

Theoretical Orientation

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The overarching goal of a Theoretical Orientation project is to discover one's own personal model of counseling through contemplating challenging questions such as what constitutes meaning in life or how to make sense out of difficult situations. This is an important step for those in a counseling profession as empirical evidence is only one factor in choosing a model and a counselor's personal beliefs, personality, and cognitive style should also factor into a theoretical decision (Petko et al., 2016). I believe that as Petko et al., (2016) mentioned, one's personal theory can evolve overtime through exploring new research and it is important to keep open-mindedness as the world around us is constantly evolving. The following sections will first take a deep dive into "Who I am," followed by discussion points into my personal model of counseling, then integrated for sports performance application.

Section 1: Who I am

The area I grew up in sheltered me to my own ethnic background comprised of Caucasian and religious Catholic beliefs while experiencing similar norms and lifestyles within the community. This shared culture that lacked diversity carried over into my undergraduate studies in New Hampshire where the Caucasian population traditionally sits above 90%. I believe this limited my personal growth as those around me looked familiar and we all tended to share similar experiences. The limited experiences influenced my personality in that I only saw the world through one lens, and it was not until I moved to the Bay Area in California that I experienced meeting diverse populations and cultures. Experiencing people of differing races, ethnicities, and sexual identities enabled me to grow and accept different worldviews that I had not been accustomed to. When living in an "ethnic bubble" it can be easy to fall into biases in thinking that the way you live is the dominant way of being and ignore any alternate views or

beliefs. Within the status of the United States current conflicts, I believe “tolerance for disagreement” is of importance in accepting opposing views and beliefs to create a further and diverse understanding of people. Being open to understand differing views and beliefs can challenge oneself to reflect on attitudes in what you think or feel about situations, what constitutes your character, how one can maintain involvement through their lifetime, and the development of a healthy personal worldview (Taves et al., 2018). The ability to reflect and ask big questions relating to how you see the world, why situations proceed the way they do, how you personally think the world works, and what one’s purpose is should be reflected in one’s personal actions, behaviors, and motivations (Taves et al., 2018). I believe one’s worldview does act as a way of life as Taves et al., (2018) states in that it can allow us to make sense of our environment, situations, and events that unfold.

From life experience, I have found that acceptance has worked to make sense out of troubling events that happen without any logical explanation. As we constantly need to adapt to make sense out of situations, it is important to also be mindful for recognizing if issues are present and for understanding in how we experience events. According to Taves et al., (2018) the way in which we personally experience events through information creates a mental mode of “what is happening now” and is important in interpreting events that are described to us, to forecast future events, and to reconstruct memories of past events. By understanding how we experience events, we can then utilize predictions for a model to start to comprehend how our social interactions with family, friends, and others in our life can be reflected in our own thoughts and feelings (Taves et al., 2018). These factors stress the need to be mindful of our environments and how we are interacting with them.

Another significant factor in one's worldview is in finding meaning in life (MIL) by deciding on what your value is in the world as studies have shown that experiencing MIL enhances self-regulation, physical and psychological health (Taves et al., 2018). I believe that my MIL is helping individuals lead healthy lives physically through maintaining exercise programs and in additionally creating psychological health through teaching mental health skills. I also believe in creating a supportive environment free of judgement for clients to feel safe and focused on cultivating well-being. There is also importance in evolving my own knowledge base to aid others wellness and to refrain from getting comfortable in the interventions I use as there is always more to study. The next section describes what counseling therapies will be incorporated into my professional model that is in the process of being developed.

Section 2: Personal Model of Counseling

A Third-wave therapy that I am drawn to is acceptance and commitment therapy (ACT) as it strives to teach people the difference in what can and what should be changed (Prochaska & Norcross, 2018). I find this valuable for the reality of life in that people strive to want to change things that cannot be changed (specific body types, ability to eat unhealthy and not gain weight, sustaining an injury) instead of learning acceptance. Ellis describes these thoughts as irrational beliefs (Prochaska & Norcross, 2018) in that, for example, one should be able to eat whatever they want and not gain weight. ACT would utilize cognitive distancing to create an objective view in these thoughts to instead view the act of eating whatever you want as a hypothesis instead of truth (Prochaska & Norcross, 2018). ACT also holistically blends Western approaches that utilize cognitive techniques with Eastern approaches in noticing, accepting, and enhancing situations and unwanted thoughts (Prochaska & Norcross, 2018). ACT also theorizes that everyone can formulate troubling thoughts as this is viewed as a natural psychological process of

the human mind (Prochaska & Norcross, 2018) and I believe this viewpoint is essential in making people feel as though they are not alone. The ACT model is also action-oriented by increasing forward movement through psychological flexibility by enhancing awareness, creating open-mindedness to experiences, and through behavior change (Dimidjian et al., 2016). I think it is critical to have interventions that produce a path for forward movement instead of solely talking about the limited progress.

Person-centered therapies value the therapeutic relationship and I appreciate how central this is to enhance positive change in an individual through accurate empathy and perceptions of genuineness (Prochaska & Norcross, 2018). By creating empathy and understanding into the other persons world, communication may improve, and trust may be developed within the therapeutic relationship (Prochaska & Norcross, 2018). Throughout the years of client facing work, I understand and value honest and respectful relationships with people and find progress is made when genuine relationships are created. For a further extension to person-centered therapies, motivational interviewing combines important factors in a therapeutic relationship (empathy, warmth, egalitarian relationship) with additionally providing methods that advances clients towards behavior change (Prochaska & Norcross, 2018). I believe that MI aspect of avoiding confrontation through rolling with the resistance is applicable for daily life in that individuals rarely like to be told what to do and it is better advised to avoid arguing for change (Prochaska & Norcross, 2018). This is a daily occurrence as in telling an individual “You must exercise” it is commonly met with resistance and instead find benefits in utilizing the specific skills in MI such as asking open-questions to produce change talk, creating affirmations based on efforts, and through reflective listening summaries within a session (Prochaska & Norcross, 2018).

Psychoanalytic therapies do not seem to fit within my personal model of counseling as it is a lengthy and expensive form of therapy that has not been proven to be more effective than other therapies (Prochaska & Norcross, 2018). I find it challenging to recommend or utilize a practice that has not been proven to be more effective if it requires more time and expense for individuals. I also agree with the existential perspective on psychoanalysis being impractical in viewing individuals to be without freedom and choices in their current lives due to past experiences in not fully developing through the Freudian Psychosexual Stages (Prochaska & Norcross, 2018).

Gender-sensitive and multicultural therapies are of importance in understating relevant knowledge and research into facilitating healthy communications with the ability to empathize, support, and collaborate with clients that identify with these groups (Prochaska & Norcross, 2018). It will be my personal responsibility for continuous professional development in educating myself and working with groups to find best practices as there is no growth in revisiting a single lens focus of the world. There are many groups and individuals that feel misrepresented, unheard, and targeted for being who they are, and it is important to identify productive ways to help represent this population as we all deserve to be heard and treated with the highest care.

Section 3: Sport Performance Integration

As the main subdisciplines of sport science include not only sports psychology but also motor control and development, skill acquisition, sports biomechanics, sports performance analysis, strength and conditioning, sports physiology, and sports technology, integration of principles, concepts, and methods of other fields are needed to heighten proficiency of sports performance (Glazier, 2017). Professionals should work with multiple disciplines to further

understand sports performance interactions between physiological, biomechanical, and psychological variables as “Seldom is a complex question answered by research based in a single science discipline” (Glazier, 2017, p.140).

Anxiety is one common psychological issue that negatively impacts sports performance through the perception of apprehension and tension that activates the autonomic nervous system and results in stiffness in joints (Glazier, 2017). Within behavior therapy, anxiety has been found to be at the root of most behavior disorders and results in an individual’s sympathetic nervous system persistently being exposed to perceived threatening situations (Prochaska & Norcross, 2018). The resulting physiological responses include increases in blood pressure, pulse rate, muscular tension, and sweating (Prochaska & Norcross, 2018). In my current profession, the goal is to increase physical health in individuals and if one’s body responses are heightened as described above, the handling of anxiety levels will need to be addressed for increasing physical health measures. In looking at the behavioral theory belief that anxiety is learned through conditioning, anxiety can theoretically be unlearned through counterconditioning to decrease anxiety levels and the resulting physiological symptoms (Prochaska & Norcross, 2018). Counterconditioning anxiety through systemic desensitization can be utilized through progressive deep-muscle relaxation where the clients are taught to fully relax muscles for awareness and skill in controlling muscular relaxation (Prochaska & Norcross, 2018).

Within an exercise related field, behavioral models can also be utilized with exercise-related injury prevention programs (ERIPPs) to improve adoption and adherence for exercise plans (Gabriel et al., 2019). ERIPPs are programmed with exercises to prevent musculoskeletal injuries from sport or within active populations and include strength, balance, range of motion, and agility exercises (Gabriel et al., 2019). According to Gabriel et al., (2019) two obstacles

arise within clients first not wanting to complete the prescribed exercises and secondly in missing an execution plan for adherence to the programs and mirrors the issues I experience daily with current clientele. As it is important for clients to maintain ERIPPs to reduce injury risk, a change in behavior is needed through identifying what specific factors need to be addressed and primary deterrents need to be identified from the participants perspective for modification of adoption and adherence in programs (Gabriel et al., 2020). By developing scales that utilize behavioral theories to assess behavioral determinants of ERIPP participation would be an important step for health care advancements (Gabriel et al., 2020). This integration of physical and physiological health would ideally create optimal care plan for clients.

Psychological processes when dealing with stressful situations can negatively impact physiological health in individuals with type 2 diabetes (T2DM) and cardiovascular disease (CVD) that presents with high inflammation and stress biomarkers (Järvelä-Reijonen et al., 2020). Increased psychological stress that is occurring with T2DM, and CVD also produces high levels of anxiety that negatively impacts levels of self-efficacy, coping strategies, and emotional regulation (Järvelä-Reijonen et al., 2020). As these issues become a “viscous cycle” it is increasingly challenging to change patterns without addressing both physical and physiological factors. This study conducted by Järvelä-Reijonen et al., (2020) showed promising benefits for application of ACT with T2DM and CVD in decreasing levels of psychological distress. The goal for clients would be to improve motivational levels for maintenance of exercise programs by decreasing levels of anxiety, inflammation, and stress biomarkers.

On a day-to-day basis I believe there is practicality in the addition of therapy techniques to enhance the current programming for the personal training clients that I work with. Progressive deep-muscle relaxation can create understanding into an ideal arousal level before

going into a big competition or a surgical procedure. For individuals that have a difficult time adhering to their ERIPPs, reciprocal inhibition can be utilized in doing the healthy opposite of the ineffective behavior (Prochaska & Norcross, 2018). For example, if a client is avoiding ERIPPs due to lack of time to complete the program, a half-hour of TV time can be swapped out for completion of the exercises. For clients that have CVD, building acceptance and awareness of current lifestyle choices (nutritional choices, quality of CV exercise, stress reducing activities) with the addition of ACT interventions may improve illness perceptions and beliefs (Järvelä-Reijonen et al., 2020).

Summary

As Glazier (2017) states, for a holistic understanding of sports performance a professional should integrate skills and knowledge from multiple disciplines. I also believe in the value of continuously researching successful ways to integrate physical and physiological health through sports performance and counseling therapies to deliver the best care to those I work with. It is also prudent to create multicultural and gender-sensitive therapy knowledge as these populations have a history of being misrepresented and poorly understood. I am excited to continue learning and growing personally and professionally as I believe that it is an ongoing process. The Theoretical Orientation paper was a prudent steppingstone in getting to know “Who I am,” what my personal model of counseling would look like, and a realistic outlook into day-to-day sports performance application.

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