

Psy444: Psychotherapy

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Unit 5 Essay Questions for Chapters 8&9

Chapter Eight

1. The Gestalt therapy is action-oriented, focusing not on the past or even the future, but on the here-and-now experiences. Clients are expected to analyze their present experience and challenge themselves to take ownership of how they are feeling, acting, thinking in that moment and then to go about identifying how they can drive change and growth. This personalized, client-driven method is highly dynamic and empowering and is similar to the notion of Christian free will. Christians are given the option to be present and active in their lives, to go about the betterment of themselves and the world around them. In fact, there's a great sense of self-awareness, freedom and responsibility that comes with free will. However, the object and goal of free will isn't to better oneself for the sake of improving oneself; it is always with the goal of honoring God and creating a better world. The self is always a means to an end – end being to glorify God in all that we do. Also, one crucial contrast is that the present is never the focus for the Christian faith. All joy and sorrow associated with the present is temporary and that our goal is to look forward to and work toward the future reality of eternity, while actively working to better oneself and one's world.

3. The Gestalt therapy relies heavily on self-awareness: what is happening in and around the client? How does this shape the way the client sees him/herself and the world? In this way, it is highly existential and adaptive. The goal of this therapeutic method is to get the client to rely less on what happened in the past, but what is happening in the present. It also entails relying less on external variables like the therapist or environment, but on one's ability to make informed choices and personally and intentionally drive one's growth. The goal of the therapist is to create

an environment where client can simply “be.” This means that the therapist takes a passive role in allowing self-awareness to grow and does not push the client to be anything other than be present in the here-and-now.

7. The simplistic, yet profound characteristic of the Gestalt theory is that it encourages clients to focus on the present. It believes that focusing on the past or even the future can deter or distract the client from focusing on the here and now. A client may even avoid the present by focusing on the past or future. Becoming aware of what clients are experiencing in the present allows them to make informed choices that lead to growth and change. For instance, in Gestalt therapy, a client isn't asked to focus on the “why” of any given situation, feeling or action, but rather, is asked to focus on the “what” and “how.” The client is asked to focus his/her energy on what is happening in the current moment. In other words, rather than describe what a client is feeling, he/she is asked to experience it. Even as it relates to past experiences that bleed into the present, the client is asked to relive it in the here and now.

9. According to the Gestalt theory, if there are issues or incidents from the past that are unresolved, they can manifest themselves in the present causing expressions of negative and harmful feelings such as rage, pain, anxiety, grief, trauma, etc. They often prevent clients from being optimally present, and they also distort the client's present sense of self, especially as they relate to others and their environment. When they reach an impasse, they become stuck or unable to self-actualize or relate to others and their environment in healthy, constructive ways. The therapist at this point encourages their clients to actually lean into this impasse rather than avoid it. In this way, clients are able to face their impasse or the potential reasons for this impasse and discover their ability to accept it or break free from it. Either way, the client is in control of this process, not the therapist.

Chapter Nine

21. The behavioral therapy is in some ways very aligned with the notion of personal agency and responsibility – that God has endowed with free will that gives us the choice to live our lives the way we want. This entails both a great sense of freedom and responsibility. Where it differs is the notion of sovereignty. While Christians can choose to live their lives how they choose, God is always sovereign. This means that God is in ultimate control of everything in the world and in our lives. While we have agency, we don't have ultimate control. This frees us to take risks with our lives without the ultimate burden of irrevocable damage. In other words, our mistakes are never beyond repair as God is ultimately in control, which, then frees us from being shackled by fear of failure because God will ultimately use even our mistakes for good. This also means that the burden of having to achieve our goals isn't solely ours. In behavioral therapy, the weight of how much we change our behavior rests solely on us, and the works-based, action-oriented nature of this therapeutic system may create an outward, behavioral change without a heart change. In other words, Christians believe that your actions are an overflow of the change that is (or isn't) taking place in one's heart – the place of motivation and desire. In this way, works for work's sake is actually considered a dangerous and ultimately futile exercise unless the inner change is happening simultaneously.

26. The behavior therapist's role when working with clients is to help them set and achieve clearly outlined goals and objectives. Heavy emphasis is placed on client's personal choice and responsibility. Rather than be directed by the therapist, the client defines and sets the goals that he/she wants to achieve. This, unlike the experiential therapeutic methods focuses less on the dynamic of the therapist/client relationship, but rather on the goals that clients sets and achieves. In this way, ongoing and formative assessments are crucial to help gauge how well the client is

tracking with targeted goals. While goals can evolve and change, the success of therapeutic relationship is measured by the formulation and successful achievement of agreed-upon goals. In this way, focus is more on the end, rather than the means to that end.

For client cases like Stan and Ruth, it is paramount they both recognize what their challenges are and play an active role in creating a specific action plan to see growth in these areas. The therapist's role would be help identify coping skills, provide role-playing opportunities to help desensitize anxiety-inducing situations (e.g. Stan and Jerry's interaction).

I am a huge proponent of setting goals as it helps direct and guide you, outlines benchmarks to be met during the process, as well as create manageable expectations between therapist and the client. I think it's also highly empowering for the client to identify the problem, find tools and resources to work toward growth, and to be able gauge success both during, and at the end of process. Though on the surface, it may seem rigid and conformist, because behavioral therapy isn't set to a specific set of methods or practices, it's quite flexible in how one chooses to implement therapeutic method, so long as client creates and takes ownership over one's goals.

27. One of the main criticisms of the behavioral therapy is the almost antiseptic, transactional nature of the client/therapist relationship. While there is danger in potentially losing the collaborative component when one becomes too results-driven, if the therapist understands that the underlying rapport between client and therapist doesn't actually helps to achieve holistic results, than therapist should make that a priority even if it's not the highest priority. In any thriving relationship, whether personal or professional, there must be mutual respect, trust, and friendship between a client and therapist so that client feels encouraged and empowered to succeed. In fact, prominent behavioral therapists like Lazarus and Linehan promoted access to

the breadth of therapeutic styles and accentuated flexibility in all client/therapist relationships. They believed that foundational to a healthy, productive client/therapist relationship was collaboration, trust, honesty and accountability.

30. I believe that in some instances the only way to decrease an unwanted behavior is to exact punishment, which simply imposes negative consequences to reduce that behavior. I believe that some behaviors cannot be corrected using positive reinforcement. For instance, telling a child that he/she will get a candy bar if he/she stops hitting his sister will likely not produce the desired results, at least not permanently. Similarly, the only way for the child to not touch a hot stove is to get a stern scolding that is immediately associated as a consequence of this behavior. No amount of positive affirmation can garner the quickest, most effective result as positive and negative punishment. However, the issue that can arise from using punishment as a model to exert change is that power dynamics must always come into play when one uses punishment as a tool to promote change. For instance, human beings can be emotionally biased and irrational when it comes to punishment. In other words, punishment can be used to express frustration and anger or, even worse, to exact revenge.

The downside to using punishment as a way to promote change is that preventing someone to change his/her behavior doesn't actually get to the root or the heart of the matter. Without a motivational heart change, the behavior can be controlled or willed temporarily, but lasting change rarely occurs. In this respect, the client must do the hard work of identifying and understanding the motivations of the "why" before addressing the practical changes to the "what." Once that's done and the client no longer desires unwanted behavior is when true and lasting change can occur.