SELF-AWARENESS: A PERSONALITY COUNSELOR

Cindy Asli Pravesti
Faculty of Teacher Training and Education
University of PGRI Adi Buana Surabaya
cindyaslibks2a12439@gmail.com

Elia Firda Mufidah
Faculty of Teacher Training and Education
University of PGRI Adi Buana Surabaya
eliasafira@yahoo.co.id

ABSTRACT
Counseling is a relationship, a repertoire of interventions, a psychological process, and in terms of goals and clientele. The intimate private counseling works with qualified counselors doing with clients. It is vitally important that a counseling professional is fully self-aware. Being able to self-reflect enables a counselor to identify and develop personal awareness, and to remain emotionally detached from the relationship he/she is developing with a client. The relationship of counselor and client has a significant value for a successful counseling. Counselors will naturally draw their own conclusions about self-awareness. Their work with clients may present many personal challenges, but also an on-going opportunity to assess personal strengths, feelings, thoughts and limitations, as they relate to other people. Understandably a counselor may also experience a sense of personal familiarity, whilst counseling clients must remain emotionally detached at all times. Self-awareness is something that grows over a period of time and with exploration. Techniques, to access information about oneself, can be learned, and personal experiences can affect personal thoughts and feelings. A counselor will experience all of these issues and concerns, and must use the knowledge gained to help their clients overcome their own personal issues. A person’s growth and understanding can only be assessed through self-awareness, and it is no different for those working in a therapeutic profession. Being continually open to personal, and career development will help a counselor fully understand their values and self.

Keywords: self-awareness, counselor

INTRODUCTION
Because of the intimately private counseling work that qualified counselors and psychotherapists do with clients, it is vitally important that a counseling professional is fully self-aware. Being able to self-reflect enables a counselor to identify and develop personal awareness, and to remain emotionally detached from the relationship he/she is developing with a client. Counselors will naturally draw their own conclusions about self-awareness. Their work with clients may present many personal challenges, but also an on-going opportunity to assess personal strengths, feelings, thoughts and limitations, as they relate to other people. Understandably a counselor may also experience a sense of personal familiarity, whilst counseling clients, but must remain emotionally detached at all times. Relating to clients, in a positive, open manner, encourages the client to disclose in a comfortable, confidential environment and provides the counselor with the ideal setting in which to communicate in a supportive way. Using their own life experiences, a counselor can demonstrate empathy, compassion and understanding without becoming personally involved in the counseling process.

Self awareness includes both a content dimension (what) and a process dimension (how). The components listed above are of what the counselor can be aware. The process dimension taps aspects of how the counselor reveals awareness through components such as concreteness or specificity (Carkhuff, 1969; Egan, 1975), ownership or responsibility (Livitsky & Perls, 1970; Miller, Nunally & Wackman, 1975) immediacy and experiencing (Gendlin,
1962) and integration and assimilation (Polster & Polster, 1973). These process components have been traditionally investigated as elements of client exploration (e.g., Schauble & Pierce, 1974), but apply equally well to the assessment of counselor awareness. Counseling courses, however carefully constructed or theoretically well-informed, do not adequately prepare the counselor to face the exigencies of clinical practice. Courses cannot achieve, within a limited period, and when faced with competing demands, the complex process of forming a counselor. Becoming a counselor, and growing as a counselor, requires me to reduce my defensiveness and increase self-awareness, in short, to take a closer look at myself, the self that I bring to the counseling room. Counselor self-awareness is considered an important aspect of counseling effectiveness according to the American Counseling Association and the American Psychological Association and in numerous studies and articles within the counseling literature.

A comprehensive review of the literature on self-awareness revealed that there is little discussion of the construct of self-awareness and/or it is outdated, making its definition difficult (Richards, Campenni, & Muse-Burke, 2010). Jevne’s (1981) survey provides a useful focus for efforts to clarify the nature of self awareness and the effective counselor. From our experience in counselor education, training and practice, self awareness is essential in the cognitive and emotional development of an effective counselor. Self-awareness (SA) refers to an individual’s awareness of his or her feelings, as well as an understanding from where these feelings originated and how these feelings impact, and are impacted by others. Burwell-Pender and Halenski (2008) declare that with increased levels of self awareness, a counselor is able to differentiate and put aside personal needs in order to best serve the client while maintaining professional boundaries. This idea of counselors being able to differentiate and put aside personal values while working with clients is closely associated with counter transference.

**Self-Awareness: a Personality Counselor**

Self-awareness is also an intrinsic component of the counselor’s characteristics and thus the therapeutic alliance. The need for counseling professionals to increase their self-awareness can be traced back to Freud himself who asserted that it was necessary in order to minimize the potential detrimental effects of counter-transference on the counseling process (Oden, Miner-Holden, & Balkin, 2009).

Counseling is one profession where the practitioner is in fact the tool of his or her trade. It is our character, and our self-awareness, that enables effective, competent practice. Counseling is finding out that who I am dictates how I journey with a struggling client. What has emerged from the literature on counselor training and clinical practice is an acknowledgment of the importance of the personal development of the counselor as an integral part of professional development. Unhelpful beliefs, unrealistic expectations of self, and acceptance of an unreasonable level of responsibility towards the client are accelerators of stress. The practice of counseling, with its emphasis on confidentiality, can be of itself an isolating experience. Self-awareness, which contributes to counselor development and effectiveness, can have an unnerving effect when the impact is not managed by self-care and in-session strategies to reduce the impact. Self-disclosure, which used appropriately, builds trust and rapport, can leave us feeling vulnerable and exposed. Self-exploration, self-disclosure and asking for feedback are means of heightening self-awareness and essential to our facilitating the same process for clients, however, these often exact a price, one of increasing our stress levels, with predictable consequences for our relationships and ourselves.

Counselor educators historically have considered counselor self-awareness to be an important aspect of counseling effectiveness (American Personnel and Guidance Association, 1965; American Psychological Association, 1954; Bernard, 1989; Blackburn, 1979; Drapela, 1983; Eppinger, 1996; Kagan, 1980; Krumboltz, 1966; Locke, 1993; Ohlsen, 1970; Truax & Carkhuff, 1967. The American Counseling Association’s (ACA, 2000) code of ethics referred to awareness several times, including the following (a) Counselors are aware of the intimacy and responsibilities inherent in the counseling relationship. b) Counselors are aware of their own values, attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors and how these apply in a diverse society, and avoid imposing their values on clients and (c) Counselors are aware of their influential positions with respect to clients, and they avoid exploiting the trust and dependency of clients. Carl Rogers
(1978) viewed awareness in operational terms and described it in the following passage, there is a formative directional tendency in the universe, which can be traced and observed in stellar space, in crystals, in microorganisms, in organic life, in human beings. This is an evolutionary tendency toward greater order, greater interrelatedness, and greater complexity. In humankind, it extends from a single cell origin to complex organic functioning, to awareness and a sensing below the levels of consciousness, to a conscious awareness of the organism and the external world to a transcendent awareness of the cosmic system including people.

The construct of counselor self-awareness has historically been considered important within the counselor education literature, along with studies conducted in other areas of mental health practices (American Personnel and Guidance Association, 1964; American Psychological Association, 1954; Bernard, 1989; Blackburn, 1979; Eppinger, 1996; Kagan, 1980; Krumholtz, 1966; Ohlsen, 1970; Truax & Carkhuff, 1967). Recently, other personal aspects of the counselor including the need for increased cognitive complexity have been emphasized instead of the need for counselor self-awareness (Sexton, Schofield, & Whiston, 1997). Additionally, there is increased emphasis in the counseling literature for counseling within decreased periods, that is, brief therapy models. When considering the need for counselors to provide their clients with models for developing adaptive skills and strategies that can be used in dealing with increasingly more complex personal and environmental demands, the current values and relationships between counselor self-awareness and counseling effectiveness need further definition.

Although self-awareness in therapist is considered important, and since many psychotherapists spend time attempting to promote self-awareness in their patients, it is surprising that so little formal promotion of self-awareness in therapists takes place (Blackburn, 1979; Chen, 1998; Salmon, 1972; Shub, 1994). Moore (1987) stated that no formal model has been advanced to develop this portion of clinical training, and very little subsequent published research addresses the development of counselor self-awareness. The importance of self-awareness is widely acknowledged in the counseling profession as one of the few constructs embraced by nearly all theoretical orientations (De Stefano et al., 2007; Hansen, 2009; Miller et al., 2008). Self-awareness (SA) is defined as counselors-in-training understanding of how their past and current personal lives, as well as their attitudes, biases, and values, affect their clinical practice, so that they can use their emotional responses to their patients and own benefit (Saunders et al., 2007). Richards, Campenni, and Muse-Burke (2010) refer to self-awareness as knowledge about the self; an internal awareness of one’s behaviors, emotions, and cognitions. Self-awareness is an evolving process of self-observation, happening in both the here-and-now and then-and-there (Yalom, 1980). As an individual increases his/her level of self-awareness, she/he will better understand why and what one feels, as well as the behaviors that follow. This understanding of what we as therapists feel and why and consequently how we respond and act during the therapeutic process is critical (Aponte & Carlsen, 2009; Guiffrida, 2005, Yalom, 2005).

The counseling profession is quite unique. It’s profession that requires practitioners to employ interventions beyond learned knowledge or acquired skills. Counselors are also required to incorporate self into their counseling practice, a task not easily accomplished. Counselor educators have the difficult role of training individuals to become competent in profession of counseling. In fact, the Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs (CACREP; 2009) states competent professionals are individuals who have mastered the knowledge and the skills to practice effectively and who have developed a professional identity. Comstock (2005) asserts the need for developing self-awareness for the purpose of increased authentic relating and the development of an understanding of one’s relational movements; done in, not out of, engagement. This includes recognition of our personality, our strengths and weaknesses, and our likes and dislikes. Self-awareness is often a prerequisite for effective communication and interpersonal relations, as well as for developing empathy for others (Hansen, 2009).

The idea that higher levels of counselor self-awareness are related to enhanced counselor therapeutic effectiveness has appeared in the professional mental health literature, CACREP standards, theoretical writings, and research articles since Freud (Oden et al., 2009).
A qualitative study conducted by Norem et al. (2006) revealed stellar supervisees possess high levels of self-awareness: defined as having the ability to identify weaknesses and strengths, self-monitor, and being acutely aware of their emotional experiences and reactions in sessions with clients. They found the personal qualities of counselors are better predictors of clinical performance than intellectual ability.

The American Counseling Association’s (2005) code of ethics and CACREP’s (2009) standards state a need for counselors to become aware of their values, biases, beliefs, and interpersonal dynamics in order to best serve culturally diverse clients (Sue & Sue, 2003). Yalom (2005) asserts counselors are only able to serve clients needs by first being acutely aware of one’s own struggles, strengths and weaknesses. This study provides insight into determining how well counselor education programs pay attention to cultivating self-awareness and which methods, strategies, and processes are best at doing so. Counselors will naturally draw their own conclusions about self-awareness. Their work with clients may present many personal challenges, but also an on-going opportunity to assess personal strengths, feelings, thoughts and limitations, as they relate to other people. Understandably a counselor may also experience a sense of personal familiarity, whilst counseling clients, but must remain emotionally detached at all times.

CONCLUSION

The greater the awareness counselors possess about their own selves, the greater their ability to develop a deeper knowledge and/or acceptance of their clients (Rønnestad & Skovholt, 1993). Raising self-awareness is essential for counselors to be authentic and genuine because they cannot teach what they do not know (Yalom, 2005). The arena of the counselor’s self has been under researched, particularly from a trans-theoretical perspective (Reupert, 2006). Schaeffer (2007) declared graduate training programs do not sufficiently address counselors’-in-training personal issues, despite the fact that developing self-aware counselors is essential during training. Hansen (2009) claimed there has been no critical appraisal in the counseling professional literature of how counselors become self-aware. The American Counseling Association stresses that counselor self-awareness (SA) is a critical aspect of counselor effectiveness (ACA, 2005). Counselors are responsible for their personal wellness and awareness of their impact on clients (ACA 2005; AMHCA, 2010; CACREP, 2009). The code of ethics of the American Mental Health Counselors Association (2010) requires counselors to have self-awareness of their knowledge, values, skills, and needs when entering into a helping relationship. Counselor education programs, supervisors, and counselor educators have a professional responsibility to foster self-awareness in CITs (ACA, 2005). CACREP supports the idea of the saliency for Counselor Education Programs to provide space for CITs to cultivate SA (Oden, et al., 2009). The 2009 CACREP standards state students must “demonstrate self-awareness, sensitivity to others, and the skills needed to relate to diverse individuals”. ACA’s (2005) code of ethics and CACREP’s (2009) standards clearly state a need for counselors to become aware of their values, biases, beliefs, and interpersonal dynamics in order to best serve culturally diverse clients (Sue & Sue, 2003). Yalom (2005) asserts counselors are only able to serve clients needs by first being acutely aware of one’s own struggles, strengths and weaknesses.

Although self-awareness in therapist is considered important, and since many psychotherapists spend time attempting to promote self-awareness in their patients, it is surprising that so little formal promotion of self-awareness in therapists takes place (Blackburn, 1979; Chen, 1998; Salmon, 1972; Shub, 1994). Moore (1987) stated that no formal model has been advanced to develop this portion of clinical training, and very little subsequent published research addresses the development of counselor self-awareness. The importance of self-awareness is widely acknowledged in the counseling profession as one of the few constructs embraced by nearly all theoretical orientations (De Stefano et al., 2007; Hansen, 2009; Miller et al., 2008).
REFERENCES


**BIODATA**

Cindy Asli Pravesti is a lecturer of Guidance and Counseling Department, University of Adi Buana Surabaya. She received her Master Degree in State University of Malang. Her major interest guidance and counseling.

Email: cindyaslibks2a12439@gmail.com

Elia Firda Mufida is a candidate of lecturer Guidance and Counseling in University of Adi Buana Surabaya. Currently, she’s postgraduate at State University of Malang. Her major interest guidance and counseling.

Email: eliafirda@yahoo.co.id