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## The Impact of Self Consistency and Congruence on Interpersonal Trust among College Students

Hou Yongmei<sup>1\*</sup>, Kong Jiahui<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1,2</sup>. Department of Psychology, School of Humanities and Management, Guangdong Medical University, Dongguan, Guangdong, China

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\*Corresponding author: Hou Yongmei

Department of Psychology, School of Humanities and Management, Guangdong Medical University, Dongguan, Guangdong, China

### Abstract

To explore the status of self consistency and congruence and interpersonal trust, and analyze the impact of self consistency and congruence on interpersonal trust among undergraduates. Methods Three hundred and sixty-nine undergraduates were selected randomly from Guangdong Province, China. They were investigated with Self Consistency and Congruence Scale (SCCS), and Interpersonal Trust Scale (ITS). Results First, the total average scores of SCCS and ITS in this group were  $(3.14 \pm 0.29)$  and  $(2.34 \pm 0.20)$ , respectively. Second, the results of multiple linear stepwise regression analysis showed that the total average score of ITS, trust in social phenomenon, and trust in others are positively predicted by self flexibility ( $\beta=0.139, 0.395, 0.235$ , all  $P<0.01$ ), negatively predicted by self rigidity ( $\beta=-0.102, -0.221, -0.104$ , all  $P<0.01$ ); and the total average score of ITS and trust in social phenomenon are also negatively predicted by the disharmony between self and experience ( $\beta=-0.268, -0.324$ , all  $P<0.01$ ) Conclusion: The interpersonal trust of undergraduates is at a moderate to low level, and the self consistency and congruence may be one of the important influencing factors of their interpersonal trust.

**Keywords:** Undergraduates, Self Consistency and Congruence, Interpersonal Trust, Influencing Factors

### INTRODUCTION

Self consistency and congruence is one of the most important concepts in C. Rogers' personality theory, referring to a psychological phenomenon in a person's self-concept that does not conflict, including disharmony between self and experience, self flexibility, and self rigidity. Among them, the disharmony between self and experience (DSE) reflects the degree of consistency and harmony between oneself and experience (or actual performance, experience), including self-evaluation of abilities and emotions, self consistency, helplessness, etc. The symptoms that DSE causes more reflect unreasonable expectations of experience. Self

flexibility refers to the degree of flexibility and plasticity of an individual's perception of themselves. Individuals with high flexibility are able to think about problems from multiple perspectives and evaluate themselves and social situations rationally. On the contrary, individuals with low flexibility often have one sidedness when thinking about problems. Due to not being able to think from the perspective of others, they do not empathize with others. The rigidity of the self reflects the stereotype, and immutability of the self-concept [1]. Individuals with self consistency and congruence are in a harmonious and

unified state of themselves, expectations, and the environment. Their behavior is mostly consistent with their self-concept and they have a high adaptability to the environment. If there is inconsistency in individual self-perception, experiencing contradictions and conflicts between experience and self, that is, the individual's views and actual performance of themselves are not harmonious, they will be in a state of "self inconsistency and incongruence", producing neurotic tendencies, unstable emotions, and easily feeling tension and anxiety, which can lead to inappropriate behavior, making it difficult to handle life events properly and adapt to the environment correctly [2-3]. Therefore, self consistency and congruence is the foundation for forming a sound personality and an important influencing factor of mental health, which is significantly negatively correlated with the severity of most physical and mental symptoms [4].

Interpersonal trust is a psychological state that holds positive expectations for the motives and behaviors of others and is willing to take on trust risks [5]. There is a significant positive correlation between interpersonal trust and social support and active coping of individuals facing great uncertainty in life [6], which has a crucial impact on establishing and maintaining cooperation between individuals and groups [7], promoting prosocial behavior [8], improving life satisfaction and lifespan [9]. Therefore, interpersonal trust has become one of the important research variables in social psychology and health psychology.

Interpersonal trust has two major characteristics: The first is risk. Because interpersonal trust involves predicting the future behavior of others and providing supportive responses, while the future behavior of others is not yet known during this process. Once the possible future behavior of others can be understood, it often leads to significant consequences, especially negative outcomes. The second is vulnerability. That is to say, building trust is not easy, but breaking trust is relatively easy. In judgment system, when synthesizing information that destroys and consolidates trust, people often have a deep impression of negative information, while the effect of positive information is relatively small [5].

From the definition and characteristics of interpersonal trust, it can be seen that high-level interpersonal trust requires individuals to have accurate judgment ability and sufficient confidence, which are precisely the psychological foundation of self consistency and congruence. That is to say, from the connotation of the concept, there is a close logical relationship between self consistency and congruence and interpersonal trust.

Based on the above analysis, this study intends to use a large sample, multicenter questionnaire survey to empirically explore the current situation of interpersonal trust and self harmony among college students, and understand the relationship between self consistency and congruence and interpersonal trust among college students.

## 1. Objects and Methods

### 1.1. Objects

Four hundred and twenty-five undergraduates are randomly selected from Guangdong Province, and 369 valid questionnaires are collected, with an effective rate of 86.8%. Among them, there are 194 male students and 175 female students; 113 freshmen, 97 sophomores, 83 juniors, and 76 seniors.

### 1.2. Tools

#### 1.2.1. Interpersonal Trust Scale, ITS

Compiled by Rotter (1976) [10], revised by Wang Xiangdong et al. [11] into Chinese version, and used to assess the reliability of a participant's behavior, commitment, or (verbal and written) statements to others. ITS has 25 items, divided into two subscales: trust in social phenomenon (TSP) and trust in others (TO). Likert 5-point scoring method is used to score from 1 to 5 points corresponding to "fully compliant" to "completely non compliant". The higher the total score, the higher the degree of interpersonal trust. In this study, *Cronbach's*  $\alpha$  coefficient of the total scale is 0.835, and *Cronbach's*  $\alpha$  coefficients of the two subscales are 0.807 and 0.785, respectively.

#### 1.2.2. Self Consistency and Congruence Scale, SCCS

Compiled by Walker et al. [12] based on Rogers' theoretical framework, revised by Wang Dengfeng [11] into Chinese version. SCCS has 35 items, divided into three subscales: the disharmony between self and experience (DSE), self flexibility (SF), and self rigidity (SR). Likert 5-point scoring method is used to score from 1 to 5 points corresponding to "completely disagree" to "completely agree". The higher the score, the lower the level of self consistency and congruence [13]. In this study, *Cronbach's*  $\alpha$  coefficient of the total scale is 0.812, and *Cronbach's*  $\alpha$  coefficients of three subscales are 0.854, 0.807, and 0.722, respectively.

### 1.3. Data processing

SPSS 20.0 is used for statistical analysis. Descriptive statistics is used to calculate the average score and standard deviation of each scale; Pearson product moment correlation is used to explore the correlation between variables; Linear regression analysis is used to analyze the impact of scores of SCCS on ITS.

## 2. Results

### 2.1. The overall status of interpersonal trust and self consistency and congruence among college students

According to Table 1, the total average score of ITS and the scores of TSP and TO, as well as the total score of SCCS, and the scores of DSE, SF and SR in this group, are all at a moderate level [10-12].

**Table 1. Descriptive statistics of ITS and SCCS (n=369)**

	Max	Min	$\bar{X} \pm s$	Number of item	M of item
TSP	50	25	37.88±5.53	12	3.16±0.46
TO	49	30	40.67±3.60	13	3.13±0.27
ITS	98	55	78.55±7.22	25	3.14±0.29
DSE	67	30	45.51±8.05	16	2.84±0.50
SF	65	22	41.76±9.28	12	3.48±0.77
SR	29	8	18.22±4.77	7	2.60±0.68
SCCS	100	65	81.97±6.89	35	2.34±0.20

### 2.2. The relationship between interpersonal trust and self consistency and congruence among college students

#### 2.2.1. Correlation analysis of interpersonal trust and self consistency and congruence among college students

According to Table 2, except for the insignificant correlation coefficients between trust in others and self consistency and congruence, trust in others and the disharmony between self and experience, there is a significant correlation between the total score of ITS and the total score of SCCS, and the scores of other

subscales, as well as the scores of other subscales of ITS and SCCS ( $|r|=0.102-0.395$ , all  $P<0.05$ ).

**Table 2. Correlation between ITS and SCCS scores (n=369)**

	ITS	TSP	TO
SCCS	-0.187**	-0.141**	-0.063
DSE	-0.268**	-0.324**	-0.032
SF	** 0.139	* 0.395*	0.235**
SR	-0.102*	-0.221**	-0.104*

### 2.2.2 Multiple linear stepwise regression analysis of the impact of self consistency and congruence on interpersonal trust among college students

The total score of ITS and scores of TSP, TO are used as independent variable respectively, scores of DSE, SF and SR are used as dependent variables, multiple linear stepwise regression analysis is conducted within a 95% confidence interval. The results are shown in Table 3.

According to Table 3, it can be seen that SF positively predicts the total score of ITS and the scores of TSP and TO ( $\beta=0.139, 0.395, 0.235$ ; all  $P<0.01$ ); The score of DSE negatively predicts the total score of ITS and the score of TSP ( $\beta=-0.268, -0.324$ ; all  $P<0.01$ ); The score of SR negatively predicts the total score of ITS and scores of TSP and TO ( $\beta=-0.102, -0.221, -0.104$ ; all  $P<0.01$ ).

**TABLE IV: MULTIPLE STEPWISE LINEAR REGRESSION ANALYSIS OF SCCS FACTORS TO THE SCORES OF ITS**

Dependent Variable	Independent Variables	B	SE	$\beta$	t value	P value	R <sup>2</sup>	R <sub>adj</sub> <sup>2</sup>
ITS	DSE	-1.317	0.355	-0.268	8.408	<0.001	0.349	0.344
	SF	1.661	0.425	0.139	7.455	<0.001		
	SR	-0.378	0.124	-0.102	-10.537	<0.001		
TSP	DSE	-0.625	0.178	-0.324	-8.255	<0.001	0.417	0.412
	SF	1.119	0.329	0.395	4.941	<0.001		
	SR	-0.773	0.286	-0.221	-2.167	0.037		
TO	SF	1.504	0.427	0.235	3.731	0.002	0.255	0.250
	SR	-0.516	0.188	-0.104	-6.742	<0.001		

### 3. Discussion

The total average score of ITS in this group is  $(3.14 \pm 0.29)$ , which is a moderate score, consistent with the research results of Wu Hongyan et al. [13], higher than the research results of Ma Jianqing et al. [14], and the total average score of SCCS is  $(2.34 \pm 0.20)$ , which is a low score, lower than the research results of Gou Shuangyu et al. [15] and Lin Xiaogui et al. [16]. This suggests that the impact of subcultural background on interpersonal trust is important: First, the interpersonal trust and self consistency and congruence of college students in different places during the same period are mostly different; Second, with the passage of time, the overall level of interpersonal trust and self consistency and congruence among college students has gradually declined, and the current level of interpersonal trust and self consistency and congruence among college students is at a moderate to low level.

The results of the multiple linear stepwise regression analysis in this study show that SF positively predicts the total score of ITS and the scores of TSP and TO, DSE negatively predicts the total score of ITS and the scores of TSP, and SR negatively predicts the total score of ITS and the scores of TSP and TO. It is suggested that self consistency and congruence is an important influencing factor of interpersonal trust.

A lot of literature points out that high-level interpersonal trust is the foundation of mental health, especially interpersonal communication [6, 7, 13-16]; The current low level of interpersonal trust among college students is closely related to their interpersonal and mental health issues [13-16], which seems to suggest that the higher the level of interpersonal trust, the better. But this statement does not conform to the concept of interpersonal

trust, nor does it conform to social reality. Interpersonal trust is a generalized expectation that individuals establish through interpersonal interaction, in situations where information is insufficient and the situation is unclear, regarding the reliability of the words, promises, and written or oral statements of their partners [17]. From this definition, it can be seen that interpersonal trust is not an unconditional complete trust in others, but rather changes with the social context, characteristics of both parties involved, and socio-cultural characteristics. From the perspective of the subject of trust, interpersonal cognitive ability and emotional state are key influencing factors [18].

Specifically, the essence of self consistency and congruence is for the behavioral subject to analyze and integrate the impact of objective environment on themselves, form experiences of people and things, gradually internalize these experiences into cognitive mechanisms, weaken the conflict between the inner self and the outer self, and meet the needs of their own growth. In short, it is the process of exploring, understanding, and improving oneself in conjunction with the objective environment. Individuals with self consistency and congruence are in a state of self consistency with their experience (or actual performance, experience). Their self-awareness, expectations, and environment are harmoniously unified, and their behavior is mostly consistent with their self-concept. Therefore, they have more confidence in their self-awareness, believing that their self-awareness and expectations are correct and can withstand the verification of facts (experience) and the review of judges (others). This confidence and self-awareness model can gradually extend to social life, serving as a driving force and method to be incorporated into social contexts, helping

individuals form social cognition and establish confidence in social cognition based on sufficient reasoning and rational judgment, making individuals believe that their understanding and judgment of others and social phenomena are also reasonable and correct, thereby establishing corresponding trust in others and society. On the other hand, due to the high adaptability, individuals with self consistency and congruence can change and improve themselves according to the needs of the objective environment, and have a high adaptability to the interpersonal environment. They can adopt different understanding methods and response strategies according to social objects and situations. Therefore, they can adapt to changes in society and social situations based on considerable interpersonal trust, promote the strengths while avoiding the weaknesses.

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