

The Essence of the Person-Centered Approach

Michael Lux, Renate Motschnig-Pitrik and Jeffrey Cornelius-White

1 Introduction

As editors, we feel somehow presumptuous (if not arrogant) wanting to determine—in one single chapter!—what the essence of something so huge like the person-centered approach (PCA) should be. In fact, our true feeling is awe toward the phenomenon of the PCA as a whole and being deeply thankful that our paths took us to encountering it both personally and theoretically. Although none of us was fortunate enough to meet Carl Rogers in person, we had ample opportunities to meet him through his books, videos, and colleagues, and through all the experiential traces somehow embodied in real, genuine, and empathically attuned relationships. Perhaps, if we would just have one sentence to say, we *feel the essence of the PCA in and through the immediate, real, astonishingly fresh, and influential quality of person-to-person encounter*. We appreciate that research in several disciplines like psychology, psychotherapy, learning, systems science, management, philosophy, communication science, etc., constantly confirms the principles of the PCA. At the same time, however, we are also not surprised that the PCA is not a predominant direction in academia. Perhaps, the PCA must be experienced to be fully understood, and this needs time and effort and hence puts a heavy burden on the full and comprehensive recognition of the PCA in all its potentialities.

M. Lux (✉)

Neurologisches Rehabilitationszentrum Quellenhof, Kuranlagenallee 2,
75323 Bad Wildbad, Germany
e-mail: luxbw@yahoo.de

R. Motschnig-Pitrik

University of Vienna, Waehringer Strasse 29/6.41, 1090 Vienna, Austria
e-mail: renete.motschnig@univie.ac.at

J. Cornelius-White

Counseling, Leadership and Special Education, Missouri State University,
901 S. National Avenue, Springfield, MO 65897, USA
e-mail: JCornelius-White@MissouriState.edu

Having said that, we are absolutely aware of the fact that there are as many “essences” of the PCA as there are people. In that way, the approach has a high potential to be meaningful to many persons in their ways and to grow with them, although it will never become an undisputed dogma. Our purpose in this chapter hence is not in any way to prescribe or determine the essence of the PCA. It just plainly is to capture some ground for bridges to be built.

2 Carl Rogers and the Development of the PCA

The PCA was founded by Carl Ransom Rogers (1902–1987), one of the most influential psychologists in history and co-founder of humanistic psychology. According to Rogers (1980), the central hypothesis of the PCA is: “Individuals have in themselves vast resources for self-understanding and for altering their self-concepts, basic attitudes, and self-directed behavior; these resources can be tapped if a definable climate of facilitative psychological attitudes can be provided” (p. 115). The exploration of this climate is one of the most important merits we owe to him. Although he was controversially considered in academic psychology, he was elected president of the American Psychological Association (APA) (1946–1947) and he got several scientific awards, for example the “Distinguished Scientific Contribution Award” (1956 APA) or the “Award for Distinguished Contributions to Applied Psychology as a Professional Practice” (1972 APA). Furthermore, immediately before his death, he was nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize. He was a gifted writer and reached millions of people by more than 200 professional articles and 16 books. Since the development of the PCA and the life of Rogers are inseparably interlinked, we want to highlight some important aspects of the biography of this great bridge builder between sciences and between humans.

Rogers grew up in a fundamentalist Christian home. He began studying agriculture in Wisconsin and after an influential trip to China at age 20 (Cornelius-White 2012), changed his study to history and then theology at the progressive “Union Theological Seminary” in New York. There he made the acquaintance of liberal theological views, which foreshadowed concepts of humanistic psychology. In this time, he attended lectures of William Heard Kilpatrick who made John Dewey’s conception of democratic learning accessible to him. Afterwards, Rogers studied psychology under Edward Thorndike among others at Columbia University. During this time, his acknowledgment of experimental procedures for the acquisition of scientific knowledge was firmly established.

Following studies at university, he began to gather clinical experiences as a child psychologist at the psychoanalytic Child Guidance Institute in New York (1927–1928) and subsequently at the Rochester Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children (1928–1940). During this time, he was influenced by Otto Rank’s Relational Therapy and the Functional School of Social Work via his colleague Jessie Taft.

Rogers was appointed professor of clinical psychology at Ohio State University (1940–1944). After he developed a program for returning soldiers of World War II (1944–1945), he became professor at the University of Chicago (1945–1957) and at the University of Wisconsin, Madison (1957–1963). During this time, Rogers originated and investigated a new approach to psychotherapy which was called non-directive, client-centered, and later person-centered psychotherapy. He and his research group were pioneers concerning scientific investigation of the exact effects of psychotherapy and of conditions which enable constructive changes in clients. Rogers (1942) was the first psychotherapist who dared to bring transparency in the psychotherapeutic treatment room by publishing a complete treatment of 8 sessions—of course in an anonymous way. Within this approach, several other psychotherapeutic concepts had been developed, for example, Gendlin's Focusing, Greenberg's Process-Experiential Psychotherapy, Prouty's Pre-Therapy, Axline's child-centered play therapy, and Motivational Interviewing by Miller and Rollnick, just to name a few. The work of Rogers and his research group also had profound influence on other psychotherapeutic schools (Goldfried 2007) and became the foundation of the discipline of counseling in the US and UK.

Although Rogers aspired to formulate his theories as hypotheses which can be verified by scientific research, he was aware of the limits of the positivistic, experimental paradigm in psychology, for example, that it does not make enough room for subjective experiences. Later, he (1980) acknowledged that “the old Newtonian conception of science” (p. 237) does not fully fit with his approach and that it is closely related to modern theoretical physics and system theory, for example, the approaches by Fritjof Capra or by Nobel Prize laureate of chemistry Ilya Prigogine.

His openness for scientific discourse becomes apparent in his dialogues with scientists and philosophers like B. F. Skinner, Martin Buber, whom he called one of his favorite thinkers, his friend Michael Polanyi, Gregory Bateson, Rollo May, and theologian Paul Tillich (Kirschenbaum and Henderson 1989a). Additionally, Rogers recognized with some astonishment close connections of his thinking with various philosophical currents. To these belong the philosophy of Søren Kierkegaard, which prompted Rogers (1980) to view his approach as a kind of “home-grown brand of existential philosophy” (p. 39). Later, he noticed conjunctions with Buddhism and with Lao-Tse. For example, he (1980) noted that his own convictions are expressed by the following sayings by Lao-Tse:

If I keep from meddling with people, they take care of themselves,
If I keep from commanding people, they behave themselves,
If I keep from preaching at people, they improve themselves,
If I keep from imposing at people, they become themselves (p. 42).

Subsequent to his university career, Rogers turned to the potentials of his approach in various social and political domains. In order to emphasize the practical reach of the approach beyond psychotherapy, it was renamed from “client-centered” to “person-centered.” At this time, Rogers moved to California where he became a member of the Western Behavioral Sciences Institute (1964) and where he founded

in cooperation with others the Center for Studies of the Person in La Jolla (1968). From now on, the approach was utilized in several social fields such as in encounter groups, in organizational consulting, in the development of an experiential education (“significant learning”), in the understanding of marriage and partnership, in a program for medical healthcare professionals, in cross-cultural groups as well as in peace initiatives. Rogers was deeply convinced of the relevance of the PCA for humankind. To propose the way of the future, he states: “Finally, there is agreement that one of the most essential elements of survival is the development of a greater sense of cooperation, of community, of ability to work together for the common good, not simply for personal aggrandizement” (Rogers 1980, p. 332).

During the 1970 and 1980s, Rogers facilitated large groups in many countries, for example, in the Soviet Union before it was falling apart and with conflicting parties in Northern Ireland and South Africa. He also held a group with government officials and policymakers in the “Central American Challenge” in Rust, Austria (1985). Such activities were among the reasons for his nomination for the Nobel Peace Prize. As a result of these various efforts, the PCA was distributed in a wide range of fields all over the world. It is one endeavor of this book to give some insights into the current state of its influence and salience. Before we go into this in more detail, we would like to outline some basic concepts of the PCA.

3 Basic Concepts of the PCA

3.1 The Theory of Personality and its Implications for Mental Health

3.1.1 Actualizing Tendency

Central to the theory of the PCA is the assumption that every being seeks both its maintenance and its enhancement. This motivational tendency to evolve the organism’s inherent potentials is called the actualizing tendency. In developing this concept, Rogers was influenced by the neurologist and proponent of Gestalt psychology Kurt Goldstein and by Abraham Maslow, one of the co-founders of humanistic psychology. The actualizing tendency comprises the entire hierarchy of needs by Maslow. Rogers (1980) summarizes its function within the organism as follows:

We are, in short, dealing with an organism which is always seeking, always initiating, always “up to something.” There is one central source of energy in the human organism. It is a trustworthy function of the whole system rather than of some portion of it. It is perhaps most simply conceptualized as a tendency toward fulfillment, toward actualization, involving not only the maintenance but also the enhancement of the organism (p. 123).

On optimal conditions, the actualizing tendency guides the organism toward a constructive development of its inherent potentials. Because humans are social

beings, social conditions are essential for the unimpeded unfolding of the actualizing tendency. These conditions are delineated below in more detail. However, the presence of less favorable conditions may bring about an estrangement from the actualizing tendency, which is regarded as the reason for mental disorders and other forms of maladjustment. Such an estrangement is related to a divergence between processes in consciousness and the wisdom of the body, which comes from the actualizing tendency: “While the organism may be constructively motivated certainly the conscious aspects often seem the reverse” (Rogers 1977, p. 243).

3.1.2 Primacy of Experience

The PCA is relatable to the philosophical school of phenomenology and of constructivism. In this sense, the construction of the subjective reality by the individual is essential for his behavior. Thus, proposition I of Rogers’ (1951/1995a) originally stated theory of personality is: “Every individual exists in a continually changing world of experience of which he or she is the center” (p. 483). The term “experience” encompasses every psychic process that can be represented in consciousness (e.g., thoughts, feelings, memories, or sensations and the senses). Because subjective reality is crucial for the way the individual orients in the world, empathizing with her/his experiences offers the best opportunity to understand a person.

From the viewpoint of the PCA, two levels of psychic processes can be differentiated. A part of the experiences is symbolized and thus represented in consciousness. The larger part remains beyond conscious awareness. The relationship between conscious and unconscious aspects of totality of experiences is illustrated metaphorically by Rogers (1980) as follows: “It is a tiny peak of awareness, of symbolizing capacity, topping a vast pyramid of nonconscious organismic functioning” (p. 127).

The actualizing tendency is based on non-conscious processes for which reason these are seen in a positive light within the PCA. Mental health is achieved by utilizing these unconscious resources: “When a person is functioning in an integrated, unified, effective manner, she has confidence in the directions she unconsciously chooses, and trusts her experiencing, of which, even she is fortunate, she has only partial glimpses in her awareness” (Rogers 1977, p. 246). These “unconscious choices” signify an organismic wisdom, which transcends the one of the conscious mind alone: “Man is wiser than his intellect” (Rogers 1977, p. 246).

As one potential explanation, Rogers utilizes the concept of “experiencing” developed by his co-worker and the founder of Focusing, Eugene Gendlin, to describe how both levels of psychic processes interact. Following from William James, Gendlin assumes that there is a continuous flow of experiences present in the organism. Within this flow of experiences, there exists an implicit order, the so-called order of carrying forward, which indicates the direction of the actualizing tendency. The implicit order is revealed in a preconceptual felt meaning, which is denoted by Gendlin as the “felt sense.” If the felt meaning is exactly symbolized in conscious awareness, a sensible change will occur—the “felt shift” according to

Gendlin. This change is accompanied by cognitive insight, an aha-experience, and feelings of coherence, relief, or bodily relaxation. It expresses that conscious and unconscious processes have become concordant and that the symbolization captures the implicit meaning within the flow of experiences.

Thus, the felt meaning is the point of reference that reveals the accuracy of symbolizations. The term self-exploration describes the search for meaning within the flow of experiences and the attempt to symbolize it as exactly as possible. This is not an easy endeavor as Rogers (1961/1995b) explains in the following statement:

But in the realm of feelings, we have never learned to attach symbols to experience with any accuracy of meaning. This something which I feel welling up in myself, in the safety of an acceptant relationship—what is it? Is it sadness, is it anger, is it regret, is it sorrow for myself, is it anger at lost opportunities—I stumble around trying out a wide range of symbols, until one “fits,” “feels right,” seems really to match the organismic experience. In doing this type of thing the client discovers that he has to learn the language of feeling and emotion as if he were an infant learning to speak; often, even worse, he finds he must unlearn a false language before learning the true one. (p. 204)

Self-exploration involves suffering and struggle but within a facilitative relationship, understanding emerges.

3.1.3 The Self as a Process Directing the Symbolization of Experiences

The self or the self-concept is central to intrapersonal and interpersonal processes. It is defined by Rogers (1959) as an “organized, consistent conceptual gestalt composed of perceptions of the characteristics of the ‘I’ or ‘me’ and the perceptions of the relationships of the ‘I’ or ‘me’ to others and to various aspects of life, together with the values attached to these perceptions. It is a gestalt, which is available to awareness though not necessarily in awareness. It is a fluid and changing gestalt, a process, but at any given moment it is a specific entity which is at least partially definable in operational terms by means of a Q sort or other instrument or measure” (p. 200).

Experiences that are not compatible with the self are subjected to defensiveness; they are denied or perceived in a distorted way in order to stabilize the self. Rogers (1959) explains: “When an experience is dimly perceived (or ‘subceived’ is perhaps the better term) as being incongruent with the self-structure, the organism appears to react with a distortion of the meaning of the experience, (making it consistent with the self) or with a denial of the existence of the experience, in order to preserve the self-structure from threat” (p. 205).

The flexibility of the self is constrained by experiences during socialization, namely the internalization of conditions of worth. It is assumed that in accordance with the emergence of the self during childhood, a need for positive regard appears. The internalization of conditions of worth occurs if the person does not receive unconditional positive regard but experiences that positive regard is given merely under certain conditions. In that case, the person integrates these conditions

within the self and pursues to meet these conditions. In this sense, conditions of worth correspond to socially mediated principles whose compliance should bring along positive regard by other persons. Self-related goals, which stem from the ideal self, “the self-concept which the individual would most like to possess” (Rogers 1959, p. 200), reflect internalized conditions of worth.

3.1.4 Organismic Valuing Process

Person-centered theory posits that the totality of experiences bears a holistic integrative evaluative process and the organismic valuing process (OVP), which expresses the direction of the actualizing tendency. In this way, the OVP has the potential “to enhance the development of the individual himself, of others in his community, and to make for the survival and evolution of his species” (Rogers 1964, p. 165).

Rogers explain the workings of the OVP by using the metaphor of a computer. By calculating all available data from senses, body, memory, and societal requirements, the OVP detects the behavior, which fulfills at best the manifold demands of a given situation. Thereby, the OVP is influenced by previous experiences stored in memory, the uniqueness of the actual situation, and anticipations relating to the future. Rogers was convinced that the totality of experiences is wiser than deliberate reasoning. During his life, he had learned to trust messages from deep within the organism and he had recognized that he can be guided by these: “As I gradually come to trust my total reactions more deeply, I find that I can use them to guide my thinking” (Rogers 1961/1995b, p. 22).

Moreover, under the condition of an undistorted perception of the inner flow of experiences, the OVP makes sure that a positive human nature comes to light: “When man’s unique capacity of awareness is thus functioning freely and fully, we find that we have, not an animal whom we must fear, not a beast who must be controlled, but an organism able to achieve, through the remarkable integrative capacity of its central nervous system, a balanced, realistic, self-enhancing, other-enhancing behavior as a resultant of all these elements of awareness” (Rogers 1961/1995b, p. 105).

3.1.5 Incongruence

If important experiences succumb to defensiveness, this is called incongruence—the breeding ground for the emergence of mental disorders and other maladaptive behaviors. Incongruence is associated with an impaired integration of personality. In this regard, the symbolization of experiences, which is determined by the self, is not congruent with the flow of experiences within the organism. Conditions of worth restrict openness to experiences and interfere with the organismic valuing process: “Thus a condition of worth, because it disturbs the valuing process, prevents the individual from functioning freely and with maximum effectiveness”

(Rogers 1959, p. 210). Feelings of tension, anxiety, irritation, or insecurity are subjective markers of incongruence. Within the self, it is revealed as a discrepancy between self and ideal self.

Incongruence comes along with a dissociation of the self-actualizing tendency from the actualizing tendency. It might be, for example, that the self-actualizing tendency makes a person to expose herself to excessive pressure to perform in order to receive other's real or imagined approval. In that case, an organismic need for silence and rest which arises from the actualizing tendency and which is not compatible with a striving after approval is not sufficiently integrated. Rogers (1961/1995b) describes this conflict as follows: "Man's behavior is exquisitely rational, moving with subtle and ordered complexity toward the goals his organism is endeavoring to achieve. The tragedy for most of us is that our defenses keep us from being aware of this rationality, so that consciously we are moving in one direction, while organismically we are moving in another" (p. 194–195).

3.1.6 Congruence

A prerequisite for an optimal utilization of the OVP is the openness of awareness to the totality of experiences. If relevant experiences are symbolized precisely, conscious and unconscious processes are adapted to each other. This condition is called congruence. Within the PCA, congruence is synonymous to mental health and the best possible access to psychic resources. Rogers (1961/1995b) describes this as follows:

What does this becoming one's self mean? It appears to mean less fear of the organismic, nonreflective reactions which one has, a gradual growth of trust in and even affection for the complex, varied, rich assortment of feelings and tendencies which exist in one at the organic or organismic level. Consciousness, instead of being the watchman over a dangerous and unpredictable lot of impulses, of which few can be permitted to see the light of day, becomes the comfortable inhabitant of a richly varied society of impulses and feelings and thoughts, which prove to be very satisfactorily self-governing when not fearfully or authoritatively guarded. (p. 203)

Openness to experiences means to accept what is present now. This means that there is no avoidance to any experience, whether pleasant or not. This kind of orientation toward reality (Rogers is famous for the phrase "The facts are friendly") allows for change and further development what is called the paradox of change: "The curious paradox is that when I accept myself just as I am, then I can change" (Rogers 1961/1995b, p. 17).

The actualizing tendency guides these changes in direction toward the fully functioning person (FFP)—the ideal case of mental health within the PCA which no one reaches permanently. Rogers had derived the concept of the FFP from observations on developments of persons which benefited from person-centered psychotherapy. According to these observations, the FFP is free of defensiveness. The FFP is not identified with a certain image of one's self and can thus flexibly

adapt to the affordances of a given situation: “The self and the personality emerge from experience, rather than experience being translated or twisted to fit a pre-conceived self-structure. It means that one becomes a participant in and an observer of the ongoing process of organismic experience, rather than being in control of it” (Rogers 1961/1995b, p. 189).

The FFP faces any experience in a mindful and unprejudiced way. Such persons are open to their experiences and perceive sensitively processes within and outside the organism. An FFP lives in the here and now. The application of previous learning experiences does not block one’s view on the uniqueness of the current situation. Creativity, a rich emotional life, and trust in the usefulness of intuition in decision-making are additional attributes of the FFP. Due to openness to experiences, an FFP is able to make decisions based on the OVP. Decisions reflect the integration of any information that is available in the central nervous system. Furthermore, Rogers had detected commonalities of value directions in such persons:

In therapy, such openness to experience leads to emerging value directions which appear to be common across individuals and perhaps even across cultures. Stated in older terms, individuals who are thus in touch with their experiencing come to value such directions as sincerity, independence, self-direction, self-knowledge, social responsivity, social responsibility, and loving interpersonal relationships. (Kirschenbaum and Henderson 1989b, p. 185).

3.2 The Theory of a Growth-Promoting Interpersonal Relationship

3.2.1 Contact

Rogers was the pioneer of research in psychotherapy. He and his co-workers were the first who used recordings of interviews to work out conditions that enable constructive changes during psychotherapy. According to this research, progress of clients in direction of the FFP occurs in a certain interpersonal climate, which is essential for the impact of person-centered psychotherapy. On the therapist’s part, this climate is marked by three basic attitudes: empathy, congruence, and unconditional positive regard (see below). Within this kind of relationship, the client experiences security, which facilitates his willingness for self-exploration. In this way, he comes to open up to his experiences and to symbolize these more exactly. The self loses rigidity, whereby the so far repelled experiences can be integrated within the self. Congruence, and thus mental health, increases and the same applies to the consonance of actualizing and self-actualizing tendency. This enables the actualizing tendency to unfold unimpaired. Contact describes a precondition of person-centered relationships (Rogers 1959). It means a mutual influence of the fields of perception of any of the involved persons, a mutual

emotional resonance, and minimally connection to consensually validated reality (Prouty et al. 2002).

3.2.2 Non-Directivity

Although each person is an expert for his or her own experiences (e.g., as a psychotherapist, client, teacher, learner) and thus brings in competencies and knowledge the other does not have, contact is realized “at eye level,” without rigid hierarchical structures. There is no one who shows the other the way to deal with problems, but instead, there will be established conditions under which this way can be found with a maximum of self-determination. This kind of autonomy supportive, empowering interaction is called non-directivity. In this regard, the actualizing tendency is the base for the trust of person-centered therapists, teachers, counselors, or other facilitators in the potential of clients, learners, consultees, or others for constructive developments. Rogers (1980) expresses the spirit of non-directivity in the following quote: “I go along with Martin Buber and the ancient Oriental sages: ‘He who imposes himself has the small, manifest might; he who does not impose himself has the great, secret might’ ” (p. 45).

3.2.3 Empathy

Empathy is one of the basic attitudes facilitators aspire to put into practice. It is defined by Rogers (1959) as: “The state of empathy, or being empathic, is to perceive the internal frame of reference of another with accuracy, and with the emotional components and meanings which pertain thereto, as if one were the other person, but without ever losing the ‘as if’ condition. Thus, it means to sense the hurt or the pleasure of another as he senses it, and to perceive the causes thereof as he perceives them, but without ever losing the recognition that it is as if I were hurt or pleased, etc. If this ‘as if’ quality is lost, then the state is one of identification” (p. 210–211).

Empathy, the attempt to understand the subjective experiences and reality of the other, is based on conscious perspective taking as well as on feeling the inner state of the other with all one’s senses. This means that empathy is viewed as a complex phenomenon, which requires cognitive and emotional functions. It implies to resonate emotionally with the other without getting lost in the other’s experiences. According to Rogers (1980): “To be with another in this way means that for the time being you lay aside the views and values you hold for yourself in order to enter another’s world without prejudice” (p. 143).

Empathy is viewed as an interactional or intersubjective process, a joint search for meaning. By communicating parts from the experiences of the other, the facilitator has understood he helps the other to explore his subjective reality. According to Rogers (1980), empathy “includes communicating your sensings of his/her world as you look with fresh and unfrightened eyes at elements of which

the individual is fearful. It means frequently checking with him/her as to the accuracy of your sensings, and being guided by the responses you receive” (p. 142). In this way, empathic understanding stimulates the process of self-exploration by which the felt meaning within the flow of experiences can be symbolized more precisely: “By pointing to the possible meanings in the flow of his/her experiencing you help the person to focus on this useful type of referent, to experience the meanings more fully, and to move forward in the experiencing” (Rogers 1980, p. 142).

3.2.4 Congruence

Another attitude person-centered facilitators hold is congruence. As described above, congruence is synonymous to openness to and acceptance of one’s full experiences. The facilitator is attentive to any of his experiences in resonance on the other, and he is able to integrate these experiences for empathic understanding. The relationship between congruence and empathy (and unconditional positive regard) was already mentioned by Rogers (1951/1995a) in a proposition in his originally formulated theory of personality: “XVIII: When the individual perceives and accepts into one consistent and integrated system all his or her sensory and visceral experiences, then he or she is necessarily more understanding of others and is more accepting of others as separate individuals” (p. 520).

Additionally, congruence has an interactive aspect called transparency or realness. This means that the facilitator is not an “empty screen” and does not hide behind a “professional facade.” Instead, he encounters the other as the person he is in reality so far as this is appropriate to the current situation: “The more the therapist is him or herself in the relationship, putting up no professional front or personal facade, the greater is the likelihood that the client will change and grow in a constructive manner. It means that the therapist is openly being the feelings and attitudes that are flowing within at the moment” (Rogers 1980, p. 115). A transparent response originates from internal congruence, and a part of that congruence is empathic acceptance. In other words, transparency is not the same thing as impulsivity or selfishness, but an authentic expression of the experience one has while endeavoring to be not only congruent, but also empathic and accepting. This implies that the facilitator communicates without any aspect of falseness but with concordance of verbal and non-verbal communication channels.

3.2.5 Unconditional Positive Regard

The last remaining attitude is acceptance, or unconditional positive regard. It implies that the facilitator is non-judgmental in relation to the experiences of the other. The facilitator unconditionally accepts these experiences and the whole person of the other. This attitude is free of demands on the other but is instead marked by respectfulness for his potential to self-fulfillment and self-

determination. This attitude is contrary to the attitude that underlies the internalization of conditions of worth during socialization. Thus, unconditional positive regard conveyed by the way the facilitator is present in the relationship enables experiences which are corrective to those in the past and which offer the opportunity “to be that self which one truly is” (Rogers 1961/1995b, p. 166). The term “acceptance” may be somewhat misleading because it does not fully capture the emotional content of unconditional positive regard. In this regard, by embracing this attitude, the facilitator experiences feelings like compassion, caring, warmth, or non-possessive love (agape in theological terms) toward the other.

3.2.6 Presence: The Ultimate Quality

The basic attitudes of the PCA are closely interwoven and mutually interdependent. We assume that a facilitator’s simultaneous holding them, or better “being them,” enables her or his “presence” in the relationship. The presence of the facilitator can enable the occurrence of a somewhat altered state of consciousness which Rogers discussed more frequently later in life after he had experienced many intensive phases of therapies or groups and perhaps closely linked with the “magic of encounter,” the transforming power of relationships. Rogers (1980) wrote:

When I am at my best, as a group facilitator or a therapist, I discover another characteristic. I find that when I am closest to my inner, intuitive self, when I am somehow in touch with the unknown in me, when perhaps I am in a slightly altered state of consciousness, then whatever I do seems to be full of healing. Then simply my presence is releasing and helpful. There is nothing I can do to force this experience, but when I can relax and be close to the transcendental core of me, then I may behave in strange and impulsive ways in the relationship, ways which I cannot justify rationally, which have nothing to do with my thought processes. But these strange behaviours turn out to be right, in some odd way. At those moments it seems that my inner spirit has reached out and touched the inner spirit of the other. Our relationship transcends itself, and has become a part of something larger. Profound growth and healing and energy are present. This kind of transcendent phenomenon is certainly experienced at times in groups in which I have worked, changing the lives of some of those involved. (p. 129)

4 Conclusion

The PCA is both a parsimonious explanation of how people grow and change, particularly in a facilitative environment, and an opportunity for complicated connections at biological, psychological, social, cultural, political, and artistic levels in both research and application. The original PCA theories of personality and growth-producing relationships provide a foundation around such concepts as actualization, empathy, congruence, and unconditional positive regard. However, these concepts also have had enormous impact on a variety of applications to shared enterprises and the potential for significantly more influence. Likewise,

these concepts foreshadowed findings and theories in other areas not imagined directly during Rogers' lifetime. Furthermore, new findings and theories can help to refine and adjust core person-centered concepts. After the subsequent chapter providing an accessible example of a direct application of the PCA in a dialogue between Rogers and a volunteer experiencing a variety of social, cultural, biological, and psychological stressors, the rest of this book endeavors to outline or draw in detail some of those connections. We hope it stimulates still more bridges to be built in an interdisciplinary fashion around the meta-concept of the PCA.

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