

Phenomenology in Psychotherapeutic Praxis

An introduction to Personal
Existential Analysis



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Janelle Kwee & Alfried Langle - Phenomenology in Psychotherapeutic Praxis

Phenomenology in Psychotherapeutic Praxis: An Introduction to Personal Existential Analysis

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Abstract

Personal Existential Analysis (PEA) is the primary psychotherapeutic method utilized in Existential Analysis (EA), a phenomenological and person-centered psychotherapy that aims to facilitate discovery of a responsible way of dealing with oneself and the world for a fulfilled and mentally and emotionally free existence. The existential approach to psychotherapy is known more for its philosophical rather than methodological tenets, yet there is instructional, empirical, and therapeutic utility in delineating transparent structures of psychotherapy. Toward this end, the practice of PEA offers a viable application of Viktor Frankl's anthropology, illuminating therapeutic processes for phenomenological practice. Systematically, PEA facilitates, a) reconnection with reality by working on a clear view on the facts, b) experiencing self-acceptance through connecting with one's impressions and feelings, c) fostering inner dialogue toward better understanding and inner positioning, and finally, d) coming to an acceptable and responsible action. Corresponding to the dialogical nature of personhood, in which the human being is in a constant process of exchange with oneself and the world as a basis for realizing being a person, the methodical steps of PEA support authentic inner and outer dialogue with the aim of restructuring the capacity of the person, which eventually allows for genuine encounter.

Keywords: Phenomenological Process, Existential Analysis, Existential Psychotherapy, Personal Existential Analysis (PEA)

Phenomenology in Psychotherapeutic Praxis: An Introduction to Personal Existential



Analysis

Existential Analysis (EA) is a phenomenological and person-oriented psychotherapy with the aim of helping a person to discover a way of living in which one is able to give “inner consent” for one’s actions. This central aim can further be described as guiding a person towards mentally and emotionally free experiences in which a person is able to make authentic and responsible decisions (Längle, 2012). What does this mean in practice? How do we describe this, methodologically? Since existential approaches to psychotherapy are regarded more for their philosophical underpinnings than for their techniques (Prochaska & Norcross, 2014), one might be surprised or even resist the perceived confines of any particular method.

Indeed, we tend to speak about phenomenological and existential psychotherapies in abstract and flexible terms, contrasting this approach with rigid and manual-based treatment approaches. However, there is instructional, empirical, and therapeutic utility in delineating transparent structures of psychotherapy. Moreover, the therapeutic structures of phenomenological practice do not reflect dogmatic explanatory frameworks, but rather aim to facilitate a receptive, descriptive, and dialogical process in which the existential task of being a person can be realized. The primary therapeutic method in EA is called Personal Existential Analysis (PEA; Längle, 1995). In exposing the processes of PEA, we offer a praxis-focused description of phenomenology.

Grounded in the anthropology of Viktor Frankl who identified meaning-seeking as the deepest human motivation (Frankl, 1988), the framework of EA elaborates three other existential motivations that precede that of the search for meaning (Längle, 2005). These include the motivations to be, to experience value, and to be oneself. Corresponding to each of the Fundamental Motivations (FM) is a primary existential question (Längle, 1999a, 2012). These are:

- I am here. Can I be? Do I have the necessary space, protection and support?
- I am alive. Do I like to live? Do I feel my emotions and experience the value of my life?
- I am me. May I be myself? Am I free to be me?; and finally, the primary question of meaning-focused logotherapy,
- What am I here for? What do I live for? What gives my life meaning?

Together, within the theoretical framework of EA, the four existential fundamental motivations make up the cornerstones of existence. Fulfillment is experienced as one is able to affirm the existential questions corresponding to the four FMs: “Yes” to the world (FM 1), “Yes” to life (FM 2), “Yes” to one’s self/person (FM 3) and “Yes” to meaning (FM 4). These FMs provide the structure for understanding the person on which the process of PEA is based. In this paper, we focus specifically on the person’s capacity for dialogical exchange in order to describe the corresponding psychotherapeutic steps of PEA.

Dialogical Exchange as the Basis of Personhood

In the existential-analytical framework, human life can be seen as the chance for something (“Das Leben ist nie etwas, es ist nur die Gelegenheit zu einem Etwas;” Hebbel, 2013), a



dynamic possibility rather than a fixed reality. Imagining life as a chance for something suggests that there is a creative challenge and great opportunity in each person's existence. It is not possible to accomplish the purpose of one's life simply by being born, by one's instincts, or by nature. To have a fulfilled or meaningful life cannot be reached objectively, but is accessed through the subjectivity of the person, through which the person is in dialogue with one's self and with the world. To reach this chance or possibility, there must be active fulfillment of being a person. Indeed, there is freedom between each person and her or his life, no matter what the objective circumstances of that life may be. In Frankl's existential-analytic framework (Frankl, 2004), the person has the noetic power of opening to the world, as well as of differentiating from the world. Personhood is fundamentally enabled for dialogue.

Inner Consent

The aim of EA is to help a person discover a way of living in which he or she is able to give "inner consent" to his or her actions (Längle, 1999b; 2012). Giving inner consent is part of a dialogical existence. It represents an answer, given as part of an active exchange with oneself and the world. To give inner consent is a capacity that is possible as a result of experiencing oneself as really being in life, and can be experienced towards the simple, everyday conditions as well as to "big" decisions. As a psychological construct, it contains the philosophical concept of freedom. In giving inner consent, one experiences oneself as free.

As an illustration, let's take the example of the person who has contemplated smoking cessation. Based on various considerations, they are convinced that it is the "right" decision to quit smoking. To name a few of these possible considerations, their physician has warned them of the health risks of continuing smoking, the social acceptability of smoking in public areas has declined dramatically in recent years, and the financial burden of the habit is unwanted. It may not be so difficult for this person to decide to quit smoking. However, consent is closer to one's personal felt experience than deciding is. Although a real decision incorporates inner consent, deciding is understood more commonly in cognitive terms, whereas one must be completely personally oneself in order to give consent. Consent emphasizes the emotional aspect of a decision and must be separated from external demands associated with ideologies, parents, education, or the social climate.

To give authentic, inner consent, it must correspond to the person in that very moment. So, a decision to quit smoking might be quite clear, but the experience of inner consent doesn't only depend on what is logical or clear cognitively, but arises from an experiential felt sense of "yes." It requires the person to bring him or herself fully into an activity, to ask oneself, "how do I feel about smoking this particular cigarette right now?" Or, "do I give consent to smoking this cigarette?" Perhaps the person will notice that it is only a habit to smoke a cigarette at this particular moment, or perhaps she or he will notice that smoking in that particular moment would bring a feeling of existential value, and can therefore affirm doing it even though it contradicts a cognitively framed goal. It is then possible to give inner consent to not taking up a cigarette at one point during the day, but experience full consent in smoking in another moment. Another possibility is that the person discovers a lack of consent to smoke but still "decides" to do it, which is common in addiction. By pausing for a brief moment of contemplation, the person enters the situation and can increasingly respond with an authentic action. If one finds a lack of inner consent to smoking, it becomes increasingly frustrating to do so against one's own



personal feeling.

This sensitization expands the personal freedom within which one may experience self-acceptance and self-determination. Although the overarching logical goal of quitting smoking may be established, the person, through remaining in a dialogical posture with oneself in each decision point through the process of changing a habit, is able to mindfully experience his or her own presence in the situation, which fosters development of the personality.

Through cultivating the freedom inherent in giving inner consent to one's actions, people can discover a responsible way of dealing with life and with the world, another aspect of the stated aims of Existential Analysis. To be personally responsible means that one can stand behind what one does, with authenticity, meaning that one's responses correspond to his or her true self. To deal with references that, in each person's existence, we encounter particular realities. A good or meaningful life with inner consent should not be confused with an ideal or fairy tale life.

Fulfillment through inner consent develops through dialogical encounters in each person's situation in the world. Each person is invited to give an answer to each real situation, the givens in his or her existence. These situations correspond to both inner and outer realities. To deal with oneself requires being in dialogue with oneself, taking a position towards one's own feelings, wishes, hopes, and anxieties. The outer realities in the world are the constraints outside of us. Though general personal development may be cultivated in each dialogical encounter, inner consent can only be given to specific situations. To understand this, we only have to ask the person who has at one point felt so sure in their heart that they are ready to quit smoking forever, yet experiences daily reminders and felt "invitations" to take it up again. It must be in each of these specific moments that a person gives his or her answer.

Potentials of the Person

Consistent with a conceptualization of life in terms of its possibility, or the chance for something, Frankl described the development of personality as a possibility that a person can fulfill. Central in the actualization of personhood is dialogue, and there are three constituent elements for dialogue to be possible (Längle, 2003):

- Dialogue has an addressee.
- The addressee should understand what is said.
- Dialogue requires a response.

These three constituent elements, then, are essential in the actualization of a person's potentials through dialogue. Corresponding to the external activities of the person in dialogue are the three subjective modes of experience of being impressionable (associated with being addressed), taking an inner position (associated with understanding), and being expressive (associated with being responsive). See Figure 1.

Receptivity. First, a person can be reached or accessed because of her or his capacity for receptivity. The person is the addressee in the dialogical encounters of his or her life. When another person greets any of us by name, a specific person has been addressed and no other I can be substituted. It calls the person who has been named into the encounter. Even if the basis for the encounter is relatively banal, it raises the intensity of one's self-awareness. When



one is personally singled out in a crowd, he or she may blush, or feel exposed or embarrassed, as a result of being personally addressed and now having the responsibility to take a position, or give an answer. When one of us, in our own life, is addressed directly, we experience a constraint—an inevitability. In the moment of being seen and addressed, one cannot hide anymore; one is detected as oneself. This goes along with being personally touched. In the situation of being addressed, one must answer; any response, even not reacting, is an answer. But in this situation, in one's openness and accessibility to the world, one has the freedom of what and how to answer. Through the capacity for receptivity, one is open to being touched by and called into an encounter with the unique world that corresponds to your own life. Nobody else can answer to your situation. There cannot be templates for authentic dialogue because to be authentic it must correspond to the unique person who is addressed in the context of his or her actual situation in the world.

Impression. Being receptive is experienced subjectively as being impressionable. Impressions do not necessarily correspond to the observable reality. They are spontaneous emotional responses that provide material for further processing. Being addressed and being impressed upon produces primary emotionality that is recovered in the first step of the therapeutic process. Being impressionable is commonly understood to be gullible or to be easily influenced. The term is used here to capture the experience of being subjectively impressed upon by one's life and one's experiences, in the sense that these make a subjective imprint on a person.

Understanding. A person's capacity to understand is the second constituent element necessary for dialogue. As understanding is less concrete and tangible than the other elements, we describe it first by its absence. Without understanding, a person's response to being addressed is simply a reaction or arbitrary behaviour; it does not represent an opening up of the person, and is not therefore a genuine encounter. The pleasantries of everyday greetings between strangers often strikingly lack this element of understanding. Though there is an apparent addressee ("hello, how are you?") and a reply ("fine, thank you"), an authentic dialogue is lacking because there is no intimate reflection or understanding within the person who is addressed in between the moment of being addressed and answering. In fact, this is not an answer in the existential sense. This conversation simply follows the template of common social norms, and that which follows a template of norms cannot authentically and uniquely correspond to the I in the situation. In contrast, the person who is drawing on the capacity for understanding, takes him or herself out of a situation in order to gain perspective in the context of one's existence. In the process of understanding, one moves from being under the influence of a situation to looking at the situation in relation to other experiences she or he has had. This private reflection facilitates understanding.

Inner Position. To come to an inner position is the result of the subjective activity of understanding. In taking an inner position, personhood takes up its own place in front of that which was "pressed" on the person through the im-pression. The raw affective reaction is taken up in a reflective process of inner dialogue. The person is free to bring his or her own values into a position, connecting these values with the new information carried by the impression. This step moves the person subjectively from primary emotionality to integrated emotionality (Längle, 2003). On the basis of understanding and sensed positioning, followed by a cognitive confrontation of the content with knowledge and experience, arises a deep inner movement



which calls for action. The will in a holistic sense is born. The inner movement tends towards a kind of realization of that which emerged within oneself in contact with the outer impact.

Responsiveness. The third element in dialogue is responsiveness. A person is able to give an answer. Giving an answer means that one has understood something and found a personal position, something corresponding to one's own. Answering, similar to being addressed, is concrete and tangible, something we readily observe through language and non- and para-verbal expressiveness. For the person giving a response, answering is disclosing oneself: by showing what he/she has inwardly, intimately generated (in the process of inner positioning) and giving it into the world by expressing it. We can say that a person is called into an encounter when he or she is receptive to being addressed. Then, the person brings a particular situation into context through private contemplation, a process of sifting and sorting other experiences relative to the situation in order to understand. Finally, in giving an answer, one experiences the resolution of decisiveness, of taking a position. After finding oneself inescapably called into an encounter, considering the situation and locating his or her person in it, it is possible to give an answer, to reveal to oneself or to the world, to say, "here I am, this is my position."

Expression. Corresponding to responsiveness is the subjective capacity for expressiveness. After finding an inner position, a person is ready for action, ready to be exposed and to express an answer. In the person's chosen expression, she or he realizes what is possible in the situation. An impression is transformed through one's own understanding and inner positioning, and the person fulfills the potential of a situation when entering back into the factual world with a response.

Drawing on each of these capacities for dialogue, a person is able to be in an encounter, to be in contact with oneself and with the world. Through encounter and dialogue, the person develops and matures into the potential of his or her personality. In the dialogical context of life, existence is giving answers to the questions of each situation. In the psychotherapeutic application of PEA, the therapist helps the person give adequate answers by connecting them to their faculties for dialogue with themselves and the world. The process takes place within an encounter between the client and the psychotherapist, and mobilizes the client's resources for dialogue and encounter in the situation of his or her life.

Psychotherapeutic Application of PEA

The terminology of Personal Existential Analysis can be seen as a tautology since existence, by definition, is always personal. However, this description of the central method of Existential Analysis is appropriate because the focus is on strengthening the power of the person. Although the person is always present, one's existence can be dominated by psychic processes. The therapeutic work in PEA centers on activating the resources of the person by helping the ego to accept and take over a greater role of ownership and direction in one's life. Thus, the central considerations in PEA are the person and existence, where the person is the center of existence. The work of PEA is concerned with locating personhood in its authenticity, enabling openness and exchange with the world.

Suffering, disappointment, frustration, and loss are all part of the conditions of real life. It is in the context of the challenges of real situations that the person has the chance to develop a response. In this personal response, an individual is able to fully enter his or her existence, bringing the resources of the person together. In order to do this, one has to work with real



situations, either biographical or actual, present-day situations. It is not possible to apply PEA to abstract problems such as “always feeling anxious.” One must be able to identify a situation in which she or he feels anxious and work on this particular situation in order to cultivate personal capacities to deal with anxiety in this and then other situations, over time changing the tendency to experience anxiety.

Though the experiences of distress vary significantly (and may be communicated through depression, anxiety, psychosomatic complaints, or interpersonal problems, to name a few), the common element of suffering that is worked on through PEA is that of not being sufficiently present as a person. Thus, any experiences in which one feels, “I am not totally me” or “I cannot be totally me” can be used for the application of PEA. PEA is contraindicated for experiences of schizophrenia, paranoia, other psychotic states, and serious depressive states when a person lacks the energy to take an inner position, and is unable to relate effectively to impressions because of the distortions caused by a unilaterally negative mood (See Längle, 2003, p. 44). Systematically, PEA facilitates,

- reconnection with reality by working on a clear view on the facts (PEA 0),
- connecting with one’s primary, often unconscious understanding and feelings (PEA 1),
- fostering inner dialogue toward better understanding and finding oneself by inner positioning (PEA 2), and finally,
- coming to an acceptable and responsible action (PEA 3).

Corresponding to the dialogical nature of personhood, in which the human being is in a constant process of exchange with oneself and the world as a basis for realizing being a person, the methodical steps of PEA support authentic inner and outer dialogue with the aim of restructuring the capacity of the person, which eventually allows for genuine encounter.

The conceptual model of personal dialogue informs the sequence of PEA, which includes four steps, described below and denoted as PEA 0, PEA 1, PEA 2, and PEA 3. See Figure 2 for a summary of the process.

Information (PEA 0): What happened really?

The first step (PEA 0) of description and information gathering is a common step in most psychotherapeutic processes. The basic question is, what happened? Exploring the facts with open ended questions allows clients to start a relationship with their situations and to reconnect with reality. By stating what happened, when, how, and with whom, a person moves into a concrete admission of the facts. Not surprisingly, the facts of an existential situation that prompt a client to seek psychotherapy, are often unpleasant, commonly associated with pain. It is a natural defense against this pain to avoid dealing with reality as it is, yet the work cannot continue unless reality is established.

By stating factually, what happened, one is able to deal with the life and circumstances that correspond to his or her own existence, not an imaginary one. It is only in this particular existence that the person can be mobilized. Connection with reality is a prerequisite for existential-analytical dialogue. In this first phase, the psychotherapist is careful to direct the conversation to facts, minimizing opinions, wishes, and explanations. Describing the facts,



including feelings, of the existential situation helps a person to find blind spots, to recognize more fully his or her inner and outer reality, and to enter a relationship with it. No close relationship exists without emotional involvement. Thus, emotional responses to entering relationship with the facts of one's existential situation, are expected, welcomed, and essential for the remaining therapeutic process. In fact, these emotions are indicators of being alive, as a person, in one's own life circumstance.

Impression (PEA 1): How is it for you and for your life?

The basic question in PEA 1 is, how is it for you? There is usually a general movement of attraction or repulsion to being impressed upon, to being impacted or affected. In this step, now that the facts have been illuminated as a basis for working within the basic conditions of life, they can be left just as that. The facts are a framework within which the client explores spontaneous feelings, impulses, and reactions. By allowing one's experiences to be, self-acceptance can be cultivated. In the step of PEA 1, the therapist and client work on detecting the primary emotion, impulse, and phenomenological content.

Primary Emotion. By definition, a primary emotion is unfiltered and spontaneous. Yet, we are accustomed to placing value judgments on our emotions, labeling pleasant ones "good" and unpleasant ones, "bad." In this step of PEA 1, the client is invited to practice mindful acceptance of the spontaneous emotions and affects. This work consists of looking for how the situation touched the person inwardly and making a precise description of his or her feelings. The therapist empathically joins with the client and may describe and offer what the therapist feels in order to facilitate the client's work in this step.

Impulse. The impulse is the spontaneous emotional reaction to the impression. The direction of movement in the impulse is usually either attraction or repulsion. The impulse can be described like the energy of a magnet, which either pulls towards or pushes away from another one. Elements from expressive therapies (such as Gestalt, art, or music) can also be utilized to help clients detect, describe and capture their emotional and affective inner movement.

Phenomenological Content. After identifying the primary emotion and impulse, the therapist helps the client do a phenomenological exploration of their experience. What is the message you received in this experience? What do the facts (what happened and how it happened), tell you? Do you understand what hurts you mostly and why? Even when the answers appear obvious, self-understanding can be an inherently healing experience and it is important to ask and to identify the personal meaning of one's emotional experience. This step uncovers the main content which most often is captured emotionally but not really understood and thus remained hidden to the person.

Inner Positioning (PEA 2): What do you make of it; What do you personally say to it?

Having clarified the experience of being impressed upon and of what touched the person emotionally by that what happened, it is now time to "digest" the "swallowed" information. In this step, the client elaborates and connects the situation to one's authentic self, to one's former experiences, and to one's existing set of values and projects. An additional opening of the person occurs in this process. This requires intimate contact, an inner touching of the content, an evaluation of how this connects with one's personal world. This process of adoption and selection starts with working on understanding, i.e. connecting the new information with



preexisting values. To come to an inner position towards what happened is to activate the power of the person to differentiate from the world and to maintain one's own. When the person is touched emotionally, one is subjected to the alien influence. The person then needs to regain power over him or herself, to be sovereign over its own. The person is given the authority to judge the situation, and he/she needs to do so to regain one's own profile in life. Judging is to assert what it means to her or his own life. In a process of constant dialogue, this step involves understanding, emotional evaluation, cognitive evaluation, and finding one's will.

Understanding. The process of understanding involves three steps. It starts with self-understanding. The content gained in the phenomenological analysis is now investigated with regard to why it can have such an effect on oneself. Why does it hurt so much, shatter, disturb, irritate? Do you really understand that? Do you recognize the values which were hurt, the expectations, the needs and hopes, about the life history behind?

After having clarified the self-understanding, we move to the next step of understanding the other. The interpersonal situations of life often have a theme of being hurt, betrayed, or let down by another person. This can make it difficult to work on the theme of understanding the other. But it is necessary to have a look on the other and their possible motives. Without trying to understand the other person, dialogical existence cannot be realized. Pursuing other-understanding is necessary to restore trust into the world and in the Mitwelt (world of the others), in order to have an orientation for being together. Understanding does not imply condoning or even forgiving another person, and is helpful even when forgiveness is not intended. In some cases of extreme trauma or violation, people do not want to try to understand the other person for self-protection. Of course this has to be respected and is needed for their stability.

Many things become understandable when carefully examined. The understanding sought is not an understanding of a singular objective reality, but the ability to empathize with various possibilities, to take perspective, to take into account a greater context. However, sometimes facts remain that are simply not understandable to a person. The third step of understanding in PEA 2 is to explicitly clarify what is not understood, or what does not appear to be understandable for both the client and the therapist. Describing the not understandable is important. It may help a person make sense of having feelings or reactions which don't seem to make sense.

Emotional Evaluation (Moral Conscience). The emotional, personally sensed evaluation invokes the person's moral conscience. "Do you have the feeling that it was OK, that it was right, that it was correct? Did it do justice to you? Have you been seen? Did you do justice to the other?" Questions like these uncover the deepest, most intimate level of the person, their personally felt position. This position coincides what has long been called "moral conscience." But existentially seen it is a personal moral conscience, not an extension of religious or societal norms. The person is free to detect, within his or her own situation, a feeling of moral judgment. Was this right? Deep down, what is your judgment about this? By making judgments about the situation, the person is asked to make use of his or her essential freedom and autonomy. In making a judgment, the person differentiates him- or her-self from the primary emotional experience, which is now integrated into the person's entire system of personal values.



Cognitive Evaluation (Taking a Stand). On the solid ground of the emotional (felt) evaluation, the person should try to come to a cognitive, conscious position. In this step, the person makes sense of the knowledge and sensations he or she has been able to integrate in order to inform his or her cognitive judgments. “What do I think about my mother? How do I judge her behavior?” Stimulated in the preceding steps, the person can be fully present in her or his cognitive position. This includes also all external information, science (including knowledge about disorders!), and experiences. Finding a cognitive position is a definitive, clear result of the client’s work on understanding and finding one’s moral conscience, and leads to finding one’s will.

Finding one’s Will. After positioning, we ask again after what is moving in the person. Is there an inner movement that makes you want to do something with your situation? Is something needed? Do you have the feeling that you want to make use of the information you have considered, the position that you have identified? After inner positioning, a person is ready to discern his or her will. Sometimes, there is nothing to be done. Sometimes, the will is to rest and the person has found that understanding and positioning has been curative, sufficient for the time being. Sometimes, it is clear that something needs to be done. The will that has been identified (e.g., “I want to speak to my mother about...”) forms the content for the expression in PEA 3.

Expression (PEA 3): What do you want to do?

In expression, the will is brought to earth. The person, expressed in his or her will, is becoming tangible, concrete, and focused. In action, the person carries out his or her existence, in the culminating experience of self-actualization by doing what is felt to be needed in the world and for oneself. In reaching the step of expression, the person’s real situation and corresponding feelings and reactions have been explored, one has worked on understanding the meaning of one’s situation and his or her position toward it, and the person has discerned one’s will. Now the person is prepared to make this orientation and ideal realistic, fulfilling one’s intentions in a way that is responsible, meaningful, and personally authentic. Fulfilling the tasks of each step of PEA, the person can find his or her felt “yes”—or inner consent—for one’s actions, thus realizing one’s inner freedom in the outer world. By acting, one becomes personally present.

Meaningful activity is not accidental or arbitrary. It is intentional, felt, reflected, and carefully chosen in concordance with the inner self. To be realistic, the psychotherapeutic process is structured to help the client who may be clear in his or her will, but needs support and encouragement to apply it in a specific way, being able to answer the questions, what?, to whom?, when?, and how?

What? First, the therapist guides the client in articulating, based on the direction of movement inherent in his or her will, what he or she wants to do. The person chooses an activity that meaningfully corresponds to his or her experience, values, and purpose and seems to be feasible and realistic in the given situation.

To whom? The therapist also helps the client to identify the relevant people in his or her chosen course of action. Perhaps there is somebody the client needs to talk to, to write a letter to. Perhaps the chosen activity is private, directed towards oneself. Who is the recipient of expression in this phase of dialogue? To whom does one need to answer?



When? The person is encouraged to identify when he or she can carry out one's chosen course of action. When is an appropriate time? When is it possible? Is there a time when one expects to have a better chance of experiencing an encounter with the person one's activity is directed to? Some people are more accessible or have more energy when they have had a break from work or family stressors in their own life. Sometimes it is advisable to announce a wish to encounter or talk and ask for a private time.

How? Finally, the therapist prompts the client to consider the specific details in his or chosen activity. "How do you want to do this? What preparation or accommodation should be made in order to do this?" "Would a phone call be best, a letter, or a pre-announcement made by somebody else, etc.?"

The step of practical action involves re-inserting the person into the world. Changing patterns in behaviors and relationships is difficult. It is frustrating to express a new position when it meets resistance from the other. At this step of the process, the therapist offers support and solidarity to the client. The therapist helps the client, as a person who is emerging into the potential of his or her unique personality, stay connected to his or her authenticity and self-worth, as well as to the meaning and value in his or her intentions. The "adequate and responsible action" we aim to help clients discover in Existential Analysis does not imply a polished and perfect performance. The process of realizing being a person is not neat and tidy, but full of practicing and experimenting in the messy complexity of the person's real life. Similar to learning to walk for a toddler, implementing new actions can feel clumsy, and it is common to trip and fall.

Supporting the process of practicing and experiencing is the client's own decisiveness and will, which has emerged and been strengthened in therapy. The clearer the will, the easier it is to get up after a fall, to keep practicing, and to determinedly work on carrying out one's existence in practical action. The therapist also provides support for the client's process of actualization. The therapist remains in connection and dialogue with the client, as the client takes new practical steps in fulfilling his or her existential intentions. The therapist provides a relational base of support from which to encourage the client in developing increasing autonomy in carrying out his or her unique existence, normalizing such stumbles and falls as integral parts of the journey of authentic self-actualization in a meaningful and fulfilled existence.

Conclusion

"He who treats two patients in the same manner has, at least, wrongly treated one" ~Dubois

Viktor Frankl used to reference the quote cited above, which he attributed to the French physician, Dubois. As a phenomenological method to psychotherapy, the practice of Personal Existential Analysis facilitates an idiographic description and understanding of a person in his or her unique situation in the world. Nomothetic observations, which are systematized into general explanatory frameworks about human behavior, are also useful in offering a holistic view of the person. As human beings, we share a number of physical, mental, and psychological characteristics. This shared reality justifies the search for general laws. However, the individual characteristics of body, soul, and spirit, which cannot adequately be observed or measured in the scientifically oriented paradigms, are the primary themes of interest in EA.

A parent who is familiar with typical patterns of sleep behavior in infants, generated from nomothetic observations, can readily appreciate that one's own child has not read the "baby



book.” Of course it can be helpful to normalize or predict disruptions in sleep patterns as the result of teething, illness, or growth spurts. However, what is most relevant in any given moment is what one’s own child’s unique needs and experiences are, based on their current physiological status, psychosocial adjustment, temperament, and other idiosyncratic factors. The way one’s own child can best be helped when in distress is through an idiographic approach to understanding and empathizing rather than a nomothetic approach to explaining. Similarly, situated in the school of Humanistic-Existential approaches to psychotherapy (Längle & Kriz, 2012), PEA approaches the person as the subject, who is best helped through an idiographic focus on understanding the person in his or her actual existence. The direction of psychotherapeutic work in PEA is toward mobilization of the person, who can ultimately only be understood in one’s singularity. The person is the subject, engaged in dialogue, not the object of analysis. Experiences in which one feels any variation of, “I am not fully myself” are appropriate for the work of personal existential analysis.

This method, which must be applied to concrete and specific circumstances, may also be applied in a cyclical process within a person’s broader life context. For example, a client may focus their work in PEA on specific problematic incidents with one’s partner. The client may be able to go through the steps of PEA with separate situations, each time gaining clarity about the situation, one’s phenomenological experience, one’s inner position, and then taking up a responsible action. These situations may also fit into a broader theme or pattern in the relationship, leading to increasingly integrated inner positioning and decisiveness. The result of working on specific situations may lead a client to take the action of standing up for her- or himself in an argument. Over time, the client may express a decisive position about the whole direction of the relationship, perhaps even resolving to end it if the conditions in the partner do not become adequate for a genuine encounter.

In conclusion, PEA, the primary method in Existential Analysis, is a systematic application of a phenomenological perspective in psychotherapy. Though phenomenological perspectives are often understood better by what they are not (i.e., dogmatic, manualized treatments developed from universal observations), and we who subscribe to them often resist confines out of a commitment to “not put one’s client in a box,” PEA offers a transparent structure for assisting one’s client in their singular, personal, life journey. One of the authors (AL) has devoted his professional career to sifting and synthesizing observations about how to effectively accompany clients in their personal development toward a fulfilled and meaningful existence. PEA was developed from this work. The other (JK) is a clinical psychologist with feminist-informed perspectives about relationality and connection as the basis for personal development, an interest in reducing oppressive power dynamics in the therapeutic encounter, and a commitment mobilizing the strengths and resources of an individual to be oneself. PEA has provided an effective framework for realizing this.

In the steps of PEA, several processes take place. The individual,

- relates personally to the conditions of his or her existence through exploring the facts (PEA 0),
- connects to one’s own feelings and impressions, thereby building capacity for self-acceptance and acceptance of “what is” (PEA 1),



- engages inner dialogue to come to understanding and inner positioning, thereby experiencing self-distancing (PEA 2), and ultimately
- comes to decisive and responsible actions toward oneself and towards the world, thus experiencing self-transcendence in the subjective carrying out of one's existence (PEA 3).

Corresponding to the dialogical nature of personhood, in which the human being is in a constant process of exchange with oneself and the world as a basis for realizing being a person, the methodical steps of PEA support authentic inner and outer dialogue with the aim of restructuring the capacity of the person, in order to facilitate the possibility of encounter.

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Figures

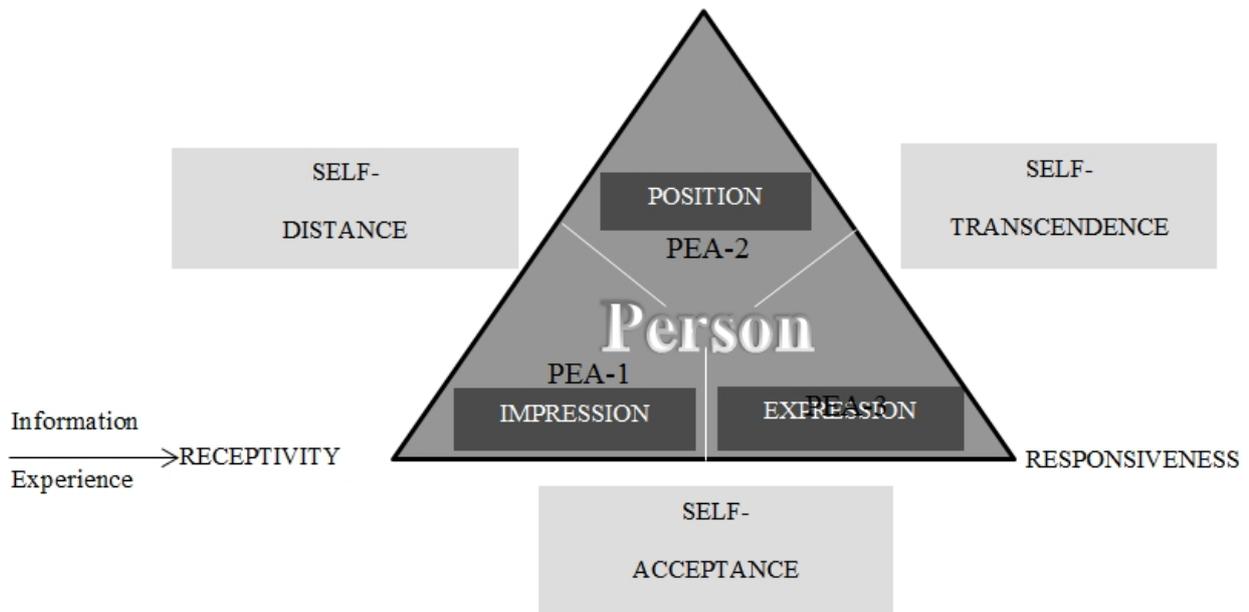


Figure 1. Conceptual Framework for PEA within an Existential-Analytic Anthropology

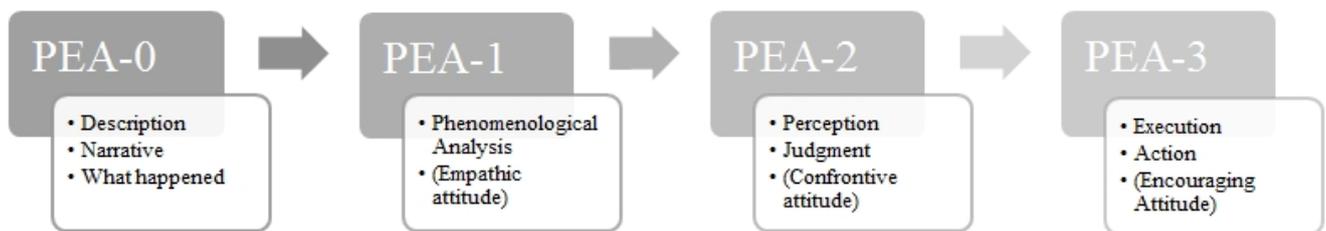


Figure 2. A Summary of the Procedural Steps of PEA