

# The Coconstruction of Congruency: Investigating the Conceptual Metaphors of Carl Rogers and Gloria

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The counseling session between Carl Rogers and Gloria, which was documented in the training film *Three Approaches to Psychotherapy* (E. L. Shostrom, 1965), is one of the most widely used teaching tools in the field of counselor education. G. Lakoff and M. Johnson's (1980, 1999) framework for investigating conceptual metaphor provided a useful method for understanding how meaning negotiation took place within the session as well as how Rogers and Gloria arrived at a meaningful therapeutic outcome by coconstructing a Utopia metaphor that reframed *perfect* as *whole* in a way that was congruent with Gloria's metaphoric structures for *self* and *knowing*.

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In 1964, a 30-year-old recently divorced European American woman named Gloria consented to be filmed as she received counseling by founders of three contrasting approaches to psychotherapy. One of those approaches, Carl Rogers's client-centered counseling, later became foundational for many counselor education programs. Rogers's session with Gloria in the training film *Three Approaches to Psychotherapy* (Shostrom, 1965) is among the most written-about sessions in the history of counseling and continues to be used as an instructional model in many helping professions (Farber, Brink, & Raskin, 1996; Glauser & Bozarth, 2001).

## Conceptual Metaphor and Counseling

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During the session with Rogers, Gloria struggled with conflicting ideas about *self* and *knowing*. As suggested by Gloria's language (e.g., "haywire," "devil"), her existing frameworks for self-understanding and decision making were no longer congruent with her new circumstance of being a recently divorced single mother. Likewise, Rogers's language back to Gloria incorporated metaphors such as "no-man's-land" and "subterfuges" to express his understanding of her dilemma.

The seeming importance of metaphor in this session is consistent with Lakoff and Johnson's (1980, 1999) theory of conceptual metaphor. In general, conceptual metaphor theory posits that people make

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sense of abstract concepts and events through concrete experiences. For example, it is common to understand *life* in terms of a *journey*. Therefore, people get "stuck at a crossroad" and "don't know which way to turn," but sometimes "find their way" to "get back on track." These metaphors for understanding have a bodily basis; that is, the metaphors reflect what people have experienced with their bodies or know vicariously about other bodies in the world (Johnson, 1987). Thus, at an unconscious level, people make sense of abstract concepts and experiences metaphorically. The specific metaphors that structure individuals' understanding are reflected in the patterns of recurring words, phrases, and literal concepts that emerge in their language. Consequently, the words people use represent much more than random verbal selections; they are, instead, a "surface realization" (Lakoff, 1993, p. 203) of people's underlying frameworks for understanding the concepts and experiences being described.

Lakoff and Johnson (1980, 1999) noted that within Western culture, there is a litany of pervasive metaphors that people use to make sense of their lives. That is, people's automatic, nonconscious perceptions of the events and circumstances they experience are delineated by personal life experiences and metaphors to which they have been exposed within their culture. For example, Lakoff and Johnson suggested that *knowing* is understood as either *seeing* (e.g., "I see what you mean"), *hearing* (e.g., "that sounds right to me"), or *feeling* (e.g., "I have a gut-level feeling that. . ."). Similarly, perceiving the psychological self as a *container* of thoughts, emotions, ideas, and so forth is a common conceptual metaphor (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980, 1999). People unconsciously construct their concept of self in terms of the normal properties of a container, such as being a three-dimensional object with the capacity to hold certain contents but with limits on how much or the kind of content. Therefore, people describe themselves as "ready to burst" and "explode" when they "can't take anymore" because "pressure" on their psychological container has become overwhelming.

### **Purpose**

The general purpose of this article was to examine the role of conceptual metaphor in a counseling setting. Specifically, we wanted to determine whether patterns of conceptual metaphor, consistent with Lakoff and Johnson's model, would be found in the session between Rogers and Gloria in *Three Approaches to Psychotherapy*? If so, what contribution, if any, did conceptual metaphor have in the cocreation of shared meaning?

Authors such as Azar (1995), Kopp (1995), and Kozak (1992) have presented theories about the possible significance of conceptual metaphor in constructing congruent therapeutic interaction. Wickman, Daniels, White, and Fesmire (1999) proposed that awareness of conceptual metaphor offered several benefits to counselors, including increases in rapport, empathy, and the ability to reframe by explor-

ing alternative possibilities, implications, and meanings within existing client metaphors. The hypothetical basis of previous writings on conceptual metaphor might have been because, in part, Lakoff and Johnson's model was a theoretically derived model rather than a practice-based one. Instead of the prewritten speeches and speculative examples that Lakoff and Johnson (Johnson, 1987; Lakoff, 1993, 1996; Lakoff & Johnson, 1980, 1999; Lakoff & Turner, 1989) and others (Azar, 1995; Kopp, 1995; Kozak, 1992; Turner, 1987; Wickman et al., 1999) have studied, we were interested in determining whether conceptual metaphor theory would be supported in spontaneous real-life conversation. If patterns of conceptual metaphor were observed, these patterns could provide a focal point for making what happened (i.e., the therapeutic process between Rogers and Gloria) more viewable to counselor educators and students. Thus, we hoped that by considering the conceptual metaphors of Rogers and Gloria, our analysis of the session would enhance counselor educators' teaching of the film, thereby improving students' understanding of client-centered counseling as enacted by Rogers.

## Method

Lakoff and Johnson's (1980, 1999) theory of conceptual metaphor was used as a framework for tracking and categorizing conceptual metaphors in the Rogers/Gloria session. First, we reviewed the session transcript to identify examples of concrete words and expressions that could have had a literal meaning but instead were used abstractly. For example, when Gloria said, "I paint a picture that I'm all sweet," she was not talking about standing in front of an easel creating an acrylic portrait of herself as a sugar cube. Rather, she was using metaphor to conceptualize her acting in such a way that people would think well of her, but doing so was only partially congruent with her self-perception. Second, categories of conceptual metaphors were formed by grouping words or phrases with similar metaphoric language. We then considered the contribution of those metaphors as Rogers and Gloria socially constructed a meaningful therapeutic interaction. For a more complete discussion of conceptual metaphor categories, see Johnson (1987), Lakoff (1987, 1993), and Lakoff and Johnson (1980, 1999).

## Results

Three individual metaphor systems were found to be pervasive. These systems were initially displayed in Gloria's language and subsequently incorporated into Rogers's therapeutic interventions: Self as a Container, Knowing Is Feeling, and Knowing Oneself Is Seeing Oneself Through Others' Eyes. These metaphors did not operate in isolation; rather they often worked in combination as Gloria and Rogers reconstructed Gloria's system for knowing herself. The ses-

sion seemed to culminate with the coconstruction of a novel blended metaphor, Utopia.

In the following sections, each example represents a pattern of language that was used throughout the session. Although many examples were available for each metaphor system, for the sake of brevity, we discuss only a limited number in this article. When multiple examples are used, each illustrates a different entailment (i.e., logical consequence) of the metaphor. Words that appear within quotation marks are direct quotes from the session; metaphoric language is italicized.

### Self as a Container

Throughout the session, Gloria's language seemed to indicate her understanding of Self as a Container, as evidenced in her repeated discussion of which "areas" of herself she could "accept," her capacity to be "open" with her daughter and father, and whether to allow her daughter to see her as "deep," "full," and "whole." At times, Gloria expressed a desire to remove from her self container things that were producing its conflicted and agitated state. Gloria's difficulty in doing so seemed to come from her indecision about whether or not to be "really open about everything." Metaphorically, it seemed that Gloria was trying to figure out which parts to "accept" and which to "rid" herself of so that she could "feel more comfortable" (i.e., achieve a homeostatic state within the container). Rogers consistently incorporated Gloria's metaphors in his formulations of the implications, for her, of what she said.

#### *Self as a Container: Example*

Gloria: I feel there are *some areas that I don't even accept.*

Rogers: And if you can't *accept them in yourself*, how could you possibly be *comfortable* in telling them to her?

Gloria: I want you to help me *get rid of my guilt feeling*. If I can *get rid of my guilt feeling* about lying or going to bed with a single man, any of that, just *so I can feel more comfortable.*

### Knowing Is Feeling

Gloria's language throughout the session consistently suggested a Knowing Is Feeling conceptual metaphor system. The occurrence of language related to feeling to express some cognitive activity was so pronounced that it was difficult to find a statement by Gloria not related to "feeling" or some close variation. The prevalence of this metaphor simply suggested that Gloria assigned affective properties to understand cognitive activities. For example, she typically said, "I feel that" or "I feel like" to indicate what she was thinking, predicting, hypothesizing, and so forth.

There was also considerable evidence that Gloria's feeling physiologically structured her meaning-making and decision-making processes beyond the use of affective words to describe cognitive activities.

Gloria repeatedly stated that how "comfortable" she felt was her way of assessing the rightness or wrongness of a situation and making a decision about what to do. Rogers used the same language in his formulations back to her. In the following example, Gloria's opening line in the therapeutic dialogue seemed to assess the safety of the relationship by verbalizing to Rogers her feelings in the here and now with him.

#### *Knowing Is Feeling: Example 1*

Gloria: Well, I'm . . . Right now I'm *nervous*, but *I feel more comfortable* the way you're talking in a low voice, and I don't *feel like you'll be so harsh* on me.  
Rogers: I hear the *tremor* in your voice, so I know you are *uneasy*.  
Gloria: I wish I could stop shaking.

In this example, "nervous" was a reference to how Gloria was feeling, "I feel more comfortable" was a gauge for perceiving rightness of the situation. "I don't feel like you'll be so harsh on me" was a metaphoric reference to predicting the absence of a potential negative interaction. "Shaking" provided evidence that being nervous had a physiological component for Gloria.

#### *Knowing Is Feeling: Example 2*

Gloria: (Sigh) But when I find myself doing something *I don't feel comfortable* with, I automatically say, *If you're not comfortable, Gloria, it's not right, something's wrong.*

#### *Knowing Is Feeling: Example 3*

Gloria: I miss *that feeling*. *It's right away a clue to me.*

#### *Knowing Is Feeling: Example 4*

Rogers: I was very much struck by the fact that you were saying, *"If I feel all right about what I have done. . . . If I really feel all right about it, then I don't have any concern about what I would tell Pam."*

Gloria's decision-making system, which was based on "feeling comfortable," was discussed overtly throughout the session. Statements like "I want to do it and it feels right," "if you're not comfortable, Gloria, it's not right, something's wrong," and "I miss that feeling. It's right away a clue to me" seemed to explain Gloria's decision-making process.

#### **Knowing Oneself Is Seeing Oneself Through Others' Eyes**

An exception to Gloria's knowing in terms of feeling took place when she used visual metaphors based on Knowing Is Seeing for decision making. Gloria's visual language seemed to represent her perception of how others might potentially view her; thus, she used a Knowing Oneself Is Seeing Oneself Through Others' Eyes metaphor system when predicting or assessing the results of her decision-making process. That is, when deciding what to think of herself, Gloria imagined how others might see her. In doing so, she seemed compelled to *paint a picture* that

was *perfect*, stating that she was "ashamed of" her *shady side* and envious that her children saw their father as *all goodness and light*.

The examples below show Gloria hypothetically assessing herself and her ex-husband through the eyes of their children, as well as Rogers's acuity for aligning his responses so that they were congruent with Gloria's metaphors. It should be noted that when she viewed herself through others' eyes, Gloria's self-perception was always negative.

*Knowing Oneself Is Seeing Oneself Through Others' Eyes:*  
*Example 1*

Gloria: I hate *facing the kids*; I don't like *looking at myself*, and I rarely enjoy it.

*Knowing Oneself Is Seeing Oneself Through Others' Eyes:*  
*Example 2*

Gloria: I want *them to see me just as sweet as they see him*.

Rogers: You sort of feel, "I want them to have *just as nice a picture of me as they have of their dad*, and if his is a little phony then maybe mine'll have to be too."

**Utopia: A Coconstructed Congruent Metaphor**

The examples thus far have demonstrated instances of single conceptual metaphor systems. However, Gloria frequently combined these metaphors as she and Rogers made sense of what she described. Rogers maintained congruence with Gloria's overarching metaphoric framework by combining the same sets of metaphors in his responses and interventions.

Throughout the session, Gloria seemed to struggle with thoughts of how she should be versus how she actually acted and felt, often using the term *perfect* as a potential descriptor for her ideal self. As the session developed, Rogers and Gloria coconstructed Utopia as a unique metaphor that cognitively reframed her ideal to "right = perfect = whole." By reframing the meaning of perfect to no longer depend on how others might see her, the Utopia metaphor provided a congruent way for Gloria to "feel right" and "comfortable" by accepting herself as an authentic "whole" person. This shift in meaning became especially relevant as perfect transformed into whole and contributed to the structure of Utopia. It should be noted that the literal definition of perfect is complete (Neufeldt & Guralink, 1988, p. 1003).

For Gloria, Utopia described the perfect-as-whole feeling in which she could know things were "right" by "feeling all in one piece" (i.e., accepting all the pieces into her self container) without "worry" or "guilt" from trying to look "perfect" in others' eyes (i.e., Knowing Oneself Is Seeing Oneself Through Others' Eyes). Gloria's frame of reference for self-evaluation gradually shifted from external (e.g., Pammy) to internal (i.e., self) criteria. As Rogers and Gloria approached Utopia, Knowing Oneself Is Seeing Oneself Through Others' Eyes lost its utility as a benchmark for decision making and instead was

We contend that the significance and complexity of the therapeutic interaction between Rogers and Gloria have been underrecognized in counselor education programs and in most previous analyses of

### Implications for Teaching

The purpose of this study was to examine the contribution of conceptual metaphor in the development of shared meaning between Carl Rogers and one of his clients, Gloria, as shown in a popular training film. Conceptual metaphor theory (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980, 1999) provided a useful framework for understanding how meaning negotiation took place within the session as well as how Rogers and Gloria coconstructed a congruent metaphor. The inherent use of conceptual metaphor in the session seemed to involve a renegotiation and reconstruction of Gloria's metaphorical ways of knowing and making meaning. It began with what was likely an indication by Gloria that she recognized that her then-current way for knowing was not complex enough for the types of complicated decisions she needed to make. Much of Gloria's language reflected an orientation to her emotional and physiological states as a basis for making decisions: "If you're not comfortable, Gloria, it's not right, something's wrong" and "I miss that feeling. It's right away a clue to me." Similarly, Gloria had been using visual metaphors when imagining how others might perceive her on the basis of her decisions. One such decision was selecting which parts of her would best fit within her metaphorical container of self. Throughout the 30-minute session, Gloria seemed to move away from an external means for decision making toward an internal measure for self-acceptance.

### Discussion

Gloria: Ah, I mention this word a lot in therapy, and . . . and most therapists grin at me, or giggle or something when I say Utopia. But when I do follow a feeling, and I feel this good feeling inside me, that's sort of Utopia, that's what I mean. That's the way I like to feel, whether it's a bad thing, or a good thing. But I feel right about me. This is what I want to cover.

Rogers: I can sense that. In those Utopian moments, you really feel kind of whole. You feel all in one piece, that . . .

Gloria: Yes. Yeah, it gives me a choked-up feeling when you say that because I don't get that as often as I'd like. I like that whole feeling, that's real precious to me. Rogers: I expect none of us get it as often as we'd like, but I really do understand it.

### Perfect as Whole

#### Utopia: Self as Container, Knowing Is Feeling, and

replaced with the metaphor Perfect as Whole. Furthermore, this change was also indicated by explicit language that increasingly focused on (a) acceptance of self and (b) absence of worry/guilt regarding external "others."

*Three Approaches to Psychotherapy*. Rogers, who is well-known for unconditional positive regard, was critical in his writings (e.g., 1967, 1984, 1986) of how his model had been oversimplified and interpreted in the classroom and in other authors' texts. For example, despite the common association of *reflection of feeling* as a hallmark of client-centered counseling, Rogers denied that the term had any relation to what he did in practice. He wrote, "Such training has very little to do with an effective therapeutic relationship. So I have become more and more allergic to the term" (1967, p. 375). Furthermore, in response to the difference between his actual style and how Rogerian counseling was portrayed in counselor education programs, he commented, "I'm in the fortunate position of not having to be a Rogerian" (see Farber et al., 1996, p. 11).

We believe that our analysis of *Three Approaches to Psychotherapy* provides counselor educators and their students with a new lens through which some of the rich detail and complexity can be viewed; for many of these students, viewing the film might be their sole opportunity to see Rogers in action. Metaphor may provide a focal point to enliven a grainy film that has distracting camera angles and nominal sound quality. In addition, our analysis demonstrates that Rogers was actively involved in the session, contrary to the sometimes watered-down portrayals of him as a passive head-nodder (Wickman & Campbell, 2003). In fact, that stereotype of Rogers may be perpetuated by showing the film without providing a means for recognizing what was taking place.

### Implications for Practice

Although Rogers was probably unaware of conceptual metaphor, he seemed to have an intuitive ability to work within clients' metaphoric systems. Rogers demonstrated a high level of congruence in conveying his understanding of Gloria's experience by blending identical metaphors used by her within his responses. Rogers effectively worked to expand understandings and implications within her existing metaphors rather than impose his own. In fact, we suggest that Rogers's intuitive ability to work within metaphoric frameworks seemed to come from (a) deliberately using the same language; (b) formulating the logical entailments of what had just been said; and (c) at all times purposefully working to form a therapeutic alliance.

We propose that familiarity with conceptual metaphor theory is a means by which counselors can enhance their skills for facilitating congruence, empathy, and unconditional positive regard. Conversely, it is likely that Rogers's ability to work within metaphoric systems came from enacting the core conditions of client-centered counseling (Wickman & Campbell, 2003). Our study supports Wickman et al.'s (1999) claim about the benefits of working within clients' conceptual



frameworks: "Although counselors cannot know precisely *what* a client is thinking, they can know their clients' thoughts and experiences are structured *this way* rather than *that*, with *these* possibilities rather than *those*" (p. 390).

Lakoff and Johnson (1980) wrote, "In therapy, much of self-understanding involves consciously recognizing previously unconscious metaphors and how we live by them" (p. 233). We contend that becoming consciously aware of one's own metaphors is sometimes useful but often would have no utility for clients and may even get in the way of relationship building. For example, saying to Gloria, "You seem to be conceptualizing your 'self' in terms of a 'container'" would likely have been insulting and depersonalizing. However, we believe that counselors who are aware of conceptual metaphor might be more successful in aligning themselves with their clients by using "like" language, thereby demonstrating a greater ability to understand clients' conceptual frameworks. In addition, counselors working with families might be able to point out conflictual metaphor systems, thus facilitating members' learning to speak each others' language.

### **Implications for Research**

There have been more than a dozen prior studies on the Rogers/Gloria therapy session (for a comprehensive literature review, see Wickman, 1999). The results from those studies contradicted each other, were generally not applicable to counseling practice, and sometimes described Rogers as providing a model of what not to do in counseling (Weinrach, 1990, 1991). We believe that our analysis supports Rogers's therapeutic effectiveness in the filmed session. Inherent in the above implications is support for the existence of conceptual metaphor. By examining a 30-minute transcript of therapeutic interaction, we were able to investigate the role of conceptual metaphor in achieving a meaningful therapeutic outcome. We believe that the prominence of conceptual metaphor in this interaction was not unique, but rather a representative instance of the significance of conceptual metaphor as people make sense of their worlds.

### **Suggestions for Future Research**

We encourage further research to examine the degree to which Rogers's metaphoric congruence in the aforementioned counseling session generalized to his enacted style of counseling. For example, how did Rogers's and Gloria's use of metaphor function to enact the core conditions for client-centered counseling? We also recommend the continued use of conceptual metaphor analysis for studying effective counselors and other master practitioners. Finally, perhaps investigations should be conducted of the extent to which the frame of

conceptual metaphor as a teaching tool improves students' abilities to recognize the complexity of the therapeutic interaction and congruence between Carl Rogers and his client Gloria.

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