

Features of a Relational Approach to Psychotherapy

- loose framework, allowing for changeable context – should lead to humility toward clients, not arrogance of “expert”
- relationships, especially interpersonal ones, are the most crucial aspects of life and living – we agree with Freud’s “love and work” as long as both are viewed as serving to help a person become part of a healthy community
- we all want (need?) to belong and be part of something larger than ourselves – if someone is enjoying satisfying relationships and feels assured of being part of some greater whole, they do not ask for (nor need) therapy (e.g., Curtis O’Banion)
- fear of rejection, the fear that we do not belong, are not accepted, or have no meaningful relationships is the greatest fear and anxiety of all
- all clients must be understood “thickly” – i.e., in relation to their interpersonal, temporal, situational, and moral contexts, which include the interpreting therapist
- part of the temporality of all contexts is possibilities, implying that a contextual agency is important (along with the responsibility assumption that this implies)
- the more “full-blooded” the therapeutic discussion or experience (e.g., particular, real, contextual) the more potential for true learning and change
- the therapist’s relationship with the client is the most pivotal aspect of therapy and can be focused upon to yield change
- to focus upon this relationship the “here and now” is useful, especially if attended to in an authentic manner (along the lines of Guignon)
- abstractions (theory, principles) are important but are only important secondarily – i.e., they should be derived from thick particulars
- relationships are not fundamentally based on sameness – difference and otherness are vital to individual identity and intimacy – this implies that we must find ways of accepting and loving the otherness of the other
- others are never reducible or capturable – we (including therapists) must be humble about our conceptions and perceptions because they are always incomplete, implying the importance of others in our community
- meaning is central because it requires connection and engagement in the world, not to mention connectedness to temporality (past, present, and future) of one’s life narrative