

CURRENT PSYCHOTHERAPIES OF MINE

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for Tom Soldahl
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INTRODUCTION

Great! One sure thing about opinions and points of view is that they are changeable. I, this end of November 1974, find that my viewpoints regarding theory and practice of psychotherapy are in a state of flux. Exciting, stimulating, workable, not workable, sifting, almost like a gone-haywire compass needle, I assume what I call my own theories of today will tomorrow be something else. ~~My stages of~~

Interestingly I find my stages this fall of learning about "how to do" psychotherapy are much like those I experienced in personal therapy several years back. Much new growth and learning has been experiential--through my fieldwork at the San Mateo County jail; much has been intellectual--through reading and course work. It would seem that the Robert Ornstein research regarding the two hemispheres of the brain are here demonstrated: the creative, intuitive, spontaneous common-sensical right-hemisphere has been primed to join forces with the logical, linear, factual left-hemisphere; the new creature emerging in terms of my professional interests involves both parts of the brain, and at this moment could be said to be a sort of chrysalis theory of therapeutic healing. It is quite different from what I brought with me when I entered Hayward's academic program in Counseling. Whether the next stage will be backward-going larva or forward-moving insect who can tell. In any case, I do feel it will be live and vital.

VIEW OF MANKIND

When I entered Hayward I had experienced three years of Freudian therapy, a short stint of Satir-type family therapy, Tom Gordon's PET work for my own teenage kids, and later an instructorship to teach

others ~~Gordon Rogers~~'s techniques. Discovering how many parents (representing all people) are hung up in authoritarian roles, strangely, reconfirmed my belief in Man's basic goodness--as well as my belief that human difficulties, personal and interpersonal, come out of misunderstood and misdirected feelings arising from adhering to the opposite philosophy, namely that Man is basically bad, and the world a hostile place.

My current view of Mankind holds that biologically we arrive into the world down the birth canal with a sort of thump. Birth is the shock that launches our self as a BEING. What happens to each of us from the moment of birth on helps determine our direction of BE--COMING. With Maslow, Buber, Rollo May etc. I feel that the most important and meaningful way of being alive in the Human Situation, is experienced through human relationship. Meaningful human relationship is experienced in Buber's I-Thou sense, of each individual openly and freely supplying of his self in creating the "bridge-between". In Buber's concept relationship is seen as the act of creating a new force field, which is both as well as neither of the two individuals. Real relationship is a vital between, rather than a simple one plus one. Healthy human relationships are necessary to the healthy human psyche, and conversely unhealthy human relationships contribute to the disturbed and anxious and hostile human psyche. Or at least so I believe, based both on personal experience and reading others' theories which tend to confirm my own experience.

HOW DOES MAN CHANGE

From Erik Erikson's "Eight Stages of Human Development", and Sidney Jourard's notion of the natural ebb and flow between stages

the relationship entity

of dependency and independence I derive an optimistic confirmation of my own personal experience of a multitude of Identity Crises struggled with at various stages of living. For me Freud's pessimistic notion of the inexorable fixedness of whatever life script we take out of early childhood is not valid in terms of Maslow's concept of BECOMING. My BEING is probably much the same as it entered the world down the birth canal, but in terms of my "Here and Now Self", my identity and what I am doing within that context is neither the same as it was two or ten years ago. And having just turned the corner of my 51st year, I am no longer an 18-year-old adolescent floundering in the normal trauma of sexual and role crises!

If my experience is true for me, my intellect tells me it can be generalized back to all human beings. I believe all life can provide the arena for personal change. Sometimes in today's confusing complexities, psychotherapy is absolutely necessary for this to take place; but as Adler remarked sixty years ago, for some people life itself seems to supply psychotherapy.

ADJUSTMENT AND MALADJUSTMENT

Ernest Becker, ex-Berkeley philosopher and political scientist who died last summer of cancer, had spent much of his relatively short life pondering the problem of Evil. The structure of Evil in the world, Becker saw as having to do with the Human Being's drive to transcend his animalness. Becker saw man as an animal with an oversized brain which inevitably got him into trouble. Making use of his uniquely human gray matter, man exploits his ability to reason and thus gains dominion over all other creatures of the world. Not being satisfied with that he takes on the universe itself. Today's

innumerable ecological and human crises stem out of this misuse of distinctly and uniquely human biological components.

Working with Becker's ideas, I see human adjustment and maladjustment as having to do with the human animal's confusion about what it means to be human rather than to be animal. Religions seem to have been preoccupied with this problem, and to have aimed at seeking ways for the two sides of our nature to become either harmoniously blended into a whole, or dualistically divided into two incompatible splits. Eastern religion tends to see the need for man to seek harmony with himself and with Nature by accepting himself as a mere part of nature, and as fitting into the larger scheme of the whole universe. Western religion sees man as smarter than, and therefore above Nature. As Genesis says God gave His Sixth Day's Creation dominion over the animals of the fields and the birds of the air; He also bid this unique creature, made in His own image, not to eat of the Tree of Knowledge, and when the temptation was too great and the human brain defied God's orders, the innocence of the Garden of Eden was lost forever. Western religion sees the race homo sapiens as hopelessly wandering and adrift unless he finds salvation through participating in one or another religious transformation in which the Self is brought closer to God and farther from Nature.

In terms of my own notions of human adjustment and maladjustment I would say that neither the Eastern blending nor the Western dichotomy provides human psychic health. As in so many other phases of human understanding, in the 20th century confused world, what is needed is an acceptance of the two and a new synthesis composed of parts from each. For me, being alive as a human being rather than as one of our fellow animal types, is a potential gift, whether in the Eastern

Stimulating
Concept

or the Western world. Having spent my first 13 years of life in China, I experienced first-hand that the Oriental philosophy of "may yo fa tse" (there is no way out--nature has willed things in this particular manner), does not automatically produce healthy human beings. There are as many pitifully subhuman, insane wrecks wandering Oriental countryside as anywhere else. What the philosophy does produce are accepting human beings, and quite possibly in that context human beings that are more able to experience meaningfulness "inspite of" inexorable Nature. In Eastern philosophy the individual is neither free to bring about willful change in things, nor is he responsible for what happens around him. The uniqueness of the individual is unimportant in the face of the whole universal order of things. The individual life, then, is of no real value and whether he suffers or not makes no real difference. To me, it is this attitude of man's inevitable helplessness which makes Eastern religions untenable.

Western philosophy which stresses that power for change is provided by our being human, and that by refusing to accept "what is", life can be made better, somewhat obviously has done no better than its Eastern counterpart at producing a healthy psyche. Stressing the importance of individual uniqueness, individual value and individual potential power, over communal and social needs, we in the West seem to have succeeded in not only creating an unhealthy unstable human being but also a similar social fabric.

It seems the Oriental basic/philosophical acceptance of "what is", has in Western Humanistic psychology emerged as an emphasis on the necessity to accept "what is" in the Self. This acceptance or non-acceptance is the crucial element to either adjustment or maladjustment. When

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(Fate)
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Australia!
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right, mate!

or unconsciously
a person consciously/rejects what he actually is through biologic inheritance and emotional needs, he inevitably contributes to his own unhealthiness, and eventually will have to face the consequences of his denial. In a way the Oriental philosophy of "may yo fa tze" is played out on the field of individual development, whether we adopt the philosophy or not. Yet with a difference: in Western Humanistic psychology, there is hope offered to those who wish to change their lot of personal confusion and torment.

ROLE OF THE COUNSELOR

Perhaps what has changed for me most in this fall's experiential and academic learning is my concept of the role of the counselor in helping produce psychotherapeutic change. In my fieldwork with inmates at the county jail, I have by simply "being there with" a client, experienced changes in my philosophy of counseling. I find that seated in a small, bare, closed-in, interviewing room, facing another human being who for whatever reason is no longer free to roam outside the clanging-barred gates, my "beliefs" about the rightness of a non-directed Rogerian approach, is not enough.

After an initial interview, mostly of active listening, I found myself drawing on instinctive common-sense and becoming directive. It became clear that since there was far too much to be dealt with in what might prove to be a very short period of working together, we must choose one simple area to concentrate on. The client seemed relieved and grateful for anything that would seem to simplify his overwhelming state of confused anxiety. Mutually we selected what the area would be for him to direct his thoughts and energies during the week, and having a goal that was small enough to be able to show some positive results, seemed to be supportive and useful to him.

How about that

Through class presentations later, I found that I had adopted various directive rational therapy techniques of both Glasser and Ellis without even knowing before what they were! What I had known before was that I disapproved of directive therapy since it seemingly would take away from the client some of his own autonomy. My earlier natural leanings towards the religious existential and Rogerian self-concept theories had to be modified when I found myself actually face-to-face with live situations in which instead of participating merely theoretically, I had become an active part of the therapeutic relationship. As counselor, I had chosen to try out what seemed to work rather than to be hopelessly (or is it helplessly?) tied to a beautiful-sounding theory about what SHOULD be done in ALL situations. I find that I have once again replaced a "should" with a more creative approach to what is happening in the "Here and Now". By being flexible, X I have also found that a relationship of trust is early established.

However, I haven't given up the non-directive approach. I think I have merely become a more open-minded Rogerian, ready to try out methods that work from whatever field--even if they seemingly are diametrically opposed to my beloved Rogers and Buber!

ROLE OF THE CLIENT

As I find my concepts of counselor's role changing, so too have my concepts of the counselor's counterpart, the client, changed. But not so drastically. I still feel the client basically has the key to his own healing. However, my fieldwork experience has led me to feel that sometimes a client, too heavily weighed down and confused or for some reason pressed for time, is unable to deal with any part of his problem effectively without some clear directive intervention.

* Not by everyone. Your client centered (Caring) approach may be the reason.

As the counselor has had to become more active, the counselee has had to become more passive, at least for a while. The counselee's own background and experience may have provided him no real handle for his ever being able to grasp his key to psychic health, without real help. He has to become for a while more dependent upon clearly presented directive counseling provided by the therapist. Or so I have found to be the case in my present real-life experience.

Good point!
However, I still feel uncertain about all this as yet. My new ideas are quite obviously influenced heavily by what I am experiencing in a fairly isolated setting. I really have no idea how much of what might be applicable to counseling people who have once-too-often "outwitted the law" and been caught in the act, is also applicable to their counterparts running loose out in society.

GOAL OF COUNSELING

The problem of what should be the goal of counseling has come home to me especially often in the setting of counseling people in jail. A decade ago, at the conclusion of my own personal therapy, I remember feeling that my final goal and my Freudian therapist's goal might not have been congruent. ~~At that time~~ a long expanse of time and mutual persistence and patience eventually helped me to become strong enough to make some decisions of my own. I chose a divorce in order to become free to develop a new lifestyle and make further conscious choices leading to further health and responsible independence.

Now working with people who request to see a "marriage and family counselor" provided to them by the Service League of San Mateo County, the therapeutic goal, it has seemed to me, is determined more or less by each special case. The goal for the 24-year-old drug addict who wanted to marry his girlfriend whom he had met as a pen-pal

proved to be, after seeing both parties, to help both of them see more clearly what this need to marry the other actually meant and would practically involve both while he was in jail and when he got out. The goal for the couple who are both currently in jail for 19 counts of robbery, both trying to get off heroine, both apparently finding in their relationship together something new and previously unknown to either's experience...their goal is different...I don't know what it is or what it should be...I only know that what seems to be happening is that both of them seem open to sharing feelings and confidences about their own inner shakiness and needs. I am amazed how much trust each seems to be able to extend out of backgrounds which, among other things, must have supplied a huge lack of people who proved to be trust-worthy.

What does all this mean in terms of goals for counseling? I must admit I really don't know. However, I can see a connection with my own past therapy. My fairly orthodox Freudian analyst, would most likely have hoped to "cure" my neuroses enough so that I could accept my difficult wifely role and continue in what in many ways was a useful marriage. Originally my goal ~~was~~ essentially the same, in that I too wanted to learn, repair damage, and work things out by maintaining the status-quo. That the eventual goal was, not what either of us had ~~for~~seen in the beginning, I consider to have been the result of successful therapy. My choosing divorce was a healthy choice, and the actual goal of therapy had involved my becoming strong enough to choose to be healthy, regardless of what my Freudian therapist's goal might have been. Herein lies the clue about my present concept of goals for therapy: the goal has to do with both counselor and counselee, and cannot be precisely defined except in terms of the

counselee's being helped towards a healthier attitude about himself, his relationships, his values and his lifestyle; only then can he become more responsible for himself, able to respond to others, and capable of making conscious rather than unconscious choices about his behavior.

CONCLUSIONS

My view of man is as an essentially ~~health~~-directed physical, mental and emotional creature. This view leads me toward a concept of seeing disturbed and disoriented states of unhealth as representing blockages interfering with normal processes of human change and growth. Dealing with anxiety, hostility and depression through psychotherapy involves the therapist's helping the client sort out personal behavior patterns, attitudes towards himself and towards his relationships with others, his values, and his specific goals. These parts of himself although acquired in the past, have combined to produce to/ unfulfilling, disorienting and often entrapping conditions in the present. Although I feel that basically only the client himself can know how best to "solve" his problems, it is the therapist's role to use all the techniques and skills he knows, and perhaps at times some he doesn't yet "know", to help the client unburden himself to the point of being able to discover the right key to his own health. The psychotherapist's role, like the medical doctor's who deals with the physical body of the patient, is to help the client become strong enough to deal with his problems in a healthy way. Although basically my approach is Rogerian, with the counselor being real as well as accepting, if appropriate it seems right to me that the counselor should also feel free to use any technique that "works", for each client's person and situation is unique and responds uniquely to treatment.

R

Dear Elizabeth:

Yours is the best
paper I've read. Your
proposal to blend the
is an exciting concept. I'm going to
entertain for some time. I'm going to
relate your demonstration
to be. You are an authority.
You are on a great deal going for you.
I thank much for being you
and our class.

Don