

PERSON-CENTERED THERAPY

Psychology 460
Counseling and Interviewing

Sheila K. Grant, Ph.D.

Rogers: Father of Humanistic Movement

- Carl Rogers is the father of the humanistic movement in psychotherapy
- His core theme in therapy is non-judgmental listening & acceptance of the client, better known as unconditional positive regard
- His therapeutic approach is known as the Person Centered Therapy, which is based on the concepts of humanistic psychology & shares many of the concepts of Existentialism
- Both of these concepts share the idea that the client can make positive & constructive choices
- His approach is also based on the theory that people are "trustworthy" and can solve their own problems without direct intervention from the therapist

Carl Rogers: Bio

- Carl Rogers was born January 8, 1902 in Oak Park, Illinois in a very strict, religious family
- He was a shy, studious boy
- He enrolled in agricultural science at the University of Wisconsin, but transferred to Union Theological Seminary in Chicago
- Disillusioned, he withdrew and entered the Teachers College at Columbia University, a hotbed for liberal, social ideas

Carl Rogers: Bio

- Rogers founded client-centered psychotherapy & pioneered in the development of scientific methods for studying psychotherapeutic outcomes & processes
- In 1942 Rogers became 1st therapist to record & transcribe therapy sessions verbatim, a practice now standard
- He published his ideas & clinical results in several books, including *On Becoming a Person* which made him a well-known figure in American psychology

Carl Rogers: Bio

- Rogers taught at the University of Chicago, Ohio State University, & the University of Wisconsin at Madison
- Rogers's client-centered therapy is among the most influential & widely employed techniques in modern U.S. clinical psychology
- This is the type of therapy cliched by phrases such as "how do you feel about that?" from the psychologist
- Bob Newhart, another Oak Park native, portrayed a Rogerian-style psychologist on the original "Bob Newhart Show"
- In his later years Rogers championed humanistic causes including racial harmony, and world peace. He was nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize in 1987

Carl Rogers: Bio

- Carl Rogers died February 4, 1987
- "Experience is, for me, the highest authority. The touchstone of validity is my own experience. No other person's ideas, and none of my own ideas, are as authoritative as my experience. It is to experience that I must return again and again, to discover a closer approximation to truth as it is in the process of becoming in me. Neither the Bible nor the prophets --neither Freud nor research --neither the revelations of God nor man -- can take precedence over my own direct experience. My experience is not authoritative because it is infallible. It is the basis of authority because it can always be checked in new primary ways. In this way its frequent error or fallibility is always open to correction."

Carl Rogers: Bio

- Rogers plays an important historical role in the development of psychology and psychotherapy
- He was one of the first, if not the first, psychologist to propose a comprehensive theory about *psychotherapy*
- Prior to Rogers, almost all forms of therapy centered around psychiatry and psychoanalysis

Person-Centered Therapy

(A reaction against the directive and psychoanalytic approaches)

- Challenges:
 - The assumption that "the counselor knows best"
 - The validity of advice, suggestion, persuasion, teaching, diagnosis, and interpretation
 - The belief that clients cannot understand and resolve their own problems without direct help
 - The focus on problems over persons

Person-centered theory Carl Rogers

- **OVERVIEW**
 - SELF-DIRECTED GROWTH
 - THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE HELPER AND THE CLIENT
 - FUNDAMENTAL CONCEPT IS TRUST
 - THE "ACTUALIZING TENDENCY" IS PRESENT IN EVERY HUMAN
 - INDIVIDUALS ARE ARCHITECTS OF THEIR OWN LIVES

Questions:

- In what ways would you say that you have been the architect of your life? In the people you have known best, have you recognized a "self-actualizing" tendency?
- Is it hard for you to have confidence in another person's ability to find their own way, with you serving as an ally instead of a guide?

Person-Centered Therapy

- Emphasizes:
 - Therapy as a journey shared by two fallible people
 - Person's innate striving for self-actualization
 - Personal characteristics of therapist & the quality of therapeutic relationship
 - Counselor's creation of a permissive, "growth promoting" climate
 - People are capable of self-directed growth if involved in a therapeutic relationship

Key Concepts

- Rogers believes that, under nurturing conditions a client will be able to move forward & resolve their own issues
- One can direct one's own life
- Congruence – both the therapist's and the client's
- Unconditional positive regard
- Accurate empathetic understanding

A Growth-Promoting Climate

- **Congruence** - genuineness or realness
- **Unconditional positive regard** - acceptance and caring, but not approval of all behavior
- **Accurate empathic understanding** – an ability to deeply grasp the client's subjective world
 - Helper attitudes are more important than knowledge

A Growth-Promoting Climate

- **Congruence** - genuineness or realness
 - The helper does not deny his or her own feelings: the opposite of hiding behind a professional mask.
 - "I find that I am closest to my inner, intuitive self, when I am somehow in touch with the unknown in me, when perhaps I am in a slightly altered state of consciousness...Then simply my presence is releasing and helpful." (Rogers)
 - **Thought:** Rogers' language is somewhat strange here, but can you conceptualize a more "mystical" dimension to helping someone? Have you ever had this experience of being attuned to your intuitive self as a helper or just a friend?

A Growth-Promoting Climate

- **Unconditional positive regard** - acceptance and caring, but not approval of all behavior
- Related Terms:
 - Acceptance of the other's reality with kindness
 - Non-possessive caring
 - Prizing
 - Non-judgmental attitude
 - Q: Have you ever "prized" someone? Could you consistently "prize" a client, even if that person seemed to be without many strengths or successes in life?

A Growth-Promoting Climate

- **Accurate empathic understanding** – an ability to deeply grasp the client's subjective world
 - Helper attitudes are more important than knowledge
 - Empathy is a consistent, unflagging appreciation of the experience of the other.
 - It is active attention to the feelings of the client
 - It involves warmth and genuineness

Basic Characteristics

- In the Person Centered approach the focus is on helping the client discover more appropriate behavior by developing
 - self-awareness &
 - ways to fully "encounter reality"
- Through this encounter the client gains insight of themselves & the world

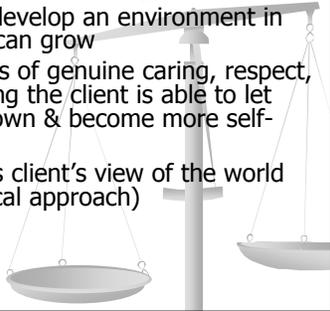
Six Core Conditions

(*necessary & sufficient* for personality changes to occur)

1. Two persons are in psychological contact
2. The first, the client, is experiencing incongruity
3. The second person, the therapist, is congruent or integrated in the relationship
4. Therapist experiences unconditional positive regard or real caring for the client
5. Therapist experiences empathy for the client's internal frame of reference and endeavors to communicate this to the client
6. Communication to the client is, to a minimal degree, achieved

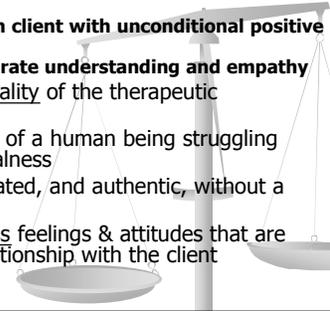
The Therapist

- Therapists are used as instruments of change but are not to direct the change in client
- Therapist helps develop an environment in which the client can grow
- Through attitudes of genuine caring, respect, and understanding the client is able to let their defenses down & become more self-aware
- Therapist reflects client's view of the world (Phenomenological approach)

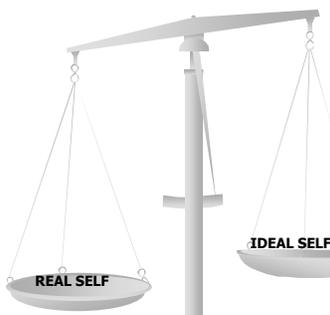


The Therapist

- The Therapist must be:
 - **congruent**
 - **able to approach client with unconditional positive regard**
 - demonstrate **accurate understanding and empathy**
- Focuses on the quality of the therapeutic relationship
- Serves as a model of a human being struggling toward greater realness
- Is *genuine*, integrated, and authentic, without a false front
- Can openly express feelings & attitudes that are present in the relationship with the client

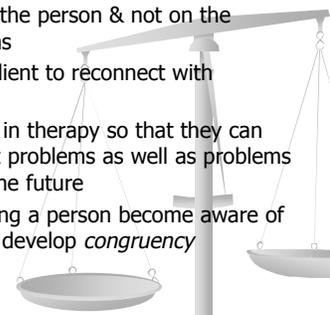


INCONGRUENCE



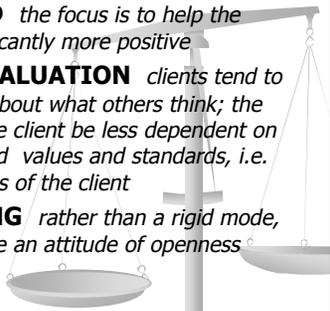
Therapeutic Process

- Main focus is on the person & not on the person's problems
- This allows the client to reconnect with his/herself.
- Client is assisted in therapy so that they can deal with current problems as well as problems that develop in the future
- Focuses on helping a person become aware of their *true self* & develop *congruency*



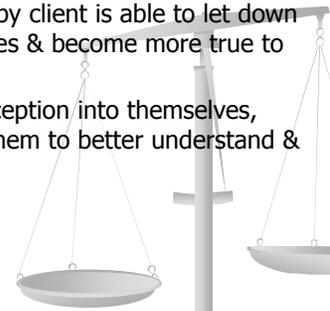
Basic assumptions about the client's process...

- **SELF-REGARD** *the focus is to help the person feel significantly more positive*
- **LOCUS-OF-EVALUATION** *clients tend to worry too much about what others think; the goal is to have the client be less dependent on other, externalized values and standards, i.e. other's evaluations of the client*
- **EXPERIENCING** *rather than a rigid mode, the goal is to have an attitude of openness*



Client's Experience

- Through therapy client is able to let down his/her defenses & become more true to him/her selves
- They gain perception into themselves, which allows them to better understand & accept others



Summary statements...

- Helper is to be present & accessible, in the moment-to-moment interchange
- Focus is on the phenomenological world of the client
- Helper should strive to be as transparent & honest as possible
- Focus is on the present, rather than explaining the past

Limitations to Person-centered Therapy

- Therapist could become so dogmatic in application of reflective approach that they
 - fail to be real with client &
 - irritate them by repeating their words in an attempt to make reflective statements
- Discounts significance of client's past
- Limited use with non-verbal clients

Roger's Rationale

- We are born into a world of Hierarchical Needs
- Degree to which, and how, these needs are met forms our outlook on life & our Self-Concept
- We have an inherent tendency toward our Ideal Self called Self-Actualization
- Given proper nurturance, our Self-Concept (who we think we are based on others' expectations) will be Congruent with our Ideal Self
- However, our interactions with others and the environment can lead to Incongruence between our Self-Concept and Ideal Self

Roger's Rationale

- We learn that we are rewarded & valued for certain behaviors, (e.g., when I cry I am fed, when I smile, I am cuddled)
- As we grow, conflicts occur in which we must choose between organismic needs/urges & behaviors that lead to reward & acceptance
- This leads to Conditions of Worth where we feel more worthy when we become the person we perceive that caretakers want us to be, even if it is not genuinely who we are

Roger's Rationale

- We learn to selectively perceive experiences & events that fit our Self-Concept (as defined by our perceived Conditions of Worth) and
- We may ignore or distort experiences that do not
- When significant experiences (particularly emotions) are repeatedly distorted or denied Incongruence between our Self-Concept & Ideal Self can lead to Psychological Maladjustment (e.g., narcissistic personality disorder)
- When in a state of Incongruence, many experiences are perceived as *threats* causing anxiety & raising our defenses
- This may lead to further distortions, more Incongruence, & maladjustment

Roger's Rationale

- However, if we are able to accurately perceive experiences & feelings they can be integrated into our self-structure making us more Congruent
- This occurs when we no longer perceive threats that were learned as part of our Conditions of Worth
- Rogers believed that if we feel Unconditional Positive Regard from a significant other (e.g., counselor) it will allow us to become fully aware of our feelings

Roger's Rationale

- As we increase our Availability of Awareness of experiences & true feelings we integrate them into our self-structure, replacing some of the values & Self-Concept that was based on the demands of others & our own distortions
- This process leads to Congruence between our Self-Concept & our Ideal Self and
- Accelerates our natural process of Self-Actualization

Definitions

- Self-Actualization: The inherent tendency of persons to develop all of their capacities; To be all we can be
- Self-Concept: Who we think we are; Influenced by our perceptions of who significant others want us to be
- Ideal Self: Who we strive to be
- Awareness: When experiences & feelings are accurately recognized and incorporated into consciousness
- Availability of Awareness: Degree to which we are able to accurately incorporate our experiences

Definitions

- Conditions of Worth: Values & expectations we put upon ourselves based on the values & expectations of others
- Congruence: When our Self-Concept & Ideal Self are close to the same
- Incongruence: When our Self-Concept differs from our Ideal Self
- Psychological Maladjustment: A state of incongruence
- Unconditional Positive Regard: We are valued as who we are not as what we have done or by our Conditions of Worth