

My personal theory



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My Personal Theory of Counseling Kristen Bellows University of Texas at San Antonio My Personal Theory of Counseling Perhaps nothing is as significant to the success of the therapeutic process and nothing represents the foundation of successful therapy more than one's personal theory of counseling. All individuals in all aspects of life work from some belief system, perspective, or model of how the world works, how things are, and how things interact. Developing a deep understanding of one's own personal theory leads to better decision-making with respect to the therapeutic process, including therapist approach and client interaction.

Such an understanding also promotes a greater ability to intervene more effectively with clients whose values are in contrast to one's own. Being aware of one's own personal theory of the world and, subsequently, one's view of counseling, also helps the therapist identify individual strengths and areas for improvement. The personal orientation of the therapist is a sum total of many influences such as interests, self-awareness, experience, values, and compassion for others, among many other things. Such influences have a direct impact on one's personal theory of counseling.

For instance, my Christian upbringing, experiences, and beliefs have a significant impact on my personal view of the world and others and, therefore, also on my theory of counseling. My religious beliefs and values coincide with some therapeutic approaches and not others. In this paper I delve into my recent introspective and reflective explorations as well as the experiences and lessons I have learned throughout my life which has led me to embrace and adopt the particular theory of counseling I believe suits me the most at this time.

Of all the theories I have learned for the duration of this class, none has resonated with me as much as Existentialism. While I have a tremendous reverence for psychoanalysis and its focus on examining the causal factors behind one's thoughts, feelings and behaviors i. e. one's past/childhood, the unconscious, as well as its contribution of key concepts to counseling such as transference and countertransference, I am a bit unsettled by the deterministic and rigid view this approach takes of human nature.

I connect much more deeply to the philosophies of existentialism: the emphasis it places on an authentic and genuine encounter with clients, its recognition and respect for the client's subjective world, trust in the capacity of the client to make positive decisions and the concepts it focuses on in counseling such as meaning, purpose, freedom, responsibility, choice, isolation, death concepts that relate to our mere existing in the world and the larger scheme of life.

I tend to shy away from the theories such as cognitive-behavioral therapy, feminist therapy, and gestalt therapy, which are very technique-oriented, exercise-driven, directive in approach, and simply require too much action on the therapist's behalf. I feel these theories do not allow much of the client's pursuits and search for meaning in life to come through or at least, it is not the major focus of therapy.

I do recognize that for some clients these other therapies may be useful, which is why I do not discredit nor dislike them; I just feel that they do not mesh with who I am personally and are not as inherent to my way of being as much as the precepts of existentialism are. Personally, I hope to find out

my purpose in life and contribute something meaningful to the world. Over the few months of self-reflection, I realize that I simply get great joy through serving others and helping them in any way I can.

I am more concerned with creating a meaningful identity and relationships with others as I recognize the limits to my existence. I know that one day, I, as well as everyone else will die, and I therefore have a longing to make the most of my time on earth and the time spent with others filled with less conflict and more harmony and love. To me, love is the ultimate gift in this world, and I think it is one of the most powerful gifts that I possess and would like to share with everyone.

I always believe there is something good to love in everyone and don't believe in categorizing people as good or bad, healthy or unhealthy. I don't believe that one's existence is fixed or that people are tied to their past. I think we are always re-creating ourselves and making sense of each moment of the life we live. Perhaps I relate so well to the concepts of existentialism also because it explores basic dimensions of the human condition, particularly death, which closely ties in with religion.

Religion, namely that of the Baptist religion, has played a large role in my life. It has helped me make sense of life and been a moral compass in most regards. The parallel I see drawn between the Baptist religion and existentialism in terms of death occurs when I think about the Lenten season and something the priest says on Ash Wednesday: " Remember man that thou art dust and unto dust thou shalt return. " This act reminds me of our

mortality, similarly to how the existentialist perspective tries to allow us to grasp the inevitability of death.

Death to me is not something I try to avoid thinking about. It is something that I am very aware of and has had a marked impact on my life. I am constantly seeking a life full of zest, meaning, and one that is filled with love and service to others. In this search, I have experienced the existential anxiety that comes from some of the inevitable conditions of simply being alive. That is, loneliness, finiteness and freedom of choice all bring up a certain amount of anxiety in me, yet I use this anxiety as reason to make changes in my life.

After I graduated with my degree in psychology in 2003, I worked for a while in a school setting. Working in the school especially caused a lot of anxiety in me because I constantly felt that I was not living up to my potential. I just felt as though the job I was doing was a means to no end. My view on work is that it should not be just a job, but rather a career, a lifestyle, something that you are proud to call your profession. It has helped me make sense of what I am called to do and given my life a purpose. I am happy with the path I am on right now.

As an existentialist, therapy would also be structured around increasing a client's self-awareness. This is important because we need to be aware of our capacities in order to exercise freedom and live as fully as possible. I would try to especially help clients take responsibility for their lives instead of passively letting circumstances and external forces direct their future. I would try to point out how it would be an inauthentic way of living if one

subsumes the role of a victim instead of exercising the freedom that they possess.

I strongly believe that we can create and shape our lives and rise to the challenges that it may present us with. In saying all this, I would not take a directive stance in expressing these opinions, as in doing so, I would be making decisions and choices for the client that they might not choose to accept. I would rather challenge them to explore how they have been living in the past that has prompted them to seek therapy today and help them discover new ways of living that will lead to a change in their situation.

A large part of therapy as well would include helping clients trust in themselves to find the answers, rather than look to others to direct them. Ultimately, we are alone. As cynical as it may sound, we did come into the world alone and we will die alone. We of course depend on our human relationships with others and connecting with others is very important, however, we must be able to function as our own person firstly and form our own identity in order to relate healthily to others. One cannot rely all the time on others for the answers and depend upon them for their happiness.

In therapy, when clients try to do the same of me as a therapist, in order to break this pattern, I would explain to them that there is no easy answer and that they alone have the capability to find the right answer. In therapy, I would also try to provide the space for clients to find meaning in their life by asking questions that help them explore whether or not they are content with their current life, and who they are becoming, as well as helping them establish values that they will need to adopt in order to live a life that is

meaningful to them. I would also be sure to talk frankly about the reality of death.

Ignoring the topic of death makes its presence even stronger than if one were to confront it. In doing this, that is, addressing a fear that seems overwhelming to explore, a client is also opened up to experiencing life in a more authentic way. Along with the goals of exploring anxiety, self-awareness, death, freedom and responsibility, and a meaningful life, the relationship between the client and me is of central prominence. Our therapeutic encounter will be the activator of positive change and it requires honesty and authenticity of me as well, in order to join the client in their subjective experience.

I believe as a therapist, it will take a lot of courage, respect and faith in the client's ability to grow and reach greater heights and it is important that I am fully present to the client in our encounters. Although right now I am solely focusing on the existential approach to therapy, I believe that later on as I see a variety of clients, I may need to adapt certain interventions or techniques from other theories that might be suitable for a particular client.

However, I believe my main assumptions and goals for clients will remain in line with that of existentialism. The existential theory of counseling appears to be an appropriate theoretical base to use in counseling because it fits my style of counseling. It is supportive of the client finding meaning in life, which resolves the existential anxiety many people are feeling today. In addition

the existential philosophy supports clients' spiritual growth but likewise can be used with a secular approach as well.

In the same way I would evaluate a client's success on the basis of whether they have been able to find a purposeful existence through the discovery of their strengths, their own freedom of choice etc. , is how I would evaluate myself personally and as a counselor. Can I live authentically? Can I create a life of meaning? Can I sit with ambivalence and anxiety? Can I make my own choices without having to depend on others? Can I face my fears rather than live a restricted existence? I do not have all the answers to these questions thus far, but they are important questions to me that I am always trying to answer.

They are questions which I will probably always be asking myself as I re-evaluate and re-discover myself, but one thing I have realized thus far that is true for me, is that love is the highest goal to which I aspire. I wish to serve others and bring about change in others in counseling through this vessel.

References Seligman, L. , & Reichenberg, L. W. (2010). Theories of Counseling and Psychotherapy: Systems, Strategies, and Skills (3rd ed.). New Jersey: Pearson Education Inc.