

## IF WE DANCE, WHO LEADS?

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Jeanne's response to our article is an excellent example of empathic resonance, in that while she raises a number of questions and concerns concerning our proposal, it is done in a way that stimulates me to go further with my own thinking. Because of publication pressures I was unable to enlist the opinions of my co-author. So I will respond for me. Since Jeanne wrote her response from the perspective of the client, I will write my reply from the perspective of the therapist. I will try to answer her questions indirectly by elaborating on our paper.

As a therapist I confront a client believing that it is the client who ultimately helps him or herself. The research shows this. I truly believe in Rogers's view that it is clients who find their own solutions, their own paths, and so on. Not only that, following Bozarth (1993) I don't even believe I am necessary. I think clients can do this in resonance with self-help books, in self-help groups, through talking to friends, through writing poetry or through journaling, or through simply internally dialoguing with themselves. I am reminded of times when I have seen people discuss problems with friends or colleagues who responded in ways that I thought were unempathic, intrusive, and unhelpful. Yet I have seen people grow *despite* these unhelpful responses from others, somehow turning the dross of these unhelpful responses into personal gold.

And then I ask myself: Why is this person here to see me? What can I contribute? And so, even if I believe that it is the client who is responsible for most of what happens in therapy, I have to figure out how I want to be in relationship to this client. I have to do *something*, after all. I don't just want to sit there while they dance, though sometimes that seems to be what they want. But often they'd rather I dance with them a bit. So how do I do it so that I am helpful in their self-orchestration, rather than somehow orchestrating for them?

One thing that I want to be, therefore, is "nondirective." But does that mean that all I can do is sit and reflect what they are already doing? Can I add nothing? In order to be nondirective, must I simply mirror where they've already been?

I don't think so. Certainly when I look at Carl Rogers's empathic responses to clients they do more than just statically feed back where the client has already been. Rogers is always embroidering just a bit on what the client has said. The semantic content may be essentially the same as the client's, but there is embroidery nonetheless. His embroidery, however, is so closely and empathically attuned to what the client is after that it fits right into the flow of the client's thought. And often the client responds to Rogers's responses almost as if the client were responding to the next step in his or her own thoughts. Rogers is doing just what we discuss in

our article: like a good jazz musician he is creatively dancing with the theme that the client is playing. But he is staying very close to the theme the client is playing.

So if I creatively respond to my client, but in empathic resonance, is that *not* being nondirective? I think not. And what if, in my empathic resonance to the theme the client is playing, a technique comes to mind? Is the sharing of this with my client being directive? Or will my client actually experience it as feeling understood and heard? If I deliberately withhold my thought about a technique in the name of being nondirective, am I not *being* directive and choosing for my client? And if I withhold, will not my client sense this and actually feel unheard?

So how do I suggest a technique if it comes to mind without imposing my path on my client? But it occurs to me: The problem is no different than when I make an empathic following response, which could impose a path on the client by a) subtly altering the focus of his or her attention based on how I rephrase his or her message, or b) by imposing a model of the therapist as empathic follower when perhaps the client wants more of a dialogue. How do I offer an empathic following response without imposing my path on the client? *Any* response I make (or do not make) may be imposing a path on my client.

It occurs to me that the answer is in the *attitude* I take towards my client, and hopefully express through my responses. Do I truly believe it is the client who solves his or her problems and that I am merely a "space" or a resource where the client can do this? Or do I believe I am the expert? And does that attitude get conveyed in the *manner* of how I respond? If I really believe I am but a resource, then I simply offer things to my client, be they empathic responses, techniques, silence, or whatever. And then I listen real hard to how the client "plays with" what I have given. If I have somehow missed the theme the client is following, I try to reattune and get back on track. My efforts are on *me* staying attuned, not on directing his or her flow. Yet in my efforts of myself staying attuned, sometimes my effort at staying attuned will include suggesting a technique.

And my staying with this attitude is helped, I think, by having a model in my mind of what the client is doing. Not so that I can impose that model *on* my client. Like Rogers, who had a model of client "psychopathology" (incongruence between self-concept and experience), but who always put his "being-with" the client above even his own model, I do not impose my model upon my clients. But my model helps *me* keep my focus on the fact that it is my client, this whole person, who is solving his or her own problems. And my model, which helps me, is that of the client "self-orchestrating" (based in Rogers's idea of the formative tendency). Is the client's achievement of "good form" in such self-orchestration any more the ultimate end point in development than achieving congruence between self-concept and experience? No. Rogers knew that such congruence was never finished or complete, but always a "dynamic tension," ever evolving. And so is the achievement of "good form," which may include highly dissonant or odd orchestrations. I do not decide for my clients what is good form, any more than Rogers decided for his clients when they had achieved congruence.

So what we were trying to do in this article was develop a model of how we can turn an "either/or" into an "and." "Either we are nondirective or we use techniques." We prefer "we are nondirective and we can use techniques." Not because I think techniques are so wonderful, but because I want to be the best resource I can for my client. Further, I believe the "either/or" must be transcended in areas other than therapy. Educators, for instance, do have techniques that can facilitate students learning. How can they use techniques and still respect the self-propelled growth tendencies of the student? I submit this is an important question that we Rogerians can address and make an important contribution in so addressing.

Most of Jeanne's questions concern the potential for abuse in our model. And I do think there is such potential. But I now think (following Gerald Goodman's suggestion, personal communication, 1994) that much of the potential for abuse comes from the role therapists occupy in our culture. Why it is so dangerous and seductive for therapists to suggest techniques to clients is because the therapist role is *constituted* in our society as one of "the expert." Imagine, as a mental exercise, that the therapist is like a law clerk gathering data and ideas for a lawyer. The law clerk listens to the lawyer think out loud, perhaps gives ideas to the lawyer, but it is the lawyer who integrates the data, thinks it out, and makes his or her own decisions. Suppose therapists were constituted in our society as resources rather than as "holders of expert wisdom on what people should do." Then I think therapists could truly be nondirective *and* free to suggest ideas, thoughts, techniques, and so on. Then their "expertise" would truly lie in their ability to empathically resonate with what their clients were after, and respond in such a way that their responses were resources that clients could use in their self-directed growth activities.

#### REFERENCE

Bozarth, J.D. (1993). Not necessarily necessary but always sufficient. In D. Brazier (Ed.), (pp. 287-310). *Beyond Carl Rogers: Toward a psychotherapy for the 21st century*. London: Constable & Co.

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