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A Path of Counselor Self-Awareness

Alyson M. Pompeo and Dana Heller Levitt

This article explores self-reflection and self-awareness from an ethical standpoint, proposing that counselors have a responsibility to themselves, their clients, and the profession to engage in these practices. The authors propose a path to counselor self-awareness and a 2nd process that assumes counselor mastery.

Keywords: counselor self-awareness, counselor self-reflection, ethics, counselor development

At the heart of the counselor's developmental process is ongoing professional self-reflection (Griffith & Frieden, 2000; Skovholt & Ronnestad, 1992). Continual self-reflection is an ethical and professional obligation agreed upon and taught by many within the counseling profession (Schmidt & Adkins, 2012). Personal self-reflection can lead to professional reflection (Griffith & Frieden, 2000). Yet there seems to be a lack of clarity about what self-reflection actually is and how to begin the process. According to Von Wright (1992), counselors need to take self-reflection from an abstract idea and turn it into a process of action:

Self-reflection is thus at the root of the notion of voluntary choice. It enables the person to see himself or herself as an actor with different alternatives. One cannot gain a measure of control over one's own thinking while one remains unaware of it. (p. 62)

Self-reflection is also discussed as a conscious choice in which one considers and analyzes one's own actions, including being honest about personal intentions and motives. Self-reflection is likewise defined as a process that includes observation, interpretation, and evaluation (Bennett-Levy et al., 2001). At the center of this focus are one's emotions, thoughts, feelings, and actions. Such self-reflection is consistent with a values focus in counseling. For example, one's personal values are the root of moral and ethical decision making (Gilligan, 1982; Kohlberg, 1969, 1976) and contribute to a clearer sense of one's position on how one manages counseling interactions and outcomes.

Conscious awareness of one's actions, intentions, motives, emotions, thoughts, and feelings is an important goal for any counselor. Some researchers have noted that practicing self-reflection can be especially critical, for both counselor and client progress, when working with certain client patholo-

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gies, such as borderline personality disorder (Diamond, Stovall-McClough, Clarkin, & Levy, 2003; Layden, Newman, Freeman, & Morse, 1993). Many counselors may see their self-reflection as necessary only because of the needs of the client and the state of the therapeutic relationship (La Torre, 2005). Although these are powerful reasons, self-reflection is also necessary for the counselor on a more personal level (Griffith & Frieden, 2000). Because counselors are also participants in the session, powerful emotions may be evoked, which can lead to an opportunity to learn more about oneself and enhance growth (Richards, Campenni, & Muse-Burke, 2010). Likewise, awareness of values contributes to one's stance as a counselor and interactions with clients (Griffith & Frieden, 2000).

The purpose of this article is to propose a path of counselor self-reflection. The premise is that self-reflection is a means to counselors' self-awareness, a critical and ethical component of counselor development (Neufeldt, Karno, & Nelson, 1996). We begin with a brief background on self-awareness as a premise to outlining the proposed path. Counselors not only may be prepared to move toward achieving self-awareness, but also will become conscious of the struggles that can impede the process. The relationship of self-reflection and ethical decision making is explored, both in terms of action and in terms of ethical counselor practice. We note that self-reflection and self-awareness are general constructs in understanding counselor development and mastery. For the purposes of this article, readers are to note the theoretical nature of the proposed model and its application in practice.

Self-Awareness

Self-awareness is an often-used term in counseling and counselor preparation. Ironically, the term is not well defined in the literature. General constructs center on the counselor's capacity for awareness of feelings, thoughts, and behaviors in the immediate experience of the counseling relationship (Oden, Miner-Holden, & Balkin, 2009; Richards et al., 2010; Williams, 2008). Most notable in the counseling context is the counselor's awareness of self as an agent of change (Sullivan, Skovholt, & Jennings, 2005). Self-awareness is construed anywhere from a state of being (Richards et al., 2010) to a process that can take a career to develop (Skovholt & Ronnestad, 1992). Williams (2008) found that novice counselors are more aware of anxiety, self-talk, confusion, and their own behaviors, whereas experienced counselors are more aware of boredom or distraction within a session. Despite the broad definition, there is consensus that self-awareness is important to counselor development and counseling efficacy (Meier & Davis, 2011; Neufeldt et al., 1996; Richards et al., 2010). The limited research that does exist on counselor self-awareness demonstrates beneficial effects on clients. For example, client ratings of counselor helpfulness demonstrate a positive relationship with counselor self-awareness (Williams, 2008).

Although many graduate counseling programs and supervisors may discuss the ideas of self-reflection and self-awareness with their students

and supervisees, there may be a disconnect regarding the theory and what the actual process looks like. Students and beginning counselors may enter the profession having discussed self-awareness and its importance, but the actual process of achieving it may not be introduced until the action is taking place. We propose that having some predisposition and understanding of the actual self-awareness process will act as a guiding principle and comfort to new counseling professionals. Ethically, self-awareness serves as a foundation for thoughtfully rendering decisions and taking actions. Yet awareness can develop over the course of a career, most of it occurring after formal counselor preparation (Skovholt & Ronnestad, 1992). Within training, counselors may be expected to engage in self-reflective activities to become more self-aware (Griffith & Frieden, 2000). The process by which this self-awareness develops has not been explored.

For the purpose of this article, we define *self-reflection* as the counselor’s awareness of feelings, thoughts, reactions, and personal values in the context of the counseling relationship. As in the case of the expectations for clients, we suggest that counselors engage in self-reflection to gain greater insight about themselves and how they are most helpful to their clients. The proposed path outlines this self-reflection process.

The Path of Counselor Self-Awareness

Figure 1 illustrates how self-reflection occurs in the proposed path of counselor self-awareness.

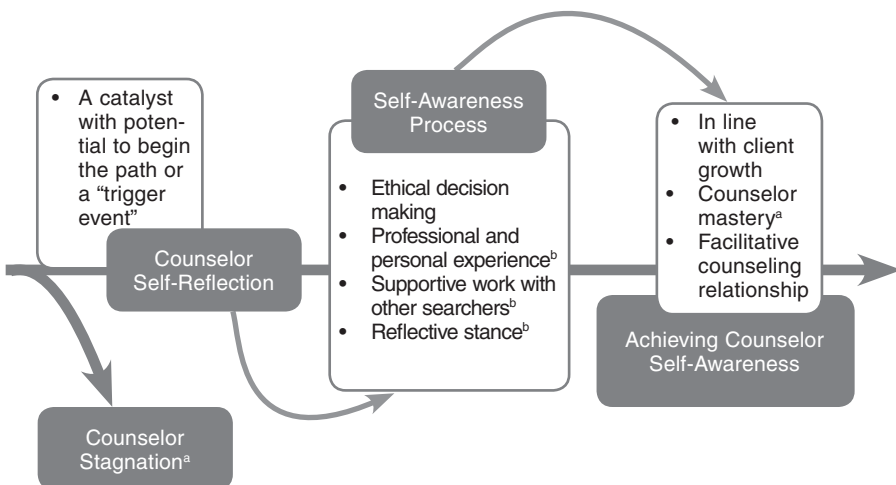


FIGURE 1

Path of Counselor Self-Awareness

^aJennings et al. (2005). ^bSkovholt & Ronnestad (1992).

Phase I: Counselor Self-Reflection and Stagnation

Prior to participating in counselor self-reflection (a necessary beginning process of the counselor self-awareness path), an individual must first be presented with a problem or dilemma. Within the research, this necessary event has been referred to as a “causal condition” (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, p. 11) to spur the self-reflective process. The term “trigger event” was also coined by Holloway (1982) to define events in counseling that provide new information to the practitioner and as a result create a potential opportunity for the self-reflective process to begin. We intentionally choose the term *potential opportunity* at this point, because although these trigger events may occur, they do not guarantee self-reflection. For example, Skovholt and McCarthy (1988) referred to trigger events as holding the potential of turning into a “critical incident” (p. 69). Furthermore, they noted that a critical incident would occur when the trigger event becomes a catalyst for counselor development. Therefore, some events may serve as critical incidents for some individuals but not for others. In fact, the readiness to learn was a major factor in an event’s transition to becoming a critical incident in professional development (Neufeldt et al., 1996). Other factors, or intervening conditions, may either facilitate or impede reflection (Neufeldt et al., 1996). Main intervening conditions that have been identified are personality, cognitive capacities, and the environment. Neufeldt et al. (1996) referred to personality as one’s personal comfort in accepting uncertainty and change. When one begins the self-reflective process, it is recognized that past beliefs may now change or be challenged (Griffith & Frieden, 2000; Neufeldt et al., 1996). Cognitive capacities encompass the ability to think in a creative and reflective way. An environment that is supportive of the reflective process is also important, including the culture of the workplace and supervisory support (Neufeldt et al., 1996).

When intervening conditions that promote reflection are present, and the trigger events are reflected on, they become critical incidents and self-reflection may begin, thus moving the individual toward self-awareness. However, when an individual does not reflect on the event, stagnation may occur. For example, stagnation may occur if the counselor ignores the effects of an event on the counseling relationship, such as during countertransference, or allows the experience to impede objectivity in counseling. Stagnation may also be present when seasoned counselors no longer look for feedback or reflect only on confirmatory feedback (Skovholt & Ronnestad, 1992).

As Neufeldt et al. (1996) noted, “reflectivity enhances awareness of events in therapy and allows a therapist to generate new behavior in response” (p. 8). We propose that the initial trigger event can lead toward self-reflection or stagnation, depending on the choice of the counselor and the readiness for reflection. Furthermore, it is suggested that as the counselor chooses whether to self-reflect to promote professional growth, clients are engaged in a parallel process. Clients also experience challenges to growth (Skovholt

& McCarthy, 1988) and engage in self-reflection to explore them. When encouraging clients to self-reflect for their own growth, counselors should remember the benefits that can come from personal self-reflection. More than personally beneficial, this process may also be viewed as an ethical responsibility to clients and the profession. One research study found that personal counseling for the counselor is significantly related to awareness of the counseling relationship, although not to internal self-awareness (Oden et al., 2009). Thus, it has been described that personal self-reflection on the part of the counselor can assist the client and motivate the counselor through efficacy and positive client feedback.

Phase II: The Self-Awareness Process

The process by which self-awareness unfolds is articulated in the second phase of the proposed path. A review of the research suggests that the path is composed of ethical decision making and professional and personal experience, including a supportive work environment and a reflective counselor position.

Ethical decision making. Reflection has been noted as being central to the developmental process of counseling professionals (Skovholt & Ronnestad, 1992). Ethical decision making is a necessary reflective consideration. The *ACA Code of Ethics* (American Counseling Association, 2005) makes reference to counselor self-awareness in several sections, including those pertaining to the counseling relationship, counselor roles, professional responsibility and competence, relationships with other professionals, and counselor education and supervision. The unique contexts in which ethical dilemmas arise demonstrate that professional ethical codes may not be enough to guide the counselor. When counselors render decisions regarding ethical dilemmas and ethical counseling practice, it is presumed that they act on their personal values and perspectives.

One expects that counselors develop a sense of “responsibleness” (Tennyson & Strom, 1986, p. 298) in which they respond on the basis of what is right and their professional duties. This responsibleness is supplemented with critical reflection about the meaning and implications of one’s actions. Self-reflection is alluded to in ethical decision-making processes discussed in the literature (e.g., Cottone, 2001; Cottone & Claus, 2000; Frame & Williams, 2005; Garcia, Cartwright, Winston, & Borzuchowska, 2003; Remley & Herlihy, 2010). Self-reflection may influence the counselor’s therapeutic direction and outcome. For example, a counselor who is personally challenged by a client’s disclosure of infidelity with an HIV-positive partner may reflect on his or her position regarding relationships. This self-awareness may be the impetus for the counselor to encourage the client to disclose to his or her partner, recommend couples counseling, or ultimately acknowledge the ethical and legal need to report potential harm to a third party. Acknowledgment of the factors contributing to these decisions and actions, including determining “right” action, may be indicative of the counselor’s self-awareness (Tennyson & Strom, 1986).

Experience, environment, and reflective stance. Skovholt and Ronnestad (1992) asserted that the nature of relationships with colleagues, supervisors, partners, and friends provides the framework for self-awareness to occur. Daily encounters can help people to reflect on who they are and who they want to grow to become. Work environment is also an important aspect of self-awareness (Skovholt & Jennings, 2005; Skovholt & Ronnestad, 1992). Yet perhaps not all counselors are fortunate enough to be part of a work environment that encourages time for reflection and growth and maintains an open and searching view. Having a supportive work environment, including available and supportive colleagues, helps foster self-awareness; however, we suggest that this process is not complete without a personal reflective stance. The idea here is that the individual must also value and actively seek opportunities for self-reflection and be open to changing one's original ideas. Therefore, we propose that self-reflection is an ongoing part of development and is necessary for self-awareness.

Counselor self-care may be a relevant process in developing self-awareness and a reflective stance. Richards et al. (2010) discovered that although there is no significant relationship with self-care, self-awareness may be the result of personal well-being. Introductory counseling textbooks (e.g., Corey, Corey, & Callanan, 2011; Gladding, 2012; Meier & Davis, 2011; Remley & Herlihy, 2010) recommend personal counseling and openness to one's own problems and personal biases in counselor development, both early in training and continually through one's career. Because experience and mindfulness can lead to reflection and self-awareness (Richards et al., 2010), personalized self-care strategies are encouraged to help the counselor recognize challenges and work through them to create a sense of presence and helpfulness in the counseling relationship.

Phase III: Achieving Counselor Self-Awareness

Client growth and counseling relationship. The final step of the proposed process is achieving self-awareness. Just as counselors progress to this point, so may clients. As the counselor's process to achieve self-awareness occurs, so may the parallel process of clients' growth. Counselors' experiences of this process may better help them to understand clients' struggles and potential stagnation. This concept is indicative of empathy, a position foundational to counseling practice (Corey et al., 2011; Meier & Davis, 2011). Counselors' awareness of and commitment to empathy may vary depending on their development. Having a better understanding and empathy for the self-awareness process may help build a facilitative counseling relationship. Self-awareness has been shown to facilitate more cultural empathy in counseling (Ridley & Lingle, 1996). Furthermore, counselors engaged in the self-reflective process may be amenable to changing their initial positions and ideas through development of empathy for the client.

Counselor mastery. Mastery does not imply that there is nothing left to learn or develop. Rather, the master counselor is constantly seeking out

new opportunities for personal and professional development (Jennings & Skovholt, 1999). Master counselors are characterized by traits and priorities that include building and maintaining interpersonal attachments and expertise, relational connections, maintenance of ethical standards, autonomy, and humility (Jennings & Skovholt, 1999; Jennings, Goh, Skovholt, Hanson, & Banerjee-Stevens, 2003; Jennings, Sovereign, Bottorff, Mussell, & Vye, 2005). Humility seems particularly salient to the path of counselor self-awareness, because, by definition, it encourages continued professional development and self-reflection (Jennings & Skovholt, 1999). This is in line with the value of professional growth, in which continued learning and feedback opportunities are sought (Remley & Herlihy, 2010). Being open to the complexities and uniqueness of each client is valued, along with the acceptance of ambiguity (Levitt & Jacques, 2005). Self-awareness includes being aware of one's own physical, emotional, and mental health in order to take care of one's self and to best serve the client. Master counselors are aware of their personal and unresolved issues that may negatively affect therapy (Jennings et al., 2005). This may include being aware of countertransference in the session, which has been described as having the potential to negatively affect the counseling relationship (Gelso & Hayes, 2007). Although master therapists are not immune to these issues, it is the constant self-awareness that makes the difference.

Cartwright (2011) noted countertransference as a phenomenon "arising from the client's influence on the psychoanalyst's unconscious feelings, a manifestation of the psychoanalyst's unresolved issues, and a potential impediment to treatment" (p. 115). Although countertransference may prove detrimental to the counseling relationship, there is also potential for it to positively contribute to the process (Gelso & Hayes, 2007). In the Path of Counselor Self-Awareness model, we propose that when countertransference issues arise, it is the counselor's awareness of the countertransference and his or her self-reflection that will support its potential to become a positive aspect of the relationship. Following through the path and achieving self-awareness, the counselor may turn countertransference into a useful therapeutic tool. Self-awareness is thus essential for managing countertransference (Gelso & Hayes, 2007). Furthermore, we propose that unnoticed or ignored countertransference will negatively affect the counseling relationship.

Illustration of the Path of Counselor Self-Awareness

The names and details in the following case study are fictional and intended to provide illustrations of the path of counselor self-awareness based on our composite experiences. Joe is a young male counselor who has been practicing for the past 2 years. Currently, one of his clients, Sue, is a middle-aged woman struggling with substance abuse recovery issues and family relationships. Joe has been feeling frustrated and impatient with Sue in how she is

managing her recovery and making decisions about her family. Physically, Sue resembles Joe's mother, with whom he has had a tenuous relationship through most of his adolescence and young adulthood, yet Joe never sought his own personal counseling for these issues. Prior to each session with Sue, Joe experiences feelings of frustration and annoyance about having to see this client. This can also be described as countertransference, which is negatively affecting the counseling relationship.

Joe's catalyst can be identified as his feelings of "frustration and impatience" with Sue. These negative feelings are causing Joe to dislike his sessions with Sue and are likely to negatively affect the counseling relationship and progress. Upon realizing his feelings, Joe can either self-reflect about the countertransference that he is experiencing or ignore it (see Figure 1). If Joe decides to ignore his feelings, he may instead blame his client, possibly telling himself something such as "She is just a frustrating person and would frustrate anyone." By ignoring his feelings and choosing not to pursue self-reflection, Joe will have entered into counselor stagnation and will be allowing the countertransference to negatively affect the sessions. If Joe does choose to reflect on his feelings, he will begin self-reflection. Joe may think, "I don't like having these feelings, and this can't be good for the counseling relationship or her progress. I need to figure out when I feel this way." At this point, Joe may also decide to refer Sue to another counselor if he and his supervisor feel that, even though Joe has decided to work through his issues, Sue would best benefit from a referral. Here, we see the importance of self-reflection from an ethical standpoint and acting in the client's best interests.

During self-reflection, Joe will begin to look inward and see what personal issues may be contributing to his current problematic feelings. For instance, Joe may begin to consider the possibility that Sue may remind him of his mother, which may be bringing up past unresolved issues for him. He may realize that he is experiencing countertransference, because his own personal feelings and experiences are being evoked through this client. Joe may also decide to enter into his own personal counseling sessions at this point.

Although Joe has started counselor self-reflection, this process can still be challenging, and the reflecting counselor may choose to retreat from the process as it intensifies. Joe might begin to think, "Sure, maybe I have some issues, but I can't deal with exploring this further right now. It's too painful, and I don't have the time." Through this illustration, one can see that Joe may still choose to stop self-reflecting and regress into stagnation.

If Joe continues to move through his self-reflection, he will move into the second phase, the self-awareness process. Joe will use his personal morals and ethics to make decisions and to help guide him through self-awareness. Is he providing the best possible care for Sue? Is he operating within his professional ethical responsibilities? The experiences that Joe has had in his life, both professionally and personally, will act as important

tools. Joe may have chosen to take part in his own personal counseling. This supportive resource, along with the support of his peers, supervisor, work environment, and personal relationships, will be essential. By sharing his struggles in the supervision session and through peer consultation, Joe will have a greater potential to gain new insights and awareness about his relationship with Sue. It is important that Joe's work environment support the time and energy that he needs to invest in the self-awareness process, including providing supervision and consultation. Finally, Joe's personality will play an important role. Joe will need to maintain a reflective stance (Skovholt & Ronnestad, 1992) during this process. Is Joe willing to work toward self-awareness, even if with it may come the need to accept new possibilities and truths about himself? For instance, Joe will need to be willing to accept the possibility that he will discover that he does hold some guilt concerning his relationship with his mother, even though he previously did not believe this to be true.

If all the aforementioned pieces are in place, Joe will achieve counselor self-awareness, the final phase of the proposed path. This achievement will positively affect Joe's professional and personal development and his current and future clients. This process will also have been in line with Sue's growth; as Joe has completed his own self-awareness process, he can better help and understand the process (e.g., empathy) that she has been going through in counseling to achieve her own personal self-awareness. Joe's self-awareness through reflection in this case leads his path toward counselor mastery. This does not imply that Joe is a perfect counselor, but rather that he is more aware of his self-reflection catalysts, is eager to self-reflect, and is in possession of the pieces crucial to achieving self-awareness.

Continual Path of Counselor Self-Awareness

For counselors who have achieved self-awareness in the preceding path, the following continual path of counselor self-awareness is characterized by continued attention to self-reflection and self-awareness combined with new knowledge and perspective.

As can be seen in Figure 2, the beginning point of the continual path assumes that the counselor now possesses the ethical values of a master therapist (Jennings et al., 2005). The master therapist now meets an initial trigger event with eagerness to self-reflect. Stagnation is no longer an option because the trigger event is viewed as an opportunity for continued growth through self-reflection. Master therapists not only identify and reflect on these events but also seek them out and help others to do the same, including their clients and supervisees (Jennings et al., 2005).

Because this trigger event is now met with eagerness, what follows is once again the self-awareness process as discussed in the previous path of counselor self-awareness. The self-awareness process is continual and necessary, regardless of counselor mastery level. The continual path of counselor self-

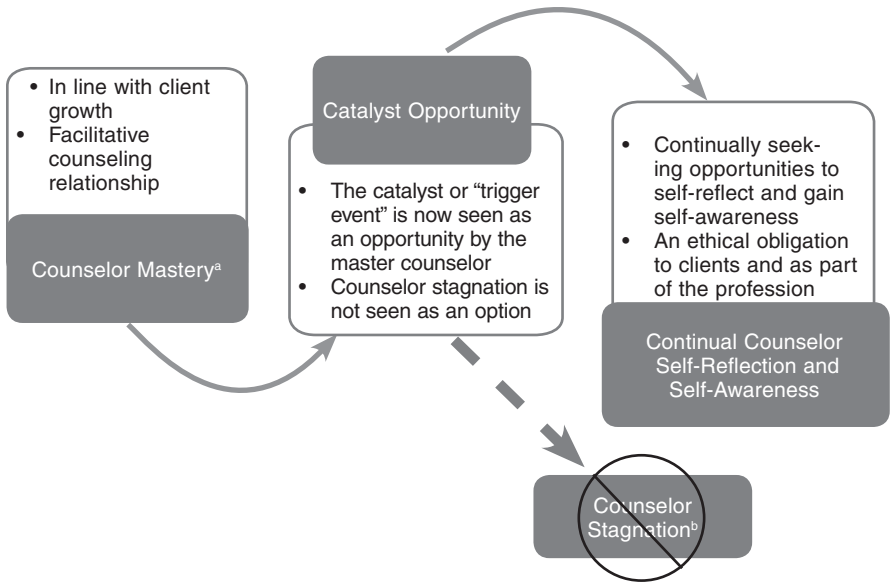


FIGURE 2

Continual Path of Counselor Self-Awareness

^aJennings et al. (2005). ^bSkovholt & Ronnestad (1992).

awareness is ongoing, beginning again with each new event or opportunity and resulting in continual counselor self-reflection and awareness.

Illustration of the Continual Path of Counselor Self-Awareness

As with the first case, the names and details included in this case study are fictional and represent a composite of our experiences. Mary, a seasoned counselor, began working with a new client who presents with parenting issues. Mary is aware that this client reminds her of a client with whom she worked several years ago who had similar presenting concerns. In this new counseling relationship, Mary is aware that the client is presenting similar concerns in a different context. However, she is concerned that she might not be fully present with this new client given her previous experience.

Having completed the path of counselor self-awareness for various catalysts earlier in her career, Mary now begins the continual path of counselor self-awareness. Mary begins this subsequent path with a new outlook and tools gained from her experiences of completing the first path. The major indicator that Mary has begun the continual path is that she instantly recognizes the catalyst and almost instinctively begins to self-reflect. Another hallmark of this advanced path is that counselor stagnation is not an option to Mary: She recognizes and views this challenge as an opportunity for continued

self-awareness. Mary may think, "It is good that I recognized this issue that I may have, and now I need to examine it further."

Mary will go on to progress through the self-awareness process as she has done in the past during the path of counselor self-awareness. As before, this journey will include the critical elements that she has in place, such as supportive peers, her supervisor, her own personal counselor, and a supportive work environment. As a master counselor, Mary recognizes that continued counselor self-awareness is beneficial to her, but, more important, it is an ethical obligation to her clients and the counseling profession.

Implications and Recommendations

The primary benefit of an illustrated path of counselor self-awareness is greater understanding of a process the counseling profession assumes standard in counselor development. Awareness of self equates to awareness of personal values, which enables cogent exploration of best practices in counseling. We reiterate that counselor self-awareness is related to awareness of the counseling relationship (Oden et al., 2009) and that such awareness is additive to client growth and satisfaction. Direct application of the elements of the proposed model depends on counselor readiness to engage in self-reflection processes. This practice requires scaffolding through counselor education, supervision, and personal development practices.

Ethical Awareness and Decision Making

Many counselor preparation programs include self-reflective activities and experiences (Schmidt & Adkins, 2012). Accredited counseling programs are bound by standards to provide opportunities for self-growth (Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs, 2009), and literature has substantially supported implementation of these practices. The foundation for self-awareness in counselor education rests with key elements such as values assessment, virtue ethics, knowledge and awareness synthesis, and attention to cognitive complexity in counselor development.

Values assessment is a presumed component of ethical decision making and self-determined abilities to work with specific presenting issues in counseling. We contend that values assessment is more fundamental to counselor development. Research on moral development assumes that individuals are aware of what is important to them and determinations of right and wrong in rendering decisions on complex topics (e.g., Gilligan, 1982; Kohlberg, 1971, 1976, 1984). In keeping with the premise of self-awareness, we propose that values assessment be included in more foundational aspects of counselor education programs and supervision. For example, beyond a mere discussion of potentially challenging clients, counselor educators can invite

discussions about the thoughts and feelings toward these clients and what this may reveal about the emerging counselor. The intent is one of growth, not denigration for honesty. Such awareness is in keeping with the development of a sense of self and thereby an ability to engage in a self-reflective process toward self-awareness.

Counselor Values

The teaching of ethics is inherently tied to discussions of counselor values. These values are directly related to the concept of virtue ethics. Although these ethics are often addressed in counselor education regarding ethical decision making, the pragmatics of the decision-making process often reign and are second to the principle ethics upon which counselors' ethical guidelines are founded (Kitchener, 1984). Certainly, counselors must wrestle with difficult decisions and make split-second decisions—thus the need for principle ethics. In the greater perspective of counselor self-awareness, it seems that attention to virtue ethics in other aspects of counselor education and supervision may be meaningful. For example, in early course work and lab-based practice, students may be exposed to self-reflective activities that beg the question, "What is important to you, and how does that influence your approach to working with this client?"

This attention to personal variables in counseling is directly related to the need for synthesis of knowledge and awareness. We do not presume that knowledge of counseling techniques, theories, practices, policies, and professional responsibilities should take a back seat to self-exploration and self-awareness. Rather, we propose acknowledgment of both aspects and opportunities for mutual reflection of the two. For example, many programs use case-based learning for challenging material. An addition to these discussions may be initial reactions to cases and how such awareness contributes to decision making and counseling approaches. Later, in professional supervised practice, supervisors can model self-reflection through discussion of challenging aspects of cases while also nurturing the reality that stagnation may occur. In such cases, encouraging continued self-reflection through counseling (Oden et al., 2009) may likewise nurture the natural process that occurs in the proposed path.

Granello's (2000, 2002, 2010; Choate & Granello, 2006) work on cognitive complexity is important in exploring the role of self-awareness. Granello and Hazler (1998) proposed programmatic course sequencing that follows students' development within Perry's (1970) cognitive development model. Early course work may indeed introduce the importance of self-reflection and self-awareness, yet should do so with awareness on the faculty's and supervisors' parts that students may be limited in their application of this awareness to course material. Counselor educators and supervisors can introduce self-reflective processes as a means of setting the tone for the expectation that students will engage in processes throughout their

training that will engage their abilities to apply personal perspectives to professional practices.

In addition to students and new professionals, seasoned counselors can also benefit by relating their own work to achieve self-awareness to the path in order to better teach and supervise their students and supervisees. A better understanding of the path of self-awareness that their counseling students are experiencing may greatly aid the training process, for both student and teacher. Also, through the continual path of counselor self-awareness, seasoned counselors can better understand and expect that, regardless of time and experience, self-awareness is a continual process. Finally, we hope that the skill to achieve self-awareness can improve with practice in the proposed process.

Conclusion

Self-awareness within the practice of counseling may best be emphasized through the very nature of the self-reflective process. Specifically, we advocate that counselors themselves endorse the proposed self-awareness path and nurture the realities that exist at each stage. Stagnation may be denied as a possibility, particularly by the early-career counselor who strives for integrity and mastery. In reality, we hope to encourage counselors at all levels of practice to recognize that stagnation is a part of their work in this profession. Acknowledging that stagnation may happen reflects counselor humility and openness to continued counselor growth. Counselors can remain aware of personal challenges and best maintain focus on clients' development through adherence to a regimen of self-reflective practices toward self-awareness as outlined in the proposed path.

The path is conceptual and based on our personal self-reflective processes, clinical practice, and preparation and supervision of counselors. Empirical research is warranted to further develop the path and to validate the proposed process. Regardless of this validation, the widespread agreement and belief in counselor self-awareness permeates the profession. A means of understanding, supporting, and engaging in self-reflective practices is critical to the development of self-awareness and the ethical, professional, and effective provision of services.

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