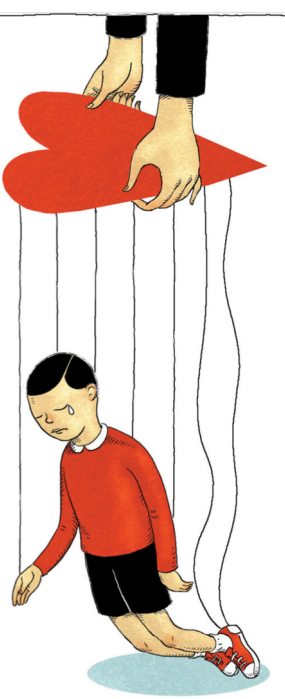


Unconditional Positive Self-Regard: The Role of Perceived Parental Conditional Regard

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Introduction

The aim of this study was to add to the extant literature bridging the humanistic and positive psychology fields. Predictor variables representative of the Rogerian *fully functioning person* were chosen for both humanistic and positive psychology constructs.

Rogers (1951) termed the ‘ultimate theoretical person’ the *fully functioning person*. This type of psychological functioning occurs when self-actualisation is organismically congruent. The fully functioning person would have at least the characteristics shown in the apposing figure.

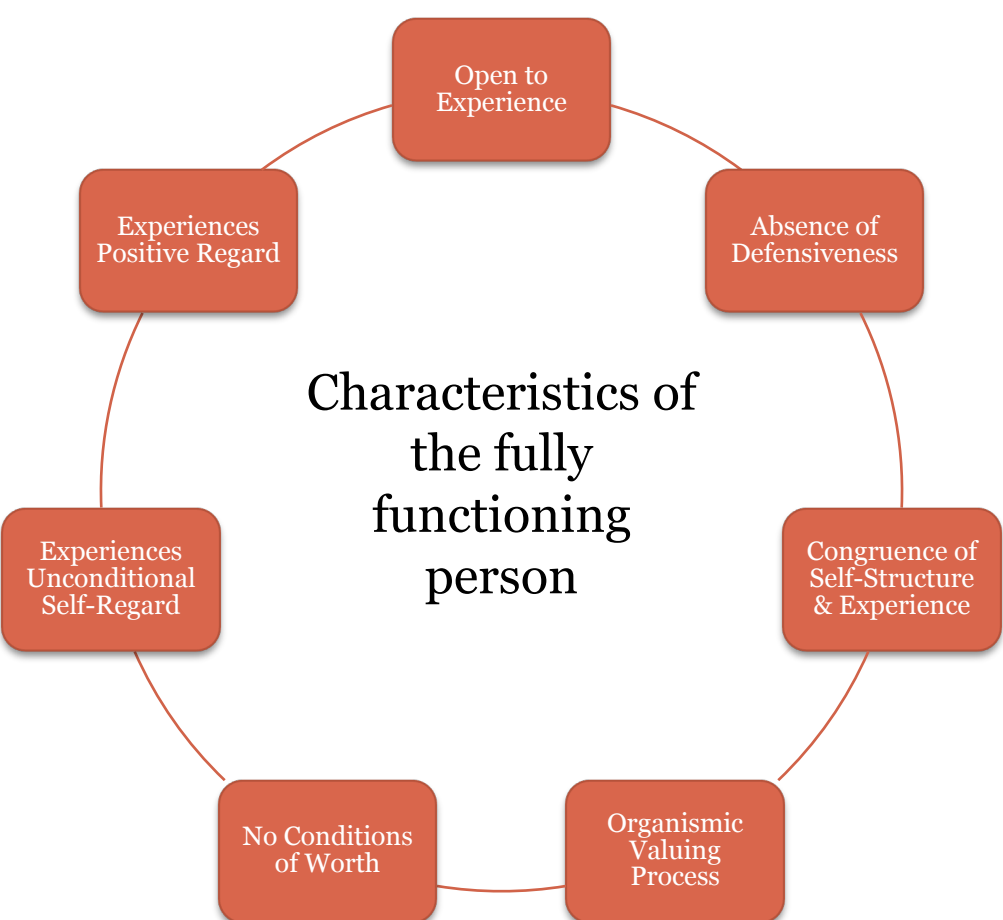
Person-centered psychology, postulates that all humans have an inbuilt tendency towards fulfilment and growth. Accordingly, all infants have two inherent systems:

1. Motivational system – ***actualizing tendency***
2. Regulatory system – ***organismic valuing process***

- Feedback from these two inbuilt systems keeps an organism attuned with satisfying motivational needs.
- Development of a concept of self (idea of ‘Me’) occurs through interaction (self-experience) with the environment (and significant others).
- As awareness of the self emerges, individuals naturally develop a need for ***positive regard***.
- Individual ***self-regard*** develops out of the association of self-experience and the innate need for positive regard (to feel good about ourselves).

Over time a positive gestalt attitude towards oneself emerges that is no longer directly dependent on the attitudes of others – individual perceives themselves in any given situation as no more or less worthy of positive regard. This is when one experiences ***unconditional positive self-regard***.

When significant others discriminate an individual as being more or less worthy of positive regard, individuals are said to develop ***conditions of worth***. Conditions of worth inform behaviour with significant others, preventing individuals from functioning freely – being one’s ‘true self’. Consequently, values become introjected (i.e., taken over from others) and applied to experiences without consideration of whether they are enhancing or satisfying.



- Others people's evaluations can be different from the child's direct valuing
- This can confuse and “threaten” the developing structure of self.

We receive positive regard within a “conditional” context:
I am good when I..... I am bad when I.....

- The child might be able to separate the valuing (but often does not)
- The child adopts the parent's “valuing” as if it is his/hers
- ‘Other's valuing are “introjected”’.

Purpose

The purpose of the study was to test the following predictions, which are based on the person-centered model, using a three block hierarchical regression:

1. Increased unconditional self-regard (UPSR) will be associated with increased self-esteem and decreased depression and anxiety;
2. Increased UPSR will be associated with increased authentic living, life satisfaction, and intrinsic motivation and decreased self-alienation and accepting external influence; and
3. Increased UPSR will be associated with decreased perceived parental conditional regard (PPCR).

Predictor Variables:

Block 1: Emotional Self-Assessments (depression, anxiety, self-esteem)

Block 2: Humanistic/Positive Psychology Constructs (authenticity, life satisfaction, and aspirations)

Block 3: Perceived Parental Conditional Regard (emotional control, prosocial behaviour, academics, sport)

Prediction of UPSR

Model	Measure	t	Significance (p < .05)
1	RSE	14.90	.000
2	AS – Authentic Living	4.00	.000
	AS – Accepting External Influence	-2.91	.004
	SLSS	2.49	.013
	AI – Intrinsic Importance	-2.98	.003
3	PPCR – Academic	2.70	.007

Methods

Participants:

- 355 young adults aged 16-19 (100 M, 255 F). Mean age 16.87 (*SD* = .819)

Measures

- Unconditional Positive Self-Regard (UPSR)
- Patient Health Questionnaire (PHQ-9)
- Generalized Anxiety Disorder (GAD-7)
- Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (RSE)
- Authenticity Scale (AS)
- Students’ Life Satisfaction Scale (SLSS)
- Aspiration Index (AI)
- Perceptions of Parental Conditional Regard (PPCR)

Results

- *Emotional Self-Assessments* – self-esteem only significant predictor of UPSR. Result is consistent with research indicating that self-esteem is conceptually similar to self-regard.
- *Humanistic/Positive Psychology Constructs* – authentic living and life satisfaction significant *positive* predictors and accepting external influence and importance of intrinsic motivation significant *negative* predictors of UPSR. Results suggest fully functioning young adults with high self-esteem and life satisfaction, who live authentically and do not accept external influence, have increased UPSR. Increased UPSR also positively associated with being in touch with one’s true self and not placing excessive value on achieving something different from one’s current state – congruence.
- *Perceived Parental Conditional Regard* – PPCR of academic success at school was the only significant predictor of UPSR. Directionality of the relationship between PPCR domains and UPSR unexpected: prosocial behaviour (-), emotional control, academics, and sport (+). Results suggest that perceived high expectations from parents practicing conditional regard can be associated with positive outcomes for young adults.

Discussion

- The parenting literature suggests that parents will be most likely to have a positive impact if they can be warm and supportive.
- A parent who is solely demanding in conditionality of regard will not create a feeling of warmth in a child. Quite the contrary, conditional regard, specifically “love withdrawal” and/or the “push and pull” of affection/regard can have long term consequences on personality, resulting in the development of disorder. For example, children of borderline mothers often create a false self to survive (see Lawson, 2000).
- Conditional regard creates an unstable environment where children are uncertain as to how they are going to be regarded; this push and pull of affection/regard creates anxiety, insecurity, and attachment issues. The repercussions of which are disordered personality and long-term relationship difficulties – most importantly, an unstable sense of self.
- We may consider that this research suggests that conditional regard with respect to academic success at school, ability to control one’s emotions, and do well in sport can be beneficial, as long as it does not coincide with conditional regard of the self as it is experienced by others (i.e., prosocial behavior). Nonetheless, the analysis here suggests that there can be a significant positive relation between at least one type of parental conditional regard and positive outcomes.
- Further, results suggest that young adults high in particular strengths of character, such as self-esteem and life satisfaction, may have buffered against the negative effects of PCR. Building character strengths as a means of buffering the negative effects of stress and the development of psychological disorder, is imperative to the positive development of young people.

Parental Conditional Regard

Parental conditional regard (PCR) is a socialising practice in which parents make their affection and appreciation contingent on a child’s display of parentally desired behaviours – more affection, attention, and appreciation are displayed when children act in accordance to specific parental expectations and less affection and esteem (ignored/rejected) when children do not act in accordance to specific parental expectations.

PCR has been shown to reliably establish target behaviours, however it is also associated with *negative affective consequences* (e.g., short lived satisfaction, shame after failure, fluctuations in self-esteem, poor coping skills, low self-worth, subjective well-being, life and satisfaction, a sense of being disapproved by parents, and resentment towards parents).

Because PCR makes children’s self-esteem and sense of love-worthiness dependent on the attainment of specific attributes, children exposed to this socializing strategy are likely to feel anxious and pressured...Thus, PCR is likely to lead to short-lived satisfaction after success in manifesting the desired attribute or behaviour...[but] the use of conditional regard to press the child to behave in parentally expected ways is likely to undermine the children’s sense of self-worth because it implies that their parents do not accept them for who they are, and that they do not trust them to behave in desirable ways out of their own choice. (Assor & Roth, 2007, p. 28)

- PCR has a negative impact on authenticity and the ability to develop a true self and is positively associated with perfectionism, the setting of excessively high and unrealistic standards for oneself.
- Overall, research suggests that although PCR can be effective in attaining a desired target behaviour or outcome, it comes at emotional, social, and/or psychological costs.

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