What is the Humanist Perspective?

What are the key ideas in the Humanistic perspective of personality?

Differences with the Psychoanalysts:

- Humanists focus on the healthy individual, not the individual with problems. Freud and the Neo-Freudians (Jung, Horney and Adler) studied people with problems.
- Unlike Freud who believed people are motivated by sexual and destructive urges, humanists believe people are innately good.

General Differences:

- Subjective experiences and perceptions of the self are important for understanding the individual (phenomenology), which helped lead to client-centered therapy.
- Humanists believe people are motivated by the need to grow psychologically.
  - Maslow believed people move towards self-actualization and Rogers believed that people strive to enhance themselves.

For example, their view of personality emphasizes human potential and such uniquely human characteristics such as self-awareness and freewill.

- Understanding the social context in which a person lives is important for understanding personality.
- Freud saw creativity as sublimation of sexual urges. Humanists see creativity as a human motive to
strive for self-improvement and expression—it’s good for the soul.
Rogers was impressed with his clients’ drive to grow and develop their potential. People are motivated by the actualization tendency—the innate drive to maintain and enhance the human organism.

Key ideas:
- The self (self-concept)
- Congruence
- Unconditional positive regard
- Conditional positive regard
  - Conditions of worth
- Fully-functional person
The Self-Concept

The self-concept is an organized, consistent set of perceptions and beliefs about oneself (page 481). You might think of this as a social identity. You identify yourself by your

- religious/spiritual beliefs.
- gender
- family relation
- occupation,
- hobby,
- associations (people you associate with), or
- possessions

Once we develop the self-concept (who we think we are), we try to live our lives in a way that is consistent with this self concept.
**Congruence and the Self-Concept**

Carl Rogers believes people are motivated to discover their concept and maintain a consistent and stable self-concept.

According to Roger’s the larger the gap between an individual’s self-concept (identity) and a person’s life experiences, the poorer the person’s psychological adjustment.
**Congruence and the Self-Concept**

For example, if your self-concept involves being environmentally conscious,

- a well adjusted individual would be one where they use less water, recycle, ride their bike to school and work, etc.
- a poorly adjusted individual doesn’t recycle, drives their SUV two blocks to the store, wastes water, doesn’t turn off the lights when not in use, etc.

If your self-concept involves being an avid tennis player,

- A well-adjusted person would be one…
- A poorly adjusted person would be one…
The Poorly Adjusted Individual

We may experience life in a way that is inconsistent with our self-concept. These inconsistencies can arise by many means (loss of job, group failures, false beliefs, poorly thought out decisions, etc.). These inconsistencies evoke anxiety.

According to Rogers the larger the inconsistency between who we think we are and how we experience life, the more anxiety we may experience.

To deal with these inconsistencies, we can
- change their self-concept, or
- change your behavior and experiences to match their self-concept
- distort reality

Distorting reality require the use of a lot “psychological energy” that detracts from our ability to live a healthy life. People who choose to deny or distort their experiences (“twist reality”) to perceive consistency can lead to self-defeating behavior and lead to maladjustment and further inconsistencies in our self-concept and experiences.
**Fully Functional People**

When a person feels that they can behave in a way that is consistent with their self-concept, they are psychologically adjusted. They do not feel they expend psychological resources to deny or distort their experiences.

When the person’s experience is congruent with his/her self-concept, the person becomes psychologically healthy and a fully functional person. They are psychologically healthy.

Rogers define a fully functional person as one who has flexible, constantly evolving self-concept. Fully functional people are:

- realistic
- open to new experiences
- capable of changing in response to new experiences
- more likely to be creative
- spontaneous
- their sense of self is consistent with their emotions and experiences
- enjoy harmonious relations with others

Conditional positive regard and conditions of worth can move you away from being a fully functional person, while unconditional positive regard can move you toward being a fully functional person.
Carl Rogers: Conditional Positive Regard

Conditional positive regard: The sense that you will be valued and loved only if you behave in a way that is acceptable to others; conditional love or acceptance.

For example, a person may feel uncomfortable if their parents only accept them if they pick a certain religious view, boyfriend/girlfriend, occupation and have children.

- With **conditional positive regard**, a person is uncomfortable to express their feelings and disagreements for fear of being rejected by someone they look up to—they learn to deny or distort their genuine feelings and can lead to inconsistencies in behavior.
- The self-concept is largely based on the evaluation of others, not your own evaluation. The person perceives behaviors as acceptable only if they meet with the approval of others. The motivations for your attitudes and behavior are external, rather than internal.
- Conditions of worth are created when people not behaviors are evaluated.
  - For example, you are accepted as long as you become a toymaker like your parents. We don’t accept you as a dentist.
Carl Rogers: Unconditional Positive Regard

Unconditional positive regard: The sense that you will be valued and loved even if you don’t conform to the standards or expectations of others; unconditional love or acceptance.

- With unconditional positive regard, a person is comfortable in expressing their feelings and disagreements with others without fear of not being accepted by someone they look up to. For example, you are accepted as a part of the family regardless of what you choose to do as a career.

When your feelings become denied, there is incongruence between your self-concept and the experience of your self-concept. Rogers did not advocate permissive parenting. You can disapprove of a child’s behavior, but not reject the child.
Carl Rogers: Unconditional Positive Regard

Rogers did not advocate permissive parenting. You can disapprove of a child’s behavior, but not reject the child.

Driving 100 m.p.h. can be dangerous to yourself and others around you. What are some possible options for disapproving of the this boy’s behavior, but not rejecting him?

You might have responses such as I understand your decision, but I disagree with it. You reject the behavior, but accept the person. E.g. Speeding in a school zone is stupid versus you are stupid driver.
Abraham Maslow

Human motives are arranged in a hierarchy of needs. As a human need, we strive to achieve self-actualization. However, in order to achieve self-actualization, needs at the bottom of the hierarchy must be satisfied first. The social environment has a strong effect on the development of self-actualization. It is difficult for the poor to satisfy self-actualization and esteem needs if safety and physiological needs are not met. Also see chapter 10 (Emotion and Motivation).

Self-actualized people:
- Realistically perceive themselves, others, and external reality.
- Are spontaneous, natural, and open in their behavior and thoughts.
- Easily accept themselves and others as they are.
- Focus on problems outside the self.
- Have a strong need for privacy and independence.
- Continue to enjoy and appreciate positive aspects of everyday life.
- Tend to be creative.
College men and women who scored higher on a test of self-actualization were:

- more likely to report being truly in love with at least one other person during the past three years than students who scored lower. The latter students reported not having been intimately involved with anyone.
- were less resentful to their former lovers than those who were less actualizing when their relationship had broken up.
Problems and Weaknesses with the Humanist Perspective

(1) Humanistic motives ignore other factors such as incentives, biological factors and situational factors.
(2) Humanistic theories are too optimistic. It has difficulties accounting for destructive behavior.
(3) Humanistic claims, concepts and motives are too vague to be assessed. Like the psychoanalytic perspective, it is based on clinical observations, rather than empirical research.
   o How do you assess when someone is self-actualized?
   o How do you assess a self-concept?
   o How do you assess whether a self-concept is congruent?
(4) If the actualization tendency is universal, then why is it difficult to find people who are self-actualized?

Contributions of the Humanist Perspective

(1) Promoted the scientific study of healthy individuals and creativity.
(2) Subjective experience and self-concept have become important concepts in the understanding of personality.