

Review of

The Relationship Inventory: A Complete Resource and Guide

By Godfrey T. Barrett-Lennard

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Several eminent scholars offer observations that characterize another of Goff Barrett-Lennard's significant contributions. They say: It is a "book that provides a significant contribution to the study of human relationships" (L. S. Greenberg), it demonstrates the test itself as having "remarkable impact and staying power" (W. S. Stiles), "is an indispensable book for all of those interested in the therapeutic relationship" (A. C. Bohart), and "is a remarkable resource and a testimony to the enduring process to understand and improve life through both relationships and science" (J. H. D. Cornelius-White). (On cover page)

One would have to wonder how such praise could possibly be raised for the development of any measuring instrument. Authors of measuring instruments devote much detailed attention to activities of item selection for each variable, testing of items in relation to the conceptual definitions, determination of internal reliability, external reliability and validity, statistical studies of comparative groups, and replication and appropriate revision of the instrument. Many authors and practitioners view such activity as peripheral and, perhaps, even dull and plodding. Barrett-Lennard forges another view with a humble comment in his preface. He reveals his good will, motivation, and perhaps his legacy when he explains: “Good research is demanding but need not be dull and plodding, and certainly has not been for me in the region encompassed here. I wish for the reader interest in ideas and materials from this book and excitement in whatever systematic enquiry you undertake” (viii). Commentator accolades are well-taken and readily understood after reading the book.

The author demonstrates the importance for theory and practice as well as the impact of one instrument as a method and system. He goes on to delineate the extended importance and effect of the development of the Relationship Inventory.

The first two chapters are concise summaries of the history and development of the theory of client-centered therapy as well as the conceptual and pragmatic delineation of an empirically developed assessment instrument.

Chapter 1 describes in less than five manuscript-size pages a thorough explanation of theory development from the evolution of a world-view (“general theory”) to theory through the measuring of variables that result in “empirically testing the conception in the therapy context that gave birth to that influence” (p. 7). Barrett-Lennard (1959) laid the groundwork for future inquiry in his doctoral dissertation the same year the formal theory of the growth hypothesis was published (Rogers, 1959).

Chapter 2 is an exemplary review of “The Classic Investigation of Carl R. Rogers’ Core Theory” (pp 8-25). The development of the theory by Rogers and colleagues through careful observation and reflection on patterns and changes in patterns would precede the instruments that measure and allow empirical testing of “the therapeutic context” (pp. 6-7). In this instance, the therapeutic context would be the unpublished hypothesis at that time concerning the

“Conditions of the Therapeutic Process” (Rogers, 1959: 213) or, as referred to in a prior published small segment of 1959, “The Necessary and Sufficient Conditions of Therapeutic Personality Change” (ibid, 1957: 95). The context would be converted to “cause and effect” through the advent of a viable measuring instrument, The Relationship Inventory (RI). *The focus was upon the therapist responses with emphasis on client perceptions of these therapist conditions.* In essence, the conception was that “the client’s perceptions of the focused variables of therapist response would be direct, operative influences in the therapy process and that these perceptions would in turn depend on an interaction of client characteristics and therapists’ actual experience in their relation” (p. 24). The experimental hypotheses would be that of higher scores on the relationship variables (i.e., the theoretical conceptualizations of congruence, unconditional positive regard, and empathic understanding in Rogers, 1957 & 1959) related to higher scores on the outcome measures (e.g., therapist ratings and client self-inventories on anxiety-and depression related instruments). It might be noted that the author refers to the relationship variables in a slightly different way than Rogers. Namely, he refers to positive regard, non-judging acceptance, empathic understanding, congruence or genuineness, and willingness to be known (p. 24). Confirmation of the experimental hypotheses in all variables except “Willingness to be Known (WK)” provided a strong foundation for future expansion of, and implementation for further examination of, the RI.

The further expansion is reported in Chapter 3 that refers to “A Major Revision” (p. 26). This chapter focuses on “the painstaking revision of the original forms” (p. 34) and includes adaptation for schools, groups, and families. It also reflects on some of the implications of the Relationship Inventory and possible shift of meanings over the previous two decades. This revision was the beginning of a shift of the RI from being viewed as an instrument to also becoming a “system” of measures, i.e., “the BLRI [Barrett-Lennard Relationship Inventory] as an instrument species” (p. 34). Barrett-Lennard (1986) suggested twenty years after the main revision of the RI that the term “system” might be more accurate than the term “instrument”. This shift is a latent but decisive thread in Chapter 4.

Chapter 4 is laden with the accumulation of evidence refining reliability, validity, norms, application, and item content. An important

aspect of this chapter lies under the thorns of a requirement for assessing instrument development. Again, the author aptly connects instrument content within the theoretical system. He notes: “The embodied approach does not measure by counting units or judge estimates of interaction, but relies on a crafted gathering of the experience of participants around primary qualities of attitude and response in relationship” (p. 35). The author then explores the complex and tenuous relationship of response to experience. He introduces a substantial argument in Chapter 4 while providing increased evidence of reliability, validity, norm development and practical advice on administration and usage of the instrument.

Chapter 5 is summarized in the first sentence, which describes the BLRI as tapping into “perceptions in a relationship” (p. 49). It is elaborated further that this view was his fundamental way of measuring qualities of relationship in therapy and other life contexts. In addition, more recent studies are reported. Here, also, is reference to further potentials discussed in a later book chapter. Within this further development is the expanded view that the Rogerian tradition depends on larger contexts of support in institutions and milieu, and that this support “makes such applications possible” (p. 63).

Chapter 6 takes the reader through sample exercises with which the author is familiar as the book moves toward a more speculative and visionary endeavor. It serves as an introduction to the second part of the book.

Parts 2 & 3 contain three chapters and an appendix. Appendix 1 includes principle forms and adaptations of the BLRI with scoring keys. Appendix 2 reviews the “Contextual Selves Inventory” and other rating forms.

Chapters 7 & 8 present the recent direction of the author’s work. Chapter 7 centers on the measurement of significant relationships that relate to study of self. Chapter 8 discusses efforts to measure “Experiential” groups.

Chapter 9 is a nascent effort to identify an unfolding new approach. This hopeful approach is, perhaps, summarized by the author’s last sentences in this chapter. He concludes: “The approach rests on a paradigm of thought in which interdependence in relationship is seen as being at the core of human life. A broad conclusion is that secure and intelligent advance of our species as a

major partner in its lifeworld rests, in big part, on an outreaching person- and system-sensitive human science of relationships” (p. 98).

The book offers quite an amazing story of a person, process, and measuring instrument that evolves from an empirical examination to experiential interaction. The usage of an instrument to measure therapist influence is a significant contribution to the theory of client-centered therapy. Moreover, it is an empirical backbone to the postulates of the theory of Carl R. Rogers.

Another thread of the book is that it can stimulate others to think more deeply about Rogers’ theory. For example, it is a bit of a chore for this reader to follow the shift from the empirical support of Rogers’ theory (a theory founded on the growth hypothesis of personal power) to a theory that ‘places relationship and interdependence at the core of human life processes (Barrett-Lennard, 2013, p. 164)’ (p. 97).

The core of relationship and interdependence of human life processes is a dependent variable in Rogers’ theory; i.e., it is part of the developmental process of congruence for the client. Relationship and interdependence for Rogers are part and parcel of individuals living in “maximum possible harmony, because of the rewarding character of reciprocal positive regard” (Rogers, 1959: 235).

The author has established an empirical system that helps to validate the theory of therapy where the therapist follows the client in a process that leads to transparent and cooperative interactions in the life process. Ironically, the author concludes that a dependent variable of Rogers is the core of the life process. He seemingly ignores the assumption of the growth hypothesis as the foundation block of the theory of client-centered therapy (Rogers, 1980). Nevertheless, Rogers and Barrett-Lennard both arrive at a profound recognition of relationship and interdependence as key factors in human development. Simply put, Rogers calls for the individual to change society and for society to change the individual through mutual experiencing of empathy and unconditional positive regard. The author’s perception is that of “an outreaching person- and system-sensitive human science of relationships” (p. 98). It seems, however, that this human science of relationships is specifically undetermined and yet to be identified and validated.

The author believes that more is needed in Rogers theory because within “the *emergent dyadic relationship system*, the theory does not take into account client expectancy, the relational life of

clients outside therapy or the therapy relation seen in its practice context” (Barrett-Lennard, 2013, p. 153). The perception of this reader is that the speculative direction of this book is an invalid shift from Rogers’ theory. It is not clear to this reader just how client expectancy and relational life outside of therapy is to be determined. It seems a bit of a return to therapist authority and analysis. Nevertheless, the esteemed author, who is a dedicated scholar, provides a multi-faceted bundle of information, history, good intentions and stimulation.

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