

## "Reflections of Feelings"

Carl R. Rogers

Although I am partially responsible for the use of this term to describe a certain type of therapist response, I have, over the years, become very unhappy with it. A major reason is that "reflection of feelings" has not infrequently been taught as a technique, and sometimes a very wooden technique at that. On the basis of written Client expressions, the learner is expected to concoct a "correct" reflection of feeling -- or even worse, to select the "correct" response from a multiple-choice list. Such training has very little to do with an effective therapeutic relationship. So I have become more and more allergic to the use of the term.

At the same time I know that many of my responses in an interview -- as is evident from published examples -- would seem to be "reflections of feelings." Inwardly I object. I am definitely not trying to "reflect feelings." Then I receive a letter from my friend and former colleague, Dr. John Shlien of Harvard, which still further complicates my dilemma, He writes

"Reflection" is unfairly damned. It was rightly criticized when you described the wooden mockery it could become in the hands of insensitive people, and you wrote beautifully on that point. But you neglected the other side. It is an instrument of artistic virtuosity in the hands of a sincere, intelligent, empathic listener. It made possible the development of client-centered therapy, when the philosophy alone could not have. Undeserved denigration of the technique leads to fatuous alternatives in the name of "congruence."

Puzzling over this matter, I have come to a double insight. From my point of view as therapist, I am not trying to "reflect feelings." I am trying to determine whether my understanding of the Client's inner world is correct--whether I am seeing it as he/she is experiencing it at this moment. Each response of mine contains the unspoken question, "Is this the way it is in you? Am I catching just the color and texture and flavor of the personal meaning you are experiencing right now? If not, I wish to bring my perception in line with yours."

On the other hand, I know that from the client's point of view we are holding up a mirror of his/her current experiencing. The feelings and personal meanings seem sharper when seen through the eyes of another, when they are reflected.

So I suggest that these therapist responses be labeled not "Reflections of Feeling, but "Testing Understandings, or "Checking Perceptions." Such terms would, I believe, be

more accurate and would be helpful in the training of therapists, by supplying a sound motivation in responding, a questioning, rather than a desire to "reflect."

But in understanding the client's experience, we can realize that such responses do serve as a mirror. This is beautifully expressed by Sylvia Slack (1985, pp.41-42) as she tells of her reactions in a therapy interview held in front of a large audience, and video-taped.

"Watching the tapes helped me to visualize the counseling process more clearly. It was like Dr. Rogers was a magical mirror. The process involved my sending rays toward that mirror. I looked into the mirror to get a glimpse of the reality that I am. If I had sensed the mirror was affected by the rays being received, the reflection would have seemed distorted and not to be trusted. Although I was aware of sending rays, their nature was not truly discernible until they were reflected and clarified by the mirror. There was a curiosity about the rays and what they revealed about me. This experience allowed me an opportunity to get a view of myself that was untainted by the perceptions of outside viewers. This inner knowledge of myself enabled me to make choices more suited to the person who lives within me."

As she hints here, and goes on to elaborate, it is important that the therapist's understanding be so sensitively correct that the mirror image is clear and undistorted. This means laying aside our own judgments and values in order to grasp, with delicate accuracy, the exact meaning the client is experiencing.

Thinking these thoughts and writing them out, has been clarifying for me. I can continue, from the therapist's point of view, to test my understanding of my client by making tentative attempts to perceive his/her inner world. I can recognize that for my client these responses are, at their best, a clear mirror image of the meanings and perceptions as experienced by the client which is clarifying and insight-producing.

#### References:

Shlien, J. Personal correspondence, April 2, 1986.

Slack, S. Reflections on a workshop with Carl Rogers. *Journal of Humanistic Psychology*, Spring 1985, 25, 35-42.

## Comentário sobre o artigo

Ana Maria Sarmiento Seiler Poelman

Neste artigo, Rogers tece algumas considerações sobre a denominada técnica de reflexão de sentimentos.

Inicialmente expressa sua insatisfação com o rumo que alguns seguidores deram à reflexão de sentimentos, transformando-a numa técnica mecânica e treinando psicoterapeutas a darem “a resposta certa” ao cliente.

Segundo Rogers, sua intenção não é refletir sentimentos, mas verificar junto ao cliente se sua compreensão daquilo que foi expresso está em sintonia com a experiência do cliente. Embora sua resposta possa consistir numa reflexão de sentimentos, ela é formulada como uma hipótese a ser confirmada (ou rejeitada) pelo cliente. Com ela, Rogers pretende verificar se sua percepção do mundo interno do cliente está correta, se ele está conseguindo captar o colorido, a textura e o sabor do significado pessoal daquilo que o cliente está experienciando aqui e agora.

Entretanto, Rogers admite que, do ponto de vista do cliente, sua resposta pode ser vista de fato, como se fosse o reflexo, a imagem no espelho, daquilo que este vivencia.

O texto tem, para mim, um interesse adicional: mostra, mais uma vez, que a relação terapeuta-cliente é que tem efeito terapêutico e não a precisão técnica e ainda: que o cliente dá à fala do terapeuta um significado próprio, diferente daquele que constitui a intenção do psicoterapeuta.