Personal Theory Approach

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Abstract

A therapist's personal theory is critical for comprehensive competent client care. A personal

theory is a combination of the therapist's individual experience, professional competence, unique

personality and worldview. These ingredients are carefully crafted through the crucible of hard

work and study while being synthesized together to represent the therapist's approach to

comprehensive competent client care. In this personal theory paper, I endeavor to explain my

worldview, articulate my base theory and incorporate support theses from particular theories in

order to compile a personal theory approach.

Introduction

I am a Christian counselor and carefully peruse my options for theoretical input. Theories are humanistically based and often contradict the bible. With that in mind, I am careful to ensure that my personal theory approach is filtered through the litmus test of scripture while ensuring the client goal of doing no harm and offering competent, compassionate client care is maintained. Hence, my personal theory is a based on person-centered therapy, supported with various theoretical concepts, interventions and tools…all viewed through the lens of a Christian worldview. All theories have both limitations and contributions, thus, we should gleam the positive aspects of a theory that may apply to our personal theory approach while extrapolating the negative aspects of a theory that may contradict our personal theory approach. As a result, this personal theory is not eclectic, per se, but rather allows for certain aspects of certain theories to be applied while viewing them through the lens of scripture, in order to provide care of individual clients and families.

Worldview

Everyone has a philosophy of life, or what is sometimes called a worldview. Stewart (2006) states, "a philosophy of life is made up of the fundamental beliefs, attitudes, and values that govern a person's behavior" (p. 88). Entwistle (2004), states that "everyone has a worldview – a window through which he or she views the world, assumptions and beliefs that color what he or she sees. The term worldview came into the English language as a translation of the German *Weltanschauung* which might loosely be translated as a life perspective or a confessional vision" (p. 67). Moreover, Entwistle (2004) states, "worldviews shape how we understand our experience in the world, and reflect our expectations about life" and "a worldview, then,

provides a model of the world which guides its adherents in the world" (p. 67). As a Christian, I view the concepts of finance and economics, relationships and society, culture and heritage, problems and solutions & life and death...all through a biblical worldview. Because of this biblical worldview, I choose to incorporate various aspects of different theories that are not antithetical to scripture, but rather, can be massaged and conformed to scriptural principles.

Personality

My personality type is Low D, with a behavioral blend of "Driving Competent Types". According to Carbonell (2005), "D types are more direct, demanding, decisive and dominant. As active/task-oriented individuals they are determined to get the job done. They are very industrious and forceful. They are strong leaders who like to be bosses. On the down side, D types can be too domineering and demanding. They tend to be impatient and insensitive. They love challenges and strive hard to succeed in accomplishing tasks. D's need to guard against the overuse of their strengths" (p. 33). According to Uniquely You Profile (2007), "Driving Competent Types are determined students or defiant critics. They want to be in charge, while collecting information to accomplishing tasks. They care more about getting a job done and doing it right than what others think or feel. They drive themselves and others. They are dominant and caustic. Improving their people skills is important. They need to be more sensitive and understanding. They are motivating by choices and challenges to do well" (Appendix, p. 21). Because of my personality type, I choose to incorporate various aspects of different theories that allow for my drive and determination to freely flow within the theoretical theses that I'll use.

Base Theory Capabilities

The base theory that agrees in part or principle with my biblical worldview while

supporting my personality, is person-centered therapy. Even though person-centered therapy is rooted in humanism, which believes that humans are basically good and have the wherewithal to make the appropriated choices which will impact client change, my biblical anthropological view can compensate by viewing man from a scriptural point of view. The scriptures actually state that man is incapable of helping himself, "…for without me (Jesus), ye can do nothing" John 15:5, King James Version). With my biblically worldview, instead of approaching the client as an individual that can rectify their own maladies, I can approach the client and meet the client where they are and perhaps help them recognize their helplessness. According to Corey (2005), "one reason clients seek therapy is a feeling of basic helplessness, powerlessness and an inability to make decisions or effectively direct their own lives" (p. 170).

Moreover, person-centered therapy does offer a positive construct that allows me as a Christian to be empathetic, caring and willing to listen. Person-center therapy is client-centered and invites the therapist to be warm and show unshakable regard for the client while showing accurate empathetic understanding of the client's problems. According to Corey (2005), "many followers of Rogers simply imitated his reflective style, and client-centered therapy has often been identified primarily with the technique of reflection despite Roger's contention that the therapist's relational attitudes and fundamental ways of being with the client constitute the heart of the change process" (p. 174). According to Corey (2005), "interventions such as listening, accepting, respecting, understanding and responding must be honest expressions by the therapist" (p. 175). According to Clinton & Ohlschlager (2002), "a prevalent failure is rehearsing what we're going to say next rather than listening to a clients entire message. We must train ourselves to listen to the end, to pause and think and only then to respond" (p. 210). As a result, by using this base approach, I can truly listen to the client's needs, hurts and wants.

Burley-Allen (1995) states, "empathetic listening requires…that the listener show both verbally and nonverbally that he or she is truly listening. The overall focus is to listen from the heart, which opens the doorway to understanding, caring and empathy" (p. 14). Thus, this would allow for the conversation to have the appearance of individuals speaking with each other, rather than talking at each other. Petersen (2007) states, "real listening gets us inside each other, and there seems to be something in such a human connection that touches and changes us" (p. 7).

Additionally, as a Christian counselor, I am always prayerful for the opportunity to lead someone to Christ. Through the construct of Christian counseling coupled with the clients' understanding of the informed consent disclosure statement, there should be no surprise that the counseling sessions will blaze a trial that eventually leads to an invitation. Christian compassion and empathy is a major factor in this equation. When I listen compassionately, I connect at a deeper level of intimacy, and thus engage with the speaker's feelings, offering a comforting ear, before offering an invitation or solution. Scripture states, "bear ye one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ" (Galatians 6:2, King James Version) and "finally, be ye all of one mind, having compassion one of another, love as brethren, be pitiful, be courteous" (I Peter 3:8, King James Version). According to MacArthur (2005), "we have that light shining through our lives if our actions reflect the nature of Christ – His love, compassion and forgiveness. His light shines through our attitudes, words, and deeds" (p. 122). MacArthur (2005) further states, "when people see that our lives have been changed so that we have Jesus' values and see the power of God at work in us, they will agree that we do have a great Savior" (p. 122). Lastly, many different clients can benefit from person-centered therapy. According to Corey (2005), "the person-centered approach has been applied to working with individuals, groups and families" (p. 176).

Theoretical Input Usage

Positively speaking, there are a number of theories that can be incorporated into my personal theory approach. Theoretical input can be used for many different purposes, such as, reaching deeper within a client with long term support, correcting cognitive thinking, providing remedy for family dysfunction, weaning the client to self-sufficiency, and moving to a point to introduce Jesus Christ to the client as Lord and Savior. The theories that support the aforementioned premises are explained later in this paper and are as follows…cognitive behavioral therapy, rationale emotive behavioral therapy, psychoanalytic therapy, solution focused brief therapy and family systems therapy.

Although there are many other theories to consider, some of which contain aspects that can be incorporated, for the most part, most other theories do not fit well with my personal approach. Some theories do not blend well with my personality, while others are hesitant to state moral absolutes, while others are hesitant to ascribe any anthropological pathology, while other theories make it very challenging to reframe themselves within a biblical worldview, and thus, lead someone to Christ. For example, reality therapy makes it very difficult to incorporate medications for our mental health clients. Further, reality therapy is reluctant to label clients with a mental health diagnosis. Furthermore, reality therapy believes that diagnoses are a result of client relationship and behavioral choices, and, as a result, does not support psychopharmacology. According to Corey (2005), "all diagnoses are descriptions of behaviors people choose in their attempt to deal with pain and frustration that is endemic to unsatisfying present relationships" (p. 316). Corey (2005) further states, "using drugs to treat symptoms of unhappiness is counterproductive and rarely helps anyone who is suffering" (p. 316). In terms of the feminist approach, from the Christian perspective, it is quite unbiblical. It causes God's

role of women and role of men to be erased, and redefined. Throughout the scriptures, there is a

clear differentiation between the roles of male and females. Moreover, the feminist therapist is

not only a therapist who uses feminist theory, but, rather is a therapist who is a feminist. Thus,

according to Corey (2005), "feminist therapists need to be cautious to avoid imposing their

values on their clients, even in subtle ways" (p. 172). Hence, feminist theory may just be a

movement by an untoward culture seeking to redefine gender roles, rather than a legitimate

therapeutic approach. In terms of postmodern approaches, situational ethics is the barometer for

right and wrong, not the Holy Scriptures. According to Goldenberg & Goldenberg (2004), "in

the postmodern outlook there is no true reality, only the family's collectively agreed upon set of

constructions, created through language and knowledge that is relational and generatively based,

that the family calls reality" (p. 8). In terms of existential therapy, this approach lacks any

concrete principles that I can fuse my biblical worldview into. Moreover, existential therapy has

an appearance of subjectiveness along with an abstract approach to traditional therapy protocols.

According to Corey (2005), "a major criticism often aimed at this approach is that it lacks a

systematic statement of principles and practices of psychotherapy" (p. 156).

Client Cognitive Support

Clients may need support with their faulty thinking. I choose to incorporate aspects from

Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT), with support from Rationale Emotive Behavioral Therapy

(REBT), as a way of supporting the client with their faulty thinking. According to Patterson

(1998), "cognitive behavioral treatments focus on changing how people think and behave. An

underlying assumption is that if a person changes thinking or behavior, physiology and emotions

will change, too" (p. 184).

Unfortunately, REBT posits that humans have within themselves the means to control

their thoughts, feelings and actions. Furthermore, REBT theory purports that human beings are inherently both rational and irrational and can be taught how to be controlled by their rational thoughts rather than their irrational thoughts. According to Corey (2005), "rational emotive behavior therapy is based on the assumption that human beings are born with a potential for both rational, or straight thinking and irrational, or crooked thinking" (p. 273).

As a solution, my Christian worldview can redirect REBT's postulation of human capability to the previously mentioned scripture, John 15:5, "without me, ye can do nothing". Thus, I can utilize aspects of REBT and CBT, but within the construct of renewing the mind as it relates to Christian counseling. Clinton & Ohlschlager (2002), states that "cognitive behavioral therapy, especially in its Christian form, where the renewing of the mind involves renouncing the lies, we believe in embracing and living our biblical truth" (p. 262). McGee (1990), incorporates "a model adapted from psychologist Albert Ellis's Rational Emotive Therapy" (p. 140). Ellis's theory states, when "Situations" occur, our "Belief" system is stimulated, which influences our "Thoughts", which trigger our "Emotions", which determine our "Actions". When the Christian renews their mind, a similar concept to Ellis is applied. The Christian utilizes the 4-R process…Recognize (the evil thought), Reject (the evil thought), Replace (the evil thought with scripture) and Rejoice (in thought victory). Hence, as a Christian counselor, I can utilize the techniques of REBT while viewing them through the prism of a biblical worldview. Christians are admonished to renew their minds according to the word of God, as stated in scripture, "and be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God" (Romans 12:2, King James Version).

Client Goal Achievement

Clients may need support with goal setting and achieving their goals. I choose to incorporate aspects from solution focused brief therapy, which offers a concise, straightforward approach. Problem talk is not encouraged but rather solution talk is used, such as, "what is working and can we do more of what is working". Solution focused brief therapy can also be used to help families find solutions to their maladies. According to Goldenberg and Goldenberg (2007), "…the solution based therapist helps families, by means of solution talk, to come to believe in the truth or reality of what they are talking about together with the therapist, and to construct solutions…" (p. 329).

Unfortunately, in terms of solution focused brief therapy, Corey (2005) states, "solution-focused brief therapy is grounded on the optimistic assumption that people are healthy and competent and have the ability to construct solutions that can enhance their lives" (p. 388).

Once again, my biblical worldview can help compensate for the humanistic bent of solution focused brief therapy, by supporting the previous scripture truism, which defines man as helpless without the Lord… "for without me (Jesus), ye can do nothing" (John 15:5, King James Version). Thus, solutions can be navigated with the client via biblically based principles.

Client In Depth & Long Term Care

Clients may need long term care that allows for exploring into the past and allowing wounds to heal. I choose to incorporate aspects from psychoanalytic theory to allow for time to unpeel the layers of defense that clients may cocoon themselves in. At times, it is important to explore the past to solve present tense issues. According to Corey (2005), "because the dynamics of behavior are buried in the unconscious, treatment consists of a lengthy process of analyzing inner conflicts that are rooted in the past" (p. 4). Psychoanalytic theory also allows for insight and thoroughness. As a Christian counselor, the Holy Spirit may direct me to insights

that may help the client immensely. Also, with our society having more and more of the microwave mentality of the quick fix…a longer, more deliberate and thorough approach to therapy may prove to be advantageous to the client's overall restoration.

Unfortunately, I disagree with this theory's view of anthropology.   Psychoanalysis views man as basically good with the superego being the seat of a person's moral code. According to Corey (2005), "the superego is the judicial branch of personality. It includes a person's moral code, the main concern being whether an action is good or bad, right or wrong" (p. 57).

My Christian world view can help compensate for this by incorporating the scriptural stance that man is quite the opposite, viewing man as depraved and in desperate need of salvation.   Scripture states, "the heart of man is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked, who can know it" (Jeremiah 17:9, King James Version).

Client Family Dysfunctional Remedy

Clients may need systems support to resolve family pathology. I choose to incorporate aspects from family systems therapy. According to Corey (2005), "if we hope to work therapeutically with an individual, it is critical to consider him or her within the family system. An individual's problematic behavior grows out of the interactional unit of the family as well the larger community and social systems" (p. 452). A tool that I enjoy using is the genogram. McGoldrick, Gerson & Shellenberger (1999) states, "genograms appeal to clinicians because they are tangible and graphic representations of complex patterns" (p. 1). Moreover, Patterson (1998) states "a genogram is a convenient way in which to visually capture the family structure" (p. 60).   By constructing the genogram, unhealthy and potentially lethal family patterns can be visually seen. The use of a genogram provides minimal conflict with a biblical worldview. A myriad of biblical examples can be shared with the client when explaining both negative family

dysfunctional patterns and positive family patterns.

Conclusion

      Various theories have much to offer when developing a personal theory approach. There are aspects that can be applied to the individual client and the family while addressing multiple types of pathology. When there is conflict between worldviews, theoretical aspects can be re-filtered through the lens of scripture. My personal approach allows for appropriate theoretical interventions to be incorporated at strategic moments, allows for my competence and experience to be utilized appropriately, allows my personality to help move the clinical sessions at a healthy pace and allows the Holy Spirit to provide insights into client care. Most importantly, my personal approach allows for compassion to flow and the eventual opportunity to lead a client into the saving knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

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