

People-Centered Therapy: of “Ordinary People”

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Carl Rogers founded people-centered therapy which tremendously impacted “virtually every major approach to counseling and therapy” (Tan, 2011. P. 146) because of the emphasis on congruence, unconditional positive regard, and his definition of empathy. With these core conditions, the therapist is providing a safe and supportive environment to deeply know and care for them in order to enter the client’s world. This is healing in it of itself for it propels the client towards self-awareness and utilizing of their own resources. Rogers believed a client is their best expert and combined with their intrinsic motivation to self-actualize, they are bound to heal and come into their complete and true self. The reason why Rogers does not call anyone a patient is because he does not find them to be ‘sick’ but “under conditions of worth that are not supportive or safe, an individual will usually become increasingly out of touch with his or her true self... leading to psychopathology” (Tan, 2011. P. 134).

Since the conditions of worth are commonly caused by external relations, Roger believes the therapist relationship with the client as restorative. The therapist would be congruent with themselves to join with the client and provide a non-judgmental acceptance of the client to foster their own exploration and eventually acceptance. Empathy is “the attitude of therapists, rather than their knowledge, theories, or techniques, (that) facilitate personality change in clients” (Corey, 2015. P. 171). In this genuine therapeutic relationship, as the client gains confidence in who they are, accept and trust themselves, set their own goals and pursue it for congruence within the self.

Conrad initiating the therapy session is a sign of him being in the “contemplation stage... aware of a problem and are considering overcoming it, but they have not yet made a commitment to take action to bring about the change” (Corey, 2015. P. 184). People-centered therapy would applaud Conrad for taking this courageous step by himself, which proves that he has inner

strength to transform. Conrad says, “I miss it sometimes, the hospital, I really do...because that’s where we had the laughs” (Redford, 1980, 39:14). It was a place he could be his true self and be able to see others. People-centered therapy is a stark difference from Karen’s perception of the “real world” (Redford, 1980, 39:07) where “the only one that can help me is myself...at least that’s what dad says” (Redford, 1980, 38:22). Often it is the pressure of others forcing Conrad to put on a façade that leads to feelings of unworthiness or doubt but just as Conrad healthily craved the authentic connections, the clients “do not have to experience the struggles of change alone and that group as collective entities have their own source of transformation” (Corey, 2015, p. 179).

As Dr. Burger, although there are no specific techniques, unconditional positive regard for Conrad would be essential because he is mired in guilt of being alive and trying to keep up appearances, especially in front of his parents. It is important for Conrad to come to his own conclusion that he matters enough to live. Since Conrad is in a crisis situation, instead of a purely non-directive approach, motivational interviewing could guide Conrad out of the past and “empower (Conrad) to find ways to achieve their goals” (Corey, 2015. P. 183). Conrad has the basis of “hope and optimism” (Corey, 2015. P. 183) so on top of the empathy to form the bond, it would suit him better to have a “deliberately directive” (Corey, 2015. P. 182) guidance.

The approach would be helpful for Conrad because he does not have a solid connection with anyone in his immediate life. Nobody talks about anything real and when it does come up, it is too “personal” (Redford, 1980, 32:39) or Beth laughing when she gets “embarrassed or awkward” (Redford, 1980, 1:46:44), a lack of congruence. Person-centered therapy might be the most beneficial for Conrad for where he is in his life and craving authentic connection because as soon as he gets it, he is empowered.

References

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