

Journal Application Assignment: Relational Dialectics Theory

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Relational Dialectics Theory in Conjunction with Finding Oneself

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“You will have it all figured out when you're older”. “When you're older you will understand”. “Find yourself when you are young so that you know what you want out of life”. These are common statements spoken to most of us when we are young and the pressure of how to manage and figure all of this out as we become adults can at times entice a dooming sense of pressure to “figure it all out”. But one very important factor many fail to mention is the importance of the relationships in your life, how to balance and manage them and the affects they will have on you as you are “figuring it all out”. The Theory of Relational Dialectics, much like relationships themselves has many different layers of communication and is a constant juggling game briming with many contradictions and methods to apply to all the different relationships in our lives. There are tensions to manage within romantic relationships, family and friendships and self-work within oneself, or as Leslie Baxter and Barbara Montgomery would assert, relational life is characterized by ongoing tensions between contradictory impulses (Turner and West, 2018, p.188). The way these impulses and contradictions collide with the many different relationships in our lives and how we handle them, I believe has a significant and meaningful place in the journey to growing up and finding oneself.

Keywords: Tensions, Contradictions, Relationships, Dialectics, and Communication

Relational Dialectics Theory is unpredictable, which much sense because all relationships are unpredictable. It is an interpretive theory not a post positive one, which means that unlike social penetration theory, it is constituted according to RDT that relationships themselves are not linear. In social penetration theory it is argued that relationships can remain stagnant and predictable. And while that is somewhat true, what RDT is doing could be looking from a different perspective and insinuating that everyone has their own subjective truth and that the point is to understand that truth within the relationship instead of trying to predict it. That itself, will not create or maintain a so to speak perfect relationship but it can aid in learning how to manage and maintain it.

Contradictions are a major factor of RDT, dialectic approach and dialectical unity are central to organizing the tensions within the relationships in your life. “A simple way of putting it is that dialectic thinking substitutes *both/and* for *either/or*, recognizing that people want multiple (and often contradictory) goals in their relational lives” (Turner and West, 2018, p. 189). This simply means that contradictions are fundamental to relationships, not to be consumed by the relationship itself. Change is relational to life, if you fight against the change, regression is a consequence. When it comes to my own personal experiences within my relationships, I feel very strongly that a big factor of feeling that I had finally found myself in my adult life, was in direct relation as to how I handled and managed the different relationships in my life. My very best friend Verenis and I met in the second grade. We grew up and did everything together. Within our interactional dialectics, there was a novelty and predictability factor to our relationship, which means that there were many expectations from Verenis of our friendship as we grew up together. I grew up and changed, as did she, and I became pregnant at 22 years old which came as a great shock and shift of motion in our friendship. Undoubtedly, many people can agree that becoming a mother shifts your life into 100mph and Verenis and I were no longer

on the same path in life which without a doubt caused great tension on our friendship. That predictability that Verenis had become accustomed to was no longer there and she fought against the change for a couple of years which then caused our relationship itself to regress. We have since then used dialectical unity and communicated our needs from each other and the friendship, found common ground and reestablished what is important to each of us, together.

Another example is the relationship between my mother and myself, undeniably one of the most important relationships in any child's life, finding who I was in my adult life was not without its many tensions and challenges when it came to the relationship between my mother and me. The contextual dialectics, which are all the outer environmental factors such as family pressure, societal roles and cultural norms influenced our otherwise loving relationship. There are many layers to unwrap so bear with me. First, my mother and I have a relationship that can be categorized as autonomy and connection, which means we desire a separate identity but a close bond between us, nonetheless. My mother was always very influential and involved in my life from the very start, so I feel that my desire for autonomy caused some hurt feelings when I made choices in my life that she did not necessarily agree with, from what school I chose to go to, to the color of my hair, and even what I majored in college. But as previously stated, a fundamental relationship can be open and closed. Over time and as I grew older my mother fought against me having my own thoughts different to her own, but part of autonomy is what is called Praxis, the ability to make choices. Choices that ranged from the friends I chose to hang out with to my religious beliefs. Within my relationship with my mother communication was central to organizing and negotiating the boundaries of our relationship so that we could both remain a part of it with positivity. Again, the dialectic approach was used so that my mother could understand that I could be an individual and we could remain connected. I believe the contextual dialectics of family influence, also known as her sisters telling her what kind of relationship her and I

should have, had a lot to do with our tensions in the relationship and when it came to her thought process of a real vs ideal relationship with me.

In conclusion, Relational Dialectic Theory is a key factor in how I think now in relation to the different relationships in my life. Even though I am an adult now and I feel that “finding yourself” and growing up are so directly related to RDT in the sense that growing up isn't linear, finding yourself and who you are albeit through your relationships or within your private self is never predictable. Life chews you up and spits you out, and at the end of the day all you really have are your relationships with your friends, partner, family and whomever else. If this theory has taught me anything is that all these relationships are all about communication and the self-work that exists within those relationships. They are vital and messy but oh so worth it.

References

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