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# Reclaiming the Person in Counselling Psychology Research and Practice: An Existential-Analytical Approach

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## Abstract

The specialization of counselling psychology offers a strength-oriented and holistic view of the person. While the person is of central concern for counselling psychology as a discipline, research and counselling practice can easily become problem-oriented rather than person-oriented. Consequently, the authors of this paper contend that maintaining a central focus on the person in counselling psychology practice needs to be specifically emphasized and cultivated. Toward this aim, the concept of personhood is elucidated from an existential-analytic theoretical perspective in order to provide a tangible framework for upholding a person-centered focus in counselling psychology practice. Drawing on this framework, the authors offer personal reflections on re-centering personhood in both research and clinical practice in counselling psychology.

## Keywords

personhood, existential analysis, phenomenology, counselling psychology

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We are pleased to be able to address an important topic, such as *reclaiming the person* in counselling psychology. However, to assert that “the person” is in need of reclamation within the discipline of psychology and that we may have something substantial to contribute on this subject, may strike the reader as somewhat presumptive. We feel similarly. And yet, we are convinced that the focus on the person in counselling psychology research and practice is very timely and essential. We believe that, in this age of technique (Heidegger, 1959/2018) and the manualization of psychotherapy (Strong, 2017), it is easy to lose sight of the central focus of our discipline, and to become preoccupied with methods, interventions, or outcomes, while disregarding the person who is central to the values and endeavours of our discipline (Canadian Psychological Association, 2009).

Our question about whether we are missing the person in counselling psychology practice may seem to the reader initially as a somewhat unusual concern. Is it not self-evident that we, as counselling psychologists, work with human beings, and that this justifies the claim that our efforts are “person-centered”? This is indeed correct, and yet, when we try to describe what we mean by “the person” or how we might work with “the person” concretely and practically, we may find ourselves somewhat at a loss. Although we may have an intuitive understanding of this, a well-articulated description of the person seems like a somewhat elusive task.

Thus, the aim of this paper is, first, to describe what we mean by person. Next, drawing upon the theoretical framework of Existential Analysis (EA, Frankl, 1970; Längle, 2003), we will elaborate the existential-analytical understanding of the person and how this resonates with the core values of the counselling psychology as discipline. Then, we will discuss how the person can be encountered within phenomenological research, counselling and psychotherapy. We will conclude with some remarks regarding the implications of our proposed understanding of the person for the counselling psychology praxis.

### *The Person: Mystery and Paradox*

We frequently begin to speak of the person as if she or he were an object, something to be grasped, captured linguistically, examined and described by our psychotherapeutic or research methods (cf. Heidegger, 1927/1962). However, such an approach may miss the mark and actually do violence to the person (Levinas, 1985). For this – an object or substance to be analyzed and defined – is precisely what we do *not* mean by “the person”. Rather, we regard the person as a fundamental mystery and paradox that eludes our intellectual efforts of definition. Although essentially ungraspable, we can experience the person in our encounters with the others, when we look into the eyes of a friend, a loved one, even a stranger. As we allow our gaze to settle, to “sink in”, and open ourselves to be touched by the beauty and mystery of that other, we begin to experience glimpses of this person as a mysterious, free, ever-changing, inviting and sometimes unsettling flow of energy that enlivens one’s being and carries someone’s unique essence. It is this mystery that we are seeking to describe and understand in this paper, the mystery of the person who is infinitely knowable (Rohr, 2016).

Someone’s personhood shows and hides itself simultaneously, it shines briefly in the ephemeral eye sparkles and then withdraws to the depth from where it springs again. It dwells in silence and speaks from a place of stillness. This paradoxical nature of the person is well captured etymologically by the Greek and Latin words for person: the Greek word “prosopon” designates a mask that was intended to hide an actor’s face in order to reveal a character, and the Latin word “personare” or sounding through, suggests that the person sounds through out of an intimate transcendence (Spaemann, 2006).

### *The Existential-Analytical Understanding of the Person*

**Philosophical underpinnings.** The existential-analytical understanding of the person emerges at the confluence of several philosophical streams. Specifically, this understanding is shaped primarily by Scheler’s (1913-1916/1973, 1987) philosophical view of the person, subsequently elaborated in psychology by Frankl (1970) in his anthropological model, and then by Längle (2013a). The work of Buber (1923/1970) and Levinas (1985) has further influenced how the person has been depicted in EA as the spiritual capacity for dialogue and encounter, and as the source of ethical-moral action.

Scheler (1913-1916/1973) described the person as the “act-being” (p. 385) unfolding in a constant flow of acts (e.g., thinking, loving, communicating) through which someone’s essence is revealed. By considering the person as the “pure becoming different” (p. 582) while maintaining an “ideal unity” (p. 583), Scheler situates the person within the temporal horizon of becoming: although I experience myself as a continuous identity across time and situations, as a person I am also free to act anew in each situation. This inherently dynamic capacity to act also endows the person with the possibility of becoming an agent of change, including systemic social transformations of oppressive systems or institutions (Fay, 2008; Foucault, 1980).

Frankl subsequently began writing about the person in the 1920s, and, throughout his lengthy career, he returned again and again to his passion for the person and against the reductionism in psychology that would reduce human beings to determined, fixed biological or psychodynamic organisms (Frankl, 1970). In Frankl’s Logotherapy, the person is an anthropological dimension that endows human beings with the capacity to stand against the limitations of life, and say “yes” to life in spite of its inevitable suffering. This capacity to stand against and prevail “in spite of” confers the human person the vocation to resist, either in acts of intimate resistance or as overt social or political resistance (Foucault, 1980; Yancy, 2008).

Frankl (1970) understood the person as that which is free in human beings. Although limited by the lawful comportment of body and psyche, human beings retain some amount of freedom to choose their attitude freely in relation to a given situation. This ontological freedom represents the *sine qua non* condition for rising above the oppressive conditions of one’s existence to promote social change and to advocate for those marginalized or oppressed (Dallmayr & Godrej, 2017).

**The dialogical capacity of the person.** Fundamental to Frankl’s (1970) understanding of the person is its dialogical capacity: as a person, I am in constant relation both with myself and with my world, and I engage in a double dialogue with myself and with the world (Längle, 2003a). My being is always a situated being, a being-in-the-world, which both precedes and transcends my individuality (Heidegger, 1927/1962). Thus, as persons, we care for the world in which we live, and are called to respond to the concerns presented in our given social-political or cultural situations. Specifically, as persons, we have the capacity to perform a “Copernican turn” (Frankl, 1982, p. 87) or existential turn (see Figure 1), as we understand ourselves not as the ones questioning life, but instead as the ones being-questioned by life, and, thus, responsible to give our answer. This act of personal “response-ability” represents the basis for acting in the world within a horizon of meaning and values, such as justice, equity and cultural hospitality, to respond to the call for social justice incarnated as the Face of the Other (Levinas, 1985).

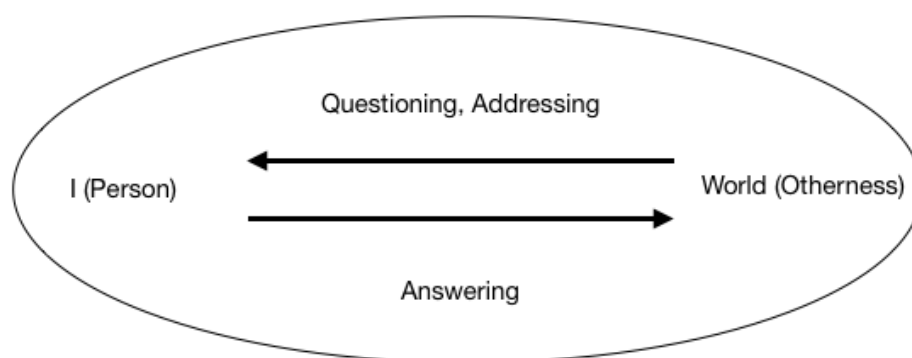


Figure 1. The existential turn.

**The existential-analytical model of the person.** Drawing primarily on Scheler's (1913-1916/1973, 1978) and Frankl's (1970) work, the contemporary EA framework developed by Längle (2013) proposes a model of the person and the I/ego<sup>1</sup> (see Figure 2), which portrays the person as "that which says I within me" (p. 213). In this representation, the person is depicted as an endless, dynamic flow, springing from a well of unfathomable depth. The flow of the person represents someone's unique, free essence that is captured by the I/ego, similar to how the mouth of a well captures the water of the spring. The more developed and the better structured the ego, the more flow it can capture, process, and channel into one's life. Further, the more we can allow the personal flow to permeate one's ego, the more one lives in an essential, personal way, and can bring these personal qualities to one's encounters with others and with the world. The confluence of the person with the I/ego (marked by the two horizontal, parallel lines in Figure 2) represents the deepest point of intimacy with one's self (me with myself) and the seed of authenticity (who I am in my unique essence). It is at this point that I am, paradoxically, mostly myself and yet drawing upon a source that transcends my individuality.

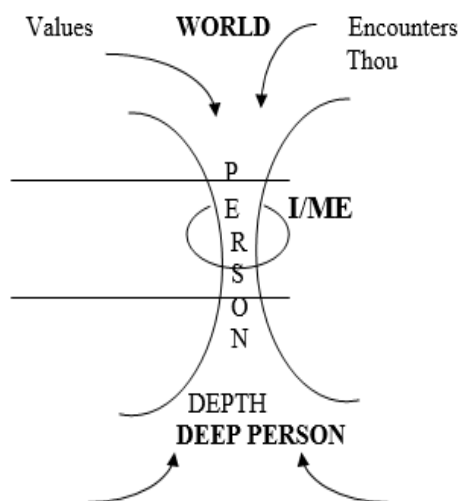


Figure 2. The Existential-Analytical model of the person.

As the visual depiction suggests, the person moves between the inner pole of intimacy with one's self, and the public pole of the personal encounters with others. It is this paradoxical nature of the person that enables us to experience our actions in the world simultaneously as most personal, corresponding to our deepest essence, and most far reaching in terms of social impact. Thus, social action is grounded not only in social convictions and external advocacy but also in our innermost resonance with social values, stemming from an "ethics of authenticity" (Taylor, 1991).

### *Personal Phenomenology: A Way to the Person in Research and Counselling Practice*

<sup>1</sup>EA understands the 'I' or the ego as the main executive psychological structure that receives and processes information from both the outer and inner world in order to make decisions and act accordingly. The ego/I structures form a rim or a funnel that can receive the person and then channel it in someone's life. In EA, the 'I' or ego is different from the self, understood as the totality of someone's self-identifications and self-representations. Thus, the self is broader than the I.

Although the existential-analytical understanding of the person affirms the importance of encountering the person within oneself and the other, the challenge of how we can encounter this free, dynamic essence presents the psychotherapist and researcher with a dilemma. What is needed is an approach to encountering the person that allows us to mobilize the freedom of the person in a systematic and yet open manner; phenomenology offers such an approach (Länge & Klaassen, 2019).

Rooted in the continental philosophy tradition, phenomenology has been adapted and implemented as a qualitative research method in social sciences, including psychology (Gallagher & Zahavi, 2012; Zahavi, 2018). Whether descriptive (Giorgi, 2014), transcendental (Moustakas, 1994), interpretative (Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2009), or hermeneutic (Finlay, 2011, 2014; van Manen, 1999, 2014), phenomenology as a research method aims to explore how we experience ourselves and various phenomena of our world in a concrete, unmediated manner. The personal phenomenology discussed here has the strongest theoretical and methodological affinities with hermeneutic phenomenology; yet, it elaborates and places at its core the existential-ethical understanding of the person as the integrating centre of the phenomenological experience.

**Personal phenomenology.** The personal phenomenological research approach acknowledges its philosophical moorings at the intersection of two traditions: the lineage of the existential phenomenology (Heidegger, 1962; Merleau-Ponty, 1962) and philosophical hermeneutics (Gadamer, 1977; Ricoeur, 1981), and that of the European personalism (Buber, 1970; Levinas, 1985; Marcel, 1951; Scheler, 1973; Tillich, 1952; Wojtyla, 1979). The existential underpinnings of this approach to research are reflected in the way in which our being-in-the-world cares about its own being, and makes its being an issue for itself (Heidegger, 1927/1967). Thus, the role of research is to nurture phenomenological openness and a lived, embodied knowing of the world. The hermeneutic penchant of this research approach values the embedded/contextualized interpretation (Gadamer, 1977). The personal aspect recognizes that human phenomena explored in psychological research are personal phenomena as they reveal our essentially personal relationship with the world, the others, and ourselves (Yannaras, 2007).

The personal dimension is constitutive to a phenomenological view and the act of disclosing (Yannaras, 2007; Wojtyla, 1979). Human beings exist not only as Dasein, and as bearers of the disclosures of being (Heidegger, 1927/1962), but they actively partake in the mystery of Being (Marcel, 1951) as ethical, communal persons (Wojtyla, 1979; Zizioulas, 2007). Their person is endowed with irrefutable dignity, uniqueness, openness to the spiritual (self-transcendence), potential for becoming, creativity and transformation, and capacity for encounter and moral action (Scheler, 1973; Wojtyla, 1979). The personal aspect draws on the understanding of the person as an “ethical being-to-and-for-the-other person” (Levinas, 1985; Wojtyla, 1979; Zizioulas, 2007), and as an “I” who encounters and is encountered by a “Thou” (Buber, 1970). Thus, personal phenomenology brings to the fore the relevance of the ethical call, social justice and personal encounter amidst embodied alterities (Ahmed, 2000) at the core of counselling psychology practice, and provides an existentially grounded response to the impetus for social justice and multicultural awareness as core values of counselling psychology as discipline (Canadian Psychological Association, 2009; Sincore & Ginsberg, 2015).

**Personal phenomenological research.** Building on this philosophical foundation, the personal phenomenological research approach expands and complements the focus of the current hermeneutic phenomenology undertakings (Finlay, 2011; van Manen, 2014), by bridging the receiving and uncovering of lived experiences and meanings with activating the

personal capacities of taking an ethical stand and responding or acting in the world (Längle, 2003a; Levinas, 1985; Wojtyla, 1979) in a manner able to acknowledge and offset the pernicious consequences of various systemic oppressive frameworks, such as racism (Gordon, 2007) sexism (Ahmed, 2006), or ethnocentrism (Ahmed, 2000; Yancy, 2008). At the core of this research approach is the personal encounter between researcher and research participants throughout the research process as well as the inner encounter of the researcher with one's self (e.g., reflexivity, phenomenological writing) and the dialogue among research team members during data analysis process and afterwards.

The act of the personal encounter is inherently intimate and thus represents both a significant possibility but also some risk. If anything, greater care must be exercised in adopting a personal ethic that strives to uphold the dignity of the participant. Thus, encountering someone's person in research begins with a particular attitude of heart or "posture of expectancy". This posture is one that acknowledges the other as mystery and gift, and as one to be encountered and received in their total "otherness", unadulterated by exoticizing the intrinsic differences (Ahmed, 2000; Levinas, 1985).

**Reflections on encountering the person in research.** A phenomenological research project exploring the lived experience of shame in the context of elite athletics will be used as a case study to illustrate how such posture was adopted during this project. A series of personal reflections written from a researcher's (Konieczny) first person perspective are shared along with some corresponding quotes illustrating examples of encountering the person in research. Adopting a first person perspective resonates with the personal I-Thou encounter between researcher and research participants.

Initiating contact with participants and planning for the subsequent interviews invited a reflective evaluation of my (Konieczny) willingness to be engaged with the topic of shame. As an emotional experience that is innately hidden and difficult to speak about, I (the researcher, Konieczny) questioned whether or not I would garner any significant insight about the phenomenon through formal interviewing. However, I was encouraged by the writing of Henri Nouwen (1979) who said in his book *The Wounded Healer*: "Who can listen to a story of loneliness and despair without taking the risk of experiencing similar pains in his own heart and even losing his precious peace of mind? In short: Who can take away suffering without entering it?" (p. 72). Through these words, I felt invited to encounter my participants in their suffering and join them in their experiences.

The research interview has great potential for the participant and researcher to simultaneously encounter one another and be impacted by each other's "otherness." I was invited to see the other through eyes of curiosity and wonder, while not desperately grasping after "knowing something" in particular. In other words, instead of the interview being a transactional exchange where information is gathered and extracted, an interview privileging an "encounter" is one where both parties are open to "seeing" each other as they are and exchanging impressions of that encounter in the context of a dialogue. Although this attitude of openness and the invitation to encounter cannot and should not override completely the power differential inherent within the researcher-participant dynamic, it provides the opportunity of personal encounter within the ethical bounds of a specific research context.

I therefore came to realize that I was playing a very active role in these interviews, and became occupied with questions such as: In what ways am I being moved by the presence of the other, my participant? What is moving me as he/she speaks about this topic? This posture

felt innately dignifying and honouring of both myself as the researcher as well as of my participant's experiences.

These preoccupations subsequently gave way to sharing how my participants' presence and words left an impression on me. In essence, encountering my participants changed me as the researcher and resulted in thoughts, feeling and responses that I actively engaged with and shared openly as they arose in me. For instance, after listening to one participant speak about their experience with a coach callously cutting them from the Olympic team, I commented:

It irks me and makes me mad even hearing about it, actually. It is very confusing and emotional...like you said, you could call it emotional abuse, or some kind of upheaval, or I don't even know what the word is.

Encountering this participant as they described their experience moved me to respond with frustration and to join them in anger for the ways that they were treated. This was a response that seemed both appropriate and validating. This exchange seemed to have also led to a deeper exploration of their experience of shame, both adding to the research objectives while also reverencing the experience of the participant.

This dialogue, however, was wrought with challenges at times. Speaking about experiences of shame was difficult. The analogy of two inexperienced dancers being asked to perform an unfamiliar dance captures this reality well. The dance, at times, was awkward, toes were stepped on, the rhythm seemed to be off, and although there were moments of rich connection, there were also just as many moments of disconnection. This proved puzzling but also highlighted the ever-changing nature of the encounters of persons, and begged me to ask the question: What conditions are necessary to facilitate encounter? Although there is a posture of openness that can be adopted, the complexity of the encounter of two persons is unique, such that one cannot replicate an "encounter".

Finally, encountering the emotionality of my participants played a crucial role in experiencing their unique "otherness", thus further illuminating the research phenomenon. When I encountered the emotional life of my participants, I encountered something deeply connected to their person, and I came closer to that which reveals something vital about them. According to Längle's (2011) theory on emotionality, emotions detect the personally relevant values in someone's experiences and thus give indication of what animates their life. Since feelings have an existential weight, they innately impact one's attitude towards life, and reveal one's personal preferences as the ground for decision making. Furthermore, Längle (2011) describes that the power of life is brought into existence through emotional experiences; it is through connecting with this vitality that we are moved by the person of the other. Hence, emotionality and relationality are inextricably linked. This example illustrates just that:

**Participant:** Yah it was like a collapse. Yah, I just felt I felt, crushed, like that was the last straw. That was what it felt like. It felt like, everything changed after that moment.

**Researcher:** I am broken. I am done.

**Prt:** Yah, like, I don't think I could have been able to say I'm done, cause I didn't know how to stop, at that point, but like I, I just felt, well that's it. Like, I, I felt like...

**R:** There is nothing after that...

**Prt:** ...there is nothing after that. I can't give you anymore.

**R:** I can't give you anymore and...the pain that you can't give anymore, it is not that I can't give you anymore and screw you, no, it was like I can't give you anymore and...what was the feeling?



**Prt:** I cast my eyes down, and like, just the wind was just knocked out of me and I think I probably felt like, just dejected, just like so...numbed, almost. I didn't know what else to do, and, and, yah, there is nothing left.

This dialogue highlights how both the participant and researcher encountered each other via their emotionality, and how in these moments of vulnerability the personal encounter is possible within phenomenological research.

**Encountering the person in counselling practice.** In the counselling context, more central than the question of whether the therapist can conceptualize the clients' suffering and offer sound interventions, reverberates the question, *do I see you?* Broken down more specifically, the therapist as the person seeing, asks, *do I see you?* And facing the "other" in the client, asks, *do I see you?* As therapists, we listen, take notes, draw genograms, engage in consultation and supervision, apply theoretical understandings to problems, and execute established interventions. But how do we train the capacity to come person-to-person, essence-to-essence in the therapeutic encounter?

If, as we stated earlier, it may come across as a bit presumptive to suggest that we have something substantive to offer to "reclaiming" the person, it may also come across as presumptive and simplistic to suggest that we can offer a counselling map for how to effectively encounter the person in counselling practice. This is not what we presume or intend to do. Instead, in this section, we offer an anonymized case illustration from counselling practice and therapeutic considerations for re-centering the client's personhood into the primary therapeutic focus.

**Meet "Zoya."<sup>2</sup>** Zoya is in her mid-fifties and serves as a spiritual leader in her community. Although she is in a high-ranking position in her religious tradition, she describes that this tradition continues to operate as a patriarchal system in which there are relatively few other female leaders. Zoya entered her counselling session prepared to ponder which themes she wanted to explore in the session that day. At first, she brushed off the fact that there had been a situation from work that had annoyed and "gotten to her" for the last few days. However, it became apparent to Zoya and to the therapist (Kwee), that Zoya continued to be preoccupied by this situation, and that it warranted time and attention.

Zoya recounted that she had been tasked with the responsibility of conducting the marriage ceremony for the son of a national-level leader in her religious tradition. This had included a season of preparation, in which she had provided spiritual accompaniment to the family in preparation for the marriage ceremony. During this time, Zoya had felt a sense of personal vitality, and was inwardly connected to her own personal and spiritual gifts that could bless this family. Indeed, she had resonance with the inner speaking of 'I' within her, and felt free in living out her sense of calling. She also described an inner vital feeling of confidence about the personal words that she would share at the ceremony.

Then came the actual ceremony. In the ceremony, with hundreds of people in attendance, Zoya described that she suddenly felt aware of the perceived critical gaze of a select few other high-ranking leaders. She perceived these individuals as power brokers of an "old boys club" in which there was not a welcome space for her gifts and leadership. Within the contrasting context of the therapy space where Zoya was listened to and received as a unique and precious

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<sup>2</sup> Zoya's case is an example, developed as a composite of real clients seen in Dr. Kwee's clinical practice, and whose therapeutic work captures the dynamics of this topic. The name and identifying information are fictional.

“other” as she recounted this event, she looked at the therapist and stated her realization, “I completely stepped out of myself.” She then offered a description of being functionally “saved” at the event by the written religious protocols that she could follow, even as a shell of herself.

Zoya described shifting from an inner sense of connectedness and knowing to acting absently in a role. Following the ceremony, she describes how she interacted with the guests in a way that was vacant of herself, without personal encounter. She acknowledged that following the protocols during the ceremony and the way she engaged people during the ceremony adequately fulfilled all external expectations for the role. Yet, there was a persisting sadness that something was “off” inside. Zoya expressed an awareness of shame in the moment that led to her protective move of stepping outside of herself during the marriage ceremony. She had objectively fulfilled expectations, but the vital feeling of her personhood flowing through her was blocked.

What might we do to support Zoya therapeutically? Among accepted therapeutic approaches, the therapist may seek ways to foster Zoya’s resilience to the shame that she was experiencing, to normalize what happened, and to provide reassurance of her actual capabilities. In this instance, in the intimate context of the counselling encounter, I (Kwee) experienced a sense of deep sorrow in response to Zoya’s experience, captured in Zoya’s own declaration that she had “stepped out of herself.” The part in her that was free and flowing and trusting of her inner knowing and being had been constricted. From this personal place of being touched in sorrow, I was able to see a glimpse of Zoya that would have been missed in reassurances or cognitive reframing. In fact, this encounter revealed that Zoya had been lost in a moment when she had the potential to experience a fulfilling sense of being her whole self. She had stepped out of herself and had lost intimacy with herself.

As her therapist, there was part of me that was fooled by Zoya’s competence and I knew that there was no objective failure on her part. This part of me could have easily offered encouragement, reassurance, and normalization of what had happened. There is another part of me that feels enraged by the dynamics of systemic oppression and I was provoked that Zoya’s unique personhood was being silenced by a patriarchal religious system. This part of me could have easily moved the session toward a rallying cry for social justice and motivating Zoya toward social action in this regard.

However, I remember distinctly a particular moment in which our eyes met, and I was gripped with sorrow. It appeared like a weight and constriction in the core of my body as our eyes met and I recognized that I physically felt an echo of the pain lingering in Zoya’s eyes. In this encounter I knew I wanted to honour her personhood by taking her seriously and allowing myself to feel the grief with Zoya. In fact, this particular incident connected to a deep and painful theme in Zoya’s life of being stepped over and of stepping over herself. I felt inwardly that it deserved our devoted attention. While there is an important place for social action as a response to this systemic silencing, Zoya was well equipped in this way and already embraced a clear stance of resistance through the way she lived out her role and embraced advocacy for others who had been historically marginalized within her religious system. Public social action was something that we regularly explored therapeutically. However, meeting Zoya in this moment appeared to me as an opportunity for a sort of *intimate activism*, which occurred in the activity of taking her personhood seriously. Social justice in this encounter was embodied in the person-to-person encounter between us.

The question, “*do I see you?*” led me as therapist to a deeper level of seeing: seeing the obscured place where Zoya’s unique essence had been stepped over. As I verbalized my felt

sense of sorrow, Zoya's grief deepened. She acknowledged that, even though nobody was concerned about her performance in this role, she had actually let them down, too. She had so much more of herself to offer and had even felt a sense of spiritual inspiration in bringing the unique gifts of her person to the role. She had let herself down and she had let the others down.

By continuing to turn towards this grief, Zoya came more into a personal intimate encounter with her own inner, free self, and connected with the sense that her actual personhood, not just her role, was precious to her. Indeed, agreeing that she had, in a sense, failed, honoured the mystery and gift of the precious uniqueness of who Zoya was; her personhood was not constrained by the religious protocols that she could competently yet absently follow. The tone of the session was sobering more than encouraging. Zoya left the session not with the benefit of a pep talk that normalized and validated the discomfort of her experience, but in a quiet and reflective intimacy with herself.

In EA, personhood is understood to be fundamentally enabled for dialogue, and personal meaning is accessed through the subjectivity of two persons entering into dialogue with each other in a personal encounter. In Zoya's example, by giving space for Zoya to explore what had felt "off" for her in what she initially brushed off as just a work problem resulted in a precious opportunity to encounter Zoya herself. Most importantly, in this dialogue, Zoya's grief turned her towards the flowing, inwardly speaking 'I' of her own person. We hope that this brief summary of a therapeutic encounter illuminates how the methods of Existential Analysis, aimed at dialogue, can provide a meaningful pathway to the person in counselling and psychotherapy.

### *Concluding Comments*

EA understands the person as that aspect of human beings that refers to their pure potentiality, the flow within and through us that is never fully actualized, but always in the process of becoming (Längle, 2003). We come upon this inner flow when we turn inwardly to listen to our own inner speaking, when we encounter another human being, and when we are called to respond to the injustices and the suffering encountered in our world. In responding to the ethical call of the Face of the Other (Levinas, 1985), our person becomes the epicentre for encountering the embodied stranger as ineluctable, irreducible difference (Ahmed, 2006), and for social justice (Pedersen & Altman, 2015). As such, the EA understanding of the person resonates very well with core values of the profession of counselling psychology, such as social justice and multiculturalism (Sinacore & Ginsberg, 2015), and offers practical opportunities for multicultural and social justice focused counselling practice.

A unique contribution of the EA understanding of the person is that it may offer a counterbalance to the externally motivated impetus for social justice that, at times, may be easily hijacked by purposeless activism or reactive advocacy that bypass the reflective component of the personal engagement. Hence, this perspective offers a unique possibility to bear witness and integrate both the intimate and overt forms of social resistance and activism as personal, authentic and fully assumed acts of social justice.

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