

Ways of Being "Dead" but Still Existing

Existential Theory

In counseling situations, I find it useful to ask people to examine parts of themselves that they feel are "dead." In what ways are you dead? How do you prevent yourself from experiencing life? What would happen if you chose to live fully instead of settling for your half-life/half-death existence?

Directions: As you read these comments that express some ways in which clients may choose "death" over "life," reflect on these questions: "How fully alive do I feel? When do I feel most alive? Least alive? What parts within me are 'dead' or 'dying'? What would it take for me to experience a new surge of vitality in these areas?" Then discuss in class, either in small groups or in dyads, the degree to which you feel fully alive. Also, share how the reality of death can give life a sense of meaning.

1. "I consistently choose to remain safe by avoiding any risks."
2. "I'll cut off all my feelings—that way I won't hurt. I've become a good computer, and I'll never experience pain."
3. "I'm dead, hollow, empty, with nothing inside. I can't find any real purpose for living. I just exist and wait for each day to pass."
4. "I live in isolation from people. I don't want to get close, so I keep myself distant from everyone."

Now list some possible ways in which parts of *you* are not fully "alive":

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____

Will We Really Change?

According to the existentialists, the best means of understanding individuals is watching their striving for the future. Because humans are always emerging and becoming, the future is the dominant mode of time for them. People can be understood as they project themselves forward.

One intervention I have often used in group situations is to ask each person to imagine his or her life as he or she would like it to be. I have asked questions such as "What future do you want for yourself? What do you want to be able to say about yourself in relation to the significant people in your life? What would you like to have inscribed on your tombstone? What are you doing now, or what can you do now to make your vision a reality?" A look into the future can be a stimulus for people to see choices they have made and the ways in which they can create and shape their own future. In some real ways they can be the architects of their future life.

Directions: Write down a brief response to each of these questions. Then discuss your answers in class, either in small groups or in dyads.

1. What do you think your future will be like if you stay very much as you are now? Complete the following statement: If I make no major changes, then I expect _____

2. List some things, situations, or people that you see as preventing your change or as making your change difficult. _____

3. If you could make *one* significant change in your personality or behavior *now*, what would it be? _____

4. What do you see that you can do *now* to make that one change? _____

5. Write your own epitaph. _____

Complete both exercises

Person-Centered Therapy

← Complete

PRECHAPTER SELF-INVENTORY

Directions: Refer to page 43 for general directions. Use the following codes:

5 = I *strongly agree* with this statement.

4 = I *agree*, in most respects, with this statement.

3 = I am *undecided* in my opinion about this statement.

2 = I *disagree*, in most respects, with this statement.

1 = I *strongly disagree* with this statement.

- _____ 1. Therapists provide a supportive structure in which clients' self-healing capacities are activated, but clients are the primary agents of change.
- _____ 2. People have the capacity for understanding their problems and the resources for resolving them.
- _____ 3. The basic goal of therapy is to create a psychological climate of safety in which clients will not feel threatened and will be able to drop their pretenses and defenses.
- _____ 4. The therapist's function is rooted not primarily in techniques but in his or her ways of being and attitudes.
- _____ 5. Effective therapists use themselves as instruments of change.
- _____ 6. The client uses the therapeutic relationship to build new ways of relating to others in the outside world.
- _____ 7. The client can make progress in therapy without the therapist's interpretations, diagnoses, evaluations, and directives.
- _____ 8. The relationship between the therapist and the client is the crux of progress in therapy.
- _____ 9. The therapist's genuineness, accurate empathy, and unconditional positive regard are essential qualities of effective therapy.
- _____ 10. It is the therapist's attitudes and belief in the inner resources of the client that create the therapeutic climate for growth.
- _____ 11. Forming a diagnosis and developing a case history are not important prerequisites for therapy.
- _____ 12. It is important that the therapist avoid being judgmental about a client's feelings.
- _____ 13. The therapist's presence is far more powerful than techniques he or she uses to bring about change.

and cross-cultural network of humanistic expressive artists, consultants, educators, and therapists. We provide education, research, resources, and mentorship to foster creativity, growth, and transformation. We envision a world in which every individual uses his or her creative capacity to achieve deep interpersonal and global connections.



QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION AND DISCUSSION

1. The person-centered view of human nature is grounded on the assumption that people have the tendency to develop in a positive and constructive manner *if* a climate of respect and trust is established. To what degree do you accept this premise?
2. A person-centered approach stresses listening to the deeper meanings of the client's behavior and allowing the client to provide the direction for the session. Are there any circumstances under which you might want to interpret the meaning of your client's behavior? Can you think of any situations in which you might actively intervene by making suggestions or leading your client?
- ★ 3. Regardless of which approach guides your practice, the core therapeutic conditions and the type of relationship emphasized in the person-centered approach seem to serve as the foundation for counseling. What are the basic concepts of this theory that you might consider incorporating into your personal style of counseling?
- ★ 4. What aspects of motivational interviewing seem similar to person-centered therapy? What are some ways that motivational interviewing is different from the traditional person-centered approach?
- ★ 5. In making interventions with clients, it is essential to consider their readiness for change. What ideas can you take from the stages of change model in working with reluctance and ambivalence within clients?
6. What do you think it would be like for you to be a participant in a person-centered expressive arts group? How would it be different for you to express yourself through various art forms such as movement, drawing, painting, sculpting, and music rather than verbally? What advantages and disadvantages do you see in expressive arts therapy versus traditional talk therapies?

make brief notes about starred questions

PRACTICAL APPLICATION: REFLECTING CLIENTS' FEELINGS

Complete following exercise

Directions: The person-centered approach to counseling emphasizes understanding clients from an internal frame of reference. To do that, the therapist must be able to discriminate clients' feelings, hear accurately what messages they are sending, and reflect the deeper meanings that they are attempting to communicate. A common mistake that counselors make is to give a superficial reflection by merely repeating almost the same words the client used. The following exercises are designed to help you learn to grasp the more subtle messages of clients and to reflect feelings as well as content. Of course, important nonverbal cues such as tone of voice and facial expressions are not captured in this exercise. Such nonverbal aspects would be most useful in understanding a client's message. First, write down a few key words or phrases that describe what the client is *experiencing*. Second, write down what your response would be if you were to *reflect* to the client what you heard.

Example: Woman, 42, tells you: "So often I feel that I'm alone, that nobody cares about me. My husband doesn't seem to notice me, my kids only demand from me, and I just dread getting up in the morning."

- a. What is this person experiencing? Ignored. Unappreciated. Taken advantage of. Unloved. A sense of futility.
- b. Respond by reflecting what you heard. I sense a lot of loneliness and desperation, a feeling of "What's the use of going on this way?"

1. Boy, 17, tells you: "I can't stand this school anymore. It doesn't mean anything. I'm bored and frustrated, and I hate school. I feel like dropping out today, but that's stupid because I'm graduating in 2 months."

a. What is this person experiencing? _____

b. Respond by reflecting what you heard. _____

2. Girl, 14, tells you: "I feel like running away from home. My stepfather always criticizes me, and he puts me on restriction for things he claims I do that I don't do. My mother doesn't ever listen to me and always sides with him. They don't trust me at all."

a. What is this person experiencing? _____

b. Respond by reflecting what you heard. _____

3. A fifth-grader tells you: "None of the other kids like me. They always pick on me and tease me. I try real hard to make friends, but everyone hates me."

a. What is this person experiencing? _____

b. Respond by reflecting what you heard. _____

4. Woman teacher, 33, tells you: "I have really noticed a tremendous difference since I've been coming here for counseling. I'm a lot more open with my kids, and they are really noticing a change in me and like it too! I am even able to talk to my principal without feeling like a scared little kid!"

a. What is this person experiencing? _____

b. Respond by reflecting what you heard. _____

5. Man, 45, tells you: "I'm so preoccupied since my wife left me that I can't think of anything but her. I keep going over in my head what I could and should have done so she would have stayed. It pisses me off that I can't get her out of my mind and go about my living!"

a. What is this person experiencing? _____

b. Respond by reflecting what you heard. _____

6. Man, 27, tells you: "Here I am, still in college and not a damn thing to show for my life. My wife is supporting me, and I know she resents me for not getting out and getting a job before this. But, you know, now I know what I want, and before I was just in school because my parents wanted me to be there."

a. What is this person experiencing? _____

b. Respond by reflecting what you heard. _____
