

# Notes on Schmid's "Psychotherapy is Political or it is not Psychotherapy: The Person-Centred Approach as an Essentially Political Venture"

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**ABSTRACT** *This article makes – and strikes – four notes in response to Schmid's (2012/2014) paper. Taking Schmid's definition of politics as encompassing policy, politics, and polity, and adding a fourth element, that of the personal, the author discusses: (1) policy – by addressing Schmid's central question "Psychotherapy is political or it is not psychotherapy"; (2) politics – by asking "How should psychotherapists act politically?" (3) polity – in which the author discusses the estimation of the World Association of Person-Centered and Experiential Psychotherapies and Counseling and its journal, Person-Centered and Experiential Psychotherapies; and (4) (the) personal – in which the author reflects personally on the concept that "The most personal is the most political". Copyright © 2014 John Wiley & Sons, Ltd.*

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## **POLICY: PSYCHOTHERAPY IS POLITICAL OR IT IS NOT PSYCHOTHERAPY**

I wholeheartedly agree with Schmid's (2012/2014) thesis that psychotherapy is political. Departing from the original understanding of politics as the consequence of an image of the human being, Schmid argues that everyone is ultimately a politician. Therefore, in his view, if psychotherapy helps a human being become more human, a psychotherapist may even be a professional politician.

The validity of this statement, however, may depend on the definition of psychotherapy which, according to the *Oxford English Dictionary* (2014), is an English word of Greek origin:

deriving from Ancient Greek *psyche*, "ψυχή" meaning breath, spirit or soul, and *therapia*, "θεραπεία" as healing or medical treatment. In early use, the combining form is "of or relating to the soul"; the modern meaning "of or relating to the mind or psyche" probably reflects the semantic development of the term psychology. Thus psychotherapy is now the treatment of disorders of the mind or personality by psychological methods.

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Frank and Frank's view (1993) that the diagnosis and therapy of mental diseases are acts based on cultural biases may give rise to a question whether the removal of mental or personality disorders really makes human beings more human. If psychotherapy represents the treatment of breath, following the original Greek meaning of psyche, one cannot speak of it without understanding what is meant by these disorders – and orders. Commenting on a conference on "The Development of Psychotherapy", held in Phoenix, Arizona, in the USA, in 1985, Zeig (1987) pointed out that the main problem which was left unsettled by participants from all over the world was the definition of psychotherapy, and that, in effect, each individual practitioner was allowed the space and freedom to have her or his definition of it.

This point is related to what Schmid views as "policy: the normative dimension". As he points out: "in reality psychotherapy politics is ... not much about policy" (Schmid, 2012/2014, p.9) There are many writings on psychotherapy, its techniques and their acquisition, but it is not so easy to find explicit formulations of its ultimate – or political – goal, and I appreciate Schmid's attempt to offer such a formulation.

It is true that there are many psychotherapists who help their clients get rid of mental or personality disorders without asking what is meant by the mind or personality disorders, distresses or disabilities which cannot simply be characterised as apolitical or unpolitical. Sichrovsky (1987), an Austrian journalist, writer, and former politician, raises a number of relevant questions: for example, whether the psycho-boom in the 1960s and the 1970s, which, in West Germany alone, produced thousands of professionals helping people to become happy and content, only transformed collective barbarism into collective repression; and what therapy was administered to many patients, the cause of whose mental disorders was their upbringing in families by parents who were Nazis. I think Japanese psychotherapists must face similar questions. Referring to the psychological care of people exposed to nuclear radiations in Fukushima, Shinobu Goto, an expert in environmental technology, has pointed out:

It is insufficient only so long as it makes them optimistic about and not thinking about the influence of the exposure to radiations on their health. Rather, it should foster judgment and critical thinking for seeing through logical contradictions and falsities of information issued by offenders, preventing brain freeze, knowing and asserting their due rights to be protected as victims. (Goto, 2013, p. 42)

A psychotherapist then, consciously or unconsciously, functions as a political being. Thus, if psychotherapy can only but be political, the only issue and difference is whether a psychotherapist is conscious of this or not. Furthermore, as Schmid points out, a psychotherapist or counsellor who does not care about politics in fact does harm to her or his clients.

## **POLITICS: HOW SHOULD PSYCHOTHERAPISTS ACT POLITICALLY?**

Schmid (2012/2014) argues that, if the word of psychotherapy is connected with personality development in a liberating meaning, then it "must not only be aware of its political *implications*: understanding, investigating, formulating, developing them ... it must also be *actively* political" (p. 6) – but how should psychotherapy be *actively* political or how should psychotherapists act politically?

In his article Schmid suggests that therapists should “raise their voices in society”, and that the person-centred approach “challenges the entire community of psychotherapists and counselors” (p. 14); and he himself gives us “a *notification of dispute* among the different approaches to the person in society” (p. 4), and sketches a *political way of being* for therapists. I wonder, however, if this way of being alone makes psychotherapists sufficiently political. Also, although the title of his paper addresses psychotherapy, the subtitle focuses on “The person-centered approach as an essentially political venture” – which implies that Schmid perhaps thinks that the person-centred approach is the most promising field for raised voices, challenge and dispute.

As the development of encounter groups gave rise to much evidence of the effectiveness of person-centredness in many fields, Rogers (1986a, 1986b) shifted the emphasis from “client-centred therapy” to “the person-centred approach” (PCA), and came to regard the PCA, a more comprehensive term, as the most adequate expression of his “approach”. In his later years he was devoted to educational reform and peace activities based on the idea of encounter groups, and wrote a number of papers on the social applications of the PCA, including: “Resolving Intercultural Tensions” (Rogers, 1977), “A Psychologist Looks at Nuclear War” (Rogers, 1982), and “The Rust Workshop” (Rogers, 1986a, 1986b). He used the terms “client-centred therapy” and “the person-centred approach” differently. The former referred predominantly to one-to-one psychotherapy, and the latter to more encompassing activities, though Sanders (2004) noted that in the United Kingdom the expression “person-centred” is often used to refer to counselling and psychotherapy, and not only for more wide-ranging activities or applications associated with Rogers’ ideas.

Although Schmid himself states that “the attitudes and actions developed out of the PCA’s image of the human being are more than a therapeutic enterprise”, his arguments remain located within the framework of psychotherapy. In Barrett-Lennard’s view:

Conditions theory illuminates basic processes *within* the microcosm of the therapist–client engagement. Because a client’s outside relations, however, can crucially effect their response to therapy, broader social conditions are necessary for the helping mode and system to arise, and the relation between personal and societal malaise has vital implications for therapeutic work. (Barrett-Lennard, 2002, p. 144)

Although he goes on to say: “An encompassing spectrum of potential healing and enabling processes emerges from a systemic-*relational* perspective”, Barrett-Lennard refers to this as “relationship therapy”, so for both him and Schmid therapy is their main concern – which raises the question as to whether psychotherapists who intend to act politically can remain within the framework of psychotherapy.

However excellent person-centred psychotherapy – or psychotherapy from the person-centred approach – is, there is the political problem that not everyone can access psychotherapy equally. Sanford (1987) referred to an experience at an international workshop held in Mexico City. A student from the back of the class raised the question of what the PCA could offer to his country. Sanford replied by declaring that the approach represented and was itself in a process of evolution from the elitism of traditional psychotherapy toward a psychotherapy which was – and is – more open to society and societal factors.

Though it is clear that a single person cannot do everything, humanistic psychotherapists – plural – must retain a viewpoint beyond the framework of psychology because humanity itself is beyond this framework. What is needed now is to understand the context of psychology

and psychotherapy and to relativise it. Elsewhere (Muramoto, 2013) I have warned that psychology, if it falls into psychologism, functions in a way that numbs critical thinking about social context, with the result that the mind is easily exploited by the state. In order to be *actively* political, psychotherapists think and act beyond their traditional framework.

## **POLITY: AN ESTIMATION OF THE WORLD ASSOCIATION FOR PERSON-CENTERED AND EXPERIENTIAL PSYCHOTHERAPY**

Rogers himself refused to create a school of therapy, or to make a particular training centre or institute follow set rules, for instance, about curriculum, or to become dogmatic about theory or practice. More recently, and more focused in Europe, groups of person-centred practitioners have established local and national associations which have promoted the establishment of their identity as professionals and provided opportunities for training and continuing professional development. In 1989, the first International Conference for Client-Centered and Experiential Psychotherapy was held in Belgium, and at the fifth such conference, in 2000, the World Association for Person-Centered and Experiential Psychotherapy (WAPCEP) (<http://www.pce-world.org/>) was born. Germain Lietaer, the organiser of the first conference in Belgium, formulated two goals for that event: (1) the balance of practice and research; and (2) the activation of communication and academic exchange between the continents and among small schools. He also made five proposals: (1) the establishment of a better organisation and network (among person-centred and experiential practitioners); (2) the awareness and pride of being a professional group and making it clearly visible in the society and the professional world; (3) the cultivation of younger scholars; (4) the more detailed examination of the therapeutic system of the person-centred approach; and (5) the setting of the framework as a school. This was an explicitly political act, and the WAPCEP and its journal, *Person-Centered and Experiential Psychotherapies* (PCEP), which resulted from this conference, can both be regarded as the polity of the PCA. The problem, however, is, again, how the PCA, strategically located within psychotherapy and counselling, goes beyond this traditional framework.

In a creative article in which Howard Kirschenbaum, Carl Rogers' biographer, reported a posthumous conversation he imagined with Rogers (Kirschenbaum, 2012), Rogers admits to some responsibility for the decline of the PCA in the USA due to him (Rogers) having refused to build an organisation there. Rogers (in Kirschenbaum's words) said: "when you began certifying people in an approach, it meant you had to define the approach and that usually killed it" (p. 17) However, as Kirschenbaum noted, towards the end of his life, Rogers did lend his name to some institutes and supported the development of the Association for the Development of the Person-Centred Approach (ADPCA) (<http://www.adpca.org/>). Speaking at the first Annual Meeting of the ADPCA, Rogers (1986a, 1986b) said: "I hope we're always on the move to a new theory, new ways of being, to new areas of dealing with situations, new ways of being with persons. I hope we're always a part of the 'growing edge'" This remark makes me feel it regrettable that the PCA has been closing the door to the development of peace activities to which Rogers devoted himself in his later life just because he did not restrict himself to being a psychotherapist. Commenting about the growth of programmes and associations in Europe, Rogers responded by saying: "The persons who are now leading this approach are extremely diverse and independent,

and the establishment of an orthodoxy appears impossible” (Kirschenbaum, 2012, p. 18), and, indeed, none of the person-centred associations in the world appear to be falling into dogmatism.

It is clear that the ADPCA is an organisation dedicated to the person-centred *approach*, and as such would embrace the politics and the political applications of the approach. Perhaps the greater challenge is for an organisation that is focused on psychotherapy and counselling to respect and, indeed, open a space to be involved in thinking and acting beyond the traditional framework of psychotherapy and counselling.

### **PERSONAL: THE MOST PERSONAL IS THE MOST POLITICAL**

Finally, to the personal and myself. I was trained as a psychotherapist in the 1980s and initially began to offer therapy at a clinic. Having been declined in my application to join a particular organisation, in 1990 I founded the Institute for Feminine Life Cycle to provide women with individual and group psychotherapy, and to send lecturers to undertake social enlightening activities mainly in trauma-related fields such as abuse, sexual violence, and domestic violence. As an extension of this, I have also administered a reconcile–reparation programme in East Asia and a ten-year project for bearing witness to the restoration of and change in Japanese society after the Tsunami of 11 March 2011. The institute, which began with an individual, has now become an organization employing 12 women. As a result of efforts to make this more comfortable for each member, my own allergy to organisations decreased, and since 2002 I have been part of a large university which is engaged in the education of the younger generation. For me it is a field of the practice of what I call a clinical approach to organisation. Though my antipathy towards the professionalisation of clinical psychology in Japan is growing, I am still practising individual psychotherapy and working as a school counsellor and, while I have never regarded myself as a Rogerian, I can trace a vein of the PCA in me.

As Shimizu (2010) has documented, Rogers’ (1942) book, *Counseling and Psychotherapy*, was translated into Japanese in 1948; “counselling workshops” in a style similar to the basic encounter group began in the early 1950s; and, in 1961, Rogers visited Japan for the first time, following which client-centred therapy (CCT), also referred to as the non-directive method, spread throughout the country. In postwar Japan, the social system greatly changed through the rapid import of American culture, with one consequence that the country needed human resources for psychotherapy in many fields. Until the end of the war in Japan, there had been nothing other than psychoanalysis and specifically Japanese methods such as Morita therapy (see Morita et al., 1998) and Naikan therapy (see Maeshiro, 2009). Counselling workshops were the beginning of counsellor training in Japan, and CCT was the principal approach or modality in Japanese counselling until 1970 (Hatase, 1992). In the 1970s and 1980s, other modalities of psychotherapy or theoretical orientations were introduced into Japan, reducing the dominance of CCT, though all teachers and trainers of those trained as psychotherapists in the 1980s, including me, shared the legacy of Rogers.

In his article Shimizu complained that the progress of the PCA in Japan had been slow. He may be right if PCA is understood as a psychotherapy, but in Japan the idea of the PCA as an approach and as a movement has widely survived, making what is sometimes referred to as the “counselling mind” popular in many areas of the helping professions. This refers to an

attitude of one who, while not trained as a professional counsellor, nevertheless builds a growth-promoting relationship with others by activating the spirit (or mind) of counselling. Theoretically, it draws on what Rogers referred to as certain conditions required on the part of the counsellor for bringing forth constructive personality change in the client. It is true that this "counselling mind", especially when based on the superficial understanding of Rogers' ideas, has had harmful effects and that its amateurishness has made professional psychotherapists suspicious. While it sends an apparently democratic message that anybody can do something like counselling, structurally it functions in the direction of producing mini-counsellors taught by genuine counsellors.

"Professional or laity?" is a question which I myself have dealt with on a personally level in my work and for which I have not yet found an answer. It is also perhaps one of the big questions for the PCA. In *A Way of Being*, Rogers (1980), then 75 years old, reflected on his deep involvement in psychotherapy as a cautious method for fulfilling his own need for intimacy without exposing himself very much to the dangers of intimacy, a sense that may be shared by many psychotherapists across all schools – but what does this suggest to us living in this age? It is interesting to see the relationship between Rogers' practice and theory on the one hand, and, on the other hand, the age, reception, and development of his psychology in each country in which it has spread and taken root. Understanding the most personal requires reading the historical, institutional, and personal contexts of the person, and it is important to know that what appears most personal is determined by these factors. In Parker's (2004) view, this task is accomplished by "reflexibility". Is this not the first step toward being the most political?

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