

## C. H. Patterson: The Counselor's Counselor

RODNEY K. GOODYEAR  
C. EDWARD WATKINS, JR.

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C. H. Patterson (Pat) has been a central figure in counseling and counseling psychology for over 30 years. As a major spokesperson for the profession and as a leading advocate of the client-centered perspective, Pat has had a direct or indirect impact on most counselors. The more than 150 articles and 10 books he has written--including his now classic *Theories of Counseling and Psychotherapy*--have provided the major vehicle for his influence.

Pat's impact on the two of us, however, has been more immediate and personal. We have both experienced him as no less than a mentor, even though we have each known him in a slightly different role at different times.

For one of us (RG), Pat was influential even before we had met. As I tried to decide on the counseling programs to which I would apply for fall 1969 admission, my undergraduate advisor strongly recommended the University of Illinois program. There I would have the opportunity to work with C.H. Patterson who was, in my advisor's words, "the counselor's counselor."

My advisor's suggestion turned out to be well-founded. In fact, during my years at Illinois, I had the opportunity to form a number of impressions of Pat:

- of the soft-spoken professor who seemed remarkably congruent with the client-centered perspective he advocated
- of the leader in our profession who was, nevertheless, always accessible to and welcoming of students
- of the 2 years of biweekly doctoral seminars, that met evenings in his home to informally discuss current issues in the profession (and I still keenly remember the time Robert Carkhuff, an overnight guest of Pat, conducted our seminar in a highly charged atmosphere)
- of the author who wrote *Humanistic Education* during the summer of 1971, one chapter per week. Unless he was out of town on business, Pat was in his office writing every weekday. He left his office door open as he wrote, giving his complete attention to all who stopped by, but as they left, he resumed his writing as if his train of thought had not been interrupted.

For the other of us (CEW), Pat's writing proficiency and his teaching and therapeutic abilities have been continued sources of amazement. Moreover, I have found him to be very giving of his time and most interested in facilitating the development of budding professionals. I met Pat some 3 years ago in a workshop he was giving at my alma mater,

Western Carolina University and later wrote to him to indicate my interest in client-centered therapy and to request his assistance in learning more about it. He agreed to supervise me and has done so for some time now.

Although Pat has been very helpful as a supervisor, he has been much more than that to me. He has served willingly as my colleague and peer and as a mentor and friend. From my perspective, then, Pat is the counselor's counselor.

We are aware that many counselors know C.H. Patterson only through his articles and books. Our primary purpose in interviewing Pat for this article was to allow them to know him more personally. In gaining that acquaintance, counselors are also provided in important historical perspective of their profession.

*ROD: You have accomplished a great deal in your lifetime, Pat. Not only are you a prominent spokesperson for the client-centered point of view and the author of a major counseling text, but you have served as president both of the American Rehabilitation Counseling Association and APA's Division of Counseling Psychology. I am curious, however, about what you regard as your major contributions.*

*PAT: That's very difficult to answer. Certainly the major text you mention, my *Theories of Counseling and Psychotherapy*, is what I am most known for. If I go somewhere to lecture or if I meet students somewhere, that's the book they know. But I have always had some regrets about that because I do not feel the book represents me. Although its last section has some of my own ideas, that book represents other people's theories or points of view.*

Two of my other books represent me more, and I wish they had been more widely read. One, *Counseling and Psychotherapy: Theory and Practice*, was published in 1959, it was in print until 1972 or 1973, but in some respects has never become outdated. For example, although many books now cover ethics and values, its chapters on each of these topics were among the earliest statements and are, I believe, still current.

The other book, *Relationship Counseling and Psychotherapy*, was written during the year I was in England and published in 1974. It has been well received by reviewers and quite widely used. It represents my view of client-centered therapy.

But I regard the impact I have had on my students as more important than anything I have written. And I'm not talking primarily of my work with the approximately 70 doctoral students I have had--though a number of them have gone on to write books and otherwise become successful. Because many of them had completed their master's work at other institutions, my impact on them was often limited to the supervision of their dissertations and to the doctoral seminars I offered.

I think my greatest contribution has probably been to that large number of masters students who took their sequence of theory and practice courses with me. That is, at least a 2 semester sequence of both the basic theory course and the supervised practicum. I

have felt--and still feel it very strongly--that students can't really understand client-centered therapy unless they are exposed to it over at least that period of time. I have been very concerned about the misconceptions, the widespread misconceptions, about client-centered therapy among students, among practitioners, and even among instructors in many counseling programs. Lacking a foundation in the philosophy and theory behind it, many still consider certain techniques such as the reflection of feelings to be the essence of client-centered therapy.

## CLIENT-CENTERED THERAPY

ED: *I remember reading something in which you said that you did not really regard yourself as an originator or pioneer in the area of client-centered therapy, but as more of an interpreter of the literature. Yet many counselors perceive this as having been your major area of impact on the field.*

PAT: I have not felt any need to try to develop my own theory of counseling and psychotherapy--or even to try to change client-centered therapy in some way. I have felt that my contribution, if any, has been as a supporter of client-centered therapy. I have been a follower of *Carl Rogers* with no need to usurp his position. As he has continued to develop his theory, I have continued to follow by interpreting and elaborating on it without trying to extend it. It is true, also, that I have reached independently many of the same ideas or conclusions as Rogers has though perhaps not at the same time.

ROD: *Regardless of whether you have extended it, you are certainly closely affiliated with the client-centered position. How did you identify yourself so closely with it?*

PAT: I first heard of Carl Rogers and his work either in late 1942 or in 1943 when I was an Air Force psychologist stationed in San Antonio. One of the psychologists there with me obtained a copy of *Counseling and Psychotherapy* and passed it around. I made no effort to read it at that time, however, for I had only then heard of Rogers and, in fact, keenly remember the comment by one of my analytically oriented colleagues that Rogers was nothing but a country hick.

After the war, I went to work for the Veterans Administration as a clinical psychologist but did not find it particularly rewarding to spend so much of my time administering Rorschachs, TATS, and Kuders to hospital patients and then to just file away the results. So when the new position of Personal Counselor was established with the VA. I was interested and applied for it at the Minneapolis VA Regional Office. The job description was that of a counselor or psychotherapist who would presumably offer short-term rather than long-term psychotherapy. This position, however, required me to participate in a 5 week training program directed by Carl Rogers and his staff at the University of Chicago. When I knew I was going to be spending several weeks with him, I obtained Rogers' book and read it. This was in the fall of 1946.

My first reaction was not particularly favorable. I suppose it could be summed up as, "Well, here I am a psychologist, and why shouldn't I know more about psychology than

clients do? Why shouldn't I be able to make recommendations, give advice, tell them what to do?" But while that was my first reaction, it changed when I got to Chicago. I found that, actually, the client-centered point of view was probably very much consistent with my general orientation toward people, what could be called a democratic orientation. It probably did have something to do with my unexpressed system of values, so that when I was exposed to this approach to counseling and psychotherapy, it stuck.

*ROD: I know that while you were with the VA in Minneapolis, you were also completing your doctorate at the University of Minnesota. Among your fellow students were people such as Don Hoyt, Ken Hoyt, John Holland, John and Helen Krumboltz and Tom Magoon, who themselves were to become prominent counseling psychologists. You alone among the Minnesota people seem to have embraced anything as "soft" as client-centered therapy. I imagine this was in some ways a rather difficult environment for you.*

PAT: Well, in some ways it was, but in other ways it wasn't. It is true that the client-centered point of view was not very welcome at the University of Minnesota. But, then, none of the other Minnesota graduate students had been exposed to Carl Rogers personally in the way that I had. Also, I discovered that it least some of the antagonism toward client-centered therapy was because the University of Chicago's program for training personal counselors was one that the University of Minnesota had wanted and applied for, but it had been denied them. If I had known it at the time, I probably would have been afraid to go into that kind of environment.

On the other hand, my advisor was *Gilbert Wrenn*. Although Wrenn has never wanted to commit himself to any single theoretical perspective, he was and is quite client-centered in his attitudes, his philosophy, and his approach to people. So I never had any trouble with him as an advisor or in any of the courses I took there. I think I had one or two classes with Wrenn that related to theory and practice, and I remember once when he was out of town he asked me to take the class for him to present my point of view.

There was one experience that is rather humorous and relates to the attitude of some Minnesota people towards client-centered therapy. At the VA, I was not always able to see my clients in a soundproof room and, at one point, one of the Minnesota-trained staff members apparently listened in on one of my interviews. I say "listened in," but the problem was that he didn't hear me talking very much. So he wrote to my superior in Washington to complain that I wasn't earning my salary, because I wasn't active or directive enough in helping my clients!

So since 1946, I've been consistently client centered and at times have felt that I've been even more client-centered than Rogers himself. In fact, I have suggested that there are only two people who really understand client-centered therapy--myself and Carl Rogers, and then add jokingly that I sometimes wonder about Carl Rogers!

*ED: What has your relationship been with Rogers over the years?*

PAT: We have very little actual contact since I left the University of Chicago program in 1947, though we have corresponded occasionally. One time, it was over the title of my 1959 book. It was clear to me that if the term *counseling* was in the title, certain people would read it and others would not; if the term *psychotherapy* was used, another group would read it and others would not. That led me, at the suggestion of E. H. Porter, to use both terms in the title. Well, Rogers wrote to ask whether it was not a violation of copyright laws to use the same title he had used. I replied to him that book titles are not copyrighted. How many "Introductions to Psychology" are there? I also told him that I felt considerable time had elapsed since the publication of his book, but that I would be careful to have advertisements include both the title and subtitle of my book, *Counseling and Psychotherapy: Theory and Practice*.

Another contact I had with him was when I wrote the chapter on client-centered therapy for my theories book. When I sent him my finished chapter for review, as I did with the other theorists, his comment was that it was pretty much an accurate representation, but that it was kind of dull, lifeless. He suggested I use some material he'd published elsewhere to give more of a personal touch to the description of the counseling process, which I did.

I have seen Rogers at conventions, of course, and was instrumental in getting him to the University of Illinois for a workshop on group counseling, which resulted in two films on groups. But my contacts with him have been almost entirely by mail.

### COMMON THREADS

ED: *I'd like to shift gears a bit. You've written articles and books on a number of topics, including the therapeutic process, counseling theory, supervision, rehabilitation counseling, college student personnel work, and school guidance. What common threads are there in that diversity?*

PAT: The answer is really implicit in what I have been saying. All the things you mention are either helping relationships or helping professions, so the basic principles of a helping relationship should apply. These, as well as *all* interpersonal relationships should be directed toward the common goal of *self-actualization*. This is, or should be, the goal of our society and its institutions, including the family, the church, and our social, economic, educational, and political systems.

ED: *So, regardless of the area in which you have written, the relationship is primary.*

PAT: Yes. That's the common element.

ROD: *Since we are on that topic, I wonder if you still share Rogers' 1957 opinion that certain relationship dimensions are necessary and sufficient in counseling?*

PAT: Well, I think writing on this topic has been restricted. First, I think it is necessary to be clearer about what they are sufficient for. Rogers defined it as therapeutic personality

change and this implies to me *voluntary* positive changes: Certainly it is possible to change behavior, if not personality, through such other means as brainwashing, drugs, and brain surgery. Second, if the client lacks skills or information, then the conditions may not be sufficient. Third, although there is little evidence on this, it may be that the conditions are not, by themselves, the most *efficient* method. Finally, I would note that my emphasis has been that a total relationship is the necessary and sufficient condition for change. Although this relationship is characterized by the three basic conditions, there may be other conditions involved--for example, concreteness or specificity. And, of course, the three basic conditions are themselves complex and may eventually be broken down into more specific elements.

*ROD: Your position on the relationship dimensions of helping has not always been a popular one. In fact, I have always admired your willingness to take a stand on professional issues without regard to the popularity of your position.*

PAT: I think I have always had a concept of myself as standing beside a bandwagon asking those who are failing all over themselves in their attempt to jump on if they know where the bandwagon is going. We've been going through a period of increasing numbers of fads and everyone seems to be afraid of being left behind or becoming out-of-date. So we've seen these movements develop and grow with no empirical support or theoretical foundation.

But I believe I have also appeared reactionary in my response to what *seemed* to be real discoveries among counselors during the late 1960s. One example was the realization of the influence of social or sociological and cultural factors in counseling. I reacted with some surprise to this because with my undergraduate work in sociology, anthropology, and the social sciences, I assumed all counselors were aware that clients occupy a social environment as members of a family, a community and a culture.

I was similarly surprised by the developmental counseling movement. In the 1960s counselor educators apparently discovered developmental psychology for the first time. Now, perhaps naively, because my masters' work had been in developmental psychology, I had always assumed that it was unnecessary to talk about developmental counseling, because all good counseling or therapy is developmental. That is, I believed all good therapists were aware that clients had a past and a future as well as a present and that they were changing and developing all the time.

Now my attitudes may have irritated some people. If so, this is unfortunate, because it was not my intent. I have responded honestly according to what I believe.

*ED: To continue in what may be a similar vein, I know you have expressed some concern about counselors' apparent lack of any sense of history of their profession. How specifically has this been worrisome to you?*

PAT: I guess I have been more concerned about this in recent years. It seems to me that the current generation of those publishing in the APGA journals demonstrate a surprising

lack of familiarity with the history and development of the field. Very few references date back more than 10 years, and it is painfully apparent that authors are ignorant of the history of the counseling profession or of the ideas they write about. Santyana, the philosopher, wrote that those who are ignorant of history are destined to repeat it, and that sort of repetition is clear to me in the publications of the past years. Many go over the same ground covered in publications of the 1950s and 1960s.

*Rothney*, in his November 1981 letter in the *Personnel and Guidance Journal*, reports his tabulation of the 256 references in the May 1981 issue (which was devoted to counseling research) in which he found only 1% of the references were from the period 1950-1959. Although his concern was research, I have the same concern about theoretical articles. Science is cumulative, incremental, building bit-by-bit on the past. Not only is it inefficient to ignore or to be ignorant of the past, but it also carries the implication that counseling is not scientific.

*ED: You sound as if you are saying that if we were to take note of this historical material and evaluate, integrate, and use it effectively, the potential for counseling as a profession would be a lot greater.*

*PAT: Yeah. I think we're wasting a lot of time spinning our wheels and getting off the track on fads. I think we have to get rid of the idea that everyone has to be original, to have his or her own theory of counseling or psychotherapy--which is, of course, nonsense. One consequence--of everyone trying to be original seems to be the rejection of anything not new. Anything more than 10 years old is regarded as obsolete.*

*ROD: As you mention the trend for everyone to have his or her own theory of counseling, I think of a study I recently completed using counseling psychologists as subjects. Of the 80 or so who indicated a theoretical preference, virtually half declared themselves to be eclectic. This is consistent with recent studies of clinical psychologists by Garfield and Kurtz and of counseling and clinical psychologists by Darrell Smith. "Eclectic" no longer seems to be the dirty work it used to be.*

*PAT: There are two trends in psychotherapy I find distressing. One is the increasing attractiveness of methods and techniques--now called *strategies*--which cast the therapist in a controlling, manipulating position as an expert in directing the lives of others. This seems to be a revival or throwback to the 1930s and 1940s.*

The other trend is the development of an atheoretical, almost antitheoretical movement. Therapists seem reluctant to subscribe to any theory and are reverting to eclecticism, which is not a theory but is essentially a "flying by the seat of the pants." Each eclectic therapist operates out of his or her own bag of techniques, on the basis of his or own unique experiences, training, and biases, on a case-by-case basis with no general theory or set of principles for guidance.

Thus, there is no common body of knowledge that can be called eclectic counseling or psychotherapy. Therefore, it cannot be taught--it can only be developed on the basis of

individual experience. This leaves the beginning therapist in an unenviable and, more specifically, in an untenable position, scientifically and theoretically, as well as practically.

*ED: I sense as you talk that your criticisms stem from a genuine concern for our profession. I would be interested to know what some of your personal hopes are for the future of counseling.*

PAT: Although I have been somewhat disillusioned of late by some aspects of counselor education and of psychotherapy, my hopes, like all hopes, are optimistic. I would like to see us move beyond the divisiveness that has occurred with the development of innumerable methods, theories, and approaches to counseling so that we could move toward some essential agreement on the basic nature of psychotherapy. In my opinion, of course, client-centered therapy provides just this sort of integration. With this agreement we could implement more effective training programs and have more effective practitioners.

It may be too optimistic to expect this to occur soon, because I think we are still in a very confused and confusing stage in which we are emphasizing the differences rather than the commonalities among the various counseling approaches. We also need to get away from our present overemphasis on techniques and back to the recognition that the essence of good therapy is the *person* of the therapist. Effective therapy is characterized by a therapist who really lives and represents the conditions of facilitative interpersonal relationships so that they are not practiced as techniques but are simply implementations of the counselor as a person, so that he or she is not playing a role.

### **BECOMING A COUNSELING PSYCHOLOGIST**

*ROD: Your commitment to counseling and counseling psychology is obvious. How did you make that career choice for yourself?*

PAT: The road I took to counseling psychology was long and winding. But it was one that afforded me a number of learning experiences I would not have had if I had made an early vocational decision and spent my whole life going down one narrow path. It is perhaps ironic, then, that I have often been glad that I received no vocational counseling in high school.

I graduated from high school in a small Massachusetts town. Because I had no further educational plans at that point and because my family needed the support (my father had died when I was 6), I went to work in a local factory. During the years I worked there, I became active with the young people in the Methodist church and eventually decided I was going into the ministry. To implement this career choice, I applied to and was accepted at the University of Chicago.

With the liberal influences I was exposed to at the University, I became interested in the social sciences and majored in sociology. By the time I graduated, I had abandoned the idea of going into the ministry.

But it was 1938 when I graduated, and there was still the depression and a scarcity of jobs. Therefore, I continued to work at two jobs I'd held part-time as a student. One was as a busboy. The other was as a student assistant in the Department of Education, where I'd been working for 2 years on a research project involving the development of a battery of mental ability tests.

The man under whom I had been working, *Marion Augustus Wenger*, (we called him Gus) left to head the Division or Department of Psychology at Fel's Research Institute for Child Development, Antioch College, Yellow Springs, Ohio. The year following my graduation, he was instrumental in my obtaining a position there. It is interesting to note that this is when and where I became a psychologist: The title of my job was research assistant in psychology with rank of instructor. So it was a rather easy way to become a psychologist.

I spent almost 3 years there and realized that if I wanted to go on in the field, I would have to have a graduate degree. So I applied to several universities for admission to graduate work in child psychology and eventually settled on the University of Minnesota, partly because it offered me a half-time teaching assistantship. I spent the 1941-1942 school year working on my master's degree there with *Florence Goodenough and John E. Anderson*.

In the fall of 1941, of course, there was the bombing of Pearl Harbor and we entered the war. A program was set up in the U.S. Army Air Force for the purpose of selecting pilots, navigators, and bombardiers. This selection program, headed by *John Flanagan*, recruited psychologists who were to administer 8 hours of pencil and pencil tests and 1 1/2 hours of psychomotor tests. In July, 1942, I left Minnesota for San Antonio, where I was assigned to administer the psychomotor tests. That made me an aviation psychologist.

Later, the armed forces recognized the need for a clinical psychologist in their hospitals to deal with the psychiatric casualties. A program was developed to give direct commissions to psychologists, although they did not necessarily have the Ph.D. So I applied for and was granted a commission as second lieutenant early in 1945. I again changed my profession overnight, this time to become a clinical psychologist.

After a 5-week training course taught by *Max Hutt* on the Rorschach, the TAT, the Wechsler, and the Bender Gestalt, I became the chief clinical psychologist at Fort Knox. Then, in the summer of 1946 at least a dozen clinical psychologists were sent to the Philippines. We did not know it then, but an invasion of Japan had been planned, and we were being sent in order to care for the resultant psychiatric casualties. But shortly after we got there, the war in the Pacific ended, so I spent 6 months or so in a general hospital

outside Manila. It was then that I began to consider what I would do after the war and decided to join the VA, which I've already told you about.

*ED: Well, we've heard something about your years at Minnesota. How did your career develop from there?*

PAT: My primary intent in obtaining my PhD was to be able to work in an academic environment. As I finished my doctorate in 1955, a development occurred that fit into my career plans: The federal government began to support university programs to educate rehabilitation counselors. Most major universities were interested in developing these programs, and I looked into several program coordinators--including the one at the University of Minnesota--before accepting the one at the University of Illinois.

I went there in March, 1956. I developed a 2-year master's program (which I believe is the minimum necessary length), and also a Ph.D. program in rehabilitation psychology. That was essentially a counseling psychology program with a specialty in rehabilitation counseling.

I never wanted to develop that program independently of the other counseling programs. So at the University I became the fourth full-time counseling faculty member within the Department of Educational Psychology. My grant for the rehabilitation counseling program provided a secretary whom I shared with the others, and that became the nucleus for what would become the Division of Counseling and Guidance. But the name did not last long, because I've always had an antipathy towards the term guidance; we soon became the Division of Counselor Education. It was not until 1975 that we finally became the Division of Counseling Psychology: Bill Gilbert directed an APA-approved counseling psychology program in the psychology department, and I did not feel it was politically wise to rename our program until he retired.

From the beginning, I felt that the common denominator for the programs being offered within the division was psychology and that the basic program was counseling. Regardless of their intended work setting, our students at the master's level were being prepared as psychological counselors. Therefore, students in school and rehabilitation counseling took many of the same courses together, including the practicum--a "generic" practicum. This was taken at the counseling center we had established for our training purposes at the Chanute Air Force Base and which the Air Force supported with administrative personnel for almost 20 years.

The Division grew to 12 full-time staff members in the late 1960s. But then the university started reducing staff and by the time I retired in 1977, it was down to about 6 members again.

*ROD: The impression I've had is that you withdrew from that program during your last years. For example, you took two Fulbright professorships within a few years, one to the University of Aston in England (1972-1973). The other to Hacettepe University in Turkey (1976-1977).*

PAT: You're right about my withdrawing. I became quite disillusioned as the State of Illinois refused to provide adequate funding. In fact, that was one of my reasons for retiring at 65 rather than staying on until the mandatory 68. Perhaps I made a mistake in developing a program to prepare high quality professionals rather than researchers in a University focused on the preparation of the latter.

ED: *How have you found your retirement?*

PAT: I stayed in Urbana the year following my retirement to allow my youngest son to graduate from high school, and to finish the third edition of my Theories book. Then, I moved here to Asheville, North Carolina, a place I "discovered" when I came for a convention of the National Rehabilitation Association in about 1960. It was October. I remember how beautiful it was. One of my daughters moved here shortly before I did, and two of my sons have since settled here, so I am fortunate to have three of my seven children living near.

But I have also found retirement to be perplexing in ways others have noticed and commented on. For example, I am amazed at how my motivation has changed. I was hard working, almost a workaholic before I retired, but now find it very difficult to motivate myself to follow up on ideas I have. It's so easy to procrastinate. In the time since retirement, I've published only a couple of small articles. Recently, however, I've become interested in completing a second edition of Relationship Counseling and Psychotherapy and have been working on that.

I do occasionally conduct a site visit for the American Psychological Association, and I've continued to do some work for publishers--particularly my long-time publisher, Harper & Row--reviewing book manuscripts. Also, I've conducted workshops and lectured at a number of universities and have very much enjoyed doing that. I really enjoy getting into contact with students again and interacting with them; not lecturing to them, but interacting with them. Although I wouldn't want to go back, I do miss teaching. I guess the most exciting thing I am involved in now is my son's new restaurant here in Asheville, The Annex. To help support him, I work 5 1/2 days a week as the maitre d'. It's one more career shift for me, but like the others have been, it is something I'm glad I found my way into.