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Consideration of the applicability of person-centered therapy to culturally varying clients, focusing on the actualizing tendency and self-actualization – from East Asian perspective

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Introduction

The concept of the *actualizing tendency* towards the fulfilment of innate potentials which involves self-actualization is regarded as the foundation block of the Person-centered Approach to psychotherapy (hereafter, PCA). That is, the PCA has developed based on Rogers' views of the actualizing tendency as the universal motivation for growth and change in all human beings (Bozarth & Brodley, 1991), and thus as 'the motivating force for psychotherapy' (Rogers, 2013, p.24). However, Rogers' viewpoint, especially his concept of self-actualization has often been subject to the criticism that it represents Western individualistic cultural emphases on the view of the independent and autonomous self, whilst disregarding the view of the interdependent and relational self which is found to be prevalent in non-Western collectivistic cultures (Bohart, 2013; Wilkins, 2010). This has led to the further question of whether the PCA is applicable to clients from non-Western cultures.

In an attempt to seek the answer to this question, this article will explore Rogers' concept of self-actualization, as well as its criticism. It will also evaluate the applicability of the PCA not only to the non-Western cultural contexts, but also to the Western cultural contexts in which the view of the interdependent self can also be possibly observed. In order to argue for the applicability of the PCA to culturally varying clients, I will suggest that what we as therapists need to focus on in working with every client is their actualizing tendency which is the universal motivation for growth, underlining that their organismic potentialities towards both independence and interdependence can be expressed in different ways and to varying degrees; subsequently, self-actualization of all individuals may be different and unique. I will then, try to elaborate upon what the focus on the actualizing tendency would mean and involve in the practice of the PCA. This will be followed by my personal reflections upon applying the PCA to my therapeutic work with culturally different clients, as well as upon personal growth of myself from a non-Western culture.

Rogers' Concept of Self-actualization

Rogers (1959, 1980) postulates that there exists the natural tendency for growth in all matter, but distinguishes this tendency of living organisms from that of the universe; the former refers to the

actualizing tendency and the latter does the *formative tendency*. To elaborate further, Rogers (1980) considers the formative tendency as the fundamental tendency of all matter in the universe to evolve into higher levels of forms with greater complexity and integration. As a subset of this formative tendency, the actualizing tendency is regarded as the principal basic tendency in the organism to develop all potentialities towards the maintenance and enhancement of the organism (Rogers, 1959). This organism includes all humankind, as well as animals and plants – even *sprouts of potatoes in a cellar* (Rogers, 1980). In this view, every individual is believed to possess the actualizing tendency by which they are propelled towards maximizing their personal maturation, in other words, their unique fulfilment of potentialities as the whole organism in which all of their physical and psychological parts are integrated (Merry, 2002).

In Rogers' conception, self-actualization is a subsystem of the actualizing tendency and a uniquely human process. That is to say, Rogers draws a distinction between the actualizing tendency of the organism and *self-actualization* of the individual (Gaylin, 2001). It is because for Rogers, the term *self* represents neither the organism itself nor a specific psychic agent. Rather, it is something like 'a conceptual *map*' (italics in original, Bohart, 2013, p.87) or 'a filter' (Westen, 1992a, p.3) according to which individuals perceive and evaluate their organismic experiences. More specifically, the self refers to a portion of the individual's perceptual field that becomes differentiated within the whole organism through social interactions, which is not something fixed but 'a fluid and changing gestalt, a *process*' (italics in original, Rogers, 1959, p.200). Thus, self-actualization is conceptualized as the maintenance and enhancement of that portion which is *self* (Bohart, 2013) and as a process rather than a state, which is motivated by the actualizing tendency that could never be demolished until death (Casemore, 2011).

To put it another way, in Rogers' view, what is actualizing is the organism, not the self. Self-actualization implies the psychological level, while actualization of the organism indicates the holistic level involving the biological or physical level as well. In a nutshell, self-actualization is part of the actualization of every individual as the organism, which is motivated by their actualizing tendency that is a particular aspect of the formative tendency (Cornelius-White & Kriz, 2008).

Western Cultural Influences on Rogers' Concept of Self-actualization

Rogers (1951, 1959) posits that the actualizing tendency is a directional tendency towards personal autonomy and independence from external influences. He elaborates on this viewpoint further with the notion of *locus of evaluation*. That is, people with an internal locus of evaluation are able to evaluate their experiences and make judgments depending on their personal values and standards, which may facilitate the potency of their actualizing tendency. By contrast, those with an external locus of evaluation are likely to rely on values, judgments or expectations of others that can be introjected or internalized as *conditions of worth* (Rogers, 1959); subsequently, their senses of self-worth become dependent on these conditions, which may thwart their actualizing tendency. In this sense, Rogers places an emphasis on the internalization of locus of evaluation which is important for the facilitation of the *organismic valuing process* (ibid.). Accordingly, his concept of self-actualization tends to focus on and emphasize individuals' self-determination and self-regulation away from the external control, in other words, their autonomy and independence in thoughts and actions rather than their conformity to social standards (Brodley, 1999; Chang, 1991).

Such ideas of Rogers have been argued to be influenced heavily by American culture (Van Belle, 1990). To illustrate, Rogers was born and raised in American culture where the dilemma of individuals' freedom against their conformity to society was prevalent. In resolving this dilemma, Rogers has developed his growth concepts in line with John Dewey's notion of growth as a process. Nonetheless, whereas Dewey posits that the growth potential is constantly formed by individuals and society, Rogers views the potential as inherent to all individuals, referring to this as the actualizing tendency (Finke, 2002). In this view, as opposed to Dewey underlining reconstruction of society towards human ends, Rogers places an emphasis on freeing individuals to actualize their potential away from societal control (Van Belle, 1990).

Van Belle (1990) argues that such an emphasis of Rogers was not something unique to himself, but it was only articulation of the cultural values shared in American society where he was living. Indeed, it may not be much surprise that Western individualistic cultural emphases on individuals' autonomy and independence are seen in Rogers' conceptions, as he developed his ideas based on his own counselling experiences in America in which Western individualistic cultural values were strongly advocated (Spielhofer, 2003). Rogers (1951, p.4) even states that the PCA is a 'product of its time and its cultural setting', although it is not solely a product of Western cultural influences.

However, Rogers' concept of self-actualization has been susceptible to the criticism that it disregards cultural variations in the conceptions of self, thereby generalizing self-actualization of all individuals as the actualization of the self at the expense of others. It is because in some cultures, especially in Asian cultures, the self is conceptualized to exist in terms of social embeddedness or interdependence with others rather than independence from others.

Western Independent Selves vs. Eastern Interdependent Selves

A great amount of cross-cultural psychological literature (e.g. Kitayama, 1992; Kitayama, Karasawa, Curhan, Markus & Ryff, 2010; Kitayama & Park, 2013; Markus & Kitayama, 2003) has argued for a distinction between Western *independent* and Eastern *interdependent* selves which was proposed by Markus and Kitayama (1991) based on empirical research findings that Westerners tend to perceive themselves as an individual and stress their uniqueness and independence in their self-construal. By contrast, Eastern, especially Asian, people are found to believe that their selves cannot be construed separately from social connections, thus tending to define themselves in terms of social relationships rather than their own individual qualities and accomplishments; they even have a certain tendency to try to satisfy others' demands or expectations in order to strengthen social relationships. This is thought to be because how individuals conceptualize or construe their selves is influenced by their cultures, as numerous empirical studies have shown that in general, people from individualistic cultures are inclined to have the independent self-concept, whereas those from collectivist cultures are likely to have the interdependent self-concept (e.g. Bond & Cheung, 1983; Brewer & Gardner, 1996; Dhawan, Roseman, Naidu, Thapa & Retteck, 1995; Ip & Bond, 1995; Lalljee & Angelova, 1995; Miller, 1987; Oyserman, 1993; Rhee, Uleman, Lee & Roman, 1995).

To illustrate, Western people's view of the self as independent from others is thought to have been affected by individualistic cultures which have been dominant in Western countries such as the US, Australia, the UK and Canada (Hofstede, 1980). Modern individualist philosophy is thought to

have started with Thomas Hobbes in the 17th century who was one of the key figures having developed Enlightenment conceptions of freedom and self-interest. From economic perspectives, individualism is considered to be related to the emergence of private property in England in the 13th century (Macfarlane, 1978), but what fostered competition and individualism in Western world is regarded as the advent of industrialization, especially the Industrial Revolution (Westen, 1992b). Protestantism is also said to have contributed to the development of individualistic values and cultures (Sanchez-Burks, 2005), particularly of American individualism (Bellah, Madsen, Sullivan, Swidler & Tipton, 1985). These ideas and changes in the history of philosophical ideas, in economic history and in religious history are thought to have promoted individualistic cultural elements such as self-orientation, self-determination, self-sufficiency and control, and the pursuit of individual goals that may be consistent or inconsistent with the goals of others or a society. These cultural elements are assumed to have potentially induced the view of self as independent from others or a tendency for behaviors being congruous to the value of independence and autonomy in Western societies (Kitayama & Park, 2013).

Eastern people's view of the self as interdependent with or related to others is thought to have been influenced by collectivistic cultures which have been more prevalent in Eastern societies, especially East Asian countries such as China, Japan and Korea (Hofstede, 1980). The roots of collectivistic cultures could be found in Buddhist cosmology in which a man is united with his/her surrounding, or Confucianism which places an importance upon social relationship or hierarchy and harmony (Kitayama & Park, 2013). In particular, Confucianism is thought to have played a crucial role in the development of collectivistic cultural values and practices. Confucian ethics and values such as Loyalty, Filial Piety, Benevolence, Propriety and Trust tend to place an emphasis on how people should behave in their social relationships rather than what they should do as an independent individual in society. For instance, Filial Piety is an essential value or moral laws of parent-child relationships which implies that children should listen to their parents and do their best for the parents; and Loyalty usually refers to obedience to superiors in hierarchical orders. In addition, the common good as harmony is often regarded as more important than individual self-interest (Kim, 1997). Furthermore, some of Confucian ethos and values have been highlighted in the industrialization of some Asian societies. As an example, many commentators attribute the miraculous economic development of South Korea to Confucian values such as 'filial piety, respect for elders and superiors, loyalty to rulers, obedience to authority, familism, and social harmony' (Palais, 2002, p.503-504). These values are often regarded as contributing to mediating the relationships between employees as well as alleviating labor-management disputes (Kim, 1992). Additionally, there is the belief that the 'subordination of individual interest' serves to benefit 'industrial harmony' and further, 'the national interest or the public good' (Palais, 2002, p.504). Such Confucian ethos and values are considered to have promoted collectivistic cultural elements such as an emphasis on sharing, cooperation and social harmony, loyalty to ascribed groups and duties and obligations towards in-groups (e.g. family, ethnic or religious groups, etc.), as well as the subordination of personal interests to the goals of the in-groups or a society (Morris, Davis & Allen, 1994). These cultural elements are assumed to have potentially influenced individuals to perceive or construe themselves as connected to or interdependent with others, whilst having a tendency to behave according to the value of interdependence and embeddedness in Eastern, especially East Asian societies (Kitayama & Park, 2013).

Such research findings of cross-cultural differences in self-construal or self-concepts may suggest that cross-cultural differences may exist in the conceptions of self-actualization. In Western individualistic cultures holding the view of the independent self, self-actualization is likely to be conceptualized in the context of personal autonomy and independence from others. By contrast, within Eastern collectivistic cultures in which the self is viewed as interdependent with others or as embedded in social relationships, self-actualization is more likely to be conceptualized in the context of such interdependence or embeddedness (Mearns, Thorne & McLeod, 2013). Nonetheless, Rogers' conception of self-actualization highlighting individuals' independence and autonomy seems to disregard the case of the interdependent self, thereby generalizing self-actualization of every individual as the actualization of the independent self. In this respect, his ideas have often been criticized for proving 'overly individualistic' (Cooper, 2013, p.12), or representing Western cultural emphasis on individualism (Wilkins, 2010). This has led to the further question of whether the PCA, which has developed based on Rogers' ideas, is applicable to non-Western cultures where the notion of the interdependent self is more dominant.

Is the PCA Only Applicable to Western Cultures?

In order to seek the answer to this question, it seems important to take into account that an emphasis on personal autonomy and independence is also found in some Eastern thoughts of self-actualization. For example, according to Chang (1991, online), the concept of self-actualization in Chinese Taoism and Japanese Buddhism (i.e. Zen Buddhism), which are influential in Eastern cultures, appears similar to that of Rogers. This is because all of these ideas view self-actualization as the development of human potential, suggesting that all individuals have 'an actualizing tendency that promotes growth, direction and productivity' (ibid.). Moreover, Taoism and Zen Buddhism do not emphasize the importance of individuals' acceptance of authority from external sources; rather, they highlight independence of individuals' thoughts and actions from social influences more strongly than Rogers. Zen Buddhism, in particular, is often contrasted to Confucianism whose emphasis on people's interdependence and social conformity has played a crucial role in developing Eastern collectivistic cultures. Interestingly, however, the idea of human independence in Zen Buddhism has 'the characteristically paradoxical notion that individualism never places one in conflict with nature or with other people' (ibid.), which appears similar to Confucian emphasis on (social) harmony.

Considering such conceptions in Taoism and Zen Buddhism, it can be argued that an emphasis on autonomy and independence in the conception of self-actualization may not be an exclusively Western cultural emphasis, although it might prove an individualistic cultural view. That is to say, since similar views to Rogers' ideas of self-actualization are found in Eastern thoughts, it can be suggested that the cultural contexts to which the PCA can be applied might be broader than the boundary of Western cultures. In other words, the PCA may be applicable to the individualistic cultural groups holding the view of the independent self in non-Western areas.

On the other hand, it may be worth considering that if it is said that the PCA can be only applied to certain cultural groups holding the view of the independent self, its applicability may become limited even in Western cultural contexts. To elaborate further, although Markus and Kitayama's (1991) notion of a distinction between Western independent and Eastern interdependent selves has received lots of supports based on numerous empirical studies, it has also been subject to the criticism that it may be a simplistic binary opposition of ethnic stereotyping. This is because, for

example, De Tocqueville (1969) states that along with the development of democracy, the equality of political and economic conditions has strengthened the importance of conformity in American society, which may imply that Americans may have a tendency towards both independence and conformity. Additionally, some Japanese researchers claim that ‘Japanese are just as independent as Americans, or in some cases, more independent’ (Markus & Kitayama, 2003, p.282).

However, it seems important to note that what Markus and Kitayama have suggested is not about complete homogeneity within cultural groups (Matsumoto, 1999). Rather, they suggest that members of a given group ‘are more likely to have been exposed to and have operated within a given cultural frame than members of the contrasting group, and thus members of the same cultural group may share *some* similar behavioral tendencies or patterns’ (italics in original, Markus & Kitayama, 1994, p.99). As a consequence, differences are likely to exist in self-construal or self-concepts between different cultural groups. Nevertheless, whilst proposing such a West-East distinction, Markus and Kitayama (1991) carefully put that not all individuals in a given cultural context may be alike in terms of self-construal. In a more recent article, they more clearly state that ‘within independent and interdependent cultural contexts, there is great diversity in individual self-definition, and there can also be strong similarities across culture’ (Markus & Kitayama, 2003, p.282). This implies that the view of the interdependent self could be possibly found in Western cultural contexts, while the independent self-concept could be possibly observed in Asian cultural contexts.

Indeed, what influences individuals’ construction of self-concepts would include not only cultures, but also religions, ethnicities or races, genders, ages, etc. Hence, there may exist differences in self-concepts not only between different cultures, but also within the frame of culture (Fiske, Kitayama, Markus & Nisbett, 1998). As an example, Cohen and Hill (2007) have found that in the American context, religious groups vary in individualistic and collectivistic cultural aspects. As earlier mentioned, Protestantism is thought to have influenced American individualism significantly. It is because Protestant Christianity tends to focus strongly on personal relationship with God, promoting the belief that salvation takes place as a process between an individual and God without the mediation by the Church that is highlighted, for instance, in Catholicism. Hence, as religious and spiritual experiences are centred on the individual, American Protestant religious cultures are regarded as individualistic. By comparison, certain religious cultures including Judaism, Catholicism, some branches of non-Catholic Christianity (e.g. Episcopalianism or the Amish) and Hinduism are considered to be more collectivistic, because they tend to stress the importance of social relationships, affiliations to the group and community, tradition and ritual. Moreover, within these religious cultures, individuals are viewed as connected with each other and their communities, and social connections are regarded as an integral part of religious and spiritual experiences (Cohen, Hall, Koenig & Meador, 2005; Cohen & Hill, 2007; Snibbe & Markus, 2005). In this regard, it seems possible to assume that influenced by their individualistic or collectivistic religious cultures, people might possibly construct different self-concepts, although they are within the same frame of a national culture. As such, differences in self-concepts may be observed not only between different religions, but also between different ethnicities or races, genders, ages and social statuses within a single culture (Laungani, 2004). This point could be supported by Lindholm’s (1997, p.410) statement that not all Americans, for example, fit to the model of the independent self, as ‘blacks, non-Protestants, women, members of the lower class, urbanites, and local communities are all reckoned to have interdependent selves’.

Therefore, it seems difficult to assert that the PCA can be definitely applied to Western cultural contexts, given that differences in conceptions of the self and thus of self-actualization may exist within the frame of Western culture. It might be wiser to assume that the PCA may be applicable to the individualistic cultural contexts which promote the view of the independent self, rather than simply Western cultural contexts. However, numerous person-centered writers (e.g. Lago & Hirai, 2013) conceive that the PCA can be applicable to all client populations. I personally agree with this, if we as therapists focus on what is universal in terms of individuals' motivation for therapeutic change, that is, the actualizing tendency.

Focusing on What is Universal

Considering that there may exist variations in the conceptions of self-actualization not only between different cultures, but also within the frame of a single culture, what seems more important may be to focus on something universal concerning self-actualization, regardless of culture, religion, ethnicity, gender, etc. That is, reiterating that similar views to Rogers' conceptions of the actualizing tendency are found within Eastern thoughts, it can be argued that what we as therapists need to focus on may be individuals' actualizing tendencies that are viewed as the universal motivation for growth. This may render the PCA applicable to counselling with culturally varying clients including those from non-Western cultures.

It is argued that although Rogers' concept of the actualizing tendency highlights personal autonomy and independence from external control, this does not mean that the actualizing tendency is a directional tendency to be away from relationships, interdependence or socialization (Brodley, 1999). Rather, Rogers (1982) notes that a basic direction of the actualizing tendency is pro-social, as human beings possess a tendency for constructive social behaviors through which their personal growth is promoted (Gillon, 2007). Brodley (1999, p.111) describes such pro-social tendencies which appear universal as involving 'the capacity for identification leading to feelings of sympathy for other persons, capacity for empathy, affiliative tendencies, tendencies toward attachment, communication, social cooperation and collaboration, capacities for forming moral or ethical rules, and tendencies to engage in struggles to live according to moral or ethical rules'. In order to avoid a misunderstanding, it may be worth noting that self-actualization does not indicate actualizing the self inevitably in a pro-social direction all the time, as the organism can possibly work to maintain and enhance what is differentiated as the self in a narcissistic and self-centered direction (Bohart, 2013). However, Rogers suggests that the more an individual is in touch with his/her actualizing tendency, the more it is likely that s/he would develop a high level of social consciousness and altruism (Mearns & Thorne, 2000).

I personally assume that what Rogers means by the pro-social nature of an individual could possibly involve what collectivistic cultural values emphasize, such as the importance of social relationship and harmony within non-Western cultural contexts. That is to say, how the individual's actualizing tendency is shown or presented may be influenced by the particular culture to which s/he belongs. As such, an inherent human pro-social tendency can be expressed in a number of different ways and to varying degrees within the context of a particular culture. To elaborate further, Rogers conceptualizes the self as the portion of the individual's perceptual field that is distinguished as *self*. How individuals differentiate that portion as *self* may be affected by how their culture defines that portion. Influenced by their culture, individuals may have the portion possessing the characteristics

of the independent self, or those of the interdependent self (Bohart, 2013). In this sense, *self-actualization* could be possibly understood as the maintenance and enhancement of that portion which is *self*, regardless of whether the self has characteristics of the independent or interdependent self. How to actualize the self in a pro-social direction within individualistic cultural contexts would be different from how to do within collectivistic cultural contexts. For example, the pro-social tendency of the independent self could be expressed as a tendency towards social cooperation or negotiated social relations, while that of the interdependent self could be expressed as a stronger tendency towards social conformity or loyalty towards ascribed groups.

This is to argue that the actualizing tendency of individuals can be expressed and manifested in different ways under the influence of different cultures. From a different angle, an increasing attention has been placed upon the consideration of human beings as involving both individuality and interrelatedness. As an example, noting that Rogers' later writing acknowledges people as being relational, Schmid points out that authentically "becoming a person" (Rogers, 1961) means not only being independent and individual, but also being interconnected and relational (Schmid, 1996, 2013). That is, the actualizing tendency could be comprehended as the fundamental axiom of individuality and interrelatedness, in other words, of independence and interdependence. In this sense, people's different tendencies and behaviors (e.g. the tendency of the independent self towards personal autonomy, or the tendency of the interdependent self towards social conformity) in terms of self-actualization could be possibly understood as the manifestation of their actualizing tendency involving both individuality and interrelatedness in different ways, influenced by different cultures. In this view, it can be argued that although what clients aim to achieve in terms of self-actualization may be different or diverse, if we as therapists focus on the actualizing tendency as their universal motivation for their unique fulfilment of potentials which involves self-actualization, this may facilitate the application of the PCA to culturally varying clients.

Focusing on the Client's Actualizing Tendency in Person-Centered Therapy

At this point, in order to support my argument that therapists need to focus on the actualizing tendency to work with culturally varying clients, regardless of whether the clients came from individualistic or collectivistic cultures, it seems necessary to explore what focusing on the client's actualizing tendency would mean and involve in person-centered therapy. This article has so far focused on the issue of self-actualization to evaluate the applicability of the PCA to different cultural contexts influencing people's different self-concepts. Here, however, I will discuss what person-centered therapists would need to do or be like in multicultural counselling for the client's therapeutic change in general, beyond the issue of self-actualization.

As I have noted, people are influenced by cultures, thereby sharing certain similarities at the level of a group such as ethnic/racial, religious, gender, national/regional cultural groups, etc. Nevertheless, at the level of an individual, everyone will possess certain differences and be unique. Apart from these individual and group levels, according to D. W. Sue and Sue (2008), there is another dimension that needs to be considered in understanding the formation of personal identity, that is, the universal level which indicates that as human beings, people share certain commonalities across cultures. They include biological needs (e.g. sleep, food, etc.), common life experiences (e.g. birth, death, etc.), common practices (e.g. the use of symbols such as language), and self-awareness. Hence, it is argued that multicultural counselling demands the therapist's awareness that people's

existence consist of individual [uniqueness], group [shared cultural values and worldviews with reference groups] and universal [common features as human beings] dimensions (ibid.).

Taking this into consideration, I suggest that in person-centered therapy, we need to recognize all of such tripartite dimensions of existence of our clients. That is to say, I assume that such universal commonalities of human beings also involve the actualizing tendency which I have empathized as the universal motivating force for individuals' unique fulfilment of potentials, thus arguing that therapists need to focus on this universal tendency so as to work with culturally varying clients. This, however, is not to suggest the disregard of cultural similarities/differences or individual uniqueness in understanding the clients. Rather, I suggest the holistic approach to understand and work with the clients, considering all of such individual, group and universal aspects. This means, whilst trusting the clients' actualizing tendency as their universal internal force for growth and healing, we need to be aware of certain cultural influences on the clients and at the same time, respect their uniqueness under such cultural influences.

Nevertheless, what may be necessary to consider is that Rogers appears to have tended to focus on the universal and individual dimensions of people's existence, placing less importance on the group dimension. It is because Rogers developed the PCA with his emphasis on the individual uniqueness in the context of the universality of human nature. In other words, while highlighting the actualizing tendency as something universal in human beings, he simultaneously underlines that the way how this universal tendency is presented will be unique in every individual, which is the basic standpoint of the PCA (Casemore, 2011). Rogers (1951) briefly mentions that the therapist needs to possess some knowledge of clients within their cultural setting, along with experiences of working cross-culturally to supplement such knowledge. Although this might imply that he recognizes the issue of cultural influences on the clients, he is often accused of neither investigating this issue in further detail in his theories nor suggesting practical skills for dealing with it (D'Ardenne & Mahtani, 1989).

More recently, however, there has been an increasing attention to the issue of multicultural counselling in the PCA (e.g. Lago & Hirai, 2013; Lago & Thompson, 1996), with an increasing demand for *cultural competence* which 'refers to an ability to interact effectively with people of different cultures' (Casemore, 2011, p.122). Cultural competence in person-centered therapeutic practice may involve: a) therapist's awareness of own cultural perspectives; b) therapist's awareness of own attitude towards cultural differences between him/herself and client; c) therapist's knowledge of client's different cultural perspectives; and d) cross-cultural skills (See, Casemore, 2011). In this respect, suggesting the holistic approach to take into account all of the individual, group and universal aspects of clients, I will try to elaborate further the person-centered ways of therapeutic practice in the multicultural counselling setting. In particular, I will explore the issues which could possibly arise in working with culturally different clients such as *blocks to empathy* (Mearns & Thorne, 1999) and racial or cultural prejudices, illustrating the person-centered ways of dealing with these issues with the emphasis on such cultural competence.

Rogers (1957) regards the actualizing tendency as the motivating force for therapeutic change and thus for psychotherapy, positing that what therapists aim to do is to 'provide an affirmative facilitative climate which permits the actualizing tendency to take over and to begin to develop' (Rogers, 2013, p.25) so that the client's organismic valuing process can be facilitated. For this, he

proposes the *six necessary and sufficient conditions for therapeutic personality change*: in *psychological contact* [the 1st condition] between *incongruent* [2nd] client and *congruent* [3rd] therapist, the therapist needs to experience *unconditional positive regard* (hereafter, UPR) [4th] and *empathy* [5th] for the client; when the client perceives UPR and empathy from the therapist at least to a minimal degree [6th], then therapeutic change would occur (Rogers, 1957). In particular, the 3rd [congruence], the 4th [UPR] and the 5th [empathy] conditions are often referred to as the *core conditions* (Mearns & Thorne, 1988).

In this view, in person-centered therapy, focusing on the actualizing tendency as the universal growth force would entail not only trusting the clients' actualizing tendency and staying *non-directive* (Rogers, 1942) towards the clients, but also providing a therapeutic environment in which their organismic valuing process becomes more congruent. More specifically, in psychological contact with the clients, the therapist aims to offer the core conditions (Rogers, 2013). This is believed to help the clients to internalize their locus of evaluation and become more in touch with their organismic valuing process, which would possibly bring therapeutic changes to the clients. To illustrate, as their locus of evaluation is internalized, the clients are likely to become free from their conditions of worth which are regarded as the sources of psychological distress (Joseph, 2001). They also become likely to have more acceptance and trust towards their organismic experiencing and rely more on their feelings, thoughts and judgments, rather than depending on those of others for approval (Casemore, 2011). Moreover, the more their organismic valuing process is facilitated, the more the clients become likely to move toward greater self-understanding and self-acceptance, as well as more significant decisions and responsibility towards changes in behavior or self-concept, thereby becoming more empowered to be the person they want to be (Rogers, 2013).

Having said that, it appears worth reiterating that focusing on the actualizing tendency as the universal internal force would not necessarily mean disregarding the importance of an awareness of certain influences of cultures – which in the broadest sense, include religious, ethnic and gender cultures, etc. – upon individuals. Indeed, if the therapist only focuses on such a universal aspect without such *cultural awareness* (Wilkins, 2010), there may be a possibility that for instance, s/he might experience blocks to empathy which is one of the core conditions. To illustrate, it is central to the person-centered therapy that the therapist aims to empathize with the clients' internal *frames of reference*, sensing their subjective worlds as if they were his/her own, yet without 'losing the *as if* quality' (italics in original, Rogers, 1957, p.99). In other words, the therapist needs to understand how the clients experience their feelings from within their own belief system and context which may be influenced by their different cultural backgrounds, rather than from that of the therapist (Casemore, 2011). However, the therapist's lack of cultural awareness could lead to the risk that s/he might view, albeit unintentionally or unknowingly, the clients' perceptual worlds from his/her own cultural framework or impose his/her cultural perspectives on the clients, which seems likely to result in a block to empathy.

Such a risk could be possibly avoided through the therapist's endeavor to enhance his/her cultural competence. That is, the therapist needs to be aware of his/her own cultural perspectives, as well as of the differences between his/her and the clients' cultural perspectives. This will require the therapist not only to develop knowledge and understandings of the clients' cultural backgrounds, but also to explore and comprehend influences of the cultural context within which s/he has been raised

and is now living upon his/her perspectives. In addition, in empathizing with the clients, the therapist needs to continuously try to put aside his/her own frame of reference influenced by his/her cultural backgrounds, and stay within and tune in the clients' frames of reference which may be affected by different cultures. This is for the therapist to be able to view and understand the clients' perceptual worlds from their cultural framework rather than from the therapist's, and to get a real sense of what the clients are experiencing *as if* s/he was in their worlds.

Another moment of blocks to empathy could result from the therapist's lack of knowledge of the clients' cultures. Take an example from my personal experience, I was born and raised in South Korea and moved to London several years ago. Working as a person-centered therapist in London which is a culturally diverse place, I see numerous clients who came from a variety of cultures; in fact, most clients of mine have been different from myself. Due to my academic backgrounds in Social and Cultural Psychology and my experiences of travelling to many different countries, I have thought that I possess certain understandings of various cultures. Nevertheless, as I try to explore my clients' subjective worlds, I realize that every client's internal world at a deeper level appear different and unique, influenced by their varying cultural (e.g. national/regional, religious, ethnic/racial, gender, age, family cultural, etc.) backgrounds. Thus, although I personally feel that my understandings of various cultures are usually helpful in empathizing with my clients more effectively, there are also the times that I experience, albeit not frequently, a brief moment of a block to empathy because of lack of knowledge of certain cultures. This makes me feel the need to learn more about a variety of cultures, not only in my preparation for the session with the clients, but also through the process of empathizing with them during the session.

To magnify the last point, empathy is not a single response or action of understanding by the therapist to the client, but it 'is a *process*' (italics in original, Mearns & Thorne, 1999, p.41). In the process of empathizing with my clients' internal worlds, I make the most of my understandings of my clients' cultural backgrounds so as to get a sense of what they are experiencing in their cultural setting. Then, I try to communicate my empathic responses to the clients to check whether I am understanding their experiences correctly, which Rogers (1986, p.376) describes as 'checking perceptions' or 'testing understandings'. However, if there is anything I do not get a sense of clearly in relation to their cultures, or if I feel like I am experiencing a block to empathy due to my lack of knowledge of their cultures, I try to stay genuine and congruent in the relationship with my clients, thereby asking carefully the clients to help me understand their cultures so that I can more empathically understand their frames of reference. It is because congruence is considered as a kind of matching between experiencing and awareness, and further, the therapist's communication of it to the client (Cornelius-White, 2013). That is, we need to stay congruent with our experiencing of a block of empathy and be able to express the need for the clients to help us understand their cultural backgrounds, if we feel that this is necessary in the process of empathizing with their frames of reference. In this process of empathic understanding, what is required also involves our non-judgmental and accepting attitudes towards their different cultural perspectives and practice, as UPR is 'warm acceptance for each aspect of the client's experience' (Rogers, 1959, p.209). In this way, implementing the core conditions in particular, I feel that I do not only resolve an issue of blocks to empathy caused by lack of knowledge of different cultures, but also extend my cultural competence through the process of empathically understanding the clients' frames of reference.

Meanwhile, although the therapist's awareness of cultural influences on clients is significant, the therapist needs to recognize that the clients' thoughts and behavior are not solely products of such influences. In other words, multicultural counselling demands the therapist's awareness and understanding of the cultural contexts which have influenced the clients' frames of reference. Nonetheless, it is also important to acknowledge that even within the same cultural context, the clients' experiences can be different, or one could have experiences which are not shared with others (Sue, 2001). Moreover, every client belongs to multiple groups, all of which affect their perceptions, beliefs, attitudes, feelings, thoughts and behavior; and these influences would uniquely blend within each of the clients (Patterson, 1996). Therefore, despite certain cultural influences, every client's internal frame of reference would be different and unique, and the unique perceptual worlds of the clients are what the therapist aims to empathically understand. This is to suggest that considering the uniqueness of the individual at a deeper level, the therapist needs to endeavor to avoid preconceiving or making any assumption, judgment and stereotype towards how the clients' cultures have impacted their experiences or internal worlds (Mier & Witty, 2004).

Another thing to consider in multicultural counselling may be the issue of prejudices, because this issue could make the relationship between therapist and client from different ethnic and cultural backgrounds uneasy (Laungani, 2004). Take an example, there may be the case that the therapist holds, albeit unknowingly or unconsciously, prejudices towards the groups to which the clients belong such as racial or cultural prejudices. Such prejudices could obstruct his/her experience or offer of empathy, and even UPR or non-judgmental acceptance towards the clients. Hence, in order to avoid this harm, the therapist would need to examine his/her cultural norms and expectations to others and be aware of his/her attitude towards other groups and cultures, becoming more aware of his/her prejudices (Lago & Thompson, 1996). Additionally, s/he needs to be able or willing to question and challenge his/her prejudices in order for the development of his/her UPR (Merry, 2002). Furthermore, during the session in particular, the therapist needs to be aware of his/her attitude towards differences between him/herself and the clients through the attempt to reflect on his/her feelings towards them, whilst trying to stay non-judgmental and accepting towards the clients.

There may also be the case that the therapist experiences racial or cultural prejudices from his/her clients. From a personal experience, I experienced comments of prejudice from a client of mine who came from a different culture, which made me feel hurt and challenged in consistently offering my acceptance and UPR to the client. After reflecting on my feelings through supervision, I decided to stay congruent, thus sharing with the client how I felt from her prejudicial comments, as I felt that this was necessary in developing my therapeutic relationship with her. Moreover, I carefully invited her to explore how each of us feel towards certain differences between myself and her, whilst reflecting on our feelings towards our therapeutic relationship together. It is because it is suggested that although 'the issues of prejudice and racism are difficult and painful areas for both' therapist and client, the therapist should be able to 'pick up, reflect and negotiate *explicitly*' such issues (italics in original, D'Ardenne & Mahtani, 1989, p.40). This explicit negotiation, as I personally believe, requires the therapist's genuineness and congruence in terms of both intrapersonal and interpersonal aspects.

To summarize, I have tried to elaborate what I mean by focusing on the clients' actualizing tendency in terms of applying the PCA to multicultural counselling, suggesting the holistic approach

to consider all of the universal, group and individual aspects of the clients. That is, trusting the clients' actualizing tendency as the universal motivating force for change, the therapist would need to provide a therapeutic environment which helps the clients respond to their actualizing tendency, especially implementing the core conditions. Concerning empathy in particular, taking into account the influences of the groups to which the clients belong upon their frames of reference, the therapist needs to enhance his/her cultural competence including an awareness of his/her own and the clients' cultural perspectives, as well as of his/her attitude towards the differences between these two, so that s/he could empathize with them more effectively and non-judgmentally. Meanwhile, considering that the way in which the actualizing tendency is presented will be uniquely different in every client, the therapist needs to avoid having prejudices or stereotyping and preconceived notions towards the clients. In this way, as I personally believe, we as person-centered therapists would be able to work with culturally varying clients, regardless of whether they came from individualistic or collectivistic cultures.

Personal Reflections on Applying the PCA to Client Work and Own Personal Growth

Working as a person-centered therapist, I have felt that all clients are different and unique in terms of the degrees and ways of presentations of their independence or/and interdependence, probably influenced by different cultures, religions, ethnicity/race, gender, etc. One of my interesting experiences as a therapist is that almost simultaneously and in different counselling organizations, I have seen two male clients coming to therapy due to similar marital relationship issues. Their ages, jobs and financial situations were similar, whereas their cultural, religious and ethnic backgrounds were different; one was British Protestant and the other was non-religious Asian. Here, I will use pseudo names: "John" for the British client and "Lee" for the other. Presumably influenced by such different backgrounds, these clients seemed to have distinctive ways of self-construal; John appeared more likely to be the independent self, compared to Lee who seemed to be the interdependent self.

To illustrate, both John and Lee were freelancing workers, and their unstable job situations and income frequently caused their stressful arguments with their wives. Both clients expressed their anger, though towards different targets. In John's case, his anger was more towards his wife, as he felt that she did not support or "allow" him to spend his own free time being away from his family, although he felt that he needed it to manage the work stress. He was concerned about looking after his family, but this was not his main concern. Rather, John often stated that he wanted to do whatever he wanted as "a free individual", giving an impression that his biggest interest was personal freedom and self-regulation in all matters. By contrast, Lee's anger was more focused on himself, as he felt that he was doing "not good enough" as a husband and a father. That is, Lee was strongly interested in what he was doing for his family, rather than for himself. He was even willing to sacrifice himself to satisfy his family's needs and expectations, considering this as his duty. In general, what I felt through counselling with them was that while John tended to put his own happiness as his priority, Lee was focused on making his family happy as his responsibility.

Although I did not intend to compare the cases of these two clients, it was interesting to observe how these clients, who were presenting seemingly different models of self-construal, make constructive changes through the therapeutic process in which as a person-centered therapist, I tried to offer the core conditions in my psychological contact with them. On the surface, how they deal with their issues appeared dissimilar. In managing the stress from their unstable work situations

which affected their feelings of self-worth, while John was focused on personal development to feel more confident with himself, Lee tried to satisfy others' expectations to boost his self-esteem. Additionally, in a way to deal with the marital relationship issues, John began to try expressing what he really needs in their relationship to his wife more openly, whereas Lee decided to listen to what his wife wants him to do more attentively. However, at the deeper level, I felt that something inside both of them was stimulating them to make small changes in their daily lives, thereby getting closer to the lives that they desired. I assumed that such motivation inside them was their actualizing tendency.

To put it another way, what they were trying to achieve in terms of self-actualization appeared different. For instance, John seemed to try to become a more independent and self-directed person, prioritizing his needs for personal freedom and self-control in his marital relationship with his wife. In contrast, Lee strongly tended to value relationships and harmony with others in his life, thereby prioritizing his peaceful interdependent relationship with his wife over his personal autonomy; for this, he tried to be a more responsible husband who was devoted to his family's happiness that he considered to be his happiness. In terms of self-actualization, it appeared to me that Lee's case may be more likely to be the case of actualization of the interdependent self, when compared to John's case to be that of actualization of the independent self. Nevertheless, through observing how both clients move forward to achieve what they aimed to do, I felt that what stimulated and enabled both of them to experience such achievements was their innate drives and potentialities, that is, their actualizing tendency with which they become more in touch through the therapeutic process.

What I have learned from counselling with these culturally different clients is that whether a client possesses the view of the independent or interdependent self might not be the most crucial issue in therapy, as long as the client's internal potential for healing and growth can be facilitated through therapeutic processes. Rogers (*italics in original*, 1961, p.11) writes that 'it is the *client* who knows what hurts, what directions to go, what problems are crucial, what experiences have been deeply buried'. Thus, what we do as therapists is to help clients to be more in touch with or respond to their actualizing tendency, rather than to direct or advise them based on therapeutic expertise (Mearns & Thorne, 1999). I assume that this applies to counselling with every client, regardless of whether they pursue personal autonomy and independence, or the enhancement of relationships and interdependence with others in terms of self-actualization. My experiences of working with culturally varying clients as a person-centered therapist generally support such an assumption, as it appears to me that all of my clients have presented different and unique aims and directions in terms of self-actualization; nevertheless, what has directed, motivated and enabled them to move forward and achieve what they aim seems to be their actualizing tendency.

Being a person, what I personally try to achieve in terms of self-actualization may also be unique. I have tended to consider myself as the interdependent self. It is not only because I was born and raised in South Korean culture where the notion of the interdependent self is found to be dominant (Markus & Kitayama, 1991), but also because I personally believe in the importance of collectivistic values such as social relationships and harmony in my personal and social life. Interestingly, however, when I tested myself with Singelis' (1994) Self-Construal Scale which is widely employed for cross-cultural psychological research on the independent/interdependent selves,

I was not convinced that I perfectly fit to the model of the interdependent self-construal. Rather, I assumed that I might also have the characteristics of the independent self-construal, presumably influenced by my own family backgrounds which are very strict Protestant Christians, as Protestant cultures are considered as individualistic.

Indeed, how I could actualize my potential both as an individual and in social relationships has been a significant issue to me. Reflecting upon my life, I have always attempted to follow Confucian values, which deeply affected Korean traditional culture that is viewed as collectivistic, such as respect for elders/superiors, benevolence or empathy for others. Whenever I successfully performed these values, my positive feelings of self-worth became more strengthened. I never felt that following these values might be my conditions of worth, because such constructive social behaviors have helped my personal development. More specifically, I often find myself growing increasingly through interaction and interconnectedness with others. On the other hand, my achievement of self-regulation, self-determination and independence in thoughts and behaviors has also been important to me. To illustrate, I believe that what contributes to my personal growth as much as such a social process is my individual process through which I freely reflect on my thoughts and behaviors in solitude. I often spend what I call *my-alone-time* to invite myself into deep thinking from my own perspective. Not only does this allow me to feel independent or free from external interventions or what makes me feel fettered, but it also helps me empathize with my inner self thereby strengthening my self-worth. According to Tomoda, people experience growth in relationships, but the true growth occurs when they are *utterly alone* (Hayashi, et al., 1998). Certainly, I experience my growth through my-alone-time; however, I cannot say whether it is the true growth. I would rather say that my potential for growth is actualized not merely through my individual process empowering my autonomy, but also through my social process rendering me interconnected with others. That is, I feel I am growing through a dialogical process between my aspects of independence and interdependence, which I personally believe is my true growth. I believe that what motivates and enables me to experience such true growth as an individual and in relationships is my actualizing tendency.

I personally believe that being myself involves both being independent and being interdependent. This, indeed, is in line with Schmid's (1996, 2013) point, which was earlier mentioned, that authentically being a person involves both being independent and being relational. However, individuals may develop and present different tendencies towards individuality or interdependence to varying degrees, influenced by different cultures, religions, gender, etc. In my case, I personally feel that I possess strong aspects of both independence and interdependence; but in others' cases, one aspect may be presented more strongly than the other, in a number of different ways and to varying degrees. This would render all individuals different and unique, which makes what they desire and aim to achieve in terms of self-actualization to be diverse and unique. Therefore, to reiterate my viewpoint, in working with clients as person-centered therapists, I assume that what we need to focus on is something universal about self-actualization, that is, the actualizing tendency. That is to say, what is important in person-centered therapy is to assist and support the clients to respond to and enhance their actualizing tendency, rather than their self-actualization (Wilkins, 2003), which may facilitate the application of person-centered therapy to a variety of clients in terms of cultures, religions, ethnicity/race, gender, etc.

Conclusion

It appears that Rogers' concept of self-actualization highlighting personal autonomy and independence could hardly escape the criticism that it reflects individualistic cultural biases. It seems to disregard that there are certain people who view themselves as interdependent with others thereby conceptualizing self-actualization in the context of such interdependence or social embeddedness, which is observed not only in Eastern collectivistic cultures, but also within the context of Western cultures. This might render the applicability of the PCA limited, to the degree that Rogers' ideas of self-actualization could only apply to people holding the view of the independent self thereby conceptualizing self-actualization in the context of autonomy and independence.

However, Rogers basically conceptualizes that self-actualization is an expression of the individual's unique fulfilment of potentialities as the whole organism. Considering that authentically being a person entails both being independent and being relational, such organismic potentialities would include both the tendency towards individuality and independence, and the tendency towards interrelatedness and interdependence. These tendencies may be expressed in a number of different ways and to varying degrees, influenced by various cultures; accordingly, what individuals aim to achieve in terms of self-actualization would be diverse and unique. Therefore, what seems more important in therapy appears to trust and focus on the universal motivation for change and growth, that is, the actualizing tendency which is what drives and enables all individuals to develop their potentialities towards personal maturation and self-actualization. This, I personally believe, could render the PCA applicable to all client populations including culturally varying clients.

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