

Theories of Psychotherapy Series
Jon Carlson and Matt Englar-Carlson, Series Editors

Reality Therapy



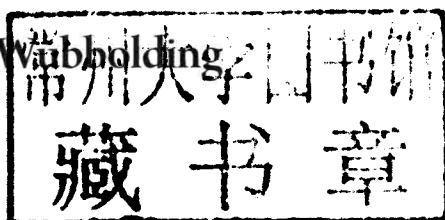
Robert E. Wubbolding

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American Psychological Association

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Reality Therapy

Theories of Psychotherapy Series

The Basics of Psychotherapy: An Introduction to Theory and Practice

Bruce E. Wampold

Brief Dynamic Therapy

Hanna Levenson

Cognitive–Behavioral Therapy

Michelle G. Craske

Existential–Humanistic Therapy

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Reality Therapy

Robert E. Wubbolding

Relational–Cultural Therapy

Judith V. Jordan

Series Preface

Some might argue that in the contemporary clinical practice of psychotherapy, evidence-based intervention and effective outcome have overshadowed theory in importance. Maybe. But, as the editors of this series, we don't propose to take up that controversy here. We do know that psychotherapists adopt and practice according to one theory or another because their experience, and decades of good evidence, suggests that having a sound theory of psychotherapy leads to greater therapeutic success. Still, the role of theory in the helping process can be hard to explain. This narrative about solving problems helps convey theory's importance:

Aesop tells the fable of the sun and wind having a contest to decide who was the most powerful. From above the earth, they spotted a man walking down the street, and the wind said that he bet he could get his coat off. The sun agreed to the contest. The wind blew and the man held on tightly to his coat. The more the wind blew, the tighter he held. The sun said it was his turn. He put all of his energy into creating warm sunshine and soon the man took off his coat.

What does a competition between the sun and the wind to remove a man's coat have to do with theories of psychotherapy? We think this deceptively simple story highlights the importance of theory as the precursor to any effective intervention—and hence to a favorable outcome. Without a guiding theory, we might treat the symptom without understanding the role of the individual. Or we might create power conflicts with our clients and not understand that, at times, indirect means of helping (sunshine) are often as effective—if not more so—than direct ones (wind). In the absence of theory, we might lose track of the treatment rationale and instead get caught up in, for example, social correctness and not wanting to do something that looks too simple.

What exactly *is* theory? The *APA Dictionary of Psychology* defines theory as “a principle or body of interrelated principles that purports to explain or predict a number of interrelated phenomena.” In psychotherapy, a theory is a set of principles used to explain human thought and behavior, including what causes people to change. In practice, a theory creates the goals of therapy and specifies how to pursue them. Haley (1997) noted that a theory of psychotherapy ought to be simple enough for the average therapist to understand but comprehensive enough to account for a wide range of eventualities. Furthermore, a theory guides action toward successful outcomes while generating hope in both the therapist and client that recovery is possible.

Theory is the compass that allows psychotherapists to navigate the vast territory of clinical practice. In the same ways that navigational tools have been modified to adapt to advances in thinking and ever-expanding territories to explore, theories of psychotherapy have changed over time. The different schools of theories are commonly referred to as waves, the first wave being psychodynamic theories (i.e., Adlerian, psychoanalytic), the second wave learning theories (i.e., behavioral, cognitive-behavioral), the third wave humanistic theories (person-centered, gestalt, existential), the fourth wave feminist and multicultural theories, and the fifth wave post-modern and constructivist theories. In many ways, these waves represent how psychotherapy has adapted and responded to changes in psychology, society, and epistemology as well as to changes in the nature of psychotherapy itself. Psychotherapy and the theories that guide it are dynamic and responsive. The wide variety of theories is also testament to the different ways in which the same human behavior can be conceptualized (Frew & Spiegler, 2008).

It is with these two concepts in mind—the central importance of theory and the natural evolution of theoretical thinking—that we developed the APA Theories of Psychotherapy Series. Both of us are thoroughly fascinated by theory and the range of complex ideas that drive each model. As university faculty members who teach courses on the theories of psychotherapy, we wanted to create learning materials that not only highlight the essence of the major theories for professionals and professionals in training but also clearly bring the reader up to date on the current status of the models. Often

in books on theory, the biography of the original theorist overshadows the evolution of the model. In contrast, our intent is to highlight the contemporary uses of the theories as well as their history and context.

As this project began, we faced two immediate decisions: which theories to address and who best to present them. We looked at graduate-level theories of psychotherapy courses to see which theories are being taught, **and** we explored popular scholarly books, articles, **and** conferences to determine which theories draw the most interest. We then developed a dream list of authors from among the best minds in contemporary theoretical practice. Each author is one of the leading proponents of that approach as well as a knowledgeable practitioner. We asked each author to review the core constructs of the theory, bring the theory into the modern sphere of clinical practice by looking at it through a context of evidence-based practice, and clearly illustrate how the theory looks in action.

There are 24 titles planned for the series. Each title can stand alone or can be put together with a few other titles to create materials for a course in psychotherapy theories. This option allows instructors to create a course featuring the approaches they believe are the most salient today. To support this end, APA Books has also developed a DVD for each of the approaches that demonstrates the theory in practice with a real client. Many of the DVDs show therapy over six sessions. Contact APA Books for a complete list of available DVD programs (<http://www.apa.org/pubs/videos>).

William Glasser's reality therapy (based on choice theory) is a popular approach in contemporary therapy. This approach focuses on the immediate or here-and-now world of the client and how clients' current actions move them closer or further away from their stated goals. In *Reality Therapy*, Glasser's main protégé, Robert E. Wubbolding, highlights the practical commonsense nature of this approach by providing illustrative case examples that depict this model in action. Further, the history of how Glasser developed this approach in response to clinical dilemmas highlights the practical and direct application of the model. Readers will quickly understand the importance of problem solving and choice making and see why this approach has had such appeal in schools and community mental health centers.

—Jon Carlson and Matt Englar-Carlson

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- Frew, J., & Spiegler, M. (2008). *Contemporary psychotherapies for a diverse world*. Boston, MA: Lahaska Press.
- Haley, J. (1997). *Leaving home: The therapy of disturbed young people*. New York, NY: Routledge.

How to Use This Book With APA Psychotherapy Videos

Each book in the Theories of Psychotherapy Series is specifically paired with a DVD that demonstrates the theory applied in actual therapy with a real client. Many DVDs feature the author of the book as the guest therapist, allowing students to see an eminent scholar and practitioner putting the theory he or she writes about into action.

The DVDs have a number of features that make them excellent tools for learning more about theoretical concepts:

- Many DVDs contain six full sessions of psychotherapy over time, giving viewers a chance to see how clients respond to the application of the theory over the course of several sessions.
- Each DVD has a brief introductory discussion recapping the basic features of the theory behind the approach demonstrated. This allows viewers to review the key aspects of the approach about which they have just read.
- DVDs feature actual clients in unedited psychotherapy sessions. This provides a unique opportunity to get a sense of the look and feel of real psychotherapy, something that written case examples and transcripts cannot always convey.
- There is a therapist commentary track that viewers may choose to play during the psychotherapy sessions. This track gives unique insight into why therapists do what they do in a session. Further, it provides an in vivo opportunity to see how the therapist uses the model to conceptualize the client.

The books and DVDs together make a powerful teaching tool for showing how theoretical principles affect practice. In the case of this book, the DVD *Reality Therapy*, which features the author as the guest expert, provides a vivid example of how this approach looks in practice.

Acknowledgments

First and foremost I am indebted to William Glasser, MD, who founded reality therapy and has taught it for almost 5 decades. Throughout these years he has maintained and increased his unswerving commitment and unshakable belief that this system of counseling and therapy, as well as its other applications to education and all human relationships, is an inestimable force for improving societies and cultures around the world. Behavioral change is the focus of *reality therapy*, a term Dr. Glasser coined while working with mental patients and residents of a correctional institution. I am also indebted to Carleen, his wife, a teacher in her own right who steadfastly supports his every effort. I am proud to have introduced Bill and Carleen to each other.

Linda Harshman, executive director of The William Glasser Institute, has provided a steady hand guiding the organization for more than 25 years. She has been a friend and colleague whose constant support for both Dr. Glasser and me has been integral to the development of choice theory and reality therapy around the world.

I wish to express deep gratitude to Jon Carlson for his belief in the quality of my work and his willingness to involve me in his work. Thanks also to Ed Meidenbauer, whose editorial fine-tooth comb is among the best.

Although they were unaware of the help they have provided, my students, workshop participants, and clients have taught me the art of counseling and psychotherapy. I wish them the best as they plan for their futures.

Finally, my wife, Sandie, has been indispensable in her patient, loyal support and editing and reediting efforts. This book has been an exciting and fruitful occasion for enriching our life together.

My wish for all of the above is *ad multos annos*. A long and happy life.

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Reality Therapy

Introduction

“**W**hat do you want?” This question encapsulates a concept central to the practice of reality therapy and also provides a starting point to learn it. Many therapists consume valuable therapeutic hours without focusing on what clients want from the therapeutic process and from the world around them. Asking this question initiates the therapeutic relationship and strengthens it when clients and therapists make themselves available to the wealth of information contained in the myriad of wants, hopes, and dreams expressed through this simple but powerful question.

If you, the reader, ask yourself, “What do I want to gain from this book?” you will put yourself in the role of an eager student predisposed to maximum learning. Similarly, if you encounter a client who says he or she feels isolated, alienated, and without purpose, the first series of questions from the reality therapy point of view include: “What would you like to accomplish from our sessions together? Would you be interested in replacing this sense of alienation with something better, such as feelings of connectedness with others? Do you want to identify and pursue a life purpose?”

A careful reading of this book will result in a thorough understanding of the theory underlying reality therapy and its methodology while providing a seminal resource for both neophyte and experienced therapists.

Throughout the book I have emphasized the rationale behind reality therapy. Understanding the foundational principles helps practitioners avoid the perception that reality therapy and therapy in general can be reduced to overly simplified techniques. Reality therapy is practical and immediately useful to therapists seeking to enrich and broaden their skills. Nevertheless, understanding the theory and rationale for it enables therapists to develop their own individualized applications, skills, and techniques. For instance, asking clients the initial question “What do you want?” is an effective technique. It is also a concept, a principle inextricably connected to the theoretical principles of internal control psychology—that is, that human motivation is internal, a principle fully explained in this Introduction.

By focusing on reality and conscious issues rather than on the unconscious, William Glasser, MD (1965), the founder of reality therapy, challenged the assumptions and practice of the psychotherapeutic community. Assuming the ability of mental hospital patients to make choices and take responsibility for their behavior resulted in his professional marginalization. Undaunted by rejection, he forged ahead. This book explains a 21st-century system based on principles now widely accepted in the helping professions, that is internal control psychology.

These pages focus on two major and inseparable components: choice theory and reality therapy. Choice theory explains how the human mind functions as a negative input control system. A rocket is an example of such a system. When its aiming device signals that it is off target, it sends a message to its propulsion system to correct the difference between its current direction and its intended direction. Similarly, when the driver of a car sets the cruise control at a desired speed, the speed mechanism corrects the car’s velocity when it detects a discrepancy between the current speed and the desired speed. Likewise, when human beings perceive that they are not getting what they want, this discrepancy causes the activation of their behavioral system; that is, they make corrective choices designed to keep them on target. On the other hand, when human beings perceive they are getting what they want from the world around them, they are satisfied. They are in a condition of homeostasis. Therefore, human behavior is purposeful. It is an attempt to influence the external world and to com-

municate with it. The goal of this effort is to gain specific perceptions that needs and wants are satisfied (Glasser 1980, 1984, 1998).

Reality therapy is best seen as rooted in this theory but has its own identity with clearly defined procedures. If choice theory is the track, reality therapy is the train that delivers the product. From its beginnings in a mental hospital and a correctional institution, it has now been applied to psychotherapy, education, management, and supervision as well as parenting and a range of other human relationships. As in many psychotherapy systems, the therapist first establishes a safe and friendly therapeutic atmosphere. The therapist then helps clients focus on current conscious issues by helping them define what they want from the world around them, examine the effectiveness of their choices, and make realistic plans for satisfying their wants and needs. A basic philosophical principle of reality therapy is that human beings are responsible for their behavior. Their external environment, early childhood experiences, and the impact of their cultural surroundings have played a major role in their development. Nevertheless, the reality therapist sees human beings as capable of alternative behavioral choices so that they need not remain victimized, trapped, or even haunted by these influences (Wubbolding, 2000a).

In learning reality therapy and in applying its principles, the acronym WDEP is an eminently useful tool. This system will be explained in later chapters in detail, but a brief orientation is in order. Each letter represents a cluster of concepts that together constitute the reality therapy procedures leading to change. W stands for asking clients what they want from the world around them. Included in this procedure is an exploration of how clients perceive themselves as well as the world around them. D represents the exploration of what clients are currently doing—that is, what behaviors they are exhibiting, including action, thinking, feeling, and physiology. The E signifies client self-evaluation, examining the effectiveness of behavior, the attainability of wants, and many other aspects of their motivation. The P denotes a plan of action leading toward desirable change.

It is clear that, strictly speaking, there is a difference between choice theory and reality therapy. On the other hand, in my teaching and lecturing, I often use the phrase *reality therapy* to encompass both theory and