Therapeutic Feminist Embodiment: An Analysis of Mock Sessions & Development of Counseling Identity

Sarah Al Potter

College Humanities and Social Sciences, Grand Canyon University

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Michelle Colarusso

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In pursuing a clinical mental health counseling career, I am fervently committed to trauma-informed care, adhering to Arizona's professional licensure standards. My practice is cemented in an ethical framework that embraces feminist principles and values the cultural intricacies of each client. Central to my counselor identity is the integration of leadership, advocacy, equity, and intersectionality, aligned with feminist therapy's core principles. This philosophical stance is foundational to delivering effective, empathetic care. I am steadfast in my ethical practice, enriched by scholarly inquiry, and continually hone my skills through supervision. These rigorous dialogues on ethical complexities and systemic challenges in therapy reinforce my knowledge, especially at the juncture of feminist ideology and clinical practice, consequently amplifying my capacity to support my clients' well-being.

Strategies for Collaborating and Consulting with Behavioral Health Care Professionals

My professional ethos is firmly rooted in ethical practice, empathetic engagement, and academically informed interventions. In Arizona, adherence to the rigorous standards set by the Arizona Board of Behavioral Health Examiners (2021) not only reinforces the professionalism of counselors but also guarantees superior care quality within the community. Collaborative efforts with other behavioral health professionals are essential in my practice, addressing the complexities of trauma through a robust interdisciplinary approach. This strategy enhances continuous professional development and broadens expertise, supported by evidence of the benefits of integrated care models that promote comprehensive, client-specific services (Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, 2021).

Aligned with modern feminist ideology, my therapeutic methods prioritize the experiences of women and people of color, acknowledging how trauma and oppression intersect. By integrating feminist and multicultural counseling theories, my practice adheres to ethical guidelines while strengthening the therapeutic alliance, creating a trusting and mutually respectful environment (American Counseling Association, 2014). This approach not only honors the lived experiences of historically marginalized groups, but also enriches the therapeutic process. In Arizona, certification and licensure are essential to the integrity of our professional identity. By achieving the Licensed Professional Counselor (LPC) credential, practitioners show a commitment to competence, ethics, and the trust of those we serve. Continuing education, a cornerstone of licensure, maintains our connection to evolving research and practices, ensuring that our interventions are informed by the most recent advancements. Licensure operates as a safeguard, a necessary bulwark against unqualified practice, thus protecting the public and ensuring the provision of safe and efficacious care (Arizona Board of Behavioral Health Examiners, 2021).

Fostering a Counselor Identity

In my role as a leader in the counseling profession, I am dedicated to upholding values conducive to the advancement of our field and societal flourishing. Leadership transcends mere management to become a catalyst for trust and an incubator for diverse intellectual contributions (American Counseling Association, 2014). My engagement in professional circles and forums reflects a commitment to dialogue and policy enhancement aimed at refining mental health services, resting on a foundation of continuous learning and self-reflective practice. As an advocate, I extend my efforts from individual therapy to social justice initiatives, seeking to eradicate impediments to mental health access and rectify systemic disparities. Informed by the

integrative view championed by Toporek and Williams (2006), I recognize the entanglement of personal suffering with broader socio-political factors, and I endorse advocacy as pivotal in fostering client empowerment and achieving transformative social change.

Embracing an equitable and intersectional approach affirms my awareness of the multifarious identities shaping individuals' mental health encounters (Crenshaw, 1989). The cultural proficiency of the counseling strategies I implement reflects a dedication to responsiveness and sensitivity to my clients' cultural and intersectional identities, as vital to our therapeutic engagement. My work is an embodiment of praxis, seamlessly connecting theoretical foundations with practical application. Through a constant process of learning and adapting, I maintain the dynamism and efficacy of my practice. Feminist therapy practices, an integral aspect of my approach, are deliberately employed to promote the empowerment of women and marginalized communities, ensuring that their autonomy is championed across all spheres of mental health care (Brown, 2010).

Dispositional Development of A Budding Counselor

In my mock sessions with Charity, a client grappling with the complex challenges of motherhood and recent widowhood, I focused on the critical application of Acceptance and Empathy, guided by ethical standards and feminist counseling principles. Adhering to the American Counseling Association Code of Ethics, I committed to fostering a nonjudgmental environment, honoring diversity without imposing values (ACA, 2014). This practice facilitated validating Charity's emotions, promoting a sense of shared human experience, and encouraged her to reflect on her relationships' power dynamics, particularly concerning support mechanisms from her family members.

The concept of Empathy, as described by Rogers (1957), proved essential in authentically connecting with Charity's emotional state, reinforcing her lived experiences and the intrinsic feelings tied to her unique journey through grief and single parenthood. This empathetic connection helped to offer her a space where her emotions were not only recognized but profoundly acknowledged and validated—core aspects reinforced by feminist modalities that emphasize emotional resonance for healing, especially pertinent to women and marginalized groups.

Throughout our sessions, I also critically evaluated and adjusted my interaction style to align more closely with Charity's needs, ensuring my approach fostered a balanced and respectful therapeutic dialogue. By modifying my responses and striving for equilibrium in our exchanges, I aimed to minimize the influence of my counseling style on the therapeutic process, thereby enhancing Charity's autonomy in articulating her needs and navigating her paths toward healing.

Skills Reflection and Analysis

Through reflective analysis of my mock counseling sessions, I embarked on a meticulous assessment of my counseling proficiency, identifying strengths and pinpointing areas for enhancement. This self-examination is foundational, not only for professional development but as an ethical obligation to meet our clients' needs with utmost competence and empathy. The adoption of the SOLER technique, alongside the empathetic principles advocated by Egan (2002) and Rogers (1957), has significantly improved the therapeutic environment. SOLER emphasizes non-verbal communication—squarely facing the client, maintaining an open posture, leaning appropriately, establishing sustainable eye contact, and adopting a relaxed demeanor—thereby fostering attentiveness and creating a warm, supportive space. This

alignment with feminist counseling principles promotes a non-hierarchical, inclusive setting, enhancing empathetic connection, particularly beneficial for clients marginalized by gender, race, or other identities, in accordance with ethical and equitable practice standards (Rogers, 1957).

In sessions with Charity, focusing on her anxiety triggers, such as her job pressures and relinquishing control to her mother, illuminated the effectiveness of empathetic questioning in addressing issues of control, emphasizing equity and empowerment. Despite initial challenges, refining the use of open-ended questions—indispensable in feminist therapy for client empowerment (Brown, 2010)—and improving my active listening are critical for fostering a deeper therapeutic alliance and understanding. Active listening, a holistic engagement with the client's communicative expressions, needs significant refinement to avoid overlooking non-verbal cues, which could potentially weaken the therapeutic rapport (Corey, 2009).

Enhancing my ability to succinctly summarize and provide reflective space for clients remains paramount, facilitating deeper client introspection and empowerment, core objectives of feminist therapy (Brown, 2010). Focusing developmental efforts on open-ended questioning, active listening, and bolstering reflective spaces within sessions is imperative for enriching my counseling practice, ensuring alignment with ethical standards, and promoting a therapeutic approach that is both effective and empathetic.

Utilization of Theory to Enhance Skill

Integrating theoretical frameworks is essential for counselors to develop tailored approaches that resonate with the complexity of the human psyche and experience. These theories offer a systematic understanding of the interplay between cognitive, and social factors, guiding the creation of nuanced interventions. Ethically, leveraging theory reflects our

commitment to evidence-based, reflective practice, crucial for addressing oppression and ensuring equity, as emphasized by the ACA Code of Ethics. Feminist theory, with its focus on power dynamics and intersectionality, is especially pertinent in crafting counseling models that prioritize the experiences of women and people of color, promoting social justice and egalitarian therapeutic relationships (Brown, 2010). This approach, along with humanistic principles of empathy and unconditional positive regard (Rogers, 1957), and cognitive-behavioral strategies for modifying behavior and thought patterns (Corey, 2009), underscores the importance of compassion, empowerment, and concrete interventions in therapy.

As practitioners advance through practicum, internship, and beyond, the guidance of supervision, in line with ACA guidelines, becomes vital. This stage of professional development emphasizes continual learning and self-reflection, adopting practices that are inclusive and attuned to the needs of marginalized communities, fostering growth as culturally competent therapists. This journey is not static but an evolving practice of integrating diverse theories to meet clients' changing needs, grounded in an ethical commitment to social justice and client well-being.

Conclusion

Strategically collaborating and consulting with behavioral health care professionals not only fosters a culture of interdisciplinary learning but also enhances the quality of care provided to diverse populations, ensuring that interventions are grounded in ethical practices and respect for client autonomy. The development of a counselor identity is an evolving process, deeply influenced by the intentional cultivation of key dispositions such as self-awareness, acceptance, and genuineness, which are quintessential for navigating the complexities of therapeutic relationships. The dispositional development of a budding counselor is intricately tied to the

ethical incorporation of theory into practice. This not only sharpens their clinical skills but also aligns with a feminist ethos that prioritizes the empowerment of clients, particularly women and people of color, advocating for a fair therapeutic dialogue.

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