

Values, spirituality, and therapy

INTRO

(discuss) What are values? Where do they come from? How do values impact our lives?

HISTORICAL THOUGHT

Modern psychology and therapy began in the late 19th century, around the time of the rise of modern science. Some scientists, including some behavioral scientists, adopted some value assumptions in an effort to separate faith from science:

- (1) Naturalism- the view that God is not necessary to explain the universe; everything has a “natural” explanation
- (2) Ethical relativism – all moral principles are valid according to the situation; there are no universal principles
- (3) Ethical hedonism – the highest good is the highest pleasure with the least pain
- (4) Positivism – knowledge is limited to observable facts; total objectivity is possible for scientists; when applied to the behavioral sciences, it implies that counseling, teaching, etc. can be value neutral

CHANGING PROFESSIONAL VIEWS

In recent years the early views of value-neutrality have been discredited – WHY?

- (1) It is now recognized that all scientists are influenced by their values; in reality, total objectivity is a myth
- (2) Research has shown that therapist and client values are very influential in the counseling process; there is mutual influence by both therapist and client

- (3) Theories that guide practice are value-laden
- (4) Ethical relativism is logically untenable belief to hold; it is easy to say; it is much harder to consistently practice

EX; handout on value themes of therapists (discuss)

Therapists demonstrate a variety of styles when it comes to dealing with value issues, some more problematic than others: (Richards & Bergin, 1997)

- (1) Deniers – try to be ethical relativists, try to ignore value issues in therapy
- (2) Implicit minimizers – de-emphasize values by not sharing theirs
- (3) Explicit imposers – try to aggressively push their views, take an “I’m right” approach

(Discuss) how might a spiritual or religious view of values differ from a secular view?

- the outcome may appear very similar, where they may differ is on the source of authority

A SPIRITUAL VALUING APPROACH

What does a spiritually based approach to dealing with values in therapy look like? (Richards & Bergin, 1997)

- (1) It takes an explicit minimizing approach; in other words, while important, the counselor’s personal values are not the central focus of the process
- (2) Begins the first session with “informed consent”
 - counselor states his guiding values up front; in writing is best

- treatment goals are influenced by values; to be workable, goals must be mutually agreed upon by both therapist and client; if can't agree, probably need to refer EX: the spouse who wants both the affair and the marriage
- specific treatment interventions need to be openly explained and discussed, as to why you think they will be helpful

(4) How do we handle value conflicts?

- openly discuss value conflicts; allow the client to disagree; give them the choice as to whether to continue or not; don't abandon clients because of value conflicts

VALUE CLARIFICATION

Value assessment and clarification is a very important part of the counseling process. There are times when it is particularly important:

- (1) When value-behavioral incongruencies exist
- (2) When values are unclear
- (3) When values are unhealthy – it is very appropriate to invite a client to evaluate the outcomes of their value choices, and to consider healthier alternatives