

## 8. Key Points in Examining a Theory of Counseling

1. **NATURE OF HUMAN BEINGS:** What does the theory assume about the basic nature of human beings? Good, evil, neutral, other?
2. **BASIC ASSUMPTIONS:** What are the basic assumptions (about human beings) of the theory? What does the theory seem to "take for granted"? What is innate, inborn? What is the nature of behavior, perception, reality? What is the relationship between emotion, behavior, and cognition? Which of these three is most important? What does the theory assume about humans & their environments?
3. **KEY CONCEPTS/CONSTRUCTS:** What are the central or key concepts of this theory? More specific than basic assumptions. How do these concepts/constructs operationalize the identified basic assumptions?
4. **PERSONALITY DEVELOPMENT:** What is the process of how people's personality develops in this theory? What does the theory say about stages of personality development? What role does the environment play in personality development? How does dysfunctional behavior originate and develop? (e.g., How does this explain that some people have dysfunctional behavior and others do not?)
5. **DESCRIPTION OF FUNCTIONAL/DYSFUNCTIONAL BEHAVIOR:** How does this theory view functional and dysfunctional behavior? In this theory, what does functional behavior specifically look like? What does dysfunctional behavior specifically look like? What does the theory say about defense/coping mechanisms?
6. **LEARNING THEORY/CHANGE PROCESS:** How do people learn? How do people change? What is the purpose for change? What factors influence learning and change?
7. **COUNSELING PROCESS AND TECHNIQUES:** What is the role of the counselor? What is the significance of the counseling relationship? What processes and techniques does the counselor use to achieve goals? What are the common interventions? Are "stages" of counseling proposed?
8. **GOALS:** What are the basic goals and objectives of the counseling process? What is the counselor trying to facilitate or accomplish?
9. **DESIRED OUTCOMES:** What are the specific desired outcomes of this theory? What are the markers of progress or non-progress? How would a counselor/client know if s/he were successful?
10. **CONTRIBUTIONS & LIMITATIONS TO DIVERSITY**  
Specifically, how might this theory work or not work ... with individuals, couples, & families from various ethnic or cultural backgrounds? ... with people of different ages, genders, sexual orientations, and social economic status? ... with people with physical or intellectual challenges?

Two goals of understanding theory are for you to:

1. Recognize why certain techniques are being used and are either successful or not successful.
2. Formulate your own techniques with a knowledge of why you are making certain interventions.

Keep asking yourself:

1. "What is the theory or assumption behind this technique?"
2. "Why did I (or person I'm observing) use this technique?"