

Book Reviews

Existential Psychotherapy

By : Irvin D. Yalom

Basic Books, Inc., Publishers, New York, 1980

Existential therapy has been practiced and continues to be practiced in many forms and situations throughout the world. Drawing from clinical experience, empirical research and literature, Professor Yalom, the author of *The Theory and Practice of Group Psychotherapy*, has written a comprehensive book on the subject.

The book is organized around what Dr. Yalom calls the "ultimate concerns of life": death, freedom, existential isolation and meaninglessness. Existential therapy is a dynamic approach that focuses on these concerns which are rooted in human existence. The meaning of each existential concern and the type of conflict that springs from our confrontation with each are tackled. He shows how these concerns are manifested in personality and psychopathology, and how therapy can be helped by our understanding of them.

In Part I (4 chapters), the author explores the role played by the concept of death in psychopathology and psychotherapy. The basic postulates described in this part can be summarised as follows: The fear of death plays a major role in our internal experience and it rumbles continuously under the surface; the child is pervasively preoccupied with death, and his or her major developmental task is to deal with terrifying fears of obliteration; to cope with these fears, we erect defences against death awareness and that, if maladaptive, result in clinical syndromes; a robust and effective approach to psychotherapy may be constructed on the foundation of death awareness.

Part II (2 chapters) deals with the concept of freedom which plays

an indispensable role in both theory and practice of all traditional and innovative therapies. The author examines the aspects of freedom that have important, everyday relevance to the clinician; specifically the individual's freedom to create his or her own life and the individual's freedom to desire, to choose, to act and - more important for the purposes of psychotherapy-to change.

Part III (2 chapters) discusses the third concern of existential isolation. Individuals are often isolated from others (interpersonal isolation) and from parts of themselves (intrapersonal isolation) but underlying these splits is an even more basic isolation that belongs to existence (existential isolation) - "an isolation that persists despite the most gratifying engagement with other individuals and despite consummate self-knowledge and integration". The types of isolation are similar subjectively, and their boundaries are semipermeable. Frequently therapists mistake them and treat a patient for the wrong type of isolation. The relations of existential isolation to the issues of relationship and interpersonal psychopathology are discussed.

Lastly, in Part IV - 2 chapters, Dr. Yalom attempts to raise the therapist's consciousness to the important issue of life meaning, and to survey the major approaches taken by other authorities. Clinical impressions cited in the book suggest that the problem of meaning in life is a significant one that the therapist must confront in everyday clinical practice.

The existential approach, as wrightly described by Yalom, is "strange yet familiar": strange because it "cuts across traditional categories and clusters clinical observations differently"; but familiar because "in his or her bones the experienced clinician apprehends the importance and the omnipresence" of the four ultimate concerns. However, "it is not capable of explaining all behaviour"; "useful for some patients, not for all patients; employable by some therapists, not by all therapists". As is the case with all psychological constructs, it

will eventually be followed by another construct with greater explanatory power.

Dr. Yalom's book renders a great service to the existential orientation in psychiatry. It should be read by every psychotherapist, and every psychiatrist and psychologist will find help in it.

Refaat Mahfouz

The New Sex Therapy

By : Helen S. Kaplan

Baillière Tindall, London, 1974.

Dr. Kaplan, the author, is a Clinical Associate Professor of Psychiatry. She is the Head of the Sex Therapy and Education Program at the Payne Whitney Clinic of New York Hospital, where she has developed and directs the clinic for brief treatment of sexual disorders. She also conducts a private practice in psychoanalysis and sex therapy. Her experience as a psychoanalyst beside her work in sex therapy directed her to combining the understanding of intrapsychic and interpersonal factors together with sex therapy techniques. Her approach treats the couple on an out-patient basis and is applicable to office practice; it focusses on relief of the sexual problem using its multicausal orientation, combining psychoanalytic and learning theories through the integration, of sexual tasks conducted by the couple at home with psychotherapeutic sessions in the doctor's office.

In an interesting preface, the author discusses her experience in Cornell program where the time limitations had been useful in elaboration of both short and efficient techniques for the management of sexual dysfunctions.

She presents, under the heading of 'Basic Concepts', the biological data on which the rational treatment of sexual disorders is founded. She explains the anatomical and physiological differences between the male and female; and how the female sexual response is more variable because it is more susceptible to psychological and cultural deter-

inants. She also explains in this area the effect of the brain and hormones on sexual functioning.

In the next area (the book is composed of six areas), she explains the etiology of sexual dysfunctioning, i.e., their biological and psychological determinants. The roles of illness, drugs and age in the production of sexual dysfunctioning are discussed. The author hypothesises that sexual dysfunctions can be conceived of as psychosomatic disorders, but she does not neglect the role of intrapsychic, interpersonal, cultural and learned factors.

Then the author shifts to the most important area in this book, the treatment. Here she describes the basic strategies and tactics of sex therapy. She first gives the rationale underlying the technique used in the treatment of each dysfunction and then describes the consequent tasks which could lead to the alleviation of this or that disorder. For example, in Vaginismus, she considers the essential maneuver to be gradual dilatation and desensitisation of the conditioned spasticity of the vaginal inlet. Concomitantly, she takes in consideration the resolution of the sexual phobias which accompany that condition. In every disorder, she gives illustrative case-histories.

In the next area, she attempts at estimating the outcome of sex-therapy in each of the sexual dysfunctions. She stresses the effects of the rapid improvement of sexual functioning on the psychological status of the symptomatic patient, on the spouse and on the quality of the relationship. But the rapid effect of the new treatment is not without hazards, it may elicit serious adverse psychiatric reactions in the symptomatic patient or his partner. The author discusses the clinical and theoretical implications of such a rare complication of sex-therapy. She also discusses the impact of psychiatric disorders on sexual dysfunctions.

Generally, it is a comprehensive book which places treatment of sexual dysfunctions on a solid, scientific basis. It is indispensable for

the psychiatrist and those working in the field of venereal diseases. The general practitioner will also benefit from its massive information in the field of treatment of sexual dysfunctioning.

Hanaa Soliman

TA

The Total Handbook of Transactional Analysis

By : S. Woollams and M. Brown

Prentice-Hall, Inc., Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey, 1979

Two authorities in the field of therapeutic psychology describe how TA can help you better understand and improve interactions with yourself and others.

Illustrated with diagrams and filled with examples and anecdotes from the authors' clinical experience, this book shows you how to use the tools of transactional analysis for effective communication and personal growth. Explaining such TA terms as ego states, strokes, transactions, games, and life scripts, the authors cover everything from the diagnosis and treatment of specific problems to a definition of the client-therapist relationship.

The overall philosophy of TA begins with an assumption that we are all OK. This means that each of us, regardless of our behavioral style, has a basic core which is lovable and has the potential and desire for growth and self-actualisation. All our parts have a positive intention and are therefore important and useful to us. Since we believe that these parts exist and we find them. Once we have established contact with these parts, we pay attention to them (stroke them), nurture them, and invite them to flourish.

To foster cooperation and mutuality in relationships, TA emphasizes the use of 'contracts' which delineate and protect each person's rights and responsibilities.

Since all people are basically OK, each of us deserves 'positive strokes' just because we exist. It is beautiful to see a person come alive and glow with the positive strokes from acceptance, love and caring. They recharge our battery and provide us with new energy. Even though everyone needs these strokes, most of us do not learn efficient methods for obtaining them. Instead, we tend to stroke only those parts of ourselves or others which we believe to be worthwhile, choosing to ignore or to put down those parts which we dislike. Whether in or outside our awareness, these rejected and unresolved parts demand our attention, depriving us of useful energy. If these rejected parts of the personality are accepted and appropriately stroked, they are more willing to change and cooperate with the accepted ones. Positive stroking invites more OKness and solves more problems than any other type of therapeutic intervention.

Transactional Analysis theory is based on a 'decisional model'. Each of us learns specific behaviors and decides upon a life plan as we are growing up. Although our childhood decisions are strongly influenced by parents and others, we ourselves make these decisions in our own unique style. Since we decide our life plan, we also have the power to change it by making new decisions at any time. No one can make us change. However, we do influence each other, sometimes profoundly. And since we are both OK, we want those influences to be positive, thus increasing the likelihood that each of us will make growth enhancing decisions. That is what TA is all about.

Written for therapists, counsellors, and those interested in TA therapy, besides providing a general theory of personality and psychotherapy, TA can also be used as a framework to integrate other methods and techniques. Thus, TA practitioners tend to be eclectic, drawing widely from other sources for information about personality development, psychodynamics, and treatment techniques. Conversely, therapists, social scientists, and business consultants who are trained in other theories and styles comfortably add TA to their frameworks.

Rafik G. Hatem