

Working With Male Abusive And/Or Violent Behaviour Using Time-Limited Existential Psychotherapy**Introduction:**

The concept of 'Time-limited Existential Psychotherapy', in the first instance, may seem like 'an enigma', however, 'all-things-considered', however, this need not be the case. In arguing that such psychotherapy may be 'an enigma', I am assuming that we cannot come to explore every nuances of our existence within the time allotted, and therefore, to suggest that this may be possible remains a 'mystery'. However, by working with clients, constructively, such that we can both take advantage of the opportunity to relate the client's everyday conflicts, dilemmas, and paradoxes, to the Existential givens of 'freedom', 'isolation', 'meaninglessness', and 'death' (Yalom, 1980), may be achieved within a pre-set time framework. By this I mean, together the therapist, and the client, agree to 'set some time aside' for making each other independent for each other in each other.

'Time'; it appears; is set-aside in ways, which suggests that we have some control over it. A 'time framework' is established within we agree to encounter each other in 'real time'. 'Time' becomes 'limited' inasmuch as we appear to decide how much time will be set aside, or spent, focusing on our intersubjective experience. Here, 'time' takes on a new hue: it becomes something that may be bought and sold - a commodity. This idea of 'time' being a commodity seems to give new meaning to the concept of time in that time no longer seems bound by shifting patterns in nature, or diurnal changes of night to day (Hoch, 1991). 'Time', now, seems to have taken on a life all of its own. Our awareness of the 'passage of time' reminds us of our 'finiteness' (Heidegger, 1962); that we ourselves are 'time-limited'.

We seem to exist within a time and space framework that has seems to have 'boundaries'. However, unlike our encounters, we appear to be 'limited' in how much influence we can have on when our time-in-the-world will begin, and perhaps more importantly, when it will end. The 'angst' that arises out of our awareness of when it will end, seems to be reflected our apparent desire to gain some control over the passage time; to dictate what we do in the 'here-and-now', and what we would like to do at some point in the future. We say that we 'make time' time to engage in therapy in ways that is reflective of our understanding of 'time' in the Western world, without considering that fact that time is not ours to own. Time marches on, relentlessly, whether we want it to or not. We are bound within a time and space framework whose boundary at its most distal end remains unknown to us. Yet, we attempt to acquire this commodity for ourselves. Do we purchase therapy in an attempt to possess the unknown in the same way that we buy and sell 'time'? We seem to be becoming more and more reluctant to but into 'open-ended therapy', and by implication, suggest that we are no longer prepared to live with the uncertainty of not knowing when our encounters with our therapists will end. We attempt to defy the 'laws of nature' by dissociating that within which we are embodied from the world-around, and is so doing, attempt to create meaning for ourselves that appears to be unrelated to the world-around. We separate-out the 'object' from what the 'object' may be observed doing. This way of being seems most apparent in those who are violent and abusive in-relation to, and with, the world. Those who are violent and/or abusive seem have difficulty understanding 'why' they are accused of being in this way. They complain that this way of being is 'not in their character', that 'they were provoked' into being in ways, which they would not, chose for themselves in 'ordinary' circumstances. They complain that the other is being 'unreasonable'. But does not the other's unreasonableness reflect the unreasonableness experienced?

In working with men who are, by their own admission, violent and/or abusive in-relation, the aim of our encounters has been to explore how the client is in-relation to, and with their lived-world. This, in-itself, requires both the client, and the therapist, to focus their intersubjective experience of therapy on those specific aspects of their existence, (e.g. responsibility, vulnerability, or empathy), that will be addressed during the therapy with aim of understanding the relationship and tension between them, and the Existential givens of meaninglessness, isolation, freedom, and death (Strasser and Strasser, 1997). All that which does not appear to be directly related to the agreed specific aspects of existence may either be 'set aside without making present'; or, reinterpreted to show relatedness to the concerns that had been agreed at the outset; such that what is brought into the 'in-between' shows significance for all concerned (Buber, 1966; Sartre, 1958). So for instance, the tension that arises out conflicts between responsibility, and the Existential givens, may be explored to show how the client's appears to escape or avoid such experiences by being abusive/violent within the context of their lived-world.

Aims and Objectives When Pursuing Ontological Change:

In working with men who want to change their violent and/or abusive behaviour, 'ontological change' may be considered to a 'secondary aim', or objective. The primary aim was to help the client to

understand, and develop an awareness of, whom they appeared to 'be' in-relation with that person; or this person; at that time how they 'became' in these ways; and how they want to 'become' in the future (Van Deurzen-Smith, 1997). I make the distinction between being, and appearing, in much the same way as Sartre (1943; 1958) may have done, and argue that the 'illusion' of appearance does not seem to represent the totality of being at any one moment in time. A person appears to be abusive and/or violent in-relation with others in their lived-world. During encounter, I myself cannot say with any conviction other than this person or that person appears to be abusive and/or violent within the context of his lived-world, as he is not being in these ways with me. With me, the therapist, he appears to 'struggle'; both, with himself, and with others; within the context of his every day life. To his victims, he appears to 'struggle' with them. But on reflection, it is not the other with whom he 'struggles', *per se*, more so, it is what the other represents for him within his own mind. Our work seems to be to 'uncover' this representation, and to bring it into the 'in-between' that exists between the client, and myself.

How we appear to the other; in any given time and place; therefore, seems critical. It presents us with an opportunity to explore the apparent difference between the 'ontic', (i.e. the self of the human person), and the 'ontological', (i.e. the self of being in the world). In genuine meeting with the other, we are offered a glimpse at the other as he may appear to others in his own lived-world. The relationship is one indicative of life in-relation with others in his own world, or 'Mitwelt', but his life in-relation with him self, or 'Eigenwelt', and life in-relation with the 'world-above', or 'Uberwelt', seems to be absent (Van Deurzen-Smith, 1997). The client describes himself in terms of 'what he does' in relation with others in his lived-world. There is distinct lack of personhood in his description of his lived-world. He will say, I am a father, I am an accountant, I am unemployed, etc, but little is said about that which makes him 'human', (e.g. his warmth, his love, his anger, his frustration, etc.). How does he relate to himself, and what does experiences of being-in-the-world say about himself in relation with it? In these ways I, too, struggle with uncovering the 'essence of the abusive and/or violent person'. In so far as it is clear that the client experiences anger, and expresses this anger in ways which appear to be abusive, and or violent, to others in his lived-world, the passage of time presents to us both a tension that must be born afresh each time we meet. How to 'uncover that which remains 'hidden', (i.e. how the client relates to himself, and how this might be reflected in his own worldview?), in the time allotted seems to be the order of each encounter.

Hypothetically, I assume that the person before me is more than they appear to be; they are more than abusive, and/or violent. In so much as the client is not abusive, nor violent during the session, we are presented with the primary paradox. In becoming abusive and/or violent, the client seems to give way to this primary passion, anger, and in so doing, creates both physical and emotional distance between himself and what could be construed as the offending object, (i.e. more often than not his partner). He avoids and escapes from a situation in which he creates for himself tension: tension that is expressed as emotion, (i.e. annoyance, and then anger). We can refer to the other, as 'object' in this sense, as all aspects of personhood of the other seem to be denied during the assault on the other. The significance of gender is not always obvious. But in as most men seem to present with concerns about their female partners, a primary conclusion must be that abuse/violent within the context of their everyday lives is, usually, directed at their female partners; and ultimately, at themselves. It would seem that the client appears to become annoyed, and then angry, with their female partners in given situations, but the anger they have created for themselves, says much about themselves, which remain to be elucidated. The client recounts with encouraged detail the situations within which he resorts to abuse and/or violent. Again there appears to be 'a difference in perception'.

Difference of Perception:

In the first instance, the client appears to be calm, and collected to the therapist, but to their female partners he appears to be 'different'. In application of Husserl's phenomenological approach to understanding the human condition, it would seem that the ontological significance of the client's abusive, and or/violent behaviour, is one associated with a perception of the female partner as the source of his anger. The client complains, 'it was she who provoked me', 'she who caused to act in these ways'; in spite of my efforts to justify my anger, she refused to accept what I was trying to say'. However, on reflection, and without allowing any products of my imagination to influence the outcome of the process of 'phenomenological reduction', the client and I, reinterpret the client's narrative such that his perception of their female partner becomes 'transformed' into statements about the client in-relation to his partner in a given context. For instance, the view their partners caused the angry and/or violent response becomes 'transformed' into statements such as, 'I felt angry in relation with my partner whilst discuss how much money we were going to spend shopping'. I could not accept the possibility of being judged, negatively, by letting my partner know how little money we had to spend. I became angry, and violent when my frustration became unbearable. In being violent my perception of her changed, from one of apparent source of my

anxiety/stress, to one of apparent powerlessness'.

Engaging the client in 'eidetic reduction' enabled us to come to some understanding of the core beliefs/values underpinning the client's abusive, and/or violent behaviour, as it appeared to be in his lived-world'. Internal validity is shown in the ways the client recounted episodes of abusive and/or violent behaviour from one session to the next, and 'transcendental reduction' should reveal the 'true' essence of the client's ways of being in defence of which he created this way of being that is abusive/violent (Sartre, 1943; Jourard, 1971). It may be shown that the client's interpretation of such events may vary, initially, but in time, and with the development of what may be construed as a 'good-enough' therapeutic relationship, the client's interpretations would come to reflect a way of being that may be shown to be consistent, over time, given the prevalence of recurring situations and circumstances. It was then possible, for instance, to say that in these situations the client seems to behave in this particular way. That is not to say that the client's ways of being are 'fixed'; merely, that any given context the client appears to be violent and/or abusive.

The time taken to undergo these three types of reduction, and so, uncover the essence of the client's 'transcendental ego', cannot be predetermined. In time-limited psychotherapy, the 'ideal' remains elusive, and may be a source of anxiety for those who enforce fixed contractual agreements. The application of 'active association', in preference to more passive ways of being with the client, leave us as we are, constantly, aware of the 'passage of time'. By this I mean, that we are both aware that our contract will end at a specific time and place, and the fact that this time is approaching. The client too, is aware of the passage of time, and we are both faced with the choice of being more, or less, authentic during our therapeutic encounters (Heidegger, 1962; Spinelli, 1994). 'To be, or not to be directive this is the question', should the therapist forgo all semblance of existential practice by denying the client the freedom of discovering themselves for themselves, or should s/he take the short-cut, and present the client with a myriad of hypotheses, and demand that the client provide enough information out of which the therapist draws his/her conclusions as to their signification/meaning? I remain tormented with the possibility both the client and I, have set a limit to the amount of time we can spend in 'becoming-with-each-other'.

This, of course, seems to be the object of the exercise. In this instance, it is the therapist's derivation of meaning that holds sway of the therapeutic process, and this in itself may bear little relation to the ontological significance of their abusive and/or violent in their lived-world. In saying, 'that art thou', the therapist has brought to bare those aspects of his/her own subjective experience to date, and in so doing, annihilated the client in the process (Buber, 1966). It may well be that the client responds by saying, 'yes, that is me', and collude with the therapist to such a degree that they take on this 'persona' and name as their own. But must we not ask ourselves who benefits here? If, our interpretations of our client work are not at 'true' reflections of how the client has become in the 'here-and-now', and they are not 'true' reflections of the client's ways of being in the 'here-and-now', how is the client able to engage in the process of 'becoming', that is not a reproduction of the therapist's imagination, at some point in the future? Such deliberations enable the therapist to understand the client's ways of being-in-the-world, but this may bear little semblance to how the client themselves views their ways of being in their lived-world. Is it not all an illusion?

Apparent Ontological Significance of Abuse and Violence:

In working with abusive and violent men, I have undertaken to engage the client is a process of self-discovery. I have found that much of the time, the client appears to 'hiding' some aspect of their being: some aspect of their 'ontological' existence: that threatens their 'ontic' existence. To do this, the client seems to create for himself ways of being that appears to increase the distance between his 'self of the human person', and the other's 'self of being'. The term of 'forced distancing' may be used to illustrate this phenomenon. By increasing the distance between themselves and the other, the client seems to attempting to keep the more vulnerable aspects of their being, from the other. This appears to be reflected in the ways the client interprets what is happening within the contexts of what may be referred to as 'critical events'. Within such events, the client seems to interpret his lived-world as if he were the 'agent of fate'. He seems to pretend that he is unaware of his own vulnerabilities, and how, in-relation with others, he appears to transform the tension that arises between the vulnerability and possibility of being confronted with that which offends, into ways of being that are abusive and/or violent. For instance, the client may attempt to 'justify their actions', or 'blame other for their violent and/abusive behaviour'. In so doing, the client sets aside the other, without making them independent (Buber, 1966). The other has been reduced to 'an object', and the importance the physical dimension of exploration shows prominence, in this instance. In so much, as exploration of the social, psychological, and spiritual dimension remain 'hidden from view', and, time passes on relentlessly.

Exploration in time-limited Existential psychotherapy presents for both the client, and the therapist, the possibility of experiencing existential angst in relation to the Existential givens of freedom, isolation, death and meaninglessness (Strasser and Strasser, 1997). Not only have to contend with the relation of these givens

within the context of the client's own lived-world, but we, also, have to contend with the Existential doubt that may arise in relation to the possibility that we may run out of time. The idea of 'running out of time', seems to be related to my own anxiety that the client may not have been given enough time to explore the relation between the Existential givens, and their aspects of being such as 'empathy', 'vulnerability', and 'responsibility' within their lived-world. The agency has set the parameters for engagement; parameters by which, we having engaged with contract, have agreed to abide. The client is invited to join the programme on the premise that they want to change their abusive and or violent behaviour. This creates for us both Existential angst, which reflects the possibility that we may not have achieved this aim in the time allotted to our 'being-with-each-other'. How to proceed such that the true essence of the client's abusive, and/or violent, ways of being in his lived-world, becomes a key theme for both the client, and the therapist.

Many clients seem to present to view of their lived-world that is fixed, immutable; and, not subject to question. The client often seems to speak in terms of certainty that belies their sedimentations, and denies the possibility that the other may not share their worldview. In consideration of the other, it becomes necessary for the client to reduce the other to ways being that objectifies the other and in so doing denies their personhood. Genuine dialogue is forgone, and is replaced by an imposition of will that seems to reflect the client's attempts to appear blameless, and in so doing, denies the possibility of accepting responsibility for their own ways of 'being-in-the-world'. By passively associating with the client, the therapist gains some insight in the client's lived-world. S/he sees the object of the client's violent and/or abusive behaviour that has been stripped of his/her personhood (Tillich, 1961). Associating, actively, with him may further encourage the client's selective recounting. The therapist attempts to enact within his/her own mind the process that precedes, and exceeds, the abusive and/or violent behaviour. The intersubjective, then becomes enthused with semblance that has variable internal validity. In exploration, parts of the process may come to light, which had previously been hidden. Setting aside one's own desire to establish meaning, the therapist engages the client in the processes of reduction that establishes his own meaning of his own abusive and violent behaviour. He has confessed, (i.e. he says, I have been abusive and/or violent, and as such accept full responsibility for these ways of being'), and now, we can proceed to establish ontological significance through the process of interpretation. What does this way of being relate to the existential givens, and other aspects of being such as empathy, and vulnerability?

The process or 'noesis' allows both the client, and the therapist, to identify the blocks of meaning (noemata), and show relatedness. For instance, the client may argue that his partner provoked him into behaviour in an abusive and/or violent way. Here, he is suggesting that when his partner behaves in a particular way, it is a deliberate attempt to annoy him, and in so doing, provoke an abusive and/or violent response. These statements not only deny the possibility of accepting responsibility for his own actions, but also, deny the possibility of confronting his Existential concerns, (i.e. freedom, isolation, meaninglessness, and death) within this situation. To fail to exist in the eyes of the other; or, to appear to be 'weak or 'vulnerable' in the eyes of the other, is denied. Reinterpretation of the statement, the other provoked me in to behaving abusively, or violently, to one which emphasis the client's part in this event, secures responsibility for the client's behaviour with the client, and not with some external object over which he attempts to assume control. So, the client confesses that, 'he feels provoked in relation with, and to, the other', and together we can then attempt to establish new meaning.

To feel provoked implies that the other 'caused' the client to feel in this way. In consideration of the context in which this abusive, and/or violent behaviour, occurred, it would seem that this is not strictly the case. For instance, the client may say that, 'he had unable to elicit the help and support of a third party in the way that the other would have preferred'. This is confession, and shows ontological significance as in relation with the other, he is forced to distance himself such that no light in shed on this aspect of his person which the client refers to as 'a vulnerability'. It was important to establish what is hidden and why this is significant, ontologically: by this I mean its interpretation/meaning. For the client, being unable to demonstrate his prowess as someone who was able to elicit the help, and support, of the third party was interpreted as 'a weakness'. The client assumes a position of vulnerability, but denies the other from sharing this view of himself, and in so doing, attempts to protect his 'self-of-the-human-person' from possible persecution (Tillich, 1961)

In so much as empathy is prerequisite of change, the client seems unable to imagine how this 'act of bad-faith' may affect his relationship with the other at any time. He assumes that at the time, he is completely justified in his actions, but on reflection he appears to have acted in ways that he believes not to be, totally, justified though acceptable, socially. In families where abuse and violence have been commonplace over several generations, the client may not share the view that abuse and violence are socially unacceptable. In such instance, that relationships between the ontological, and the Existential givens, may appear to present little existential angst. In all instances, it remains necessary to explore the client's own perception of that which is believed to be acceptable behaviour in any given situation. Exploring how others may feel in relation

to the client invites an imaginative response, but this must be considered to have internal validity as it gives some insight into the client's own perception of the other, and the essence of what it is he is responding to. So, where the client says the other such-and-such a person, there is no point in challenging this view of the other with information from our own subjective experience, as this may show little semblance to the other who is not in the room. Instead, the client's own material may be used to elucidate that truth about the other. The acquisition of enough information to enable the therapist to engage in genuine dialogue with the client, and successfully challenge inconsistency in this way, requires time. The paradox remains will there be enough 'time' to discover the essence of 'self-of-the-human-person' in-relation with that which appears to offend: the 'passage of time' presents to us both a tension that must be born afresh each time we meet.

We move swiftly on. The client too, indulges me in his imaginations. With me he attempt to elucidate my views/opinions of his abusive/violent behaviour. I have set these aside in order to make the client independent. Such views and opinions have no place, here. Suffice to say that during encounter, the client does appear to be trying to justify his ways of being in relation with me. 'That art thou, I say', but he here is not. Again I say your justifications are failing what aspect of your self are trying to hide from me? The client draws breath, and sighs. I see him, apparently, struggling'. The desire to add products of my imagination is strong. I believe I 'know' what he is trying to hide from me, but this too, is no more imagination than his justifications for his own actions in-relation. I have offered him the opportunity to discover himself for himself; this would be lost should I impose my own imaginations on the presented situation; imagination which may bare no semblance to the clients interpretations of his own experiences. I would prefer that he discover himself for-himself. Time marches on. Internally, I say 'think'; I imagine I say 'nothing', physically. What were you thinking, doing, before you decided to challenge you partner's ways of being-in-relation with you? The reply comes with renewed 'flow of consciousness' (Csikszentmihalyi, 1991). The therapeutic relationship is good enough to allow the free flow of consciousness that shed light on the client's predisposition. Courageously, he comes forth into a new way of being during the encounter (Tillich, 1952). He says to me, the therapist that he did not want his partner to realise a 'failing', a way he may appear 'vulnerable' to others'. I ask him, 'what is likely to happen to you, if, you had said what he had jut said to me, to his partner?' He replied, nothing. We are silent for a moment. I say would this 'confession' not offer up an opportunity to do something constructive about what that, which troubles you?

Conclusion:

Time limited Existential psychotherapy seems to reflect our demand for certainty with respect to the time spent 'doing' it. We demand that we 'know' when our encounters will begin and when they will end. We are no longer prepared to be dependent on the natural order of things, (i.e. the diurnal passage from day to night; the coming and going of the seasons). We seem to want to control how we appear to others with the context of our everyday lives given that that too seems dependent on the rules applied by the society within which we choose to live. We search for meaning, and where necessary seek out the help and support of 'professionals' who are deemed well versed in clarifying in-relation with the client, that which presents for the client as a 'mystery'; something of a 'paradox'; with which only he can grapple. The essence of his being abusive, and/or violent, in-relation seems to be an expression of the client's humanity with which he struggled. The abuse and violence seems symptomatic of an underlying dilemma, or paradox, which would be elucidated during therapeutic encounter. Establishing the relationship between the action, and the underlying uncertainty, it was possible to encourage ownership of the abusive/violent behaviour. With ownership, the client was able to take responsibility for how he had expressed himself within given contexts/situations. In embracing this aspect of his humanity he had been offered the opportunity to 'transcend' his old ways of being, by presenting himself in ways, which were reflective of the uncertainty he felt in-relation with others. We separate-out the thing itself, (i.e. ontic), from what the thing does, (i.e. ontological). We explored the values/core beliefs that underpinned his behaviour in relation with others, and questioned the validity how he expressed these values in-relation with others. We practiced this during our encounters, discussed the possibilities in-relation with others within his lived, and actively chose to 'do something different' in spite of his feelings of vulnerability, and fear of the unknown. He seemed surprised that others responded to the change in the way he chose to express himself. I remain hopeful, and we are out of time.

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