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**“How Did I Get Here:” An Autoethnographic Study of a Counsellor  
Educator’s Lived Experience of ‘Becoming’**

A thesis

submitted partial fulfilment

of the requirements for the degree

of

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## **Abstract**

This study considers the usefulness of applying key concepts of the Rogerian theory of 'becoming a person' as a framework to theorise the personal growth and change process of becoming a counsellor. It is contended that person-centred philosophy and theory provides one way in which to view the personal development of the person of counsellor during training. This hypothesis is based on the recognition of a perceived similar change and growth process which Rogers identified in clients in therapy, with those of training counsellors. After reviewing the literature on the importance placed on the personal development of counsellors in training, a distinction is made between personal development and personal growth. An apparent gap is identified within undergraduate training. It is recognised that some students, in particular mature students, training at undergraduate tertiary level for the first time, have unique challenges from those within post graduate programmes. A further gap within the literature is the self-study of a student's own experience and perceptions of undertaking counsellor training at this level. Therefore, fitting the above demographic, the author retrospectively examines her personal experience using an autoethnographic method of enquiry. With this method the researcher is both an "insider" and "outsider" (Dyson, 2007, p. 39) of the cultural context under investigation. Autoethnographic data consists of a poem titled: School Reports, which contains the story of a failed high school student. Other data are drawings created using the metaphor of an acorn growing into an oak tree to symbolise Rogers's theoretical propositions of a theory of personality and behaviour. Reflective journal entries written during undergraduate counsellor training further support the analysis. The author's poem and drawings form the basis of an autoethnographic inquiry analysed through a number of Rogerian philosophical concepts of development along with 'moments of movement' towards change and growth. The main focus of personal growth and change centres on the author's early development of the self-concept of a failed high school student, revised to a self-concept of successful, due to the curative experience of training. The

conclusion is made that the primary Rogerian theoretical concept of becoming a person, the organism's tendency to actualise, along with its "moments of movement" (Rogers, 1961, p. 130), can provide one way in which to conceptualise the personal growth and change process in becoming a counsellor. Implications for counsellor education is the consideration of facilitating growth promoting learning environments and learning opportunities. The principal limitation of the study is identified as applying classic person-centred theory as a framework whereas contemporary theorising would consider the person in both context and environment. A self-study on just one experience of a mature student in undergraduate training was also considered a limitation. Both these limitations warrant further investigation. A further recommendation for further research is a comparative study examining the personal growth and change process of counsellors in training from different philosophical positions.

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## Table of Contents

Abstract .....	ii
Acknowledgements.....	iv
List of Figures .....	ix
Introduction and Literature Review .....	1
Preamble: The person of the counsellor/counsellor-educator .....	1
Locating the Research and Research Question.....	2
<b><i>Development of a working hypothesis</i></b> .....	4
Choosing a Research Method .....	5
Autoethnography .....	6
Thesis Summary .....	7
Literature Review .....	8
The importance of personal development .....	8
The nature of personal development .....	9
Personal development/personal growth .....	10
Research on the personal development of counsellors in training .....	11
Conceptual frameworks for personal development.....	12
Gaps in the literature .....	12
Chapter 1: Theoretical concepts of the Person-centred Approach.....	14
Carl Rogers (1902 – 1987) and person-centred theory – a brief history:.....	14
The Formation and development of the Person-centred Approach and Research.....	16
Person-centred Philosophical Assumptions - A Theory of Personality.....	18
View of Human Nature.....	18
The Organism .....	20

The Actualising Tendency .....	21
Self-Actualisation .....	23
The Self.....	24
Self-Concept .....	25
Organismic Valuing Process .....	27
Positive Regard.....	28
Conditions of Worth.....	29
Chapter 2: Rogers’s Theory on the Process of Becoming.....	31
Toward openness to experience and trust of Self .....	32
Moving away from facades; Getting behind the mask.....	33
Away from ‘oughts’ and pleasing others .....	34
Towards acceptance of Self .....	34
Away from meeting expectations .....	34
Towards self-direction .....	35
Towards being process.....	35
Towards acceptance of others .....	35
Summary .....	36
Chapter 3: Research Approach and Process .....	37
The adoption of autoethnography as a research approach .....	37
Philosophical alignment of autoethnography and person-centred theory.....	38
Autoethnographic research and person-centred theory as a framework for analysis .....	39
Research aims .....	40
The Research Process.....	41
Ethical considerations .....	45

Chapter 4: Analysis 1: School Reports .....	47
Conditions of worth and the development of the self-concept of ‘A Good Girl’ .....	49
The need for positive regard and the development of the self-concept of ‘Failed Student’ .....	52
Cultural and social conditions of worth and education .....	54
A tentative move towards self-actualising .....	55
Conditions of worth and the world of academia .....	57
Self-actualisation and final reflections.....	59
Chapter 5: Analysis 2: A Visual Presentation of Rogerian Theoretical Concepts .	60
Introduction .....	60
The Phenomenological Significance of the Organismic Self .....	62
Figure 1. The Phenomenological Significance of the Organism.....	62
The Tendency to Actualise .....	67
Figure 2. The Tendency to Actualise .....	67
Philosophical Alignment with the Tendency to Actualise.....	68
The Tendency to Actualise and the Unconscious Motivation to Pursue Counsellor Training .....	71
The Fully Function Self? The Conditioned Self.....	73
Figure 3. The Fully Functioning Self? .....	73
Figure 4. The Conditioned Self .....	73
Moving away from facades .....	74
Away from “oughts”, “shoulds” and pleasing others .....	77
The Development of Self-Acceptance.....	79
Figure 5. The Development of Self-Acceptance.....	79
Towards acceptance of self.....	80



Towards Self-direction .....	83
Towards acceptance of others .....	84
Final reflections .....	84
Chapter 6: Research Conclusions .....	86
Conclusions .....	86
Implications .....	87
For Mature Students .....	87
For Counsellor Education .....	88
Limitations .....	88
Recommendation .....	89
Final thoughts .....	89
References .....	91
Appendix 1 .....	96
Rogers's (2003) Nineteen Propositions on a Theory of Personality and Behaviour .....	96

## **List of Figures**

Figure 1. The Phenomenological Significance of the Organism.....	62
Figure 2. The Tendency to Actualise .....	67
Figure 3. The Fully Functioning Self? .....	73
Figure 4. The Conditioned Self .....	73
Figure 5. The Development of Self-Acceptance.....	79

## Introduction and Literature Review

### ***Preamble: The person of the counsellor/counsellor-educator***

Philosophy plays a major role in counsellor education. Training programmes are informed by, developed within, and delivered from particular philosophical positions. The programmes' aim, philosophy and graduate profile, along with curriculum and pedagogy, reflect its theoretical stance. Assessment procedures and tasks are also influenced by the programme's adopted philosophy. Training programmes represent and teach philosophical understandings of the formation, motivation and behaviour of being human. The primary reason for learning about the philosophical underpinnings of counselling approaches is for students to gain an understanding of the origins of pathology and/or psychological disturbance. Additionally, knowledge gained in training influences counselling practice by endorsing a theory on how people change and grow. Furthermore, the influence and/or involvement of the counsellor in the therapeutic encounter will be governed by the practitioner's philosophical understanding and position. Whether it is an intentional educational practice or not, students view themselves, and view their clients, through the philosophical lens from which they are taught, combined with their personal philosophical stance. Newton and Augsburger's (2007, p. 18) statement supports this: "all counseling is *impositional* [original italics]. Every counselor imposes a point of view on those who come for help". Training counsellors' professional development is predominantly focused on integrating counselling theory to practice, therefore developing professional identity.

This research project is based on my interest in the personal development aspect of becoming a counsellor; more specifically – a person-centred counsellor. This interest is motivated by my professional roles: Head of School, programme developer and tutor, for a private tertiary provider delivering an undergraduate

bachelor of counselling. I am also a person-centred counsellor and supervisor in private practice. Carl Rogers's person-centred philosophy and approach is embedded in the college's counsellor training programme. Grounded in humanistic psychology, this approach prizes the human organism's propensity for growth. According to Hoshmand (2004), from this orientation, the training emphasis is on the "development of the personhood of the counsellor" and focuses on "the student's self-understanding and the use of Self in the process of learning and potentiating positive development in others" (p.83). As such, the training programme values personal development above the acquisition of skills and techniques (Rogers, 2003). Mearns (1997) supports this notion: "person-centred counselling training is not simply a matter of 'learning how to do it' but requires considerable attention to personal development since it is the 'Self' of the counsellor that is the central ingredient in the [counselling] endeavour" (p. xi). Like other person-centred training courses, our bachelor programme aims to produce "highly developed individuals who are advanced in achieving their potential" (Bennetts, 2003, p. 305). The objective for personal development in such a programme is that students grow in self-awareness, self-understanding and experimentation with "Self" (Mearns, 1997, p. 94). Consequently, the programme's pedagogy and curriculum are focused on providing an environment in which integration of theory to personal integration (Worsley, 2011) are fostered, with the aim of developing students' professional identity grounded in their 'way of being' with Self and other. Throughout the three-year programme students are required to examine their personal formation, beliefs and values through the lens of the approach's central theoretical concepts; philosophical values (Embleton Tudor, Keemer, Tudor, Valentine, & Worrall, 2004) along with the conditions required for establishing therapeutic relationships (Merry, 2002).

### ***Locating the Research and Research Question***

Much attention has been given to the development of the training counsellor in terms of their developing practice (Fitch, Canada, & Marshall, 2001). While I

acknowledge the importance of establishing a competent level of practice within training, there appears to be little attention paid to trainees gaining an understanding of themselves and their behaviour through the lens of the training approach's philosophical assumptions and principle values. Regardless of the apparent lack of empirical knowledge, Chang (2011) points out that "counsellor educators and supervisors often conceptualize the development of counsellors through their own theories of therapy" (p. 407).

Summarising Sanders' (Sanders, 2006, pp. 104–107) list of contemporary research on person-centred theory, the primary focus has been on: outcome studies, comparative studies (with other approaches), effectiveness for varying psychological problems, and ingredients of effective relationships. There appears to be a lack of scholarly discussion on the key theoretical concepts themselves or their possible usefulness as a framework for the personal development of training counsellors. This current research aims to examine whether Rogers's (1961) theory of personality, commonly known as 'becoming a person', can be employed as a framework to examine the personal development of counsellors in training. The phrase 'becoming a person' is synonymous with Rogers's person-centred theory and depicts the client change process he observed in therapy. The research hypothesis is based on the recognition that the anticipated therapeutic outcomes appear to be the same for both client in practice, and the student in person-centred training. Not only do both client and student engage in a process of self-discovery, self-understanding, acceptance, growth and change, to a greater or lesser extent, but they each also work towards attaining their full potential. It could be said that both counsellor and client are in their own process of 'becoming'. Mearns and Thorne (2013) concur with this proposition when referring to the person-centred counsellor: "The work on the self can never be complete... the counsellor is confronted by a lifetime's task if she is to remain faithful to her commitment" (p. 51).

### ***Development of a working hypothesis***

As a counsellor educator I have a keen interest in the personal development that takes place for students as a result of their training. This interest has been the subject of much of my post-graduate studies. In previous work I have examined the literature on a number of areas associated with this topic. Specific subjects of inquiry have included: an examination of how self-awareness is facilitated in counsellor education; an investigation into the ways in which who we are as people impacts on how we are in counselling practice; and an analysis of the personal development component of professional supervision. I acknowledge that much of my attentiveness to this area of counsellor education stems from recognising and valuing my own process of personal growth and change throughout undergraduate training and beyond. In my own experience, whilst I learnt professional knowledge, understanding and practice, the personal development component of the training had profound intrapersonal and interpersonal impact on my life, and in particular, my perception of myself. I regard my experience of training to be a counsellor as transformational. The most significant transformation was moving from having a self-concept of 'failed student' to that of 'competent' and 'successful'. Although I recognised that this shift had taken place somewhere in the process of beginning counsellor training to the present time of writing a Master's thesis, I do not possess a theoretical framework to conceptualise that change process. On reflection I have asked myself, as Meekums (2008, p. 287) did – "How did I get here"?

Much of the literature on the development of counsellors in training is at a post-graduate level – namely, masters or PhD programmes (Auxier, Hughes, & Kline, 2003; Coll, Doumas, Trotter, & Freeman, 2013; Patterson & Heller Levitt, 2012). It might be assumed therefore, that students on these programmes have already succeeded to some degree, in undergraduate training. Interestingly, there is a paucity of research on undergraduate counsellor training. This omission is corroborated by Lau and Ng (2014, p. 424). When examining the learning environments of counsellor training programmes Lau and Ng found that there was

scant research on adult, graduate and post-secondary education. There is a noticeable gap of relevant literature on the experience of middle-aged, first-time academic learners and the impact this has on their personal growth.

As a result, there appears to be a lack of research specific to the experience of mature students undertaking undergraduate studies in counsellor education. I contend that the experiences of mature students entering a tertiary level qualification for the first time, and more specifically a counsellor education programme, are unique. One common experience for some mature students entering tertiary training for the first time, is the fear and anxiety associated with academic expectations and requirements. It appears that the degree to which students experience anxiety and fear can be attributed to their learning experiences from high school. It is especially so when their experiences have not been positive or affirming of themselves as competent and successful learners. Such students may have developed a self-concept of 'failure', or other falsities. However, the transformative nature of counsellor training has the potential to revise, and even reverse, such self-perceptions.

Therefore, my research question is:

**How useful might some Rogerian theoretical concepts on the process of "Becoming a Person" (Rogers, 1961) be in providing a framework to conceptualize the personal growth process in becoming a counsellor?**

### ***Choosing a Research Method***

Just as the person of the counsellor in person-centred training and practice is a central entity, so too is the person of the educator and researcher. Because of my own on-going person-development, and being a facilitator of the personal development of students, I acknowledge my subjectivity to the study. Like Dyson (2007, p. 39) observed, "I am far too close to my study. I am living in my own research space day by day". Furthermore, the work of Holman Jones, Adams and

Ellis (2013) prompted me to consider how who I am, my life experiences, thoughts, feelings, beliefs and relationships have influenced this research. Muncey's (2010) assertion was particularly compelling:

I ask you to consider what particular kind of filter you are employing to separate your own experience from what you are studying. It must be a powerful one if you try to deny that the impact of your experience has no bearing on the way you conduct your own work. Isn't it healthier to acknowledge the link and purposely build it into your work, or even more interestingly, make yourself the focus of the study (p. 2).

### ***Autoethnography***

Autoethnographic research recognises that, as the researcher, I am both "insider and outsider" (Dyson, 2007, p. 39) of the cultural context that am studying. My function as an autoethnographer will be to compare and contrast personal experience against existing literature. Research data will consist of rich, authentic accounts of lived experience in which my values, biases and assumptions are accounted for (McIlveen, 2008). Analysis of the autoethnographic material will be through the lens of some of the key concepts of person-centred theory. As both subject and object of the study I will utilise my own self-awareness and introspections (Dyson, 2007). Rather than assuming to claim empirical truth, this project will present an emerging knowledge of my lived reality on developing my own 'way of being.' In turn, I will use these understandings to consider the experiences of counselling students engaging in the same self-scrutiny (Ellis, 2002).

My personal interest as a counsellor educator is that by having a greater understanding of my own process of 'becoming' and establishing my 'way of being,' I am able to draw from these experiences and become better informed to facilitate the same in the learning environment. In this regard I concur with Satir (1987, p. 23):



When I am in touch with myself, my feelings, my thoughts, with what I see and hear, I am growing towards becoming a more integrated self. I am more congruent, I am more “whole,” and I am able to make a greater contact with the other person (Rodriguez, 2013, p. 10).

In the same way that self-awareness and understanding build the capacity for empathic understanding of the counsellor towards their clients, so the educator’s commitment to self-development may offer a bridge between all entities.

### ***Thesis Summary***

Using autoethnographic enquiry, the research question is addressed by providing a first-hand, retrospective account of the personal growth process of becoming a counsellor. A variety of styles of autoethnographic data are presented for analysis. Analysis 1: *School Reports*, is a poem written at the commencement of the research process. The poem is analysed through the lens of key person-centred philosophical concepts to examine the development of the self-concept of ‘failure’ and provides a biographical context for Analysis 2. Analysis 2 is presented as a series of drawings using the metaphor of an acorn becoming an oak tree. The drawings are representations of five of Rogers’s (Rogers, 2003) nineteen propositions from his theory of personality and behaviour (see Appendix 1). The analysis and discussion are supported by excerpts from my reflective and process journals written throughout my undergraduate training and the research process. Data is analysed using elements from Rogers’s (1961) notion of, “moments of movement” - moments when it appears that change actually occurs” (p. 130) in the direction of ‘becoming a person.’

After providing a brief biography on Carl Rogers and the historical development of the person-centred approach, Chapter 1 provides an overview of the key philosophical assumptions and a synopsis of Rogers’s process of ‘becoming a person’. In Chapter 2 autoethnography as a research method is discussed, along with a rationale for its suitability for this work. Ethical considerations are discussed

along with the measures taken to minimise risk and ensure privacy and safety. After outlining the research aims, an outline of the research process is provided. The autoethnographic data and analysis are presented in Chapters 3 and 4. The discussion and conclusion chapter, go some way in answering the research question along with my personal question – How did I get here? Implications of the study for mature students and counsellor education are discussed, as well as the limitations of the study and areas for further investigation.

## ***Literature Review***

The examination of literature throughout the research process has focused on a number of key areas. These areas included the importance of personal development for counsellors in practice and training, the nature of personal development, making the distinction between personal development and personal growth warranted further investigation, as often appeared interchangeable. After consolidating literature on research specific to training counsellors, theoretical frameworks used to conceptualise personal development, were examined.

### *The importance of personal development*

It has been suggested that the importance placed on personal development coincides with a turn in counselling theories towards ‘the counsellor’s use of self’ (Donati & Watts, 2005; Hayes, 2002) and ‘the person of the counsellor’ (Johns, 2012). Aponte and Carlsen (2009) suggest that it is a change in society that has brought about the focus on the person of the therapist: “society has become more democratic and egalitarian” (para. 8). The significance given to the counsellor is supported by research that confirms the person of the counsellor as the most significant factor in effective therapeutic relationships (Johns, 2012). It is for this reason a commitment to personal development is considered by Johns (2012) to be crucial throughout the career lifespan of the counsellor – from beginning trainee through to seasoned practitioner. The importance of the personal

development of the trainee counsellor is unquestionable (Donati & Watts, 2005; Irving & Williams, 1999). Some say that the importance is due to the belief that in order to facilitate psychological health and awareness of the client, the counsellor first needs to have a measure of the same (Coll et al., 2013; Donati & Watts, 2005). This notion is supported by the maxim: “the counsellor can only take their client as far as they have been themselves” (Sinason, 1999, in Donati & Watts, 2005, p. 476). Further, there is agreement that personal development is fundamental to ethical and competent practice (Johns, 2010). Dryden and Thorne (1991) stated: “an unaware counsellor leading an unexamined life is likely to be a liability rather than an asset” (Johns, 2012, p. 17).

Personal-development in training has significant importance in humanistic orientated counselling theories (Coll et al., 2013). Such programmes are focused on the development of the personhood of the counsellor (Hoshmand, 2004) and deem the exploration of self experiences essential (Coll et al., 2013). According to Hoshmand, the emphasis is on “the students’ self-understanding and the use of Self in the process of learning and potentiating positive development in others” (p. 83).

#### *The nature of personal development*

In reference to personal development, Auxier et al. (2003, p. 25) refer to a process of “individuation”. The training counsellor becomes autonomous of “authority figures” – initially from their past lives and then of their trainers. According to Hoshmand (2004), personal development involves self-reflection on “social and cultural dimensions of identity” (p. 84). Other literature on personal development denotes identity development as a counsellor or therapist (Skovholt, 2010). Unlike personal growth, personal identity formation places emphasis on the role of the counsellor in practice rather than in relation with themselves. Newman and Newman’s (2007) description of identity supports this observation. Identity is “an internal subjective feeling and reality. It is a kind of internal clarity about oneself. It is a coming-into-focus process about the Self as a therapist or counsellor”

(Skovholt, 2010, p. 67). However, what seems unclear is a definitive description of personal development and, more specifically, its distinction from personal growth.

### *Personal development/personal growth*

While they acknowledge similarities, Irving and Williams (1999) make a distinction between the two concepts. They suggest that although the terms are used interchangeably, and pertain to change, linguistically they mean different things with different attributes. Development is said to relate to “starting something” (p. 518). Development can be planned, structured and specific with definable goals that can be evaluated. The effects of development are transitory (Donati & Watts, 2005). In contrast, growth is unstructured, perceived retrospectively, an outcome of personal development. Growth also denotes the whole person, permanent change, and is fluid. Irving and Williams go on to say that growth is “more becoming than being” and “is often judged by the sense made of the past” (p. 519). Of particular relevance to this work and the implications for counsellor education, Irving and Williams summarise the terms as “personal development – developing specific skills, aptitudes and qualities” (and is client focused), while “personal growth – becoming a certain kind of person” is centred on the counsellor’s well-being (p.522). Aponte and Carlsen (2009) conclude:

The personal growth of therapists should always be a goal for all therapists in an effort to free themselves of old hang-ups that impede good therapy, and to grow in personal insight and emotional maturity to bring a more complete self to the therapeutic encounter (para. 24).

Research on personal growth is even scantier. Literary discussion on this area of counsellor development appears to be found within the larger context of examination. Nelson and Jackson’s (2003) research on professional identity development of Hispanic counselling students is a case in point. Personal growth was one of seven themes that emerged from their study. The areas of personal

growth identified were working through personal issues, insights about self and changed self-perceptions.

With the distinction between personal development and personal growth made, this work will focus on the personal growth and change of counsellors in training. This decision is based on the nature of personal growth which aligns with the process and theoretical concepts of person-centred philosophy. This notion will become apparent throughout this thesis.

### *Research on the personal development of counsellors in training*

There is general agreement that research on counsellor personal development is scarce and particularly of counselling students (Chang, 2011; Gibbons, Cochran, Spurgeon, & Diambra, 2013; Paris, Linville, & Rosen, 2006). Gibbons et al. (2013, p. 7) went so far as to say: “We were not able to find any research addressing the specific area of focused personal development among counselling students”. It was this observation that instigated their mixed method examination of the personal dispositions of nineteen students on practicum. Other research that has been carried out on the personal development of counsellors in training has predominately focused on professional identity development (Auxier et al., 2003; Gibson, Dollarhide, & Moss, 2010; Nelson & Jackson, 2003; Rønnestad & Skovholt, 2003) and the role of professional supervision (Aponte & Carlsen, 2009; Howard, Inman, & Altman, 2006; Pistole & Fitch, 2008). Furthermore, investigation into counsellor development has been largely conducted within post-graduate levels of education, namely, masters or doctorate programmes (Auxier et al., 2003; Chang, 2011; Coll et al., 2013; Patterson & Heller Levitt, 2012).

According to Bennetts (2003) there is a dearth of literature on the personal development of training counsellors from their own experience. A notable study was that of Folkes-Skinner, Elliot and Wheeler (2010), who examined the changes experienced at the start of therapist training using a single case study. Their aim was to identify the aspects of the training programme that assisted in the process

of becoming a therapist. Their findings confirmed others in which training was said to be stressful and resulted in noticeable change in identity and self-knowledge.

### *Conceptual frameworks for personal development*

Chang (2011) recognises a variety of conceptual frameworks of counsellor development. He discusses frameworks such as career development, model-based approaches, stage models and lifespan models. The model-based approaches Chang examined covered the spectrum of counselling approaches. Two observations are of note. One, as Chang points out, the published accounts of these examples are outdated. And secondly, they are based on “therapy-based theories of supervision” (p. 407). Another supervision model is Aponte and Carlsen’s (2009) ‘Aponte’s Person-of-the-therapist Training Model’. As well as being a model of therapist’s use of Self, its key elements are: mastery of Self (self-knowledge with self-command) and access to the Self (memories, emotions, and values) (para. 12).

### *Gaps in the literature*

Although the importance of personal development and/or personal growth has been established, there appears to be limited examination on this in practice. There is a scarcity of research on the experiences of mature students in undergraduate training. Nor were there examples of the use of counselling theory to conceptualise person growth during the training process. The scant amount of research available is limited to external, observable and, in some cases, measurable factors. Such research lacks the breadth and depth a self-study can provide.

The aim of this current work is to contribute to and stimulate further scholarly discussion and examination. The person-centred theoretical concepts outlined in

the following chapter may offer a starting point to conceptualise the personal growth process of training counsellors.

## **Chapter 1: Theoretical concepts of the Person-centred Approach**

While it may not always be acknowledged, almost all models and approaches of counselling and psychotherapy are based on person-centred principles (Cooper, O'Hara, Schmid, & Bohart, 2013). This notion is particularly evident in the characteristics of the therapeutic relationship (Cooper et al., 2013; Corey, 2005; Nelson-Jones, 2000); although the relationship's centrality and influence may differ between methods.

It is not within the scope of this work to include a comprehensive history and description of the person-centred approach to counselling practice. Rather, to contextualise the theoretical concepts relevant to this research, what follows is: a concise biography of the life and work of Carl Rogers; a brief outline of the development of the approach over a period of five decades, and its place in the contemporary world of practice. Additionally, a summary of the embedded philosophical assumptions along with a description of key theoretical concepts is presented before providing a synopsis of Rogers's process of becoming a person. Note will be made of the concepts used to analyse the research data and their relevance to the research question.

### ***Carl Rogers (1902 – 1987) and person-centred theory – a brief history:***

Born in 1902 into an orthodox, religious and strict family, Carl Rogers was a sickly, shy child and was considered an introvert, spending much of his time alone reading and in reflection (Corey, 2005; Nelson-Jones, 2000). In describing Rogers, Nelson-Jones (2000) states: "Rogers was a complex mixture of high intelligence, high energy, ambition, competitiveness, Protestant work ethic, strength, vulnerability, charisma, idealism, altruism, self-centredness, caring, shyness, sensitivity, warmth, and ability to touch others deeply" (p. 101). Nelson-Jones



(2000) adds that Rogers was teased by his family for his absentmindedness and was emotionally deprived; a condition that affected him throughout his life.

Initially Rogers followed his family's Protestant Christian thinking, practice and ethics (Embleton Tudor et al., 2004). In early adulthood his goal was to become a minister of religion. He later liberated himself from his parents' fundamental beliefs; a purposeful step towards personal independence (Nelson-Jones, 2000). The authoritative and controlling influence of his parents, standard in that era, impacted on Rogers's work (Nelson-Jones, 2000) and the inception of the key philosophical concepts of person-centred theory. He placed a high value on personal freedom, autonomy and self-direction rather than being impelled by external authoritarian entities. In referring to Rogers, Embleton Tudor et al. (2004, p. 16) state: "He saw men and women as born healthy and creative, and he believed that under appropriate conditions their behaviour would be naturally constructive and social, and therefore not in need of regulation, direction or punishment from the outside." While rejecting fundamentalist Christian doctrine for the rest of his life, there are some who believe that Rogers encountered the spiritual dimension in human experience (Thorne, 2012), which is reflected in his later work.

Much of Rogers's life was spent in academia. His interests began in agriculture, then history and religion (Corey, 2005), before attending teachers college and beginning work in community child guidance (Rogers, 1959). It was for his work in clinical psychology (Corey, 2005) that he is renowned. Based on his practice and research as a therapist, Rogers was a prolific writer (Thorne, 2012). According to Thorne (2012, p. 73), he wrote 16 books and over 200 articles. He also co-authored a number of books (Sanders, 2006). It was his research, practice and authorship as a counselling psychologist over a period of fifty years, which has earned him his primary legacy. His influence and contribution in the fields of psychology, psychotherapy and counselling have been recognised by a number of authors (Cook, Biyanova, & Coyne, 2009; Cooper et al., 2013; Embleton Tudor et al., 2004; Merry, 2002; Nelson-Jones, 2000; Thorne, 2012). The results of Cook, Biyanova

and Coyne's (2009) extensive research on influential psychotherapy figures show that founder of the person-centred approach, Carl Rogers, "is still seen as the single most influential psychotherapist by psychotherapists" (p. 48). This is a position he held twenty five years earlier. Rogers's legacy is further recognised for his innovation in developing therapeutic group experiences, and recording and publishing case examples of therapeutic dialogue (Thorne, 2012).

### ***The Formation and development of the Person-centred Approach and Research***

Person-centred theory was founded on robust research and revision with the aim of examining the process of therapy and discovering the elements which facilitated constructive growth and change for clients (Wilkins, 2010). This work began in the 1940s by Carl Rogers, along with his students and colleagues. Over this early period of twenty five years, Rogers's research group was considered the largest of that time (Wilkins, 2010). The evidenced-based theory development was considered radical as it contradicted many of the interpretive psychodynamic therapies of that era (Nelson-Jones, 2000). These contradictions were evident in the theory's "non-pathologizing" nature and its trust in the human potential to improve and to "self-right" (Cooper et al., 2013, p. 1). In 1940 Rogers presented a paper at the University of Minnesota entitled: '*Some newer concepts in psychotherapy*' (Nelson-Jones, 2000, p. 98). According to Nelson-Jones (2000), it was most likely this event that marked the birth of what became known as client-centred therapy.

A number of writers have chronicled the development of the theory spanning five decades (Corey, 2005; Embleton Tudor et al., 2004; Merry, 2002). Of note over this period were the numerous name changes before becoming commonly known as person-centred. It was the broadening influence of the person-centred philosophy into other areas such as education, health care, conflict resolution, industry and politics that instigated a further adaption to: the person-centred approach.

It is widely recognised that Rogers's person-centred theory has influenced many of the other approaches used in counselling today. Many, if not all, approaches have adopted the three core conditions of the therapeutic relationship, namely - unconditional positive regard, empathic understanding and congruence. These conditions are considered to be certain attitudes or qualities which the counsellor has within themselves and offers towards a client. Sadly, the 'three core conditions' are often all that is known of person-centred counselling. It seems the other three conditions that Rogers considered necessary and sufficient for therapeutic change, are largely unknown along with the philosophical principles upon which the approach is based.

According to Embleton Tudor et al. (2004), there is an "emergence of a new generation of practitioners and writers" (p. 21) influenced by the philosophical roots of Rogers's approach. The resurgence of interest in Rogers's ideas, especially of its relevance within a contemporary context, has been identified by others (Cooper et al., 2013; Kirschenbaum & Jourdan, 2005). This current period has seen the development of a number of therapeutic approaches, such as experiential approaches (Merry, 2002; Sanders, 2006); person-centred integrative counselling; and dialogical approaches (Sanders, 2006). While these methods may differ in some aspects, they all share the fundamental philosophical concepts of person-centred theory.

According to Embleton Tudor et al. (2004, pp. 23–24), Carl Rogers's life's work not only provides a theory of the conditions, process and outcomes of counselling, it also conceptualizes a view of human nature; a theory of personality and behaviour (Merry, 2002); a theory of the 'fully functioning person'; and a theory of interpersonal relationships. This summation is consistent with Rogers's intention in writing his now renowned 1959 paper in which he attempted to summarise the fledgling which he believed offered theoretical implications for a number of human activities (Rogers, 1959). Additional to those already stated, Rogers included activities such as family life; education learning; group leadership; and group conflict. Rogers himself did not consider his theory as a "dogma of truth"

but rather a “stimulus for further creative thinking” (p. 191). The continual development and evolution of person-centred theory and approach is evidence that researchers, writers and practitioners have utilized Rogers’s original ideas to demonstrate its relevance in contemporary contexts. For example, Embleton Tudor et al. (2004) have applied the person-centred approach to ways of considering human development, psychology, education and working with different group systems.

Before providing a description of Rogers’s theory on the process of change, it is imperative to be cognisant of the key concepts of his theory of personality. These philosophical concepts provide the basis that underpins his conception of the change process. The concepts also provide a hypothesis of the creation of psychological disturbance and the notion of the “fully functioning person” (Merry, 2002, p. 28).

### ***Person-centred Philosophical Assumptions - A Theory of Personality***

#### ***View of Human Nature***

Person-centred philosophical principles and practice is embedded in the values of phenomenology and existentialism (Embleton Tudor et al., 2004). Phenomenology, like Rogers’s ideas, is interested in how people perceive and make sense of their lived experience. Perception and subjectivity were fundamental to Rogers’s belief as shown in this quote: “Man lives essentially in his own personal and subjective world, and even his most objective functioning, in science, mathematics, and the like, is the result of subjective purpose and subjective choice” (Rogers, 1959, p. 161). It was from this philosophical position that client/person-centred therapy received its name (Nelson-Jones, 2000). Phenomenology considers ‘reality’ as fluid and subjective - informed by personal experience, biases, prejudices and “perceptual filters” (Embleton Tudor et al.,

2004, p. 18). We make sense and meaning of our lives based on our expectations, history and needs (Merry, 2002). Embleton Tudor et al. (2004) suggest that the person-centred practice of empathic understanding is a “process of attending phenomenologically to the phenomenological world of another”(p. 18). They further propose that Rogers’s concept of the ‘fully functioning person’ is a description of a person who is living phenomenologically. This is evident in Rogers’s (1961, p. 173) description of the direction taken by clients – “the individual moves toward living in an open, friendly, close relationship to his own experience.”

Existentialism values free will, authenticity, personal choice and responsibility, all of which are consistent with Rogers’s original ideals of personal freedom, autonomy, self-direction (Fitch et al., 2001) and congruency (Embleton Tudor et al., 2004). Although Rogers himself did not deem himself an existentialist, according to Embleton Tudor et al. (2004), his theory development was influenced by existentialist Søren Kierkegaard (1813 – 55), along with the existential theologian, Martin Buber (1878 – 1965). Not only did Rogers adopt Kierkegaard’s phrase “to be the self which one truly is” (Embleton Tudor et al., 2004, p. 17), in his book *On Becoming a Person*, he used Buber’s “I-thou” (p. 18) phrase to characterise the therapeutic relationship.

Contrary to the psychoanalytic and behaviouristic approaches at the time of its inception, person-centred theory became commonly associated within humanistic psychology (Merry, 2002), often referred to as “third force psychology” (Embleton Tudor et al., 2004, p. 22). As such, person-centred theory held distinct differences from its precursors. Of note was the Freudian notion that all humans were “inherently, essentially and inevitably evil, flawed or driven by self – and other - destructive urges”, as described by Sanders (2006, p. 23). Rogers, however, upheld the belief that human nature is trustworthy (Merry, 2002; Sanders, 2006). His view of human nature is considered an optimistic one in which people are seen to be social, creative, constructive and always in an active process of ‘becoming’ (Merry, 2002; (Embleton Tudor et al., 2004; Sanders, 2006). The significance of the

humanistic foundations of Rogers's theory is emphasized by Sanders (2006, p. 23): "Rogers promoted the idea that humans were responsible for (and therefore could influence) the human condition." Hence, his conjecture is considered to be a positive view of human nature because it upholds the notion that all people have the capacity to "direct their own behaviour in a purposeful and meaningful direction" (Fitch et al., 2001, p. 233). Also consistent with humanistic psychology, person-centred offered a holistic theory as opposed to the reductionist ideas of the time (Sanders, 2006). From this new radical perspective the psychological, social, physical (Embleton Tudor et al., 2004; Sanders, 2006), cognitive and emotional (Merry, 2002) dimensions of a person were recognised as interrelated parts of the whole person (Embleton Tudor et al., 2004; Sanders, 2006).

### *The Organism*

Synonymous with person-centred theory is the concept of the 'organism' (Fernald, 2011; Wilkins, 2010), along with its derivatives- 'organismic' and 'organic'. It is interesting to note that Rogers himself did not offer a definition of this (Embleton Tudor et al., 2004). Embleton Tudor et al. suggest that this omission was due to Rogers taking the term so much for granted that he did not consider it necessary to offer one. It is implied however that every living thing is an organism. By way of offering a definition for the human organism, Wilkins (2010, p. 35) states that the use of the term 'organism' denotes the whole person encompassing what he terms "subsystems" of the biochemical, physiological, perceptual, emotional, behavioural and relational. Embleton Tudor et al. present a statement made by Rogers that they believe embodies the essence of the term – "the inner core of man's personality is the organism itself" (Rogers, 1953/1967, p. 92, cited in Embleton Tudor et al., 2004, p. 25). The 'inner core' is said to comprise of the unselfconscious aspects of the individual human being such as the bodily, visceral, sensory and instinctual factors. Continuing Rogers's quote, the organism "is essentially both self-preserving and social". Embleton Tudor et al. clarify this notion by saying that the organism will do whatever it can to stay alive and does

so in relation to other organisms. The organism has further been described as “trustworthy, positive, life affirming, social, relational, and self-regulating” (Fernald, 2011, p. 176). An example of this can be recognised in a new born baby who cries when hungry or hurt. The baby’s crying is an organismic response to an organismic experience and is generally comforted by physical contact and receiving nourishment. As the baby grows into a child, teenager and adult, he/she develops more complex needs and responses. Therefore the human organism, as with all organisms, is in a constant process of ‘being’ and ‘becoming’ (Embleton Tudor et al., 2004), or as Fernald states: “a continuous moment-to-moment process of change” (p. 175). This motivational process is known as ‘actualisation’ (Merry, 2002).

### *The Actualising Tendency*

Congruent with humanistic psychology, person-centred theory holds the fundamental philosophical assumption that every living organism has a tendency towards growth and development (Merry, 2002; Nelson-Jones, 2000). Rogers named this inherent propensity the ‘actualising tendency’ and described it as being the single motivating agent towards maintenance, enhancement and reproduction of every living organism, including the human organism (Cooper et al., 2013; Rogers, 1959; Wilkins, 2010). The actualising tendency is both “*active*” and “*directional* in that the organism inexorably moves towards development ...differentiation and increasing complexity” [original italics] (Sanders, 2006, p. 28). Rogers further claims this tendency as a “*biological force*” [original italics], involving the whole organism (Merry, 2002; Rogers, 1959; Sanders, 2006), and is not a “fundamentally moral” process (Cooper et al., 2013, p. 86). The actualising tendency is a movement towards autonomy and away from external forces (Cooper et al., 2013; Rogers, 1959). Cooper et al. (2013, p. 86) expand on the description by adding, “The actualizing tendency ....is not merely a movement to survive. It is an *organizational* tendency to develop greater effectiveness ...to proactively grow and adapt” [original italics]. Additionally, Rogers renders the

growth process involving the tendency to seek pleasurable experiences, to be creative, and to learn and develop through potentially painful experiences – for example a child learning to walk when crawling may equally meet his/her needs more comfortably (p. 196).

To emphasise that the actualising tendency is not distinct from the organism, and to signify that the organism is always in motion, contemporary theorists have opted to refer to the concept as “the organism’s tendency to actualise” (Embleton Tudor et al., 2004, p. 27). In other words, the whole organism will make the best constructive use of its environment, regardless of the conditions, in the direction towards self-regulation and the pursuit of reaching its full potential (Merry, 2002). Rogers (1961, p. 108) recognised this tendency in his work with clients and asserted that “the goal the individual most wishes to achieve, the end which he knowingly and unknowingly pursues, is to become himself”. Nelson-Jones (2001, p. 83), simplifies the concept in his statement: “People have the capacity to guide, regulate and control themselves, provided certain conditions exist”. When the actualising tendency is free from restriction the organism may achieve its full potential (Sanders, 2006, p. 28). Rogers (1959) postulated that it was only within optimal conditions that an individual actualises towards being a “fully functioning person” (p. 234). Full functioning assumes that both the ‘organism’ and the ‘Self’ actualise in tandem (Sanders, 2006). In other words – there is congruence between ‘Self’ and the organismic experiencing (Rogers, 1959). The extent to which the individual is able to attain their full potential is determined by their social and environmental circumstances (Merry, 2002) and/or conditions (Sanders, 2006). In other words, the actualising of some potentials of the individual may be limited or constrained within social contexts (Merry, 2002). Mearns and Throne (2013, p. 16), casts the concept this way: the “force towards continuing development [that] may be socially affirmed or condemned depending on different perspectives”. A contemporary view of actualisation takes into account the fact that as human beings we don’t live in isolation; our existence is



dependent on complex and cohesive forms of social organisation (Merry, 2002).

Merry states:

The full expression of what it is to be human depends, at least in part, on the existence of other people with whom we form relationships, on our abilities to describe and share our subjective experiences, and to hear and understand the experiences of others (p. 23).

Therefore, the process of socialisation requires restraining and/or withholding the expression of organismic impulses which may endanger either self or others.

### *Self-Actualisation*

While the processes of the actualising tendency and self-actualisation are similar and related, Rogers made a clear distinction between the two (Embleton Tudor et al., 2004). For Rogers, self-actualisation is a subset of the actualising tendency (Cooper et al., 2013). Whereas the actualising tendency refers to the whole organism, Rogers (1959, p. 196) described self-actualisation as the process attributed to the portion of the organism symbolized in the 'Self'. Or in other words - that portion of the phenomenal field that is differentiated as the 'self' (Cooper et al., 2013). Bohart (Cooper et al., 2013), asserts, "for Rogers self-actualization is the process of maintaining and enhancing the development of the self" (p. 86-88). Sanders (2006) adds that the 'Self' actualises towards survival and enhancement of the self-structure.

A number of writers distinguish the difference between Maslow's view of self-actualisation and that of Rogers's (Cooper et al., 2013; Embleton Tudor et al., 2004; Sanders, 2006). Bohart, stresses that "Rogers would never have considered identifying individuals as 'self-actualized'" (p. 88). Maslow's notion of the self-actualised person implies a state of being to aspire to (Cooper et al., 2013), whereas Rogers believed that as human beings we are in a constant process of "being" and "becoming" (Embleton Tudor et al., 2004, p. 83). "To be the Self one truly is" (Rogers, 1961, p. 163), is an ongoing and unfolding process of life (Embleton Tudor et al., 2004, p. 83). While being in a "constant process of growing

and learning” we are “continually integrating together all aspects of oneself” (Cooper et al., 2013, p. 88). Rogers (1961) developed the concept of the “fully functioning person” (p. 183) to describe a person who is open to learn, adapt, grow, and own and accept their personal feelings (Cooper et al., 2013).

Classic person-centred theory on self-actualisation has been criticised for being culturally biased, “westernised” (Mearns & Thorne, 2000, p. 79), and individualistic (Cooper et al., 2013). However, contemporary theorists refute this point of view and argue that such a notion shows a lack of understanding and ignorance of Rogers’s concept of self actualisation (Bohart, as cited in Mearns & Thorne, 2000). Bohart (2013, p. 87) contends, “His [Rogers’s] concept is compatible with cultures that view the Self as in relational rather than individualistic terms, and even with cultures that have no concept of Self”. Bohart further suggests that the Self can be thought of as “connected and sociocentric” (p. 87). Mearns and Thorne (2000, p. 79) support Bohart’s assertion by advocating for the concept’s “transferability” across cultures. Further, they draw attention to the concept of the fully functioning person characterised by “well-developed qualities of altruism and social responsiveness” (p. 80).

### *The Self*

Rogers appointed distinct differences between ‘the organism’ and ‘the Self’, although some contemporary authors refer to the ‘organismic self’ (Embleton Tudor et al., 2004), in reference to the notion of the ‘true’ Self as opposed to the ‘false or conditioned self’ (Merry, 2002). In human development terms, the developing ‘self’ is an observable process by which an infant gains the ability to differentiate between self and other (Embleton Tudor et al., 2004; Nelson-Jones, 2000). For example – “this is me, this is who I am”, along with, “this is not me, this is not who I am”. Rogers (1959) explains that differentiation is part of the process of the actualizing tendency and happens as a result of self-experiences. Summarising Rogers’s definition, Merry (2002, p. 32) states, “the self is not an

entity; rather, it is a constellation of perceptions and experiences, together with the values attached to those perceptions and experiences.” Unlike the unselfconscious organism then, the ‘self’ is said to be that aspect of the human being that is available to be known (Mearns & Thorne, 2000; Merry, 2002) but not necessarily in awareness (Rogers, 1959). This assertion was significantly different to that of the psychoanalytic thinking at that time which focused on the unconscious dimensions of the Self (Mearns & Thorne, 2000). Embleton Tudor (2004, p. 25) further distinguish the person-centred notion of 'self' as “the product of an organism’s capacity to reflect on its own experience of itself, and to look at itself as if from the outside.” In other words – the ability to reflect on experience. Tudor and Merry (2002, p. 126) describe this function as “reflective consciousness” (Wilkins, 2010, p. 36). Additionally, Rogers refers to the ‘Self’ as being fluid, changing and subject to revision rather than being fixed (Merry, 2002). It is important to note that for his description of ‘Self’ Rogers asserts that his definition was based on constructs that could be observed and measured in research at the time (Rogers, 1959). This conjecture is supported by contemporary person-centred theorists (Mearns & Thorne, 2000).

Contemporary theorists have proposed a revision to the concept of ‘self’. For example, Mearns and Thorne (2000, p. 175) suggest broadening the definition of the self to include material at the “edge of awareness”. This addition includes experiences and elements of Self that are not yet fully “symbolised” (Mearns & Thorne, 2000, p. 176). In other words - yet to appear in consciousness (Merry, 2002).

Although Rogers used the terms ‘Self’, ‘self-concept’ and ‘self-structure’ interchangeably (Merry, 2002; Rogers, 1959), it is the conceptual construction (Mearns & Thorne, 2013), or view of ‘Self’ (Merry, 2002), that person-centred theory refers to as the ‘self-concept’.

### *Self-Concept*

As a result of his early work and research Rogers offered a tentative definition of 'self-concept':

The self-concept, or self-structure, may be thought of as an organized configuration of perceptions of the Self which are admissible to awareness. It is composed of such elements as the perceptions of one's characteristics and abilities; the percepts and concepts of the Self in relation to others and to the environment; the value qualities which are perceived as associated with experiences and objects; and goals and ideals which are perceived as having positive or negative valence (Rogers, 2003, pp. 136–137).

Nelson-Jones (2001, p. 86) paraphrases Rogers's definition: "The self-concept is the Self as perceived and the values attached to these perceptions, or what a person refers to as 'I' or 'me'". While Rogers considered his definition of self-concept to be open for further examination and adjustment as the fledgling theory developed (Rogers, 2003), the principle remains consistent with contemporary thinking. For example, Nelson-Jones (2000) and Sanders (2006) both maintain that as an infant grows it develops perceptions about itself based on interaction within its environment and the evaluation of others. Mearns and Thorne, (2000) have added the concept of 'configurations of self' to describe different parts or dimensions of the Self (Merry, 2002). This development dispels the notion of a unitary Self while acknowledging the plurality, and sometimes conflicting internal and external needs and demands, the 'Self' experiences (Mearns & Thorne, 2000). Merry (2002) summarises this concept by stating, "there are different 'configurations' of the Self available to the individual that emerge at different times to take into account the differing circumstances that an individual confronts in life." This revision appears to build on Rogers's (1959) notion of the self-concept being a "gestalt ..... a configuration in which the alteration of one minor aspect could completely alter the whole pattern"(p. 201). Rogers illustrated this concept by referring to the optical illusion of the old hag/young woman. Two different

configurations within the one picture; changed by altering one's perspective or focus.

Additionally, the self-concept consists of both negative and positive values attached to self-perceptions (Sanders, 2006). Valuing experiences as to whether they are positive and enhance, or negative and threaten the organism, is referred to as the organismic valuing process (Merry, 2002).

### *Organismic Valuing Process*

The organismic valuing process positively evaluates those experiences that are consistent with and maintain and enhance the self-concept, while negatively valuing those that threaten or conflict with its continual development (Merry, 2002; Sanders, 2006). Embleton Tudor et al. (2004, p. 30) explain the process in this way: "We learn to value experience, moment by moment, according to whether it satisfies an organismic need. This moment-by-moment evaluation is continuous and life-long". In simple terms, we accept, value and seek out positive experiences that we like and enjoy. In contrast, experiences that we dislike are valued negatively and are avoided or rejected. As the term suggests, evaluations happen at an organic level.

A characteristic of the 'fully-functioning' person is one who has trust in, and is in touch with, their organismic valuing process (Cooper et al., 2013). According to Bohart, evaluative information comes from two sources: "bodily felt senses and intellectual-conceptual thought" (p. 91). The fully functioning person is able to trust their own thoughts, deepest feelings and experiences, and make decisions in accordance with them along with their inner perceptions, desires and inner wisdom (Mearns & Thorne, 2013). Such a person would be said have an 'internal locus of evaluation' (Embleton Tudor et al., 2004). They are not dependent on the evaluation of others for positive self-regard (Merry, 2002). Conversely, a person who is alienated from their organismic valuing process as a source of knowledge, guidance and decision making, have an 'external locus of evaluation' (Mearns &

Thorne, 2013). Because of a lack of trust in their organismic valuing process, the person may develop a reliance on the guidance and evaluation of external authorities (Mearns & Thorne, 2013). Furthermore, their sense of self-esteem and feelings of acceptance are dependent on the evaluation of others (Merry, 2002).

The basis for establishing trust in the organismic valuing process is attributed to the acquisition of positive regard from significant others in early infancy (Embleton Tudor et al., 2004; Mearns & Thorne, 2013; Merry, 2002; Rogers, 1959, 1961).

### *Positive Regard*

Positive regard is said to involve the attributes of warmth, liking, respect, sympathy, love and acceptance (Rogers, 1959). Both Rogers and contemporary theorists emphasised the essential need for positive regard in early development, especially in the development of the self-concept (Embleton Tudor et al., 2004; Merry, 2002; Nelson-Jones, 2001; Rogers, 1959). Rogers goes so far as to say that this need is “pervasive and persistent” (1959, p. 223). A developing child’s need for positive regard is attributed to the development of trust in the “accuracy and reliability” of their organismic valuing process (Mearns & Thorne, 2013) or “inner experiencing” (Merry, 2002). The development of positive self-regard is fragile as it relies on the evaluation of others (Merry, 2002). Embleton Tudor et al. (2004, p. 102) expound: “Receiving positive regard from the significant other becomes more important than satisfying other needs of the organism.”

An important theoretical concept is that positive regard is reciprocal (Embleton Tudor et al., 2004; Nelson-Jones, 2001). This notion is confirmed in Rogers’s theorising: “It is reciprocal, in that when an individual discriminates himself as satisfying another’s need for positive regard, he necessarily experiences satisfaction of his own need for positive regard” (1959, p. 208). When experiences of positive regard from significant others are consistent with the child’s organismic valuing process, positive self-regard is developed. The child develops self-worth

and acceptance (Embleton Tudor et al., 2004). However, when positive regard is threatened or withheld, the child learns to distrust their inner experiencing. Such is a person's need to maintain their positive regard they may learn to ignore or not act on their inner experiencing (Merry, 2002). The result is the development of a lack of trust in their organismic valuing process and a disconnection with their actualising tendency (Mearns & Thorne, 2013).

Children learn to value those aspects or traits about themselves that have been valued or prized by significant others. The child will reinforce that approval by acting out experiences that gain praise and acceptance. Conversely, a child will learn to avoid or suppress those thoughts, feelings and behaviours that are rejected or disapproved of (Mearns & Thorne, 2013). They will "avoid revealing qualities for which [they have] received negative attention" (Embleton Tudor et al. 2004, p. 101). As a result the child's sense of worth, in their own and others' eyes, becomes conditional upon gaining approval and avoiding disapproval (Mearns & Thorne, 2013).

### *Conditions of Worth*

Summarising Rogers's (Rogers, 1959, p. 225) explanation of the development of conditions of worth: Children learn to view themselves and their behaviour in the same way they are experienced by others – liking some aspects while rejecting others. A child will learn to positively regard some thoughts, feelings and behaviours which are in fact not satisfying at an organismic level, while negatively regard those that are organismically gratifying. The values and evaluations taken in from others, which become part of the self-concept, are termed - *introjected values* (Sanders, 2006). When a person behaves in accordance with these introjected values, which are incongruent with their organismic valuing process, they are said to have "acquired a *condition of worth*" [original italics] (Rogers, 1959, p. 224).

Sanders (2006, p. 59) describes conditions of worth as "the conditions which determine our sense of worth in the world". We believe we are loved, valued and

accepted when we think, feel and behave in ways that are positively valued by others (Merry, 2002), even when they contradict with our inner experiencing. By continually acting out these conditioned states, they become integrated into the self-concept. The result is the development of a “false or conditioned self” (Merry, 2002, p. 28). We learn to ignore, reject, or deny to awareness certain experiences that do not match the conditioned self-concept. Integrated conditions of worth become the basis of personal beliefs and assumptions. Self-experiences that are consistent with the conditions of worth evoke feelings of positive self-regard, while experiences inconsistent with the conditions of worth evoke negative feelings (Cooper et al., 2013). Rogers (1959, p. 226), explains, “From this point on his concept of Self includes distorted perceptions which do not accurately represent his experience, and his experience includes elements which are not included in the picture he has of himself”. Rogers concludes that at this juncture a person can no longer live as a “unified whole person”. Merry (2002, p. 28) adds, “This conditioned self is the self that operates in the world, and this is the self that continues to actualise”.



## **Chapter 2: Rogers's Theory on the Process of Becoming**

Person-centred theory maintains the view that people want to be healthy (Mearns & Thorne, 2013) and they possess the innate potential and ability to move towards that goal. Rogers (1961, p. 166) borrowed the Danish philosopher Søren Kierkegaard's phrase, "to be that self which one truly is", to capture the apparent objective clients most want to achieve in therapy. Throughout his writing, Rogers offers a number of characteristics of the process of change he identified in clients as they worked towards their goal of becoming their true Self. He discusses the change process under a number of different headings. In one instance he outlines "the process of becoming" (1961, p. 108) while in the same publication he uses the same descriptors to present the trends he observed in the "directions taken by clients" (p. 167). Again in the same publication, Rogers identified the characteristics of what he titled: "A Therapist's View of the Good Life: The Fully Functioning Person" (p. 183). In a later publication he observed "common value directions" a person moves towards to enhance "personal growth and maturity" (Rogers & Stevens, 1973, p. 25). The common theme of each description is what Rogers termed the "tendency to move away" from certain restrictive experiencing and engagement with life (1961, p. 167); a cessation to striving to be and maintaining a person they are not; restrictions such as falsehood, wearing masks and hiding behind facades; familial, cultural and societal conformity, restraints and expectations; and pleasing others at the cost of being true to self. Simultaneous to moving away is the fluid, changing and complex process of movement towards a state of "becoming" an authentic Self, or a fully functioning person (Rogers 1961, p. 167- 176).

"Moments of movement" (Merry, 2002, p. 66; Rogers, 1961, p. 130) is the phrase Rogers used to indicate personal growth and change. Within these moments are certain identified characteristics (Rogers, 1959, p. 132). While noting some

apparent overlaps in Rogers's (1961; 1973) numerous descriptions of the process of change, below is an attempt to synthesise a number of his descriptions of the characteristics and present them under identified 'moments of movement'.

#### *Toward openness to experience and trust of Self*

While being previously detached from their inner experiencing through denial, distortion (Merry, 2002) or mistrust, "the individual moves toward living in an open, friendly, close relationship to his own experience" (Rogers, 1961, p. 173). This movement involves becoming aware, receptive and accepting, of complex and sometimes contradictory inner feelings, senses and reactions, even though these may refute a previously held self-concept. While initially rejecting facets of self, a willingness to discover, accept and embrace previously unknown dimensions of self begins to develop. Instead of being fearful, defensive or threatened by inner reactions and experiences, the person becomes attuned to and lives more closely to moment by moment organismic experience. Rogers (1961) states, "He is free to live his feelings subjectively, as they exist in him"(p. 88). This could be seen as a movement towards trust of self.

Trust of Self involves having trust in one's organism. To have such a trust means to be "free to change and grow in the directions natural to the human organism" (Rogers, 1961, p. 64). In moving towards gaining confidence in their organismic processes an individual begins to think their own thoughts, feel their own feelings, and behave in ways that are congruent with being truly and deeply themselves. "The individual comes to *be* – in awareness – what he *is* – in experience" (Rogers, 1961, pp. 104–105). They become motivated towards maximising their full potential (Merry, 2002, p. 70).

There is an increased tendency towards existential living. This is a tendency to "live fully in each moment ....It means that one becomes a participant in and observer of the ongoing process of organismic experience" (Rogers, 1961, pp. 188–189).

The individual is able to make meaning from experiences and utilise them as a valuable resource. Such resources enable accurate awareness of social demands and norms. By “weighing and balancing” the consequences of external situations (Rogers, 1961, p. 118), responses can be made which are congruent with internal experiences. There is a growing awareness that the locus for choices, decisions and evaluative judgements comes from within the individual themselves, rather than relying on the approval or disapproval of others.

While becoming open to internal experience there is also a move towards becoming aware of the reality which exists outside the Self. There is an openness and valuing of the reactions and feelings of others (Rogers & Stevens, 1973, p. 26). Previously held rigid beliefs are replaced with an ability to tolerate ambiguity. This movement implies a shift from black and white thinking to that of accepting the grey reality of life.

#### *Moving away from facades; Getting behind the mask*

The person begins to recognise and become dissatisfied with being someone they are not, such as living behind a façade of conformity, denying feelings or wearing a mask of intellectual rationality (Rogers, 1961, p. 114). They distinguish behaviours and feelings of pretence and defensiveness which contradict with their more basic inner responses. False fronts, facades and masks that have been adopted to cope with life are tentatively put aside.

Moving away from facades means facing up to the true authentic Self – warts and all. It is not just focusing on the good, positive qualities, it also involves acknowledging and accepting the darker, less comfortable – even less tolerable aspects of the Self, including weaknesses and failings. When those aspects are acknowledged and brought into awareness they are more readily available to manage and control.

### *Away from 'oughts' and pleasing others*

Rogers (1961, p. 110), identifies this movement as the client's discovery that:

he exists only in response to the demands of others, that he seems to have no self of his own, that he is only trying to think, and feel, and behave in the way that others believe he *ought* to think, and feel and behave .....he is guided by what he thinks he *should* be, not by what he is.

Moving away from 'oughts' is a movement away from imperatives regardless of whether they are imposed by others or culture. It is a movement away from a self-concept based on gaining the approval or meeting the demands or standards set by others. A self-concept of shame moves towards self-acceptance, self-respect and freedom to be true to self. This is an indicative movement towards "being real" (Rogers & Stevens, 1973, p. 25).

### *Towards acceptance of Self*

As a result of learning to listen to, and tolerate hidden aspects of self, including challenging and difficult emotions, positive self-regard is developed. Negative attitudes towards self decrease while positive ones increase. There is movement away from feelings of unworthiness, undeserving of respect, towards perceiving self as a person of worth. A movement towards gaining a better, deeper understanding of self is also a shift towards valuing self more highly. Such a change in the perception of self necessitates a more realistic view of self. Consequently, an increase in self-confidence fosters change to occur in personality, attitudes, and behaviour. Rogers (Rogers, 1961, p. 87), describes this tendency this way: "he actually comes to *like* himself. This is not a bragging or self-assertive liking; it is rather a quiet pleasure in being one's self".

### *Away from meeting expectations*

Rogers (Rogers, 1961; Rogers & Stevens, 1973) describes this movement as a moving away from the pressures of conformity or cultural expectations and a movement towards personal freedom. These are movements towards engaging

with life in a more constructive, intelligent, socialized and satisfying manner (Rogers, 1961, p. 36).

#### *Towards self-direction*

This is a movement towards autonomy, self-responsibility and claiming the personal freedom to make choices in life and behaviour. There is an ability to form standards and values based on personal experience. Instead of denying responsibility for problems there is movement towards accountability in relating to problems.

#### *Towards being process*

The person is said to find contentment and acceptance in being in a fluid, changing process rather than striving towards an end goal or “finished product” (Rogers, 1961, p. 122). Or in Rogers’s words, “to accept oneself as a stream of becoming” (p. 122). Elsewhere Rogers describes this notion as, “a process of potentialities being born” (p. 172). Being process is also to acknowledge the complexity of the changing self, along with its sometimes contradictory feelings within any given moment.

#### *Towards acceptance of others*

While there is a movement towards accepting and valuing self, there is also a movement towards accepting and valuing others. When façades or false fronts are put aside and real feelings are acknowledged and communicated then there is an openness to “listen freely to another” (Rogers, 1961, p. 324). Sensitivity and acceptance of the experience of others develops, along with an appreciation of the similarities between self and others. While close, intimate relationships are positively valued there is a willingness to be a separate person with “different feelings, different values, different goals” (p. 325).

## **Summary**

What has been described is a person-centred perspective on the philosophy of personality along with Rogers's theory on the process of 'becoming' through "moments of movement" (Merry, 2002, p. 71). It is important to note that these 'moments of movement' are not intended to present a step-by-step linear process of growth and change, with an end goal in sight. Instead, as Rogers (Rogers, 1961, p. 181) states, "It is a continuing way of life". Further, while Rogers identified this growth process in clients in therapy and others in their search for life purpose and meaning, he also saw these concepts being a value choice which could be upheld by groups, organisations or even nations.

In the next chapter concepts from Rogers's theory of personality will be utilized to analyse the poem *School Reports*, in order to identify specific areas of personality development. Particular attention will be given to the conditions of worth that influenced early development, along with the need for positive regard that shaped the self-concepts 'a good girl' and 'failed student'. Throughout these formative years, until counsellor training, the tendency to actualise will be illuminated. Because the nature of these theoretical concepts are overlying, other concepts will become apparent in the process of 'becoming a person'.

The drawings in Analysis 2 illustrate a process 'becoming a counsellor' through the lens of Rogers's theory of the process of becoming. Each drawing depicts one or more of Rogers's philosophical Propositions of Personality Theory. (See Appendix 1 for a list of all nineteen). The tendency to actualise continues to be apparent as moments of movement are identified through the drawings and reflective journal entries.

### Chapter 3: Research Approach and Process

#### ***The adoption of autoethnography as a research approach***

Autoethnography, as a form of qualitative enquiry, was largely developed in the 1990s and influenced by researchers such as Ellis and Brochner (Anderson, 2006). It is a specific form of critical enquiry that is supported by theory and practice (McIlveen, 2008). Ellis, Adams and Bochner (2011, p. 1) provide a succinct description of autoethnography: “an approach to research and writing that seeks to describe and systematically analyze (*graphy*) personal experiences (*auto*) in order to understand cultural experience (*ethno*)”. It is a field of research and writing that “displays multiple layers of consciousness” (Holman Jones et al., 2013, p. 53). Strong, Pyle, de Vries, Johnston, & Foskett, (2008, p. 124) add: “An autoethnography is a self-narrative that describes the self within a specific context”. In terms of research practice, an autoethnographer retrospectively tells about, and analyses, cultural experiences (Holman Jones et al., 2013) as a participant of a culture or cultural identity. Muncey (2010, p. 2) clarifies this notion further by stating: “Not only is the individual a participant in the social context in which their experience takes place, but they are also an observer of their own story and its social location.”

By adopting autoethnography as my research approach I distinguish myself as both an insider and outsider within the culture I am investigating (Dyson, 2007). In the words of Ellis (2009, p. 13), “I am both the author and focus of the story, the one who tells and the one who experiences, the observer and the observed, the creator and the created”. As an ‘insider’, I am intentionally positioned within the social context that is being researched. I offer my own perspective on the lived experiences of engaging in a process of ‘becoming’ a person as a mature student undertaking undergraduate counsellor training. Particular attention is given to the

development and perpetuation of self-concepts within cultural and social contexts. Consideration is also given to the therapeutic movement away from previously held self-concepts towards personal learning, growth and change. The emphasis of this project on my personhood is consistent with Reed-Danahay's (Holman Jones et al., 2013, p. 72), verification that the focus of autoethnography is on "issues of identity and self-hood, voice and authenticity, cultural displacement and exile". By utilising a person-centred theoretical framework for analysis and discussion on my lived experience, I move to an outsider gaze with the aim of stimulating an "emerging knowledge" (Dyson, 2007, p. 40) of the cultural phenomenon of a mature student training to be a counsellor. Although, as Ellis and Bochner (Dyson, 2007, p. 9), claim - the "distinctions between the cultural and personal become blurred as the author changes the focus and moves back and forth between looking outward and looking inward". The changing positions from insider to outsider also provides critical reflexivity and avoids self-indulgence (Grbich, 2007).

### ***Philosophical alignment of autoethnography and person-centred theory***

In the past, within a positivist paradigm of counselling and psychotherapy research, the claim that autoethnographic inquiry "counts" as research had been questioned (Wright, 2009, p. 629). However, according to Wright, there has been a growing acknowledgement and acceptance of researcher subjectivity and researching the self. Muncey (2010) also identifies the growing trend of autoethnographic research in the disciplines of humanities and social sciences. One reason for the increase in this method of research might be the philosophical alignment of autoethnography and counselling approaches. Wright identified an overlap within feminist approaches. Other similarities can be made in terms of autoethnography with a person-centred approach. Firstly, they both share a phenomenological stance. Both philosophies are based on subjective experience whereby truth is "generated within the individual" (Sanders, 2006, p. 21) and constructed from lived reality. In other words, both research method and the counselling approach researched are interested in the internal frame of reference



of the researcher-subject and the client-therapist rather than an objective external frame of reference. The significance and validity of experience is captured in the words of Rogers (1961)

*Experience is, for me, the highest authority.* The touchstone of validity is my own experience. No other person's ideas, and none of my own ideas, are as authoritative as my experience. It is to experience that I must return again and again, to discover a closer approximation to truth as it is in the process of becoming in me (pp. 23-24).

Another parallel is the centrality of the cultural context. While, autoethnography, "offers a variety of modes of engaging with self, or perhaps more accurately with selves, in relation to others, to culture" (Holman Jones et al., 2013, p. 64), person-centred philosophy offers a theory of personality development in which the self is constructed through organismic and self-experiences in relation to others and its environment. There is also agreement on the centrality of personal values in the research and therapeutic processes. While the autoethnographer's lived experiences, along with personal values, biases and assumptions are accounted for through transparency in their expression (McIlveen, 2008), authenticity and genuineness are valued in the person-centred way of being with self and others.

### ***Autoethnographic research and person-centred theory as a framework for analysis***

Person-centred theory has had a long history of research, from its inception through to its on-going contemporary development (Mearns & Thorne, 2013; Sanders, 2006). Of note, is Rogers's (1957, p. 213), early work on the 'necessary and sufficient conditions' for personality change and the assessment of self-concept (Mearns & Thorne, 2013). Much of the more recent research has focused on evidence-based practice (Sanders, 2006), counselling process and the process of change (Mearns & Thorne, 2013). Mearns and Thorne maintain that process studies contribute to on-going "theory-building" (Stiles, 2007, as cited in Mearns

& Thorne, 2013, p. 193) by establishing “points of contact between theory and observation” (p. 193). My contention is, by engaging in autoethnographic inquiry, in which my personal lived experience is intentionally reflected on and analysed through the lens of person-centred theory, this project offers a further dimension to theory-building. More specifically, autoethnography provides “a method of exploring, understanding and writing” (Adams, Holman Jones, & Ellis, 2015, 548/5845), from and through personal experiences of being a mature student entering undergraduate counsellor training with an established self-concept of ‘failed student’. By applying person-centred theory as a framework by which the ‘process of becoming’ can be analysed, the personal growth process of becoming a counsellor can be conceptualised.

### ***Research aims***

With this project I wish to:

- 1) Ascertain the usefulness of applying a person-centred theoretical framework to conceptualise the personal development process of becoming a person/counsellor.
- 2) Contribute to increasing the knowledge and understanding of the unique personal development experiences of mature students undertaking undergraduate counsellor training. I do this by offering an apparent missing story from the “empty spaces” (Muncey, 2010, p. 3) of the wider narratives of the personal development of counsellors in training.
- 3) This research takes the form of a “personal narrative[s]” (Ellis et al., 2011, para. 24). According to Ellis and Brochner, by utilizing this form of autoethnography, as the author I view myself as the “phenomenon and write evocative narratives specifically focused on their [my] academic, research and personal [life] lives” [my addition].
- 4) Present accessible, emotive and complex autoethnographic data in form of poetry and drawings. By using poetry I wish to encourage a reciprocal

relationship with the reader by “understand[ing]the [poem] through the lens of their own experience” (Furman, 2008, p. 27). Using drawings and poetry as data is consistent with the goal of autoethnography; that is to “show rather than tell” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008, p. 69). The different forms of data provide a vehicle in which “multiple layers of consciousness” (Ellis & Bochner, 2000 as cited in Dyson, 2007, p. 40) are discovered. Furthermore, due to writing in the first person I convey personal accountability (Ellis & Bochner, 2000 as cited in Dyson, 2007, p. 40).

- 5) Demonstrate critical reflexivity by moving from insider and outsider subjectivities (Grbich, 2007; Humphreys, 2005). This is achieved by utilizing key concepts of person-centred theory as a framework for analysis, discussion and conceptualisation.
- 6) Contribute to existing research discussion on the personal development of counsellors by comparing and contrasting this current work against existing research (Holman Jones et al., 2013), and literature.
- 7) Captivate the research audience by stimulating an emotional and intellectual response by drawing attention to “human experience and social sense-making” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008, p. 423).
- 8) Stimulate reciprocity of a shared humanity - as McIlveen (2008) so eloquently states in reference to the autoethnographic story:

Storying serves the reader: I read you, I hear you, I speak you, and thus I am here too. Perhaps story is the soul of *empathy*- genuine understanding, a shared humanity that reaches across and touches; and in feeling with the other, we become our own self- the human intertextuality of existence (p. 8).

### ***The Research Process***

The research procedure was not formulated in advance to beginning this project. Rather it evolved throughout the process in response to my reading, writing,

reflections, inner promptings and creative inspirations. The following is an outline of how the process developed:

- 1) Coinciding with my enrolling in a Master's Thesis programme, I received an envelope containing my high school reports. I was surprised by my impassioned response. Sitting with them in my hand, wondering what to do with them. I was particularly disturbed by the palpable power the evaluative comments within them still had on me after nearly forty years. Their content being an obvious contradiction of my current life circumstances was not lost on me. I wondered: "How did I get here"? Rather than sit with the angst, I pulled out pen and paper and wrote the poem: *School Reports*. I then put the poem and reports on my bedroom table where they sat – for months.
- 2) I returned my focus to my thesis topic. Initially I was curious about the wounded healer stories of counsellors and more specifically counsellors in training. My particular interest was of the pathway from wounded to healer and how as healers we hold our woundedness while allowing ourselves to be available to engage with our clients. As I reflected on my own wounded healer stories, my school reports lingered at the periphery of my awareness – along with my earlier question, "How did I get here"? I came to see that my story of 'Failed Student to counsellor and counsellor educator' was a wounded healer story and could be the focus of this project.
- 3) I conducted an investigation of literature on the personal development and personal growth of training counsellors.
- 4) Recognising the need to conduct an autoethnographic project, I spent some time examining literature on this method of research. My objective was to gain a working understanding on the process of creating, collecting, analysing and presenting autoethnographic data. While I searched for the 'what' and 'hows' of this form of research, I also searched the literature for exemplars of autoethnographic research in counselling practice and education. The work of Meekums (2008), in which she examined the *'Embodied narratives in becoming*

*a counselling trainer'*, was inspirational and would become a touchstone for this work.

- 5) Considering a theoretical framework for analysis of the autoethnographic data was challenging. There didn't appear to be any set example to follow. Rather, examples of this form of research tended to present the autoethnographic story as process and product (Ellis et al., 2011, para. 1), in which data analysis is embedded. It became clear that my process was going to be experiential. By adopting person-centred theoretical concepts as a framework for analysis provided a platform to respond to the research question: **How useful might some Rogerian theoretical concepts on the process of "Becoming a Person" (Rogers, 1961) be in providing a framework to conceptualize the personal growth process in becoming a counsellor?**
- 6) Throughout the research process I kept at the forefront the question: How are person-centred concepts evident in my development process of becoming a person/counsellor/counsellor educator
- 7) Data collection: Data collection took a number of different forms: A poem I wrote at the beginning of the research process after receiving an envelope containing my high school reports; archive material from journals written during my undergraduate counsellor training, excerpts from research process and reflective journals; a series of drawings depicting Rogerian theoretical concepts in the form of the metaphor of the acorn becoming an oak tree, drawn during the research process. The drawings were inspired by Rogers's (1980, p. 118) metaphor of potatoes growing in the dark to describe the concept of the actualising tendency. My rationale for including the drawings as research data is supported by Hamilton (2006, p. 87), in which she claims, when referring to arts-based autoethnography, - "Art seems to provide a powerful way to investigate and express an understanding of social and cultural life and most concepts and ideas can be studied or 'seen' through art". Further, expressive art is also considered a therapeutic process supported within a person-centred approach. Throughout the creative process I recognised that the drawings symbolised my own 'process of becoming'.

- 8) Writing the chapter on theoretical concepts. I synthesised the literature on the development and theoretical concepts of the person-centred approach, along with Rogers' (1961, p. 130), notion of "moments of movement" in the process of 'becoming'. In the process of reading, synthesising and writing the theoretical concepts chapter, my understanding, knowledge and integration developed further.
- 9) After reviewing related literature, the identifiable gaps were the lack of research on the experiences of mature undergraduate students. No work was found on the use of counselling theory to conceptualise the personal growth of students. What research was conducted was from an external, observable perspective rather than a personal lived experience in the form of a self-study.
- 10) Data presentation and analysis: Research data is presented as Analysis 1: School Reports and Analysis 2, A Visual Presentation of Rogerian Theoretical Concepts. While I sat with and reflected on the research data and began the process of writing, connections and evidence of the theoretical concepts and process began to emerge. My intention was to present the data and analysis in biographical form with a beginning, middle and ending. The beginning (Analysis 1), is based on the poem – *School Reports* along with archive material from undergraduate training. This presentation and analysis focuses on my early development of self-concepts, through my school years and up to the beginning of undergraduate counsellor training in my late thirties. The middle is represented by Analysis 2, whereby my drawings depicting Rogerian theoretical concepts, represent my personal development during counsellor training. In this analysis, I identify specific areas of personal growth and change. These areas represent Rogers's (1961) trend he recognised in clients as a result of therapy, which he termed - "moments of movement" (p. 130). I have endeavoured to communicate my on-going commitment to personal development by not presenting an 'end', so to speak, but rather to keep the work open-ended – in keeping with the notion a 'process of becoming'.

### ***Ethical considerations***

Ethical considerations have been a constant and evolving factor of the whole research process. The process has required me to consider the personal, relational, and institutional risks and responsibilities of doing an autoethnographic study (Adams et al., 2015). I first recognised and acknowledged my privileged role as the researcher-participant. A central ethical consideration was to concede that my lived experience takes place amongst others. There was the potential that intimate others may have been characters in the stories I choose to tell (Ellis, 2007). Ellis (2009, p. 307) asserts that in telling my own story, "it's not possible to leave others out". Although she acknowledges that there is "no one set of rules to follow" (2009, p. 309), Ellis's discussion on "relational ethics" (p. 4) provided a key principle - "seek the good" (2009, p. 310). Throughout the research process I have endeavoured to uphold this principle with my aim of protecting the privacy and safety of myself, others and any communities who may be implicated in the telling of my own experiences. With my intent to "seek the good", I kept the following question in mind: "How do I honour and respect my relationships with intimate others while remaining faithful to what I perceive to be the truth of my story and maintain the integrity of the work"? The following is a list of the measures taken to minimise the risk and ensure the privacy and safety of all.

- 1) I believe I have provided an honest and authentic presentation by viewing and writing about my experiences from my own frame-of-reference.
- 2) In writing in the first person, I have endeavoured to refrain from making generalised statements or implicating others.
- 3) I have been mindful of protecting my own privacy and vulnerability brought about by exposing myself to an unknown research audience (Wright, 2009). My wellbeing has been managed by prudently choosing the stories I have told and by continually reviewing levels of self-disclosure within the stories presented.
- 4) I have chosen stories with the protection of intimate others in mind. The choice of stories to be presented has been based on those that make little or no overt reference to any other identifiable person.

- 5) I have involved my intimate others in the full research process. Immediate family members have been involved in the choice of stories, along with the presentation and theoretical analysis of them.
- 6) I have been mindful of how intimate others may feel about the stories I have told. I have acted on this consideration by doing as Ellis and Brochner (Ellis et al., 2011), suggest – I invited family members to read and respond to what I have written a number of times throughout the process and before the final product was presented.
- 7) I have purposely chosen experiences and stories in which there are no identifiable others. No names or details of the towns, schools, or teaches are disclosed in the telling of school experiences or school reports. I have also purposely omitted the names and details of certain events.

The following chapter presents Analysis 1: *School Reports*. This poem is the primary data for analysis using Rogerian philosophical concepts.



## Chapter 4: Analysis 1: School Reports

The following poem was written on the night I received an envelope containing my reports from my years at high school. Their arrival coincided with my enrolment into a Master of Education Thesis programme and the beginnings of considering my research topic. Knowing the content of this envelope, I sat with it in my hand and reflected on the intervening years from when these reports were written to now. “How did I get here”? I asked myself. From failed high school student to Head of School for a bachelor of counselling programme and about to write a master’s thesis.

As a process of analysis, I sat with the poem, reflecting, wondering and sensing from my perspective as a person-centred counsellor. I imagined the words of the poem being spoken by a client. From this ‘outsider’ position I could ask questions based on what I know and understand of person-centred theory and concepts. I asked: What am I hearing in these words and the spaces between them? What do I know about this? What sense am I making about what’s being communicated? As I did so, I began to make connections from both the written content and the hidden, with a number of key Rogerian philosophical assumptions. What emerged and presented here, are the theoretical concepts of: conditions of worth; the need for positive regard, developing self-concepts, and the tendency to actualise.

Along with the identified concepts within *School Reports*, I culturally contextualise them within a biographical story which leads up to the time of beginning counsellor training.

### **School Reports**

*Tissue-weight paper – transparent*

*Smooth to the touch, permanent creases*

*Folded and kept for 38 years*

*But these are not documents to be proud of – full of “well done,” “excellent work” with a smatterings of As and Bs*

*These are the reports that get lost on the way home from school or ‘accidentally’ discarded with leftover lunch or buried deep within the dark interior of the school bag – a place no parent wants to plunge a hand.*

*But because I am a ‘good daughter’ I must reluctantly hand them over. Neatly folded in their brown, hand-addressed envelopes. I nervously prepare myself for parental disappointment - shame.*

*Who could have thought such innocent looking documents could hold so much power. Defining an identity - keeping me captive for too many years.*

*Why are such mementoes kept?*

*Surely these are not valuable documents to be treasured?*

*What lasting memory – what words are so momentous – worthy to be returned to?*

*Must I remember such descriptions?*

*“Below average” “Unsatisfactory”*

*“Needs to try harder ..... Needs to apply herself ..... Needs to improve her behaviour”*

*Improved to “Average” – no higher*

*But, but, but, I’m a good girl!*

*Are those words describing me? Do they define me? Did these teachers even know who I was?*

*I thought I was invisible – non-descript - just another maroon uniform filling up space at a desk.*

*When was I seen amongst the crowd – viewed with such scrutiny - to be given such qualifiers?*

*These reports don't describe the girl I remember – doing her best – yes, feeling dumb – not understanding but wanting to get it right - wanting so much to do better.*

*These reports don't describe the girl who enjoyed learning – the girl who struggled to fit in – didn't belong with the cool brainy girls but also knew she didn't belong in the 'below average' stream she was placed in.*

*Perhaps it was an example of "you are the company you keep?" Perhaps there was no expectation that I would be anything more than "average" - at best.*

*I didn't need these reports kept for 38 years to remember the power of those words imprinted deep within – forming the identity of 'Failed Student' – an identity that became an ever-present reminder.*

*Oh, the battles I've had with 'Failed Student' throughout the years.*

*'Failed Student' had a very loud voice for far too long – intimidated in the company of my peers; shying away from any situation in which exposure of 'Failed Student' was remotely possible.*

*In the wee small hours as assignment due dates loomed within hours, 'Failed Student' had the power to bring on verbal constipation – each word painfully and slowly forced out of my brain and onto the page.*

*However, many years later, with each success, I have learnt to quieten 'Failed Student's' voice to a faint whisper which I can now choose to ignore as I learn to recognise the new voice of 'Successful.'*

*What must I do with these accusing reports – kept, treasured for 38 years? I want them gone – no more do they have a hold on me – no reminders or future mementoes – they are not a heritage to pass on to my loved ones. Oh, but 'Good Girl' thinks they should remain because 'Good Girl' does as she is told.*

*As the inner conflict battles the school reports remain.*

### ***Conditions of worth and the development of the self-concept of 'A Good Girl'***

Configurations of perception of self (Rogers, 2003, p. 136) that can be identified within the poem, are the self-concepts of: 'I am a good girl' and 'I am a failure';

along with – ‘I am successful’, and more subtly is the concept of ‘I am creative’, apparent in its creation. According to Rogerian theorising about the self, these concepts I have of myself, came about as a process of self-actualisation (Merry, 2002) and developed without any conscious awareness. What I now know is, from birth, my perceptual world was influenced by being the middle child to working-class, Pakeha parents from a traditional Christian background. In those early formative years I was reliant on my visceral, sensory and instinctual reactions (Embleton Tudor et al., 2004) in response to my environment as I developed into my differentiated self.

*“....I am a good girl.....”*

Even before being a ‘good girl’ was “raised to the level of conscious symbolization” (Rogers, 2003, p. 504), I was known to be a ‘good’ baby. Which meant I met all the appropriate developmental milestones and didn’t cause my parents any undue anxiety other than holding my breath when I got upset. As a toddler I knew, based on my parent’s account, what it meant to be good or bad by the reactions I received or viewed as a result of either my own actions or that of others. Anything that was deemed good behaviour elicited positive, encouraging responses; while bad behaviour resulted in negative, sometimes frightening, consequences. One of my earliest memories confirmed my perception of good and bad. I recall at the age of two having my thumb bitten by a fellow two-year-old playmate. Although I must have been distressed, I don’t remember the pain. What remains in my memory was the absolute shock and horror of seeing the thumb of my playmate being bitten by an adult in retaliation. This event is likely to have contributed to learning that I had to be a good girl. The thought of being bad was frightening. I recall feeling - sick in my tummy - for the pain my playmate experienced. On reflection, I can see that this early experience may have been the beginnings of my personal value for social justice and the ability to be empathic and care for others.

*“.....I am a good daughter.....”*

My self-concept of being a 'good daughter' is the outworking of my organismic valuing process by which, at an organic level, I evaluate those experiences that substantiate being loved and accepted (Merry, 2002; Sanders, 2006). Those experiences which resulted in positive regard from parents and significant others were repeated and reinforced the value of being 'good'. The positive regard I received was my perception of the experiences in which I made a positive impact on others (Nelson-Jones, 2000). In simple terms, I felt good about myself when I pleased others. Any thoughts, feelings or behaviours that conflicted with this self-concept were either ignored, distorted or denied. These evaluations formed the basis for the regard I had for myself and the trust I placed on my own organismic experiences; or lack of it. Theoretically, you could say that I developed an external locus of evaluation, looking outside myself for validation (Mearns & Thorne, 2013). Rather than trust my own inner experience, the source of my feelings of self-esteem and acceptance came from outside myself.

Conditions of worth informed me that in order to gain a sense of self-worth (Mearns & Thorne, 2013), be lovable, accepted and valued by others, I needed to 'always do the right thing', be agreeable and compliant. One condition of worth that reinforced my self-concept of 'good girl' was – "There are certain rules in life, and if you don't obey them it is because you are bad" (Merry, 2002, p. 30). One of those rules is parents are always right and were to be obeyed. Because I wanted to be loved and accepted I always endeavoured to obey them even if to do so was painful. That meant I had to handover my reports. Being bad for not doing what was expected was worse than parental disappointment of low grades.

The time in which I was born and through to my teens, there were social and cultural conditions of worth that informed 'good' parenting and social norms. Merry (2002, p. 30) lists some of these as: Children should be seen and not heard; expressing emotions is not OK, especially in company; it's wrong to be angry; being emotional is the same as being weak; girls are not as important as boys; there are always people worse off than you - be grateful for what you've got. These

conditions were reinforced with repeated reminders or more subtlety with unspoken messages.

As I grew older I became a people-pleaser and peace-maker in order to win approval from others and avoid condemnation. These configurations of self (Merry, 2002) grew with me into my teens where I developed a new self-concept.

*“....Needs to try harder....Needs to apply herself.....Needs to improve her behaviour.....But, but, but, I’m a good girl.....”*

*“....the girl who struggled to fit in....”*

### ***The need for positive regard and the development of the self-concept of ‘Failed Student’***

Along with the well-established self-concept of a good girl, I adopted ‘Failed Student’ as a new construct for the first time when I entered high school. While my school reports document my academic performance they also contain teachers’ and principals’ evaluative statements of their experience and perception of me as a student. These evaluative statements have held as much authority as exam results alone. Motivated by the desire to gain approval and acceptance, my teachers’ less than positive evaluation of me resulted in my acquisition of this negative self-concept. This development marked the beginning of an internal conflict between contradictory self-concepts. Firstly, a good girl doesn’t fail at school. And secondly, it wasn’t cool to be a good girl, especially in the lower streamed classes. Like many teens, I was up against the pressure of social conformity and the influence of the pop culture of the 1970s. The movie musical *Grease* was the happening thing. It influenced dress, culture and social norms. The resounding message was that it is more socially acceptable and fun to be a high school ‘drop out’ and a ‘lovable rebel’. Certainly not a clean-cut nice girl like the character ‘Sandy’, who was predictably destined to be made-over. I identified myself with the conservative Sandy before she became ‘cool’. Long blond hair,

modestly dressed, a 'nice good Christian girl' - *"....the girl who struggled to fit in....."*

*"....These reports don't describe the girl I remember.....These reports don't describe the girl who enjoyed learning.....Perhaps there was no expectation that I would be anything more than "average" – at best....."*

I wonder how much my self-concept of a failed student was a result of, and reinforced by, the pedagogical nature of education in New Zealand in the mid-to-late 1970s. Education was based on teacher and knowledge-centred pedagogy rather than student-centred learning. The teacher was considered the expert and their responsibility was to impart and deliver information and knowledge. The student's task was to retain that information and knowledge. Examinations provided the proof of how much the student retained and regurgitated information into the desired format. This model of education contrasts dramatically with Rogers's (Kirschenbaum & Land Henderson, 1990) model for education based on his concept of trust in the human organism. He states:

If I distrust the human being, then I *must* cram her with information of my own choosing lest she go her own mistaken way. But if I trust the capacity of the human individual for developing her own potentiality, then I can provide her with many opportunities and permit her to choose her own way and her own direction in her learning (p. 313).

Rogers's philosophy for education contrasts considerably to my experience and most likely that of the majority of students past and present. The decision to be enrolled into the 'G' (general) stream at an all girls' high school was made based on the fact that in the early 1970s, while I was being schooled within an Australian curriculum in Papua New Guinea, New Zealand introduced 'new maths.' Much to my disappointment, this decision meant that I would not be encouraged to follow my interest and natural aptitude for languages. In the 'G' classes, along with the

core subjects of English, Maths and Science, other classes were practical 'employable' skills like Sewing, Cooking and Typing. From my perspective, I was at the bottom looking up at the bright intelligent 'A' and 'B' girls. The girls 'up there' were the future teachers, secretaries and nurses, while my classmates and I were most likely to end up in retail, at best, unskilled labour, or 'high school dropouts' on the unemployment benefit or the DPB (Domestic Purposes Benefit). Many of my peers, to whom school was an unattainable challenge or unpalatable, left either before or during the fifth form. Sixth and seventh form were for girls working towards higher education. Examinations at these levels confirmed this belief - Sixth Form University Entrance and Seventh Form Bursary. Although I believed I worked hard and generally enjoyed school, my reports identified me as average at best and sometimes below average. My status was confirmed, not only by exam results, but also under the category of - 'place in class'; a feature of the reports. I failed the School Certificate examinations - confirming 'Failure' as the identity I ascribed to myself. Although I returned to repeat fifth form along with school certificate examinations the following year, I only marginally passed and left school after the first term of sixth form.

### ***Cultural and social conditions of worth and education***

The potency of my self-concept of being a failure might have also been sustained or supported by some of the cultural and social conditions of worth that were available at the time. One such condition is identified by Nelson-Jones (2001, p. 88): "Achievement is very important and I am less of a person if I do not achieve". Having a tertiary level education is privileged by many sectors in society. A person is valued and worth more if they have at least a degree qualification. Conversely, born into a working class family, hard work and independence was valued above a university education. Higher education was considered a waste of time and a waste of tax-payers' money. Therefore leaving school at seventeen to get a job to support myself was not only valued but it was expected. This decision, and the cultural value of hard work and independence, had no obvious adverse effect on



me for twenty years. These were the years in which I got married, had a family and worked alongside my husband as we established a substantial dairy farming business. However, in my late thirties, I began to consider my future job prospects and career options. I was no longer required to work on our family farm or in the day-to-day practicalities of our children's lives now that they were gaining their own independence. It seemed as though I wasn't needed. People would ask - "What do you do"? And I'd reply - "Oh, I'm just a stay-at-home mum". Being at home seemed somehow undervalued by society especially outside a rural community. On one level I had attained the self-concept of - 'I am successful'. In partnership with my husband, we were raising three children, had built a successful and profitable family business, and were active participants in our community. However, my self-concept of 'successful' had very little voice outside our home. I began to search the Situations Vacant pages of the local newspaper but quickly became mindful of my state of being 'unskilled' and 'uneducated'. I felt like I was a kid again - a 'failed student'.

### ***A tentative move towards self-actualising***

From the informal volunteer helping and support roles I engaged in during the intervening years since leaving school, people who knew me recognised my natural qualities and abilities. They suggested I'd be a good counsellor. It was this recognition that instigated the seed of an idea of entering into the academic environment. This was a time of conflicting emotions, however. While I experienced a spark of excitement and hope for the future, the memories of failing at school lurked at the periphery of my awareness. What I experienced at that time is described well by Embleton Tudor et al. (2004):

If we can't take the child out of the adult, then we can't take the child's formal learning experiences out of the adult. Many of us therefore reach adulthood with some anxieties around learning, some fixed ideas about what we can and can't do that rarely match with our actual

potential, and with a lack of awareness of or trust in our own learning processes (p. 183).

The thought of going back to school, in any form, was the stuff of nightmares. I literally had recurring dreams of being in an exam environment – frozen; not being able to think, let alone have the ability to write anything coherent and legible. I recognized my dreams as echoes from the past. However, my nightmares became reality the first time I enrolled into a counsellor education programme. I enrolled into a training programme taught with a strong emphasis on Christian theology. While I enjoyed the course, especially the practical learning of counselling skills, I struggled to articulate the theological component of the course. Although I had been familiar with Christian doctrine all my life, when it came to having to discuss theological concepts in an exam situation I literally froze. After staring into space for some time, I got up and walked out of the exam room and away from the course without ever finding out what my results were. I confirmed my self-concept of 'Failure'.

Fortunately, my tendency to actualise was still at work drawing me in the direction towards growth and development and beyond a self-concept of failure. Two years following my first attempt, and after working for a private training establishment as a receptionist and personal profiles administrator, I reconsidered the idea of training to be a counsellor. It was the positive regard from others, along with the accompanying development of a fledgling positive self-regard, which quietened my failed student self-concept to the point where I was ready to try out the world of academia again. Still, Failed Student, along with its many complexities, inhibited my thinking and behaviour when I undertook counsellor training for the second time. This persistent self-concept is evident in the below extract from *School Reports*:

*"In the wee small hours as assignment due dates loomed within hours, 'Failed Student' had the power to bring on verbal constipation*

– each word painfully and slowly forced out of my brain and onto the  
page.....”

It is clear that overcoming anxiety and fear of failure was a major aspect of my own personal development in becoming a counsellor. A major difficulty for me was to articulate myself on paper with coherent words and use of language. It would seem I am not alone in this challenge. While not being unique to counsellor education, Bennetts (2003) discovered that some students “found problems in translating their emotions and thoughts into a piece of work suitable for an academic setting” (p. 309). I have always found that creative activities seem a more natural process especially when attempting to emotionally express myself or integrate a complex concept. My propensity to turn to creative means of expression is evident in this current project in which I began the process by drawing out the theoretical concepts in my visual diary. Thankfully, my second attempt at counsellor training was successful. I gained my Bachelor of Counselling, secured a job as a grief and bereavement counsellor and began to establish a small private practice. Some years later, after I had been offered the role as a counsellor educator, you might assume that I had finally dismissed ‘failure’ as a self-concept. But, as can be seen in *‘School Reports’*, it remains a self-concept that is readily available if I choose to engage its presence. Shadows of ‘failure’, or its fellow configuration of self - ‘I don’t fit in’, are especially present in situations where conditions of worth are evident.

### ***Conditions of worth and the world of academia***

Conditions of worth within the world of academia are pervasive. This premise was brought home to me in a recent publication in which the author advocates for autoethnographic research findings be made available to non-academics (Holman Jones et al., 2013). Chang (as cited in Holman Jones et al., 2013) asks: “Does the knowledge that autoethnography produces privilege the perspectives and

experiences of academics”? (p. 120). What I was especially curious about were the terms used to describe so-called, ‘non-academics’. Descriptors such as: “common-folk” and “ordinary others .....without scholarly endowment”. These descriptors appear to confirm that ‘academics’ are somehow better and superior somehow. Since reading Chang’s comment I have grappled over where I belong in academia. My angst can be seen in two recent journal entries:

*“I’m experiencing an inner struggle. It’s like I have a foot in both camps – one in academia and the other with the “common-folk”. The most troubling thing is that I’m not sure where I belong. Part of me feels proud of how far I’ve climbed up some mythical ladder of success, while another part of me wants to stay firmly planted on the ground where the “ordinary” people are” (Journal entry, January 2015).*

*“How did I get here? It seems like a quantum leap from ‘failed student’ to Head of School for a bachelor of counselling programme. This title implies something. It implies that I am qualified, educated, and experienced. All of which I am. It also puts me in the category of intelligent – “brainy”. I was called that the other day – in a public situation. I’m puzzled by my response – I was quick to dismiss the notion that I was anymore “brainy” than anyone else in the meeting. When I say I’m writing a masters’ thesis I am subtly (or maybe not so subtly), communicating a privileged position” (Journal entry- January 2015).*

It is not surprising that I’m not sure that I belong in the field of ‘academics’ any more than I can still be considered a non-academic. This is especially so if, to be regarded an academic is based on Humphrey’s (2005) discussion on the academic rite of passage. Although teaching for thirty years, he didn’t consider he had reached the academic pinnacle until a number of years after completing his Ph. D., was presenting on the conference circuit, publishing single-authored articles in internationally rated journals, and attaining the appointment of senior lecturer at a university in the United Kingdom. Interestingly, he describes those who have

reached the top as: “increasingly valuable commodities in the university transfer market and their talents are exhibited at a range of conferences on the global stage” (p. 843). This seemingly depersonalised position appears a less attractive goal to attain to somehow.

### ***Self-actualisation and final reflections***

Throughout ‘*School Reports*’ there is a sense of an underlying force or thirst that has yet to be fully realised. Although I had internalised conditions of worth and developed my self-concepts based on experiences and the evaluation of others, there is an instinctual knowing that my identity is not defined by the evaluative words of “*below average*” and “*unsatisfactory*”. These statements, along with the evocative tone throughout the poem, demonstrates self-determination and an indication of Rogers’s (1959) process of self-actualisation towards ‘becoming a person’. There appears to be an unrestrained drive towards self-enhancement and growth. Further aspects of self-actualisation is the unconscious movement towards self-understanding and self-direction (Rogers, 1986, in Cain, 2002, p. 62). Because the self-concept is not a fixed entity but fluid and changes through experience (Merry, 2002; Rogers, 1959); old self-concepts, along with the conditions of worth that maintain them, can be challenged and revised. The presentation and analysis in the next chapter attempts to exemplify “moments of movement” (Merry, 2002, p. 66; Rogers, 1961, p. 130) away from the restraints of conformity along with some evidence of tentative movements towards becoming closer to what I consider my authentic self (Rogers, 1961). Through the medium of my drawings, I use a metaphor of an acorn becoming an oak tree to further illustrate the applicability of key concepts of person-centred theory in my personal growth and my perception of my identity.

## **Chapter 5: Analysis 2: A Visual Presentation of Rogerian Theoretical Concepts**

A visual presentation of an acorn/oak tree as a metaphor for key concepts of person-centred theory and the process of becoming a person/counsellor

### ***Introduction***

This analysis uses drawings from my visual diary drawn as part of the research process to extend my knowledge and personal integration of the key concepts of person-centred theory. While I undertook this activity with the intention of providing a pictorial presentation of the sometimes difficult to understand theoretical concepts, the process of creating, along with the drawings themselves, became a means of personal growth. I experienced an unexpected increase in self-awareness, self-understanding and insight (N. Rogers, 1993). The work of Natalie Rogers (1993), daughter of Carl Rogers, inspired me to use my drawings as autoethnographic data and analysis. Natalie developed a therapeutic process known as the Creative Connection. She introduced the notion of expressive arts being used together as a vehicle to connect to our inner core, based on the philosophy of person-centred theory. Engaging in the expressive arts, she suggests, is an aspect of “being fully functioning and creatively human” (p. xiv). Natalie further states: “as we journey inward to discover our essence or wholeness, we discover our relatedness to the outer world” (p. 8). It is my contention that by analysing my drawings, acknowledging them as a reflection of my inner self, I gain further insight into myself and others through the lens of person-centred theoretical concepts.

My use of the metaphor of an acorn growing into an oak tree to represent person-centred theoretical concepts is not an original idea. I was inspired by Rogers Rogers’s (1980, p. 118) metaphor of potatoes growing outside optimal growing

conditions to describe the theoretical concepts of the tendency to actualise. Other authors have also used the organismic properties of plants to describe the same concept (Embleton Tudor et al., 2004; Merry, 2002; Thorne, 2012). My intention here is to extend the allegory to symbolise some further key concepts while aligning them with a number of Rogers's (Rogers, 2003) nineteen Propositions of his theory of personality and behaviour. The aim is to demonstrate the use of some key theoretical concepts of person-centred philosophy as a framework to conceptualise my personal development in becoming a person/counsellor.

## ***The Phenomenological Significance of the Organismic Self***



*Figure 1. The Phenomenological Significance of the Organism*

"Every individual exists in a continually changing world of experience of which he is the center" Proposition (I) of Rogers's theory of personality (Rogers, 2003, p. 483).

Whereas Rogers used to the term 'organism' as a synonym for the individual human being (Embleton Tudor et al., 2004), he also employed the term in reference to the "private world" (Rogers, 2003, p. 483) , or "inner core" (Rogers, 1953/1967, in Embleton Tudor et al., 2004, p. 25), of the person. Although



portions of their private world is available to awareness in certain circumstances by the individual themselves, it can never be fully known by anyone else. Rogers's states: "the individual is the only one who can know how [an] experience was perceived" (p. 484). My use of the metaphor of the acorn in this drawing (Figure 1.1), alongside Rogers Proposition (i), to represent the phenomenological significance of the organismic self, firstly acknowledges that my experience of becoming a person/counsellor is my own perception of experiences although I share the process alongside others. The focus of the drawing is on one acorn while giving the impression that it is attached to the tree and other acorns are close by. My family, friends and colleagues are all part of my experience of becoming a person, counsellor and counsellor educator. My training to be a counsellor was shared by fellow students, tutors, supervisors and clients. However, my lived experience is my own perception of events and I do not assume to represent anyone else's experience or understandings although there may be commonalities.

Secondly, the focus of this drawing is on one acorn, although contextual factors are evident. This depiction might be considered a metaphor for an aspect of the philosophy and practice of person-centred theory. Just as the client, and their unique frame of reference to their lived experience, is the centre of person-centred practice, so the person of the would-be counsellor is the focus of person-centred training. Embleton Tudor et al. (2004, p. 64) agree with this notion and support it by quoting Rogers:

A person-centred training puts the person of the individual therapist-to-be at the heart of the training process. This is consistent both with a client-centred approach to therapy, which puts the client at the centre of the process, and with Rogers's belief that the person of the therapist is significant in the therapeutic process: 'In any psychotherapy, the therapist himself is a highly important part of the human equation. What he does, the attitude he holds, his basic

concept of his role, all influence therapy to a marked degree' (Rogers, 1951, p. 19).

It wasn't long into my own training that I realised the centrality of my personhood had on both my learning and practice. Like many new trainees I entered counsellor training with great enthusiasm. I was anxious to learn the skills to 'help' people change, grow and heal. In reference to Rønnestad and Skovholt's (2003) phases of therapist/counsellor development, my pre-training experience concurs with "Phase 1: *The Lay Helper Phase*" [original italics] (p. 10), of their proposed 6 phases of development. I had experience in a number of helping roles, including wife, mother, employer, church leader and community volunteer. Within these responsibilities I supported people in differing degrees of need and/or distress. However, as Rønnestad and Skovholt highlight, I had little awareness of emotional boundaries or my tendency to become overly-involved and over-identify with those I was 'helping'. Fortunately it wasn't long into my training that I realised the focus of my learning was on me and not about learning how to 'fix' people. This realisation can be seen in a journal entry I wrote in my first week of training:

*".....I soon began to realize that this class may stretch me beyond my comfort zones.....I'm feeling a little apprehensive about that.....My feelings.....and how I process those are the things I believe that this course is going to be about.....I guess it just highlights to me how much I'm going to learn about myself and be challenged by dealing with my own insecurities....."* (Personal Journal Entry: February 2003).

This journal entry underplays my genuine experience at that time. What I actually felt was anxiety and fear at the thought of being the centre of my own attention. I recognise my pre-training-self in Mearns and Thorne's (2013, p. 37) statement: "The world is full of helpers whose activity is a desperate strategy to avoid confronting themselves". Not only was I concerned about facing up to my authentic self – warts and all, I struggled to align my traditional Christian values of selflessness by putting others' needs before my own. Undertaking counsellor

training, with the primary focus on me – the person of the counsellor, might be considered an exercise in self-indulgence and ‘navel gazing’. Mearns and Thorne accurately describe my value conflict: In the Christian tradition, “it is considered unhealthy even to reflect unduly on one’s own state of being” (p. 37). While being personally and spiritually challenging, it is clear I had begun a journey of self-discovery, self-respect and self-acceptance.

Just as my metaphoric acorn represents a living, changing and adapting process towards maturity, my organismic self is in a constant process of being and becoming (Embleton Tudor et al., 2004). While I grew and developed as a person in the years preceding training, it wasn’t until I began, that my learning became more intentional, focused and lifelong. On reflection, I consider my life before undertaking counsellor training as largely unexamined. By comparison, I had a low level of self-awareness and self-understanding. I was soon challenged to have the courage to look deeper within myself and explore and question the origins of my beliefs, values and attitudes. A journal entry from my last year of training exemplifies this development:

*“.....Throughout my training and in practice as a counsellor, I have learnt to do regular ‘self-checks’. I think previously I went through life without giving too much thought to how and why I reacted in certain ways, and what was underlying them. I now analyse myself. My family have both noticed this and, I hope, have benefitted from it. By doing these regular check-ins I have grown in self-awareness and recognise myself as a “work in progress”. This I can also associate within my counselling practice, as I encourage others to gain greater self-awareness of their inner processes and recognition that it is an organic thing that changes and grows throughout our lives” (Development of Counselling Practice Process Notes, 2005).*

Representing a metaphor for living, changing and adapting is to recognise that the acorn in this drawing (Figure: 1.1) is yet to reach its full potential. It is not until autumn that the acorn reaches maturity, dries, falls to the ground where it hibernates before germination, then sprouts into an oak sapling in spring. In the fullness of time the sapling becomes a fully matured oak tree – reproducing itself throughout the seasons with the production of more acorns. As a representation of my process of becoming a counsellor, you could say that at the time of entering counsellor training, I was on the threshold of significant change and development towards living and being closer to my full potential.

## *The Tendency to Actualise*



*Figure 2. The Tendency to Actualise*

“The organism has one basic tendency and striving – to actualize, maintain, and enhance the experiencing organism” – Proposition (IV) of Rogers’s theory of personality (Rogers, 2003, p. 487).

Following on from Figure: 1.1, this drawing (Figure: 1.2), along with Proposition (IV), is representative of the acorn fallen from the oak tree; is currently in a state of hibernation preparing to germinate. My drawing of the grown oak tree within the acorn is an attempt to illustrate the notion of the full potential existing within

the organism long before it is fully realised. My endeavour to draw the concept of the “organism’s tendency to actualise” (Embleton Tudor et al., 2004, p. 27) was to visually capture the sense of the unconscious, yet innate, propensity of the acorn, “a relatively simple form”, to strive and grow towards becoming an oak tree, “a much more complex form as it matures” (Merry, 2002, p. 21). What this drawing denotes is the acorn’s capacity for reaching its full potential already exists within its inner core. The acorn will only grow into an oak tree not another tree variety. And the ability for the oak tree to achieve a measure of its full potential is determined by the conditions of the environment within which it grows.

I recognise this drawing as a projection of my own actualising process; in other words – my tendency towards self-actualisation. The image captures for me my personal story of ‘becoming’ a person, within which lays my story of ‘becoming’ a counsellor and counsellor educator. Metaphorically, the drawing represents for me two key aspects of myself. Firstly, the inner-most being of myself and secondly, an innate drive that propels me towards growth and wholeness; or in Rogers’s (1961, p. 163) words: “to be that self which one truly is”. Additionally, the degree to which I reach my full potential is determined by internal and external conditions; or as Merry (2002, p. 19) states: “the extent that [the] social and environmental circumstances allow”. Furthermore, within the drawing I recognise the previously unknown seed of this current work; the fledgling practitioner and researcher unconsciously working towards applying person-centred concepts to her own process of ‘becoming’. One such unconscious movement was the attraction towards a philosophical alignment between my personal values and that of an integrated counselling approach: an approach which now informs my way of being in both my personal and professional relationships.

### ***Philosophical Alignment with the Tendency to Actualise***

This drawing (Figure: 1.2), exemplifies an identifiable link between my personal philosophy, informed by my Christian beliefs, and that of the person-centred approach long before I had even heard of Carl Rogers. In my developing

scholarship of person-centred theory and practice, it could be assumed by some that I might reject my Christian beliefs; considering them as being incongruent with the philosophical values of this humanistic approach. Nonetheless, like Brian Thorne, an internationally renowned figure in the field of person-centred theory, and a Christian, I experience “no incompatibility in this dual allegiance” (Thorne, 2012, p. 61). Philosophical alignment is evident in the shared belief in the concept of our inner core being the source of wisdom. Of note however, is the differing opinions on the foundation for this belief which has its basis in my different understanding of God from that of Rogers’. Rogers’s view of God, influenced by a “perverse and primitive theology” from his family and early environment (Thorne, 2012, p. 62) was as an external authority to be rejected in preference to attributing full trust in the individual’s inner authority alone (Embleton Tudor et al., 2004). He termed this inner authority an “organismic wisdom” (Thorne, 2012, p. 69). Conversely, my perception and experience of God is of an indwelling triune Being who is both personal and relational and the source of my inner wisdom. Interestingly, in his later years, Rogers acknowledged a spiritual dimension to his work in which he spoke of a connection of his inner spirit with that of his clients’. He began to refer to a “transcendental core” (Thorne, 2012, p. 147); of which Thorne likened to the concept of the actualising tendency. Further, Thorne, a close colleague of Rogers, identified a shift in him. He describes the change in Rogers this way:

he moved close, [however], to the spirit of those Christians down the ages who have seen the glory of men and women as lying in their capacity to realise their divine potential through their relationship both with God and with each other (p. 68).

Although I wasn’t aware of it at the time I drew it, this picture immediately and consistently brings to mind a fundamental belief of my Christian faith related to my innermost being and my tendency to actualise. It is my belief that God, being omnipotent and omnipresent, created me with my full potential already within me long before I was born. For me, Rogers’s concept of the actualising tendency is the God factor within me which drives me towards seeking and living closer to my full

potential. As well as being an organismic process I contend that it is also a spiritual quest for me to be all that God has created me to be. Thorne (2012) appears to agree with this notion when describing his trust in the actualising tendency. He states: “people have a potential within them to become more than they are, that essentially we all long to grow towards our full stature, that we have within us the seeds of glory” (p. 299). The following psalm of David emulates my wonderment and awe of God’s creation and His unrelenting interest in the apparent fragility of human beings:

*For you created my innermost being; you knit me together in my mother’s womb.....My frame was not hidden from you when I was made in the secret place. When I was woven together in the depths of the earth, your eyes saw my unformed body. All the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be*  
(Psalm 139: 13-16 New International Version).

It is my belief and trust in this inner Source of wisdom that first led me to consider training as a counsellor. My personal conviction can be seen in the following journal entry that I wrote during my second year of practicum training. We were asked to reflect on the life events that impact on our counselling practice. I wrote:

*The main event that led me to want to be a counsellor was the experience I had in pastoral care and leadership in the churches we’ve been involved in for the past twenty years. I enjoyed the role I had in offering spiritual and practical help to those that came for assistance but felt that I wanted to be able to do more than offer prayer and kind words. Although we were able to bring practical help to those who were suffering – such as food parcels and household goods, I wanted to offer a service that could assist others in seeking their own strength to make positive change in their lives. We would often see the same people coming to us wanting prayer, asking God to intervene in their lives. I recognised that with the appropriate guidance they could be encouraged to seek answers from within themselves, and take some responsibility to bring about the changes they sought. This led me on to the quest to become trained in counselling so that I could offer that guidance and assistance in helping others develop a greater self-awareness and self-empowerment.*  
*My Christian faith impacts my counselling practice in the sense that I have a strong belief in encouraging people to be all they were created*



*to be – being fulfilled and living to their full potential. I find great fulfilment in walking beside others while they discover their inner strength to overcome life's obstacles.*

*Throughout my training I have felt challenged many times to re-evaluate my Christian beliefs and biases but I have remained strong in my faith. I believe that it is the example that Christ gave in loving all people that has the strongest influence on my practice. The core principles of person-centred therapy, such as accurate empathic understanding, unconditional positive regard and congruence are all characteristics that I strive to attain in my personal life, spiritual quest and in providing a professional service to clients (March, 2005).*

Although ten years ago I had a limited understanding of the theoretical concepts of the person-centred approach, or values of existentialism, to a minimal degree I aligned myself to its principles of valuing peoples' personal choice, autonomy and responsibility. It is also evident in the above journal entry that I possessed a beginning appreciation that, as the counsellor, I had a role to play in facilitating a climate for change in my way of being with others.

My tendency to actualise is further evident in the unconscious motivations (Barnett, 2007) that led me towards self-enhancement through counsellor training. Like the yet-to-be realised tree within the acorn, my incentive to train as a counsellor might be considered an unconscious movement towards personal growth and attainment of my full potential. In hindsight I recognise a major aspect of the innate drive within me was a spiritual quest to be all I was created to be. Counsellor training became a vehicle towards that direction.

### ***The Tendency to Actualise and the Unconscious Motivation to Pursue Counsellor Training***

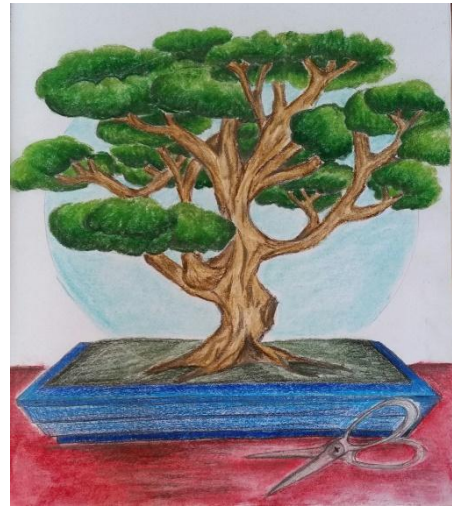
I agree with Barnett's (2007, p. 269) suggestion that the real reasons why people choose to work as counsellors "can be better understood with hindsight and professional maturity" rather than at the commencement of training. Nonetheless, it could be said that the very desire that motivates someone to train as a counsellor is evidence of "the organism's tendency to actualise" (Embleton

Tudor et al., 2004, p. 27). Although applicants may initially be compelled by their ambition to help and understand others (Barnett, 2007), I suggest at an organismic level, is an unconscious “urge to expand, develop, [and] mature” and to “express and activate all capacities” of the self (Rogers, 1961, p. 351), all characteristics of the actualising tendency. Applying this notion to my own experience of considering counsellor training, I recognise evidence of this concept at work. I possessed “unconscious motivations” (Barnett, 2007, p. 257) steering me in a certain direction. Although I had no words to articulate it at the time, I held an inner awareness of there being a part of me that was yet to be fully realized. My tendency to actualise is apparent in my motivation of wanting to be involved in activities that help grow and utilize my natural, innate qualities. I had an unconscious strive for new experiences (Sanders, 2006, p. 28), along with an unspoken desire to grow as a person and work towards attaining my full potential (Merry, 2002). In order to move closer towards my full potential, that is to live and be my true self, I first needed to confront the facades and masks behind which my true self was hidden. To this end I recognise that another of my unconscious motivations, and the outworking of my tendency to actualise, was the prospect of examining and reevaluating existing self-concepts.

### *The Fully Function Self? The Conditioned Self*



*Figure 3. The Fully Functioning Self?*



*Figure 4. The Conditioned Self*

Rogers's Propositions (ix) & (x) (Rogers, 2003)

(ix) As a result of interaction with the environment, and particularly as a result of evaluational interaction with others, the structure of self is formed – an organized, fluid, but consistent conceptual pattern of perceptions of characteristics and relationships of the “I” or the “me”, together with values attached to these concepts.

(x) The values attached to experiences, and the values which are a part of the self structure, in some instances are values experienced directly by the organism, and in some instances are values introjected or taken over from others, but perceived in distorted fashion, as if they had been experienced directly (p. 498).

Figure: 1.3 aims to portray a mature fully grown oak tree in its prime. Like the previous drawings, it is drawn within a circle to represent wholeness. However, once I had drawn the tree it appeared incomplete. It was as if the wholeness of the tree was being hidden or masked behind a facade. I continued to draw and what emerged was Figure: 1.4 – an oak tree that has been manipulated and conditioned into a bonsai tree. While appealing - attracting curiosity and wonderment - the bonsai is a manufactured representation of an actualised oak

tree. These two drawings represent for me major aspects of my personal development at the beginning of my process of becoming a counsellor. My attention is drawn specifically to the concept of the need for positive regard and its impact on the development and enhancement of the self-concept. Rogers's (2003) Propositions (ix) and (x) of his theory of personality seem to go some way to describe these theoretical concepts and form the basis for the following analysis along with Rogers's (1961, p. 130) concept of "moments of movement" to indicate specific areas of personal growth and change.

### ***Moving away from facades***

Naively, I entered counsellor training relatively confident in the interpersonal skills, knowledge and experience I brought to the profession. My perception of counselling was that it was an activity I did – a professional service I was willing to offer to others. My expectation was that counsellor training was going to show me how to do that service. What I quickly discovered was that this profession was going to focus on who I was as a person. I had given very little attention to 'who' I was because my life revolved around my 'doing' roles and responsibilities. I was therefore surprised when I realised that, like a therapeutic process, I had begun an on-going journey of self-discovery, healing and growth. All-be-it an unconscious motivation (Barnett, 2007) it is evident in my willingness to embark on such a journey that I was "at a point of readiness to embrace the personal development dimension of the training" (Mearns, 1997, p. 96). Mearns lists this readiness as a prerequisite for undertaking person-centred training. Firstly, however, I was required to possess a level of personal courage and emotional robustness to engage in an honest self-appraisal.

I have titled Figure: 1.3 as The Fully Functioning Self with a question mark because when entering counsellor training, by all appearances I had 'it all together'. You could say that I was a well-adjusted, socially competent, reasonably successful, middle-aged Pakeha woman. However, could I honestly claim to be "inwardly free" (Rogers, 1961, p. 196)? A phrase Rogers uses to sum up his definition of the "Good Life" (p. 195), or the fully functioning person. Because my life was relatively

unexamined, I had little awareness of the masks and facades that concealed the real me. 'Keeping up appearances' was very important and valued in my life. I sought to be the perfect Christian wife, mother, daughter and friend. An excerpt from my group work journal is an example of my reflection on the prospect of revealing myself at the beginning of my counsellor training:

*"If I am honest with myself, I think I would want everyone to think I have the perfect life. I know that it is not and I struggle through issues too but I am just really concerned about 'hanging out my dirty washing'" (March, 2003).*

Like the process of drawing Figure: 1.3, at a deep level I knew that what I portrayed to the outside world, and who I chose to see in the mirror, was not a true reflection of the real me. I was living behind a façade of 'appearances', afraid of being exposed or found out and harshly judged or rejected. My fear of exposure is evident in a later journal entry: *"I tend to put up walls to hide behind the real self – people may not like the real me – I may not like the real me!"* (Personal reflection, June, 2004). I recognised that the facade and wall had been with me from a young age.

Interestingly, Barnett's (2007) study identified therapists having similar personality traits as children. She elaborates on this finding by describing a number of common lived experiences therapists share. My own experience resonates closely with her conclusion. I offer the rewritten text below as a description of the development of my self-concept and the formation of façades and masks I carried through from childhood to adulthood:

*"I tended to be rather introverted, often solitary, the 'odd one out'. Inner feelings of anxiety and lack of confidence had sometimes been masked by efforts to amuse and entertain. I experienced a special sensitivity to the needs of others and a readiness to comply in order to maintain feelings of security and well-being. A reparative urge was in place at an early age and the roots of a desire to heal and mend lay in the dynamics of my family of origin. In my younger years I had a sense of being restrained and restricted in some way, owing to the demands and needs of others which always took priority. This pattern continued into adulthood"* [a personalized quote modified from Barnett, (2007, p. 269).

In this text I recognise the possible roots to the development of self-concepts such as peace-maker, people-pleaser and family joker and entertainer. A significant area for personal development in my first year of training was recognising and challenging these adopted self-concepts along with their assumed roles. Roles that I identified were based on my insatiable need to avoid and prevent conflict and disharmony. In a reflective journal from my first year of training I wrote: *"I recognise how uncomfortable I am with conflict and how it makes me want to hide or run away and how I quickly put the blame on myself"* (Personal journal, July, 2003). What I was hiding from was being responsible for creating any discord by disagreement or confrontation. When it came to conflict between others, if I wasn't in hiding, I was positioned between the disputing parties trying to create peace and harmony. Additionally, I believe the origins of the role of family joker and entertainer was influenced by my childhood storybook hero - 'Pollyanna'. A loveable and admirable character who brought joy and happiness to the lives of others by her positive and optimistic outlook on life. I desperately wanted to be just like Pollyanna because she was loved and valued for the positivity she exuded to all those around her. In my endeavour to avert any distress or unpleasantness I would either adopt an easy-going jovial façade - a façade that obscured my real feelings of fear and anxiety - or retreat within myself. It's alarming to think of now, that in my adolescent years I was so adverse to conflict that I would retreat within myself to the point of going into a dissociated state.

I am now able to see that these self-concepts were developed as a result of my need to secure positive regard from significant others during my early development. I felt loved and valued when my behaviour resulted in affirming responses. Consistent with the person-centred concept of positive regard being reciprocal in nature (Embleton Tudor et al., 2004; Nelson-Jones, 2001), my development of positive self-regard was determined by receiving positive affirmation and acceptance from others. Therefore, the facade and wall served me well at that time, by upholding the self-concepts that provided me a measure of self-acceptance and esteem while also maintaining protection of whatever

vulnerability lay behind them. What I discovered, as I began to look behind the façade, was that rather than concealing some terrible secret, what the 'dirty washing' really represented was honesty and true humanity, with all my failings along with my triumphs. What was also revealed was a facade of compliance with all its pretence and defences which covered up my authentic self.

Like the bonsai tree (Figure: 1.4), although appearing pleasant and relatively attractive and functioning at some level, I recognise that who I am has been shaped and formed into a measure of conformity by conditions of worth. Hence this drawing is titled 'The Conditioned Self'.

### ***Away from "oughts", "shoulds" and pleasing others***

I named the second drawing 'The Conditioned Self' (Figure: 1.4) to characterise the familial and cultural conditions that were rewarded and reinforced (Nelson-Jones, 2001), consequently shaping my early development and the self-concepts of 'people-pleaser' and 'peace-maker'. Conditions of worth, mentioned elsewhere and specific to the formation of these configurations of self are: expressing emotions is not OK, especially in company; being emotional is the same as being weak; it is wrong to be angry; there are certain rules in life, and if you don't obey them it's because you are bad; keep yourself to yourself - it is wrong to let other people know your business; other people know best; there are always people worse off than you - be grateful for what you've got (Merry, 2002, p. 30). These conditions of worth determined how I ought to think, feel and behave. Nelson-Jones (2001) elaborates: "conditions of worth entail not only internalized evaluations of how people should be, but also internalized evaluations about how they should feel about themselves if they perceive that they are not the way they should be" (p. 88). As Rogers's (Rogers, 1961, p. 110) describes – I was guided by what I thought I should be, not by who I really was. I recognise now that being a people-pleaser and peace-maker meant denying or avoiding my own real thoughts or feelings. This realization is consistent with Merry's (2002, p. 56) assertion: "The introjection of many or powerful conditions of worth results in an inevitable estrangement between the 'real self' and the conditioned self". Furthermore, it

was in these roles that I based my self-worth and self-acceptance. I had learnt to not rely on or listen to my organismic valuing process to the point of not trusting any thought, feeling, or opinion of my own especially when it conflicted with someone else's. I tended to hold back from expressing myself rather than risk being found out, wrong or seen to be argumentative. I had developed an external locus of evaluation by which my feelings of self-worth, self-acceptance and self-esteem was reliant on the evaluations of others (Merry, 2002). Becoming aware of and understanding the 'oughts', and 'shoulds' that shaped my behaviour, along with my need to please others, was the first step away from the self-concepts of 'people-pleaser' and 'peace-maker'.

A beginning movement away from these configurations of self, based on gaining the approval of others, began early in my counsellor training. The journal excerpt below demonstrates this new awareness.

*A significant moment of personal growth ...came about as a 'light bulb' moment.....I became aware of the irrational belief about being the peacemaker in my family and thinking that I was needed to bring about reconciliation. I began to process my usual behaviour of rescuing. I was quite conflicted as I debated within myself about my role in the family, my beliefs around that and the actions that were very typical of self-sacrificing to the expense of ....myself. I recognised that I didn't have to feel obliged to get involved in other peoples' disputes ....also realizing that it was not my responsibility.....This is new thinking and behaviour for me and I put that down to learning to evaluate and reflect on my actions, thoughts and beliefs (Group work reflective journal, July 2003).*

As a consequence of self-understanding and self-awareness change and growth were inevitable. Kosko (1994, p. 205, in Embleton Tudor et al., 2004, p. 75) puts it this way: "To learn is to change. And to change is to learn.....you cannot learn without changing or change without learning". One of the most significant and life-changing learnings for me came as a result of removing my facades and moving away from the assumed expectations of others. This undertaking required me to face up to my true authentic self and begin a movement towards an acceptance and respect of the self I discovered.



## *The Development of Self-Acceptance*



*Figure 5. The Development of Self-Acceptance*

Proposition (xviii) “When the individual perceives and accepts into one consistent and integrated system all his sensory and visceral experiences, then he is necessarily more understanding of others and is more accepting of others as separate individuals” (Rogers, 2003, p. 520).

Keeping with the theme of the oak tree, my initial intention when creating this drawing (Figure 1.5), was to illustrate the notion of environmental aspects that either inhibit or enhance growth. However, with further scrutiny, a number of additional key concepts can be identified. Firstly, an actualisation process can be recognised by the oak tree making the best use of its environment for growth, despite some conditions being less than ideal. Secondly, the concept of conditions of worth can be applied by considering inhibiting factors and the impact of a hostile environment to the oak tree reaching its optimal potential. However, with greater depth of observation, examination and reflection I have come to attribute a more optimistic perspective to this drawing. For me, it epitomises my true self – both the pleasing aspects along with those parts of myself that are less pleasing,

possibly even challenging and difficult. I have therefore titled this drawing, The Development of Self-Acceptance, to represent a fundamental aspect of personal development in my process of becoming. Rogers's (2003, p. 520) Proposition (xviii) provides a theoretical link between my acquisition of self-acceptance with its implications on how I relate with others. The following analysis is therefore based on my movement towards acceptance of self and the consequential acceptance of others.

### ***Towards acceptance of self***

Presenting this drawing (Figure: 1.5), as a representation of my developing self-acceptance draws attention to the apparent contrasting elements. What the distinctions symbolise for me is the need to accept all aspects of myself. While appreciating the positive features, it also means accepting those aspects of myself that are less desirable. A significant movement towards acceptance of myself is that although I acknowledge my weaknesses and faults, I no longer consider myself fundamentally flawed. I can examine this drawing (Figure: 1.5), and rather than see what is wrong with it, I can recognise and celebrate its complexity and contradictory elements. I am reminded of the seasons of life I have experienced in my process of becoming. Accepting, even celebrating, the different stages of my development. Appreciating the times of apparent dormancy and the need for pruning, along with times of growth and fruitfulness. I am reminded that even during the seasons of apparent stagnation, actualisation is still at work. Like Rogers (1963, in Merry, 2002, p. 22) says, the organism is always "up to something".

Low self-esteem and lack of self-acceptance have been recurring themes throughout my life. I have perceived myself as a person of low self-worth to the point that I could barely receive affirming feedback from others. In the following reflective journal excerpt I examine my responses.

*"I was really feeling uncomfortable about receiving positive stuff. It brought to mind my automatic deflection response when my own family say nice things about me. I have been trying not to rebut these compliments but I am wondering why it seems almost the unconscious*

*thing to do. I know it hurts the person on the receiving end so I am making a concerted effort not to do it but still the unspoken message in my head says – “they’re just saying that”* (Reflective journal, March 2004).

It is evident at the time I wrote this reflection I was endeavouring to change a habitual behaviour of rebuttal without fully understanding its source.

Merry (2002, p. 42) describes the acceptance of self as a: “Movement towards the ability to recognise introjected values (those adopted from outside oneself), and conditions of worth, and the ability to develop values that are more consistent with the basic organismic valuing system”. By examining my process of becoming a person through the person-centred theoretical lens I am able to gain a greater appreciation and understanding for the foundations of the low perception I had of myself. I have identified my reliance on the evaluation of others for my feelings of a positive self-regard, self-acceptance and self-esteem. This is an apparent indication of an external locus of evaluation (Merry, 2002). It is evident that my lack of self-acceptance and loss of trust in my organismic experiencing came about as a result of conditions of worth - the messages I received that reinforced or denied feelings of worth and acceptance (Tolan, 2012). I have grown up with the Christian commandment to ‘love your neighbour as you love yourself’. Somehow only the first part of that commandment became integrated into my value system. The ‘love yourself’ aspect was largely ignored within a traditional Christian doctrine which values selflessness and self-sacrifice. Once these introjected values were recognised and acknowledged a move towards self-acceptance required reestablishing trust in my organismic self.

Moving towards an openness and trust of my organismic experiences meant firstly acknowledging that I am a human being not a human doing. I have learnt to value who I am rather than what I do or allow a given label or role to define me. I have tentatively moved towards prizing myself and seeking to live life more authentically. In doing so I am gaining a respect and acceptance of all aspects of myself. A major expression of myself I have come to appreciate and value is my creative self.

From a very young age I have enjoyed creating things with my hands; whether it be with textiles or art medium. Like most small children, I enjoyed the encouragement and praise from others for my amateur creations. It was the positive regard from others which reinforced my self-concept of being creative. However, somewhere along the way, the evaluation and judgement of others on the finished product became more valued than my own evaluation or the enjoyment I gained from the creative process. Rather than give up this essential part of myself, I redirected my creativity into areas that gained praise and social approval. I have come to understand that my creative self is an expression of my tendency to actualise and when I am engaged in a creative process I am living more closely to my authentic self. I have also experienced the curative nature of creating of which Rogers (1961) speaks of:

The mainspring of creativity appears to be the same tendency which we discover so deeply as the curative force in psychotherapy – man’s tendency to actualise himself, to become his potentialities. By this I mean the directional trend which is evident in all organic and human life – the urge to expand, extend, develop, mature – the tendency to express and activate all the capacities of the organism, or the self (pp. 350-351).

Both Carl (1961, p. 193) and Natalie Rogers (1993) concur that a creative person is “involved in the directional process”. Carl Rogers refers to such a person as “living the good life” (p. 193). Personally, I consider the act of creating a spiritual encounter because it provides a connection between myself and the Creator God who formed me. This is similar to Natalie Rogers’s (1993) notion of the creative expression forming a connection to our inner core. Further, Rogers’s (1961) description of living creatively includes the individual having a sensitive openness to his own organic experience as well as his environment. Rogers also theorises that when the value of the created product is established by the creative person themselves, their locus of evaluation is internal rather than external - in such a case the value of the product would be determined by the judgement from others. Presenting my poem and drawings for the purposes of this research project is an indication that I am moving towards living more closely to my own organismic

experience (Rogers, 1961). The drawings particularity have provided a vehicle to discover and embrace unknown dimensions of myself. And as Rogers (1993) contends, I have found the process of creating these drawings both healing and transformative.

### ***Towards Self-direction***

The movement towards self-direction was seen by Rogers (1961) as a move towards autonomy. By this he meant that clients appeared to begin to take responsibility for themselves and make their own choices about their behaviour, then learn from the consequences. As I reflect on this in my own life I am drawn back to the image in Figure 4 which depicts the conditioned self using the metaphor of a bonsai tree. In my process of 'becoming', I imagine the restraints and manipulations that form, shape and restrict the bonsai being removed and set free. This process began to happen for me in my first year of training. I entered the learning environment with the same expectations I had when I left school. I was prepared to be told what I had to do and how and when to do it. I naively expected tutors to feed me all the information and knowledge I required. One of my biggest learnings, which came with some initial angst, was the realisation that I was responsible for my own learning. I was encouraged, when I wanted to know something, to look for ways to find my own answers. Learning to be an independent learner was one of the scariest, and freeing experiences. What if I got it wrong? Being released from the bounds could certainly be messy. Rogers's (1961) quote from a client sums up my experience both in my private life and as a student: "I feel frightened, and vulnerable, and cut loose from support, but I also feel a sort of surging up or force or strength in me" (p. 171). I recognise my move towards self-direction was evidence of a tentative trust in my organismic valuing process. This is congruent with what Auxier et al. (2003, p. 26) identified in the ongoing development of counsellors after graduation. They quote Skovholt and Ronnestad (1992) who also recognised the same change, "movement from reliance on external authority to reliance on internal authority" (p. 514).

### ***Towards acceptance of others***

As I have begun to value, respect, and accept my own humanity, with all its complexity and contradictions, I have developed a greater capacity for empathic understanding and unconditional positive regard towards myself and others.

In my process of becoming - as I live more closely to my authentic self - I am more able to create an environment in which others may do the same. I often refer to my practice as the meeting of two people in all our humanness – person-to-person – heart-to-heart. This would appear to concur with Rogers's (1961; Thorne, 2012) suggestion that it is the acknowledgement of our imperfections and flaws that enables us to be accessible to another. I am cautious however, that in my endeavour to be empathic, that I don't metaphorically - 'fall in' to another person's experience. As I have gained a greater awareness and understanding of my own feelings I am more able to hold them separate from those of others. Therefore reducing my earlier tendency of over-identification and becoming over-involved.

### ***Final reflections***

When I reflect on my process of becoming, with the many changes I have experienced over the past fifty plus years, I can't help but recognise how adaptable, resilient and ever changing the human organism is; as are all living organisms. Just as the acorn has no control over the environment in which the oak tree is planted or grows, there have been, and are, environments and situations in which I have lived that I have had very little or no influence; yet at an organismic level, I am able to utilize those situations for personal growth and development. Even though that growth may only be appreciated with the benefit of hindsight. Merry (2002) states: "Each individual .....interacts with its environment, including those aspects of the environment that tend to inhibit growth, and seeks the best way it can to become all it is capable of becoming under less than ideal circumstances" (p. 22). Likewise, some environments and situations I have experienced may have been considered hostile, even threatening, and yet with one - sometimes laboured breathe after another - I have carried on and found the

capacity to build an enriching and fulfilling life despite the challenges and the remnant of scars.

In the final chapter conclusions are drawn from the data, along with implications for mature students, counsellor education and myself. The limitations of the study are discussed along with areas warranting future investigation.

## **Chapter 6: Research Conclusions**

The key objective of this study was to ascertain the usefulness of Rogerian theoretical concepts as a framework to conceptualise the personal growth process of training counsellors. The autoethnographic method of carrying out this inquiry positioned me as an 'insider' because of my personal experience of being a mature student in undergraduate counsellor training, albeit a retrospective perspective. My multiple roles as person-centred counsellor, supervisor, counsellor educator, and novice researcher, has positioned me as an 'outsider'. Traversing across all positions is my current position of being a post-graduate student. I acknowledge that the meaning and conclusions I make of this project are influenced by the values, biases and assumptions from all positions.

### ***Conclusions***

In order to carry out this investigation, it first required more than a rudimentary understanding of Rogerian theory and concepts. My commitment to expanding knowledge and clearly articulating and employing the concepts is evident throughout this thesis. Firstly with an exhaustive explanation in the theoretical chapter, and in the application of the theoretical concepts as a framework for data analysis. The results can be seen throughout Analyses 1 and 2.

In Analysis 1, Rogerian theoretical concepts could be used as a lens by which to view my early development as a child, along with my acquisition of the self-concepts of 'good girl' and 'failed student'. The tendency to actualise provided a theoretical understanding of the unconscious drive and motivation which moves me beyond the restrictions of such self-perceptions and towards opportunities for growth and change. These opportunities availed themselves as I was instinctively motivated towards counsellor education where a new self-concept of 'successful' emerged.



Again the overarching theme in Analysis 2 is the organism's tendency to actualise depicted in the metaphoric drawings of the acorn growing into an oak tree regardless of inhibiting factors. The archive material provides evidence of my change and growth process throughout undergraduate training. Rogers's (1961, p. 130) notion of "moments of movement" provided a framework by which to articulate specific areas of the growth and change process.

Throughout both analyses other person-centred theoretical concepts were utilised. For instance, conditions of worth and the need for positive regard, provided a conceptual frame by which to understand the back story to the development of the person of the counsellor. However, consistent with Rogerian theorising, the fundamental philosophical concept of the organism's tendency to actualise was seen to be predominant in all aspects of growth and change of the counsellor in training. Similar to a client's growth experience within a therapeutic relationship, counsellor training can be considered curative. This is evident in the opportunities training provides to revise growth inhibiting self-concepts, diminish conditions of worth, move away from restrictive experiences and behaviour and make tentative steps towards being "that self one truly is" (Rogers, 1961, p. 166).

### ***Implications***

While being cautious to not make generalisations based on this one case study, the implications I recognise are:

#### ***For Mature Students***

What I can draw from my own experience as a student during training, a counsellor educator, and the focus of this study, is that personal growth and change are not easily achieved. It takes commitment and courage to face our true selves' warts and all. Implementing and living out new experiencing and behaviours can be challenging and takes time. This observation is consistent with Mearns's (2013, p. 163) description in which he refers to change as "osmotic". Gradual change is imperceptible as it accumulates over time and only recognised with hindsight.

### *For Counsellor Education*

Similar to the therapeutic environment, the learning environment can provide conditions for growth and change. Therefore, it seems important that the environment, programme curriculum and pedagogy reflect the values of personal freedom, autonomy and responsibility. Within such an atmosphere, students' tendency to actualise will make the most of the growth promoting properties in their directional drive towards reaching their full potential. Indications of movement may be seen in the questioning and revising of self-concepts (Auxier et al., 2003).

The archival material in the research contain significant areas of growth and change. Others agree that reflective journals and group work provide opportunities for personal learning and development (Mearns, 1997). Process notes from practicum also indicate that working with clients was another significant area for personal learning.

### ***Limitations***

This study is primarily limited by focusing this study on Rogers's theoretical propositions developed and written over fifty years ago. Contemporary person-centred theorising accounts for the person in their context and environment (Embleton Tudor et al., 2004), has not been considered. By not taking into account the person in context and community, this current work is limited in its illustration of facets of cultural experience (Ellis et al., 2011).

As others have agreed (Folkes-Skinner et al., 2010), single case findings are limited as they represent only one person's experience.

While this work only focused on one aspect of the experience of personal growth and change for a mature student, it is recognised there are many other associated factors.

Further, other theoretical positions may account for the development of training counsellors differently. Other approaches will hold, possibly even opposing

philosophical positions which then determine the language used to conceptualise the view of human nature, the formation of distress, diagnosis, the change process and a view of “the good life” (Newton & Augsburger, 2007, p. 19).

### ***Recommendation***

A similar study utilizing contemporary person-centred theorising, with the focus on the person of counsellor in their context and environment, would add to this current work. Such a study could go some way, as Embleton Tudor et al. (2004) suggest, to addressing the critiques of the approach for “not taking sufficient account of the impact of context or commonality of experience”(p.2004).

A larger study involving interviews with other cultural members, namely, mature students training in undergraduate counsellor training, would add to this work by identifying patterns of cultural experiencing.

A comparative study from different theoretical approaches would also add to the body of knowledge.

### ***Final thoughts***

The process of ‘becoming’ is common to us all. In this work I have examined a possible theoretical framework to provide a language by which personal growth can be articulated and conceptualised. Clarkson (1994) summarises for me the meaning I have taken from this work in my multiple perceptions of: researcher; counsellor educator; supervisor; counsellor; student; and the person within the research:

The urge to learn is not a compulsive, externally motivated search for mystical perfection, it is more a natural organismic urge to grow and develop and to become more skilled, more understanding and more compassionate. Being in touch with this evolutionary drive in ourselves enables trainers ...and supervisors to experience, model and inspire their chargers in similar ways (p. 18).

When referring to the process of becoming a person-centred counsellor, Combs (1986, as cited in Cain, 2002, p. 270), advocates for “deep personal exploration

and discovery of meaning, a person-centred process of individual growth and becoming". I believe that this project, with the creation and analysis of autoethnographic data, has provided the opportunity for me to fully engage in the process Combs suggests.

At the beginning of this research process I asked myself – "How did I get here"? The Rogerian concept of the tendency to actualise has provided a conceptual understanding of how I have grown and changed from failed student to successful student. In my ongoing process of becoming – moving closer to living in my full potentialities, where next might I be inexorably drawn?

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## Appendix 1

### ***Rogers's (2003) Nineteen Propositions on a Theory of Personality and Behaviour***

- i) Every individual exists in a continually changing world of experience of which he is the center.
- ii) The organism reacts to the field as it is experienced and perceived. This perceptual field is, for the individual, 'reality'.
- iii) The organism reacts as an organized whole to this phenomenal field.
- iv) The organism has one basic tendency and striving – to actualize, maintain, and enhance the experiencing organism.
- v) Behavior is basically the goal-directed attempt of the organism to satisfy its needs as experienced, in the field as perceived.
- vi) Emotion accompanies and in general facilitates such goal-directed behavior, the kind of emotion being related to the seeking versus the consummatory aspects of the behavior, and the intensity of the emotion being related to the perceived significance of the behavior for the maintenance and enhancement of the organism.
- vii) The best vantage point for understanding behavior is from the internal frame of reference of the individual himself.
- viii) A portion of the total perceptual field gradually becomes differentiated as the self.
- ix) As a result of interaction with the environment, and particularly as a result of evaluational interaction with others, the structure of self is formed – an organized, fluid, but consistent conceptual pattern of perceptions of characteristics and relationships of the 'I' or the 'me', together with values attached to these concepts.
- x) The values attached to experiences, and the values which are a part of the self-structure, in some instances are values experienced directly by the organism, and in some instances are values introjected or taken over from others, but perceived in distorted fashion, *as if* they had been experienced directly.

- xi) As experiences occur in the life of the individual, they are either (a) symbolized, perceived, and organized into some relationship to the self, (b) ignored because there is no perceived relationship to the self-structure, (c) denied symbolization or given a distorted symbolization because the experience is inconsistent with the structure of the self.
- xii) Most of the ways of behaving which are adopted by the organism are those which are consistent with the concept of self.
- xiii) Behavior may, in some instances, be brought about by organic experiences and needs which have not been symbolized. Such behavior may be consistent with the structure of the self, but in such instances the behavior is not 'owned' by the individual.
- xiv) Psychological maladjustment exists when the organism denies to awareness significant sensory and visceral experiences, which consequently are not symbolized and organized into the gestalt of the self-structure. When this situation exists, there is a basic or potential psychological tension.
- xv) Psychological adjustment exists when the concept of the self is such that all the sensory and visceral experiences of the organism are, or may be, assimilated on a symbolic level into a consistent relationship with the concept of self.
- xvi) Any experience which is consistent with the organization of structure of self may be perceived as a threat, and the more of these perceptions there are, the more rigidity the self-structure is organized to maintain itself.
- xvii) Under certain conditions, involving primarily complete absence of any threat to the self-structure, experiences which are inconsistent with it may be perceived, and examined, and the structure of self revised to assimilate and include such experiences.
- xviii) When the individual perceives and accepts into one consistent and integrated system all his sensory and visceral experiences, then he is

necessarily more understanding of others and is more accepting of others as separate individuals.

- xix) As the individual perceives and accepts into his self-structure more of his organic experiences, he finds that his is replacing his present value system – based so largely upon introjections which have been distortedly symbolized – with a continuing organismic valuing process (pp. 483 – 522).