

# Comparing and contrasting person centred and existentialism therapy



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“ Man lives essentially in his own personal and subjective world, and even his most objective functions, in science, mathematics and the like, is the result of subjective purpose and subjective choice” Rogers,. (1959 191) as cited in Jones, N, R. (2006). It was this importance of subjective as well as the perceptual views of the client that created the expression person centred. The perception that the client see are their own version of their reality Jones, N, R. (2006).

By comparing and contrasting person centred and existentialism therapy both are holistic in their approach to treatment. However both approaches have many differences when it comes to their clients. Yalom agrees with Rogers that it is the therapeutic relationship that heals. Yalom does this by taking a more philosophical stance in helping his clients in dealing with their problems. Rogers however helps his client's by allowing the client to take the lead. Rogers uses three core conditions unconditional positive regard, congruence, and empathy which will be look at in greater detail later. This is where the person centred approach differs from existentialism Jones, N, R. (2006). It is this importance of subjective as well as the perceptual views of the client that created the expression person centred. This is the perception that what the client sees is version of their own reality Jones, N, R. (2006). Furthermore both these therapies have similarities as well as differences. Existentialism focuses on freedom of choice in the shaping of the clients life, and is responsible for the client self- awareness in how it shapes their personality. Existentialism thereby gives this freedom of choice to the client. The same can be said of the person centred approach it also gives the client more responsibility in their own treatment. As the therapist steers the client

towards self-awareness the client has more responsibility in their own treatment. By letting the client address certain denied feelings. In doing this the therapist is helping the client to a way of resolving these issues.

According to Roger's person centred approach the individual is regarded as an authority on their own experiences (Mulhauser, G. 2010). Roger's childhood involved many struggles, and uncertainties; one was how could someone entirely love him. These types of negative emotions he had were never shown for fear his parents would judge him. This resulted in him having issues with authoritative figures. He grew up with a perpetual battle expressing emotions and feelings such as anger, self-acceptance, he struggled developing interpersonal relationships drawn from his own experiences. These life experiences eventually led him to develop a successful way of helping individuals much like himself Mulhauser, G. (2010). Rogers personality theories are a true reflection of his childhood experiences which he later identified three fundamental core conditions he thought were compulsory for therapy to occur (Derry, J. 2009). First was unconditional positive regard which he viewed as the trust the therapist must put in the client's ability to achieve constructive change. Furthermore the therapist as well as the client could also have their own struggles and the therapist must be mindful at times of the client's ability to achieve constructive self-direction (Derry, J. 2009). This makes a principal feature of the therapeutic approach and the relationship which the client is valued, and respected as a worthy person (Jones, N, R. 2006).

Rogers believed empathic understanding was needed next for the therapists understanding and acceptances of the client's point of view. By <https://assignbuster.com/comparing-and-contrasting-person-centred-and-existentialism-therapy/>

understanding the clients' thoughts and their feelings the therapist showed the client's point view as important and acceptable thus reassuring the client (Mulhauser, G. 2010). To have a better understand their client's the therapist should be able sense the concealed world as it was their own but never losing sight that it is only the clients world they are in not their own Jone, N, R. (2006).

Rogers last core condition congruence is when a therapist is more congruent that the therapist will be more accepting of their client's Tolan, J. (2003). If the therapist remains authentic and genuine, and does not appear aloof but remaining transparent to the client, this is why the therapist must be in touch with their own feelings and to " live these feelings, be them in the relationship, and ... communicate them if appropriate (Rogers, 1962: 417) as cited in Jones, N, R. (2006) what Rogers is saying is that the therapist can communicate these feelings if he so wishes if appropriate at the time (Mulhauser, G. 2010). Although the therapist may be in danger of turning it from person centred to therapist centred session; nevertheless with the therapists sharing some of their feelings can be seen as strengthening the relationship between themselves and the client being expressed genuinely (Mulhauser, G. 2010). Rogers believed these core conditions the therapist uses are what helps client's experience therapeutic change. There have been many criticisms of person centred counselling due to its unrealistic view that individuals are essentially good. However this view that a person is good is a common misunderstanding of this theory Tolan, J. (2003). People are capable of harming themselves and others and this type of behaviour could be seen as a distortion and denial of self-experiencing. This distortion

is an attempt by the person to meet their own, real, needs. But not to be able to experience these needs truthfully, they cannot meet them in a straightforward way Tolan, J. (2003). This leads us back to what Tolan suggested earlier in that when a therapist is more congruent that the therapist will be more accepting of their client's Tolan, J. (2003).

Existential therapy on the other hand is about "facilitating the client's own encounter and, to work alongside them in the job of exploring and understanding their values, assumptions and ideals" Mulhauser, G. (2010). Therefore the therapist becomes more engaged with the client.

Existentialism sets out three modes of world that distinguish people's existence as being – In the world, Umwelt is a symbol of the natural world around us as well as the laws and nature. Along with the environment for both animals and humans the Umwelt incorporates the instinctual drives, biological needs, and daily life cycles. It is acknowledged as real. Mitwelt symbolises with the world; this means it can be related to as singly or in groups. May, (1958) thought "the essence of relationships is that in the encounter both persons are changed" (1958: 63) as cited in Jones, N, R. (2006). Simply put how much a person puts of themselves into a group shapes the outcome not only for the group but for the individual as well. The last mode of world is Eigenwelt or own world. This links to self-consciousness as well as self-awareness. The Eigenwelt necessitates and symbolizes the meaning of an object for example Jones, N, R. (2006) says "this flower is beautiful" means "for me "this flower is beautiful"(2006: 203). These three modes of being are linked together in according to Jones, N, R. (2006) he chose the example of the emotion love. Saying that love needs more than

the biological drive of Umwelt it also needs the interactions of the social part of the Mitwelt. Finely how love involves the relation to others in the Eigenwelt. As well as these modes of world the existential approach try's to understand what it means to be human and what conflicts people face. According to Jones, N, R. (2006) he believes that death is one of the first existential conflicts individuals face. Being aware of death and the predictability of death as well as some people may want to be dead, is a constant cause of anxiety whether it be neurotic, normal or existential. Even when you hear or read the term death terror this suggests a more forceful threat of death than the apprehension of death. Fear of death itself can be either conscious or unconscious caused from earlier experiences. When growing up children who are preoccupied with death can display in feelings of anxiety that may be repressed to form a defence to cope with this conceivable threat of terror (Jones, R. 2006). Another conflict that we face according to Jones, N, R. (2006) is the freedom of choice which sometimes leads to both anxiety and feelings of isolation from others. This freedom of choice can also increase our sense of control in assuming accountability where the individual becomes responsible for their own lives and their actions, Jones suggest that when individuals join groups they are trying to avoid feelings of anxiety and isolation. Given that isolation cause anxiety people have always felt a need for belonging and seeking approval of others. The same can be said of freedom in that people join groups but in doing so may in overtly take on the identity of that group and there by trade-off their independence to belong with others, he also suggest the mere thought of isolation in some people can remind a person of how vulnerable they are, and also there morality even though everyone has to die sometime.

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Additionally when we isolate ourselves it leads to, bad choices being made which may even cause fatality.

When comparing both these approaches it becomes evident that they both share similar meaning and understanding. They both recognize the therapeutic relationship and how it is responsible in a person's existence, (way of life) and looking at the individual's personal issue. However according to Derry, J. (2009) neither approach recommends what a person existence (way of life) should be or how it should be changed. Furthermore both these approaches argue against Freud's theory of the unconscious but on the other hand focus on Rogers idea of a conscious existence. The client needs to fully experience and comprehend their emotions to be able to accept them and move on. Derry, J. (2009) suggests both approaches do show preference to the person's subjective meaning of their life.

Existentialism gives acceptance to the biological givens of life as well as death. However in spite of this existentialism recognizes that the individual may have a different opinion and response to these givens which could vary in the meaning attributed to them by the individual.

In contrast the person centred approach focuses on the importance of the therapists ability to understand the meaning of the clients world from the clients' point of view. According to Derry, J. (2009) both of these approaches have similar views regarding the meaning as a way of the individual's subjective interpretation of their own life. These links to the world views give strength as well as the philosophy view found in existentialism; this is why the person centred approach attempts to understand the world surrounding the client subjective world. Person centred does this by limiting the <https://assignbuster.com/comparing-and-contrasting-person-centred-and-existentialism-therapy/>

perceptions to, reflecting feelings and understanding the client's words this allowed Rogers to enter thoroughly and fully empathetically into his frame of reference (Derry, J. 2009). Whereas existentialism according to Mulhauser, G. (2010) is about "facilitating the client's own encounter and, working alongside them in the job of exploring and understanding their values, assumptions and ideals". Therefore the therapist becomes more concerned with the client taking the client's view as being in the world as in the Umwelt, Mitwelt, and Eigenwelt. Rogers accepted others around him as individuals through this therapeutic understanding he thereby highlighted the importance of listening, understanding, and accepting another person's emotions. It is during this type of relationship that the client's self-development takes place. This allows the therapist to show congruence between their unique concept of self (Derry, J. 2009). Equally both these approaches are holistic in the way that the client is dealt with as an individual whereby according to Derry, J. (2009.) The therapist assists the client to resolve any personal conflict they may experience due to their own choices and actions in their lives.

On the other hand existentialism deals with the present as does the client centred approach which believes in the here and now. People have a more positive direction that they move towards when they are accepted and understood as individuals the therapist provides the person with a safe environment where the client can off load their thoughts and feelings leading to interpersonal change (Derry, J. 2009).

In conclusion it can be seen that when comparing and contrasting both these approaches they have both similarities and differences. Existentialism  
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focuses on freedom of choice in how a person's life is shaped. It shows us how the client is responsible for their life and for their self-awareness, and the uniqueness of each individual and how it shapes their own personality; starting in childhood. This type of approach focuses on the present in that the therapist shows the client that due to these choices they make they are responsible for their own consequences in life. Existentialism indicates that this freedom of choice can be the cause of anxiety and isolations to some clients. However the same can be said of the client centred approach in that it also gives the client more responsibility in their own treatment. The therapist can steer the client towards self-awareness by letting the client address certain denied feelings. In doing this the therapist guides the client to a way of resolving these issues. Both of these approaches don't dwell on past events in treating the client and just look at the here and now, Derry, J. (2009) suggests one way that person centred therapy and existential approaches becomes obvious is when you look at certain aspects of Rogers life and his personality as a child Rogers struggled with doubts that someone could love him leading him to develop a unconditional positive regard. These feelings of loneliness; then led him to becoming social isolated. With these life experiences that enabled Rogers to go beyond these issues, in establishing an understanding and effective way of helping clients much like himself. His personality theories are exact opposite of what he underwent as a child (Derry, J. 2009).

One of the main aspects in Rogers person centred approach remains the relationship in which the client is valued. The same can be said of the existential approach both recognize the client's existence as an individual

core issue (Derry, J. 2009). However neither of these approaches explain what they mean by what existence is, should be or how it can be changed when Rogers refers to a conscious existence he means that clients need to be able to experience as well as understand their feelings to permit them to accept them and so move on to other phases of existence.