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Personal Theory

EDG 6323: Theories of Counseling

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Personal Theory

Throughout this course on counseling theories, I have thoroughly enjoyed exploring the various approaches, especially those with which I feel a personal connection as I plan for my future role as a licensed professional counselor. I believe that understanding the different theories, their ideal applications, and the aspects that resonate with me is crucial as I move forward in my career. While I have appreciated learning about a range of counseling theories and recognize the value of integrating aspects of several into my practice, I find myself particularly drawn to the philosophy behind Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT) and Dialectical Behavior Therapy (DBT). The balance these approaches strike between acceptance and change resonates deeply with me, as does the focus on recognizing cognitive distortions and reducing catastrophizing. These strategies not only align with my own values but also offer practical, effective tools that I believe will greatly benefit both my personal growth and my future work with clients.

Personal Theory Reflection

I strongly believe in the potential for behavioral change, recognizing that different techniques are better suited to address the unique needs and personality types of clients. Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT) and Dialectical Behavior Therapy (DBT) have particularly resonated with me, and I am eager to continue learning and integrating these approaches into my future practice.

DBT operates under the belief that behavioral change is critical to improving emotional regulation and overall mental health. It incorporates elements of CBT to help individuals identify, challenge, and modify maladaptive behaviors. Through DBT, clients gain increased

awareness of their behaviors, develop new coping strategies, and receive support for managing emotional and interpersonal challenges (Ashworth, Mooney, & Tully, 2017). By combining mindfulness, emotional regulation, distress tolerance, and interpersonal effectiveness skills with therapeutic principles of acceptance and change, DBT offers a comprehensive framework for modifying negative behaviors and promoting long-term emotional well-being (Jones et al., 2023).

Dialectical Behavior Therapy (DBT) is a specialized form of Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT) developed by Marsha Linehan to address emotion regulation difficulties, particularly in individuals with Borderline Personality Disorder (BPD) (Michałowska & Cheć, 2024). Over time, DBT has been adapted to treat a wide range of mental health conditions, including mood disorders, anxiety, and trauma-related disorders. It is highly effective in enhancing emotional regulation, managing overwhelming emotions, improving interpersonal effectiveness, and reducing impulsive behaviors (O'Connell & Dowling, 2013).

The core values and beliefs of DBT emphasize a balance between acceptance and change, mindfulness, self-validation, and fostering emotional regulation, interpersonal effectiveness, and self-compassion. These principles underpin DBT's therapeutic approach, supporting individuals in navigating difficult emotions, improving relationships, and leading more fulfilling lives (Jones et al., 2023). DBT therapists stress that while individuals are doing the best they can, they also need to push themselves to do better, try harder, and make changes to improve their emotional well-being (Kujovic et al., 2024).

Personal Theory Application

Present Problem and Past History

Throughout my life, I have struggled with intense emotions—both positive and negative. As a child, adolescent, and well into adulthood, I believed everyone experienced emotions the way I did, and that I simply wasn't good at managing them. My difficulty with understanding boundaries has been a challenge, as I often tell others to take care of themselves but fail to listen to my own advice. My struggles with emotional regulation have affected various aspects of my life, particularly at work, where I sometimes feel hurt or unseen in situations that don't warrant such personal involvement. This sometimes hinders my ability to maintain composure and appear professional. My personal relationships have also been impacted by my emotional responses and the overthinking that occurs inside my mind, which I often fail to communicate. In moments of frustration and shame over my inability to manage my emotional waves, I question how I can truly believe I am capable of helping others who face similar struggles.

Etiology

Emotional dysregulation refers to the difficulty individuals face in managing or controlling their emotional responses. Unlike typical emotional reactions, emotional dysregulation is characterized by extreme intensity, prolonged duration, and inappropriate reactions (Michałowska & Cheć, 2024). Extreme intensity occurs when emotions are experienced with overwhelming force, often feeling unbearable and uncontrollable. Prolonged duration includes intense emotions that may persist for long periods, impairing a person's ability to function effectively in daily life or interact with others. Inappropriate reactions can occur when emotional responses become disproportionate to the triggering event, leading to impulsive or self-destructive behaviors, such as self-harm, aggression, or substance use, which temporarily reduce emotional distress but ultimately worsen the problem (Michałowska & Cheć, 2024).

Proposed Treatment Approach

Dialectical Behavior Therapy (DBT) offers a structured and comprehensive approach to addressing the root causes of emotional dysregulation by helping me increase self-awareness, develop effective coping strategies, and enhance emotional regulation (Ashworth, Mooney, & Tully, 2017). The skills I acquire through DBT not only enable me to manage my emotions more effectively but also foster the development of healthier relationships and a more balanced, functional life. By teaching me how to approach intense emotions mindfully and constructively, DBT provides a transformative framework for turning emotional dysregulation into adaptive emotional responses.

Techniques to be used

Emotional regulation skills are designed to teach individuals how to identify and manage emotions in a healthy, adaptive way. I will work towards monitoring and accurately labeling my emotions, then implementing coping strategies to reduce emotional intensity. Techniques such as reframing negative thoughts, engaging in positive activities, and practicing relaxation exercises are commonly used to promote emotional balance (Michałowska & Cheć, 2024). DBT incorporates a variety of techniques to help individuals regulate their emotions by enhancing awareness, fostering acceptance, and providing practical tools for managing distress. By learning to apply mindfulness, distress tolerance, emotion regulation, and cognitive restructuring, I am working towards gaining greater control over my emotional responses and reducing maladaptive behaviors. These skills offer a comprehensive toolkit for managing intense emotions and promoting healthier emotional patterns in my everyday life.

Mindfulness is a cornerstone of Dialectical Behavior Therapy (DBT), helping to develop greater awareness of thoughts, feelings, and bodily sensations in the present moment. This heightened awareness is crucial for preventing emotional dysregulation (Jones et al., 2023). Key

mindfulness techniques in DBT include observing, where I am encouraged to notice my emotions and sensations without judgment; describing, which involves labeling my experiences in an objective and non-judgmental way; and participating, a technique that focuses on fully engaging in the present moment without being overwhelmed by emotions or overthinking. These practices will help me develop a deeper understanding of my emotional experiences and promote greater emotional regulation moving forward.

Building distress tolerance skills will provide me with strategies to manage painful emotions without resorting to maladaptive behaviors for myself such as overeating and oversleeping. These techniques offer practical ways to endure emotional distress in the moment. Self-soothing involves using the five senses—sight, sound, smell, taste, and touch—to comfort myself during emotional turmoil. For example, I may engage in calming activities like listening to soothing music, inhaling a familiar scent, Eucalyptus is my favorite, or touching a comforting object like the variety of Squashmallows that I keep in my office. Healthy distraction helps me redirect my focus away from overwhelming emotions by engaging in activities such as reading, walking, or grounding exercises. The IMPROVE the Moment technique encourages me to enhance my emotional state through methods like imagery, prayer, relaxation, and other strategies, fostering a more peaceful and pleasant experience in the present moment (Greene, 2020).

Possible roadblocks to change

As I work through Dialectical Behavior Therapy (DBT), I recognize that there are several potential roadblocks I may encounter that could hinder my progress. One challenge I might face is emotional avoidance, where I could be tempted to use maladaptive coping mechanisms, like

dissociation or isolation, to avoid confronting uncomfortable emotions. This would prevent me from processing my feelings healthily, but DBT provides mindfulness and distress tolerance techniques to help me experience and tolerate emotions without resorting to avoidance (Jones et al., 2023). Another difficulty could be intense emotional reactions, which might overwhelm me and make it challenging to apply DBT techniques effectively. To address this, DBT teaches grounding techniques, opposite action, and self-soothing, helping me regain control and reduce emotional intensity (Jones et al., 2023). Finally, cognitive distortions and negative self-talk, such as feelings of unworthiness, could also increase my emotional distress and impede my progress (Martin, 2023). DBT helps me by using cognitive restructuring to challenge these unhelpful thoughts and replace them with more balanced, realistic perspectives, supporting my journey toward emotional regulation.

Navigating my own emotional struggles over the years has deeply influenced my passion for helping others facing similar challenges. I believe my personal journey provides me with a unique perspective and drive to support individuals in overcoming emotional dysregulation, guiding them toward the help and support I once felt was lacking in my own life. Throughout this course, I have gained a comprehensive understanding of various counseling theories and approaches, with a particular focus on Dialectical Behavior Therapy (DBT). The knowledge I have gained in DBT has been invaluable in not only enhancing my own emotional regulation but also in preparing me to better assist others in their emotional growth. As I continue to develop these skills, my goal is to create a compassionate and effective environment for those struggling with similar difficulties, empowering them to navigate their emotional challenges with resilience and self-awareness.

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