Carl Rogers (1902-1987)

A Phenomenological Theory: Carl Rogers’ Person-Centered Theory of Personality

History

• Born in 1902 in Illinois--Midwestern conservative religious upbringing
• Started training for the ministry but rejected it as too rigid, but those values evident in his approach
• A key advocate of humanistic psychology.

Context for Theory Development

• Early, intense therapeutic practice in child guidance practice
• Pragmatic approach to make psychotherapy more effective. Practice based but also research efforts
• Departure from restrictions of classical psychological science because it removed important variables from examination.
  • Phenomenology
Rogers Self Theory

- The most innate tendency of humans is a drive towards self-actualization.

Rogers Self Theory

- The individual’s subjectively felt and interpreted experience is the only reality.
- The person’s experience of “self” is important in the formation of personality.
- The “self” develops through our interaction with others.

Rogers Self Theory

- Self-actualization requires congruence.
- Incongruence leads to anxiety and confusion.
- Unconditional positive regard leads to congruence.
Parental Characteristics which foster Healthy Self-structure Formulation

- Unconditional Positive regard
  - Ability to accept the child’s feelings and strivings.
  - Ability to accept our own feelings that certain of the child’s behaviors are undesirable.
- Communication of acceptance of the child as a person.
- Avoid conditions of worth

Incongruence and consequences

Open, authentic communication in which the way I present myself to the world matches what I think and feel at a deeper level. Rogers writes, "I have found, in my relations with persons, that in the long run it does not help to pretend to be something I am not."
Growth and development

- Growth occurs in a state of congruence
- Requires unconditional positive regard
- “Entity view of self” vs. “Incremental (or malleable) view of self”
- Cultural considerations of this view

Research

- Need quantifiable data to measure self-concept and congruency (discrepancy between self and ideal self).
- Q-sort task (Stephenson, 1953)
- Instrument that attempts to measure congruency between self and ideal self
- Adjective Checklist and Semantic Differential (Osgood et al., 1957)
- Instrument that attempts to measure attitude towards characteristics of the self on a scale from 1-7 on these dimensions:
  - Evaluation (e.g. Good/Bad, Kind/Unkind, Beautiful/Ugly)
  - Potency (e.g. Strong/Weak, Large/Small, Heavy/Light)
  - Activity (e.g. Active/Passive, Fast/Slow, Hot/Cold, Noisy/ Quiet)
Research (cont.)

- Attempt to measure self-actualizing motive
- Index of Self-Actualization (Jones & Crandall, 1986)
  - 15-item scale (see Fig 5.2 in book)
  - Results correlate with other measures of self-regard and well-being (self-esteem and health)

Research on origins of self-regard (self-esteem).

- Self-esteem grows out of reflected appraisal
- Three areas of parent-child interactions
  - Degree of acceptance
  - Permissiveness and punishment
  - Democratic parenting style
Empirical evidence for incongruence

• Chodorkoff, 1954; Cartwrithe, 1956
  • Poorly adjusted individuals (low self-concept) use defenses (e.g., denial) more frequently than adjusted individuals.
  • Poorly adjusted individual showed poor recall of words (distortion) that were inconsistent with self schema.

How influential was Rogers?

• Were Rogers’ suggestions and thoughts familiar to you (or intuitive for you)?
• Human potential movement has been pretty strong in the U.S., thanks to Rogers.