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Developing skills for individual counseling.

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Learning Objectives

- To have knowledge of **theoretical frameworks** for individual infertility counseling and to derive strategies for counseling.
- To have knowledge of **fundamental issues** in individual infertility counseling:
 - First sessions – themes of infertility
 - Gender differences – ‘how to’ in individual counseling
 - The role of the counselor - where does it begin or end?



Workshop content



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Introduction: theoretical frameworks for infertility counseling

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Theoretical frameworks

- Psychodynamic psychotherapy
- Cognitive-behavioral therapy
- Solution-focused brief therapy
- Crisis intervention
- Grief counseling

→ Recommended reading: Chapter 8 – individual counseling.
Infertility Counseling: A comprehensive handbook for Clinicians
– 2nd Edition; Covington, S. & Burns, L. (2006)

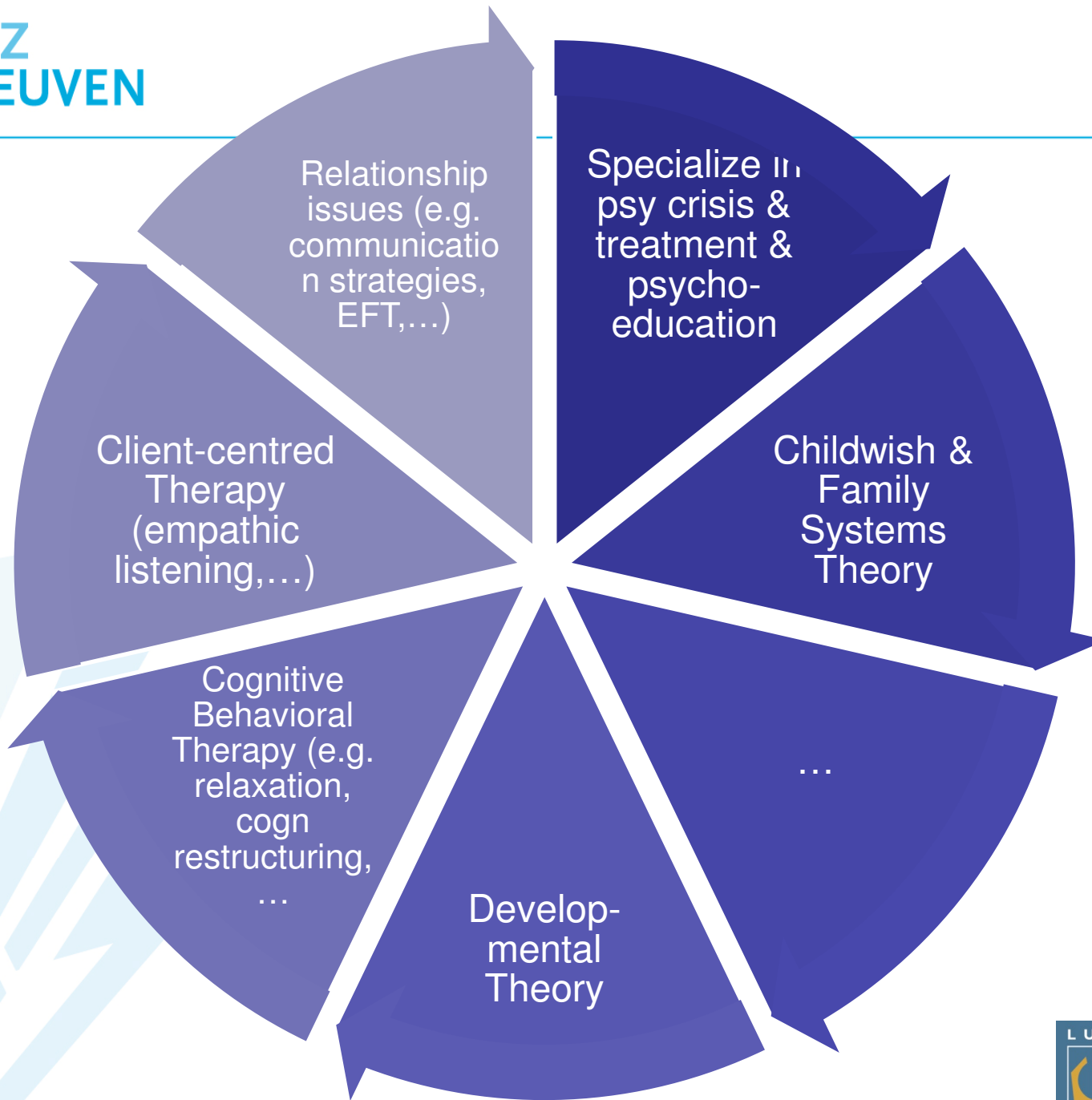


Theoretical framework today...

The shoe that fits one person, pinches another.

There is no recipe for living that suits all cases. ~ *C. Jung*





Why do we want children?

- 'I don't know.'
- 'Legacy'
- 'Loving and caring'
- 'Family building'
- 'Something greater than ourselves'
- 'Motherhood, fatherhood'
- 'Beliefs and values'
- 'They're fun and cute.'
- 'Children are our beginning and our ending.'
-

The wish for a child

- Child wish: a complex phenomenon

- ‘Biological parenthood’

- = implicitly valued and primary role in western society

- = ‘script’

- = developmental milestone

- Multifactorial Motives:**

- = Individual

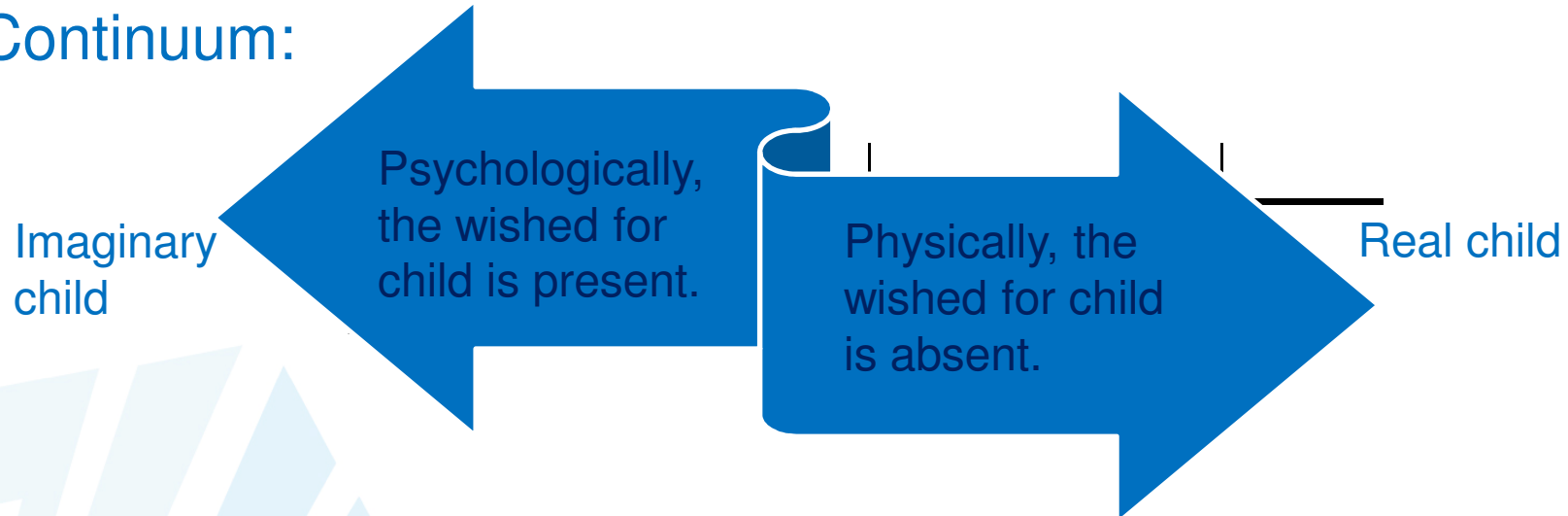
- = Relational

- = Transgenerational

- = Sociological/Society

Infertility: unfulfilled wish for a child

Continuum:



- Wish for a child: process of attachment and growing towards an 'imaginary' baby and confronting reality
 - e.g. the 'wished' for child versus the 'actual child'*
- Crisis of infertility as a **transition to non-parenthood**
- **Boundary ambiguity**

Infertility: unfulfilled wish for a child

Demand

- Enforced
- All-consuming

Desire

- Room for longing
- Can never be fully met
- You cannot control it

Counseling strategies

- Normalize the experience + psycho-educate
- Self-acceptance and identity: healing yourself and your relationships
- Coping and communication
- Mourning and grieving various losses
- Alternatives (and decision making): re-assessing of goals and motivation
- Gaining control



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1. Fundamental issues in infertility counseling

→ ‘first sessions’ – themes of infertility

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Infertility counseling?

- Counseling =
 - Opportunity to explore, discover and clarify ways of living more satisfyingly and resourcefully (BICA, 1999)
 - Requires professional qualification
 - Differs from patient-centred care

Individual counseling

- Setting of the counselor?
 - Within clinic and medical setting
 - Private practice
- Role of the counselor in the setting?
 - Assessment
 - Counseling specific issues (3rd party reproduction, decision making, adoption, etc.)
 - Referrals
 - Psychotherapy

Exercise 1

Associate freely on:

'INFERTILITY'



Exercise 2

- Videoclip 'Friends'
→ The fertility test

- Associate freely on:

'INFERTILITY'

As Chandler and Monica would see it...



Some of the fundamental issues in infertility

- Implications for social life and social support
- Emotional Roller Coaster
- Developmental impact of Infertility
- Coping and decision making
- Marital and sexual effects of infertility
- Gender differences: his or hers
- Grief

Phases of infertility...

- **Pre-diagnose:** worrying, wondering
→ *Still in the game...*
- **Diagnosis:** couple-effects, individual effects
→ *'Crisis'*
- **Pre-treatment:** impact on life, future and the idea of 'control'
→ *Back in the game: we will beat this...*
- **Treatment:** 'emotional roller coaster'
→ *If at first you don't succeed, try, try harder...*

Individual counseling

- Dealing with “resistance”:
 - First contact with mental health professional
 - Stigma and prejudice
 - Fear of evaluation (or rejection)
 - Introduction and communication by medical or paramedical staff - challenges

Individual counseling

- ‘Intake’ session/ routine counseling
 - Themes of infertility
 - Patient versus clinic
 - Added value?
 - For patients
 - For the clinic
 - For the counsellor
- Message of the counsellor?

Intervention: P L I S S I T model (Jack Annon, 1976)

P



Permission

L I



Limited
Information

S S



Specific
Suggestions

I T



Intensive
Therapy

Differential model of treatment:

not everyone needs the same things at the same time

→ sensitive and tailored interventions

Where to start?

I have learned that
people will forget what you *said*;
people will forget what you *did*,
but people will never forget
how you made them *feel*.

Maya Angelou



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2. GENDER DIFFERENCES

→ 'How to' in individual counseling

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*“No man is an Island, entire of itself;
every man is a piece of the Continent,
a part of the main.”*

John Donne

Exercise 3:

- Divide into 4 groups
- You get assigned either male or female gender
- Talk and discuss in group what questions/themes your gender could bring into counselling.
- Take notes

Themes for gender differences

- Group discussion themes:



Gender differences

- Individual counseling:
 - Couple is still a unit
 - Infertility = couple problem → ‘it takes two’
 - Impact can differ for men and women
 - Social context
 - Degree of confrontation

Gender differences

- **Position of the counsellor:**
 - Join with the patient
 - Take the meta-perspective
 - Balance the individuals (cfr. ‘a rope’)
- **Finding:**
 - Common ground
 - Common language & translation problems
 - Differences are ok



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3. The role of the counsellor

→ Where does it begin or end?

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Role of the counsellor

- Wish for a child = unborn child
- Reproductive freedom and rights
...a nod to 3rd party reproduction...
- More questions than answers...

Eva Hoffman – the secret

“You never thought about me, did you?” I said quickly, “You never thought what it would be like for me.”

“Why . . .” he said again, looking baffled, “It was what your mother wanted. We did it with your mother’s full consent.”

“But what about me?” I said. “Didn’t anybody think, didn’t anybody imagine what it would be like to be me?” [p. 98].

Role of the counsellor

- Responsibility of the counsellor >< team?
- What is the 'evidence' in our hands?
- Ethical/moral questions
 - ><
 - possibilities
 - ><
 - psychological issues

Role of the counsellor

- What of the unborn child?
 - ‘Wrongful birth’, ‘wrongful life’
 - physical defects
 - Psychological harm?
- Where does our role begin or end?

Role of the counsellor

- How to...
 - Work with the ‘yuk’ factor
 - Know yourself (and your team)
 - Consult with others / supervision /intervision
 - Get perspective: we are who we are...
 - Be honest...



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Thank you for your attention!
Thank you for your participation!

Questions, remarks, additional information:

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