

Book Review

Embracing non-directivity: Reassessing person-centered theory and practice in the 21st century

Edited by **Brian E. Levitt**

Ross-on-Wye, UK: PCCS Books, 2005, www.pccs-books.co.uk

ISBN: 1898059683, Cost: £19.00, 357 pp.

Embracing Non-directivity: Reassessing Person-Centered Theory and Practice in the 21st Century, edited by Brian E. Levitt, is a thorough exploration of the nondirective attitude as it relates to the person-centered approach. Throughout, the book begs questions about the practice of psychotherapy in general. This volume includes distinguished international authors and practitioners, many of whom include illustrative transcripts or vignettes from their own work.

The book is organized in three sections that walk the reader through a timeline and focus attention on pertinent implications for the practice of person-centered therapy as it relates to the foundational nondirective attitude. The sections are “Historical and Theoretical Perspectives,” “The Non-Directive Attitude in Individual Psychotherapy,” and “Ethics and Applications Beyond Individual Psychotherapy.” So foundational is the quote by Nathaniel Raskin that Levitt includes it in his preface as well as in Raskin’s previously unpublished chapter at the end of the book: “It has become clear that learning nondirective therapy is not a matter of acquiring technique, but of gradually gaining the conviction that people do not have to be guided into adjustment, but can do it themselves when accepted as they are” (p. 346).

Levitt begins the book with a chapter asserting the foundational nature of the nondirective attitude. He makes a strong case that the core conditions as Rogers describes them are “not the same thing at all if they are not infused with, not supported by, or do not flow from a non-directive stance” (p. 8). He then explores the core conditions one at a time, considering each in regard to the importance of a nondirective attitudinal underpinning.

Nathaniel Raskin’s chapter, “Historic Events in Client-Centered Therapy and the Person-Centered Approach,” traces the history of Carl Rogers’ development of the “newer therapy” and his references and inferences of the nondirective attitude. Garry Prouty (“Forms of Non-Directive Psychotherapy: The Non-Directive Tradition”) continues this

The Person-Centered Journal, Vol. 13, No. 1-2, 2006

Printed in the United States. All rights reserved.

exploration of the historical influence of the nondirective approach, specifically targeting therapists' contact reflections and describing a model of "pre-therapy" for those who are contact-impaired (listing examples as diagnosed as "psychotic," "retarded," or suffering from dementia). Prouty includes two transcribed vignettes of the pre-therapy technique, aptly illustrating the impact of the non-directive attitude.

Chapter 4 ("Two Rogers and Congruence: The Emergence of Therapist-Centered Therapy and the Demise of Client-Centered Therapy"), written by Marvin Frankel and Lisbeth Sommerbeck, postulates that person-centered therapists commit a "category error" when they "consider acting as a genuine human being as a way of acting in addition, or opposed, to acting as a therapist" (p. 41). As a way of underscoring the importance of nondirective congruence, the authors provide examples of Rogers' early work (Rogers-1) and differentiate it from his work in the post-Wisconsin years (Rogers-2). Pointing to selected examples of Rogers' Gloria tapes that Frankel and Sommerbeck label "non-empathic," the authors boldly assert, "it is impossible to know what kind of therapy Rogers-2 was engaged in" (p. 60).

Francoise Ducroux-Biass ("Non-directivity: An Ontological Concept") and Peter Schmid ("Facilitative Responsiveness: Non-directiveness from Anthropological, Epistemological and Ethical Perspectives") complete the first section. These two chapters offer explorations of the concept of co-experiencing and time in the former, and historical misunderstandings of nondirectivity in the latter chapter.

The second section explores nondirectivity in individual therapy through a series of authors' perspectives. Levitt and Brodley ("It Enlightens Everything You Do?: Observing Non-Directivity in a Client-Centered Therapy Demonstration Session") offer a transcript of a demonstration session and the student discussion dialogue that followed. Of particular interest in this chapter is Brodley's continued "non-directiveness" in student discussions, underscoring the earlier chapter's point that the attitude must be part of the person, not additive or differential from other aspects of the therapist's (or teacher's) self.

Elizabeth Freire, in "The Experience of Non-Directivity in Client-Centered Therapy: A Case Study," offers an illustration and concise analysis of nondirectivity in a client session. Using IPR methodology, Freire illustrates the client's experience of process and outcomes.

Marvin Frankel returns for another critical examination of the nondirective attitude, specifically exploring the Socratic method of inducing self-examination ("Socratic Self-Examination by Means of Non-Directive Empathy: The Anatomy of Empathic Reflections"). He presents a

compelling case to consider whether “empathic reflections are often done as a means to an end rather than an end to themselves” (p. 168).

Specific populations (people diagnosed with mental illness, and drug and alcohol users) are targeted in the next two chapters, with the authors Lisbeth Sommerbeck (“Non-Directive Therapy with Client Diagnosed with a Mental Illness”) and Sue Wilders (“An Exploration of Non-Directive Work with Drug and Alcohol Users”) offering specific suggestions for the application of the nondirective attitude in these client populations.

Jerold Bozarth rounds out the second section with his chapter, “The Art of Non-Directive ‘Being’ in Psychotherapy.” Here is offered a snippet of the autobiographical journey of nearly 50 years of becoming—or “being.” Bozarth explores the question of “art” or “science” of psychotherapy and offers conclusions from his own inquiry of the profession and experience.

Section 3 deals with a variety of topics, from an exploration of the topic of the social influence inherent in the interactions labeled as “therapy” (in Marjorie Witty’s chapter, “Non-Directiveness and the Problem of Influence”), to Barry Grant’s cogent analysis of the concept of empathy (“Taking Only What is Given: Self-Determination and Empathy in Non-Directive Client-Centered Therapy”).

Kathryn Moon takes another look at congruence in her chapter (“Non-Directive Therapist Congruence in Theory and Practice”) and reiterates the importance of client-centered therapists to be “engrossed in the activity of being with the client and not preoccupied by theory or fear of making mistakes” (p. 276). She describes congruence as a freedom and capacity for openness to the experience of self and client, which provides the critical environment for the nondirective attitude to flourish.

Jerold Bozarth (“Non-Directive Person-Centered Groups: Facilitation of Freedom and Personal Power”) and John McPherrin (“Client-Centered Family and Couple Therapy: A Retrospective and a Practitioner’s Guide”) provide applications for the nondirective client-centered approach with groups and couples. Both reinforce the need for the therapist to trust the inherent wisdom in the room, whether in the individuals who form the group (and the group process) or in the couple. Bozarth asserts, “Person-centered principles extend to the politics of social cooperation and natural processes of interpersonal interaction, and can facilitate personal and social transformation” (p. 299).

The topic of nondirectivity in education is explored in the chapter authored by Jeffrey and Cecily Cornelius-White (“Trust Builds Learning: The Context and Effectiveness of Non-Directivity in Education”). The authors note important distinctions between the context of therapy and that of

education, including time spent together (in a typical elementary school as compared to the therapy hour), a content-learning requirement, and a more pronounced power differential. Citing a meta-analysis of person-centered education, the authors point out that while both are impacted, affective/behavioral outcomes are more positively affected than are cognitive outcomes. The authors conclude with the reminder that “just as trust in the client allows more space for the actualizing tendency to manifest itself in therapy, trust in the student’s learning process does appear to increase learning potential in educational settings” (p. 322).

C. H. Patterson and C. Edward Watkins Jr. (“Some Essentials of a Client-Centered Approach to Assessment”) offer several cogent suggestions in application of the client-centered approach in the process of assessment. Specific reminders include consulting clients before test selection and retaining the client-centered locus of evaluation in test interpretation.

A fitting chapter to end this exciting exploration of nondirectivity is Nathaniel Raskin’s oft-quoted essay, “The Nondirective Attitude.” This 1947 paper includes Carl Rogers’ longhand marginal comments, included here as footnotes. We see the interplay of these two, the author exploring in depth the then-new concept of nondirectivity, and Rogers offering his edification, clarification, and occasional rebuttal. Raskin accurately foresaw the likelihood that this foundational concept of “the new therapy” was likely to be misunderstood, as if “nondirective” were the same as “directionless,” a problem that plagues the therapeutic community still.

Reviewed by:

A. Leslie Anderson, Ph.D.

Missouri State University