

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 Structure of the Personality

- **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 Structure of the Personality

- **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 Structure of the Personality

- **The Self Concept**
 - 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

The Dynamics of the Personality:
Congruence and Incongruence

- **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

**The Dynamics of the Personality:
The Role of the Self Concept in Experience**

- Three ways in which people deal with experiences (determined by the **specific needs of the self concept**):
 - Experiences can be **ignored** (perhaps they are irrelevant to the person's needs in that moment)
 - Experiences can be **symbolized** (or internalized; if they correspond with the person's needs) – such experiences are allowed into the consciousness
 - Experiences can be **denied** or **distorted** (if they contradict the person's self concept) – such experiences are not allowed into the consciousness

**The Dynamics of the Personality:
The Role of the Self Concept in Determining Behaviour**

- Actualizing organismic potential is the basic motive for behaviour **BUT** most of what a person actually does will correspond with the self concept (so the self concept strongly influences our behaviour)
- Problems arise when an individual's needs do not match their self concept and these needs are then denied
 - Denied needs can result in behaviour that directly satisfy these needs, but the individual is not willing to 'own' their behaviour afterwards
- 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