

HUMANISTIC APPROACHES TO COUNSELING

(the primacy of personal
experience)

Gestalt Theory

Existential Theory

Person-Centered Approach

Techniques of Counseling
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Introduction

- ◎ The humanistic approaches to counseling include the following:
 - > Existential approach – intellectually dense and philosophical in nature
 - > Client-centered approach – unexpressed feelings
 - > Gestalt therapy – primary experience

Introduction

- These three approaches are humanistic in orientation because of its beliefs in the power of people to heal themselves, especially in the context of a genuine, authentic type of relationship.
- Humanistic practitioner seeks to create a relationship with clients *that is warm, caring, genuine, and engaging.*

Basic assumptions

- ◎ The primacy of experience
 - > Humanist seeks to understand personal experience in its essence
 - > Every individual is unique
 - > Human experience is irreducible
 - > Subjective, inner state should be honored and respected.

Basic assumptions

◎ Growth orientation

- > Will People have the tendency to grow and actualize their potential.
- > Increased self-awareness and acceptance will help people in their journey toward greater fulfillment and productivity.

Basic assumptions

- ◉ Free choice
 - > Rather than being deterministic, humanist believe that people can become almost whatever they choose.

The Healing Relationship

- ◉ *Being in* - In order to experience pure empathy, you must leave your own self-centeredness and enter into the being of another.
- ◉ *Being for* – when times are tough, you are the one person they can count on for support and encouragement.
- ◉ *Being with* – “certainly means listening and hearing the other’s feelings, thoughts, objectives but it also means offering my own perspectives and views” (Moustakas (1986, p. 102))

EXISTENTIAL THEORY

● Introduction

Existential theory:

- Focuses on exploring themes such as mortality, meaning, freedom, responsibility, anxiety, and aloneness as this relate to a person's current strength
- The goal of existential therapy is to assist clients in their exploration of the existential "givens of life," how these are sometimes ignored or denied and how addressing them can ultimately lead to deeper, more reflective and meaningful existence.
- Clients are invited to reflect on life, to recognize their range of alternatives and to decide among them.

EXISTENTIAL THEORY

- ◉ Existential therapy is grounded on the assumption that we are free and therefore responsible for our choice and actions.
- ◉ We are the authors of our own lives, and we design the pathway we follow.
- ◉ Basic existential premise: we are not victims of circumstance, to a large extent, we are what we choose to be.
- ◉ Existential movement stands for respect for the person, for exploring new aspects of human behavior, and for divergent methods of understanding people.

EXISTENTIAL THEORY

- It helps people engage the dilemmas of contemporary life, such as isolation, alienation, and meaninglessness.
- It focuses on the individual's experience of being in the world alone and facing the anxiety of this isolation.

Figures in Existential Theory

ROLLO MAY

- He is one of the main proponents of humanistic approaches to psychotherapy
- He viewed that psychotherapy should be aimed at helping people discover the meaning of their lives and should be concerned with problems of being rather than with problem solving.
- He said that the real challenge is for people to be able to live in a world where they are alone and where they will eventually have to face death.

Figures in Existential Theory

IRVIN YALOM

- He developed an existential approach to psychotherapy that addresses four “givens of existence,” or ultimate human concerns: freedom and responsibility, existential isolation, meaninglessness, and death.
- He believed that these themes deal with the client’s existence, or being-in-the-world.
- He advocates using the “here and now” of the therapeutic relationship to explore the client’s interpersonal world.
- He believed that the therapist must be transparent, especially regarding his or her experiences.

Figures in Existential Theory

VICTOR FRANKL

- He believed that essence of being a human lies in searching for meaning and purpose.
- He believed that love is the highest goal to which human can aspire and that our salvation is through love. We can discover this meaning through our actions and deeds, by experiencing a value (love, achievements through work) and by suffering.
- He developed his own theory and practice of psychotherapy, which emphasized the concepts of freedom, responsibility, meaning, and search for values.

CONCEPTS

Basic dimensions of human condition according to the existential approach:

Proposition 1: The Capacity for Self-Awareness

- Freedom, choice, and responsibility constitute the foundation of self-awareness. The greater the awareness, the greater our possibilities for freedom. According to Corey (2013) increasing self-awareness is the main goal of counseling that includes awareness of alternatives, motivations, factors influencing the person, and personal goals.

CONCEPTS

We increase our capacity to live fully as we expand our awareness in the following areas:

- ◉ We are finite and do not have unlimited time to do what we want in life.
- ◉ We have the potential to take action or not to act; inaction is a decision.
- ◉ As we increase our awareness of the choices available to us, we also increase our sense of responsibility for the consequences of these choices.
- ◉ We are basically alone, yet we have an opportunity to relate to other beings.

CONCEPTS

Proposition 2: Freedom and Responsibility

- A characteristic existential theme is that people are free to choose among alternatives and therefore lay a large role in shaping their own destiny. **Freedom** implies that we are responsible for our lives, for our actions, and for our failures to take action. While **existential guilt** is being aware of having evaded a commitment, or having not to choose.

CONCEPTS

Proposition 3: Striving for Identity and Relationship to Others

The courage to be. According to May in 1975 (as cited in Corey, 2013) courage entails the will to move forward in spite of anxiety-producing situation such as facing our death.

The experience of aloneness. The sense of isolation comes when we recognize that we cannot depend on anyone else for our own confirmation; that is, we alone must give a sense of meaning to life, and we alone must decide how we will live

CONCEPTS

- *The experience of relatedness.* Humans depend on relationships with others and they want to be significant in another's world and they want to feel that another's presence is important in our world.
- *Struggling with our Identity.* The therapist challenges the client to begin examining the ways in which they have lost touch with their identity especially by letting others design their lives for them.

CONCEPTS

Proposition 4: The Search for Meaning

- One of human's distinct characteristics is the struggle for a sense of significance and purpose in life. This therapy can provide a conceptual framework for helping clients challenge the meaning of their lives and it can be done through asking the following questions to the client: "Do you like the direction of your life?" "Are you pleased with what you are now and what you are becoming?" If you are confused about who you are and what you want for yourself, what are you doing to get some clarity?"

CONCEPTS

- *The problem of discarding old values.* Clients may discard traditional (imposed) values without creating other, suitable ones to replace. They seek new guidelines and values that are appropriate for the newly discovered facets of themselves.
- *Meaninglessness.* When the client perceives that the world they live in is meaningless. They may wonder if it is still worth it to continue struggling or even living. They may ask “is there any point to what I do now, since I will eventually die?” Meaninglessness in life can lead to emptiness and hollowness or a condition that Frankl calls the **existential vacuum**.

CONCEPTS

- ◉ *Creating new Meaning.* Logotherapy is designed to help clients find meaning in life wherein the role of the therapist is not to tell the client what their particular meaning in life should be but to point out that they can create meaning even in suffering.

CONCEPTS

Proposition 5: Anxiety as a Condition Living

- *Existential Anxiety.* It is the unavoidable result of being confronted with the “givens of existence” —death, freedom, choice, isolation, and meaninglessness.. It arises as we recognize the reality of our mortality , our confrontation with pain and suffering, our need to struggle for survival and our basis of fallibility. It is also experienced as we become increasingly aware of our freedom and the consequences of accepting or rejecting that freedom.
- *Normal Anxiety.* It is an appropriate response to an event being faced and does not have to be repressed and can be used as a motivation to change.
- *Neurotic Anxiety.* In contrast with the normal anxiety it is about concrete things that is out of proportion to the situation and typically out of awareness, it can also immobilize the person.

CONCEPTS

Proposition 6: Awareness of Death and nonbeing

- In existentialism death is viewed as a basic human condition that gives significance to living. It should not be considered as threat rather it must provide the motivation for us to appreciate what we have at present.

The Therapeutic Process

Therapeutic Goals

- The central goal of the existential therapy is increased awareness, this will allow the client discover the alternative possibilities existing, where none were recognized before. At the end of the therapy the client is expected to realize that they can make changes in their way of living in the world.
- **Role of the Therapist**
- To assist clients in seeing the ways in which they constrict their awareness and the cost of each constriction.
- He/she can hold up a mirror, so to speak, so that clients can gradually engage in self-confrontation the way they live.
- He/she should aim toward removing roadblocks to meaningful living and helping clients assume responsibility for their condition.
- To assist people in facing life with courage, hope, and willingness to find meaning in life.

Client's Experience in the Therapy

Clients are encouraged to assume responsibility for how they are currently choosing to be in their world. They must be active in the therapeutic process because during the sessions they must decide what fears, guilt feelings, and anxieties they will explore. Through the therapeutic process clients become aware of what they are now, they are better and able to decide what kind of future they want. They can also explore alternatives for making their visions real.

Therapeutic techniques and Procedure

- The therapist may incorporate many techniques from other models to understand the subjective world of the client.

The existentialists give emphasis on the following (Leano, 2006, pp. 133 & 134):

- It helps clients realize the importance of responsibility, awareness, freedom and potential;
- It hopes that during the course of counseling, clients will take more responsibility for their lives than they have previously taken;
- The aim of therapy is that the patient experience his existence as real and that this existence gives meaning to his life;

The existentialists give emphasis on the following (Leano, 2006, pp. 133 & 134):

- ⦿ Through this process, the client is freed from being an observer of events and becomes a shaper of meaningful personal activity;
- ⦿ Existential counselors make use of confrontation. Clients are confronted with the idea that everyone is responsible for his/her own life;
- ⦿ Existential counselors do not make use of psychological tests, nor do they make diagnoses.

GESTALT THERAPY (Fritz Perls and Laura Perls)

- Gestalt Therapy is an existential, phenomenological, and process-based approach created on the premise that individuals must be understood in the context of their ongoing relationship with the environment.
- . It is phenomenological because it focuses on the client's perception of reality and existential because it is grounded in the notion that people are always in the process of becoming, remaking, and rediscovering themselves.
- It focuses on the process than on content, the here and now, the what and how, and the I/Thou of relating. Gestalt therapists assume that individuals have the capacity to self-regulate when they are aware of what is happening in and around them.

CONCEPTS

Holism. All of nature is seen as a unified and coherent whole, and the whole is different from the sum of its parts. Gestalt therapists are interested in the whole person, they place no superior value on a particular aspect of the individual.

- This therapy attends to client's thoughts, feelings, behaviors, body, memories, and dreams.
- Emphasis may be on a **figure** (those aspects of the individual's experience that are most salient at any moment) or the **ground** (those aspects of the client's presentation that are often out of his or her awareness.)

CONCEPTS

- *Field Theory.* Asserts that the organism must be seen in its environment or in its context as part of the constantly changing field. Gestalt therapist pay attention to and explore what is occurring at the boundary between the person and the environment.
- *The Figure-formation Process.* It tracks how some aspect of the environmental field emerges from the background and becomes the focal point of the individuals attention and interest.

CONCEPTS

- ◉ *Organismic Self-Regulation.* A process by which equilibrium is disturbed by the emergence of a need, a sensation, or an interest. What emerges on the therapeutic work is associated with what is of interest or what the client needs to pursue a sense of equilibrium or change. Gestalt therapists direct the client's awareness to the figures that emerge from the background during a therapy session and use the figure-formation process as a guide for the focus of therapeutic work.

CONCEPTS

The Now

- The Gestalt approach puts emphasis on learning to appreciate and fully experience the present moment. Phenomenological inquiry involves paying attention to what is occurring now.
- To help the client make contact with the present moment, therapists ask “what” and “how” questions, but rarely ask “why” questions.

CONCEPTS

Unfinished Business

- These are the figures that emerge from the background but are not completed and resolved that can be manifested in unexpressed feelings such as resentment, rage, hatred, pain, anxiety, grief, guilt, and abandonment.
- Gestalt therapy gives attention to these unexpressed feelings because they tend to result in some physical sensation or problems.

CONCEPTS

Contact and resistances to contact

- Aiming for change and growth, contact is necessary in gestalt therapy. It is made by seeing, hearing, smelling, touching, and moving. Effective contact means interacting with the nature and other people without losing one's sense of individuality. Meanwhile, resistances are developed as a means of coping with life situations, they possess positive qualities as well as problematic ones, and many contemporary.

CONCEPTS

- **Energy and blocks to energy**
- In Gestalt therapy special attention is given to where the energy is located, how it is used, and how it can be blocked. Blocked energy is another form of defensive behavior. It can be manifested by tension in some part of the body, by posture, by keeping one's body tight and closed, by not breathing deeply, by looking away from people when speaking to avoid contact, by choking off sensations by numbing feelings, and by speaking with restricted voice.
- Clients can be encouraged to delve fully into tension states. For instance, by allowing to exaggerate their tight mouth and shaking legs.

Therapists function and role

- ◉ Gestalt therapists view clients as the experts on their own experience and encourage them to attend to their sensory awareness in the present moment.
- ◉ context of I/thou dialoge in a here and now framework
- ◉ They also pay attention to the client's body language.

- ◉ . Therapist may ask the client, “What do your eyes say?”
- ◉ If your hands could speak at this moment, what would they say?” “can you carry on a conversation between your right and left hand?”
- ◉ counselor also places emphasis on the relationship between language patterns and personality believing that client’s speech patterns are often an expression of their feelings, thoughts, and attitudes.

- *“It” talk.* When the client says “it” instead of “I” they are using depersonalizing language. The counselor may ask them to substitute personal pronouns for impersonal ones so that they will assume an increased sense of responsibility.

Example: “It is difficult to make friends” to “I have trouble making friends”

- *“You” talk.* Global and impersonal language tends to keep the person hidden. The therapist often points out generalized uses of “you” and asks the client to substitute “I” when this is what is meant.

- *Questions.* Questions have a tendency to keep the questioner hidden, safe and unknown. The counselor often asks clients to change their questions to statements.
- *Language that denies power.* Some clients have a tendency to deny their personal power by adding qualifiers or disclaimers to their statements.

Example: maybe, perhaps, sort of, I guess, possibly, I suppose

- *Listening to client's metaphors.* The therapist gets rich clues to client's internal struggles by tuning to their metaphors.

Example: It's hard for me to spill my guts in here

At times I feel that I don't have a leg to stand on

I feel like I have a hole in my soul

- ◉ *Listening for Language that uncovers a story.* Clients often use language that is elusive yet gives significant clues to a story that illustrates their life struggles. Polsters believed that storytelling is not always a form of resistance instead it can be the heart of the therapeutic process.

CLIENT-CENTERED THERAPY (Carl Rogers)

Roger's basic assumptions:

- People are essentially trustworthy
- They have a vast potential for understanding themselves and resolving their own problems without direct intervention on the therapist's part
- They are capable of self-directed growth if they are involved in a specific kind of therapeutic relationship

CONCEPTS

View of Human Nature

- Carl Rogers trusts the clients that they have the ability to move forward in a constructive manner if conditions fostering growth are present. He believed that people are trustworthy, resourceful, capable of self-understanding and self-direction, able to make constructive changes and able to live effective and productive lives.

CONCEPTS

- He maintained that three therapist attributes create a growth-promoting climate in which individuals can move forward and become what they are capable of becoming:
 - 1) congruence (genuineness or realness),
 - 2) unconditional positive regard (acceptance and caring),
 - 3) accurate empathic understanding (an ability to deeply grasp the subjective world of another person.)

Humanistic view of human nature believed that:

- the individual has an inherent capacity to move away from maladjustment and toward psychological health and growth. Here, the therapist places the primary responsibility on the client. The person-centered approach
- In the person-centered approach rejects the role of the therapist as the authority who knows best and of the passive client who merely follows the beliefs of the therapist.
- This therapy is rooted in the client's capacity for awareness and self-directed change in attitudes and behavior.

Humanistic view of human nature believed that:

- This approach emphasizes how the client act in their world with others, how they move forward in a constructive directions and how they can successfyllly deal with obstacles (both from within themselves and outside of themselves) that are blocking their growth.
- It promotes self-awareness and self-reflection, clients learn to exercise choice.
- Humanistic therapists emphasize a discovery-oriented approach in which clients are th experts on their own inner experience.

CONGRUENCE AND INCONGRUENCE

- A state of **congruence** exists when a person's symbolized experiences reflect all of the actual experiences of the organism. When one symbolized experiences do not represent all of the actual experiences, or if they are denied or distorted, there is a lack of correspondence between the self as perceived and the real self.
- In such situation, there is **incongruence** and possible maladjustment.

ACTUALIZATION

- Actualizing tendency according to Brodley (1999, as cited in Corey, 2013) is a directional process of striving toward realization, fulfillment, autonomy, and self-determination. According to Van Kalmthout in 1995 (as cited in Engler, 2012) this actualizing tendency is part of universal life force; it follows lines laid down by genetics and may also be influenced by temperament. The process of actualization is neither automatic nor effortless; it involves struggle and even pain.

THE SELF

- The **self-concept** is a portion of the phenomenal field that has gradually become differentiated. It is composed of those conscious perceptions and values of “me” or “I,” some of which are a result of the important others. It is an object of perception. It is the person as she or he perceives herself or himself. Thus, we have distinction between the organism or real self in the process of actualization , and the self as perceived , or object. The “self” that are taken over from other people rather than the actual experiences of the organism.

DEVELOPMENT OF PERSONALITY

- **Positive regard** refers to being loved and accepted for who one is. In an ideal situation, positive regard is unconditional. It is given freely to children for who they are regard regardless of what they do.
- **Unconditional positive regard** is not contingent on any specific behaviors. Conditional positive regard is given only under certain circumstances.

- . **Positive self-regard** follows automatically if one has perceived unconditional positive regard. Children who are accepted for who they are come to view themselves favorably and with acceptance.

ACCURATE EMPHATIC UNDERSTANDING

- Implies that the therapist will sense client's feelings as if they were his or her own without becoming lost in those feelings. A way for therapists to hear the meanings expressed by their clients that often lie at the edge of their awareness.

