

ORIGINAL RESEARCH

Reiki and Humanistic Theory: Common Ground for Holistic Counseling

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ABSTRACT

Complementary and integrative therapeutic methods are fast becoming customary in mental health counseling and within the broader medical community. Reiki, an energy-based healing practice, is one such method. Research specific to the medical field has shown that Reiki is useful in treating anxiety and chronic pain. Moreover, Reiki as an adjunct intervention to counseling is trending. Yet, there is little information in the literature that describes the mechanisms that link the healing practice of Reiki to counseling theory and practice. This conceptual article

explores some foundational constructs of Reiki and the ways they interface with important principles of various humanistic counseling theories. This article provides readers with an overview of Reiki and three humanistic counseling theoretical approaches to provide common ground between the core constructs of these approaches. This article aims to enhance professionals' holistic understanding of how Reiki can be utilized within the field of counseling for treatment. (*Altern Ther Health Med.* 2025;31(2):30-37).

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INTRODUCTION

Over the past decade, there has been a growing interest in complementary healing practices such as yoga, mindfulness, and Reiki.¹ Numerous businesses have recently begun offering breathing practices (e.g., yoga, mindfulness), and the energy-based practice of Reiki. The National Center for Health Statistics² found a growing interest in complementary approaches among female adults. Notably, on average, those who utilize these complementary therapies (CTs) experience improvement in their quality of life. Researchers have linked many CTs to improved mental wellness and enhanced feelings of coping.^{3,4} Thus, counselors often prefer integrating CTs with their professional practice.⁵

CTs fall within the domain of the U.S. National Institute of Health's (NIH's) complementary health approaches that focus on treating a person holistically.⁶ This view of healing may be one rationale for counselors using Reiki, an Eastern approach to healing, as an adjunct to Westernized counseling approaches. Furthermore, the Surgeon General's Report on Mental Health enquired professionals on how culture and

society relate to mental health, thus providing opportunities for counselors and health professionals to benefit from non-Western healing practices by integrating them with modern approaches to healing.⁷ Therefore, it is intriguing to explore the growing fascination with Reiki and how the constructs of this practice interface with counseling theory and practice.

Reiki is an energy-based practice founded in Japan by Mikao Usui in 1922,^{8,9} although some researchers believe that the true origin of Reiki is referenced within the Tibetan Sanskrit Sutras. This implies that Eastern healers have practiced energy healing for centuries.^{8,10,11} The practice of Reiki involves the deliberate guiding of healing energy by the practitioner either hovering their hands or using gentle, non-invasive touch to remove what Usui referred to as "dis-ease" or negative energy blockages from a person's energy field.^{9,12} Reiki is deliberately used to cleanse the mind and the body to promote a greater sense of wholeness and sense of enlightenment.¹³ A survey by the NIH found that among adults living in the United States, there was an increase in the use of complementary healing approaches, which can include practices like Reiki, which rose from 19.2% in 2002 to 36.7% in 2022.¹⁴ Reiki users claim it helps with depression, anxiety, relaxation, and pain management.¹⁵ In recent years, Reiki has been included in energy psychology as a legitimate form of healing that promotes psychological well-being.¹ Reiki assumes that psychological or physical distress occurs due to a blockage in one's energy fields via the chakra system, which can cause negative symptoms.¹² ¹⁶ It also assumes that adverse life experiences, such as trauma,

loss, and grief, can disrupt energy layers within the human energy field (HEF), therefore leading to the development of mental or physical illnesses.¹² Reiki is purported to help restore balance by removing these negative or blocked energies within one's energetic system. However, most of what we know about using Reiki as a complement to counseling is anecdotal. While empirical studies validating the use of Reiki in counseling are lacking, several mental health researchers have encouraged its use and provided practical and ethical considerations in doing so.^{12,17,18} Therefore, there is a disparity between the growing use of Reiki in counseling practice and a bridge that links this practice to counseling theory.

To that end, the impetus of this conceptual paper is two-fold. First, we will link the constructs of Reiki to important principles of various humanistic counseling theories. We do this in the hope of adding to the knowledge of Reiki in the counseling arena and encouraging counselors to integrate more multicultural practices into their work with clients. Second, we offer fresh direction for counselors who experience dissonance between Reiki's connotation with *woo woo* or pseudo-science within the medical and mental health community and their counselor identity. It should be noted that this article does not educate readers on "how to conduct" Reiki, and therefore, readers interested in the method are encouraged to seek further training. Additionally, we remind counselors to work within the scope of their competency.

A BRIEF INTRODUCTION TO REIKI

As briefly discussed, the practice of Reiki derives from Eastern healing traditions and is based on pre-scientific beliefs involving the flow of energy. Reiki is composed of two Japanese words, *Rei* and *Ki*.¹¹ The concept of *Rei* represents "holy, spirit, mystery, gift, nature spirit, or invisible spirit" and *Ki* translates to "energy, nature scene, talent, and feeling."¹⁹ *Reiki* can be interpreted as a "universal life force."¹⁹ While the benefits of Reiki are deeply ingrained in Eastern philosophies and traditions, attention to its benefits as a complement to physical and mental healthcare has grown in Western society.²⁰ In an interview with Petter,²¹ Mikao Usui, the founder of Reiki, described it as a method of healing impacting the physical, spiritual, and psychic processes within humans. In the interview, Usui posits that an individual's energy flows freely when we have hopeful thoughts and diminishes when we have negative thoughts and feelings.²¹ Rand,¹⁵ a Reiki master and teacher in the U.S., stated that a disruption or block in energy can lead to imbalance in its best state but illness in its worst. He noted that Reiki can be used as a complementary practice to aid in the treatment of mental health concerns. The mechanism of Reiki is simple, the practitioner uses their universal life force energy and facilitates the flow of their client's *Ki* through the hovering of hands or gentle non-invasive touch through certain hand positions to release blockages in the client's chakra system or energetic body, which allows the client to access their *Rei*, or high sense of self or purpose, which conversely relieves them of their suffering symptoms.

To practice Reiki, the Reiki practitioner must undergo a process of attunement by a Reiki Master.⁹ According to the Internal Center for Reiki Training,⁹ there are four levels of Reiki training. Levels I and II allow practitioners to perform Reiki on themselves and others, while Levels III and IV occur after an individual has been trained in Level II for at least 6 months and it is required to become a Reiki Master. These training courses typically occur over two days and it is recommended that an individual experience at least one personal session of Reiki before attending their training. However, unlike the field of counseling, a practitioner can provide Reiki as soon as they complete the Level II training which is due to Usui's belief that anyone can practice Reiki since the practitioner is only a vehicle for the flow of the client's *Ki* and therefore their only role is to assist the client in connecting to their higher self (or *Rei*) through this exchange of energy.

During pre-treatment, the Reiki practitioner learns about the client via dialogue or by information obtained through client intake forms. The Reiki practitioner determines where the client is experiencing imbalance by assessing their chakra system and gathering information about their current symptoms or stressors.²² According to Judith,²³ the chakra system originates from the ancient Tantric tradition of Kundalini Yoga. Judith described the chakras as a series of seven portals or wheels that receive, assimilate, and express life force energy. While these wheels do not exist physically, there is evidence to demonstrate that the chakras connect with major nerve ganglia branching forward from the spinal column, which is connected to the fascia system.²⁴ Therefore, Reiki works by restoring balance to one's chakra system by allowing these wheels to metaphorically "spin" harmoniously with the flow of *Ki* throughout one's system, which leads to optimal physical, emotional, mental, and spiritual health. During a Reiki therapy session, the practitioner places his/her hands slightly above or on the recipient and uses various technical hand positions to open blocked energy channels in the body via the chakra system^{22,25} to facilitate the person's healing response.⁶ After the administration of Reiki, the practitioner will typically provide a closing ritual to metaphorically seal the client's chakras or energy centers to close the session. Afterward, the client may or may not discuss their experience of Reiki with the practitioner for processing. However, it should be noted that typically the practitioner remains quiet during the Reiki process for the client to access their internal wisdom.

RESEARCH ON REIKI: MEDICAL STUDIES

The scientific mechanisms of how energy healing therapy works have only begun to be explored recently by researchers. Robinson et al.²⁶ noted that all cells in the human body are made of energy. Therefore, proponents of Reiki postulate that the universal life force is present within the energy of the cells of the body and can be accessed to open blocked channels in a patient for healing. Therefore, from this perspective, symptomology and disease, or rather *dis-ease*, are said to be

rooted in blockages to this energy system. According to LeBlanc, “disease,” as we know it, can be looked at “as the body—in all of its complexities—being not at ease or out of sync, thus “dis-ease.”²⁰ Hamilton²⁷ offered a plausible theory as to the mechanisms behind Reiki, placing value on the mirror neuron system (MNS) in the brain. Regarding healing, he claimed that clients may be experiencing a form of “emotional contagion,” which he describes as “the transfer of emotional states between people,” which occurs through exposure to the Reiki practitioners’ calm and empathic presence. Furthermore, Hamilton²⁷ posited that Reiki activates the parasympathetic nervous system which by proxy supports the immune system, thus reducing stress and negative physical and emotional arousal.

Reiki is listed in a nursing “scope and standards of practice” publication as an accepted form of care, and a 2008 USA Today article²⁸ reported that in 2007, 15% of U.S. hospitals (over 800) offered Reiki as a part of their regular patient services. Additionally, some Reiki training programs qualify as continuing education for those in the medical field.²⁰ A search of Reiki in medical care using PsycINFO and Applied Sciences over the last five years resulted in several studies. Jahantiqih et al.²⁹ compared the treatments of Reiki, drug therapy, and physiotherapy in 60 patients with lower back pain. There were significant improvements in decreased pain intensity for the patients who received Reiki and drug therapy. Zucchetti et al.³⁰ investigated hospitalized children ages 7-17 years undergoing stem cell transplants. Patients received a 30-minute Reiki session, 3 times a week for 4 weeks. Researchers found patients reported a significant decrease in short-term pain. Gantt and Orina³¹ studied 30 military healthcare beneficiaries (i.e., active reservists, retirees, or military family members) with chronic pain. Participants received six 30-minute Reiki sessions over 3 weeks and noted a 27% decrease in pain. Thrane et al.³² studied 16 hospitalized children (ages 1-5 years) receiving palliative care. Each participant received two Reiki sessions for 3 weeks. Although the results were not statistically significant, per parent report, the treatment had a medium-to-large effect on children’s quality of life and stress levels. Results of these studies indicate that Reiki is a promising complementary therapy for pain and stress relief, thus improving the quality of life.

RESEARCH ON REIKI: MENTAL HEALTH STUDIES

The term “Psychotherapeutic Reiki (PR)” was coined by psychologist and Reiki Master, Robert Curtin. Curtin developed a protocol to incorporate the use of Reiki in psychotherapy.²² His ground-breaking book *Psychotherapeutic Reiki: A Holistic Body-Mind Approach to Psychotherapy* offers a step-by-step approach to utilizing Reiki in session and discusses key ethical considerations that mental health professionals should be aware of when administering this form of treatment.²² A search for psychotherapeutic Reiki, over the last five years, in PsycINFO and Dissertation Abstracts resulted in two studies. Webster and her colleagues⁵ explored the use of PR as

an intervention for the treatment of anxiety with four adult clients from a large public university in the southwestern region of the United States. The study participants who ranged from 22 to 57 years old, were given 50 minutes of PR once a week for a minimum of 6 sessions and completed the adult version of the Adult Manifest Anxiety Scale (AMAS-A). The results of three out of the four participants indicated that the intervention relieved their anxiety.⁵ Interestingly, of the four individuals who participated in the study, two elected to continue to receive PR through the counseling clinic. While the sample size of this study was small, it significantly demonstrated that the use of PR alone can benefit clients in session and that Reiki can be therapeutically beneficial. Additionally, although clients’ anxiety levels did not change significantly across the sessions, they did report finding it easier to achieve a calmer headspace and an increased ease of falling asleep.⁵ Furthermore, many participants noted a stronger awareness of their mind-body connection and bodily cues once receiving treatment. This indicates that PR’s effects extend beyond physical and emotional symptom relief, promoting greater awareness and self-insight.

However, research in this area is lacking. One reason may be the fear of stigma that counselors may encounter if they begin utilizing these approaches in session.⁸ In one study, Hecht conducted a descriptive phenomenological study to explore the lived experiences of Reiki trained, Licensed Mental Health Providers to examine their experiences of using Reiki with clients. Results indicated that among the main concerns for the participants was the fear of potential consequences of losing one’s licensure or being accused of malpractice. Many of the participants reported feeling uneasy about introducing the concept of Reiki into sessions with clients due to fear of potential backlash or concerns that they may offend clients, especially those from traditional Western backgrounds and faith-based systems.⁸ However, while the practitioners in the study were reluctant to use traditional Reiki in session, they did disclose creative ways in which they integrated the principles and skills used in Reiki into psychotherapy.⁸ Specifically, they likened constructs of Reiki to mindfulness, guided imagery, and other humanistic approaches. This indicates that mental health practitioners are finding ways to infuse Reiki constructs as an adjunct to counseling.

From these findings, Hecht noted that there was a dissonance between the mental health professional’s counselor identity and Reiki.⁸ This indicates that the participants were unable to reconcile how they could maintain proper ethical boundaries and their sense of identity as psychotherapists while incorporating their training and experience as Reiki practitioners. This conflict of identities makes sense, given how the counseling profession has become more evidence-based in recent years.⁸ Therefore, as the counseling profession becomes more focused on standardizing the methods of treatment, it could subsequently limit clinicians who are open to Eastern practices since these methods of treatment, which emphasize a more humanistic and relational approach, may be viewed as less scientific.

Even though the counseling profession has moved into a more scientific, evidence-based value system, individuals and clients are increasingly becoming interested in holistic practices.² Thus, it is important that health professionals and counselors understand the benefits of incorporating CTs, like Reiki, into a session. Moreover, many of the mechanisms used in Reiki, such as empathy, activating co-regulation, using attunement, meditation, body awareness, and self-insight, are all skills that underpin many of the humanistic therapies within the counseling profession. Therefore, the authors of this paper postulate that perhaps many of the underlying mechanisms and techniques that make Reiki so effective for clients can also be likened to the constructs of humanistic counseling. This indicates that there may be a way to incorporate both Eastern and Western healing methods into clients' mental health treatment.

REIKI AND HUMANISTIC COUNSELING THEORY: IDENTIFYING COMMON GROUND

The National Center for Complementary and Integrative Health (NCCIH)⁶ categorizes Reiki as an overarching healing method with a psychological component that is both a mindful and spiritual practice in psychotherapy. LaTorre¹⁸ asserted that Reiki (1) augments the therapeutic relationship and (2) exemplifies processes for clients to practice self-healing, both of which are goals of counseling. In this section, we explore some of the constructs of Reiki, specifically regarding ways they interface with important principles of three humanistic counseling theories (Person-Centered, Gestalt, and Existential counseling). These three theories are often lumped together and referred to as *humanistic theories* since they emphasize understanding the human experience and how it impacts clients' mental health symptoms rather than focusing on symptom relief as their main treatment method. See Table 1 for a visual link of common constructs.

Person-Centered Counseling

Person-centered therapy, also known as Rogerian therapy, was developed during the 1940s by humanist psychologist Carl Rogers. Informed by his study of the universe and organic matter, which Rogers noted would become more complex over time, Rogers postulated that individuals have a natural tendency to move towards growth and a healthier way of being, which he referred to as the *Actualizing Tendency*.^{32,33} Rogers felt that as individuals begin to move towards actualization, they encounter a process of assimilation where they become more congruent and move towards embodying his notion of The Self.³² Rogers' view of The Self can be traced back to many of the underpinnings found within many Eastern traditions and philosophies which involves achieving a sense of harmony or integration between what Rogers' referred to as the Real Self, (the human or fallible parts of one's psyche) and Ideal Self (the parts of the self which are motivated by external recognition/achievement).³² Rogers noted that this process of actualization is ever-evolving and thus, the process is ongoing throughout

Table 1. The Robichaux Table of Reiki Constructs in Comparison with Foundational Constructs of Humanistic Counseling Theories

Reiki Constructs	Person-Centered Theory	Gestalt Theory	Existential Theory
Presence	Therapeutic Alliance Core Conditions	I-Thou relationship	Here and Now
Facilitating the flow of <i>Ki</i>	Actualizing Tendency	Integration/Holism	Purpose
Outside/Unconscious awareness		Unconscious and Figure-ground formation	
Assessment of Chakras or blocked energy in the body		Integration/Holism	Polarizations
Relational Attunement	Core conditions	I-Thou relationship	Authentic Human Connection
Connecting to one's higher self	Actualizing Tendency		Purpose

one's life.^{32,34} In addition to the theoretical underpinnings of Rogers' theory, his approach to therapy focuses less on technique but rather on a way of being, where the therapist strives to be empathic with the client by embodying a relational approach or a way of being.³⁵

Value of Relationship. The *way of being* focuses on the relationship between practitioner and client, which is heightened in Person-Centered counseling, and can be compared to similar approaches used by Reiki practitioners.^{32,18} LaTorre noted that the practitioner draws on energy from the client and reflects it to the client. This relationship not only creates an impression of safety for the clients but benefits them as it supports the interpersonal work of the client and practitioner.³⁶ Therefore, just like a Person-Centered counselor, the Reiki practitioner must be in tune with their energy. Thus, they are encouraged to do Reiki work on themselves to remove blocks that would otherwise interfere with the treatment. Reiki practitioners value relationships and stress the importance of the interplay between themselves and their relationship with others and the outer world.^{37,38} Reiki, like Person-Centered counseling, is considered a nondirective healing approach. During a Reiki session, energy flows through but is not directed by the practitioner, resulting in a curative sensation for the individual receiving the treatment. Therefore, Reiki is not only a curative technique but also a philosophy of living that acknowledges the body and mind as it relates to all things³⁹ just like Rogers' theory of *Actualization Tendency*.^{32,33}

Core Conditions. Hamilton,⁴⁰ a proponent of Reiki, discussed how mirror neurons, which respond to actions observed by another, can be beneficial in the healing process of Reiki. We liken this mechanism to what is occurring in psychotherapy when a counselor displays Rogers' core conditions with clients. Rogers believes that if given the right conditions (empathy, non-judgment, and unconditional positive regard) clients would naturally foster greater congruence within themselves and self-actualization (be the most authentic version of themselves).⁴¹ Among the psychotherapy theories, Rogers was one of the first psychotherapists to advocate for the importance of the connection, (a type of attunement) between the client and the counselor and how it may impact therapeutic outcomes.⁴¹ Rogers would often note subtle changes in his clients, speech, or body movements and used the reflection of feeling and

meaning to foster greater awareness within his clients. Lindquist et al.³⁹ noted that attunement (a self in connection with the other) is fundamental in the practice of Reiki since the practitioner needs to be open to receiving the energy of the client when administering treatment. Therefore, the Reiki healer, like the Person-Centered counselor and their use of Rogers' core conditions accepts the client without expectations.^{20,41}

Self-Actualizing Tendency. As indicated above, one of the strongest correlations between Reiki and Person-Centered counseling is the comparison between the Reiki construct of *Rei* and Rogers' concept of the *Actualizing Tendency*.^{32,33} Rogers believes that it is because of the therapeutic relationship that the client moves towards congruence and self-actualization.⁴² Not only does Reiki follow this principle that one's "spirit or life force" is guiding them to their highest potential,^{19,9} but it also posits that the role of the practitioner is to facilitate this natural internal process through a non-directive approach while trusting the universal intelligence (the principle that energy fosters existence), will move the client towards healing.³⁶

While Rogers himself never used the terms *Rei* or *Ki*, he felt that the use of the therapeutic alliance was key to creating a healing environment for the client where they could begin to integrate their real and ideal self thereby reducing psychological distress and promoting a greater sense of congruence.^{32,33} Thus as counselors, we would say that Rogers used the core conditions, as mentioned above, to move the client towards self-actualization. While this is something most counselors would agree with, perhaps if a Reiki Master were to watch one of Rogers' sessions, they might say that Rogers provided attunement to his clients via the therapeutic relationship to facilitate their flow of *Ki*, which allowed his clients to access their *Rei* or universal consciousness so that they could feel in alignment with their highest self.

Gestalt Counseling

Gestalt therapy originated from the work of Laura and Friedrich "Fritz" Perls in the 1940s.³⁵ Laura and Fritz Perls were husband and wife and were inspired by many existential philosophers and Eastern healing practices when constructing their theory.³⁵ Gestalt therapy, at its core, focuses on the present moment and values current experiences and understanding of the self via our associations with others. Therefore, gaining awareness of self and behaviors is the central goal of this therapy.³⁵

Integration/Holism. Like Rogers, Fritz Perls believed that humans are inherently capable of "self-regulating and are growth-oriented beings". Therefore, Gestalt therapy aims to enhance the client's awareness.⁴² Specifically, Perls believes that the goal of Gestalt therapy is not simply to remove clients' suffering, but rather, clients would experience relief of their symptoms once they have gained a greater awareness of their unconscious motives, which were driving their behaviors.⁴³ Thus, this goal of Gestalt therapy and the emphasis placed on self-awareness can be reflected in Webster

et al.'s results⁵ on utilizing psychotherapeutic Reiki in session. One of the benefits reported by clients using this intervention was that they reported a greater awareness of their own bodily reactions, which in turn promoted a greater understanding of themselves.⁵ Therefore, one can speculate that Reiki and Gestalt therapy may operate in very similar ways where the goal is to make hidden or unknown information (unconscious) known to the client.

To make unconscious material known to the client, Gestalt theory focuses on bringing awareness to automatic habits, behaviors, or patterns the client displays in session.⁴³ This bringing of unconscious material to light using bodily awareness is reflected in the assessment of the chakras (or energy points in the body) utilized in Reiki.²² As discussed, when administering Reiki, practitioners assess for blockages within one's chakra system which can result in several physical or emotional side effects.^{23,24} While some medical professionals and counselors may be quick to dismiss the chakra system as pseudoscience, leading trauma therapist Bessel van der Kolk⁴⁴ in his groundbreaking book, *The Body Keeps the Score: Brain, Mind, and Body in the Healing of Trauma*, argued that science has only now begun to validate what perhaps our early human ancestors have known for centuries. Furthermore, Dr. van der Kolk⁴³ describes in his book how the body remembers and responds accordingly to traumatic stimuli or reminders of a trauma, even if it is outside of an individual's conscious awareness. Thus, it is possible that the chakras can represent these areas of the body where unconscious wisdom has been stored and that when an individual can release these stored emotions (whether that is through counseling or Reiki), memories and information that might have been previously out of consciousness for clients might become accessible to them. This provides more insight into themselves, which may prompt them to change their behavior.

Unconscious/Figure-Ground Formation. Through the awareness of their body, clients can integrate seemingly opposing aspects of themselves (or what the Perls referred to as *polarization*).⁴² Throughout their work, Fritz and Laura Perls discussed the concept of the *figure-ground formation* and how polarities shape clients' experiences of themselves and their concept of the outer world. Therefore, one of the goals of Gestalt therapy is to move the client towards *Holism* or a "happy union" within oneself.⁴² Specifically, the Perls believed that blocks to awareness, residing in the unconscious, occur because the person feels threatened by the pain or discomfort of the feeling.⁴² Thus, this blockage (not unlike what Usui described in his practice of Reiki and the Chakra system) remains in the background and has difficulty becoming a figure or object in the client's conscious mind because the person has a phobic attitude towards their discomfort.^{42,21,15} Therefore, we purport Perls' use of polarizations and the figure-ground construct is remarkably similar to how Reiki practitioners use clients' energy systems to assess the blockages within their chakras. Since each chakra is examined during a Reiki session, the practitioner

focuses on facilitating the flow of *Ki* to these systems within the body to promote greater cohesion.¹⁵ This subsequently results in clients gaining insight or awareness through memories or sensations in their bodies that they were previously unable to bring into their consciousness.

I-Thou Relationship. As mentioned, Fritz and Laura Perls were heavily inspired by European philosophers while constructing their theory. Perls expressed his annoyance with the “over-intellectualization” of the field of psychotherapy.⁴² This frustration with the hierarchal nature of the field in which the counselor is seen as the expert, led Fritz to create his notion of the *I-Thou relationship*. Thus, he believed that while therapists may be experts on transforming the psyche, clients are the experts in their lives.⁴⁵ Therefore, Gestalt therapists work to reduce the hierarchy between the counselor and client in session and use the I-Thou relationship to foster greater connection and self-discovery.⁴⁴ In many ways, this concept reflects the importance of relational attunement, which was previously discussed by the authors when discussing the overlap of the skills used by Person-Centered counselors and Reiki practitioners. According to Rand,⁴⁵ the practitioner’s role in Reiki is to serve as a vehicle for the flow of *Ki* for the client to achieve maximum benefit. Thus, practitioners are encouraged not to advise since they might not know what is best for the individual, and the client is given autonomy to decide what is best for them. This fits with the I-Thou relationship within Gestalt theory since the role of the counselor or therapist is to bring awareness to the client’s behaviors and unconscious; however, it is the client who is viewed as an expert of their own life.

Existential Counseling

Existential therapy is premised on the idea that all humans face four main life conflicts (i.e., isolation, death, meaninglessness, and freedom of choice).⁴⁶ While there is no one founder of existential psychotherapy, therapist Irving Yalom posits that all symptoms of anxiety and depression can be seen as a result of not facing these conflicts or attempting to avoid them.⁴⁶ Therefore, a self-understanding of these areas can minimize anxious or depressive feelings within an individual, thus making this form of humanistic counseling focus on the client taking responsibility for their life choices.³⁵

Higher Self and Purpose. Existential counseling focuses on the inevitable conditions of human existence, which Yalom⁴⁶ sums up in four aspects of existence- freedom, responsibility, the pursuit of meaning, and death. According to Yalom, death is the ultimate existential concern for all of us.⁴⁶ Therefore, according to the husband-and-wife duo, Sommers-Flanagans, the existential theory “focuses on promoting self-awareness, facing the unavoidable conditions of human existence and authentic living”.⁴⁴ Therefore, just as we did with the theories of Person-Centered and Gestalt counseling, when we compare this goal of existential therapy to the goal of Reiki, there is much overlap, since Reiki is used to promote the flow of *Ki* to access one’s *Rei*, or higher self. According to Rand, when we are aligned with our higher self,

we feel more connected to ourselves and the universal life force energy around us.⁴⁵ Thus, similar to Yalom’s writings regarding existential theory, it is by connecting to this energy that our highest self can find meaning, a sense of fulfillment, or fulfill one’s purpose in life.^{44,45,46} Thus, at its core, Reiki embodies many of the philosophical underpinnings of existential therapy.

Symptoms such as Blockages and Polarizations. From an existential framework, symptoms are not viewed as a pathology that needs to be fixed or removed, but rather as part of the human condition which should be explored and leaned into to understand the root cause of a client’s suffering.^{44,46} This concept is reflected in many Eastern philosophies, such as Buddhism³⁸ and LeBlanc’s notion of *dis-ease* discussed above.²⁰ Thus, from a Reiki perspective, when clients have experienced suffering, whether it is through trauma, relationships, or a myriad of factors that involve the human condition, these experiences block the flow of *Ki* in the body, thereby creating blockages in one’s chakra system.^{9,22} Another way these blockages present themselves is through polarizations, which we have previously discussed regarding Gestalt therapy,⁴² and is a concept used by existential therapists.⁴⁴ Thus, this notion of being *blocked* either due to avoiding or overidentifying with one’s symptoms and how this can disrupt the healing process, gets reflected in each of these approaches.

Here and Now. While focusing on the present is a hallmark of most humanistic therapies,^{41,42} this concept is perhaps amplified the most in Existential Therapy. In the book *Creatures of Day*, Yalom, a well-known existential therapist, discusses the use of *here and now* to direct clients’ focus to foster a stronger therapeutic connection.⁴⁶ Furthermore, he stresses the importance of slowing down in sessions to avoid overwhelming clients, which subsequently helps clients become aware of their sensations, feelings, and experiences at the present moment. Thus, it brings forth newly uncovered (or unconscious) information that the counselor and client process in the therapy room. This intentional act of slowing down to access deeper wisdom is at the very core of Reiki. Clients are invited to sit or lie down and focus on their breath, naturally allowing them to focus on whatever sensations or feelings are rising within them while Reiki is being administered.^{15,22} Therefore, similar to existential counseling, as information comes forth into the here and now, the counselor or Reiki practitioner can create space for what the client is experiencing in the present moment through their attunement or embodied presence in session.

Authentic Human Connection. Notably, one of the most famous existential therapists- Austrian psychiatrist and Holocaust survivor Viktor Frankl, expressed his discontent with the use of technical skills and interventions in counseling, which he described as treating the patient “as some sort of machine”.⁴⁷ Therefore, to abstain from this robotic approach, existential counselors prefer avoiding scientific terms and procedures in their interactions with clients. This helps the counselors to adopt a more philosophical approach and

foster greater authenticity between themselves and the client.⁴⁴ To embody this approach, the counselors use skills such as presence, empathic mirroring and focusing, feedback, confrontation, and mindfulness.⁴⁴ These skills can be summarized in the therapeutic skill of immediacy, where the counselor practices being present and using one's therapeutic presence as a form of intervention. Furthermore, Existential Theory, like Gestalt Theory, utilizes the I-Thou relationship, which, as previously discussed, emphasizes transparency and authenticity between the client and the counselor.⁴⁴

This notion of the therapeutic alliance being the healing agent is perhaps reflected best in a quote by Yalom stating, "the one thing I've come to know with certainty is that if I can create a genuine and caring environment, my patients will find the help they need, often in marvelous ways I could have never predicted or imagined."⁴⁶ In other words, Yalom argues that it is through the process of creating a healing space through authentic human connection, that clients can develop the exact tools they need to solve their problems without direct intervention by the therapist. Furthermore, his words reflect the power of humanistic counseling approaches and the philosophical underpinnings of Reiki and many holistic complementary therapies or CTs. Thus, we argue that it is the power of human connection, whether using the core conditions, immediacy, or even facilitating the flow of *Ki*, which helps clients heal and that it is simply a matter of preference how we choose to define that power within between the respective fields of counseling and the healing practice of Reiki.

CONCLUSION

There is a growing interest in complementary therapies or CTs, like Reiki, amongst counselors and other mental health practitioners. However, Reiki as a tool in mental health treatment is yet to be fully understood. Thus, while there is growing interest in CTs, particularly the use of Reiki as an intervention, as evidenced by the existing literature, the articles on Reiki focusing on mental health are still largely conceptual. Several researchers have recommended the incorporation of Reiki by mental health practitioners in their sessions. However, there is still a large amount of fear and confusion among counselors regarding the ways they can find common ground between their training as counselors and the teachings of Reiki. This article attempted to describe common ground between the core constructs of Reiki and Humanistic counseling theories to reduce counselors' feelings of discrepancies. On a broader scale, we hope this article brings light to using Reiki as a supportive adjunct to therapeutic interventions. Furthermore, we hope this article inspires counselors to consider integrating holistic and multicultural practices into their sessions. Doing so may help serve clients whose cultural background may reflect Eastern or non-Western values in healing. We acknowledge that this information is conceptual and preliminary and encourage researchers to expand on this information by assessing its use in practice.

AUTHOR DISCLOSURE STATEMENT

The authors declare no conflict of interest related to the publication of this article. The perspectives presented in this article are solely based on comprehensive research and professional experience, aiming to bridge the gap between humanistic counseling theory and Reiki/energy healing practices. Any mention of specific Reiki or counseling theories and techniques is for educational purposes and does not reflect endorsements or affiliations with particular organizations or proprietary techniques. The authors have received no external funding or support for the creation of this article.

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