Overview of Carl Rogers' Life and Contributions to the Field of Psychology

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Abstract

Carl Rogers was a well-known psychologist in the mid to late 1900s. His work is still well known today and practiced. His tools and techniques are used in many different situations like counseling offices, therapist offices, higher education institutions, and in research labs. Carl Rogers worked with all age groups including studying infants through mature adults. Some of his works include psychotherapy, client center therapy, theories on personality and growth, the humanistic approach, the fully functioning human approach, and the organismic value process. An underlying theme is presented through Carl Rogers' work that forms the different aspects of psychotherapy. Most of Rogers' work and research are focussed on patient-client relationships and how to construct that relationship in a way that is beneficial for the clients' success.

Keywords: Carl Rogers, humanistic approach, client-centered therapy, psychotherapy

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Carl Rogers was born on January 8, 1902, in Illinois, Chicago. He was born to his father Walter Rogers and his mother Julia Cushing. His father spent his life as a civil engineer and his mother was a stay at home mother. He was one of five children in the household. During his adolescence, Rogers and his siblings were isolated in a strict household. Each of the children had to learn how to be self-disciplined and meticulous. Walter and Julia were both Christian and ran a strict religious household. Once Carl Rogers finished his adolescent schooling, he went on to attend the University of Wisconsin and majored in agriculture (Kirschenbaum, 2004). As his college experience went on, he decided to instead study religion with hopes of becoming a minister.

After he graduated, Rogers married Helen Elliot without parental approval and then moved to New York City. From there Rogers started attending seminars, one which changed his views of entering the ministry. One seminar, in particular, was based on a personal decision as to why an individual is joining a ministry. After this seminar, Rogers found that he did not agree with the church on many issues. From there he proceeded to attend Columbia University to study clinical psychology. Rogers received a Ph.D. in clinical psychology in 1931 (Kirschenbaum, 2004). He then began clinical counseling at the Rochester Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children. Through his time spent there, he started studying and researching different techniques to go about facilitating different methods of clinical counseling. After his time in Rochester, he got a job at Ohio State in 1940 as a professor. During his time at Ohio State, he wrote his first book *Counseling and Psychotherapy* in 1942. In 1945 Rogers was asked to set up a counseling center at the University of Chicago. Rogers was then elected as the American

Psychological Association (APA) president in 1946. From there on he published his book

Client-Centered Therapy in 1951(Kirschenbaum, 2004).

Though Rogers' was a major influence in the field of psychology, he never told his

family friends about his work and accomplishments. He was humble in the aspect that he did not

see himself as this major influence in the field of psychology. During an interview with Heppner

and Lee (1984), he went into more detail as to why he believed that he does not see himself as a

major influence in the science of psychology.

Carl Rogers was a psychologist who was open to new ideas. Rogers wanted to provoke

inquiry of new ideas among his students. Rogers typically saw that researchers were

re-experimenting and studying the same topics. Instead, Rogers wanted his students to research

practical topics to answer unanswered questions. During his life, he focussed on studying things

that differed from the typical dissertation during that time. Students of Carl Rogers were

encouraged to find new ways and techniques of studying and researching topics in the field of

psychology. During an interview with Carl Rogers, Heppner and Lee (1984) asked many

questions about what Rogers thought of his impact in the field of psychology. Rogers was

humble, as described in the interview notes when talking about his life's work in psychology. He

talks about how he did not see himself as a mentor, he was just open to his students' ideas and

encouraged them to pursue them. During this interview, he seemed as though he was modest and

receptive.

During the interview, Rogers was asked about his time teaching at Ohio State. Through

his answers, the interviewers learned that Rogers was not well-liked by his faculty peers. The

students of Ohio State wanted to have Rogers as their advisor for their dissertations. This was

because of the freedom Rogers gave them in determining what they wanted to research and write about. The other faculty members resented Rogers because they saw it as him stealing their students; however, Rogers did not think of it as taking students from other advisors, the students asked and he was always willing to take on new students.

Rogers focused on only doing research if it interested the researcher personally, and instructed his students to not only do research in order to be famous. This was the reason Rogers focussed on relying on individual creativity. He also did not want students to be his prodigies, he wanted students to make something of themselves, by themselves. He did not want the credit, he only wanted to foster openness and creativity.

Carl Rogers described, in an article, some of the issues and challenges the profession of psychology was facing in 1973. One challenge being if psychology was ever going to be classified as a respected science, rather than pseudoscience. Carl Roger's answer was that psychology as a whole will form into a study of the meanings and processes of inner thoughts and emotions. He describes psychology as a way to study phenomenological ideas of thoughts and behaviors of a person.

Rogers believed that the challenge that was holding psychology back was the loss of freedom and creativity in masters and doctoral programs. Students began repeating the same concepts over and over again, without any new and innovative ideas to research. Another problem that Carl Rogers found was classifying professionalism in the realm of psychological services. This issue is relating to how even individuals with a degree in psychology, do not always have the true qualifications for the job at hand.

Carl Rogers believed in getting rid of the terms master or expert. Therefore, there is room for individuals without as much schooling and/or experience who have more qualifications to bring the creativity factor back into the field of psychology. For example, former drug abusers have a greater impact on current drug users, rather than a person with credentials who have not experienced what the individual has experienced. Meaning that individuals' paper qualifications are sometimes not the most qualified for certain cases. Carl Rogers also touches on problems of whether or not all different communities and social groups of people will ever be able to work together, and if psychology was going to detach from philosophical roots. As a final thought, Carl Rogers explained that there are many more problems and challenges, but the ones mentioned are some that are keeping psychology from becoming its own independent and respected science.

Research with Children

One of Roger's interests was studying and researching children. In particular, the impacts their environment has on them and their academics. One of his studies was with Monte Smith and Micheal Coleman (1978) where they examined how a child's social groupings have an effect on self-concept and academic achievement. The researchers performed the study on 159 students in various elementary schools, where the age range was from six to 12 years old. These students were grouped into a total of 17 classrooms and were given two tests. One test that measured academic achievement scores in math and reading, and the other measured forms of a childs' self-concepts such as behavior, academic status, social status, physical appearance, anxiety, popularity, and happiness.

When analyzing and ranking the data scores, the researchers found that there was significant evidence that social groups and social comparison have an effect on academic achievement and social concept. If the child was placed in a classroom where the academic achievement levels of the other students were equally comparable, the student had a higher self-concept. Whereas, if the student was put in a classroom of mixed academic achievement levels, a student with a lower level of academic achievement may have a lower rating of self-concept due to the social comparison to the students with a higher level of academic achievement.

Carl Rogers also worked on finding different treatment measures for children. He writes about this in his article "Three Surveys of Treatment Measures used with Children" in the *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry* (1937). The first measure is changing the environment. If a child is in a harmful or negative environment, moving them to an environment that can give them adequate care is one solution. Rogers studied how changes in an environment affected a child in an unhealthy home. He studied the mentality changes caused by moving children into various environments. There were four environments in which the child was in. One being staying in their present placement. The changes in the environment included moving the child to a foster home, an institution, or other changes like orphanages. Rogers found that children who were not as difficult cases went to foster homes, whereas, the more difficulties the child has, the more likely they would be put in an institution. Another type of therapy is keeping the child in the home but instead changing the parents and/or relatives' behavior and attitudes in the home. Rogers found this helpful for the child because they were in a place that they were used to, but had a change of the negative experiences they were having.

Rogers compared the children that stayed at home versus the children who were put into a foster home. He found that foster homes tended to already have techniques and attitudes suited for a foster child from an unhealthy home. Therefore, it is easier to put a child in a foster home who is willing to take in children from unhealthy homes. Whereas, there would need to be more work put into changing the attitudes and techniques of the unhealthy household; however, child service places would like to keep the child in their own home with their parents. Rogers talked about how the treatment is helpful, but each case is different. Each child has different needs and has their own problems. Thus, not one type of therapy treatment is not applicable to every child.

Organismic Valuing Process

Carl Rogers also worked on researching the valuing processes of different age groups. In the article "Toward a Modern Approach to Values: The Valuing Process in the Mature Person" (1964) Rogers describes how a person grows from being an infant to an adult and experiences many changes, one being what the person values. At a young age, infants value things like food, security, new experiences, and love. These valuable things are essential for an infant to have a healthy life and childhood.

Rogers believed that values change as children grow up into adults. Some of these adult values include having real feelings, self-direction, potentiality, sensitivity, meaningful relationships, and openness to new experiences. Although, the things an individual valued at a young age are still valued and still relevant, the values of an adult become more sophisticated. Rogers described how these values are what have caused human evolution to develop. The

human race no longer values simplistic and elementary needs, instead, humans have complex

values that lead to survival.

In this article, Rogers investigates the organismic valuing process. He starts by describing

the valuing system of an infant. In the case of an infant, the valuing process is not finalized,

instead, it changes repeatedly per decision. The infants valuing process is opportunistic, meaning

that what an infant values at that moment may change in another, or something all of a sudden

becomes more valuable than before depending on the situation. These values that the infant has

are not influenced by external sources. These decisions are made solely by the infant and his or

her likes and dislikes.

As the child becomes older Rogers determined that their valuing process may start to be

influenced by their immediate surroundings. Rogers goes into describing these immediate

surroundings as individuals in which the child encounters on a daily basis, such as parents and/or

siblings. These individuals have an effect on what that child now likes or dislikes. Rogers called

this process conditions of worth. One example, explained by Rogers, is the child valuing parental

acceptance and the need to obtain it. In this scenario, the child has a high value of becoming an

artist; however, it is something the parents do not accept. Thus, the child does not get that

acceptance that they value, but the child is then influenced by the parents. The child has come to

realize that they get more acceptance from their parents if they say they want to be a doctor. So

now the child's valuing process is influenced by the parents, which in turn changes the child's

value of being an artist, to instead becoming a doctor.

When that child then becomes an adult, they find that their valuing process is determined

by their environment and the individuals in which they surround themselves. Rogers explains

that once an individuals valuing process is compromised by others, individuals start to lose

confidence in themself and their own judgment on what they find valuable. Rogers then

explained how these individuals can see this adjustment in their valuing process when in a

therapeutic setting with them. Then, once the individual sees this adjustment, they can start to

find value in the mature person.

Rogers explains the valuing process of a mature person is to be able to understand the

valuing processes of others but be able to form their own individual valuing process. This mature

person can remain open to new ideas and form how they choose to value it. These values are

what ensures the survival and healthy development of that individual. Although each mature

person is free to choose their valuing system, it can still be influenced by moral codes set in

place by things such as society's morals, religion, and governmental laws.

Nature of Man

Another topic Rogers focused on was the rationale and morals in men. Carl Rogers'

research on the nature of man is not as well known due to his abundance of other famous works;

however, his article has research on male behaviors. Carl Rogers wrote "The Nature of Man"

(1957) as describing characteristics where men are rational and have self-regulatory systems to

keep them from committing violent acts or turning away from others for their own personal

benefit. Instead, Rogers sees the true nature of men as productive, trustworthy, and goal-oriented.

Healthy Relationships

Carl Rogers also did research on healthy client/therapist relationships as well as the

relationships an individual has with those individuals in their life. In Carl Rogers' view of *The*

Characteristics of a Helping Relationship (1958b), he describes a healthy relationship where the

two individuals focus on growth, development, functionality, and coping strategies. Relationships that encompass these attributes are parental and child, physician and patient, teacher and student, and a vast array of different relationships. Most relationships require these characteristics, whether it is in the home, work, community, or school.

Therapeutic Techniques

In terms of therapeutic techniques, Carl Rogers had his own view and procedural steps when counseling a patient (Rogers, 1945a). He focused on structured relationships where the client feels that they are in a place where they can be open and honest, without the fear of judgment or chastisement. This way the client can talk about the deep-rooted problems and challenges that are holding them back. The vulnerability of the relationship allows the client to work through obstacles in their life. The structural and verbal situation of the client and therapist is determined by the client. In Carl Rogers' counseling process, everything is client-oriented. This means that the therapist guides the conversation in the beginning and turns the metaphorical wheel for the client to then guide the conversation. This way the client begins to understand themselves better and generates their own solutions to the challenges they face.

Client-Centered Therapy

In the article "A Current Formulation of Client-Centered Therapy" by Carl Rogers, in the *Social Service Review* (1950), he found that in self-directive therapy there are conditions that render best practices when helping a patient. One is to give the patient a feeling of acceptance and respect. Another condition is to not force the conversation or voice any opinions or evaluations of the patient during the session. The client should come to realizations on their own with slight guidance of the therapist. The third condition is to see the patient from their own

personal point of view on the subjects, which the client brings up. The fourth condition Rogers

mentioned was to be empathetic at that moment without an opinion of the subject in which the

patient is discussing. The last condition is to accept what the patient is saying without a

demeanor or inflection that would give them the idea that the therapist does not have acceptance

of them.

Rogers goes on to describe a therapy session from the client's perspective. The client

should feel as though they are the only ones in the room because there is minimum interaction

from the therapist, only acceptance. Another client aspect is that the therapist is seen as an out of

body self-image of the client themself. This way the client feels as though they are talking

through their own problems with themselves. The client should also feel that they are in full

control of what information and topics they want to discuss. They determine the topic and what

they would like to work on.

The conversation should then go from external blaming of problems to

self-accountability. The client needs to be aware and open to new ideas or thought processes

about a problem in which they already had an opinion about. The client should feel encouraged

and confident to talk about internal problems, as well as the confidence to face those problems.

Lastly, the client should feel that talking to a therapist is a safe space in which there are no

judgments or repercussions, but also not having approval or relief from the therapist for his or

her actions and/or feelings. Rogers describes this client-centered therapy as a phenomenon that

produces a process in which therapy sessions will naturally cause the patient to solve and

understand their problems.

Carl Rogers determined that the best therapeutic technique when doing social science research is a non-directive method. He goes into detail in an article published in The American Journal of Sociology titled "The Nondirective Method as a Technique for Social Research" (1945b). Rogers goes on to say that during a therapist and client session, the patient should guide the conversation, not the therapist. This way the patient can find their own solutions by talking about their challenges and problems without the therapist giving them the answers. The therapist is only rephrasing what the patient says so the patient can compartmentalize what the therapist just repeated to them. This method of clinical practice is not only helpful to the patient, but it also gives the researcher unbiased accounts of the patients' mental processes and their personal thoughts and feelings.

Rogers deemed that the patient will go more into detail about their feelings and emotions if they are guiding the conversation. Likewise, it made social science research studies more reliable if the information was directly from the client, instead of construed through the researcher. Thus, the method of non-directive interviewing and/or counseling was determined not biased.

Humanistic Psychology

Rogers' book, "On Becoming a Person: A Therapist's View of Psychotherapy", was one of the most well-known books he published. This book merged many of his articles about forms of client-centered counseling and psychotherapy as a guide for professionals in behavioral sciences. The book was written in a style that was suitable for professionals and the general public to understand. Rogers wrote in a simple style because the general public was interested in and wanted to learn more about the science of psychology. For this reason, Rogers' book "on

Becoming a Person: A Therapist's View of Psychotherapy" was popular during the late 1900s and still remains a popular and influential book to this day. (Kirschenbaum, 2004).

Rogers' became focussed on humanistic psychology and how it was client-based, instead of a therapist evaluating and diagnosing. Humanistic psychology was a way for the client to develop skills in therapy that helped them reach the fully functioning person. Rogers' described the fully functioning person as an individual who has reached a level of self-actualization where they have reached their full human potential. Rogers' was considered a humanistic psychologist because he focussed his ideas on therapeutic techniques around the clients' feelings, morals, values, and individual choices (Kirschenbaum, 2004).

Since Carl Rogers had a humanistic view of psychology, it contrasted with the views of other psychologists. One being B.F. Skinner, a behavioral psychologist. Rogers had debates with Skinner because they were two of the leading psychologists in the world and their ideas clashed (Kirschenbaum, 2004). Rogers and Skinner had many debates, one even lasted for six hours. One of these famous arguments focussed on what causes an individual's behavior. The debate was published in an article titled *Some issues concerning the control of human behavior"* (1956). During this debate, Rogers argued that the cause of an individual's behavior is internal, based on their freedom of choice, feelings, and value. Contradictory, Skinner argued that an individual's behavior is caused by external sources. Skinner argued that things like an individual's environment, government, or socio-economic status control behavior. This debate began the start of the Humanistic Psychology Movement.

Psychotherapy

Lastly, one of Carl Rogers' major accomplishments and contributions to the field of psychology is psychotherapy. In an article titled "A Process Conception of Psychotherapy" (1958a) by Carl Rogers, he wrote about the beginning stages of developing psychotherapy. Rogers wanted to find a new therapeutic technique to better suit those individuals who have a wider range of mental health problems. To create this new form of therapy, Rogers began listening to old interview recordings of patients. Through listening to these therapeutic interviews, Rogers explains through the article that clients need to be fully received. Rogers labeled this idea as unconditional positive regard, meaning that the client feels accepted and understood by the therapist.

Rogers determined that the therapist could assume the client is fully and psychologically received and starting to change by examining the client's facial expression. From this idea, Rogers created seven stages in which a therapist could measure the clients' change on a continuum. The first stage indicates that the client does not perceive any problems, or just does not have the need to change. To move on to the second stage, the client has to reach a point where they feel fully and psychologically received. From there, the second stage can consist of a variety of subtle mentions of personal topics and expressions of events that the client describes as in the past or external from oneself.

The third and second stages are not mentioned in the article because Rogers deemed that they encompass detailed descriptions of what to look for when listening to a client. Rogers then goes into describing stage five, where clients are now perceiving their feelings as present and are taking ownership. This stage has a more open dialogue between the client and therapist, and more room for the client to accept feelings and past events as their own. The sixth stage is a form

of clarity in the client. Now the client is openly accepting the problems and feelings they have and are working towards a solution.

From the sixth stage, the client should be able to continue on to the seventh stage without the need of having to be fully and psychologically received from the therapist. The seventh stage is when the client experiences change. Now, not only has the client changed from the beginning and has worked through those problems, the client also now has the skills and abilities to work through future problems they encounter on their own, without the help from a therapist. Rogers claims in the article that not every client makes it to stage seven because it is basically reaching the maximum level of psychological understanding. This stage means that the client is self-aware and is able to decipher changes in themselves and acknowledge it as itself and not correlate it with past events or feelings. Thus, the client can be accepting of the change.

Psychotherapy is a form of therapy that therapists use to combat many concerning behaviors, habits, and/or feelings an individual may have. Psychotherapy falls back on the ideas mentioned previously about client-centered therapy. The therapist is working with the individual to find the cause of the problem(s) they are having and have the client guide the session. This way the client is coming to the root of the problem on their own, rather than being told the answers. Coming up with an understanding of a personal problem has a greater impact because an individual found it from within. Rogers predicted that the individual can achieve these accomplishments if the therapist shows unconditional positive regard and avoids conditions of worth. This means that the therapist should be providing an open environment, where they are accepting what a client tells them without judgment. Thus, causing the fully functioning human

approach to which the therapist is helping the client reach their full potential (Kirschenbaum, 2004).

   This client/therapist accepting relationship allows the processes in which a person has changes in their personality, through the study of psychotherapy. In doing this he created a continuum of the process of personality changes. As mentioned above in the detailed description of the seven stages (Rogers, 1958). The lower end contains the first stage being that during psychotherapy the client still is in a fixed mindset about past events; and the second stage goes on to indicate that an individuals' feelings are disorganized and that the individual has not yet been received psychologically. This means that the person does not have full control or understanding of the emotions they are currently encountering. Next are the fifth and sixth stages (the middle of the continuum). The fifth stage is having more control and understanding of feelings and emotions. During the sixth stage, the individual emotions and feelings are fully received in the individual. The individuals are aware of what emotions or feelings they are having and work towards coping with it. The seventh stage is representative of the higher levels of the continuum and encompasses the idea of an individual being able to accept the change in his or herself and be accepting towards more change and compartmentalizing and understand past experiences. In all, the continuum shows the process of being in a fixed mindset to then evolving and developing coping strategies and understanding of one's own being. Therefore, psychotherapy was then created with these ideas of client-centered therapy and the seven stages of developing psychotherapy.

Applying Ideas on a Macro Level

Rogers used his person-centered approach in more situations and settings than just therapy. During the 1970s-1980s, Rogers worked on using the person-centered approach to stop international conflict (Kirschenbaum, 2004). Rogers used workshops to implement this approach among different opposing groups of people. Some conflicting groups he did demonstrated this approach with was in Northern Ireland with Catholics and Protestant and Black and White people in South Africa. Rogers would create workshops that emphasized positive regard and how using it can ease tension and promote healthy communication between groups. Rogers performed these workshops all around the world in places such as Brazil, Mexico, Hungary, and the Soviet Union (Kirschenbaum, 2004). Each workshop estimate 100-800 participants. One of his workshops in Austria, even caused representatives Central America to come together in an effort to reach peace. Rogers' work in resolving international conflict led to him being nominated for the Nobel Prize for Pease in 1987 and creating the Carl Rogers Peace Project

Carl Rogers influenced the field of psychology for six decades and wrote 15 books and 200 articles that have been published in over 60 languages (Kirschenbaum, 2004). Rogers was the first psychologist awarded the American Psychological Association's Distinguished Professional Contribution Award in 1972 for his work in psychotherapy and development of the client-centered approach. To this day Rogers has impacted the field of psychology. Rogers' client-centered approach is still used by therapists in counseling and psychotherapy to this day. The client-centered approach is not only popular in the United States, but has also recently become vastly used in Europe, Russia, and Latin America (Kirschenbaum, 2004).

Conclusion

Through Rogers' work in the science of psychology, he has become influential among a vast number of countries that still use his approaches and theories to this day. Rogers was the start of a humanistic approach to psychology that used support and understanding to provoke healing and growth. Carl Rogers researched a vast array of topics including, but not limited to psychotherapy, client center therapy, theories on personality and growth, the humanistic approach, the fully functioning human approach, and the organismic value process. Carl Rogers died in 1987, from a hip injury, leaving behind a legacy in psychology (Kirschenbaum, 2004). His contributions to the field of psychology are still widely used in everyday practices. Thus, making him one of the most influential individuals in psychology.

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