Christian Carditive Therapy

Techniques for Getting to the Heart of Change
Origins of Experiential Therapy

- Freud’s focus on transference and “working through”
- Humanistic psychotherapy
  1. Carl Roger’s Person-centered therapy
Origins of Experiential Therapy

- Fritz Perl’s Gestalt Therapy

These origins should caution Christians, since humanistic psychotherapy is explicitly autocentric.
Origins of Experiential Therapy

- Outcome-based psychotherapy research
  - Leslie Greenberg, Major researcher
  - Susan M. Johnson, Marital therapy
A Brief Rationale for Christian Experiential Therapy

- God reveals himself as having emotions
- God created human emotions, so they belong to him
- Emotions communicate significance; they are important to proper human functioning
- Christianity is a religion of the heart, so emotions are central to the salvation (or soul-healing) process
What is the heart?

According to the Bible and lay psychology: the heart is the deepest part of a person. It is the focus of Christian salvation. It includes our emotions and motivations.
What are the emotions?

An emotion is a sign.

But what is a sign?

A sign is anything that points to something else.
Emotions convey information about...

- Good and bad
- One’s perceptions about good and bad
- Beauty and ugliness
Emotions are motivational

- Emotions can direct or hinder action
- Emotions are usually related to goals, perceived needs, and concerns in life
Emotions can be stored in memory... in the brain.
Conclusion: Emotions are filled with meaning
A Christian Framework for the Emotions

Using a Redemptive-Historical Model

- Creation
- Fall
- Redemption
Emotions and Creation

- Emotions are created good
- Emotions are for the glory of God
- Humans are to be image-bearers in their emotions: We should love what God loves and hate what he hates
- Proper human development leads from simple emotions to virtuous emotions
Emotions and the Fall into Sin

Emotions are corrupted by sin and develop in a fallen world.
Sin’s Direct Effects on Emotions

- Sin makes human emotions autocentric
- Sin produces objective shame; Sins produce objective guilt
- So, healthy humans now should feel appropriate *true* shame and *true* guilt
- But sin also leads to an autocentric denial of shame and guilt
The Emotion-System can be Damaged in a Sinful World

Parents can sin against their children in ways that activate emotions, by...

1. Maintaining a chronically negative emotional atmosphere
2. Apparent hating of their child or terrorizing the child
3. Neglecting the child
4. Fostering arrogance/sense of superiority/judgmentalism

Such activities create excessive negative emotions, including *false* shame and *false* guilt
The Emotion-System can be Damaged in a Sinful World

Parents do not always know how to promote healthy emotions, for example...

1. Sudden, radical exchange of one negative emotion (fear) for another (sadness): “Stop crying!!”
The Emotion-System can be Damaged in a Sinful World

- Parents do not always know how to promote healthy emotions, for example...

  2. Promotion of inauthentic emotions: “Be a perfect girl.” (implied)

  3. By not soothing the child when the child is distressed.
The Emotion-System can be Damaged in a Sinful World

Outcomes of poor emotion shaping

1. Some will under-regulate their emotion
2. Some will over-regulate
3. Some will develop shame-prone personalities
   Shame is strongly associated with all major forms of obvious psychopathology
The Emotion-System can be Damaged in a Sinful World

- People’s brains (and emotional patterns) get “wired” in childhood

  Past emotional patterns tended to be repeated in the future
The Redemption of Emotions

God gets glory by freeing people from sin and sin’s effects, and personally bringing them into his intended design for them, including healthy emotions.
The Redemption of Emotions

Christ’s life, death, and resurrection is the basis of human redemption.

On the cross, Christ absorbed our objective shame and guilt.

Through Christ, God’s emotions towards humanity changed. On the cross, divine rejection, alienation, uncleanness, anxiety, and despair are mysteriously mixed together with divine love, compassion, mercy, and forgiveness.
The Redemption of Emotions

Believers enter into union with Christ by faith.

Union with Christ leads to two sides of salvation:

1. Declarative salvation
2. Experiential salvation
The Redemption of Emotions

Declarative salvation is the believer’s new identity in Christ: holy, righteous, child of God—as perfect as a human can be.

Experiential salvation is the gradual realization in life of one’s declarative status: experiential Christlikeness.
The Redemption of Emotions

So, experiential salvation involves changes in one’s beliefs, emotions, actions, and understanding of others through the activity of the Holy Spirit.

A primary goal of experiential salvation is having properly functioning emotions.
The Redemption of Emotions

According to Jonathan Edwards, properly functioning emotions include:

1. Love of God and delight in his beauty
2. An appropriate love of God’s image-bearers
3. Humility
4. Contrition for sin
5. Joy in God and God’s goodness
6. Appropriate sorrow at human suffering
The Redemption of Emotions

The redemption of emotions means our emotions correspond more and more to God’s emotions.

This is a primary goal of redemption.
The Redemption of Emotions

We are conformed to God as...

sin’s influence on our emotions is undermined,

and we are healed from our past emotional damage,

so that our hearts more and more

relish God and his beauty and those made in

his image,

and hate what he hates (sin and injustice).
Strategic Principles in Christian Experiential Therapy
Strategic Principles in Christian Experiential Therapy

We may need to justify authentic emotional experience before God.

2. Consider the book of Psalms.
3. Consider God revealed through the prophets.
4. Consider Christ (before Lazarus was raised, at Gethsemane, on the cross).
5. God prizes honesty and transparency ("Beware of the leaven of the Pharisees").
Strategic Principles in Christian Experiential Therapy

The goal is to reorganize one’s emotions in redemptive ways. This involves...

1. Reexperiencing the emotion/engaging an emotion now
2. Objectifying the emotion, without repression
3. Bringing in other healing considerations to the emotion
Strategic Principles in Christian Experiential Therapy

Help counselees experience their true emotions

1. Role model tolerating the counselee’s emotions. Be a “holding environment.”

2. Train counselees to be alert for signs of emotion.

3. Train counselees to value the revelation of bad emotions. Seek to normalize them (given their story).

4. Explore places where emotion would be expected, but is absent. Seek to uncover the layers of emotion, including the inhibiting emotion (usually anxiety).
Strategic Principles in Christian Experiential Therapy

Promote authentic emotional expression

1. Everything can/should be expressed to God.
2. Some emotions need to be shared with other humans. This must be weighed carefully.
   a. Close trusted friends
   b. Regarding those who have wronged the counselee:
      * If it is best for the other, and they can benefit from it.
      We have no license to share our emotions with people who cannot handle it. It ought not be motivated by revenge.
      * Some things ought to be shared with perpetrators, whether or not they can benefit from it at the time. But the counselee needs to be ready for this.
Strategic Principles in Christian Experiential Therapy

Promote emotion regulation

1. By doing emotion work with the person, you are training how to keep emotions engaged, without becoming overwhelmed (seek to promote a “safe emergency”)

2. Emotion regulation allows the person to process the emotion in a healthy, mature way that makes it productive: leading to self-awareness, action, God, psychospiritual growth, repentance, and so on.
Strategic Principles in Christian Experiential Therapy

Emotion Integration
Combine healing emotions with toxic emotions

1. Tie it into the glory of God: “My life is contributing to the glory of God.”
2. Tie it into God’s story: “My story is becoming part of God’s story of healing and glory.”
3. Take it to the cross: “My anxiety was nailed to the cross. I nail it there by faith and let it go.”
4. Discuss how Christ was affected emotionally by the sufferings of others. Encourage the recognition that Christ was affected “in your case.”
Strategic Principles in Christian Experiential Therapy

Emotion Differentiation
Help counselee distinguish between good created/redeemed emotions and sinful or damaged emotions.
For example…

1. Emotions from creation (e.g., anger at perpetrator)
2. Emotions that flow mostly from sin (e.g., anger at God for the difficulties in one’s life).
3. Emotions that are better understood as a result of damaged creation structures (e.g., intense anxiety in the face of someone who’s angry).
4. Emotions that flow from redemption (e.g., love of God).
Summary of Christian Carditive Therapy

LOVERS

1. Lift up your heart to the Lord
   (Lamentations 2:19)

2. Open up your heart to him, knowing he loves you in Christ.

3. Verbalize your feelings to him (lament if it’s legitimate) and confession if it is sinful) (it can be both). If possible, express to appropriate person.

4. Empty your heart of the feeling, surrender if legitimate, repentance if sin.

5. Receive a new creation emotion from God: Let him raise your heart from the dead.

6. Serve others in the love of Christ.
Specific In-Session Strategies

1. Gently pursue emotions: asking questions that help the counselee explore his or her emotions, like “What is the worst thing about that memory?” Eventually, try to bring redemptive considerations into it.

2. Empty-chair technique: Counselee telling people in past what he or she needed to say in the past but couldn’t (or telling people in the present what they would like to, but can’t), because it would be inappropriate to say it to the person. (or telling the therapist, as a substitute for that person)
Specific In-Session Strategies

3. 2-Chair technique: Old self and new self having an emotional conversation.

4. Take counselee back to a traumatic event and invite Jesus into that event, to bring about a resolution.

5. Use guided imagery to symbolize negative emotions or sinful emotions and redemptive resolutions.

6. Counselee prayer to God, expressing emotions to God.
Out-of-Session Strategies

1. Promote private and public worship of God
2. Assign homework and practice for during the week
   a. Identification of emotions
   b. Journal about one’s emotional experiences (past or present)
   c. When negative emotions arise, practice taking them to God and expressing them to God in prayer
   d. Monitor emotions during emotional episodes
   e. Practicing meditation and guided imagery that activates and processes emotions redemptively; the deeper, the better. Practice the “Death/Resurrection shift”: Activation of neg. emotion => taken to the cross Experience of pos. emotion in its place => the fruit of resurrection