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PERSPECTIVES

PERSPECTIVES is a special feature included in this issue of Journal of Creativity in Mental Health *that provides mental health professionals with an opportunity to discuss their positions on a variety of creativity-related topics. In this column, Samuel T. Gladding and Melanie Drake Wallace share their perspective and reflections of the contribution of notable entertainers and counselors with the surname Rogers on 20th century American society. Samuel T. Gladding is Professor and Chair of the Department of Counseling at Wake Forest University. Dr. Gladding is former president of the American Counseling Association, Association for Counselor Education and Supervision, and the Association for Specialists in Group Work. He has published in the areas of creativity, family therapy, group counseling, and professional development. Melanie Drake Wallace is Assistant Professor at Jacksonville State University. Dr. Wallace is past President of the Alabama Counseling Association. She has published and presented in the areas of creativity, grief and loss, and counselor supervision.*

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Perspectives on Creativity, Counseling, and the Contributions of Counselors and Entertainers to Mental Health: The Rogers

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In the 20th century, a group of talented individuals with the surname Rogers made creative contributions to American society. This article examines the most noted of these personalities and their effect on the mental health of a nation. Although it is unlikely that a group with the same last name will be as prominent again, it is crucial for counselors to be mindful of the therapeutic impact of entertainers, as well as counselors, to wellness.

KEYWORDS creativity, counseling, mental health, wellness, Carl Rogers, artistic entertainers

Counseling made a major transition when Carl Rogers formulated and advocated what was then known as nondirective therapy in the early 1940s. Carl Rogers's (1942) book, *Counseling and Psychotherapy*, was a radical challenge to the theories that preceded it, namely psychoanalysis, behaviorism, and E. G. Williamson's counselor-centered approach. Although other theories of counseling were formulated after Carl Rogers's, it is questionable as to whether any stirred more interest and debate in the counseling world. The nondirective approach generated a series of debates between Carl Rogers and Williamson and Carl Rogers and B. F. Skinner that were exciting, spirited, and informative. They influenced a generation of mental health clinicians. The end result was an acceptance of Rogers's premises regarding listening,

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reflecting, and promoting the necessary and sufficient conditions of therapy to bring about personal change (C. R. Rogers, 1957). A direct descendant from the approach and the interest it stirred in the process was the formulation of universal helping skills (i.e., microskills), which transcend almost all theories of counseling today (Poorman, 2003).

However, as significant as the life and work of Carl Rogers were, he was not the only one with the last name Rogers to add to the profession of helping and make an impact on counseling in the 20th century. One other Rogers, namely Carl Rogers's daughter, Natalie, emerged as a professional therapist in her own right in pioneering therapeutic work in the expressive arts (N. Rogers, 1993). Natalie Rogers was person-centered in her approach but found her distinctiveness by pursuing her own interests rather than continuing down the path her father had taken.

However, overlooked by most helping professionals is a group of unrelated individuals with the popular Rogers surname (Powell, n.d.), and what they contributed to the mental health of society that was inspirational, different, and yet as valuable in its own way as the contributions of the famous psychologist and his daughter. These other Rogers, specifically Will, Ginger, Roy, Fred, and Kenny, all of whom achieved some amount of fame and notoriety, may have done even more for the well-being of the population of the United States than Carl or Natalie Rogers did.

Although it may be said that having the Rogers surname is just a coincidence, it should be noted that in the counseling, creativity, and mental health fields, there is not a parallel. More importantly, as this article stresses, much of the wellness and well-being of a people and a nation are dependent on those in the public spotlight who entertain, as opposed to those who are professional helpers and healers. The Rogers of the 20th century examined here were truly amazing in developing their talents, living exemplary lives, and contributing to a positive zeitgeist that made the American experience of their day exceptional and healthier than it might have been otherwise. It is essential in the 21st century for counselors to identify similar models who can add overtly and subtly to the good of people regardless of external circumstances.

THE OVERT THERAPEUTIC ROGERS: CARL AND NATALIE

Every practitioner in the helping professions is aware of Carl Rogers (1902–1987). In survey after survey, he is recognized as one of the most influential theorists of the 20th-century therapists (Smith, 1982). Carl Rogers was the first to recognize that the relationship between counselors and clients was more important than the techniques of a theory. In his early professional years, he asked the question: "How can I treat, or cure, or change this person?" Later, he phrased the question: "How can I provide a relationship which this person may use for his or her own personal growth?"

Carl Rogers's genius and insight were partially influenced by the fact that he was introverted and observed his environment well. He was also a careful listener to not just words but the ways in which messages were conveyed. At the same time, Carl Rogers was courageous and not afraid to change, such as when he switched from preparing for the ministry at Union Theological Seminary to preparing to be a psychologist at Columbia's Teachers College (Gladding, 2004). Another example of his bravery was when he left the safety of academic settings to establish his own institute so that his theory could receive even further public exposure and confirmation. That freedom also allowed him to film his interactions with individuals and groups and to work internationally for peace and justice. The sheer volume of Carl Rogers's work, much of which was completed after he turned 65, is truly astounding. With few exceptions, Carl Rogers was one of the most prolific figures ever in the helping professions. Yet his name and influence are not as familiar to the general public as other Rogers who lived around his time.

Natalie Rogers (1928–) is even less well known to the general public than her father is. Natalie Rogers is Carl Rogers's daughter, who grew up in the shadow of seeing her famous dad and his theory rise in status within the helping professions. Rather than try to emulate and follow in his footsteps like Anna Freud did with her father Sigmund Freud, Natalie Rogers blazed a trail of her own. She became interested in the arts and practiced, taught, and published as an art therapist (N. Rogers, 1993). Her writings and her reputation never reached the heights of her father's, but her contributions have been well received.

It was Natalie Rogers who, along with a host of other early creative arts therapists, called attention to the power and potential of using creative arts in and outside of strictly therapeutic settings as a means through which healing and wholeness could take place. Natalie Rogers recognized that the process of artistic expression was much more effective in dealing with difficult emotions compared with using words alone (Sommers-Flanagan, 2007). Building upon her initial work in art therapy, Natalie Rogers added movement and psychodrama to her repertoire of healing modalities. She referred to expressive art as a language of healing and eventually established a training program in person-centered expressive art. Her voice was more quiet than that of her father, because she was not in the mainstream of counseling or psychology initially, having taken time out to raise a family. Thus, her work and contributions have often gone unnoticed or underappreciated.

THE SUBTLE THERAPEUTIC ROGERS: WILL, GINGER, ROY, FRED, AND KENNY

As mentioned earlier, there were at least five other individuals with the surname Rogers who had a major impact on the 20th century. In chronological

order, they were Will, Ginger, Roy, Fred, and Kenny. They were not related biologically. What they held in common was a dedication to perfecting their talents and entertaining the public. They did not have the same intent as Carl or Natalie Rogers, but their influence in inspiring others generated a greater good than they may have been aware of or than those who were counselors in their day may have imagined. Each will be briefly examined here.

Will Rogers (1879–1935) is the first of those with the Rogers surname who made a significant contribution to the mental health of Americans, but he did so more covertly than overtly. Will Rogers came to prominence during the Great Depression of the 1930s. The United States, and indeed the world, faced economic crises and the rise of Nazi Germany and Imperial Japan. There was little to laugh about as the world inched closer to despair and war. Yet Will Rogers, a lasso-twirling Oklahoman who got his start in vaudeville, formulated a down-to-earth humor and helped Americans smile and even laugh—sometimes at themselves, but definitely at human folly. Will Rogers poked fun at everything and everyone that was prominent, popular, or in the public domain. His humor was sharp but not biting (Yagoda, 2000).

Will Rogers knew how to entertain. He did not call attention to himself but rather to the inconsistencies, incongruities, and absurdities of life. People were drawn to him because they felt he was one of them. They sensed that he had many of the same thoughts and feelings they had and could express them in a clever way that often resulted in a chuckle. The moments of levity he gave to others took their minds off immediate crises or troubles. He helped them get through their days in a way that was more productive because they were less absorbed with the difficulties they faced. Later research initiated by Norman Cousins (1979) would back up the mental health benefits of humor (Gremigni, 2012). Through creating original and funny stories and one-liners, Will Rogers elevated spirits in a time of terrific struggles and pain.

Ginger Rogers (1911–1995) is the next of the class with the famous last name who should be revered for her contributions to mental health and creativity. Ginger Rogers was part of the famous dance team of Fred Astaire and Ginger Rogers. The team was noticed and applauded for their choreography and grace. They made dancing look easy and elegant. Ginger Rogers was an entity unto herself as a Hollywood star, as was Astaire, but neither achieved as much fame alone as they did as a pair in a series of MGM motion pictures in the 1930s and 1940s (Croce, 2010).

Ginger Rogers is said to have done everything Fred Astaire did but backwards and in heels. She was an icon of femininity and a model for what a dancer could and should be. In essence, she was a strong woman role model but without an edge. Young women watching Ginger Rogers could see beauty and power at the same time. Ginger Rogers was involved in dialogue as well as dance, so she exemplified more than a one-dimensional character. At the same time Ginger Rogers was on the big screen, other

dancers were prominent. However, these dancers did not have names. They were simply part of a production or team. That is one reason Ginger Rogers became so important as a role model and remained so. She showed how dance can be empowering and lift a person to new heights while being pleasing aesthetically (Faris, 1994).

Roy Rogers (1911–1998) provided substantial creativity, although at first glance he appeared to be straight-laced and even somewhat bland. Roy Rogers reached his zenith of popularity in the 1950s with a television show that bore his name (Henry & Lacey, 1951). Like the other Rogers already covered, Roy Rogers established himself as multidimensional figure. First, he was a cowboy who was prosocial in the best kind of way. He went after the bad guys and won with the help of his wife Dale Evans, his sidekick Andy Devine, his famous palomino horse named Trigger, and his dog Bullet (Kazanjian & Enss, 2005). He showed what a group with a purposeful leader can do. Roy Rogers also sang. If one word could sum up what he was, or at least how he was portrayed on television, it would be "hero."

The good was seen as a path to follow, and Roy Rogers showed it could be done while still having fun, and with a few songs and fellowship with others. In many ways, the days of Roy Rogers were those of black-and-white issues, just like the television sets on which his show was watched. However, Roy Rogers modeled mental health in a positive way, and his solutions to catching crooks and bandits were often creative and ingenious.

Fred Rogers (1928–2003) is the next Rogers whose contribution to creativity and mental health deserves broader recognition. Fred Rogers was an ordained Presbyterian minister whose television show, *Mister Rogers' Neighborhood* (F. Rogers, 1968), was viewed by millions of young children for several generations. Fred Rogers was low-key but inviting. His opening song and invitation of "Won't you be my neighbor?" drew children in to what he would do next, made them feel accepted, and captured their attention. Fred Rogers also highlighted the importance of using imagination to solve problems by visiting "the land of make-believe," where interpersonal dilemmas were acted out and children could see that often problems can have more than one solution.

Fred Rogers's neighbors, both adults and puppets, carried on interesting conversations with him and at times enacted scenes that showed prosocial behaviors that children could emulate. In an era where children's television shows were becoming increasingly irrelevant and outrageous, except for the Sesame Street series (Parente & Stone, 1969), *Mister Rogers' Neighborhood* (F. Rogers, 1968) and Mr. Rogers stood out like beacons of light. Children could watch a friendly, wise man give them important lessons in life through talk and drama so that they could be better in their interactions with others (F. Rogers, 2003).

Kenny Rogers (1938–) is the youngest and last of the Rogers examined. He overlapped in time those examined already. Kenny Rogers is known

best as a singer/songwriter who has made 65 albums and sold more than 100 million records (*Kenny Rogers*, 2012). He is a crossover artist and enjoys success in various music genres, especially country music and pop music. In 1985, Kenny Rogers teamed up with 45 other artists to record "We Are the World" (Jackson & Richie, 1985), and with this group, he supported hunger relief in Africa.

Thus, Kenny Rogers, like the entertainers already mentioned, has been a model of refining his talent, offering it in public, and entertaining others while showing empathy and care for people that is rare and inspiring (K. Rogers, 2012). He is humble in recounting his success, but his story is one that is moving and helpful to those who have dreams but are not sure how to harness their art and ambition.

DISCUSSION

In looking back at the Rogers of the 20th century, there are a number of lessons we can learn. First, as counselors, we can recognize the importance of being creative and innovative, and also recognize how these individuals continued to grow throughout their lives. Carl Rogers transformed the counseling profession through the continued formulation of his theory. He did so as a reaction to the directive theories of his time, which he observed were not working well in many situations. Carl Rogers was so original and persistent that he influenced the lives of thousands of mental health specialists both in his time and now. His daughter Natalie Rogers, who based her work with the expressive arts on person-centered therapy, is someone who learned from the past but forged her own future in a creative manner. Both Carl and Natalie Rogers's contributions to the therapeutic enterprise enriched and enlivened the helping professions in a dynamic and dramatic way so that the field of counseling and therapy would never be the same again (Gladding, in press; Kirschenbaum, 2008).

However, the significance of other well-known personalities with the surname of Rogers impacted the general public in a profound and significant manner as well. The influence of these artistic entertainers was different from that of Carl and Natalie Rogers. Yet it should be acknowledged and appreciated for what it did and still does when it is revisited. These performers, through the use of the media—radio, movies, newspaper, magazines, and television—were creative, positive, and productive in showing those who saw or heard them how to live life fully and keep life in perspective. Whether through humor, dance, music, conversation, or heroic acts, these Rogers made a major creative contribution to society in a preventive and a cathartic way that was and still is therapeutic in its own right. They provided models of living for others to emulate as well as active art forms to admire, appreciate, and inspire.

Often in examining creativity, mental health, and counseling, persons and processes outside the professional domains of direct services are overlooked. That is probably as it should be, because a profession, such as counseling, needs to focus internally if it is going to grow and flourish. However, every now and then, those in professional helping should examine the external environment of society for ideas and personalities that are therapeutic, because through such a process, adjunct methods for working constructively with others may be discovered. For example, the healthy use of humor and movement may be incorporated into a counselor's treatment plan, or the use of music may be used to help clients become more aware of their feelings.

The other Rogers, besides Carl and Natalie Rogers, were not overtly part of the field of mental health and yet they provided outlets for those in pain to laugh, dance, sing, and reflect. They were, whether they knew it or not, practicing preventive mental health, and what they did can be viewed and used by counselors and clients today. These Rogers found ways to express themselves productively and in healthy ways that were important for the Americans of their day and ours. As a group, the Rogers who were artistic entertainers shared the following characteristics:

- role models who were aware of their actions and influence;
- hard workers who perfected their talents;
- unique in displaying their abilities;
- human in suffering through failures, disappointments, and tragedies as well as success;
- positive in what they expected of themselves and others; and
- interested in others and the development of good character.

In summary, the Rogers of the 20th century were all important to the health and well-being of the population of the United States. Similarly, there are entertainers today who may well be just as important in positively influencing the mental health of many Americans as the Rogers of the past. Although these individuals may not have the same last name as famous counselors and innovators, they should be valued and utilized by helping specialists to point clients to role models they can follow or performers who can make them feel better about themselves, others, or life.

CONCLUSION

All of the Rogers of the last century discussed here were creative, persistent, innovative, evolving, and caring. They worked hard on their talents and maximized them. They found a fit within their professions. They chose

wisely to pursue their passions, and in the end, they lived meaningful, purposeful, and productive lives. It is to their credit that modern research has continued to explore and validate the therapeutic theory of Carl Rogers and that creative counselors have continuously and sensitively highlighted the therapeutic value of the artistic fields in which the other Rogers of the group focused. Mental health and wellness possibilities are found in each.

It is the responsibility of counselors today to find modern Rogers who can help clients heal not just through counseling but through humor, dance, music, action, and the art of conversation. When that happens, everyone benefits, regardless of their surname or their background.

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