

COMMENTARY

The Humanistic and Behavioral Traditions: Areas of Agreement and Disagreement

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This comment, a response to Steven Hayes's contribution, addresses areas of agreement and disagreement between the humanistic and behavioral traditions. Areas of agreement include a common interest in humanism, cognition, and contextualism. Areas of disagreement include Hayes's analysis of humanistic psychology's historical focus on human science and qualitative research as well as his view that humanistic psychology is not scientifically based. In the interest of collaboration, the article concludes with a request that behavioral clinicians be more cautious about extolling the specialness of behavioral approaches in psychotherapy.

Keywords: humanism, behaviorism, cognition, contextualism, cognitive-behavioral therapy, psychotherapy effectiveness

My comment will focus on only one of the articles in this special section because my recent work has critiqued behavioral approaches to psychotherapy (e.g., Elkins, 2007, 2008, 2009a, 2009b) and because Steven Hayes (2012) raised specific issues in his article about humanistic psychology. My tradition is humanistic psychology and Steven's is the behavioral tradition. I appreciate Steven's collaborative spirit and his straightforward style. In this response to his article, I will address areas of agreement and disagreement between our traditions. I hope my commentary helps clarify areas for future discussion, collaboration, and integration between the humanistic and behavioral traditions.

Areas of Agreement

Steven is correct that humanistic psychology arose in the 1950s and 1960s, in large measure, as a reaction to behaviorism. As Steven noted, Maslow and other founders of humanistic psychology believed behaviorism was based on a mechanistic model of the human being and they considered that model too limited to address such important human phenomena as meaning, purpose, awe, love values, choice, spirituality, and self-actualization.

Ironically, as a young man, Maslow was enamored with behaviorism. He was trained in behaviorism and animal psychology at the University of Wisconsin where he served as laboratory assistant to Harry Harlow (Goble, 1978). However, he became disillusioned with behaviorism. In an interview (see Hall, 1968), Maslow described the event that changed him:

Our first baby changed me as a psychologist. It made the behaviorism I had been so enthusiastic about look so foolish I could not stomach

it any more. It was impossible. I looked at this tiny, mysterious thing and felt so stupid. I was stunned by the mystery and by the sense of not really being in control . . . (p. 17).

From that point on, Maslow began stressing the need for a broader, more inclusive psychology. Eventually, he would help found the movement that would become known as humanistic psychology. I am pleased that today, 40 years after Maslow's death, Steven and others in the behavioral tradition have embraced humanistic ideas. Steven and I agree that humanism is very important.

A second area of agreement is the importance of cognition in psychotherapy. When I was student in the early 1970s, I was shocked to learn that John B. Watson, the founder of behaviorism, viewed the mind as nothing but an epiphenomenon of behavior. In his fanciful case of the "psychopathological dog," Watson (1924/1967) chided those who believed the mind was involved in emotional difficulties by showing how a dog could be conditioned to have problems and unconditioned and reconditioned so the problems went away, all without "the needlessness of introducing the 'conception of mind'" (p. 298). As a student, I thought Watson's view was extreme—and my opinion hasn't changed. However, in recent decades, it has been gratifying to watch the growth of cognitive-behavioral therapy (CBT) with its emphasis on the client's cognition. CBT helped bring the "mind" back into behavioral psychology. CBT therapists focus on the thoughts and feelings, along with the cognitive schemata, of clients. Humanistic therapists focus on the same inner, phenomenal world. Those who practice from an existential perspective often use the "phenomenological method" as a way to explore and understand the structure of the client's inner experience (see Yalom, 1980). Although CBT and humanistic therapists differ in their descriptions of, and approaches to, cognition, they agree on the importance of the client's thoughts, feelings, and cognitive structures. It would be exciting for the two traditions to discuss their respective language, con-

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structs, and methods for exploring and understanding the phenomenal world of clients. A third area of agreement is the importance of contextualism. Steven is a leader in his tradition on contextual perspectives. Humanistic psychology also emphasizes the importance of contextualism in psychotherapy. Because Steven's article covers this well, I will not elaborate here except to say that this is another area of agreement.

Finally, although Steven does not address this in his article, there is another area of historical, but not current, agreement between our traditions. Originally, behaviorism eschewed the medical model in psychotherapy, saying that much of what had been called "pathology" was the result of faulty learning experiences. Humanistic psychology agreed with behaviorism that the medical model was problematic. Unfortunately, the clinical branch of behaviorism abandoned that original position and is now heavily involved with the medical model, perhaps more than any other psychology tradition. Clinical scientists in the behavioral tradition have led the field in conducting specificity studies designed to discover "treatments" for "mental disorders." Thus, behaviorism is now one of the "major players" on the medical model team. This could be a historical mistake because increasing evidence suggests that the medical model with its emphasis on medical-like techniques as the primary determinants of effectiveness is wrong (Elkins, 2009b; Wampold, 2001).

Areas of Disagreement

Authentic collaboration means that we must not ignore differences. Here are some areas where Steven and I disagree. One area of disagreement has to do with Steven's view that humanistic psychology emphasized human science and qualitative research because the movement wanted to hold on to humanistic ideas but didn't have experimental research tools at the time to prove their scientific validity. Steven believes the emphasis on human science and qualitative research harmed the humanistic movement. He suggests that contemporary behaviorism can now provide the scientific tools needed to place humanistic ideas on a solid empirical base. I disagree with Steven's analysis. It does not reflect the historical facts. Humanistic psychologists did not focus on human science and qualitative research because of an inability to study humanistic ideas scientifically, as Steven suggests. Instead, Maslow (1966) and others (e.g., Giorgi, 1970, 1992) recognized the limitations of positivistic science and knew that the methods of the physical sciences were not always appropriate for the study of psychological phenomena. Thus, Maslow called for a broader science that would allow researchers to study human phenomena that had been ignored by psychology due, in part, to the narrow epistemology that dominated the field at that time. Maslow was trained in experimental research and knew both its benefits and limitations. He knew it was difficult, if not impossible, to force such subtle human phenomena as love, awe, values, meaning, and spirituality into the physical sciences mold. To put this into contemporary language, humanistic pioneers called for epistemological diversity and a recognition of the value of qualitative and mixed methods research. Once again, humanistic psychology was ahead of its time and the field now recognizes the value of diverse scientific methods. Thus, humanistic psychologists' historical interest in epistemological issues was not, as Steven suggested, a maneuver to hold onto humanistic ideas because they could not be

proven scientifically. Instead, it was an important effort to expand science beyond the narrow positivism that was limiting psychological investigations.

A third area of disagreement, directly related to the above, is Steven's assumption that humanistic psychology does not have a solid scientific base. Steven is not the first to make this mistake. In the *American Psychologist*, Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi (2000) said the same thing and had to be corrected by two humanistic scholars in a later edition of the journal (see Bohart & Greening, 2001). It is a myth that humanistic psychology is not scientifically grounded and the perpetuation of this myth, even when done unintentionally, harms humanistic scholars and the humanistic movement. Therefore, I will respond to this issue at some length. Because this discussion is focused on psychotherapy, I will describe some of the research that supports humanistic therapies. I hope this information helps deconstruct the myth. First, as I documented in my article, there is increasing contemporary evidence to support what humanistic psychologists have believed for 50 years: that the personal and interpersonal elements of psychotherapy are the primary determinants of psychotherapy effectiveness. However, we did not embrace this belief because some charismatic humanistic pioneer told us to do so. Instead, we embraced the view because extensive research conducted 50 years ago supported it as scientific fact. Carl Rogers, a major founder of humanistic psychology, conducted research on psychotherapy for more than 20 years, most of it during his tenure at the University of Chicago. Here are some facts that may surprise those who think humanistic psychology is not scientifically grounded: (a) Rogers was the first to conduct major scientific studies on psychotherapy using quantitative methods; (b) Rogers's findings showed that personal and interpersonal factors were the main ingredients of psychotherapy effectiveness; (c) Rogers was the first to develop a theory of personality and psychotherapy based on quantitative research; (d) Rogers's theories have generated more research than those of any other clinical psychologist in history; (e) the American Psychological Association (APA) gave Rogers two of its most prestigious awards: the "Award for Distinguished Scientific Contributions" in 1956 and the "Award for Distinguished Professional Contributions to Psychology" in 1972; (f) Rogers's theories have influenced, and generated additional research in, education, social work, nursing, group therapy, interpersonal relations, organizational development, international relations, systems theory, psychiatry, counseling, psychology, and other disciplines. It is also worth mentioning that in two major surveys of clinicians, one conducted in 1982 and the other in 2006, Rogers was named as the most influential psychotherapist (see Smith, 1982; *Psychotherapy Networker*, March/April, 2007). (The above information on Rogers was taken from the following sources: Bozarth, Zimring, & Tausch, 2002; Cain & Seeman, 2002; DeCarvalho, 1991; Elkins, 2009b; Bohart & Greening, 2001; Kirschenbaum, 2009; Kirschenbaum & Jourdan, 2005; Rogers, 1957, 1959; N. Rogers, 2008).

Maslow, chair of the department of psychology at Brandeis University, studied high-functioning individuals and developed a list of characteristics of self-actualized persons (see Maslow, 1971). Shostrom (see Shostrom, 1963; Shostrom & Knapp, 1966), in turn, used Maslow's list to develop the Personal Orientation Inventory, a measure of self-actualization that has been used widely by both researchers and clinicians. Maslow also brought spirituality under the umbrella of psychology so that it could be

studied scientifically (Taylor, 1999). In 1969, Maslow helped launch *The Journal of Transpersonal Psychology*, the first psychology journal specifically dedicated to publishing scientific and theoretical articles on spirituality.

Gendlin (see Gendlin, 1969; Gendlin, Beebe, Cassens, Klein, & Oberlander, 1967), now a professor emeritus at the University of Chicago, conducted research on why some clients benefit from psychotherapy and others do not. Gendlin corroborated participants' self-reports by recording brain waves and using galvanic skin responses. Based on his research, Gendlin developed a model to explain the phenomenal experience of clients when insight and emotional release occur. His model allows therapists to identify clients who are not likely to benefit from therapy and train them so they will. Gendlin's model is used widely by both therapists and laypersons. Greenberg and others (see Goldman, Greenberg, & Angus, 2006; Greenberg & Goldman, 2008; Greenberg & Watson, 1998; Greenberg & Watson, 2005) have conducted extensive research on "Emotion-Focused Therapy." Elliott (see Elliott, 2002; Elliott, Greenberg, & Lietaer, 2004; Stiles, Shapiro, & Elliott, 1986), another humanistic psychologist, directs a center for experiential therapies and conducts psychotherapy research on an ongoing basis. Stiles and others (see Stiles, Barkham, Mellor-Clark, & Connell, 2008) conducted the largest naturalistic study of psychotherapy effectiveness ever done in "real world" clinical settings. The study involved more than 5,000 psychotherapy clients, and the findings showed that CBT, Person-Centered, and Psychodynamic therapies were all effective and that they were equivalent in effectiveness.

The humanistic movement has several scholarly journals that publish scientific and theoretical articles. For example, the *Journal of Humanistic Psychology*, which was launched in 1961 with the help of Maslow, has published such articles on humanistic themes for more than 50 years. Similarly, *The Humanistic Psychologist*, which is the official journal of the Society for Humanistic Psychology (Division 32 of the APA), has published articles on humanistic research and theory since the 1970s (see Aanstoos, Serlin, & Greening, 2000). *The Journal of Constructivist Psychology* reflects postmodern themes and constructivist approaches to research and knowledge (see Messer & Neimeyer, 1995; Sexton, 1997). Numerous other journals are also dedicated to humanistic and existential themes. The *Journal of the Society for Existential Analysis* and the *International Journal of Existential Psychology and Psychotherapy* are two examples.

The Society for Humanistic Psychology (Division 32 of APA) is both a professional and learned society that participates in APA's annual conference where members present scholarly papers on humanistic themes, including humanistic research. In addition, Division 32 holds its own "Society for Humanistic Psychology Annual Conference" which is devoted exclusively to scholarly presentations on humanistic topics. For the 2012 meeting, 150 humanistic psychologists and graduate psychology students submitted proposals.

I could go on but perhaps the aforementioned information is sufficient to deconstruct the myth that humanistic psychology is not scientific. When one considers that humanistic psychology is a relatively small tradition, the amount of scholarly activity by humanistic psychologists is quite impressive. This does not mean that we do not need to do more research but it does mean that psychologists in other traditions should stop perpetuating the myth that humanistic psychol-

ogy has little empirical base. (For additional information on humanistic research and scholarship, see the following sources: Aanstoos, Serlin, & Greening, 2000; Cain & Seeman, 2002; Child, 1973; Elliott, 2002; Elliott, Greenberg, & Lietaer, 2004; Schneider, Bugental, & Pierson, 2002; Wertz, 2001).

Finally, I want to call attention to an important issue that directly concerns the behavioral tradition. Clinical psychology is currently engaged in an important debate, the outcome of which could determine the future of psychotherapy. The debate is about the medical model and whether techniques or contextual factors are the primary determinants of psychotherapy effectiveness. As I documented in my article, there is increasing evidence that techniques—including the so-called "empirically supported" techniques of CBT—have relatively little to do with psychotherapy effectiveness (Elkins, 2007, 2008; Wampold, 2001, 2005; Wampold, Lichtenberg, & Waehler, 2002). In addition, since the late 1970s and early 1980s, the research has shown that all bona fide therapies are effective, and equally so (see Bergin & Lambert, 1978; Lambert & Bergin, 1994; Messer & Wampold, 2000; Seligman, 1995; Smith & Glass, 1977; Smith, Glass, & Miller, 1980; Stiles, Barkham, Mellor-Clark, & Connell, J., 2008; Stiles, Barkham, Twigg, Mellor-Clark, & Cooper., 2006; Wampold, 2001; Wampold, 2005; Wampold et al., 1997). Yet, despite this evidence, many behavioral clinicians continue to insist on the "specialness" of CBT techniques for the treatment of various disorders. If they simply affirmed that CBT is effective, as are all bona fide therapies, there would be no problem; but when they insist on the specialness of CBT, they go too far. Therefore, in view of the scientific evidence and in the interest of egalitarian collaboration, I respectfully ask the proponents of CBT to be more cautious about extolling the specialness of CBT approaches. This would mean a lot to those of us in other traditions.

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