

# POSITIVE PSYCHOTHERAPY AS AN EXISTENTIALISM

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# DISCUSSION OUTLINE

- Introduction
- What PPT and Existentialism have in common
  - The significance of Meaning
    - Existentialism is...
    - Positive Psychotherapy is...
      - Our PPT capacities
      - Our Existential capacities
        - Life Energy
    - Models and Exercise
      - Life Balance Model
      - Meaningful Acts Model
  - Existential Positive Psychotherapy

# WHAT PPT AND EXISTENTIALISM HAVE IN COMMON?

## Existentialism

- Man is doomed to freedom and has the capacities to be what he wills himself to be
- Sartre asserts that the key defining concept of existentialism is that the **existence** of a person is prior to his or her **essence**.
- Sartre defines **anguish** as the emotion that people feel once they realize that they are responsible not just for themselves, but for all humanity



## Humanism

- Humanism is a very general term usually used to refer to any theory which puts human beings at the center of things
- Humanism has the positive connotation of being humane and is generally associated with an optimistic outlook.
- The humanism Sartre (1946) and others at the time endorsed emphasizes the dignity of human beings; it also stresses the centrality of human choice to the creation of all values
- Francis Ponge suggest "Man is the future of man" (p.34).



## Positive Psychotherapy

- Positive view of humanity. Man is innate good
- this therapy accepts belief as an implicit aspect of healthy psychological functioning.
- contents of the unconscious in PPT are the conflicts between capacities, and undifferentiated and undeveloped actual capacities
- Humans are creatures who have physical, mental, and spiritual capacities which can be developed.

# KEY = MEANING & LIFE BALANCE

## • Positive Psychotherapy

- In PPT, "The two basic capacities [to know and to love] are the foundation upon which the capacity for meaning develops" (Peseschkian 1985, p. 43)
- Fantasy or imagination goes together with intuition, the future and its long-term goals as well as a vision of life after death, and a thirst for moral and spiritual capacities. Life takes on meaning through this domain (Cope, 2009)
- In PPT, religious meaning fosters many different psychological attitudes: openness and acceptance of difference, tolerance and amiability, broadmindedness, and inquisitiveness, as well as less healthy forms such as closed-minded literalness, intolerance, and more radical extremes of fundamentalism.
- In PPT, meaning is derived in four ways; (1) education (2) self-help, (3) therapy, and (4) the transcultural problematic (Peseshksian, 1985)

## • Existentialism

- Although each of us is limited by innate, biological invariants, we still provide unique meanings and interpretations of the physical world we inhabit
- Kierkegaard stated, "I exist, therefore I think,"
- In contrast to philosopher **Rene Descartes's** famous words, "I think, therefore I am."
- Bulka (1979) maintains that the search for meaning is the main motivational force in people
- Frankl (1975) meaning provides a rhythm for human existence
- Puligandla (1975) meaning makes one feel that his/her presence on earth has contributed to the common good of the human community

# EXISTENTIALISM IS...

## Critiques:

- Existentialism as a philosophy will only lead to a 'quietism of despair', in other words they thought it to be a philosophy of inaction, merely contemplative, one which would discourage people from committing themselves to any course of action.

## Influences:

- Existential philosophy is based on the writings of philosophers like: Heidegger, Husserl, Dostoevsky, Kafka, Camus, Kierkegaard, Nietzsche, Sartre, among others.
- However, during the mid-twentieth century, pioneering European clinicians like Otto Rank, Karl Jaspers, Medard Boss, and Ludwig Binswanger were among the first to apply existential principles to the practice of psychotherapy, followed prominently by Viktor Frankl (Vienna), R.D. Laing (London), Rollo May (United States) and Irvin Yalom (United States).

## Therapeutic Goals:

- Sets aside, or brackets, his or her own beliefs, theories, biases and assumptions; Similarly, rather than present themselves as 'symptom-removers', 'treatment-providers', 'directive educators' or 'professional helpers', existential psychotherapists return psychotherapy to its original meaning: the attempt to "stay with", "stand beside" or attend to another
- Emphasizes and explore the client's immediate conscious experience of "being with another"

# EXISTENTIALISM IS...

## Main Pillars

1. Life
2. Death
3. Responsibility
4. Accountability
5. Freedom
6. Connection
7. Loneliness, Isolation
8. Meaning
9. Becoming
10. Courage

## Central Themes

- Humans have the capacity to be conscious of themselves as well as of the events in the past, and present that influence them as well as envision a future.
- The subject and the world are inseparable
- A human is thus being, he/she is not static/fixed but always becoming
- Being also implies non-being (death), it is what gives life reality since, along with being it is the one absolute fact of life.
- The threat of nonbeing is the source of existential anxiety
- Each person is unique and irreplaceable
- Other than the limits of being, man has the capacity to transcend himself
- Man is characterized by alienation from the world. Loneliness and isolation are part of his existence.

## Influences

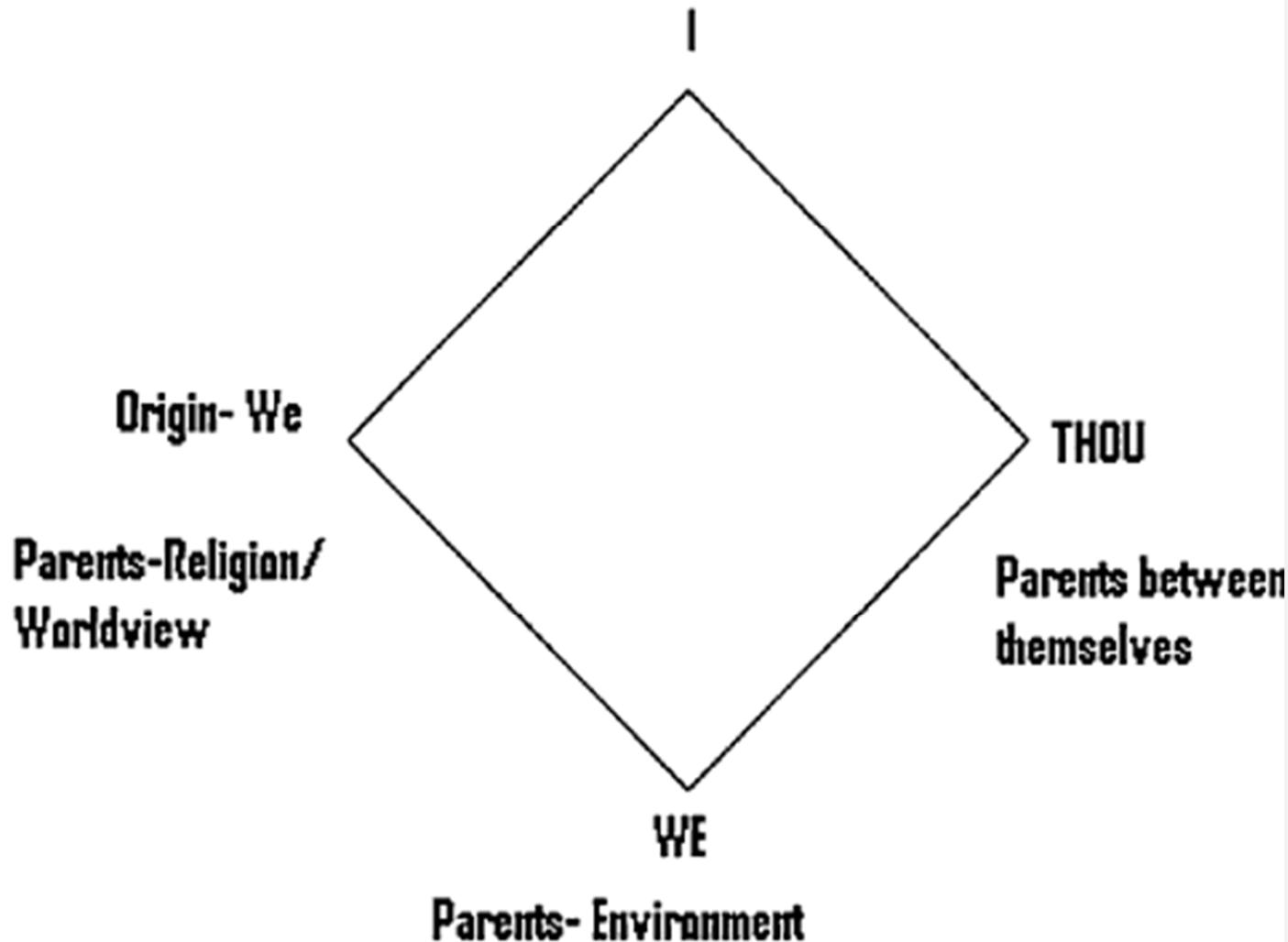
- Logo-therapy-Frankl
- Person Centered Therapy-Rogers
- Group Therapy –Yalom
- Humanism-*humanitas* is commonly used as a synonym for philanthropy-Aulus Gellius
- Phenomenology - Moustakas, Gadamar
- Hierarchy of Needs- Maslow
- Jungian Psychology- Jung

# POSITIVE PSYCHOTHERAPY IS...

- Positive Psychotherapy (PPT) is an approach to psychological healing which derives its scientific foundations from psychodynamic and behavioral psychologies, and psychosomatic medicine, as well as philosophical inspiration from the writings of the Baha'í Faith
- PPT is a practical approach to psychological development that has an explicit educative function: the client or one who studies Peseschkian's works, learn the psychosocial significance of human capacities
- Therapeutic Goals: achieving life balance, insight into innate capacities to resolve problems of living
- Life Balance: . Pesschkian asserts that humans know of reality and judge what is real via four methods: sensation, reason, tradition, and inspiration (see e.g., 'Abdu'l-Baha' 1981).
- Capacities: According to Peseschkian, our innate capacities manifest themselves in the world as social norms, family norms, and patterns of behavior, value systems and sources of internal and external conflict

capacity to love

parents/siblings -- Child



## The capacity to love

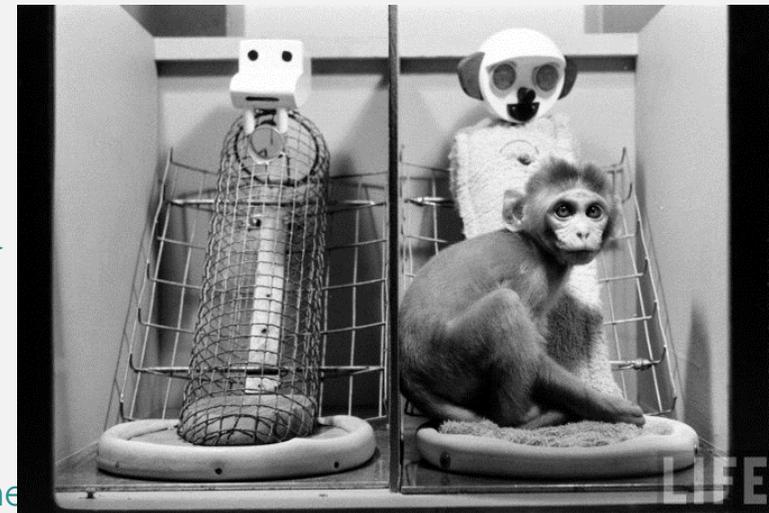
- The capacity to love initially is expressed instinctually—we express our needs and have them met by a nurturing caretaker.
- When we love and are loved, we accept something from another and are accepted in return. When we develop this capacity, other capacities within this spectrum are developed.

For consideration...

- Sullivan's: (1953) "[Theorem of Reciprocal Emotion](#)" emphasized the reciprocity (or complementarity) that is evident when two partners interact.
- Bowlby: [Maternal Deprivation Hypothesis](#): breaking the maternal bond with the child during the early stages of its life is likely to have serious effects on its intellectual, social, and emotional development
- Harry Harlow Study
- Bowlby Attachment Theory
- Hierarchy of Needs

# HARRY HARLOW MONKEY EXPERIMENT (1958)

- Wanted to study the mechanisms by which monkeys bond with their mothers
- 2 studies:
  - Infant monkeys reared to isolation
    - Taken from birth and isolated with no contact with anyone
  - Infant monkeys reared with surrogate mothers
    - Placed in cages with one wire surrogate mother and one terry cloth mother
- **Results:**
  - isolation: when placed back with others, they appeared scared and then aggressive
  - Surrogate: both groups spent more time with the cloth mother, even when she had no milk; when placed with others, they were timid and easily bullied
  - Maternal deprivation leads to emotional damage but can be reversed if an attachment is made before the end of the critical period



Harry Harlow Experiment

## ATTACHMENT THEORY: MAIN POINTS

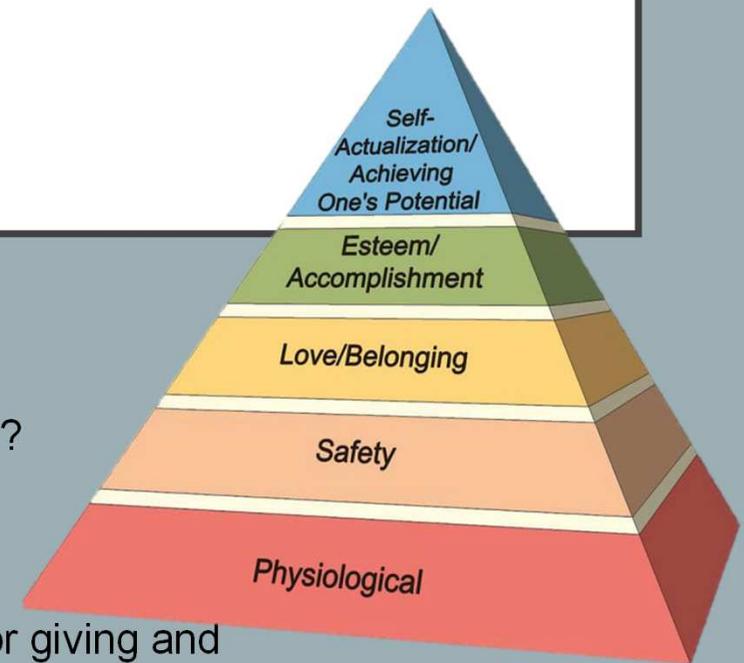
1. A child has an innate need to attach to one main attachment figure
2. A child should receive the continuous care of the attachment figure for approximately the first two years of life
3. There are long-term negative consequences of maternal deprivation
4. Short-term separation from the attachment figure leads to distress
5. The child's attachment relationship with their primary caregiver leads to the development of an internal working model
  - a) 3 main features of the internal working model
    - A model of others as being trustworthy
    - A model of the self as valuable
    - A model of the self as effective when interacting with others

# REVISITING MASLOW'S HIERARCHY OF NEEDS

For discussion:

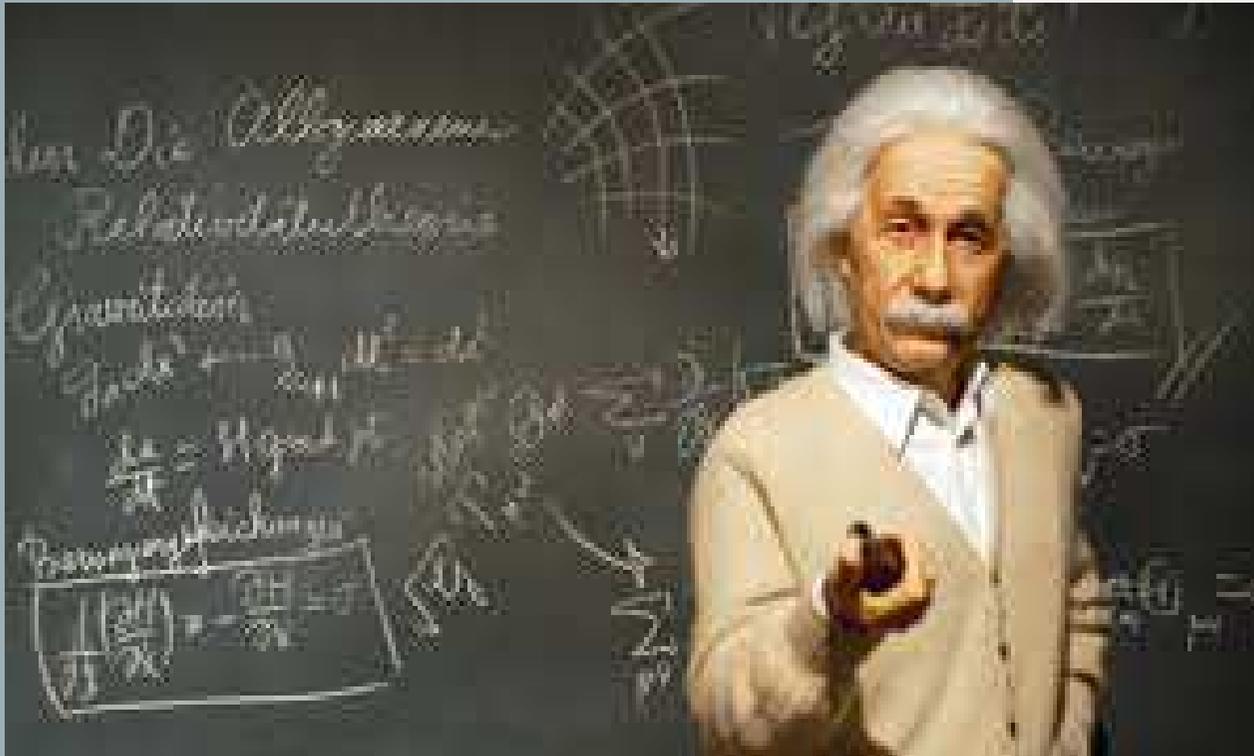
Love or Food: Which one does a person need more?

- Potency vs. Necessity
- How does the Hierarchy of Needs impact one's capacity for giving and receiving love



(Maslow, 1943)

## THE CAPACITY TO KNOW



This basic capacity to know and the methods by which we come to know about ourselves and our world are what we learn from our experience with ourselves, with things, and with others

The capacity to know initially begins by differentiating self from non-self as the cognitive structures mature

Our innate capacity to know is based on the cultural transmission and self appraising process noted by Vontress (1988) and created by Sullivan (1953) called **Consensual Validation**

**Consensual Validation** refers to the agreement of two or more perspectives on reality. This is when two or more separate individuals agree on observed events (Sullivan, 1953, pp. 183-184).

PESECHKIAN (2000) ASSERTS THAT ACTUAL CAPACITIES MANIFEST AS: SOCIAL NORMS, FAMILY NORMS, PATTERNS OF BEHAVIOR, VALUE SYSTEMS, CONFLICT SOURCES (INTERNAL AND EXTERNAL), CAUSES AND TRIGGERS OF ILLNESS, SOCIALIZATION VARIABLES, SIGNS OF GROUP MEMBERSHIP, MASKS OF BEHAVIOR, WEAPONS AND SHIELDS IN RELATIONSHIPS, EXPECTATIONS OF OTHERS BEHAVIORS, PERSONALITY ATTRIBUTES, JUSTIFICATIONS OF BEHAVIOR, CAPACITIES FOR DEVELOPMENT, CRITERIA/STANDARDS OF JUDGMENT; THEY ALSO HAVE FLEXIBILITY-FIXATION AND ACTIVE-PASSIVE DIMENSIONS.

- Primary Capacities

- Love (emotionality)      Doubt
- Modeling                      Trust
- Servitude                      Sexuality
- Confidence                      hope
- Patience                        unity
- Time
- Faith
- Contact

- Secondary Capacities

- Punctuality                      Justice
- Cleanliness                      Diligence
- Orderliness                      Thrift
- Obedience                        Reliability
- Curtesy
- Conscious
- Honesty
- Faithfulness

EXISTENTIAL PSYCHOTHERAPY IS CONCERNED WITH MORE DEEPLY COMPREHENDING AND ALLEVIATING AS MUCH AS POSSIBLE (WITHOUT NAIVELY DENYING REALITY AND *LA CONDITION HUMAINE*) PERVASIVE POSTMODERN SYMPTOMS

### Negative Themes

- excessive anxiety
- apathy
- alienation
- nihilism
- avoidance
- shame
- addiction
- despair
- depression
- guilt, anger, rage, resentment, embitterment, purposelessness, madness (psychosis) and violence

### Positive Themes

- relationship
- love
- caring
- commitment
- courage
- creativity
- power
- will
- presence, spirituality, individuation, self-actualization, authenticity, acceptance, transcendence and awe

## POSITIVE PSYCHOTHERAPY, LIFE BALANCE & EXISTENTIALISM

- Positive Psychotherapy-Four Domains of Existence (Peseshkian 1985)
  - 1. Body/Senses
  - 2. Work/Achievement
  - 3. Social contacts/Relationships
  - 4. Imagination/Fantasy/Virtue
- Existentialism- Four domains of Existence (Ludwig Binswanger, 1963)
  - 1. Umwelt – natural world
  - 2. Miwelt – interpersonal world
  - 3. Eigenwelt – intrapersonal world
  - 4. \*Uberwelt- Spiritual world

## THE CAPACITY TO INTROSPECT (SELF- REFLECTION)

According to Vontress (1999), *introspection* refers to the self looking within to discover and evaluate the content that is housed there.

Introspection provides access to the contents of consciousness (Wilhelm Wundt & E.B. Titchener, 1913)

A person engaged in introspection should be unbiased and should prevent other associations from influencing the report of the immediate experience. In addition, subjects should be alert, free from distractions, healthy, fresh and free from fatigue, and interested in the experience under study (Titchener, 1910)

*Introspection* may be used synonymously with **human self-reflection**. Introspection looks like an activity described by Plato, "...why should we not calmly and patiently review our own thoughts, and thoroughly examine and see what these appearances in us really are"





## THE CAPACITY TO ACT (COURAGE)

- Courage derives from the Latin word cor, which means "heart" (Servan-Scheiber, 1987)
- Sartre (1982) states, "Man is nothing else but that which he makes of himself. That is the first principle of existentialism," (p. 28).
- Søren Kierkegaard (1813-55), argued what was most lacking was people's courage to live with passion and commitment from the depth of existence's Courage to act
- Vontress (1999) explains courage is an emotion and a strength that plays a significant part in determining behavior.
- Rollo May (1975) posited that courage is the capacity to confront life as it is.
- Michael Bedford (1972) argues that courage give individuals the will and determination to introspect and to accept themselves as they really are.
- M. Bedford (1972) also argues that people need courage to defend their ways of living.
- Courage allows one to accept themselves as they really are and not adopt roles that are foreign to their nature or to lead inauthentic lives (Lowen, 1980)
- Paul Tillich referred to the determination to live as ontological (being) courage (May, 1975)

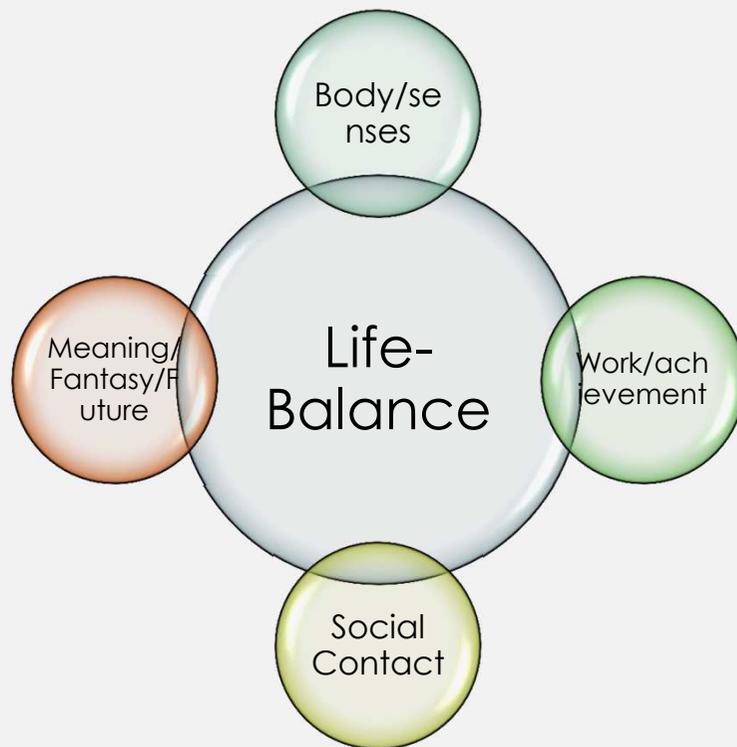
# LIFE ENERGY & EXERCISE



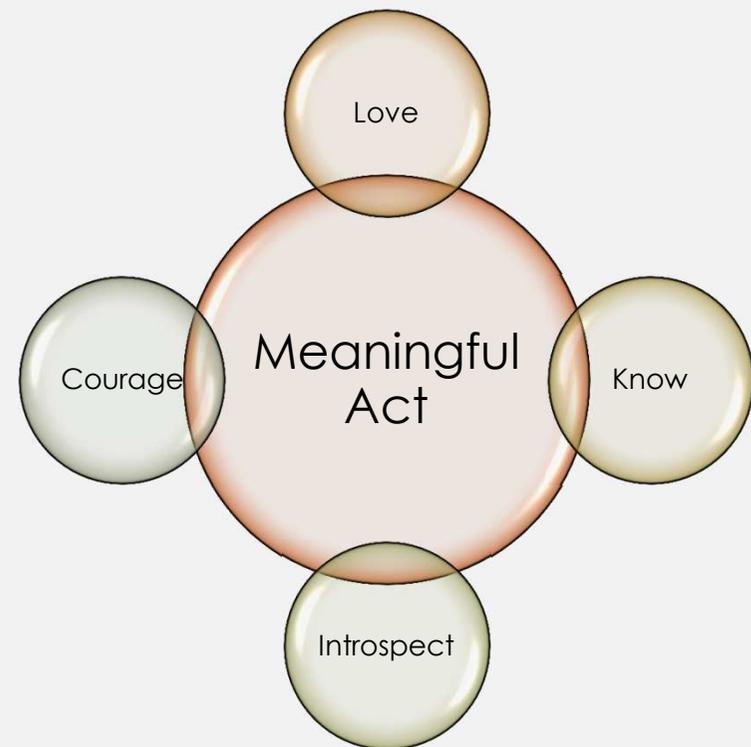
- **Biofield:** Research shows **Bio-field** is the word coined in 1994 to describe the field of energy and information that surrounds and interpenetrates the human body. It is composed of both measurable electromagnetic energy and hypothetical subtle energy, or chi.
- **Albert Einstein:** "Law of Conservation" states that energy is neither created nor destroyed. It can only be transformed or transferred from one form to another.
- According to PPT each of us have a **100%** life energy to dispense among our four life domains
- **Interpersonal Neurobiology:** Clinical and medical tests have shown that the healing powers of meditation and awareness directly affect the physical body in relation to the creation of new neuronal pathways
- **Chi or Qi:** is believed to be a **vital force** forming part of any living entity, though it cannot be proven scientifically. (Lee, Pittler, & Ernst, 2009)

**Exercise 1:** Similar to assessing your life balance with 100% life energy, apply the same principle to a situation in which you have to make a decision. Is it a balanced decision, a meaningful act?

Life-Balance Model



Meaningful Acts Model



## Capacity to Know +

- Emphasis on Secondary Capacities
- Focus on rules, norms, efficacy, solutions
- Emphasis is on social contacts and work and achievement domains

## Capacity to Love +

- Emphasis on Primary Capacities
- Focus on desire, passions, immediate gratifications, cares little for rules, long term planning.
- Emphasizes social contacts and future/fantasy/meaning domains

## Capacity to Introspect +

- Emphasizes a reflection on both Primary and secondary capacities, how they were formed and primary influences that shaped them.
- Focus or stuck in the past, thoughts and decision are based on old experiences often unprocessed.
- Danger of existential vacuum or stuckness

## Capacity to Act (courage)

- Emphasizes action, impulsivity.
- Emphasizes social contacts and work/achievement
- Danger of existential vacuum or stuckness

= MEANINGFUL ACTS = MEANINGFUL  
EXISTENCE



## THE PURPOSE OF PPT AS AN EXISTENTIALISM

- Helps us to ensure we make meaningful life decisions.
- Addresses the criticisms that existentialism emphasizes the philosophy of existence rather than the psychology of existence.
- Provides existentialist with psychological tools and methods to address neurosis and psychosis and meaninglessness
- Demonstrates the humanity at the core of psycho-analytic & psycho-dynamic theory
- Augments the transcultural nature inherent to PPT and Existentialism
- Helps to contextualize and focus PPTs methods toward

IN CONCLUSION...I AM AN EXISTENTIAL  
POSITIVE PSYCHOTHERAPIST, YOU?9



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