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Assignment 3.3 - *Creativity and Theories of Counseling*
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The purpose of this paper is to illuminate Existential Counseling Theory as “creative” in relationship to Psychoanalysis. To demonstrate this we must first examine what “creativity” is. We must then establish a foundational understanding of psychoanalysis from which to work. Finally we must identify characteristics that distinguish Existential Theory from Psychoanalysis.

Creativity, according to the Systems Model proposed by Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, occurs when a person who has mastered the rules of a specific domain generates an idea, or a process which is truly novel. If deemed valuable by the experts in that particular field of study, it is added and changes the culture within that field, usually generating more research (Csikszentmihalyi, pp. 29-31). Therefore, the definition I propose for our purposes is that creativity in the field of counseling is a new approach to the treatment of clients that builds on ideas from the past, but yet distinguishes itself with clarity as truly unique.

Psychoanalysis is a counselor centered approach developed by Sigmund Freud, and developed further by his daughter Anna. It depends heavily on the ability of the counselor to interpret what is revealed from the unconscious through techniques such as free association, dream analysis and the analysis of transference, which is encouraged. It has three important ideas that function as basic building blocks of the theory. The first is the idea that human beings possess a conscious, preconscious and an unconscious mind. The conscious mind is aware of its surroundings, the preconscious mind is the seat of forgotten memories that can be recalled, and the unconscious mind is the place where painful memories can be repressed (Gladding, pp. 186-189).

The second important idea is that the personality of human beings is formed by three distinct parts. They are the *id*, the *ego* and the *superego*. The *id* is the part of the personality that is driven by pleasure and consists of our base instincts. The *ego* is the part of the personality that is capable of making decisions. The *superego* is the moral center of the personality and usually contains the moral principles established by parental figures (Gladding, pp. 186-189).

The third important idea is that of the five psychosexual development stages proposed by Freud. They are the oral stage, the anal stage, the phallic stage, the latency stage and the genital stage. These stages are a natural process of development through which human beings progress. However, the process can be interrupted, which results in what has become known as “arrested development.” This simply means that progression of development has been stopped due to the inability of the individual to adapt to his or her surroundings. When a person becomes “stuck” or “fixated” in the development process, defense mechanisms are formed as a means to cope with an unpleasant, or a painful reality (Gladding, pp. 186-189).

Psychoanalysis does have limitations, and therefore presents great opportunity for creativity. The first limitation is that psycho analysis requires a great deal of time and is therefore expensive. Second, it is not an approach that is effective with a broad range of clients. Third, it can be difficult to understand and to communicate. Fourth, pursuing a greater level of training is difficult and therefore inaccessible to many counselors who do not possess a medical degree. Fifth, psychoanalysis is “deterministic” which simply means that outcomes are controlled by forces outside of an individual’s will. Finally, it is not a theory of counseling that can be applied to the majority of persons who pursue counseling. This list of limitations of psychoanalysis helps us understand the opportunity Rollo May and Viktor Frankl seized in order to develop a unique theory that improved upon these inadequacies, and after being added to the field of counseling, changed it’s trajectory forever (Gladding, p.189, 197).

Existential Counseling places great emphasis on meaning. Viktor Frankl, one of the leading developers of this theory believed that meaning exists on three levels. The first is ultimate meaning, the second is meaning in the moment, and the third is common or day to day meaning. He believes further that a person can discover meaning through achievement and accomplishment, by experiencing a value such as love, or even by suffering (Gladding, p. 198). Furthermore, existential theory pays close attention to anxiety. While the theory holds that not all anxiety is negative, it is a natural result of failing to “make meaningful choices, or to meet one’s potential (Gladding, p. 198).

Existential theory distinguishes itself from psychoanalysis in four important ways. First existential theory is *humanistic* and *anti-deterministic*. This means that it focuses on the client’s potential as well as their freedom and responsibility in making choices that “affect themselves and their environment (Gladding, p. 194; Fernando, pp. 226-241). This is explicitly distinct from the deterministic approach of psychoanalysis.

Secondly, existential theory is client centered. This is distinct from the counselor centered approach developed by Freud. This approach emphasizes the importance of the counselor being *authentic* and developing a deeply meaningful and transparent relationship with the client. According to Delini M. Fernando, this approach functions maximally when, “the therapist uses his or her authentic and genuine self to meet the authentic and genuine self of the client” (Fernando, pp.226-241).

Thirdly, existential theory de-emphasizes technique in favor of relationship. Most other theories of counseling make use of specific techniques. In this approach however, it is the role of the counselor to assist the client in accepting responsibility for his or her choices. This is accomplished by modeling this attitude in the relationship. (Fernando, pp. 226-241). This certainly involves being authentic and may involve “sharing personal experiences.” (Gladding, p. 198). It is also the role of the counselor to identify the client’s role in the presenting problem.

(Fernando, pp.226-241). This is distinct from Freud's approach in which the counselor functions as an interpreter of what can be drawn out of the unconscious mind of a client through techniques such as free association. Such a distinction frees the counselor to "accurately perceive the world of the client, rather than projecting their own meanings to the client's subjective world." (Milton, p. 239)

Finally, existential counseling is a highly effective approach in multi-cultural settings. (Gladding, p. 199). This is a huge improvement on the limitations and inadequacies of psychoanalysis, which "has become associated with major adjustment difficulties," and "does not lend itself to the needs of most individuals who seek counseling." (Gladding, p. 189).

In conclusion, it is clear that some of the strengths and key components of existential theory are directly compensatory to some weaknesses and limitations of psychoanalysis. The strengths and practice of existential theory by no means render obsolete the contributions of Sigmund Freud and his theory of psychoanalysis. They do however, build on what has been established and change the trajectory of the field of counseling in an irreversible way. Rollo May, Viktor Frankl and others provided the field of counseling a novel approach. The experts who comprise the *field* of counseling have clearly deemed existential theory to be a valuable and a worthy addition to their field of study. It is for these reasons that existential counseling can be called *creative*.

Sources

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