

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF INDIVIDUAL CREATIVITY FOR PSYCHOTHERAPY

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A new interest and emphasis upon creativity and mental health, as related to individual, personalistic psychology, is now beginning to appear with increasing frequency in the current stream of psychological thought. Conceptions of mental health as a positive, self-fulfilling force and of personality as a unified and consistent organization of experience are becoming more evident in recent publications.¹ Many disciplines, arts, and schools of psychiatric, psychological, and philosophic thought seem to be converging (and all at one point in time) upon the understanding of mental health and creativity in positive terms. The fact that so many people from different fields are arriving independently at similar theoretical conclusions seems to prove their significance more effectively than any argument could.

The present paper is one aspect of the continuing exploration into the meaning and significance of mental health in terms of creativity. It attempts to express certain views of creativity, to discuss the unique individual's relationship to society, and to point out limitations in traditional evaluations of psychotherapy.

CREATIVITY

When we use the word creativity in this paper we refer to a process of individual experience which is unique and real, and enhances the self and others. It is an expression of personal being and integrity which is one aspect of the actualization of the personality. Creativity, for us, does not imply the creation of artistic forms or scientific knowledge even though the process of individual experience may eventuate in esthetic products. Since we are referring to a process of experience, creativity cannot be measured or evaluated. It is inherent in the individual's unique pattern of perception. It can be known directly through participation in an interhuman experience, but it is often unrecognized by others.

Creativity as we see it involves trust, respect, mutual confidence, and the enhancement of others. In this sense it always has positive

¹See list of readings appended to MOUSTAKAS, C. E. Self-explorations of teachers in a seminar in interpersonal relations. *J. Indiv. Psychol.*, 1957, 13, 72-93.

social value. On the other hand, it is not at all identical with social conformity and may actually be contrary and inconsistent with those social conventions which violate the integrity and dignity of the individual. The individual is not creative when he perceives or behaves in an unusual way in order to manipulate, trap, or punish others, but he is creative and honors others by perceiving or behaving in terms of his real experience even though this may set him apart and cause him to be labeled as peculiar.

Truly creative experience is the expression of the whole person who is in unity with the world of objects and persons. It exists as personal insight, exploration, and discovery in the context of existential being. True creativity is immanent existence in a world of becoming. It is always vivid and imaginative and wells up as the pervasive reality of the person.

The individual is born as a totally creative person whose world may continually open and expand. However, when society limits, defines, and categorizes the person, it alienates him from his potentialities so that he must struggle to find his real self and to express his creativity.

Creativity cannot be taught or given to another person; it is the individual's unique heritage. Human presence and understanding, however, do foster individual exploration, encourage personal insight and self-discovery, and permit the expression of the individual's creativity. In such an atmosphere, the person expands and grows in the stream of his experience.

RELATIONSHIP TO SOCIETY

In the positive view of mental health, individual and interhuman values are not at odds. The individual who truly loves himself cannot destroy others or hurt them without destroying himself. He can only love others as he does himself. The individual who flourishes as a truly creative person enhances his personal self and in turn creates social values and social health; that is, he frees others to be themselves and to develop their potentialities. The creative person is not interested in changing others, as such, but only in expressing what he must express in accordance with his intrinsic nature and his experience. Though he is not motivated to influence others, through his own creativity he enables others to trust their own perceptions.

Man who is at one with the world has a basic urge to develop and realize himself and through himself to enrich the world. This is the

basis for the development of all ethical values. The person's striving to express his creativity is the positive and healthy essence of personality. Different individuals may express this in different ways, in variations and unique patterns; but the presence of such intrinsic creativity is the incomparable given of all human nature.

In the American society the individual often gropes with two aspects of a basic conflict: the struggle to become a self-fulfilling person, and the need for social recognition and approval. While every person wants to be accepted and valued, the threat of ostracism and rejection often forces the individual away from truly creative expression which is necessary for his own personal growth. Many persons fail to remain free and develop true self-insight when forced to respond to social demands and to others, at the expense of their own self-responsiveness.

LIMITS OF TRADITIONAL EVALUATIONS OF PSYCHOTHERAPY

In the American society, the view of creativity as the essence of mental health is generally not recognized. We have developed certain ideals and social values which we regard as common. The person described as healthy is the one who accepts these values and who strives to adapt himself to social expectations. Thus, from the traditional view, health is measured in terms of the presence of standards and norms and the absence of symptoms. This approach to health encourages the individual to accede to the standards of others and to become comparable. Thus he distorts his incomparable nature. The person who has values which differ with those commonly held is often regarded as sick, even when these differences arise from his own creative uniqueness.

The approach developed in this society to bring about an adjustment in the individual which he has been unable to achieve for himself is called psychotherapy. It often focuses on parts, elements, or aspects of the individual which need to be corrected or removed. Segments of behavior are isolated, studied, and analyzed. Therapeutic measures often consist of classifying the individual in broad categories with much use of "dynamics and systems" but with little valuing of the experiencing person. The point of view which ignores the existence of unique experience in the development of the healthy personality does not consider or recognize creativity.

Success in psychotherapy is evaluated on the basis of attainment of standards and norms, and removal of symptoms rather than the recognition of the creative and unique strengths of the individual.

Assessment of the individual is often made by objective tests, using the average person as a frame of reference. The average then becomes the ideal. Attempts to avoid the concept of average by employing projective methods and self-ratings, also have failed to touch the creative experience of the individual. Concepts of the perceived and ideal self *as measured* are externalized reflections and categorizations, that is, objectified views of the self, taken out of the personal context and expressed within the framework of outside social values and ideals. Thus, progress in psychotherapy is measured in terms of the individual becoming more like others, i.e., in conforming, rather than in the individual realizing more fully his creative human potentials.

When the person maintains his individuality throughout therapy and does not adapt to external expectations, therapy is regarded as a failure. Study of the therapeutic process has frequently meant the search for changes in the individual and the ignoring of substantial, meaningful, unyielding, and consistent positive forces within the person. The usual process of therapy ignores the individual's own search for self-actualization. To the extent that psychotherapy evaluates the individual on the basis of fixed societal values and standards, it reinforces what the person is already experiencing in society, that is, an inability to find a way to real self-expression and fulfillment of potentiality. Often the person must struggle in therapy to keep from submerging himself in a world of conventionality and of adjustment.

A CASE

We would like to present some excerpts from the case of a person who is described as "a 'failure' in psychotherapy."² The author draws upon external evidence and upon the client's sorting of conventionalized value judgments of himself to indicate that this client did not change significantly in the direction predicted by clinical theory, and that the therapeutic process failed to bring about "health and adjustment." He presents excerpts from the interview transcripts to corroborate the clinical judgment that the person did not make significant "gains" in personality integration.

For us, these excerpts represent an individual's struggle for recognition of his inner experience and for society's acceptance of him

²These excerpts are taken from a case study by C. R. Rogers in C. R. ROGERS & ROSALIND F. DYMOND (Eds.), *Psychotherapy and personality change*. Chicago, Ill.: Univer. Chicago Press, 1954. Pp. 349-409.

as a unique person. Viewing health in terms of creativity, this client cannot be regarded as a failure. He comes to recognize the pain, confusion and conflict of his relation to society as inevitable if he is to maintain his inner sense of truth. He realizes that he cannot change without alienating himself from himself nor can he change his society. Therefore, he sees that the conflict or ambivalence between his self and his society is not something he can remove or deny but rather a conflict with which he must live.

Fourth interview. C.: (Long pause) and then sometimes I (pause), I don't know if this makes sense, but . . . sometimes I just feel that . . . I want to exist, so to speak, completely . . . within myself, I mean, within . . . without any . . . normal social intercourse, and then . . . but when I feel like that I (sighs), I sort of feel sorry for myself. And then I become sorta depressed. And then (sighs) at other times I feel that I don't want to exist within myself at all because it . . . brings sort of agony or torment or sort of mental . . . hardships. And then I just want to . . . indulge in complete . . . normal . . . social . . . relationships, and I don't want at all to exist within myself, but (sighs) well, then I become . . . then I feel it's that somewhat . . . I mean I feel that's good

C.: Yeah. I mean, I know . . . I mean, rationally, I know that . . . as I may say . . . I mean, I'm only what I am . . . I mean, I'm nothing more or nothing less than that. But I hope that what I am is . . . is something *good* rather than something *bad* . . . but if someone should come along and say that . . . tell me that it's something bad . . . I just wouldn't accept it, but then I feel . . . I'd just go elsewhere to seek some confirmation.

Fifth interview. C.: Somehow I feel that . . . I never get . . . I mean, any real external proof of . . . of one's own . . . abilities or capacities for doing something well. Somehow it (sighs) . . . don't you think it all depends upon . . . an inner awareness or an inner . . . conscious feeling of one's own . . . abilities? Somehow I feel that even if I should get a degree, it would really mean nothing to me unless I felt convinced myself that I really had accomplished something and produced something . . . something good. And, well, in that case, a degree is never really any proof. I feel that there's inner awareness of, a feeling of . . . that what one does is *good*, and . . . is appreciated, I mean, has to be . . . judged just mostly by one's self.

Sixth interview. C.: That is why . . . I mean, if you become completely yourself, I mean, or just accept yourself for what you are, I mean . . . In that case, you just exclude any labeling or any . . . any way of handling (?) things by words. But that I feel is impossible because of your . . . of the way we live . . . I mean, in reality (tone more confident).

Eighth interview. C.: But as I said . . . I mean, deep within myself, I feel that it has to be. I mean, no external assurance would really alter anything or . . . would make any modification or . . . well, I mean, it has to be some of . . . some inner realization or inner awareness or inner realization of just what I am. (Pause).

Ninth interview. C. Well . . . (sighs) I've been thinking about what I told you. And . . . a . . . I've concluded that (pause) that since (pause) if I (pause) achieve some inner realization . . . that what I'm doing . . . is right . . . well, then everything, it appears, would . . . would be all right . . . and . . . but then if that is the case . . . I mean, there is no . . . use . . . I mean, for me . . . to . . . talk it over with other . . . people any more when, when I've . . . if I've come to this realization.

C.: But I think that the most important thing . . . is the fact . . . I feel that . . . well, that I realize that . . . in reality that . . . the people of . . . I mean, the

judgment of other people . . . outside yourself is not really . . . important. And you can only realize your own value . . . I mean through some inner awareness of what you feel that you are. And no matter what other people think of it, it makes really no difference unless you . . . you yourself feel that way about it . . . if you don't agree with them, then you . . . it just won't (*sighs*) just won't help any . . .

C.: M-hm. I feel it has eliminated the uncertainty. (Pause.) I feel that participation and things like that would only be meant toward this end that . . . coming to depend more upon yourself. (Pause.) Well, I mean, not depend on yourself to the extent that you exclude, I mean, human relations or anything like that. (Pause). Just depend on yourself so that (pause) you realize that you (pause) do have the . . . potentialities, I mean, of doing something, instead of having to ask people all the time whether they think it's right or not.

Here is a person who came to an expression of his own being. He recognized the final necessity of self-trust and self-dependence. He found that only through inner awareness and inner realization could he know the true nature of his experience. He came to see that reality could have meaning and value as an expression of the individualized self.

His conflict is a persistent and pervasive reality with which the creative person must live in our society. The creative person may withdraw from the social reality through isolation or he may withdraw by submission. But if he deals with this reality directly, it is natural and inevitable that the person feel threatened and disturbed. On the one hand, he is attempting to live in terms of his own uniqueness and individuality, and on the other, he is faced with the prospects of ostracism or social disapproval. Such a struggle results in anxiety which may be viewed externally as an unhealthy sign of disturbance. But such anxiety, when understood by the person in the context of conflict between inner growth and external pressure, is a natural condition of the struggle and not something to be removed. There is no uncertainty or confusion about where the creative person stands in this situation.

The creative person, as every person, wants recognition, acceptance, and human understanding, but he wants to be known in terms of his real self rather than from social values and expectations. He can be healthy only as long as he finds expression and fulfillment of his unique and personal potentialities. Even though society may block and frustrate him and create anxieties which society calls ill health, the individual is maintaining a personal and creative health when he recognizes the conflict and continues to maintain his individuality.