

## **Personality: humanistic theories**

Humanistic psychologists take a rather different view of health from Freud. Where he seems to have considered that absence of mental illness was enough to constitute mental health, humanistic psychologists consider that mental health must mean the full realisation of an individual's self.

### **Carl Rogers**

#### **Client-centred non-directive therapy**

Carl Rogers soon came to the conclusion that Freudian techniques did not work and that the less he tried to manipulate the therapy, the more likely was improvement in his patients. Out of this experience he developed his notion of *client-centred therapy (or person centred)*, called 'client-centred' because it is the intention that the client/person should arrive at the insights rather than the therapist. It is *non-directive* because the therapist does not try to direct the patient's attention to particular topics, such as early childhood experiences. Unlike Freud, who wanted his patients to talk about their feelings, Rogers wanted them to experience them. In the USA Rogerian client-centred therapy now predominates in therapy.

#### **The Phenomenal World**

According to Rogers we enter the world with no self-concept and no self. All we have is sensory impressions, biological processes, motor activities. Rogers said 'every individual exists in a continually changing world of experience of which he is the centre' (quoted in McConnell and Philipchalk (1992)). He called this *the phenomenal world*. As we grow, we learn to differentiate our self from the other parts of the phenomenal world and eventually come to see ourselves as an 'independent self'.

In Rogers' view, people came to him for counselling because, as a result of experiences as they had grown up, 'they had become someone they were not'. They would be suffering from anxiety, stress, low self-esteem as a result.

#### **Self-concept and self-actualisation**

The notion that his clients 'had become someone they were not' reflected Rogers' conviction that people have a *self-concept*. His clients appeared to have very clear ideas about their 'inner selves', their 'self-concept' and were troubled by behaviour that didn't seem to fit with those ideas.

Rogers' believed that humans have a fundamental need to realise their potential, a need for what he referred to as *self-actualization*. We use this

need as the basis for evaluating our experiences in life - those which enhance our development are seen as positive experiences. Because we all have somewhat different potentials, we will evaluate experiences differently and thus come to develop different sets of values.

### **Unconditional positive regard**

Central to the practice of Rogerian counselling is the *unconditional positive regard* for the client. He or she must be accepted as she is. Before you can accept yourself, according to Rogers, you must see that others accept you for what you are. Rogers' saw the requirement of positive regard as a fundamental human need. If it is frustrated, our potential for self-actualization can suffer.

The emphasis which Rogers and the other major humanist psychologist, Maslow, place on health rather than sickness and also on the fact that it is within the individual's power to shape their own personalities and actualise their self is generally appealing, especially to those who like simple ideas and emphasis on individualism. However, unlike other notions of personality, the humanist view is rather vague as to how personality develops and there is little attempt at any objective measurement.

It's worth noting in passing that the holistic approach of the Rogerians to the individual as having a 'whole self' conflicts in principle with Freudian theory, as well as with recent developments in post-structuralism and postmodernity. Poststructuralists have attacked the very notions of subject and identity. They see subjective identity as a construct of language and society. Many postmodernists, notably the French commentator Baudrillard, see a fragmented, disjointed mode of experience as the essential postmodern condition.