

Person-Centered Theoretical Approach to Counseling

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Introduction

With a variety of theoretical approaches to counseling out there, it can be difficult to understand which method is best suited for you and your personal goals. As I have learned throughout this course, there are a myriad of ways to go about achieving personal growth goals, learn new behaviors, and make effective changes in one's life. For me, throughout this course I have always been drawn to person-centered theory. I believe person-centered theory is the most effective type of theory to ground myself in when it comes to my future practice as a school counselor. Throughout this essay, I intend to cover all the facets of this type of theory and why this theory will be beneficial to myself and my future clients within the school setting.

Human Nature and Change

My personal values and beliefs pertaining to human nature and change, best fall within the parameters of person-centered theory. The key concepts of person-centered theory revolve around this idea that the client has the freedom to discover themselves. I think that as human beings, we are inclined to learn about not only ourselves but others as well. A huge part of the human experience is learning about what values, beliefs and desires you have as an individual. Person-centered theory is founded on the view that humans are naturally self-understanding and trustworthy, and I personally agree with this stance. (Corey, 2017). I also believe that human beings are ever changing, and we have the power to decide our future behaviors and control our thoughts and impulses. In person-centered theory, change is seen as something that is controlled by the client and that their choices are theirs to make. However, I do believe that social context and past experiences shape the choices we make and the behaviors we have as a direct result. This aligns with person-centered theory as well. In person-centered theory the developer, Carl Rogers, believed that with a growth-promoting climate clients can become who they desire to be.

(Corey, 2017). As a Christian, I cannot deny the fact that God walks in step with us throughout our personal growth journeys. Believing that the Holy Spirit is a catalyst for change in our lives is something that I also believe goes hand in hand with person-centered theory. Because this theory is so focused on the person and who they are and all the attributes that go with that, spirituality is something that is accepted within this type of theory.

Personal Background

Growing up in a Catholic household shaped my views of human nature, what my personal views and beliefs were, and the values I have held throughout my life. I have always been someone that has naturally believed the best in other people. I have had a knack for understanding others deeply and figuring out why they have certain behaviors. I really enjoy learning about other people and how they have become the people they are today, because of both their past and present experiences. All these values that I hold for other people I think are what shape me into the understanding and caring individual that I am. I have had my fair share of difficulties and adversity throughout my life, that directly influence my own behavior and choices. I am guarded when I interact with others and when it comes to sharing about myself, I find it difficult for me to trust others easily with personal information. In my past and present relationships, I am slow to warm up to others but once I feel as though someone is trustworthy, I am very loyal. I have seen so much personal growth within myself when it comes to how I handle stress, adversity, and how I have changed a lot of past dissatisfactory behavior patterns. When it comes to person-centered theory, I believe this is the type of theory that really allows for individuals to feel heard, understood and that they can trust the counselor. Because of my personal beliefs on how all individuals have the potential to be their best, when nurtured and within a safe space, person-centered theory really elevates those beliefs. Within the context of

person-centered theory, I believe I would be able to operate best and counsel others appropriately because of how closely this theory lines up with how I like to approach other people and their personal struggles. Again, as a Christian I feel as though there is so much potential for others to be who they desire to be because I believe that God gives us that strength through the Holy Spirit. I also believe that God gifts us with the ability to self-analyze and self-discover through the Holy Spirit as well. Person-centered theory allows for the conversation of spirituality to exist free of scrutiny, and it allows for the client to have the freedom in expressing their religious beliefs if that is something they feel comfortable with.

Relationship Building and Assessment

I would establish a positive therapeutic relationship with the client by clearly communicating that the main values of the practice are rooted in trust. Establishing trust with the client is essential if there is to be any progress made. As the counselor, I will approach the client with respect, honesty, and an open dialog. This will eventually lead to a rapport between myself and the client, and the relationship can develop further from there. Having a positive attitude towards the client and their ability to succeed is necessary for the client to feel encouraged and supported. I will place an emphasis on self-discovery and how opening-up will truly allow for real change to occur, because being honest with yourself is the first step in creating a plan to make effective changes in behaviors and lifestyle choices. I plan to assess the client's needs by first asking about their life story from the beginning until present. After having the information about the individual, I will be able to ask questions that both allow for further self-discovery from the client and champion the client taking control of the conversation. Giving the client to ability to decide what they wish to discuss is important for the client to have self-realization, free of being influenced by me as the counselor. Based on what the client shares, further assessments

can be made, and goals or plans can be implemented collaboratively. Progress with the client will be made as they reveal what it is they wish to attain and achieve. I would set goals in relation to wellness and prevention by walking alongside the client in their journey of self-discovery and guiding the client towards healthy choices. Allowing space for the client to express what they feel and think and then challenging the client to problem solve I believe is the most effective way to achieve progress. Once the different strengths and weaknesses of the client have been personally identified and divulged by the client, I as the counselor can give insight into how best to prevent certain behaviors and promote healthy choices. The view of psychopathology in person-centered theory puts focus on the client holistically. The client is evaluated on their needs, their context, their desires, goals, and strengths. The client is the core of this theory, from here assistance and goals can progress. (Dollahide, & Lemberger-Truelove, 2018). Because of this narrow focus on the client, it can prove difficult to quantify outcomes of therapy. Due to the ambiguity of a client's feeling satisfaction and growth because of therapy with this specific type of theory, measuring client outcomes can be challenging. In a study done on pregnant unmarried teens, the experiment sought to understand if group person-centered therapy can reduce symptoms of depression, improve self-concept and feelings of resiliency in the women. The research found that the person-centered group therapy did in fact reduce overall levels of self-reported depressive symptoms in the group and individuals felt as though they had a greater sense of self. However, the degree to which this improvement can be quantified and proved with empirical data is difficult to grasp at because of the imprecise effects of this therapy. With the client as the assessor of self-improvement, the data can be skewed by bias of the individual. (Sa'ad, Yusooff, Nen, & Subhi, 2014). Evaluation of self-improvement is up to the client.

Ethical & Biblical Principles

There are professional ethical principles that need to be considered when it comes to person-centered theory. The ethical principle of multiculturalism and social justice are two very important things that should be addressed when utilizing this type of therapy. Because of the counselor's duty to empathetic understanding and unconditional positive regard, understanding a client's culture and personal beliefs when it comes to issues of social justice is something to be sensitive towards. Ensuring that your client feels as though you are both educated and willing to learn about their culture is imperative to continuing building a strong relationship with your client. Consideration of multiculturalism and holding value for all cultures is a value that all counselors should have but especially when working within the person-centered theory. It is key that the client feels as though they are exercising their cultural beliefs and norms if they so choose. This is essential for the client to achieve congruence within themselves, which is one of the main goals of this therapeutic approach. In a study done on the concept of multiculturalism and social justice within the context of person-centered theory, the experiment sought to explain how counselors serve as social justice advocates for their clients. This study discusses the value in counselors working to not only conceptualize social justice issues that the client may have, but also encourage the client to feel empowered. (Swan, & Ceballos, 2020). My personal theoretical orientation blends with my Christianity and my values on many levels. I believe that as individuals, we are all unique in how we are made by God and how we function. However, I also believe that we all have the same innate desire to better ourselves and be the best versions of ourselves that we can be so we can be of service to those around us. In person-centered theory, the goal of congruence within the self I think matches up with this value of self-actualization and reflection. The goal is to improve within so that you can help and love others well, like Christ. I

think that as a counselor I will incorporate biblical principles into my practice by treating each client as an individual who is beautifully by our Heavenly Father. I think that because Christ sees value and worth in every person, as a follower of Christ I also must-see others in this capacity. With this basic view of those around me, when I enter my practice, I will work to make sure that the client feels valued, respected, and honored by me and this will set the tone for the therapeutic process. As a counselor, I desire to minister to others and ultimately lead them to a healthier way of living and that is ultimately them coming to know the love of God through Christ. I believe that as a counselor there are many ways in which I can emulate Christ through my practice. I can shine the light of Christ through my words, my actions, my internal dialog/thoughts, and through my demeanor towards the client. In a study done on a person-centered approach to spirituality, the experiment sought to understand if a person-centered approach improved individuals' spirituality. While the research is inconclusive for individuals that lean towards analytical processing of information, the individuals that utilize intuitive cognitive processing found the person-centered approach to increase their sense of overall spirituality. (Czekóová, Shaw, & Urbánek, 2018). Because of this research, I believe it is essential for me to integrate biblical principles into my future practice with my clients, for the betterment of their well-being.

Conclusion

In reflection of this theory, I can firmly say that this theoretical approach to my future clients within a school setting is the most appropriate one. As a future school counselor, I desire to reach individuals that have a sense of dissatisfaction with their own behaviors, choices and/or thoughts and help get them to a point of inner peace. I think that person-centered approach is not only effective but appropriate for a school setting since the individual within that context often times needs someone in their life that will listen to and understand them. I believe that the view

of human nature and change within this theory directly aligns with my personal beliefs, values, and views. I believe that because of this alignment, I will be the best counselor I can be and excel at helping my future clients. I believe that this approach allows me to truly understand individuals and their desires and that will easily lead me to a place of crafting a realistic plan alongside the client. Individuals within the school setting need an individual willing and able to listen, someone who is empathetic, supportive, and positive. This approach also allows for the clients to take charge of their life and choices, which is consistent with what the children are being taught when it comes to their academic success. Overall, I think that person-centered theory not only synchs up with my personal values but also with the school context and because of this, individuals will receive the most effective form of therapy they can.

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