

Attitudes and Beliefs: A Personal Reflection

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Abstract

For counselors to be successful, it's imperative that they reflect on their own values and ascertain how these values may affect his or her ability to effectively work with diverse populations. After completing an Attitudes and Beliefs Inventory, and reflecting on how I rated each question, I can glean areas within my own value system that may interfere with my clients' beliefs and values. Areas of focus are: questions that elicited the strongest reaction or were the most incongruent with my own beliefs, where beliefs originated, and work I need to complete to manage or resolve these contradictory beliefs.

Keywords: beliefs, values, attitudes, diversity, counseling

Attitudes and Beliefs: A Personal Reflection

Counseling professionals must be aware of diverse cultures and core belief systems within various populations. In addition, counselors should acknowledge their own values and recognize how their beliefs may impact their ability to work with perspectives that are different from their own. Will these differing views create conflict? Our values are so deeply engrained in our daily thoughts, feelings, and actions, that it may be difficult to put aside, even for client purposes. Therefore, it is imperative that counselors reflect on their own beliefs, recognize that clients' views may differ, and ensure that this dichotomy does not interfere with the clients' best interests.

Measuring one's value system is not an objective task, and a multitude of surveys exist. Using a modified version from *Issues and Ethics in the Helping Professions* (Corey et al., 2019), I identified how comfortable I would be working with particular populations and specific problems. Prior to this survey, I hadn't given it much thought, but I can certainly understand how not reflecting on these issues could present moral conflicts and potentially violate ethical standards. Upon my own reflection, I have identified which situations produced the strongest reactions, where and when I learned these beliefs, and the work I still need to do regarding these issues.

Reaction

Many of the questions on the survey were difficult to answer, but a few gave me pause, and for two different reasons. The first item that made me question myself was regarding fundamentalist religious beliefs. Initially, my hesitance was not fully understanding the definition of what constitutes a fundamentalist religion. Fundamentalism is used in different religious contexts to convey, "...the devotion and strict loyalty to a set of principles or ideas"

(Razaghi et al., 2020). To further my inquiry, fundamentalist religions are described as being absolutists and fanatics, have strict social norms, and limit exposure to the outside world to reduce influences beyond of the fundamentalist group (Nica, 2020). I then wondered if I know enough about the Quran, Talmud, Book of Mormon, or even the Bible to counsel an individual who may be basing their entire existence on the literal meaning of these texts. That being said, I do not think my personal values would limit my ability to properly address the individual, it would be my lack of confidence in understanding their religion.

The remaining questions that proved difficult to answer were all related to the intentional malicious treatment of other people. I realize no one is perfect, we can all learn from past actions, regret things we have done, and become a better person. Helping individuals is the primary motivating factor to become a counselor. However, certain survey questions seemed to indicate that the individual did not show remorse and was seeking counseling as a mandate, not out of a desire to change. For instance, question 19 stated that a man, convicted of pedophilia, was court-ordered for counseling, and question 23 referred to a man convicted of rape seeking counseling after recently being released from jail. After reading the question, I pictured myself sitting in front of the man, and all I could think was, "How can I look that person in the eyes?" I then began to wonder why I didn't want to look at him in the eyes. To be completely frank, as a woman, it would bother me to think as he's looking back in my eyes, he may be fantasizing ways to violate me, too. Even the pedophiliac, since they aren't necessarily motivated by the traits of a child, but by victim availability (Kahabka & Riga, 1996). Simply serving one's term does not make one a better person. If his goal is to simply check a box stating he completed his court ordered mandate, and he's not invested in the process, I would find it extremely difficult to continue the sessions.

As stated, the fundamentalist religion question didn't contradict with my values as much as my confidence, but the latter questions did. My morals and values center around compassion, kindness, empathy, loyalty, selflessness, and generally treating other human beings with care. Certainly, a rapist's and pedophile's value system does not coincide with my core belief system. They seem to be acting for their own pleasure, not for the benefit of others. Though our values may be completely different, I respect the notion that many of these individuals have a mental illness, and without the help of professionals, their chances of rehabilitation are nil. I am in the profession of helping others, and I look forward to continuing my education to better understand how to best serve all populations.

Response

I learned these beliefs from life experiences. Regarding the fundamentalist religion question, until age 10, I was a Jehovah's Witness. I was told some family members ostracized us due to our beliefs, and I felt like an outcast every morning and during any holiday celebration at school. We did not say "The Pledge of Allegiance" and we did not celebrate most holidays due to biblical interpretations. When you're young, your goal is to simply belong and be a member of the community. As a counseling professional, I could empathize with the idea of a religion affecting your world, but I would be cognizant that I lack the knowledge regarding the nuances of various religions, and I may not be able to offer the connection the client needs during their sessions. There wouldn't be a moral or value conflict in this situation, but I would feel I'd be an inferior choice among a pool of more experienced professionals.

The other survey questions that gave me pause were also learned from life experiences and from the golden rule, "Therefore all things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them; for this is the law and the prophets" (King James Version, 1969/2017,

Matthew 7:12). In essence, treat people the way you would like to be treated. Even if Jesus hadn't proclaimed this commandment, it seems like an obvious way to live. Unfortunately, I've been a victim of child molestation, home invasion, and assault with a deadly weapon. The child molestation case is the one that resonates with me the most. Although it happened in 1982, and I had moved on and left it in the past, in March 2020 I was subpoenaed to testify again to ensure he remained in a state hospital. After my testimony, due to COVID shutdowns, it was considered a mistrial, and I had to testify again in January 2022. He now remains in San Luis Obispo State Hospital. Needless to say, this opened old wounds. My emotions about men preying on children and women or harming others with malintent, harbors resentment within my soul.

Action

This is only the second class in my endeavor to obtain my master's degree in school counseling, and all signs seem to point towards personal therapy. I am resilient, well-adjusted, and successful. I've also done a fabulous job at leaving the past in the past. I was fine leaving it there, but due to the recent testimony that caused me to relive the events and lay eyes on my perpetrator, I've noticed many emotions resurfacing. I can adapt and leave it in the past again, or I can deal with it. Not only would personal therapy give me the opportunity to learn more about the counseling profession, but it would give me the opportunity to reflect on my own core beliefs and behaviors and how they may influence my ability to effectively work with clients (Corey et al. 2019).

In addition, I plan to continue my education in school counseling and internalize as much information as possible. My goal is to help increase the quality of life for those that I counsel. Life is difficult, and if I can minimize life's challenges, share strategies to improve well-being,

give hope to those that feel hopeless, and relieve their burdens, then I consider that a reward in itself.

Conclusion

Counselors are human beings that have values, beliefs, and life experiences that influence their perspectives. Once they identify these attitudes and beliefs, they are one step closer to reducing possible conflicts in a professional setting. Carl Roger's idea of unconditional positive regard states that counselors should care for the client as an individual, free from judgment, with the ability to have his or her own experiences, as the counselor values the client and is accepting of the client's beliefs and attitudes (Wilkins, 2020). If counselors cannot put their own value system aside for the good of the client, and accept differing views and beliefs, then perhaps this isn't the right field for them. It is our ethical duty to respect the rights of our clients, maintain a nonjudgmental attitude, and ultimately act in the best interests of those we are trained to help.

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Confidentiality and Right to Privacy: A Helpful Receptionist

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Abstract

Effective counselors employ various standards, laws, ethics, and professional judgment in their practice. This is also the case for school counselors in an educational environment. Counselors must be familiar with the American School Counselors Association (ASCA) Ethical Standards for School Counselors, the American Counseling Association (ACA) Code of Ethics, as well as the district and state laws that pertain to school counseling. It is helpful to reflect on various situations and consider how confidentiality, privacy, and other ethical codes have been breached to ensure these behaviors are not repeated. It is in the best interest of future counselors to consider these laws and how counselors need to be privy to authentic real-world experiences that may violate these laws. In the following scenario, a helpful receptionist unknowingly reveals that a man's wife is a client at the clinic, violating the wife's privacy among other codes of laws and ethics.

Keywords: code of ethics, laws, privacy, confidentiality

Confidentiality and Right to Privacy: A Helpful Receptionist

Introduction

Counselors have a professional, ethical, and legal obligation to protect clients' confidentiality and privacy unless legally authorized. There are various situations when a counselor may have no choice but to disclose information as a duty to protect or a duty to warn. However, there are circumstances when a client's personal information is disclosed without consent. In this case, the client's rights have been breached and may be a violation of codes of ethics or state and federal laws.

Identify the Problem

In the video, *A Helpful Receptionist* (Herlihy et al., 2005), a husband enters the Metropolitan Counseling Center and states to the receptionist, "My wife is here for counseling," and proceeds to ask the receptionist to relay a message to his wife. The receptionist states, "Certainly, I'd be happy to do that for you." Shortly after, the receptionist communicates the message to the wife who said, "So you told him I was here." She explains that they are in the middle of a divorce, and he has threatened to use her counseling visits against her by insinuating that she's unstable and unfit to have custody of the children. She claims, "Now he knows I'm here, that I've been seeing a counselor." The receptionist states, "Yes, I told him I'd give the message." The question is, has the receptionist violated any legal, professional, or ethical codes by agreeing to relay the husband's message to the wife? Although the receptionist never specifically stated the wife was there or was seeing a counselor at the establishment, she did agree to relay the message, therefore suggesting the wife was readily accessible. Unbeknownst to the receptionist, she violated the client's confidentiality and right to privacy under various codes of laws and ethics as well as lacking professional care within the clinical setting.

Applicable ASCA and ACA Codes

For a client to feel comfortable with his or her counselor, there needs to be established trust and security that one's privacy will be maintained as well as a high level of confidentiality. The receptionist breached the patient's confidentiality per ACA Section B.1.c., B.2.e., B.3.a. (2014), and ASCA Section A.2.e. (2016).

ACA Section B Confidentiality and Privacy exhibits the parameters of confidentiality with clients. The receptionist in the video violated Section B.1.c. that enforces counselors to maintain privacy of current clients as well as prospective clients while disclosing information only with appropriate consent or if it's justified with legal or ethical consideration. The wife did not give consent for the husband to know that she was being seen by the clinic, nor was it justified legally. Section B.2.e. mandates that clients are informed before any disclosure of confidential information is revealed and are involved in the disclosure. The wife was not given this opportunity. Perhaps the largest violation of Section B includes B.3.a. that states counselors need to ensure the privacy of clients are also secured by employees, in this case, the receptionist. The receptionist was not well-trained, and it is the counselor's responsibility maintain the client's privacy by ensuring the receptionist is aware of various avenues to maintain clients' privacy.

If the client were a student receiving counseling, this would have been a violation of ASCA Section A.2.e. (2016) that indicates information is confidential unless it is legally required to be divulged. "The Case of Serena" in *Issues and Ethics in the Helping Professions* (Corey et al., 2019), relayed the importance of school counselors to convey to administration, teachers, and parents the importance of students' right to privacy, and the counselor in that situation proactively educated all concerned. Unfortunately, the practicing therapist in *The Helpful*

Receptionist video did not educate all concerned and should have ensured the receptionist knew how to respond in the given situation to maintain the woman's right to privacy.

Applicable State Codes/or Mental Health Laws

Under Utah State Legislature Code 58-60-114, therapists may not disclose any confidential information about their clients without the written consent of the client. Granted, it was the receptionist that disclosed the information, but it is the counselor's responsibility to ensure the receptionist is aware of the patient's right to privacy. The woman's rights were violated when the receptionist indicated to the husband that the wife was accessible, and she would be "happy" to give the message to his wife.

Nature/Dimensions of the Dilemma

There are five main moral principles to guide decision making (Forester-Miller & Davis, 2016): autonomy, nonmaleficence, beneficence, justice, and fidelity. In this case, the client's sense of autonomy is in jeopardy. She now lacks the ability to manage her own privacy, privacy that the counselor (and employees) should safeguard. Nonmaleficence is circumventing actions that may harm clients. The husband may attempt to use her therapy as proof that she is unstable to have custody of the children. The client is now at risk to lose her custody of her children due to the clinic's breach of confidentiality. Although the receptionist was attempting to exhibit beneficence by doing good for others, in the end, she should be looking out for the client's welfare, not for the husband's welfare. The clinic also violated the principle of fidelity when they failed to maintain the commitment of loyalty to the client. The wife had a reasonable expectation that her information would remain private, but it wasn't.

Applicable Federal Mental Health or Educational Laws

In addition, the receptionist violated a federal law found in the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPPA) that was passed by congress in 1996. Title 45 CFR 164.510 states that patient information may be given to the client's family members, friends, or others involved in the patient's health care if the patient does not object. In this situation, the wife/client clearly objects to her husband having information regarding where she's being treated and that she's being seen by a therapist.

Potential Course of Action

It is crucial for clients to feel secure and trust that their confidentiality and privacy is not violated. Unfortunately, it is quite easy to violate a patient's privacy and usually happens inadvertently while the violator is preoccupied with a current task (Johnson & Weinstock, 2012). To resolve the problem, therapists should be proactive and discuss potential breaches of confidentiality with employees. In a school setting, counselors should also be proactive by sharing the importance of students' privacy with administration, teachers, parents, and members of group counseling. Rhonda Williams references Carolyn Stone's solutions to ethical problems in schools (STEPS) by listing nine steps to consider when approaching an ethical dilemma (2007). Of these nine steps, though school-specific, many can be applied to receptionist's case as well. For instance, one needs to apply the ASCA ethical code and legal issues as suggested in step two. In addition, when dealing with this specific ethical dilemma, the counselor should employ the moral principles (step five), determine a course of action (step six), evaluate the action (step seven), consult peers (step eight), and implement the selected action (step nine). In the future, the counselor needs to ensure the receptionist understands and values the privacy of the clients as well as ethical, legal, and federal codes of law. She needs to be informed of clinic policies and needs to be prepared to act in the welfare of the client in varying situations.

Conclusion

Overall, current and future counselors need to be acutely aware of the myriad ethical and legal codes and laws associated with their profession. Counselors have a duty to their clients to act in the clients' best interests to ensure their welfare. Confidentiality among clients can be complicated as there are legal and ethical implications and limitations. Further studies may consist of methods to reduce breaches of confidentiality among administration, teachers, and parents in school settings as well as in group therapy.

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