

Fundamentals of Counseling Psychology: Integrative Theory

Understanding oneself may not be as easy as it sounds. We may feel that we know our own thoughts, feelings, and behaviors, and that we can control what we say, think, and do, but this is not always the case. If one does not understand themselves from varying angles and take each aspect of their thoughts, feelings, and behaviors into consideration, then how can one truly understand human nature and connect with the world around them? By using personal scenarios of how I came to understand myself, I will explore the idea of my own logical integrated counseling theory, through the lenses of Existential Therapy as well as Cognitive-Behavior Therapy (two theories with which I can identify), in hopes to provide others with the tools necessary to understand themselves on a deeper level, first with the aid of a counselor and then with the use of their own personal strengths.

I have always struggled with meaning. I was the girl in the class who used to sit back, say nothing, keep her head down, do what she was told, and live for other people rather than living for herself. I was plagued by feeling as if I had to please others to feel some sense of accomplishment in my life. I felt as if I needed to make sure I had the approval of those around me to guarantee I was doing things correctly and making the right choices. I was that girl who would not speak for fear of being judged or disliked because of a “dumb” thought or an unpopular opinion I may have on a particular topic. These thoughts haunted me day in and day out, especially when it came to my family. This way of living, I have recently come to realize, is no way of living at all. With existential techniques, I have found that living for myself is the way to achieve true happiness and find my own meaning in life.

It was the end of sophomore year of college (so very recently since I am now a junior) when I came into a relationship with my current boyfriend. Shortly after the start of our adventure together, he received word that he would be moving to Seattle, WA for the summer for an internship at Amazon’s headquarters. My first thought when he told me of his plans, which

were not far in the future, was that I wanted to go. I wanted to partake in an adventure with him, but I stopped myself before saying anything other than a simple “congratulations, I’m so happy for you.” What held me back? My family. My fears. My thoughts. My thoughts of how my parents would react and the thought of disappointing my loved ones, since I would be going against religious morals by living with a man to whom I am not married. I was dealing with many other internal battles at the time, and this conflict pushed me over the edge, so I decided to speak to a counselor.

I never thought of going to therapy. I never acknowledged that my thoughts were grounds for therapy sessions. I denied it in every way, shape, and fashion, until I went through my first several sessions, releasing all my pent-up emotions that I have suppressed over the last twenty years onto the counselor before me. At first, I was nervous, she could tell. She sat me down and reassured me that I was in a safe space. She reassured me that it was okay to talk about my thoughts and feel the way I feel. She helped me realize that she and I were on this new journey in my life together. She allowed me to sit and vent, and vent some more, and some more. She listened attentively to all the stories I had and helped guide me to the realization that I have never lived for myself; that much of my trauma came from trying to please everyone else and being trapped in an endless cycle of making sure everyone else approved of my actions rather than if I approved of my actions.

She spoke only when she felt I needed to hear my own thoughts in a different manner, and she showed me that I was on a search for meaning in my life. I have always lived in fear of disappointing my loved ones, my parents especially, so I always made my decisions based on what would please them and not what would make me happiest. My counselor explained to me that I could make choices for myself, but that I had to be the one to endure the consequences. I

had to be the one to recognize my need for freedom and all that may follow any choice I make in life. It was through this existential phenomenon that I made the decision to go to Seattle, knowing it was going against my parents' wishes, knowing that it was going to cause tension between my freedom and responsibility to my family, knowing it was going to be the first time I decided to do what I wanted to do and not what my parents wanted me to do. I had to go. With a clearer mind, I said yes and took the journey to Seattle. We have only so long on this earth. We are mortal and if we live, if I live, in fear of everyone else's judgment, then what am I really living for? Will I die one day and look back on the "life" I lived and be pleased with what I see? It was here that I had to go beyond myself, recognize that there is a push and pull between self-freedom and responsibility, accept the anxiety I felt about finally doing something for myself, and have the courage to trust myself and that what I am doing is best for me. With the help and guidance of a trusting relationship with my counselor, I was able to relieve my psychological distress, as could also be seen through a cognitive-behavioral approach.

Within cognitive-behavior therapy, it is believed that psychological distress stems from, and is maintained by, cognitive processes. Our minds are a wondrous tool, but sometimes they harm us as we think, feel, act, repeat. I witnessed (and continue to witness), as I am sure many of my peers witness, this distress first-hand as we gravitate through this thing called school. Very often, I find myself stuck in a negative mindset as schoolwork piles up and my intelligence begins to feel challenged. This rings true, especially, when I receive feedback on an assignment I felt I did great on, but then see comments all over the page and a grade lower than I may have been expecting. Due to a lower grade or a particular comment, I fall into a mindset of being dumb or that my professors do not necessarily like me. School has always been an important thing within my family, so when I do poorly on an assignment, I feel as if I am now a

disappointment and there would be no need to try on the next assignment if I cannot do as well as I would like.

Looking back on all these times, I realize that I held arbitrary thoughts of myself as well as of my professors. I realized, with the help of my peers and those close to me, that it is okay to make mistakes on assignments. I learned that I am not always going to have people like me, and that is okay. I remember one time, I was feeling down over a grade and was degrading myself to my boyfriend. He sat me down, looked me dead in the eye, and just began agreeing with me. He knew that he had tried every other viable way to get me out of my head, so he felt the next best thing was to agree with the statements I was making, no matter how absurd. In this moment, I remember being taken aback by what he was repeating back to me. I remember, at first, being appalled, and then upset, and then feeling defensive. With each comment he made relating to what I had previously said about myself, I felt the need to counter his statements and provide a positive thing I have done in my life or mention a time in school when I did well and felt that I had built a good relationship with my professor(s). I made it my mission to seek out the positives in my daily life and focus on those aspects rather than the minor mishaps that are bound to happen to anyone.

Thanks to my boyfriend and his understanding nature, I was able to recognize the areas in my life causing my depressive thoughts, create new internal dialogue, and learn for myself the benefits of positive self-talk while overall creating a healthier and happier mindset. Thanks to these two separate theories, I found I could understand myself in ways I never could have imagined prior to these instances. By integrating various techniques, I was able to come to a broader understanding of who I am and find a more well-balanced nature at my core. The same

could be said for more people in need of help in understanding who they are if an integrative approach is taken within the offices of other counselors.

Over the last several hundred years, psychologists, from Sigmund Freud to present day psychologists like Gerald Corey, have had difficulty in discovering the best way to instill personality change within a client who is seeking help in their day-to-day lives through therapy sessions. Different beliefs among different theoretical approaches have now resulted in the creation of more than 300 counseling theories, leaving counselors completely dedicated to their chosen theoretical schools. Through an integrative approach, counselors may be able to better interpret, practice, and effectively work with clients on their thoughts, feelings, and behaviors. In this way, counselors will pull ideas from several theories, using a variety of techniques to achieve all three levels of human experience, otherwise known as the triangle of psychology.

Basic Philosophy

The Cognitive Bliss Theory promotes a happy, healthy, and supportive environment for clients to unwind, unleash, and come into their own realizations of their purpose in life while dispelling their own negative cognitive triads. In this philosophy, the counselor will help clients realize that they are their own person and can make their own choices. However, there will be consequences to all choices made, therefore, the counselor will be there as a support beam going through this journey with the client and guiding them on a path to a happier and healthier life. This philosophy recognizes that everyone is different and has their own stories to tell but adapts to each person who may walk through the doors. The Cognitive Bliss Theory builds client's courage in their own identities by coming to terms with their own cognitive distortions and working to change their negative self-talk into a positive thought process. No matter where one goes, no matter where

their minds wander, with the fundamentals of Cognitive Bliss, they will be able to counter negative thoughts and pull themselves into a safer mental state at any time of day.

Key Concepts

Cognitive Bliss Theory will establish meaningful relationships between client and counselor, recognize and help clients find their capacity for self-awareness and modify their self-statements to help improve their emotions, teach clients how to change their own behavior through stress inoculations, and bring clients to a clearer conscience as they learn to trust themselves and accept their freedoms, responsibilities, and the anxieties which are to follow. By building a meaningful relationship with a client, the client will be more open to talking about the deeper stressors which may be weighing on their minds. Through open communication, the counselor and client can work hand in hand with one another, getting to the bottom of the client's cognitive stressors, and guide the client through a series of self-talk sessions to gain a feel of how the client cares for themselves. In this way, the counselor will then be able suggest a variety of ways of understanding the client's thoughts and teach the client ways to change their own thoughts and behaviors through various techniques, I.e., stress inoculation—a series of coping skills. Once a client recognizes their capacity to change, they will soon learn that in this capacity to take the reins on their own lives, they will develop a new sense of trust within themselves to find their own freedoms and trust that they will be able to handle whatever tension is thrown their way by their responsibilities. Clients will understand that anxiety comes with decisions and learn to manage their anxieties not only with the help of their counselor, but also with their own internal strengths. However, to get to this point, a client must start somewhere with a counselor who will manage their counseling sessions with the aim of achieving particular goals.

Role of a Counselor

As a counselor practicing in the field of Cognitive Bliss, one must first understand their own lives and how they deal with their day-to-day stressors so as to not transfer their own issues onto the client. The counselor will then recognize and understand that everyone has their own story and with their stories come personal meanings placed on certain events which may arise within sessions. It is the role of the counselor to listen to these stories, recognize where and what these personal meanings may be, and feel for the hidden meanings or deeper connections within the client's stories. The counselor is then there to act as a friend and guide for the client, joining them on this journey of self-awareness, while also not being afraid to offer a more directive approach where need be in the client's journey. To accomplish this goal, the counselor will need to be open and transparent with the client, especially in the initial sessions, to build a warm and trusting relationship. After the initial sessions are over, and a relationship is built, the counselor will then be able to take a more backseat role in the client's life and simply guide the client along through the sessions. This backseat/guiding role to be adopted by the counselor will allow the client to come to their own realizations in their lives. The counselor may intervene when they feel the client is losing focus or wandering from the path which may lead to their personal epiphany.

It is important for both the client and the counselor to be aware of the client's potential to cope with their thoughts, feelings, and behaviors. The counselor will share their reactions with the client in a genuine manner. Through genuine reactions and questions from the counselor, the client will learn to become more authentic and learn when they are deceiving themselves. The counselor aims to challenge the client and act as a mirror for the client's life. This will allow the client to learn how to assume responsibility for their current lives, dispute their own irrational beliefs, learn

to make their own choices, and counter where their thoughts and anxieties may lead. This may be done in a variety of techniques used by an effective Cognitive Bliss Counselor.

Techniques of Cognitive Bliss Counselors

Counselors may help clients get to the bottom of their thoughts through a variety of methods in which the counselor will assume a certain role in the client's life to aid them in their self-actualizations. A counselor may first acknowledge a fear seen within the client and ask the client to role-play with them. In this role-playing tactic, the counselor may take the position of a fear plaguing the client and ask the client to confront this fear. For example, if a client was afraid of deciding on a certain topic because of what their parents may say, the counselor would take the role of the parent and have the client play through a couple different scenarios where they talk to the parent on said topic and engage in what may or may not become a confrontational moment in the client's life. Role-playing, in this way, helps the client recognize their need for freedom, the choices they will make for themselves, the consequences which may follow, and how to handle the anxieties to come. Role-playing, however, is not the only way a Cognitive Bliss counselor will aid in a client's freeing of the mind.

Through a series of shame-attacking exercises, a counselor will guide the client to become aware of themselves and accept themselves as they are. They will come to realize they have more to themselves than their negative thoughts and that there is more to the world than black and white ways of living. In a series of shame-attacking exercises, the counselor will repeat back all the negative things their client has said about themselves, forcing the client to counter the comments with their own positive aspects. This causes the client to challenge their prior beliefs of themselves

and fall into the understanding that these negative thoughts can be broken down and they can be overcome to create a more positive mindset.

Counselors may also assign cognitive homework to clients. These assignments may consist of keeping a journal of every time they experience a trigger in their day causing their depressive thoughts. This counselor will then have them come up with a way to dispute these triggers and direct their thoughts to a more positive setting. Using cognitive homework, a client will understand that they must trust themselves and dig deep into their thoughts to find triggers, dispute them, and then maintain a positive mindset. This becomes a challenge to a client's identity from who they believed themselves to be and then to who they have the potential to become.

Strengths of Cognitive Bliss Therapy

Cognitive Bliss Therapy is a very universal therapy. This therapy is person-centered and contains a more universal focus on a client's behaviors and how past, present, and future thinking shapes an individual's cognitive beliefs. This theory places emphasis on the client taking the action into their own hands and finding their own meaning in life with the guidance of a counselor. The client, in this theory, learns for themselves how they can change their own lives and mold themselves into who they want to be without focusing on societal pressures. This theory does not separate cultures and collaborates client's self-goals with all a counselor may offer.

Limitations of Cognitive Bliss Therapy

Cognitive Bliss Therapy is very individualistically focused, which may not be welcomed in more collectivistic societies. This theory also aims for clients to focus on themselves, which may cause tension for those coming from a culture that focuses on family, rather than personal

thoughts and feelings. Finally, Cognitive Bliss Counselors use a mix of directive and indirective counseling techniques, sometime there are more indirective styles than directive. This may cause issues for those coming to counseling and expecting to receive a directive style of therapy. It may make a client unsure of themselves and then cause them to terminate therapy early.

Conclusion

Cognitive Bliss Therapy aims to build a relationship between client and counselor for the counselor to then act as a guide in the client's journey of self-understanding. To understand the world around, one must understand themselves. To understand oneself, one must trust in their potential to change and accept their opportunities of freedom, counter the anxieties to follow, and assume consequences for their own responsibilities. Cognitive Bliss Therapy is a way for clients to learn new skills, learn about themselves, and then go out into the world as a happier and healthier member of society.

Personal Thoughts on this Assignment

This paper was by no means an easy paper to write, but the class knew that going in. When I first began thinking about this assignment, I found it to be quite an interesting and complex assignment. Fundamentally, the idea behind this integrative theory paper is yet one of the most interesting papers I have come across. While writing this paper, I was forced to think back on times in my life where I thought I was simply making a decision or coming to terms with reality, only to realize there was more to those situations than I thought. This paper has shown me the immense work of psychologists and the time it takes to truly find a way to understand someone and their thoughts, feelings, and behaviors. This paper has also shown me that, if I was to ever enter the helping profession, I would want to be on even ground with those I am helping. I do not want to

take a superior stance. I am to be one and trust in my client as my client is to trust in me. Overall, I found this paper to be rather eye-opening into a counselor's life as well as a writer's life.

Rietta Steffen

Professor Loh

HONR 360L-111

12 December 2021

Ancient Chinese Philosophers and Contemporary Counseling Theories

Ancient Chinese philosophies inhabited the fundamental teachings of modern counseling theories well before psychologists grasped these ideals and turned them into techniques of helping those with mental, emotional, and internal issues. Zhuangzi, and Laozi are two philosophers who cultivated what society now knows to be Gestalt and Existential theories within their teachings and understandings of who human beings are at the core and how this understanding of oneself may impact society. Everyone strives to live a happy and healthy life, each of these schools of Chinese philosophy were the original schools of thought as to how one should live out their daily lives and be the best members of society. These philosophers shaped the way contemporary counselors view the human psyche and how such counselors aid in the self-cultivation of each of their clients through the various techniques.

Dependence, perspective, and transformation become three major themes seen within the Zhuangzi. Dependence is a key component in creating perspectives for perspectives depend on certain conditions out of which to form. These perspectives, Zhuangzi argues, are what create blocks or resistance to boundary disturbances. Perspectives begin to mold a society in such a way that it begins to limit the potential for knowledge as people conform to where they believe themselves to best fit within the societal expectations. This in turn may cause unhealthy mindsets as perspectives then limit how one views their own value in society. “The cicada and the student-dove laugh at her [Breeze], saying, ‘When we start up and fly, we struggle for the elm or the

sandalwood. Sometimes we don't even make it... what is she doing rising ninety thousand *li*...?" (Ivanhoe & Van Norden 2003, p. 209). This passage shows how a limited perspective may cause people to turn a blind eye to the abilities of others and judge such capacities seeing as they themselves are unable to perform such tasks with a limited mindset. These people become fixated on one or two values and block themselves from all other possible values or goals they may be able achieve. Gestalt theorists took this concept from Zhuangzi and played it around to explain how people create contact or boundary disturbances.

Contact is the way people interact with nature and with other people without losing sight of one's individuality. However, as Zhuangzi acknowledges, everyone has a sense of value and there are too many values where nothing is obvious. This creates people's own boundary disturbances which consist of the defenses people develop, preventing them from experiencing the present fully. Zhuangzi would also look at the concepts of contact and resistance to contact found within Gestalt Therapy and exclaim how too many people create their own boundary disturbances, hindering their own ability to create contact and maintain themselves. Blocking energy, as Gestalt theorists would say, is to fool oneself for they are creating a defensive behavior which may result in unfinished business. Gestalt therapists then tend to focus on where the energy is located, how it is used, and how it can be blocked and then transformed into more adaptive behaviors to prevent people from thinking of themselves as lesser value than those around them. This concept may also be transcribed into a series of living in the here and now, as Zhuangzi subtly approaches this notion with his students.

Living in the here and now allows people to remain in a state of potentiality and govern the possibility of transformation to broaden their perspectives, increase their limits, and fulfill their full value. Zhuangzi discusses the meaning of the Sad Nag who was so ugly that people

grimaced upon seeing his face. There was nothing special about this man—he never had the lead in a performance, he could not sing, he could not dance he was not of lordly status—and yet, everyone took a liking to him. People wanted to make him king and follow him. Society was drawn to this man in more ways than they could imagine (Ivanhoe & Van Norden 2003, p. 233). Through this story, Zhuangzi shows how maintaining a state of potentiality will allow one to increase their limits and have a sense of greater value, of a greater purpose in life. When one can be on their own, live for each minute rather than worrying about yesterday or tomorrow, then they may find themselves in a position of transformation and a state of prosperity and happiness as they live each day to their fullest potential. With this, Zhuangzi shows and “addresses the project of personal realization” within his students (Ames & Nakajima 2015, p. 2).

Gestalt theorists took this state of potentiality, and all which may accompany it, and turned it into a therapeutic technique. When clients come in feeling devalued, a counselor may sit and listen to their stories. Much like Zhuangzi has done, metaphors will be used and picked apart to then come to the realization that a true meaning of the unhappiness faced may stem from the lack of potentiality they are allowing themselves and conforming to those societal molds rather than living in the here and now. As Zhuangzi used to do with his students, Gestalt therapists, when encountering someone in such a state of mind, will provide exaggerated exercises as Zhuangzi once provided exaggerated metaphors to further explain his teachings. Zhuangzi opened the gate for contemporary Gestalt theorists to come in and transform his teachings into a way to transform the mind for the betterment of the self and society. However, Zhuangzi is not the only one whose teachings have made an impact on contemporary counseling theories.

Laozi's Daoist teachings can be seen within modern-day existential therapy. Laozi focuses on maintaining balance and harmony within ourselves. He believes if harmony is kept internally, then society may become a harmonious society. To achieve internal harmony, one must avoid placing name or highlighting something in a particular way. To do this is to create artificial value rather than recognizing it for its true value. As Laozi says, "The Way is forever nameless. Unhewn wood is insignificant, yet no one in the world could master it" (Ivanhoe & Van Norden 2003, p. 178). In this section, Laozi portrays that to be fully Dao, to follow The Way, is to remain nameless. This may seem like a simple task, but Laozi goes on to exclaim how simplicity is not as easy to master as some may think. To lead a simple life, one must look beyond themselves fulfill only their Desires of the Belly to reinforce their Dao. In this way, people will maintain a natural cycle and harmony between Yin and Yang and stray from their path of suffering. However, that is not always the case as people grow tempted by societal pressures and expectations to then follow their Desires of the Eye, placing name and emphasis on specific objects over others, creating a broken cycle and invite suffering. "The difficult undertakings in the world all start with what is easy. The great undertakings in the world all begin with what is small. This is why sages never work at great things and are able to achieve greatness" (Ivanhoe & Van Norden 2003, p. 194). When one strives to be great and wants to go directly to the top of the chain, they will fall short and encounter issues and difficulties as they try to take the effortless way to the top. They follow society and listen to what society tells them they need to do, breaking them away from their harmony and into the way of societal influences, hence why Laozi states simplicity is rarely ever achieved.

Existential therapy takes human conditions and breaks it down into the nature of a human being and the meaning of life. Existentialism offers a road to self-awareness, allowing people to

bring a balance back into their lives, as is the goal for Daoists to maintain this balance. Through existential therapy, one may find one's own capacity for self-awareness, no longer relying on societal influences, as well as coming to terms with their own freedoms and responsibilities and identity and relationships. To have freedom implies that one must make their own decisions but know the consequences to follow. To have the freedom to decide would be a resemblance of one's Yang whereas the consequences following a decision is one's Yin balancing out their life. In the same semblance, identity focuses on the courage to be and trust in oneself to search within and find their own answers, creating harmony for themselves and not for others. Creating a balance in aloneness and relatedness helps an individual develop their own unique identity, providing a sense of purpose and meaning. "Cultivate it in oneself and its Virtue will be genuine" (Ivanhoe & Van Norden 2003, p. 188). Laozi has been speaking of self-cultivation for centuries before existential therapy was used in this way. Look beyond oneself, and they shall find harmony and meaning.

According to Yueh-Ting Lee, the heart of Laozi's philosophy is to "imply motivation by inward rectitude" (Lee 2003, p. 68). This conveys the need for existential therapy providing clients with the encouragement to choose more expanded ways of being in their daily lives through their own self-cultivation. By doing so, they are creating a more harmonious lifestyle for themselves, and allows them to know themselves enough to "know contentment and avoid disgrace; know when to stop and avoid danger; ...[to] long endure" (Ivanhoe & Van Norden 2003, p. 184).

It is understandable that these two philosophers were so influential in the creation of two similar counseling theories: Gestalt and Existential. As Zhuangzi stems from Laozi, Gestalt stems from Existentialism. These ancient Chinese philosophers laid the foundation for modern

counseling theories. As the philosophers aimed to help people cultivate themselves for the betterment of China, little did they know their practices and teachings would be taken, reworked, and newly implemented to help people of all ages with all forms of mental illnesses. Zhuangzi and Laozi were just some of the first to create a framework necessary to build more than three hundred counseling theories from and change the foundation of psychologists everywhere.

Works Cited

- Ames, Roger T., and Takahiro Nakajima. *Zhuangzi and the Happy Fish*. University of Hawai'i Press, 2015.
- COREY, GERALD. *THEORY AND PRACTICE OF COUNSELING AND PSYCHOTHERAPY, ENHANCED*. CENGAGE LEARNING CUSTOM P, 2020.
- Ivanhoe, Philip J., and Bryan W. Van Norden, editors. *Readings in Classical Chinese Philosophy*. Hackett, 2003.
- Lee, Yueh-Ting. "Daoistic Humanism In Ancient China: Broadening Personality And Counseling Theories In The 21st Century." *Journal of Humanistic Psychology*, vol. 43, no. 1, 2003, pp. 64–85., <https://doi.org/10.1177/0022167802238814>.