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## THE COUNSELLOR AND HIS ASEXUAL CLIENT

**ABSTRACT:** In terms of human sexuality, counsellors are trained to function as if living in a Victorian society. This is achieved by simply pretending that sex does not exist. The counsellor has a role to perform in assisting his clients to come to grips with their own sexuality. The counsellor's competence in this area is questioned. Competence involves training the counsellor in the area of human sexuality.

In their effort to define counselling, Brammer and Shostrom (1968, pp. 5-6) observe that, historically, counselling has been characterized by such terms as: educational, supportive, situational, problem-solving, consciousness awareness, and emphasis on "normals." This global approach suggests that the counsellor must be prepared to view his client as a complete being.

If the intention of the counsellor is to deal effectively with the human condition, then he must be prepared to be facilitative in a process where sex is the content. Within this context he will serve both as educator and therapist. The client will gain from counselling in sexuality when the process is problem-centered, and when its basic nature is developmental.

### *Counsellors — Sexual Reactionists*

The past decade has witnessed the acceptance by our culture of a new method for approaching sexual matters. Gagnon and Simon (1970) claim that the change is not behavioural in nature. Instead,

their emphasis is on the verbal aspects. They don't dispute that people are willing to talk about sex and are quite open in discussions related to it. However, they warn against attaching a corollary regarding actual behaviour. Freedman (1970) also gives support to this interpretation. He postulates that, in terms of behaviour, the sexual revolution is still largely an event of the future.

Mazur (1968, pp. 5-8) does not accept the foregoing argument. He encourages the use of the term "revolution," claiming that it "best expresses the nature of the contemporary changes in patterns of sexual conduct and conviction (1968, p. 5)." He believes that the birth-control pill and the new morality have served as the revolution's catalysts.

The center position on this matter is represented by Ira Reiss (1966). If a label is to be used, he suggests that "renaissance" rather than "revolution" be employed. He presents a sound argument, claiming the term has accuracy in that it denotes a more open attitude and a new interest in human sexuality. This does not necessarily imply a drastic shift in general morals and behaviour.

It is obvious that the argument is not over the existence of social change. Rather, it is the degree of change, and whether it is best explained using the construct of evolution or of revolution. The public no longer accepts the Victorian taboo that surrounded all aspects of sexuality. Today people are prepared to talk openly about sex and sexual behaviour. They are also more willing to seek professional assistance when they encounter problems in sexual matters. Unfortunately, counsellors are unable to provide help in this area. This is necessarily the case because the sexuality dimension is usually ignored in counsellor training. The rapid changes of the past decade demand a re-evaluation of this viewpoint.

### *The Client as a Sexual Being*

Given the proper training, a counsellor can play a meaningful role in assisting people to come to grips with their own sexuality. He may serve as a catalyst in the developmental process. He may assume the role of a helper in correcting the dissonance between a client's attitudinal and behavioural systems. Finally, the counsellor's human-relations skills permit him to view sexual problems within the context of social relationships. This ability is crucial when the client's sexual problems are an extension of a more fundamental and larger pattern of maladjustment. Sex counselling skills are needed by all counsellors irrespective of the age levels of their clientele.

"Adequate sexual adjustment in early childhood is a prime factor in later adult sexual adjustment, as healthy attitudes toward self and sexuality are the foundations of adult adjustment (Elias and Gebhard, 1970, p. 17)." This quotation places sexuality in its proper perspective. It suggests that sexuality is a phenomenon which is not confined to the world of adults. As it relates to sexual problems, a large part of prevention rests with having children experience an

encounter with an adult who is an effective communicator, and one who is able to facilitate the child's sexual development. This concept has particular meaning when analysed within the framework provided by Brown and Lynn (1966). They argue that existing facts do not support the idea of an innate, pre-determined, psychological sexuality. Instead, they suggest that the individual begins life psychosexually plastic and therefore capable of developing in a number of ways. This viewpoint leads to a recognition of the role that the effective counsellor can play in helping a child come to grips with his sexual being.

As children reach adolescence, problem-centered counselling in the area of sexuality becomes more frequent. The developmental aspect is still present. Blocher's model (1966, p. 57) provides a typical example. Here the counsellor can play a definite role as the student attempts to develop sex-appropriate behaviours, the range of which will be flexible and adaptable.

In dealing with the post-high-school adult population, developmental aspects, in terms of emphasis, are probably replaced by the more problem-centered aspects of human sexuality. No effort is made to limit this aspect of helping to the confines of marriage counselling since sexual problems are not limited to married people. The implications are clear. The counsellor's clients have sexual identities. This component of the whole person should not be ignored in training, thus encouraging the counsellor to ignore it in practice.

### *A Sexual Awakening*

If the situation is viewed in terms of the public's needs, one must conclude that a lacuna exists in the services which the helping profession provides for people experiencing sex problems. A few Canadian cities provide services in this area. For most people, however, travel to a distant clinic for consultation and treatment is not practical. A realistic alternative is to have easily accessible professionals who are trained to be facilitative in short-term counselling with the normal population. Counsellors are generally hesitant to fill this void when sex is the area of concern. An examination of the existing training programs makes clear the reason for this reluctance. Counsellors are provided with theory courses in personality, counselling, and adolescent development. They receive training in individual and group testing, as well as personnel and information services. Human sexuality? The absence of a course either implies that the trainees already possess the required knowledge, or it is not necessary for them to have such knowledge.

Sex counselling must be given specific attention in the curriculum. The trainee, functioning at a facilitative level, must be taught to maintain such a level within the more sensitive and threatening framework of sex counselling. With no specific training, the counsellor's probable defense is denial. The counselling profession simply pretends that its clientele is asexual. This allows for the exclusion of courses and practicum experiences involving problems in human sexuality.

**RESUME:** En ce qui concerne la sexualité humaine, les conseillers sont formés comme s'ils devaient vivre dans une société victorienne. Cela est évident dans l'attitude de négation de la sexualité. Le conseiller a le devoir d'aider ses clients à assumer leur sexualité. Ce qui met en question la compétence du conseiller à cet égard. La compétence implique que le conseiller a reçu une formation dans ce domaine.

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