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Spinelli, E. (2007). *Practising existential psychotherapy: The relational world*. Sage.

1. Worlding is the term I employ to express the ongoing, ever-shifting, linguistically elusive, process-like experiencing of being. When, as human beings, we reflect upon, contemplate and seek to discern meaning from our lived experience of worlding, we essentialize the process so that it is conceived of in a structural fashion. The resulting structure is what has been termed the worldview. The worldview, therefore, is a partial and skewed expression of worlding since, as a structure, it cannot maintain or express directly all of the process-like aspects of worlding. There must, therefore, always be 'gap' or dissonance between worlding and the worldview. Thus, our human attempts to access the experience of worlding through the worldview provides the foundation for the dissonances and disturbances in living with which we all must contend.
2. Existential-phenomenology argues that the very enterprise of psychotherapy is principally focused upon the experience of relatedness, uncertainty and anxiety within the confines of the therapeutic encounter. This focus, in turn, discloses the client's currently maintained worldview so as to identify that worldview's resonances with and deviations from the client's ongoing experience of worlding.
3. The primary focus of investigation is the client's experience of inter-relational being as expressed through the presenting worldview-derived issues, disturbances or conflicts being brought to therapy.
4. Existential psychotherapy implicates the presence of the psychotherapist in its inquiry and acknowledges the (currently) unpredictable impact of that presence upon the dispositional stances maintaining the primary constructs of the client's lived worldview (i.e., the self-, other- and world constructs). In like fashion, it acknowledges the (currently) unpredictable impact of the client's presence upon the dispositional stances maintaining the primacy constructs of the therapist's lived worldview.
5. Existential psychotherapy can be considered from a general standpoint as a particular form of descriptive investigation centered upon the key existential themes of relatedness, uncertainty and anxiety. Viewed in this way, it is hardly surprising that existential psychotherapy's stance toward the therapeutic relationship itself becomes a pivotal aspect of the therapeutic process.
6. The way the client 'is' in the therapeutic relationship reveals his or her wider stance concerning the possibilities and limitations of existence. It can therefore be

seen that the focus of the therapeutic relationship as understood by existential psychotherapy is always on the-client-as-relationally-present. It is via this first, and crucial, step of 'staying with' and 'attuning oneself to' the client's current worldview – no matter how debilitating, restrictive, limiting and irrational it may appear to be to the therapist if not all others in the client's world, as well as the client him or her self) – that the existential psychotherapist, simply via this client-attuned presence, begins to challenge profoundly the client's various expectations, assumptions and concerns.

7. The existential psychotherapist's presence

- The existential psychotherapist is the present other to the client. As this other, the therapist acts as both the representative of all others in the client's wider world relations and, just as importantly, is also the other who challenges the client's self-, other- and world-constructs simply by the inter-relational impact of his or her presence. It becomes evident that any hope of achieving this enterprise requires initially the therapist's openness to, and acceptance of, the client's currently presenting worldview.

8. The existential psychotherapist's acceptance

- Rather than focusing upon notions of problem-solving, goal-setting, establishing programs for change and directing discourse, existential psychotherapists attempt a stance of acceptance which can be defined as the openness both to what (or who) is there in the encounter and how it is to be in the relationship as it is being lived within the encounter.

9. The existential psychotherapist's experiential immediacy

- This attitudinal shift promotes the possibility of clients' greater willingness and courage to confront the fixed, or sedimented, biases and assumptions they hold within that worldview and to consider how these sedimented stances, and their parallel dissociations of incongruent experience, may themselves have provoked their current problems in living. Once the therapist's presence has begun to provoke a more open, honest, clarifying process of worldview exploration by the client, the therapist has earned sufficient trust to be able to focus upon the client's experience of being with a particular 'other' (the therapist) so that the experiential immediacy of their current encounter can be considered in terms of the resonances and contrasts it provokes with regard to the client's wider worldview.

10. The existential psychotherapist's dialogical attitude

- Although existential psychotherapists are dismissive of any formal 'technique', it must be acknowledged that attempts to educate clients directly about the formal properties and principles of existential

phenomenology is as much a 'technique' as is the assigning of homework or the training of clients to regulate their breathing.

11. Not-knowing / Un-knowing

- The term express the aim of the existential psychotherapist as that of seeking to discern that which is understandable within what is initially experienced as being un-understandable – whether to the therapist, to the client, or to both. This shift in attitude from a natural' assumption of shared knowledge toward that of a phenomenological attitude of initial openness and naivety requires the therapist to abdicate, at least for the time being, a great deal of that which might, from the standpoint of other psychotherapeutic models and approaches, be taken as the therapist's authority, expertise and interpretative power.

12. Symptom

- From existential psychotherapy's inter-relational perspective, symptoms of distress and disturbance are expressions of the client's attempts to maintain the current worldview no matter how restrictive, disabling, irrational, contradictory or incomprehensible it might appear to be to the client and therapist alike, because its maintenance serves to allay the acknowledgement of intolerable uncertainty as manifested through existential anxiety. In this sense, existential psychotherapy proposes that every symptomatic problem is also an attempted solution to the irresolvable 'problem' of existential anxiety.

13. Change

- Level 1 change is that change whose initial focus is upon a sedimentation existing within any one of the primary constructs of the worldview but whose principal impact is upon either or both of the remaining constructs. Level 1 does not directly affect or alter the sedimentation as reflected from the perspective of the focus construct but does provoke an attitudinal and/or behavioral shift in the sedimented stance from the perspective of the remaining constructs.
- Level 2 change is that change whose impact is directly upon the sedimentation within the focus construct. That is to say, level 2 change acts to de-sediment the sedimentation with the focus construct and hence is typically experienced as being more significant or powerful than level 1 change. However, as far as the person who maintains the worldview is aware, the experience of change remains limited to, or within, the focus construct; the impact of de-sedimentation does not extend directly to either or both of the remaining constructs. In this way, level 2 change is

experienced as limited or divided rather than truly inter-relational.

- Level 3 change is that change regarding a sedimental stance within a particular construct whose impact extends to the remaining constructs and, hence, affects and re-contextualizes the worldview as a whole. Level 3 change provokes an interconnected shift in the self, other- and world-construct constituents of the worldview. Level 3 change is likely to be experienced as highly powerful, meaning-altering and transformational since it provokes a direct experience of an interrelated reconstitution of the worldview as a whole.

14. The three phases of existential psychotherapy

- Phase One is concerned with the co-creation by the existential psychotherapist and client of a 'therapy world'. This includes making explicit and respecting the boundaries, frame and inter-relational conditions that set its parameters. By so doing, Phase One permits the initiation of an open and honest descriptive exploration of the parameters of, and explicit tensions in, the client's worldview as experienced relationally within the 'therapy world' so that it can be compared with and contrasted to the client's narratives regarding the worldview as experienced in his or her 'wider world' relations.
- Phase Two focuses upon the descriptive investigation of the client's interrelational experience of co-habiting this 'therapy world' with the existential psychotherapist. This often intensely experienced examination of the client's worldview as it presents itself in the 'therapy world' may enable the implicit or covert dispositional stances that maintain the explicit or overt tensions and disturbances being presented by the client to be more adequately clarified and considered from the standpoint of their relatedness to the worldview. Since such inquiry is centered upon the immediacy of the relationship with the existential psychotherapist in the 'therapy world', Phase Two's central focus is on the client's honest examination of the challenges provoked by the therapeutic relationship itself.
- Phase Three puts into practice the possibilities of reconfiguring the client's 'wider world' worldview via the incorporation of at least some of the experiential alternatives provoked by the experience of co-creating and co-habiting in the 'therapy world'. By doing so, an increased resonance between the newly established worldview and the client's experience of worlding may become possible. Through this (at least partial) bridging of the client's 'therapy world' and 'wider world' worldviews, Phase Three provides the means by which the temporary 'therapy world' is 'closed

down' via the ending of the therapeutic relationship.

15. Phase one: Exploring relatedness

- Other-focused listening
 - The primary task throughout phase one is that of seeking to clarify descriptively the client's worldview as it expresses itself in the therapy world so that this worldview can be considered, compared and contrasted to the client's statements regarding his or her wider world worldview. The descriptive exploration being attempted by the existential psychotherapist concentrates upon the clarification of:
 - The noematic elements of the client's narrative – that is to say, the 'story' or, more broadly, the 'what' of the client's narrative;
 - The noetic elements of the client's narrative – that is to say, the 'referential' elements of the client's narrative that express 'how' the client experiences that narrative via his or her dispositional stances.
- Being with and being-for the client
 - Existential psychotherapy's focus calls upon therapists to respond to the challenges of openness and uncertainty that arise in the immediacy of their encounter with the client with whom the therapy world is co-created.
 - Being-with the client: The attempt at being-with the client, expresses the existential psychotherapist's respect for, and acceptance of, the worldview of their clients as revealed within the therapy world. Being-with the client is the attempt to embrace both the dispositional stances being adopted by the client and the way in which they are being given its expression such as via the language employed, the non-verbal movements and gestures that may express or accompany client statements and the chosen means of dialogue employed by them.
 - Being-for the client: Being-for the client expresses the existential psychotherapist's willingness to attempt an increasingly adequate 'resonance' with the client's worldview as it presents itself in the therapy world. It enjoins the existential psychotherapist to be an other who, in the act of embracing the alien worldview of the client, seeks to permit that worldview to co-habit the therapy world without threat of its being distorted, amended, altered or rejected by the other's (i.e. the therapist's) more powerful worldview.
- The existential psychotherapist as 'the Other'
 - The existential psychotherapist is the presenting focus for the client's other-construct. As this other, the therapist is both the representative of

all others who contribute to the definition and maintenance of the client's other-construct and, just as importantly, is also the other who challenges the client's current other-construct and, hence, the currently maintained worldview.

- Via the existential psychotherapist's client-attuned presence, clients are more likely to respond to the presence of a non-judgmental other who attempts to describe and embrace their worldview by initiating an accepting stance toward it. This shift, in turn, promotes the possibility of clients' greater willingness and courage to access novel worldview possibilities within the secure boundaries of the therapy world and thereby confront the sedimentations and dissociations that define and maintain their wider world worldview as a whole as well as its primary constructs (i.e. the self-, other- and world-constructs).

16. Phase one: Exploring the client's worldview

- The phenomenological method of investigation
 - The rule of epoche (bracketing): the first step urges the existential psychotherapist to set aside any initial biases and prejudices and to suspend, or bracket, all expectations and assumptions regarding the client's statements and their implicit meaning.
 - The rule of description: the second step shifts the existential psychotherapist's focus of attention away from theoretical explanations, and, instead, emphasizes the task of describing as concretely as possible that which the client presents.
 - The rule of horizontalisation (the equalization rule): in being willing to follow this rule to some extent, investigators reduce the likelihood of imposing unnecessary judgments or biases on their initial observations. In doing so, they increase the adequacy of their conclusions. Conversely, the failure to maintain a horizontalizing attitude too soon after an investigation has begun will skew the therapist's attunement to the client's presenting worldview so the overall attunement will likely be far less adequate than it might have been.
- Existential tensions
 - As a means of clarifying the client's worldview as focused initially upon his or her self-construct the exploration of the client's existence tensions may prove to be useful in generating descriptive discourse.
 - What is critical to understand about the exploration of existence tensions is that they are primarily a means with which to map or 'to get a reading of' the client's worldview. The aim is not one which seeks to

amend any aspects of the polarities they express. Nor is it to shift the client's position with regard to each polarity closer toward some sort of balance or equilibrium.

- Descriptive challenging
 - The focus of existential psychotherapy during phase one tends to avoid what might broadly be termed analytically focused investigations whose principal concerns lie with explanatory hypotheses about possible past or originating 'causes' of the client's current worldview. Thus, the existential psychotherapist's interventions tend to center upon the 'what and how of experience' (that is, the noematic and noetic constituents of an experience) as exemplified through the phenomenological method.
 - Descriptive challenging is the challenging of the client's worldview so that its implicit dispositional stances are made more explicit. The more the dispositional underpinnings of the client's worldview are brought to awareness, the clearer will be the inconsistencies, contradictions and areas of tension that are contained within them or which they provoke for the worldview. Even then, however, the task of the existential psychotherapist is not to offer alternatives or attempt their reduction or removal but, rather, to engage with the client in the exploration of their relatedness to the presenting problematic issues.
 - The effectiveness of descriptive challenging rests initially upon the existential psychotherapist's willingness and ability to be creative in the descriptive challenges presented to the client. This creative quality is founded upon what I have termed curiosity.

17. Phase one: Therapeutic un-knowing

- Acceptance
 - You, the client, have the right to be who you are being as you are being
 - I, the therapist, have the right to be who I am being as I am being
 - We have the right to be with each other as we are being
- Curiosity
 - What is it like for me, the therapist, to be in the presence of this other whom I designate as 'you'?
 - What is it like for me, the therapist, to attempt to embrace your way of being as you express it?
 - How willing am I, the therapist, to attempt an enterprise of shifting between the polarities that are expressed as 'you' and 'me'?
- Existential confrontation

- What fits/does not fit between the being you say you are and the narratives you provide regarding that being?
- What fits/does not fit between the being you say you are and the being who is in or embodies this current relation?
- What fits/does not fit between your stance regarding the others you say exist 'out there' and this particular other who is in or embodies this current relation?

18. During Phase Two, the task of the existential psychotherapist becomes increasingly that of engaging in a dialogue with the client that stands at the 'self' end of the therapist' self/other polarity and which simultaneously stands at the 'other' end of the client's self/other polarity. In this way, the client's primary experience of the therapist is as an 'other' who asserts that 'otherness'. Through it the client can begin to engage in a novel way of dialogue which permits the exposure and challenging of any number of foundational components of the currently maintained world-view and, in particular, those components impacting upon the self-construct and other-construct.

19. Thus, Phase Two focuses upon the descriptive investigation of the client's experience of co-habiting in the therapy world with the existential psychotherapist. Through this, the interrelation between the explicit tensions presented by the client and the implicit components that generate and maintain these tensions can be more adequately disclosed via the resonances, divergences, challenges and conflicts that arise as expressions of the 'self/other' polarity experienced in the immediacy of the therapeutic encounter.

20. Phase Two: Listening to and challenging the client's narrative

- The overall task of Phase Two listening and challenging remains that of continuing to assist exposing and exploring 'what is there' for the client as expressed via the currently maintained worldview. Therefore, the shifts in listening and challenging that are characteristic of Phase Two require continuous scrutiny as to the impact they may be having upon the client's experience of sufficient security within, and trust of the other who co-habits, the therapy world. As one option, the existential psychotherapist can always monitor the client's experience through straightforward inquiry. A second option is for the existential psychotherapist to adopt an overtly invitational stance to all such investigations so that they proceed only if agreed to by the client.
- Shifts between the particular and the general: this first aspect of Phase Two listening and challenging invites the client to reconsider those narratives focused upon a particular experience from a perspective that opens the

experience to its more general experiential possibilities.

- Shifts from the explicit to the implicit: the existential psychotherapist focus rests more directly upon that which implicitly underpins the client's explicit statements. This focus attempts to disclose the underlying, unstated dispositional stances through which the explicit statements emerge so that the client is challenged to address and explore that which was previously left implicit and on the fringes of his or her awareness.
- The existential psychotherapist's use of 'self-as-other': the exploration of immediacy within the therapy world can be extended to include directly the client's experience of engaging with the existential psychotherapist as 'the other in the client's other-construct, and whose way of being 'the other in the therapy world' is a challenge to the client's other-construct, and, through it, the whole of his or her worldview.

21. Phase two: Exploring sedimentations and dissociations in the client's worldview

- While some components of the worldview remain relatively flexible and open to reconstitution and redefinition in response to experiential challenge, it is also the case that many of components, in response to challenge, resist redefinition and remain fixed or inflexible to alteration. These typically recurring, fixed dispositional stances or sedimentations provide the worldview with a sense of (relatively) fixed and permanent essence.
- Via the clarification of the client's sedimentations, various emergent distorted and disowned or dissociated experiences of being can begin to be identified. Dissociation refers to that 'splitness in reflective being' that arises when the worldview's response to the challenges of meeting the world is that of denying or 'disowning' those challenges in order that the current sedimentations that define it can be maintained. Dissociation 'blocks' or avoids the assimilation of challenging inter-relational experiences whose impact and 'ownership' would alter or fragment the worldview.
- The problems that arise through sedimentation and dissociation, in so far as they are of relevance to psychotherapy, can be briefly summarized: the degree to which we sediment is parallel in the extent to which those experiences that challenge the sedimentation must be dissociated.
- The examination of the client's worldview through Phase Two permits both the existential psychotherapist and client to identify the sedimentations and dissociations that present themselves through the descriptive investigation and challenge being undertaken. In addition, as well as identifying these, Phase Two challenges to the worldview allow the clarification of the depth

or rigidity of the sedimentations (and the parallel strength of their concomitant dissociation).

22. Phase Two: The inter-relational realms of encounter

- This approach focuses upon four distinct inter-relational realms. I have labeled these the I-focused, You-focused, We-focused and They-focused realms of encounter.
- The I-focused realm of encounter attempts to describe and clarify the dispositional stances that arise through ‘my experience of being “my self” in any given relationship’.
- The You-focused realm of encounter attempts to describe and clarify the dispositional stances that arise through ‘my experience of the other in any given relationship’ as well as ‘my experience of the other’s experience of me in any given relationship’.
- The We-focused realm of encounter attempts to describe and clarify the dispositional stances that arise through each participant’s experience of ‘us being in relation with one another’. It asks, ‘what do I tell my self about the experience of being us in the immediacy of this encounter?’

23. Phase Two: Working with dreams

- Dreams allow the dreamer to challenge the currently maintained worldview, particularly in terms of its currently problematic sedimentations and dissociations, by providing ‘dream world’ descriptions, alternatives or challenges to that worldview for the dreamer to experience, explore and ‘play with’.
- Allow the client to recount the remembered dream in his or her own initially preferred way.
- Invite the client to offer any additional information that seems immediately relevant to the remembered dream.
- Invite the client to consider a number of descriptively focused clarification intended to contextualize the dream: Spatial contextualizing, temporal contextualizing, contextualizing dream world objects, contextualizing the dreamer in the dream world, contextualizing key behavior.
- Following these initial steps, invite the client to repeat the dream, but this time expressing it in the present tense.
- As the therapist, repeat the dream for the client staying in the present tense, using the first person (I) throughout and imitating key behavior as has been previously demonstrated by the client.
- Has the repetition of the dream provoked any further thoughts or

remembrances about the dream for the client?

- Highlight the key elements of the dream from an inter-relational perspective and centred upon the dreamer.
- Explore descriptively with the client each of the above inter-relational dream elements. Of, if there are too many, ask the dreamer to select those that provoke the greatest interest or curiosity. The descriptive explorations are intended to focus on the various dispositional stances that emerge when the inter-relational associations between the dreamer and the dream-content element are considered.
- Explore the potential inter-relations between the dream-content elements while keeping in mind what has been discerned from the previous step above.
- Explore what has emerged from the above points in relation to the presenting problem with which the client has been grappling in recent therapy sessions. Does anything emerge through this exploration which sheds light on both the dream and the problem?
- Explore what has emerged from the above points in relation to whatever sedimentations and dissociations in the client's worldview has been previously discerned and/or have been mentioned in the course of the investigation of the dream. Does anything emerge that suggests a relation between the dream and these sedimentations and dissociations?

24. Phase Three: Closing down the therapy world

- The closing down of the therapy world refers to the completion of all contracted arrangements, and their inter-relational conditions, between existential psychotherapist and client. The therapy world that has been co-created by them and which has served as the principal structure within which to disclose and challenge the client's worldview must formally cease to exist. As such, Phase Three addresses the relevant issues surrounding the question of endings as understood by existential psychotherapy.
- The closing down of the therapy world also refers to the consideration and implementation on the part of the client of those possibilities of relatedness as experienced and examined within the boundaries of the therapy world extending beyond its boundaries and into his or her wider world of relations.
- Phase Three: The They-focus
 - The They-focus realm of encounter concerns itself with the client's experience of how those who make up his or her wider world of

'others' experience their own inter-relational realms in response to the client's way of relating to them.

- The descriptive exploration and challenge of the impact that a client's dispositional stances may have upon an other's – or various others' – relations to that other's or those others' sense of self.
- The descriptive exploration and challenge of the impact that a client's dispositional stances may have upon an other's – or various others' – way of relatedness to a different other or a group of others.
- The descriptive exploration and challenge of the impact that a client's dispositional stances may have upon an other's – or various others' – relations to the world.
- The existential psychotherapist who is attuned to They-focused realm of inquiry, can urge the client to consider the meaning and effect of his or her decision from the standpoint of its impact upon the self-construct of those others in the client's wider world relations who have been singled out as being significant. In addition, the existential psychotherapist can challenge the client to consider the meaning and impact of his or her decision from the standpoint of those others' relations with one another (i.e., the others' other-construct). Finally, the existential psychotherapist can explore with the client the possible meaning and impact of his or her decision from the standpoint of those others' world-construct.
- Phase Three: Bridging the client's therapy world and the wider world
 - Phase Three can be considered as that phase in existential psychotherapy wherein the client becomes the primary investigator of the worldviews as he or she lives, or embodies, it beyond the confines of the therapy world.
 - Phase Three is also a period of discovery for the client, some of which will allow the establishment of novel wider world worldview dispositional stances that are resonant with those experienced within the therapy world, and some of which will confront the client with the painful awareness of his or her inability to establish or maintain these stances within the wider world worldview.