

Exploring Real and Ideal Self in Frozen (2013): A Study Based on Carl Rogers' Self Theory

¹Sasmita Hening Sekar Sukmana, ¹Destary Praptawati*, ¹Diyah Fitri, ¹Idha Nurhamidah

¹English Literature Department, Faculty of Language, Literature, and Culture, Universitas Islam Sultan Agung, Indonesia

***Corresponding Author**

Email: mitass1606@gmail.com

Abstract

This study analyses the self-concept of Elsa as the main character in Frozen (2013) by using Carl Rogers' Self Theory. The study focuses on identifying and analysing the characteristics of the real self and ideal self portrayed by Elsa throughout the film, as reflected in her experiences as a queen who struggles with fear, emotional suppression, and self-acceptance due to her extraordinary powers. This study employed a qualitative research method. The data used in this research consisted of dialogues and monologues, taken from the script of the film Frozen (2013). The data were collected through several steps, including watching the film repeatedly, identifying relevant data, classifying the data, and reducing the data according to the research objectives. This study applied a psychological approach to literature using Carl Rogers' Self Theory. The results showed that Elsa demonstrated characteristics of both the real self and ideal self throughout the film. Her real self was shown through actualizing tendency, positive regard, and self-regard, while her ideal self appeared in striving, ambition, and self-worth. These findings indicated that Elsa's character reflected the dynamics of self-concept based on Carl Rogers' Self Theory.

Keywords: Self-concept; Ideal Self; Real Self; Carl Rogers; frozen

INTRODUCTION

Literature represents human experiences, emotions, and ideas through imaginative narratives. As stated by Wellek and Warren, literature is a product of human creativity expressed in written or spoken form (22). It not only reflects reality but also conveys the author's imagination, cultural background, and personal perspective. Because of this, literature becomes a meaningful medium for exploring psychological aspects of human life.

Literature can function as an important medium for reflecting social realities and human experiences. Among its various forms, film holds particular significance in its ability to represent cultural and societal issues. Beyond serving as a form of entertainment, film often operates as a social reference that influences how audiences perceive and interpret the world around them. Research based on film screening experiences conducted by Muna et al. (2023) further demonstrates that the formation of associative mental images, linked to viewers' sociohistorical backgrounds, can play a significant role in shaping and even transforming audience perceptions of important social issues, including adolescent concerns such as popularity.

The relationship between literature and psychology is closely connected, as both focus on understanding human behaviour and mental processes. Psychological approaches in literary studies help reveal characters' motivations, emotional conflicts, and inner development. Kenney explains that analysing literature involves understanding how its elements function together as a unified whole (5). Therefore, applying psychological theory allows a deeper interpretation of both character and narrative structure.

One of the relevant theories in analysing character development is Carl Rogers' self-concept theory, which emphasizes personal growth, self-awareness, and internal conflict. Rogers highlights that personality is flexible and develops through experiences, influenced by factors such as actualizing

tendency, positive regard, and self-regard. His theory consists of two main components: the real self, which represents an individual's true characteristics, and the ideal self, which reflects the person they aspire to become (Rogers 156).

This theory can be applied to literary or cinematic works that depict psychological development, such as the film *Frozen* (2013) directed by Chris Buck. The film portrays Elsa's internal conflict between her true self and the ideal image she tries to maintain. Her struggle with fear, emotional suppression, and social expectations eventually leads her toward self-acceptance and personal growth. Therefore, this study focuses only on Elsa's character in the first *Frozen* film.

Several previous studies have explored character development using psychological approaches. Firliana Aura Rias (2024) analysed *Eighth Grade* using Carl Rogers' self-theory, identifying elements of the real self and ideal self. Other scholars examined Elsa through different perspectives, such as Ni Kadek Jenni Lestari (2016), who discussed Elsa's psychological dimensions, and Nor Rahmah (2017), who analysed her psychological conflict. However, studies specifically applying Carl Rogers' self-concept theory to Elsa remain limited. Although *Frozen* has been widely studied, research applying Carl Rogers' theory is still limited. This theory is relevant to Elsa's character as it explains her internal conflict between the real self and the ideal self, which eventually leads to self-acceptance. Therefore, this study aims to analyse Elsa's real self and ideal self in *Frozen* (2013) using Carl Rogers' self-concept theory, focusing on these two aspects.

This study examines Elsa's psychological development through her internal conflict, emotional suppression, and personal growth. The research is guided by two questions: (1) How is Elsa's real self-portrayed in *Frozen*? (2) How is Elsa's ideal self-depicted? The analysis focuses on selected scenes and dialogues and is limited to the first film. This study is expected to contribute to literary and psychological studies by showing how Carl Rogers' theory can be applied to fictional characters.

In conclusion, *Frozen* reflects Elsa's journey toward self-acceptance. Through Carl Rogers' framework, this study highlights the relationship between self-concept and psychological conflict in shaping her character.

Carl Rogers' Self-Concept Theory

Carl Rogers' self-concept theory is a fundamental concept in humanistic psychology that emphasizes personal growth, self-awareness, and subjective experience. Rogers (1902–1987), known as the pioneer of the client-centered approach, believed that the concept of self is central to understanding human personality. He argued that individuals are not passive beings but active agents who continuously strive to develop themselves and achieve personal growth through their experiences (Rogers 202).

According to Rogers, personality is shaped by how individuals perceive and evaluate themselves, which is known as self-concept. This self-concept consists of two main components: the real self and the ideal self. The real self refers to an individual's actual characteristics and experiences, while the ideal self represents the person they aspire to become, often influenced by social expectations and personal values (Rogers 156). The interaction between these two aspects plays an important role in shaping behaviour, motivation, and psychological development.

Real Self

Physiological The real self represents an individual's authentic identity, including their true thoughts, feelings, and perceptions. It reflects who a person actually is, based on their real experiences rather than external expectations or social pressures (Rogers 144). A clear understanding of the real self is essential for psychological well-being because it allows individuals to accept both their strengths and weaknesses, as well as recognize their personal values and life goals.

Rogers emphasizes that every individual possesses an inherent tendency toward growth, known as the actualizing tendency. This tendency motivates individuals to understand themselves,

adapt to their environment, and develop their full potential. He states that each person has the internal resources to change their self-concept, attitudes, and behaviour in accordance with their needs and aspirations (Rogers 184). Therefore, the real self is not static but continuously develops through life experiences and self-reflection. Rogers identifies several important aspects that shape the real self, including actualizing tendency, positive regard, and self-regard:

Actualizing Tendency

Actualizing tendency refers to the natural drive within individuals to grow, maintain, and enhance themselves. It is considered the primary motivational force in human life, guiding individuals to realize their potential and become their true selves. This process is continuous and involves learning from experiences, adapting to challenges, and improving self-understanding. Rogers (1951) explains that individuals naturally seek new experiences and opportunities that support their personal development, showing that human behavior is directed toward growth and fulfillment (33).

Positive Regard

Positive regard refers to the acceptance, care, and recognition individuals receive from others, which significantly influences their self-concept. It can be expressed through love, affection, support, and appreciation (Rogers in Madhumathy S. 990). Rogers distinguishes between conditional positive regard and unconditional positive regard. Conditional positive regard is given only when individuals meet certain expectations, which may create pressure and lead to inconsistency between the real self and the ideal self. In contrast, unconditional positive regard involves accepting individuals without conditions, allowing them to feel valued and secure. This type of acceptance is essential for healthy psychological development because it encourages individuals to express their true selves without fear of rejection (Rogers 208).

Self-Regard

Self-regard refers to how individuals evaluate their own worth and value. It develops through interactions with others, particularly from experiences of acceptance or rejection during early life. According to Rogers, self-regard is formed through the relationship between self-experiences and the satisfaction of the need for positive regard (Rogers 225). When individuals receive positive and supportive responses, they tend to develop a positive self-regard, which leads to confidence and emotional stability. Conversely, lack of acceptance may result in low self-esteem and internal conflict.

Ideal Self

The ideal self represents the person an individual aspires to become. It includes personal goals, ambitions, values, and expectations that guide behaviour and decision-making (Rogers 200). The ideal self is influenced by both internal desires and external factors such as cultural norms, social expectations, and personal aspirations. As a result, it may change over time as individuals gain new experiences and perspectives.

The ideal self functions as a standard for evaluating oneself, helping individuals measure the gap between their current condition and their desired future. When the gap between the real self and the ideal self is too large, individuals may experience psychological discomfort or dissatisfaction. However, when these two aspects are relatively balanced, individuals are more likely to achieve self-acceptance and emotional well-being.

Rogers identifies several aspects related to the ideal self, including striving, ambition, and self-worth:

Striving

Striving refers to the continuous effort to achieve one's ideal self. It is driven by the natural desire for growth and self-improvement. This process reflects an individual's motivation to develop their abilities, overcome limitations, and move closer to their goals. Rogers emphasizes that human beings are naturally motivated to achieve self-actualization, meaning they actively seek to realize their potential (Rogers in Hathaway 223).

Ambition

Ambition refers to the aspirations and goals that individuals set for their future. It represents the qualities, achievements, or identities they hope to attain. Rogers explains that the ideal self embodies these aspirations, which are dynamic and can evolve over time as individuals grow and adapt to new circumstances (Rogers in Madhumathy S. 990). Ambition plays an important role in motivating individuals to pursue personal development and achieve meaningful goals.

Self-Worth

Self-worth refers to an individual's evaluation of their own value based on their achievements and personal standards. It is closely related to self-esteem and reflects how individuals perceive themselves in relation to their goals and expectations. In Rogers' theory, self-worth is influenced by both internal judgments and external validation, making it an important factor in determining whether individuals feel satisfied with themselves (Rogers in Madhumathy S. 990). A healthy sense of self-worth supports confidence and encourages individuals to continue striving toward their ideal self.

METHOD

This study used a qualitative descriptive method to examine Elsa's psychological development in the film *Frozen* (2013) based on Carl Rogers' self-concept theory. Qualitative methods were chosen because they help to understand meanings, experiences, and psychological aspects presented in the film through dialogues, monologues, and narrative scenes. As Ahmad et al. explain, qualitative research aims to gain a deeper understanding of how individuals think, feel, and respond to experiences through observation and interpretation (2829). Therefore, the data in this study were presented in the form of words, phrases, sentences, dialogues, and narrative expressions rather than numerical data. The film *Frozen* (2013) served as the main source of data, which was used to identify Elsa's real self and ideal self.

The data were collected by watching the film several times to understand the storyline, character development, and emotional progression. The researcher also examined the film script carefully to identify important dialogues, monologues, and narrative scenes relevant to the study. The selected data that reflect Elsa's real self and ideal self were identified and documented. These data were then classified based on Carl Rogers' self-concept theory and organized into tables presented in the appendix. Irrelevant data were removed to ensure that the analysis focused only on elements related to the research objectives.

The analysis was conducted in three steps, including selecting relevant data, organizing them into tables to identify patterns and categorize themes, and drawing conclusions based on Carl Rogers' theory and the context of the film. Both primary and secondary data were used in this study. Primary data were obtained directly from the film, including dialogues and monologues, while secondary data were collected from books, journals, and academic sources related to Carl Rogers' humanistic psychology. The findings and interpretations of this study are presented in the following chapter, while the complete data are provided in the appendix for transparency and reference.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The Real Self of Elsa Portrayed in *Frozen*

The identification of Elsa's real self in *Frozen* (2013) shows that her authentic personality is portrayed through several psychological characteristics that reflect Carl Rogers' self-concept theory. The real self refers to an individual's genuine identity, representing the most natural and truthful aspects of

personality. According to Rogers, every individual possesses a real self that is closely connected to their inner personality and emotional authenticity, even though it may not always appear perfect, as it reflects what feels most sincere and psychologically genuine (Ismail & Tekke 30). In Elsa's character, this real self is expressed through three main psychological elements proposed by Rogers: actualizing tendency, positive regard, and self-regard. These aspects are revealed through her emotional expressions, behavioural responses, and internal conflicts throughout the film, particularly in moments that show her struggle with anxiety, self-acceptance, and emotional control.

Actualizing Tendency

Actualizing tendency refers to the innate drive within an individual to realize their potential and develop their abilities in ways that enhance personal growth and well-being. Elsa's actualizing tendency is reflected when she begins to recognize her own capabilities after years of fear and suppression.

Anna can't help but be struck by Elsa's beauty.
ANNA
Elsa, you look different.... It's a
good different.... And this place
is amazing.
ELSA
(cautious, polite)
Thank you, I never knew what I was capable of.
(00:54:13–00:54:35)

Elsa's statement, "*I never knew what I was capable of*," represents a moment of self-realization in which she acknowledges her hidden potential. This realization occurs after she isolates herself in the mountains and creates the ice palace, a space where she can freely express her abilities. According to Rogers, the actualizing tendency is the organism's inherent drive to develop its capacities in ways that maintain or improve itself (196). Elsa's acknowledgment of her capabilities demonstrates the emergence of this tendency, as she begins to accept her powers as part of her authentic identity rather than something to fear.

Positive Regard

Positive regard refers to acceptance, appreciation, and emotional support received from others, which plays a crucial role in shaping an individual's self-concept. Rogers explains that positive regard includes expressions of warmth, affection, respect, and acceptance that help individuals feel valued and emotionally secure.

ELSA
...You look beautiful.
ANNA
Thank you. You look beautifully. I mean, not fuller. You don't look fuller, but more beautiful.
ELSA
Thank you.
(00:20:32–00:20:50)

This dialogue reflects positive regard through Anna's admiration and sincere appreciation of Elsa. Anna's response conveys warmth and acceptance, which positively influences Elsa's emotional state. After years of emotional distance and isolation, this interaction allows Elsa to feel acknowledged and valued. Rogers states that positive regard contributes to the development of self-confidence and

emotional stability by making individuals feel accepted for who they are (Rogers in Madhumathy S. 990). Through Anna's supportive response, Elsa experiences emotional reassurance that strengthens her sense of belonging and self-worth.

Self-Regard

Self-regard refers to how individuals evaluate their own worth and abilities, often shaped by past experiences and emotional interactions. Rogers explains that self-regard develops through the association between self-experience and acceptance or rejection from others (Rogers 225). Elsa's self-regard is strongly influenced by fear and negative self-evaluation, as shown in the following dialogue:

ELSA
I CAN'T CONTROL THE CURSE!
ANNA
WE'LL REVERSE THE STORM YOU'VE
MADE.
ELSA
ANNA, PLEASE, YOU'LL ONLY MAKE IT
WORSE!
ANNA
DON'T PANIC.
ELSA
THERE'S SO MUCH FEAR!
ANNA
WE'LL MAKE THE SUN SHINE BRIGHT.
ELSA
YOU'RE NOT SAFE HERE!
(00:57:25–00:57:34)

Elsa's repeated expressions of fear and inability to control her powers reflect a negative evaluation of herself. Her belief that she is dangerous to others indicates low self-regard rooted in past trauma and emotional repression. According to Rogers, individuals with low self-regard often perceive themselves as unworthy or harmful due to negative self-experiences (Rogers 225). Anna's reassuring responses serve as emotional support that challenges Elsa's negative self-perception, suggesting the possibility of developing healthier self-regard through acceptance and understanding.

The ideal Self of Elsa Depicted in Frozen

The ideal self represents the version of oneself that an individual aspires to become. According to Rogers, the ideal self is shaped by personal goals, internalized expectations, and social values, guiding behaviour and self-evaluation. In *Frozen*, Elsa's ideal self is reflected through striving and self-worth, which are revealed through her internal monologues and self-instructions.

Striving

Self Striving refers to the active effort to achieve one's ideal self, driven by the desire for self-control and self-actualization. Elsa's striving is clearly reflected in her repeated internal monologue:

ELSA
DON'T LET THEM IN
DON'T LET THEM SEE.
(00:15:40, 00:16:22, 00:31:50)

This repeated line represents Elsa's continuous effort to control her emotions and powers in order to meet the standards she believes are necessary for acceptance. The repetition emphasizes her persistent struggle and determination to regulate herself. According to Rogers, striving toward the ideal self reflects an individual's motivation to achieve self-actualization and personal ideals (Rogers in Hathaway 223). Elsa's internal command demonstrates her conscious effort to shape herself into the version she believes she must be.

Ambition

Ambition refers to an individual's determination to achieve personal goals and become the version of oneself that reflects their aspirations. In Rogers' self-concept theory, ambition motivates individuals to pursue growth and develop qualities associated with their ideal self (Rogers in Madhumathy S. 990). Elsa demonstrates ambition through her effort to protect herself and control her powers when facing danger.

ELSA

Stay away!

Elsa shoots ice at the thugs. They duck out of the way and continue the attack.

THUG

Get her! Get her!

Elsa fights for her life.

(01:10:48–01:10:55)

Elsa's command, "*Stay away!*" and her defensive actions show her determination to take control of the situation. Instead of avoiding conflict, she actively uses her powers to protect herself. This scene reflects Elsa's ambition to become stronger and more capable in managing her abilities. It also shows her psychological development from fear toward confidence, which aligns with Rogers' view that ambition supports individuals in moving closer to their ideal self.

Self-Worth

Self-worth refers to how individuals evaluate their value based on personal standards and internalized expectations. Elsa's sense of self-worth is strongly influenced by the belief that she must behave perfectly to be accepted, as reflected in the following monologue:

ELSA

Be the good girl you always have to be.

(00:15:49–00:15:52, 00:16:29, 00:31:54)

This repeated instruction highlights Elsa's internalized pressure to conform to an ideal image of perfection. By repeatedly reminding herself to "be the good girl," Elsa evaluates her worth based on her ability to suppress her true emotions and maintain control. According to Rogers, self-worth is shaped by what individuals consider valuable and desirable in themselves (Rogers in Madhumathy S. 990). Elsa's self-worth, therefore, is tied to performance and self-control rather than genuine self-acceptance, illustrating the tension between her real self and ideal self.

CONCLUSION

This study examined Elsa's psychological development in *Frozen* (2013) through Carl Rogers' Self Theory, focusing on the concepts of real self and ideal self. Through the analysis of selected dialogues and key narrative scenes, the study shows that Elsa's character reflects a strong internal conflict between her authentic identity and the ideal image she tries to maintain. Her real self is revealed through several psychological aspects, including actualizing tendency, positive regard, and self-regard. Elsa demonstrates an internal drive to understand and control her powers, even while experiencing

fear and emotional tension, which reflects her actualizing tendency. At the same time, the influence of her parents' protective yet restrictive upbringing shapes her experience of positive regard, contributing to her anxiety and emotional suppression. This condition also affects her self-regard, as she initially perceives herself negatively, believing that her powers make her dangerous and unworthy, which leads her to isolate herself from others. In addition, Elsa's ideal self is reflected in her desire to become a perfect sister and a responsible queen who does not harm others. She attempts to achieve this by suppressing her emotions and maintaining strict control over her powers, showing her effort to meet both personal and social expectations. However, this creates a gap between her real self and ideal self, resulting in psychological tension throughout the film. As the story develops, Elsa gradually begins to confront her fears and accept her true identity, reducing the conflict between these two aspects. Overall, Elsa's journey illustrates how the interaction between the real self and ideal self shapes her personal development. The film highlights that internal conflict can emerge when individuals are unable to accept their authentic selves, but through self-understanding and emotional awareness, they can move toward greater self-acceptance and psychological balance.

REFERENCES

- Ahmad, S., et al. (2019). Qualitative v/s quantitative research: A summarized review. *Journal of Evidence Based Medicine and Healthcare*, 6(43), 2828–2832. <https://doi.org/10.18410/jebmh/2019/587>
- Hatzfeld, H., Wellek, R., & Warren, A. (1949). Theory of literature. *Comparative Literature*, 1(3), 277. <https://doi.org/10.2307/1769174>
- Ismail, N. A. H., & Tekke, M. (2015). Rediscovering Rogers's self theory and personality. *Journal of Educational, Health and Community Psychology*, 4(3), 28–36.
- Joseph, S. (2021). How humanistic is positive psychology? Lessons in positive psychology from Carl Rogers' person-centered approach—It's the social environment that must change. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 12, 1–10. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2021.709789>
- Kennedy, P. (2019, September 20). What is psychological realism in writing? *ThoughtCo*. <https://www.thoughtco.com/psychological-realism-220783>
- Kenny, D. T. (2017). *Psychoanalysis*. Springer International Publishing.
- Krikorian, M. (2022). Carl Rogers: A person-centered approach. In *The Palgrave handbook of educational thinkers* (pp. 1–13). Springer International Publishing. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-81037-5_106-1
- Madhumathy, S. (2018). Positive communication and positive action: Introduction to Carl Rogers, key concepts and Rogerian theory of personality. *International Journal of Research in Social Sciences*, 8(9).
- Muna, N., Widiyati, E., & Wulandari, D. F. (2023). Piloting film-based intervention on santri's perception towards striving for academic success: Findings from Kampung Santri, Kudus Regency. *EduLite Journal of English Literature and Culture*, 8(2), 321. <https://doi.org/10.30659/e.8.2.321-334%0A>
- Proctor, C., et al. (2021). Unconditional positive self-regard: The role of perceived parental conditional regard. *The Humanistic Psychologist*, 49(3), 400–422. <https://doi.org/10.1037/hum0000168>

Rogers, C. R. (1959). A theory of therapy, personality, and interpersonal relationships as developed in the client-centered framework. In S. Koch (Ed.), *Psychology: A study of a science* (Vol. 3, pp. 184–256). McGraw-Hill.