



Locus of Evaluation

Definition

‘Locus of evaluation’ is ‘that to which people refer in order to make judgements about themselves, others and the world’ (Feltham and Dryden, 1993: 106). ‘Locus’ is Latin for ‘place’, so the term describes the place from which a person makes a value judgement. The term was first used by Carl Rogers, the father of person-centred counselling.

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. How much do you value your view of yourself? And how much do you value others' view of you?

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.

How Therapy Can Help

Feltham and Dryden (1993: 106) assert: 'Clients often begin counselling from an external locus of evaluation; as they progress, they often achieve a greater trust in their own decision-making processes (in their own gut feeling).' This is achieved through receiving the core conditions of empathy, congruence and unconditional positive regard from the therapist. Rogers (1951: 150) describes this as follows:

In therapy, in the initial phases, there appears to be a tendency for the locus of evaluation to lie outside the client. It is seen as a function of parents, of the culture, of friends, and of the counsellor. In regard to this last, some clients make strenuous efforts to have the therapist exercise the valuing function, so as to provide them with guides for action. In client-centered therapy, however, one description of the counselor's behavior is that he consistently keeps the locus of evaluation with the client.

Examples

In the therapy room, a common indication that someone is operating from an external locus of evaluation is that they use the word 'should' or 'ought'. For example, a bereaved client might say: 'It's six months since my mum died. I should be feeling better by now.' Or someone whose parents had been emotionally cold towards her might say: 'I ought to be grateful really, because they weren't cruel to me, and I was always warm and well-fed.'

In each of these cases, the words 'should' or 'ought' shows that the organismic self of the client doesn't feel better or grateful – instead, they think they should, based on what others have said.

As noted in Rogers' quote above (1951: 150), some clients with a predominantly external locus of evaluation may try to get the counsellor to say what they think or to provide

advice. In person-centred counselling, it is important always to keep the locus of evaluation with the client. This includes not praising the client, 'which is just as much a judgement as condemning the client' (Tolan, 2003: 75). So, for example, if a client arrived in a session and jubilantly announced, 'I've not had a cigarette all week!' both the following answers – while on the surface positive and supportive – could have opposite effects:

'Well done! I'm so pleased with you' (reinforces external of evaluation).

'I can see you're delighted with that, and so proud of yourself' (encourages internal of evaluation).

References

Feltham C and Dryden W (1993) *Dictionary of Counselling*, Whurr Publishers

Rogers C (1951) *Client-Centered Therapy*, Constable

Tolan J (2003) *Skills in Person-Centred Counselling & Psychotherapy*, Sage