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1. Learning Outcomes

After studying this module, you shall be able to

- Know about Rogers' view of the human nature.
- Learn about the structure and the development of personality.
- Learn about the assessment techniques used by Rogers to analyze personality.
- Analyze Rogers' theory of personality in comparison to others.

2. Introduction

Carl Rogers is the proponent of one of the most popular approaches of psychotherapy, known as the client- centered therapy which later came to be known as the person- centered therapy. Like Maslow, Rogers's theory is also based on the principals of humanistic psychology, which emphasized on the optimistic view of human nature. Rogers's theories are not derived from the laboratory experiments, but based on his working experiences with the clients.

Rogers's majorly focused on the subjective experiences of the individual, as he felt that they serve the basis of understanding the human behavior. His approach was based on the concept of phenomenology i.e. understanding the person with reference to his immediate, conscious experience. His approach is called the person-centered approach because he believed that humans are rational beings, who are capable to bring about change in their lives through the support and guidance of the therapist. Thus the person himself directs the change (improvement) in his life and therapist is only a facilitator in the process.



Fig.1 Carl Rogers

Rogers never stressed upon the role of unconscious forces to determine human behavior, but he did recognize the role of childhood experiences, which influence the way we preserve the environment and our own self. He discussed about the need for positive self regard and its importance in terms of the development of self esteem. He also gave a lot of theories about self and proposed the concept of fully-functioning person.

3. Biographical Sketch

Carl R. Rogers was born on January 8, 1902, in Oak Park, Illinois, a suburb of Chicago. His father was a successful civil engineer. His close-knit family included four brothers and one sister, three of them older. Rogers's believed in conservative Protestantism and the value of hard work. When Carl was 12, the Rogers decided to move to a farm west of Chicago in order to live away from the stressors of suburban life. There he read about the scientific approaches to farming. Carl's study of farming generated a marked respect for the scientific method and led him to pursue an undergraduate degree in agriculture at the University of Wisconsin, but he soon became more interested in the helping professions. At first he attended the Union Theological Seminary in New York, in order to become a clergy man. But his experiences at the institution introduced him to psychotherapy. He then transferred to the Columbia University Teachers College, where he received his Ph.D. in 1928. Carl married Helen Elliott on August 28, 1924. The union proved to be a happy and successful one, and the Rogers had one son and one daughter from his marriage.

Rogers's first professional position was at a child guidance clinic in Rochester, New York, where he had a strong confrontation with orthodox psychiatrists. They believed that since he was a nonmedical practitioner, he was not sufficiently qualified to head a mental health operation. On the other hand, educated in Freudian theory among others, Rogers found that analytic insight often did not seem to benefit his clients and began to formulate his own approach to psychotherapy. In 1940 he accepted a full professorship at Ohio State University. Rogers moved to the University of Chicago in 1945, where he established a counselling centre. In accordance with his theory, he gave up control of the centre in 1947 and allowed everyone an equal voice in running it—including student interns, secretaries, and faculty. The enthusiasm brought about by this equalitarian approach was so high that when the centre lost its grants, everyone paid their own money and worked for very little till the time new funding was found.

In 1957, Rogers joined the University of Wisconsin to conduct research on psychotherapy and personality. However, the doctoral program emphasized the memorization of trivial facts and rigid formal examinations, and many of his most able and creative graduate students either failed or left in disgust. Rogers resigned in 1963 and joined the Western Behavioural Sciences Institute in La Jolla, California, where he pursued the humanistic study of interpersonal relationships and founded the Centre for Studies of the Person. He received Distinguished Scientific Contribution Award of the American Psychological Association in 1956. Rogers was keenly interested in promoting world peace, organized the Vienna Peace Project that brought together leaders from 13 nations in 1985, and conducted peace workshops in Moscow during 1986. Carl Rogers died on February 4, 1987, from cardiac arrest following surgery for a broken hip sustained in a fall.

4. The basic nature of human beings

Since Rogers's theory is rooted in humanistic psychology he holds a very positive view about human nature. He proposed the following concepts about human nature:

4.1 Actualization

According to Rogers human beings are motivated to grow, develop and they strive to unfold their inner potentials and enhance self, which means they possess the self-actualizing tendency. This tendency includes the reduction of the physiological drive-hunger, thirst, sex, safety and once they are achieved they strive to attain the higher order psychological goals such as curiosity, creativity and free will. People have a tendency to expand, extend and become autonomous which often involve a lot of effort and painful learning experiences but it is worth the experience because it helps us reach the goal of self-actualized beings. Rogers explained it with an example of the child learning to walk, “when children take their first steps they may fall and hurt themselves. Although it would be less painful to remain in the crawling stage, most children persist. They may fall again and cry, but they persevere despite the pain because the tendency to actualize is stronger than the urge to regress simply because the growth process is difficult.” (Schultz & Schultz, 2009)

4.2 The Need for Positive Regard

Rogers believed that the need for positive regard is innate for any individual. He considers it to be universal and persistent. The need for positive regard consist of the need for acceptance, love, warmth, support and respect from our ‘significant others’. According to Rogers the need for love and approval from mother is most important during infancy as it largely influences the child’s perception about themselves and world in general; also it plays an important role in creating a path for achieving self-actualization later in life. Any individual who is not able to fulfill this need experiences frustration and are in the state of confusion. They also experience incongruency between their real and ideal self because in many situations they have to act in a certain manner which is in contrast to their real self in order to gain approval and acceptance from others. It is important to note that as human beings we are very much influenced by what others think about us and this further determines how we regard our own selves. Thus the need for positive regard is indispensable.

5. The Structure of Personality

Rogers saw human beings in a holistic perspective. Thus, he never posited a specific structure of human personality. Yet he believed that humans suffer from painful intrapsychic conflicts that make them “estranged from their own organisms” (Rogers, 1977, p. 243).

5.1 Experience and the Organismic Valuing Process

5.1.1 Experience

All of us are centers of our private realm called **phenomenal field** or **experiential field**, which constitutes our personal inner experiences and is ever-changing. This world can never be

perfectly understood by another person than us. **Experience** includes every thought, perception, emotion and need that is available to our awareness at any given moment, even those which we overlook or forget about at that particular moment (Ewen, 2003). However, only a small part of our experiences are at the conscious level; the rest are “subceptions”, that is, below our level of awareness. We evaluate our experiences on the basis of the hypothesis we formulate and test. Also, how we evaluate those experiences is more important than the objective reality around us (Ewen, 2003).

5.1.2. The Organismic Valuing Process

It is an innate ability to positively value those things that are actualizing and negatively value those things that are non-actualizing (Ewen, 2003). It is a part of our unconscious experience. For example, an infant comes to value the food when it is hungry, but becomes disgusted by it when it is satiated. This unconscious aspect of our personality helps us in our conscious thoughts and actions as at this deepest level we know what is good (actualizing) and bad (non-actualizing) for us. Not even our parents and closest confidants know about it. Through this process we come to know about our organismic values and plan how to best actualize our talents and potentialities.

5.2 The Self Concept and the Self-Actualization

All of us have the tendency to self-actualize our inner potentialities. Guided by this tendency, an infant comes to see itself as a separate entity by expanding its experiential field. The child develops the perceptions and beliefs about the self and its elements, such as academic performance, athletic competence, and physical appearance. This is called **self-concept**. When the actualizing tendency gets directed towards meeting the demands of the self, it is called **self-actualization**.

5.3 Congruence and Incongruence

In order to be self-actualized, the self-concept of an individual must be supported by the **unconditional positive regard** from the significant others, especially parents. When the parents limit their criticism to specific undesirable behaviors and do not interfere with the child's organismic valuing process, he develops a positive regard for himself. When the person's view of himself is **congruent** with his experiences of the environment and his organismic valuing process, he moves toward self-actualization. This because the child knows that his parents will always love no matter what. He is not faced with the anxiety of losing his parents' love even when he chooses a behavior that may not meet the parental approval.

However, parents very often respond to their child with **conditional positive regard**, that is, when the child behaves in a way that meets the parental approval. Because of this, the child gets confused and is faced with two choices: either to accept her true inner experience and face the shattering possibility of becoming unloved; or to succumb to temptation, disown her real feelings, and distort her experience in ways that will please others. So, if the child comes to behave in a way that pleases his parents in order to think well about himself, his actualizing and self-actualizing tendencies become **incongruent** and work at cross purposes, leading to a state of confusion and anxiety.

5.4 Defense

Rogers believe that we try to defend ourselves against the anxiety caused by the experiences that remind us of the incongruence between the self-concept and the organismic experience. We distort these experiences and block them from our awareness. For example, a girl has hostile attitude towards her brother and wants to hit him. Her experience of hitting him is pleasurable, but internally she feels that it is bad to hit one's younger brother. Now to defend her self-concept against incongruence and preserve her positive self-regard, she decides that she must only feel love for her brother. Even positive feelings, like love and joy, can be defended against if they are inconsistent with our self-concept. For example, a girl loves a boy of another religion and knows that this love is inconsistent with her idea of getting married with parental approval as her parents are against inter-religious marriage. Now in order to guard herself from the potential anxiety caused by this incongruent situation, she decides to end the relationship and gets married as per her parents' wish.

6. The Development of Personality

6.1 Unconditional positive regard

Rogers did not specify any stages of development of personality but he did talk about the role of the unconditional positive regard and how it determines the development of the personality. The meaning of unconditional positive regard is that the child is loved, accepted and looked upon irrespective of his behavior (good or bad). By this, Rogers meant that “the mother's love for the child is granted freely and fully” (Schultz & Schultz, 2009). When children receive positive regard from their parents then over a period of time they also develop positive self-regard i.e. the self-acceptance and approval which further enhance our self-concept and the development of condition of worth.

6.2 Fully Functioning Persons

To Rogers, the fully functioning person is “the desired result of psychological development and social evolution” (Rogers, 1961 as cited in Schultz & Schultz, 2009). He made a list of certain characteristics of fully functioning persons. According to him, such a fully functioning person is completely aware of all the experiences, be it positive (courage, happiness) or negative (fear, pain). They accept them without using any defenses, because there is nothing which threatens their self-concept. Secondly they live life to the fullest, savoring every moment they live. Third characteristic is that they are guided by their own organismic process and not by the social codes or opinions of others. They trust their own feelings and act according to them. They make their choices based on their free will and believe in the following saying- life is what you make it, i.e. they are aware of the power they have to make their own future as a result they also experience high sense of freedom. Fully functioning people are very spontaneous and highly creative. They live their life constructively and adapt to the environment as per the

situation. They are able to face all the difficulties in their life and create a path of self-actualization for themselves.

7. Assessment

The only way, according to Rogers, to assess a person's personality is his or her subjective experiences, how he or she perceives them and what meaning he or she gives to them. Rogers also believed that the client himself has the ability to find the causes of his or her problems and make recovery from it. He or she is able to direct him or herself towards self-actualization by overcoming the obstacles in his or her path caused by the incongruence between the self-concept and the organismic experiences.

7.1 Person-Centered Therapy

Rogers believed that this is the only approach to assess an individual's personality. In this technique the client is the center of attention and the role of the therapist is that of the facilitator. The therapist tries to understand the client's feelings and attitudes about the self and toward the other people. In order to understand the client's subjective experiences and his inner world, the therapist needs to be accepting and empathize with the client's feelings. Thus, we are able to know as a therapist about the client's actual experiences and his feelings and thoughts. The unconscious experiences may be hidden, but by probing too much about them may lead the therapist to project his own feelings about the client's experiences.

One major advantage according to Rogers, of this kind of therapy is that it is not based on a predetermined, specific structure. This allows the therapist to accept the client as he is and not to project his own feelings about it. The client can then freely talk about his feelings. Thus, we are not trying to fit the client in mold. Rather, we are allowing the client to be on his own. This allows the client to maintain his inherent values and worth. Clients are active participants of their own healing process, which allows them to discover their true self and proceed on the path of self-actualization by perceiving the obstacles in their path.

7.2 Encounter Groups

Rogers believed that individuals can also achieve an enhanced psychological state and self-awareness in a group setting. He developed a technique called **encounter group** in the 1960s and early 70s for the purpose of bringing positive functioning and better health to a greater number of people. Group size ranges from 8 to 15 people. They typically meet 20 to 60 hours over several sessions. They begin with no formal structure or agenda. The group facilitator is not a leader in the usual sense. He or she establishes an atmosphere in which group members can express themselves and focus on how others perceive them. The facilitator's job is to make it easier for members to achieve self-insight and become more fully functioning. Some people report feeling better and more aware of their true nature once they have participated in an encounter group. Rogers believed that most (though not all) participants would become more fully functioning. However, this kind of technique may not always be useful. Faith, Wong, & Carpenter (1995) showed that larger groups that met more frequently produced more favorable outcomes than smaller groups that met less frequently.

7.3 Psychological Tests

Rogers did not use psychological tests to assess personality, nor did he develop any tests. He believed that the psychological tests tend to devalue the human experiences by treating them as constructs that can be quantified and measured. He rather believed that the client's self-reports are better adept at providing us with the information about his or her feelings and perceptions about the self and others.

8. Evaluative Comments

8.1 Criticism and controversies

In spite of showing human beings in a positive light for the first time in the history of psychology, Rogers has been criticized on several grounds. Firstly, his theory is too optimistic and simplistic in its view about human nature. For example, Ewen (2003) points out, "Actualizing all of our innermost potentials is desirable only if the deepest levels of personality are healthy and constructive. Yet it seems doubtful that an inherently peaceful and cooperative species would so frequently engage in war, crime, and other destructive behaviors solely because of parental pathogenic behaviors and introjected conditions of worth" (pg. 208). Secondly, it is not always possible to bring about a positive change only through genuineness, unconditional positive regard and empathy. Some amount of interpretation, childhood causes and other standard procedures are also necessary to look at psychological problems and behavioral maladjustments. Thirdly, Rogers' theory does not present any distinct concepts from what has already been a focus of theories given by Horney, Sullivan and Jung. Fourthly, his approach hardly changed in the last 20 years of his life, even though he himself believed that theories are expandable in light of new discoveries. Lastly, as he gradually accepted the unconscious processes, this raised doubt about the idea of self-concept being a conscious process and measuring only from the clients' self-reports.

8.2 Contributions

Rogers was the first psychotherapist who emphasized the sensitivity of the client-therapist relationship by placing importance on the client in the healing process and giving the role of facilitator to the therapist. Earlier, the client was only seen as a receiver of the therapy who had a passive role in his own recovery. But Rogers believed that the client has the important role to play here. He also unraveled the mysteries of the therapy sessions by becoming one of the first psychotherapists to tape record the sessions and publishing the verbatim transcripts.

He added to our understanding of parental pathogenic behavior, which may lead to psychopathology. He also expanded on the concept of self, which proved to be one of the most widely studied constructs in psychological research. To some psychologists, Rogers's emphasis on healthy inner potentials represents an important alternative (or "third force") to psychoanalysis (with its emphasis on the illicit aspects of personality) and behaviorism (which concentrates on observable behaviors). He was the first

psychologist to see human beings in a positive light and focused on their inner potential to self-actualize. As Ewen (2003) summarizes the essence of Rogers' theory, "To be psychologically healthy, each of us must heed those positive inner potentials that are uniquely our own" (pg. 212).

9. Summary

- Rogers was the major proponent of one of the most popular approaches to psychotherapy, called the person-centered approach, which was based upon the principals of Humanistic psychology. It takes a very positive view of the human nature.
- Basic nature of human beings: Actualization and Need for Positive Regard. The Self-actualization is a tendency to grow, develop and strive to unfold their inner potentials and enhance self. While the need for positive regard is innate and consists of need for acceptance, love, warmth, support and respect from our 'significant others'.
- The Structure of Personality: Rogers explained that each of us is the center of our own private realm which consists of experiences, which consists of our every thought, perception, emotion and need, whether conscious or unconscious. We also have an innate ability to positively value those things that are actualizing and negatively value those things that are non-actualizing, which is called organismic valuing process. According to Rogers, experiences and organismic process are important components of our personality. He also talked about the concept of self, which includes our own beliefs and perceptions about our own self. If the self-concept is congruent with the experiences and organismic processes that we have, the self gets actualized. We may also use certain defenses in order to guard ourselves against the anxiety caused by the experiences that remind us of the incongruence between the self-concept and the organismic experience.
- The Development of Personality: Rogers did not specify any stages of personality development. But he did say that if a person is accepted as he is and given an unconditional positive regard, it plays an important role in the healthy development of self-concept and generates a positive regard for oneself. The result of such a development is a fully-functioning person, someone who is optimally adjusted. Rogers also enumerated various characteristics of such a person.
- Assessment Techniques: The only way, according to Rogers, to assess a person's personality is his or her subjective experiences, how he or she perceives them and what meaning he or she gives to them. Rogers also believed that the client himself has the ability to find the causes of his or her problems and make recovery from it. He introduced two therapeutic techniques: Person-Centered Therapy and Encounter Groups. He did not believe in using the psychological tests as he was of the view that they devalue the human experiences.
- Criticisms: Rogers has been criticized for producing a very optimistic and simplistic theory. It lacked appropriate interpretation of psychological problems and neglected childhood causes and other standard procedures. His theory did not change much over the course of time. His ideas are not new and are found to be similar with those Jung, Horney, and Sullivan. Rogers' gradual acceptance of unconscious processes puts to question the idea of self-concept being a conscious process.
- Contributions: In spite so much criticism, Rogers' theory is relevant for the field of psychotherapy as it shed a positive light on human nature and helped unravel the mysteries of therapy sessions. Also, it provided an alternative to negative school of thoughts such as psychodynamic and behaviorism. It also added to our understanding of pathogenic parental behavior, which may lead to psychopathology.