

How Modernism and Postmodernism Perspectives Can Inform Counseling Practices?

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Counseling practices are informed by traditional approaches – identifying the root of the client's problems or causes and to remove them, thus bringing relief to the client. In psychoanalysis the causes may be located in the deep recesses of the mind (repression); for the Rogerian they may reside in the client's discrepancy between ideal-self and real self; while the cognitive counselor will trace the root of the problem to defective thinking. Social constructionism challenges these approaches to counseling practices.

The reading materials by Gergen (2000) and Marotta & Watts (2007) both address modernist and postmodernist in counseling profession in relation to best practices or outcome research in counseling. These readings offer interesting perspectives that involve a twist to our old notion of client's presenting concern and counseling outcomes at large. Instead of focusing on the disparities between the two paradigms, an effective counselor should be wise to use both paradigms where they can benefit the clients in the counseling session.

A modernist claims the importance of objectivism in understanding human experience and hence recognizes the knowledge from the therapist to determine appropriate therapy outcomes. A modernist is contrasted with a postmodernist, who asserts human experiences are interpreted differently based on the language and its meaning. The word of language itself conveys more degree of freedom to describe situations and offers multiple solutions. Despite the dichotomy descriptions outlined for modernist and postmodernist, both strive to provide the best interest for individuals who are receiving counseling.

First of all, what stood out to me most about postmodernism was its emphasis on human as social creatures that anticipate relationships to develop. Individuals' experience of relationship is manifested through dialogue and the use of language to put meaning to their experience. From my perspectives, the word "relationship" itself is a broad concept to comprehend. I believe there are horizontal and vertical types of relationship that exist in the world. Horizontal relationships involve fellow human beings in which language becomes the most important medium to interact with each other. Individuals create reality through relationship in which they share and agree on certain subjects. The language used to interpret the reality is subjective and this implies no reality is equal. Vertical relationships are the ones human have with other spiritual beings. These relationships affect the society in many aspects of life. The ways individuals describe and explain the world are outcomes of relationship between them and spiritual beings. Although individuals do not believe in spiritual being, non-believer relationship still gives impact on how they put meaning in their life. The mixture between horizontal and vertical relationships enriches the meaning and purpose of life. The rationale for considering these two relationships is the fact that purpose of living for all individuals is the same. In other words, the meaning of life could be different depending on individuals' spiritual belief, but the purpose of life could be the same in which we are all moving toward self-actualization.

Secondly, modernism and postmodernism give impact to research outcomes in counseling variously as each has its own unique way in understanding, describing, and interpreting a phenomenon. Just as research outcomes are various, so the outcomes are opened to multiple interpretations which undoubtedly involve validity issues. Modernism practitioners believe the capability of empirical research to be objective, whereas postmodernism practitioners questioned

the objectivism approach in understanding a phenomenon. A modernist researcher presumes the existence of a phenomenon under study. In other words, the researcher fills up some populations with certain labels just to substantiate the construct they have developed. A modernist researcher's pre-assumptions of a phenomenon might put the validity of the research in jeopardy. The reason for that is a researcher trying to prove his scientific hypothesis will lead to self-fulfilling prophecies.

A postmodernism researcher on the other hand believes in subjectivism and purports that the truthfulness of problems are subjective, opened, and fractured. The value of validity has little meaning when it comes to the best practice. The mantra that there is no absolute truth imposes the meaning that validity of research outcomes is personalized to each client. This is justified that truthfulness encapsulates multiple sources of knowledge, including but not limited to, the meaning of the language, opinions from the expert, and excerpt view from established theories. To offer subjectivism approach in understanding the presenting problems means to create more space in the session where collaborative relationship will cultivate.

Although the idea of collaboration seems interesting, there is a limitation of exercising postmodernism on certain population of client. For instance, individuals with addiction problems are unable to determine what is the best for themselves and instead require others (typically their significant others) to decide. It is likely that addiction counseling begins with coercion. Therefore, there is less degree of freedom to view their problems from their own perspectives and put meaning on the language used. The language selection is frequently limited due to their brain being damaged by substance consumed. Nevertheless, the language of drug addicts are able to be evaluated through defense mechanisms they use. The pattern of defense mechanisms is characterized by the unconscious mind, and therefore it is opened to multiple interpretations of drug addicts' problems. Freud underlined the power of mind in nature. The concept is aligned with the postmodern idea that emphasizes on the representation of things rather than things themselves (Horrocks, 2001).

Due to some limitations inherent in modernism and postmodernism paradigms, I would rather to develop a more appreciative concept where counselors could apply both paradigms to enrich their understanding toward the client's problems. It is possible to achieve maximum benefits for clients in counseling by bridging modernism perspectives to postmodernism paradigms. Counselors can use postmodernisms' perspective to generate their understanding of problems while needing a framework to develop treatment plans and goals. Treatment plans and goals are subject to change, and flexibility of counselor is priority so not to be rigid with the same meaning throughout the session. The framework is designed to lead the process of change to be more systematic.

In the final reaction, the ultimate truth of knowledge is a journey and not a termination. The classical knowledge found in the earliest centuries is a journey to the new discovery of postmodern age. Postmodern age is not a termination and believably it is a transition to another area of understanding the knowledge where another orientation toward truth claim emerges. The evidence-based practices are area to ponder about after empirical research-based practices were developed. The journey of discovery either empirical or evidence research are still benefiting human in different unique ways. Human existence in the world promises the revolution of understanding knowledge and experiences.

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