

# **ARTIGOS**

**- ESTUDOS TEÓRICOS OU HISTÓRICOS .....**

---

# EMOTIONAL EXPERIENCE: APPLYING PERSON-CENTERED APPROACH TO THE PRACTICE OF EXISTENTIAL ANALYSIS

*Experiência emocional: Aplicando a Abordagem Centrada na Pessoa para a Prática da Análise Existencial*

*Experiencia Emocional: Aplicando el Enfoque Centrado en la Persona a la Práctica del Análisis Existencial*

ELENA STANKOVSKAYA

---

**Abstract:** This article focuses on the issue of integration of the ideas of person-centered and existential approaches. Specifically, it shows how C. Rogers's notion of "necessary and sufficient" conditions for a successful therapy is firmly embedded in the practice of existential analysis and logotherapy, and works as a basis for confronting interventions. The paper analyses similarities and differences of the work with emotional experiences in E. Gendlin's focusing and A. Längle's personal existential analysis. It was shown that, despite the divergence in terminology, there is considerable similarity in their value principles and theoretical guidelines. The potential contribution of combining these two approaches to psychotherapy is discussed. The paper concludes with a practical case illustration.

**Keywords:** Person-centered psychotherapy; Existential psychotherapy; Focusing; Existential analysis.

**Resumen:** Este artículo está enfocado en el asunto de la integración de las ideas de la psicoterapia centrada en el cliente y la psicoterapia existencial. Específicamente, demuestra cómo la noción de C. Rogers de "los necesarios y suficientes" condiciones para el éxito de psicoterapia está profundamente incluida en la práctica del análisis existencial y la logoterapia, y funciona como la base para las intervenciones de confrontación. El artículo analiza las similitudes y diferencias en el trabajo de "focusing" de E. Gendlin y análisis existencial personal de A. Längle. Está demostrado que a pesar de las divergencias de la terminología, hay una similitud considerable en sus principios, valores y direcciones teóricas. La posible contribución a la combinación de estos dos enfoques en psicoterapia está discutida. El trabajo se concluye con una ilustración de un caso práctico.

**Palabras clave:** Psicoterapia centrada en la persona; La psicoterapia existencial; De enfoque; Análisis existencial.

**Resumo:** Este artigo enfoca a questão da integração das idéias de abordagens centradas na pessoa e existenciais. Especificamente, ele mostra como a noção de C. Rogers de condições "necessárias e suficientes"; para uma terapia bem sucedida está firmemente incorporado na prática da análise existencial e logoterapia, e funciona como uma base para enfrentar intervenções. O trabalho analisa as semelhanças e diferenças do trabalho com as experiências emocionais em E. Gendlin de foco e análise existencial pessoal de A. Längle. Mostrou-se que, apesar da divergência de terminologia, há uma semelhança considerável em seus princípios de valores e diretrizes teóricas. A contribuição potencial de combinar essas duas abordagens para a psicoterapia é discutida. O artigo conclui com um caso de ilustração prática.

**Palavras-chave:** Psicoterapia centrada na pessoa; Psicoterapia existencial; Com foco; Análise existencial.

---

## Introduction

Contemporary psychotherapeutic field with its many forms and faces clearly has a tendency towards integration and mutual enrichment from different areas. The comparison and synthesis of approaches open an opportunity for a deeper understanding of the essence of psychotherapy, of the factors that ensure its effectiveness, and also let a practitioner comprehend better his or her professional activity.

One of the approaches that has a strong influence on values and modus operandi of psychotherapists is person-centered approach (McWilliams, 1994; Richert, 2002; Spinelli, 2005; Meekums, 2006; Längle & Kriz, 2012). In this article I tried to describe some considerations regard-

ing integration of its ideas into existential psychotherapeutic practice. The main emphasis is on the possibility for the use of the Rogers's conditions of therapeutic change (Rogers, 1957) and the Gendlin's focusing procedure (Gendlin, 1969, 1981) when working with emotional experiences within existential analysis.

Since person-centered approach (PCA) and existential psychotherapy are two independent paradigms, the issue of their integration should be examined in more detail. There is a growing body of literature about the divergences between PCA and existential psychotherapy (Valle and King, 1978; Yalom, 1980; van Deurzen, 2002). Summarizing the differences between the two orientations, E. van Deurzen (2002) stresses the following. PCA emphasizes the basic 'goodness' of people, processes of

their realization, in general, and self-realization, in particular; considers 'personal growth' as a preferable way of living. In contrast, existential psychotherapy regards that human beings may develop in any direction ('good' or 'bad') by the means of their decisions; addresses the complexities and inevitable paradoxes of existence, and acknowledges the "importance of helping people to take stock of their present mode of living" (van Deurzen, 2002, p. XIV).

However, other authors, while appreciate the divergences, argue for similarities in person-centered and existential psychotherapies (Cooper, 2003; Spinelli, 2005, 2007). For instance, Spinelli (2005, 2007) reveals the importance of phenomenology and lived experience, which is crucial for both paradigms. Thus, the combination of existential analysis and person-centered approach becomes possible due to the similarity of their value principles and theoretical guidelines. Both belong to understanding paradigms; they are dialogical, non-directive, and oriented towards the investigation of the unique world of a person by the means of open encounter between the psychotherapist and the client. They both see the clients as potentially capable of coping with their problems and building an authentic, responsible life (Rogers, 1951, 1957; Gendlin, 1981; Richert, 2002; Spinelli, 2007; Längle & Kriz, 2012). Specifically, the comparison and integration of the two orientations may heavily contribute to understanding of the client's lived experience (Spinelli, 2005).

The version of existential therapy that is examined in this paper is called 'existential analysis and logotherapy'; it has been developed by Längle based on the ideas of his teacher, V. Frankl. Due to the fact that most publications about this approach are in German, its basic propositions are presented in the beginning of this paper, then in more detail a discussion on the use of Rogers's and Gendlin's ideas within the context of applying personal existential analysis, and finally a practical case illustration as a conclusion.

## 1. Existential analysis and logotherapy: brief review

As many authors have pointed out, there is no single form of existential psychotherapy (Yalom, 1980; van Deurzen, 2002; Cooper, 2003; Spinelli, 2005, 2007). Traditionally, the origination of a designated existential psychotherapy is strongly associated with the names of L. Binswanger, M. Boss and V. Frankl (Valle and King, 1978; Spinelli, 2005). The approach, which is discussed in this paper, was derived from Frankl's ideas by his follower Längle. I will now briefly review Längle's standpoint, then contrast it with Frankl's and person-centered approach. The emphasis will be made on the client's emotional experience.

According to Längle, *existential analysis and logotherapy* – is a phenomenological approach to psycho-

logical counseling and psychotherapy, where the central theme is a person in his or her interaction with the world. The basic assumption is that the necessary condition and at the same time the means for achieving a fulfilling existence by an individual is the development of their spiritual dimension. This constructive spiritual power is called "personality" or "person", in Längle's terminology. Its key characteristic is a state of constant dialogue with the world and with itself. The aim of psychotherapy is to help the client to form a dialogue, which enables authentic positioning and responsible actions, and thus leads to the life with inner consent (Längle, 2008, 2012).

Frankl started the development of existential analysis in the 1930s, but later he put it aside and concentrated more on logotherapy. He decided to abandon his own society for logotherapy mainly because of theoretical disagreement with his colleagues. The disagreement primarily concerns the importance of 'self-experience', in general, and emotionality and self-acceptance, in particular, within existential analysis (Längle, 2012). According to Frankl (Frankl, 1988), the man's primordial motivation is the development of meaning in life. To do so, one should use 'human capacities' of 'self-distancing' and 'self-transcendence'. Längle and his colleagues (Längle, 2011, 2012) found this perspective insufficient, and amplified it with three other fundamental motivations (they are briefly discussed below) and the man's capacity to accept him/herself. For Frankl, it was beyond the scope of logotherapy, and he left the society for existential analysis and logotherapy.

Not only did Längle develop the ideas of his teacher, he also reviewed and supplemented them, which permits us to talk about his conception as original. Längle's existential analysis is now a scientifically based and empirically proven psychological approach (Nindl, 2001; von Aesch, 2007; Cordini, 2008; Luginbühl-Schwab, 2008), which is recognized by the international community (International Federation of Psychotherapy, European Psychotherapy Association etc.) (Spinelli, 2007; Längle, 2008, 2012). Long-term training programs are conducted in Austria, Canada, Russia, Argentina, and Chile.

Following Frankl's views, a human, in this approach, is seen as a living unity of three dimensions: bodily, psychic and spiritual. Main topics, contents of the person's individual life are generalized by Längle in his *theory of the fundamental motivations* (Längle, 2008, 2012). When a person analyzes the nature of the world's demands towards him, he selects within them four horizons: that of the possible, that of the valuable, that of the ethically acceptable, and that of the meaningful. According to this the author outlines four basic areas of existence: Outside world, with its conditions and possibilities; life, human nature in its vitality; being oneself; future with its possibilities for realization and call for action. These fundamental conditions of a fulfilling life are constantly

present in the existence of an individual, and act as four fundamental existential motivations of a person:

- Motivation towards the physical and spiritual presence in the world, to “be able to be” – corresponds with the horizon of that is possible;
- Motivation towards enjoyment of life and emotional experience of values, to “like living” - corresponds with the horizon of that of the valuable;
- Motivation towards authenticity and justice, to “have a right to be oneself” - corresponds with the horizon of the ethically acceptable;
- Motivation towards the existential meaning and realization of values, to “act in a due way” - corresponds with the horizon of that of meaningful.

When practicing counseling in existential analysis, this theory is used for structural and procedural diagnostics of the difficulties the client is having, for conceptualization of an individual case, and also for planning the strategy and tactics of the counseling process (Längle, 2008). Of course, these motivations are interrelated and the strict separation of them is an artificial venture; again, for practical and didactic reasons, it might be useful. Some details of the conception of the four fundamental motivation will be set out below, in the next section.

‘Existential analysis and logotherapy’ belongs to the phenomenological school, so the central part of the psychotherapeutic work is focused on the *emotional experiences of the client* (Längle, 2011). Based on the ideas of M. Scheler (Scheler, 1973), emotions are seen as a subjective connotation of values, which contains information about how that what occurs affects a person’s life. Feelings and emotions are seen as an important channel for perception of reality, as well as an independent dimension of existence. Owing to the openness and to the involvement in relationships a person entirely, on a bodily, psychic, and spiritual level, is touched by what is going on. The being affects him, leading to an *immediate impression*, which includes *primary emotionality, spontaneous impulse, and phenomenal content*. This immediate impression is a pre-reflective form of a position, and through negotiating it with a more generalized value system and conscience, it becomes an *integrated emotionality*. Integrated emotionality is the basis of feelings for authentic positions and actions. So the main direction for the work with a person’s feeling experiences in therapy is to help them integrate their emotional experience and express it in specific actions (Längle, 2011).

Paradoxically, this interpretation of emotionality stands much closer to PCA than to original Frankl’s principles (Frankl, 1988), and leads to possibility to integrate Rogers’s (Rogers, 1951, 1957) and Gendlin’s (Gendlin, 1969, 1970, 1981) ideas into existential psychotherapeutic practice. This possibility and the connection between the values, the emotions and the phenomenal content will be addressed in more detail below.

## 2. Personal existential analysis: possibilities for application of the ideas of Rogers and Gendlin

One of the main methods of work in the described version of existential analysis is the personal existential analysis (PEA), which was created by Längle (2000). Its theoretical basis is constituted by the ideas of Jaspers (1963), Scheler (1973), Frankl (1988), Buber (2002) and others.

In accordance with the general assumptions of existential analysis, this method is aimed at the development of the person by strengthening or restoration of its authentic dialogue with itself and with the world (Längle, 2000, 2008, 2012). Practically it means working with the person’s ability to perceive the situation, get an impression about the situation, understand what is going on, take a (personal) position, and carry it out in specific actions. On a feeling level the counselor’s efforts are directed at helping the client to better recognize, experience, and integrate their own emotions, by relating them to a wider system of vital values and conscience. This movement from the primary emotionality to the integrated one is reflected in taking an authentic position and in mobilization of the will of the patient. Therefore, in existential analysis and logotherapy there is a strong correspondence between the theoretical conception of the four fundamental motivations and practice.

PEA is used for solving a wide range of tasks: Helping the client to clarify their motives and values; to change the patterns of emotional reactions; to make decisions; to define and train preferable actions etc. In the psychotherapeutic practice this creates a basis for treatment of various disorders: phobias, depression, PTSD etc. This method can also be used as a diagnostic instrument, which reveals the deficits and the resources of the patient. A relatively small number of evidence-based researches on topic were conducted (Cordigni, 2008; Luginbühl-Schwab, 2008), and further studies needed.

PEA includes three basic steps, as will be described below, which are preceded by the description of the situation. It should be emphasized that this scheme has been created for methodological purposes, and is actually a “map”, which helps the practitioner to find his or her way in the inner world of the patient, while leaving space for improvisation. Though this scheme is described in detail, it is open to the intuition of the therapist and the uniqueness of the client (Längle, 2000).

During all the stages it is important for the therapist to implement the attitudes that Rogers (Rogers, 1957) called “necessary and sufficient” for successful therapy: to be in contact with the client; to be present in the relationship in an integrated and congruent way; to demonstrate an unconditional positive regard for the client. All of this ensures the security of the client (Meekums, 2006), encourages him to accept and investigate the problematic situation, and his/her individual mode of living.

At the same time, the existential practitioner can turn the client's attention to limitations and interrelations of his/her life, reveal how some beliefs are unrealistic, display his or her own positions and offer new ideas. The developmental process of the client's personality therefore happens more as a dialogue and confrontation, due to more general theoretical propositions of this approach. For example, the therapeutic relationship is seen as a part of the client's dialogue with the world; so there should exist not only conditions for self-actualization, but also for personal exchange (Längle, and Kriz, 2012). It should be emphasized, that the client remains the "author" of his own life. The psychotherapist's efforts are directed primarily at clarification of the client's intentions and at bringing them in accordance with the possibilities that he/she has. This permits us to see the conditions proposed by Rogers (Rogers, 1957) as the basis for confrontation in existential analysis.

Let's examine closely each step of PEA, and the possibilities for the introduction of the ideas of the person-centered approach.

**PEA 0: Description of the facts.** The client is asked to retell in detail the specific situation where he or she is having difficulties. In an empathetic manner, the counselor is trying to help the person to see the situation better, to create interrelations, and also gather the history of this problem – how did it develop, how often does it occur etc (Längle, 2000).

Psychotherapist's questions are directed "through" the emotions to the facts. Primarily they help the client to restore the circumstances and the objective interrelations in which he or she is involved. Basic questions: "What happened? How exactly? When? Where?", "What exactly you were doing? What were the others doing?"

This detailed description of the problem helps the person to reconstruct the relationship with reality, to take distance from the emotions that are overwhelming and, thus, to create a space to find the authentic way of action. During this stage he/she also establish closeness with the topic at hand, which makes a basis for the client's future emotional involvement in the work.

**PEA 1: Acknowledgement of the impression.** The description of the facts that constitute the difficult situation for the client naturally introduces feelings in the psychotherapeutic space. At this stage the counselor helps the client to turn to his or her spontaneous emotions and impulses which arise in response to the situation. If on the previous step, PEA 0, the attention is on *what* is happening in the client's life, then in this step the psychotherapist opens the space for discussing and comprehending of *how* this situation affects the person. The client focuses on his/her feelings, establishes emotional contact with himself and phenomenologically investigates the situation that troubles him (Längle, 2000).

The basic questions used by the counselor are founded on the theory of emotions from the existential analysis. They are directed towards revealing:

- Primary emotionality: "What feelings does it bring up in you? What do you sense? What do you like in it? What burdens or bothers you?";
- Spontaneous impulse: "What would you like to do most? What is your spontaneous urge?";
- Phenomenal content: "What does this situation "tell" you, what does it mean to you?"; "If you stay a little longer by this feeling, what becomes clear to you?".

This way, the client's attention first concentrates on the bodily and emotional experience, and then is transferred to those values and meanings that can be recognized through feelings.

For the client this "grasping" of the phenomenal content can be unfamiliar, but crucially important. It is the acknowledgement of the phenomenal content – the "message of the world" about his life, which due to reflection clearly appears in consciousness – actualizes the spiritual personality ("person"). Owing to such careful and laborious work with the emotional experience, a person gains access to the area of subjective values and meanings: to things that touch and move him/her on a spiritual level (Längle, 2000, 2011).

At the PEA 1 stage it is especially important to use Rogers's (Rogers, 1957) attitudes. Empathetic non-judgmental dialogue, unconditional positive regard and congruence permit the client to submerge into the delicate and intimate world of his feelings. Clients often tend to devalue their emotional experience, so it is of special importance at this stage to show respect and invite the client to acknowledge the value of what is revealing itself. But I would like to add, that the revelation of the phenomenal content assumes something more than following the client's feelings, and is often carried out in a more confrontational manner.

One of the difficulties that clients meet at this stage is that the feelings are blocked. In this case it is useful to turn to Gendlin's focusing (Gendlin, 1969, 1970, 1981). The origination of this technique was influenced by C. Rogers's ideas. Focusing helps the client to clarify and to develop his or her unclearly sensed experience, to find a fresh meaning of it, which, in turn, changes his or her behaviour. The essence of the procedure is to "make contact with a special kind of internal bodily awareness" (Gendlin, 1981), or, in other terms, to receive a felt sense. To describe and organize this inward activity, Gendlin (Gendlin, 1981) designed the six-stages procedure. It includes the following steps: Clearing space, felt sense, handle, resonating, asking, and receiving.

Focusing and PEA have a lot in common. Both of them:

- Are directed towards the search for an authentic answer to a situation through the work with emotional experience;

- Presume a transition from senses and feelings to meanings and values directly presented in one's consciousness (felt sense in Gendlin's terms, or phenomenological content in Längle's terms);
- Consider that the explicit meaning generates through an interchange between symbols and preverbal experience of living;
- Actualize the dynamics of feelings, which leads to integration of emotional experience;
- Invite the client for a dialogue with him/herself and for an active inner work on the border between the conscious and the unconscious experience.

However, on closer analysis, divergences between focusing and PEA begin to emerge. Main differences between the methods have to do with the ways of dealing with the revealed subjective meanings and with the identification of the following actions of the client. From Gendlin's perspective (Gendlin, 1969, 1981), the explicit meaning is "carrying forward" from the pre-verbal holistic body-sense by the process of focusing itself. It is experiential effect, symbolization and other client's actions that do change and develop the meaning. PEA, on the contrary, assumes a *more extensive and dialogical procedure of constructing a meaning, taking a personal position and elaboration of the strategy of its implementation on specific actions* (Längle, 2000). As a result, *the psychotherapist's position becomes more confronting*. In addition, Gendlin (Gendlin, 1969, 1970, 1981) stresses respectively more on bodily aspect than Längle (Längle, 2000). In particular, he describes his procedure as "bodily method" (Gendlin, 1969).

On the PEA 1 stage, the symbolization of the subjective meaning (phenomenal content) occurs: It is an important step towards understanding one's own emotions and behavior. The person is withdrawn from his or her captivation by the emotions, stops being blindly guided by his or her feelings, and establishes a clear contact with him/herself. The same way as in the symbolization of the felt sense, in deciphering of the "message" of a situation a person feels certain relief. The client, also, gains trust towards his/her own feelings and him/herself: He/she gets a sensory experience of how substantial are his/her emotional reactions and how tightly he/she is involved in the world. The work with the impression lays the basis of comprehension of the situation. When a person realizes the phenomenal content, he/she becomes aware of the important interrelations of his/her life: It becomes evident *why and in relation to what values* do feelings arise. On the next step, this understanding grows stronger.

**PEA 2: Deepening of understanding and taking a position.** At this stage, the client is solving a very important task: He/she integrates the experience uncovered on the previous stage into a wider context of his/her life.

Through understanding and taking a position, he/she returns to freedom, gains a possibility to look at what is going on from a certain inner distance and, authentically, answer the challenge presented by the situation (Längle, 2000). Practically, there are the following *basic questions* that could be used:

- "Do you understand yourself? Do you understand why it affects you this way?"; "Do you understand why the other acts the way he does? What good is he trying to achieve?"; "Do you understand why this situation has occurred?";
- "How do you evaluate it? What can you say about it? Do you think this is right? What do you, personally, deep in your heart, think about it?"; "What does it mean to you? Of what does it deprive you? How important is it for your life?"; "What would you like to do in this situation? What would be a good, a correct way to act?"

It should be emphasized that taking a position happens not only on the cognitive level, but primarily on the level of intuition and feelings. Here there is a similarity with the person-centered approach (Rogers, 1951, 1957; Gendlin, 1969, 1981). Technically, in existential analysis the psychotherapist can offer his/her own vision, actively ask for and reveal the concealed aspects of the client's attitude towards the situation. Taking a position always contains an element of surprise: It is impossible to foretell it or make a choice for the client.

So, PEA 2 ends with a "bridge" to action, which is a natural continuation of the dynamics of the emotional experience: when a situation is understood and a position has been taken about it, the person gets a spontaneous urge to do something about it, to realize him/herself (Längle, 2000).

**PEA 3: Responsible action.** On this step, the client concentrates on searching for specific actions that might express his/her new position and on training it. According to existential analysis and logotherapy, a person can truly fulfill himself in actions; therefore it is very important to help the client express his authentic position in actions (Längle, 2000).

The elaboration of a plan of action becomes a special task in such cases, when a person enters in new areas of his/her life and dares to make radical changes. Habitual behavioral patterns are inert, so it is important to help the person to see and sensibly evaluate the possibilities offered to him/her by the reality and his/her own resources (Längle, 2000).

*Main questions:* "What would you like to do?"; "How would you prefer to make it happen?"; "What could it lead to? What consequences could it provoke?"; "Will you be able to take responsibility for what you are planning to do?" Often this stage is used to design (train) a new way of action (Längle, 2000).

So, the main goal of PEA 3 is to elaborate a clear and realistic plan, to find specific ways which would implement the authentic will of the client into life. The psychotherapist actively helps him/her to find and evaluate the available options and adds his/her own vision and knowledge. One of the phenomenological criterions of appropriateness of the actions is the client's feeling of "I can do it" (Längle, 2000).

Summing up, let's look at some ideas about the integration of the ideas of Rogers (Rogers, 1957), Gendlin (Gendlin, 1969, 1981) and Längle's (Längle, 2000) personal existential analysis. "Necessary and sufficient conditions" of psychotherapeutic change proposed by Rogers (Rogers, 1957) are firmly incorporated into the practice of existential analysis. The confrontation performed by the psychotherapist in PEA is based on them. Therefore, the conditions described by Rogers (Rogers, 1957) act as prerequisites for the emotional security of the clients in psychotherapeutic process. Focusing, developed by Gendlin (Gendlin, 1969, 1970, 1981), can be also used in the context of PEA due to the similarity of their goals and the phenomenological way of working with the client. Felt senses revealed during focusing and the preferred actions can be integrated into the dialogue with the psychotherapist and become the starting point for taking a position by the client.

### 3. Practical illustration

I would like to offer an example from practice to illustrate the possibility of the application of the ideas and techniques from the person-centered approach in the work with emotional experience in existential analysis. Bearing in mind the goals of this article I am not going to give a detailed account of the therapeutic process, but limit this illustration to a brief description of the relevant aspects.

When Maria (age 24) first came to my office, it seemed to me that she was hidden deeply within her body: I had the impression that her vital energy could not reach the surface of her skin. During our first session she said that she, sometimes, has a "strong depression", when she does not want to live. She managed to keep some distance from her pain and hoped that her life might become better, but sometimes her faith weakened. In one of such moments she decided to ask for psychotherapeutic help.

These attacks of despair and suicidal thoughts, which Maria connected with the relationship with her mother, started when she was 11 years old. Her life story was full of pain from disappointments with close relationships. When she was two years old, her parents divorced. Her father started living separately and, for many years, he did not express any wish to meet her. When Maria was six, her mother remarried. Since this moment, her mother "always abandoned her". The relationship with her step-

father did not work well: There were frequent rows in the family and her mother blamed the client for them. When she turned 11, her mother had another child. At that time, the conflicts with her step-father grew stronger. Though they lived together, Maria was, in fact, pushed aside and deprived of family warmth: When the step-father was home, she had to eat separately, to spend most of the time in her bedroom etc.

During our first meetings, Maria's accounts did not contain emotions: She would list the facts, not showing her attitude towards them. Her own feelings frightened and burdened her; she wanted me to give her exercises, which would help her "get rid of the depression" and stop the psychotherapy. This desire to instantly get some instruments, which would help her quickly to reach her goals, was a manifestation of a more general "instrumental" and impatient attitude towards herself and towards life. Paradoxically, her determination, ability to distance herself from her feelings and act swiftly, which saved her for many years, now, deepened her self-alienation and despair.

At the same time, I felt that Maria suffered from the lack of close relationship in her life. She wanted to be seen, appreciated, understood, respected in her feelings and values by others. She was in need of a person who would be sincerely interested in her. At this stage of psychotherapy, the conditions described by Rogers (Rogers, 1957) were especially needed. Only in the atmosphere of empathy, unconditional positive regard towards her feelings, sincere involvement could the pain that chained her for so many years start to melt. Maria was especially sensitive to my congruence: With her experience of disappointments in close relationships, she was constantly testing my position for authenticity.

The world of her emotional experience was mostly unavailable for the client, so the themes for the first stage of our work were her current feelings towards her mother, and also the emotional difficulties that were emerging in her life. We were working to understand her state and find ways to relieve it. In our work we turned a lot to the PEA, concentrating mainly on the PEA 1 and PEA 2 steps. It was hard for Maria to take a position towards her mother: She was torn between feeling offended and accepting that her mother was right in treating her this way. So, our first task had become to take a position towards her own feelings: It was important to protect the delicate world of her intimacy from the devaluating attacks to which she was subjecting it.

Gradually, she began to discover the value of her emotional experience, to learn to recognize and to understand it better. We were touching her feelings carefully and gently, revealing the phenomenal contents behind them. It was making a double effect: On one hand, Maria was feeling relieved by being understood by another person; on the other, it strengthened her trust in herself.

When her emotional experience would be especially entangled, we used Gendlin's focusing (Gendlin, 1969,

1981). This technique turned out to be particularly useful on the second stage of psychotherapy, when we concentrated on her relationships with men. For example, Gendlin's procedure (Gendlin, 1969, 1970, 1981) helped her, firstly, to find out about her aggression towards men, and then to detect the felt meaning of it. After understanding and revealing the meaning of her feelings, Maria was able to integrate them into her life and to change her relationship with the men. It also positively affected her relationship with her body and strengthened her self-value. Often, the felt senses that she would become aware of, during focusing, became a subject for a dialogue and a theme for biographical work.

In conclusion of this brief and undoubtedly fragmentary review of our meetings, I would like to note the following: Warm, trusting relationship and a detailed phenomenological analysis of Maria's emotional experiences permitted her to significantly liberate herself from the pain and to reach a deeper consent with her life. She was able to become more authentic in her relationships with men and with her mother. Although her past and many moments in her present life caused her pain, the quality of her emotional experience towards it was different.

Throughout our sessions, Maria kept striking me with her amazing capacity to resist circumstances and determinedly built a good life. I think the success of our psychotherapy was largely due to the "stubbornness" of her spirit. I also want to thank her for giving her kind permission for publication of these materials.

It was especially nice for me that Maria, who was so clear about wanting "instruments" in the beginning of psychotherapy and so mistrusting towards "simple conversations", after ten sessions confessed that the most important for her in our work was "the possibility for frank dialogues". For me it is not only the confirmation of the values I share, but also a great answer to a question about the effectiveness of humanistic psychotherapy. Additionally, this brief case illustration shows that, despite the divergences between PCA and existential analysis indicated above, the combination of them would be beneficial for the clients. Specifically, it opens new ways of dealing with emotional experiences of the clients.

## Conclusions

Some thoughts on how the ideas of person-centered therapy are or could be used in practice of existential analysis and logotherapy were discussed in this article. The similarities and divergences between the two orientations were briefly reviewed. Particularly, it was shown that in the same way as in many non-directive approaches, the principles of successful psychotherapy stated by Rogers (Rogers, 1957) are actively integrated in the work of psychotherapists in existential analysis. The possibilities for the use of Gendlin's focusing (Gendlin,

1969, 1981) were illustrated by an example of PEA; also, the similarities and differences of these approaches in the work with emotional experiences were discussed.

## References

- Aesch, von, S. (2007). *Sinnhaftigkeit: out oder aktueller denn je? Eine Untersuchung der Konstrukte Existentialität, Emotionsregulation und psychische Gesundheit*. Diploma-Work at the Institute for Psychology of the University of Berne
- Buber, M. (2002). *Between Man and Man*. New York: Routledge.
- Cardigni M. L. (2008). Paula: The Rebirth of the Person. *Existenzanalyse*, 25(1), 54-57.
- Cooper, M. (2003). *Existential Therapies*. London: SAGE Publications.
- Deurzen, van, E. (2002). *Existential Counselling and Psychotherapy in Practice*. London: SAGE Publications.
- Frankl, V. E. (1988). *The Will to Meaning: Foundations and Applications of Logotherapy*. New York: Nal Penguin.
- Gendlin, E. T. (1997). How Philosophy Cannot Appeal to Experience and How it Can. In D. M. Levin (Ed.), *Language beyond Postmodernism: Saying and Thinking in Gendlin's Philosophy* (pp. 3-41) Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press.
- Gendlin, E. T. (1969). Focusing. *Psychotherapy: Theory, Research and Practice*, 6(1), 4-15.
- Gendlin, E. T. (1981). *Focusing*. New York: Bantam Books.
- Gendlin, E. T. & Olsen, L. (1970). The use of imagery in experiential focusing. *Psychotherapy: Theory, Research & Practice*, 7(4), 221-223.
- Jaspers, K. (1963). *General Psychopathology*, vol. 1. Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press.
- Längle, A. (2000). *Personalen Existenzanalyse*. Vienna, Austria: Facultas University Publ.
- Längle, A. (2008). Existenzanalyse. In: Längle, A., Holzhey-Kunz, A. *Existenzanalyse and Daseinsanalyse* (pp. 29-180). Vienna, Austria: University Textbook (Facultas).
- Längle, A. (2011). Emotionality: An Existential-Analytical Understanding and Practice. In: Trnka, R., Balcar, K., Kuska, M. (Eds) *Re-constructing Emotional spaces. From Experience to Regulation* (pp. 41-62). Prague: Prague College of Psychosocial Studies Press.
- Längle, A. (2012). The Viennese school of existential analysis: the search for meaning and affirmation of life. In: L. Barnett & G. Madison (Eds) *Existential therapy: Legacy, vibrancy, and dialogue* (pp. 159-170). New York: Routledge.
- Längle, A. & Kriz, J. (2012). The Renewal of Humanism in European Psychotherapy: Developments and Applications. *Psychotherapy*, 49(4), 430-436.



- Luginbühl-Schwab, E. (2008). From the Impression to an Expression. *Existenzanalyse*, 25(1), 20-27.
- McWilliams, N. (1994). *Psychoanalytic Diagnosis: Understanding Personality Structure in the Clinical Process*. New York: Guilford Press.
- Meekums, B. (2006). Embodiment in dance movement therapy training and practice. In: Payne, H. (Ed) *Dance Movement Therapy: Theory, research and practice* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.) (pp. 167-183). London: Routledge.
- Nindl, A. (2001). Zwischen existentieller Sinnerfüllung und Burnout. *Existenzanalyse*, 18(1), 15-23
- Richert, A. (2002). The Self in Narrative Therapy: Thoughts From a Humanistic/Existential Perspective. *Journal of Psychotherapy Integration*, 12(1), 77-104.
- Rogers, C. (1951). *Client-centered therapy: Its current practice, implications and theory*. London: Constable.
- Rogers, C. R. (1957). The necessary and sufficient conditions of therapeutic personality change. *Journal of Consulting Psychology*, 21(2), 95-103.
- Scheler, M. (1973). Formalism in Ethics and Non-Formal Ethics of Values. *A New Attempt toward a Foundation of an Ethical Personalism*. Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press.
- Spinelli, E. (2005). *The Interpreted World: An Introduction to Phenomenological Psychology* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.) London: SAGE Publications.
- Spinelli, E. (2007). *Practicing Existential Psychotherapy: The Relational World*. London: SAGE Publications.
- Valle, R.S. & King, M. (1978). *Existential-Phenomenological Alternatives for Psychology*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Yalom, I. (1980). *Existential Psychotherapy*. New York: Basic Books.

---

**Elena Stankovskaya** - Is a psychologist and an existential psychotherapist, works at the National Research University Higher School of Economics, Moscow (Russia). Address: 46 b Volgogradskyi prospect, office 102, 109316, Moscow, Rússia. E-mail: [stankovskaya@gmail.com](mailto:stankovskaya@gmail.com)

---

Recebido em 01.05.2013  
Primeira Decisão Editorial em 24.10.2013  
Aceito em 18.06.2014