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**THE CONGRUENCY HYPOTHESIS.
A CLOSER LOOK AT ITS COMPONENTS:
INTERPERSONAL AND ACHIEVEMENT-ORIENTED PERSONALITY
AND LIFE EVENTS**

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ABSTRACT

This research involved an examination of Beck's congruency hypothesis (1983). There were three studies, each examining an assumption that underpins the congruency hypothesis. There were two groups of participants: 61 remitted depressives and 61 university student controls, who were followed for a 1-year period.

The first study stemmed from Blatt's theory that interpersonal and achievement-oriented personality styles are independent and enduring, arising from different early childhood experiences. It investigated individuals' perceptions of the parenting style they had experienced in the first 16 years of their life and how these related to their current personality style. Overall, an achievement-oriented personality style (self-criticism) was predicted by maternal protectiveness in the university student sample and by a lack of maternal warmth in the clinical sample. No relationship between perceptions of early parenting and an interpersonal personality (dependency) was found.

The second study comprised two parts. The first examined the stability of personality over the 1-year examination period. This was seen as an important test. For personality to be a vulnerability factor or diathesis in terms of the congruency hypothesis, it must be stable over time. The second part of this study investigated whether any significant changes in personality over time were predicted by recent negative life events that had been experienced. The results showed that all of the personality constructs investigated (sociotropy, autonomy (solitude, independence), dependency, self-criticism) were stable over the 6-month period. However, during the 12-month period, there was a significant decrease in mean scores on sociotropy for the university students group and a significant decrease in mean scores on sociotropy and dependency for the remitted depressives group. For the remitted depressives group, change in dependency was predicted by stress resulting from negative life events as rated by an independent research team (objective stress) but not by participants' own ratings of the stressfulness of these events (subjective stress).

In research testing the congruency hypothesis, life events are routinely classified as being either sociotropic or autonomous. The third study investigated the validity of this practice. The results of this study demonstrated only partial support for the a priori procedure for classifying events in this way. Across samples (university students and remitted depressives) and measures (self-reported and interview measures of life events), participants did not consistently rate events as sociotropic or autonomous in line with their own personality styles.

Throughout the research, many of the methodological shortfalls that were identified as being present in prior research on the congruency hypothesis were addressed. Notably, comparisons were made between the different samples (student versus clinical) and measures (self-report versus interview) used. The results of the current research differed depending on the choice of sample and the type of measures used. For example, in some instances, significant results were found only when the stressfulness of an event was rated by the research team (objective stress) rather than by the participants themselves (subjective stress). However, it is subjective stress that is most commonly used in previous research on the congruency hypothesis. This choice could well contribute to the many non-significant results found in this area of study. These and other methodological issues are taken into account, examined, discussed, and recommendations for future research are made.

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