

STILL RELEVANT -- STILL REVOLUTIONARY
(SPECIAL INVITED RETROSPECTIVE REVIEW)

C. H. Patterson

(Contemporary Psychology, 1996, 11, 759-762. Also in Understanding Psychotherapy: Fifty Years of Client-Centered Theory and Practice. PCCS Books, 2000.

Carl R. Rogers
Counseling and Psychotherapy: Newer Concepts in Practice
Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1942. 450 pp.

Carl R. Rogers
Client-Centered Therapy: Its Current Practice, Implications, and Theory
Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1951. 560 pp. \$35.96

Carl R. Rogers
On Becoming a Person: A Therapist's View of Psychotherapy
Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1961. 429 pp. \$11.95

This review will consist of four parts. The first three will each consider one of the books under review. The fourth will be a concluding statement.

COUNSELING AND PSYCHOTHERAPY

I first saw this book in 1942 or 1943 when I was a psychological assistant in the Air Force. I remember a psychoanalytically oriented colleague remarking that Rogers was nothing but a country hick. I did not read the book until 1946, just before a short course with Rogers and his staff at the University of Chicago, in preparation for a position with the Veterans Administration as a Personal Counselor, a title which later became Counseling Psychologist.

The book grew out of Rogers's experience in Rochester and his first year at Ohio State. Although Rogers claimed no credit for the "newer concepts," his systematization and his experiential and research support of them constitute a revolution in counseling and psychotherapy (the terms are used interchangeably). It turned upside down the concept of the therapist as an expert, solving the client's problems, or leading the client to (the therapist's) solutions, while the client remained a passive participant. The term nondirective the role of the therapist. The client was responsible for the process, as well as its goal or outcomes.

This reversal was responsible for jokes and stories, particularly among instructors in undergraduate psychology courses--some of which still persist. An apocryphal story circulated in the late 1940s as a parody of non-directive counseling. Rogers, it was said, was counseling a client high up in an office building.

Client: I feel terrible.

Rogers :You feel terrible.

Client: I really feel terrible.

Rogers: You really feel terrible.

Client: For two cents I'd jump out that window.

Rogers: For two cents you'd jump out that window.

Client: (getting up and going to the window) Here I go!

Rogers: (getting up and going to the window): There you go!

Another line was apparently added later. The client hits the ground with a "plop" sound.

Rogers: Plop.

This story includes a basic hypothesis or assumption of non-directive counseling, along with a misconception of its practice. This hypothesis states that human beings have within themselves the potential and capability to challenge and grow; therapy frees the individual for normal growth and development. The misconception is that the therapist does nothing but repeat what the client says, or as it is usually stated, reflects the clients' statements. Nondirective therapy is characterized by the technique of reflection. But nowhere does Rogers use the word; it is not indexed in the book. The terms Rogers uses are acceptance, recognition, response to and clarification of feelings. The objective is to encourage expression of feelings and attitudes by the client. Thus, though the book is usually thought to focus on techniques, they are secondary to, and implementations of, counselor permissiveness, warmth, and understanding, designed to enable the client to release and express feelings.

The book was unique in its time in the recognition of the need for research and the introduction of research findings in support of the practices it described. Early in the book Rogers refers to the need for "hypothetical formulations" derived from experience, to be put to test (p. 16). The book, he states, "endeavors to formulate a definite and understandable series of hypotheses . . . which may be tested and explored" (pp. 16-17). This theme pervades all of Rogers's writings. The basic hypothesis or definition of counseling is that a free and permissive relationship allows the client to develop an understanding and acceptance of self and to take self-initiated positive actions. The book is also unique in the use of many examples taken from recorded interviews and the inclusion of the first complete transcription of an actual therapy case. The case of Herbert Bryan consists of 176 pages of eight complete interviews, with comments by Rogers. The therapist is anonymous, but it was most certainly Rogers himself.

Counseling and Psychotherapy was not enthusiastically received. Psychotherapy and counseling were dominated by psychoanalysis or the Minnesota (directive) point of view. It is amazing how current and relevant the book is today. Yet there is currently an increase in directive methods of psychotherapy, while paradoxically, medicine is moving toward less invasive procedures. The book could well be used as an introductory text today.

CLIENT-CENTERED THERAPY

This book represents an advance over *Counseling and Psychotherapy* in several respects. It replaces the term nondirective with client-centered, a term that occurs some dozen times in the earlier book as an alternative to nondirective. The latter still occurs occasionally in *Client-Centered Therapy*. There is no discussion of the reasons for this change, which was present in articles during the 1940s (e.g., Rogers, 1946).

The focus of the approach is changed from techniques to attitudes, a term used occasionally in the earlier book. The basic attitude is a philosophical orientation characterized by a deep respect for the individual and his or her right to and capacity for self-direction. Techniques are implementations of this attitude. The core implementation is empathy, by which the therapist enters the client's frame of reference—the client's world as it were. Empathy is a manifestation of acceptance, respect, and trust and confidence in the client, developing a relationship that is the essence of therapy.

Rogers emphasizes that this relationship is a hypothesis that is tested with each client. It is posed as an "if-then" statement: If certain therapist attitudes are present and perceived by the client, then certain client responses and behaviors result.

The movement away from techniques is seen in the differences between the case of Bryan and excerpts in *Client-Centered Therapy*. Rogers quotes from his 1946 article recognizing "the subtle directiveness" in the case of Bryan.

A long chapter on the process of therapy, with excerpts from therapy sessions and references to research, culminates in a brief statement of a theory of the therapy process. The process is essentially one of changes in the client's perception of and attitudes toward the self, or the self-concept, leading to a reorganization of the self. Changes in perception lead to changes in behavior. A nonthreatening relationship makes these changes possible.

There is a brief consideration of transference, diagnosis, and the applicability of client-centered therapy. Simply stated, "transference as a problem doesn't arise; diagnosis is regarded as unnecessary, and client-centered therapy is applicable to all cases" (p. 198). Countertransference is not mentioned. However, in the earlier discussion of the therapist's functioning it is stated that where the therapist is nonevaluative and operates from the frame of reference of the client, "where the therapist endeavors to keep himself out, as a separate person, and where his whole endeavor is to understand the other so completely that he becomes almost an alter ego of the client, personal distortions and maladjustments are much less likely to occur" (p. 42).

A chapter on the training of counselors and therapists describes a short-term program for the Veterans Administration and the then current doctoral program at the University of Chicago. Today's instructors might profit from this chapter.

The book ends with a 50-page chapter on "A Theory of Personality and Behavior." Nineteen propositions are stated as assumptions or hypotheses. It is a phenomenological theory. The self and the self-concept are central; the theory has been designated as self-theory. A more extended and formal statement of a theory of personality, interpersonal relationships, and of therapy and personality change appears in Koch's *Psychology: A Study of a Science* (Rogers, 1959).

Three chapters on applications of client-centered therapy beyond individual psychotherapy are included: a chapter on play therapy by Elaine Dorfman, on group therapy by Nicholas Hobbs, and on leadership and administration by Thomas Gordon. There is also a chapter on student-centered teaching by Rogers. Rogers later published books on education (Rogers, 1969, 1983) and groups (1970).

As in *Counseling and Psychotherapy*, material from recorded interviews is interspersed throughout, as well as comments on their therapy by clients, including the comments of one client following each of eight interviews. The excerpts and the comments on them provide an understanding of the therapy not possible from a didactic exposition. Although there are no reports of actual research, research evidence is repeatedly referred to. And as in the earlier book, Rogers repeatedly emphasizes that his statements and conclusions are tentative. As was stated about the earlier book, Client-Centered Therapy is relevant for psychotherapy today.

ON BECOMING A PERSON

Unlike the other two books, this is a collection of 21 papers, published and unpublished, written between 1951 and 1961. The papers go beyond psychotherapy and include teaching, family life, interpersonal relationships, persons and science, and the place of the person in the behavioral sciences.

The book opens with a piece titled, "This Is Me," that is a brief autobiographical statement of Rogers's personal and professional development, in which it becomes clear that his interpersonal relationships replicated or mirrored his professional relationships with his clients.

The chapter dealing with psychotherapy reiterates the conditions of a good therapeutic relationship. Though considered in various chapters, they do not become repetitive: There are nuances in each. They fill out in considerable detail the therapist attitudes and the process and outcomes of client-centered therapy. The attitudes are not only effective in psychotherapy but in all human relationships, including marriage, parenting, teaching, and administration. Excerpts from therapy sessions are frequent. Research evidence is referred to or cited, with cautions about the tentative nature of the findings.

The if-then nature of the therapy process is stated in various forms. For example: "When I hold in myself the kind of attitudes I have described, and when the other person can to some degree experience the attitudes, then I believe that change and constructive personal development will

invariably occur-and I include the word 'invariably' only after long and careful consideration" (p. 35).

The excerpts and comments focus on the therapy process and the client's experience of it. But the therapist is also there and emerges as an awesome person.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

Rereading the three books made me think about Rogers as a person and his place, and that of client-centered therapy, in psychology and psychotherapy today and in the future.

Rogers was a very modest person. He not only would not impose any beliefs, values, or solutions on his clients, but also not on his students, readers, and colleagues. His statements were cautious, tentative, proposed as hypotheses. He wrote that "there can be no closed system of beliefs, no unchanging set of principles which I hold.... There is no closed system of beliefs or set of principles which I would encourage others to have or hold" (1961, p. 2). In the education of therapists he stated: "The first step in training client-centered therapists is to drop all concern as to the orientation with which the student will emerge" (1961, P 432).

Yet it is clear that Rogers did have a philosophy, convictions, and beliefs that, although not closed or unchanging, did guide his life and his practice of psychotherapy. His emphasis always was that it was his way of doing therapy. But he was deeply concerned about the effects of his therapy on his clients. At a workshop in a Wisconsin state hospital, three psychotherapists interviewed the same patient. Following the third interview, by Rogers, he commented in the discussion:

"Most of the time, especially in a discussion during a workshop of this sort, I can really let other people have their own way of working with people and realize, "Sure, they're working in their own way." Then it's surprising how deeply I feel in an actual specific situation how much of a partisan I have become." (Rogers, 1958)

Then after commenting critically on the approach of the other two interviewers, he said, "And my feeling is, there's an in-between kind of way. And curiously enough, it happens to be the way I work" (Rogers, 1958).

Rogers was unusual, if not unique, in the extent to which he combined being a therapist with being a researcher. His experience as a therapist led to hypotheses that were the bases for the great amount of research conducted by himself, his students, and his colleagues. In the chapter "Persons or Science" (1961, p. 200), he refers to his "'double life' of subjectivity and objectivity" and explores these dual roles, attempting to integrate them.

The if-then relationship between the therapist-provided conditions and therapy outcomes recurs several times in Rogers's books. One statement reads as follows: "We have established by external control, conditions which we predict will be followed by internal control by the individual" (1961, p. 397). This sounds like a statement by a behaviorist. It occurs in a chapter based on Rogers's statement in a debate with Skinner at the American Psychological Association

convention in 1956. Implicit in it is the basis for reconciling behavioral psychology with humanistic psychology. The difference is in goals. The conditions are stimuli for "behavior which is essentially free" (1961, p. 398). They are also reinforcers for the in-therapy behaviors of the client.

There is a paradox in the esteem in which Rogers is held and his current influence in the field of psychotherapy. Kirschenbaum and Henderson (1989) make the following statements: "A pioneering psychotherapist"; "the most influential psychologist in American history"; "he carried out and encouraged more scientific research in counseling and psychotherapy than had ever been undertaken anywhere"; "more than any individual he was responsible for the spread of counseling and psychotherapy beyond psychiatry and psychoanalysis to all the helping professions-psychology, social work, education, ministry, lay therapy and others" (p. xi).

Client-Centered Therapy and *On Becoming A Person* are still in print and widely read. Rogers was listed (#54) among the 75 authors who must be read (Writer's Digest, 1995). His books are read by nonprofessionals and have been translated into a dozen languages, yet they are no longer required reading in programs in clinical and counseling psychology. Kirschenbaum and Henderson (1989, p. xiii) note that Rogers's work "is not held in high esteem in academic settings." A student desiring to learn to practice client-centered therapy would be unable to find a program where it would be possible, though there are a few places where a course is available. There is more interest in client-centered therapy in other countries-Europe, South America, Japan-than in the United States.

In the 1985 Phoenix *Conference on the Evolution of Psychotherapy* (Zeig, 1987), Rogers received a five-minute standing ovation, the only person so honored. Yet there is no evidence of his influence in the presentations of the other participants. In the *History of Psychotherapy* edited by Freedheim (1993), there is a chapter on client-centered therapy (by Zimring and Raskin), but only 17 references to Rogers. In a special issue of the *Journal Psychotherapy* on "The Future of Psychotherapy" (Norcross, 1992), consisting of 21 papers, there is not a single reference to Rogers.

When one reads-or rereads-these books it becomes clear that the system of therapy they present is revolutionary. It is directly opposed to the current approaches to psychotherapy. The statement of a graduate student in a meeting at which Rogers spoke is still relevant:

"I spent three years in graduate school learning to be an expert in clinical psychology. I learned to make diagnostic judgments. I learned the various techniques of altering the subjects' attitudes and behavior. I learned subtle modes of manipulation, under the labels of interpretation and guidance. Then I began to read your material, which upset everything I had learned. You were saying that the power rests not in my mind but in his organism. You completely reversed the relationship of power and control which had been built up in me over three years." (Rogers, 1977. p. 3)

Yet its philosophy, theory, clinical evidence, and research evidence are compelling. The research evidence accumulated over a period of some 50 years has been resisted, even rejected. There is some evidence that this negative evaluation is changing. The most recent review (Beutler,

Machado, & Neufeldt, 1994, p. 259) concluded that "consistent evidence exists to support the assertion (now almost a 'truism') that a warm, supportive therapeutic relationship facilitates therapeutic success.... Research in this area continues to be strong."

In his classic article on the necessary and sufficient conditions of therapeutic personality change, Rogers (1957) wrote: "It is not stated that these six conditions are the essentials of client-centered therapy, and that other conditions are essential for other types of psychotherapy.... My aim in stating this theory is to state the conditions which apply to any situation in which constructive change occurs, whether we are thinking of classical psychoanalysis, or any of its modern offshoots, or Adlerian therapy, or any other" (p. 101). Beutler, Machado, and Neufeldt (1994, p. 244) wrote: "Collectively the quality of the therapeutic relationship, by its various terms, has consistently been found to be a central contributor to therapeutic progress. Its significance traverses theoretical schools, theory-specific concepts, and diversity of measurement procedures." The necessary and sufficient conditions of Rogers are the common elements in all approaches to psychotherapy. Immersing oneself in the work of Rogers leads to the conviction that this system of psychotherapy must eventually become the treatment for psychosocial disturbances. Rogers was-and still is-beyond the times.

The rereading of these books after some 35-50 years was a humbling experience. I discovered that some of my ideas that I had thought were original were present in Rogers's writings. This led to the realization that other writers, including myself, have added little of significance to these classics.

REFERENCES

- Beutler, L. E., Machado, P. P. P., & Neufeldt, S. A. (1994). Therapist variables. In A. E. Bergin & S. L. Garfield (Eds.), *Handbook of psychotherapy and behavior change* (4th ed., pp. 229-269). New York: Wiley.
- Freedheim, D. K. (Ed.). (1993). *History of psychotherapy*. Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.
- Kirschenbaum, H., & Henderson, V. M. (Eds.). (1989). *The Carl Rogers reader*. Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin.
- Norcross, J. C. (Ed.). (1992). The future of psychotherapy [Special issue]. *Psychotherapy*, 29(1), 1-158.
- Rogers, C. R. (1946). Significant aspects of client-centered therapy. *American Psychologist*, 1, 415-422.
- Rogers, C. R. (1957). The necessary and sufficient conditions of therapeutic personality change. *Journal of Consulting Psychology*, 21, 95-103.
- Rogers, C. R. (Speaker). (1958). Interview with Loretta (Tape No. 1). American Academy of Psychotherapists Tape Library.
- Rogers, C. R. (1959). A theory of therapy, personality and interpersonal relationships, as developed in the client-centered framework. In S. Koch (Ed.), *Psychology: A study of a science. Study 1: Conceptual and systematic. Vol. 3: Formulations of the person and the social context* (pp. 184-256). New York: McGraw-Hill.
- Rogers, C. R. (1969). *Freedom to learn: A view of what education might become*. Columbus, OH: Charles Merrill.
- Rogers, C. R. (1970). *Carl Rogers on encounter groups*. New York: Harper & Row.
- Rogers, C. R. (1977). *On personal power: Inner strength and its revolutionary impact*. New York: Delacorte Press.
- Rogers, C. R. (1983). *Freedom to learn for the 80s*. Columbus, OH: Charles Merrill.
- Zeig, J. K. (Ed.). (1987). *The evolution of psychotherapy*. New York: Brunner/Mazel