UNIT 3  HUMANISTIC AND
EXISTENTIAL
PSYCHOLOGY

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3.0  INTRODUCTION
In the former Unit, you were informed about the biological theories of psychology, the present unit will try to explain the humanistic and existential theories. Unlike the biological theories, the humanistic and existential theories focus on human growth and the value of life. Abraham Maslow and Carl Rogers are the two important proponents of humanistic approach. In this section, the major concepts of humanistic and existential theories will be dealt in detail.

3.1  OBJECTIVES
With the help of this Unit, you will be able:
- to understand the concept and framework of Humanistic theories;
- to explain the Rogers’ person centered theory;
- to elucidate the Maslow’s theory of hierarchy of needs; and
- to describe the concept of existentialism.
3.2 HUMANISTIC PSYCHOLOGY

The school of humanistic psychology developed as an alternative to behaviourism and psychoanalysis. Humanistic psychologists considered that individuals are governed by their own values and choices, not entirely by the environment, as behaviourists think, or by unconscious drives, as psychoanalysts believe. The goal of humanistic psychology is to help people function effectively and fulfill their own unique potential. The proponents of this approach include American psychologists- Carl R. Rogers and Abraham H. Maslow. The theories propounded by Rogers and Maslow under the vicinity of the school of Humanistic psychology will be explained to you sequentially.

3.3 PERSON CENTERED THEORY

This theory was developed by Carl Rogers. The basic assumption of his theory is that every human being is naturally inclined to fulfil his/her own needs. All human beings have the natural potential for love, creativity and meaning.

The theorist deliberated upon the uniqueness of every human being. He believed that every human being has a subjective perception about oneself. This is termed as the self-concept. There are basically two concepts of self. One is what the person believes himself to be. The second one what he would aspire to be or the ideal-self. When there is congruence between the real (self image and experiences) and the ideal self, then the person is well-adjusted and functional and psychological disorders occur when there is a mismatch between the two.

He also believed that all human behaviour is motivated by one single positive force and termed it as self-actualization. This is the tendency to preserve and enhance oneself. Childhood experiences are important in determining this process. As soon as a child becomes aware of him/herself, he/she automatically develops the need for positive regard. This positive regard is based on the affection and approval from important people in the child’s life, particularly the parents. The positive regard received from parents or an important person is based on the conditions that the parents or environment impose on the child. These conditions are termed as conditions of worth. They determine which of the child’s experiences are “good” or “bad”. If the conditions of worth are few and reasonable then child will be open to new experiences and learn. If these are unreasonable and too many, then it will impede the child’s personal growth and affect self-actualization. This has been suggested as being the cause of abnormal behaviour. He utilised his thought in to a therapy. He suggested the concept of unconditional positive regard. This involves a warm and accepting atmosphere with respect and approval of the client’s needs and imposing no conditions of worth. Keeping the concept of unconditional positive regard as a major factor, he proposed a ‘Client Centred Therapy’.

3.3.1 Roger’s Theory – Important Concepts

It is worthy to mention the facts proposed by Rogers towards people whom he believed are basically good or healthy; he perceived mental health as the
normal progression of life, and mental illness, criminality, and other human problems, as distortions of that natural tendency. The entire theory is built on a single force of life which he calls *actualizing tendency*. It can be defined as the built-in motivation present in every life-form to develop its potentials to the fullest. The human beings strive to make the very best of their existence.

Rogers opined that organisms know what is good for them. Evolution has provided them with the senses, the tastes, the discriminations they need. When an organism is hungry, it finds food – not just any food, but food that tastes good. This is called *organismic valuing*.

Among the many things that a person instinctively values is *positive regard*, which has been termed for things like love, affection, attention, and nurturance, and so on by Rogers. Babies need love and attention and may fail to thrive without it. By the term-*conditional positive regard*, Rogers meant that an individual gets Positive regard “on condition.” He further stated that a person values *positive self-regard* (self-esteem, self-worth, a positive self-image) and this is achieved by experiencing the positive regard others show over years of growing up.

**Incongruity**: The aspect of a person’s being that is founded in the actualizing tendency, follows organismic valuing needs and receives positive regard and self-regard, Rogers calls the *real self*. When he/she is forced to live with conditions of worth that are out of step with organismic valuing, and receive only conditional positive regard and self-regard, he/she develops an *ideal self*. By ideal, Rogers suggested something which is not real, something that is always out of a person’s reach, the standard he/she can not meet.

This gap between the real self and the ideal self, the “I am” and the “I should” is called *incongruity*. The greater the gap between the real and ideal self, the more is the incongruity. This increase in incongruity increases the suffering of the concerned person. In fact, incongruity is essentially what Rogers means by *neurosis*.

Rogers further explained the *concept of defenses*. According to him when a person is in a situation where there is an incongruity between his/her image of him/herself and his/her immediate experience (i.e. between the ideal and the real self), that person is in a *threatening situation*. For example, if a person has been taught to feel unworthy on not getting A’s on all tests, and he/she is not really a very good student, then the tests will bring that incongruity to light – tests will be very threatening. When a threatening situation is expected, person will feel *anxiety*. Anxiety is a signal indicating that there is trouble ahead and that situation should be avoided. One way to avoid the situation, of course, is to run away from the situation. Since that is not usually an option in life, instead of running physically, a person runs psychologically, by using *defenses*.

He also explained concept of *perceptual distortion* which is reinterpretation of the situation so that it appears less threatening. It is very similar to Freud’s rationalization. For example, a student threatened by tests and grades may, for example, blame the professor for poor teaching, trick questions, and bad attitude.

Rogers also has a partial explanation for *psychosis*. Psychosis occurs when a person’s defenses are overwhelmed, and his/her sense of self becomes...
shattered into little disconnected pieces. His/her behaviour likewise shows little consistency to it and has psychotic breaks, episodes of bizarre behaviour. His/her words may make little sense, emotions may be inappropriate and may lose the ability to differentiate between self and non-self.

3.3.2 The Fully-functioning Person

Rogers describes a healthy person as fully-functioning, and has following qualities:

- **Openness to experience.** This is the opposite of defensiveness. It is the accurate perception of one’s experiences in the world. It also means being able to accept reality, including one’s feelings. Feelings are an important part of openness and convey organismic valuing.

- **Existential living.** It is living in the here-and-now. Rogers insists that the present is the only reality a person has. However, this does not mean that he/she should not learn from the past and not plan or day dream about the future. The focus should be on recognizing the memories and dreams as experienced in the moment and reflect on them.

- **Organismic trusting.** A person should allow him/herself to be guided by the organismic valuing process and should trust him/herself, do what he/she feels right, what comes naturally. In other words, organismic trusting shows that a person is in contact with the actualizing tendency.

- **Experiential freedom.** Rogers proposes that it is irrelevant whether or not people really have free will. The fully-functioning person acknowledges that feeling of freedom, and takes responsibility for his/her choices.

- **Creativity.** If a person feels free and responsible, he/she will act accordingly, and participate in the world. A fully functioning person, in touch with actualization, will feel obliged by his/her nature to contribute to the actualization of others, even life itself. This can be through creativity in the arts or sciences, through social concern and parental love, or simply by doing one’s best at one’s job. Creativity as Rogers uses it is very close to Erikson’s generativity.

3.3.3 Therapy

Carl Rogers made tremendous contributions to therapy. His therapy has gone through a couple of name changes along the way. He originally called it non-directive, because he felt that the therapist should not lead the client, but rather be there for the client while the client directs the progress of the therapy. As he became more experienced, he realized that, as non-directive as he was, he still influenced his client. In other words, clients look to therapists for guidance, and will find it even when the therapist is trying not to guide.

So he changed the name to client-centered. He still felt that the client was the one who should be saying what is wrong, find ways of improving, and determine the conclusion of therapy.

Nowadays, though the terms non-directive and client-centered are still used, most people just call it Rogerian therapy. One of the phrases used by Rogers to describe his therapy is “supportive, not reconstructive,” and he uses the analogy of learning to ride a bicycle to explain. When you help a child to learn
to ride a bike, you cannot just tell him/her how. He/she has to try it for him/herself. And you cannot hold the child up the whole time either. There comes a point when you have to let him/her go. If the child falls, he/she falls, but if you continue to hang on, he/she will never learn. It is the same way in therapy. If therapist is helping the client to achieve independence (autonomy, freedom with responsibility), then it will not be achieved till he/she remains dependent on the therapist. The client has to try his/her own insights in real life beyond the therapist’s office. An authoritarian approach to therapy may seem to work marvellously at first, but ultimately it only creates a dependent person.

In Rogerian therapy, technique of reflection is used. Reflection is the mirroring of emotional communication e.g. if client says “I feel upset!” the therapist may reflect this back to the client by saying something like “So, life’s getting you down?” By doing this, the therapist is communicating to him/her that he/she is indeed listening and cares enough to understand. The therapist is also letting him/her know what the client is trying to communicate. However, reflection must be used carefully. Many beginning therapists use it without thinking (or feeling), and just repeat every other phrase that comes out of the client’s mouth. Reflection must come from the heart – it must be genuine and congruent.

Rogers believed very firmly that a therapist, in order to be effective, must have three qualities:

**Congruence** – genuineness, honesty with the client.

**Empathy** – the ability to feel what the client feels.

**Respect** – acceptance, unconditional positive regard towards the client.

According to him, these qualities are **necessary and sufficient**. If the therapist shows these three qualities, the client will improve, even if no other special techniques are used. If the therapist does not show these qualities, the client’s improvement will be minimal, no matter how many techniques are used.

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**Self Assessment Questions 1**

**Fill in the blanks:**

1) *Non-directive* refers to a process in which the therapist leads the client and directs the progress of the therapy ...............  .

2) Rogers insists that the present is the only reality a person has............ .........................................  .

3) Rogers’ therapy is supportive and not reconstructive................................. ........................................  .

4) The gap between the real self and the ideal self is called congruity...... .................  .

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**3.4 MASLOW’S THEORY**

Maslow’s theory is based on similar premise as Roger’s theory. He considered all human beings as basically good, rational and social. His focus is on the optimistic and positive side of human nature, in contrast to the earlier...
Maslow’s contribution is the concept of hierarchy of needs. He proposed that there are five levels of needs that must be met in the process of development and self-actualization. He explained human motives or needs by arranging them in a hierarchy. This hierarchical arrangement of needs is made in ascending order according to potency and priority of unsatisfied human needs and has different levels.

However, an individual’s stand in this hierarchy is determined by either deficiency-oriented (D behaviour) or growth-oriented behaviour (G behaviour). The person who is deficiency-oriented is one whose basic needs have not yet been satisfied and who is oriented towards achieving satisfaction and eliminating deficiency. The person who is growth-oriented is the one whose basic needs have been satisfied and who is motivated towards self-actualisation.

At the first level are the physiological needs. They are the most basic aspects of human motivation. The first level is the need to satisfy biological needs such as hunger, thirst, sex, physical comfort and survival. These needs pertain to conditions which are essential for maintaining life. Once these needs are satisfied the second level needs emerge and gain importance. The second level is of the safety needs, which looks for a stable and predictable environment. It constitutes desire for security, protection and freedom from danger. On the whole these feelings pertain to the individual’s desires to attain a stable and secure environment.
When these needs are satisfied, *the third level* needs emerge; they are love and the feeling of belonging. These needs motivate the individual to have friends, companions, a family and identification with different groups. As these needs are satisfied, *self-esteem need* emerges. This involves the desire for respect, confidence and admiration from others as well as oneself.

*At the highest level*, it is the desire to utilise one’s personal capacities, to develop one’s potential to the fullest and to engage in activities for which one is well suited. This level is called ‘self-actualisation’.

### Table 3.1: Demonstration of Needs at different hierarchical level

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Serial No.</th>
<th>Needs</th>
<th>Characteristic Features</th>
<th>Example</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1)</td>
<td>Biological and Physiological needs</td>
<td>Desire for comfort and survival of human beings.</td>
<td>air, food, water, shelter, warmth, sex and sleep</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2)</td>
<td>Safety needs</td>
<td>Desire for security, protection and seclusion of human beings.</td>
<td>protection, privacy, security, order, law, stability, freedom from fear.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3)</td>
<td>Love and belongingness needs</td>
<td>Desire for gaining acceptance in family, group and society.</td>
<td>friendship, intimacy, affection and love, - from work group, family, friends, romantic relationships.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4)</td>
<td>Esteem needs</td>
<td>Desire for gaining expertise, self respect and respect in society.</td>
<td>achievement, mastery, independence, status, dominance, prestige, self-respect, respect from others.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5)</td>
<td>Self-Actualization needs</td>
<td>A stage of seeking personal growth and desire to be part of the surrounding world and appreciate it.</td>
<td>realizing one’s own potential, self-fulfillment, and peak experiences.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### 3.4.1 Motivation Psychology and Abnormal Psychology

In this hierarchy, it is assumed that the lower level need dominates a person until that level is fairly satisfied; then the next one emerges and then the next one and so on. However, Maslow explains that every individual does not ascend this hierarchy step-by-step; exceptions do arise. An individual sometimes risks his life to save someone else or to save a valued object by defying his own safety needs. Sometimes individuals reject love, family, friends, another by committing suicide, thus defying the needs of love and the sense of belonging. Often people remain at a certain level, being content without moving up in the hierarchy.

The hierarchy, however, does not imply that needs at lower level become dormant once they are satisfied and the needs at higher level become active. In any individual at any time, all the needs are active. The changes, which occur, refer to the potency or capacity of the different kinds of needs to motivate behaviour. Thus, basic needs like hunger and thirst cease to be powerful motivators of behaviour once they have been satisfied to a certain degree. This means, from a practical point of view, every category of needs has a limited capacity to motivate behaviour. Beyond this point of limitation, it is necessary for us to involve needs at higher level to motivate action.
3.5 CRITICISM OF THE HUMANISTIC MODEL

Since each coin has two sides, the other side of the theories of humanistic psychology has its critics. The humanistic theories have been criticised for being overoptimistic about mankind in general. The humanists display immense faith in the inherent goodness of man. If behaviourism is considered too cold and psychoanalysis too pessimistic, then the humanism is too unrealistic. Maslow’s theory has been accused of being too idealistic, looking at only the healthy side of man and totally ignoring the unhealthy side. Also, it is not necessary that the series of the hierarchy be felt or followed by every individual of this world. Human behaviour is a combination of healthy and unhealthy behaviour and unhealthy behaviour needs to be explained.

Self Assessment Questions 2
Fill in the blanks:
1) The first level is the need to satisfy biological needs such ............... .................................................................
2) In this hierarchy, it is assumed that .................................................................
3) Self actualisation is a stage ..........................................................................
4) The humanistic theories have been criticised for being..........................

3.6 EXISTENTIALISM

The starting point of existential philosophy can be traced back to the nineteenth century in the works of Kierkegaard and Nietzsche. Both were in conflict with the predominant ideologies of their time and committed themselves to the exploration of reality as it can be experienced in a passionate and personal manner. Existentialism believes that although humans are essentially alone in the world, they always desire to be connected to others. People want to have meaning in one another’s lives, but ultimately they must realize that they cannot depend on others for validation, and with that realization they finally acknowledge and understand that they are fundamentally alone. The result of this revelation is anxiety due to the knowledge that our validation must come from within and not from others.

There is no existential personality theory which divides humanity into types or reduces people to part components. Instead there is a description of the different levels of experience and existence with which people are inevitably confronted. The way in which a person is in the world at a particular stage can be charted on this general map of human existence. One can distinguish four basic dimensions of human existence: the physical, the social, the psychological and the spiritual. On each of these dimensions, people encounter the world and shape their attitude out of their particular understanding of their experience. Their orientation towards the world defines their reality. The four dimensions are interwoven and provide a complex four-dimensional force field for their existence. Individuals are stretched between a positive pole of what they aspire to on each dimension and a negative pole of what they fear.
3.7 LET US SUM UP

In a nutshell, we can sum up from the above discussion that according to the humanistic model, a person is not a mere combination of different systems but a single entity consisting of many part functions. Further, the humanistic theories have been accepted in our modern world because it attempts to view man as a man and not as an animal or machine. It is also to be mentioned that, the Humanistic theories believe that human beings are good and therefore optimistic in its views. Existentialism uses a philosophical approach to explain about the consciousness within an individual such as the relationships, acts, memories, feelings, thoughts, fantasies, images, and events and so on, which we experience in our everyday lives.

3.8 ANSWERS TO SELF ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS

Self Assessment Questions 1

1) False
2) True
3) True
4) False

Self Assessment Questions 2

1) Hunger, thirst, sex, physical comfort and survival.
2) The lower level dominates a person until that level is fairly satisfied.
3) Of seeking personal growth and desire to be part of the surrounding world and appreciate it.
4) Overoptimistic about mankind in general.

3.9 UNIT END QUESTIONS

1) What is the basic premise of person centered theory?
2) What is positive self regard?
3) What is the basic assumption underlying Maslow’s theory?
4) What is self actualization?
5) Explain the term fully functioning person.
6) Describe existentialism.

3.10 REFERENCES


Websites:
http://www.simplypsychology.org/maslow.html accessed on 30/4/15