**A Holistic Approach to Secondary School Counseling: Supplementing Cognitive Behavioral Therapy with Person-Centered and Feminist Therapy**

CHLOE SMITH

KANSAS STATE UNIVERSITY

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Dr. Alex Becnel

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 Foundational to my practice as a school counselor is my passion for creating space that allows students to bring their full selves into the room – the parts they feel proud of *and* the parts they want to hide. I believe we can only heal when all our parts are met with compassion, acceptance, and embrace. In the field of counseling, this is done in a variety of ways, and a wide range of therapeutic techniques are practiced. This range depends on a number of factors, including the type of counselor (mental health counselor, couple’s counselor, school counselor, spiritual counselor, etc.), the context of counseling, and the framework from which the counselor is working. Counselors take a variety of approaches for a variety of reasons. That being said, in the field of therapeutic counseling, some counselors take more of an integrative approach to their practice, meaning they will integrate two or more theoretical models into their counseling practice as opposed to adhering to one specific theoretical lens. In my own practice, I have a desire to take a holistic approach to the work that I do in the context of secondary school counseling. With this integrative approach, I will utilize Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT) as my foundational theory, supplemented by Person-Centered Therapy and Feminist Therapy. I recognize CBT as an effective model in working with teenage clients and addressing distorted behaviors and patterns of thinking, but it can lack proper acknowledgement of relational and emotional content. Person-Centered Therapy helps me address that limitation, drawing specific attention to emotions presented (or not presented) as well as capitalizing on the therapeutic relationship, helping to capture the full essence of the human experience. The person-centered approach puts an emphasis on the client’s capacity for self-healing, allowing the client to lead the change that occurs through the process of therapy. The feminist approach will allow me to address the soci-political part of clients’ lives. This is something that traditional styles of therapy don’t offer. Throughout this paper, the terms “client” and “student” will be used interchangeably, as this paper is addressing a specific client population within the counseling setting.

**Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT): The Foundational Model**

Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT) is a common form of therapy that helps to address negative thoughts or patterns of thinking, in hopes of changing faulty behavior. A CBT therapist believes that identifying and changing negative thought patterns can, in turn, change negative behaviors. CBT holds a variety of techniques and approaches that work to address a range of thoughts, emotions, and behaviors. Having CBT as the foundation of my therapeutic work is helpful in working in a school setting, as sessions are often sporadic and short-term. CBT is an effective therapeutic model, but it can lack proper acknowledgment of emotional content. Therefore, the incorporation of Person-Centered Therapy is crucial, as it would help the counselor close that gap.

When addressing about the goals of Cognitive Behavioral Therapy, Dr. Gerald Corey (2020) states, “﻿To a large degree, cognitive behavior therapy assumes that beliefs, behaviors, emotions, and physical reactions are all reciprocally linked. Changes in one area lead to changes in the other areas. A change in beliefs is not the only target of therapy, but enduring changes usually require a change in beliefs” (p. 270). Through a collaborative relationship between the therapist and the client, cognitive distortions and limitations as well as maladaptive patterns of thoughts and behaviors are named and processed, with the end goal being to improve a person’s feelings and behaviors and enhance overall functioning. In recent researched published by the Department of Psychiatry and Behavioral Sciences at The University of Texas, the following chart was noted.

Ugueto, 2019

This image simply articulates the heart of CBT. In her published article, Ugueto explains, “The goal of CBT is to teach clients how to manage their problematic cognitions and behaviors through various strategies, so clients can reach their goals and end treatment. Ultimately, CBT aims to prepare clients to maintain treatment gains, autonomously manage future problems, and attain future goals without needing to re-enter therapy” (Ugeuto, 2019).

**Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT): Therapeutic Techniques**

Unlike traditional “talk-therapy,” CBT is heavily focused on the present, not the past. With this in mind, there are a variety of techniques that are used in CBT that have historically been successful for a wide range of issues including but not limited to depression, anxiety, substance use disorders, PTSD, grief and loss, personality disorders, and childhood behavioral issues. On a broad level, these techniques include various methods of meditation, cognitive restructuring, guided imagery, and visualization (Ugeuto, 2019). Within each of these categories, there are many specific activities and techniques that can be applied to the therapeutic work. One technique that has played a central role in CBT over the years is cognitive restructuring. This is the process of recognizing a dysfunctional thought or behavior and developing more rational, grounded ways of dealing with the dysfunction. Cognitive restructuring is less about “flipping the negative to a positive” and more about developing a more sophisticated viewpoint that considers ALL aspects of a situation, adopting a thought that triggers less of a negative emotional experience and is more effective at helping the individual cope with the situation at hand (Beck, 2011).

Another technique that is often used in CBT is the ABC Model of Functional Analysis. This is a processing of “identifying the maintaining conditions by systemically gathering information about ﻿about situational antecedents (A), the dimensions of the problem behavior (B), and the consequences (C) of the problem” (Corey, 2020). This model helps clients to look at their life from more of a bird’s eye view, suggesting that behavior is often influenced by a particular event or set of events that precede it (antecedents) and by a particular event of set of events that follow it (consequences). Putting this technique into practice can be done through traditional talk-therapy, recording a thought journal, or through a behavioral assessment interview, done by the therapist.

With this style of therapy, an equal amount of involvement is required from both the therapist and the client. Oftentimes, a CBT therapist will make use of “homework,” inviting the client to think about the therapeutic work outside of their time one-on-one with the therapist. Not only does this encourage client involvement in the therapeutic process, but it invites the client to assume an active role of responsibility in his/her/their healing process.

**Person-Centered Therapy: A Supplemental Model**

Person-Centered Therapy places a heavy emphasis on the therapist/client relationship, believing that for the client to get the most out of their therapeutic experience, the therapist must be warm, genuine, and empathetic. At the core of this theory are three conditions that reflect how the therapist must enter into the therapeutic space to make person-centered therapy effective. The first condition is that the therapist must be congruent with the client. The therapist is genuine, honest, and keeps their behavior congruent with their emotion(s). There is a genuine nature to the way that the therapist enters relationship, doing away with any sort of façade, and reveals bits of his/her/their personality (McLeod, 2019). Empathy is the second core condition of person-centered therapy, capitalizing on the ability to see situations from the client’s perspective, understanding and sharing the feelings of the client. Attuning to the client’s experience and feelings accurately and sensitively in the present moment is crucial to creating safe and healthy attachment. Lastly, the concept of unconditional positive regard is essential to this style of therapy. It is critical that the therapist approaches the client with pure care and acceptance, coming into the therapeutic space with an attitude of “I accept you just as you are.” Another key aspect of Person-Centered Therapy is that the goals of the space and the direction of the work is led by the client. “A person-centered therapist trusts in the client’s ability to move forward in a constructive manner if conditions fostering growth are present” (Corey, 2020).

**Person-Centered Therapy: Therapeutic Techniques**

There are a number of therapeutic techniques that can be used when initiating person-centered therapy. Motivational interviewing is a person-centered technique that can be helpful when behavioral change is necessary but the counselor wants to incorporate more of an emotional check-in as opposed to strictly behavior modification. As described by Corey (2020), “The primary goal [of motivational interviewing] is to reduce client ambivalence about change and increase the client’s own motivation for change.” Motivational interviewing works to create awareness for how the client’s actions and behaviors affect not only them but the people around them. It is the counselor’s responsibility to engage the client in open-ended questions and offer affirming feedback and reflective listening through the interviewing process.

 Reflection of feelings is another helpful way of guiding clients through a therapeutic experience in a person-centered manner. Therapeutically noting when certain emotions rise to the surface, helping the client name and experience whatever may come, is a way of *being with* the client in the shared, therapeutic space. This could sound like, “When you began talking about the interaction you had with your teammate after practice last night, your demeaner shifted from relaxed to a bit more guarded. Can we talk about why that may be?” Or “As you talk about Christmas with your family, I noticed tears welling up in your eyes. Can we stay with those tears for a little bit?” In doing this, not only does the practitioner open the door for emotional attunement, they are also actively inviting the client to take initiative and responsibility in their own therapeutic process.

**Feminist Therapy: A Supplemental Model**

Feminist Therapy focuses on empowering female clients by identifying and discovering how to break gender-normed stereotypes that may be blocking growth and development. Feminist Therapy often focuses on strengthening women in areas such as self-esteem, assertiveness, relationships, and communication. The aim of Feminist Therapy is twofold: acknowledgement and change. Acknowledging the impact of gender issues and inequalities, both societally and personally, as well as changing the way women and men interact with a patriarchal world are key to the role of feminist theory in therapy. Although one may assume that Feminist Therapy is only for women, men, too, can benefit from this therapeutic process. Men deal with social and gender role constraints such as demands of strength, autonomy, and competition. By participating in a therapeutic process that incorporates feminist theory, skills such as vulnerability, sensitivity, and empathy are fostered and encouraged. Utilizing the feminist approach helps the counselor address the socio-political part of clients’ lives, something that traditional styles of therapy don't offer.

There are a variety of goals when considering feminist therapy. According to Grant (n.d.), one crucial goal of this therapeutic style is to help the client become aware of their gender-role socialization process. Not only does this include the analyzation of the client’s present-day experience but also examining what events (or lack of events) leading up to this time in their life have shaped the way they see themselves in the world based on their gender. From here, acquiring skills to bring about change in their environment and how they interact with it is very important.

**Feminist Therapy: Therapeutic Techniques**

Engaging in Feminist Therapy has a lot to do with assessment and empowerment. “Feminist therapists believe that external and contextual factors are as important as internal dynamics in understanding the client’s presenting problems” (Corey, 2020). Using feminist techniques as supplemental techniques to CBT and Person-Centered is helpful, as it capitalizes on parts of the human experience that may otherwise be left out. Where CBT techniques may work to define client symptoms as evidence of pathology or cause for diagnosis, feminist therapeutic techniques look a bit deeper, understanding these symptoms as coping or survival strategies.

Empowerment is central to the practice of Feminist Therapy. Similar to Person-Centered Therapy, the client is empowered to lead the direction, length, and procedures of the therapeutic process. Along with that, the client is considered the expert and is assumed to be innately good. Encouraging the client to take charge of their own healing process empowers them to notice that power and autonomy is available to them and in the words of Corey, it interrupts the trance of powerlessness (Corey, 2020).

**An Integrative Approach**

Although some may say that Cognitive Behavioral Therapy and Person-Centered Therapy are on opposite ends of the theoretical spectrum, I would argue that they are highly complementary of one another. As CBT can be solution-focused, Person-Centered can be relationally focused. As CBT can be results-oriented, Person-Centered can be softer on expectation. As CBT can be more cognitive, Person-Centered can be more emotional. My goal as an integrative practitioner is to center the therapeutic focus on motivation, cognition, behavior, *and* emotion, understanding that the combined focus is the primary pathway to change.

Not only are beliefs, behaviors, emotions, and a client’s physical experience all interconnected, it is crucial that the therapist addresses all parts, as they all affect one another. This is where Person-Centered Therapy would come into play and be an important factor in my client’s therapeutic process. It is important that my clients are adequately equipped with, not only cognitive and/or behavioral tools, but also tools to help process the emotional aspect of their experience.

Utilizing the feminist approach helps me address the socio-political part of my clients’ lives which is something that traditional styles of therapy don't offer. Feminist theory takes into consideration a lifespan perspective, which assumes that a person’s development is lifelong and that rather than being limited to a childhood experience, personality and behavioral changes can occur at any time (Corey, 2020). This idea is complimented by CBT and Person-Centered Therapy, helping me look at the lives of my clients from a holistic perspective, addressing all facets of the human experience.

**Multicultural and Diversity Aspects to Consider**

In any field of work, especially in the field of counseling, it is important to consider the multicultural aspects. The foundation of my therapeutic approach (CBT) has several strengths when it comes to working with individuals from a variety of diverse backgrounds (cultural, ethnic, racial, etc.). Because CBT is more of a collaborative style of therapy, it gives the client some autonomy while also inviting the therapist to take responsibility in diversity education. There are a variety of factors that make CBT an effective style of treatment for diverse clients including but not limited to individualized treatment, focus on external environment, emphasis on learning, and concern with present behavior (Corey, 2020). With that, Person-Centered therapeutic philosophies are grounded in the importance of hearing and understanding the deeper and underlying messages of a client. This naturally caters to a diverse understanding of client experience from a diversity perspective. There is also a lack of assumption that takes place in these therapeutic approaches that is incredibly beneficial in engaging with clients from diverse backgrounds. Feminist Therapy naturally brings in more of the social and pollical side of diversity by addressing issues such as patriarchy, homophobia, and socio-economic discrepancies.

**Conclusion**

 Utilizing an integrative approach in my work as a school counselor gives me flexibility to meet the needs of each individual student. When working with a variety of student demographics, it will be important to attune to the needs and desires of each individual student. This may mean shifting my therapeutic model as needed. Having an integrative approach as the basis for my practices gives me a solid foundation for the shifts that are inevitable. Though a perfect complimentary integration is nearly impossible, I do believe that these three techniques fill in one another’s gaps to truly create a holistic therapeutic experience, tailored to each client based on the needs that are present. My goal as a practitioner is to implement multiple therapeutic approaches that are different while complimentary of one another to meet the needs of a wide client population while maintaining a strong, consistent counseling foundation.

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