

CHAPTER 12

THE SELF-CONCEPT THEORY OF CARL ROGERS

part 2

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The Development of the Personality

- Most important area of human functioning are the interaction between a person's subjective experience of reality and their self-concept
- The primary focus of personality development for Rogers is the formation of the self concept
- Infancy: no distinction between the baby and their environment
- With increasing interactions with the environment the individual begins to distinguish themselves as separate from their environment
- Gradually, this leads to the development of the self-concept

The Development of the Personality: The Development of the Self Concept

- Individuals attach specific personal meanings to experience which involve them
- Need for positive regard: our value judgments of experiences are also influenced by 'significant others'
- These 'meanings' become incorporated into the self-concept
- Two important factors that influence the development of the self concept: unconditional positive regard and conditional positive regard

The Development of the Personality: The Development of the Self Concept

- **Unconditional positive regard**
 - Experience unconditional acceptance by others
 - Do not feel the need to fulfill particular requirements to receive esteem from others
 - Self concept is free to include all experiences
 - Congruence between individual potential and the self concept
 - Ideal environment that can lead to the actualization of potential
 - Distinction between unconditional acceptance of the person and unconditional acceptance of the person's behaviour
 - Individual perception is important for the experience of unconditional positive regard

The Development of the Personality: The Development of the Self Concept

- **Conditional positive regard**
 - Rarely experience complete unconditional positive regard
 - Often experience non-acceptance from significant others
 - **Conditions of worth:** the values (based on the values of others) that a person includes in their self concept
 - Conditional positive regard is achieved by meeting these conditions of worth
 - The greater the conditional positive regard experienced, the more conditions of worth are included in the self concept, leading to greater incongruence (a lack of congruence between the self concept and subjective experiences)
 - Limits the ability to achieve actualization and impairs development

The Optimal Development of the Personality

- Psychological adjustment: all experiences are allowed into the self concept
- Individual sees themselves as they truly are
- Greater integration of all experiences into the self concept, the better the individual knows themselves and the better they are able to use abilities and talents to achieve full potential

The Optimal Development of the Personality

- Fully functioning people display the following characteristics:
 - **A Growing Openness to Experience**
 - ❖ Person moves away from defensiveness and is increasingly open to experience
 - **An Increasingly Existential Lifestyle**
 - ❖ Able to live fully in the moment without distorting experiences
 - ❖ Person does not know how they will react in a given moment
 - **Increasing Organismic Trust**
 - ❖ Greater trust in the self for choosing appropriate behaviour than in relying on social codes/norms, or the judgment of others

The Optimal Development of the Personality

- **Freedom of Choice**
 - ❖ Feel responsible for their choices and determining their own behaviour
- **Creativity**
 - ❖ Stems from being open to a wide range of experiences, the freedom to make choices and the ability to live fully in the moment
- **Basic Reliability and Constructiveness**
 - ❖ Individual can be trusted to act positively and constructively
 - ❖ Able to admit and accept all needs and maintain a realistic balance between these needs
- **A Rich, Full Life**

Views on Psychopathology

- Incongruence leads to defensiveness that limits ideal functioning
- Incongruence can lead to tension: large parts of subjective experience is denied inclusion into the self concept
- Incongruent experiences can lead to anxiety as the self concept feels threatened
- Threat to self concept and anxiety triggers defense mechanisms

Views on Psychopathology: Defense Mechanisms

- Freud: defense mechanisms ensure the survival of the individual (suppress the death drive and sexual drive)
- Rogers: defense mechanisms protect the self concept from incongruent experiences
 - **Distortion:** incongruent experiences are distorted to fit the self concept so that it can remain intact in the face of the incongruent experience
 - **Denial:** incongruent experiences are ignored and excluded from the consciousness

Views on Psychopathology: Malfunctioning

- Defensive behaviour lowers person's consciousness of threat (but does not eliminate the threat itself)
- Leads to a complex network of misconceptions about the self and increases the possibility of threatening experiences
- Incongruence leads to greater perception of threat, which leads to greater defensiveness, which leads to a more rigid structure of the self concept
- Eventually defense mechanisms may no longer be able to fully protect self concept from incongruent (threatening) experiences

Implications and Applications: Psychotherapy

- **9.3 & 9.4 for self-study**
- **Person-centered Therapy:** Provide clients with the opportunity to get to know themselves better and to reveal their full potential in an environment where the therapist accepts the client unconditionally
- Emphasis on the quality of the client-therapist relationship in the therapy setting

Implications and Applications: The Therapeutic Process

- The therapist acts as a facilitator who creates a climate of unconditional positive regard, warmth and empathy
- Client feels free to allow change and to strive towards congruence and actualization
- Focus on empowering the client with the freedom of choice
- The therapeutic climate is characterized by:
 - **Sincerity/Congruence** of the therapist – the therapist does not hold up a façade in client-therapist relationship
 - **Unconditional acceptance** of the client
 - **Empathy**: therapist is able to put themselves into the shoes of the client - the therapist is able to observe the world from the client's frame of reference, putting aside external observations

Implications and Applications: Interpretation and handling of Aggression

- Rogers acknowledges destructive human behaviour, but he does not believe it is inherent
- Rogers believes the individual can be trusted to make constructive choices if they are able to function in a nurturing, growth-promoting climate
- Rogers' assumptions work well in one-on-one relationships but are more difficult to translate for use in larger social groups

Evaluation of the Theory

- Rogers' theory has made a valuable contribution to the approach to therapy
- His focus on the subjective experience makes a valuable contribution after the emphasis on unconscious processes by psychoanalysts and the emphasis on the influence of the external environment by behaviourists
- Questionable just how free individuals are to make their own choices in their pursuit of unconditional positive regard (we are all subject to conditional positive regard in one way or another) – can his theory be realistically applied in everyday life?
- Rogers basic assumption that humans are inherently good does not address the negative, hostile human tendencies sufficiently
- Difficult to define concepts such as 'potential' operationally (for research purposes)