

# The main aim and focus in psychodynamic psychotherapy



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The main focus of psychodynamic psychotherapy is to help individuals make sense of current problems and view how their past has/might/will/ have affected the current situation that would have brought them to counseling. Psychodynamic views the person as a whole thus mind, body, soul in order to recognize the relationships between these dimensions which make up the person. These internal relationships are dynamic, always changing as they form an individual.

Psychodynamic psychotherapy helps review experiences and feelings that can only be understood in relation to a client's past. This in turn helps reflect possibilities which might have led to the current problem or situations and hence counselor and client will explore the unconscious into the conscious mind. In psychodynamic psychotherapy there is the topographic viewpoint, which refers to the layering of mental processes into conscious, preconscious and unconscious. Freud's topographical model represents his configuration of the mind. According to Freud, there are three levels of consciousness, conscious this is the part of the mind that holds what one is aware of, people can visualize about their conscious experience and can think about it in a logical fashion. While the preconscious level is the ordinary memory meaning to say things stored here are in the conscious, they can be readily brought into conscious. Freud felt that this part of the mind was not directly accessible to awareness. In part, he saw it as a dumping place for feelings and ideas that are tied to depression anxiety, conflict and pain and if not dealt with will lead to cases of suicidal thoughts. These feelings and thoughts if not dealt with and according to Freud, they

are the exerting influence on our actions and our conscious awareness (Messer 1995).

Psychodynamic psychotherapy goes in depth of every detail presented in the therapy whether its past or present situation as the main aim is to view how the past might have affected the present. Psychoanalytic concepts explain human growth and development, and the nature of psychological problems. Psychodynamic counseling uses the therapeutic relationship to gain insight into unconscious relationship patterns that evolved since early stage of life, memories and other evidence of early relationships are used to make sense of current problems. The process of change occurs as clients become more aware of the effects of the unconscious, including defense mechanisms that influence negative behavior, and hence more able to control their actions and responses in the future.

Existential approach sees humans as being able to change and transform a negative lifestyle to a positive, living and meeting the conditions of worth meaning clients live a life that Rogers explained to be ' conditions of worth that are threatening to the self '( Barret-Lennard, 1998, p. 101) . Meaning to say the individual can no longer live as unified whole life as this is further explained to mean one might be deserting themselves from the way of a positive lifestyle they once lived. The existential approach is all about exploring meaning and value and learning to live authentically meaning living in accordance with one's priorities and values.

The existential approach hold that the human being struggle is with the givens of existence that is death, isolation, freedom and meaninglessness.

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People often ignore these existential givens, until life events increase the sensibilities (Corey, 2005, p. 174) According to Yalom, these four existential realities are the root of most psychological problems . While other existentialists may be more optimistic about the ability of people to find answers to these questions, it is generally agreed that these four issues are central to the human experience. That is why Existential counseling seek to empower the client through self actualisation working with the ' here, now and the future'not including the past (Blackham, 1975, p. 114). The approach is mainly person centered as it views the client as their own best authority on their own experience, and it views the client as being fully capable of fulfilling their own potential for growth. It recognizes, however, that achieving potential requires favourable conditions and that under adverse conditions, individuals may well not grow and develop in the ways that they otherwise could.

“ People commonly become aware of their desire for counselling when there is some internal or external disturbance in the homeostasis of their lives, the hormonal imbalances of adolescence often coincides with emotional storms which bring them to a counsellor” (Clarkson, 1999, p 41 ) People seek counseling for a variety of reasons that include but are not limited to the following sadness, anxiety, relationship problems , loss of work, persistent feelings of isolation and loneliness, or even aiming or needing motivation to be more successful in life, work or relationships. (Prochaska & Norcross, 2003) Wexler, 1974 viewed therapy as a ' process of expanding consciousness and bringing about more effective information that would

occur in the context of genuine empathic relationship characterized by positive regard.

Existential therapy seeks to help clients live with freedom and to remove the limitations that are self-imposed. By challenging clients about rigid beliefs and thought patterns, therapists work to provide an environment where individuals are safe to consider their belief systems and adopt new views. Therapists focus on current life situations the client is dealing with rather than resolving past issues. Through this focus on the here and now, individuals address their beliefs and look at enjoying life more fully and with more appreciation .

Sessions of psychodynamic psychotherapy have greater frequency to allow for more in-depth treatment. The duration of individual sessions varies, It is not usually possible at the start of treatment to estimate the number of sessions that will be necessary in order to achieve the person's goals. It is possible, however, for the person to make arrangements for a specific number of sessions.

Psychodynamic psychotherapy and existensial humanistic counseling operates the same way in the counseling room. They all begins with a period of evaluation during which the client discusses with the therapist the reasons for seeking treatment. This process gives the therapist the opportunity to learn about the person, to develop an understanding of his or her troubles, and to formulate ideas about how treatment should proceed. This phase of interviewing and learning may take place in one session or over a series of sessions; or it may be done in a less structured manner, depending on the

therapist's style. At some point within the first few sessions, the therapist and the individual will come to a mutual understanding of the goals for treatment. The two methods of counseling only defer with what has to be discussed in the treatment room meaning to say psychodynamic goes deeper into exploring a client's past of which existential only deals with current problems and focus on way forward.

By allowing the client to communicate, the counselor encourage self exploration on the clients' part and also allowing the client to hear themselves speak and becoming familiar with their own thoughts and feelings that the client may have not realized had the opportunity to see (Meier & Davis 2005). When the thoughts and feelings are taken back inside the projecting person from the other person, they may be better able to handle them as they also bring back something of the other person and the way they appeared (Meir & Davis 2005) bringing to attention that treatment will be focusing primarily on the insight of past present and future helping to make the unconscious conflict become conscious.

session, the therapist is trying to judge, how much you are in touch with your own feelings, what feelings you are not aware of, how close are you to knowing the unconscious feelings, how painful these feelings are to you, and how well you can tolerate the pain that becoming aware of these feelings will bring. In the book Systems of psychotherapy, Rogers emphasizes the importance of communication as a genuine sense of empathy so that clients will experience a deeper understanding and acceptance of what they will be going through (Prochaska & Norcross, 2003, p. 89). As according to

Prochaska " some experiences are distorted or denied, there is incongruence  
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between what is being experienced and what is symbolised as part of a person's self concept."

According to Prochaska, an individual have an experimental world, in order to understand a client's action a counsellor who use both existential humanistic and psychodynamic counselling therapy place himself in the internal framework of a client (Prochaska & Norcross, 2003, p. 141). Wexler, 1974 viewed therapy as a ' process of expanding consciousness and bringing about more effective information that would occur in the context of genuine empathic relationship characterized by positive regard'. A client whose counsellor might not want to use psychodynamic therapy (that is talk about past experiences in depth) may feel that the counsellor does not want to touch on certain issues of his/ her life .

The therapeutic relationship in contemporary psychodynamic counselling is based on acceptance, empathy and understanding, with an emphasis on developing a good working alliance that fosters trusts. The counselor takes account of the real world of the client, including the impact of trauma, cultural difference, sexual orientation, disability and social context. The insight and understanding about human functions gained from psychoanalytic theory, can enhance the life of the counselor as well as the client, and can be put to a variety of good uses. The most defining strength of psychodynamic theory is the appreciation of the unconscious, Freud attempted to provide a means of understanding the unconscious world as it tends to review and work closely with the present situations/ probles being explained by client (conscious) . At the same time some clients might not

feel comfortable to discuss their past or explore themselves and their feelings might work well with existential counselors .

existential humanistic counseling core condition of unconditional positive regard means the client is free to explore all thoughts and feelings, positive or negative, without danger of rejection or condemnation which leads to empathic understanding of client's thoughts, feelings, from the client's own perspective. Unlike in psychodynamic counseling where the counselor takes the journey to the client's past and try to match their current problems with their past. Existential therapy in a way makes the client grow in their own way unlike psychodynamic that tries to match personalities traits of client's generation to what they will be going through in the present time. However in psychodynamic therapy by getting deeper with client's past the counselor will know more information, behaviour, character and self defenses of a client. In doing so it helps strengthen their relationship as the client feels more comfortable to explore more issues in their past life and this will in turn might strengthen the relationship of them . Psychodynamic psychotherapy is a form of depth therapy because its aim is to reveal or try to make sense of the unconscious to become conscious.

The goals of psychodynamic psychotherapy vary therapy seeks to relieve a client through the development of insight, or the slowly developing awareness of feelings and thoughts that were once outside of the person's awareness through guidance from a therapist, the adult becomes aware of present ways of coping that are ineffective and how they served a purpose in childhood that is no longer relevant. The person learns that he or she now



has a range of new options for solving problems, and for living in general that are now based on his or her maturity and independence.