The Person-Centered Approach as a Subculture

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Abstract. PCA is considered to be not just a narrow professional counseling and psychotherapeutic practice, but a cultural movement, a subculture which has a potential to change the entire culture of the humankind. As arguments for that perspective are discussed 1) a wide spread of PCA in different areas of human life and practice and 2) a compliance of the PCA to main characteristics of culture. PCA is viewed as a subculture, a cultural way of being which enables to live constructive and satisfying life.

Key words: the Person-Centered Approach, culture and subculture, main characteristics of culture.

Considering the PCA from the Cultural-Historical Psychology perspective we dare to set a rather radical hypothesis, namely: PCA is not just a narrow professional practice, but is a developing subculture within the culture of humankind. This subculture has a potential to change the global human culture.

The arguments in favor of this assumption are, first of all, a wide spread and rooting of PCA in various areas of human life. The person-centered approach deals with various spheres of human relations and life today. Started as a psychotherapeutic approach (the client-centered psychotherapy) it has gone out far beyond its limits – in education (Rogers, Freyberg, 2002; Gordon, 2003, etc.), business and working relations (Kolpachnikov, 2000, Kolpachnikov, Tishova, 2016, Shtroo, Kolpachnikov, 2014, Meadows, 2002, 2014, etc.), medicine and nursing (Kolpachnikov, 2009), mediation and resolution of conflicts (Shamlakashvili, Hazanova, 2014, etc.), daily interpersonal relations (Rogers, 1961, 2002), child nurturing (Gordon, 2000), etc. This permeation of the PCA in different areas of human life and practice we see as a main argument for viewing it

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1 Cultural-Historical Psychology is a scientific approach to development of human consciousness and personality in the context of mutual activity and relations in society. A role of culture, i.e. cultural tools – signs, especially, language meanings and concepts, as means of transforming of psychological formations - and subject activity in development of human consciousness is underlined. The foundations of the approach were elaborated in the first half of the XX century by famous Russian psychologist Lev Semyonovich Vygotsky (Vygotsky, 1983). This approach actively develops in modern Russian psychology, mainly in Lomonosov Moscow State University.
as not just narrow professional practice, but a cultural way of being and relating to people around.

As a second argument for considering PCA as a subculture we take the fact that PCA fits to the main basic characteristics of culture. Let's consider the last argument in detail.

**Compliance of PCA to the main attributes of culture**

According to cultural-evolutionary approach (Asmolov, 1990, etc.) there are the following main characteristics of culture:

- Culture is a concrete historical form of human practice and relations, which has proved to satisfy main vital needs and to promote being of the person in the world.
- Culture is constituted by historically developed system of knowledge (values) and practice.
- Culture is delivered to new members of society in the course of joint activity and communication.
- Culture is apt for historical change/evolution.

Let’s look at each of these characteristics of the PCA in detail.

**PCA as a system of knowledge and practice**

The person-centered approach is a coordinated and developing system of knowledge (values) and practice. The system of knowledge in PCA consists of the developing theoretical and empirical ideas about the person, one's change, relations with other people in various spheres of life. The system of theoretical knowledge of PCA is concisely presented at the Fig. 1 taken from the famous paper of Carl Rogers (1959). This scheme might be supplemented by new theoretical and empirical sections, developed by many modern followers of the approach.

Fig. 1. Conceptual system of the Person-Centered Approach
The system of practice of PCA consists of personal attitudes and skills of congruence, empathy/empathic listening and unconditional positive regard. These attitudes and skills are used in different types of activity, such as therapy, education, medical treatment, interpersonal relations and personal growth, etc.

**Delivering the PCA to new generations**

More and more people are involved in an orbit of the person-centered relations in different areas such as counseling and psychotherapy, education, business, everyday interpersonal relations, etc. The Person-Centered Approach is acquired by "beginners" - clients, students, partners - in active relations with “holders” of this worldview and way of being. Gradually they start to live in according with the approach. In this way PCA is transferred to new people, new generations of people.

**PCA’s openness to changes**
Carl Rogers made an invaluable personal contribution to the practice and theory of the person-centered approach and, respectively, into entire human culture. Certainly, it was not him who had first discovered empathy, congruence and unconditional positive regard. They were present and are present in constructive communication and interaction of people. However, he was the first who allocated and systematized components of the constructive relations and has shown importance of their joint manifestation as necessary and sufficient (Rogers C.R., 1959, Rogers C., 1994) conditions of constructive change and being of the person.

Carl Rogers warned about the danger of transformation of the person-centered approach into a rigid system of beliefs and practice. He always stood up for the development of the approach, while being devoted to its core principles.

Colleagues and followers of Carl Rogers continue to develop theory and practice of the person-centered approach. A huge contribution, from our point of view, was made by Ernest Meadows, a member of the CSP, colleague and friend of Carl, who was a business consultant applying the PCA to work with personnel of business organizations. A result of his work was not only a wide distribution of the person-centered approach into business relations. As main result of this lifelong work has become a development of the general model of constructive person-centered relations for any partnership – in business, education, politics, everyday life (Meadows E.E., 2002, 2014). This model supplements widely known model of six conditions of the constructive therapeutic relations of Carl Rogers (Rogers C.R., 1959).

Eugene Gendlin, developed the practice of focusing on bodily states which allow the person to realize and understand oneself deeper (Gendlin Yu., 2000). Thereby practice of the client-centered psychotherapy and, consequently, the theory and practice of self-knowing and congruence has been advanced.

Garry Pouty (2009) developed theory and practice of pre-therapy as a way of creating of psychological contact, which is an eminent condition of both therapy and constructive partnership. Practice and theory of pre-therapy are successfully used today in work with people, who suffer of disturbances of contact and in education of children with autistic and other disorders.

Godfrey Barret-Lennard for many years creatively investigates constructive person-centered relations and communication and makes a valuable contribution into theory, and practice of the person-centered approach. (Barret-Lennard, 2015).
Charles O'Leary for many years successfully develops practice of person-centered family psychotherapy and theory of constructive family and couples relations (O'Leary, 1999).

A big contribution into development of the theory and practice of the person-centered approach is made by Arthur Bohart (1999, etc.), who is the most known and respected modern theorist of the person-centered approach.

It would be possible to give a wider set of examples of development of the person-centered approach much of which is made during fifty years by members of the CSP. It really grows and develops!

**PCA is a concrete historical form of human practice and relations, which has proved to satisfy main vital needs and to promote being of the person in the world.**

Typical cultural practices during a long history of humankind were competition and rivalry. They used to be effective and led to appropriate satisfaction of needs and promote human development. But nowadays they don't lead to wellbeing anymore. Moreover, the commitment to them has delivered the modern world on a side of global crisis (O'Hara, Leicester, 2012). PCA leads to cooperation. A person, while remaining oneself, is capable to understand and to regard another person with one's needs and requirements. On this basis becomes possible to look for mutually best decisions.

PCA recognizes and regards the uniqueness, self-value and innate ability for human development and growth. Empathy, congruence and unconditional positive regard form personal competence in relationships. The core conditions help in constructive conflict resolution, maintaining a delicate balance between individual and community interests. Under these conditions true (not imposed) learning arises, promoting growth and full functioning of students. Creation of new working communities becomes possible. These communities benefit from the best possible potential of each individual for the mutual benefit of the person and the organization (Meadows, 2014), (Kolpachnikov, Tishova, 2016). Aspirations and expectations of people can be realized more fully (Kolpachnikov, 2009). Because of this PCA penetrates and deeply roots in the various fields of human practice, more and more people consciously or spontaneously start to realize the person-centered approach in their life. It becomes a cultural way of being.

**Conclusion**
The image of the person-centered approach not as a narrow professional practice, but a cultural-historical movement, subculture which is presented here is open for discussion. We view the perspective as reasonable. We have provided arguments in favor of compliance of the Person-Centered Approach to the main characteristics of culture. The person-centered approach as subculture, a socio-historical way of living leads to wellbeing, constructive self-actualization, full functioning of modern person and human communities. It answers to the challenges which the modern humankind faces.

References


