Values and Ethics: The Counselor as a Person and Professional

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Overview

• How do our life experiences shape our values? Do these beliefs and attitudes impact our ethical decision making abilities?
• Do you know yourself well enough to realize when you are responding from more of a life script verses an objective stance?
• Can our needs and desires lead to a more subjective course of action?
• Using an interactive approach, this workshop will cover how values impact our approaches, therapy, treatment, and overall ethical framework.
Professional Characteristics

1. Sincere interest in the welfare of others
2. Ability & willingness to be present in client’s joy or pain
3. Recognition & acceptance of one’s strength & vitality; no need to diminish others
4. Found one’s own counseling style.
5. Willingness to be vulnerable & take risks
6. Self-respect, self-appreciation, strong sense of self-worth
7. Serve as models for clients
8. Risk mistakes & admit making them
9. Growth orientation
10. Sense of humor
Professional Characteristics Cont.

• Interpersonal skills: Pragmatism, Competence, Respect, Genuineness, Promotion of client empowerment & self-responsibility
• Effective Helpers: Self awareness, Psychological health, Sensitivity to racial, ethnic, & cultural factors, Open-mindedness
• Objective
• Competent
• Trustworthy
• Interpersonal Attractiveness
What characteristics are missing from the list?

“I’m right there in the room, and no one even acknowledges me.”
Dare we be??

- Although it is laudable to work toward greater consistency in the way we treat clients, a mental health professional is a fallible human being subject to quirks, biases, errors, misjudgments and distortions of reality (Jeffrey Kottler 2010)

- Even with the best education, training, supervision, study, and self-analysis, a mental health professional is hardly the anonymous, perfectly stable, neutral, all-knowing, and accepting creator that clients prefer to see (Jeffrey Kottler 2010)
Self-Awareness of Your:

- Values/Beliefs
- Life-scripts
- Previous experiences
- Our Needs:
  - To Give or nurture
  - To Be liked, respected, loved; receive approval
  - To Control, be critical, be right
  - To___etc
Self-Awareness of Your:

- Motivation for helping
- Feelings
  - Happiness, satisfaction
  - Hurt, disappointment
  - Anger, sadness
  - Fear, confusion
- Personal strengths, limitations, & coping skills
- Ability to receive constructive feedback
"A human being is a part of the whole, called by us "Universe." He experiences himself, his thoughts and feelings as something separated from the rest—a kind of optical delusion of his consciousness. This delusion is a kind of prison for us, restricting us to our personal desires and to affection for a few persons nearest to us. Our task must be to free ourselves from this prison by widening our circle of compassion to embrace all living creatures and the whole of nature in its beauty."

~Albert Einstein
Johari Window

- **Public Area**: Known to self and known to others.
- **Hidden Area**: Known to self but unknown to others.
- **Blind Area**: Unknown to self but known to others.
- **Unknown Area**: Unknown to self and unknown to others.

**Feedback from Others**

**Disclosure of Self**
Ethical Terminology Defined:

- **Values**
  - beliefs and attitudes that provide direction to everyday living

- **Ethics**
  - beliefs we hold about what constitutes right conduct. Ethics are moral principles adopted by an individual or group to provide rules for right conduct.

- **Morality**
  - our perspectives of right and proper conduct and involves an evaluation of actions on the basis of some broader cultural context or religious standard
Transference

• The process whereby clients project onto their therapists past feelings or attitudes they had toward significant people in their lives

• The “unreal” relationship in therapy
  – Counselors need to be aware of their personal reactions to a client’s transference
  – All reactions of clients to a therapist are not to be considered as transference
  – Dealing appropriately with transference is an ethical issue
Counter-transference

• Any projections by therapists that distort the way they perceive and react to a client

• Occurs when clinicians
  – demonstrate inappropriate affect
  – respond in highly defensive ways
  – lose their objectivity because their own conflicts are triggered.

• Can be either a constructive or a destructive element in the therapeutic relationship
Examples of Counter-transference

- Being overprotective with a client
- Treating clients in benign ways
- Rejecting a client
- Needing constant reinforcement and approval
- Seeing yourself in your clients
- Developing sexual or romantic feelings for a client
- Giving advice compulsively
- Desiring a social relationship with clients
Values Exercise!
Values and the Helping Relationship

- Research has provided evidence that therapists’ values influence every phase of psychotherapy, including:
  - theories of personality and therapeutic change
  - assessment strategies
  - goals of treatment
  - the design and selection of interventions
  - evaluation of therapy outcomes
The Counselor as a Person and Professional

- Counselors must be aware of the influence of their own personality and needs

- Personal needs of counselors based on unresolved personal conflicts:
  - a need to tell people what to do
  - a desire to take away all pain from clients
  - a need to have all the answers and to be perfect
  - a need to be recognized and appreciated
  - a tendency to assume too much responsibility for the changes of clients
  - a fear of doing harm, however inadvertently
Topics that are value laden

- Zero tolerance policies
- Sentencing minors as adults
- Polygamy laws
- Same-sex marriage
- FCC’s actions against indecency
- Medical marijuana
- Racial profiling
- Energy crisis
- Prisoner privileges
- Affirmative action
- Execution of mentally deficient criminals
- Pro Athlete salary caps
- Fighting terrorism
- Bilingual education
- Animal rights
- Prostitution laws
- Media influence of high profile trials
- Any proposition
- Beauty pageants
- Any presidential candidate
- Flag burning amendment
- Stem cell research
- Illegal immigrant issues
- Censoring the internet
- Banning hate speech
- Prosecuting downloaders
- Immigration issues
- driver’s licenses for illegal aliens
- gas prices
- electronic voting
- war in Iraq
- prison conditions
- healthcare
- campaign issues
- health care
- airline safety
- military recruiting practices
- Three strikes laws
More specific to the field?

- Personal Therapy
- Client autonomy/Dependence
- Sexuality
- Abortion
- Spirituality and Religion
- End-of-Life Care
- Parenting Styles
- What it means to act in the client’s best interest

- Birth Control
- Rights to confidentiality Child/adolescent vs. Parent/Guardian
- Documentation Practices
- Licensing/Rules

“VALUES ARE LIKE FINGERPRINTS. NOBODY’S ARE THE SAME, BUT YOU LEAVE THEM ALL OVER EVERYTHING YOU DO.”

ELVIS PRESLEY
Personal Therapy for Counselors

• Reasons for participating:
  – to explore your motivations for becoming a helper
  – To explore how your needs influence your actions, how you use power in your life, and what your values are
  – To identify and explore your blind spots and potential areas of countertransference
  – for remediation purposes
Client Dependence

• A temporary dependence is not necessarily problematic.

• An ethical issue occurs when counselors encourage and promote dependence.

• Can manifest in subtle ways
  – Counselors may collude with their clients in keeping them dependent
  – Termination can be delayed even though a client no longer needs services
Some professionals invest their egos too intensely in the outcome of their work, a result that depends very much on the client’s motivation and behavior. They may therefore attempt to do too much in the sessions, taking excessive responsibility for filling silences, providing immediate relief of symptoms, and generating insight. The more control the professional takes, the less the client assumes. The more the therapist does, the less there is for the client to do.

Jeffrey Kottler: On Being a Therapist 2010
Ask yourself?

• Are you expecting things from your clients that they are unable or unwilling to do, yet interpreting their behavior as resistant, defiant, reluctant, or obstructive?

• How is your empathy with certain clients compromised, or even impaired, making it difficult for you to feel respectful and caring toward them?

• How do you experience feeling blocked, stymied, helpless, and frustrated with this client?

• In what ways have you lost or misplaced your compassion?
End-Of-Life Decisions

• Various continuing care or treatment options exist:
  – Aggressive treatment of the medical condition(s)
  – Life-sustaining treatment
  – Medical intervention intended to alleviate suffering (but not to cure)
  – Withdrawing life-sustaining treatment
  – Voluntary active euthanasia
  – Physician-assisted suicide

• Rational suicide
  – When a person has decided—after going through a decision-making process and without coercion from others—to end his or her life because of extreme suffering involved with a terminal illness.

• Aid-in-dying
  – Providing a person with the means to die; the person self-administers the death-causing agent, which is a lethal dose of a legal medication.

• Hastened death
  – Ending one’s life earlier than would have happened without intervention. It involves speeding up the dying process, which can entail withholding or withdrawing treatment or life support

• Advice directives
  – Written documents that specify the conditions under which people wish to receive certain treatment or to refuse or discontinue life-sustaining treatment
Stress in the Counseling Profession

• Counseling can be a hazardous profession and lead to empathy fatigue.

• Some sources of stress for counselors are:
  – Feeling they are not helping their clients
  – The tendency to accept full responsibility for clients’ progress
  – Feeling a pressure to quickly solve the problems of clients
  – Having extremely high personal goals and perfectionistic strivings
Counselor Burnout and Impairment

• **Burnout**
  – a state of physical, emotional, intellectual, and spiritual depletion characterized by feelings of helplessness and hopelessness

• **Impairment**
  – the presence of a chronic illness or severe psychological depletion that is likely to prevent a professional from delivering effective services and results in consistently functioning below acceptable practice standards
Signs of “Therapist Decay” Which Lead to Burnout

• An absence of boundaries with clients

• Excessive preoccupation with money and being successful

• Taking on clients that exceed one’s level of professional competence

• Poor health habits in the areas of nutrition and exercise
Signs of “Therapist Decay” Which Lead to Burnout

• The absence of camaraderie with friends and colleagues

• Living in isolated ways, both personally and professionally

• Failing to recognize the personal impact of clients’ struggles

• Resisting personal therapy when experiencing personal distress
Maintaining Vitality as a Counselor

• Counselors are often not prepared to maintain their vitality.

• Sustaining the personal self is an ethical obligation.

• Personal vitality is a prerequisite to functioning in a professional role.

• Clinicians need to acquire and regularly practice self-care and wellness strategies.
Questions
References

• Arizona Board of Behavioral Health Examiners


