

Adlerian Feminist Integrative Theory of Counseling

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ABSTRACT

The discipline of psychotherapy originated a little over a century ago. Throughout its history, the narrative of psychotherapy has been characterized by a gradual and ongoing effort to comprehend human anguish and discover effective treatments for it. The new treatments from this conference are amalgamations of ideas and approaches characteristic of at least two psychotherapies. These novel treatments are often known as integrative psychotherapies, and there are several models available. The formal practice of integrating different psychotherapy approaches began in 1983 with the establishment of the Society for the Exploration of Psychotherapy Integration (SEPI). Primary considerations were comprehending the interconnection between theory, method, and experience. Recent concerns have focused on the classification of different methods for integrating psychotherapy, the involvement of the client, and the connection between psychotherapy integration and evidence-based practice. The major focus of evidence-based therapy is of utmost importance. However, it is crucial to adopt a wide definition of evidence and stress the role of the client, the therapeutic relationship, and the integration of treatment techniques. This article focuses on the important modern integrative techniques and aims to explain their similarities and consistencies in 4 modalities of psychotherapy, namely Adlerian, Feministic, Person-Centered, and Behavior Therapy.

Keywords: *Psychotherapy Integration, Therapeutic Relationship, Treatment, Theoretical Orientation*

The field of counseling has consistently shown interest in and made efforts to incorporate new advancements in the fields of scientific and social sciences, philosophy, religion, arts, and literature. Integration of varied psychotherapy paradigms has been popularized and proven to be the best approach to counseling. An isolationist, single theoretical stance has been contested by very few researchers and professionals who have not successfully transcended theological lines. The integrationists have sought to facilitate a productive exchange of perspectives among practitioners from different schools of psychotherapy. Their objective has been to advance the findings for the most efficient treatment modalities attainable. An integrative theoretical model entails amalgamating the unique frameworks from many single-theorized treatments and approaches into unified new theories and functional treatment modalities. With the increasing number of journals and publications focused on psychotherapy integration, it seems that theoretical integration has reached a mature stage, as stated by Arkowitz (1991).

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For counselors to effectively aid and support their clients, it is crucial that they possess a comprehensive understanding and knowledge of the broad spectrum of human development and its resulting behavior. Harms (2010) argues the need for a multidimensional approach in comprehending the frameworks and treatment modalities behind various theoretical orientations, thus aiding in an exhaustive knowledge of a client's presenting problems.

Theoretical integration in counseling refers to the deliberate attempt to surpass the limitations of a single school of thought and instead include insights from other viewpoints to provide a service most suitable for a client (Norcross, Karpiak, & Lister, 2005). Most psychotherapists do not strictly adhere to one particular therapeutic approach but instead use integrative strategies throughout their sessions (Norcross, 2005; Norcross & Beutler, 2011). According to a survey conducted by the Psychotherapy Networker in 2007, just 4.2% of participants reported utilizing a single approach technique, while 95.8% stated their commitment to an integrated treatment paradigm.

Among the laureates (Wachtel, 1977; Golfried, 1980), therapeutic integration could be classified into three main categories: common factors, technological integration, and theoretical integration. Approximately ten years later, Messer introduced a new category called assimilative integration (1992). As accounted by Stricker (2010) thusforth, there are four primary approaches to combining several psychotherapies: technical integration, theoretical integration, assimilative integration, and common factors.

Theoretical integration: All theories offer a framework that directs our comprehension of the client. When it comes to theoretical or assimilative integration, considering a homogenous integration is of utmost importance. It is important to consider the main factors within each theory to be highlighted that forms a foundation for an integrative theory.

Technical integration: Technique refers to the actual actions or methods used in therapy and is given more emphasis in relation to common variables and technological integration. Goldfried (1980) observed that the focus should be on treatment techniques as the most suitable ground for integration. However, it can be argued that techniques only provide instructions on how to do a task but do not explain the underlying reasons for doing so. Without a guiding concept or theories, technical integration may devolve into a haphazard and uncontrolled way of combining different ideas and practices. Even the most effective technical integration approaches, such as Beutler, Consoli, & Lane (2005), include a fundamental theoretical principle of providing background to each client.

Assimilative integration: Assimilative integration uses a single theory to guide the selection of integrated interventions. This process may adhere to accommodations to the main guiding theory, thus modifying to account for situations where the theory fails to suggest the usefulness of the integrated techniques (Gold & Stricker, 2001).

Common Factors: For an integrative theory to be formed, it is important to highlight the common factors that are present in each parent theory that may aid in a homogenous picture of the client, possible techniques, and core therapeutic standards in an integrative theory.

The clinician's expertise is crucial when selecting treatments and strategies, and deciding when to deviate from the recommended approach. The optimal balance between these factors is always a matter of concern and maybe where clinical expertise is most prominently shown. Despite the significance of these four sources of contribution to the

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therapeutic integration, each tenant has its limitations. Theory may impose constraints as well as provide insights to formulate case conceptualization for clinicians. Assimilative integration, which uses a single theory to guide the selection of integrated interventions, has been observed to require accommodations (Gold & Sticker 2001). Nevertheless, theoretical integration facilitates awareness of the counselors' individual approaches, preferences, and the strengths and shortcomings of their singular theoretical orientation by offering means to integrate many different theories into one functioning framework for the clinicians.

The four theories that will be used for the purpose of this manuscript to form the Adlerian Feminist Integrative Theory (AFIT) are Adlerian Therapy, Person-Centered Therapy, Behavior Therapy, and Feminist Therapy.

PRINCIPLES OF PARENT THEORIES – THEORETICAL INTEGRATION

Adlerian therapy operates on the fundamental premise that individuals are driven by their need for social connection and strive to achieve their life goals. This therapeutic approach also emphasizes the importance of overcoming feelings of inferiority and superiority to effectively handle life's many challenges and responsibilities (Corey, 2016). It adopts a phenomenological standpoint to examine oneself and contemplate pursuing a life goal that may influence one's actions. One crucial element that holds great significance in this model is constructing a distinctive way of life that is well-suited for oneself while also developing a deep understanding of one's family of origin and the dynamics within the family. The premise that individuals possess the ability to comprehend and exert creative control over their own lives bestows a significant degree of independence onto that individual (Corey, 2016).

In Person-Centered Therapy, the client has the capacity to comprehend and resolve their own issues. The theoretical framework focuses on recognizing and comprehending the maladjustments caused by the difference between one's real self and ideal self. The primary objective is to direct one's attention to the current moment and be emotionally and mentally completely conscious of one's own state of being (Corey, 2016). In sessions, clients are seen in a positive regard as individuals capable of resolving their own difficulties; thus, it motivates them to strive for self-actualization. Clients are urged to investigate emotions that have been suppressed and ignored, with the goal of developing a sense of autonomy, spontaneity, and self-reliance. This theory aims to create a therapeutic setting that is both safe and secure, enabling the client to completely embrace and acknowledge aspects of their personality that were previously suppressed or rejected (Corey, 2016). Offering unconditional positive attention helps to find purpose in life and develop an internal sense of control.

As the name suggests, Behavior Therapy primarily targets overt behaviors and aims to provide a structured treatment strategy for addressing maladaptive habits. According to the principles of learning theory, the focus is primarily on the present behaviors and their corresponding outcomes (Corey, 2016). This theory emphasizes that abnormal behavior is acquired and modified through the processes of reward and imitation. The fundamental premise is that behavior is acquired by either operant or classical conditioning. Mindfulness and acceptance are essential components of theoretical pedagogy. Additionally, this treatment strongly emphasizes using holistic methods that include current approaches. Through this framework, clients can actively address their issues, include themselves in cooperative goal-setting, and participate in periodic assessments to assess their progress (Corey, 2016).

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The principal focus of Feminist Theory is the egalitarian relationship between a client and the therapist. This statement presupposes that any information shared in sessions will be comprehended within a wider context of empowerment. Therapists are responsible for promoting society's well-being and striving to bring about a widespread transformation via their therapy sessions. This theory takes the stance of reinterpretation of the notion of psychological discomfort. The practice prioritizes a comprehensive approach that encompasses the understanding of oppression, intercultural competency, and social justice (American Psychological Association, 2007; Beardsley, Morrow, Castillo, & Weitzman, 1998; Brown & Root, 1990). The key tenet of this philosophy is comprehending the cultural, sociological, and political factors that impact an individual's subjective concerns. Therapists endeavor to instigate a transformation in both the client and the broader community (Enns & Byars-Winston, 2010). This treatment seeks to enable clients to identify and comprehend their suppressed gender constraints, with the ultimate objective of effecting a more substantial transformation in the functioning of the system (Corey, 2016).

ASSIMILATION OF PARENT THEORIES FOR AFIT FRAMEWORK

The theories converge in the realm of cognition based on their perspectives on the client throughout the session. All four methods share the belief that clients who have the ability to solve their issues are driven by the desire to achieve objectives and develop better-coping strategies in life. Maladjustments arise from disparities between a client's perception of their actual and desired selves. All four theories emphasize the need to raise awareness. All clients are regarded positively and seen as capable of achieving self-actualization with the assistance of therapy. The ultimate objective of sessions, regardless of the theories, is to acquire a new type of behaviour as they respond to their new self-identity. Once we have comprehended our objectives, maladaptive habits, complexes, or systemic oppression on a cognitive level, the next stage is to concentrate on acquiring actions that effectively reduce the sources of stress. Examining suppressed emotions that might lead to sentiments of inferiority or superiority, ultimately culminating in societal oppression, adds to the emotional integration of all four theories. The ideas strive to cultivate spontaneity, self-awareness, self-reliance, and empowerment in a person.

The ideas emphasize the need for collective accountability, establishing mutually agreed-upon objectives, and fostering respect and trust between therapists and clients. To establish a strong connection with the client, the therapist must demonstrate certain attributes such as authenticity, compassion, and courtesy. The connection is crucial since clients use this relationship as a prototype for other relationships outside the realm of treatment. While this connection alone may not directly cause a change in the client's condition, it serves as the fundamental basis for any potential change. The main purpose of the association in therapy sessions is to facilitate empowerment. A collaborative and collective connection is established with the client, enabling them to develop their expertise and mastery in driving change.

AFIT prioritizes social interest, collectivism, altruism, the pursuit of life's purpose, and goal orientation and are thus aligned with the values of many cultures. The idea focuses on the individual within their surroundings and permits the examination of cultural influences. The techniques promote open and inclusive communication among different cultures and value cultural diversity. The primary emphasis is on the social and cultural circumstances influencing behavior and emotions. Both individual transformations and societal transformations are prioritized. The sessions are often examined via the client's phenomenological viewpoint and comprehended within the framework of their social

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environment. The maladaptive behaviors addressed during sessions are always mindful of the client's specific requirements, and a customized treatment plan is created to align with the individual's expectations.

EMPATHY AND THERAPEUTIC RELATIONSHIP

The Adlerian Feminist Integrative Theory (AFIT) emphasizes the need to integrate the personality with social and cultural institutions to understand individuals as a whole. AFIT is strongly influenced by social connections and driven by intentional and focused actions. AFITian therapists aim to establish an equal therapeutic connection with the client, ensuring that everything said during the session is considered from both the individual's standpoint and a broader perspective of empowerment. This empathetic perspective will concentrate on intrinsic determinants of behavior, such as beliefs, values, interests, objectives, attitudes, and the client's internal perspective. Therapists strive to comprehend behavior via the client's viewpoint, and hence, AFIT utilizes its sympathetic knowledge of human nature to adopt a phenomenological approach. This idea places great importance on empathy as a fundamental characteristic in the work of counselors. The counselors must have a strong feeling of empathy for their clients. Empathy relies on a sense of community, which is essential for being linked to mankind as a whole, therefore contributing to a more stable environment. In order to establish an effective therapeutic alliance, therapists must demonstrate authenticity, a non-evaluative mindset, unwavering acceptance, mutual esteem, and the promotion of personal agency.

The therapist should also consider the relationship from a gender and equality perspective. To facilitate the client's self-exploration, the therapist should use discretion while sharing personal information, ensuring no obstacles impede the process. The fundamental basis of the therapeutic relationship is established via the joint participation, transparency, and combined endeavors of the therapist and the client. AFIT has a perspective on human nature that does not consider it to be abnormal or diseased and refrains from categorizing clients with specific diagnoses or diseases. An essential aspect of the therapeutic interaction in AFIT is the clarification of the counseling process. The counselor provides their insights on the ongoing events in the sessions and requests the clients' comments about these observations. By including clients in the therapy process, the relationship may be maintained as egalitarian as feasible while also providing psychoeducation and empowerment to the client. Ultimately, establishing a strong therapeutic connection is crucial for the efficacy of this hypothesis.

TECHNIQUES

The following techniques form the basis of Adlerian Feminist Integrative Therapy:

Immediacy - Person-Centered Therapy

The concept of immediacy is mostly explored in the realm of communication study and has received little attention in the context of healthcare. Immediacy behaviors refer to actions that include approaching clients, creating a sense of interpersonal relationships that leads to heightened sensory stimulation, which is then regarded as warmth (Andersen, Andersen, & Jensen, 1979). Immediacy is the concept that relates to how persons perceive their physical and/or psychological proximity to one other (Gottlieb, Wiener, & Mehrabian, 1967). These behaviors include actions such as approaching someone physically during session engagement, making physical contact, maintaining direct eye contact, smiling, adopting an open body position, employing gestures, and expressing oneself vocally (Kay & Christophel, 1995). Although the study of nonverbal communication is not new, immediacy involves a broader range of factors beyond merely non-verbal activities. Immediacy is a

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notion that is founded on effect, meaning that communication actions are a reflection of the underlying psychology of the individuals involved in the communication.

Mindfulness and Social Skills Training- Behavior Therapy

Mindfulness, defined as the act of consciously and non-judgmentally being aware of the present moment, has a moderate effectiveness in alleviating symptoms of anxiety and depression (Ludwig & Kabat-Zinn, 2008). It achieves this by enhancing emotional awareness and acceptance, thereby reducing emotional dysregulation (Hofmann, Sawyer, Witt, & Oh, 2010). Mindfulness-based therapies have been shown to enhance stress management, reduce anxiety and depression, and improve cognitive functioning (Chiodelli, Mello, Jesus, & Andretta, 2018).

Resocialization- Feminist Therapy

Resocialization approaches are derived from research conducted in the fields of social and gender-role studies. Resocialization entails the process of reorganizing the client's cognitive framework and belief system (DuttonDouglas & Walker, 1988). Clients acquire the ability to assume unconventional roles and self-perceptions while also cultivating alternative coping mechanisms. Treatment may include strategies like cognitive restructuring and subsequent behavioral rehearsals. However, the specific techniques used might vary depending on the therapist's theoretical approach ((Dambrot & Reep, 1993). In resocialization, the client has the opportunity to enhance their self-esteem by acquiring the needed assertiveness skills. As a key aspect of feminist theory, through the stage of resocialization, clients actively acquire fresh identities during sessions. Generalizing new information to the client's actual world is critical in the healing process. It is essential for treatment to have enduring and beneficial impacts on the client (Israeli & Santor, 2000).

Encouragement - Adlerian Therapy

Encouragement is a frequently used method for people to show support for one other (Hwang et al., 2011; Jose & Bellamy, 2012). According to Maxwell (2008), encouragement is a significant subject in several self-help books, focusing on enhancing leadership qualities (Dinkmeyer & Eckstein, 1996), as well as books that aim to improve marital pleasures (Rainey & Rainey, 2010). Encouragement is a fundamental principle of Adlerian thought. It highlights the value and importance of every human being. It maintains a positive perspective by stating that people have the capability to initiate, make choices, and take steps to bring about change (Adler, 1956). Encouragement is not a specific method but rather a manner of interacting with people that encompasses both positive attitudes and the ability to develop strong relationships. While not always explicitly stated, many applications of counseling psychology also involve the utilization of encouragement. This is because counseling psychologists have historically embraced the concept of human strengths. Encouragement is integrated into various counseling approaches that focus on strengths, as well as in supervision methods recommended by counseling psychologists (Scheel, Davis, & Henderson, 2013; Smith, 2006; Wong, 2006a).

EFFECTIVENESS OF AFIT

Assessing the efficacy of integrative theory is a complex task. Norcross and Beutler (2011) concluded that evidence-based practice demonstrates dedication and emphasizes the effectiveness of interventions rather than the theoretical framework behind them. A meta-analysis of the results of integrative psychotherapy has shown that it is not only effective, but research has also demonstrated that the integrated use of psychotherapy is extremely successful (Smith, Glass, and Miller, 1980). Adlerian therapy perceives its counselors as

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authoritative figures who alone provide answers to the client's issues. In contrast, Feminist therapy places significant importance on establishing an equitable connection between the therapist and the client. AFIT combines egalitarian principles with the role of a coach/expert to address maladaptive behaviors and promote the application of learned knowledge. AFIT utilizes feminist treatments to examine and address challenges through a gender-sensitive lens. It is accountable for integrating feminist ideals and interventions into other therapeutic modalities, such as behavior and Adlerian techniques. It also motivates a growing number of women to challenge gender disparities, stereotypes, cultural norms on oppression, expectations of women's attire, and similar issues.

AFIT will play a crucial role in highlighting issues such as child abuse, incestuous rape within families, sexual harassment, domestic violence, toxic masculinity, maladaptive oppressor syndromes, power struggles in relationships, and other similar topics that cannot be effectively addressed and treated using a single theoretical approach. AFIT may be used in both group and individual contexts. Additionally, it can be integrated into many therapeutic approaches, such as family therapy, parent-child therapy, behavior administration and management, and couples therapy. This technique is characterized by its high level of adaptability and is applicable to a diverse range of clients, including those seeking treatment for parent-child interactions, children in need of guidance, those struggling with family system management, women in correctional programs, victims of drug misuse, and victims of sexual assault. The primary emphasis is on alleviating oppression and addressing the problems that impede progress. Furthermore, due to its foundation in the behavioral therapy paradigm, AFIT is very successful in addressing phobias, traumas, behavioral issues, and stuttering, among other conditions. Moreover, it specifically emphasizes providing therapy for interpersonal relationships and implementing interventions within the community to improve the overall well-being of society. Despite its name, this integrated treatment is designed to be inclusive for both men and women, making it universally applicable.

Adlerian Feminist Integrative Therapy works on the freedom model of change (Slate, Scheeren, Dunbar, 2012). Afitian therapists believe that client changes happen to achieve freedom. Therapists in this integrative approach aim to achieve freedom in the following manner;

1. Freedom *from* maladaptive behaviors using techniques of Behavior therapy
2. Freedom *to* make individual choices and express thoughts freely, using techniques of Person-centered therapy
3. Freedom along *with* others who express similar cultural values and tolerance using techniques of Feminist therapy
4. Freedom *for* the good of a just and equitable society using techniques of Adlerian Therapy

The Precursors Model of Change (Wilkinson & Hanna, 2018) emphasizes the crucial role of awareness in a therapy session. It posits that the client must first become aware of the issue before they can endeavor to modify it. AFIT employs mindfulness training to enhance clients' awareness and equip them with the ability to confront fear or discomfort throughout the process of transformation using behavioral strategies such as systematic desensitization. The method of enhancing the client's awareness also addresses the client's inclination and evaluation of their readiness to make changes.

THERAPIST COMPETENCY

In his work, Lazarus (1996a) contends that therapists must ascertain the appropriate moments to adopt certain roles throughout therapy sessions. The author highlights that a proficient therapist will possess the ability to choose the appropriate moments to be confrontational or directive, formal or casual, divulge personal information for the benefit of the client, or remain anonymous. As an AFIT counselor, one problem I may have is effectively using my expertise in a clear, thorough, and succinct way. I have had difficulties in determining the appropriate degree of self-disclosure since I often experience discomfort when customers anticipate my sharing personal details about my life. Firstly, I am curious about the advantages the customer will get from knowing about me. Secondly, I am determined to meet or exceed their expectations throughout our sessions. In order to enhance my proficiency as an AFIT counselor, it is imperative that I acquire the ability to effectively manage self-disclosure and create appropriate boundaries to safeguard my privacy.

Furthermore, I want to acquire proficiency in methodically discerning the client's issues and formulating a potent therapy strategy using several modalities. An integrated theory has many advantages, including its teachability, evaluability, and replicability (Norcross & Beutler, 2011). In order to enhance this degree of integration, I must familiarize myself with the four theories used for integration into AFIT and consistently assess the efficacy of the approaches employed to assist customers.

DIVERSITY AND SOCIAL JUSTICE ADVOCACY

AFIT places significant emphasis on social equality and the inherent social interconnectedness of individuals, drawing inspiration from the parent Adlerian Theory. The approach is founded on the assumption that our difficulties primarily emerge from social factors. Therapists strive to comprehend their clients from the perspective of a systemic social framework to which they are connected. The fundamental principles of AFIT include the significance of a cultural context, prioritizing individual well-being above disease and diagnosis, and comprehending the client from their phenomenological perspective. Therapists assist clients to recognize and articulate their own identities within the context of their social surroundings. This approach abstains from categorizing or assigning clients to a predetermined model that is intended to be universally applicable. Instead, it functions inside the cultural and worldview framework of the customer. Contrary to its title, this treatment is effective in treating male clients as well. Both male clients and therapists have the opportunity to examine societal injustices, such as stereotypes related to masculinity, limited expression of emotions, and power relations. AFIT fosters inclusivity by including a broad range of gender identities and empowering individuals to effectively communicate their emotions, cultivate self-acceptance and openness, comprehend their susceptibilities, and address their desire for a sense of belonging.

CONCLUSION

Ultimately, the Adlerian Feminist Integrative Theory highlights the need to foster social and political transformations via the establishment of an equitable connection between the counselor and the client. It is based on the fundamental concept that personal matters are interconnected with political matters, and it emphasizes both individual transformation and collective efforts for societal transformation. Afitian therapists are urged to conduct a thorough analysis of cultural ideas and values that face discrimination to improve the capabilities of varied groups and people.

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Conflict of Interest

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