

The Effect of Person-Centered Theory for Clinicians with Hard Science Favor

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I was very skeptical going into the conference. I had come from an educational background of the hard sciences and also with a very heavy interest in research. I found myself aligning with theories such as CBT and the work of Ellis and Gestalt. I am also going to be completely honest and say that I did not have much faith in person-centered theory and took the class merely as a way to earn some credits. I also thought it would be interesting to experience what others opinions upon the matter were. I was pleasantly surprised by the wealth of information that I am taking away from the person-centered conference. The conference was very informative between the lectures and the sharing of experience and knowledge with professionals in the field. Also, the conference presented the concepts and frameworks of person-centered therapy in action. It is safe to say that by attending the conference I have gained much more insight and knowledge for future practice. My eyes are now opened to the thought and power of person-centered.

There are a few concepts that I would like to break down and express what I have learned through the conference. I find that some of these concepts are very useful in a wide range of practice. Similarly, they also have use for a diverse range of clients. The information gathered from the conference has made a significant impact on myself, so much so that I can imagine using them in future practice. I want to express, once again, the wealth of information that I have gathered from the conference and note that this paper only begins to scratch the surface of my experience.

The first concept that I want to discuss is goal setting for our clients. As I have mentioned I have had vast experience in the hard science field. This means that I have had strict and measurable goals set for each client or case that I have been a part of. Before the conference, I had a sense of security with set goals due to the ability to measure my success after completion. This idea paralleled into counseling for me as well. With such theories as CBT, I would again, have trust in the determined and measurable goals, for example, symptom/irrational belief reduction. According to Carl Rogers, one of the goals of therapy is for the individual to become a fully-functioning person. A fully functioning person has a better sense of

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awareness and value. This person may also experience a more comprehensive and fluid environment and match that with their mental processes (Rogers & Koch, 1959).

I find this idea of the fully-functioning person to be quite intriguing. I experienced this idea during the conference when individuals would share their experiences. It was inspiring to see other professionals simply be there for that individual and let them experience whatever they may have needed at the moment. I realized that while the safety net of a strict framework was missing there was also a level of comfort that filled that space. The individual was not set on meeting certain standards to be “okay” or worried about their responses and what that could mean for their progress. They were granted a space to be themselves and experience their reality however they needed.

With this realization, the individual could hone in on themselves and their awareness. With this ability, the client also has the opportunity to gain accountability and power. They are taking charge of their journey and that is a big factor in client outcome.

The next concept that has been on my mind is the 6 core conditions which are necessary and sufficient to allow personality change for the client. The six core conditions are as follows:

1. Two persons are in psychological contact.
2. The first, whom we shall term the client, is in a state of incongruence, being vulnerable or anxious.
3. The second person, whom we shall term the therapist, is congruent or integrated into the relationship.
4. The therapist experiences unconditional positive regard for the client.
5. The therapist experiences an empathic understanding of the client's internal frame of reference and endeavors to communicate this experience to the client.
6. The communication to the client of the therapist's empathic understanding and unconditional positive regard is to a minimal degree achieved (Rogers, 1957).

The conditions mentioned hold a lot more meaning than I had previously thought. More specifically, empathy, unconditional positive regard, and the congruence of the therapist were conditions that I had heard of before but did not truly understand their depth until the conference. Along with my classmates, I'm sure, I have heard the word empathy used in every single class thus far. This word has been the tried and true method for counseling across the board. In a book written about a similar theory,

empathy is discussed concerning an individual's ever-changing emotion and experience.

“Of crucial importance ... is the recognition that all the client’s processing operations occur in the present and that the therapist’s attention needs to be focused in a fully absorbed manner on the client’s present experience and expression. The therapist attempts to hear, see, and understand clients as they are at that moment and to stimulate experiential processing rather than attempting to formulate hypotheses about clients’ internal dynamics or to change or modify clients’ cognitions or behaviors” (Greenburg, Rice, & Elliott, 1993, p. 3).

The quotation states the maintenance required with true empathy and also helps to depict what a positive therapeutic environment could look like. With the combination of the information read and the experience from the conference I think I have a much better understanding of the true meaning and work that must go into being an empathic counselor.

During the conference, there were many different situations that groups were utilized and individuals could speak openly about whatever they desired. It was during the event that an individual would share something personal that I had the opportunity to observe true empathy. Empathy is not just understanding what the person is telling you. It is much deeper than that. Empathy is finding those deeper meanings and helping the client to comprehensively understand themselves and the effects of the experiences. To see a counselor simply provide a space for someone but also understand the true deeper meaning behind it was fascinating. Also, there were many times that an individual would state concern or belief which would be revisited after some time had passed. The individuals were not necessarily questioned about their statements but rather their thoughts and feelings after some time to process. It helped resonate with the power of empathy and exemplify its proper use.

Lastly, I would like to touch base upon the mechanics of the conference so to speak. The format of the conference was very lax. There were structured lectures and set times for meetings but in actuality, they were loosely enforced. To be transparent, this was difficult for me to process at the beginning. I did not understand how everyone could be so relaxed. This was not very Rogerian of me. As time passed I made the connection as to why this played out the way it did.

In a lecture given by Carl Rogers, he spoke largely about education and the teacher-student relationship. In the video, Rogers placed much more emphasis on the relationship shared and the individual learner versus the

course material itself. Rogers states “I want to think and learn for myself and I can’t get that out of a textbook or mechanical teacher persona” (Rogers, 1957). I think that this quote exemplifies Rogers's mentality very well. This mentality is also then seen in his client-centered theory.

To return to the schedule and layout of the conference, I think that the previously mentioned mentality is the source of the lack of structure. Rogers did not believe in a controlled or planned out course of action because he did not believe that a client can learn from that to the extent that they can learn from themselves. Rogers believed in the power of the client and their relationship to others which is exactly what the format of the conference encouraged. As I mentioned earlier I was very uncomfortable in the beginning and I think that this is partly because I was uncomfortable with myself and my abilities as a counselor. As time went on and the material covered helped me to gain more knowledge, I became more confident. I was comfortable sitting in silence and not having control over the direction of conversation (for the most part). I think that by experiencing this breakthrough myself, I have learned the impact of the Rogerian way.

I am an individual who came into this conference fairly skeptical with baseline knowledge about Carl Rogers, at best. I have learned so much from the professionals in attendance at the conference, my peers, and the class material. Most importantly I have learned a lot from myself. I now have a much deeper understanding of Client-Centered Therapy and can confidently proclaim its potential in my future practice. I would like to thank everyone who made this discovery possible to me, but most importantly I would like to thank Dr. Cohen for giving me the opportunity that has and will continue to impact me for a very long time.

References

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