

Position Paper #4

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GCN618.OA: Theology in Mental Health Counseling

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April 25, 2022

Throughout my four years as a graduate student for mental health counseling, I have learned many ideas and techniques as a Christian and a counselor. One overarching theme that I have learned, in this course specifically, has been that we can serve God's purpose as a Christian through counseling without ever revealing that we are Christians. As Virginia Todd Holeman says in our textbook *Theology for Better Counseling*,

“self-giving love is key to understanding the Trinity. This kind of love is less concerned with what the beloved can do for the lover, but what the lover can offer to the beloved. It is “other centered” or “other oriented” love, that is sustained by the being of the lover, not by the beloved one's reciprocity... self-giving love is key to understanding the therapeutic alliance. Theologically reflective counseling is less concerned about what the client can do for the counselor than it is with what the counselor can offer to the client, which the client can receive, reject or modify. The therapeutic relationship is other centered or client centered.” (Holeman, 2012).

How much more “other-centered” can we be than to make our whole career about helping others become better? Verses about loving others can be found many times in the Bible, one example being in John it states 15:12-13. “My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one's life for one's friends.” (*Bible gateway - New International Version*). This is a good example that it is through loving others that we can serve God and help our clients at the same time.

At my current business where I own a fitness studio and work one on one, along with small groups of clients, I have a little more freedom to self-disclose than I will as a counselor. Though I never push my faith on my clients, I also do not keep it a secret from them. I have the symbol for “Cross Equals Heart” in my Instagram profile along with being tattooed on my back.

I also am not shy to mention if I attended Church over the weekend or a Bible Study group during the week and if someone ask about my faith, I am happy to disclose that I am a Christian. I even have attended Church with one of my clients whose husband leads worship. At the same time I have many clients (most of them actually) who follow a different religion than I do or believe in a different God completely and live a lifestyle or have a set of morals that I completely disagree with. I actually find it beautiful that all of these different beliefs are able to come into community for a common goal of health.

I mention this because it never changes the way that I help them. I treat all of my clients with the same care, kindness, and love. I am there to help them get healthier, no matter their lifestyle or beliefs. I often think of the time that one of my clients, whom I had never spoken to about religion, said to me “Can I ask you a question?”, I responded “Of course” and she said “I’ve noticed from your instagram and tattoo that you’re a Christian, but you know I’m a lesbian right?” I told her yes and she said “you’re still so nice to me. All of my experience with people who are religious is that they’re judgemental of me and my lifestyle.” I told her that no matter what I believe is right or wrong according to the Bible, that it is not my place to judge her, my only job is to love others.

This is a reminder to me that we are always showing our clients God’s love and they may notice it more than we realize. As a Christian it is always my first priority to serve God and fulfill His will. God has been very clear with His direction for my life, first in fitness and now adding on the mental health aspect. Of course, I would love to work with clients who have the same beliefs and morals as myself. That is not realistic for me though, as I do not plan to work in a Christian counseling clinic but rather to incorporate my counseling profession with my current

fitness business. This business serves all of the Upper West Side, New York City community. Which is full of many different beliefs, morals, and religions.

In the book *A Peaceable Psychology: Christian Therapy in a World of Many Cultures* by Alvin Dueck and Kevin Reimer, they discuss this scenario of being a Christian counselor in the middle of other beliefs. They state “We are challenging the Christian psychologist to be cognizant not only of the client’s political and cultural narrative, but also the role of her or his own Christian story in the therapeutic dialogue” and go on to say that “Since psychologists holds in her or his hands the delicate psychic fragments of another human being, maintaining our Christian authenticity does not mean imposing our Christian story” (Dueck and Raimer, 2009). Showing again that pushing our faith onto a client is not helpful to that client in their current crisis.

In conclusion, throughout this course, my four years at Alliance University, and my over ten years of experience working with secular personal training clients, I have learned that I can maintain my faith while not pushing it onto my clients. At the same time, I do not have to deny or hide my faith. Later in John 15 verse 35, Jesus states “By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another” (*Bible gateway - New International Version*). Showing that all we need to do is care for our clients as God has loved us and that will be enough to show them our faith.

References

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