CHAPTER 12

THE SELF-CONCEPT THEORY
OF CARL ROGERS

part 1

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Background

• Carl Rogers’ theory is based on three central assumptions:
  ▪ The individual has **constructive potential**
  ▪ The nature of the individual is **goal-directed**
  ▪ The individual is **capable of changing**
• Rogers emphasizes the importance of people’s subject experience of themselves (their **self-concept**)
• Humans strive to achieve their full potential through **actualization**
  ▪ Only achieved in an environment in which the individual experiences unconditional acceptance for who they are

The View of the Person

• **Humanistic-phenomenological** view of the person
  ▪ **Humanistic**: emphasizes the individual be studied as a whole and that the individual plays an active role in actualizing their inherent potential
  ▪ **Phenomenological**: emphasizes the importance of the individual’s subjective experience of their world and how this influences their self-concept
  ▪ Emphasis on human freedom and the positive/constructive element of human nature
  ▪ Individuals can be trusted to follow the best course in order to become the best they can be
  ▪ Environment only plays a facilitating or inhibiting role in the realization of the individual’s potential

The View of the Person

• Environment lays down certain conditions for accepting the individual (**conditional acceptance**)
• Individuals then often act in accordance with the conditions set down by others (to gain their acceptance) – this has a negative influence on the individual’s self-concept
• Individual freedom is constrained by the conditions set by the environment
• Given the individual’s freedom to change, the individual can overcome these constraints to achieve their full potential – this will require the experience of **unconditional acceptance**
The Structure of the Personality

(see Proposition 1 – 5 on page 367)

• Three structural elements: the organism, the phenomenal field, and the self concept

The Organism

• The total individual (including physical and psychological functions)
• The central figure in constant (and dynamic) interaction with an ever-changing world
• The organisms behaviour is influenced by their subjective perception of his/her world

The Phenomenal Field

• The totality of a person’s perceptions and experiences
• Includes perceptions of objects or events outside the person (and the meanings attached to these) and inner experiences (and the meanings attached to these) that relate to the organism

The Self Concept

• A separate part of the phenomenal field that concerns the person themselves
• Develops through accumulated perceptions of the characteristics that relate to the ‘I’ or the ‘Me’
• Refers to the ‘mental picture’ that individuals have of themselves and the value they attach to themselves (strongly influenced by the conditions of worth imposed by others)
• An individual’s conscious experience of themselves
• Though it is relatively stable, it is flexible and open to change – change in one part of the self concept results in change in the self concept as a whole

• The ideal self: the self concept the individual would most like to have
• Psychologically healthy: the self concept closely resembles the ideal self
• Psychologically unhealthy: the self concept does not at all resemble the ideal self
• Therapy is aimed at bringing the self concept closer towards the ideal self
The Dynamics of the Personality
(see Proposition 6 – 13 on page 367 & 368):
The Actualizing Tendency

- The basic motive that underlies all behaviour
- All organisms strive for utmost development of their potential, regardless of their environment
- In humans this tendency is called the actualizing tendency – the tendency to maintain ourselves and continue growing to become the best we can be
- Self-actualization in Rogers' theory refers to the actualization of the self-concept only
- Therapist aims to lead their clients towards discovering their own potential and helping them to develop that potential as fully as possible

The Dynamics of the Personality:
The Need for Positive Regard

- Need for positive regard from others
  - Basic need for approval and validation from others
  - The individual may adopt the values and wishes of others to receive their acceptance, respect, love etc. (conditions of worth)
- Need for positive self-regard
  - People require esteem from others in order for them to feel good about themselves

The Dynamics of the Personality:
Congruence and Incongruence

- The need for positive regard (especially from others) can inhibit the actualizing tendency
- Individuals strive to achieve their full potential, and they generally know what behaviour is required to actualize their potential
- Congruence
  - When there is no difference between the person’s experience of the world around them (including feedback from others) and their view of themselves
  - Congruent people see themselves as they truly are
  - The individual’s self concept corresponds with their actual potential
- Incongruence
  - Incorporate the conditions of worth from others into our self concept
  - Have experiences that are in conflict with the self concept
  - Individual’s then exclude these incongruent experiences from their consciousness (by denying them)
  - Congruence versus incongruence of the organismic experience and the self concept is central to Rogers’ theory
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<th>The Dynamics of the Personality: The Role of the Self Concept in Experience</th>
<th>The Dynamics of the Personality: The Role of the Self Concept in Determining Behaviour</th>
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<td>• Three ways in which people deal with experiences (determined by the specific needs of the self concept):&lt;br&gt;  ▪ Experiences can be <strong>ignored</strong> (perhaps they are irrelevant to the person’s needs in that moment)&lt;br&gt;  ▪ Experiences can be <strong>symbolized</strong> (or internalized; if they correspond with the person’s needs) – such experiences are allowed into the consciousness&lt;br&gt;  ▪ Experiences can be <strong>denied</strong> or <strong>distorted</strong> (if they contradict the person’s self concept) – such experiences are not allowed into the consciousness</td>
<td>• Actualizing organismic potential is the basic motive for behaviour <strong>BUT</strong> most of what a person actually does will correspond with the self concept (so the self concept strongly influences our behaviour)&lt;br&gt;  ▪ Problems arise when an individual’s needs do not match their self concept and these needs are then denied&lt;br&gt;  ▪ Denied needs can result in behaviour that directly satisfy these needs, but the individual is not willing to ‘own’ their behaviour afterwards&lt;br&gt;  ▪ Psychologically healthy when the self concept is congruent with an individual’s needs and feelings – behaviour then corresponds with self concept and reflects needs and feelings</td>
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