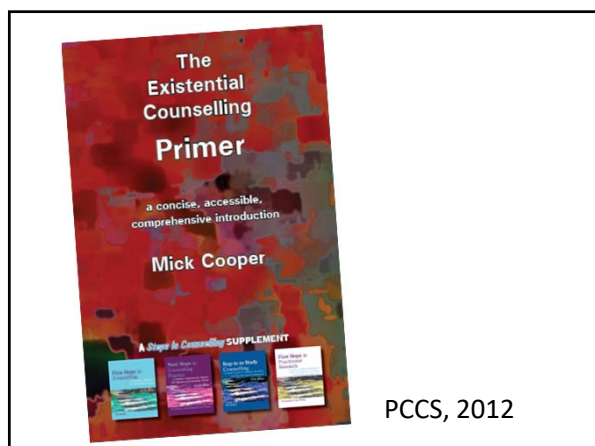
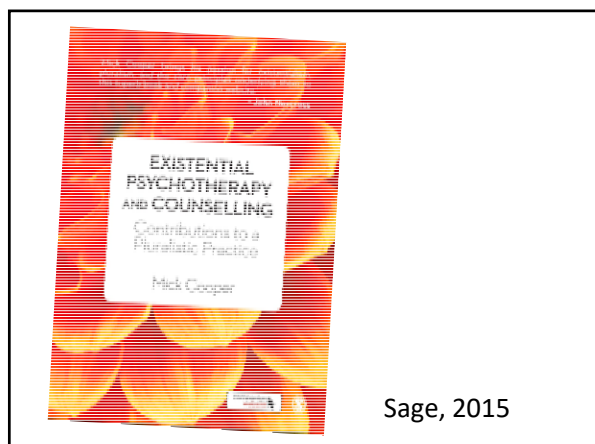


Sage, 2003, 2017



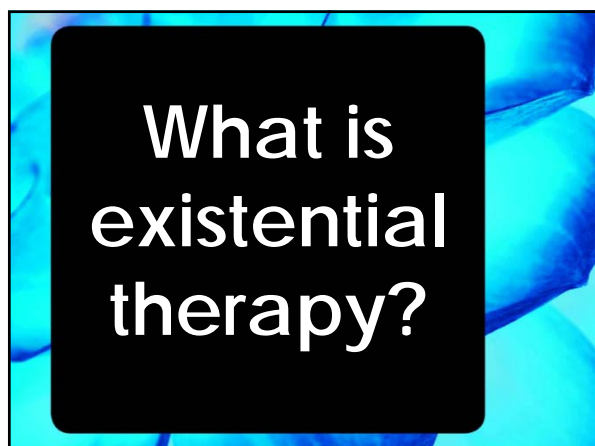
PCCS, 2012



A Pluralistic Framework for Existential Therapy



- There is no one 'best' therapy
- Different clients benefit from different therapeutic understandings and methods at different points in time
- If we want to know what is most helpful for clients, let's talk to them about it



The Diversity of Existential Therapies

'Existential therapy means something to everyone yet what it means precisely varies with the exponent'

- John Norcross

Definition

Forms of therapeutic practice that are based, primarily or wholly, on the assumptions associated with the existential school of philosophising

Martin
Heidegger
1889-1976

1

What is being?

Jean-Paul
Sartre
1905-1980

2

Being as freedom

Søren
Kierkegaard
1813-1855

3

Subjectivity and self

Martin
Buber
1878-1965

4

*Relationality
The I-Thou stance*

The Essence of Existential Philosophy

- Critiques systems of thought that **de-humanise**: that reduce the richness of human lived-existences to impersonal laws, systems, numbers
- A return to the person 'of flesh and bone' (de Unamuno, 1954) – the concrete realities of existence

The Essence of Existential Therapy

Helping clients acknowledge, live 'in tune with,' and make the most of the actuality of their existences

The Branches of Existential Therapy

Existential-phenomenological therapy (relational)

Daseinsanalysis

The existential-humanistic approach

Meaning centred therapies

Existential-phenomenological therapy (philosophical)

Relational and Phenomenological Foundations

Husserl

Buber

Core Practices of Relational-Phenomenological Therapy

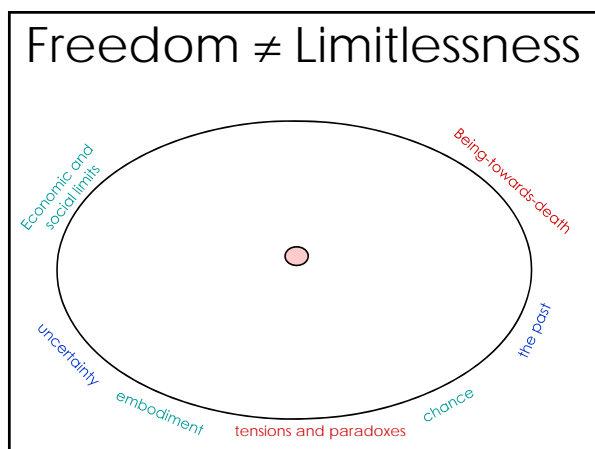
- Active listening
- Empathising
- Bracketing
- Descriptive rather than interpretative
- Non-judgmental
- Asking open-ended questions
- Exploring the here-and-now encounter
- Using symbols and metaphors
- Engaging in dialogue
- Helping clients to **unpack** their experiencing

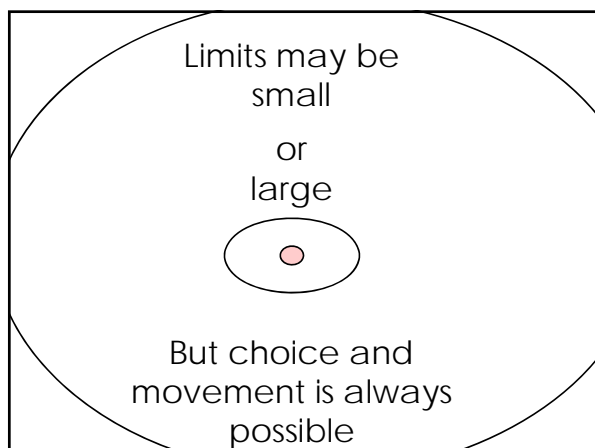
Freedom
and
Choice

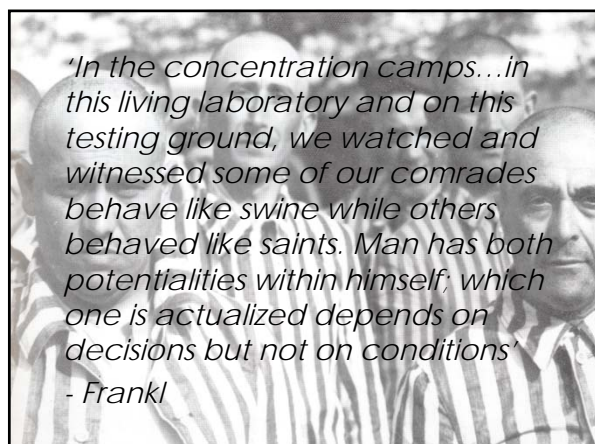
Being as Free

'Man does not exist *first* in order to be free *subsequently*; there is no difference between the being of a man and his *being-free*' - Sartre

Understandings







We Are Our Choices

'Man is nothing else but what he makes of himself'
- Sartre

Understandings

Freedom = Anxiety

1. Alternatives exclude
2. Our choices affect others = responsibility
3. The overwhelming possibility of freedom

Understandings

The Denial of Freedom

- Being a 'victim' /delegating choice to others
- Cynicism
- Fatalism
- Conformity
- Procrastination
- Rebellion
- Trying to do it all

Losing our Humanity

- Temporary relief but....
- 1. Reduces self-worth
- 2. Defences falter: Existential anxiety become neurotic
- 3. Not living the life that we want

Understandings

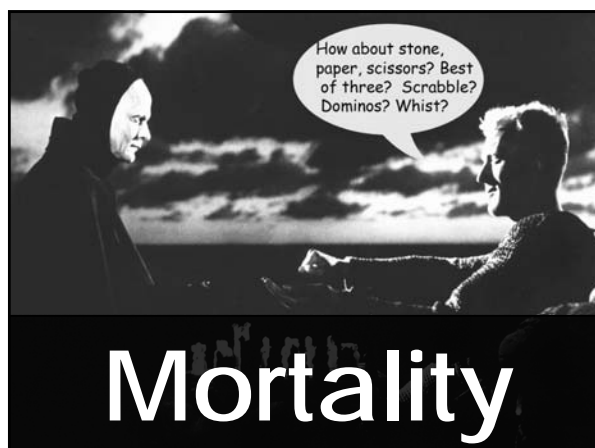
Helping Clients Acknowledge Freedom

- Can range from 'tougher', more direct challenging to gentler, more empathic exploration

Methods







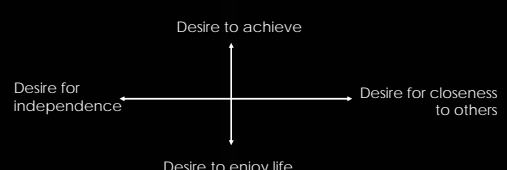
Understandings

The denial of limits

- Tendency to deny limits: e.g., 'I'm too special to die,' 'I can do it all'
- But denial means we don't make most of reality of our existences...
- and haunted by brute, impersonal, unforgiving facticity of world

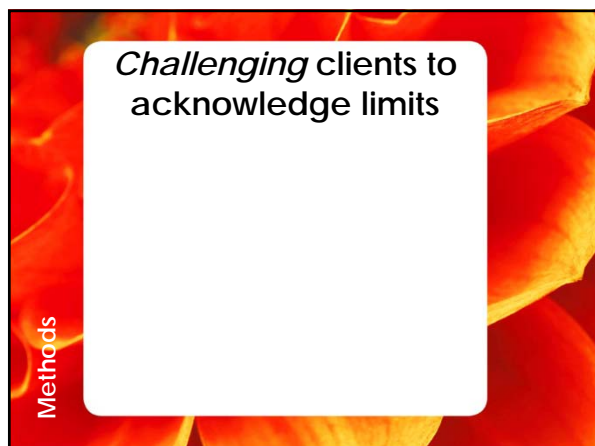
Tensions

- We are unavoidably pulled between competing directions



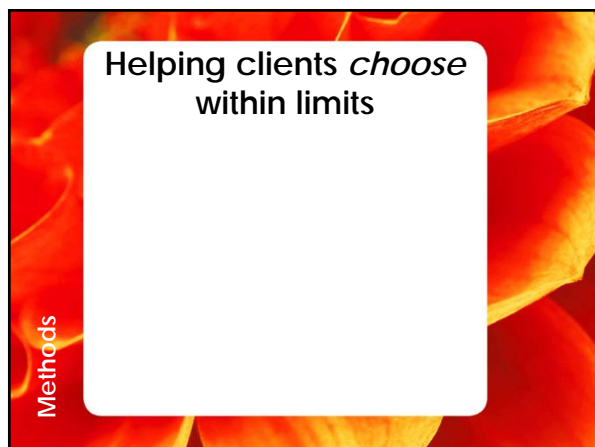
Methods

Helping clients to acknowledge limits



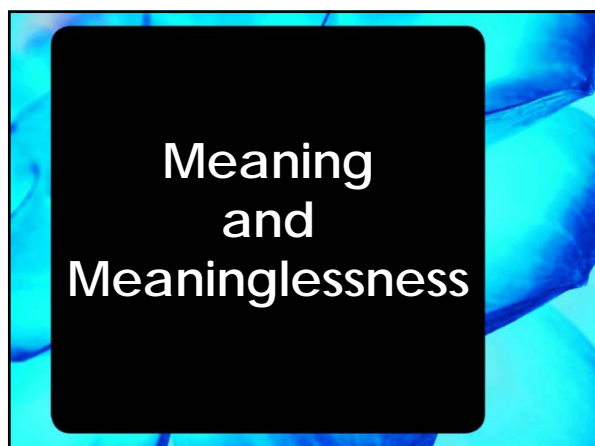
Challenging clients to
acknowledge limits

Methods



Helping clients *choose*
within limits

Methods



Meaning
and
Meaninglessness

Meaning is...

- The 'web of connections, understandings, and interpretations' that help us comprehend our lives (Michael Steger)
- Includes 'purposes': the plans and projects to which we devote our time and energy

Understandings

Meaning → Wellbeing

- Frankl: Human beings have a fundamental need for meaning
- Without it, we can experience an 'existential vacuum'
- Attempts to fill vacuum through 'existential neuroses' (e.g., addictions) << distress as loss of meaning
- There are always meanings and purposes to be 'discovered' in any situation: actions, experiencing, attitudes

Understandings

Being Mindful of Clients' Meanings and Purposes

Methods

Understandings

The Meaninglessness of Existence

- 'There exists no "meaning," no grand design in the universe, no guidelines for living other than those the individual creates' - Yalom
- We are 'interpretation all the way down' - Dreyfus
- Need to come to terms with fundamental meaninglessness

Methods

Empathising with Meaninglessness

'Challenging the meaning of life can...never be taken as a manifestation of morbidity or abnormality; it is rather the truest expression of the state of being human, the mark of the most human nature in man'

- Frankl

Conclusion