Counseling and Psychoanalysis: Advancing the Value of Diversity

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Arguably, the defining feature of the counseling profession is an appreciation for human diversity. Early counseling movements emphasized individual diversity, while multiculturalism and social justice highlighted cultural diversity. The author maintains that contemporary psychoanalytic thought can supply a needed intraindividual diversity perspective, which has been suppressed by dominant ideologies.

Podría decirse que el rasgo definitorio de la profesión de la consejería es la apreciación por la diversidad humana. Los movimientos iniciales en el campo de la consejería enfatizaron la diversidad individual, mientras que el multiculturalismo y la justicia social pusieron de relieve la diversidad cultural. El autor sostiene que el pensamiento psicoanalítico contemporáneo puede proporcionar una perspectiva necesaria sobre la diversidad intraindividual, que ha sido suprimida hasta ahora por las ideologías dominantes.

During the mid-20th century, mental health culture was ideologically dominated by psychoanalysis (Shorter, 1997). This dominance was eventually unseated by the rise of biological psychiatry (Hansen, 2007), the introduction of alternative treatment orientations (e.g., behaviorism, humanism), and challenges from researchers who questioned the efficacy of psychoanalytic methods (e.g., Eysenck & Wilson, 1973). Currently, in contrast to its former dominance, psychoanalytic thought has a relatively minor influence on mental health culture (Hansen, 2009; Shorter, 1997). In keeping with this larger culture, the counseling profession also appears to have little use for psychoanalytic thought, as evidenced by the relative lack of attention given to psychoanalytic ideas in contemporary counseling texts on theories and techniques (e.g., Egan, 2007).

The purpose of this article is to demonstrate the vital importance of psychoanalytic thought to the counseling profession. Indeed, I take the position that an infusion of psychoanalytic ideas is precisely what the profession needs to advance the value of diversity. My thesis, in short, is that the counseling profession has historically identified with ideologies that highlight individual (e.g., humanism) and cultural diversity (e.g., multiculturalism). The missing component of this laudable emphasis on diversity, however, is intraindividual diversity (i.e., diverse components of being that exist within individuals). Psychoanalytic ideology, in its contemporary form, provides a compelling theoretical structure to fill this diversity void, thereby supplying a means for the counseling profession to make ideological progress toward advancing its core value of diversity.

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the counseling profession and appreciation for human diversity

Appreciation for diversity has been a strong historical theme of the counseling profession (Hansen, 2010). The history of the counseling profession can arguably be understood as a continuing effort to advance the value of diversity. To best illustrate this point, the history of efforts to advance the value of diversity in the counseling profession is divided into modern and postmodern ideological phases.

MODERNISM AND DIVERSITY

Modernism is a philosophical position that has thoroughly colored Western thought since the Enlightenment (Sexton, 1997). Essentially, modernism posits the existence of fixed, universal truths (Hansen, 2004). From a modernist perspective, human beings can overcome their subjectivity, primarily through the scientific method, and come to know these truths in a pure, objective form, which is uncontaminated by human bias (Rorty, 1991). For example, chemical reactions are governed by the objective truths, or laws, of chemistry. Research chemists attempt to discover these laws through the scientific method. As knowledge accumulates, the ability of chemists to predict and control the behavior of chemicals for human betterment is enhanced. From a modernist perspective, then, the acquisition of objective truths is the key to human progress (Anderson, 1990).

The foundational movements in the social sciences were guided by modernist assumptions (Rosenau, 1992), and the counseling profession was no exception to this rule (Hansen, 2002). However, it can be argued that, in contrast to other helping professions, counselors used modernism as a means to foster an appreciation for human diversity.

To illustrate, the vocational guidance movement, which is usually cited as the beginning of the counseling profession (Bradley & Cox, 2001), is thoroughly modernist, because the goal of vocational guidance is to find objective truths about individuals in the area of career fit (Jones, 1994). This modernist emphasis on individualism and truth also characterized other professions that were emerging at the turn of the century, such as psychiatry and psychology (Rosenau, 1992). However, unlike psychiatry and psychology, which used modernist ideology to judge human differences as deviant or abnormal, the vocational guidance movement emphasized appreciation for, not judgment of, human diversity.

During the mid-20th century, counseling began to identify with psychological humanism, particularly in its Rogerian form (Hansen, 2005). Humanism, like vocational guidance, is grounded in modernism because of the humanistic emphasis on using empathic responsiveness to find objective truths about in-
dividual selves (Hansen, 2000, 2002). Again, though, unlike other theoretical orientations to counseling that were available at the time (e.g., psychoanalysis and behaviorism), humanism emphasized an appreciation for human diversity, not pathological judgments about alternative ways of being (Matson, 1971; Rogers, 1980).

Arguably then, the counseling profession has used modernism to advance the value of diversity, unlike alternative helping professions, which used modernism to categorize human differences as either normal or pathological. It is noteworthy that humanism, because it emphasized the individual construction of reality, provided a valuable bridge to postmodernist ideology (Rudes & Guterman, 2007).

POSTMODERNISM AND DIVERSITY

Postmodernism rejects the central tenets of Enlightenment modernism (Flax, 1990). Specifically, postmodernist ideology embraces the notion of multiple legitimate perspectives rather than the singular truth of modernism (Hansen, 2004). Furthermore, in contrast to the modernist self, which is an enduring, willful fountain of being, the postmodernist self is linguistically organized, socially constructed, thoroughly de-centered, and “saturated” (Gergen, 2000, p. 7) with diverse identity possibilities (Muran, 2001). As was modernism, postmodernist epistemology was used by the counseling profession to further the value of diversity. Postmodernism, because it allows for multiple legitimate perspectives, formed the ideological foundation of the multicultural movement (Hansen, 2010). The counseling profession strongly identified with multiculturalism, or the “fourth force in counseling” (Pedersen, 1990, p. 93), which emphasized an appreciation for cultural diversity, in contrast to the individual diversity touted by humanism.

As the multicultural movement expanded, and theorists began to note certain practical and philosophical problems with using the postmodernist ideology of individual constructivism as a basis for counseling interventions, the element of postmodernism that emphasized the social construction of reality began to become preeminent in counseling theorizing (Rudes & Guterman, 2007). Thus, social constructionism, which highlights the ways in which groups create realities, became a foundational ideology for the counseling profession (Hansen, 2004).

Social constructionism provided a strong philosophical foundation for the appreciation of diversity in the counseling profession (Hansen, 2010). In addition to multiculturalism, the qualitative research movement, which endorses the locally constructed rather than the universal and eternal nature of truth (Berg, 2004), is also thoroughly grounded in social constructionist epistemology. More recently, the social justice movement has emerged in the counseling profession as another powerful approach to the appreciation of diversity (Lee, 2007), and which, notably, is also ideologically founded on social constructionist principles (Hansen, 2010).
CONCLUSIONS ABOUT THE COUNSELING PROFESSION AND DIVERSITY

Counselors have consistently used ideologies as tools to advance an appreciation of human diversity. Modernism was conceptually leveraged by counselors into orientations that valued individual differences. Postmodernism, particularly in its social constructionist form, is foundational to key counseling ideologies that were designed to foster an appreciation for cultural diversity, such as multiculturalism and social justice. Over the past century, then, counseling has been unique among the helping professions in its unwavering commitment to the value of diversity.

This historical analysis raises an interesting question: What is the next ideological step that the counseling profession should take to further advance the value of diversity? The best way to answer this question is to analyze, for limitations, the history of efforts to advance the value of diversity in the counseling profession. In this regard, modernist movements have certainly fostered an appreciation for individual diversity, while postmodernist ideology has positioned cultural diversity at the fore of contemporary counseling consciousness. The missing part of this diversity equation, then, is an appreciation for intraindividual diversity (i.e., diverse aspects of being that exist within individuals). That is, the counseling profession has historically worked its way up from individual to cultural diversity. However, the profession has generally not worked its way down to an appreciation of the diverse, and often conflictual, elements of being that animate individuals.

psychoanalytic thought and intraindividual diversity

Although psychoanalysis is a complex, multifaceted intellectual movement, psychoanalytic thought has consistently emphasized the diverse currents of experience that flow through individuals (Hansen, 2000). Indeed, the common denominator of the many schools of psychoanalysis is arguably the idea of internal conflict (Auld & Hyman, 1991; Brenner, 1976). Thus, because of its emphasis on intraindividual diversity, psychoanalytic thought could potentially help to fill the diversity void (i.e., diversity within individuals) in counseling ideology.

Psychoanalysis, however, has sometimes been wholly dismissed in contemporary mental health discourse because of the seemingly bizarre types of diverse, intrapsychic experiences that Freud (1905/1958) initially posited, such as sexual desires toward one’s parent pitted against castration anxiety. In other words, the content of early Freudian ideas has been emphasized at the cost of ignoring the overall image of intraindividual diversity that psychoanalysis proffers.
Contemporary psychoanalytic thought, however, has loosened its grip on the early psychosexual ideas and has, instead, emphasized the rich self-narrations that are constructed during the counseling encounter (Gill, 1994; Hoffman, 1998; Moore, 1999; Schafer, 1992). The differences between Freudian orthodoxy and contemporary psychoanalytic ideas are important to appreciate if psychoanalysis is to be taken seriously as a credible ideological candidate to advance the value of diversity in the counseling profession. Therefore, a brief overview of psychoanalytic thought is provided in the section that follows. As was done with the historical review of movements in the counseling profession, it is useful to organize psychoanalysis according to its modernist and postmodernist foundations.

**MODERNIST PSYCHOANALYSIS**

Freud posited his ideas during a period of high modernism, when the pursuit of objective truth through the scientific method was idealized (Gay, 1988). As a product of his time, Freud viewed psychoanalysis as a scientific method to discover truths about the psyche (Mitchell & Black, 1995; Moore, 1999). Indeed, Freud operated within an epistemology of “naïve realism” (Spence, 1982, p. 25) and viewed “reality, both internal and external . . . [as] relatively fixed and essentially knowable” (Hoffman, 1998, p. 6). For Freud, then, “the highest virtue was to come to grips with the truth” (Hoffman, 1998, p. 6). This modernist Freudian foundation (Strenger, 1991) had interesting implications for both the theory and the practice of psychoanalysis.

Theoretically, Freud postulated certain foundational truths about the mind. Unconscious mental functioning, the deterministic nature of the psyche, and the centrality of childhood sexual conflicts are a few of the hallmark features of early psychoanalytic thought (Freud, 1900/1958, 1905/1958; Gabbard, 2004). In keeping with modernism, Freud regarded these elements of psychoanalytic theory as objective scientific discoveries (Gay, 1988; Hansen, 2002). The modernistic foundations of psychoanalysis propelled the theory forward, creating submovements that emphasized repressed drives, ego psychology, object relations, and the self structure (Hansen, 2000; Pine, 1990).

Notably, the object relations and self movements within psychoanalysis have been used in recent decades to form the basis for intersubjective approaches (Stolorow, Atwood, & Orange, 2002), which are distinctly postmodernist in nature (Hoffman, 1998; Mitchell & Black, 1995). However, when object relations and self psychology initially emerged, these movements posited the existence of literal mental structures that could be objectively known by psychoanalysts (Gill, 1994; Moore, 1999; Spence, 1982). Therefore, ego psychology, object relations, and self psychology were all conceived within a modernist ideology.

Modernism also had implications for the practice of psychoanalysis. Many parameters of practice, in keeping with modernism, emanated from the idea that psychoanalysts should be objective, neutral observers of client psychology.
The practice guidelines from this era of psychoanalytic thought have been theoretically summarized as a “one-person psychology” (Gill, 1994, p. 33), because it was presumed that psychoanalysts could keep their own psychological material out of the dyadic interaction, thereby ensuring that the client’s psychology was the only one that would be activated during the counseling encounter. To keep their own psychological processes from contaminating the relational field, psychoanalysts were instructed by Freud (1912/1958) to undergo a personal psychoanalysis and to follow particular parameters of treatment, for example, to be neutral in relation to client material, to be personally anonymous, and to avoid gratifying client wishes that emerge during counseling (Gill, 1994).

Freud’s modernist vision, then, thoroughly colored the theory and practice of psychoanalysis. Notably, it is this modernist era of psychoanalysis that is sometimes dismissed as bizarre and irrelevant to contemporary practice. However, postmodernist ideas have substantially revised the core assumptions of modernist psychoanalysis, thereby making contemporary psychoanalytic thought an extraordinarily useful, and perhaps vital, ideology for counselors to adopt.

POSTMODERNIST PSYCHOANALYSIS

The postmodernist movement, as previously noted, has challenged the modernist ideals of singular truth and the self as an enduring structure from which human agency emanates. Instead, postmodernism embraces the legitimacy of multiple perspectives (rather than singular truth; Hansen, 2004) and the socially constructed “dialogic character of the mind” (Shawver, 1996, p. 375). These postmodernist assumptions have had a profound impact on the theory and practice of contemporary psychoanalysis.

Because postmodernist epistemology challenges the notion of singular truth, contemporary psychoanalytic theorists often wholly dismiss the grand theoretical structures, psychosexual stages, and maps of the mind that characterized the modernist era of Freudian thought (Gill, 1976, 1994). In short, because the postmodernist vision rejects the Enlightenment assumptions that foundational truth is obtainable and necessary, Freudian truth claims from the modernist era are often viewed by contemporary psychoanalytic theorists as, at best, completely unnecessary and, at worst, an unfortunate ideological anchor that historically kept the psychoanalytic craft from sailing to more promising waters. Of course, this radical revision at the theoretical level made for substantial changes to psychoanalytic practice.

Regarding practice, the impact of postmodernist ideas can be theoretically summarized as resulting in a “two-person psychology” (Gill, 1994, p. 33). In other words, contemporary psychoanalytic thought emphasizes the profoundly relational nature of the counseling encounter, wherein the counselor and client are both continually making psychological contributions to the interpersonal field.
This conceptualization of counseling practice is in sharp contrast to the one-person psychology of modernist psychoanalysis, which presumed that counselors could artificially subtract the impact of their personal psychology from the counseling relationship by remaining neutral, anonymous, and abstinent. Therefore, contemporary psychoanalytic practitioners are generally far more active and relational than their relatively stoic, modernist predecessors (Hoffman, 1998).

Two-person psychology, along with postmodernist skepticism about finding objective truth, has also redefined the general goal of the psychoanalytic encounter. The old, modernist goal was for the neutral psychoanalyst to discover objective truths about clients. Because the ideal of discovering objective truth is no longer tenable within a postmodernist epistemology, the goal of contemporary psychoanalysis is often conceptualized as the coconstruction of meaning within the counseling relationship (Hoffman, 1998). Within this vision, there is no truth to find; there are only healing, meaning structures for the relational participants to cocreate (Hansen, 2006).

CONCLUSIONS ABOUT PSYCHOANALYSIS

The defining feature of psychoanalytic thought is arguably psychological conflict. This emphasis on the diverse experiences that exist within individuals is represented in modernist psychoanalytic theory by reified psychic structures, realms of the mind, and object representations. Postmodernist psychoanalysis continues to focus on diverse experiences. However, these experiences are conceptualized as being actively constructed within the counseling relationship, not as buried psychological artifacts waiting to be dug up by an objective, emotionally aloof counselor. As one, somewhat whimsical, illustration of this transition, the unconscious has been conceptually transformed from a literal psychic structure to a “sensitive, whacky backstage partner who feeds us our best lines” (Rorty, 1986, p. 7).

It is certainly understandable that the modernist version of psychoanalytic thought has not been embraced by the counseling profession. However, counselors have generally thrown out the postmodernist psychoanalytic baby with the modernist bathwater. This is unfortunate because postmodernist psychoanalysis not only is highly congruent with the relational ideals of the counseling profession, but also provides a well-developed theory of intraindividual diversity. Therefore, postmodernist psychoanalytic thought is an excellent ideological tool to help move the counseling profession forward by supplying the missing intraindividual piece to the diversity puzzle that counselors have been assembling for over a century.

discussion and conclusion

I have argued that a defining feature of the counseling profession is an appreciation for human diversity. Historically, the vocational guidance movement and Rogerian humanism have emphasized interindividual diversity. More
recently, multiculturalism and social justice have fostered an appreciation for intergroup or cultural diversity. This move to collectivist ideologies, however, has generally left the individual behind, thereby creating an intraindividual void in the way that counselors ordinarily conceptualize diversity.

To advance the value of diversity, the counseling profession should adopt an ideology that addresses intraindividual diversity. Psychoanalytic thought emphasizes internal conflict, thereby potentially providing an ideology of intraindividual diversity for the counseling profession. However, the modernist form of psychoanalysis has largely been dismissed by counselors because of its emphasis on psychosexual conflict and its concomitant de-emphasis on the counseling relationship. Postmodernist psychoanalysis, alternatively, is free from the dogma of traditional Freudianism and emphasizes the cocreation of meanings during the relational encounter. Therefore, psychoanalysis in its postmodernist form is an ideal candidate to fill the intraindividual diversity void in the counseling profession.

In terms of applications, an appreciation for intraindividual diversity has the potential to substantially enrich counseling practice and the counseling profession as a whole. Regarding practice, instead of attending exclusively to cultural factors and the unique qualities of individual clients, an ideology of intraindividual diversity will enable counselors to appreciate the diverse, and often conflictual, currents of experience that flow through their clients. Postmodernist psychoanalysis provides a powerful tool for engendering this appreciation.

To elaborate on this point, the risk of giving too much emphasis to cultural background is that client individuality may be lost. Counselors can use contemporary psychoanalytic thought as an ideological tool to help clients identify and resolve conflictual, internal motivations. For instance, a client came to my practice with symptoms of depression. The reasons for the depression were mysterious to her. As I came to know her, however, it became clear to me that the depression was her way of resolving diverse internal experiences. Specifically, she was raised in a family that was very intolerant of anger, and it was particularly unthinkable in her culture that anyone would become angry with the male head of the household. In her current life, though, her husband (the person that her past defined as the head of the household) had given her plenty of reasons to become angry, including refusing to provide for the family and a history of chronic infidelity. She resolved the diverse internal experiences of unconscious rage toward her husband and her developmentally based inhibition against anger by becoming depressed. In other words, she turned the anger toward her husband against herself, thereby satisfying both the need to express the anger and the need to prevent herself from knowing that she was angry. As we worked together, I began to call her attention to these experiences, particularly when they became present in the immediate moment with me. Gradually, as a result of this work, her depression began to remit.
This brief clinical example illustrates the value of viewing clients from the perspective of intraindividual diversity. Furthermore, it shows the value of drawing from the object relations school of psychoanalysis, which counselors can use to help clients see how past relationship patterns are unconsciously repeated in the present. Therefore, counselors can use postmodernist psychoanalytic thought to formulate interventions on the level of intraindividual diversity, which may bring an entirely new level of diversity to their practices.

Regarding the profession in general, counselors have been engaged in debates about professional identity for the past several decades (Gale & Austin, 2003). The term identity, though, implies unity as a goal, not diversity. In other words, by searching for a unified professional identity, the counseling profession is, by definition, dismissing, or at least severely smoothing over, the diversity within the profession. Ideologies that emphasize intraindividual (i.e., intraidentity) diversity, such as psychoanalytic thought, may cause counselors to critically reappraise the goal of finding a congruent, unified professional identity. Furthermore, if the idea of intraindividual diversity is infused into the professional identity debate, it becomes theoretically possible for individual counselors to have multiple identities, thereby lessening the need for an overarching comprehensive professional identity (Hansen, 2010).

Psychoanalytic thought, then, is not a bizarre, antiquated theory. On the contrary, in its postmodernist form, psychoanalysis is a highly compelling, relational account of intraindividual diversity. Psychoanalytic ideas have rich, practical implications for many facets of the counseling profession, including the client–counselor relationship and the professional identity debates that have preoccupied the profession for decades. Most important, however, psychoanalytic thought can be used to help the counseling profession advance its long-standing ideological commitment to an appreciation for human diversity.

references


