

EDITORIAL

Existential Psychology for the 21st Century

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What is existential psychology? By definition, it is the psychology of human existence in all its complexity and paradoxes. Human existence is more than an abstract concept; it involves real people in concrete situations.

Unencumbered by its philosophical roots, existential psychology needs to become the practical psychology of everyday living - how to survive and thrive in the midst of tensions between good and evil, hope and despair, love and hate, courage and safety, agency and community. It is about the high dramas of coping, dreaming, and transformation. It is the mature, positive psychology of how to live and die well in spite of the conflicts and tensions that pervade human existence.

Shifting through the colliding narratives and contradicting 'facts', existential psychology seeks to address fundamental questions relevant to the survival of humanity and the well-being of every individual. The following represents a sample of such questions:

(1) What does it mean to exist and live as a human being? What sets us apart from infrahuman animals? What are the unique human characteristics and potentials that enable us to rise above the laws of the jungle? How do we learn to treat each other with human dignity

and respect? What are the virtues and values necessary for the survival of a humane, civilized society? What are our deepest yearnings and most cherished dreams? What are the highest reaches of human aspirations?

- (2) What does it mean to be authentic and fully alive? How can we discover our true identity? What is our calling and mission in life? How do we live a life that is authentic, vital and worth living? How do we maintain a passion for living, when things are not going well? How can we function fully, develop our full potentials, and remain optimistic in an oppressive or hostile environment? How can we exercise our freedoms responsibly? How do we make wise decisions that enhance personal development and eschew self-destruction? How do we become self-actualized individuals?
- (3) What are the givens of human existence? What is the structure of human existence in all its complexity and duality? What is the meaning of suffering, pain and death? What is the meaning of life in light of these negative givens? How do we live with fear, anxiety, despair, alienation, loneliness, guilt, absurdity and meaninglessness? How do we recognize and embrace courage, hardiness, friendship, love, kindness, hope, forgiveness, coherence and meaning? How can we integrate both the negative and positive givens to facilitate personal growth and community development?
- (4) What are the forces that shape the human conditions? What are the social and psychological underpinnings of the horror of war and atrocity? How can we change the conditions that perpetuate human misery and injustice? What needs to be done to create a safe, trusting and caring environment

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necessary for any positive community?
How can we make this world a better
home-the only earthy home we have-for
all its inhabitants? How do we replace
the politics of power, control and
corruption with the politics of
servanthood and pure heart?

The challenge of existential psychology
is to find answers to these pressing
questions. No one school of psychology is
large enough to encompass the various
dimensions and levels of the whole spectrum
of human existence. Therefore, any attempt
to pigeonhole existential psychology within
a particular philosophy, school or
methodology is to lose sight of its richness
and limit its potential for addressing human
concerns.

In order to be the kind of
compassionate, positive, and practical
existential psychology we need for the 21st
century, it will need to step out of the long
shadows of Kierkegaard, Heidegger, Sartre,
and Husserl. Existential psychology will
continue to be informed and influenced by
philosophers and writers, but it needs to
develop its own identity. I hope that this
journal will provide the forum for an
ongoing and fruitful discourse on how to
redefine existential psychology.

In order to create a body of knowledge
regarding all aspects of human existence, the
journal will value the subjective,
phenomenological experiences of the
person, as well as the objective, observable
and measurable behaviours. It does not see
any contradiction between the holistic study
of the whole person and the quantitative,
experimental research of certain
psychological attributes; both approaches
can enrich our understanding of human
existence. Life is full of paradoxes, puzzles
and mysteries. Therefore, I would like to see
creative, innovative methods to illuminate
the seemingly incomprehensible,

inexplicable wonders and horrors of human
existence.