
When the Values of Clients and Counsellors Clash: Some Conceptual and Ethical Propositions

Dan L. Mitchell

University of British Columbia

Abstract

This article addresses those difficult situations in counselling that are characterized by a fundamental clash in values between client and counsellor. A conceptual framework is offered for understanding the bases of fundamental value clashes, counsellor bias, counsellor integrity, and respect for clients. A model for ethical counselling concerning fundamental value clashes is presented. Of primary importance in the model are counsellor self-scrutiny and obtaining clients' informed consent regarding the values employed by the agency and/or the counsellor.

Résumé

Cet article adresse ces situations difficiles en counseling qui se caractérisent par une incompatibilité fondamentale entre les valeurs du client et celles du conseiller. Un cadre de référence conceptuel est offert pour saisir les bases des valeurs fondamentales incompatibles, les préjugés du conseiller, l'intégrité du conseiller et le respect pour les clients. Par la suite, un modèle d'éthique en counseling concernant les valeurs fondamentales incompatibles est présenté. Les grands points importants dans le modèle sont un examen par le conseiller sur lui-même et l'obtention d'un consentement informé par les clients en ce qui concerne les valeurs employées par l'agence et/ou le conseiller.

This article addresses those difficult situations in counselling that are characterized by a fundamental clash of values between the client and counsellor. The Guidelines for Ethical Behaviour of the Canadian Guidance and Counselling Association (CGCA Guidelines, 1989) state that "members' PRIMARY OBLIGATION is to respect the integrity and promote the welfare of counselees" (section B, number 1). In most client-counsellor interactions, the empathic posture of non-judgmental acceptance (Egan, 1986) and working within the client's value structure adequately fulfills this mandate. However, there are times when value clashes are so fundamental that counsellors have great difficulty in attempting to integrate the opinions and wishes of clients (Pederson, Holwill & Shapiro, 1978). For instance, Thompson (1990) discloses how, over the years, several of his male clients have sought help to become successful seducers of women. Thompson rightly concludes that "this is not a proper interest for a therapist" (p. 56).

In light of such dilemmas, this article affirms that individuals (client and counsellor alike) have the right to choose their own values and insists that professional clinicians minimize personal bias and maximize respect for clients. Practical application of these concepts is also discussed.

World Views

Since values are clearly integral components of one's world view, the notion of world view is central to understanding fundamental value clashes. World views, as defined here, are the unique ways in which individuals perceive and construe the world. Our world views function to help us filter incoming perceptual data (Hollon & Kriss, 1984), interpret, understand, explain, develop expectations (Hamilton, 1983), and make sense of what we experience. World views include metaphysical, epistemological, and axiological assumptions that are organized according to the information stored in our minds.

Ibrahim (1985) and Smith (1985) frequently refer to the concept of world views. Other authors have chosen different descriptors that capture similar meanings. These include belief systems (Cayleff, 1986), construction systems (Kelly, 1955), reference points, views of reality (Friesen, 1985), frames of reference (Egan, 1986), cognitive structures, schemata (Hollon & Kriss, 1984), and personal theories (Cochran, 1987).

World views are organized structures of constructs (Hollon & Kriss, 1984; Kelly, 1955). In addition, world views define their own values by the presence or absence of information and by inferences and deductions drawn from that information. World views "help determine which information will be attended to and which ignored, how much importance to attach to stimuli, and how to structure information" (Hollon & Kriss, p. 37).

Pluralistic World Views

Ibrahim and Arredondo (1986) urge counsellors to adopt a culturally pluralistic attitude. The present article suggests that counsellors go a step further and develop a pluralistic world view. A pluralistic world view assumes that no universally agreed upon world view exists or will ever exist (Kelly, 1955) because the criteria by which world views are judged can never be value-neutral (Lee, 1983). Consequently, fundamental value clashes between counsellors and clients are inevitable eventualities.

Value clashes are fundamental when two or more individuals reach different conclusions regarding the facts, logic, and/or the organizational structure of information in their world views. Fundamental value clashes are common around contentious social issues such as abortion, racism, sexual orientation, open marriage, gender inequality, and so on.

A pluralistic world view, applied to fundamental value clashes between clients and counsellors, means that counsellors need to minimize personal bias, maximize the congruence between their values and their behaviour, and strive to respect their clients' world views. Beneficent treatment of clients (Cayleff, 1986) is of utmost concern. "Beneficent treatment ensures that the patient is not harmed through disregard for

his or her belief system and does, in fact, benefit from the counsellor-client relationship" (Cayleff, p. 346).

In order for counsellors to minimize personal bias and maximize congruence between values and behaviour, it is imperative that they recognize the distinction between bias and values. *Bias*, as defined by Woolsey (1988), has three hallmarks: ignorance of or resistance to evidence, or lack of effort in seeking it; distortion of existing evidence; and rigidity, or unwillingness to change one's views in the face of new information. *Values*, on the other hand, are individuals' "standards, beliefs, or conceptions of the desirable" (Rokeach & Regan, 1980, p. 577). Values cannot be objectively challenged because individuals choose them subjectively. However, bias in one's world view is open to public scrutiny. Questions such as whether a world view exhibits sufficient evidence to support the "facts," whether the logic is valid, and whether the individual is actively seeking disconfirming evidence, are open to public debate.

A clear example of confusion between bias and values is found in Morin (1977) and Morin and Charles (1983). These authors define heterosexual bias as "a belief system that *values* [italics added] heterosexuality as superior to and/or more 'natural' than homosexuality" (Morin & Charles, p. 309). According to this definition, it would appear that counsellors are biased if they value heterosexuality more than homosexuality. More recently, heterosexual bias (synonymously heterosexist bias) has been clarified as "conceptualizing human experience in strictly heterosexual terms and consequently ignoring, invalidating, or derogating homosexual behaviours and sexual orientation, and lesbian, gay male, and bisexual relationships and lifestyles" (Herek, Kimmel, Amaro & Melton, 1991, p. 957). This definition allows for an appropriate distinction between values and bias. In fact, it is not inconsistent with the definition to say that counsellors may value heterosexuality and not be heterosexually biased. A pluralistic world view insists that everyone has the right to choose their values, and that value clashes are inevitable, even among minimally biased world views.

It should be evident that efforts to minimize bias are prerequisite to maximizing counsellor integrity. It should also be clear that the behavioural expression of integrity will be as unique as the values held by the individual counsellor. Thus, if greater priority is placed on integrity than on minimizing bias, bias is sure to result. Bias is disrespectful towards clients and precludes beneficent treatment (Cayleff, 1986).

Maximizing respect for clients in the face of fundamental value clashes requires a firm belief in the innate dignity and worth of persons, and in the right of individuals to freedom of thought and choice. The CGCA Guidelines (1989) demand that "members guard the . . . personal dignity of the client" (section A, number 10). Clinicians are also responsible for respecting the worth of clients unconditionally as stated in the Canadian

Psychological Association's (CPA's) code of ethics: "All persons have a right to have their innate worth as human beings appreciated . . ." (p. 1). Any effort to grapple with client-counsellor value clashes must have as a basis the innate dignity and worth of clients.

The CGCA states that, regarding clients' rights to freedom of thought and choice, "The counsellee should be INFORMED OF COUNSELLING CONDITIONS at or before the time the counsellee enters such a relationship" (CGCA Guidelines, 1989, section B, number 5). The CGCA Guidelines also require that "members guard the individual rights . . . of the client" (section A, number 10). "Rights to privacy, self-determination, and autonomy" (CPA code of ethics, p. 1) are notably important. Also relevant to the present topic is the right of clients to construct their own world views (Kelly, 1955) and consequently to define their own values.

MODEL FOR ETHICAL COUNSELLING CONCERNING FUNDAMENTAL VALUE CLASHES

The model for ethical counselling concerning fundamental value clashes (see Figure 1) applies a pluralistic world view to the counselling setting. It is mindful of the CGCA Guidelines' (1989) assertion that "members have a RESPONSIBILITY both to the individual who is served and to the institution in which the service is performed" (section A, number 2).

The three goals of the model are to maximize respect for clients, to minimize counsellor bias, and to facilitate counsellor integrity. Agency decisions play a role in the model. As well, counsellor self-scrutiny and obtaining clients' informed consent are essential to reaching these goals.

Agency Responsibilities

The model asserts that it is the responsibility of the governing bodies of individual agencies to decide whether to explicitly publicize the world view(s) employed by the counsellors in the agency. This is an important decision because, if counsellors' world views are not made explicit at the outset, clients will probably assume that the agency is pluralistic and that the counsellors' values will not clash with their own. If the world view is made explicit, informed consent—regarding the world view (and values) that will guide the counselling process—is obtained as early as possible.

World views can be made explicit in the title of the agency (e.g., Gay Affirmative Counselling Centre), in advertising, in the initial telephone contact, and in any intake forms the client is asked to fill out. When agencies make their world views explicit, most fundamental value clashes will be avoided because clients are likely to seek help from agencies whose world view/values are congruent with their own.

Agency Responsibilities

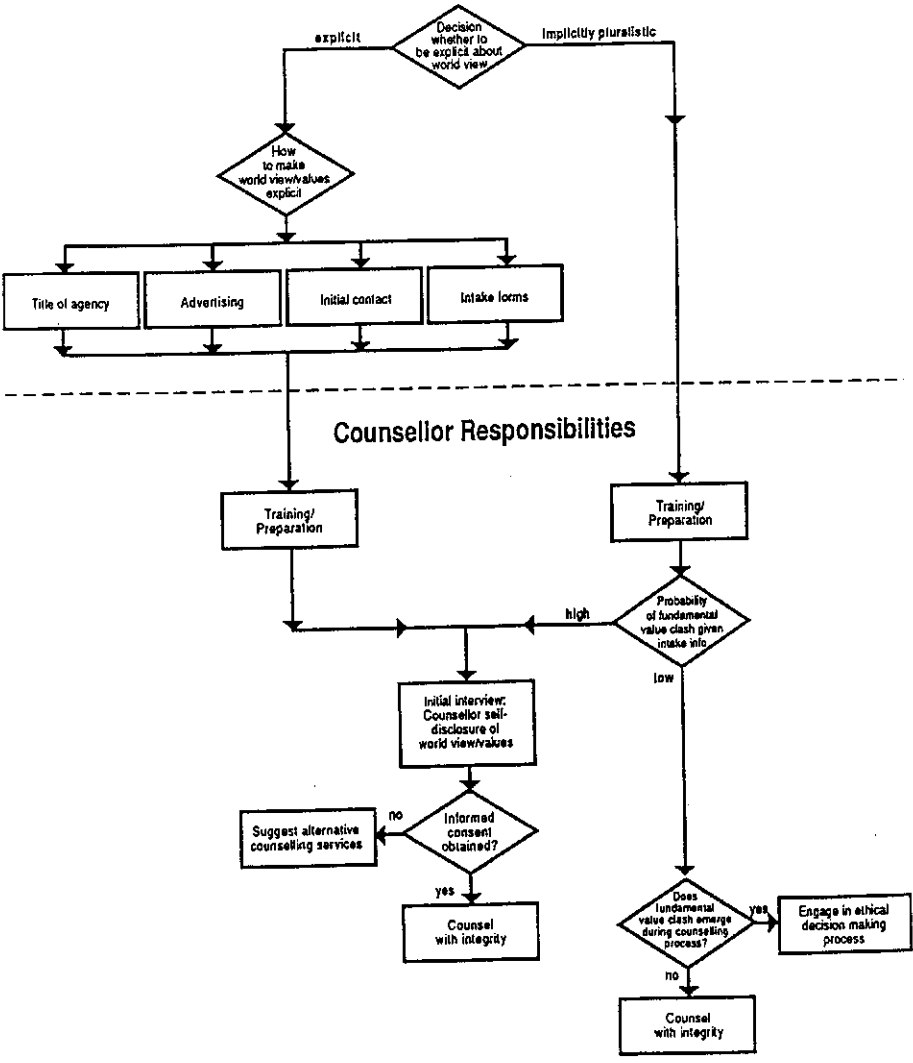


FIGURE 1

Model for ethical counselling concerning fundamental value clashes.

Counsellor Responsibilities

The bottom section of Figure 1 shows how counsellors can avert or cope with fundamental value clashes. The figure first identifies appropriate training and preparation. Then, depending on the counsellor's work context, several decision points are identified and appropriate courses of action mapped out.

Counsellors must address their most important responsibilities before clients are seen: appropriate training and preparation involving ongoing self-scrutiny to minimize bias.

Training

The literature often cites the training model suggested by Pederson et al. (1978). They suggest an experiential exercise involving triads. In a simulated role play, a counsellor and a client are defined as culturally different. A third trainee plays the role of the problem or the "anticounsellor." As the counsellor and the anticounsellor both try to form a coalition with the client, many undetected cultural differences and biases are made explicit.

Also seeking to minimize counsellor biases, Carney and Kahn (1984) offer a comprehensive five stage model for trainee development in cross-cultural awareness and competency. For each stage, the authors propose an appropriate learning environment including suggestions for skill development, experiential exercises, modelling, self-reflection, and the role of the trainer.

Ongoing self-scrutiny

Because world views are, by nature, self-validating and resistant to change (Kelly, 1955; Hollon & Kriss, 1984), counsellor self-scrutiny is imperative. Some ethical codes address self-scrutiny specifically. For instance, the CPA code states that clinicians should "continually re-evaluate how their own backgrounds, values, social context, and individual differences influence their interactions with others" (principle #2, ethical standard #9). It is important that counsellor world views be well articulated, continually reviewed, thoroughly tested, and willingly modified to minimize bias and to clarify the boundaries of one's "zone of toleration" regarding value differences. This process has been recommended by many authors (e.g., Downing, 1982; Egan, 1986; Glaser & Kirschenbaum, 1980; Ibrahim & Arredondo, 1986; Margolis & Rungta, 1986).

Such self-scrutiny also implies that counsellors should keep up-to-date regarding the literature that is relevant to their world views and values. Counsellors should also be aware of the diversity of world views that exist, particularly regarding contentious social issues that are likely to arise in

their professional lives. Ideally, one's attitude, upon seriously testing one's world view and values, will allow for changes as necessary.

The initial interview

Three scenarios for the initial interview are possible. In the first two, clients need to be informed of a counsellor's world views and values, and how these will affect the counselling process. In the third scenario, counsellor self-disclosure is not immediately necessary.

The first scenario applies to agencies that have been disclosing the world view employed by the counsellor(s) from the outset. In this case, counsellors should self-disclose their world view and how their values are likely to influence the counselling process. This completes the informed consent process.

The second scenario applies to counsellors in agencies that have not made their world view explicit from the outset. In this case, counsellors should disclose their world view and values if the available intake information suggests that a client may be dealing with issues about which the counsellor has strong value-based feelings. Occasionally it may be necessary for counsellors to explore potential value clashes during the initial interview to make a more informed decision.

In either of the two scenarios above, if clients decide that they are not comfortable with the counsellor's world view, or if they seem apt to acquiesce to the counsellor's values, they should be informed of other counselling services that are available locally (see CPA code of ethics, principle #2, ethical standard #17). On the other hand, if clients consent to receive counselling within the world view that has been made explicit, counsellors are free to act with integrity (i.e., to allow their values to directly influence the counselling process) albeit with constant tentativeness.

The third scenario also applies to agencies that have not made their world view explicit from the outset. Based on the intake information, if the client's needs do not seem to be related to the issues about which the counsellor has strong value-based feelings, counselling may proceed without receiving consent beyond what is normally obtained when counselling commences. As a cautionary note, it is always wise to assume that each client is culturally different (Downing, 1982) in order to facilitate openness and sensitivity toward clients.

If, in an agency that has not made its world view explicit, a fundamental clash of values should arise unexpectedly, counsellors are faced with an ethical dilemma involving several options. One obvious option is counsellor self-disclosure. The benefits and risks of this and any other option must be weighed. Some benefits of self-disclosure could include maintaining genuineness with the client, and—recognizing that value free counselling is impossible (Bergin, 1980; Beutler & Bergan, 1991; Lakin,

1991; Lee, 1983)—obtaining the client's informed consent to continue. Possible risks include harming the client-counsellor relationship, and client acquiescence to the counsellor's values. Consultation is also in order, preferably with a colleague whose values resemble the client's more than the counsellor's. Obviously, engaging in the ethical decision-making process as described in the CGCA Guidelines (1989) is essential. Because each case manifests its own nuances, a universal solution is not possible.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

A pluralistic world view has been offered as a conceptual framework from which fundamental value clashes can be understood. Within this framework, respect for clients, counsellor integrity, and the distinction between bias and values have been explicated.

The model for ethical counselling concerning fundamental value clashes aims at minimizing counsellor bias and maximizing counsellor integrity in order to ultimately maximize respect for clients. The model primarily addresses itself to the prevention of fundamental value clashes through appropriate counsellor training and continual self-scrutiny. Maximal respect for client self-determination and autonomy is achieved by providing information to the client about the world view/values to be employed before counselling begins, where applicable. In this way clients are enabled to make informed decisions about the treatment they receive.

A future extension of a pluralistic world view that may be worth exploring is its application to other professional activities, such as conducting research, writing, and presenting oral discourses apropos contentious social issues.

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About the Author

Dan L. Mitchell completed both his bachelor's degree in psychology and his master's degree in counselling psychology at the University of British Columbia. He is currently employed as a psychotherapist for the Province of British Columbia, Alcohol and Drug Programs.

Address correspondence to: Dan L. Mitchell, 2864 Munday Place, North Vancouver, B.C. V7N 4L1.