

# Theories and methods in humanistic psychology



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Humanistic psychology, also referred to as humanism, is a perspective that strives to help people fulfill their potential, well-being, and drive toward self-actualization. The humanistic approach encourages individuals to view themselves as a “whole individual” through self-exploration. Humanistic psychology, which first developed in the 1950’s, helped psychology develop more by offering a new set of values to be applied to the understanding of the human condition and in determining their state of mental health.

Humanists objected to the beliefs of psychodynamic and behaviorists for viewing human behavior selfish, due to environmental influences, and factors that were out of their control. Humanistic psychologist tries to see people’s lives as those people would see them, with focus on client care rather than research. Two American psychologist contributed to this new approach to understanding personality and improving individual satisfaction with qualitative research methods. These methods were used instead of scientific methodology, like experiments, because it was more valuable in finding out in depth, the way people think or feel (e. g. case studies).

Carl Rogers, a humanist theorist, once said “The good life is a process, not a state of being. It is a direction not a destination” (Rogers, 1967, p. 187).

Rogers believed that every person could achieve their goals, wishes, and desires in life. To achieve those things, a person’s self-worth, self-image, and ideal-self are important, which is what the humanist approach is composed of.

Self-worth, or self-esteem, is how you value and think about yourself.

Rodgers believed feelings of self-worth developed in early childhood that were based on the interaction the child got with the mother and father. Self-

image is how we see ourselves and affects how a person thinks, feels and behaves in the world. Rodgers believed that self-worth was important for a person's psychology health because it helped achieve goals and ambitions. If a person has high self-worth, they are confident in themselves and have positive feelings, but when they are faced with obstacles in life, they can easily accept failure and continue to face challenges. A person with low self-worth is the opposite. They avoid challenges and are often guarded, which doesn't allow them to achieve goals in life, resulting in an unhappy life. Rogers believed that to have a high sense of self-worth, the individual needs to feel valued, respected, and loved, especially as a child. Then, there is how the person wishes to be, which is defined as a person's ideal-self. This consists of a person's goals and ambitions in life. Rogers said that we display behaviors with our self-image which reflect our ideal-self. When a person's ideal-self and self-image are close in relation, they have a higher sense of self-worth. When they are farther apart, people tend to become defensive or depressed. The understanding of a person's self-image, self-worth, and ideal-self allowed Rogers to develop a form of psychotherapy called client-centered therapy. This form of therapy is based around the humanist perspective. The form of psychotherapy was tested with two other approaches, Gestalt by Frederick Perls and Rational emotive by Albert Ellis. Rogers and a client, Gloria, were in a session where he performed all three approaches. The interview was recorded, and the results ended with Rogers' approach showing the most progression with the client. A study done by Wickman and Campbell (2003) investigated the session between Rogers and Gloria, which also attested to the result of the client-centered approach that Rogers employed.

Another famous psychologist that expanded the field of humanistic psychology was Abraham Maslow. Maslow's primary focus, like Rogers, was on an individual's innate drive towards self-actualization- a state of fulfillment of one's potentials. Maslow also believed that people are innately good and naturally driven. With this, he developed a theory of motivation called the hierarchy of needs. The hierarchy of needs comes from Maslow's belief that " the fundamental desires of human beings are similar despite the multitude of conscious desires" (Zalenski & Raspa, 2006). The hierarchy of needs are made up of five needs in a pyramid format: physiological, safety, love, esteem, and self-actualization, arranged with psychological needs making up the bottom of the pyramid. The idea behind the hierarchy is that people are born with certain needs, the fulfillment of one allows to move forward and fulfill the next need. Maslow said that people will become more motivated to fulfill each level of needs, even when they are denied the first time. One example being the longer a person goes without food, the hungrier they will become. Hence motivating them to obtain the goal of finding food to eat. This theory looks at the physical, emotional, social, and intellectual qualities of an individual to apply a holistic approach. To test Maslow's approach, he formulated characteristics of self-actualized individuals from biographical analysis. Other studies have been performed and used Maslow's hierarchy of needs to support results.

The humanistic perspective has helped psychology advance in many positive ways. Alternative therapy was discovered and understanding human thoughts and behavior were better understood. It also empowered individuals to improve their mental and physical health. Humanists stress

acceptance of people and emphasize human uniqueness. Both Rogers and Maslow believe in personal growth, living a fulfilled happy life, and describe different ways self-actualization can be attained. Throughout my personal life journey, I have used Maslow's hierarchy of needs and Rogers theory to become a better myself through my school and work career, as well as my personal life. I have embraced my values and have fulfilled my needs to grow, develop, and become the person I want to be.

## References

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