



Tales of Un-Knowing: Therapeutic Encounters from an Existential Perspective

Ernesto Spinelli

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The number of people in therapy has grown at an unprecedented rate over the last decade. Yet the dynamic between therapist and client remains an enigma. In **Tales of Un-Knowing**, Ernesto Spinelli presents eight tales of a therapeutic approach that has proven highly effective in assisting troubled individuals in confronting the problems of everyday life. According to Spinelli, therapy at its most fundamental level involves the act of revealing and reassessing the "life stories" that clients tell themselves in order to establish or maintain meaning in their lives. The role of the therapist is not only to listen, but to help the client to explicate and reconstruct this life story.

Tales of Un-Knowing presents the lives of eight individuals whose experiences illuminate a variety of dilemmas and anxieties that most of us encounter at different points in our lives. We meet a man who refuses to grow old gracefully, a woman who fears that she is only loved for her body, and an octogenarian who lives simultaneously in the present and in the past. We also meet Giles, whose obsessive identification with Einstein led him to theorize about his sex until it became a "living mathematics" full of enthralling permutations and combinations. In the course of the book Spinelli tackles head on the last great taboo of therapeutic practice--sexual attraction between therapist and client.

Existential therapy, then, requires that the therapist experience life through the client's eyes. This frequently leads to challenges to the therapist's own ways of being, and the underlying values, beliefs, and assumptions that maintain them. The term "un-knowing" refers to the challenge to the therapist, who must force him or herself to remain open to new interpretations of that which is familiar, and to treat the seemingly familiar as novel, unfixated in meaning, and accessible to previously unexamined possibilities.

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