Chariots of Fire

Eric Liddell
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This 1981 movie was directed by Hugh Hudson, and starred Ben Cross as Harold Abrahams and the late Ian Charleson as Eric Liddell. The setting is leading up to the 1924 Olympics in Paris, as the two sprinters prepare to run.

I chose to analyze Eric Liddell because I hope to become a Christian counselor and I felt Eric’s character fit well with Carl Rogers’ personality theory.
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Eric Liddell

Eric Liddell was the second son of a Christian missionary. He was born in China but migrated back to Scotland at age 5 when his parents came home for a leave.

He was a sickly child but was determined to grow up healthy, so became interested in sports. He also was very shy throughout his life.

After his parent’s leave was over, his family went back to China to stay.
Eric and his brother Robbie stayed in Scotland and grew up in a boarding school, then attended Edinburgh University.

They were both extremely good athletes and Eric became captain of the rugby team as well as a running star.

At the time of the movie, Eric was just about to complete his Bachelor of Science degree.

He also had professed his Christian faith and was an evangelist, in spite of his shyness.
Carl Rogers proposed the first major theory to serve as an alternative to the psychoanalytic Freudian theory.

Whereas Freud believed in determinism that “the natural man is fundamentally evil, hostile, destructive and antisocial”, Rogers on the other hand believed in free-will and that man is “positive, forward-moving, constructive, realistic and trustworthy”.

Rogers is “inclined to believe that fully to be a human being is to enter into the complex process of being one of the most widely sensitive, responsive, creative and adaptive creatures on this planet.”
Representational Strategy or Phenomenological Approach
Carl Rogers’ Personality Theory

Based on this belief about man’s nature, Carl Rogers’ Personality Theory is based on the two assumptions that we learned in class:

1. Behavior is guided by each person’s unique actualizing tendency, which means to do everything they can to maintain or enhance themselves

2. All humans have a need for positive regard in the form of unconditional love, respect, acceptance, and empathy from themselves and others
As Eric trained hard to excel in sports, often to the point of agonizing pain, he also grew more and more spiritual. He had a fierce love for God and all things good and wholesome.

He also studied hard to learn science and various languages.

In the movie, he explains to his sister, who thinks he spending too much time running, instead of his missionary work, that God made him for a purpose of being a missionary, but also made him fast so he could run races.
Further, he tells a crowd that life is like running a race, in which we each take part. He compares faith with running that race. “It’s hard, requires concentration of will. Energy of Soul. You experience elation when the winner breaks the tape. There is no formula for winning. Everyone runs it in his or her own way. So the power to see the end, comes from within.” He goes on to say that with Jesus Christ in your heart, He will guide you through the race.
Eric Liddell’s Actualizing Tendency

His internal locus of control became world renown when he chose not to run the 100 meter race at the 1924 Olympics because the preliminaries were held on Sunday. People couldn’t understand why he didn’t make an exception this one time. But he stood firm on his belief that Sunday was only for God. Instead, that day he preached at a local church in Paris and then went on to win the 400 meter race, not his best event.

In the end, he became a national hero and was well respected for his beliefs.
Eric Liddell’s Display of Positive Regard

When Eric was young and living in China, he and his family were walking in the cold weather, and he was holding them back. He said “It’s too far. I’ll have to be left”.

In another instance, when a new boy in school was afraid to go through the “ragging” initiation and was in tears, Eric felt so sorry for him that he stepped in, raised his hand and ordered the event to end. Everyone respected him and sensed his authority.

Eric always showed humility. When the crowds cheered him, he always considered it not for himself, but rather for his school or country. Yet he had an extreme amount of self-confidence that he was able to do what he set out to do.
Eric Liddell’s Display of Positive Regard

When Eric was first asked to talk about his faith, even though he was shy, he said ok. There was no lecturing, preaching or judging others. Instead, he related God to every aspect of his own life, and said he hoped they would share and enjoy God’s love with him.

At the start of a race, Eric always walked along and shook hands with his competitors, wished them well and offered them his trowel to dig their “starting blocks”. The competitors and crowds were shocked and amused to see such sportsmanship.

In WWII, while he was in a Japanese concentration camp, he always thought of others before himself.
Conflict Between Eric Liddell and Carl Rogers’ Personality Theory

Carl Rogers believed that Christianity was an outside force which influenced people’s individual values and growth.

Christians believe that when Adam and Eve disobeyed God by eating the forbidden fruit, man fell from God’s grace, making human nature inherently evil. It is only through the passion of Jesus Christ’s death and resurrection can he be redeemed. This is more in line with Freud’s thinking, rather than Carl Rogers’.
Eric Liddell and Carl Rogers’ Personality Theory

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Questions?