

While I view my counseling style as an integrated/holistic approach that focuses on the relationship between mind, body and spirit, this self-test surprised me. I would have considered myself psychodynamic, cognitive and pragmatic. Instead according to the theoretical evaluation self-test, my theoretical preference for counseling incorporates psychodynamic theory, cognitive theory and ecosystem. However, since I do believe that an individual's physical and social environment is influential in the development of their personality, the ecosystems theory as one of my top three is reasonable and justifiable. In looking back at my sessions with clients, I realized that I have not really used existentialism as I have used the three theories the theoretical evaluation self-test revealed.

Psychodynamic, cognitive and ecosystem theories are theories that are easily integrated. It is my belief that each one has therapeutic tools and approaches that can be individualized to address the client's functioning level by focusing on the area of dysfunction: mind, body and/or spirit. Integrating these theories allows for assessment and conceptualization in regards to a client's thought process, emotion and/or behavior.

A goal of psychodynamic counseling is for the client to gain self-awareness and understand the influence of the past on present behavior (Corey, 2016). A psychodynamic approach focuses on internal psychological dynamics. Cognitive theory also focuses on internal psychological dynamics where the focus is on thoughts or the way a person thinks. In cognitive theory, the assumption is that thoughts are a primary determinant of emotion and behavior (Corey, 2016). Ecosystems theory explains behavior through inherent qualities of children and

specifically how their environments influence how they grow and develop (Gardiner & Kosmitzki, 2011).

Psychodynamic theory views dysfunction as having its origin in the unconscious and that all of behavior and feelings as adults stem from childhood experiences (Corey, 2016). Since dysfunction may be a product of unconscious thoughts and emotions, my goal as a counselor is to enhance their awareness of their subliminal thoughts and emotions. During the counseling session, I am using psychodynamic theory when I attempt to help clients find patterns in their emotions, thoughts and beliefs. This will help them gain some insight into their current functioning. The client must have self-awareness or be able to identify important pieces of the puzzle that makes them who they are and rearrange them in ways that allow the client to form a more functional and positive sense of self. For example, if a client expresses a negative perception, through talk, I try to have them become aware of the influences that may have caused the negative perception. I help the client achieve insight using talk therapy and free association which has led to interpretative work. The client is able to begin working through painful memories and difficult issues from the past see how it has affected their perception of their present.

In applying cognitive theory (CT) as a counselor, my goal is to help the client realize that their emotions and behavior are the product of their perceptions of the situations (Murdock, 2013). My first goal is to work on the development of a collaborative relationship between myself and the client. The therapeutic relationship is very important in cognitive theory (Corey, 2016). Then I like to use CT to help clients' restructure their automatic thoughts (Murdock, 2013). In order to restructure their thoughts, they first have to take notice of when and why negative/distorted thoughts occur. There are a number of techniques that I have used such as

journaling, challenging beliefs, relaxation, mindfulness and homework (Corey, 2016). For example, I would use the cognitive technique of questioning the evidence to help clients' question and modify their beliefs regarding a problem (Murdock, 2013).

In the ecological systems theory, it is believed that an individual will encounter different environments throughout their life span (Gardiner & Kosmitzki, 2011). This theory is important when trying to understand and analyze the effects various environments have on emotions and personalities of different people . For example, according to Gardiner & Kosmitzki (2011), the ecological niche is very important because it indicates the roles and position a species has relative to other species. For the human species, the role and position affect the individual emotionally and mentally (Gardiner & Kosmitzki, 2011). Therefore, for humans, the ecological niche along with the socialization of and relationships within the family is critical and invaluable in the development of personality and temperament (Gardiner & Kosmitzki, 2011). In using an ecological perspective, I attempt to identify how client's environment affects their well-being. I try to assess their relationships with people in their different environment by asking various questions. Specifically, I try to ascertain what life roles and identities are important to the client along with their targeted concerns and how the problem(s) fits or occurs within their ecological niche.

When I integrate the above referenced theories, I am combining approaches and fusing them together to fit the needs of my clients. For example, Ms. A sought counseling for low self-esteem. After intake, I realized that besides low self-esteem, Ms. A suffered from anxiety. This was realized through talk therapy that started with free association which is part of psychodynamic therapy. The low self-esteem and anxiety affected Ms. A's occupational functioning, self-care and areas of family and relational functioning . Ms. A would begin

discussions regarding nervousness and tenseness at work, home and church. I gave Ms. A the Generalized Anxiety Disorder 7-item questionnaire which confirmed that she did have anxiety. Her score was between mild and moderate. Testing is a form of cognitive therapy.

Ms. A was able to gain insight and awareness that her low self-esteem and anxiety stemmed from childhood. By looking at and studying her ecological niche, she became aware of the socialization and familial dysfunction within her religious family. While studying her ecological niche, she was able to gain insight utilizing free association. She was able to acknowledge and admit to herself how controlling and critical her parents were, especially her mother.

Ms. A continues to make good progress where she is showing vast improvement in her capacity for self-care and overall life management. We have explored and interpreted underlying issues that have inhibited self-expression and assertion. This fear of self-expression and assertion stemmed from childhood. Now that she is aware or has insight as to the beginning of low self-esteem, we continue to explore the underlying schemas that have impacted her thoughts and behavior. Besides exploring underlying schemas, cognitive behavioral techniques have been used to implement strategies and techniques of self-assertiveness and greater confidence. One way we have accomplished this is through role-play. We have also used in vivo exposure to help address anxieties and fears at the work place. The tasks that cause the most anxieties and fears I have had her practiced them. For example, some tasks require a manual and just the thought of having to get the manual will cause anxiety. I had her get the manual a couple of days and put it on her desk before I had her actual practice some of the tasks.

Ms. A and I will continue our therapeutic work using psychodynamic and cognitive behavioral techniques while still exploring her ecological niches. Ms. A has developed

awareness of the onset of a panic/anxiety attack. Journaling has helped her become aware of the events that have led to an attack. Relaxation and meditation techniques have helped to lessen the severity of a panic attack. Psychoeducation, homework and role playing has helped to improve her confidence and assertiveness.

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Reference

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