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Architectures of Encounter: A Grounded Theory Study of Authentic Communication and Self-Discovery in Everyday Life

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ABSTRACT

This study presents a qualitative investigation into the phenomena of the Encounter in everyday life. It uses a person-centered approach with the grounded theory as the methodological framework. The analysis of in-depth interviews established a conceptual framework that delineates the manifestation of the Encounter in everyday contexts. The meaning of Encounter is rooted in the organismic valuing process. It involves authentic communication with others to access one's true Self. We distinguished between two types of Encounters: fundamental and episodic. We identified three levels of knowing of the Encounter, which depend on the degree of implicit awareness about the Self: mindful, bodily, and organismic. We revealed that people experience cycles of discovery and exploration of the Self. The transition toward Encounter occurs gradually and comprises four stages: latent Self, appearing Self, manifested Self, and transpersonal Self. These findings were organized into the Continuum of Self-Encounter Model. Finally, we determined aspects encouraging and impeding individuals from experiencing the Encounter. The experience of Encounter establishes a field in which reality, the Self, and the Other are co-constructed in a shared existential domain. The findings underscore the paramount significance of this phenomenon in human existence, which parallels the essence of Rogerian organismic values.

> Human existence unfolds in the context of human relations.
>
> D. Bugental

A poignant paradox unfolds in the bustling landscapes of contemporary urban living—the one woven into the fabric of our daily experiences. Many of us, particularly those residing in sprawling metropolises, find ourselves entwined in a peculiar circumstance: surrounded by a sea of faces yet grappling with an acute sense of solitude. The paradox of feeling isolated amidst a crowd, a universally recognized phenomenon, is the impetus for exploring the intricacies of everyday Encounters.

Rogers (1969) introduced the concept of Encounter after a longitudinal observation and analysis of therapeutic interactions between therapists and clients. He described it as "an opportunity to meet one another in a deeper, more personal way" (p. 16). APA Dictionary of Clinical Psychology defines a basic encounter as "a meaningful

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experience in one person's relating to another that is characterized by mutual trust and empathy" (American Psychological Association, 2013, p. 63). The experience of Encounter is a crucial path to human transformation, leading to a more meaningful and fulfilling life, "worthwhile living" (Rogers, 1971, p. 276). Hence, we can presume that an Encounter has the potential to provide an individual with meaning in life and a sense of stability and grounding.

The phenomenon of Encounter also resonates with various approaches to relationality. The latter emphasizes the importance of interpersonal relationships and social contexts in understanding human behavior and development. Central to this perspective is the idea that individuals are inherently social beings whose identities and experiences are profoundly influenced by their interactions with others. This view is well-articulated in attachment theory (Ainsworth, 2015; Bowlby, 1999), which posits that early relationships with caregivers form the foundation for future relational patterns and emotional regulation. Similarly, family systems theory (Bowen, 1985) and relational-cultural theory (Jordan, 1991; Miller, 1986) emphasize the interconnectedness of individuals and the significance of growth-fostering relationships.

Moreover, empathy, a core component of both the Encounter and relational approaches, is crucial for understanding and meeting the emotional needs of others, facilitating mutual growth and connection (Decety & Jackson, 2004). From the relationality perspective, Encounter is a critical moment where relational connections are established and deepened. These interactions are not merely social transactions but fundamental to developing and maintaining a healthy, cohesive self. Research on interpersonal communication and social interaction supports this view, highlighting how Encounter can enhance emotional well-being, reduce stress, and improve relational satisfaction (Reis, 2018; Reis et al., 2000).

Scholars have explored the importance and impact of therapeutic Encounters (e.g., Bugental, 1992; Jordan, 1991; Stern et al., 1998), attempting to measure the depth of communication (e.g., Knox, 2013; Mearns & Cooper, 2005) or therapeutic interaction (e.g., Bugental, 1992; Yalom, 1985). Carl Rogers and Martin Buber had a public dialogue in 1957 about the phenomenon of Encounter (Cissna & Anderson, 1994). Both agreed on the effects of the Encounter on an individual. However, Rogers perceived it as developing in therapeutic conditions, while Buber believed it could occur in everyday situations.

Rogers (1961) identified conditions for developing the Encounter in the therapeutic setting: unconditional positive regard, congruence, and empathy. However, no study has determined those conditions for Encounters in everyday life.

Therefore, the present study sets out to determine those prerequisites. We asked the following questions: First, is the Encounter possible in everyday life? Second, how frequently do people experience the Encounter? Third, what impact could an individual's life have on the Encounter? Fourth, what attitudes could facilitate the Encounter? Finally, what prevents people from experiencing the Encounter in everyday life?

The answers to those questions could provide a clear framework for developing a more elaborate theoretical construct of Encounter. Further, understanding the mechanisms of the Encounter in everyday life could shape an individual's agency for effective self-healing through meaningful interpersonal interactions, leading to a more fulfilling life. Considering limited research in this area, empirical investigation becomes critical.

Methods

Methodology

The study used the grounded theory (GT) approach (Glaser & Strauss, 2017). This qualitative research methodology emphasizes the importance of an inductive approach and systematic analysis. The inductive nature of GT is pivotal for studying the Encounter organically. GT prescribes starting with no predetermined theories or hypotheses, which makes the study phenomenon- rather than theory-centered. This approach allows emergent themes and patterns to shape the study, where phenomena lend the research field and direct the researcher's attention (Morse, 2016). Generating emergent theories directly from the data is particularly valuable when studying the often unpredictable and dynamic nature of the Encounter in everyday life. Constructing a theory based on gathered data and comparing it with existing perspectives often leads to discovering new phenomena (Charmaz & Thornberg, 2021). Additionally, the GT approach strongly emphasizes capturing participants' subjective experiences, aligning with the need to understand the Encounter from the perspectives of those directly involved.

Hence, the GT appears to be a plausible methodology for the empirical study of the Encounter in everyday life due to its inductive nature, flexibility, holistic understanding, systematic analysis, focus on participants' perspectives, and the ability to generate emergent theory.

Participants

We initially included five participants in our convenience sample based on the GT procedure. They were chosen voluntarily without specific prerequisites. During the interviews, two participants revealed no experience with the Encounter, while three others had occasional Encounters. Since our study focuses on the phenomenon of Encounter, we decided to interview further only individuals who had experienced it. Then, using a snowball sampling technique, we asked participants who reported the Encounter to refer those with that experience. Thereby, we obtained eight more participants. Upon analyzing their interviews, we revealed that the participants who had experienced the Encounter were either from creative professions or lived abroad for an extended period. Hence, we continued sampling to include seven more creative professionals with extensive international experience.

Twenty participants (15 female and 5 male) aged between 23 and 60 ($M = 36.00$, $SD = 9.09$) participated in the study. Ten participants were single, two were in temporal relationships, and eight were in permanent relationships. They were professionals in different domains: science, art, entrepreneurs, finance, law, and IT.

The sample size was determined by the GT's saturated sample strategy (Charmaz & Thornberg, 2021), which refers to the point in data collection and analysis where new information ceases to yield additional insights or dimensions to the emerging theory. This strategy aims for transferability instead of statistical generalizability. Detailed descriptions and contextual understanding allow for a nuanced exploration of the phenomenon, which provides deep insights and understanding that can be transferred to analogous settings (Glaser, 1978).

Procedure

The procedure began with data collection through non-structured, in-depth interviews. To secure the reliability of the data, we took additional measures to ensure that participants fully understood the phenomenon being studied. As Strauss (1987) pointed out, it is crucial to validate the emerging meanings during communication with the speaker to ensure the reliability of the collected data. Therefore, our first step was to explain to them the theme of the Encounter.

The participants in the pilot sample revealed little understanding of the term "Encounter." So, we replaced it with a more colloquial, "meaningful communication." Moreover, we provided an explicit definition stating, "This is a state of deep contact and interaction between two people, in which each person is completely open to the other and able to understand and appreciate the experiences of another at a high level" (Mearns & Cooper, 2005, p. 12). However, this approach remained challenging to the participants. Therefore, we adapted the definition of Encounter to their experience and selected the words frequently used to describe meaningful communication. Subsequently, we refined these definitions during the interview to ensure the participants fully comprehended the topic. We came up with the phrases "honesty in communication," "authenticity," and "genuine conversation," addressing the nature of interactions in which individuals could be themselves without pretense or masks. These utterances were used during the subsequent interviews.

Further, we observed that while the pilot sample eventually grasped the interview theme, they struggled to articulate their thoughts and emotions. Additionally, when broaching sensitive topics, they expressed worries about confidentiality despite being informed about the anonymity of their responses. This observation led us to consider creating a secure environment that fosters trust among the participants.

At the beginning of the interview, we posed two questions. The first question aimed to create an open and welcoming atmosphere for a deep discussion. Participants were asked to express their thoughts on the statement, "The whole of humankind are my friends" (Sartre, 2013, p. 208). We expected this question to encourage participants to contemplate their existential values. This approach was intended to create a thoughtful environment that would make it easier for participants to discuss their personal experiences.

The second question was, "Have you ever experienced a kind of communication and interaction where you did not feel the need to put on any mask and could be at ease with who you are?" After participants answered these questions, the interviewer followed the GT recommendations (e.g., Glaser & Strauss, 2017) and built a dialogue based on their answers. During the interviews, we observed verbal and non-verbal dynamics essential for GT. All interviews were audio recorded and transcribed.

Further, the interviews were transcribed and systematically coded. Initially, open coding involved breaking down data into discrete components. Open coding was followed by axial coding, where relationships between codes were identified, and selective coding, where a core category was established (Charmaz, 2012; Corbin & Strauss, 1990). This category formed a foundation of our research: to reveal transformations experienced by an individual during the Encounter. The coding procedure was accompanied by writing theoretical memos, which aided in developing and refining categories and codes. The memos captured thoughts, ideas, and emerging concepts.

Results

Meaning of Encounter

An analysis of the interviews revealed specific patterns that emphasized the significance and meaning of the Encounter in an individual's life. We have recorded the participants' responses to the question, "How do you feel when you experience Encounter?" Their answers described the meaning of this experience. For example, "I am alive," "I am a part of the whole," "I am significant." These descriptions highlighted their existential stance on the phenomenon, emphasizing its fundamental, organismic nature. Hence, we can assume that the meaning of Encounter is rooted in the *organismic valuing process*. The latter is an instinctive mechanism where individuals subjectively evaluate experiences based on their alignment with their authentic Selves (Rogers, 1964). It guides choices that promote personal growth and well-being, operating at a pre-conscious level and adapting to evolving circumstances.

Thus, the meaning of Encounter in people's life revolves around their authentic Selves. The meaning of the Self in psychology is rich and multifaceted, reflecting the dynamic and complex nature of human identity and consciousness. We adopt the definition of the Self as the comprehensive, unifying principle of the psyche that embodies the full integration of conscious and unconscious elements (Jung, 1959). Although the Encounter occurs in communication with others, the ultimate goal is to gain access to one's Self. In the words of one respondent, "To reach some concepts, a person needs to conduct a dialogue with someone because sometimes, dialog with oneself is not enough." In this context, the goal of Encounter is for the Self to transcend the ego, allowing individuals to achieve psychological wholeness and balance.

Levels of knowing of Encounter

Although not all participants in our study reported the experience of the Encounter, further analysis of the interviews revealed that it has immense value to everyone, regardless of their personal experience. However, people vary in their degree of awareness about the Encounter. These variations are stipulated by the level of implicit knowing about this phenomenon.

Some participants could not immediately understand the significance of the Encounter. For example, a respondent said, "This never happened to me. It does not exist. I do not think it is possible." Those who have never experienced it needed to engage in prolonged introspection to formulate an answer as if they were delving into the depths of their memory and imagination. At this point, we could notice some doubt in their responses: "Well, maybe in my case it is not possible anymore; I am all covered with shells; I am not sure who am I. I do not think I am even honest with myself." These people have sensations regarding the potential of the Encounter but do not feel them yet and, therefore, do not recognize it as a valuable experience. However, through in-depth dialogues, knowing the Encounter became accessible to them, presumably due to their organismic valuing process (Rogers, 1964). For example, one respondent was prompted by the interviewer to imagine the possibility of the Encounter and reflect on how she would feel about it. She replied, "Well, if I imagine

having such a connection with someone, I suppose I would not feel lonely." Therefore, following Rogers, we refer to this level of knowing as *organismic*.

On the other hand, those participants who reported the experience of the Encounter occasionally talked about their feelings related to this. When we asked them about their experience, they could remember recent cases of Encounters and verbalize various aspects of this in detail. For example, "I felt a kind of unusual connection when everything goes into the background. That is, at this moment, you do not have to think that you have to live here and now. Everything just dissolves, and your contact comes to the forefront. That is the first thing, and the second thing is that I do not feel lonely." This detailed account shows that these individuals are more aware of the possibility of the Encounter than those of the previous type. However, their knowing has yet to reach the level of full awareness. They feel the Encounter but struggle to initiate it. We perceive feelings as bodily sensations or "felt senses" (Gendlin, 1981), which refer to a holistic bodily awareness of a situation or issue. Gendlin defined it as "an internal aura that encompasses everything you feel and know about the given subject at a given time—encompasses it and communicates it to you all at once rather than detail by detail" (p. 32). This process helps align actions with authentic values and leads to personal growth. Therefore, we refer to this level of knowing as *bodily*.

In contrast, the third type of participants who reported experiencing Encounters as a way of life had no issues initiating this process. Moreover, they claimed it was the only meaningful interaction they found worth investing time and effort in. For example, one respondent provided insights into how this experience enriched her life: "You know, I do not even start any other communication. Only communication without masks brings meaning, so why would I have anything different?" They were grateful to be asked about this experience and eager to discuss it. For example, "Oh, that is what fulfills my life experience. I often think about it, actually. Thank you for asking." In addition, a subsequent analysis of the interviews revealed that they regularly contemplate this experience. This finding suggests that the Encounter became their habitual necessity and an integral aspect of daily life. Those individuals reached the highest level of awareness about this process. In various contemplative and spiritual traditions, this level of awareness is often linked to mindfulness (e.g., Kabat-Zinn, 2003; Lutz et al., 2007; Nhat Hanh, 1976). This link is rooted in the practice's focus on cultivating a non-judgmental and present-moment awareness. In essence, mindfulness is perceived as a transformative tool that can elevate one's awareness to the highest levels of consciousness. Therefore, we refer to this level of knowing as *mindful*.

Hence, we distinguish three levels of knowing of the Encounter: mindful, bodily, and organismic. This finding suggests that every person has the potential to know the Encounter, but only some are aware of it. The level of awareness of this knowledge varies from person to person. Some people have a higher level of awareness and can easily access this knowledge, while others need to delve deeper into their consciousness to find it.

Our data revealed that two respondents did not experience Encounter at all. They responded negatively to the second interview question about the experience of the Encounter: "No, I have never experienced that," "I do not think it is possible." These participants were defined as *organismic-knowing* individuals. Thirteen participants were

familiar with the concept but considered it a rare occurrence. They responded, "Yes, but it is very rare," "Only with a few people that I trust." We identified them as *bodily-knowing*. The remaining five participants considered the Encounter a way of life and were recorded as *mindful-knowing*.

Cycles of Encounter

Further, we explored the differences between selected types of individuals in their perception of the processes underlying the Encounter.

Mindful-knowing respondents demonstrated an understanding of these processes. In contrast, those of the other types were more inclined to respond with "I do not know." We believe the former participants showed more understanding of the process due to their acute self-reflection. For example, a respondent said, "I am very focused on myself anyway, and often when I talk to another person, I either understand myself better or I understand myself better through another person. How else will the universe talk to you but through someone else's mouth?"

This idea has significant ramifications for our understanding of the process of the Encounter. At least several participants mentioned that they needed to comprehend their authentic values before attempting to accept the values of others: "Before opening to others, it is essential to first open to yourself."

This observation suggests that the first step toward the Encounter is meeting with the Self and discovering one's Self. This process involves introspection and deeply understanding one's identity, values, and purpose. It often requires becoming more aware of one's thoughts, emotions, motivations, and overall sense of being. It is akin to Gendlin's (1981) felt sense mentioned above.

After discovering the Self, we set off to explore it. Recall our previous discussion that the ultimate meaning of the Encounter is to reach the Self. The participants reported that their experience of the Encounter not only allowed them to connect with the other but also triggered the exploration of the Self. For example, one mentioned that each Encounter "opens something new in me." Even when one connects to others, the goal is to embrace the wholeness of the Self. Moreover, through the Encounter with the others, an individual connects to the Universe: "Oh, it is an incredible experience. A sense of life. Touching something, the core, getting to the earth's core." This observation highlights how the experience of the Encounter is reflected onto an individual and helps undertake a journey of exploring the Self.

People meet with the Self during the *discovery* phase to find their foundation. Participants recalled that state as aloneness (or positive solitude; Shiovitz-Ezra & Rozen, 2023) when one is alone but does not feel lonely: "Even when we are together, I need time to be alone. Otherwise, some resources will begin to be lacking. Well, that is, I can be alone, but I do not go crazy from it." This state gives power to a person to endeavor on a contemplative journey toward the Self. In a respondent's words, "to feel this contact, one must be in resource, ready to explore this world."

During the *exploration* phase, a person is ready to explore new facets of the Self. This can be accomplished through Encounters with Others because they provide an individual with values and worldviews that are different from his or her own. These new perspectives are reflected in the individual and reveal new aspects of the Self.

However, often during this phase, one needs to be alone again. One participant reported, "When I am not in a resourceful state, sometimes I should not communicate with people for several months than mechanically say 'how are you.'" This state is needed to go back "home" to the foundation, that is, back to the discovery phase. Presumably, the process of Encounter largely relies on the reflections one receives from the others. It is entirely possible that an individual's perception of oneself becomes masked by those reflections. Therefore, it becomes necessary for an individual to go back to the state of aloneness to process new experiences, align them with the organismic valuing process, and regain a close link to her or his authentic values.

Thus, the Encounter consists of cycles of discovering and exploring the Self. The discovery phase occurs intrapersonally, whereas the exploration phase occurs interpersonally.

Stages of Encounter

People transition from a state where they experience no Encounter to one where Encounter becomes their way of life. Along this way, they undergo cycles of discovery and exploration of the Self. This transition occurs gradually, and we need to consider the various stages involved in the process.

The first stage is when people experience no relatedness with the Self or the Other. We named this stage *latent* because the Self appears dormant, and people have no connection with their authentic values. They usually exhibit a high level of loneliness, disconnection, lack of trust, and fear of rejection. We inferred this from the analysis of their verbal and bodily responses. They tend to close themselves off, hunch their backs, lower their heads, and have sad facial expressions when discussing their relationships with others. For example, one respondent said, "I do not know why I do not have close relationships. I want to. However, you cannot trust people. Most people betray." This last phrase also demonstrates that people at this stage may have false beliefs about others and the world. These people are at the organismic-knowing level.

This stage corresponds to the beginning of the discovery phase of the Encounter. To overcome the first stage, one must initially acknowledge the willingness to be accepted and commit to realizing this aspiration. Table 1 demonstrates the correspondence between the stages, the levels of knowing, and the cycles of the Encounter.

As discovery continues and people overcome the first stage, they enter the second stage, marked by the potential of the initial Encounter. Our participants showed great enthusiasm when discussing the prospect of having an Encounter or recollecting past experiences of the first Encounter. People acknowledge the significance of being accepted. Moreover, they understand that focusing on the value of acceptance is essential, and they are willing to put effort into realizing this pursuit.

The Self begins to appear; therefore, this stage is named the *appearing*. However, people still reveal the tendencies of the immature Self. They tend to conceptualize and analyze things instead of self-reflect on them. For example, "If we assume that we are all particles of one single organism, then naturally, such a butterfly effect will occur; that is, you do not know how your words, thoughts, and gestures will reflect in others." They condition their success on external factors. For example, "Yes, I always feel unsafe, and to feel safe, I need some kind of super-openness from another person." They make

Table 1. The correspondence between the stages, the levels of knowing, and the cycles of the Encounter.

Cycles of Encounter	Levels of Knowing	Stage of Encounter
Discovering	Organismic	Latent Self
Exploring	Bodily	Appearing Self
		Manifested Self
	Mindful	Transpersonal Self

decisions based on their perception of societal expectations. These individuals frequently emphasize the importance of conforming to social norms and adopting popular opinions. One respondent said, "You are always playing a part. One role with this, another with that, yet another with the third." However, they do not see that their desire for social approval impedes the manifestation of their authentic values. The second stage signifies the transition from the discovery to the exploration phase.

The latter phase starts with the third stage, where the Self is *manifested*. This process enables interaction with the Other, creating a qualitatively new field of Encounter.

During this stage, individuals become open to new experiences. They often show a playful attitude. They do not hide behind the social masks anymore. Life becomes a game in which people open up to discoveries. The decision to drop the masks facilitates openness. For example, one respondent said, "You look at old things differently. You can even call it a game. Everything can be turned into an interesting experiment. Yes, actions become possible that you would never have done before. For example, suddenly follow your impulse, which you wanted, but you did not do it before. You could say you are becoming more of yourself."

As the respondents advanced in the discussion of the Encounter during the interview, they revealed a noticeable shift in language use. They focused more on expressing their emotions rather than explaining their thoughts. This transformation happens because their attention shifts from thoughts to feelings.

Respondents also emphasized the importance of being present at the moment when interacting with others to establish meaningful connections: "You do not need to think that you need to live here and now. Everything just dissolves, and your connection comes to the fore."

This stage corresponds to the sense of rebirth reported by several participants. They discover their authentic values, for they refuse the social masks and defense mechanism: "The real Self is beginning to hatch. It turns out to be unknown. Maybe you were like that as a child, but you had no experience, and now you have experience, and the defenses fall away, and you hatch. Sounds like a rebirth. It is something long forgotten but very new."

The bodily-knowing participants are in the second and third stages. These stages are crucial because essential decisions regarding exploring the Self need to be made. Once the decision to move forward is made, there is no turning back.

Mindful-knowing people are at the fourth stage. For them, the Encounter becomes a way of life. They can encounter any person in any situation. The reason is their ability to connect with the Other at common authentic values. Acquisition of these values transcends an individual's personality. Therefore, this stage is called the *transpersonal*, where the personal becomes universal (Rogers, 1961).

The experience of oneness with the Other characterizes this stage. For example, one mindful-knowing respondent said, "I feel connected, that we are on the same wavelength. You understand each other not only in words but also energetically." Another shared, "I feel a co-presence that we are about the same things." Moreover, the Encounter with the Other provides a sense of belonging to the Wholeness: "When two mental energies recognize each other in another person, they merge into one and become part of the Universe." These people even feel happy: "It is a very moving experience. You experience real but not obvious happiness."

At this stage, people prioritize and engage in meaningful interpersonal interactions and demonstrate a unique approach to communication. They actively manage their relationships and carefully choose the nature, mode, and extent of these relations. As a result, they confidently make decisions that align with their values and principles.

These people are fully engrossed in introspection. The Encounter becomes a vehicle for discovering new things about themselves. For example, "I am very concentrated on myself, and often when I talk to another person, I either understand myself better, or again, through another, I understand myself better. Well, how else will the Universe talk to you if not through someone else's mouth."

The introspective practices allow individuals to reflect on and examine their thoughts, feelings, and behaviors. These practices enhance their self-discovery and self-reflection, contributing significantly to the development of self-awareness (Cherry, 2018). Individuals with high self-awareness can enhance their understanding of themselves, leading to personal growth, improved relationships, and a more authentic and fulfilling life. For example, one participant shared, "There was a period in my life when I decided that I only want to have relationships with people when I can be myself, I can be open, and they are open with me. When there is an exchange of thoughts and energy without any masks." Their keen sense of self-awareness enables them to recognize the consequences of their actions and adjust their behavior accordingly. For example, "I suddenly noticed that I became interested in listening to people, and they somehow began to appear more in my life in a way that interests me. If you want to change what you get, change what you give."

They acknowledge their faults and imperfections but maintain strong self-worth, the internal sense of being good enough and worthy of love and belonging from others. The sufficiency of the Self promotes this sense. It denotes its inclination to cultivate greater independence from external factors that consistently influence an individual, ultimately fostering self-confidence.

In sum, significant transformations unfold as individuals progress through the stages of Encounter. In Stage 1, characterized by loneliness, individuals embark on a journey leading to a profound shift toward a sense of belonging. This transformation reflects a fundamental human need for connection and community, marking a transition from isolation to a fulfilling sense of inclusion. In Stage 2, the evolution from perceiving the world conceptually to understanding it through feelings signifies a transformative shift in cognitive and emotional awareness. Individuals may rely heavily on conceptual frameworks to interpret the world in the early stages. However, as they advance, a deepened understanding emerges, emphasizing the importance of emotional intelligence and an experiential grasp of the world. In Stage 3, the journey from engaging in social games to experiencing life as a playful endeavor speaks to a shift in the individual's

approach to social interactions and life's challenges. Early stages may involve navigating social dynamics as if participating in games marked by competition or strategic maneuvers. In contrast, progressing to Stage 4 involves embracing life with a playful spirit, emphasizing joy, creativity, and a lighthearted approach to the human experience.

Types of Encounter

The discussions in the previous sections identified three types of people classified according to their degree of awareness of the Encounter. The organismic-knowing type is not aware of the possibility of the Encounter. The bodily- and mindful-knowing types are aware of this phenomenon and, therefore, engaged in cycles of discovering and exploring the Self. The difference between the latter constitutes the frequency of the occurrence of the Encounter. Typically, the bodily-knowing respondents recollected one or two specific instances of the Encounter and emphasized that these experiences were profound. For example, "I was flying on a plane, and on this flight, I met my best friend." In contrast, mindful-knowing respondents recalled their most recent Encounter. They emphasized that these instances are just a few out of many possible occurrences. For example, "Of course it happened, and I will even say this happens to me often."

Moreover, we noticed that the bodily-knowing individuals placed more expectations for these occurrences. The less frequent the Encounter, the greater its perceived significance. They believe the Encounter occurs only in an exceptional situation under particular conditions. For example, "It could happen with people with whom there is a relationship and trust in each other and a feeling of security." At the same time, the mindful-knowing participants consider the Encounter as something habitual, a lifestyle. For example, "Well, this probably happens to me almost always."

This distinction underscores the two types of Encounters. First, a *fundamental* Encounter involves an interaction that leads to a transformation of the Self. Our participants reported that this type of Encounter left a lasting impression on their memory, making them more aware of the potential for closeness and ease in connecting with others. Several respondents mentioned the fundamental nature of the Encounter. For example, a bodily-knowing respondent said, "I only recently realized how important closeness is. After having an experience with that person, it suddenly became a significant value for me; it is important; it fundamentally changes the quality of life." Another noted, "It creates a foundation for the future." The fundamental Encounter instills in respondents the belief that they are "significant" and "valuable," which contributes to their sufficiency of the Self and self-worth discussed above.

Second, the *episodic* Encounter occurs during spontaneous and relatively short interactions. For example, a mindful-knowing respondent explained: "Sometimes it can be quite episodic, like with a salesperson in a shop. It might only last five minutes, and we do not discuss profound things, but it feels very fulfilling." The other confided, "I experienced it with a taxi driver the other day. I asked him about his family, and he shared his story. He was very grateful at the end, saying people usually only criticize him, but what I said changed his perspective. I think it is because I speak to people with an open heart."

Hence, the distinction between fundamental and episodic Encounters constitutes the duration of the interaction. Episodic Encounters could occur with random individuals and last a relatively short period. Fundamental Encounters last longer and often entail continuous relations.

The episodic Encounter is only possible after a fundamental Encounter occurs. The latter starts the process of transformation of the Self, and the former refines it. It is as if the fundamental Encounter forms a raw diamond, and the episodic Encounter polishes it.

Both types of Encounter have the same depth of contact. Note that depth in this context does not refer to the complexity of the content of the interaction but rather to the emotional depth of the interaction. In other words, people experiencing fundamental and episodic Encounters have the same experience, but the latter occurs more readily.

The mindful-knowing individuals who experience episodic Encounters perceive any mundane situation as a potential for reconnecting with the Self. In contrast, bodily-knowing people with no capacity for episodic Encounters may simply ignore these situations. Hence, the predisposition for episodic Encounters empowers individuals to imbue everyday experiences with significance. In turn, the more frequently one has episodic Encounter, the more comfortable one becomes with opening up to others.

Aspects influencing the Encounter

We see that some people could experience the Encounter, whereas others could not. Given the value that the Encounter adds to a person's life, it is crucial to understand the aspects facilitating one's Encounter and those that might deter someone from experiencing it. We derived these aspects from analyzing participants' responses concerning bridges and barriers influencing their experiences of the Encounter. These aspects constitute the practical facet of our findings. Understanding these aspects would help individuals establish internal and external conditions leading to the Encounter.

Mindful-knowing participants reported that they generally believe "it is my decision." They take responsibility for their existential decisions and everyday actions. This attitude is called an internal locus of valuing. In general, locus of valuing refers to the source or origin of an individual's values and the place where they are grounded (Rogers, 1964). It reflects the context within which individuals develop and internalize their beliefs about what is essential, desirable, and meaningful in life. The difference between internal and external locus of valuing lies in the source of an individual's values. With an internal locus, values are self-determined and rooted in personal reflection and individual experiences. In contrast, an external locus involves the influence of external factors like societal norms, cultural expectations, and family values. The distinction centers on whether values primarily originate from personal introspection or external influences.

The locus of valuing shapes an individual's ethical framework and worldview. For example, one respondent shared, "When I permit myself to be who I am, I feel free to be among people of different cultures and views. I have more of that now than when I was a teenager or a child." The internal locus of valuing manifests one's organismic valuing process, which, per earlier discussion, signifies the Encounter. Therefore, the *internal valuing* process appears to be the first aspect of increasing the likelihood of the Encounter.

Some participants indicated that shifting from an external to an internal locus of valuing requires focusing on the organismic valuing process and alienation from the opinions imposed externally. For example, "I recently went on a weekend trip alone and did not write to anyone on purpose because I wanted to go alone. Because when I am alone, I kind of generate energy from somewhere." The 'somewhere' in this example seems to refer to the internal valuing system. Moreover, one must make an effort to maintain this focus and continue aligning with the organismic valuing process. Therefore, *concentration* and *perseverance* become two other aspects that facilitate the Encounter.

Further, we considered aspects hindering individuals from experiencing the Encounter. A significant hurdle that prevents people from engaging in social interactions is a *lack of trust*. Organismic-knowing individuals reported a fundamental lack of trust. For example, "As a child, I did not develop a basic level of trust in the world." The primary cause of this issue is a fear of losing newly established connections. Guided by this fear, people prefer to avoid intimate interactions to prevent despair. In contrast, mindful-knowing participants claimed that the pleasure of the Encounter encouraged them to take the risk. For example, "It is a risk. Make a few mistakes; do not be afraid; you will be rewarded anyway. I strongly believe that it is rewarded by coexistence with the person you care about."

The second reason is a *fear of rejection*. Participants of organismic- and bodily-knowing types indicated that they are often afraid of not being accepted for who they are. They also need to learn how to change to be accepted. For example, "If you take my friend, I cannot tell her everything, and she does not tell me everything either. Sometimes, I say something wrong not to upset her. I have not had such a contact in my experience when I am fully accepted unconditionally." The question is, should one change to please others or to strengthen their values? Until individuals answer this question, they may continue to fear. In this state, people refuse to engage in the Encounter.

The third reason is *false beliefs*, which refer to a misconception or an incorrect understanding that an individual holds about a particular situation, object, or fact. They can arise from misunderstandings, misinformation, cognitive biases, or misinterpretations of events. Our interviews collected examples of these beliefs, including "you cannot trust people; they all betray" or "people always disappoint me." False beliefs, whether rooted in stereotypes, prejudices, or misconceptions, profoundly impact the experience of genuine Encounter. These distorted perceptions hinder authentic connections by influencing interpretations, communication, and empathy. Individuals holding false beliefs may misinterpret intentions, leading to unnecessary conflict and strained relationships. Moreover, these beliefs contribute to prejudiced judgments, creating barriers to effective communication and limiting the capacity for empathy. False beliefs often result in missed opportunities for connection, as individuals may overlook shared values or common ground. Conflict and mistrust can arise, eroding the foundation for a meaningful Encounter.

Encounter field

Finally, in the open coding analysis, we observed participants describe processes unfolding between them and the Others. These processes occur outside an individual

and establish the space between them and their interlocutor. Therefore, we termed this space an Encounter field.

Participants' descriptions could be grouped into three categories. The first category, *Genesis*, describes the conditions for the Encounter field to occur. The *spontaneity* condition highlights the organic and unforced emergence of the field. It includes the following instances from the interviews: "presence at the moment," "spontaneity," "naturalness," "lack of expectations," and "unpredictability." The *openness* condition describes the emotional openness and vulnerability shared between individuals. It encompasses "a willingness to open up," "disarm," and "accept one's imperfection." The *engagement* condition focuses on the active efforts to engage and connect with the other person. It contains "connecting," "touching," "directness," "initiative," "willingness to see the other," and "friendship formation."

The second category, *Attributes*, presents characteristics of the Encounter field. The *depth* attribute highlights the profound and intrinsic connection between individuals. It includes "depth," "a sense of life," "a sense of the core of the earth," and "a sense of meaning." The *authenticity* attribute underscores compassion and genuine self-expression fostered within empathetic and inclusive human connections. It contains "love for humanity," "you are accepted and understood," and "authenticity." The *dynamics* attribute accentuates a dynamic and invigorating experience that awakens awareness, ignites enthusiasm for life, and cultivates a feeling of empowerment. It encompasses "spontaneity," "unpredictability," "burst of energy," "interest in life," and "a sense of empowerment."

The third category, *Experiences*, portrays what people experience when they are in the Encounter field. The experience of *positivity* reflects the positive emotional states experienced by individuals within the field. It encompasses "carefree," "unforgettable," "warmth," "lightness," "simplicity," "joy," "freedom," "fearlessness," and "a sense of happiness." The experience of *unity* highlights feelings of belonging, acceptance, and mutual understanding. It includes "not loneliness," "unity," "being on the same wavelength," "disarming," "the armor comes off," and "a person is exposed." The *transformation* experience captures the transformative and enlightening aspects of being in the field. It features "rebirth," "feeling like myself," "creator of my own destiny," "consciousness opens up," "a sense of life," "a sense of meaning," "better understanding of self," and "your eyes open."

The Encounter field represents a dynamic space where individuals converge, transcending barriers to connect and experience profound moments of unity. By embracing the principles of openness, spontaneity, and authenticity, individuals can intentionally navigate the Encounter Field, fostering meaningful connections and enriching their lives.

Discussion

This study strives to explore the phenomenon of encounters in everyday life. As mentioned in the introduction, Rogers (1969) extensively elaborated on this concept in the context of therapeutic sessions, where the therapist elicits the encounter between therapist and client. However, no research has been dedicated to how Encounter occurs between individuals in their daily lives.

The GT research aims to derive theories from meticulously analyzing collected data. A thorough interview analysis obtained the following findings.

The meaning of Encounter is rooted in the organismic valuing process. It involves authentic communication with others, which pursues the ultimate goal of accessing one's true Self. The level of awareness of the Encounter varies among individuals. It depends on the degree of implicit knowing about the Self. We identified three levels of knowing: mindful, bodily, and organismic.

Further, we revealed that people gradually transition from a state of no Encounter to one where it becomes a way of living. Along the way, they experience cycles of discovery and exploration of the Self. The discovery phase occurs intrapersonally, whereas the exploration phase occurs interpersonally.

This transition occurs gradually and comprises four stages: latent Self, appearing Self, manifested Self, and transpersonal Self. The first stage marks the beginning of the discovery phase; the organismic-knowing individuals are at this stage. The second stage signifies a transition from the discovery to the exploration phase and from organismic- to bodily-knowing type. The third stage corresponds to the exploration phase; the bodily-knowing individuals are at this stage. In the fourth stage, the continuing exploration of the Self transforms people into the mindful-knowing type.

The difference between bodily-knowing and mindful-knowing people constitutes the frequency of the Encounter. This distinction underscores the two types of Encounter: fundamental and episodic. Episodic Encounters last relatively short and can happen with random individuals, while fundamental Encounters last longer and often entail continuous relations.

Finally, we determined aspects encouraging and impeding individuals from experiencing the Encounter. Internal locus of valuing, concentration, and perseverance facilitated the Encounter. In contrast, lack of trust, false beliefs, and fear of rejection hindered it.

We have organized our findings into the Continuum of Self-Encounter Model, as shown in Figure 1.

The model presents a transition toward Encounter that occurs gradually and comprises four stages: latent Self, appearing Self, manifested Self, and transpersonal Self. People experience cycles of discovery and exploration of the Self. The discovery phase starts at the latent Self stage and ends around the appearing Self stage. The exploration phase begins around the appearing Self stage and continues through the manifested Self and transpersonal Self stages. People could have three levels of knowing the Encounter: mindful, bodily, and organismic. Organismic-knowing people are at the latent Self stage, bodily-knowing people are at the appearing Self and manifested Self stages, and mindful-knowing people are at the transpersonal Self stage. Finally, there are two types of Encounters: fundamental and episodic. The fundamental Encounter (represented by green circles in the diagram) happens to organismic-knowing and bodily-knowing people, and the episodic Encounter (represented by a cyan circle in the diagram) happens to mindful-knowing people.

While this model is based on data, we strive to show that our empirical findings align with established psychological knowledge. By placing our model within different psychological theories, we ensure that our results are not isolated but contribute to a
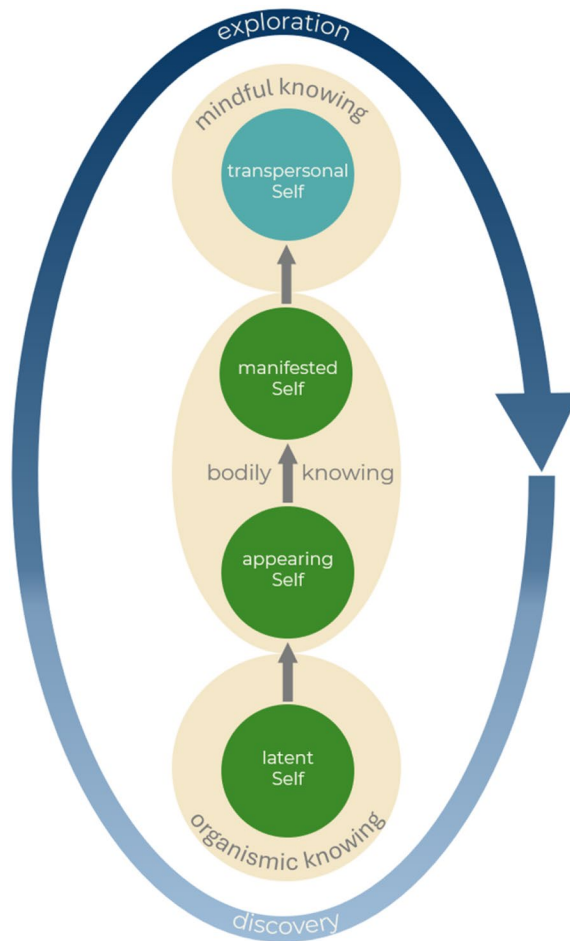
Figure 1. Continuum of Self-Encounter Model.

larger body of scientific understanding. This strengthens the validity and reliability of our research.

Meaning of Encounter

Our interviews revealed that the concept of Encounter is deeply rooted in the organismic valuing process, and the meaning of Encounter in people's lives revolves around their authentic Selves. These findings correspond to the core ideas of humanistic psychology about the organism's inherent drive to actualize its "nature" (e.g., Angyal, 1939; Goldstein, 1939; Rogers, 1964). In fact, the concepts of the Self and nature parallel humanistic emphasis on growth, authenticity, and the intrinsic tendency toward fulfillment. Just as nature follows its course of development, unfolding its potential dynamically and organically, the Self is seen as inherently driven toward self-actualization, the realization of one's full potential and the desire to become the most that one can be (Maslow, 1954). In both cases, an inherent order and purpose are acknowledged.

The concept of Self is not a static entity but a dynamic process of becoming, much like the ever-changing and evolving nature around us.

Levels of knowing of Encounter

Our interviews revealed that although everyone has the potential to experience the Encounter, only some are conscious of it. The level of awareness about the Encounter determines the levels of knowing: mindful, bodily, or organismic.

In our study, the Self refers to the introspective and subjective aspects of an individual's consciousness that are intertwined with thoughts, feelings, and perceptions. It corresponds to Rogers (1961) concept of the organismic Self, a subjective and unique aspect of each person closely tied to the ongoing process of evaluating experiences through the organismic valuing process (Rogers, 1964). Although the presence of the Self is not evident to everyone, we all have it, even without awareness. This idea is reflected in the process of organismic knowing, which emphasizes the presence of the Self deeply rooted in our existence.

The bodily knowing guides the bodily sensations of the Self. Hence, it corresponds to the idea of the felt sense from Gendlin's (1981) focusing approach. Felt sense refers to a holistic bodily awareness that is pre-verbal and implicit. It involves a meaningful, interconnected understanding that goes beyond simple sensations. Gendlin believed that to address any issue, one should find its sensation in the body. The body is not just an unconscious object; it interacts with the environment and holds implicit wisdom and knowledge through felt sense.

The mindful knowing stands for the highest level of awareness about the Self. It is akin to the intentional and non-judgmental awareness achieved during mindfulness practices (Goldstein, 1939; Nhat Hanh, 1976; Salzberg, 2020). According to Heidegger (1962), awareness is an inseparable aspect of human existence. He proposed the concept of *Dasein* (German for "being there" or "existence"), which encapsulates human existence as experienced from a first-person perspective and signifies being immersed in the world, with an active engagement in everyday activities and interactions. Dasein emphasizes the interconnectedness of the Self, world, and time. It is not just individuals' existence; it encompasses the totality of their being in the world. Therefore, mindful knowing is pertinent to everyday activities, interpretation, and engagement with the world. This process enhances perception, creativity, and effective decision-making (Langer, 2014).

Cycles of Encounter

Further, our finding of the cyclical nature of an individual's growth in the process of the Encounter also overlaps with major theories in humanistic psychology (e.g., Goldstein, 1939; Maslow, 1954; Rogers, 1961). For example, both Maslow and Rogers recognized that human development is not a straightforward progression but involves cycles, revisiting previous stages, and responding to changing circumstances. The fluid and dynamic aspects of personal development suppose that individuals may experience periods of self-reflection, reassessment, and renewal throughout their lives, allowing for flexibility and adaptation to the changing needs and challenges individuals face.

Through introspection and understanding their identity, values, and purpose during self-discovery, people meet with their Self. In his study of James' concept of the Self

in the context of consciousness, Woźniak (2018) proposed the distinction between the "I" and the "Me." The former represents the subjective Self as an active knower, and the latter represents the Self as an object of knowing. Our phase of self-discovery can be perceived as the initial Encounter between the Self as the subject and the Self as the object and the commencement of the dialog. This dialog entitles people to realize the multidimensionality of their personality. They would understand that their Self-as-subject can link to their Self-as-object, which hints at the possibility of connecting to the Self-as-object of others. Hence, they accept the potential of Encounter.

The internal dialog between the two components of the Self signifies the transition from loneliness to aloneness. Human existence is accompanied by the experience of loneliness (Moustakas, 1961), which appears to be a universal phenomenon (Macià et al., 2021). It is "such a painful, frightening experience that people will do practically everything to avoid it" (Reichmann, 1959, p.1). One of the possible reasons for that is the lack of relatedness to one's true Self (Ettema et al., 2010). The transition from loneliness to aloneness during the self-discovery phase appears paramount because self-actualization requires an organism to confront the world and undergo loneliness to develop an "adequate attitude" toward it (Goldstein, 1939, p.196). Jung (1959) described this transformation as "a moment of conscious insulation from the unconsciousness of the herd" (p. 211).

At the end of the self-discovery phase, an individual crosses a rubicon of self-actualization: once you are beyond it, there is no return to the state of latent Self. That provides a feeling of inner "home" where one can escape from the chaotic world without developing loneliness.

Further, recall that the ultimate purpose of the Encounter is to comprehend the Self. After discovering the Self, we begin exploring it. The self-exploration phase involves connecting with the Others and understanding and even accepting variations in their values and worldviews. Understanding and appreciating those divergences helps one accept these variations in oneself. As Hermans (2003) stated, "self-knowledge is seeded with affect-laden self-acceptance" (p.122). Hence, individuals explore new facets of their Self. In Fromm et al. (1974) words, "the many is what makes the one possible" (p. 61).

It is not surprising that Rogers (1961) theory of unconditional positive regard expresses similar sentiments. Unconditional positive regard is an attitude of acceptance, warmth, and nonjudgmental understanding toward another person, traditionally perceived as necessary for self-actualization. Usually, Rogers talked about providing clients with unconditional positive regard during therapy to facilitate their acceptance of themselves, develop their positive self-concept, and reach their full potential. However, we can also talk about providing unconditional positive regard to the Other during everyday Encounters. By doing this, we start a dialog that helps us learn to understand and accept the other person, resulting in understanding and accepting new aspects of our Self (Bakhtin, 1975; Ricœur, 2008).

Exploring the Self in the dialog with the Other supports the Dialogical Self Theory (Hermans & Gieser, 2011). This theory offers a dynamic view of the Self, conceptualizing it as a collection of internalized voices ("I-positions") engaging in ongoing dialog and position-taking. Individuals adopt multiple self-positions influenced by personal experiences and social interactions. These positions interact internally and

externally, shaping identity, perception, and behavior and influencing how individuals navigate their social and cultural environments. The goal of the dialogical Self is to achieve coherence and integration among the various self-positions, fostering a sense of unity and wholeness. Our view of exploring the Self in the dialog with the Other assumes similar achievements.

Stages of Encounter

Further, our findings revealed four stages an individual undergoes to adopt the Encounter in everyday life. During Stage 1, people are not aware of the Encounter; during Stage 2, they develop the awareness of the Encounter; during Stage 3, they experience the Encounter, but only occasionally; and during Stage 4, they adopt the Encounter as a way of living.

These stages correspond to changes in an individual's comprehension of the Self. During Stage 1, people do not realize the presence of the Self; during Stage 2, they start recognizing its existence; during Stage 3, they become aligned with the Self; and during Stage 4, they learn to connect to the Self of Others.

These changes are also reflected in an individual's state of mind. During Stage 1, the mind is trapped in socially defined norms and expectations, such as false beliefs, fear of rejection, and a lack of trust. During Stage 2, people realize that their minds are trapped and try to liberate their Self and have it accepted by the Others. At this stage, they are delusional about the imperative of acceptance by Others, which causes them significant distress. During Stage 3, they open their minds to new experiences and learn to reflect on their feelings (not only thoughts). The result is that they start accepting themselves and consequently becoming accepted by Others. During Stage 4, the mind is in a state of acceptance and happiness, and people experience oneness with the Universe.

Many psychological, mystical, and esoteric theories conceptualize development as a sequence of stages. They share the idea that human development is not a static process but involves a series of steps or stages that individuals progress through over time. Each stage brings about new capacities, understandings, or levels of consciousness. The classics in psychology are Piaget's (1954) theory that cognitive development occurs in distinct stages (sensorimotor, preoperational, concrete operational, and formal operational stages) from infancy to adulthood and Erikson's (1950) theory that outlines stages of psychosocial development (trust vs. mistrust, autonomy vs. shame and doubt, identity vs. role confusion, etc.) across the lifespan. In mystical traditions, the Kabbalistic Tree of Life (Scholem, 1974) is a symbolic representation of the journey of spiritual development that consists of ten interconnected spheres (sefirot) representing different aspects of divine and human existence. The ascent through these spheres signifies a progression toward higher levels of consciousness and union with the divine. In our very own humanistic psychology, Maslow's (1954) hierarchy of needs assumes a stage-like process a person goes through toward self-actualization.

The transition through these stages is accompanied by a transformation of how we comprehend the world. We employ an analytical (intellectual) perception of the world at the journey's beginning. Toward the end, we rely more on our feelings, something that Gendlin (1981) called "felt sense" and what we discussed above. We realized that

thinking masks our experience. Fromm et al. (1974) stated, "As soon as you begin to think about it, it is no more there" (p. 17). Hence, to comprehend it fully, we need to feel it. Fromm continues, "to feel, not in its ordinary sense, but the most primary of fundamental sense" (p. 14). This feeling directs our attention toward something ingrained in a person, deeply organismic (Rogers, 1964; see also discussion above).

In the third stage, people discard their social masks and embrace openness, often exhibiting a playful attitude as they view life as a game. Fromm et al. (1974) discussed a similar attitude, which he called spontaneity. It is the natural expression of one's authentic self, characterized by the uninhibited and genuine manifestation of thoughts, feelings, and actions. It entails the freedom to act by one's innermost desires, values, and creative impulses without being constrained by external pressures, societal norms, or internalized fears. Both playfulness and spontaneity share liberation from social pressure.

An individual's connection with Others in the fourth stage corresponds to a sense of interconnectedness with others and the universe, as seen in Maslow (1971) concept of self-transcendence. He introduced this concept to refer to the capacity to reach beyond oneself and to connect with something greater than the individual self. Maslow believed that self-transcendence represents the highest level of human development, surpassing even self-actualization.

Types of Encounter

Further, we identified two types of Encounters. Fundamental Encounters last long and have a transformative effect on the Self. In contrast, episodic Encounters are brief, and although they affect the Self and its sufficiency, their transformative effect is not apparent. The underlying distinction revolves around differentiating between profound, foundational shifts in an individual's relation with the Self in the case of fundamental Encounters and temporary, situational changes in the case of episodic Encounters.

A similar distinction is found in Sullivan (2013) interpersonal theory, which emphasizes the importance of fundamental and episodic transformations in shaping an individual's personality and interpersonal relationships over time. Fundamental transformations represent significant developmental milestones, while episodic transformations reflect the ongoing influence of interpersonal experiences and environmental factors on behavior and psychological functioning.

A difference between fundamental and episodic transformation can also be found in Transformative Learning Theory (Mezirow, 1978). This theory explores how individuals' perspectives and beliefs can shift significantly through critical reflection and questioning. According to this theory, fundamental transformation involves a profound restructuring of one's meaning schemes or frames of reference, leading to a new understanding of oneself and the world. Episodic transformations, conversely, may involve more superficial changes in beliefs or attitudes without fundamentally altering the individual's worldview.

Aspects influencing the Encounter

We identified three aspects stimulating the occurrence of the Encounter in everyday life.

The first aspect, the internal locus of valuing, refers to individuals' personal and internalized standards, beliefs, and principles to determine the worth or importance of various aspects of their lives. It is about the individual's judgment and evaluation system that can assess the significance of things based on one's intrinsic values rather than relying solely on external validation or societal norms. Fromm et al. (1974) said, "What distinguishes the experience of the self is that it is saturated with the feeling of autonomy, freedom, self-determination, and lastly, creativity" (p.31). The determination of the Self stimulates alignment with the intrinsic valuing process and, therefore, facilitates the Encounter.

The second aspect, focusing, suggests that an individual needs to concentrate on the organismic valuing process by shifting from an external to an internal locus of valuing. The third aspect, effort, suggests that one needs to make an effort to maintain this focus and continue aligning with the organismic valuing process. Therefore, the second and the third aspects facilitate the contribution of the first aspect, the internal locus of valuing.

This idea of internal locus of valuing aligns with several psychological theories, emphasizing the importance of individual beliefs, attitudes, and values in guiding behavior and decision-making (e.g., Ajzen, 1985; Deci & Ryan, 1985; Schwartz, 1992). For example, Deci and Ryan's Self-Determination Theory emphasizes the role of intrinsic motivation and the satisfaction of psychological needs (autonomy, competence, and relatedness) in driving behavior. According to this theory, individuals are more likely to engage in activities and pursue goals aligning with their values and interests. Interestingly, the theory of cognitive dissonance (Festinger, 1954) posits that individuals experience discomfort when their beliefs or attitudes are inconsistent with their actions. To reduce this discomfort, they may adjust their attitudes or behaviors to align with their internal values and beliefs, highlighting the influence of internal standards in decision-making.

Additionally, we identified three aspects hindering the occurrence of the Encounter in everyday life.

The first aspect, the lack of trust, refers to when someone doubts or lacks confidence in another person, group, or institution due to past experiences or perceived risks. This distrustful attitude can be learned through exposure to negative social interactions, betrayal, or experiences of deception (Bandura, 1997). There is an opinion that the lack of trust or distrust originates in childhood due to insecure attachment styles, such as avoidant or anxious-ambivalent attachment (Weiss & Bowlby, 1980). Individuals with an avoidant attachment style tend to avoid emotional intimacy and closeness in relationships. They may be uncomfortable depending on others and prefer to maintain emotional independence. Conversely, individuals with an anxious attachment style crave intimacy and closeness in relationships but often fear rejection or abandonment. These individuals tend to be reluctant to bond with Others and, therefore, fail to experience the Encounter.

Fear of rejection is the second aspect, which refers to a strong aversion to not being accepted for who you are. It leads to avoiding situations or behaviors with a risk of rejection. The fear of rejection stems from a fundamental need for belongingness, as individuals perceive social exclusion as threatening their survival and well-being. This threat activates neural and psychological mechanisms that are linked to physical pain

and distress. At the same time, fear of rejection is also related to individuals' evaluations of their self-worth and social acceptance (Branden, 1994). Low self-esteem and self-doubt can amplify these fears, leading individuals to seek validation and approval from others while avoiding situations where they perceive a risk of social disapproval or rejection. As a result, they substitute the internal locus of valuing with the external one, which prevents them from exploring the Self and consequently experiencing the Encounter.

The third aspect, false beliefs, refers to an individual's misconception about a particular situation, object, or fact. Cognitive psychologists explain that false beliefs can be formed as a result of inaccurate or outdated schemas or cognitive frameworks (that help individuals organize and interpret information about the world; Brewer & Treyens, 1981), confirmation bias (a tendency to search for, interpret, and remember information in a way that confirms one's preexisting beliefs or hypotheses; Nickerson, 1998), illusory correlation (perception of a relationship between two variables that does not actually exist; Hamilton & Gifford, 1976), or memory distortion (distorted or reconstructed memories of past events, especially if those memories are influenced by suggestion, misinformation, or other cognitive biases; Schacter, 2022). More pertinent to our discussion, social aspects, such as peer pressure, conformity, and authority influence, can also contribute to forming false beliefs (e.g., Cialdini, 2009). Individuals may adopt false beliefs to fit in with a social group, comply with authority figures, or avoid social rejection. This process brings the external locus of valuing to the front, which casts the focus away from the internal locus of valuing, thereby impeding the journey to the Self and, hence, the experience of the Encounter.

Encounter field

In the process of Encounter, individuals establish the Encounter field, a vibrant zone where they meet, surpassing obstacles to forge connections and share deep moments of togetherness. This field is characterized by its genesis, attributes, and experiences it fosters. The genesis outlines the prerequisites for the Encounter field's emergence: spontaneity, openness, and engagement. The attributes detail the distinct features of the Encounter field: depth, authenticity, and dynamics. The experiences depict the emotions and transformations individuals undergo within the Encounter field: positivity, unity, and transformation.

The notion of the Encounter field resembles what Hermans (2001) delineates as the dialogical space, wherein individuals participate in dialogue not solely with external others but also with divergent aspects or "voices" within their own Selves. Hermans posits that individuals are confronted with many perspectives, beliefs, and emotions within this space, engaging in a continuous discourse that fundamentally shapes their perception of Self and reality. Similarly, Angyal (1939) introduces the concept of a biosphere, arguing that individuals in interaction do not independently mirror reality; rather, reality manifests as a biospheric phenomenon, becoming perceptible only within this communal sphere. Here, reality unfolds as an integrated whole. Angyal's theory suggests that an authentic comprehension of reality necessitates a synthesis with others, thereby echoing the principle underlying the Encounter field—that reality, the Self, and the Other are co-constructed in a shared existential domain.

Conclusion

Our study placed the phenomenon of the Encounter in the context of everyday life. We found that although the experience of the Encounter is necessary for everyone's well-being and even possible for everyone, many people fail to experience it due to social pressure and socially constructed frameworks. We also discovered that even though the Encounter centers on the Other, it is essentially a journey toward an individual's Self. Hence, the internal locus of valuing appears to be the key mechanism of experiencing the Encounter in everyday life.

We have identified different levels, stages, and types of Encounters. However, the first step toward the Encounter is the most valuable. Fromm et al. (1974) said, "If one candle is brought into an absolutely dark room, the darkness disappears, and there is light. But if ten or a hundred or thousand candles are added, the room will become brighter and brighter. Yet the decisive change was brought about by the first candle which penetrated the darkness" (p. 138). We can say the same about the Encounter: Our acute awareness of the possibility of the Encounter would be a life-changing experience. It can motivate us to live each day to the fullest, anticipating something remarkable happening at any moment.

As with any novel endeavor, this study has some limitations. First, it is difficult to replicate because the interviewer's personality may affect the study's outcome. The specificity of the subject matter requires establishing a supportive and congruent environment where people would feel comfortable sharing their intimate thoughts. Hence, attention needs to be paid to the interviewer. Second, our study relies on qualitative data, which is descriptive and narrative-based. Hence, it lacks the quantifiable measures that can be used in statistical analyses. Nevertheless, the GT used in our study generated rich, contextually grounded explanations of the phenomenon of Encounter and provided valuable insights that could not emerge from numerical data alone. The third limitation is the inclusion of the initial question about whether all humankind can be friends. Although the intention behind including this question was to create a more comfortable and relaxed atmosphere for participants to share their thoughts, it is also possible that this question could influence participants to respond differently to the following questions that are more directly related to the study. This potential influence could bias the research. Finally, we employed a simple random sampling method and only included participants who spoke Russian. Therefore, our findings may not be generalized to other groups or populations who speak different languages. We plan to conduct further studies to test our findings with participants from other languages and geographic regions.

In addition, we plan to delve into the differences between mindful-knowing and bodily-knowing individuals to understand what personality traits, behavioral patterns, and life circumstances could facilitate or hinder the Encounter. Understanding these elements could help us develop intervention programs facilitating the experience of the Encounter in everyday life.

Finally, a vital ramification of our study concerns a creative aspect of the Encounter. We believe that a growing awareness of the Self feeds an individual's creative capacity. Kharkhurin's (2014) 4D model of creativity includes attributes of novelty, utility, esthetics, and authenticity. The authenticity attribute stipulates that creative work expresses

an individual's inner Self and relates one's values and beliefs to the world. Hence, the experience of the Encounter stimulates the awareness of the Self and, consequently, the authenticity in the creative process. In this regard, the follow-up study should look into variations in understanding the concept of creativity and the degree of engagement in creative activities of individuals with different levels of knowing.

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