

This case study dissertation has been written by me as a partial contribution towards an MA in Humanistic Person-centred Psychotherapy. The other part of this award constitutes an audio tape transcript of a therapy session and commentary. I am especially interested in how person-centred therapy, fathered by the late Carl Rogers' (1902-1987), associates to shame and self-identity. To enable me to explore my interest with consistency and depth I have chosen the same client for both pieces of work. For ease of reference a glossary of terms², footnotes, figures, appendices, individual references and a bibliography are included.

Rogers' held a fundamental belief in the potential value and goodness of human beings and that if offered the six necessary and sufficient conditions integrating contact, empathy, congruence and unconditional positive regard in relationship a person³ would move towards self-actualisation. Self-actualisation is the highest, holistic intention of our deepest part. It is the pinnacle of Maslow's (1908-70) hierarchy of needs and is akin to authenticity, "that self who I truly am" (Spinelli, 1989).

Section 5 (this work) examines some of the contemporary psychotherapeutic literature on shame and goes on to explore the relationship between shame and self-identity in parallel with person-centred theory as presented in Chapter Seven and Eight of Mearns & Thorne (2000).

According to Mearns & Thorne, (2000, Ch 7), a person experiencing moderate conditions of worth could create "configurations of self" connected to their organismic self/self-identity⁴. The subceived (un)spoken message in such relationships is, "I will love you if you are....quiet....obedient....placid....not angry etc.," With the hope of being loved, consciously or unconsciously, the person complies and creates an "as if" inauthentic self-identity which is incongruent with their organismic self and may be distanced or severed from their organismic experience. The extent and degree of this creativity will occur in direct proportion to the received conditions of worth.

² For ease of reference, certain terms will be footnoted in addition to being listed in the glossary.

³ Person — a term for a person of any age, in relationship with another.

⁴ Self / Self-identity — Please see Section 3 for a fuller definition.

According to Warner in Mearns & Thorne, (2000, Ch8), a person experiencing physical and/or sexual trauma could create “configurations of self” severed from their organismic self at least in some or all aspects of themselves. Such a person could have little trust in their own experiencing and internal locus of evaluation.

While Chapter Eight (Mearns & Thorne, 2000) focuses on physical and/or sexual trauma my focus in this dissertation is on exploring the effect of the emotional trauma on self-identity, of internalised shame created in interpersonal relationship (Kaufman, 1989).

Thus, section 5 (this work) explores:

- the relationship between self-identity and configurations of self created in an, “I will love you if...” relationship;
- the relationship between self-identity and configurations of self created in a shaming, “I won’t love you no matter what you do” relationship; and
- the relationship, if any, between both of the fore-going.

I believe that self-identity is inextricably linked with interpersonal worth and shame and in both cases (un)conscious internalised shame will result in parts being severed from a person’s experience but with the dominance of conditions of shame over conditions of worth, the self-identity could develop to be more bound to deficiency, to shame.

I agree with Warner in (Mearns & Thorne, 2000) where she explicitly says that shame plays a prominent part in fragile process⁵ while implicitly mentioning shame as co-existing with the arising of dissociated process,

“almost exclusively as a response to early childhood trauma... whatever their attachment histories.” (ibid, p. 158).

⁵ Process — See Appendix 2 and Glossary of Terms

While I agree that dissociated process can arise through trauma, my focus is on "attachment" experiences which are sufficiently traumatic in themselves to create fragile and/or dissociated process. "Attachment histories" provide an (in)secure base from which to form an interpersonal self-identity and are linked to Rogers' (1959) conditions of worth and to internalised shame which is created interpersonally (Kaufman, 1989).

Since value, worth, low⁶ self-esteem⁷, worthlessness⁸, and shame⁹ mean different things to different people, I work phenomenologically and heuristically with each individual person and stay close to what these words mean to them. I believe that valuing in relationship is inherent in Rogers' (1959) six necessary and sufficient conditions which can be the effective antidote to conditions of worth (ibid) and internalised shame (Kaufman, 1989) enabling the organismic self-identity to self-actualise. My belief is supported by Nathanson (1994),

"When Carl Rogers taught us to treat the patient within an atmosphere of "unconditional positive regard," he was creating a counter-shaming attitude. All of the regulations about the nature of "privileged communication" are veiled references to the importance of shame within the therapeutic encounter." (ibid, p. 319).

⁶ **Low** - adjective - Below average in amount, extent or intensity. Less good than is expected or desired. OED

⁷ **Self-esteem** - noun - Confidence in one's own worth or abilities; self-respect.

Esteem - verb - to respect. OED

⁸ **Worth** - noun - The value of the person under consideration.

Worthy - adjective - Deserving of effort, attention or respect.

Worthless - adjective - Having no real value or use. OED

⁹ **Shame** - noun - A painful feeling of humiliation. A loss of respect or esteem.

Shame - verb - To make someone feel ashamed.