

Overview of personality humanist theorist: carl rogers



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Carl Rogers (1902-1987) humanist theorist is best remembered for his nondirective method of therapy. His approach was based on a client-centered form of clinical work. He believed that a human's basic foundation was that of good and positive features. Rogers' theory suggests that people aspire to achieve their fullest potential if unhindered. A trained therapist should only be involved with an individual that is willing to participate in the therapeutic process. This paper will review the theories that Rogers favored and how his research impacted the field of psychology.

Rogers was born into a conservative family in a Chicago suburb. His early studies included agricultural, seminary and social philosophy. While pursuing his seminary studies he also took psychology courses at a nearby affiliated school. As his studies progressed he became frustrated with religion and more captivated with psychology. With the influence of psychology instructors he chose to transfer to the affiliated school to pursue his doctorate in clinical psychology where he first encountered Freudian thinking. Like Freud, Rogers became a clinician. However, his strategies in therapy were far different.

In the early years of Rogers' clinical and laboratory work he was frustrated with the then established forms of psychotherapy. Kirschenbaum (2004) noted that " Rogers was impressed at how strong the human will is and how patients will resist even the most skillful therapist interventions when it goes against their purposes or they have not chosen to change themselves."

Rogers had become acquainted with " relationship therapy" from students of Otto Rank, whose " focus was on the patients' self-insight and self-acceptance within the therapeutic relationship (Kirschenbaum)." In 1939,

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Rogers published his first book, *The Clinical Treatment of the Problem Child*. This publication launched his career and gave him the opportunity to start communicating his own views on counseling and psychotherapy. Now students of Rogers were asking what his views on counseling and psychotherapy were. By 1942 Rogers published those views in his second book, *Counseling and Psychotherapy: Newer Concepts in Practice*. But Rogers' *pièce de résistance* was the publishing the work that defined his place in psychological therapeutic theory, *Client-Centered Therapy: Its Current Practice, Implications, and Theory*, in 1951.

Rogers received many awards throughout his life. He was the president for the American Association for Applied Psychology (1944-1945), of the American Psychological Association (APA) (1946-1947), and of the APA's Division of Clinical and Abnormal Psychology (1949-1950); and he was the first president of the newly formed American Academy of Psychotherapists (1956). He remained active in his work until his death in 1987. It was poignant to note that on the day of his death, February 4, 1987, a letter arrived to inform Rogers that he had been nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize.

Improving the strategies of psychotherapy was very important to Rogers. As a therapist he worked very hard to comprehend concepts available to him. As he began his practice he looked to improve the client-centered process, thereby lending to the development of the client-centered approach, also called person-centered psychotherapy. Rogers' association with Sigmund Freud was short-lived and his similarity lies in their primary focus was clinical work. B. F. Skinner and Rogers agreed that they wanted to “ see <https://assignbuster.com/overview-of-personality-humanist-theorist-carl-rogers/>

approximately the same type of person in the future (Hergenhahn and Olson, 2007, p. 455)” but Skinner argued that their differences were in the methods they were choosing to arrive at that future-behaviorism versus humanism. In addition, Rogers and George Kelly alike believed that humans “sought, and were capable of, better personal . . . conditions (p. 408).”

There were several events in Rogers’ early studies and career that affected the development of his nondirective method of therapy. One of the earliest was that of watching his children grow up. Hergenhahn and Olson (2007) discussed an early scrutiny of Rogers saying “observing his children grow up taught him ‘far more about individuals, their development, and their relationships than [he] could ever have learned professionally’ (p. 440).” In pursuit of his PhD, Rogers learned that the psychoanalytic approach was often unproductive. The one event, however, according to Kirschenbaum (2004), that seemed to influence his historically noteworthy psychotherapeutic discovery happened while trying to help a mother find a solution to her delinquent son’s behavior. Rogers’ theory that this mother’s rejection of her son was the cause of his delinquency was met with no resolution. At the time that they agreed that they had both tried and failed, she queried Rogers about whether he took adults for counseling as well as youths. When he responded with assent, she asked for help for herself. It was this experience that Rogers realized that it was the client that knew the direction in which therapy should take. Kirschenbaum quotes Rogers’ saying “that it began to occur to me that unless I had a need to demonstrate my own cleverness and learning, I would do better to rely on the client for the direction of movement in the [therapeutic] process.”

Additionally, it was at this point in Rogers' theoretical progression that he encountered Alfred Adler from which he learned that " a therapist could learn more by determining how the patient relates to the here and now" (Hergenhahn and Olson, 2007, p. 441), rather than focusing the patients' history. Boeree (2006) commented on Rogers' theories of fulfillment and satisfaction of the needs of all living organisms, even that of plant life-that it is in the nature of all life to expend effort to reach a definitive potential. He further stated that " People . . . in the course of actualizing their potentials, created society and culture. In and of itself, that's not a problem . . . But when we created culture, it developed a life of its own." Confessing that culture is not in itself evil, Boeree noted that culture for the most part has helped humankind " survive and prosper", but at the same time it may have caused to hinder a person's self-fulfillment.

Alfred Adler's concept of " striving for superiority" was a forerunner of Roger's suggestion of the incongruent self. " Rogers believed that people, even infants, when given the chance, will choose what is best for them (Hergenhahn and Olson, 2007, p. 443). This is related to Rogers' method of Organismic Valuing Process. He believed that experience was the authority on the developing personality. Rogers was noted as saying that " Neither the Bible nor the prophets-neither Freud nor research-neither the revelations of God nor man-can take precedence over my own experience (p. 444)."

Rogers optimistic view of the human personality development fostered his belief that humans strive to positively enhance their own experience. He believed that experience took authority over all else, hence he pardoned persons that acted negatively attributing it to fear and defensiveness.

Negative behavior was not in accordance with nature. Rogers believed that even those who acted out of fear and defensiveness had strong positive tendencies at deep levels which needed to be discovered. According to Hergenhahn and Olsen, the positive tendency Rogers was speaking of was the actualizing tendency (p. 443).

According to Rogers, actualizing tendency is the driving force as opposed to Freud's instincts as the driving force behind personality. Using actualizing tendency, humans evaluate their experiences with the organismic valuing process. This process, Rogers believed was within each human. It is sanctioned by a person's own senses. Other in the environment can devalue and even reject an individual's personal valuing process. When that occurs, many adopt other values to please external sources and the self-actualization goal is stunted. Cooper (2003) suggests this leaves the individual adapting to ideas and values conceived by others and thereby torn between what should be a fluid and malleable process, maximizing their ultimate development, and the rigid concepts of others. This can be particularly precarious because as Pescitelli (1996) suggests a person that is self-accepting is more accepting of others. That being the case, the individual may be overly influenced by the ideas of others, corrupting their personal fulfillment. Further, Cooper indicated that with Rogers and other humanistic psychologists the resolution came with reconnecting with the individual experience process. This process could be accomplished with Rogers' nondirective, client-centered therapy that uses empathy, unconditional positive regard and congruence (p. 96).

In Rogers' phenomenological reality, Hergenhahn and Olson (2007) noted that the subjective world determines the behavior of people. When the environment interrupts the positive developmental process that takes place naturally, the individual misses experiences that enhance the self-concept that is positively valued and prepares for the emergence of the self. When an event or experience enters a person's awareness it becomes symbolized according to Rogers (p. 444). Pescitelli (1996) commented on the value of an individual realizing their fullest potential and agreed that there needed to be an internal agreement within the individual and that the "human capacity for awareness and the ability to symbolize gives us enormous power . . ." but he also advised that care be taken, because if the self-awareness is distorted, then the growth may be unstable.

Critical to Rogers' person-centered approach to therapy is the clients' receiving love, care, respect and acceptance from persons that are important the individual's life is the need for positive regard. People want to feel appreciated by the people that are most important to them. In the work of Rogers (1979), he stated that each "individual has within him or herself vast resources for self-understanding, for altering the self-concept, basic attitudes, and his or her self-directed behavior. . ." and that three conditions needed to exist to foster a growth-promoting climate in "any situation which development of the person is the goal," (1) congruence, (2) unconditional positive regard, and (3) empathetic understanding. Incongruency occurs when people stop using their organismic valuing process. When people lose their sense of value, they begin to lean on society to make choices for them. This is when society begins to determine value over what their internal value

system should tell them. Their frame of reference belongs to someone else. This is the first condition that Rogers's suggested was important between the therapist and the client-congruence. A genuineness and realness is imperative on the part of the therapist for the client to excel in their growth potential. Secondly, the unconditional positive regard was the means in which the therapist demonstrates acceptance of the clients' climate " at that moment." Moments change, attitudes change and the therapist needs to show " nonpossessive [sic] caring" (Rogers, 1979) for the client to flourish. " Rogers' believed that unconditional positive regard was an essential ingredient of psychotherapy (Hergenhahn and Olson, 2007, p 450)." Thirdly, the precursor of the qualified therapist is achievement of empathetic understanding. It is vital that the therapist be so attuned to the client that they can " clarify not only the meanings of which the client is aware but even those just below the level of awareness." According to Rogers', this was the ability to " listen with real understanding, true empathy (1979)."

One noteworthy event that Rogers participated in was a video recording of an interview with a client, Gloria. This video recording was one of a three part film series comparing three forms of psychotherapy: (1) Client-centered by Carl Rogers, (2) Gestalt by Frederick Perls, and (3) Rational emotive by Albert Ellis. The client-centered approach ended with remarks by Rogers's interview with Gloria whereas, in essence, he was moved by the process that Gloria progressed through in her efforts of self-discovery starting with her description of her past and moving into her current situation. The evidence was demonstrated by Rogers-the value of the establishing the proper climate for the exchange of information, the genuineness of the therapist and the

showing of empathy. These measures gave an observable impact on Gloria (Psychological Films, 1965). A study by Wickman and Campbell (2003) investigated the session between Rogers and Gloria. The study attested to the result of the client-centered approach that Rogers employed. It genuinely made a difference in how Gloria felt about herself, when they reported that she made the statement “ Rogers had helped me to recognize my potential-my value as a human being” gives credit to that concept. Additionally, Rogers’s demonstration of empathy, genuineness and unconditional positive regard during the session helped Gloria see that “ she could be her own agent of change.”

As far as the analysis of Rogers’ work and impact on current psychotherapy is concerned, the overall desire of all type of therapy is that of taking care of the patient. In many cases, as Rogers’s work showed it is that the patient that knows simply what is causing them trouble. The work of the client-centered therapist is to delve into the patients’ comments and to help them to uncover a workable solution to their problem on their own. The trained therapist should have the tools to help them to do so.

Rogers’s concept is very simplistic. There are occasions where a patient or client may have some physical limitation or mental illness that inhibits the progression to achieving a fully functioning person, i. e., schizophrenia, bipolar disorder, obsessive compulsive disorder and others. Therapy alone may not be the solution, but therapy with medication may bring the patient very close. Hergenhahn and Olson (2007) observed that Rogers also felt strongly that a when person that does what “ truly feels good [that] is the

best guide for action (p. 462).” They also remarked that “ Rogers said little about the developmental experiences that are conducive to healthy growth.”

I would posit that talk-therapy like what was demonstrated by Rogers with the patient; Gloria is a very effective strategy for someone like me.

Intelligent, functioning persons that lack in positive self-esteem or reinforcement, benefit when tactical questions and conversational techniques like those of Rogers are used. It is also noteworthy that Rogers’ form of psychotherapy is still evident in the work of psychologists today.

What is personally evident is that there are numerous therapeutic strategies available to psychologists that are positioned to help persons effectively grow and prosper in this fast-paced society that surrounds humankind today.

The path that has been laid and that is being laid is vast. Personalities are challenging to decipher and it takes a psychologist willing to learn about and assimilate the plethora of information and patterns of therapy available to them to be able to benefit the many which ultimately becomes the few.