



Counseling Theory

Guiding Reflective Practice

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CACREP Guide: Brief Version

CACREP 2009 STANDARDS

1. **PROFESSIONAL ORIENTATION AND ETHICAL PRACTICE** - studies that provide an understanding of all of the following aspects of professional functioning:
 - a. history and philosophy of the counseling profession,
 - b. professional roles, functions, and relationships with other human service providers, including strategies for interagency/interorganization collaboration and communication
 - c. counselor's role and responsibilities as an interdisciplinary emergency management response team
 - d. self care strategies
 - e. counseling supervision models, practices and processes
 - f. professional organizations including membership benefits, activities, service to members and current issues
 - g. professional credentialing, including certification, licensure and accreditation practices and standards
 - h. the role and process of the professional counselor advocating on behalf of the profession
 - i. advocacy processes needed to address institutional and social barriers that impede access, equity, and success for clients
 - j. ethical standards of professional organizations and credentialing bodies and applications of ethical and legal consideration in professional counseling
2. **SOCIAL AND CULTURAL DIVERSITY** - studies that provide an understanding of the cultural context of relationships, issues and trends in a multicultural society related to including all of the following:
 - a. multicultural and pluralistic trends, including characteristics and concerns between and within diverse groups nationally and internationally
 - b. attitudes, beliefs, understandings, and acculturative experiences, including specific experiential learning activities designed to foster students' understanding of self and culturally diverse clients
 - c. theories of multicultural counseling, identity development and social justice
 - d. individual, couple, family, group, and community strategies for working with and advocating for diverse populations, including multicultural competencies.
 - e. counselors' roles in developing cultural self-awareness, promoting cultural social justice, advocacy and conflict resolution and other culturally supported behaviors that promote optimal wellness and growth of the human spirit, mind, or body.
 - f. counselors' roles in eliminating bias, prejudices and processes of intentional and unintentional oppression and discrimination
 - g. ethical and legal considerations
3. **HUMAN GROWTH AND DEVELOPMENT** - studies that provide an understanding of the nature and needs of individuals at all developmental levels and in multicultural context, including all of the following:
 - a. theories of individual and family development and transitions across the life-span
 - b. theories of learning and personality development including current understanding about neurobiological behavior
 - c. effects of crises, disasters and other trauma-causing events on persons of all ages
 - d. theories and models of individual, cultural, couple, family, community resilience
 - e. human behavior, including an understanding of developmental crises, disability, psychopathology and situational and environmental factors that affect both normal and abnormal behavior
 - f. theories and etiology of addictions and addictive behaviors including strategies for prevention, intervention and treatment
 - g. theories for facilitating optimal development and wellness over the life span
4. **CAREER DEVELOPMENT** - studies that provide an understanding of career development and related life factors, including all of the following:
 - a. career development theories and decision-making models
 - b. career, avocational, educational, occupational and labor market information resources, visual and career information systems
 - c. career development program planning, organization, implementation, administration, and evaluation
 - d. interrelationships among and between work, family, and other life roles and factors including the role of multicultural issues in career development
 - e. career and educational planning, placement, follow-up, and evaluation
 - f. assessment instruments and techniques that are relevant to career decision making
 - g. career counseling processes, techniques, and resources, including those applicable to specific populations in a global economy
5. **HELPING RELATIONSHIPS** - studies that provide an understanding of counseling in a multicultural society, including all of the following:
 - a. an orientation to wellness and prevention as desired counseling goals
 - b. counselor characteristics and behaviors that influence helping processes including
 - c. essential interviewing and counseling skills
 - d. counseling theories that provide the student with models to conceptualize client presentation and that help the student select appropriate counseling interventions. Students will be exposed to models of counseling that are consistent with current professional research and practice in the field so they begin to develop a personal model of counseling.
 - e. a systems perspective that provides an understanding of family & other systems theories and major models of family and related interventions.
 - f. a general framework for understanding and practicing, consultation
 - g. crisis intervention and suicide prevention models including the use of psychological first aid strategies.
 - h. ethical and legal considerations
6. **GROUP WORK** - studies that provide both theoretical and experiential understandings of group purpose, development, dynamics, counseling theories, group method skills, and other group approaches in a multicultural society, including all of the following:
 - a. principles of group dynamics, including group process components, developmental stage theories, group members' roles and behaviors, and therapeutic factors of group work
 - b. group leadership styles and approaches, including characteristics of various types of group leaders and leadership styles
 - c. direct experiences in which students participate as group members in a small group activity, approved by the program, for a minimum of 10 clock hours over the course of one academic term
7. **ASSESSMENT** - studies that provide an understanding of individual and group approaches to assessment and evaluation, in a multicultural society including all of the following:
 - a. historical perspectives concerning the nature & meaning of assessment
 - b. basic concepts of standardized and non-standardized testing and other assessment techniques including norm-referenced and criterion-referenced assessment, environmental assessment, performance assessment, individual and group test and inventory methods, psychological testing and behavioral observations,
 - c. statistical concepts, including scales of measurement, measures of central tendency, indices of variability, shapes and types of distributions, and correlations
 - d. reliability (i.e., theory of measurement error, models of reliability, and the use of reliability information)
 - e. validity (i.e., evidence of validity, types of validity, and the relationship between reliability and validity)
 - f. age, gender, social and cultural factors related to the assessment of individuals, groups and specific populations
 - g. ethical strategies for selecting, administering, & interpreting assessment and evaluation instruments and techniques in counseling
8. **RESEARCH AND PROGRAM EVALUATION** - studies that provide an understanding of research methods, statistical analysis, needs assessment, and program evaluation, including all of the following:
 - a. the importance of research in advancing the counseling profession
 - b. research methods such as qualitative, quantitative, single-case designs, action research, and outcome-based research
 - c. statistical methods in conducting research and program evaluation,
 - d. principles, models, and applications of needs assessment, program evaluation, and use of findings to effect program modifications
 - e. use of research to improve evidence based practice
 - f. ethical and culturally relevant strategies for interpreting and reporting the results of research and program evaluation studies.

Titles in Counseling and Professional Identity series

CACREP Standards	<i>Sangganjanavanich, Introduction to Professional Counseling</i>	<i>Watson, Counseling Assessment and Evaluation</i>	<i>Conyne, Group Work Leadership</i>	<i>Parsons, Becoming A Skilled Counselor</i>	<i>Parsons, Counseling Theory</i>	<i>Wong, Counseling Individuals Through the Life Span</i>	<i>Duan, Becoming a Multiculturally Competent Counselor</i>	<i>Wright, Research Methods For Counseling</i>	<i>Tang, Career Development and Counseling</i>	<i>Scott, Counselor as Consultant</i>	<i>Sheperis, Ethical Decision Making for the 21st Century Counselor</i>
1. PROFESSIONAL ORIENTATION AND ETHICAL PRACTICE	1a 1b 1d 1e 1f 1g 1h 1i 1j	1j	1b 1j	1b 1d 1e 1j	1j	1j	1j	1j	1b 1j	1b 1j	1b 1d 1e 1f 1h 1i 1j
2. SOCIAL AND CULTURAL DIVERSITY	2c 2f 2g	2g	2d 2e 2g	2b 2c 2g	2c 2e 2g	2a 2b 2c 2d 2e 2g	2c 2e 2f 2g	2g	2g	2d 2g	2c 2e 2f 2g
3. HUMAN GROWTH AND DEVELOPMENT			3f		3b	3a 3b 3c 3d 3e 3f 3g	3d 3e		3e		3g
4. CAREER DEVELOPMENT		4f							4a 4b 4c 4d 4e 4f 4g	4c	
5. HELPING RELATIONSHIPS	5a 5b 5c 5f 5g 5h		5b 5c 5d 5e	5a 5b 5c 5d	5b 5c 5d 5e 5g	5b	5b 5e		5b 5c	5b 5c 5f 5g 5h	5b 5d 5h
6. GROUP WORK			6a 6b 6c 6d 6e								6d 6e
7. ASSESSMENT		7a 7b 7c 7d 7e 7f 7g	7b	7b		7f		7c 7d 7e			
8. RESEARCH AND PROGRAM EVALUATION								8a 8b 8c 8d 8e			8d

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Counseling Theory

Guiding Reflective Practice

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Brief Contents

Introduction to the Series	xxiii
Editors' Preface	xxv
Acknowledgments	xxvii
About the Contributors	xxix
SECTION I: THE VALUE OF THEORY TO REFLECTIVE PRACTICE	1
Chapter 1: Theory and the Reflective Practitioner	3
<i>Richard D. Parsons</i>	
Chapter 2: Multicultural Considerations: Within and Beyond Traditional Counseling Theories	27
<i>Dong Xie</i>	
Chapter 3: Case Conceptualization: The Case of Y-Chun	55
<i>Naijian Zhang and Richard D. Parsons</i>	
SECTION II: THEORIES AND THEIR APPLICATIONS	79
Chapter 4: Freud and Psychoanalytic Theory	81
<i>Faith Deveaux</i>	
Chapter 5: Individual Psychology: Alfred Adler	109
<i>Robyn L. Trippany-Simmons, Matthew R. Buckley, Kristin Meany-Walen, and Tiffany Rush-Wilson</i>	
Chapter 6: Existential Counseling and Psychotherapy	141
<i>Mark B. Scholl, Michael Walsh, and Michelle Perepiczka</i>	
Chapter 7: Carl Rogers and Client-Centered Counseling	171
<i>Marjorie C. Witty and Ray Adomaitis</i>	

Chapter 8: Gestalt Therapy	201
<i>Joseph Spillman and Christina M. Rosen</i>	
Chapter 9: Cognitive-Behavioral Theories	229
<i>Julia Y. Porter</i>	
Chapter 10: Behavior Theory	253
<i>Barbara C. Trolley and Christopher Siuta</i>	
Chapter 11: Reality Therapy	289
<i>David A. Scott and Hannah G. Barfield</i>	
Chapter 12: Solution-Focused Therapy	311
<i>Brandé Flamez and Joshua C. Watson</i>	
Chapter 13: Relational-Cultural Theory in the Context of Feminism	343
<i>Kristi B. Cannon, Jason Patton, and Stacey L. Reicherzer</i>	
Chapter 14: Family and Couples Therapy	371
<i>Rebecca M. Goldberg</i>	
SECTION III: LOOKING TO THE FUTURE	407
Chapter 15: Seeking Integration	409
<i>Adam Zagelbaum, Maureen Buckley, Shana Friedman, and Kalia Gurnee</i>	
Chapter 16: East Meets West: Integration and Complementation	443
<i>Michael G. Laurent and Shengli Dong</i>	
Index	467

Detailed Contents

Introduction to the Series	xxiii
Editors' Preface	xxv
Acknowledgments	xxvii
About the Contributors	xxix
SECTION I: THE VALUE OF THEORY TO REFLECTIVE PRACTICE	1
1 Theory and the Reflective Practitioner	3
<hr/>	
<i>Richard D. Parsons</i>	
Counseling Theory in Context	4
Theory	4
Precision and Testability	5
Empirical Validity and Stimulation	5
Parsimony	5
Practicality/Utility	5
Theory: Guiding Practice Decisions and Serving Ethical Practice	6
Case Illustration 1.1: What's It All About?	6
Organizing Data	8
Case Illustration 1.2: Anthony—Ants in His Pants?	8
Exercise 1.1: Why Did I Do That?	10
Providing Direction	11
Case Illustration 1.3: What to Do?	12
Marking Progress	13
Supporting Ethical Practice	15
Welfare of Those Served by Counselors	15
Developmental and Cultural Sensitivity	15
Informed Consent	16
Monitor Effectiveness	16
Boundaries of Competence	16
Theory–Research Connection	17
Theory: An Essential Component of a Counselor's Professional Identity	18
Exercise 1.2: Theory–Professional Identity Connection	19

Ideal to Real: Constraints Guiding Selection and Implementation of Theory	20
Realities of the Workplace	20
Financial Realities	21
Diversity	21
A Gift and a Challenge	22
Keystones	22
Reflections From the Contributor's Chair	23
Additional Resources	24
References	25

2 Multicultural Considerations: Within and Beyond Traditional Counseling Theories

27

Dong Xie

Development and Evolution of Multicultural Counseling	28
Historical Development of Multicultural Counseling: 1960s to 1990s	28
Recent Development of Multicultural Counseling in the New Century	29
Multicultural Counseling Competence: Enriching Counselor Professional Identity	30
The Tripartite Model of MCC and Its Revisions	31
Requirements of Multicultural Training in CACREP Standards	32
Multiculturalism: A Core Element to Counseling Practice	33
Focusing on Specific Components	33
Case Illustration 2.1 The Case of Mara	34
Internationalizing Multiculturalism	35
Increasing Supervision, Practicum, and Internship Experience in Multicultural Counseling	35
Multicultural Considerations Within Traditional Counseling Theories	36
Multicultural Considerations Within Psychoanalytic/Psychodynamic Theories	36
Case Illustration 2.2 The Case of John	37
Multicultural Considerations Within Cognitive-Behavioral Theories	39
Case Illustration 2.3 The Case of Liu	40
Multicultural Considerations Within Humanistic Approaches	41
Multicultural Considerations Beyond Traditional Counseling Theories	43
Racial/Cultural Identity Development Models	43
Acculturation Models	45
Integrative Model of Cross-Cultural Counseling and Cultural Accommodation	46
Working With Y-Chun From a Multicultural Perspective	48
Keystones	49
Reflections From the Contributor's Chair	50
Additional Resources	51
References	51

3 Case Conceptualization: The Case of Y-Chun

55

Naijian Zhang and Richard D. Parsons

Case Conceptualization	57
------------------------	----

Case Illustration 3.1: I Lost My Library Card	57
The Process	59
Data Collection	59
Organization of Data	60
Case Illustration 3.2: Rosie and the Failed Relationships	60
Finding Meaning	61
Not So Easy	62
Case Illustration 3.3: “Because I Screamed”	62
Theory Guiding Case Conceptualization	64
Case Illustration 3.4: The Case of W. J.	64
Case Conceptualization Across Theories	66
Symptoms and Problems	67
Precipitating Stressors	67
Predisposing Events and Conditions	67
Inferred Mechanisms	67
Case Illustration 3.5: Alicia	68
The Case of Y-Chun: A Case Through Many Lenses	68
Exercise 3.1: Initial Case Conceptualization	69
Exercise 3.2: Posttest Case Conceptualization	70
The Client: Y-Chun	72
Five Minutes Into the Intake Session	72
Keystones	77
Reflections From the Contributor’s Chair	78
References	78

SECTION II: THEORIES AND THEIR APPLICATIONS

79

4 Freud and Psychoanalytic Theory

81

Faith Deveaux

Introduction	82
Historical Background: A Profile of Sigmund Freud	82
Areas of Development	84
Overview of Psychoanalysis	85
View of Human Nature	86
Basic Characteristics and Assumptions of Psychoanalytic Theory	87
Case Illustration 4.1	88
The Structure of Personality: Id, Ego, and Superego	88
Exercise 4.1	89
Use With Diverse Populations and Children	92
Exercise 4.2	94
Research, Intervention, and Supportive Evidence	94
Limitations	95
Professional Identity	95
Case Illustration 4.2	96

Therapeutic Process and Application	97
Psychoanalytic Techniques	97
Exercise 4.3	98
Ethical Considerations	98
Counselor–Client Relationship	99
Theory-Guided Case Conceptualization	99
Therapeutic Goals	99
Intervention and the Change Process	99
Assessment	100
Y-Chun: Through the Lens of a Psychoanalytic Counselor	100
Focus and Intentionality: A Consultation Model	100
The Initial Steps in the Consultation	101
The Middle Steps in the Consultation	103
The Last Step in the Consultation	103
Keystones	104
Reflections From the Contributor’s Chair	104
Additional Resources	106
References	106

5 Individual Psychology: Alfred Adler

109

*Robyn L. Trippany-Simmons, Matthew R. Buckley,
Kristin Meany-Walen, and Tiffany Rush-Wilson*

Introduction	109
Historical Background	109
Areas of Development	110
Overview of Individual Psychology	111
Individual Psychology	111
View of Human Nature	112
Free Will	112
Case Illustration 5.1: Michelle	112
Social Interest	113
Inferiority Versus Superiority	113
Case Illustration 5.2: Continuing With Michelle	114
Style of Life	114
Case Illustration 5.3: Michelle’s Feelings of Inferiority	115
Purposeful Behavior	115
Fictional Finalism	115
Subjective Perception of Reality	116
Early Memories	116
Dreams	116
Basic Characteristics and Assumptions	116
The Role of the Family	116
Birth Order	117

Life Tasks	118
Task of Love	118
Task of Community	118
Task of Work	119
Use With Diverse Populations and Children	119
Strengths and Limitations	120
Professional Identity	120
The Therapeutic Process and Applications	121
Change Process	121
Exercise 5.1	122
Case Illustration 5.4: Cynthia	123
Assessment Strategies	125
Focus and Intentionality: Applying the Theory in Early, Middle, and Late Sessions	125
Exercise 5.2	126
Case Illustration 5.5: Increasing Client Awareness	127
Exercise 5.3	128
Interventions	128
Catching Oneself	128
Early Childhood Recollections	129
Exercise 5.4	129
Spitting in the Client's Soup	130
The Question	130
Acting as If	130
Dream Analysis	130
Paradoxical Intention	131
Task Setting	131
Consequences	131
Modeling	131
Y-Chun Through the Lens of Adlerian Theory	132
Building a Collaborative Relationship	132
Investigating the Lifestyle	132
Gaining Insight	134
Reorientation	135
Keystones	135
Reflections From the Contributor's Chair	136
Additional Resources	138
References	138

6 Existential Counseling and Psychotherapy

141

Mark B. Scholl, Michael Walsh, and Michelle Perepiczka

Profile of Main Figures	142
Victor Frankl (1905–1997)	142
Rollo May (1909–1994)	142

Introduction	142
Foundation as a Philosophy	142
Exercise 6.1: Being, or Dasein	144
From a Philosophy to a Counseling Approach	145
Victor Frankl's Logotherapy	145
Rollo May's Existential Therapy	146
Case Illustration 6.1: Evelyn	146
Case Illustration 6.2: Michael	148
Exercise 6.2: Five Types of Love	150
Areas of Development: Recent Trends in Existentialism	150
Professional Identity in Existentialism	151
How Existentialism Differs	152
Strengths and Limitations	152
Strengths	152
Limitations	153
Ethical Considerations	153
Research Supporting Theoretical Constructs and Interventions	154
Use With Diverse Populations and Children	155
Diversity	155
Children	155
Existential Psychotherapy Process and Applications	156
Therapeutic Goals in Phase 1: Cultivation of the Relationship	156
Change Process in Phase 2: Authenticity and Self-Exploration	157
Change Process Later in Phase 2: Authenticity and Self-Exploration	158
Change Process in Phase 3: Actualizing Life Meanings in the World	158
Interventions	159
Promoting Client Courage	159
Exercise 6.3: Constructing a Strengths Inventory	160
Using the Expressive Arts in Counseling	161
Y-Chun Through the Lens of Existential Psychotherapy	161
Phase 1: Cultivation of Presence and the Authentic Relationship	162
Phase 2: Authenticity and Self-Exploration	162
Early in Phase 2	162
Later in Phase 2	165
Phase 3: Actualizing Life Meanings in the World	166
Keystones	166
Additional Resources	167
References	168

7 Carl Rogers and Client-Centered Counseling

171

Marjorie C. Witty and Ray Adomaitis

Introduction	172
Profile of Carl R. Rogers	172

Historical Background	173
Areas of Development	173
Overview	174
View of Human Nature	174
Rogers's Motivational Theory	174
The Development of the Regard Complex	174
Exercise 7.1: What Is Unconditional Positive Regard?	175
Case Illustration 7.1: Y-Chun Through the Lens of Client-Centered Theory	177
Characteristics and Assumptions	179
Use With Diagnostic Groups, Age Groups, and Diverse Populations	180
Case Illustration 7.2: The Journey From James to Jamie	181
Strengths and Limitations	183
Research Supporting Constructs and Practices	183
Professional Identity	185
Therapeutic Process and Applications	185
Therapeutic Goals	185
Change Process	186
Client Factors	187
Relationship Factors	187
Exercise 7.2: Implementing the Attitudes	188
Interventions	190
Conclusion	193
Keystones	193
Reflections From the Contributor's Chair	194
Additional Resources	195
References	197

8 Gestalt Therapy

201

Joseph Spillman and Christina M. Rosen

Introduction	202
Historical Background	202
Profile of Main Figures	202
Overview of the Gestalt Approach	203
Human Nature	203
Basic Characteristics and Assumptions	204
Exercise 8.1 Self-Awareness	204
Acceptance	204
Authenticity	204
The Here and Now and Being Present	205
Exercise 8.2 Being in the Moment	205
Figure and Ground	206
Cycle of Experience	206

Case Illustration 8.1 Tom 207

Resistances 208

Case Illustration 8.2 Empty Chair 209

Research and Supportive Evidence 214

Use With Diverse Populations 215

Strengths and Limitations 215

Therapeutic Goals 216

Therapeutic Process 216

Focus and Intentionality: Application to the Case of Y-Chun 216

Y-Chun Through the Lens of Gestalt Therapy 217

Middle Stage of the Counseling Process 221

Keystones 226

Reflections From the Contributor's Chair 227

Additional Resources 227

References 228

9 Cognitive-Behavioral Theories

229

Julia Y. Porter

Profile of Main Figures 230

Behavior Theories 230

Cognitive Theories 230

Cognitive-Behavioral Theories 231

Introduction 231

Historical Background 232

Areas of Development 232

Rational Living Therapy 232

Dialectical Behavior Therapy 232

Mindfulness-Based Cognitive Therapy 233

Acceptance and Commitment Therapy 233

Professional Identity 234

Overview of REBT 234

Case Illustration 9.1: The Car Accident 235

Exercise 9.1 236

View of Human Nature 237

Basic Characteristics and Assumptions 237

Case Illustration 9.2: Using the A-B-C-D-E Model to Think Rationally 239

Exercise 9.2 240

Research Supporting Theoretical Constructs and Interventions 241

Use With Diverse Populations and Children 242

Strengths and Limitations 242

The Therapeutic Process and Applications 243

Therapeutic Goals 243

Interventions 243

Assessment Strategies 245

Focus and Intentionality: Applying the Theory in Early, Middle, and Late Sessions	247
Y-Chun Through a CBT Lens	247
Keystones	249
Reflections From the Contributor's Chair	250
Additional Resources	250
References	251

10 Behavior Theory

253

Barbara C. Trolley and Christopher Siuta

Introduction	253
Historical Background	253
Areas of Development	254
Overview of Behavior Theory	255
View of Human Nature	255
Basic Characteristics and Assumptions	255
Behavior as Learned	255
Focus on Overt Behavior	256
Case Illustration 10.1: Defining Goals: Scenario and Script	256
Exercise 10.1: Translating Personal Goals	258
Here-and-Now Focus	258
Value of Therapeutic Alliance	258
Use With Diverse Populations and Children	259
Strengths and Limitations	260
Overview of Professional Identity	262
Therapeutic Process and Application	263
The Use of Operant Strategies: Developing and Increasing Strength of Behavior	263
Case Illustration 10.2: Development of Behaviors	265
Strategies to Reduce or Eliminate a Behavior	266
Case Illustration 10.3: Reduction and Elimination of a Behavior	267
Replacement of Behaviors	268
Case Illustration 10.4: Replacement of a Behavior	269
Guided Practice	269
Case Illustration 10.5: Abdominal Breathing, Relaxation, and Counterconditioning Case and Script	270
Case and Script	276
Y-Chun Through the Lens of Behavior Theory	277
Assessments	277
Therapeutic Goals	279
Change Process	279
Interventions	280
Final Reflection	282
Keystones	283
Reflections From the Contributor's Chair	284

Additional Resources 284

References 284

11 Reality Therapy

289

David A. Scott and Hannah G. Barfield

Choices 289

Introduction 289

 Historical Background 289

 Glasser and the Development of Reality Therapy 291

 Basic Needs in Reality Therapy (View of Human Nature) 291

Case Illustration 11.1: Graduation 292

 Current Trends in Reality Therapy 294

Support for the Use of Reality Therapy/Choice Theory 294

 Evidence-Based Support for Reality Therapy/Choice Theory 294

 Use With Diverse Populations and Children 295

 Strengths 296

 Limitations 297

Professional Identity and Overview of Reality Therapy: Why Use Reality Therapy 298

Exercise 11.1: Reality Therapy and You 298

Therapeutic Process and Application 301

 Choice Theory Constructs 301

 Choice Theory and Schools 301

Case Illustration 11.2: Sulli 302

 Wubbolding's Description of Choice Theory (The WDEP System) 303

Case Illustration 11.3: The WDEP System 305

Y-Chun Through the Lens of Reality Therapy 305

Keystones 307

Reflections From the Contributor's Chair 307

Additional Resources 308

References 308

12 Solution-Focused Therapy

311

Brandé Flamez and Joshua C. Watson

Profile of Main Figures 312

Introduction to Solution-Focused Therapy 312

 Historical Background 313

 Areas of Development 314

 Professional Identity 314

Exercise 12.1: Reflecting on Personal Views	315
Exercise 12.2: Thinking About the Solution-Focused Approach	316
Overview of Solution-Focused Therapy	316
View of Human Nature	319
Research Supporting Theoretical Constructs and Interventions	320
Use With Diagnostic Groups, Children, and Diverse Populations	320
Diagnostic Groups	320
Children	320
Multicultural Groups	321
Strengths and Limitations	321
Strengths	321
Limitations	321
The Therapeutic Process and Applications	322
Therapeutic Goals	322
Change Process	322
Interventions	325
First-Session Task	325
Miracle Question	325
Exercise 12.3: The Miracle Question	326
Scaling Questions	326
Exercise 12.4: Scaling Question	327
Coping Questions	327
Exceptions	327
Exercise 12.5: Exception Questions	328
Fast-Forward Questions	329
Using Solution-Focused Language	329
Using the Client's Language	329
Relationship Questions	329
Compliments	330
Normalizing	330
Assessment Strategies	330
Focus and Intentionality	330
Y-Chun Through a Solution-Focused Lens	331
Stage 1: Joining With the Client	332
Stage 2: Describing the Problem	332
Stage 3: Goal Setting and Future Orientation	336
Stage 4: Break and Ending the Session	336
Keystones	336
Reflections From the Contributor's Chair	337
Additional Resources	337
References	338

Kristi B. Cannon, Jason Patton, and Stacey L. Reicherzer

Introduction	344
Historical Background	345
Areas of Development	346
Overview of RCT	347
View of Human Nature	347
Basic Characteristics and Assumptions	347
Mutuality	348
Growth-Fostering Relationships and the Five “Good Things”	348
Cycle of Connection and Disconnection, Relational Paradox, and Condemned Isolation	349
Exercise 13.1: Felt Connection	349
Exercise 13.2: Corrective Emotional Experience/Moving Out of Disconnection	350
Relational Images, Controlling Images, and Relational Competence	351
Research and Supportive Evidence	352
Exercise 13.3: Controlling Images	352
Use With Diverse Populations	353
Marginalization, Power-Over, and Privilege	354
Application to Diverse Clientele	354
Limitations	354
The Therapeutic Process	355
Theory-Guided Case Conceptualization	355
Therapeutic Goals and Guiding Framework	355
Focus and Intentionality	356
Applying the Theory in Early Sessions	356
Applying the Theory in Middle Sessions	357
Applying the Theory in Late Sessions	357
Professional Identity	358
Y-Chun Through the Lens of a Relational-Cultural Counselor	359
Keystones	364
Reflections From the Contributor’s Chair	364
Additional Resources	366
References	366

Rebecca M. Goldberg

Introduction	372
Historical Background	372

Profiles of Main Figures	372
Nathan Ackerman	372
Alfred Adler	372
Gregory Bateson	373
Ivan Boszormenyi-Nagy	373
Murray Bowen	373
John Gottman	373
Jay Haley	374
Salvador Minuchin	374
Virginia Satir	374
Carl Whitaker	375
Areas of Development and Recent Trends	375
Professional Identity	376
Overview of Family and Couples Therapy	377
View of Human Nature	377
Basic Characteristics and Assumptions	377
Research Supporting Theoretical Constructs and Interventions	377
Use With Diverse Populations and Children	378
Strengths and Limitations	379
Strengths of Family and Couples Therapy	379
Limitations of Family and Couples Therapy	379
Therapeutic Process and Applications	380
Introduction	380
Therapeutic Goals	387
Change Process	388
Interventions	389
Ecomaps	389
Exercise 14.1: Ecomaps	389
Family Sculpting	390
Case Illustration 14.1: Family Sculpting	390
Genograms	392
Exercise 14.2: Genograms	392
Paradoxical Injunction	392
Reframing	392
Case Illustration 14.2: Paradoxical Injunction	393
Case Illustration 14.3: Reframing	394
Exercise 14.3: Reframing	395
Focus and Intentionality	395
Assessment Strategies	397
Y-Chun Through the Lens of Family/Couples Counseling	399
Keystones	402
Reflections From the Contributor's Chair	403
Additional Resources	404
References	405

15 Seeking Integration

Adam Zigelbaum, Maureen Buckley, Shana Friedman, and Kalia Gurnee

- Profile of Main Figures 409
- Introduction to Psychotherapy Integration 411
 - Historical Background 412
 - Overview of Psychotherapy Integration 413
 - Common Factors 413
 - Assimilative Integration 414
 - Technical Eclecticism 414
 - Theoretical Integration 414
 - Multitheoretical Framework 415
 - Caveat Before Proceeding 415
 - View of Human Nature From a Transtheoretical Frame of Reference 415
- Exercise 15.1: New Year's Resolution 416**
- Case Illustration 15.1: Chris 417**
- Exercise 15.2: Assignment Procrastination 418**
- Exercise 15.3: Community Genogram 419**
 - Basic Characteristics and Assumptions 420
- Case Illustration 15.2: Small Steps 421**
 - Research Supporting Theoretical Constructs and Interventions 422
 - Use With Diverse Populations and Children 423
 - Strengths and Limitations 423
- Therapeutic Process and Application 423
 - Interventions and Change Process 424
- Case Illustration 15.3: Dramatic Relief 425**
- Case Illustration 15.4: Self-Reevaluation 425**
- Y-Chun Through a Transtheoretical Lens 428
 - Assessment Strategies 429
- Keystones 436
- Professional Identity 437
- Reflections From the Contributor's Chair 438
- Additional Resources 438
- References 439

16 East Meets West: Integration and Complementation

Michael G. Laurent and Shengli Dong

- Overview 444
- Western Philosophy/Psychology 444

Alchemy and Gnosticism (the Beginnings)	445
From Philosophy to Psychology	445
Exercise 16.1: Reflecting From a Western Perspective	446
Case Illustration 16.1 Susan	446
Eastern Psychology	447
An Overview	447
The Role of Eastern Religions and Philosophies	447
Comparison in Philosophies Between East and West	449
Case Illustration 16.2 Jin Jung	450
Human Nature: Collectivism and Naturalism	450
Exercise 16.2: Beliefs About Human Experience	451
Case Illustration 16.3 Confrontation	452
View of Mental Health	452
Therapeutic Process and Application	453
Goals of Counseling	453
The Therapeutic Process of Change	454
Interventions and Evaluations	455
Y-Chun Through a Cross-Cultural Lens	456
Professional Identity	460
Coming From a Western Orientation	460
Coming From an Eastern Orientation	460
Keystones	461
Reflections From the Contributor's Chair	462
Additional Resources	462
References	462

Introduction to the Series

Counseling and Professional Identity

C*ounseling Theory: Guiding Reflective Practice* will introduce you to myriad theories and models guiding counselor practice. This text and the theories represented will play an important role in your ongoing development as a professional counselor. Growing as a competent professional counselor requires the acquisition and employment of more complex mental structures—those that help counselors organize information and make meaning of experience in a more comprehensive, integrated, and differentiated manner. Counseling theory is integral to these processes of finding meaning and directing practice. The use of theories to guide practice enables counselors to engage in problem solving from a broader range of perspectives.

This text provides a learning experience that will foster the development of these complex mental structures. However, one text—one learning experience—will not be sufficient for the successful formation of your professional identity and practice. That will be a life-long process—one we hope to facilitate through the presentation of this text and creation of our series of counseling books, titled *Counseling and Professional Identity*.

Counseling and Professional Identity is a fresh, pedagogically sound series of texts targeting counselors in training. This series is *not* simply a compilation of isolated books matching those already available in the market. Rather, each book in the series, while targeting specific knowledge and skills and proving valuable in and of itself, gains further value and significance as an integral part of a coordinated series of texts targeting the professional development of counselors. The focus and content of each text within the series serve as a single lens through which a counselor can view clients, engage in practice, and articulate a personal professional identity. This is one lens among the many needed to serve as a competent counselor.

Counseling and Professional Identity, as noted, is not simply a “package” of traditional texts. Rather, the series provides an *integrated* curriculum targeting the formation of the reader’s professional identity and efficient, ethical practice. Each book in the series is structured to facilitate the reader’s ongoing professional formation. The materials found within each text are organized to move the reader to higher levels of cognitive, affective, and psychomotor functioning, resulting in their assimilation in the reader’s professional identity and approach to professional practice. The texts included within the series reflect the core courses provided in most graduate counselor education programs (see Table P.1).

Table P.1 Books and Corresponding CACREP (Council for the Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs) Competencies

Counseling and Professional Identity	
Books in the Series	Typical Courses Served by the Text
<i>Introduction to Professional Counseling</i> Varunee Faii Sangganjanavanich and Cynthia A. Reynolds	Introductory
<i>Becoming a Skilled Counselor</i> Richard D. Parsons and Naijian Zhang	Basic skills
<i>Becoming a Multiculturally Competent Counselor</i> Changming Duan and Chris Brown	Multicultural and diversity
<i>Counseling Individuals Through the Lifespan</i> Daniel Wai Chung Wong, Kim Hall, Cheryl Justice, and Lucy Wong Hernandez	Human development
<i>Counseling Assessment and Evaluation: Fundamentals of Applied Practice</i> Joshua C. Watson and Brandé Flamez	Assessment
<i>Research Methods for Counseling</i> Robert Wright	Fundamental research
<i>Counseling Theory: Guiding Reflective Practice</i> Richard D. Parsons and Naijian Zhang (Eds.)	Theories
<i>Ethical Decision Making for the 21st Century Counselor</i> Donna S. Sheperis, Michael Koct, and Stacy Henning	Ethics—or sections within each course covering ethical issues
<i>Career Development and Counseling: Theory and Practice in a Multicultural World</i> Mei Tang and Jane Goodman	Career counseling
<i>Counselor as Consultant</i> David Scott, Chadwick Royal, and Daniel Kissinger	Consultation and coordination
<i>Group Work: An Introduction for Helping Professionals</i> Robert Conyne	Group dynamics, group counseling

While each text targets a specific set of core competencies (see Table P.1), they all share a common emphasis:

1. Assimilation of concepts and constructs provided across texts in the series, thus fostering the reader's ongoing development as a competent professional
2. Blending of contemporary theory with current research and empirical support
3. Development of procedural knowledge, with each text employing case illustrations and guided practice exercises to facilitate the reader's ability to translate the theory and research discussed into professional decision making and application
4. Need for and means of demonstrating accountability
5. Fostering of the reader's professional identity and, with it, assimilation of the ethics and standards of practice guiding the counseling profession

Editors' Preface

“**W**hy?” When asked by a curious observer of human behavior, this question, more often than not, brings responses characterized as “maybes” rather than “absolutes.” Human behavior is complex. Observers of human behavior have drawn inferences and interpretations, and some have developed these into hypothetical constructs and theoretical models—all in the hope they will conform to the real, empirical world of the behavior being observed.

For counselors, theories of human behavior need to be more than just points of intellectual curiosity. Counseling theory is an invaluable tool essential to effective counseling. The value of theory rests in its use as a screen or filter—an orienting framework through which client information can be processed and better understood.

Counseling theories help counselors distinguish the relevant from the tangential. They give counselors the framework for making predictions about clients' behavior. Counseling theories provide the counselor direction as to the goals and purposes of the counseling as well as the processes and techniques needed to achieve those ends.

Counseling Theory: Guiding Reflective Practice provides an understanding of the process of change and use of both classical and cutting-edge theoretical models of change as lenses through which to process client information and develop case conceptualizations and intervention plans. This text is unique among the vast array of “theories” textbooks in that it features the following:

- *Expert practitioners as authors:* Each of the theories presented within this book is written by an expert in that theory—someone who not only understands the theory presented but also employs it as a framework for client case conceptualization and treatment planning.
- *Insight into professional identity:* The authors—who are scholars, academics, and practitioners—share the special value and import of the theories they employ, not just as a guide to their practice decisions but as an essential component of their professional identities.
- *Emphasis on application:* This book goes beyond promoting understanding of theories to facilitating their application to guide practice. It demonstrates the truth behind Lewin's statement that there is “nothing so practical as a good theory.”¹ The text employs a single illustrative case and the concept of “reflective practice” as the anchor for each author's presentation of a particular theory. While articulating the history, significant contributors, and essential concepts of the theory, the primary

¹Lewin, K. (1951). *Field theory in social science: Selected theoretical papers*. New York: Harper, p. 169.

focus of each chapter is on the contributor's application of that theory to the illustrative case. Each author will demonstrate, use of the theory as a tool guiding the practitioner in processing client data and formulating treatment plans. This modeling, along with the chapter's guided practices, helps the reader "see" the theory in action and employ it to guide his or her own case conceptualization and practice decisions.

- *Reflection of the reality of increasing globalization:* This book presents theories that reflect the increasing globalization and diversity of clients engaged in counseling and the issues they bring. It not only highlights the various lenses through which one must view multicultural issues but also demonstrates how each of the theories discussed, while developed in Western culture, can apply to people from different cultural backgrounds.
- *Presentation of classical and cutting-edge theories:* While the classical theories of counseling are fully presented within this text, it also provides the reader with a "peek" into the future of counseling as a profession and practice, as it takes form in emerging, cutting-edge theories that will move counseling well into the 21st century.
- *Address of CACREP competencies:* As with all the books in this series, *Counseling Theory: Guiding Reflective Practices* is most noteworthy in that it has been developed to foster the reader's formative development and professional identity. This book gains value by being a significant part of the integrated series, targeting the professional formation of counselors. As part of an integrated body of work, this book presents theory as an essential component to the counselor's identity formation and eventual professional practice, and to this end is designed to address specific competencies identified by CACREP as essential to developing an understanding of the processes of counseling and development of a counselor's professional identity. Specifically, the goals of this text are as follows:

1. Demonstrate the value of theory to a counselor's reflective practice
2. Identify the historical roots of contemporary theories
3. Present models of counseling consistent with current professional research and practice
4. Compare and contrast the major tenets of affective, behavioral, and cognitive theories
5. Apply counseling theory to material guiding case conceptualization and selection of appropriate interventions
6. Describe the "what," "when," and "why" of selecting family and other systems theories and related interventions
7. Highlight the impact of increasing globalization and diversification of the practice of professional counseling and of the clients served

We are proud to have had the opportunity to assemble such a diverse group of scholar-practitioners to share their chosen theories and unique professional identities. We know you will find their presentation valuable to your own professional practice and developing professional identity.

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S E C T I O N I

The Value of Theory to Reflective Practice

Theory and the Reflective Practitioner

Richard D. Parsons

Counselors, like most “helpers,” tend to be doers—pragmatic in their approach. But counselors, unlike lay helpers, are professionals, and as professional counselors, they “do” what they do with intentionality and rationale.

Counseling is not a haphazard, random, hit-or-miss process. Counselors approach their work with their clients with an understanding about the human condition and the factors and processes that promote growth and well-being. As trained professionals, counselors are objective observers who deliberately gather data deemed essential both to understanding the nature of the client’s concern and to the formulation of a treatment plan. The interpretation of these data and the resultant understanding are guided by the “theory” of the human condition that the counselor brings to professional encounters.

This chapter introduces you to the nature and value of theory. But beyond merely presenting the rationale for the use of theory in practice, this chapter and all those that follow attempt to help you reframe “theory” so you will value counseling theory as an essential component of effective practice, not just academic curiosity. Specifically, after reading this chapter you will be able to do the following:

1. Describe the essential qualities of a “good” theory
2. Explain the value of theory as a guide to counselors’ understanding
3. Describe the connection of theory to counseling approach and treatment planning
4. Explain the role “theory” plays in the ongoing development of a counselor’s professional identity

COUNSELING THEORY IN CONTEXT

Early approaches—or “theories,” if you will—describing the origin, course, and even treatment of those we would now identify as having psychological problems often pointed to spiritual, or supernatural, causes. The Middle Ages were ripe with illustrations of this demonological perspective. People who we now know and were most likely suffering from psychological disorders were tortured in an effort to remove the demons and cure the affliction. Thankfully, our theories and practices have progressed from those darker days—under the guidance of the research and practice of many thoughtful pioneers.

Development of the psychodynamic approach (see Chapter 4) and the work of Sigmund Freud are often identified as a significant turning point, or even first major force, in the development of psychotherapy. Significant in this “first force” was emphasis on the natural versus supernatural nature of psychological disturbance and the rooting of its understanding in “science” and practice.

This initial formation of our understanding and practice of psychotherapy was further aided by the appearance of the research and practice of early behaviorists (see Chapter 10) and those modern theorists who followed in the tradition of cognitive-behavioral theory (see Chapter 9). This second influence turned our attention away from the determinism of early childhood experiences and unconscious drives and instincts and toward a focus on understanding the impact of learning and environmental conditions as they give shape to our thinking and actions. A final wave of theories confronted the implied negative view of man proposed by many in the psychodynamic orientation and the mechanistic view offered by many behavioral theorists. Led by Carl Rogers (see Chapters 6 and 7), this third force in psychology—the existential-humanistic orientation—emphasized the positive nature of the human condition and pointed to the importance of people taking charge of their lives in the process of finding meaning.

Since these initial “schools” of psychology, theories have continued to be created, refined, combined, and altered. According to Kazdin (2008), there are more than 500 different approaches to counseling. While this growth and refinement in counseling and psychotherapy theory speaks to the value of theory in the guidance of one’s practice, it is essential that counselors learn to discern what is “good” theory.

The American Counseling Association’s (ACA, 2005) *Code of Ethics* directs counselors to devise counseling plans that have a reasonable promise of success (Section A.1.c). This is a mandate that can be met by the judicious use of theories as a guide to practice decisions, assuming that counselors approach their practice and the theory(ies) they employ with a critical, evaluative attitude.

THEORY

While it may be obvious, “theory” is not “fact.” A theory is a system of inferences, assumptions, and interpretations drawn from one’s observations and experiences. And while we all draw inferences from our experiences or jump to conclusions based on our biases and assumptions, such meaning-making, while perhaps reflective of our personal theory, typically fails to manifest the qualities characteristic of a “good” theory: precision and testability, empirical validity, parsimony, stimulation, and practicality/utility.

Precision and Testability

A good theory in counseling or physics is general and provides clear operational definitions of its constructs that will allow others to “test” the theory, which in turn predicts future observations and stimulates new discoveries. “Good” theories present well-defined, specific, and measurable constructs (Monte & Sollod, 2008). In addition to providing precise constructs, a good theory also specifies the nature of the relationship these constructs have with one another. Such precision allows for others to investigate these constructs, their relationship, and the fundamentals of any one theory to determine the degree to which it meets the next criterion of a “good” theory—that is, empirical validity.

Empirical Validity and Stimulation

Unlike theories in arts and philosophy that explain ideas and phenomena that may not be measurable, scientific theories—including those in counseling—propose explanation of phenomena that can be tested for confirmation or falsification using scientific experiments (Edies & Appelrouth, 2010). Testing counseling theories to assess their validity or truthfulness is a difficult process. The nature of our counseling does not lend itself to the purity of a scientist’s laboratory and controlled experimentation.

Over the course of the past 20 years, new research methods and statistical techniques have been developed and applied to researching counseling effectiveness and the degree to which employment of different theories contributes to that effectiveness. The findings, while generally supporting the effectiveness of counseling (Wampold, 2010), continue to find it difficult to differentiate the specific value of each theory. Most of the current research presents various theoretical orientations as equally effective with a wide variety of client issues (Wampold, 2010).

While some theories lend themselves more than others to validating research methodology, as will be noted in the upcoming chapters, all theories seek to find empirical support for their validity and effectiveness. This ability to excite the research practitioner to question and challenge is what constitutes the “stimulation” aspect of a good theory.

Parsimony

To be of value, theories should be parsimonious while at the same time comprehensive enough to address the entirety of the experience being explained. The principle of parsimony directs us to value a theory that provides the simplest explanation when confronted with the option of a simple or complex interpretation. This assumes that both explanations are equally precise, testable, and valid.

Practicality/Utility

Finally, and perhaps most importantly, a theory should be of value to the practitioners who employ it. As with all scientific theories, counseling provides explanation for various elements of the human condition that can be tested for theory confirmation or falsification. But counseling theory moves beyond describing and “explaining” the reality we experience and presents ways one can affect those realities. Our counseling theories help us articulate

the assumptions, interpretations, and hypotheses we employ to understand what is happening with our clients and to make predictions about what may happen in the future. An effective counselor employs a theory to describe, explain, predict, and change behavior. A “good” theory in counseling serves as an essential ingredient to effective practice and practice decisions (Hansen, 2006, 2007).

THEORY: GUIDING PRACTICE DECISIONS AND SERVING ETHICAL PRACTICE

The National Cancer Institute’s (2005) monograph *Theory at a Glance* distinguishes two types of theory, both of which hold relevance for the professional counselor: *explanatory* theory and *change* theory.

Explanatory theory helps one understand complex situations (Buchanan, 1994) and, as such, is useful to counselors as they attempt to understand the stories their clients share. As explanatory theory, counseling theories help counselors take the complexity and uniqueness of a client’s presenting concerns and decompose this ill-structured problem into subproblems that can then be reconfigured in ways that allow for more meaningful resolution (Voss & Post, 1988). Consider the data shared by the client in Part A of Case Illustration 1.1. Of everything the client said, what is truly important? A counselor seeking an answer to that question and questions such as, “What does the information suggest about the client or the client’s problem?” and “How might these data point to effective interventions?” may find answers within the counselor’s operative model or theory, as shown in Part B of Case Illustration 1.1.

CASE ILLUSTRATION 1.1

What’s It All About?

Part A

The following exchange occurred during the opening minutes of the initial “intake” session with this 37-year-old woman experiencing the break-up of a 3-year relationship.

Client: (Crying) I simply don’t know what to do . . . this is devastating.

Counselor: If I understood what you shared, the ending of the relationship seemed to come “out of the blue”—totally unexpected?

Client: He’s such a son of bitch. He led me on for 3 years, talking about marriage and picket fences and all that bullshit. I mean, sure we had our problems, but what relationship doesn’t?

What am I to do? I'm 37 years old. Who's gonna want me? I'm going to spend the rest of my life alone. I mean, really what does this say about me? What a loser I must be! Most of my friends are all moving on—married with kids, established relationships, houses . . . good jobs. The friends I have who are single won't want me hanging with them since for the past 3 years I put Tony ahead of them. And my family—Christ, mom will be crying about no grandkids!

Who's going to want to hang with me? I have absolutely nothing to offer . . . (breaks down in tears). I don't want to be alone!

Part B

The following reflects the different focuses brought to interpretation of the client's story as a result of employing two different counseling theories. Not only do the two therapists focus on different aspects of the client's disclosure, but they are directed to two different types of interventions.

Dr. L (Cognitive theory): Well, clearly she is in pain, and I truly feel for her struggle, but I am really drawn to her conclusion that *"I'm 37 years old. Who's gonna want me? I'm going to spend the rest of my life alone."* It seems, at least in this incident, that she has a tendency to overdramatize or catastrophize problems. Assuming that is true (and I would want to elicit more data to support that), then I believe helping her see this loss for what it is and nothing more, along with helping her discern the real consequences that follow from the ending of this relationship, rather than those that she is assuming, would be beneficial.

If I can assume the relationship I have with her is strong enough, I would like to question, if not outright challenge, her on what appears to be faulty thinking. She is taking the fact that this one relationship (while 3 years long) ended as evidence that she will spend the rest of her life alone. Such catastrophizing of the event is, in my view, creating the extreme sadness and hopelessness she now experiences.

Dr. G (Solution focused): She is presenting with a failed social relationship and is narrowly constructing her sense of her world and herself as a reflection of that one failed relationship. With this view of self and the world, she is understandably feeling extremely sad and hopeless. However, as she shares her story, she hints at a goal (not to be alone) and even to the fact that she has the ability and experience to make and maintain relationships.

She seems to be sharing that, while this relationship has ended, she has in fact developed relationships with many others—some married, some single. So I guess I would like to turn her attention to looking at the statement, "I don't want to be alone," and help her reframe that to a more positively stated goal, such as, "I want to have social relationships." If I could help her focus on that, then we could look at the successes she has had in the past—with her current friends and even with Tony, during the early part of their relationship—as a way of identifying things she can do to reinstate old relationships or venture into new ones.