

Differences between Counseling and Psychotherapy

Counseling Theories August 3, 1995

Running head: Counseling vs. Psychotherapy

Counseling v. psychotherapy is there a difference between the two? This paper will attempt to prove that there are several differences between counseling and psychotherapy. While counseling and psychotherapy have several different elements in each, the following information will also attempt to show the reader that there are some areas where the two overlap. At times this was a confusing topic to research. A fine line distinguishes the two topics and one must look hard to see this line. Definition of Counseling One survey taken by Gustad suggests a definition of counseling where he included three key elements. Counseling is a learning-oriented process, carried on in a simple, one to one social environment, in which a counselor, professionally competent in relevant psychological skills and knowledge, seeks to assist the client by methods appropriate to the latter's needs and within the context of the total personnel program, to learn more about himself, to learn how to put such understanding into effect in relation to more clearly perceived, realistically defined goals to the end that the client may become a happier and more productive member of his society (1957, p. 36). In lay terms counseling can be described as a face to face relationship, having goals to help a client to learn or acquire new skills which will enable them to cope and adjust to life situations. The focus is to help a person reach maximum fulfillment or potential, and to become fully functioning as a person.

Definition of Psychotherapy is the process in which a therapist assists the client in re-organizing his or her personality. The therapist also helps the client integrate insights into everyday behavior. Psychotherapy can be defined as "more inclusive re-education of the individual" (Brammer & Shostrom, 1977).

Objectives of counseling The objectives of counseling according to the Committee on Definition, Division of Counseling Psychology, American Psychological Association are to "help individuals toward overcoming obstacles to their personal growth, wherever these may be encountered, and toward achieving optimum development of their personal resources" (Arbuckle, 1967). In a paper written by Dr. T. Millard, it is stated that "Counseling provides clarity and a positive and constructive venue for the individual to sensibly examine the instinctive-emotional and rational (or irrational) motives which determine the drive, content, and even the form of human conduct." This shows the part which counseling plays in a client's treatment. Objectives of psychotherapy According to Everett Shostrom (1967), the goal of psychotherapy is "to become an actualizer, a person who appreciates himself and others as persons rather than things and who has turned his self defeating manipulations into self fulfilling potentials (p. 9). Shostrom also feels that awareness is the goal of psychotherapy, "The reason is that change occurs with awareness!" (1967 p. 103). Shostrom feels that awareness is a form of non-striving achieved by being what you are at the moment even if what you are means the phony manipulative role that we all play sometimes for external support (1967 p. 103).

Professional opinions Not all therapists feel that there is a distinction between counseling and psychotherapy. C.H. Patterson feels that it is impossible to make a distinction; He feels that the definition of counseling equally applies as well to psychotherapy and vice versa. Donald Arbuckle (1967) argues that counseling and psychotherapy are identical in all essential aspects. Others believe that there is a distinction. Psychotherapy is concerned with some type of personality change where counseling is concerned with helping individuals utilize full coping potential. IN Donald Arbuckle's work he included Leona Tyler's thoughts on the differences between counseling and psychotherapy. Leona Tyler attempts to differ between counseling and psychotherapy by stating, "to remove physical and mental handicaps or to rid of limitations is not the job of the counselor, this is the job of the therapist which is aimed essentially at change rather than fulfillment (Arbuckle 1967).

Differences between counseling and psychotherapy

One of the major distinctions between counseling and psychotherapy is the focus. In counseling, the counselor will focus on the "here and now", reality situations. During psychotherapy, the therapist is looking into the unconscious or past. A psychotherapist is looking for a connection of past to unresolved problems which are now present in the real world. Donald Arbuckle states, "There is a further distinction to be made. This involves the nature or content of the problem which the client brings to the counselor. A distinction is attempted between reality-oriented problems and those problems which inhere in the personality of the individual" (1967, p.145). Counseling and psychotherapy also differentiate when it comes to the level of adjustment or maladjustment of the client. Counseling holds an emphasis on "normal". One could classify "normal" as those without neurotic problems but those who have become victims of pressures from outside environment. The emphasis in psychotherapy however is on "neurotics" or other severe emotional problems. Counseling can also be described as problem solving where in psychotherapy it is more analytical. In counseling a client may have a situation where they do not have any idea how to handle it. There are two types of problems, solvable and unsolvable. If the problem is a solvable one, a therapist may help that client by looking at the problem with them and helping the client draw out solutions. When thinking of solutions one must also think of the consequences. While counseling deals with problem solving, psychotherapy on the other hand deals with the analytical view. Here the therapist would determine the cause of ones behavior from the results of that behavior. An example could be if a spouse was abusing the other spouse it could stem from the abusive spouse's past. The abusive spouse may have been a victim of abuse as a child, abused in a relationship themselves or even have been a witness to abuse. The counselor would analyze each act and try to link it to something in the unconscious past. Length of treatment also differs between counseling and psychotherapy. Counseling is shorter in duration than psychotherapy. The time spent in counseling is determined by goals set by the client and the counselor. Once these goals are met the client should then be able to go back on their own.

Psychotherapy tends to last a while longer. Sessions range from two to

five years. Psychotherapy is more of a comprehensive re-education of the client. The intensity and length of therapy depends on how well the client can deal with all of the new found information. It could take quite sometime for the client to be able to live with these feelings which originated in past experiences which are usually hurtful ones. A -psychotherapist also needs time to modify all existing defenses. The setting of treatment also differs between counseling and psychotherapy. A counseling session usually takes place in a non medical setting such as an office. Psychotherapy is the term used more in a medical setting such as a clinic or hospital. Another difference between counseling and psychotherapy has to do with transference. Brammer and Shostrom (1977) state, "The counselor develops a close personal relationship with the client, but he does not encourage or allow strong transference feelings as does the psychotherapist (p.223). The counselor tends to find this transference as interfering with his or her counseling effectiveness. A psychotherapist might feel that this transference is helpful and the client may be able to see what he is trying to do with the therapist relationship. A counselor may look at transference as "manifestations in an incomplete growing up process"(Brammer & Shostrom 1977), where the psychotherapist interprets these transference feelings as an unconscious nature of feelings.

Resistance is another area of counseling and psychotherapy that tends to differ. Counselors see resistance as something that opposes or goes against problem solving. A counselor tries to reduce this as much as possible. A psychotherapist on the other hand finds resistance to be very important. If the therapist can understand the client's resistance, he can then understand how to help the client change his or her personality.

Similarities in counseling and psychotherapy

While there are clearly many differences between the counseling approach and psychotherapy, there are some similarities between the two. First, each of these are similar in the sense that each client brings with them the assets, skills, strengths and possibilities needed with them to therapy. Secondly, counseling and psychotherapy are similar in the way that they both use an eclectic approach. The counselors and therapists do not have only one technique, they borrow from all different techniques. Arbuckle argues that "counseling and psychotherapy are in all essential respects identical" (1967, p.144) He states that the nature of the relationship which is considered basic in counseling and psychotherapy are identical. Secondly, Arbuckle says that the process of counseling cannot be distinguished from the process of psychotherapy. Third of all he feels that the methods or techniques are identical. Arbuckle lastly states in the matter of goals and or outcomes there may appear to be differences but no distinction is possible. One major similarity between counseling and psychotherapy are the elements which build a person's personality. Each of these processes deal with attitudes, feelings, interests, goals, self esteem and related behaviors are all which are affected through counseling and psychotherapy.

Summary and Conclusion

One can see from the material provided that there are several differences between counseling and psychotherapy. The biggest difference in my opinion is the time factor/ focus faced in each of these approaches. Counseling primarily deals with reality situations versus the unconscious past focus of psychotherapy. Secondly counseling has been described as helping one to develop competencies in coping with life situations where as psychotherapy is a re organization of one's whole personality. Finally a last distinction is that the counselor deals with life adjustment problems while the psychotherapist deals with past unresolved issues from the family of origin. While there are many distinguishing differences between counseling and psychotherapy, there are some aspects that do spill over into each other. As one can see by the graph provided (see figure. 1.1) there is a section where the two approaches cross paths. One must definitely take a close look at counseling and psychotherapy to distinguish whether or not there is a difference between the two approaches. I found this to be a very confusing topic at times. Just when I thought I had completely grasped a concept I would run across authors such as Arbuckle who speaks of the fact that one can not distinguish counseling from psychotherapy. Luckily, I researched part of this topic using my class notes, to my advantage the lecture on June 15, 1995 discussed the differences between counseling and psychotherapy. After reading these notes I realized that I was right on track and there is a difference between counseling and psychotherapy

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