THE ROLE OF EXISTENTIAL ANXIETY IN COMMON PATHOLOGICAL FUNCTIONING: A REVIEW OF EXISTENTIAL PSYCHOTHERAPY

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A Life Examined
Existential Therapy: Key Concepts

- Psychodynamics
  - Existential Concerns
    - Death
    - Freedom
    - Isolation
    - Meaninglessness
  - Boundary Situations
  - Awareness
  - Anxiety
  - Adaptive Defense
  - Maladaptive Defense
Death

• Core Conflict
  – Awareness of inevitability of death
  – Desire to continue living

• Literal and Figurative

• Defenses
  – Specialness
    • Compulsive Heroism
    • Workaholic
    • Narcissism
  – Ultimate Rescuer
Therapeutic Concepts: Death

- Freudian Roots
  - Creative (Erotic)
  - Self-Destructive (Thanatos)
  - Homeostasis
- Lacan
  - Symbolic and Real
  - Jouissance
- Becker
  - Mortality Salience
  - Society
- Erikson
  - Ego Integrity vs. Despair

- Connection to Other Concepts
  - Freedom
  - Isolation
  - Meaning
Freedom

• Core Conflict
  – Awareness of the chaos of existence
  – Desire for structure

• Locus of Control

• Role of Responsibility

• Defenses
  – Displacement
  – Denial
  – Avoidance
  – Impulsivity
  – Compulsivity
Therapeutic Concepts: Freedom

• Free-Will vs. Determinism
  – Structuralism

• Here-and-Now Concerns
  – Therapist as provider of choice

• Leverage-Producing Insights
  – Only I can change the world I have created
  – There is not danger in change
  – To get what I want, I must change
  – I have the power to change

• Willingness and Will
  – Trading down
  – Delegation
Isolation

• Core Conflict
  – Awareness of existential isolation
  – Desire to be part of a larger whole

• Categories
  – Intrapersonal
  – Interpersonal
  – Existential

• Defenses
  – Existing in the eyes of others
  – Fusion
    • Dependent
    • Sadistic
Therapeutic Concepts: Isolation

- I-Thou vs. I-It
- “Need Free” relationships
- Psychopathology
  - “I don’t exist when I’m alone.”
  - “I am not alone, I am a part of others.”
- Observation
  - Hedonism
  - Idolatry
  - Fragmentation
- Therapeutic Tasks
  - “Exploring modes of resting in our loneliness”
- Therapeutic Relationship
Meaning

• Core Conflict
  – Awareness of meaninglessness in the universe
  – Desire for purpose and direction

• Cosmic vs. Secular

• The Absurd
  – Expectation vs. Reality

• Defenses
  – Nihilism
  – Crusadism
  – Vegetativeness
  – Compulsive Activity
Therapeutic Concepts: Meaning

- Cosmic Meaning
  - Religion
  - Divine Justice
  - Divinely Ordained
  - Emulation

- Secular Personal Meaning
  - Altruism
  - Dedication to a Cause
  - Creativity
  - Hedonism
  - Self-Actualization
  - Self vs. Self-Transcendence

- Camus and the Absurd
Existential Therapy: Review

- Psychodynamics
- Existential Concerns
  - Death
  - Freedom
  - Isolation
  - Meaninglessness
- Boundary Situations

Awareness → Anxiety

Adaptive Defense
Maladaptive Defense