The Development of the Self-concept and Conditions of Worth

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My self-concept and condition of worth has changed a lot in the past decade, yet still there are things from my childhood that affect my life. I often missed acceptance from my parents. My father was very strict. He had high expectations and I was never good enough. I had problems with my self-esteem that caused me a lot of problems with people, especially at work, as they often misused my weaknesses (the lack of self-esteem and my effort to constantly please others). Therefore, I often felt anxious, especially if there were expectations. Now I have more self-knowledge, skills and experiences that help me to feel more worthy. I can manage to handle situations where other people try to make me less worthy. Yet, sometimes I still think that I do not deserve to be loved, helped or praised. There are always competitions and it is impossible to be an expert in everything, so we cannot always prove to others (and to ourselves) that we are valuable and lovable. We often depend on others, which can make us vulnerable.

Thorne (2003, pp. 31-32) suggested that our capacity to feel positive about ourselves depends on the quality and consistency of the positive regard shown us by others. Where this is missing we are the victims of what Rogers described as *conditions* *of worth*. We think, feel and behave in ways that others have told us are worthy of love and respect. This introjections of 'alien' values in the internalisation of conditions of worth and the sense of the personal worthlessness makes the person totally divorced from his or her organismic valuing process (OVP) with which the person was in contact before the consciousness of self emerged. Thorne added that where such a discrepancy exists between the self as perceived and the actual experience of the total organism there is an incongruence between the self and experience. This incongruence leads to a psychological vulnerability, which will often make the person anxious and confused. Sanders (2011, p. 35 noted that he more discrepancy is there, the more the self-structure is rigid and trying to support this element within itself − element that is causing the problem in the first place. A healthy self-structure needs to be flexible, since the life unfolds in unexpected ways, so we must respond creatively.

According to Mearns and Thorne (2000, pp. 117-118) there is a configuration constructed around the negotiation of the condition of worth that allows us simultaneously to develop an adapted response that has a self-protective function as well. If someone is faced with challenging, diverse and sometimes contradictory conditions of worth, the part of the self adopts while another part of the self is preserved intact. The self which has endured and adapted to pervasive and sometimes contradictory conditions of worth needs to find ways to respond to self-experienceswhich are inconsistent with the rest of the self. Experiences dissonant with the rest of self are often rejected (protective mechanism of *denial)*. However, Cooper (1999, cited in Mearns and Thorne, 2000, p. 117) suggested an alternative protective response that include and encapsulate those dissonant experiences within a part of the self. Mearns and Thorne suggested that there are different hypotheses and pathways of processes of configuration depending on the individual thoughts, feelings and self-experiences. The organising principle function of the configuration may allow us to include other narratives about self. For example, if a person believes that he/she is ‘untrustworthy’ it can lead to a conclusion of being 'unlovable'. In addition, similar ‘narratives’ of failure may cause the person to behave with the expectation of failure and thereby enhance the possibility of failing − self-fulfilling prophecy.

If I relate my group experience to the theories that have been suggested, I can conclude that the attitude of the group can help me to connect myself (self-concept) with my experience (OVP). Our group is open-minded and accepting. It helps me to maintain a positive self-concept and self-esteem. They make me feel valued, respected and accepted. I am able to build a kind of trusting relationship with them; it helps me to connect with other people - and perhaps with myself - and to see my life from a different point of view. If I have any problem, in this environment the solution for my problem can come naturally due to my experience, or at least I can feel better. I do not feel less worthy than others and I have positive feelings toward them. I do not judge them and I accept everyone who they are. I accept that the our group member have different life experiences. Also, there are cultural and age differences that are affecting our relationships.

I think unconditional love, acceptance and non-judgement are closely related to each other. Thorne (2003, p. 37) suggested that the term unconditional positive regard (UPR) is an elaboration of Rogers’ concept of acceptance, which is uncontaminated from judgements or evaluations of the thoughts, feelings or behaviour. According to Carl Rogers (1961, p. 283), the UPR means that the therapist is warm and caring to the client with no personal gratification. This attitude creates an atmosphere that simply demonstrates care without the conditions of worth attached to it.

In relation to my group experience, perhaps I can even idealise that everything is perfect. However, nothing is black and white − but I try to accept that we do not live in a perfect world. Maybe I am wrong, but I think our group is somewhat artificial, made for practicing purposes. There is some degree of acting to please the expectations (role playing). In some situations, this role playing can somewhat undermine our genuineness. I find an interesting statement from Petterson (1985, p. 63). He suggested that one of the functions of the psychotherapy training is to separate trainees who want to play the role of therapist from those who want to be therapists. As a student, I do not feel to be a therapist yet.

Nevertheless, in general, I am genuine and trust our group to tell them about my life. Hopefully, my personal approach and openness is having some positive effect on others. Yet, when we are genuine and we are communicating our feelings with others, we should do it mindfully and in an appropriate way (Sanders, 2011, p. 96). For example, one group member was pleased with my honest feedback, even though this

feedback had some positive criticism. As my intention was positive and she/he understood that I want to help, she did not feel offended. I explained to the person that I also often make the same mistakes that I want to rescue the speaker and that I am encouraging positive thinking and development instead of just putting myself into the speaker's shoes. But this is probably not what the speaker needs. Nevertheless, if I am aware of this issue I can remain conscious in the present and I can avoid these mistakes.

Although I was working quite a lot on my self-development in recent years, this course is a new experience that gives me opportunities for progression. It helps me to accept myself and to improve my self-confidence. I have some insight to other people's problems that may also form my perception about many things (about others, myself, human nature, etc.). This course helps me to be more accepting, to be a better listener and to communicate more effectively and in a way that helps others. It helps me to be mindful and to discover things about myself that I was not aware of. For example, as I mentioned earlier, by writing this essay I realised that I do not feel to be a therapist. Although it was self-evident I was not aware of it. But by bringing it to my awareness, my perspective has changed about this particular feeling. Besides, there are issues that I have been aware, but I did not have the skills to deal with them. For example, I was often impatient and I jumped in when someone was talking. But recently, I try to be more aware of my feelings and I try to show more respect to others by not interrupting them while they are speaking.

The person-centred approach and most of the theories behind it are in align with my beliefs (including the concepts I did not discussed), such as the ability for self-healing, individual experiences, the importance of the UPR, freedom from threat, etc. In overall, I can conclude that this course helps my personal development. I can conclude that it affects positively my relationship with others and it helps me to feel better about myself. Moreover, it gives me skills that I can use to help others.

### References

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