

**A PERSON-CENTERED  
FOUNDATION FOR COUNSELING  
AND PSYCHOTHERAPY**



Second Edition

# A PERSON-CENTERED FOUNDATION FOR COUNSELING AND PSYCHOTHERAPY

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*We dedicate this book to our grandchildren:  
Erik, Katelyn, Kyle, Jocelyn, Rye and Samantha*



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## PREFACE

When the first edition of this book was published in 1990, we hoped that it would broaden and expand the concept of person-centered theory to embrace new possibilities for helping people in the form of an integrated and synergistic person-centered eclecticism. Since the publication of the 1990 book, we have been delighted and excited about the accelerating exploration, creative extension, and further development of person-centered theory throughout the world. Person-centered theory and practice are flourishing outside the United States in the Netherlands, Switzerland, Sweden, Great Britain, Spain, France, Hungary, Italy, Belgium, Germany, Ireland, Denmark, Norway, Austria, Japan, Australia, Brazil, Argentina, Chile, Uruguay, Peru, Colombia, Venezuela, Mexico, South Africa, Poland, Portugal, Greece, Czechoslovakia, and Russia. The recent 1998 international conference, the Person Centered Approach Forum, held in South Africa, has demonstrated the continuing worldwide interest in and commitment to the person-centered approach just as the first international conference at the University of Leuven in Belgium did in 1988. During the nineties rich theoretical contributions have been made in more than a dozen important books published or about to be published in Britain and Europe by key person-centered theorists and practitioners including Barrett-Lennard (1999); Cohen (1997); Hutterer, Pawlowsky, Semid, and Stipsits (1996); Lietaer, Rombauts, and VanBalén (1990); Mearns (1994, 1997); Mearns and Thorne (1999); Merry (1995); O'Leary (1999); Prouty (1994); Rennie (1999); Thorne (1992); and Thorne and Lambers (1999). It is clear that the theoretical center and momentum for the person-centered approach has shifted from the United States to Europe.

While we are excited about the theoretical developments in Europe, we are disappointed that the person-centered approach does not enjoy the same level of therapeutic popularity in the United States. We agree with Kahn (1996) that this lack of popularity may be due to the democratic attitudes inherent in the person-centered approach with its values against elitism and materialism, its emphasis on equalizing the counseling relationship, and its commitment to broad social change. Person-centered practitioners seek to expand the boundaries of person-centeredness to include teaching, parent-

ing, marriage, race relations, organizational behavior, pastoral work, medicine, community development, and international relations. We are elated with this evolvment. Our expectation is that person-centeredness will be applied in even more interpersonal areas in the decades ahead. Indeed, as we approach the dawn of a new millennium, the preservation of the human qualities of the person, in an increasingly depersonalized and technological world, requires a sustained commitment to the empathic attitudes and behaviors that are the core of person-centeredness .

Within this framework of expansion, we hope that this second edition of *A Person-Centered Foundation for Counseling and Psychotherapy* will renew interest in the person-centered approach in the United States, make a significant contribution in extending person-centered theory and practice, and promote fruitful dialogue and conversation and further development of person-centered theory. The focus of the book is on counseling and psychotherapy. While the person-centered movement is committed to issues and relationships that go beyond individual and group counseling, we want to reaffirm our commitment to counseling as a fundamental process for influencing attitudinal and behavioral change among troubled persons. While beneficial person-centered general concepts are being implemented in other areas of living, we want to be sure that the psychological needs of individuals are also being met through a humanly sensitive counseling process. These needs must receive the attention of those professionals who provide counseling services. While person-centeredness nurtures the generic development of humans within society as a whole, counseling must also maintain its special sense of responsibility to troubled individuals within that society.

Our concept of person-centered counseling is synergistic. We join established concepts of person-centered counseling with other concepts in the hope that each enriches and expands the other and makes the other more effective. We desire that person-centered counseling possess a freshness and vigor that makes it applicable to a widening range of client needs. We desire that it continues to be viable in a rapidly changing world.

In the concept of person-centered counseling contained in this book, we want to clarify the following:

- Our rationale for an eclectic application of person-centered counseling.
- The rationale and process for reflecting clients' feelings.
- The importance of theory as the foundation for the counseling process.
- The importance of values and their influence on the counseling relationship.
- The modern person-centered counselor's role.
- The essential characteristics of a person-centered counseling relationship and an example of its application.
- The group counseling movement and the person-centered perspective on its theory and application.

- The application of person-centeredness through play therapy.
- The difficulties and opportunities surrounding evaluation.
- A person-centered perspective on the process of counselor education.
- Four therapeutic opportunities that are available outside the field of counseling.

We have struggled with the paradoxical dimensions of a person-centered eclecticism and the challenge of articulating an eclecticism which is coherent, meaningful, and consistent with person-centered therapeutic principles. Whether we have accomplished our goal, we leave it for you, the reader, to determine.

In the evolution of our eclecticism we have drawn not only from the contemporary literature of counseling and psychotherapy but also from the rich, vibrant, and eloquent history of client-centered theory and practice. We choose not to be ahistorical but to draw deeply from the historical roots of person-centered counseling. We hope you will resonate to this blend of the contemporary and the historical.

And finally, throughout this book, we share our personal beliefs and values which have emanated from our experience and reflections upon that experience. We share these beliefs and values with you in the hope of stimulating a silent dialogue between us and you, the reader. You may agree, disagree, approve, or be infuriated. Whatever your response, we hope we engage you and that the engagement will advance your goals in reading this book.

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**A PERSON-CENTERED  
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## Chapter 1

# EXPANDING PERSON-CENTERED COUNSELING

We have been identified with the person-centered literature of counseling since 1963 (Boy & Pine, 1963). Our deep commitment to person-centered counseling has not only been a visceral commitment, but the intellectual depth of the viewpoint has been reinforced in our own experience as counselors, by the human goals of the approach, the face validity of the process, and the objective research evidence that supports its effectiveness. Person-centeredness has been, personally and professionally, an enriching journey for us; but like other journeys, we have not yet reached our destination. The purpose of this book is to continue that journey and to formulate a more applicable approach to person-centered counseling. Hopefully, our current viewpoint will attract the intellectual interests of theoreticians, the application interests of counselors, and the curiosity of researchers.

We hope that this book serves as a transition from a traditional interpretation of person-centeredness to an eclectic application of the viewpoint. Our eclectic application does not mean that we have abandoned the traditional philosophic values of person-centeredness; these values are enduring. While retaining our commitment to these values, we also want the counseling process which reflects these values to be more flexible.

An effective theory of counseling is always developing, seeking an improved application model for assisting clients. We shall attempt to move the application model of person-centered counseling a notch forward with this book, but we realize that what we present may not be the ultimate outcome that we seek.

Person-centered counseling was founded and developed by Carl R. Rogers (1942, 1951, 1954, 1961, 1967, 1969, 1970, 1972, 1974, 1975, 1977, 1980). What began as a viewpoint that was originally developed to improve one-to-one counseling has become expanded to an ever-widening range of situations in which better interpersonal relations are crucial: teaching, orga-

nizational behavior, families, parenting, groups, marriage and its alternatives, leadership, pastoral and interpersonal relations in general. The impact of the Rogerian view has been immense in enabling a person to become self-actualizing, and thereby influencing the emergence of a self-actualizing behavior in others (Levant & Shlien, 1984).

Hart (1970, pp. 3-22) identifies three historic periods in the development of person-centered counseling:

*Period 1 (1940-1950):* The nondirective period in which the counselor created a permissive noninterventative atmosphere essentially forming a relationship with the client based upon acceptance and clarification.

*Period 2 (1950-1957):* The reflective period in which the counselor essentially responded to the client's underlying feelings by reflecting those feelings back to the client rather than simply semantically rephrasing what the client said.

*Period 3 (1957-present):* The experiential period in which the counselor created Rogers' necessary and sufficient conditions moving beyond reflecting the client's feelings and engaging in a wider range of responses in order to meet the needs of the client.

Corey (1996:III) has added a fourth phase (1970 to mid-1980s) which "...encourages an eclectic spirit in using a wider variety of methods rather than being restricted to listening, reflecting, and communicating understanding."

In this book, we attempt to develop a view that incorporates the major emphases within the four periods in an effort to produce a unified and more flexible application of person-centered theory.

We are essentially adding to the long-standing tradition of person-centered counseling. Rogers never intended that the person-centered viewpoint be an inflexible system of application. A fundamental thrust of person-centered-counseling has been its willingness to change, its openness to experience and to research data. As Rogers (Rogers & Wood, 1974:213) has said: "The incorporation of this element in changingness has set it apart, almost more than anything else I know, from other orientations to therapy."

Corsini (1973:123) observes that the changing character of person-centered counseling is due to Rogers' insistence on looking at the facts and altering the theory and methods whenever experience and research so dictated. A rigid interpretation of person-centered counseling would be in contradiction to the developmental nature of both Rogers and the theory: "Fortunately there has not grown up around Rogers the kind of orthodoxy that would require his formulations to be the last word on any issue. Rogers certainly would not welcome this kind of blind devotion and would in fact view it as a failure in actualization" (Wexler and Rice: 9). Person-centered counseling

is a viewpoint that is still in the state of emergence. It is a set of tentative principles rather than dogma (Corey, 1986).

Our eclectic application of person-centered counseling aims to fit Patterson's (1985:v) view of eclecticism as "the selection and orderly combination of compatible features from diverse sources." We agree with Patterson (Watkins & Goodyear 1994: 181) that "the basic conditions of client-centered therapy—empathy, respect, genuineness—have been generally incorporated by most approaches" and "to the extent that these conditions have been accepted, one may say all therapy is some what client centered." We believe that the methodologies of other theories of counseling can be compatible with person-centered counseling when they do not violate the underlying and fundamental philosophy and values of person-centered counseling. We believe that counselors can be person-centered in their values and attitudes, and not violate those beliefs when applying a technique or approach from another theory of counseling. We don't feel that person-centered theory is ever compromised when these other methodologies are collaboratively applied to serve client needs which have been identified by clients themselves. Carl Rogers (1986) captures the spirit of our viewpoint when he says:

Over the years I have become more and more aware of an aspect of the client-centered/person-centered approach that sets it apart. The approach is paradoxical. It emphasizes shared values yet encourages uniqueness. It is rooted in a profound regard for the wisdom and constructive capacity inherent in the human organism—a regard that is shared by those who hold this approach. At the same time it encourages those who incorporate these values to develop their own special and unique ways of bring, their own ways of implementing this shared philosophy.

Our person-centered approach accommodates the viewpoints of existentialism, humanism, and theology since certain aspects of these viewpoints contribute important parallel concepts regarding human nature, behavior, and the goals of existence. The person-centered viewpoint has traditionally dealt with human freedom, self-actualization, the necessity of a congruence between the ideal self and the actual self, acceptance, openness, socialization, the internal locus of evaluation, genuineness, nonpossessive love, and empathy. Parallel viewpoints regarding the preceding have also emerged from existentialism, humanism, and theology in their treatment of free will, humanity's desire for peace and goodwill, personal honesty and responsibility, respect for the dignity and worth of others, the desired congruence between a person's personal and social consciousness, the person's natural inclination to transcend the self, and guidelines for moral behavior that sustain the self and serve others.

Person-centered counseling is the core of our viewpoint, but existentialism, humanism, and theology can be viewed as enriching that core. We choose to identify with the person-centered viewpoint because it fulfills the requirements of a valid theory of counseling; has a substantive theory of personality that undergirds its application; has an established, effective, and flexible application model with enough range so that it can be translated into practice in a wide variety of settings, possesses both qualitative and quantitative research evidence supporting its effectiveness; and has been confirmed in our own experience as persons and as professionals.

### **THE CONTEXT FOR EXTENDING THE PERSON-CENTERED VIEWPOINT**

Since the publication of the first edition of this book in 1990, there has been a marked trend toward integration in theory and eclecticism in counseling practice (Arkowitz, 1992; Barrineau, 1992 & 1996; Bohart, 1995; Bradley, Parve, & Gould, 1995; Beutler & Consoli, 1992; Cottone, 1992; Duncan et al., 1992; Goldfried, 1995; Kelly, 1991; Kelly, 1994; Kelly, 1996; Kelly, 1997; Kleinke, 1994; Kottler, 1991; Kottler & Brown, 1996; Lazarus & Beutler, 1993; Norcross & Goldfried, 1992; Prochaska & Norcross, 1994; Safran, 1990a; Safran 1990b; Safran & Segal, 1990; Wachtel, 1991). The trend toward theory integration and eclecticism has been accompanied by efforts to find common theoretical ground among various counseling philosophies and theories (Becvar & Becvar, 1997; Coghlan & McIllduff, 1995; Day & Matthes, 1992; Kahn, 1996; Lumbelli, 1997; Moreira, 1993; Sanford, 1993). This body of work provides an intellectually rich and theoretically supportive context for extending person-centered theory and for laying the foundation for person-centered eclecticism. For example, Kahn (1996), based on his review of the relevant literature, has concluded that at their core, Rogers's person-centered approach and Kohut's self psychology approach to psychotherapy are one. Safran (1990a and 1990b) has developed a refinement of cognitive therapy in light of interpersonal therapy. Day and Matthes (1992) have identified numerous similarities between person-centered, Gestalt, and Jungian approaches to group therapy. Barrineau (1992 & 1996) has proposed a model of dream work which reflects the principles of person-centered therapy and calls for expansion or modification in our understanding of person-centered therapy.