

**Week 9, Theoretical Orientation**

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6110 Personality and Counseling Theories

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## **Who are you?**

I am the third of four kids born to Patrick and Gretchen McCarthy. When I was ten, my oldest brother Tim died in an accident. The trauma this caused our family played out over the next few years and almost broke us apart. Luckily actions led our family to find counseling where we gained self-awareness and understanding of our situation. My family learned about the negative behaviors we were showing and found ways to adapt to new models that made us band together. My parents were married for 58 years before my father passed and I remain close with my brother and sister. Irish catholic, we went to St. Anne school and church every Sunday. I remained in the community until a few years ago but no longer actively participate because the church does not reflect my values in various ways.

Growing up as a dyslexic learner, I have the gift of thinking in pictures. I also had the challenge of decoding words & letters, which made me a slow reader until college. I was labeled as a “daydreamer,” and unfocused; but in reality, was disorienting to try to make sense of my world. Teachers were not trained on how to treat dysgraphia and we all suffered through it. Despite challenges, in hindsight, I demonstrated a tremendous work ethic to learn the material, but I would not recognize and value this in myself till years later. When dyslexics understand a system or a process, we quickly master it without the need for multiple repetitions others need. This intrapersonal characteristic furnishes me with the ability to create internal dialogs and go deep into thoughts, Albert Einstein labeled this practice as “thought experiments.” When I learned I could adjust the frame and change the way I perceived the world it was like something lifted and light filled my mind as it never had before. I gained the ability to change the

way I see the world and used it from then on. In performance psychology, my understanding of different theories and how they can be used together started to click with how I see the world. Everyone is a unique snowflake and how one constructs their world is dependent on many factors. How one operates in the world and the behaviors one chooses creates consequences. No one does it alone, we all need help forming and improving our realities.

The context of the culture I grew up in was interesting and evolving. Our neighborhood and community were pretty much all white. I recall in grade school my parents sponsored an African American family into our parish, and a few Latinx families came too, but there was no real diversity. That being said, we were raised to treat everyone equally and this was put to the test when I started working at the Recycling Depot while in high school. It was located on the edge of the industrial area and the central district which at the time had a diverse mix of black, Asian, Hispanic, and white families. I assimilated to the environment and quickly developed comfort interacting with a wide variety of people, from homeless people to the mayor of Seattle. I saw how vocabulary and dialects were socially constructed. I could tell what micro-neighborhoods people were from by the way they walked, spoke, and phrased sentences. I gained a deeper understanding of the advantages of a strong family and secure foundation with parents who supported and loved me. I saw people my age without those supports and knew they could not have the same worldview as me.

As a girl-father, I have become more aware and action-oriented towards mental health literacy for female athletes. Did you know that 81% of female NCAA athletes reported they felt they needed to lose weight? This included 40% of cross-country

runners, (Kuettel, 2019). The situation is exacerbated by the onset of social media amplifying concerns about weight, aesthetics, and peer pressure. Performance consultants provide effective tools to deal with and prevent anxiety and depression; which lead to mental health issues.

Community involvement is important to me which is represented by the number of communities I participate in including lacrosse coaches, lacrosse officials, basketball officials, cycling groups, kids' sports, and others. As an influencer and find myself drawn toward leadership positions because I see opportunities for process improvement. Arranging is a strength of mine and it manifests in assessing a system, breaking down the process into steps, and working to create better action items. A motivation for me to pursue an SPP degree is to acquire the foundational scientific knowledge to systematically apply theories to real-world applications because humans operate in complex systems and communities, general systemic theory is foundational to my approach. Systems theory includes variation for individuals within a system so it has the flexibility to address the whole person. It also sets up interaction between variables so behavior can be assessed, addressed, and grown for performance-oriented goals.

### **Personal Model of Counseling**

My model of counseling is structured within general systems theory and grounded in other theories based on each client's needs and goals. Critical to performance consulting is gaining entry to work with a client. Part of that process is assessing their needs and what I think they need with a detailed intake and formulation process. The use of path-goal theory surfaces the client's motivations, values, goals, and fears so that we become aligned on the direction and destination of our work. With an endpoint in mind,

self-determination theory (SDT) supports the development of plans and processes to achieve future goals. SDT helps paint the picture for the client of how to direct motivations, inform decisions, use skills, and collaborate with others to track toward group and individual goals. Gaining agreement by all stakeholders builds depth into our therapeutic alliance and commitment to our common purpose.

Within the integrative perspective, person-centered theory (PCT) is a reflective process that helps clients discover internal and external influences that shape their worldview. By immediately demonstrating the values of positive regard, empathy, and genuineness, trust is established and discovery of internal and external forces can begin with a strong therapeutic alliance (Norcross, 2018). The client leads the content and the consultant controls the process that results in the client's realization of their relationship with a challenge or trauma and how it is shaping their behavior today. Guided discovery and MI evoke intrapersonal recognition which leads to quicker and more effective adoptions. As opposed to psychoanalysis, PCT responds to the world as the client sees and operates in it now. The concern is with the client's self-awareness of their internal constraints and how they guide behaviors.

As clients examine their thoughts and feelings, distancing helps them detach judgments about their thoughts from who they are as a person. As an example, a client can see herself as a caring mother who is dealing with some unresolved issues. She can look at her behavior detached from who she is as a person and decide if they are serving her and her family. She can now say this behavior is not serving me as opposed to I cannot control myself and I am a bad person.

With relational frame theory, the client learns that humans relate new stimuli to an experience to frame our reference and then apply meaning. If one's relationship to alcohol is positive, new information is received that way. If the relationship is negative, all alcohol is perceived as a threat, possibly inducing trauma. RFT helps clients understand they create the frame of how they perceive things in their world based on previous experience. The associations and constructs are based on their experience frame. As they become aware that thoughts are arbitrary and their connection of thoughts is not congruent with their desired world, they have an impetus for change. By reframing thoughts, they become empowered by them. A client is suffering from dysfunctional cleaning behavior. Once she can see why her frame of reference is dysfunctional, she can develop psychological flexibility and move her frame of reference to more functional cleaning behaviors that serve the world she wants.

Reflective practices are extremely helpful to coaches and athletes because they desire instant feedback that helps them quickly adjust and improve. The concept of psychological flexibility can help them become aware of their thoughts label them and categorize them; beneficial or detrimental, within their control or out, and in other ways. They develop control of how to address, store, or discard thoughts. With increased recognition and the ability to control, clients are in a better position to be present and work towards goals.

Awareness of a problem starts the process but is not sufficient to drive change. Awareness-commitment therapy (ACT) from a clinical perspective is useful for people who are feeling stuck, trapped, unhappy, and anxious. Many times, athletes can feel the same way because things that got them to their level are no longer producing results and

they do not know how to adjust. Their relational frame does not allow them to connect new behaviors. When they do athletes call these breakthroughs. Going deeper, many coaches and athletes have been in their sport for years and are not aware or clear of their motivations, values, goals, and fears.

ACT works in conjunction with MI and systemic theory because ACT relies on the client's values as the guide to behavior. When motivations, values, and goals are in alignment clients are congruent, and watch out! More than being aware of thoughts, the client is aware of their values and uses their values to guide their behavior. Value-driven behavior is intrinsic and because an individual is driving adoption from within, change happens quicker and with greater satisfaction. As an evidence-based therapy, clients directly relate changes to measures that are in their control. By understanding what is in their control, individuals can distance what is not in their control and reduce anxiety.

### **Professional Integration**

In my community, I am drawn toward the challenges sports coaches have and know impacting one coach can help groups to generations of kids. Studies show coaches are considered among the most influential adults to adolescents; up there with teachers, doctors, and religious leaders (Kuettel, 2019). The minimal training volunteer coaches receive has become detrimental to all sports, kids, and coaches. It is driving kids out of organized sports. Coaches provide benefits to athletes and the larger society because they are in the unique position of putting adolescents under dynamic physical, mental, emotional, and social pressures that surface problems and dysfunctions. Teachers do this too, but it is limited to schoolwork, tests, and class projects. Teachers are required to have certifications and advanced degrees, but there is an acceptance of minimal training

for coaches. It is critical to increase mental health literacy with coaches and parents. Our communities and as a society, we owe it to coaches and kids to provide volunteer coaches education, guidelines, and better tools to support student-athletes.

Practically speaking let's look at a case study example of how these theories integrate into an SPP consulting practice. Before we can get started, we need to understand the context a coach takes on when they volunteer to lead a team of athletes and parents. Joe volunteered to coach a high school lacrosse team because he loves the sport and wanted to serve his community by giving his best to shape young men through sports. He was motivated enough to volunteer but did not list, analyze, and reflect on his motivations. He did not deeply consider the situation he was stepping into. With players from five different high schools, they did not know one other very well, and trust needed to be built. Joe was not prepared for conflicts from strong personalities and challenged authority. PCT would help Joe assess the intrapersonal thoughts and constructs driving initial actions. Developing a systematic perspective, he could evaluate interpersonal behaviors and realize how his behavior affects himself and others. If he feels he needs to examine the origins of traumas or issues, a reference to a licensed counselor may be in order.

With news awareness, Joe could establish distancing so he can assess his thoughts and behaviors, and reduce his stress level knowing that they do not determine who he is as a person. Distancing is enhanced by CBT where Joe examines his thoughts, feelings, and actions about how he has associated information in the past. Joe did not receive any coach training, so he did what every other volunteer coach does, coach the way he was coached, and repeated the sins of the past until he learned better ways. Many behaviors



that were accepted in the past, like practicing with “Shirts and skins” are not appropriate today. When Joe was able to look at his thoughts, feelings, and actions he increased his self-awareness. By developing psychological flexibility, Joe learned to label his thoughts, he could decide if he needed to deal with them now, later, or disregard them. Having a way to process thoughts and feelings helped Joe to make better decisions because he increased his capacity to be present. Building on new skills, Joe adopted mindfulness practices of visualization and meditation to increase reflection and reduce stress. With greater self-awareness, Joe used strategies and tools to guide his thoughts, but he had neither a strong plan nor process to guide decisions. Joe was struggling with relationships on his team, feared they would splinter, and the team would lose cohesion. Using ACT, Joe surfaced his values as a coach and for his team. He found a way to install standards and discipline that were not punitive toward players. He learned how to listen to challenges from athletes, distance his emotions, and engage with MI to evoke a solution with the athletes in which they had ownership. Joe felt a breakthrough with his team and his satisfaction level went through the roof. He was congruent with what he wanted to do (motivations), how to do it (values), and had addressed his fears. Joe installed three measures to measure success for the last four games of the season. First, make the playoffs, second, track negative comments between players, and third, rate in the huddle behavior (hustle in, listen first, productive comments).

### **Conclusion**

With the systemic orientation intervention, Joe has a system to address the behavior of himself and others. When Joe experienced problems halfway through the season, he had the process to assess, formulate, and create changes. At the end of the

season, Joe can repeat the cycle in reflective practice to synthesize takeaways and improve for his next season.

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