

The Counselor Identity

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I've always enjoyed assisting others in many ways. Being raised in a Christian home gives me access to the Bible as a guide for living, which I consider a huge benefit. There, any query is addressed. I became interested in this subject since it is my calling. Some of my friends used to come to me for guidance when we were still in school. My peers knew I was raised in a Christian home, and my father is a senior pastor. They contacted me for assistance with problems even though they were not Christians. Most of the time, I thought it was an excellent way to help my friends and spread the gospel. I remember attending a career orientation talk as a senior high school student. The presentation displayed the employment market. The career route and admission into the workforce were also covered. "Que bueno es dedicarte a lo que te guste y encima te paguen," or "How wonderful it is to work on what you love and on top of that they pay you," is some advice that comes to mind.

Furthermore, as a psychology student, I knew the counseling field was not about giving advice. In fact, it means looking at the person, figuring out their needs, and helping them find their way. While paying attention to the purpose of consultations is essential, progress may often be made in other areas. There are many other issues behind it, and the client cannot see them. I began studying various forms of testing, interviewing methods, and projective drawings. After the clinical evaluation, we can diagnose and determine the best way to help the client if a technique is used; therefore, providing therapy is a different history. For example, the approach I related is Cognitive Behavioral Therapy. This strategy is more suited to me because of my personality traits. In brief, employing several techniques while working with a specific client is crucial. Neukrug (2022) describes,

Choosing and applying techniques effectively is a careful and deliberate process that occurs through a series of stages that includes building the relationship, clinical assessment, focusing on problem areas and setting goals, choosing techniques and working on goals, assessment of goal completion, and closure and follow-up. (p. 117)

In my opinion, I require this kind of structure in my profession. Definitely, you need to be able to look at things critically to understand how the purpose of a consultation relates to how to develop a therapy plan.

From my experience, I've learned that counselors do many different things during counseling sessions and that there are many things to consider. So, the most important things to do in a counseling session are to take good notes, listen carefully, and show compassion.

First, being a good listener is a challenging task. Neukrug defined a good listener as, Talks minimally, Concentrates on what is being said, Does not interrupt, Does not give advice, Gives and does not expect to get, Accurately hears the content of what the helpee is saying, Accurately hears the feelings behind what the helpee is saying, Is able to communicate to the helpee that they have been heard (through head nods, "uh-huhs," or reflecting back to the client what the helper heard), asks clarifying questions such as, "I didn't hear all of that. Can you explain that in another way so I'm sure I understand you?" and does not ask other kinds of questions." (Neukrug, 2022, p. 152)

I agree with the traits Neukrug listed, but the most important is being able to read nonverbal cues. It is essential to comprehend and interpret body language when assessing a client. Without a doubt, a client's body language and what they say can help counselors figure out what they really want. For instance, if the client states that everything is alright, but their affect is labile, and their mood is problematic, we should analyze further what is going on with the client. The

Mental Status Exam tool aids in determining a client's fundamental level of functioning; therefore, it is vital to train your eye for detail. In Spanish, "tener ojo clinico," which means "to have a clinical eye," means paying close attention beyond the words and being ready to recognize different characters.

Definitely, having empathy for the client is crucial in psychotherapy. For example, "Working empathically decenters you in the therapeutic process. You use your personal history and your body-based sensibility to help you maintain your focus on, and make visceral sense of, your clients' experience" (Flemons, 2022, p. 52). In other words, doing psychotherapy involves more than just delivering counsel; it also assists the client in developing their unique perspective on the world. Because our past experiences have shaped us, it is challenging to decenter us in the therapeutic process. "Empathy allows the therapist to build a therapeutic alliance by apprehending the client's perspective and goals, understanding their unique personality style and preferences, and communicating with them in an appropriate way" (Gerace, 2018, p. 1). In other words, empathy is the gateway that is open to client comprehension.

Moreover, the ability to take notes is helpful. This is a work in progress for me. It is pertinent because we must monitor the client's development and the information provided by the client so that we may make subsequent judgments. I have had many meetings where I wanted to take notes, but I had to remember to use the observation tool. It's crucial how the client communicates to us their experience and observations. This way, we can develop treatment programs, and while it may be laborious, keeping current records would help us stay organized and ensure that everything is in order in the event of an audit.

Contrarily, there are several things that counselors cannot perform during sessions. Mental health counselors must adhere to moral standards that benefit their clients. At this time,

according to my perspective, refraining from criticizing would be one of my "not to do"s. Without a doubt, refusing to judge people based on their appearance or past experiences is crucial. Thereafter, information on the patient's actions, thoughts, and mood is acquired through the MSE. Even when conducting the mental state examination, we will wrap things up once their assessment is complete. As has been noted, less biased interactions would aid us in not misinterpreting information due to other reasons. Because of our prior experiences, it is complex, but when we refrain from criticizing, we can continue to assess and understand the client. As a Christian counselor, I believe what says in the book of Romans, "So we should stop judging each other. Let's decide not to do anything that will cause a problem for a brother or sister or hurt their faith" (Easy to Read Version Bible, 2006, Romans 14:13). This Bible verse encourages me to improve myself instead of focusing on what other people do wrong.

Countertransference is another issue we must prevent. It is difficult when a patient in therapy sets off a therapist's problems. For instance, I once had a client who was an active Christian in his native country but was placed under the Office of Refugees' care upon coming to the United States. He made friends with adolescents from multiple nations and cultures. He began to worry about his reconciliation since he needed to attend church and interact with other Christians. He said, "El diablo me está jalando para el mundo", translating to "The devil is carrying me into the world." Indeed, that remark brought back memories of high school when I often felt odd. In fact, I used to dislike going to parties with my pals. While I was at church with my Christian friends, I felt at home; yet, it was a challenging period in my life in high school. I had a countertransference of his need for church fellowship as a way to please God. The experience taught me how to spot any countertransference of upsetting feelings and speak with a

supervisor or counselor; this way, it will be the client's space to process their emotions rather than me bringing up painful memories.

In addition, we need to refrain from directing our clients on what to do during sessions. When clients seek counseling to improve their emotional and social functioning to improve their satisfaction and the overall quality of their lives, the psychological profession's role is to assess the client, help them identify their problems, and facilitate positive change. Tenglad (2009) concludes, "..., but the final goal will always be quality of life, and some forms of empowerment or other internal determinants of quality of life will be part of the model" (p. 139). In other words, our goal is to help them complete their mission.

In reality, working in the field for thirteen years has given me the skills to help people. One of my traits is that I listen actively. My experience studying psychology has given me keen observational abilities and attention to detail. I have become adept at interpreting the clients' body language and tone of voice. This ability enables me to listen to the client beyond words or stories. I am an active listener because I combine the two.

Moreover, being organized also helps me track my treatment goals and progress notes. I always go ahead and get ready for my sessions. In fact, it is because I also have a background in education. It taught me how to organize a session and specify its goals and results. As a result, plan ahead helps me feel more at ease and less stressed at work. A structured session lets the client learn that the psychologist is prepared for their case.

In mental health counseling, knowing what type of clients we succeed with is very important. For instance, I used to build therapeutic connections when I worked with children and adolescents. I have dealt with parents, children, and adolescents as well. Before moving to the US, I spent seven years working in schools. These demographics were great to work with since

you get instant feedback on how your practice is going. The youngsters are usually open, and we can evaluate how the treatment has worked. We also get feedback from the parents or guardians. In fact, they help us figure out the therapy goals. In addition, I received CBT for kids' training for several years. I work in behavioral modification using strategies like the token economy, modeling, and behavioral parent training. Working one-on-one with teenagers has also taught me different ways to build therapeutic relationships, which is essential for therapy. Furthermore, I dealt with Latino unaccompanied children immigrants who wanted to reunite with their sponsors, mostly family members. Naturally, we monitor their progress in the program and analyze their performance. I have gotten along with the girls more than the boys. My sessions are more about doing art projects, playing therapeutic card or board games, or drawing. I have more meaningful connections with the girls because this is more attractive to women. Therefore, I found it challenging to connect with young males since they were reluctant to discuss their emotions. Thus I prefer working with girls. I develop rapport with them, and they are willing to open up about their feelings and emotions.

On the other hand, it is equally essential to be aware of the limitations of the kinds of clients we feel most at ease working with. There is also a clientele that would be the most challenging for us to counsel. I would struggle in an outpatient scenario with clients who were psychotic. They can change at any time. Considering which clients would be the hardest for me to help brings up the idea of stigma. "Stigma leads to rejection, discrimination, distress and other burdens and is a major obstacle to successful treatment, rehabilitation, and reintegration of people with mental illness" (Restek-Petrovic et al., 2015, 364). The therapist may have a detrimental impact on this during therapy. Increasing awareness is the first step in destigmatizing mental health. Even though I may have a wrong impression of people with

psychotic diseases because of a negative stereotype, I can try to change my negative thoughts and feelings as I learn more about this group. As a counselor-in-training, I need to know what I cannot do and discern stigma when it exists in my interactions with specific clients. These conclusions are frequently the result of ignorance. Therefore, I want to learn more about these illnesses to discover what causes them and what treatments might help. I also want to say a prayer for every one of my clients. I would get spiritual strength by begging God for help with my treatment plan. In other words, becoming more knowledgeable about diagnostics would broaden my perspective on various clients.

Moreover, I've learned how important it is to wear clothes appropriately, depending on my workplace. A proper clothing code is how employees should present themselves at work. When going to work, wearing clothes that are common in your industry and make you feel comfortable is best. These examples of unsuitable clothing for counselors include filthy clothes, discolored, torn, or missing parts; apparel, buttons, or emblems; or offensive or provocative writing or images. In addition, undershirts and other undergarments are purposefully displayed or worn as outerwear. Another inappropriate attire would be aerobic clothing like spandex tops and bottoms or other attire created especially for physical activity or athletic competition. Furthermore, shorts or skirts that are too short, tank tops, tube tops, see-through or suggestive apparel, and sleepwear. This list is about dressing comfortably but casually.

However, a more relaxed dress code would be appropriate for a counselor. The most crucial is making sure to keep a professional demeanor. For example, clothes should be pressed, neat, and suited for our work. The Bible says,

And I want the women to make themselves attractive in the right way. Their clothes should be sensible and appropriate. They should not draw attention to themselves with

fancy hairstyles or gold jewelry or pearls or expensive clothes. 10 But they should make themselves attractive by the good things they do. That is more appropriate for women who say they are devoted to God. (Easy to Read Version Bible, 2006, 1 Timothy 2:9-10)

In this situation, we should be concerned about the natural beauty of pleasing God. Definitely, we can show respect for our clients during the session.

Finally, the helpful professional's responsibility for self-care is highly crucial.

Counselors, as helping professionals who listen to and support clients through some serious and distressing issues, often on a daily basis, are at high risk for professional burnout. Researchers focusing on practitioner burnout for a 2012 Administration and Policy in Mental Health and Mental Health Services Research journal article found that as many as 2 out of every three mental health workers “may be experiencing high levels of burnout. (Bray, 2018, p. 1)

For this reason, it is essential to avoid professional burnout. I've discovered that developing a support network of reliable individuals is beneficial. Also, practicing relaxation techniques and attending church would help me balance my career and other responsibilities in my life.

Moreover, spending time with my family and friends would also take my mind off my professional obligations when I am off the clock. Previously, we have learned to work from home during the epidemic, but it did not work for me because I used to put in more hours at home. Yet, since I can now complete my work in person, I may turn off my computer and wait until the following day. Indeed it says one of my favorite Bible verses, “So don't worry about tomorrow. Each day has enough trouble of its own. Tomorrow will have its own worries” (Easy to Read Version Bible, 2006, Matthew 6:34). Learning to rest in the Lord has helped me to avoid burnout in my professional life.

Last but not least, working on these themes has made me appreciate my job. It is great to return to the field after a seven-year absence. Since moving to the United States seven years ago, I have been working in the education sector, which I also enjoy. I yet harbor the desire to go back to my profession of counseling. Now that I have the chance, I'm enjoying taking the first step toward becoming a certified mental health counselor, which is earning my master's degree.

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