
Process Differentiation and Person-Centeredness: Introduction to the Special Issue

**Prozessdifferenzierung und Personzentrierung: Einführung in das Sonderheft
Diferenciación de Proceso y Calidad Centrada en la Persona: Introducción al
Ejemplar Especial**

Procesdifferentiatie en persoonsgerichtheid: Introductie van het themanummer

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Abstract. The guest editors introduce this special issue by describing its overall theme and the papers included. The question of whether process differentiation is consistent with the essence of person-centeredness is a key question for therapists within the person-centered and experiential approaches to therapy. In this special issue on the 2003 Egmond aan Zee PCE conference, we present four widely varying viewpoints on this unresolved question, each originally presented as a keynote address at the conference.

Zusammenfassung Die Gastherausgeber stellen dieses Sonderheft vor und beschreiben sein Thema und die einzelnen Artikel. Die Frage, ob Prozessdifferenzierung mit dem Wesen der Orientierung an der Person zusammenpasst, ist eine Kernfrage für Therapeutinnen und Therapeuten innerhalb der Personzentrierten und Experienziellen Ansätze in der Psychotherapie. In diesem Sonderheft zur PZE-Konferenz in Egmond aan Zee 2003 stellen wir vier sehr unterschiedliche Standpunkte auf diese ungelöste Frage vor. Jeder davon wurde ursprünglich als Hauptvortrag bei der Konferenz präsentiert.

Resumen. Los editores invitados introducen este ejemplar especial describiendo su tema general y los artículos incluidos. La pregunta de si la diferenciación de proceso es consistente con la esencia de la cualidad centrada en la persona es una pregunta clave para los terapeutas dentro de los enfoques terapéuticos centrados en la persona y experienciales. En este número especial de la Conferencia PCE del 2003 en Egmond aan Zee, presentamos cuatro puntos de vista ampliamente variados sobre esta pregunta no resuelta, cada uno presentado originalmente como una disertación principal de la conferencia.

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Samenvatting De gastredacteuren leiden dit bijzondere nummer van het tijdschrift in met een beschrijving van het thema en de hier opgenomen artikelen. De vraag of procesdifferentiatie te rijmen valt met het persoonsgerichte uitgangspunt van onze therapierichting is zonder meer een fundamentele kwestie, waarover verschillend gedacht wordt. In deze speciale uitgave van het tijdschrift worden vier hoofdlezingen die over dit thema tijdens het PCE 2003 congres in Egmond aan Zee werden gehouden, gepubliceerd. De meningen van de betrokken sprekers lopen sterk uiteen.

Keywords. client-/person-centered therapy, person-centeredness, process differentiation.

From the 60 years' history of client-centered therapy and counseling, dating back to Carl Rogers' book *Psychotherapy and Counseling* (1942), it can be concluded that a variety of therapeutic modes have been developed within the realm of person-centered psychotherapy, ranging from non-directive counseling to more interactional and process-experiential orientations. However different our views on the psychotherapeutic encounter may have become, its core is still seen as an interchange based on equality between therapist and client, in which the client's experiences are met with unconditional regard, respect, empathy and genuineness by the therapist. We foster the self-actualizing process of the person and, more than in other stances, we put our trust in the client's potentials and self-agency. However, in the course of time, client-centered therapy has differentiated into a variety of psychotherapeutic and counseling practices.

The intention of the organizers of the 6th International Conference on Client-Centered and Experiential Psychotherapy and Counseling (PCE2003), held last year in Egmond aan Zee in the Netherlands, was to reflect on our therapeutic attitudes and interventions in the face of two apparently opposing propositions. On the one hand, therapeutic processes need to be differentiated in response to different client problems; while on the other hand, it is argued that it does not matter anyway which problems the client has with respect to our therapeutic attitudes and actions. Five eminent speakers were thus each asked to deliver a keynote address on this conference theme, '*Process differentiation and person-centeredness*'. Four of them have agreed to publish their addresses in this special issue of *PCEP*. Regrettably, Dave Mearns decided to withdraw his contribution, so you have to miss for now his inspiring paper with the challenging title: 'Problem-centered is not person-centered' (it will be carried in a later issue of *PCEP*).

However, we are very pleased to publish the other four keynote addresses in this special issue. Starting with the contribution of Hans Swildens on self-pathology and post-modern humanity, process differentiation and person-centeredness are discussed within the context of the narcissistic defense, which is considered to be the great challenge of our times. In turn, he discusses the changing language of psychopathology, the rise of self-pathology, and broader nosological and sociological perspectives on the loss of identity and the development of a post-modern human type. Swildens concludes that person-centeredness and process-differentiation are intertwined and inseparable aspects in the treatment of narcissistically organized clients.

Echoing Husserl, Peter Schmid proclaims that we have to go back to our clients. In his

paper he follows Rogers in arguing that the essential conditions of psychotherapy exist in a single configuration, even though the client may use them very differently. From a dialogical point of view therapists and clients are not only seen as being *in* relationships; as persons they *are* relationships, which makes them different in each therapeutic contact. Further, Schmid rejects the concept of psychological health, preferring a theory of authenticity. Consequently, he refuses to speak about clients with specific disorders, but only about persons who are suffering from an inauthentic or alienated self-concept. Symptoms are a specific cry for help, which have to be understood in a process of personal encounter between therapist and client.

In contrast to this view, Rainer Sachse advocates a change of the client-centered paradigm from a primarily relationship-oriented therapy to a primarily clarification-oriented one. According to him, research shows only moderate effect-sizes for traditional client-centered therapy, so we have to abandon the paradigm of non-directiveness and move on to more directive forms of psychotherapy, including process-experiential and clarification-oriented psychotherapy. These modern modes of client-centered therapy equal the effect-sizes proclaimed by cognitive behavioral therapies. When offering clients traditional non-directive therapy it means offering them a suboptimal method, which Sachse considers not to be a client-centered but, rather, a therapist-centered way of dealing. That's why he wants to depart from this ideology-based form of therapy towards an empirically based 'clarification-oriented' psychotherapy.

Leslie Greenberg, in a more moderated statement, is also pleading for a more action-oriented approach in client-centered, 'process-experiential' psychotherapy, in which specific therapist interventions for specific client tasks are at stake. However, he emphasizes the importance of the core conditions and respects and acknowledges the client's expertise, while trusting and believing more than Sachse does in the client's capacity to grow. He tries to overcome the dichotomy between Being and Doing by the notion of integrating 'following' and 'leading' in therapy. This is seen as a dialogical process, in which the distinction often disappears, 'analogously to a dance in which each partner responds to the other by alternately following and leading'. Greenberg's ideal is an easy sense of dialogue and co-exploration in an overall collaborative alliance.

Altogether, this special issue of PCEP on the occasion of the 6th International Conference on Person-Centered and Experiential Psychotherapy and Counseling offers a broad spectrum of views on our stance nowadays, especially on the theme of person-centeredness and process differentiation. We hope that the reader will succeed in determining his or her own position in this debate. In an article in the next issue of PCEP we will report on the panel discussion, which took place at the closing of the Egmond conference, and add some of our personal thoughts.

REFERENCES

Rogers, C. R. (1942). *Counseling and Psychotherapy*. Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin.