

# [Personality theories according to stolorow and atwood](https://assignbuster.com/personality-theories-according-to-stolorow-atwood/)

During our life we all develop some ideas about people in general, some terms for describing and differentiating among people, and some rules for understanding and predicting the behaviour of others. For example, someone who sits in a corner and does not talk to many people and does things primarily by himself might be described as having a very reserved type of personality. We describe people in personality terms and based on our assessment of their personality, make assumptions on whether or not we like them.

Personality theorists are concerned with the total person and attempt to understand the complex relationships among the different aspects of an individual's functioning. Personality theories according to Stolorow & Atwood (1979) try to make two kinds of statements. The first statement refers to the core of personality. It is in this core where the theorist makes his major statement about the overall directionality, purpose and function of life. The second statement refers to the periphery of personality.

It is at the peripheral level where the theorist makes his major statement concerning the concrete styles of life that differ from person to person. Within the core tendency of the Rogerian theory of personality is that of actualising one's inherent potentialities (Maddi, 1976). Rogers believed that the concept of actualisation involves the tendency on the part of the organism to grow from a simple structure to a complex one, to move from dependence to independence (Pervin, 1989).

Rogers (1959) states that the actualising tendency is common to all living matter and like all living things the human shows the basic biological form of the actualising tendency, the aim of which is to express the inherent potentialities. According to Rogers, all the inherent potentialities of the human are in the service of maintenance and the enhancement of life. But the human also shows rather distinctly psychological forms of the actualising tendency.

The most important of these and which is a key structural concept in Rogers theory of personality is the tendency toward self-actualisation (Rogers, 1959). This is different from the actualising tendency in that the self is involved: .... the organized, consistent conceptual gestalt composed of perceptions of the characteristics of the " I" or " me" and the perceptions of the relationships of the " I" or " me" to others and to various aspects of life, together with the values attached to these perceptions.

It is a gestalt which is available to awareness though not necessarily to awareness (Rogers, 1959, p. 200). Here Rogers points out the self-actualising tendency is the pressure to behave and develop, to experience oneself consistently with one's conscious view of what one is. In contrast, however, within the core tendency of the Alderian theory of personality is the striving toward superiority or perfection (Adler, 1956). The goal of striving toward perfection is not to have social distinction or hold a position of power. Rather, it is the full realisation of the ideal self.

Adler describes the striving for perfect completion by saying: I began to see clearly in every psychological phenomenon the striving for superiority. It runs parallel to physical growth and is an intrinsic necessity of life itself. It lies at the root of all solutions of life's problems and is manifested in the way in which we meet these problems. All our functions follow its direction. They strive for conquest, security, increase, either in the right or the wrong direction. The impetus from minus to plus never ends. The urge from below to above never ceases.

Whatever premises all our philosophers and psychologists dream of self-preservation, pleasure principle, equalization-all of these are but vague representations, attempts to express the great upward drive (Adler, 1956, p. 398). It must be stated that the striving for perfection and the actualisation tendency are not the same. On the contrary, for Rogers, the core tendency of man is to actualise his inherent potentialities. What this means to Rogers is that there is a pressure in people that leads in the direction of them becoming whatever it is in their inherited nature to be.

For example, if being imaginative were an inherent potentiality, then wanting to be imaginative would qualify as one expression of the actualising tendency (Rogers, 1951). In contrast, achieving perfection is not a matter of expressing potentialities. Adler emphasises this through his concept of fictional finalism, which expresses the goal of the core tendency. The word finalism refers to the reaching of an end or goal state, and the tendency to go in that direction. The word fictional indicates that what the person is striving to reach is an ideal, or fiction (Way, 1956).

Ideals are not potentialities, or a pressure inside the person. Adler and Rogers core tendencies are different by the fact that the actualising version will express itself spontaneously, because it is based on a genetic blue print whereas the perfection version requires that the person work hard to make a reality of what is only a vague possibility in him at birth (Mairet, 1930). The person's striving for perfection will only occur if he holds it as an ideal and disciplines himself for it accordingly.

Now that the core tendencies of each personologist have been stated we need to look at the core characteristics of each in trying to determine how each of the tendencies are manifested. Rogers indicates that there are offshoots of the actualising tendency; they are the need for positive regard and the need for positive self-regard (Quinn, 1993). The need for positive regard refers to the person's satisfaction at receiving the approval of others and frustration at receiving disapproval. The need for positive self-regard is more internal and refers to the person's satisfaction at approving and dissatisfaction at disapproving of himself.

Because the person has a need for positive regard it is possible for him to become affected or influenced by the attitudes toward him of the significant people in his life, such as family and friends. Whilst gaining approval or disapproval from them, he will develop a conscious sense of who he is, called the self-concept (Rogers, 1961). Rogers believes that there are two characteristics at the core of personality, the first being the inherent potentialities, which are genetically determined and define the ways in which the actualising tendency will be expressed.

The second being the self concept, which is socially determined and defines the ways in which the self actualising tendency will be expressed. Adler on the other hand first indicates that the striving toward superiority is innate and it may manifest itself in a number of different ways. Adler's source of " the great upward drive" comes from two main ideas considered core characteristics of personality. The first is organ inferiority. Adler believed that people who suffered from an organ inferiority or illness in one part of the body would compensate for it via something else.

For example, blind people who develop exceptional auditory capabilities (Way, 1950). Over time Adler broadened the notion of organ inferiority to include his second core characteristic, that being feelings of inferiority. Feelings of inferiority include either physical handicaps or psychological and social disabilities. For Adler, the feeling of inferiority was the motivation that people needed to strive for perfection: " In comparison with unattainable ideal perfection, the individual is continually filled by an inferiority feeling and motivated by it," (Adler, 1956, p. 23).

Looking a the core tendencies and the characteristics of the core tendencies of each theory of Rogers and Adler we can broadly classify people but to separate and find out about the differences between individuals we have to look at the parts of the personality that are peripheral in nature. In Rogers' core theory people had only been separated into two broad types. These types comprise of the people in whom the actualising tendency is expressed leading to the enhancement of living, as opposed to the people in whom the actualising tendency is defensively expressed, leading to the mere maintenance of living.

Rogers (1959) describes people falling into the first type as a fully functioning person whereas someone falling into the second type would be considered maladjusted. Rogers then elaborates on this core level of characteristics in the periphery of personality. The first of these characteristics within the fully functioning person is openness to experience. According to Rogers an individual open to his experience, ... is becoming more able to listen to himself, to experience what is going on within himself. He is more open to his feelings of courage and tenderness, and awe.

He is free to be live his feelings subjectively, as they exist in him, and also free to be aware of these feelings. (Rogers, 1961, pp187-188) Some clear concrete peripheral characteristics of someone open to experience would be emotionality, both positive and negative, and reflection, showing an awareness of who himself is. The next characteristic of the fully functioning person according to Rogers is what he calls existential living. Existential living involves living each and every moment as if it is a new and different from that which went before.

Rogers says: One way of expressing the fluidity which is present in such existential living is to say that the self and personality emerge from experience, rather than experience being translated or twisted to fit preconceived self-structure. It means that one becomes a participant in and observer of the ongoing process of organismic experience, rather than being in control of it. Among the peripheral characteristics apparent in Rogers' notion of existential living are flexibility, adaptability, spontaneity and inductive thinking (Pervin, 1989).

Another characteristic of the fully functioning person is what Rogers calls oganismic trusting. Rogers (1961), describes this characteristic as being able to trust your oganism and not forcing decisions but letting them come to you. It involves the person to be intuitive, self-reliant and trusting. The two final characteristics Rogers mentions are experiential freedom and creativity. Experiential freedom means that a person is free to choose between alternative courses of action and creativity is having the ability for producing new and effective thoughts, actions and things (Rogers, 1961).

Having covered the characteristics of the fully functioning person it is now quite simple to discus the characteristics of the maladjusted person since is it is nothing more than the opposite of the fully functioning personality. The maladjusted person rather than enhancing life is defensive, lives according to a preconceived plan rather than existentially, and disregards his organism rather than trusts it. In consequence of these feelings, he feels manipulated rather than free, and is common and conforming rather than creative (Maddi, 1976).

Adler's viewpoint on the periphery of personality is that the individual takes one of the four styles of life comprised of fictional finalisms and traits. They are the active-constructive, passive-constructive, active-destructive and passive-destructive styles (Adler 1964). These styles are established in childhood and it is assumed that they do not change much thereafter. These four styles are related to the person's sense of his inferiorities and his means for dealing with them.

The manner in which he deals with inferiorities will be greatly influenced by the family atmosphere since the style of life is determined at a young age. For example, if the atmosphere established by the parents is one of cooperation, mutual trust, respect, help and understanding then the child will be encouraged to express his attempt to overcome inferiorities in a manner that is constructive for him and for others. But if the family atmosphere is one of competition and distrust, or neglect then the child will be destructive in trying to overcome inferiorities (Orgler, 1963).

Whether the child will be active or passive in these attempts will be influenced by whether the family atmosphere is such that he is encouraged to give and initiate as well as receive. The active-constructive style includes the fictional finalism, or goal of service and the trait of ambitiousness. The passive-constructive style includes the fictional finalism of attention getting and having a trait of charm or receiving special attention for what one is rather than what one does.

The active destructive style has the fictional finalism of abrogation of power, achievement of revenge and the bid to be left alone. The traits include being a nuisance, rebelliousness, viciousness and degeneration. The passive-destructive style has the same fictional finalism as the active-destructive style but differs in including the traits of laziness, stubbornness, passive aggression and despair. At the core and peripheral levels, the differences between Adler and Rogers are readily apparent. The differences between them being the nature of the postulated force.

If the force is the tendency to express capabilities, potentialities, or talents based in one's genetic make up, then we are confronted by the actualisation theory of Rogers. If however, the force is the tendency to strive for that which will make life ideal or complete, and even compensating for inferiorities we are confronted by Adler's perfection version. The actualisation version is humanistic whereas the perfection version is idealistic. On deciding on who I would most likely recommend an 18 year old friend, in need of counselling after a major life change, I would choose Carl Rogers.

According to Adler the goal of therapy is the reorganisation of the patient's mistaken beliefs about themselves and others, the elimination of faulty goals, and the adoption of new goals that will help them realize their potential as human beings (Ryckman, 2000). An 18 year old who is having a major life change I do not think requires his goals to be redirected. On the contrary, Rogers (1959) specifies three conditions for psychotherapy to occur: unconditional positive regard, empathy and congruence.

Raskin and Rogers (1989) believed that the clients needed the reassurance that the therapist would " prize" the client in a way that was without conditions of any sort. The therapist needed to be sensitive to the patients moods and to be able to be himself openly. This I feel is what would be needed for an 18 year old in need of counselling. The therapist needs to empathise with the patient and help him understand who he is and what possibilities are out there to get through the life change.