

Serving Those Who Have Served: Key Interpersonal Approaches to Occupational Therapy with Modern Combat Veterans

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Background

- Combat veterans returning home report readjustment difficulties, strains on family life, and loss of interest in daily activities.¹
- OT provides valuable physical and psychosocial rehabilitation for veterans – physical disability, assistive device training, emotional regulation, life skills, cognitive and visual impairment, community reintegration, social participation, driving rehab, and more.^{2,3}
- Current research has not addressed how OT practitioners approach relationship-building and therapeutic interactions with combat veteran clients.

Research Question

What are the interpersonal approaches to care used by occupational therapy practitioners (OTs) in interactions with clients who served in the recent wars in Iraq and Afghanistan – Operation Iraqi Freedom, Operation Enduring Freedom, & Operation New Dawn?

Methods & Participants

- Semi-structured phone interview
- 3 female, 1 male – civilian/veteran/active duty
- *Settings:* national military hospital, regional military outpatient clinics, regional VA hospital, home health

Results

THERAPEUTIC SITUATION

Context

- Medical model of care
- Military culture/values

Clients

- Age <30
- Evolving emotions
- Lack of initial motivation
- Needing to feel heard
- Special Forces = “special”
- Resilience*

OT Practitioners

- Individual personality
- Cheerleaders
- Military experience
 - (+) Common bond
 - (–) Chain of command barrier
- No military experience
 - (+) Experts on civilian life
 - (+) Less formal interaction
 - (–) Steep learning curve



Discussion

- Interactions in this setting are transactional – characteristics of clients, OTs, and the treatment context create a dynamic therapeutic situation that offers both supports and barriers to rehab.
- OT literature supports this characterization of veterans.
- Further research needed – no empirical evidence yet exists to validate these themes and analysis.
- *Limitations:* Small sample size; 1 interview per participant.

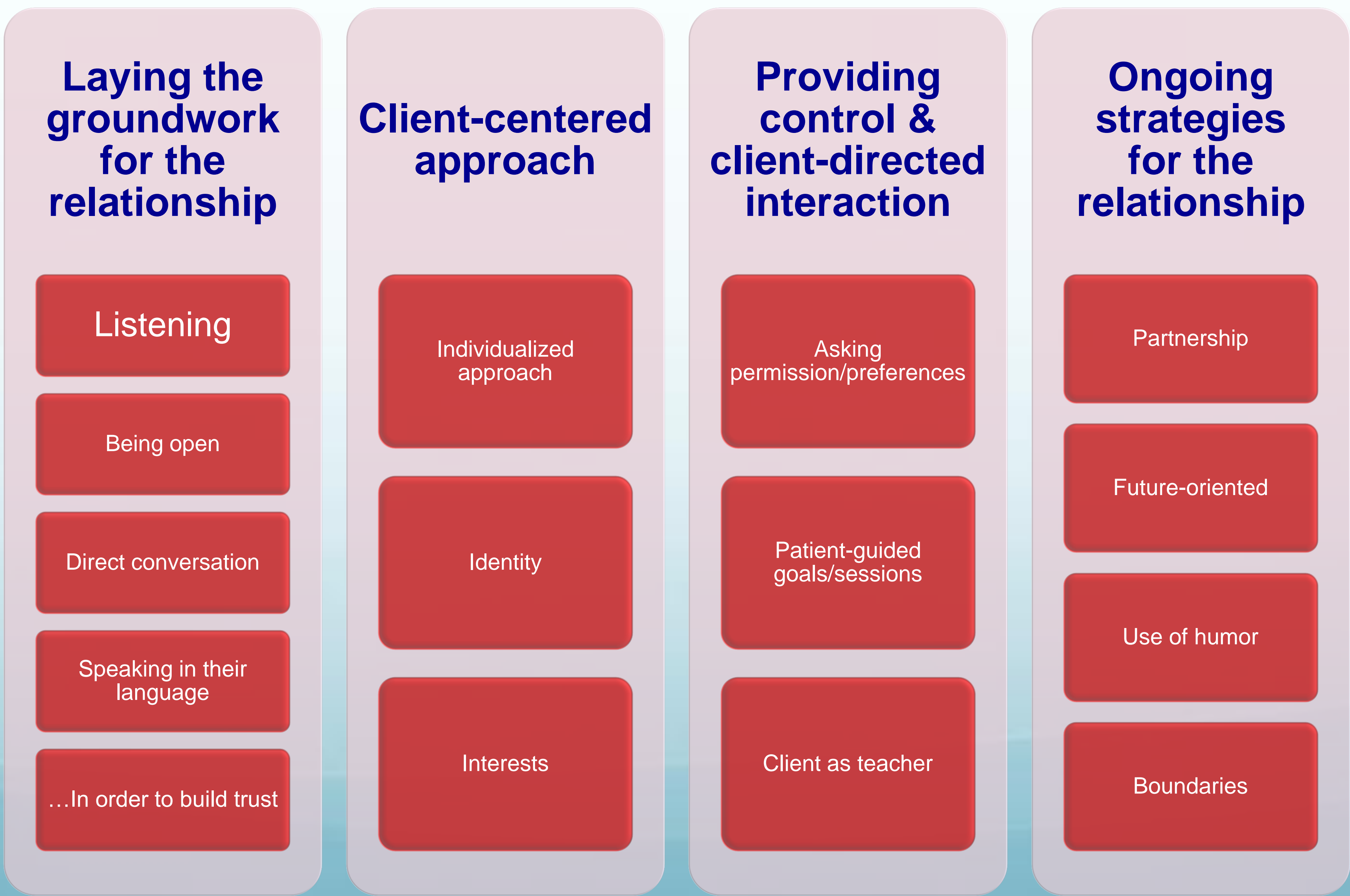
References

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THEMES



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