

CONFIRMATION

confirmation: the recognition and acknowledgement of another person as a worthwhile fellow human being; acceptance of the person's uniqueness, validation of his perspective on himself and the world, and, most importantly, affirmation of his potential to change and grow.

Discussion:

The crucial message of confirmation is the affirmation that the person can be more than or different from the way he is now. This affirmation can take the form of a respectful challenge to become aware of and integrate parts of himself that have been alienated or denied (Yontef, 1993, 222-3) or to experiment with new ways of being that may allow him to become more fully and authentically himself. However, this must be done with adequate support and caring, so that the client does not feel shame, experiencing the challenge as a criticism of how he is now or as a threat to his being accepted and valued by the therapist.

Children whose parents confirm their value and uniqueness will tend to have a strong sense of their own worth and competence. They will not be afraid to be themselves and live fully. Those children who are unconfirmed or disconfirmed will more likely develop shame or psychopathology. Some develop a "false self," trying to be the person their parents want them to be, rather than their true self. When the latter turn to psychotherapy for help, part of the Gestalt therapist's work is to provide the caring and confirmation that they never received, enabling them to trust that they have the possibility and capacity to develop into whoever and whatever they want to be.

Illustrative Quotations:

• **Buber:** "Sent forth from the natural domain of species into the hazard of the solitary category, surrounded by the air of a chaos which came into being with him, secretly and bashfully he watches for a Yes which allows him to be and which can come to him only from one person to another. It is from one man to another that the heavenly bread of self-being is passed." (1965, p. 71)

"...the inmost growth of the self is not accomplished, as people like to suppose today, in man's relation to himself, but in the relation of the one and the other, between men, ...in the mutuality of the...making present of another self and the knowledge that one is made present in his own self by the other." (1965, p. 71)

• **Friedman:** "...our parents are not always willing to confirm us in our uniqueness. ...'We will confirm you only if you conform to our model of the good child, the good churchgoer, the good student, the good citizen, the good soldier.'" (1994, p. 122) "The 'seeming man'...[does] whatever he thinks will win the other's approval. [This] tendency...originates in man's need for confirmation and in his desire to be confirmed falsely rather than not to be confirmed at all." (1994, p. 121)

• **Hycner & Jacobs:** "[There is] a *deep yearning for a genuine encounter with others*, ...[a] deep underlying need for confirmation, not just from the therapist... - but from the *person* of the therapist. ..."Acceptance, as such, places no interhuman existential demand on the other person to be more than s/he is. Confirmation, on the other hand, at a deep existential level, recognizes and affirms this person's existence even perhaps while saying that his current behavior is unacceptable." (1995, p. 25)

• **Yontef:** "*People become unique selves by the confirmation of other people.* ...The therapist confirms that the patient exists, that the patient has an effect and is as worthwhile as any other person.

...Confirmation also includes confirming what you are called to become, Accepting people as they are does not mean that hope of growth is given up. On the contrary, it is precisely the potential for growth into what one can truly be that is at the heart of confirmation.” (1993b, pp. 35-36)

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