live up to the unrealistic ideal self.
  - 7) A fragmented or unstable sense of identity, in which the person struggles to understand who they truly are.
  - 8) Inauthentic relationships and difficulty with decision-making, since choices are often made to meet external validation rather than reflect internal needs or desires.
  - 9) Stagnated personal development, where the path toward self-actualization is blocked by fear, guilt, or shame.

Over time, chronic incongruence may lead to psychological defensiveness, where individuals become emotionally closed off, excessively rationalize their actions, or adopt fixed coping mechanisms to protect their vulnerable self-concept. These defenses, while offering temporary relief, ultimately deepen the disconnection between the self and lived experience.

Rogers (2020) believed that reducing incongruence is a key objective of psychological growth. Through relationships that provide empathy, genuineness, and unconditional positive regard, individuals begin to accept and reintegrate previously denied parts of selves. This process involves acknowledging difficult emotions, relating internalized ideals, and slowly reshaping the self-concept into that more accurately reflects their authentic experiences. This movement toward congruence is essential for achieving what Rogers (1959) called the fully functioning person, an individual who lives openly, honestly, and in alignment with their deepest values and emotions.



#### 4. The Fully Functioning Person

The concept of the fully functioning person represents the ideal outcome of psychological development. A person who has achieved a high degree of congruence between their self-concept and actual experience, and who has grown in an environment characterized by unconditional positive regard (Rogers 2020). This individual is not “perfect” or free from hardship, but is deeply in touch with their authentic self and capable of living a rich, adaptive, and meaningful life.

Rogers (2020) described the fully functioning person as someone who lives in harmony with their internal experiences, rather than repressing or altering them to meet external demands. Because they have learned to accept themselves without conditions, they are free to explore their true potential and respond to life with openness and flexibility.

Characteristics of a fully functioning person include (Rogers 2020):

- a. Openness to experience: Rather than avoiding or denying difficult emotions, fully functioning individuals are willing to acknowledge and experience them. This openness applies to both positive and negative feelings, allowing for emotional depth and psychological resilience.
- b. Existential living: They live in the present moment rather than being preoccupied with past regrets or future anxieties. This does not mean ignoring past or future concerns, but rather maintaining a grounded presence and responsiveness to life as it unfolds.
- c. Trust in the organismic valuing process: Rogers believed that all individuals have an internal guide, a natural, instinctive process for evaluating experiences based on their capacity to promote growth and well-being. Fully functioning individuals trust this inner compass to make decisions and navigate challenges.
- d. Psychological freedom and flexibility: They are adaptive and capable of changing when new experiences or insights arise. Rather than clinging rigidly to fixed beliefs or behaviors, they remain open to learning and development.
- e. Creativity and personal growth: Fully functioning persons often express creativity. Not necessarily in artistic terms, but in the way they approach problem-solving, relationships, and life choices. Their self-awareness and emotional openness encourage continual personal evolution.

Importantly, being fully functioning does not imply the absence of problems or conflict. Rogers (2020) emphasized that such individuals still encounter challenges, failures, and emotional pain. However, they respond to these difficulties with resilience rather than defensiveness, using them as

for learning and self-discovery.

state of being is closely linked to self-actualization, the process of s inherent potential. For Rogers, the fully functioning person is the of this process: someone who is in ongoing movement toward nticity, emotional integration, and life fulfillment.



Carl Rogers' humanistic theory provides a constructive framework for understanding and resolving internal psychological conflict by emphasizing individual perception, emotional authenticity, and the role of a nonjudgmental, accepting environment. According to Rogers (2020) and (2004), psychological distress often stems from a misalignment between the self-concept and lived experience which leads individuals to deny or alter their true feelings in order to meet external expectations or to preserve self-esteem.

Rogers (2020) argued that healing begins when individuals are able to acknowledge disowned or previously denied emotions without fear of rejection or judgment. This process is facilitated either through supportive interpersonal relationships or within the therapeutic setting, where the therapist offers unconditional positive regard, empathy, and genuineness. Such a relationship creates a psychologically safe space where the client can begin to explore, accept, and reintegrate fragmented parts of the self.

The reestablishment of congruence allows for greater self-awareness, emotional openness, and psychological balance. As this congruence increases, individuals are more likely to live authentically and respond constructively to life's challenges, rather than defensively or avoidantly.

Ultimately, this journey of reintegration and acceptance enables the individual to move closer to what Rogers termed the fully functioning person, a state marked by emotional resilience, creativity, openness to experience, and a strong sense of inner direction. In this way, Rogers' model not only addresses the root of internal conflict but also provides a pathway toward lasting psychological well-being and personal growth

