



Theories of Counseling and Psychotherapy: A Case Approach (2nd Edition)

By Nancy L. Murdock

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Based on a deeply held belief that theory does matter in effective helper–client interactions, this text examines with clarity and with wit fourteen theories of counseling and psychotherapy. At the beginning each chapter, readers “meet” a new client through a case example. The author then presents the theory’s basic philosophical assumptions; its beliefs about what motivates human behavior; its central constructs; its picture of how humans develop; its ideas about what constitutes mental health and dysfunction; its perspective on how our relationships with those around us impact our functioning; and its view of how our behavior, thoughts, and emotion impact our functioning. Throughout each chapter, the author immediately illustrates the application of a construct or process by showing how it relates to the client case described at the beginning of the chapter, demonstrating the translation of each theory into practice.

The second edition includes three new chapters (Chapter 3: Neoanalytic Approaches, Chapter 6: Existential Psychotherapy, Chapter 15: Narrative Therapy) and a companion DVD to accompany the texts. See applications of theory come to life! The **Theories in Action DVD** illustrates six therapists of different theoretical orientations working with the same client.

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Editorial Review

About the Author

Nancy L. Murdock, Ph.D. is Professor and Chair of the Division of Counseling and Educational Psychology at the University of Missouri-Kansas City. She has served as the Vice President for Education and Training of the Society of Counseling Psychology and is a past chair of the Council of Counseling Psychology Training Programs. Her research interests include professional issues, counseling/supervision process, and family systems theory.

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There is nothing so practical as a good theory.

— Kurt Lewin

WHY I WROTE THIS BOOK

The quote from Kurt Lewin aptly captures my philosophy on the role and use of theory. I have been teaching about counseling theory for longer than I care to say, and I consider myself something of a theory freak. I admit that I think theory is fun. However, over the years I have learned that theory is not very useful if you don't know how to apply it; application is what makes theory practical and good. I have struggled to teach the application of theory to my students, trying different methods and models along the way. Knowing that it is sometimes difficult for me, how can I expect the application of theory to be easy for students just learning the basics of counseling theory? That's why I wrote this book; it is an effort to demonstrate the value of theory through its application. Theory comes alive when it is used to understand a client presentation. The pitfalls and strengths of an approach are never more evident than when it is put to use in this way.

The task of understanding a client presentation in a theoretical structure creates a situation in which you need to know the theory in a way that is different from simply knowing its constructs and techniques. At times it is tempting to give up the attempt to apply a theory to a given client presentation, because the theory under consideration just doesn't seem to fit as well as some other one. My experience has been that when this situation occurs, the potential for learning is great. Clients don't offer their problems in theory-laden terms. They tend to speak in their own language, and it is your job to do the best you can to understand that language in ways that are helpful. In essence, you need to interpret the client's presentation in theoretical terms. I have found that theory is most useful when my clients have me confused. Instead of operating on automatic pilot, I am forced to ask, "Now what on earth just happened here?"

In each chapter of this book, I have tried to present the various theories in a straightforward, understandable way. What distinguishes this book from others is that I immediately illustrate the application of a construct or process by showing how it relates to the client case described at the beginning of the chapter. I use different client cases for each chapter for at least two reasons: First, I want to show that theory can apply to clients who range across the broad spectrum of individual and cultural diversity and present with many kinds of distress. Second, I do not want my readers to lose interest from reading about the same case chapter after chapter. In essence, I have tried to make this book interesting without compromising the intellectual quality of the presentations. However, it is an engaging and useful exercise to apply different theories to the same case, so I would urge the users of this book to undertake this task as a way of comparing the approaches in a meaningful way.

THE THEORIES I CHOSE

A question always arises about which theories to include in a text like this one. Some choices are obvious; others less so. I included classical Psychoanalysis—even though true analysis may not be common these days—because it is the foundation of the profession and the springboard for many other systems. If you ever write something that generates as much love and hate as Freud's work did, you have really created something important. I chose other theoretical approaches based on several criteria: (a) currency—whether the theory is used by professionals in the real world; (b) potential to contribute to understanding of the counseling process even if the reader does not adopt the theory wholesale; and (c) comprehensiveness—the extent to which the theory provides a conceptual structure as well as guidelines for counseling and associated techniques.

MY PHILOSOPHY

I am a Counseling Psychologist and a scientist-practitioner, and these aspects of my professional identity influence the structure and content of the presentations in this book. Counseling Psychologists attend to individuals' strengths and are oriented toward health as much as (or more than) they are toward dysfunction. I prefer to look at people through a positive lens, seeing personal strength and the potential to change in every life moment. To focus primarily on deficits seems to me to be a disservice to the human spirit. This emphasis leads to the use of terms such as *client* instead of *patient* and *dysfunction* rather than *disorder*. I also include sections in each theory chapter that describe the theory's version of the healthy personality.

An important element of the identity of a Counseling Psychologist is a commitment to the scientist-practitioner model. The scientist in me wants some confirmation that a theoretical structure is valid. This is not to say that I endorse the idea of one true reality; rather, I consider myself an intellectual pragmatist. I simply want some evidence that the version of reality presented by a given theoretical structure actually helps me to understand the counseling process and to help my clients. The sections on research support in each theory chapter grew out of this empirical bent. Philosophically, I lean toward the contextual perspective, rooted in Frank and Frank's (1991) work and further supported and elaborated by Bruce Wampold. You'll find this model described in chapter 14. It would be nice if we could find the one true theory, but for now I think that that possibility is fairly remote, and the data seem to support this position.

Another defining feature of Counseling Psychology is attention to individual and cultural diversity. We are all aware that our world is changing and that, historically, counseling and psychotherapy have been mired in a Caucasian, Western European, male model. The failure to recognize the biases inherent in this model (e.g., emphasis on individualism, a lack of attention to social and cultural forces in people's lives) is, to be blunt, unethical. I have attempted to address these issues systematically in each chapter. I have also selected clients and counselors of diverse backgrounds for the case presentations.

My concern about the effects of sexual bias in language has led me to the solution of alternating the singular pronouns used in this text. In the theory chapters the pronouns used match those of the client and counselor in the case study. If the client is female, references to client issues and processes in the discussion of theory employ feminine pronouns. If the therapist is male, reference to therapist activities or processes employ masculine pronouns. The diverse cases include men and women in both client and counselor roles. In chapters 1 and 14, pronouns are alternated randomly.

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