

Individualized Counseling Theory

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INDIVIDUALIZED COUNSELING THEORY

Abstract

Traditional counseling approaches often involve struggles with sanity and mental health. However, now positive psychology theories offer new theoretical views that focus on human strengths and well-being. Currently, people are living together with a variety of cultural and social backgrounds yet they need to be understood individually. As a counseling student from a communal community like Indonesia, I tend to be more comfortable using the Adlerian approach that accommodates individual uniqueness and focuses on their strengths to grow rather than on their deficits or disabilities. To complete my counseling experience in this course and program, I plan to earn a doctoral degree, continue practicing counseling, and conduct further research on the Adlerian approach and related approaches.

Keywords: positive psychology, Adlerian approach

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Introduction: What Works in Counseling?

To see what works in counseling, I would like to use a contextual approach based on community life. In this writing session, I would like to see what works in counseling in the United States and Indonesia as the starting point to discuss my personal preferences for new styles of counseling and my plans in the future.

Counseling in the United States is different from counseling in my country. I believe that both countries have approaches to help other people psychologically but they do that in different ways. In the United States, counseling is based on approaches that are used by counselors, psychologists, and other social workers and are generally acceptable for all people (McLeod, 2003) unlike in Indonesia where counseling is still looked down upon and individuals are considered troubled. Moreover, Indonesians prefer to share their concerns or problems with pious people who are older or shamans.

With reference to this description, I believe that both counseling in America and Indonesia serve as a way to struggle with sanity, discipline, determination, motivation, and inspiration (Howard, 2000). However, since the birth of positive psychology, counseling is focusing more on human strengths, well-being, and less on pathologies and personality disorders.

What works for me?

Both countries now influence me. I am originally from Indonesia and I will go back there after finishing my study in the United States. Indonesian counseling scholars now are struggling to evolve counseling in more empowering ways by learning from counseling approaches in western countries such as America that are considered to be more scientific, and well structured (McLeod, 2003). I am one of these scholars but I will not merely learn what works in American

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counseling, but learn to apply my new knowledge into the context of Indonesian society and global community.

Many people can easily provide suggestions or input for other people who are experiencing mental health problems. However, I believe that this is not the best way for individuals to be empowered and find the strengths to handle their own life problems. I particularly like the Adlerian skills in counseling such as attending, observation, empathy, active listening, and encouragement that allow individuals to grow and reach their goals themselves without being dependent on the counselor or another individual they talk with. I also could not agree more that a counselor must see clients unconditionally positive at whatever level they are and whatever their ethnic, religious, and racial background.

I have learnt many new counseling theories that have their own uniqueness such as Psychoanalysis, Behavior therapy, Gestalt therapy, Cognitive behavioral therapy, Adlerian therapy, Person Centered Therapy, and Reality Therapy. As a graduate student who is practicing some of these approaches, I had the chance to test the theories one by one with clients in counseling sessions. I found many are applicable but some are more interesting yet at times difficult to apply. One approach that I felt especially comfortable is Adlerian therapy along with Person-Centered Therapy, Behavioral therapy, and Gestalt therapy. One approach that I considered difficult is psychoanalysis theory. However, I like some aspects of this theory especially in terms of individual defense mechanisms, and the separation of consciousness and unconsciousness including related diagnosis symptoms.

Personal Theoretical Style

Adlerian theory offers principles to see people as indivisible and understand them in the context that is socially embedded such as family, culture, school, and work (Sweeney, 2009;

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Corey, 2009). Adler saw individuals as the creators and the creations of their own lives and they are responsible to create themselves rather than be solely the product of childhood experiences (Sweeney, 2009). With this perspective, individuals are creative decision makers that socially and creatively act and are inseparable from their life context to search for meaning, achieve success, completion, and perfection (Corey, 2009). I think this approach is applicable for Indonesian people that exist in a communal community (Aragon, 2011).

I believe that this approach provides an excellent model for counseling services because I am a person who comes from a communal community. Adlerian theory demands counselors to see people individually reaching their goals without ignoring their context. It is real for with me who views human strengths as the potentials to attain their flourishing. I learned this approach from positive psychology therapies that encourage solutions to everyday problems by focusing on human strengths to reach happiness and well-being (Seligman, 2000). Many authors have written about how clinical psychology has traditionally focused on disability and psychological deficits (Carr, 2001; Seligman, 2000). I believe that empowering people through their potentials are more successful rather than only focusing on their illness or weaknesses. Employing the skills and techniques that are empowering is one of my goals to develop my potential in counseling to encourage individuals to deal with challenges in their life and flourish (Carr, 2001).

Conclusion: Future Goals

I am fully aware that one semester of theory and practicum is not enough to build the necessary expertise in counseling skills and techniques. To be sure, I will need to make more effort to improve my capability in counseling. There are at least three points that I will focus on to develop my skills in counseling. The first one is to keep studying until postgraduate level, the

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second is practicing counseling more, and the third is doing research on Adlerian counseling and related approaches.

To develop my style and skills, I will need to study deeper about Adlerian therapy by taking courses in degree or non-degree programs. I plan to continue pursuing a doctoral degree after finishing this Master's Program. In addition to my obligations to earn a doctoral degree as a faculty in an education department in Yogyakarta State University, I have choices to improve my skills on counseling through counselor education, counseling psychology, or education doctoral programs that focus on counseling skill development.

Based on my research on some possible programs for my doctoral degree, there will be some practicum courses that will allow me to do more counseling practicum even inside of campus or outside as internship. This chance to do practice is beneficial for me as a student who wants to enhance my capacity as both counselor and educator in the university setting. There will also be opportunity for teaching assistantships that would open my wider knowledge and experience in teaching counseling or educational courses. I believe that these practices will sharpen my skills and expertise in the counseling field.

For an academician, doing research is necessary. To earn the doctoral degree and in most practices, it would not be enough without doing research in the field in which I am involved. I have started to do research on Wellness approaches and am now working on this fascinating topic. I hope there will be more chances in the future to do further research in relation to the Adlerian approaches and related topics so that I can become knowledgeable and skillful to use the Adlerian approach and teach students about this topic.

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