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## PRESENTATION

# Thematic section: Practice and research in the humanistic and phenomenological approach in psychology: Some proposals to contemporary challenges

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Are psychologists prepared to experience and find answers to the serious crises that currently challenge humanity, even if threatening their own survival? In the article entitled “Responding to contemporary challenges: new people for new times”, Maureen O’Hara, a renowned university professor, psychologist, researcher, and social scientist, now a professor at the National University in California, and member of the International Futures Forum, reflects on what she considers “serious world problems that threaten human civilization today”. She acknowledges the relevance of her mentors ideas in the fields of Biology and Psychology, especially those from the North American psychologist Carl Rogers, for having developed a new theoretical and methodological paradigm that proposed an equal subject-subject relationship between the researcher and the research participants and the researcher’s not-knowing position as a premise for triggering new knowledge from personal and collective experiences. This approach to human problems not only promotes new knowledge but also helps the researcher to acquire more appropriate skills and competences to understand the complex and seemingly insoluble crises of the 21st century. Maureen states that, to potentialize the possibility of transformation, a new type of Psychology, more adapted to the current conditions, is needed. *The People of Tomorrow*, a term coined by humanistic psychologist Carl R. Rogers during the conflicts of the 1960’s, are characterized by a keen awareness of events and creative ability to make change.

An application of this perspective can be found in the article entitled “Building comprehensive narratives from dialogical meetings: in search for meanings”. The authors describe an original methodological strategy developed in phenomenological investigations which seeks to reveal the nature of human phenomena from the description and understanding of lived experiences. The traditional way is to record long interviews that are later transcribed and analyzed. The authors propose that the researcher’s contact with the participants, in order to understand their experiences about a given phenomenon, be effected through dialogical encounters. The researcher writes comprehensive, first-person narratives about the encounters with each participant in order to understand his experience on the subject of the investigation; this is done based on her own impressions

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raised during the dialogue. A narrative synthesis is then built as the process of phenomenological analysis develops, unveiling the structural elements of the phenomenon that emerged from the experiences of all participants. At the end of this type of phenomenological analysis, it is possible to point out the meaning of the lived experience. It is a process in which the interpersonal relationship forms the basis for the understanding of experience that is singularly lived.

Gestalt therapy, developed by the renowned psychologist Fritz Perls in the United States in the 1950s, received many influences throughout its development. Is it correct to say that this therapeutic proposal is of a phenomenological and existential nature? This is a controversial thesis since the founders were not concerned with establishing clear philosophical and epistemological frameworks. In the third article, "Influence of phenomenology and existentialism on Gestalt therapy", the authors seek to answer this question based on a literature review that allowed them to reconstruct the different historical influences on Perls himself and in his colleagues during the development of the Gestalt therapy. They conclude that there has been a convergence of the phenomenological-existential position that influenced the Gestalt psychology itself, based on the propositions of Goldstein, Laura Perls and Goodman, as well as the approximation with the phenomenology developed by Brentano that descended from Husserl and Merleau-Ponty. As for Existentialism, it has roots in the philosophical writings of Kierkegaard, Nietzsche, Buber, and Sartre. Under these influences, the concept of man as being-in-the-world and an emphasis on experience as a psychotherapeutic method emerged.

The contemporary challenges that afflict humanity and the planet are manifested in the daily lives, creating forms of suffering that receive many names: violence, intolerance, discrimination, exclusion. The proposition of research studies previously inserted into an agenda may appear to be an alternative for many psychologists who are outraged by the innumerable forms of domination to which the most vulnerable groups of the social fabric are subject to. However, the urge for meaningful interpersonal relationships that empower people to build more just and supportive societies needs to be met in order to enhance creativity and acknowledge the many forms of wisdom already available. One way to do this is to value intersubjective experiences as a first-order "raw material" in order to find integrative solutions that minimize social disruption.

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