

Pseudo-Subjectivity in Counseling

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Leaders in the field of counseling have stressed an integration of objective and subjective attitudes as being essential to the counselor. Yet, a review of the literature concerning the ideal characteristics of counselors shows a heavy emphasis on subjective traits, such as warmth, acceptance, and understanding. The authors are critical of such an overemphasis and point to studies of effective people which demonstrate the importance of objective traits and attitudes as well. A recommendation is made for the recognition of individual differences in the selection of counselors and for the strengthening of objective attitudes and skills in the training of counselors.

IN REVIEWING the literature concerning the most helpful attitudes of counselors and therapists, one is struck by the similarity of comments made by leaders in these fields. The authors felt that a review of these statements might help establish goals for counselors in training and provide a criterion for evaluating counselor preparation programs. If leaders in the field have discovered through their contacts with people that certain characteristics make for effective counselor performance, and if the characteristics described prove to be similar, it would seem urgent and necessary to apply these as criteria for our programs.

THE BASIC ATTITUDE OF THE COUNSELOR

Perhaps a start could be made with Rogers' (1955, p. 268) treatment of the scientific and experiential approach and the con-

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flict he felt in trying to resolve these approaches in his own work. He defines the experiential approach in these terms:

I launch myself into the therapeutic relationship having a hypothesis or a *faith* [italics added] that my liking, my confidence, and my understanding of the other person's inner world will lead to a significant process of becoming.

The scientific approach is described as follows:

In approaching the complex phenomena of therapy with the logic and methods of science, the aim is to work toward an *understanding* of the phenomena.

Later, in describing the basis of the conflict, he states:

The major shortcoming was, I believe, in viewing science as something 'out there,' something spelled with a capital 'S'. . . . When viewed in this external and impersonal fashion, it seems not unreasonable to see Science not only as discovered knowledge in lofty fashion, but as involving depersonali-

zation, a tendency to manipulate, a denial of the basic freedom of choice which I have met experientially in therapy.

He concludes, after examining science in a new light, that he achieved "a fresh integration in which the conflict between the 'experientialist' and the 'scientific' tends to disappear."

Although the account of this conflict resolution seems very personal and subjective, it is interesting to note the frequency with which the conflict is expressed by others who work very closely with people.

Allport (1962, p. 378) dealt with a similar conflict, although in different terms, and saw the integration of the two viewpoints as a goal for clients as well as counselors:

From the existential point of view the ideal counselor will strive to develop two attitudes in his client. Taken separately they seem antithetical; but fused into a world-view they provide strength for the future. One attitude is *tentativeness* of outlook. Since certainties are no longer certain, let all dogmas be fearlessly examined. . . . Up to now psychologists have not dealt with the remarkable ability of human beings to blend a tentative outlook with firm commitment to chosen values. . . . We have the freedom to commit ourselves to great causes with courage, even though we lack certainty. We can be at once and the same time half-sure and whole-hearted.

Here there is another highly personal statement of a conflict and its resolution that bears some resemblance to the one expressed by Rogers. And there are others who have defined the same phenomenon in even different terms.

In discussing the dilemma of the psychologist, Bordin (1966, p. 118) states the problem in terms of compassion and doubt:

Compassion fosters the thought, "Here are a great many persons in distress, we need to bend our efforts to relieve them with whatever knowledge, intuition, or experience we have." Doubt says, "Here are a great many persons in distress, we must develop theories and engage in research so that we will come to understand what has created the anguish and how it can be relieved". . . . I base my position on the assumption that, although the motivations of compassion and doubt form a volatile combination, their integration within the same psychologist is a

very necessary ingredient to the purpose of psychology as both a science and a profession.

Brammer and Shostrom (1960, p. 146) use the terms "objectivity" and "subjectivity" to describe the same phenomenon:

Objectivity refers to the more cognitive, scientific, generic aspects of the relationship wherein the client is regarded as an object of study or as a part of broad suffering humanity. . . . The subjective elements of the relationship include emotional involvement in the form of human "warmth" and psychological "closeness," as well as intense interest in the particular client and his problems. . . . Thus, it may be inferred that in counseling practice, objectivity and subjectivity are in harmonic, yet paradoxical relationship.

Not to belabor the point, but to show the prevalence of this idea and the infinite ways in which it is expressed, three other examples are cited. Harry Stack Sullivan's (1953) concept of the therapist as a participant-observer is well-known, but seems to take on much more meaning in the context of this discussion. Farson (1954) used the terms masculine and feminine to describe the same conflict and concludes that "it is necessary for us to broaden our concepts so that we can include the behavior of both roles. . . ." And finally, Pepinsky and Pepinsky (1954) recommend an integration of the roles of practitioner and scientist.

If these ideas were presented diagrammatically, it would resemble TABLE 1.

NEEDED INTEGRATION

Presented in this way, this basic attitude seems very clear-cut and easy to attain. However, a successful integration is rarely made, and new experiences constantly threaten the integration once it is made. More often, we find ourselves at one extreme of the continuum or the other in what we might call pseudo-objectivity and pseudo-subjectivity.

Pseudo-subjectivity would be typified by an over-identification and involvement with people, motivated by an incapacity to make sense out of one's own life. It differs from true subjectivity because it separates the process from the product. An example of pseudo-subjectivity would be the use of "self-look" groups in counselor training

TABLE 1

Basic Attitude of Counselors and Therapists as Described by Leaders in These Fields

Theorist	Integration of:		
Rogers Allport	Scientific Tentativeness of outlook	and	experiential
Bordin	Doubt	and	commitment
Brammer and Shostrom	Objective	and	compassion
Sullivan	Observer	and	subjective
Farson	Masculinity	and	participant
Pepinsky and Pepinsky	Scientist	and	femininity practitioner

without ever applying what is learned to the task of counseling. This resembles the behavior of a client who continues to talk about his fears without making the application to his behavior.

Pseudo-objectivity would be typified by a preoccupation with research and facts, motivated by a fear of becoming involved with people. It differs from true objectivity because it, too, separates the process from the product. An example of pseudo-objectivity in counselor training would be the use of counseling techniques without going through the process of relating them to one's own mode of operation. This resembles the behavior of a client who does many "right" things but lacks the self-involvement that would make his behavior more truly his own.

Neither attitude is very helpful in counseling, but it seems that the current danger in counseling is more in the direction of pseudo-subjectivity than in the other direction. The lack of a sizable research-oriented group in the field to check and challenge the highly personal and sometimes vague theories presented by others is one sign of this trend. On the other hand, integration is not seen as a compromise between the extremes of subjectivity and objectivity. Rather, subjectivity would be enhanced by exposure to the objective and objectivity would be enhanced by exposure to the subjective.

IS THERE AN OVEREMPHASIS ON SUBJECTIVE TRAITS IN COUNSELORS?

Reviewing the literature from 1927 to 1962 related to the ideal personal characteristics of counselors reveals a marked consistency on the subjective side. The writings in the field by Allen (1927), Ro-

sencrance (1938), Jones (1941), Cox (1945), Traxler (1945), the National Vocational Guidance Association (1949), Tolbert (1959), Wrenn (1962), and the Committee on Professional Preparation and Standards of APCA (1963) suggested similar personal characteristics for effectiveness in counseling. These suggestions focused on the following characteristics: sympathetic understanding, emotional stability, easy and cordial manner, approachability, interest in people, flexibility and adaptability, sense of passion, patience, a capacity for being trusted by people, a warm, friendly personality, commitment to individual human values, and open-mindedness.

As counselors and counselor educators observe the data related to personality characteristics of counselors, the emphasis on subjectivity also seems to ring true. Counseling is a people-oriented profession and the emphasis is on subjective traits. The traits reinforced over and over again while training counselors are warmth, acceptance, understanding, and friendliness. The words used are *non-judgmental*, *non-evaluative*, *committed*, and *confident*. The people who are attracted into counseling as a profession, and especially those considered to be the "best" counselors, are very much people-oriented. An indication of this is the manner in which counselor trainees seem to run toward practicum courses and away from courses in statistics and data analysis.

Now, it might be appropriate to see whether this imbalance holds up in relation to the measured personal characteristics of counselors. Studies related to the personal characteristics of counselors increasingly have come to the attention of investigators.

There appears to be a desire among researchers in guidance to learn what personality traits counselors generally possess and what personality characteristics are the most appropriate for counseling effectiveness. If one adhered to the theoretical integration model as demonstrated in TABLE 1, he would expect to find traits that would indicate the growth and development of a counseling personality that demonstrated an integration of characteristics. If one adhered to the suggestions of writers in the guidance literature as to ideal personal characteristics of counselors, he would expect to find traits that showed a very subjectively oriented person.

A review of investigations by Bailey (1940), R. Brown (1946), DiMichael (1949), Wrenn (1952), Cottle and Lewis (1954), Kemp (1962), and Mahan and Wicas (1964) on the personal characteristics of school counselors, vocational rehabilitation counselors, guidance psychologists, and counselor trainees shows little conclusive evidence. The most significant conclusion seems to be the inconsistency of the findings.

Investigations that attempted to study the relationships between personality characteristics of effective and ineffective counselors and counselor trainees proved just as inconsistent as the data described above. A review of studies by Arbuckle (1956), D. Brown (1960), Brams (1961), Coutts (1962), Kazienko and Neidt (1962), Steffle, King, and Leafgren (1962), and Embree (1963) shows that sometimes intelligence, aptitude, and achievement were distinguishing factors and other times they were not. The results also point out a discrepancy in what personality characteristics were found to be best. Characteristics went from highly accepting to highly dominating, and from interest in science to interest in art.

The empirical data related to the personal traits of counselors do not seem to reflect as extreme an imbalance as the personal characteristics writers have proposed counselors should possess. The most significant finding would seem to be the inconclusiveness and inconsistency of the results. In summary, the situation seems to be one in which writers and training programs emphasize an imbalance of counselor attitudes on the subjective side while

counselors, themselves, exhibit a conglomeration of attitudes.

To conclude this section, the question raised initially related to an overemphasis on subjective traits in counselors. According to the writers proposing traits counselors should possess, there seems to be an imbalance toward the subjective side. From our experience, as counselor educators and counselors, it seems as though subjective traits in counselor trainees are emphasized and reinforced. It also seems evident that people who possess subjective traits are attracted to counseling as a profession. Data on measured characteristics of counselors and studies on personal effectiveness in counseling are inconclusive. Because of these data, the personality emphasis being suggested by writers may not be as clear-cut as some might have imagined. Evidently the "ideal" is different from the "real." The question being considered in this article is whether the "ideal" is really ideal. To proceed further in answering this question, it would seem appropriate to look at people who are effective to find if they also possess the subjective traits held up as the "ideal" in the guidance literature.

ARE EFFECTIVE PEOPLE IN GENERAL CHARACTERIZED BY A SUBJECTIVE ORIENTATION?

Having noted the fact that leaders in the field have urged an integration of the two polar attitudes and that the field of guidance is characterized by an overemphasis on the subjective extreme, it might at this point be important to substantiate further the idea that an integration of these polar traits is desirable. Perhaps this could be accomplished best by noting the personality characteristics of some effective people to see whether or not they are characterized by the same overemphasis on subjective, compassionate, etc., qualities.

Blocher (1966, p. 731) has given the following description of an effective person:

The effective personality is not an "other-directed" person who merely conforms to external demands. He interprets role expectations in ways that permit self-actualization. Examples of such interpretations are those that result in opportunities for *leadership, creative or original contribu-*

tions, helping relationships, and unusual levels of accomplishment.

We might use these last four examples (leadership, creativity, helping relationships, and unusual levels of accomplishment) as categories in which personality traits could be considered.

The first question, then, is, Are people in leadership positions characterized by an overemphasis on subjective traits? Rather than consider leadership in general, we will look at the measured personality characteristics of leaders in an allied field, that of psychology. Campbell (1965, p. 643), in a study of Strong Vocational Interest Blank profiles of presidents of the American Psychological Association, reports:

The data . . . indicate that the APA presidents reported more interest in the physical sciences and less in the social service areas than did the Psychologists-in-General. These results correspond closely with Clark's (1957) report on American psychologists where he noted that significant contributors in psychology had more interest in science and less in helping other people on a face-to-face basis than did psychologists at large.

It would be interesting to conduct a similar study on leaders in the field of guidance and counseling.

Now, many reasons other than the one at hand may be advanced for this finding. However, the fact remains that leaders in the field of psychology (APA presidents and contributors to journals) are not characterized by an overemphasis on the subjective approach. If this definition of leadership were broadened to include leaders in other fields, perhaps even less of an emphasis on a subjective approach would be found. Do the attitudes emphasized in guidance programs lead to effective leadership? Or, at least, is not there some doubt as to whether these attitudes should be emphasized to the extent they are?

Blocher's second category is that of creativity. Do creative persons exhibit an imbalance of subjective attitudes? Taylor (1964, p. 27), in his summary of research on creativity, gives the following description of the personality characteristics of creative people:

There is some evidence that creative persons are more autonomous than others, more in-

dependent in judgement (they go against group opinion if they feel it is incorrect), more open to the irrational in themselves, more stable, more feminine in interests and characteristics (especially in awareness of their impulses), more dominant and self-assertive, more complex, more self-accepting, more resourceful and adventurous, more radical (Bohemian), more self-controlled and possibly more emotionally sensitive, and more introverted but bold. . . . Other personality characteristics that may be relevant to different types of creativity are: Liking for ideas versus people versus things, tendencies toward socialization and interpersonal involvement, introversion versus extroversion, commitment to primary versus secondary thought processes, impulse control (suppression versus expression), and surgency versus desurgency.

While this description includes the feminine and the subjective, there seem to be other traits included that are on the masculine or objective side of the continuum (such as autonomy, dominance, self-assertiveness) and one wonders whether people with these traits would be attracted to counseling and, if so, how they would be received. Another description of the creative person is given by Barron (1958, pp. 119-128):

In brief, the creative individual is someone who has an exceptionally strong need to find order where none appears, and who as a result of his own abilities and personal experience honors the apparently unclassifiable with his consecrated attention.

A need for structure is generally not considered a desirable attitude in counseling.

Blocher's third area is that of helping relationships, and we again refer to the statements of leaders in this field concerning the need for an integration of both subjective and objective traits as being essential for the counselor.

Blocher's fourth area is that of unusual levels of accomplishment. Any number of examples might be used here, but for the purpose of brevity and relevance we might look at the research on personality characteristics of superior students. Frankel (1964) describes superior students as intellectually oriented; flexible in thought; possessing of desirable moral, social, and ethical standards; conscientious, persevering; self-reliant and resourceful. Can an intellectual orientation be helpful in coun-

seling or is the emotional orientation the only way to effective counseling?

The authors realize that the selection of examples could be criticized on many counts. However, the purpose of this section was not to prove that a cold, objective, aloof attitude is desirable in a counselor but to raise some doubts about the overemphasis in our field on the opposite extreme. If effective people, as defined by Blocher (1966), are not characterized by this overemphasis, is it not possible that we as counselors will not be effective as long as we shy away from "atypical" (objective) counselor attitudes?

IMPLICATIONS

If it is agreed that the basic attitude described by leaders in the field is desirable, that the field of counseling is characterized by an overemphasis on the subjective side and that this overemphasis is not found in effective people in general, then some implications can be noted.

The subjective orientation is a good one, especially as a starting point. Perhaps the greatest advances in any field are closely related to intuitive "hunches," personal feelings that persist despite doubt and tentativeness. However, unless these "hunches" and feelings are made explicit and examined, they could lead to a pseudoscience of counseling, and if carried to the greatest extreme, to a form of fanaticism. The fanatic "feels" he is right and pays no attention to evidence to the contrary.

On the other hand, the objective orientation is a good one, also. The "hunches" and feelings described above can be doubted, examined, and conclusions drawn. However, the objective orientation devoid of personal involvement is stultifying and if carried to the greatest extreme, results in complete inaction.

In the field of counseling it seems that the subjective orientation has been given great weight as the desirable one and that the integration of the subjective and objective has not been greatly stressed. If this is true, a number of questions present themselves: Is it not possible that counselors are in error concerning some of their subjective feelings about clients? Are objectively oriented clients threatening to counselors? Can counselor educators relate effectively to objectively oriented

counselors-in-training? Can the field of counseling advance without some exposure to an objective orientation? Is the subjective orientation of counselors-in-training merely reinforced in their training? Are people of an objective orientation discouraged from entering counseling? Are there as many "bad" names, such as "fanatic," for subjectively oriented people as there are for objectively oriented people, such as "rigid," "structured," etc.? Is the growth of counselors and clients being inhibited by an overemphasis on the subjective approach?

If the answers to these questions reflect an avoidance of the objective approach, counselors and counselor educators may have some rethinking to do. Perhaps, in training programs, a few courses in tests and measurements will not suffice to represent the objective point of view. Maybe exposure to the objective approach might better be provided in counseling courses themselves, including practicum, theories of counseling, the case study, and others. Integration cannot be achieved unless both attitudes are seen as possible and relevant alternatives.

CONCLUSION

The belief in individual differences has always been a basic principle for counselors and counselor educators. It has been assumed that this principle runs through all counselors' interactions with people. Yet if one accepts the data described above, it seems that a particular type of person is sought in counseling. This assumes that a set of specific personality traits are the key to effective counseling. The question being asked in this article is, "Do the traits that have been suggested make for effectiveness? Or is it possible that the subjective emphasis limits growth?" Shouldn't an interaction of subjective and objective traits be aimed at rather than a posing of either one as the ideal?

As has been indicated, it appears difficult to know what personality traits reflect effective counselors and people. Counselors need exposure to subjective and objective learning experiences and people. It also seems that counseling needs people who begin with an objective orientation as well as a subjective one. Only through in-

tegrated experience can counselor-trainees and the field of counseling reach maximum efficiency.

Tyler (1961, p. 245) hinted at this concern when she said:

It may be that we have been approaching the problem from the wrong direction. The assumption that there is a certain combination of personal characteristics which is optimum for counseling may be unsound. It seems possible now that men and women of a wide variety of personality types can function successfully in this situation. If we give up the belief that there is one standard relationship that should be created in every case, we can relinquish along with it the requirement that the counselor be any one type of person.

Attracting to the field and selecting objectively oriented people is only a first step. An objective or subjective person without exposure to opposite points of view will be less effective than a counselor who is working for an integration of the two viewpoints. Our concern is directed at not only attracting objectively oriented as well as subjectively oriented people into counseling but also varying the learning experiences of counselor trainees. For example, using the Strong Vocational Interest Blanks M-F scale and our own observations, trainees might be selected who are objectively oriented and then exposed to a variety of self-look and counseling experiences, and a group of subjectively oriented people might be selected and exposed to a heavy dose of the scientific method. This would provide trainees with exposure to people different from themselves and provide program content that would facilitate experimental learning. Through these experiences, it is hoped counselor trainees would begin to develop an attitudinal integration for more effective counseling.

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Wrenn to Occupy "Dream" Chair

► The Macalester College Board of Trustees has recently established a unique Distinguished Professorship to encourage experimental dreams and innovations. Dr. C. Gilbert Wrenn, Professor of Educational Psychology at Arizona State University, Tempe, has been named to fill the chair. It is expected that Wrenn will serve as a resource person for faculty dreams in educational change. These will range from changes in courses and teaching approaches to learning experiences in all areas of student life across the campus.