

Scripts People Change

by Lena Kornyeveva

Before the Orange Revolution, Kiev was an interesting place for a psychologist who was trying to find a satisfying answer to two important questions: “How could it happen that in the same culture, in the same land, there are suddenly two apparently opposite forces, one prodemocratic and the other proauthoritarian? And what makes people authoritarian?”

I elaborated the latter question into a research proposal for my PhD work. While preparing my project, I studied books on the authoritarian character, from Reich and Fromm to Milgram and Zimbardo, including the latter’s famous Stanford prison experiment. They gave me quite a good understanding of the phenomenon in a social-psychological context. Many newer books and studies were no less interesting, but they seemed to deal more with the “surface” of personality—political views and preferences and their development—not with the cause of their development. And then I thought about not OKness. Could that hold the answer I was looking for?

I was a trainee in a TA group in Kiev, and my TA teacher from St. Petersburg, Elena Soboleva, offered me Claude Steiner’s book *Scripts People Live*. We discussed his ideas about

scripts and the idea that they could be consciously changed. This book was the only one of Claude’s that had been translated into Russian at that time, and it helped me to recognize my own script and the way I wanted to change it.

The Other Side of Power was another of Claude’s books that I read. There were no translations in Russian or Ukrainian, but Claude made the text freely available on his website. The more I worked on my research, the more I was sure that Claude’s understanding of the nature of power plays was related to the authoritarian issue I observed in my country. It seemed to me reasonable to examine empirically whether the TA concept of the negative existential position (not OKness) serves as a predictor of the authoritarian character.

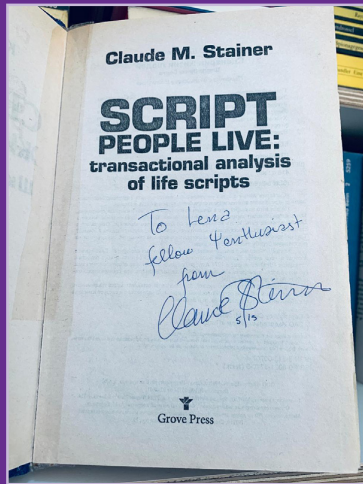
When my research proposal was done, I presented it in an academic



Lena with Claude (photo credit: Mike Meister)

institution in Kiev. It was approved, but I could not conduct my research unless I agreed to do some “favors” for some professors, unofficially, of course. It was just another authoritarian game I did not want to play.

I decided to find a professor who would be really interested in the ideas I believed in. The books I had read gave me the impression that Western social scientists are more interested in understanding authoritarianism than those in my country. I translated my research into English and changed the research design by making it comparative in a multicultural social context. Some questions on the matter emerged during this



Booked signed by Claude for Lena

work, so I decided to email Claude and ask for his opinion.

After a few weeks with no answer from Claude, I thought that he was not interested in any letters, and I should not bother him further. However, a friend of mine who helped me to translate my research proposal into English told me that, because Claude had made his phone number public, it would not be a problem to call him and kindly ask whether he had received my email.

So, I dialed Claude's number. He picked up the phone and said calmly, "Yes, I received your letter. I actually sent you my reply some time ago. I find your research idea very good. You should definitely do it. I wish you good luck!"

Sometimes it happens: For some reason, an electronic letter does not find the right addressee. Claude promised to resend his email, and when I received his comments and answers to my questions, I could not have been happier. My idea was approved by the one of the greatest psychologists I knew! None of my TA cotrainees could imagine such a thing would be possible—to ask a "star" for some support and to get it. It was beyond their scripts and actually beyond my own as well at that time.

I then sent my research proposal to a professor who is one of the most experienced in the field: Klaus Boehnke. A German, he was doing science and teaching at universities of Australia and Canada previously but now is working in an English-language university in Bremen. His response was another acknowledgment for my idea. International University Bremen (now Jacobs University Bremen) invited me to do my scientific work. *Scripts People Live* was among a small selection of books I took with me on that journey.

My hypothesis was later confirmed by my quantitative research. As the statistics were done and my dissertation was written and defended, I decided to return to my occupation. I found a vacancy in a rehabilitation clinic in Bavaria, where I also work with people in private practice. I love my work and cannot imagine what my life would be like if I had not dared to change my script.

In 2013 I was going to write Claude a letter of appreciation. I wanted him to know how he helped me to change my life and that I mentioned his ideas in my book on authoritarianism, which was published in both Russian and German. I thought he should feel rewarded, as I do, when my patients thank me for the job I do using his approach.

I opened Claude's website and discovered that there was going to be a conference on emotional literacy in Bad Grönenbach, and Claude was a special guest. The next thing I did was to book a train ticket to Bad Grönenbach, which is only 300 km from my home.

I took my copy of *Scripts People Live* to the conference. When I introduced myself to Claude, he said he remembered my idea, and I thanked him for his kind support. What I had

obtained from him years before was actually more than advice; it was a permission.

We talked about power plays in my homeland, and he said, "There is a hell of a job to do for us!" I saw a kind of shining in his eyes as he told me with obvious love about his teacher and friend Eric Berne. He said he regretted that he had not been able to properly express his feelings to Eric those days.

I told him about my colleagues in Ukraine and how they appreciated his ideas. He smiled softly and said, "You know, sometimes I wonder why people find my contribution so special. I just do what I think is the right thing to do."

On my way home, I was reading *Scripts People Live* probably for the fifth time. I had shown Claude the book and told him that it was one of the books that accompanied me all those years, from Kiev to Bremen, and from Bremen to Bavaria. Now it is signed by the author. Claude wrote, "To Lena, fellow Ψ enthusiast from Claude Steiner." And then he asked, "There must be 'I dedicate this book to Eric – my teacher, friend, father and brother,' could you please show me how it looks in Russian?" I found the page, and he wrote below the dedication: "and to Lena from Claude Steiner." That is the way we should treat one another, I believe. 📖

Lena Kornyeveva was born in Ukraine (the USSR back then) and was planning to obtain her TA certification in psychotherapy there (she has over 268 hours of TA training) before she moved to Germany to complete her doctorate. She still uses TA knowledge in her practical work, attends TA events, and continues her training in emotional literacy. Lena can be reached at: kornyeveva@imbdp.de.