Rogers' Three Core Conditions:
The Other Side of the Coin

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Abstract. This paper aims to show that the three core conditions proposed by Carl Rogers are important not only for therapeutic change, but also for attracting people to enter therapeutic or helping relationships. By showing the results of a study investigating factors encouraging students in seeking certain people for help, this paper argues that there is other side of the three core conditions declared by Rogers. A multi-method design was adopted in this study. A questionnaire measuring students' selection of helpers was distributed to 1,279 students. This was followed by individual semi-structured interviews (n = 32) and focus groups with students (n = 4 groups). Findings in the present study suggest that people would seek help from those who are perceived as having understanding, acceptance and congruence. Understanding, acceptance and congruence are essential not only for facilitating personal growth, but also for inviting people to enter helping relationships.

Key words:congruence, unconditional positive regard, empathic understanding, Carl Rogers, helping relationships

Abstrak. Artikel ini bertujuan untuk menunjukkan bahwa tiga kondisi inti yang dikemukakan oleh Carl Rogers penting tidak hanya untuk terjadinya perubahan terapeutik, tetapi juga untuk menarik orang memasuki relasi pertolongan atau relasi terapeutik.Dengan memaparkan hasil dari suatu studi yang meneliti faktor-faktor yang melandasi pemilihan penolong pada mahasiswa, artikel ini menunjukkan bahwa tiga kondisi inti yang dideklarasikan oleh Rogers memiliki sisi lain. Studi ini menggunakan desain multi-method. Kuesioner yang mengukur pemilihan sumber penolong disebarkan kepada 1279 mahasiswa. Hal ini dilanjutkan dengan wawancara semi terstruktur terhadap 32 mahasiswa serta 4 FGD. Hasil menunjukkan bahwa individu akan mencari pertolongan pada seseorang yang dianggap memiliki pemahaman empatik, penerimaan dan kongruensi.Pemahaman empatik, penerimaan dan kongruensi sangat penting tidak hanya untuk memfasilitasi terjadinya pertumbuhan pribadi, tetapi juga untuk mengundang orang untuk memasuki relasi pertolongan.

Kata kunci:kongruensi, penghargaan tanpa syarat, pemahaman empatik, Carl Rogers,
relasi pertolongan

It is widely known that students face many different concerns during their university career. During their time in the university, students face many changes in their lives. These changes give them opportunities to develop themselves and reach personal growth. However, at the same time, these changes also involve stress for them. Therefore Wittenberg (2001) mentions that being at the university can be a 'time of growth', as well as involve 'unbearable stress'.

Realizing these facts, many universities provide counseling service for students. The service is provided in order to help students pass through their university career and develop their personal life. University counseling service plays three important roles, including remedial, preventive and developmental roles (Setiawan, 2000). It could be argued that psychological problems can interfere with students' academic functioning and performance. Therefore, remedial role is the first and most widely accepted role of the university counseling service (Ratigan, 1989; May, 1999; Dean, 2000). However, it could also be contended that a university counseling service needs also to play a preventive role before problems arise (Ratigan, 1989; Association for University and College Counseling (AUCC), 1998;

Dean, 2000). When problem have already arisen, students may have experienced problems which is too late to tackle. Additionally, a university counseling service needs also to play a developmental role by holding activities which help students achieve their personal and professional growth and their personal goals (Ratigan, 1989; AUCC, 1998; Dean, 2000).

In performing this remedial role, university counselors carry out counseling work to help students with problems, so that students can function and perform optimally in their academic life (Archer & Cooper, 1998; Stein, 1999). One of counseling approaches is humanistic approach. Counselors who adopt humanistic approach assume that all human beings are basically good and have an inborn capacity to grow and achieve their full potential (Rogers, 1967; Feltham, 1995; Dryden and Mytton, 1999; Sanders, 2002). One of humanistic approach is person-centered counseling which is pioneered by Carl Rogers.

In person-centered counseling, Rogers (1995) emphasizes the importance of conditions provided by counselors in order to help clients achieve their personal growth. Rogers (1967) argues that these three conditions are the core conditions in order to help clients cope with their problems more adequately and comfortably. The three conditions include genuineness, acceptance, and empathic understanding.

Rogers (1995) continues that when a counselor is genuine, the client will change and grow in a constructive manner. Being genuine means that the counselor does not put personal façade, and is transparent to the client. The second condition is acceptance, which means that the counselor respects the client just the way he/she is. The counselor prizes the client and allows the client to be what ever immediate feeling is going on. In other words, the counselor accepts the client unconditionally. The final condition is empathic understanding, which means that the counselor understands the private world of the client. The counselor understands the client's feelings and communicates this understanding to the client.

If the counselor is genuine and shows unconditional positive regard to the client, the counselor will be able to listen to the client better. This will lead her/him to understand the feelings and conditions of the client. When the counselor shows un-conditional positive regard, the counselor also accepts the client unconditionally. Thus, the client is helped to accept her/himself better. When the client accepts her/himself better, s/he is more confident, unique and expressive, can be transparent and accepts others, and more able to deal with her/his personal problems. In this way, the client achieves personal growth.

This paper describes a study investigating the behavior of help-seeking among students. Specifically the study was designed to examine factors influencing the selection of helpers. By presenting the findings of this study, this paper shows that there is another side of the three core conditions argued by Rogers.

Method

Before investigating factors influencing the selection of helpers among students we need to know which helpers are highly selected so that it is easier to explore factors considered in choosing a helper. A multi-method design was adopted in this study, which combined both quantitative and qualitative approaches (Niglas, 2000). By using quantitative approach, the study could provide the description of preferred helpers as a result of a large-scale study on a representative sample. By adopting qualitative approach, the study could provide detailed explanations of factors influencing the preference for helpers. Thus, the combination of quantitative and qualitative approaches was chosen to help the researcher generate the more adequate explanations of the research topics (Kelle, 2001, para. 17).

In the quantitative end, a self-administered questionnaire was distributed to participants. The questionnaire consisted of 14 items. In each item students were asked to imagine themselves to experience serious problems in a certain area of concern and to choose one of the 14 choices of helpers. The areas of concern included academics, transitions, welfare, parental relationships, romantic relationships, other relationships, loss, physical health, self, depression or mood change, anxiety, compulsive behavior, and abuse. The areas of concern presented in the questionnaire were constructed based on the categorization of client concerns by the Association for University College and Counseling (AUCC, n.d) and factor analysis

of problem checklist scales (Zalaquett & McManus, 1996). The choices of helpers presented in the questionnaire included father, mother, brothers, sisters, other relatives, spouse/boy or girl-friend, lecturers, friends, counselors, doctors or psychiatrist, religious leaders, guardians, self, and others. The choices of helpers were constructed based on a pilot work preceding this study.

In the qualitative end, individual interviews and focus group discussions were chosen to be data collection tools. There were 32 individual interviews and 4 focus group discussions were conducted to collect qualitative data. In interviews and focus group discussions, participants were asked to discuss their considerations or reasons for choosing a helper and their reasons for not choosing other sources of help.

Participants were undergraduate students from two private universities in an urban area in Indonesia. A total number of 1,279 students participated in this study. One thousand two hundred and eleven students out of the 1,279 participated only in the questionnaire survey. On the other hand, 32 students participated in the individual interviews and 36 students participated in the focus group discussions in addition to answering the questionnaire.

Results

Following the calculation of the percentage of students choosing certain helpers in each area of concerns, the researchers calculated the average of percentage of students choosing certain helpers to find the position of each helper to others in general. Results showed that Friends, Mother and Self achieved highest percentage compared to other helpers. This means that across areas of concern students tended to choose their friends or their mother as the main helper. Alternatively students did not choose any helpers, but relying on their own resources in facing their problems.

Factors Influencing the Selection of Helpers

The above findings did not inform factors influencing students in choosing certain helpers. It is not clear yet what reasons underlie the choice of help-ers. Analyses of findings from qualitative data provide explanations about this.

In individual interviews and focus group discussions, participants of the current study provided explanations about their considerations in choosing somebody for help. The data show that some issues were found to be consistently mentioned by participants as their considerations in choosing a helper. The considerations included personal qualities of the helper, familiarity with the helper, capacity of the helper to help, accessibility, role perceived, and confidentiality.

Personal qualities of the helper. Personal qualities of the helper were consistently mentioned as the factors influencing participants in selecting a certain helper for help. The personal qualities of helper favored by participants were understanding, acceptance, caring, and genuineness.

(a) Understanding; some students who did not see anybody for help mentioned that they did not trust that others would be able to understand themselves and their problems. Therefore they thought that it would be better to rely on their own resources. Those who chose friends as their helpers felt that their friends were a similar age. This condition enabled them to share ways of thinking and problems. Therefore friends could understand their problems, feelings and difficulties.

> Friends have a similar age to me, they can understand us. And they have probably experienced the same problems.

Mother was also chosen as helper as participants felt that their mothers had sensitivity to their situations and understood their feelings.

> Because so far I feel that my mum can understand me more [than others]. It has been said that women are more emotionally sensitive. Therefore, I just feel comfortable to talk with mum, she can understand me.

Participants who did not choose father as their helper commented that they did not feel father would understand their situation. The participants felt that father was more rational and less caring about their feelings. Lecturers were described as lacking an understanding of students' lives and seeing things only from an academic angle and ignoring

factors that might complicate students' life.

While talking about religious leaders, those who did not choose religious leaders as their helper felt that religious leaders often see things from a religious angle only and do not understand the whole picture.

> Most religious leaders see things only from a religious perspective, from one angle, religion only. They don't see things from my background. They don't see things from my cultural point of view; don't see things from my life.

Uncertainty about helpers' ability to understand students' situation was also reported as a barrier and prevented them from seeking counselors for help. The issues of lack of understanding were also mentioned as reasons for not choosing brothers and sisters as their helpers.

(b) Acceptance and caring; Participants in the current study mentioned that they chose friends as helpers because friends showed acceptance to them. When talking with friends, they felt a permissive climate. This climate enabled them to feel free to share their problems or ask questions without fear of being criticized. Mother was also chosen as a helper as mother showed tolerance and caring to them.

On the other hand students also raised the issue of acceptance when they gave their reasons for not choosing father, lecturers and religious leaders as their helpers. Some students mentioned that they did not normally talk to their father as they worried of being blamed or laughed at. Lecturer and religious leader were described as lacking of acceptance and tending to blame or criticize students when they brought their problems, which stopping them from sharing their problems to these people. A few number of participants mentioned that they did not choose their sisters as their helper because their sister did not care for them. Similar concerns were reported when students explained their reasons for not seeking counselors for help.

(c) Congruence; One of the reasons for some students who did not choose anybody to seek help was a lack of trust that the helper would be genuine in helping. Similarly, a few number of students raised the issue of congruence when they mentioned their reasons for not choosing religious leaders as helper. They felt that religious leader showed a lack of congruence between what they say and what they

do. Other students also mentioned that they did not seek counselors for help as they were uncertain with counselors' genuineness in helping.

Familiarity. In addition to personal quality of helper, familiarity with the helper was also consistently mentioned as the factor encouraging the selection of a certain helper. A majority of students participating in the interviews and focus group discussions reported that they were familiar with their friends. A sense of familiarity enabled them talk over their problems with friends comfortably. A sense of familiarity and closeness in relationships were also felt towards mother. Most of participants chose their mother as they had a close relationship with her. They also perceived their mother as approachable.

A lack of familiarity was raised when students gave their reasons for not choosing counselors, lecturers and religious leaders as their helpers. They viewed counselors and lecturers as outsiders and did not feel close to them. The sense of unfamiliarity prevented them to talk about their personal problems to counselors, lecturers and religious leaders. Unfamiliarity also led them to an uncertainty that these people could understand and help them.

Lecturers are outsiders. So I am not comfortable to talk with them. They are definitely outsiders.

A number of students who did not choose their brothers and sisters as their helpers also reported that they lack of close relationships with their brothers or sisters.

Capacity to help. A helper's capacity to help was also raised as a factor considered in selecting a helper. A helper who was perceived as not having capacity to help was not seen for help. Interestingly, students perceived their friends and mother as having the capacity to help, but not counselors and religious leaders. The students reported that counselors and religious leaders do not know them well; therefore they would not be able to help effectively. As counselors did not know them well, the counselors would only give very general solution to their problems and it would not work. A few number of students also argued that religious leaders would only give solutions based on religious perspectives, which they

thought sometimes would not be applicable in real life.

> Religious leaders normally, if we have problems, ask us to pray for example, pray for your friend. But we are not patient. If we only pray, it doesn't guarantee that it works.

Accessibility. The issue of accessibility was raised when students explained their selection of helpers. A number of students felt that they had no difficulties in seeing their friends as they socialized regularly with them. Therefore, it was easy for them to access and to find time to talk with friends. Mother was also highly selected as their helper as mother was perceived as being at home a great deal, so that they could easily see mother whenever they needed to. Unlike mother, father was described as difficult to be accessed because father was not at home much. Lecturers were reported as difficult to be accessed as they were seen as busy doing many things. Religious leaders were not selected as they were difficult to be accessed.

Perceived role. A few number of students raised the issue of perceived role of the helpers when they selected a helper. Mother was selected as their helper, not father as father was perceived as not having the role of dealing with children's issues. Students felt that all children's affairs were within mother's role.

About father, normally children's affairs are handed over to the wife. […] Dad only … let's say if you do something prohibited, he will tell you. If not, he is not involved.

Similar issue was also reported when students talked about lecturers. According to them, lecturers did not have any roles of dealing with students' personal problems. Lecturers were described as having roles of academic matters. Consequently students did not select lecturers as a helper for their personal problems.

Confidentiality. The issue of confidentiality was raised by a limited number of students, especially when they explained the reasons for not seeking their father for help. They worried that father would pass their personal problems to other people who they did not want to know. Similar issue was also reported when students explained their reasons for not selecting counselors for help.

Discussion and Recommendations

Results of this study showed that compared to o-

ther considerations, personal qualities of helpers and familiarity with helpers were stronger encouraging factors for selecting a certain helper as they are consistently raised and strongly stressed by participants in the current study. The results of this study support findings of studies conducted by Grayson, Clarke, and Miller (1998) and Lindsey & Kalafat (1998).

Among six issues presented earlier, considerations about personal qualities of the helper including understanding, acceptance or caring, congruence, and familiarity with the helper were consistently and strongly stressed by participants in this study. Personal qualities of the helper and familiarity with the helper strongly influenced students to seek somebody for help. A person who was perceived as having understanding, showing acceptance and caring, congruence or genuineness, and a person with whom students are familiar with, was highly seek for help. On the contrary, a person who showed no understanding, no acceptance and caring, no congruence, and a person with whom students are not familiar with, was avoided.

Interestingly, personal qualities of helpers including understanding, acceptance, caring and congruence reported by participants in the current study echo the three core conditions argued by Rogers (1967, 1995). Rogers contends that these conditions must be present in order for a climate to be growth-promoting. According to Rogers (1995), congruence, acceptance or caring or prizing, and empathic understanding are the three conditions for therapeutic change.

Rogers (1995) argues that the more the therapist is genuine whatever the self of the moment, the greater the possibility that the client will change in a constructive manner. Being congruent means that the therapist or helper is transparent to the client so that the client can see right through what the therapist is in the relationship. Furthermore, the therapist must sense accurately the client's feelings and personal meanings and communicate this understanding to the client. That requires the therapist to listen with real understanding to the client. The therapist must create a climate of acceptance or caring or prizing, which is called 'unconditional positive regard' as this will lead to therapeutic movement or change. Unconditional positive regard means that the therapist accepts and cares for the clients whatever

immediate feeling is going on the client.

Rogers argues that empathic understanding, acceptance, and congruence are essential to therapeutic change; however, I would argue that people need to enter a therapeutic or helping relationship before they are helped to achieve personal growth or to achieve therapeutic change. The findings in the current study suggest that people who are perceived as lacking understanding, acceptance and congruence are unlikely to be sought for help. On the contrary, people who are perceived as having understanding, acceptance and congruence are more likely to be sought for help. In other words, those who have these three qualities attract help seekers to turn up, whereas those who do not have these qualities will be avoided. Consequently, understanding, acceptance and congruence are not only essential for helping people to achieve therapeutic change, but also for inviting people to enter the helping or therapeutic relationships. Following this, these three conditions should have been possessed by a helper or therapist not only when they have a person to help or client with him/her, but far earlier before the helper have a person to help or client with him/her.

Findings in the current study showed that far more participants sought friends and mother for help than those who sought counselors for help even when they are experiencing serious problems. These findings are very interesting as counselors who are often perceived as having higher competence than friends and mother were not frequently selected as helper. It is widely known that counselors have educational or training backgrounds which support their roles as a counselor. Nevertheless, findings in this study showed that personal qualities are put in higher priorities or regarded as far more important than academic qualification or capacity to help. Personal qualities are even thought to be a basis to ability to help.

Familiarity or closeness in relationships with the helper was also important consideration in selecting a helper. It could be argued that familiarity or the closeness in relationships with the helper and personal qualities of the helper are interrelated. A helper who shows the three conditions discussed above would reduce the psychological distance between the helper and the one being helped and lead to closeness in relationship. If somebody feels understood and accepted s/he would feel closer to those who understand them. Similarly, two people who are familiar with each other or two people who have close relationship will know each other better, which will lead to better understanding. If they are familiar or close in relationship, it will be easier for them to understand the perspective and meaning of other. This empathic understanding would also make it easier to accept others.

Having discussed the findings of the current study, we can conclude that personal qualities of the helper are core conditions not only for therapeutic change, but also for inviting people to enter helping or therapeutic relationships. Therefore, those who are involved in student support services as well as helping professionals should enhance their personal qualities such as understanding, acceptance and care, and congruence.

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