

# Teaching Us a Thing or Two: Kahn on Psychoanalysis and Rogers

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Both Freud and Rogers displayed unbending commitments to what they saw to be central to their life and work: Freud's dogma, his "monotony of interpretation" (Jung, 1989, p. 152), was sex; Rogers insisted on the idea that "*all individuals have within themselves the ability to guide their own lives in a manner that is both personally satisfying and socially constructive*" (Kirschenbaum & Henderson, 1989, p. xiv) without outside coercive strategies and directive interventions. However both were surprisingly flexible in theory and in practice—there was the Freud who, in treating the poet Hilda Doolittle, dropped the blank analytical mask and complained that she acted as if she didn't love him (Doolittle, 1956), and the Rogers who could be much more active and confrontational in encounter groups (Rogers, 1970). Since their deaths, the development of psychoanalysis and client-centered therapy has been in the general direction of greater flexibility rather than stricter dogma. Both have continued to evolve well beyond what their founders could have envisioned, and as Ed Kahn's (2010) paper reminds us, we need to periodically update our reference list so that we aren't constructing arguments involving outdated theoretical versions of these approaches.

Kahn (2010) provides a personable and knowledgeable tour of some of the new varieties—self-psychology, intersubjectivity, and the relational approach—that have been bred out of the old stock of Freudian psychoanalysis. As he does so, he plots his own development; Kahn does so in a refreshingly candid manner, talking about his faults and deficits, and being "freely and deeply himself, with his actual experience accurately represented by his awareness of himself" (Rogers, 1957, p. 97). Kahn's paper, then, provides a good comparison/contrast of contemporary approaches to psychoanalysis and client-centered therapy for clinical and educational purposes, as

well as insight into the journey of an educator and practitioner from the 1970s to the present.

In teaching counseling theories, I joke with my students that if I'm asking for the name of a theorist and they don't have any idea who it is, they should just guess Freud or Rogers and they'll have a 50-50 chance of getting the answer right. It's a joke—but only just. The most vital clinical issues oscillate between the two: the central importance of the client to each theory and how there were clients who could be considered partners in the founding and development of psychoanalysis and client-centered therapy (e.g., Anna O. and Dora and Little Hans; Herbert Bryan and Miss G. and Gloria); the therapeutic relationship and what the client and the therapist think and feel about each other; the central role each played personally in the development of their approaches (e.g., Freud's interpretation of his own dreams; Rogers' description of "becoming a person"), and so on. Teaching in general from a common factors perspective (e.g., Duncan, 2002), I focus mainly on the aspects of Freud's and Rogers' theories that foreground the client and the therapeutic relationship, and I am appreciative of the way Kahn helps us to update psychoanalytic understandings of the client's self and the client's and therapist's relationship, while continuing to compare and contrast these understandings with a client-centered approach.

As an educator, then, I can use Kahn's (2010) paper to describe the ways these approaches have continued to communicate with each other; for example in the work of Kohut, whom Kahn convincingly describes as borrowing from Rogers without giving credit in developing self psychology, and in the idea that Rogers anticipated intersubjective psychoanalysis, as he developed more and more of an interest in being fully real and authentic in all the relationships in his life. Kahn's paper provides more reasons for students of counseling and psychotherapy to continue to fully immerse themselves in the history of their field, since without knowing what Freud and Rogers originally said to one another (metaphorically speaking), we might not be able to follow the conversation today.

Kahn's (2010) paper accomplishes a deeper educational purpose of conveying an authentic and open attitude toward clinical theory and experience. He is open to the surprising finding that his

relational analyst provided Rogers' core conditions but also freely offered his idiosyncratic frame of reference (rather than suppressing it), and that this (somewhat directive) analyst helped him personally and professionally. He non-judgmentally describes his idealization of Kohut, followed by a gradual de-idealization, and says that he still finds many of Kohut's ideas to be worthwhile. He concludes that Rogers' lessons are simple but profound, and that often the best thing to do with clients is to just get out of their way. I could not agree more; there is much to be said for intensely meditating on a few of the most basic and profound lessons that have resulted from the ongoing conversations between Freud, Rogers, and others. I can imagine using Kahn's paper with my students to show how theory and one's experiences can combine to these kind of simple and profound moments, wherein we manage to step aside at the exact right time.

#### References

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