The Three Core Conditions for Therapeutic Change

In his seminal article "The necessary and sufficient conditions for therapeutic personality change," originally published in 1957, **Rogers** identified three core components of what he considered to be the effective approach to counselling. Since then, few theorists, commentators, or clinicians have raised any arguments against the qualifier "necessary". However, the label "sufficient" has been targeted by a number of critics.

**Based on your understanding of the humanistic approach to counselling in general and the person-centred school in particular, do you think that the three "core conditions" are indeed sufficient for producing a "therapeutic personality change"?**

**Week Four Reading**

**Introduction**

Of all the theoretical systems among the humanistic therapies, the person-centred approach probably has had the greatest impact. It was developed by Carl Rogers in reaction to the traditional, diagnostic, probing and interpretive methods of psychoanalysis. The theory shows consistency from the view of human nature through the processes and techniques used in counselling. Basic to the theory is the inherent tendency of the person to strive toward self-actualization. The name used to describe this approach to counselling and psychotherapy changed from *nondirective* therapy, to *client-centred* therapy, and finally to *person-centred* therapy.

**Objectives**

Upon completion of the lesson you should:

1. understand the key concepts of the person-centred approach;
2. understand the use and application of Rogerian techniques to the practice of counselling;
3. be able to outline the therapeutic process with respect to the therapist's role, the client's experience, and the relationship between the two;
4. critically examine your own values, attitudes, and beliefs in relation to the core concepts of the person-centred approach: *unconditional positive regard, empathy, and genuineness*.

**Required Readings**

The text reading for this lesson is Chapter 5 of *Current Psychotherapies*, Corsini and Wedding (2011).

I have uploaded this chapter 2 on “Sharing site” and can be accessed through:

<http://www.keepandshare.com/doc/5000260/chapter-5-corsini-and-wedding-2011-pdf-2-7-meg>

[**Fernald's (2000)**](http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=a9h&AN=2995870&site=ehost-live)

<http://www.keepandshare.com/doc/5027314/fernald-s-2000-pdf-826k>

[**Rogers (1992)**](http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=a9h&AN=9212281721&site=ehost-live)

<http://www.keepandshare.com/doc/5027313/rogers-1992-pdf-1-0-meg>

Read the chapter before you begin to work on the lesson in order to get an overview of the theory. Supplement the textbook material by reading [**Fernald's (2000)**](http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=a9h&AN=2995870&site=ehost-live) article and the seminal article by [**Rogers (1992)**](http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=a9h&AN=9212281721&site=ehost-live), in which he clearly outlines the necessary and sufficient conditions for effective psychotherapy. This article was originally published in 1957 and was reprinted in the Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology five years after Rogers's death. The reprint marked the centennial anniversary of the American Psychological Association and reflects the enduring impact of Rogers' ideas on the practice of counselling and psychotherapy worldwide.

**Basic Concepts**

After you have read Chapter 5 in your textbook, begin to work on the meanings of the concepts. As Raskin and Rogers address each of the concepts, write your own definitions. Remember that you can always look up technical terms in the online Glossary.

1. Organism
2. Phenomenal Field
3. Self
4. Accurate empathic understanding
5. Congruence/Genuineness
6. Unconditional positive regard
7. Reflection
8. Actualizing tendency
9. Ideal Self
10. Internal frame of reference

**Basic Assumptions**

There are several basic assumptions that apply to *person centred therapy*.

* Humans have an innate tendency toward self-actualization;
* The client is the best expert on his/her own experience;
* The individual has the capacity to modify his/her perceptions;
* If provided with the proper conditions in counselling, clients can arrive at their own solutions to their own problems.

**Causation**

*Heredity*: Humans are born with an innate actualizing tendency. Positive forces toward health and growth are natural and inherent in the organism.

*Environment*: Our feelings about self and others are based on our interaction with others. The self-concept governs the perceptions and meanings attributed to the environment. The structures of the self are formed in the interactions with the environment, particularly the interpersonal environment. The organism selects the features of the environment to which it will react. Our personality becomes visible to us through relating to others. Our actualizing tendency requires external stimulation, that can be provided by the physical, social, and cultural environment in which we live. (Wallace, 1993).

*Cognitions*: The individual's subjective perceptions of self and the world are the central determiner of behaviour. The person-centred theory does not segregate the intellect from other functions. Both thoughts and emotions are integrated in the individual's perception of his/her experience. However, Rogers (1951) saw emotions as accompanying and facilitating goal-directed behaviour in human beings.

*Motivation*: According to the person-centred theory, the central motivational force is to actualize, maintain, and enhance the self.

**Time Orientation**

The client's current perceptions of his/her experience constitute the focus of exploration in person-centred counselling. The past is important insofar as it has an enduring impact on the present. Even though the client's history may emerge during the counselling process, it is not purposely targeted by the counsellor. This approach is known for its focus on the 'here and now'. The person-centred counsellor would most likely respond to the client's description of a past incident by reflecting on the current emotional impact that the past event may still have on the client (e.g., "You are still very angry about what your father said to you years ago"). Rogers believed that all the information necessary for change exists in the present and it is not imperative to know and understand the client's past.

**View of Human Nature**

Humans strive continuously to realize their inherent potentialities and the process of self-actualization is a life-long endeavour. Rogers disagreed with the Freudian view that people are driven by irrational impulses which inevitably lead them into conflict with society. However, early adverse circumstances, namely a social/familial environment based on conditional positive regard, leads to the internalization of conditions of worth. Then, according to Rogers (1959), the individual "values an experience positively or negatively solely because of these conditions of worth which he has taken over from others, not because the experience enhances or fails to enhance his organism" (p. 209).

**Preference for Explanations**

*Holistic vs. Atomistic*: In Rogers's holistic view, the organism behaves as a unified whole and not as a series of differentiated parts. It is a single unity. What happens in a part affects the whole (the whole is more than the sum of its parts). The self is the centre of a continually changing world. We make meaning out of all of our experiences. Rogers (1951) defined the self as "an organized, fluid, but consistent conceptual pattern of perceptions of characteristics and relations of the 'I' or the 'me', together with values attached to these concepts" (p. 498).

*Internal vs. External Determinants*: Rogers stressed the role of internal determiners to personality development and behaviour. Our perceptions of self and the world determine our behaviour. The world we live in and the realities we react to are constructed out of our individual subjective perceptions and interpretations of personal experiences.

*Nomothetic vs. Idiographic*: The emphasis is on the uniqueness of the individual. This phenomenological view emphasizes individual perception, as a private, subjective, and unique experience. Although Rogers encourages us to accept our commonalities, he places an even greater emphasis on the importance of recognizing and accepting our uniqueness.

*Longitudinal vs. Cross Sectional*: Person-centred therapy works in the here and now, focusing on the clients' current perceptions of their phenomenal world. However, longitudinal perspectives do have a place in the person-centred approach, as the individual's journey towards self-acceptance and self-actualization is a life-long process.

*Tension Production vs. Reduction:* As a self-actualizer, the individual would always strive to expand his or her growth. Full expression of the actualizing tendency is sought through tension increase. Its direction is forward.

**Observer Frame of Reference**

*Internal:* One of the central concepts of the person-centred theory is empathic understanding. According to Rogers (1951), empathy must remain the counsellor's primary modus operandi, as it is a necessary condition for positive therapeutic change. "The therapist endeavours to keep himself out as a separate person... his whole endeavour is to understand the other so completely that he becomes almost an alter ego of the client... The whole relationship is composed of the self of the client, the counselor being depersonalized for the purpose of therapy into being 'the client's other self'." (p. 42)

**Bases for Inference**

Openness of choice and the focus on the client's unique worldview makes prediction of behaviour unlikely and undesirable.

**Bases for Psychopathology**

The following can constitute sources of psychological distress:

* early experience of conditional positive regard, leading to the internalization of conditions of worth;
* incongruence between the self-concept and self-actualizing tendencies;
* guilt for not reaching one's potentiality;
* the organism may deny or distort experiences in awareness in such a way that these experiences cannot be incorporated into the self.

**Bases for Healthy Personality**

The primary characteristics of a healthy personality include:

* an openness to experience and change;
* internalization of an unconditional sense of worth (self-acceptance);
* endeavouring to always be genuine, congruent, or authentic.

**Role of the Therapist**

The therapist focuses on the uniqueness of the client. He or she is patient, an expert listener, and one who fully accepts each individual by offering an atmosphere of unconditional positive regard and empathic understanding.

**Implications for Helping Relationship**

In the person-centred approach, the client is viewed as responsible and capable of determining his or her own future. Through the counsellor's consistent attitude of unconditional positive regard, the counsellor models self-acceptance within the client. At the same time, Rogers's views may have been shaped by his advocacy of what is a questionable Western cultural belief, namely that growth is always in the direction of greater independence and separation.

While most clients seem to respond positively to the person-centred approach, due to its non-directive character, this form of therapy can extend over a relatively long period of time. Some clients who expect a more directive form of guidance may find the Rogerian approach somewhat ineffective.

**Goals of Helping**

The goal is to help the client develop his or her own individualized goals, to reorganize the self, to increase openness to experience, and to increase the congruence between self-concept and experience.

**Techniques and Procedures**

Since the approach stresses the client/therapist relationship, it specifies few techniques. Techniques are secondary to the therapist's attitudes. The approach minimizes directive techniques and maximizes active listening, reflection of feelings (empathy), and clarification. The emotional quality of the client's experience is particularly targeted through counsellor's reflections. Person-centred therapy places a strong emphasis on affect or emotion in the growth of the self and in the therapeutic transaction between therapist and client

Rogers did not support the technique of interpretation at all, and was highly critical of psychoanalysts who used inappropriately timed, or erroneous interpretations.

While the person-centred approach encourages therapist authenticity and genuineness, Rogers changed his position about therapist self-disclosure through the years. According to Tobin (1991), "he admitted that he had trouble accepting the emotion of anger in himself, which may account for his rather slow acceptance of the expression of this feeling toward clients" (p. 25). In any event, even when employed, self-disclosure from the part of the counsellor must never detract the focus away from the client.

**Learning Activities**

Following are some problem situations that call for practical application. The problem situations are exercises in helping you develop your skills in actively listening to client messages and gaining practice in reflecting to the client what was heard. The person-centred approach to counselling emphasizes understanding the client from an internal frame of reference. The following examples will help you learn how to grasp the hidden messages in what clients say and how to reflect feelings as well as content. Write down the feelings of the client and your reflective response to what you hear.

1. Joe Taylor, an unemployed 23 year-old, described his feelings about himself and his view of life during a first session with a helper. He found out about the service from a public service announcement over the radio and thought a visit might get him a job. Joe said:

*I feel kind of funny being here and talking to you. I figured you might know of a job or something for me. I haven't had a job for over two years now--since I last worked at an auto body shop. But the people I worked with were jerks. I wouldn't go back there again. People say I should go back to school, but I hated school. I didn't like the teachers, the kids, or the principal! No thanks, that wasn't the place for me. I got no real friends. Nobody really cares about me and I don't care about them. I don't know what to do. I don't think you can help me. Nobody wants to help me.*

* What assumptions do you make about Joe based on the person-centred theory?
* What do you hear Joe saying?
* What aspects about himself does he seem to accept and which does he not accept?
* How would you establish a helping relationship with Joe?

2. Man, 32, talking to a counsellor about a possible divorce:

*I just can't divorce her. My parents would be so upset. They don't really like her, but they believe that marriage is forever. My mother is very religious. I don't go to church much anymore, myself, but my parents aren't aware of that.*

* What is the person feeling?
* What would be a good reflective response?

3. A woman, 34, comes for counselling because she fears she is an alcoholic. She has been drinking heavily for several years and recently has had some physical symptoms (blackouts) that she hadn't experienced before. She has never known anyone with a serious alcohol problem.

* What would this person be feeling?
* What would be your response to her?

4. *I know I look a wreck. I try to... [pause]. You see, I have three small children. They take up most of my time. My husband... [pause]. He, well, he's filing for a divorce. [she begins to cry]. No, I'm all right. I just, well, I don't know what to do. I'm lost. I never thought he'd do this to me. I knew we had a few problems, but I thought we could work them out. Now he's living with another woman. I can't believe he'd do this to me... [pause], the mother of his children.*

* What is the person feeling?
* What would be your reflective response?

5. Review the summary of questions and answers related to the theory of personality in Rogerian psychotherapy included in Fernald's (2000) article (p. 174).

**Study Questions**

1. What is the view of human nature and what are the basic assumptions underlying the approach?
2. Which are the three necessary and sufficient conditions for therapeutic personality change, according to Rogers?
3. What are the major differences between the person-centred approach and psychoanalysis regarding causation of behaviour?
4. Do you think that the client-counsellor relationship, as advocated by the person-centred approach to therapy, is enough to effect behaviour and personality changes in clients? Elaborate on your arguments.
5. Discuss the concept of self-actualization as it pertains to this theory.
6. Jason, a person-centred therapist, is in the throws of a difficult divorce. Some of his clients have begun to perceive him as being aloof and uncaring. How will these perceptions on the part of the clients hinder the process of psychotherapy?

**References:**

Fernald, P. S. (2000). Carl Rogers: Body-centered counsellor. *Journal of Counseling & Development, 78*, 172-179.

Rogers, C. R. (1951). *Client-centered therapy: Its current practice, implications, and theory*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin.

Rogers, C. R. (1959). A theory of therapy, personality, and interpersonal relationships as developed in the client-centered framework. In S. Koch (Ed.), *Psychology: A study of a science. Vol. III: Formulations of the person and the social context* (pp. 184-256). New York: McGraw-Hill.

Rogers, C. R. (1992). The necessary and sufficient conditions for therapeutic personality change. *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology, 60*, 827-832.

Tobin, S. A. (1991). A comparison of psychoanalytic self psychology and Carl Rogers's person-centered therapy. *Journal of Humanistic Psychology, 31*, 9-33.

Wallace, W. A. (1993). *Theories of Personality*. Boston: Allyn and Bacon.

**Useful Links:**

Association for Humanistic Psychology. Website: [**http://www.ahpweb.org/**](http://www.ahpweb.org/)

*Carl Rogers, core conditions and education*. Website: [**http://www.infed.org/thinkers/et-rogers.htm**](http://www.infed.org/thinkers/et-rogers.htm)

*Personality Theories: Carl Rogers (1902 - 1987)* by Dr. C. George Boeree. Website: [**http://www.ship.edu/~cgboeree/rogers.html**](http://www.ship.edu/~cgboeree/rogers.html)

