

Authors' Response to Bohart and Bozarth

Marvin Frankel

Sarah Lawrence College, NY

Lisbeth Sommerbeck

Bornholm Psychiatric Center, Denmark

The Straw-Man Charge of Behaviorism

Bozarth and Bohart claim we are behavioristic by judging our behavior rather than our “intentions” much as Bohart claims “one-and two year olds” do. Their argument can be summed up with a syllogism:

1. Frankel&Sommerbeck are behaviorists because they require an empirical meaning of a concept.
2. Behaviorism is wrong or at least excessively simplistic.
3. Frankel&Sommerbeck are wrong or at least excessively simplistic.

We could perhaps evade the apparently inescapable logic of this simple syllogism by claiming that though we behave like behaviorists, we are actually anti-behaviorists in our internal feelings and attitude and it is surprising to us that Bohart and Bozarth who are so committed to understanding internal feelings have failed to “mind-read” our “intentions.” (See Bohart’s reference to “Theory of Mind” in his rejoinder p. 77) In any case, the caricaturing of an argument as behavioristic is not a refutation of an argument.

Does Rogers go beyond empathic reflectivity in 1951?

Bozarth feels our emphasis on empathic reflections is a misunderstanding of Rogers in 1951 and offers the following quote: “it is entirely possible that the simple concept of ‘an accurate reflection of feeling’ no longer fits the therapist’s behavior. . . (that) . . . the therapist becomes a companion to the client” (Rogers, 1951, pp. 112-113). He goes further: “The words—of either client or counselor—are

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seen as having minimal importance compared with the present emotional relationship which exists between the two” (p. 172).

There is no suggestion whatsoever in the quoted portion that Rogers is urging the therapist to offer attitudes, judgments, values, or advice from his own internal frame of reference. In fact, a reading of the pages preceding that quote reveals that Rogers was concerned that empathic reflections may seem at first like a mere technique to the client-centered therapist particularly in the beginning of therapy when the client is scratching the surface of his life, but gradually it evolves into an “emotional relationship.” It is sadly ironic to us that Bohart and Bozarth criticize “empathic reflection” much like Rogers-1 used to be criticized for it (Rogers, 1986: Reflections of feelings. *Person-centered review*, 1 (4) Sage.).

**Client: “Why should I care how you would feel
if you were in my place?”**

Bohart acknowledges that he goes beyond the internal frame of reference of his client when he asserts how he would feel if he were in her place and concerned about making the wrong choice. In our paper we discussed in detail why his decision to speak from his own internal frame of reference was misguided at best and patronizing at worst. We also showed that Rogers-1 when confronted with a suicidal patient (Gil) did not offer his own view of the client’s situation and showed that Rogers-1 devotes an entire chapter explaining why he refrained from speaking out of his frame of reference. In his refutation of our article as well as in his original paper Bohart (1995, see reference in our original paper) fails to explain why he chose to inform his client how he would feel if he were in the client’s place. Instead Bohart suggests that the failure of the therapist to speak out of his own framework reveals a “simplistic”, even “insulting” perspective to a client. We do not believe that Rogers-1 was ‘simplistic’ and “insulting” to Gil when he refrained from speaking out of his own frame. For us, as we believe for Rogers-1, the interview with Gil defines the essence of non-directive therapy. Indeed, it was Rogers-1’s attitude towards Gil that made non-directive therapy infamous at worst and controversial at best, which continues to appear true today. Moreover, we continue to

wonder why Bohart's concern over making the wrong choice is a relevant consideration. It seems to us an attempt to employ his private reactions as illustrative of anything at all.

“I doubt the wisdom of your decision”

Bozarth claims we rigidly and shallowly misunderstand him when he writes: “If I doubted his decisions, I would have shared this with him in depth as I did with many clients.” Again, it is our belief that when a therapist voices doubts about the decisions of a client he is not being non-directive by any stretch of that term.

Emergent empathic response or breaking down empathic barriers?

In our article we cite Bozarth's (1984) use of a supervisor's persistent sexual attraction to his supervisee as a bizarre example of empathy. In his refutation Bozarth claims that the communication of the supervisor's sexual attraction was “an effort to reduce empathic barriers.” In other words, Bozarth claims we got it wrong. In the original chapter Bozarth describes the supervisor's sexual feelings as an example of an emergent empathic response, not an effort to reduce empathic barriers. Our paper was written to make distinctions and avoid confusion between these characterizations.

Attitude and Actions

Aristotle recognized that once you accept essential differences between habits of behavior and habits of thought, anything goes (Rachlin, 1994, p. 87, 102) – you're off to the races – so that sexual attraction, suggesting what you would do in the client's place, etc...can be characterized as non-directive.

Reference

Rachlin, H. (1994). *Behavior and Mind*. New York: Oxford University Press. (From Aristotle Metaphysics Book 7.)