

## Article 31

# Creating a Personal Counseling Theory

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To explore a structure for creating a personal counseling theory, this counselor training model begins with the distillation of counselor theories into 13 dominant approaches to counseling, integrates 7 of those theories around existentialism, and establishes a sequence of stages for counselor development by applying Bloom's (1964) taxonomy and feedback from counselor trainers of their perceptions of 13 dominant theories. The goal of these processes is to improve how we help people by integrating key theories and strategies into a more unified model.

Seven different textbooks on counseling theories from five different publishers (Capuzzi & Gross, 2003; Corey, 2000; Corsini & Wedding, 2000; Day, 2004; Gazda, Ginter, & Horne, 2001; Kottler, 2001; Sharf, 2004) were selected, and the theories they included were analyzed. The Gazda et al. (2001) text is included because of its difference in organization. Even though it is a group counseling theories textbook, it combined several theories, e.g., existential, person-centered, and Gestalt therapies are addressed together as are several cognitive behavioral approaches. (See Table 1.)

**Table 1. A Listing of Counseling Theories Included in Several Textbooks (by senior author, publisher, year, and edition).**

SCHOOLS OF THERAPY	SIGNIFICANT PARTICIPANTS	TEXTBOOKS						
		Capuzzi (1999)	Corey (2000)	Corsini (2000)	Gazda (2001)	Kottle (2002)	Day (2004)	Sharf (2004)
<b>Psychoanalytic Therapy</b>	Sigmund Freud	chapter	chapter	chapter	chapters	chapter	chapter includes Jung	chapter
<b>Individual Psychology</b>	Alfred Adler, Rudolph Drieckurs	chapter	chapter	chapter	---	with cog'tive therapies	chapter	chapter
<b>Analytic Therapy</b>	Carl Jung	chapter	chapter	chapter	---	with Freud	chapter	chapter
<b>Existential Therapy</b>	Viktor Frankl, Abraham Maslow, Rollo May, Irwin Yalom	chapter	chapter	chapter	two chapters with person-centered & Gestalt	chapters with person-centered & Gest't	includes Freud chapter with Rogers	chapter
<b>Person-Centered Therapy</b>	Carl Rogers	chapter	chapter	chapter	two chapters with exist'l & Gestalt	with exist'tial & Gest't	chapter with exist'l	chapter
<b>Gestalt Therapy</b>	Fredrick Perls, Simick	chapter	chapter	chapter	two chapters with exist'l & person-centered	with exist'l & p-cent'd	chapter	chapter
<b>Reality (Choice) Therapy</b>	William Glasser, Wubbolding	chapter	---	chapter	---	with cog'tive	chapter	chapter
<b>Rational-Emotive Behavioral Therapy</b>	Albert Ellis	chapter	chapter	chapter	two chapters with behav'al	chapters with cog'tive	chapter with CT	chapter
<b>Behavioral Therapy</b>	J.B. Watson, B.F. Skinner, Albert Bandura, Arnold Lazarus, Donald Meichenbaum	chapter	chapter —extra on Lazarus	chapter	two chapters with REBT	chapter without Lazarus & cognitive	chapter	chapter; Lazarus also in integ'ted
<b>Cognitive Therapy</b>	Aaron Beck, Judith Beck	chapter	chapter	chapter	---	with Adler, Ellis, Lazarus	chapter with Ellis	chapter; also some Meich'n

*Note.* Listed are Capuzzi and Gross (Prentice Hall, 2003, 3<sup>rd</sup>); Corey (Brooks/Cole, 2000, 5<sup>th</sup>); Corsini and Wedding (Peacock, 2000, 5<sup>th</sup>) Day (2004, Houghton Mifflin), Gazda, Ginter, and Horne (Allyn & Bacon, 2001); Kottle (Allyn & Bacon, 2001); and Sharf (2004, Wadsworth).

While Kottler (2001) also includes existential and Gestalt therapies together, the other textbooks reserve the combining of theories to cognitive and behavioral approaches.

Along with these hints that some of these theories might go together, a consensus seems to emerge from these textbooks on the 13 dominant counseling theories at the turn of the millennium. In alphabetical order by the senior developer, these are (1) Albert Adler's individual psychology, (2) Albert Bandura and John Krumboltz's social learning theory, (3) Aaron and Judith Beck's cognitive therapy, (4) Albert Ellis' rational emotive behavioral therapy (REBT), (5) Viktor Frankl/Rollo May/Irwin Yalom's existential therapy, (6) Sigmund Freud's psychoanalytic therapy, (7) William Glasser's reality (choice) therapy, (8) Carl Jung's analytic therapy, (9) Arnold Lazarus's multimodal therapy, (10) Donald Miechenbaum's cognitive-behavioral therapy, (11) Fritz Perl's Gestalt therapy, (12) Carl Roger's person-centered therapy, and (13) B. F. Skinner's behavioral therapy.

In Mobley (2005), the case is made that several theories could be combined, not just on a technique level but also on a theoretical level. These theories emphasize the nonmaterial nature of humans including the importance of relationships, the power of choices, the need for purpose in life, and the potential for transcendence and improvement. Three of the 13 approaches clearly make similar existential or humanistic assumptions: existential therapy, Gestalt therapy, and person-centered therapy. Perls said that he was providing the techniques for doing existential therapy. The underlying assumptions between existential and Gestalt therapies are the same. Rogers also makes comparable nonmaterialistic assertions in his focus on the client.

While applying different interventions, three other approaches also seem to support existential qualities in the counseling process: valuing the counselor-client relationship, improving clients' ability to define critical incidents and make strategic choices, and creating a life that is more satisfying and productive. Adler's individual psychology, Glasser's new reality therapy (based on choice theory), and Ellis' rational emotive behavioral therapy empower people to choose to be more responsible and even feel better by thinking and behaving differently. The issue is more about the future and what people want, and their goals (more existential in orientation), than their past experiences (less existential). Another perspective could be associated with these two problem-solving but existential therapies: Krumboltz's version of behaviorism, now called social learning theory.

Krumboltz included an existential description about the value of understanding the client's

phenomenology and developing a quality relationship with the client. Techniques are in the service of treating people and not just materialistically treating problems. People can make new choices and move toward a future that is different from their past. These four cognitive behavioral therapies in combination with existential, Gestalt, and person-centered therapies form a substantial range of concepts, potential issues addressed, interventions, and counselor skills around the philosophy of existentialism.

While we agree that having more than one theory will make the counselor more effective with more clients, we further believe that the theories can assist the helping process and prefer integrating them beyond the technique level. A division among the theories between those approaches that are existential and those that are not opens the door to their being combined, not just on a technique level but also at a theoretical level.

Pedagogy for training counselors and creating a personal counseling theory could also emerge based upon Bloom's (1964) taxonomy and a survey of counselor trainers' perceptions of the 13 major theories. Once the theories are separated into two groups, the more existentially sensitive and less existentially oriented, an improved sequence for training counselors in the theories could begin with concrete activities that are not complex, relatively speaking, and proceed to the ones that are more abstract and more complex. Beginning counselor training or a counselor education textbook with Freud and Jung is exactly backwards from what is suggested by Bloom's system. In the process that is suggested here, Freud and Jung would be delayed in their presentation until the more existential and less abstract techniques have been mastered. The less complex theories and techniques are presented first.

Presenting seven existentially sensitive theories beginning with the more concrete and less complex suggests the following order:

**Stage I**—*Connecting With Clients* utilizing Rogerian person-centered therapy. Post-Rogerian empathy and immediacy has been explained and researched by Carkhuff and Gazda (with a variety of colleagues). Gordon has provided much of the language to discuss these topics: active listening, I-messages and their related sentences (see Mobley, 2005).

**Stage II**—*Problem Solving With Cognitive Behavioral Techniques*. Specific stages in the therapeutic process and techniques are detailed by each of four theories: Krumboltz can identify a problem and

create a behavioral plan in four steps; Glasser can isolate what a client wants and generate a plan utilizing “radio station” W-D-E-P; Ellis disputes (D) faulty beliefs (B) to change clients’ feelings (F) in a straightforward A-B-C-D-E-F process; and Adler is more complex and abstract while identifying people’s goals and intervening with the C-A-R-E process. These theories are ordered from the more concrete to the more complex with behaviorism being the least abstract and Adler being the most abstract. Ellis is more complex than Krumboltz or Glasser because he considered client cognitions more often than he did overt behavior. All of these approaches move clients toward personal responsibility primarily by changing thoughts and behaviors.

**Stage III—*Resolving an Underlying Dichotomy.*** If the client wants to achieve opposite goals (e.g., to leave the abuser but maintain the family intact), Stage II will not be successful. The client must integrate the opposing perspectives into a single one that can be problem solved. The techniques from Gestalt therapy might be specific, but the issues they address, like energy, unfinished business, and dichotomies, are not concrete. Paradoxing clients’ divided issues are counterintuitive and abstract. Integration into a single resolved goal allows the counseling to return to Stage II and problem solving to again be applied.

**Stage IV—*“Therapizing” Underlying Issues.*** Having established how to connect with clients, problem solve client issues, and resolve dichotomies, the more abstract and complex therapeutic processes can now be taught. Freud and Jung can explore the less obvious and often important issues that impact the results of counseling. More complicated Adlerian processes could be added. By exploring Beck’s cognitive therapy and Meichenbaum’s cognitive behavioral therapy, more complex cognitive behavioral techniques can be applied to the existential core (particularly Stage II). Lazarus’ technical work might also be applied. The existential core counseling processes that are sensitive to the relationship with clients (Stages I–III)

can be extended, teaching from what is known to related concepts that are unknown.

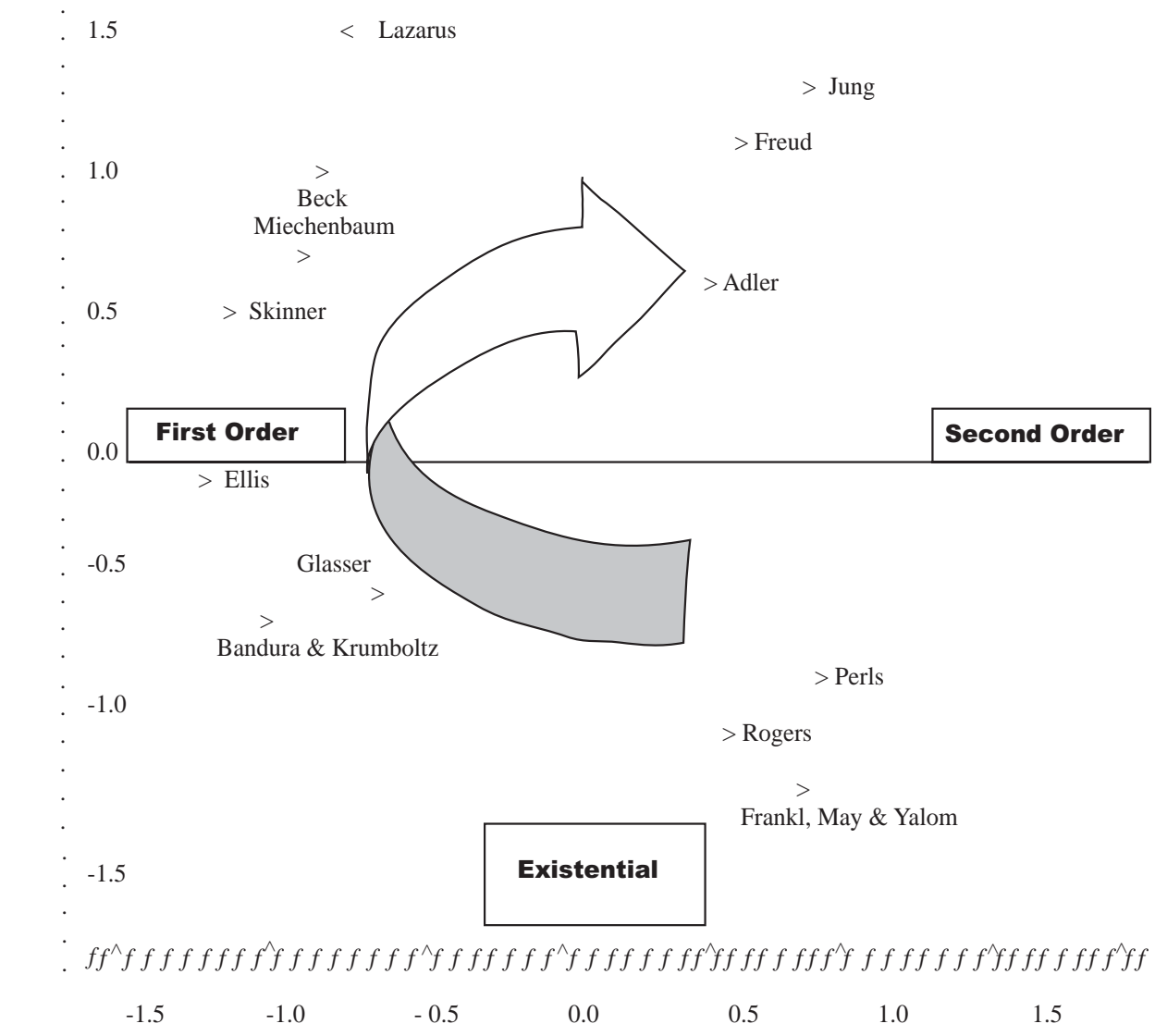
**Stage V—*Counseling With More Than One Person at a Time.*** The first three stages can be performed with small groups and families. Each of these seven theories has been described with applications to both environments. While additional concepts like leadership styles and family systems are important in working with multiple people at the same time, counselors can apply their integrated theories to these applications.

Having integrated over half of the 13 dominant theories around existentialism, Bloom’s (1964) taxonomy can be utilized to create a developmental sequence of theories from the most simple and concrete to the most complex and abstract.

To begin to establish the validity of this perspective, over 1,000 counselor educators were e-mailed a survey from July 1 to December 31, 2004. Participants were asked their perception of similarity and differences among the 13 dominant theories. The resulting matrices of their ratings were analyzed with the multidimensional scaling (MDS). The results from the very meager number of respondents ( $N = 40$ ) confirm the emerging structure for creating a counseling theory that has been discussed above. During the April 9, 2005, presentation at the American Counseling Association meeting, the dimensions of the two-factor solution were interactively named by over 200 participants (Mobley & Gazda, 2005).

While the number of respondents was small, every one of the 13 theories was represented (and narrative or family therapy was listed as “other”), and the results substantiate this personal theory model (See Figure 1). Developing a personal counseling theory appears to begin in the lower right-hand quadrant with existential and relationship issues, move counterclockwise to the lower left-hand concrete problem-solving theories, continue into the upper left-hand quadrant with the more complex cognitive behavioral strategies, and conclude in the right-hand quadrant with Freud and Jung. Lazarus is at the top of complexity because he addressed emotions, thoughts, images, behaviors, and chemical condition of the person. Adler is probably in this upper-right block because of his exploration into motivations for behavior, an abstraction beyond Glasser’s “What do you want?” (a relative concrete idea in the lower left quadrant).

**Figure 1. Diagram of Counseling Theories**



*Note.* A listing of the perceptions of 13 counseling theories by counselor educators in two dimensional space. The x-axis seems to group the theories in terms of whether they solve the immediate problem, “first order” counseling, or explore underlying issues, “second order” counseling. The y-axis divides the theories based upon their relationship to existential issues. After understanding existential issues, counselors could move from the concrete and less complex lower right quadrant to the more complex but still existential lower left quadrant, to the cognitive-behaviorally familiar but less existential upper left quadrant, and conclude with the most abstract and complex theories in the upper right quadrant.

Analyzing the perceptions of counselor educators provides evidence that supports a developmental model for how a counselor can develop his or her understanding and capacity to evolve a personal theory of counseling.

In a practical application of the preceding information, a structure can be suggested that guides counselors in developing their approach to helping. The opening statement (section I) is more of a marketing

statement to say to clients and potential employers and should therefore omit jargon and theories in favor of descriptions and potential outcomes. The core of the personal counseling theory is expressed in section II. After individually affirming existentialism and basic person-centered applications, counselors can choose one of the three problem-solving approaches and become expert at applying that process. Knowing more than one process is desirable, but knowing one cognitive

behavioral approach is essential. Parts of Adlerian psychology could be applied at this point because of its sympathy with existentialism. (Adler was an existentialist before there was existentialism.)

As was explained earlier, Gestalt therapy (Stage III) provides a means for beginning to explore complicated underlying issues that might limit or prevent Stage II problem solving. A Gestalt perspective can serve as a cognitive bridge to learn both Freudian and Jungian concepts. Since Perls was doing psychoanalysis in the present (rather than delving into the past), many of the concepts are similar to Freud's (e.g., energy, defense mechanisms, and catharsis—Freud called it abreaction). Perls also indicated the importance of recognizing dichotomies—something that Jung found across a wide range of human experience (e.g., man-female, introversion-extroversion, thinking-feeling, or self-shadow self). Progressing from the familiar to the unfamiliar while increasing the complexity and level of abstraction, counselors' theories can apply Bloom's (1964) taxonomy and develop their approaches sequentially. To illustrate and apply their concepts and techniques, the next section (III) invites them to write a dialogue between themselves and a client. The techniques that are being applied should be labeled as further indication of their mastery of the information and skills.

The core theory can be applied to group (section IV), family (section V), career (section VI) and multicultural (section VII) counseling. Elaborating each of these aspects of counseling enhances the usefulness of the current approach and elucidates any omissions and limitations.

The profession and each of the approaches offer direction for additional training and maintaining perspective. The last section (VIII) allows them to design an action plan that might guide their continued development into the areas that they consider important. Obtaining professional memberships, continuing to read books and journals, attending professional conferences and workshops, and utilizing supervision are vital aspects of all counselor maturity.

All counselors have a personal theory of counseling. Some theories are better than others because they are more developed: they serve more clients and symptoms than others. The approach suggested here could establish a process that could be utilized to assist counselors in creating their personal counseling theory. The journey begins with existentialism to affirm the human condition, connects unconditionally with clients utilizing neo-person-centered best practices, and problem solves with one of several cognitive behavioral approaches. Issues that are not immediately obvious can interfere with the

establishment and implementation of plans requiring an expressive therapy like Gestalt therapy, or even Freudian psychoanalysis or Jungian analytic work. Applying the evolving theory to more than one person at a time in group or family counseling increases the complexity of the personal counseling theory and incorporates leadership and systemic ideas that are more abstract. The resulting document and statement of theory can be a powerful inclusion in counselors' portfolios.

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