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#1 My Integrative Approach to Counseling

According to my belief, existential therapy is the most sensible approach because I can integrate several other counseling methods within this system which creates access to a diverse range of possibilities. Following this belief, I can branch out to other methods that have less open approaches in their techniques and rely on a complicated system of techniques. Psychoanalysis and cognitive behavioral therapy would be examples of such fixed systems which have not the possibility to vary their counseling styles like existential therapy. Since this essay is about key concepts and other features of existential therapy, I will take an approach on these topics first before going further into integrating other techniques with it.

Corey (2021) states, “Existential therapy focuses on exploring themes such as morality, meaning, freedom, responsibility, anxiety, and aloneness as these relate to a person’s current struggle” (p. 132). In existential therapy, the human condition is prioritized because meaning, freedom, and anxiety are part of a person’s experience. It is important to live a meaningful life which has a purpose, independently from others. The client is free to choose and carries the responsibility for his or her own lifestyle that can create anxiety which has to be faced with the support of a good relationship between counselor and client. Freedom means not always doing what one likes, it takes responsibility to respect freedom and free will for what it represents. Everyone has to deal with the challenges of life, just some need more help to make their way through and face them.

Since the relationship between the counselor and the client is a priority, it has to be honest and authentic from both sides. According to Corey (2021), “The relationship is important in itself because the quality of this person-to-person encounter in the therapeutic situation is the stimulus for positive change” (p. 148). This authentic relationship transports the counselor into the orbit of the client’s world which is subjective because the view of the client is of great importance. Issues of understanding different moral values between client and counselor could become a problem, since every individual has a different sense of moral standards which should not be imposed on others. We should remember that the goal of the therapy is to support clients in self-awareness and freedom of choice.

Since existential therapy is flexible, Ludwig Binswanger developed an approach which is called existential analysis and recognizes the subjective view of the client with techniques used in psychoanalysis. “This perspective enabled him to understand the worldview and the immediate experience of his patients, as well as the meaning of their behavior as opposed to superimposing his view as a therapist on their experience and behavior” (Corey, 2021, p. 135). For example, I have a client who seems to have problems with his or her worldview which is far off by meaning of responsibility and freedom of choice. A client who does not understand that he alone is responsible for his life’s decisions and existence. To respect the autonomy of the client, I could lead him in the right direction by using my experience and expertise which are considered.

In some cultures, freedom and choice can provide a problem because traditions and certain standards are a fixed feature of this culture. In my opinion, gender issues are mostly responsible that women are reluctant to take responsibility for themselves and deny themselves the possibility of freedom and choices. As an example, many countries, which have a male-dominant society and so a head of government in the same gender, take responsibility and freedom from women away because it was always done like that. Autonomy of women is undermined and so their responsibility to seek for their own choices in life. To address this, I have to consider their culture and traditions which can be adjusted, if clients are willing to do so. Otherwise, I cannot impose my own cultural values on clients because I need to respect theirs.

#2 How Theories Apply to Me Personally

My personal development is important to me because I want to improve myself and become a better person for me and others. On Monday evening, we went through some exercises which are not only important for the cooperation with clients, but also play a role in my personal life. How can those techniques help me personally? What does it mean to apply those methods to me? Those questions need to be answered to be more effective as a counselor by applying self-care which improves not only my personal and but also my professional development. I think that existential therapy and psychoanalysis are well suited to address those moments of self-reflection and personal learning before application to others.

Since the exercise was not only a matter of counselor versus client, but it also played a role in my personal life, I will focus on examples which are suitable for me. The first impression that occurred to me pertained to the exercise itself, which is very personal according to the questions being asked. Every single problem seems to focus on the person itself rather than a particular issue in a separate context. Sometimes, I had some problems reacting to the problems in the role as a counselor or in the role as a client because the most suitable methods to apply would be existential therapy instead of going with a fixed technique like CBT. Another method would be psychoanalysis which is another personal favorite to me because of its use of repressed feelings which could have occurred in childhood. I will refer more in detail to this in a later point of this essay which pertains to my personal application of the technique. Right now, I would like to point out that in the next paragraph I will describe how example number nine of the handout appealed to me the most.

“When I hear about all of the terrible things that are happening in the world (mass shootings and hate crimes, terrorism, poverty, and homelessness), I wonder what the meaning of all this suffering is about. How can I possibly find meaning in a world that is so dangerous and negative?” (Villarreal, April 10, 2023). Those issues are affecting me not personally, I am aware of this, but it affects my understanding of life in general. I know that I cannot change everything by myself and make it go away because I cannot be responsible for everyone else. I have to find a way to face this anxiety and take responsibility for my own life instead of worrying about others. My childhood was always safe and pleasant, which could be the reason this memory will be shattered by today’s world. As already mentioned, existential therapy and psychoanalysis could help me to develop more self-awareness instead of focusing on things which are carrying a much higher responsibility than my own consciousness allows me to.

According to Corey (2021), “Freedom implies that we are responsible for our lives, for our actions, and for our failures to take action” (p. 140). First of all, I am responsible for my own life and actions which be solved if I am showing myself open to existential therapy. My responsibility is anchored inside me not with anyone else because freedom is for a self-sustained person who takes care of herself first before dashing off to take care of the whole world. How can I be responsible for my own actions, if I am not self-aware of my own person, but I am aware of everyone around me. Means, I see the world in an objective view away from any authentic feelings towards myself, in a subjective way. I need to look at myself first and be open to my own feelings which are buried inside me than I can become a more aware person.

In the last part of this section, I would like to address psychoanalysis again because I want to make part of my self-awareness which may have started in my childhood. Even the most protected childhood is not free of responsibilities which I never had to carry. Maybe, this fact led me to the conclusion that I had to take care of everything else, accept me. I need to do some changes in my life and let myself know before I inform others.

#3 Challenges I May Face and How I Would Address Them

I think every counselor is facing challenges which no program or school can prepare for because client situation is unique and cannot be seen from a uniformed perspective. In this section, I will focus on examples based on religious beliefs that can influence the client’s and counselor’s view of working together in a counseling session. Should I make my own spiritual beliefs part of a session, or should I stay away from it? Is counseling for a religious organization different than for a secular institution? Do some clients think that a church group is more leaned by bending rules? All those questions need to be answered because failing to act right could have consequences later for counselor and client.

Since we are living in a multicultural society, we are confronted with different problems which could be avoided by handling each other with care and respect. It is always good to do research into a client’s cultural background to make sure we are not overstepping our authority. I am using ‘we’ because it should be a general rule for every counseling body and individual. Specially, faith organizations and their counseling staff are seen as more holistic in their approaches and tend to attract individuals who might think they could take advantage of them. This might be a speculation on my side, but I have also an example of such a case in my next paragraph. It also might occur that the counselor’s faith comes in the way of proper counseling by the attempt of imposing certain beliefs on to the client which I will show later in an example. It should be of any significance which beliefs or faith I am following that would interrupt the counseling success. As already mentioned, I will demonstrate on examples which are part of class assignments done over the course of the semester.

Let’s talk about Aaron, counselor in a faith organization and Matt, a client who participated in a burglary. Both, I assume, are aware that this action is illegal and a criminal offense. According to the text, “He asks Aaron whether he will inform the police. Aaron assures him that he will not tell the police or anyone else” (“Aaron,” 2023). This case is very interesting because the client is appealing to the counselor’s consciousness in a way that is not appropriate. Apparently, he thinks that Aaron’s work for a faith organization turns him into a clergy man with who he can share his sins. Aaron is a counselor with integrity on his mind, I assume, and is being pushed by the client in a situation which lets him choose between his consciousness and fixed rules of engaging the problem. In my opinion, Aaron should have reported this incident to his supervisor because the whole church agency is affected by that. At least, he should have asked for advice and then continued to counsel Matt. On the other hand, Matt’s intention not to change his behavior seems to be pretty obvious, according to my opinion. He needs to change and face the consequences like Aaron’s behavior not telling his supervisor.

In the next case, Guiza, who is in an internship at a counseling center, is confronted with the choice between her faith and the client’s own beliefs. According to the text, “In Guiza’s assessment of Alejandro, she finds that he grew up without any kind of spiritual or religious guidance in his home, and he states that he is agnostic” (“Counseling and Spirituality”, 2023). Since Alejandro does not belief in God or in any other deity, it would be disrespectful, if Guiza is convincing him of God and her spiritual beliefs. Of course, it would be also offensive, if he would not respect her belief by deliberately speaking about God in a profane way. Even though Guiza is attempting to give into her religious views, she should avoid any suggestions which could be misunderstood by Alejandro. Guiza could counsel him in a way which would be meaningful and supportive to him since the client is our number one concern. Religion is not meaningful to a person who is neutral in their belief system, and every client should be appreciated in his or her own way.

#4 My Work with the Case of Stan

Stan is one of the cases which is introduced by Dr. Corey, the writer of the textbook, we are using in class. On several occasions, we watched videos which showed Stan in different counseling sessions with Dr. Corey. Those counseling sessions are mock trials, and they are used to demonstrate to counseling students how real sessions could be conducted with different theories in place. My trial with Stan is a demonstration of several theories which vary in their approach, but could also be integrated, if needed. I will start with an intake session which lets me know Stan a little bit better to make my assessment about him. In the next coming sessions, I will use psychoanalysis and existential therapy which I hope that they agree with his problems of alcohol, family, and women which connects to one big problem of lacking self-confidence.

In his intake interview, Stan admits that he drinks occasionally which is his reason for hiding his fear of getting with people together. He states, “Probably the reason I sometimes drink a bit too much is because I am so scared when it comes to socializing” (“Stan”, 2023). In this interview with Stan, I can already sense his insecurity when it comes to talking with other people or even going on a date with a woman. To hide this feeling of being lost in the crowd of others, he prefers drinking as an effective way to mask his fear. After listening to him, I would conclude that drinking might not be the main problem, but it surely can bring Stan in situations which should be avoided. In my next session, I will try to find more out about his personal life like family and work situation which seems to be important for his therapeutic progress.

My further investigation starts with a session which I am using to demonstrate the healing power of psychoanalysis. A technique that uses early childhood memories as a window into the consciousness of one’s adult life. Since Stan seems to have difficulties with a normal functioning relationship between him and his parents, this would conclude that Stan needs to solve his problems there. According to Corey (2021), “His father was the weak one who always lost, and his mother was the strong, domineering force who could and did hurt men” (p. 86). I believe those difficulties started in early childhood because this is the time which started to dominate his adult life which haunts him for the rest of his remaining existence if nothing is being done. As a counselor, I will be staying neutral to Stan because I want him to transfer his feelings for his parents to me. His unconsciousness will do that, and so he can relieve himself of the burden which seem to be unsolvable to him. Such a transference can bring all the bad memories out which normally would be released against his father and mother. Besides this action, I will also recommend a conversation with his parents to consciously face past and present problems. With that in mind, I will end my session with Stan, but I also keep in mind that this has to be repeated over several sessions.

Since Stan seems to have no paternal role model in his father who is known for his passive behavior against a dominant mother. I want Stan to take his life in his own hands and learn to live without the constant approval of his parents which will be difficult to reach because we are not conducting family therapy. Corey (2021) states that “Stan is demonstrating what Sartre would call ‘bad faith’ by not accepting personal responsibility” (p. 155). Since Sartre was a philosopher of existentialism, the therapy I am using on Stan is called existential therapy. This approach provides the possibility that Stan can take responsibility for his own life and actions without needing to wait for others to take this obligation away from him. It would also give him a purpose in life to establish on his own relationships with people he prefers and likes. My relationship with Stan is guide him towards self-awareness which should be positive for him and the people, he associates with, his parents or maybe a female companion. Altogether I must say that Stan, if he is willing, will be on his way to recovery.

References

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