

# Unit 2, Assignment 5

## Self-Reflect using Theoretical Approaches

*5 Be able to self-reflect using theoretical approaches*

*5.1 Reflect on ways in which the study of counselling theory has developed their understanding of self*

*5.2 Explain how this informs own approach to counselling*

*Student should complete a reflective piece on ways in which the study of counselling theory has developed their understanding of self, and explain how this informs their approach.*

*Word count: 800 minimum.*

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The study of counselling theory - with its many different facets - has directly impacted upon my understanding the self. The self is a dynamic concept which relates to how people view themselves, their self-esteem and self-belief, and also how they believe other people view them. Naturally, these different facets also inform my own approach to applying counselling skills and help me to realise the significance of counselling theory.

The person-centred theory presents a sense of self consistent with the American psyche; this is especially relevant to the context in which the person-centred (or 'humanistic') approach developed. Whilst some scholars have suggested that the humanistic approach can be traced back shortly before World War 2, the humanistic counselling theory is generally accepted to have been developed between the 1940s and the 1960s in America as a reaction against the quantitative and technical approaches of the psychodynamic theory. The humanistic approach was proposed almost antithetically to the psycho-dynamic approach, returning the 'person' to the centre of the discussion rather than techniques and quantitatively-measured outcomes. The American sense of self - which was heavily rebranded during the cold war through the rhetoric of the 'American Dream' - became such an integral part of the national identity that it is was pervasive throughout a myriad of cultural, academic and artistic developments during this period. I am particularly interested in how the American sense of self - which is engrained within the language of optimism, hope, destiny and autonomy - informed a branch of counselling now commonly practiced within the UK also.

If one considers the theory of self-actualisation developed by Rogers and Maslow through the lens of the American Dream, it is easier to understand the principles underpinning the humanistic approach that all humans have the potential to be happy, healthy and successful within themselves. This notion underpins Maslow's hierarchy of needs, where he proposes that there are some factors which must be in place in order for a person to fulfil their own potential and achieve 'self-actualisation'. These begin with the fundamental physical needs such as food, water, sleep, health. The next needs extend to those around safety - such as a feeling of security within one's employment, resources, family, and home. The following branch is far more to do with one's sense of belonging and identity within their friends, family or community. Beyond this, there is the level of esteem and confidence which must be in place. If all of these things exist within a person's life, then it is possible for them to fulfil their own potential in the realm of emotional health and wellbeing. Understanding that a person's most passionate and

confident sense of self is informed by some basic building blocks, I understand then the significance of counselling theory in helping to establish things like 'self-esteem' and 'self-belief' to aid a client in their journey to self-actualisation.

Understanding this more American sense of self is interesting when explored as an antithetical response to the more Euro-centric, pessimistic sense of self which informed the earlier psychodynamic theory. Despite these two subtle differences in senses of selves, the process of globalisation and digitalisation over the course of the last century has made the boundaries of these national identities more porous and accessible within the minds of individuals across the planet. Since the 1970s, the person-centred approach has become an inherent part of counselling within the UK where it is broadly accepted now that the individual self possesses within themselves the potential to achieve happiness. The core conditions (empathy, UPR and congruence) which were borne directly out of person-centred theory are inherent to the general professional expectations of counsellors within the BACP's Ethical Framework. Naturally, this will then inform my own approach to counselling.

Within Cognitive Behavioural Theory, I have also learnt that the self is not static but is dynamic. Automatic thoughts which have the potential to define a person (adjectives such as 'anxious' or 'depressed') can be replaced through an ongoing process which explores the cyclical effect of thoughts, actions and behaviours. Viewing the self as dynamic and changing will naturally inform my optimism and outlook when helping clients to overcome fears and anxieties. I equally recognise the importance of challenging the definitions people have about themselves - applying adjectives which have the potential to perpetuate and damage the replacement of negative automatic thoughts.

The dynamic nature of the self is also integral to the understanding of diversity and how this informs a person's sense of self. A person's individual sense of self is complexly informed by a myriad of factors, including: national identity, cultural identity, age, gender, sexuality, race, community, education. Naturally, understanding the idiosyncrasies that inform the sense of self will enable to be to embrace diversity - consistent with my own values and the expectations outlined by the BACP's ethical framework.