

Conditions of Worth

Conditions of worth explained

Conditions of Worth are **conditions we believe we have to meet to gain acceptance, love or positive regard from others**.

As children, we quickly learn what behaviours please parents, caregivers, teachers, friendship groups and society in general.

Eventually, these become **introjected values** - internalised ways of behaving based on the expectations of others. These expectations may eventually clash with our individual world views, which may lead to unhappiness, depression or anxiety.

An example of conditions of worth

As a child, Johnny believes that if he does well in school, he is a better person and worth more.

This belief is then reinforced by others, like teachers and parents, who praise Johnny for his excellent work and tell him how clever he is.

Johnny believes that when he performs well academically, he is more valuable as a person. He is measuring his own self-worth based on how well he does in a test. This is an example of how a condition of worth is formed.

The trouble with measuring self in this way is that if Johnny does not do well, he may view himself as being less worthy. He is also measuring himself against an **external locus of evaluation**, how other people expect him to behave.

Internal or external locus of evaluation

If a person is operating from an internal locus of evaluation, then they trust their own instincts – that is, they use their organismic valuing process.

However, **many people operate from an external locus of evaluation**; this means that they **introject the values of others**, often parents or significant others, through **conditions of worth acquired in childhood**.

'People often judge themselves according to whether others find them acceptable or wanting' (Tolan, 2003: 5). The culture can also be a key source of introjected values.

There are probably very few people who manage always to operate through an internal locus of evaluation, but this becomes increasingly feasible as they progress through the seven stages of process.

But just as it is common for a person to operate sometimes from an internal and sometimes from an external locus of evaluation at different times, depending on what else is going on for them, so it is natural to oscillate between the stages of process to an extent.

Therapy can help to increase people's ability to operate from an internal locus of evaluation.

Quick summary

- Internal Locus of evaluation = *How much we trust and value our view of self.*
- External Locus of evaluation = *How much we trust and value how others view us.*

Some conditions of worth: 'If I am to be of value, I must...':

- work hard
- please others
- not cry
- not get angry
- not show any weakness
- be quiet
- do as I am told

Use of the term

Conditions of worth is a theory by Carl Rogers, the father of Person-Centred Therapy.

Rogers recognised that external factors could affect how we value, or measure, our self-worth based on our ability to meet certain conditions we believe are essential.

Rogers (1959: 209) introduced and explained conditions of worth as follows:

"The self-structure is characterized by a condition of worth when a self-experience or set of related self-experiences is either avoided or sought solely because the individual discriminates it as being less or more worthy of self-regard. ... A condition of worth arises when the positive regard of a significant other is conditional, when the individual feels that in some respects he is prized and in others not. Gradually this same attitude is assimilated into his own self-regard complex, and he values an experience positively or negatively solely because of these conditions of worth which he has taken over from others, not because the experience enhances or fails to enhance his organism"

When conditions of worth are acquired?

Conditions of worth are usually acquired in childhood:

'Conditions of worth are transmitted to the child, who learns that s/he is acceptable or lovable if s/he behaves, thinks and feels in certain ways.' (Tolan, 2003: 4)

We may be surrounded by this from birth, giving the message: 'Comply if you want to be viewed as worthy of being loved.'

Conditions of worth include rules that govern values, beliefs and behaviours – if we break these rules, we expect to receive disapproval and rejection. They become part of our self-concept, and **we accept them as the truth rather than as an opinion.**

Conditions of worth can be very subtle and so extremely powerful, and they may not be obvious to us.

How can we move away from conditions of worth?

The process of leaving behind conditions of worth and beginning to operate as our real selves includes moving away from facades, away from 'oughts' and 'shoulds', and away from pleasing others.

As receiving the **core conditions** enables us to identify and reject conditions of worth that are unhelpful, we move towards self-direction, openness to experience, a greater trust in self, and a greater respect for and understanding of others.

When Rogers (1959) sought to identify the characteristics of an actualized person, these included: **'Have no conditions of worth and experience unconditional self-regard'** (Merry, 2014: 40).

Accepting ourselves requires a movement towards being able to recognise – and ultimately reject – conditions of worth, moving towards using our own **organismic valuing process**.

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