

Course Material (E-Content) of Psychology

By – Dr. KHURSHID JAHAN

Department. of Psychology

MagadhMahila College

Humanistic Approach of Clinical Psychology

The humanistic approach to clinical psychology was introduced by Abraham Maslow and Carl Rogers in the 1950s as a reaction to psychodynamic theories. Humanistic theories suggest each person has built-in mechanisms that can help him or her to move past psychological problems and develop a strong personality.

The humanistic approach focuses on enabling the client to understand his or her thought and behaviour patterns to make positive changes in life. This approach emphasizes the Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs and aims to reach the level of self-actualization.

Maslow's hierarchy of needs starts at the most basic with physical needs that are shared by every living being, things like shelter, food, and security. As we move up, we begin to see things like companionship, love, and self-actualization. These last few items, where people begin to develop higher senses of self, are impossible with the behaviourist model.

Carl Rogers believed in treating the patients as humans. He refused to call them 'patients' as he believed there was nothing wrong with them. Instead, he referred to them as 'clients.'

The humanist approach had an enormous influence on the course of psychology and contributed new ways of thinking about mental health. It offered a new approach to understanding human behaviours and motivations and led to developing new techniques and approaches to psychotherapy.

Some of the major ideas and concepts that emerged as a result of the humanist movement include an emphasis on things such as:

- Client-centered therapy
- Free will
- Fully functioning person
- Hierarchy of needs
- Peak experiences
- Self-actualization
- Self-concept
- Unconditional positive regard

The humanistic approach (so-called third force psychology) rejects determinism, of both subconscious and biological (e.g. conditioning or traumatisation) explanations of

psychoanalytic and cognitive-behavioural theories (Johnston, 2011; Szondi, 1963). Unlike psychoanalysis, personal history is less important than one's present, which is in concord with the CBT's position (Beck, 2011). Whereas in psychoanalysis 'investigation' of personality with its 'drives', reactions, defences and compensations is taking place (Fenichel, 1977), humanism rather provides unconditional support, positive regard and empathy towards the person (which is then supposed to increase the level of self-esteem and self-image, and foster positive therapeutic gains; Rogers, 1967). Humanistic approach takes into account socioeconomic circumstances, which is now getting into practice in various treatments with developing Biopsychosocial Theory and holistic views (Saleebey, 2001). On the other hand, Rogers developed a unique client-centred way of treating the client emphasizing the role of the empathy, respect and support (Raskin, 1989). Moreover, spirituality plays a big role in humanism.

According to humanistic approach, there is no 'right' or 'wrong', there is no 'pathology' and 'norm' (those ideas linking humanism with anti-psychiatry; Laing, 1990; Seligman, 1975; Szasz, 1977). Likewise, the thoughts and behaviours are not matched with 'correct' or 'adaptive' patterns, and rather being observed (and directed into a positive way of thinking though, contrary to CBT, without rationalizations; Rogers, 1961; Wilken, 2006). Striving achievement (self-realization, recognition by the environment) is also acknowledged by humanists, where the environment is often viewed more like a restraint (thus, negative influence) than CBT's combination of positive and negative influences and resulting learning (Rachman, 2009; Rogers, 1959).

Personality, considered to be always 'originally positive' in humanism (contrary to psychodynamic views; Freud, 1924), goes through various situations and transformations as a reaction to environmental constraints (losing the initial equilibrium due to external influences); the psychotherapeutic idea is to 'restore' the balance between oneself and the environment, and to become anew a 'fully functioning person' open to new experiences, change and success (Rogers, 1967). That contrasts both psychodynamic and CBT views, the latter accepting certain biological and developmental external influences determining the way of being (Rayner, 1986; Tryon, 2005).

Techniques of the Humanistic Approach –

1. Active listening - In the humanistic approach one technique is active listening. This involves listening to the client intently and offering summaries and reflection of what the patient is saying.

2. Empathy - Another technique is empathy; this is where the therapist displays emotions to comfort the patient. It is one of the most important aspects of humanistic therapy. This idea focuses on the therapist's ability to see the world through the eyes of the client. Without this, therapists can be forced to apply an external frame of reference where the therapist is no longer understanding the actions and thoughts of the client as the client would, but strictly as a therapist which defeats the purpose of humanistic therapy.

3. Unconditional positive regard - Unconditional positive regard refers to the care that the therapist needs to have for the client. This ensures that the therapist does not become the authority figure in the relationship allowing for a more open flow of information as well as a kinder relationship between the two.

These techniques assume that inner conflict arises from the lack of validation. Thus therapy seeks to reassure the client and make them feel as though someone has heard and validated their struggles. The humanistic approach seeks to instill a sense of empowerment and self actualization (Plante, 2005).

Strengths of humanistic approach

1. One of the major strengths of humanistic approach is that it emphasizes the role of the individual. This approach gives people more credit in controlling and determining their state of mental health.
2. It also takes environmental influences into account. Rather than focusing solely on our internal thoughts and desires, humanistic approach also credits the environment's influence on our experiences.
3. Humanistic approach helped remove some of the stigma attached to therapy and made it more acceptable for normal, healthy individuals to explore their abilities and potential through therapy. While humanistic approach continues to influence therapy, education, healthcare, and other areas, it has not been without some criticism.

Criticisms of humanistic approach

1. Humanistic approach is often seen as too subjective; the importance of individual experience makes it difficult to objectively study and measure humanistic phenomena. How can we objectively tell if someone is self-actualized? The answer, of course, is that we cannot. We can only rely upon the individual's own assessment of their experience.
2. Another major criticism is that observations are unverifiable; there is no accurate way to measure or quantify these qualities.