



## Origins of Clinical Science in Carl Rogers

- Recording and observing therapy sessions
- Measuring client outcomes
- Testing clinical assertions as hypotheses
- Defining key relational variables
- Measuring therapist and client processes reliably
- “therapeutic mechanisms” research
- Linking treatment processes to client outcomes



Miller, W. R., & Moyers, T. B. (2017). Motivational interviewing and the clinical science of Carl Rogers. *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology, 85*(8), 757-766.

## Relational Factors in Counseling

- How “common” are they? Certainly not universal
- Calling them “non-specific” just means that we haven’t done our homework
- They are specifiable, measurable, and variable
- They matter: Account for far more variance in outcome than do specific treatment methods
- One of the clearest relational factors that matter is *empathy*

## Measuring Accurate Empathy

(Example 5-point Likert scale)

- 1. Clinician gives little or no attention to the client’s perspective.
- 3. Clinician is actively trying to understand the client’s perspective, with modest success.
- 5. Clinician shows evidence of deep understanding of client’s experience, not just for what has been explicitly stated, but what the client means but has not yet said.

## Measuring Accurate Empathy

(Example behavioral observation scale)

- **Reflections:** reflective listening statements made by the clinician *in response to client statements. Reflections may introduce new meaning or material, but they essentially capture and return to clients something about what they have just said. May be either Simple or Complex.*
  - **Simple reflections** convey understanding but add little or no meaning (or emphasis) to what clients have said. They do not go far beyond the client’s original statement.
  - **Complex reflections** add substantial meaning or emphasis to what the client has said. They serve the purpose of conveying a deeper or more complex picture of the client’s experience.

## A skill set or a way of being?

- There is more than technique here
- This practice changes you over time
- There is an underlying mindset/heartset
  - Partnership
  - Acceptance
  - Compassion
  - Evocation



Miller, W. R., & Rollnick, S. (2013). *Motivational interviewing: Helping people change* (3rd ed.). New York: Guilford Press.

### and yet, Accurate Empathy:

- is reliably measurable from observable practice behavior
- is learnable: quality can improve with training and practice
- It matters: observed counselor skill predicts client outcome
- Its absence (low counselor empathy) is harmful
- Baseline skill predicts in-session practice and client outcome

Moyers, T. B., Houck, J. M., Rice, S. L., Longabaugh, R., & Miller, W. R. (2016). Therapist empathy, Combined Behavioral Intervention, and alcohol outcomes in the COMBINE research project. *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology, 84*(3), 221-229.  
 Moyers, T. B., & Miller, W. R. (2013). Is low therapist empathy toxic? *Psychology of Addictive Behaviors, 27*(3), 878-884.

### Accurate Empathy in Counseling

- Counselors who show high levels of empathic skill have clients who are:
  - Less “resistant” and more likely to remain in treatment
  - More likely to change, less likely to “relapse”
- Higher counselor levels of accurate empathy predict better outcomes in client-centered counseling, psychotherapy, behavior therapy, health promotion, and motivational interviewing

### So . . . Accurate Empathy

- Is observable and reliably measurable behavior
- Can improve with training and coaching
- Is highly variable across counselors and therapists
- Pre-measured skill (for example, when screening candidates) predicts actual accurate empathy in later observed practice
- High accurate empathy predicts better client outcomes
- Low accurate empathy predicts poorer outcomes or harm
- Implications for hiring

### The Picture Without the Sound

- Full attention
- Eye contact
- Posture
- Chair position
- No barriers



### The Process of Communication

(Thomas Gordon)



### Three Places a Communication Can Go Wrong



Practice 1: Guessing Game  
Groups of Three

## Speaker's topic:

Something you should understand about me is that I am (adjective)

Some examples: Adventurous, Blessed, Cautious, Cheerful, Compassionate, Complex, Compulsive, Courteous, Curious, Diligent, Energetic, Faithful, Forward-looking, Friendly, Generous, Grateful, Imaginative, Lucky, Moody, Optimistic, Organized, Patient, Pensive, Persistent, Resourceful, Strong, Thrifty, Unconventional, Wild, Winsome

Practice 1

## Listeners

- Take turns asking: Do you mean that you \_\_\_\_\_?
- The speaker may answer *only* "Yes" or "No" (no elaboration)
- **Demonstration**

Practice 1

## Listeners

- Take turns asking: Do you mean that you \_\_\_\_\_?
- The speaker may answer *only* "Yes" or "No" (no elaboration)
- When the listeners have asked at least six questions *and* you think you have some sense of what the speaker means, the speaker may choose to say a bit more for clarification
- Then the next person (to the speaker's right) becomes the speaker
- Continue taking turns as speaker and listeners (~7 minutes)

## Mirroring

### • Reflections:

- Are statements rather than questions
- Make a guess about the client's meaning (rather than asking)
- Yield more information and better understanding

## Turning Questions into Reflections

- First, you can *think* (but don't speak) this question:
  - Do you mean that you \_\_\_\_\_?
- Erase the question words, "Do you mean that . . ."
- Make it a statement (turn your voice tone *down* at the end)
- And you've got a reflection!
- It makes a *guess* about what the person means
- No need for artificial prefaces like, "What I hear you saying."

## Reflections: Statement vs. Question

- You're angry with your mother?
- You're angry with your mother.
- You don't see anything wrong with what you did?
- You don't see anything wrong with what you did.
- You're feeling kind of anxious?
- You're feeling kind of anxious.

## Practice 2: Forming Reflections Groups of Three

### Speaker's topic:

Something you should understand about me is that I am (adjective)

Some examples: Adaptable, Ambitious, Bold, Capable, Careful, Conservative, Creative, Determined, Flexible, Forgiving, Goofy, Happy, Honest, Hopeful, Inquisitive, Liberal, Nerdy, Old-fashioned, Open, Outgoing, Perceptive, Picky, Reflective, Reliable, Reserved, Responsible, Rugged, Stubborn, Thoughtful, Wary, Wily, Wistful, Zestful

## Practice 2

- A speaker begins: **One thing you should understand about me ...**
- A listener replies with a *statement* (inflect *down* at the end), not a question, that makes a *guess* about what the speaker means
- **The speaker then replies: *not just yes or no, but elaborate, say a little more about what you do mean* (One sentence)**
  - And now the listeners have new information to reflect!
- Listeners take turns offering one reflective listening statement
- **Speaker: If a listener asks a question . . . .**
- **Demonstration**

## Practice 2

### Rotating Practice Roles

- When the listeners have offered at least five reflections and have some sense of understanding what the speaker means
- The speaker may (if desired) say a little more about what he or she meant
- Then the next person becomes the speaker
- Continue taking turns as speaker and listeners until time is up (~12 minutes)

### Fine Tuning

1. Levels of reflection
2. Continuing the paragraph
3. What to reflect
4. Overstating/understating



## 1. Levels of Reflection

Simple Reflections . . .  
add little or nothing to what the person has said: repeat or slight rephrase

Complex Reflections . . .  
make a guess about meaning that has not been directly stated: paraphrase, metaphor, reflection of feeling, continuing the paragraph, etc.



## 2. Continuing the paragraph

- (Client) It's been a pretty rough week.
- (Listener) You've been having a hard time.
- (C) I'll say! Nothing seems to be going right.
- (L) Not the way you hoped.
- (C) I guess I'm not surprised, really, but our daughter's been spending time again with friends we told her she shouldn't see anymore. She just doesn't listen.

- (L) You're pretty worried about her.
- (C) Worried? She wound up in the emergency room the night before last!
- (L) So you're more than worried.
- (C) We just don't know what to do. I feel like we've tried everything to get her on the right track, but she's not thinking about her future. It's like she doesn't care.
- (L) You *do* care, though, and aren't willing to give up on her.
- (C) I just feel so helpless sometimes.

### The paragraph (from client's perspective)

- *It's been a pretty tough week. I've been having a hard time. Nothing seems to be going right, not the way I hoped. I guess I'm not surprised, really, but our daughter's been spending time again with friends we told her she shouldn't see anymore. She just doesn't listen, and I'm pretty worried about her. She wound up in the emergency room the night before last, so we're more than worried. We just don't know what to do. I feel like we've tried everything to get her on the right track, but she's not thinking about her future. It's like she doesn't care. I do care, though, and I'm not willing to give up on her. I just feel so helpless sometimes.*

### 3. What to Reflect?

- No one reflects randomly. That would be bizarre.
- Moment-to-moment decisions, partly conscious
- What is important to highlight?
  - Underlying (or expressed) feeling or emotion?
  - Client's own insight and clarity (Rogers, in Truax 1966)
  - Change talk (motivational interviewing)
- Become more conscious about what you reflect and why
- You are strengthening what you reflect

### 4. Overstating and Understating

- "I'm just upset with Joe. He makes me so mad sometimes."
- What would the client say if you reflected:
  1. You're a little annoyed with him.
  2. You're angry with him.
  3. You're furious with him.



### 5. Summaries are also reflections

- Clients hear themselves speak
- Then they hear it again if you reflect
- Then they may hear it again in summaries that pull together what has been said
- It matters what you put in a summary
- How *do you* decide what to include?

### Four summaries of the same interview

#### Summary 1

Well, it sounds like your life is pretty stressful. When you wake up in the morning you often feel bad. You have a stressful commute in traffic in the morning, and you put in a lot of time at work. By the time you get home, you're exhausted. You're a single Mom now, and there's a constant battle with your ex about getting time with your kids. You really miss them when they're not with you, but you also feel kind of helpless to do anything about it. Mostly what you do in the evening is watch TV, and alcohol helps you to relax. Have I got it right?

## Summary 2

Let me tell you what I hear so far. Because of some lab tests, Dr. Clark is concerned that you are drinking too much, and asked you to talk to me. You're wondering what the lab test means, and you don't understand how you could still have been legally drunk that morning, though some mornings you do feel pretty bad. On the other hand, alcohol helps you to relax, and you don't think you really drink that much. You certainly don't think you're an alcoholic, and you don't want to be lectured about drinking. Is that about right?

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## Summary 3

So here's what you've told me so far. Dr. Clark noticed a blood test elevated that often is a warning about drinking too much, and she was concerned enough to call you personally. That scared you a little. You were also surprised that there was still enough alcohol in your bloodstream for you to be arrested for drunk driving if you had been stopped, even though you had not had anything to drink in the morning. If that happened, you could lose your job. When you wake up in the morning you often feel pretty bad - headache, tired, nervous. That may happen more when the kids aren't with you, and you drink more at night. What else have you noticed?

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## Summary 4

Well, I'd say you have a serious problem with alcohol. You say you don't drink that much, but you're drinking enough at night that you're still legally intoxicated in the morning when you're driving to work or taking your kids to school. The way you're feeling bad in the morning sounds a lot like alcohol withdrawal to me. You're using alcohol like a drug to relax you and help you forget about the stresses in your life. Your husband thinks you have a problem and doesn't want the children to be with you. So you watch television and drink, and deny that you have a problem. Sure sounds like alcoholism to me, don't you think?

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## It matters:

- What questions you ask
- What content you choose to reflect
- What you include in a summary

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## Sustained Reflection



## Demonstration



## Speaker's Topic

- Something that you feel two ways about *and haven't made up your mind*
- For example:
  - Some change that you might make
  - A social, political, and/or ethical issue
  - A decision you need to make
  - An interpersonal relationship
  - Empathic listening

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## My role

Rely as completely as possible on accurate empathy  
 Offer no opinion or advice  
 Make no attempt to influence or "fix" it  
 Seek solely to understand the ambivalence  
 Try to keep my balance and not "take sides"

## Observe

Count listener responses:  
 Simple reflections  
 Complex reflections  
 Questions  
 Support or Affirmation

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## Trusting Empathic Listening

- Try reflecting instead of asking questions
- Can you sustain reflective listening instead of other habits?
- If 100% reflection is too difficult, try 67%
  - If you ask a question, follow with at least two reflections



## Practice 3

### Sustained Empathic Listening

- Work in groups of three
- In each round there is:
  - One speaker
  - One listener
  - One observer

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Practice 3

## Speaker's Topic

- Something that you feel two ways about *and haven't made up your mind*
- For example:
  - Some change that you might make
  - A social, political, and/or ethical issue
  - A decision you need to make
  - An interpersonal relationship
  - Empathic listening

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Practice 3

## Listener's Role

Rely primarily or solely on reflective listening  
 Offer no opinion or advice – keep out of it  
 Make no attempt to influence or “fix” it  
 Seek solely to understand the ambivalence  
 Try to keep your balance; don't take sides

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Practice 3

## Observer's Role

Count listener responses:

Simple reflections  
 Complex reflections  
 Questions  
 Support or Affirmation

And make notes of particularly good reflections

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## One Round

- Speaker talks and listener responds for five minutes
  - Speaker: Give the listener spaces to respond
- When I call time:
  - The listener gives a summary of what she/he heard (1 minute)
  - The observer offers feedback, including particularly good examples of reflections, non-verbals, and other good listening (1 minute)



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