PASTORAL COUNSELING WITH LOW-INCOME CLIENTS: CONGRUENCE WITH INDIVIDUAL PSYCHOLOGY

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It is now well documented that there is a marked difference between social classes with regard to psychotherapy—its form, accessibility, and duration, as well as the status of its practitioners (10). In Honolulu, as in many cities, psychotherapy agencies were generally removed from people in low-socio-economic areas. To meet this problem a group of ministers instituted counseling centers within three housing projects. While the plans did not include a theoretical formulation of the counseling approach to be used, what evolved seemed to be compatible with the principles of Individual Psychology. The present article is based on the author's experience in the first center which was established.

THE CLIENTS

Demographic Data

The initial target area was a multiracial housing project involving 614 units in a complex combining two 16-story high-rise structures and two-story apartment houses. Adhering to Federal guidelines for maximum income levels, the median income was $4,500-$4,999, excluding 35% of the tenants who were on welfare. (For a family of four to live moderately in Honolulu, at this time, the income required was approximately $10,000.) Of the total population of 2,219, 24% were under 6 years of age; 27%, between 6 and 13; 24%, between 14 and 25; and only 1.5%, 65 and older. Of the 586 families, 42% had a mother as the only parent, 47% had both, and less than 2% had only the father. Hawaiians and Caucasians were the modal groups (55%), with Filipinos, Samoans, Orientals, Negroes, and others present in smaller numbers. Many Caucasian families had fathers who were low-ranking enlisted men in the military services whose incomes qualified them for the housing project.

The educational level of the population can be assumed to be similar to that in other low socio-economic areas. In scholastic

ability (SCAT scores) the children compared favorably with those of the State as a whole until the fourth grade, with decreasing scores at each succeeding grade.

"Now" Orientation

When a tenant sought counseling, he did not come with the expectation of, or desire for, personality change, but rather with a feeling of some discomfort, a problem that he could not cope with. Were I to have asked about his goals in life, he would have looked with amazement as if asking, "What does this have to do with the way I feel now?" A husband came because he could not trust his wife anymore. A divorcee felt that her children were demanding entirely too much from her and were taking all her time. An unemployed man saw that his children were turning more to his wife than to him. A wife complained that her husband would not stay home and instead spent too much time and money "drinking with the boys." In each situation the client wanted relief from the particular problem that he faced; in other words, the goal of the client was resolution of the immediate concern now.

Low Motivation

First year statistics show that 45.6% of the clients terminated with the first interview (7). Among many factors operating, low motivation is presumed to have been one of the more important. Many had experienced failure with the traditional social agencies and thus were somewhat apprehensive about trying again.

Further, many clients would be passive in their interaction with the counselor, expecting the "expert" to demonstrate his competence in resolving their difficulties. Such passivity, too, was a function of discouragement.

Expectation of Prescriptive Treatment

While clients from low-income areas receive less medical attention than the remainder of the society, they are, nevertheless, acquainted with the role of a patient. Our clients carried this role over to the counseling relationship, requesting prescriptive treatment of their personal concerns. They expected ready answers for the resolution of their concerns. "Tell me *what* to do," was a common request.

For a then "non-directive" counselor this experience was frustrating and lead to an awareness of the inappropriateness of that ap-

proach. Non-directive counselors seemed to have a higher drop-out rate, especially within the first three sessions, than others. Failure to meet the role expectations of the client was probably an important factor.

Simple Language

The educational level of the clients required the counselor to abandon his generally understood psychological vocabulary in favor of a more direct, non-abstract language. To talk about generalization, rationalization, or psycho-social development was to invite disruption and/or termination of the counseling. Communication was further complicated by socio-economic differences between client and counselor and, occasionally, by differences in native culture. Still another difficulty was the use of pidgin, the "native language" of most of the clients. On several occasions the counselor was taxed to find the simplest expression in order to communicate.

ADLERIAN COUNSELING PRINCIPLES

Having presented the characteristics of our clients we now turn to some principles and approaches of Individual Psychology which seemed to be significant in dealing with them and their problems.

Understanding

The counselor needs a holistic understanding of the individual, realizing that a client who is motivated to remain in counseling is motivated also in other areas of life. Such understanding includes an appreciation of individual differences as well as of the family structure. The mother's role is especially important in families such as ours where there is often no father.

With such a holistic understanding, that is understanding the life style of the individual, the counselor will be better able to deal with the presented problem. Furthermore, as Hacker has pointed out, "successful influencing of treatment motivation will depend on a necessary quick estimate and a fast and appropriate reaction to the main personality structure and problem" (9, p. 288). Understanding the life style is facilitated by the interpretation of early recollections which also permits the client to see a consistency of attitude or of certain dimensions in his mode of response.

Each individual is striving to overcome feelings of inferiority and achieve some form of success. The client's life style offers cues as to

his level of motivation and his desire to reach particular goals. Mairet has said: "All positions of inferiority, whether due to family, social or individual experience, find compensation in the pattern of a man's life plan" (12, p. 59). And Alexandra Adler, commenting on compensation, described the therapist's function as helping the client to find new ways of compensation, means which will be satisfying for him (1). Nikelly comments that when a person becomes aware of his short- or long-term goals, motivation increases, and as the person assumes responsibility for his actions, he gains confidence in his ability to continue to respond in this way (13). The therapist's participation in the planning and execution of these goals is of major importance.

Encouragement

As stated, a quick understanding and appropriate reaction on the part of the counselor is in itself a strong motivating factor. Beyond this, however, especially with clients such as ours, further motivation in the form of encouragement is necessary for the person to enter, continue, and benefit from counseling. Angers, speaking about clients in general, points out that the client has a fear of failure, and this fear, while being grounded in some particular problem area, can generalize to the entire counseling relationship (4). If the client has had difficulties in his previous social relationships, which is most likely the case, he will anticipate failure in the counseling interaction as well. As Adler held: "There is only one reason for an individual to sidestep to the useless side: the fear of a defeat on the useful side" (3, p. 157).

Thus there is a need for encouragement and the counselor needs to be sensitive to his reinforcement value. Encouragement is a fundamental Adlerian therapeutic technique. "Altogether, in every step of the treatment, we must not deviate from the path of encouragement" (3, p. 342). And as Nikelly puts it, "The individual not only needs to know his potentials but must have faith and conviction that he will succeed if he tries" (13, p. 164).

Re-education

The individual's life style, although ultimately of his own creation, has been learned, and can therefore be unlearned, so that psychotherapy can be a process of relearning or re-education. This consideration accounts for the optimism in the Adlerian therapeutic

process. As Adler pointed out: "In Individual Psychology treatment we have appreciable help [for building up courage] in that we are always able to draw attention to errors only and never to innate defects" (3, p. 342), and mistakes can be corrected. The optimistic attitude of the therapist, and his encouragement of the client, can best become effective through the rapport and empathy which he demonstrates to the client.

In re-educating, the counselor's role, however, is not that of a teacher to a pupil, but that of a co-equal. He and the client together attempt to resolve the difficulty. He is an active participant in the therapeutic endeavor (14). In this way, as Nikelly suggests, transference which implies passivity to authority is not encouraged (13). Throughout the therapeutic process the client is made to feel that he is responsible for his adjustment and, although the counselor may make suggestions or question the behavior of the client, the client himself is made to feel that his accomplishments are all his own, that he is responsible for them.

Emphasizing the Present

While the counselor must have a grasp of the life style of the client, which means he must spend some time on the past, the focus is on the present with an eye toward the future goal of the client. Glasser (8), among others, has asserted that concentration on the client's past is actually detrimental because it provides him with reasons and excuses for his behavior. By concentrating on the present the counselor has a better opportunity also to help his client to focus on his own behavior and to alter it. This helps the client to face the area of concern, to sustain his involvement, and hopefully to achieve results sooner.

Increasing Social Interest

Lacking material signs of achievement and success, our clients were likely to have intensified inferiority feelings. But they could compensate for this by more social interest and satisfying social interaction.

According to Adler, the only true compensation for inferiority is a developed social interest and the consciousness of solidarity and usefulness which it can bring about (3, pp. 154-155). Alexandra Adler states this in slightly different terms: Everyone has the need to be liked and respected and this can be accomplished when action is

"channeled into constructive social concern" (2, p. 57). In recent years the emphasis on community planning and action has increased the number of opportunities for expansion of social interest, as we shall mention below.

Consideration of Values

The concept of social interest as a human aptitude which has to be developed includes an ideal or values for which to strive. The discussion of values has often been thought inappropriate for the therapy "hour." We, however, are of the opinion that values are of great importance, especially if re-orientation of the client is the desired goal, and we believe values will assume an increasingly important role (5, 11). Their importance in any approach of cognitive orientation is set forth by Nikelly: "Experience has shown that drives are irrelevant in the development of pathology, and that they become strong or weak in a particular case depending upon the individual's attitudes and values. Drives become a means for neurotic or antisocial expression, and are subsumed and guided by the individual's values and attitudes which are part of his conscious functioning" (13, p. 164). Consideration of values, especially new ones, is central because it affords new possibilities for the client as he seeks to alter his situation.

In this respect the pastoral counselor has an advantage over the secular counselor. Parishioners and/or clients anticipate the discussion of values to be an integral part of their interchange when they consult a pastoral counselor.

PASTORAL COUNSELING AND INDIVIDUAL PSYCHOLOGY

In the housing project where the present counseling service was located, the clergymen who volunteered held positions as parish priests or congregational ministers working only part-time in this agency. While counseling is a demand characteristic of the ministerial role, the designation "pastoral counselor" may refer to a function which engages representatives from several different professions without any one being able to claim exclusive rights to it. The clergyman who counsels is only limited by his training, skill, and commitment to this activity. The client-concerns with which he deals may extend the full range of what other non-educational counselors experience, with perhaps the exception of questions of religious faith and belief which society generally assigns to designated representatives of various church bodies.

Thus, as Stettner has said, "The uniqueness [of pastoral counseling] lies in the image expectations of counselee and counselor and in the *context* in which the counseling takes place" (15, p. 12). The present agency named Pastoral Counseling Service did raise certain expectations of the clients.

General Compatibilities

No one of the pastoral counselors in this project had a background in psychoanalytic theory or practice, nor were any trained in a specific psychological "school." Their training had been primarily crises intervention which encompassed most of the counseling they were called upon to perform. This training, and their prior experience and interests, mitigated against concentration upon unconscious material, in favor of concern with the clients' presented problems, much as if seeing their own parishioners, with *emphasis on the present*. Further, lacking the psychological background with its attendant jargon, the counselors were predisposed to communicate in the *vernacular*, which was especially helpful with the many clients using pidgin.

As the clergyman is generally seen as an authority figure, as both priest and teacher, the clients commonly manifested corresponding dependent behavior. This included the desire for *prescriptive treatment*, as mentioned earlier, and the combined priest-teacher role of the clergyman rendered his prescriptions "believable." While the efficacy of this approach for long-term client gain may be questioned, it was a response to the client's *immediate concern*.

One of the demand characteristics of the pastoral role of "shepherding the flock" is to offer support, encouraging the parishioner in his attempts to "walk in *The Way*." Thus it may be presumed that when clients came to the counselors, *encouragement* was one of the expected outcomes. Previous social failures probably heightened the clients' level of anxiety, especially in initial interviews. Thus encouragement facilitated the counseling process by decreasing the threat of failure in the present relationship.

Emphasis on Social Interest

The point at which Individual Psychology and pastoral counseling seem most compatible is the emphasis on *social interest*. While this would seem most obvious, pastoral counseling was initially influenced by the medical model, then passed through a phase of non-directive counseling, followed by a concentration on crises intervention. But now, in recent years, pastoral counseling has begun to find its most

productively therapeutic intervention by broadening its scope to include the social dimensions of the troubled persons. Here the clergyman has the greatest potential resource, more than any other professional, the traditional "right" to intervene in attempting to reconcile fragmented relationships, to assist in creating opportunities for social interaction, and to offer guidance (shepherding) in enhancing existing relationships.

Preference for Group Techniques

In the present project, the ministers came to appreciate the importance of social interest and to realize that individual counseling was often not sufficient to develop enough social interest in the client to meet the presented problems. The pastoral counselors drew upon individuals from within their congregations to assist in integrating those who felt isolated and socially inept. If appropriate groups did not exist, the clergyman had the prerogative of establishing them either within the housing project or his congregation.

Initially there was much uncertainty about the most effective way of facilitating social interest, but trial-and-error led to a concentration of effort within the housing project rather than existing programs of the neighborhood churches. The opportunities for social reinforcement were more frequent within the housing project, and assistance in the promotion of social concerns seemed to be the most productive mode of operation. An example of this is the formation of a mothers' group which focused on child rearing practices. Personal experiences were shared, new techniques were learned, *e.g.* natural and logical consequences (6), and socialization increased.

Importance of Values

The concluding area of compatibility is appreciation of the importance of values. For the minister this is one of his primary role expectations. In the discussion of values the pastoral counselor and his client often share a common vocabulary, *e.g.* commandments, Golden Rule, sin, forgiveness, and, although this commonality is theologically oriented, the minister can utilize it in not only helping the client explore his own value system, but use it to increase his understanding of himself and his religion towards the goal of their integration.

SUMMARY

This paper has outlined Adlerian principles as a basis for pastoral counseling with residents of a housing project in a low socio-economic

area in Honolulu, Hawaii. While the counseling service from which this material was gleaned was not designed to demonstrate the efficacy of Individual Psychology, it did in fact utilize Adlerian principles, as was seen in retrospect. The clients were interested in solving an immediate problem and not particularly in personality change, and they possessed limited abilities in abstraction, functioned on a low motivational level, and desired prescribed treatment formulae. It was suggested that for the counselor to be effective in this situation his goals should be: (*a*) understanding the client's life style; (*b*) emphasizing the present rather than the past; (*c*) offering encouragement to motivate the client to grow in responsibility, thereby gaining self-confidence; (*d*) improving the client's social interest; (*e*) arranging for group experiences; and (*f*) a willingness to consider values. As the counselors were clergymen, these areas may be regarded as points of congruence between pastoral counseling and Individual Psychology.

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