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Personal Development of Undergraduate Psychology Students through a Gestalt Workshop

Isabel del Rosario Stange Espínola¹, Aída J. Ortega Cambranis², Juana Estela Maza Navarro³, Citlalli Gamboa Esteves⁴ and José Luis Rodríguez Sánchez⁵

¹ PhD in Gestalt Psychology. Research professor at the Faculty of Psychology, head of the Academic Body "Psychology and Health" of the Benemérita Universidad Autónoma de Puebla, Mexico; Phone 2221629156; isabel.stange@correo.buap.mx; ORCID: 0000-0001-7555-6271

² PhD in Education. Research professor at the Institute of Physiology and member of the Academic Body "Psychology and Health". Benemérita Universidad Autónoma de Puebla, Mexico; Phone 2225888686; aidaortegacambranis@gmail.com; ORCID: 0009-0003-4321-0817.

³ PhD in Education. Research professor at the Faculty of Electronic Sciences and member of the Academic Body "Psychology and Health". Benemérita Universidad Autónoma de Puebla, Mexico; Phone 2224262705; estela.maza@correo.buap.mx; ORCID: 0000-0003-2717-6519.

⁴ PhD in Chemistry. Research professor at the Institute of Physiology; member of the Academic Body "Psychology and Health". Benemérita Universidad Autónoma de Puebla, Mexico; Phone 2221843154; citlalli.gamboa@correo.buap.mx; ORCID: 0000-0002-5967-8743.

⁵ Ph.D. in Psychology. Director and research professor of the Faculty of Psychology, member of the Academic Body "Psychology and Health". Benemérita Universidad Autónoma de Puebla, Mexico; joseluis.rodriguez@correo.buap.mx; ORCID: 0009-0001-5736-5356.

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Address for Correspondence:

Yu-Shu Raissa Kao, PhD in Gestalt Psychology. Research professor at the Faculty of Psychology, head of the Academic Body "Psychology and Health" of the Benemérita Universidad Autónoma de Puebla, Mexico. (isabel.stange@correo.buap.mx)

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Abstract	This study identified the correlations among teachers' perceptions of their social status, professional identity, and professional development. The participants were 482 teachers from elementary and junior high schools in 3 counties in Central Taiwan. We investigated (a) the factor structure of teachers' perceptions of their social status, professional identity, and professional development; (b) the effects of background variables on teachers' perceptions of their social status, professional identity, and professional development; and (c) a proposed overall model for representing the 3 variables. A structural equation model showed an acceptable fit to the data. Implications for research and practice are discussed.
Keywords	Experience Cycle, Sensations, Blockages, Personal Growth, College Students.
Resumen	El objetivo de esta investigación fue promover el desarrollo personal de estudiantes de Licenciatura de Psicología a través de un taller con orientación gestáltica. El grupo se constituyó con 30 personas, con un rango de edad de entre 20 y 26 años. El estudio fue preexperimental, con diseño pretest-posttest, con un solo grupo. Con el Test de Psicodiagnóstico Gestalt de Salama (2006) se evaluó el nivel de los bloqueos en el ciclo de la experiencia antes y después del taller. Con las categorías planteadas por Jiménez, Vázquez & Hernández (1998) se analizaron los adjetivos empleados para definir el estado de conciencia durante las evaluaciones, resultando una disminución de los bloqueos cognitivos y el aumento de la función de darse cuenta.
Palabras Clave	ciclo de la experiencia, sensaciones, bloqueos, crecimiento personal, estudiantes universitarios

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1. Introduction.

Gestalt therapy promotes three basic aspects: appreciation of the moment through the here and now, awareness or consciousness, and taking responsibility for one's emotions, thoughts, and behaviors (Castanedo, 2007; Naranjo, 2006; Perls & Baumgardner, 1978). The process of becoming aware allows an individual to position themselves in the here and now, questioning where they are heading or wish to go, and to take responsibility for their interactions with others (Salama, 2006; Salazar Valadez, 2011; Stevens, 2012).

Stevens (2012), building on Perls' work, suggests that an individual can develop the ability to understand what they are experiencing in the moment, and also enhance and diversify their awareness through experiments and guided work. The areas of awareness, as Stevens proposes, encompass the individual's present, past, and future (Stange and Lecona, 2014).

Being present in the experience and emphasizing the "how," "what," and "why" enables an individual to focus on themselves, thereby broadening their level of consciousness. Yontef (2009) points out that the expansion of consciousness is a central element that facilitates both personal growth and autonomy (p. 141).

By living and embracing the process of becoming aware, an individual achieves balance in their daily life. If a person intensely feels what they are doing, their interest in understanding why they are doing it decreases, although this does not rule out the possibility of discovering the reason (Salama, 2006; Stevens, 2012). In Gestalt therapy, individuals are acknowledged as responsible for themselves and their lives, recognizing their sensations as the starting point for initiating action through the formation of the figure and the emergence of need, which is part of the organismic self-regulation that helps to resolve unfinished Gestalts. This psychophysiological process has been given various names: the Experience Cycle, Contact-Withdrawal Cycle, Organismic Self-Regulation Cycle, Needs Satisfaction Cycle, Awareness-Excitement Cycle, Gestalt Experience Cycle, Interactive Cycle, Gestalt Cycle (Castanedo, 2007; Latner, 2007; Naranjo, 2006; Perls & Baumgardner, 1978; Zinker, 2000, 2005). Zinker (2005) notes, "The phases of this cycle are continuous and sometimes overlap, as one cycle follows another, intertwining" (pp. 84-85).

For a person who is unstable or disturbed, it can be difficult to identify what is important to them, whereas a healthy individual can do so clearly. When a person satisfies that need, a stage of rest follows until a new need emerges, becoming the figure, and the cycle of organismic self-regulation repeats (Zinker, 2000, 2005).

If the need is not satisfied, dysfunction occurs; if it is satisfied, well-being arises, leading to assimilation and growth (Zinker, 2000, 2005).

Professional training in Psychology involves working with students to develop the ability to recognize their own experiences or become aware, and to convey this experience in psychological service.

2. Methodology.

2.1 Overall Objective. Promoting personal development among undergraduate psychology students through a Gestalt workshop that utilizes guided fantasy.

2.2 Specific objectives.

2.2.1 Identifying the obstacles encountered by group members before the experiment, assessed with the TPG.

2.2.2 Identifying the obstacles encountered by group members after the experiment, assessed with the TPG.

2.2.3 Detecting differences in organismic self-regulation or the Gestalt Cycle through responses to the TPG, before and after the experiment.

2.2.4 Classifying adjectives in response to the TPG before the experiment using the categories proposed by Jiménez, Vázquez & Hernangómez (1998).

2.2.5 Classifying adjectives in response to the TPG after the experiment using the categories proposed by Jiménez, Vázquez & Hernangómez (1998).

2.2.6 Analyzing the adjectives used in response to the TPG before the experiment.

2.2.7 Analyzing the adjectives used in response to the TPG after the experiment.

2.3 Research questions.

2.3.1 Is there a difference in the cycle of experience or organismic self-regulation before and after the Gestalt workshop in which guided fantasy was used?

2.3.2 Is there a difference in the adjectives used as responses to the TPG before and after the experiment?

2.4 Independent variable: Gestalt workshop in which guided fantasy is used.

2.4.1 Conceptual definition: The process of integrating new experiences that enhance self-perception and interaction with others through the guided fantasy "Rosebush identification."

2.4.2 Operational definition: Participation in the workshop with the theme "My Partner."

2.5 Dependent variable: Experience Cycle

2.5.1 Conceptual definition: The process aims to identify how people relate to themselves and their environment. The cycle of experience begins in a state of rest (equilibrium and starting point of a new Gestalt) and concludes in the post-contact phase (de-energization in a continuous state of awareness), leading to a new rest phase after undergoing a process of assimilation, integration, or alienation.

2.5.2 Operational definition: Responses to the TPG before and after the experiment are considered, as provided by each participant in the workshop.

2.6 Participants.

The sample consisted of 30 students, 20 women (66.66%) and 10 men (33.33%), from the 7th to 10th semester of a Bachelor's degree in Psychology, aged between 20 to 26 years. The sample was non-probabilistic and selected for convenience.

2.7 Inclusion criteria.

2.7.1 Being enrolled in the 7th, 8th, 9th, or 10th semester of a Bachelor's degree in Psychology.

2.7.2 Signing the informed consent form, which specifies voluntary participation in the research.

2.7.3 Commitment to attend all 4 sessions of the workshop, each lasting 2 hours.

2.7.4 Willingness to respond to the TPG.

2.8 Ethical and bioethical aspects.

The research adhered to the ethical principles outlined in the Declaration of Helsinki (World Medical Association, 2013), the National Bioethics Commission (Mexico, n.d.), and the guidelines specified in the Code of Ethics for Mexican psychologists (FENAPSIME, 2018).

2.9 Type and design of the research.

The research followed a pre-experimental design, employing a single group, pretest-posttest evaluation, and a descriptive scope.

The design with a single group can be represented using the following diagram.

G → O₁ → X → O₂

G= Group of people

O₁= Measurement of the person or group pre-experiment

X= Treatment, stimulus, or experiment

O₂= Post-Experiment Person or Group Measurement

2.10 Instrument.

The *Salama Gestalt Psychodiagnostic Test (TPG)* is a process-focused tool where the individual is the primary subject of evaluation. Its administration is quick, taking only 15 to 20 minutes, and it can be re-administered to the same person without affecting the results, provided a 24-hour gap since the first administration. The TPG is characterized by 93% reliability and 92% internal validity. It is applicable across a wide age range, from 14 to 64 years (Salama, 2006).

The TPG consists of 40 items to which the individual responds with "YES" (true) or "NO" (false), based on the frequency with which they experience the statement in question, about a specific topic. Out of these 40 items, 8 are not considered in the evaluation (numbers 5, 10, 15, 20, 25, 30, 35, and 40). The remaining 32 items are randomly distributed and correspond to 8 blocks of the Gestalt Experience Cycle (4 items per block). These blocks are Procrastination (items 9, 16, 28, 37); Desensitization (items 1, 18, 26, 36); Projection (items 8, 19, 29, 39); Introjection (items 2, 11, 21, 33); Retroflection (items 4, 17, 27, 38); Deflection (items 3, 12, 24, 34); Confluence (items 6, 13, 22, 31); and Fixation (items 7, 14, 23, 32).

Responses are scored with a value of 0 for valid responses and 2 for invalid ones. The scores are recorded in Interpretation Table 1.

Table 1. Values for interpreting the results of the TPG

Score	Blockage Percentage	Interpretation
0	0%	Unblocked
2	25%	Functional
4	50%	Ambivalence
6	75%	Dysfunctional
8	100%	Blocked

Source: Salama, H. (2006). TPG. *Manual of Salama's Gestalt Psychodiagnostic Test*. Mexican Institute of Gestalt Psychotherapy (p. 135).

The interpretation of the values was carried out following the criteria outlined in the subsequent Table 2.

Table 2. Description of the Interpretation Nomenclature.

Blockages	Interpretation
Unblocked	This refers to the phase that is currently free of blockages, allowing energy to flow naturally towards the resolution of the need.
Functional	This applies to a partial blockage. Energy remains available for change in this phase.
Ambivalence	This implies a phase where energy is trapped between two opposing forces of equal intensity, causing a temporary stagnation.
Dysfunctional	The blocked phase becomes weaker due to the consumption of energy, thereby reducing the continuity of the flow to a minimum.
Blocked	It occurs when the flow of energy is completely halted in a certain phase, resulting in no change until the blockage is released.

Source: Salama, H. (2006). TPG. *Manual of Salama's Gestalt Psychodiagnostic Test*. Mexican Institute of Gestalt Psychotherapy (p. 135).

2.11 Procedure

This study was conducted over four sessions, each lasting two hours. In the first session, students were informed about the objective and scope of the research and were asked to read and sign a consent form that clearly outlined

their voluntary participation. The specific topic addressed was “my romantic relationship.” Participants completed the Salama Gestalt Psychodiagnostic Test, and subsequent sessions were scheduled, one each week.

During the second session, the gestalt intervention program was applied, focusing on diaphragmatic breathing, relaxation exercises, and areas of self-awareness. In the third session, the “Rosebush identification” exercise was conducted (Stevens, 2012, p. 64). The rosebush identification is an exercise that promotes self-awareness; it is a directed fantasy, involving the visualization of a peaceful scene or the use of imagination (Castanedo, 2005; Desoille, 1975; García & Lizeretti, 2017; Stevens, 2012).

Through gestalt experiments, it is possible to work on the process of self-awareness, through which an individual can perceive what is happening both internally and externally (Salama, 2006; García & Lizeretti, 2017; Stevens, 2012). Using the “Rosebush identification” experiment proposed by Stevens (2012), individuals can learn to accept themselves with their strengths and weaknesses, resolve disturbing situations, identify their areas of conflict, and pinpoint aspects they need to work on.

In the fourth and final session, the TPG was administered with the specific theme of “my romantic relationship.” Group feedback was provided after everyone completed the TPG. Data capture followed, with careful recording of TPG information for each participant. Administering the TPG twice over a month reduces the likelihood that changes are due to other factors, although this cannot be completely ruled out (Hernández, Fernández & Baptista, 2010).

3. Results

3.1 Analysis of the responses to the TPG pretest

For the analysis of the pretest and posttest responses to the TPG, the elements presented in Figure 1 are considered. This figure indicates the active and passive zones and the relationship zones in the Gestalt cycle. The differentiation between the active and passive zones relates to the area with which the organismic energy is in contact: the passive zone refers to the interior of the person (feeling, thinking); the active zone refers to the exterior of the person (action - assimilation).

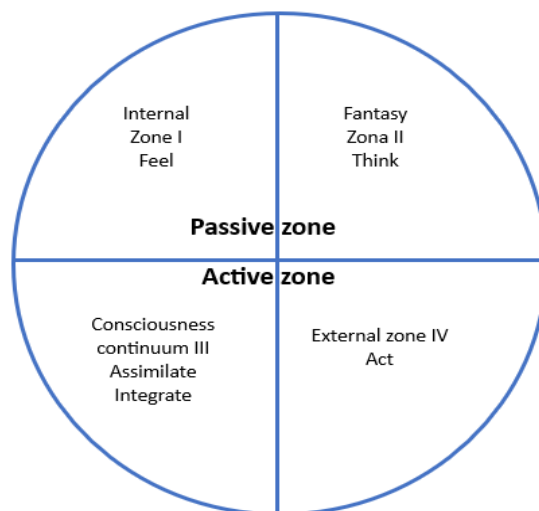


Figure 1. Gestalt Experience Cycle

Source: Taken from: TPG. *Manual of Salama's Gestalt Psychodiagnostic Test* (pp. 35-49), by H. Salama, 2006.

In the responses to the first application of the TPG, it was observed that the majority of participants were located at the Functional or Unblocked level of the Gestalt cycle. The exception was those who were in a Rest phase characterized by ambivalence, where an individual experiences contradictions between opposing thoughts or emotions towards something or someone.

In the Rest phase, a person is in equilibrium, which can be the starting point for the emergence of a new Gestalt (a new need). The Rest phase is situated in the passive zone and is located in the internal area, representing the individual's relationship with their inner self and emotions. The beginning of this phase is related to the rising need

in the individual. In this study, it represents the phase with the highest level of blockage or self-interruption. The blockage percentage is 50%, interpreted as ambivalence, where energy is temporarily trapped or halted, associated with the fear of being well and succeeding. It is considered that there is a rejection or fear of embarking on a new experience through the "Now I am aware" experiment.

In the Sensation Phase, also located in the Internal and Passive Zones, the individual establishes a relationship with their inner self. The organismic energy is Unblocked, showing the lowest score in the TPG responses. The individual is accepting sensory contact and recognizing their sensations with the emerging need, which is the pursuit of pleasure or the need to feel pleasure and the acceptance of the sensation being experienced.

The Figure Formation Phase is situated in the Passive Zone, but it is also in the Fantasy or Intermediate Zone, where mental processes (ideas, fantasies, fears) are incorporated. The figure is identified, and the sensation is accepted. The value is between the Unblocked and Functional levels. It is considered that the individual accepts and assimilates what belongs to them and does not attribute or project it to an external cause. The individual values and accepts themselves.

In the fourth phase, Mobilization of Energy, there is an increase in the score (1.86) compared to the Figure Formation Phase (1.4). In the Mobilization of Energy, the energy is in the Unblocked phase, meaning that the energy flows naturally toward the resolution of the need.

The Figure Formation Phase continues in the Passive and Fantasy or Intermediate Zones. In this phase, the necessary energy is gathered to achieve in action what satisfies the need. There is no observed blockage of introjection, as beliefs and thoughts that are not assimilated are excluded.

The Action Phase, located in the External and Active Zone, is where contact between the organism and the environment is established. It has a score of 1.73, with a blockage percentage of less than 25%, and falls between the Unblocked and Functional levels. The Retroflexion blockage, typically associated with this phase, is not observed. In Retroflexion, an individual does to themselves that they would like to do to others or do to others what they wish to be done to them.

The sixth Phase, Precontact, scored 2 in the TPG pre-experiment, with a 25% blockage, considered at the Functional level. In this phase, the source of satisfaction is identified, and energy can be directed towards it. The Precontact Phase is situated in the External and Active Zone. The blockage in this phase is Deflection, where energy is not directed toward the relational object but toward insignificant objects, avoiding the situation.

In the seventh Phase, Contact, located in the Active Zone, Confluence is observed as unblocked (blockage percentage between 12.5% and 25%). The individual distinguishes between the self and the environment. If Confluence blockage occurs, the individual fails to identify the boundary between themselves and their context and does not fully take responsibility for the contact established.

The final Phase, Postcontact, is in the Active Zone and involves the Continuum of Consciousness, integrating the Internal Zone, Fantasy Zone, and External Zone. In this Phase, energy flows freely between the organism and its environment. The organism experiences pleasure if the need is satisfied.

In the pretest, the Postcontact Phase scored 2.93, falling between the Functional and Ambivalence levels. In this Phase, if the need has been met, a momentary equilibrium begins, along with the integration and assimilation of the experience. The organism can then initiate a new Gestalt. If the need has not been satisfied due to a blockage in any of the previous phases, Fixation occurs, where behavioral patterns become rigid until the blockage is resolved.

3.2 Analysis of the Responses to the Posttest TPG

From the responses given after experiencing the "Now I am aware" experiment, the biopositive aspect of the Procrastination blockage in the Rest Phase was considered, as well as the biopositive part of the Retroflexion blockage in the Action Phase. By placing the responses within the cycle of experience and noting that seven of the eight phases are at the Unblocked or Functional level, with only the Rest Phase at the level of Ambivalence, it can be inferred that none of the phases are at the Dysfunctional level. This suggests that any postponement, either at the beginning or the end of a phase, is voluntary (Figure 2).

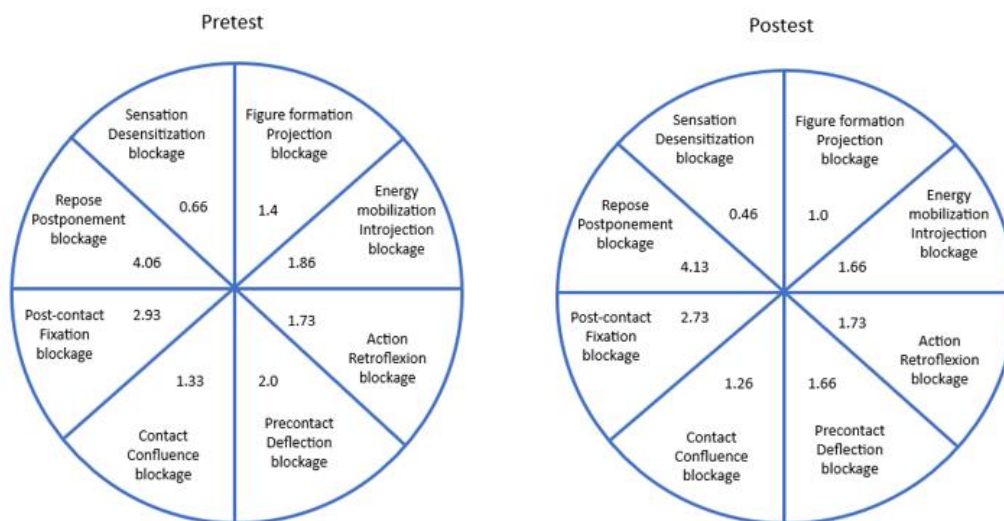


Figure 2. Cycle of Experience: Group Responses to the TPG Pretest and Posttest, with the Emerging Theme: My Partner.

Source: based on responses to the TPG

The biopositive aspect of the Procrastination blockage, occurring in the Rest Phase, indicates that the individual knows how to postpone the continuation of the process until they deem it necessary or appropriate. The biopositive aspect of the Retroflexion blockage in the Action Phase represents the capacity to wait. Both biopositive aspects point towards the ability to decide when to continue with the process.

Table 3 shows the difference - in percentage points - between the values obtained in the first and second evaluations of the TPG.

Table 3. Percentage difference between pretest and posttest TPG.

Phases and blockages of the state of consciousness	1º TPG	2º TPG	Percentage points
Rest. Postponement blockage	4.06	4.13	0.07
Sensation. Desensitization blockage	0.66	0.46	-0.2
Formation of the figure. Projection blockage	1.4	1.0	-0.4
Energy mobilization. Introjection blockage	1.86	1.66	-0.2
Action. Retroflexion blockage	1.73	1.73	0.0
Pre-contact. Deflection blockage	2.0	1.26	-0.74
Contac to. Confluence blockage	1.33	1.26	-0.07
Post-contacto. Fixation blockage	2.93	2.73	-0.2

Source: based on responses to the TPG.

Based on the aforementioned, it can be concluded that following the implementation of the Awareness Exercise in the "Rosebush identification" experiment, the observed changes in TPG responses are directed towards the flow of energy. In this process, each participant embraced their sensations, accepting themselves without any hindrances related to the emerging theme of "my partner." The responses are unrestricted and subsequently linked to the list of depressives, anxious, and mixed-content adjectives proposed by Jiménez, Vázquez & Hernangómez (1998).

3.3 Analysis of Adjectives Used in Response to the Pre-Experiment TPG.

The adjectives indicated in response to the TPG "Define with one adjective how you feel right now," both before and after the Awareness Exercise in the "Rosebush identification" activity in the four seasons of the year, were analyzed

and compared with the list of "Adjectives with depressive, anxious, and mixed content, assessed in their state dimension" proposed by Jiménez, Vázquez & Hernangómez (1998, p. 210). Table 4 presents the pre-Awareness Exercise responses, while Table 5 contains the post-Awareness Exercise responses.

"...adjectives express general attributes of objects and possess a more structured semantic field than nouns and verbs. This characteristic makes them particularly suitable for activating cognitive representations of reality and self" (Jiménez, Vázquez & Hernangómez, 1998, p. 202).

Table 4. Classification of Adjectives into Depressive, Anxious, or Mixed Categories in Response to the Pretest TPG.

Adjective	Negative (directly related to depression)	Positive (inverse relationship with depression or anxiety)	Mixed	Anxiety	Neutral (functional)	Neutral (dysfunctional)
Cheerful		3				
Alert					1	
Anxious				1		
Fatigued						1
Conscious					1	
Curious					1	
Bewildered			1			
Hesitant						1
Stressed						1
Restless						1
Nervous						1
Thoughtful					3	
Pressured						1
Weird						1
Reflexive					2	
Relaxed					1	
Tense						1
Calm		8				

Source: Based on responses to the TPG pre-experiment of *Noticing*.

In the TPG, requesting each individual to choose the adjective that best defines how they feel at the moment of responding allows for free identification of the term that most accurately matches their mood, without the need to select it from a previously prepared list.

Upon observing Table 4, which presents the frequency of adjectives used to define how one feels before the experiment, it becomes apparent that no adjective directly related to depression is employed. Two adjectives considered positive, as they exhibit an inverse relationship with depression or anxiety, are used, as well as one adjective "bewildered" (desconcertada) related to both depression and anxiety, and one adjective related to anxiety. Furthermore, nine adjectives classified as neutral, since they have no association with anxiety or depression, are considered functional, as they enable individuals to assess and decide whether or not to initiate change. Eight adjectives are presented as neutral and dysfunctional because they induce discomfort in the individual. Ultimately, the adjective "tranquilo" (calm) emerges as the most frequently used, classified as a neutral and functional adjective.

3.4 Analysis of Adjectives Used in Response to the Post-Experiment TPG.

Table 5 presents the analysis of the adjective's individuals used to define how they felt at the moment they responded to the post-experiment test.

Table 5. Classification of adjectives as depressive, anxious, mixed, in response to the post-test TPG.

Adjective	Negative (directly related to depression)	Positive (inverse relationship with depression or anxiety)	Mixed	Anxiety	Neutral (functional)	Neutral (dysfunctional)
Anxious				3		
Mindful					1	
Changing					1	
Fatigued						3
Pleased		1				
Dissociated						1
Uncomfortable						1
Reflective					1	
Relaxed					3	
Sleepy					2	
Calm		13				

Source: Based on responses to the post-test TPG.

Table 5 shows that fourteen students who responded with positively oriented adjectives are inversely related to depression or anxiety. Three students used adjectives associated with anxiety, while thirteen students identified themselves with neutral adjectives that did not reflect either anxiety or depression. Among these, eight are considered functional, while five are categorized as dysfunctional, with descriptors such as 'uncomfortable,' 'dissociated,' and 'fatigued.'

3.5 Analysis of the adjectives used in response to the pre-and post-experiment TPG

When comparing the information from Table 4 (pre-experiment responses) and Table 5 (post-experiment responses) in the "Now I am aware" study, it is noted that the number of adjectives used to describe participants' feelings decreased from 18 in Table 4 to 11 in Table 5. In both tables, no negative adjectives associated with depression were recorded. The adjective "tranquilo" (calm) remained predominant, with 8 people reporting feeling calm in the pre-experiment and 13 in the post-experiment. The adjective "alegre" (cheerful), which can be seen as inversely related to depression or anxiety, was replaced by "contenta" (pleased), with a decrease in the number of people choosing this descriptor from 3 to 1. The adjective "desconcertada" (bewildered), an indicator of anxiety and depression, was not used in the post-experiment, as opposed to its appearance in Table 4. However, the number of people reporting feeling anxious increased from one in the pre-experiment to three in the post-experiment. As for adjectives considered functionally neutral, there was a decrease from 6 to 5, with the number of people selecting them dropping from 9 in the pretest to 8 in the posttest. Similarly, the use of adjectives labeled as dysfunctionally neutral decreased from 8 to 4, with the number of people selecting them also falling from eight to five.

Finally, the use of functional adjectives to describe current feelings increased after the experiment. Adjectives such as "curiosa" (curious), "desconcertada" (bewildered), "dubitativa" (hesitant), "estresada" (stressed), "intranquila" (restless), "nerviosa" (nervous), "pensativa" (thoughtful), "presionada" (pressured), "rara" (weird), and "tensa" (tense), recorded in the first application of the TPG, were not repeated post-experiment. Out of the 30 participants, 13 indicated feeling calm after the experiment.

4. Conclusions.

One factor that can undermine psychotherapeutic work is the therapist's own biases or stereotypes, as well as any blocked stages in their experience cycle. Therefore, it is crucial to conduct experiments to resolve and clarify these elements. This enables trainees to identify and take responsibility for areas they need to work on, committing to self-care and personal accountability.

According to our findings, we can positively answer the research questions, as the changes observed were in line with an increased awareness of one's changes, as reflected in the Gestalt Experience Cycle or the Organismic Self-Regulation Cycle. The experiment revealed that among the students, the procrastination blockage occurs in the ambivalence phase, where energy temporarily gets stuck and then increases by .07% after the experiment. This suggests that the group's energy is caught between initiating change and postponing it.

After the experiment, there was a decrease in the blockages related to desensitization, projection, and energy mobilization, as well as deflection, confluence, and fixation blockages.

Regarding the adjectives used to describe their feelings at the moment, there was a 6.66% increase in the use of functional adjectives to describe their state of awareness. The work conducted with John Stevens' 2012 "Now I am aware" experiment encouraged group members to connect with their experiences and needs, steering them towards greater well-being and self-commitment. Therefore, it is recommended to apply this approach during university training to promote personal development, enhance body awareness, and help psychology students recognize their personal and professional resources.

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