

“Family Counseling Approach Research Paper”

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Abstract

According to Clinton & Ohlschlager, (2002), “Integrationist Gary Collins, defines the Christian counselor as “a deeply committed, Spirit-guided (and Spirit-filled) servant of Jesus Christ who applies his or her God-given abilities, skills, training, knowledge, and insight to the task of helping others move to personal wholeness, interpersonal competence, mental stability and spiritual maturity” (p. 44). According to Gladding (2004), “the American Counseling Association (ACA), states, “the practice of professional counseling is the application of mental health, psychological or human development principles, through cognitive, affective, behavioral or systemic interventions, strategies that address wellness, personal growth, or career development, as well as pathology” (p. 6). Both the Christian counselor and his/her professional secular counterpart are competent and utilize evidence based therapeutic interventions. The Christian counselor, however, comes from a Biblical world-view, which is incorporated into their Theoretical Orientation and is the foundation of their overall counseling practice. Although integration can be a challenge, it can be done, as stated by Clinton & Ohlschlager, (2002), “biblical theology and psychosocial sciences can be integrated into a workable model” (p. 42). Cognitive-behavioral therapy can offer an opportunity to integrate some of its interventions along with some of the techniques used in Christian counseling.

Introduction

Christian counseling and psychotherapeutic interventions can be synthesized and integrated to give professional and quality care to clients. According to Clinton & Ohlschlager, (2002), “Christian counseling must be a biblical-clinical process that facilitates case-wise client sanctification, built on the sure foundations of Holy Scripture, dependent on the inspired leading of the Holy Spirit” (p. 51). Meier, Minirth, Wichem & Ratliff (1991), states, “...a common viewpoint and approach is to integrate Christianity with Psychology as co-equals” (p. 29). However, I prefer to maintain all Christian principles as both paramount and compulsory to ensure that a biblical worldview is maintained. The following paper is a brief on Cognitive-behavioral therapy and the integration of this theory with the Christian principle of Renewing the Mind.

Cognitive Behavioral Theory

According to Freedman, Kaplan, Sadock (1976), “the origins of Behavioral Therapy or Behavioral Modification can be traced back to the animal learning laboratories of Bekhterev and Pavlov in the Soviet Union and Thorndike in the United States” (p. 895). Further, Goldenberg & Goldenberg (2004), states that “behavioral models go back to the early 1960s and cognitive therapies emerged in the 1980s” (p. 288). Furthermore, Goldenberg & Goldenberg (2004) credits, “Stuart, Patterson and Liberman as pioneering behaviorists, while attributing Ellis & Beck as pioneering cognitive therapists” (p. 290). According to Goldenberg & Goldenberg (2004), “by the late 1970s some behaviorists, less determined to keep mental activities out of the

equation than in the past, began to acknowledge that cognitive factors (attitudes, thoughts, beliefs, attributes, expectations) also influence behavior, and they sometimes introduced an auxiliary cognitive component to supplement the main behavioral treatment. Increasingly, since that breakthrough (cognitive connection that influences behaviors) mental health theorists, researchers and practitioners have come to recognize cognitive-behavioral therapy as a major part of mainstream psychotherapy” (p. 290). According to Patterson (1998), “cognitive-behavioral treatments focus on changing how people think and behave. An underlying assumption is that if a person changes thinking or behavior, physiology and emotions will change, too” (p. 184). Moreover, according to Worthington (2005), “the cognitive paradigm consists of two parts, the general and the specific. In general, get across two truths: 1) it is cognition that causes maladaptive behavior and feelings, not external events or people and 2) changing cognition will change behavior and feelings” (p. 196). Thus, cognitive-behavioral therapy is based on the premise that our thoughts cause our feelings and behaviors, not external things, like people, situations, and events. The benefit of this fact is that we can change the way we think, thus feel and act better, even if the situation does not change. Cognitive-behavioral therapy uses a set of therapeutic procedures, derived from behavior therapy, that attempts to change behavior by modifying or altering faulty thought patterns or destructive self-verbalizations. As a result, cognitive-behavioral therapy stems from some of the behavioral-therapists that began to acknowledge that cognitive factors such as attitudes, thoughts, beliefs, attributions and expectations also influence behaviors.

Although many professional camps are split between the belief that either thoughts come before feelings, or, either that feelings come before thoughts, I prefer to approach the former...that thoughts come before feelings. According to Bonstingl (1991), “the Experience Pattern has five steps and the order of precedence is as follows...Perception, Conceptualization, Thoughts, Action and Reaction” (p. 8). Furthermore, Meier, Minirth, Wichem & Ratliff (1991) states, “thinking has been defined as the ability to manipulate and organize elements in the environment by means of symbols instead of physical acts” (p. 133). Thus, thinking comes before the physical action. Additionally, Freedman, Kaplan & Sadock (1976), underscores the order of thoughts before feeling by stating, “cognition is a mental process of knowing & becoming aware” (p. 1289). One of the few criticisms of cognitive-behavioral therapy is addressed by Patterson (1998), which states, “A major criticism of cognitive-behavioral therapy is that it ignores emotion, a central quality of any marriage” (p. 161).

Cognitive Behavioral Theory Interventions

Many therapies, particular cognitive-behavioral ones, include skills training as a therapeutic solution (Beck & Emery, 1985). Moreover, according to Goldenberg & Goldenberg (2004), “all family therapy models provide an opportunity for change based upon client perceptions of new choices. Differences arise between models in how they go about achieving this goal...cognitive-behavioral does this by building skills...” (p. 463). Additionally, cognitive-behavioral therapies have various exercises that can be used as interventions.

For example, an excellent cognitive-behavioral exercise is The Ripple Effect, taken from Von Bertalanffy's Natural Systems Theory (Lynn Meade, The Communications Website). The Ripple Effect, which emphasizes the "interconnectedness of parts", is a system where one part can have significant impact on the whole. Goldenberg & Goldenberg (2004) credits Von Bertalanffy with General Systems Theory, which in part states, "...the study of the relationship of interactional parts..."(p. 508). Simply stated, when one part is affected, a chain reaction often spreads across an entire system. Hence, the client would learn that thoughts, affects feelings and affects behaviors. Further, the client, slowly but methodically would understand the differences between thoughts, feelings and behaviors. Furthermore, the client would also begin to understand the sequence in which the three (thoughts, feelings, behaviors) triggers each other.

Cognitive-behavioral therapies may be used to assist clients overcome suffering. For example, cognitive-behavioral therapies teach people to identify negative thoughts about pain: recognize connections between thoughts, feelings and pain: substitute adaptive thoughts for negative ones; and use various coping strategies (such as distraction, relabeling of sensations and imagery) to alleviate suffering (Turner & Chapman, 1982)

Cognitive-behavioral therapies may be used to help clients suffering from the pain of depression. Cognitive-behavioral theories propose that depression results from particular habits of thinking and interpreting events (Beck et al., 1979). Martin Seligman's (1975), Theory of Learned Helplessness held that people become depressed

when their efforts to control the environment fail. Additionally, many studies showed that with repeated failures in avoiding pain or danger, animals become physically exhausted and emotionally drained. The consequences of this exhaustion are dramatic. The animal stops struggling for survival. It may become sick, even developing a cancerous tumor (Visintainer, Volpicelli & Seligman, 1982). Finally, according to Haby, Donnelly, Corry, & Vos (2005), “cognitive behavioral therapy is an effective treatment for depression, panic disorder, and generalized anxiety disorder...” (Evidenced Based Mental Health Online, Review).

Cognitive-behavioral therapies may be used as an intervention, such as cognitive restructuring, which Goldenberg & Goldenberg (2004), states as “an intervention procedure whereby the therapist attempts to modify client thoughts, perceptions and attribution about an event” (p. 506). Cognitive Restructuring helps the client modify their perceptions and allow for healthy self-statements and cognitive affective techniques, such as thought stopping. According to the online Self-Help Book, Mental Help Net, “the thought stopping technique is as simple as can be. It is nothing more and nothing less than the suggestion that when people become aware that they are engaged in a thought habit chain that will lead them towards a likely bad outcome that they do something to interrupt the progression of that chain. However, there are a few problems with thought stopping. A first problem is that people can't use thought stopping until they have become enough aware of their automatic thoughts that they can identify them while they are happening. Thus, thought stopping must be preceded by self-monitoring if

it is to be an effective tool. A second problem is that thought stopping doesn't help people to know what to do once they have succeeded in interrupting their automatic thought chain. It isn't enough to simply interrupt a thought chain. Without some other behavior or thought to replace it with once interruption has occurred, it is highly likely that you will go back to thinking your automatic thoughts in short order. Therefore, it is a good idea to borrow an idea from relapse prevention and create a list of safe alternative behaviors you can engage in once you have successfully interrupted the chain's progression” (MentalHelp.net, Psychological Self Tools). The goals of these interventions are to restructure one's thoughts, perceptions and beliefs while facilitating behavioral and emotional change, but as we can, they are futile without the power of the Holy Spirit and a changed life through salvation in Christ. Finally, cognitive-behavioral therapy claims to help client overcome the effects of poor relationship choices that cause irrational thinking. For example, when a client is keeping unhealthy company and harmful associations are a factor in the client's aberrant decision making, it can be defined as Differentiation Association. Kornblum (1997), defines this as “a theory that explains deviance as a learned behavior determined by the extent of a person's association with individuals who engage in such behavior” (p. 62, glossary).

Integrating with a Biblical Worldview

According to Meier, Minirth, Wichem & Ratliff (1991), and for purposes of simplicity, there are three basic views to consider...“1) Christianity against psychology or 1st position, 2) psychology against Christian or 2nd position and 3) the Christianity and

psychology viewpoint” (p. 27-28). When integrating Christianity and psychology, we must be dogmatic that the scriptures will not be subjugated to secular theories. As stated, “casting down imaginations and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ” (II Corinthians 10:5 King James Version). Furthermore, “beware lest any man spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit, after the tradition of men, after the rudiments of the world, and not after Christ” (Colossians 2:8, King James Version). In addition to ensuring that the scriptures are paramount, we must guarantee that we integrate from a biblical worldview. Entwistle (2004), states that “everyone has a worldview – a window through which he or she views the world, assumptions and beliefs that color what he or she sees. The term worldview came into the English language as a translation of the German *Weltanschauung* which might loosely be translated as a life perspective or a confessional vision” (p. 67). Furthermore, Entwistle (2004), states, “worldviews shape how we understand our experience in the world, and reflect our expectations about life” and “a worldview, then, provides a model of the world which guides its adherents in the world (p. 67). An unbeliever sees the world through the lens of secular humanism, in the light of how man sees it...while...a believer sees the world through the lens of scripture, in the light of how God’s sees it. Moreover, secular psychology is based on theories that promote change via the use of self...while...Christianity is based on the truth of God’s word that will promote change through the power of the Holy Spirit via the absence of self. Thus, it behooves us as Christian counselors to integrate from a scriptural basis and a biblical worldview.

Integrating Cognitive Behavioral Therapy

When integrating, cognitive-behavioral therapy can be somewhat synthesized rather smoothly. Cognitive-behavioral therapy is an integrated method that combines the reversal of self-defeating thinking with efforts to modify behavior with the end goals of altering the way people act and altering the way people think. It seeks to make people aware of their irrational negative thinking, to replace it with new ways of thinking, and to practice the more positive approach in everyday settings. As a result of the aforementioned statements, Cognitive-behavioral therapy can be integrated with the Christian principle of Renewing the Mind. Indeed, Clinton & Ohlschlager, (2002), states that “cognitive-behavioral therapy, especially in its Christian form, where the renewing of the mind involves renouncing the lies, we believe in embracing and living our biblical truth” (p. 262). McGee (1990), incorporates “a model adapted from psychologist Albert Ellis’s Rational Emotive Therapy” (p. 140). Ellis’s theory states, when “Situations” occur, our “Belief” system is stimulated, which influences our “Thoughts”, which trigger our “Emotions”, which determine our “Actions”.

Christians are admonished to renew their minds according to the word of God, as stated in scripture, “and be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God” (Romans 12:2, King James Version). When the Christian renews their mind, a similar concept to Ellis is applied. The Christian utilizes the 4-R process...Recognize, Reject, Replace and Rejoice. First, the Christian must Recognize the evil thought (by the power of the Holy Spirit measuring all truth by the word of God).

Scripture authenticates this by stating, “for the word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any two edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart” Hebrews 4:12, King James Version) and “but strong meat belongeth to them that are of full age, even those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil” (Hebrews 5:14, King James Version). Second, the Christian must Reject the evil thought (by the power of the Holy Spirit). Again, scriptures underscore this principle by stating, “brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended: but this one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus” (Philippians 3:13-14, King James Version) and “for the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strong holds, casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ” (II Corinthians 10:4-5 King James Version). Third, the Christian must Replace the evil thought (with the Word of God). Scripture confirms this point by stating, “finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever are of good report; if there be any virtue and if there be any praise, think on these things” (Philippians 4:8, King James Version). Fourth, the Christian must Rejoice in thought victory. Scripture again, supports this premise by stating, “rejoice evermore” (I Thessalonians 5:16, King James Version) and “but thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory

through our Lord Jesus Christ” (I Corinthians 15:57, King James Version). Similarly, McGee (1990), also confirmed the first step, “identifying our false belief is the first step on our path toward new freedom in Jesus Christ” (p. 145).

As we can see, there can be an integration with Christian principles combined with psychological interventions, however, the methodology is different. The Christian counselor depends on the power of the Holy Spirit and uses the word of God as a basis for truth and to agree with the will of God, while the secular counselor may depend on intellect and the resiliency of the client. The Christian counselor would say, “I can do all things through Christ which strengthens me” (Philippians 4:13, King James Version), while the secular counselor would suggest achieving self-actualization (the total fulfilling and achievement of the self). The Christian counselor would say, “...without me (Jesus Christ), you can do nothing...” (John 15:5, King James Version), while the secular counselor would suggest to seek self-awareness, which Gladding (2004), states as “a knowledge of self, including attitudes, values and feelings and the ability to recognize how and what factors affect oneself” (p. 36). The Christian counselor would say “O how love I thy law! it is my meditation all the day” (Psalms 119:97, King James Version) and “My hands also will I lift up unto thy commandments, which I have loved; and I will meditate in thy statutes” (Psalm 119:48, King James Version), while the secular counselor may suggest that the client meditate on something ascetic.

Conclusion

Cognitive-behavioral therapy is a theory that claims that thoughts influence feelings which influence actions. Moreover, cognitive-behavioral therapy states that client change can be facilitated changing the thoughts of the client, which will affect change in the clients' feelings, which will affect change in the client's actions. When integrating Christian counseling principles with psychological interventions, cognitive-behavioral therapy would seem to synthesize well with Christian counseling. The important concern is that a biblical worldview must be maintained and Christian principles paramount. Without the power of the Holy Spirit and salvation in Christ, cognitive-behavioral therapies will only facilitate change in a person within the realm of their human potential, which will still come short of peace, joy and rest in the Lord.

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