



**UNIVERSITI PUTRA MALAYSIA**

**INNER EXPERIENCES AND PERSONAL GROWTH WITH PERSON-  
CENTRED COUNSELLING AMONG MALAY FEMALE UNIVERSITY  
STUDENTS IN MALAYSIA**

**MARDIANA MOHAMAD**

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CENTRED COUNSELLING AMONG MALAY FEMALE UNIVERSITY  
STUDENTS IN MALAYSIA**

**By**

**MARDIANA MOHAMAD**

**Thesis Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies, University Putra  
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**May 2008**

**Chairman: Associate Professor Lily Mastura Haji Harun, PhD**

**Faculty: Educational Studies**

Despite the high regard practitioners and counsellor educators have for the person-centred approach to counselling, their main concerns in applying the approach in the Malaysian context are the lack of structure and direction in its egalitarian counsellor-client relationship style, and the counsellor's personal qualities of genuineness, unconditional positive regard and empathy. In relation to these concerns, the study aimed to describe the inner experiences and personal growth among female Malay university students attending the person-centred counselling. Firstly, the inner experiences of the clients in the study with regard to the non-directive, egalitarian relationship as postulated by the counselling approach were described. Secondly, the clients' inner experiences in response to the person-centred counsellor's qualities of genuineness, unconditional positive regard and empathy were also explored. The third objective was to explore the clients' experience of personal growth as they engaged in the process of self-exploration in a non-directive, egalitarian counselling relationship with a person-centred counsellor. Fourth,

the study attempted to describe the indicators of personal growth based on aspects of non-verbal expressions of the clients, in their relationship with a genuine, unconditionally accepting and empathic counsellor.

The study employed the qualitative case study design. Based on purposive sampling technique, three Malay female clients participated in the study. They were students from a local university, aged twenty to twenty-four years old with situational and developmental concerns. Clients attended twelve counselling sessions conducted by the researcher who had undergone training and been certified as person-centred counsellor by three observer judges. Altogether, thirty-five counselling sessions were held for the purpose of the study. All the sessions were audio-visually recorded with the permission of the clients. The sessions were transcribed and qualitatively analysed to meet the purpose of the study. Clients were requested to write journal entries after each session. Interpersonal process recall interviews were also conducted with each client. Finally, based on the audio-visual recording of the counselling sessions, the clients' non-verbal expressions were observed and described by the researcher.

The study indicated that the Malay clients were apprehensive at the beginning of the counselling relationship; however, as they perceived the counsellor was genuine, accepting and empathic, they became more positive with the counselling sessions and the counsellor's personal qualities. Although some of them had expected to receive advice from the counsellor, the counsellor's personal qualities enabled them to appreciate the

counselling relationship despite its non-directive nature. In terms of the indicators of personal growth, the major themes include *flow of emotion, awareness of self, others and experience, personal changes, self-directed behaviour* and *spiritual dimension*. Clients' non-verbal behaviour also indicated some constructive changes where less rigidity and more congruent expressions were manifested by their eye-contacts, body posture, hand and arm gestures, vocal cues, eyes and facial expressions.

The findings provided information on the inner experiences and personal growth of the Malay female clients participated in person-centred counselling. Limitations and implications of the study were discussed, and recommendations for future research were provided.

Abstrak tesis yang dikemukakan kepada Senat Universiti Putra Malaysia sebagai memenuhi keperluan untuk ijazah Doktor Falsafah

**PENGALAMAN DALAMAN DAN PERKEMBANGAN PERIBADI MELALUI  
KAUNSELING PEMUSATAN INSAN DI KALANGAN PELAJAR  
UNIVERSITI WANITA MELAYU DI MALAYSIA**

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Walau pun pengamal dan pendidik kaunselor memandang tinggi terhadap teori kaunseling pemusatan klien, permasalahan utama dalam mengaplikasi teori ini dalam konteks Malaysia ialah berkenaan dengan kekurangan struktur dan arahan dalam perhubungan sama rata di antara kaunselor dan klien, dan penekanan terhadap kualiti peribadi kaunselor iaitu ketulenan, penerimaan tanpa syarat dan empati.

Sehubungan dengan itu, kajian ini bertujuan untuk menerangkan pengalaman dalaman dan perkembangan peribadi yang dialami oleh pelajar wanita Melayu yang menyertai kaunseling pemusatan insan. Pertama, pengalaman dalaman klien terhadap perhubungan bersifat 'non-directive' dan sama rata di antara kaunselor dan klien yang dianjurkan oleh teori kaunseling ini telah diterangkan. Kedua, pengalaman dalaman klien terhadap kualiti kaunselor pemusatan insan iaitu ketulenan, penerimaan tanpa syarat

dan empati juga diterokai. Tujuan yang ketiga ialah untuk meneroka pembangunan sendiri klien apabila mereka menjalani proses 'self-exploration' di dalam perhubungan 'non-directive' dan sama rata bersama kaunselor pemusatan insan. Keempat, kajian ini bertujuan untuk menerangkan tanda-tanda perkembangan peribadi klien berdasarkan aspek ekspresi tanpa lisan yang dipamerkan oleh klien dalam perhubungan mereka dengan kaunselor yang bersikap tulen, menerima tanpa syarat dan empati.

Kajian ini menggunakan kajian kes kualitatif. Berdasarkan teknik persampelan bertujuan, tiga orang klien wanita telah menyertai kajian ini. Mereka terdiri daripada pelajar di sebuah institusi pengajian tinggi awam, berusia antara dua puluh sehingga dua puluh empat tahun yang sedang menghadapi masalah situasi dan pembangunan. Klien menghadiri dua belas sesi kaunseling yang diadakan oleh pengkaji yang telah menjalani latihan dan diperakui sebagai kaunselor pemusatan insan oleh tiga orang hakim pemerhati. Keseluruhannya, tiga puluh lima sesi kaunseling telah dijalankan. Kesemua sesi kaunseling telah dirakam secara audio dan visual atas kebenaran klien. Sesi-sesi ditranskripikan dan dianalisa secara kualitatif. Setiap kali selepas sesi, klien diminta membuat catatan jurnal mengenai sesi yang mereka hadiri. Kaedah interviu 'interpersonal process recall' juga dijalankan dengan setiap klien. Akhirnya, melalui rakaman sesi kaunseling, tingkahlaku bukan lisan klien juga diperhatikan dan diterangkan oleh pengkaji.

Kajian ini mendapati bahawa klien berasa kurang selesa dan risau pada peringkat awal sesi kaunseling; bagaimana pun, apabila mereka mendapati kaunselor bersikap tulus, menerima dan empati, mereka menjadi lebih positif terhadap sesi kaunseling dan kualiti peribadi kaunselor. Sesetengah daripada mereka berharap untuk mendapatkan nasihat dan bimbingan pada peringkat awal perhubungan kaunseling, tetapi, kualiti peribadi kaunselor membuatkan mereka menghargai perhubungan kaunseling tersebut yang bersifat 'non-directive'. Tentang perkembangan peribadi klien, tema utama yang didapati ialah *aliran emosi, kesedaran diri sendiri, orang lain dan pengalaman, perubahan peribadi, tingkahlaku 'self-directed', dan dimensi spiritual*. Tingkahlaku bukan lisan klien juga menunjukkan perubahan konstruktif iaitu ekspresi yang kurang kaku dan 'kongruen' telah dipamerkan melalui kontak mata, gerak bahasa badan, gerakan tangan dan siku, nada suara, bahasa mata dan ekspresi wajah.

Dapatan kajian mengemukakan pengalaman dalaman dan perkembangan peribadi yang dialami oleh klien-klien wanita yang menghadiri kaunseling pemusatan insan. Limitasi dan implikasi kajian ini juga diperbincangkan, termasuk saranan untuk kajian di masa hadapan.



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Finally, I remain solely responsible for any errors and shortcomings contained in this study.



I certify that an Examination Committee has met on 29 May 2008 to conduct the final examination of Mardiana binti Mohamad on her Doctor of Philosophy thesis entitled "Inner Experiences and Personal Growth with Person-centred Counselling Among Malay Female University Students in Malaysia" in accordance with University Pertanian Malaysia (Higher Degree) Act 1980 and University Pertanian Malaysia (Higher Degree) Regulations 1981. The Committee recommends that the student be awarded the Doctor of Philosophy degree.

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## **DECLARATION**

I declare that the thesis is my original work except for quotations and citations which have been duly acknowledged. I also declare that it has not been previously, and is not concurrently, submitted for any other degree at University Putra Malaysia or at any other institution.

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**MARDIANA BINTI MOHAMAD**

Date: 15 August 2008

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

	<b>Page</b>
<b>ABSTRACT</b>	ii
<b>ABSTRAK</b>	v
<b>ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS</b>	viii
<b>APPROVAL</b>	x
<b>DECLARATION</b>	xii
<b>LIST OF TABLES</b>	xvi
<b>LIST OF FIGURES</b>	xvii
<b>LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS</b>	xviii

### CHAPTER

<b>1. INTRODUCTION</b>	
1.0 Overview of the chapter	1
1.1 Background of the study	1
1.2 Person-centred approach to counselling: An overview of theory and practice	5
1.3 Statement of the problem	11
1.4 Research objectives	15
1.5 Research questions	16
1.6 Significance of the study	16
1.7 Delimitation of study	17
1.8 Definition of terms	18
1.9 Summary	25
<b>2. LITERATURE REVIEW</b>	
2.0 Introduction	26
2.1 Person-centred theory of counselling: A theoretical framework of the research	29
2.1.1 Background	29
2.1.2 Philosophy	33
2.1.3 View of human nature	34
2.1.4 How do individuals have problems?	36
2.1.5 How does person-centred counselling help in personal growth process?	38
2.1.6 Seven stages of therapeutic process	45
2.1.7 A theoretical framework of the person-centred approach to counselling	50
2.2 Classical work on person-centred counselling	52
2.3 Studies on the person-centred approach	61
2.4 The necessary and sufficient conditions for constructive change in counseling	75
2.5 Client's perception or evaluation in counseling	84
2.6 Non-directivity of person-centred approach	85
2.7 Person-centred approach to different groups of clients	83
2.8 Person-centred approach with Malay clients	90



2.9	Conclusion	95
<b>3.</b>	<b>METHODOLOGY</b>	
3.0	Introduction	98
3.1	Qualitative approach of research	98
3.2	Case study design	104
3.3	Practitioner Research	106
3.4	Participants	114
3.5	Ethical principles of research	116
3.6	Collecting the data	120
3.7	The pilot study	124
3.8	Managing and analysing the data	125
3.9	Validity and Reliability of the Research Design	131
	3.9.1 Credibility	132
	3.9.2 Transferability	133
	3.9.3 Dependability	134
	3.9.4 Confirmability	134
3.10	Conclusion	135
<b>4.</b>	<b>THE PARTICIPANTS</b>	
4.0	Introduction	137
4.1	Case of Ifa	137
4.2	Case of Yati	140
4.3	Case of Sham	143
4.5	Conclusion	145
<b>5.</b>	<b>FINDINGS – THE INNER EXPERIENCES</b>	
5.0	Introduction	147
5.1	Clients’ inner experiences in the non-directive counselling relationship	147
	5.1.1 The Early Phase	148
	5.1.2 The Middle Phase	155
	5.1.3 The Final Phase	161
	5.1.4 Summary	167
5.2	Clients’ inner experiences in relation to the counsellor’s personal qualities	170
	5.2.1 Feelings	170
	5.2.2 Perception	175
	5.2.3 Effect of the counsellor’s personal qualities	178
	5.2.4 Summary	182
<b>6.</b>	<b>FINDINGS – INDICATORS OF PERSONAL GROWTH</b>	
6.0	Introduction	184
6.1	Section One: Clients’ personal growth in the non-directive, egalitarian person-centred counselling relationship	185
	6.1.1 Flow of Emotion	187
	6.1.2 Awareness of self, others and experience	196

6.1.3	Personal changes	202
6.1.4	Self-directed behaviour	207
6.1.5	Spiritual dimension	212
6.1.6	Conclusion	215
6.2	Section Two: Clients' non-verbal expressions as indicators of personal growth	216
6.2.1	The Early Phase	217
6.2.2	The Middle Phase	221
6.2.3	The Final Phase	224
6.2.4	The non-verbal behaviour	227
6.2.5	Conclusion	232
<b>7.</b>	<b>DISCUSSION OF THE FINDINGS</b>	
7.0	Introduction	235
7.1	Clients' inner experiences in the non-directive relationship	236
7.2	Clients' inner experiences with regard to the counsellor's personal qualities	247
7.3	Clients' personal growth in the non-directive, egalitarian person-centred counselling relationship	257
7.4	Clients' non-verbal expressions as indicators of personal growth	269
7.5	Conclusion of the findings	276
7.6	Limitations of the study	281
7.7	The implications of the study	283
7.8	Recommendations for future research	289
7.9	Conclusion	290
	<b>REFERENCES</b>	292
	<b>APPENDICES</b>	315
	<b>BIODATA OF THE STUDENT</b>	328
	<b>LIST OF PUBLICATIONS</b>	329



## LIST OF TABLES

<b>Table</b>		<b>Page</b>
5.1	Clients' Inner Experiences in a Non-directive, Egalitarian Counselling Relationship	168
6.1	Clients' Non-verbal Behaviour as Indicators of Personal Growth	234

## LIST OF FIGURES

Figure		Page
2.1	A Theoretical Framework of the Person-centred Approach to Counselling	51
3.1	Storage and filing system	127
3.2	The Conceptual Framework of the study	136
7.1	Clients' Inner Experiences in a Non-directive Egalitarian Person-centred Counselling Relationship	246
7.2	Clients' Inner Experiences in relation to Counsellor's Personal Qualities	256
7.3	Clients' Personal Growth in a Non-directive Egalitarian Person-centred counselling relationship	268
7.4	Clients' Non-verbal Expressions as Indicators of Personal Growth in relation to Person-centred Counsellor's Personal Qualities	275



## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

CACREP	Council for Accreditation for Counselling and Related Educational Programs
CSLR	Counsellor

# CHAPTER 1

## INTRODUCTION

### 1.0 Overview of the Chapter

This chapter aims to provide an overview of the study, the theory and practice of the person-centred approach to counselling and to discuss the statement of problem, objectives, significance and definitions of terms of the study.

### 1.1 Background of the study

Malaysia is a multiracial country located in the South East Asian region. As one of the newly emerging industrialised countries, the effects of modernisation and improved technology are currently being felt in the country. More and more people are being subjected to increasing stress in their daily lives. The extended family unit which previously functioned as a useful support to individual family members is rapidly disappearing. Social mobility and urban migration have taken members away from their original homes (Abdul Halim Othman & Amir Awang, 1993). The members of the rural population who migrated to the cities have to adjust quickly to the pace of the urban culture. Society is becoming more individualistic and materialistic. More decisions are made and actions are taken without sufficient consideration for moral, ethical and religious values. The lack of ethical or conscience leads to unpredictable behaviour among the members of the society. Many individuals show syndromes of emotional disturbances, such as frustration due to unachievable goals, feelings of dissatisfaction, low self-esteem, and feelings of inferiority. Others face the problems of

adjustment, stress, depression, and psychological conflict. Hence, the need for support activities and counselling services have increased in various settings such as business, industry, private clinics and hospitals (Pope, Muhaini Musa, Singaravelu, Bringaze & Russel, 2002).

The school system also has to cope with industrialisation. Pressure for academic and intellectual success has increased, leading to serious stress and tension among students. Truancy, school drop-out, gangsterism, vandalism, pregnancy, delinquency, substance and drug abuse are among psychosocial problems faced by school children and adolescents in the country, creating a lot of psychological pressure to adults as well as a tremendous loss to the country (Suradi Salim & Rafidah Aga Mohd Jaladin, 2004). As a result, guidance and counselling services become more important in schools, colleges and universities, in order to curb the psychosocial problems (Abdul Halim Othman & Amir Awang, 1993). Counselling has become a rapidly emerging profession in Malaysia (Scorzelli, 1987; Lloyd, 1987; Pederson, 1984) and counsellor education programs has begun to mushroom since the 1980s (Abdul Halim Othman & Amir Awang, 1993).

Along with the progress of guidance and counselling in the country, many counselling educators are asking whether the counselling approach that they learnt abroad can be adopted or should be modified in order to be consistent with cultural and religious issues in Malaysia (Suradi Salim & Rafidah Aga Mohd Jaladin, 2004). To date, counsellors in Malaysia are still searching for

an approach which suits the needs, culture and religious values of the people (Suradi Salim & Rafidah Aga Mohd Jaladin, 2004; Wan Abdul Kader Wan Ahmad, 1986). According to Abdul Halim Othman and Sharifah Bee Abu Bakar (1993),

The major issues and problems confronting counselling and counsellor education in Malaysia are much the same as those faced by other societies that attempt to implement foreign ideas and experiences. Although counselling is strictly an American enterprise and has readily found its way across the Atlantic and the Pacific, implementation of the counselling ideas, principles, and practices has led to uncertainties, dilemmas, and roadblocks. Apart from the basic cultural differences that exist, traditions, political ideologies, religion, and level of technological and economic development present problems that are not easily surmountable. (Abdul Halim Othman and Sharifah Bee Abu Bakar, 1993, p. 17).

The above quotation implies that to implement counselling models or principles which come from the West causes uncertainties and dilemmas among psychologists, counsellor educators and practitioners in Malaysia. Religious and racial diversity in Malaysia have made the development of an indigenous “Malaysian” counselling approach a great challenge (Suradi Salim & Rafidah Aga Mohd Jaladin, 2004). Hence, some counselling authorities have attempted to make cultural adjustment on the Western psychotherapy and counselling models, whereas, others have chosen to adopt a traditional counselling approach in their practice. These efforts are manifested in writings and research, for instance, on family therapy (Ng, 2003), religious psychotherapy (Azhar Md Zain, Varma & Dharap, 1994; Azhar Md Zain & Varma, 1995a; Azhar Md Zain & Varma, 1995b), cognitive therapy (Azhar Md Zain & Varma, 1996), career counselling (Pope et al., 2002), psychosocial interventions (Razali Salleh M, Hasanah Che Ismail, Umeed Ali Khan & Subramaniam, 2000), religious–cultural psychotherapy with anxiety

patients (Razali Salleh M, Aminah Kassim & Umeed Ali Khan, 2002), conceptualisation (Sulaiha B. K. Mastan & Mason, 1994) and treatment on mental illness (Azhar Md Zain & Varma, 2000), rehabilitation system (Scorzelli, 1986) and person-centred approach to counselling (Wan Abdul Kader Wan Ahmad, 1986).

However, research in guidance and counselling in Malaysia is still lacking and most of them are exploratory in nature with greater emphasis on vocational guidance and psychological phenomena (Abdul Halim Othman, 1984; Suradi Salim & Rafidah Aga Mohd Jaladin, 2004). With regard to the person-centred approach to counselling (Rogers, 1942) there has been no empirical research carried out in Malaysia. Most available writings on the person-centred approach are theoretical in nature (Abdul Rahman Haji Salleh, 1983; Yunus Majid, 1985; Nor Anisah Abdul Malek, 1985; Abdul Ayah @ Abdul Aziz Mahmood, 1984; Khairuddin Mohamed, 1985; Wan Abdul Kader Wan Ahmad, 1986). Several authors have come up with different viewpoints regarding the suitability of practising the person-centred counselling in the Malaysian context. For instance, Hamzah S Mohamed (1984) viewed that the theory is not suitable. On the contrary, Wan Abdul Kader (1986) wrote a more positive view about practising the approach with Malay clients, suggesting that there are similarities between the humanistic approach and the cultural values of the society (Wan Abdul Kadir Wan Ahmad, 1986).

As the person-centred approach has been an important guideline for counselling relationships (Ministry of Education, 1984) and basic counselling skills training programs in Malaysia, it is crucial to conduct an empirical research on exploring the Malay clients' inner experiences and personal growth as they participate in this non-directive, egalitarian counselling approach. The exploration of the participants inner experiences and personal growth provides an insight on the potential suitability and usefulness of the approach with this group of clients.

## **1.2 Person-centred approach to counselling: An overview of theory and practice**

The person-centred approach to counselling was developed by Carl Rogers (1902-1987) in the United States based on the principles of humanistic psychology. Humanistic psychology emphasises the present experience, essential worth of the whole person, promotes creativity, free choice, and spontaneity, and fosters the belief that people can solve their own problems. As the proponent of the humanistic tradition, the person-centred approach stresses on the unique capacities of each individual to self-realisation and personal growth. As a result, the approach focuses more on human creativity, authenticity, and internal locus of evaluation with a belief in the uniquely human aspects of experience, including personal choices, interpersonal relationships, intentions, purposes, and transcendental or spiritual experiences, instead of stresses on environmental control on individual personality and behaviour, as well as the role of expert therapist in answering individual's problems.



Carl Rogers' ideas have been heavily influenced by his relationships with clients in counselling. He believes that counselling relationship characterised by counsellor's core conditions of genuineness, unconditional positive regard and empathy is a special instance of interpersonal relationships in general (Rogers, 1961). Non-directivity is another characteristic of person-centred counselling, whereby, the counsellor does not play a superior role to the client. It is believed that an individual client is trustworthy and capable of finding the answers to his problems. He postulates that if the counsellor's conditions of genuineness, unconditional positive regard and empathy are present and maintained in the counselling relationship over a certain period, the client will experience the process of personal growth. The personal growth is characterised by an increase in individual understanding of self and experience, self-esteem, openness to experience, and acceptance of responsibilities. In other words, the egalitarian relationship and counsellor's qualities facilitate the clients' process of becoming more congruent, less defensive, more realistic in perceptions, more effective in problem-solving and more accepting of others.

Rogers presented his theory in a number of writings such as freedom to learn in education (1969), encounter groups (1970), becoming marriage partners (1972), and the revolutionary impact of personal power (1977), and studies on the practice of the approach with hospitalised patients (e.g., Rogers, Gendlin, Kisler, & Truax, 1967; Barrett-Lennard, 1959; Mitchell, Truax, Bozarth & Krauft, 1973). Besides, lectures, live demonstrations and workshops were carried out by Rogers, and audiovisual recordings of the