Own Theories Paper

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INTRODUCTION

According to Socrates, “the unexamined life is not worth living” (Schiller, n.d.). In class, we have explored many interesting theories that we can use to support our clients. Upon reflecting on these theories to create my own, I feel that my own theory would be guided by the goal of helping the individual to help themselves. I can achieve this by meeting the person at any point in their life, which includes having no expectations, practicing unconditional positive regard, and using humor and empathy to gain trust. It is important to me to keep my clients responsible for their choices and actions, including considering intended and unintended consequences.

In building my theory, I have consulted existing theories; the one I would feel most comfortable working with and which I believe would be most effective in most situations is Psychoanalytic Freudian therapy. Freudian therapy concentrates on making the unconscious conscious, especially related to trauma. This method also utilizes dream work, which involves working with clients to discover new hidden meanings from their dreams. In Freudian therapy, we can also explore one’s childhood, as this is a foundation for the personality of each person (Corey, 2017, pp. 60-61). Another theory that I would utilize is Adlerian therapy. Applying Adlerian therapy techniques will help clients discover themselves and have a more fulfilled life. The major goal of Adlerian theory is to “increase the client’s self-awareness and challenging and modifying their fundamental premises, life goals and basic concepts” (Corey, 2017, p. 105). Techniques used here would include looking at the family constellation, early recollection, and encouraging self-understanding and insight.

Another therapy approach that I would utilize is Rational Emotive Behavior Therapy (REBT). I feel very comfortable with this theory as I attended workshops on REBT. A technique used in REBT is the ABC model. This is an excellent tool "for understanding the client's feelings, thoughts, events and behavior" (Corey, 2017, p. 273). The A represents an activating event, B is the person's belief about A, and C is the emotional reaction (Corey 2017, p. 273). Albert Ellis would often challenge a person's thoughts and have them review why they are thinking the way that they are. Another therapy approach that I feel could be very effective as part of my own theory is Cognitive Behavior Therapy (CBT). CBT is similar to REBT in that negative thought processes are challenged. The last technique I would incorporate is Person-Centered Therapy. Here the therapist provides "a safe, responsive, and caring relationship to facilitate self-exploration, growth, and healing" (Corey 217, p. 169). In summary, my own theory will be flexible to attend to a client's current situation and prioritize their immediate needs without judgment; as I continue a journey with a client in therapy, my techniques may change to accommodate their needs for growth.

PART 1 - *Human nature*: Are people essentially good, evil, or neutral? How much of personality is inborn or determined by biological and/or other innate factors? Are there inborn drives, motives, tendencies, or other psychological or behavioral characteristics that all human beings have in common? How much of a person's individuality is determined by heredity or other innate factors?

A concept that is integral to my theory is that people are generally good, and I have always believed this. For example, a study conducted by Dr. Paul Bloom from Yale University and his wife Karen Wynn demonstrated that babies as early as three months old can distinguish good from evil. In front of an audience of babies, the researchers performed basic tasks such as opening a box or passing a ball with two puppets, where one puppet was kind and the other puppet was cruel. Afterward, the babies were given a chance to choose either puppet and all of

the participants chose the kind puppet (Bloom, 2014). As human beings, we all have some evil in us and we do show aggression and anger at times, but if we obtain control and awareness over these emotions, we can be healthy emotional people. Freud mentions this in his theory using the id, ego, and superego (Corey, 2017, p. 60). Using psychoanalytic therapy will enable me to help the individual understand themselves better and better understand their emotions.

Furthermore, I believe that biological and also innate factors impact personality. We first must look at the biological drives we are born with. According to Maslow, we have basic biological needs, such as food, water, shelter, sleep, and warmth (Spielman, 2017, p. 13). Any lack of these basic needs would significantly impact a person's personality. For example, someone with a sleep deficiency will be angry, stressed, and have health conditions. The basic needs of an individual must be met before anyone can move on to the next stages in the hierarchy of needs. This is an important aspect when conducting an initial interview with a client, as we should be checking to ensure that the individual is meeting these basic needs. Innate factors also contribute to a person's personality. For example, if someone is born with a genetic disease (such as a brain disorder or an immune disease), their personality will be affected depending on how severe it is. All of these factors must be taken into consideration when counseling someone.

I also believe that, from birth, every person has common natural motives that they need to survive. Everyone needs food (hunger), water (thirst), sleep, sex drive, safety, social drive, esteem drive, and self-actualization as stated by Maslow (Spielman, 2017, p. 13). I agree with Alfred Adler that individuals are motivated by a desire for social connection and a sense of well-being, which he called social interest (Corey, 2017, p. 102). Some behavioral and psychological characteristics of human beings are communication, as we are social beings. We also all have emotions, such as happiness, sadness, anger, aggression, love, and fear. We also have perception, cognition, memory, and self-concept. Motivation in humans leads to desires, needs, and goals.

Freud mentions our inborn drives, which are called Eros and Thanatos. Eros represents the desire for pleasure and Thanatos represents the death drive, which also represents aggression and self-destruction (Tan, 2011, p. 33). This all must be considered when understanding the individual in counseling.

I have often wondered about the degree of influence of heredity and innate factors of individuality. We inherit many physical characteristics from genetics, such as eye color, weight, height, and body type. Genetic abnormalities can have a severe impact on one's individuality. Someone born with a handicap, such as the loss of a limb due to a birth defect, may be limited in their physical abilities. Innate social factors that one is born into, such as family life, economics of the family, and the neighborhood the person grows up in can either limit them or help them to achieve success. However, even when someone is faced with unfathomable trauma, I believe we still have the ability to overcome these obstacles with the support of therapy. The perfect example to explain this is the story of Oprah Winfrey. She was born to poor teenage parents and lived with her grandmother. She learned to read at age three. At age six, she goes to live with her mother and at age nine she is raped and molested by several male relatives. She turns to drugs and sex to cope; however, she turns her life around and is very successful, becoming a media giant. She is known for her intelligence and empathy (Spielman, 2017, p. 243). Similarly, in my theory, I agree with Adler that "we create ourselves rather than merely being shaped by our childhood experiences" (Corey 2017, p. 98). I hope to empower my clients with the tools to help them realize their true potential, including and beyond birth factors they cannot control.

PART 2 - *Role of environment in personality development*: How influential is one's physical and/or social environment in one's personality development, and how does the environment affect personality development?

In my theory, I believe that the physical and social environment that one experiences throughout their lifespan has a significant influence on a person's personality development over their lifespan. The physical world where a person lives can influence how their personality develops and changes. A person living in a low socioeconomic neighborhood will be affected by poor housing, where there could be very poor living conditions like no heat or hot water, an infestation of rodents, and lead paint. The neighborhood will usually have limited choices of stores to shop in and they will likely not provide nutritious choices when it comes to food. If a family is poor, they may eat at local fast food restaurants known for food that lacks nutrition and is high in calories, but the cost is less. The school environment may not have the best teachers or all the services a well-budgeted school could provide, like extra help in reading and math. The neighborhood itself may be prone to crime and violence, thus influencing the personality development of a child. The child will have limited after-school activities to attend and may not be motivated to get involved. By living in this environment, the child may also be limited in the choices of colleges to attend, if they even get the opportunity to attend one. Socially, the child will be influenced by the opportunities available to them. There may not be any social activities that the child could participate in, like martial arts, ballet, and dance. If a child grows up in a limited social and physical environment, they may not have the full potential to grow physically as well as intellectually.

We also need to keep in mind prejudice and discrimination and how this will affect a child growing up. Racism can also be an influence on one's personality development. For example, many racial and ethnic groups are subjected to harassment by the police. In my theory, personality development is not limited to one's childhood; social and physical environments can change and impact one's personality development over their lifespan. As a counselor, I hope to support my clients as they navigate significant changes in their lives, especially changes in social

and physical environments. For example, we can use REBT to help clients better understand their thought patterns across the lifespan and combat negative or limited thinking to explore and realize the opportunities and goals they can access.

PART 3 - *Model of functionality*: What constitutes functionality/mental health or dysfunctionality/mental unhealthy in an individual? How do innate and environmental factors interact in influencing a person's functioning, be it relatively healthy or unhealthy?

When looking at what constitutes functional or dysfunctional mental health in my own theory, we must be careful in this determination. Someone's deviant behavior that we observe and label as dysfunctional may be acceptable in their culture (Comer, 2016, p. 3). My definition of a functioning healthy person is someone who has control over their emotions, knows how to deal with stress, has healthy relationships, accepts people for who they are, and does no harm to others. A dysfunctional person is someone who cannot adapt to their society's norms. Signs of dysfunctional behavior can include stress, behavior issues, and relationship problems. Overall, those with dysfunctional behavior have a hard time adapting to life changes.

An unhealthy individual can be assisted with the proper help. Someone going for counseling can be helped with therapy. A therapist who can provide an understanding environment, an accepting atmosphere, and unconditional positive regard would be the first step in helping someone with poor mental health (Corey, 2017, p. 175). We can also assist clients by assessing how they see their current situation and helping them apply the A-B-C model of REBT. Relationships and family interactions could have a major impact on someone's mental health. For example, someone living in an unhealthy household with abusive parents or siblings who are verbally abusive would create a poor self-image. Adlerian therapy would be very helpful with someone who is having family or social problems; an example of an Adlerian tool would be the family constellation, so a counselor can better understand how the family interacts with one

another. In my theory, I believe that even individuals who are having (dysfunctional) challenges in their personality, which may be severe, can benefit from a combination of talk therapy and medication as needed.

PART 4 - *Personality change*: How does personality change after it is to some extent developed? What conditions are necessary but not alone sufficient for personality change to occur, and what conditions are both necessary and sufficient?

In my theory, personality may change due to a few factors, such as when a life-changing event impacts someone so emotionally that they change their entire life outlook, hopefully positively. Personalities can change due to minor factors, such as adopting a pet, or significant life shifts, such as a cancer diagnosis or the loss of a loved one. I believe that, in order for a person to healthily navigate a life change that may alter their personality, therapy is needed to guide the person along the path they are looking to undertake and to resolve any issues they have had in their life. For example, someone subjected to a traumatic event in their childhood could benefit from psychoanalysis, where the unconscious can be made conscious and the traumatic event can be dealt with. Using dream interpretation can be very helpful when working with a client, as there may be hidden meanings in the dreams that can be discussed and worked on.

For someone to change, the first step is to be motivated to change. Deciding to read self-help books, attend workshops, or even go to therapy without any desire to change will not have a lasting impact on the person's personality. Also, to change, we must have obtained the five types of needs according to Maslow; a person needs to have their basic needs met before attempting a change. Seeing a counselor could potentially assist a person in moving through Maslow's hierarchy of needs. For therapy to be effective, there are many conditions in the therapeutic relationship between the therapist and the client that need to occur in order to change one's personality for the better. According to Carl Rogers, these conditions include: "psychological

contact between the counselor and the client, the client is congruent, the counselor is congruent, the counselor shows unconditional positive regard to the client, the client receives empathy from the counselor, and the client perceives acceptance and unconditional positive regard" (Tudor & Merry, 2006, p. 25). When people face life stresses, obstacles, or challenges, they are often motivated to go to therapy to make a change in their life. In my theory, a motivated individual will be the best client to work with to make a change in their life.

CONCLUSION

To develop my own counseling theory, I have considered the existing theories and approaches that I would feel most comfortable using and which I believe would be the most effective in a therapeutic relationship. I believe an eclectic approach to therapy is the most effective. Not every theory will be suitable for everyone; therefore, I will keep an open mind when seeing a client and utilize the skills that I have learned along with the theories to help the client in the best way I can. I believe that a counselor's education never ends, and the more they read and learn, they can become an even more effective counselor.

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