

# PERSON-CENTERED PERSONALITY THEORY: SUPPORT FROM SELF-DETERMINATION THEORY AND POSITIVE PSYCHOLOGY



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## Summary

The present article examines the person-centered personality theory of Carl Rogers in light of recent developments in theory and research within the emergent discipline of positive psychology. In particular, the theoretical observations and research findings from self-determination theory are reviewed. It is argued that at the metatheoretical level, person-centered theory and self-determination theory provide similar perspectives, and thus the empirical evidence testing

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aspects of self-determination theory is equally supportive of the account of personality development, psychological functioning, and the process of therapeutic growth, as hypothesized within person-centered theory. This is an observation that will be of theoretical interest and practical relevance to those who specialize in person-centered therapies. These observations on person-centered metatheoretical assumptions also promise to be of interest to positive psychologists.

**Keywords:** *person-centered theory; self-determination theory; positive psychology*

It has been almost 50 years since Carl Rogers published his most important theoretical paper, "A Theory of Therapy, Personality and Interpersonal Relationships, as Developed in the Client-Centered Framework" (Rogers, 1959). Person-centered theory as outlined by Rogers (1959) provides the metatheoretical foundation for the person-centered movement and the client-centered approach to counseling and psychotherapy. The crux of the theory is the assumption that human beings have an inherent tendency toward growth, development, and optimal functioning. This assumption, in turn, serves as the guiding principle for client-centered therapeutic practice.

Although the person-centered approach was central to mainstream psychological thought in the 1950s and 1960s, it has become marginalized within contemporary psychology. We would argue that this is because person-centered theory has been misunderstood as suggesting, for example, the naive theoretical position that people will always develop in a positive direction when left to their own devices. The reason for this misunderstanding is that most commentators on person-centered theory have tended to base their comments on Rogers's popular writings (e.g., Rogers, 1951, 1961) rather than his substantial theoretical work (Rogers, 1959). Indeed, Rogers himself regretfully concluded that his 1959 article was "the most thoroughly ignored of anything I have written" (Rogers, 1980, p. 60; see also, Ford, 1991).

Although there has been considerable research within the person-centered tradition in the past (see Barrett-Lennard, 1998), person-centered theory has not provided a concentrated focus for research during the past 30 years. This is because person-centered researchers have tended to focus on phenomenological methods and qualitative research in preference to quantitative methods with the

consequence that answers to the questions shaped in the current climate of evidence based practice are not readily available.

Person-centered theory has therefore become subject to criticism that it lacks a solid theoretical and empirical foundation. Outside mainstream psychology, however, person-centered theory and client-centered therapy remain very influential in the world of counseling and psychotherapy (see Bozarth, Zimring, & Tausch, 2002; Elliott, Greenberg, & Lietaer, 2003; Joseph, 2003). In an attempt to heal this rift between person-centered practice on the one hand and mainstream academic psychology on the other, we wish to reexamine person-centered theory in light of the emerging evidence base in positive psychology. We are interested in building bridges between the person-centered movement and the new positive psychology movement because we think that the person-centered movement can benefit from an understanding of the extant empirical literature in positive psychology, and the positive psychology movement can benefit from an understanding of the metatheoretical perspective provided by person-centered theory.

The aim of the present article is to evaluate the person-centered framework in light of recent developments in the area of positive psychology. First, an outline of person-centered theory will be given. Second, this theory will be considered in the light of recent theoretical developments within the positive psychology tradition, in particular, self-determination theory (SDT; Deci & Ryan, 1985b, 1991; Ryan & Deci, 2000, 2002). Third, relevant empirical evidence from the positive psychology literature will be reviewed and the implications for person-centered theory considered. We will argue that the main hypotheses generated from person-centered theory are supported by current research within positive psychology, and thus criticisms of the person-centered approach for lacking an empirical base are unjustified.

## PERSON-CENTERED THEORY

Person-centered theory is often considered within the framework of humanistic psychology, but we would caution that humanistic psychology is a broader discipline, and not all aspects of humanistic psychology share the same metatheoretical assumptions that characterize person-centered theory. A broader review of the humanistic and positive psychology interface is provided elsewhere (see Sheldon & Kasser, 2001).

The person-centered approach offers a dynamic, process-focused account of personality development and functioning, of vulnerability to and development of psychopathology, and of therapeutic growth toward psychological well-being (Rogers, 1959). The main tenets of person-centered theory evolved during the 1950s based on naturalistic observation of the individual change processes that clients experience within the context of the therapeutic encounter (Rogers, 1947, 1951) and supported by subsequent research into the hypotheses generated by this process of observation (see Barrett-Lennard, 1998, for an historical overview). The aim of this first section is to provide a broad overview of person-centered theory as outlined in Rogers (1959).

According to person-centered theory, the human organism, in common with all living organisms, is born with an innate motivational drive, the *actualizing tendency*. Rogers (1959) defined the actualizing tendency as

the inherent tendency of the organism to develop all its capacities in ways which serve to maintain or enhance the organism . . . . [This tendency involves] development toward autonomy and away from heteronomy, or control by external forces. (p. 196)

Under favorable social-environmental conditions, Rogers proposes that the individual's self-concept actualizes in accordance with his or her *organismic valuing process* (OVP). The OVP refers to the evaluation of experiences in a manner that is consistent with one's intrinsic needs:

The human infant is seen as having an inherent motivational system (which he shares in common with all living things) and a regulatory system (the valuing process) which by its "feedback" keeps the organism "on the beam" of satisfying his motivational needs. (Rogers, 1959, p. 222)

Rogers (1957b) coined the term *fully functioning person* to describe an ideal of autonomous psychological functioning that occurs when self-actualization is organismically congruent. The conceptualization of fully functioning people necessarily presupposes that such individuals have first been able to satisfy their most fundamental needs, as proposed by Maslow (1970). Rogers (1963, 1964) proposed that the attitudes and behaviors of more fully functioning individuals are consistent with certain internally generated *value directions*. The value directions include

moving toward increasingly socialized goals, where sensitivity to others and acceptance of others is positively valued and where deep relationships are positively valued, and moving in the direction of greater openness to experience, where the person comes to value an openness to all of his or her inner and outer experience (Rogers, 1964, p. 166).

However, in contrast, under unfavorable social-environmental conditions, the actualization of the self-concept becomes discrepant from organismic experiencing, causing a conflict, a state of *incongruence*:

If self and experience are incongruent, then the general tendency to actualize the organism may work at cross purposes with the subsystem of that motive, the tendency to actualize the self . . . . The state is one of tension and internal confusion, since in some respects the individual's behavior will be regulated by the actualizing tendency, and in other respects by the self-actualizing tendency, thus producing discordant or incomprehensible behaviors. (Rogers, 1959, pp. 197-203)

Thus, self-actualization does not necessarily refer to the realization of optimal psychological functioning (as it does in other humanistic writings), and Rogers (1959) is clear that conflict between self-actualization and the actualizing tendency is the usual state of affairs (see Ford, 1991). Rogers (1959) further proposes that the actualizing tendency is more usually usurped and thwarted by an unfavorable social environment characterized by *conditions of worth*. Conditions of worth are conceptualized as those values that are introjected by the individual from his or her social interactions and that stem from the developing infant's need for positive regard from significant others in his or her social environment. When the infant receives positive regard that is *conditional*, then he or she learns to evaluate experiences according to whether or not they satisfy the externally imposed conditions. As the child develops, the conditions of worth are introjected, acting as an internalized social other and replacing organismic valuing as the principle governing the individual's attitudes and behavior.

In this way, person-centered theory can be seen to adopt a position that, rather than naively asserting that people always behave in a positive and constructive way, instead recognizes that the usual response to unfavorable social-environmental conditions is for the actualization of the self to become incongruent with the individual's organismic experiencing, leading to development of the

self in a direction that is discrepant with the *intrinsic* motivation toward positive and constructive functioning (Ford, 1991). It is this incongruence that activates the self's defensive processes of distortion and denial of organismic experiencing, potential sources of vulnerability to psychopathology (Rogers, 1959).

A particular indicator of psychological disturbance that results from the internalization of conditions of worth is the tendency to evaluate experiences externally. The concept of *locus of evaluation* refers to the source of evidence regarding values, which can be either *internal* or *external*. As the individual becomes estranged from his or her organismic needs, there is a loss of trust in the person's own internal judgments and an increasing tendency to defer to the external judgment of others.

The aim of client-centered therapy is to create facilitative social-environmental conditions, within the context of a therapeutic relationship, that will enable the client to evaluate experiences organismically rather than in accordance with his or her conditions of worth (Rogers, 1957a, 1959). Rogers's proposed six necessary and sufficient social-environmental conditions that he thought characterized the social environment that promotes therapeutic change—the central condition being unconditional positive regard that serves to counteract the person's introjected conditions of worth.

## SUMMARY OF PERSON-CENTERED PERSONALITY THEORY

A number of metatheoretical hypotheses arise from person-centered theory, as outlined above. These will now be briefly summarized to set the context for our examination of both the theoretical and the empirical support for person-centered theory provided by recent developments in positive psychology.

*Hypothesis 1:* It is hypothesized that the human organism is born with an innate need to actualize, to which he or she responds by a process of organismic valuing.

*Hypothesis 2:* It is hypothesized that the presence of certain social-environmental conditions will result in an organismically congruent process of self-actualization that will be positively associated with psychological well-being.

*Hypothesis 3:* It is further hypothesized that this process of change will result in certain specifiable outcomes, which will be positively associated with healthy psychological functioning.

*Hypothesis 4:* It is hypothesized that experiences of conditional regard from significant others will lead to displacement of the individual's OVP and the introjection of conditions of worth, with negative consequences for psychological well-being.

*Hypothesis 5:* Finally, it is hypothesized that more fully functioning individuals will share common, universal, and specifiable internally generated *value directions*.

These five person-centered hypotheses will be evaluated in the light of theory and empirical research from the newly emerging discipline of positive psychology, and in particular from SDT.

#### SDT: THEORETICAL SIMILARITIES AND POINTS OF CONVERGENCE WITH PERSON-CENTERED THEORY

SDT is a more contemporary organismic theory of human motivation and personality functioning that emphasizes the central role of the individual's inner resources for personality development and behavioral self-regulation (Deci & Ryan, 1985b, 1991, 2000; Ryan & Deci, 2000, 2002). In accord with person-centered theory, SDT views the person as an active growth-oriented organism, attempting to actualize his or her potentialities within the environment in which he or she functions. The organismic tendency toward actualization is seen as one pole of a *dialectical interface*, the other pole being the social environment, which can either be facilitating or inhibiting of the person's synthesizing tendency (Ryan & Deci, 2002). SDT therefore provides a similar metatheoretical perspective to person-centered personality theory:

The first is that human beings are inherently proactive, that they have the potential to act on and master both the inner forces (viz., their drives and emotions) and the external (i.e., environmental) forces they encounter, rather than being passively controlled by those forces . . . .

Second, human beings, as self-organizing systems, have an inherent tendency toward growth, development, and integrated functioning . . . .

The third important philosophical assumption is that, although activity and optimal development are inherent to the human organism, these do not happen automatically. For people to actualize their inherent nature and potentials—that is, to be optimally active and to develop effectively—they require nutrients from the

social environment. To the extent that they are denied the necessary support and nourishment by chaotic, controlling, or rejecting environments, there will be negative consequences for their activity and development. (Deci & Vansteenkiste, 2004, pp. 23-24)

These are essentially the same metatheoretical elements that constitute the person-centered personality theory of Rogers (1959). Although there is theoretical convergence at the metatheoretical level, there is also much theoretical convergence at the subtheory level, although this is obscured by the different terminology of SDT and person-centered theory. Thus, before we review the empirical evidence in light of person-centered theory, it is helpful to show the main points of terminological convergence.

### *Sources of Motivation / OVP*

SDT views behavior as either *intrinsically motivated* or *extrinsically motivated*. Intrinsic motivation refers to carrying out an activity solely for its inherent satisfactions and implies a high degree of autonomy, or self-determination. In this way, intrinsic regulation is equivalent to acting in accordance with the OVP. Extrinsic motivation, in contrast, refers to carrying out a goal to fulfill interpersonal or intrapsychic standards, goals, or expectations. SDT further elaborates the category of extrinsic motivation, proposing the existence of four subcategories postulated to be theoretically, experientially, and functionally distinct from one another (see Ryan & Deci, 2000), and though they provide a more complete account of external regulation than does person-centered theory, in person-centered terminology conditions of worth can be understood to refer broadly to extrinsic regulation.

### *Perceived Locus of Causality / Locus of Evaluation*

*Perceived locus of causality* is the term used to describe the individual's perception as to whether the motivation for his or her behavior is located internally or externally, and this is similar to the person-centered construct of locus of evaluation (see Rogers, 1959).

### *Basic Needs / Necessary and Sufficient Conditions*

A further subtheory of SDT proposes that there are three *primary* intrinsic psychological needs—the needs for *competence*,



*relatedness*, and *autonomy*—that are essential for facilitating psychological growth and integration, social development, and personal well-being but, if not satisfied, contribute to psychological ill-being (Deci & Ryan, 1991; Ryan & Deci, 2000). Competence refers to our need to control outcomes and to be efficacious in our environment. Autonomy refers to the individual's attempts to be a self-determining agent of his or her own attitudes and behavior. Relatedness describes the urge to be in relationship with others, caring for others, and being cared for by others. SDT hypothesizes that, for the individual to experience an ongoing sense of integrity and well-being, each of these three basic needs must be met throughout the life span. This appears to be a more articulated account of the role of growth-promoting and growth-inhibiting conditions posited by person-centered theory but one that nonetheless remains in accord with the person-centered assertion that certain social-environmental conditions nurture self-regulation based on organismic valuing and lead to a process of growth and change in the direction of healthy functioning and psychological well-being, whereas other conditions thwart this process and contribute to ill-being (see Rogers, 1959).

### *Contingent Self-Esteem / Conditional Self-Regard*

One final point of theoretical convergence is the SDT conceptualization of contingent self-esteem, which is hypothesized to result from experiences of contingent regard of significant others (Deci & Ryan, 1995; Ryan & Brown, 2003). This is similar to the person-centered view of conditional self-regard resulting from introjection of conditional positive regard from significant others (see Rogers, 1959).

## EMPIRICAL SUPPORT FOR PERSON-CENTERED THEORY

Having provided a broad overview of SDT and noted its points of theoretical and terminological convergence with person-centered theory, we now can review the empirical literature and consider its significance for person-centered theory relating to each of five hypotheses central to person-centered theory.

### *Hypothesis 1*

It is hypothesized that the human organism is born with an innate need to actualize, to which he or she responds by a process of organismic valuing.

Empirical evidence supporting the existence of a growth-oriented OVP comes from research by Sheldon, Arndt, and Houser-Marko (2003). These investigators studied how people changed their goal pursuits during three different periods (ranging from 20 minutes to 6 weeks). Based on the rationale that a tendency to move goal pursuits toward goal choices that are more beneficial for self and others would provide evidence for the existence of an OVP, the results showed that participants demonstrated relatively greater ratings shifts toward goals that were more likely to be beneficial to both their own well-being and that of others. Other research found that, in terms of the longitudinal effects of self-concordant goal-selection, individuals who chose more *self-concordant* goals (i.e., intrinsically motivated choices that represent the individual's implicit interests and values) put more sustained effort into those goals, thus enabling them to better attain their goals. Goal attainment was associated with stronger feelings of autonomy, competence, and relatedness, which promote greater well-being. Furthermore, these processes were illustrated in an integrated path model supported by causal modeling procedures (Sheldon & Elliot, 1999). Not only do these interesting findings provide evidence for the existence of an OVP, they also indicate that individuals who act concordantly with their OVP experience positive psychological growth and well-being.

### *Hypothesis 2*

It is hypothesized that the presence of core social-environmental conditions will result in an organismically congruent process of self-actualization that will be positively associated with psychological well-being.

In the person-centered approach to psychological therapy, growth-oriented change results from the creation of facilitative relationship conditions, enabling the client to feel empathically valued and unconditionally accepted. The role of the therapist is to facilitate the client's connection with his or her innate OVP. To this end, the approach is nondirectional, encouraging autonomous self-direction through maintaining the sufficient relationship conditions and with little emphasis on particular therapy techniques. Some support for this approach comes from research by Deci and Ryan (1985b), showing that choice, acknowledgment of feelings, and opportunities for self-direction enhance intrinsic motivation because they give the individual a greater sense of autonomy. More

recently, a meta-analysis of research on tangible rewards (Deci, Koestner, & Ryan, 1999) found that all expected tangible rewards made contingent on task performance undermine intrinsic motivation. In addition to the findings for tangible rewards, the research demonstrated that threats, deadlines, directives, pressured evaluations, and imposed goals all reduce intrinsic motivation because, as with tangible rewards, these are all conducive to an external perceived locus of causality. These findings support the person-centered argument that *core* conditions in the therapy relationship, such as the communication of accurate empathy and unconditional positive regard to the client, are more likely to be therapeutically beneficial than are directive techniques.

Initial support for the proposal that organismically congruent growth, or self-actualization, will be positively associated with psychological well-being is provided by a study by Deci and Ryan (1985a) measuring people's causality orientations. Based on participants' scores on a causality-orientations scale, the study found that *autonomy orientation* was positively correlated with self-esteem, ego development, self-actualization, and the tendency to support other people's self-determination. Also consistent with the person-centered hypothesis, negative psychological variables were associated with nonautonomous functioning, with *control orientation* being correlated positively with type A behavior pattern and with public self-consciousness and *impersonal orientation* correlated positively with self-derogation, social anxiety, and external perceived locus of causality.

### *Hypothesis 3*

It is hypothesized that the process of change, which is most often observed in the context of therapy, will result in certain specifiable outcomes that will be positively associated with healthy psychological functioning.

The symptom-reduction focus of contemporary outcome studies in psychotherapy relies predominantly on medical-like indicators of therapeutic effectiveness. Even given this limitation, client-centered therapy fares extremely well in such research (see Friedli, King, Lloyd, & Horder, 1997; King et al., 2000). Unfortunately, studies of the therapeutic effectiveness of client-centered therapy have not concerned themselves with theoretically consistent indicators of change. Rogers (1959) identified the key indicators of

successful therapy to be increased congruence, increased openness to experience, and reduced defensiveness. Given the lack of theoretically consistent outcome research, we instead consider evidence relating the key hypothesized outcomes of client-centered therapy to healthy psychological functioning.

*Increased congruence.* Being more congruent as a therapeutic outcome is supported by evidence from empirical research by Koestner, Bernieri, and Holt (1992). These researchers designed an experiment to investigate the relationship between the individual's autonomy and integration in personality. Participants were divided into two groups (autonomy orientation and control orientation) on the basis of scores on the General Causality Orientations Scale (Deci & Ryan, 1985a). The hypothesis was that *autonomy* participants would demonstrate greater consistency or integration than *control* participants across three aspects of personality. The first study compared participant scores on a free-choice behavioral measure and on a self-report-of-interest measure of intrinsic motivation. Results showed that more autonomous individuals showed greater integration between behaviors and feelings than did nonautonomous individuals. A second study showed that autonomy was associated with greater congruence between self-report and action. Taken together, these findings suggest that autonomous individuals show greater congruence between feelings and behaviors and are more fully integrated individuals. Person-centered theory would suggest that the cause of this greater congruence between thoughts and feelings is that the autonomously functioning individual can more accurately symbolize his or her organismic experiencing and will therefore perceive reality (internal and external) in a more accurate way and respond accordingly.

*Increased openness to experience.* Openness to experience has been conceptualized by Rogers as *the polar opposite of defensiveness*, as perhaps the most important outcome of therapeutic change, and as the principal characteristic of the fully functioning person (Rogers, 1957b, 1959, 1961, 1964). An overview of SDT research findings regarding openness to experience is provided by Hodgins and Knee (2002). Of relevance to the person-centered hypothesis of therapeutic outcomes is evidence from research by Knee and Zuckerman (1996), indicating that increased openness to experience is positively associated with autonomous functioning. This study examined whether autonomy and control orientations are moderators of

self-serving bias, a defensive attributional tendency in which people take more responsibility for success than for failure. Individuals were randomly assigned to pass or fail on a task, and their attributions were measured. The results demonstrated that only participants who were high in autonomy orientation showed no self-serving bias, making fewer self-enhancing attributions for success and fewer defensive attributions for failure. These findings provide support both for the person-centered proposal that self-directing individuals will show greater openness to experience and for the related proposition that such individuals will show a more accurate and less defensive perception of experience.

The findings from the above study are complemented by research by Hodgins, Koestner, and Duncan (1996), who examined naturally occurring interpersonal behavior between students and their parents during a 3-week period while also investigating all student interpersonal relationships during a 1-week period. In terms of student-parent interactions, the study found that autonomy predicted experiencing greater pleasantness, higher self-honesty and other-honesty, and greater self-esteem. This contrasted with participants scoring high on control orientation, who were found to be less honest and disclosing, to have lower self-esteem, and to be more defensive in interactions initiated by their parents. Results consistent with these were found in the 1-week study of all of the students' interpersonal relationships, suggesting that autonomy orientation is associated with greater openness to social experience, as both SDT and person-centered theory would predict.

*Reduced defensiveness.* Reduced defensiveness refers to the ability to respond to experience in a nonthreatened way because of perceiving no threat to self from one's experiencing (Rogers, 1959, 1964), and it is merely a corollary of increased openness to experience. As described above, research by Knee and Zuckerman (1996) has shown that individuals with high autonomy and low control causality orientations make fewer self-enhancing attributions after success and fewer self-protective attributions after failure. Similarly, in a study of people's behavior in terms of accepting responsibility and apologizing for their actions after wrongdoing, Hodgins, Liebeskind, and Schwarz (1996) found that autonomy orientation was related to a higher number of apologies and greater complexity of apologies in participants, whereas control and impersonal orientations predicted less apology (i.e., greater defensiveness). Finally, Knee and Zuckerman (1998) have demonstrated that individuals

who are high in autonomy and low in control engage in fewer defensive coping strategies (particularly denial) and exhibit less self-handicapping (a defensive tendency to erect impediments to one's own success to provide an excuse for anticipated future failure). Taken together, these findings indicate that self-directing individuals exhibit lower use of defensive coping strategies, consistent with the predictions of person-centered theory.

#### *Hypothesis 4*

It is hypothesized that experiences of conditional regard from significant others will lead to displacement of the individual's OVP and the introjection of conditions of worth, with negative consequences for psychological well-being.

Initial evidence of the detrimental effect of introjected conditions of worth on autonomy comes from early SDT research into the social and environmental factors that facilitate or undermine intrinsic motivation (see Deci & Ryan, 1985b). *Ego-involvement* experiments set out to induce a self-esteem-contingent (ego-involved) condition versus a task-involved condition in two groups of participants carrying out an inherently interesting activity. In one such study, Ryan (1982) demonstrated that participants induced to become competitively *ego-involved* in achievement tasks, where they would be contingently evaluative of themselves, showed a decrease in intrinsic motivation (indicated by performance on a behavioral free-choice measure) compared to control participants. The results suggest that the ego-involved group behaved in a more *internally controlling* manner rather than an intrinsically motivated way, a finding that is supported by a meta-analysis of experimental studies that confirmed that ego-involvement versus task-involvement causes a decrease in intrinsic motivation (Rawsthorne & Elliot, 1999). This observation is important because it lends support to the person-centered proposal that when an individual's behavior or performance is contingent on his or her conditions of worth (contingent self-esteem), behaviors will be more constrained, whereas more organismically congruent (inherently interesting) activity, involving self-regulation by organismic valuing, results in more autonomous, intrinsically motivated functioning. What is more, these research findings suggest that introjection of conditional regard is associated with displacement of the OVP.

Further evidence demonstrating that conditional regard from significant others leads to the introjection of conditions of worth comes from research by Assor, Roth, and Deci (2004). These researchers hypothesized that students' perceived use of conditional regard by their parents as a socializing practice in four life domains (emotion control, prosocial, academic, and sport) would be associated with introjected internalization of behavioral regulations (as indicated by the presence of feelings of internal compulsion), higher negative feelings toward parents, and lower psychological well-being. The study found that participants' perceptions of parental conditional regard were related to feelings of internal compulsion and pressure to enact behaviors, perceived parental disapproval, feeling resentful toward parents, and fluctuations in self-esteem, providing evidence in support of the person-centered proposal that parental conditional regard leads to internalization of conditions of worth that then act as determinants of the individual's behavior. This observation is supported by research by Kasser, Ryan, Zax, and Sameroff (1995), showing that teenagers who embrace materialism (an extrinsically motivated behavior) have grown up in environments characterized by an absence of parental warmth and excessive parental control.

An indication of the negative impact of conditions of worth on psychological well-being is provided by findings from a second study by Assor et al. (2004). Investigating mothers' perceptions of their own parents' use of conditional regard, the study found that subjectively estimated parental conditional regard predicted poorer psychological well-being and the adherence to more controlling parenting attitudes in the participants themselves and also predicted participants' daughters' views of their mothers as using conditional regard, providing evidence that parental conditional regard has negative consequences for psychological well-being. Furthermore, findings from studies of intrinsic versus extrinsic life aspirations strongly indicate that aspirations reflecting extrinsic goals such as financial success, appearance, and social recognition are associated with psychological ill-being (see Kasser, 2004). This relationship is evidenced by studies showing that extrinsic goal aspirations are associated with lower levels of vitality, self-actualization, and positive affect but higher levels of depression, anxiety, and narcissism (Kasser & Ryan, 1996) and lower self-esteem, more television consumption, greater drug use, and lower quality of relationships with friends and romantic partners (Kasser & Ryan, 2001). Finally, a recent study of alcohol use among

students (Neighbors, Larimer, Markman-Geisner, & Knee, 2004) used mediation analysis to demonstrate that the relationship between having a control causality orientation and drinking behavior is, at least partially, mediated by contingent self-esteem (contingent on internalized conditions of worth).

### *Hypothesis 5*

It is hypothesized that more fully functioning individuals will share common, universal, and specifiable internally generated value directions.

As previously mentioned, person-centered theory hypothesizes that individuals who are engaged in an organismically congruent process of self-actualization will share common, universal, and specifiable value directions (Rogers 1963, 1964) that are internally generated. These include valuing sensitivity to others, acceptance of others and deep relationships, and valuing openness to experience (Rogers, 1964).

*Valuing sensitivity to others, acceptance of others, and deep relationships.* Empirical evidence supports the hypothesis that intrinsically motivated individuals will move in a direction of increasing relatedness with others. According to SDT, we have a basic need for *relatedness*, defined as the urge to be in relationship with others, caring for others, and being cared for by others (Deci & Ryan, 1991). Similarly, according to person-centered theory, the self-actualizing individual is one who values sensitivity to others, acceptance of others, and deep relationships (Rogers, 1957b, 1961, 1964). Evidence supporting the hypothesis that this value direction emerges in those people who actualize in line with their OVP comes from research by Sheldon and Kasser (1995), who found that people with extrinsically oriented goals were less empathic, whereas those with an intrinsic goal orientation were more empathic and were also more likely to help friends experiencing problems. Further evidence of the association between source of motivation for behavior and experience of relatedness comes from research by Kasser and Ryan (2001), which examined the quality of participants' relationships with friends and lovers through measuring both length of relationship and other relationship variables including trust, acceptance, and jealousy. Results showed positive correlations between the quality of relationship and the importance participants placed on



intrinsic goals. A corresponding negative correlation was demonstrated between quality of relationship and the importance given to extrinsic goals.

Finally, an indication of the role of intrinsic versus extrinsic aspirations on relationships with both self and others comes from research by Kasser and Ryan (1993), which found that individuals who placed a higher value on the intrinsic aspirations of self-acceptance, affiliation, and community feeling scored relatively low on measures of control causality orientation, with the opposite being true for individuals who placed a higher value on the extrinsic aspiration of financial success.

*Valuing openness to experience.* Evidence supporting the association of this value direction with more psychologically mature and autonomous functioning has been reviewed in our consideration of therapeutic outcomes (see Knee & Zuckerman, 1996; Hodgins, Koestner, et al., 1996; Hodgins, Liebeskind, et al., 1996).

The universality of these value directions across different cultures is an area that has received less attention than it merits, and although initial findings from self-determination research lend some support to the universality assertion (see Ryan, Chirkov, Little, Sheldon, Timoshina, & Deci, 1999), research in this area is still in its infancy. Even if the evidence does point toward the universality of intrinsic values and aspirations at an implicit level, one question that will need to be addressed is whether or not the ways in which people express or realize these values and aspirations differ among cultures.

## CONCLUSION

Rogers's person-centered personality theory suggests that the path to psychological well-being involves following an innate guidance mechanism. The research reviewed in the present article, although coming from a different theoretical tradition and using different terminology, does demonstrate the existence of a strong empirical base consistent with person-centered theory. In reviewing the empirical evidence, we have considered its implications for the key hypotheses of person-centered theory. Although some of the hypotheses examined, such as the relationship of the individual's experiences of conditional regard from significant others to the introjection of conditions of worth, are supported by consistent

findings from a number of empirical studies, other hypotheses, such as the role of the OVP in the actualization process, currently have a more modest degree of empirical support, highlighting a need for further empirical studies by interested researchers. Nevertheless, all five hypotheses examined are broadly supported by the empirical findings reviewed, providing person-centered theory with a considerable addition to its evidence base.

There may also be aspects of personality development and vulnerability to psychopathology that are not fully addressed in person-centered theory. It may be argued, for instance, that negative or chaotic social-environmental conditions do not always result in negative consequences such as psychopathology and that buffering factors are not accounted for by person-centered theory. This is supported by research into resilience among children and adults who have grown up in chaotic social environments but who have avoided psychological maladjustment, managing to minimize or overcome the predicted damaging effects of adversity (see Fonagy, Steele, Steele, Higgitt, & Target, 1994; Garmezy, 1991). However, certain aspects of person-centered theory are able to account for the development of growth following adversity, as chaotic social environments may serve to break down existing conditions of worth, thus releasing the tendency toward actualization and the possibility of becoming more fully functioning (Joseph, 2004; Joseph & Linley, 2005).

Having established that person-centered theory does indeed have a considerable empirical base, it is important to consider whether Rogers's theory has anything to offer the emergent discipline of positive psychology. In this article, we have reviewed empirical evidence that demonstrates the importance of understanding the individual within his or her social environment and suggests that acting in accord with one's intrinsic, organismic needs is associated with psychological well-being, autonomous functioning, and socialized values. On the other hand, we have examined evidence supporting the assertion of both person-centered theory and SDT that the OVP becomes distorted by non-facilitative social-environmental conditions, so that the extent to which the ongoing valuing and choices of the individual remain organismically congruent becomes increasingly restricted. We are left with the unanswered question of what constitutes facilitative social-environmental conditions. Taking the definition of *conditions that facilitate intrinsic, organismically congruent, self-regulation* (e.g., Rogers, 1959; Ryan & Deci, 2000), it becomes clear that the

person-centered theory of therapy may provide us with an answer. Client-centered therapy specifies the ingredients of the psychologically facilitative climate that are thought to promote therapeutic change. These elements are congruence (or genuineness), empathy, and unconditional positive regard (or acceptance). Rogers and his coworkers identified these core conditions through years of careful naturalistic observation of the process of individual psychological change in applied therapeutic settings, and since then, a considerable body of research evidence has emerged to support the assertion that these are indeed the social-environmental conditions that support psychological growth in the context of human relationships (see Barrett-Lennard, 1998; Bozarth, 1998; Cramer, 2003; Cornelius-White, 2002; Truax & Mitchell, 1971). Whether these core conditions extend to all social-environmental contexts remains unclear, but promising indications appear from studies in contexts such as family, friendship, and couple processes; teacher-student relations; small group settings; and, to a limited degree, large group processes (see Barrett-Lennard, 1998). We argue that the person-centered theory of the facilitative conditions of therapeutic change would appear to provide us with the elements that constitute a facilitative social environment.

Finally, we propose that the metatheoretical elements of person-centered theory, and SDT, promise to provide the foundation stone for positive psychology. A similar argument is made by Linley and Joseph (2004) and by Deci and Vansteenkiste (2004), who write:

Although positive psychology researchers are working to identify factors that enhance individuals' capacities, development, and well-being, only a few . . . fully embrace and utilize this critical meta-theoretical assumption for grounding their research or building their theoretical perspectives. (p. 24)

In the present article, we have shown that person-centered theory is consistent with recent empirical research and theory in positive psychology and SDT. It is important to demonstrate this convergence of theory and evidence to address the criticism of person-centered theory that it lacks research evidence, to make explicit this evidence base for researchers and practitioners of the person-centered approach, and to call attention to the potential contribution that the metatheoretical assumptions of person-centered theory could make to positive psychology.

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