E-Mental Health and Counselor Training

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Abstract: In this article we discuss the various ways that we train counselors to work with a perspective taking model for enhancing e-mental health. This model is used to promote ethical behaviors in the therapy room and with online counseling. Also discussed are our efforts to encourage any of the students we train in the online counseling and psychotherapy fields to incorporate social responsibility elements within any future practice that they will be involved in. Students' training experiences and 'use of self' show how this model could be adopted by both domestic and international counselor training programs and used in any psychotherapy business. In partnership with local mental health professionals and social responsibility advocates, community and corporate leaders could benefit from the model to promote the well-being of workers and the community at large.

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1. Introduction

For many years we have been training counselors through an interactive teaching environment powered by blackboard technology. It also included the use of various audio and video conferencing technologies. We were successful in integrating e-mental health elements in training many students to provide counseling in underserved and underrepresented schools and communities. We have devised this unique feature within our counsellor training program because we believe it is important to widen the students' perspective where they can learn about themselves and their environment. We felt that with online counseling every trainee will need to tackle the difficult questions such as, how do I perceive myself? how do others perceive me? Students will need to also challenge themselves in pondering to what extent should it really matter. To get a true account of their environment we realized that students needed to gain a better understanding of what is really going on around them, in any given situation and in life and in general.

Perspective Taking is a broad term that in some schools of thought focuses on empathic abilities that involve individualist and collectivist values (Myyrya, Juujarvi, & Pesso, 2010). But it more generally refers to simply seeing things from the perspective of others. Developmentally, Perspective Taking or Social Perspective Taking is used describe children's growing ability to understand others' feelings and perspective (Bengtsson, and Arvidsson, 2011; Schwenck et at., 2013).

Early on in the program we instill in students the ability to be mindful and to quickly determine the mental health status of others. When they are counseling someone and confronting a situation online where a client is experiencing hardship and where distress shows in non-verbal ways students are able to

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draw on the perspective taking techniques that they learned to widen their viewpoint and they quickly consider some other factors, such as: Is this person in good physical health to be seeing me at this very moment? Is this person on drugs? Are there any health issues to consider that are beyond my scope of practice? Or, is there a mental health disorder where further assessment may be needed? They are ultimately able to ascertain if online counseling is possible and if a situation warrants a referral for the client to see someone in person.

As mental health professionals, we believe that it is important to encourage clients to interact and communicate with one another, and to engage with their wider community. Therefore, in counselor training, and especially in with applications of e-mental health with clients in underserved and underrepresented school and communities, we encourage our students to open up to new viewpoints new avenues and help people gain perspective on their life problems, who would otherwise remain isolated in one-dimensional living.

For many years we have been helping people of all ages with diverse mental health issues. We have mainly been doing so in licensed psychotherapy clinics, schools and hospitals. In this paper we will discuss how we train counselors to become competent in the fields of online counseling and psychotherapy and at the same time teach them to promote social responsibility. We will be exploring this through the various ways that we instill in them a need for ethical behaviors during their careers in e-mental health and in the counseling and psychotherapy fields. One way we effectively and efficiently achieved that was with Perspective Taking as a form of monitoring ethical behavior. Barnett (2008) contends that psychotherapists need to constantly strive to achieve the highest ethical standards in their profession. Our Perspective Taking model demonstrates how we personally promoted ethical behavior and social responsibility while training counselors, working with colleagues, treating clients and promoting it within the community. For example, adhering

to the American School Counselors Association (American School Counseling Association, n.d.) school counselors in our school counseling Master degree program are asked to adhere to the same ethical guidelines in a virtual/distance setting as they would in face-to-face settings. They also need to demonstrate appropriate selection and use of technological tools that will facilitate effective online counseling sessions. With the training the authors essentially serve as a team of specialists in online counseling and counselor training. Dr. Gardere's has extensive experience in online counseling and his clinical work involves the treatment of families and their children. He has helped student understand how to fully be present in front of a camera. He has brought his expertise to reality TV in such venues as VH1's Dad Camp, where he counseled very young men and their teenage pregnant girlfriends into becoming responsible and loving families He has also appeared on CNN, MSNBC, FOX Network, CBS News, ABC News, and at many other television shows. Dr. Maman developed several counselor training programs in New York State. He is a Distance Credentialed Counselor and Approved Clinical Supervisor. He devised the Perspective Taking techniques we discuss here at the time that he was developing a Master degree in mental health counseling, where he recruited and trained the largest workforce in that field in New York state to work in underserved communitIes. He was awarded the a second doctoral degree for his efforts, a first of its kind in the world, for his public works in the field of psychotherapy and for being a social entrepreneur who changed the landscape of mental health services in underrepresented schools and community and where perspective taking was essential for outreach. Dr. Sharir has been providing counseling and psychotherapy in underserved communities for many years and has devised coursework in the counseling and psychotherapy fields that focus on serving poor and marginalized population.

As a training team we stress in training that internet counseling requires a different and yet sometimes similar set of skills. Of course with any psychotherapeutic treatment or office

session the therapist must be educated, trained, and certainly competent to provide assistance to the\client. Just as importantly, the therapist must be tuned into the client, exhibit facial and body postures that shows the client that there is interest, attention and intent, and a "feel" for being in an office setting. That means the therapist must still be appropriately dressed and act in a professional manner. From his vast television experience Dr. Gardere stresses to the students the importance of knowing in which direction the camera is facing for getting the best view possible. In essence, the setting should be staged to give the effect to the client that he or she is receiving therapy in a professional office space. To fully accomplish this effect the therapist should have a background setting with books, diploma, and furnishings that will allow the space to resemble a professional office. It is vitally important that the therapist be aware that he or she is on camera and is a talking head in front of the client. Therefore, the therapist must consistently look into the camera, not the client, in order to let the client know that he or she is the center of attention. When the client is sitting in the office, the therapist can look away, and even sit in a relaxed manner. This is primarily because there are many different objects in the room that can gain the client's attention. In an Internet therapy session, there are many less distractions and the face of the therapist now becomes the focus of the session from the client's point of view. Therefore, the therapist must pay attention in this regard to facial and physical expressions and gestures. Finally, the therapist needs to prepare the client for any possible technical difficulties, with informed consent before starting the therapy and with referral options that may be necessary if technology fails. In general, the setup for the therapy session with the technical realm should be as smooth as possible, to include adequate lighting, sound, and an excellent Internet connection, so that technical difficulties do not cause discomfort or interfere with the therapy session. Essentially, the goal of the online counseling session is to make it feel and look as much as possible as stepping into the therapist's office. One of the aspects we

extensively train students in therapist involves also doing everything possible to address any confidentiality issues that can be violated on the Internet and how various secure internet connections should be addressed.

2. I-mental health training Methodology

The concept of Perspective Taking in counseling (Campbell et al., 2014; Chang, 2010; Macran et al.,1999; Todd & Galinsky, 2014) provided a useful methodology for evaluating the trainees' capacities for empathy and self-awareness when it came to 'use of self' (Reinkraut, Motulsky, & Ritchie, 2009). The training experiences also provide a set of prescriptive tenets to those who wish to replicate such training efforts. Students in the internship stage of the counselor training program were trained by us in perspective taking techniques so that they employ them in online counseling session for better understanding of the multi dimensionality of clients in the community and with their online communication efforts. We present our student training efforts for discussion as outlined below.

3. Disscusion

There is a consensus among the counselor training faculty we regularly converse with, in many parts of the globe, that trainees are faced with a number of major challenges during their efforts to engage in e-mental health in underserved and underrepresented schools and communities. We summarize previous experiences in training and the consensus as a whole in the field to what seem to us as common occurrences in online counseling and e-mental health in general. The Perspective Taking theme served as a fundamental stepping-stone towards cooperation with clients in the training. We initially believed that doing so would promote a more ethical behavior towards clients. The Perspective Taking techniques we use, that Dr. Maman developed in 2003 and since successfully trained hundreds of counselors to effectively bring about change in marginalized communities, centers around seeing clients as human beings with whom we share a cooperative spirit. As far as social

responsibility was concerned, we knew that the impact on the environment where we continued to successfully operate would be definitely more positive if the starting point was fostering more cooperation between people.

Thunnissen (2014) stresses the importance of promoting ethical behavior and social responsibility in psychotherapy businesses and in the way we transact with one another in general. Knowing that we are training students to work in that business we believe that fostering cooperation and understanding between people can have a multiplying effect. One of the Perspective Taking techniques Dr. Maman developed for the training calls for trainees to imagine a school and family life where teens are happy and where their parents are happy. Their parents are happy that they are happy and then teens are happy that their parents are happy. Then their peers and teachers are happy and happy that they are happy…and counselors training in a school environment can easily see where we are going with this in terms of of the cooperative spirit that is so needed in today's world, in essence it is a quick imaginary technique for seeing the big picture.

Based on his teaching tolerance work, with funding from the mayor's office and support from the southern poverty law center Dr. Maman devised a more recent Perspective Taking technique, that he introduce last year at a lecture at Princeton University. It calls for peace building through a bird's eye viewpoint, where Google Earth could serve groups in seeing conflicts from far away and where we become mindful that cooperation between people is best achieved by creating an atmosphere that encourages tolerance and inclusiveness. This is particularly important when working with teens and their parents. A collaborative atmosphere is helpful for many conflict resolutions in Marriage and Family therapy as well and depends heavily on the particular viewpoints, from which we mindfully examine life, this especially worked well in training for work with teens and their parents. Seeing things from a distance is a prerequisite for continuing to other perspective taking activities that may

involve more in-depth critical thinking where we can relate to our ethical behaviors in the most effective way. Often a teen would be asking about a formula that he or she can carry on with them beyond the therapy room for perspective taking. Through years of practice we found that gaining perspective on school life and on life in general can be attributed to one's ability and willingness to engage in perspective taking without assigning any specific rules. It is preferable that people of all ages come to think of it as an activity that promotes personal growth and overall understanding of the human condition. In the broader context of health and well-being people have to create satisfactory lives for themselves and others and in this way become responsible for their community and society at large.

Figure 1 - The Online Counseling Dynamic

Figure 1 above is based on Dr. Maman's development of Perspective Taking techniques in our training and it offers an illustration of how the therapist could instantly imagine three different viewpoints on how the counseling progresses in the therapy room. The bottom circle would represent the beginning of most online counseling experiences where the therapist is in the therapy room and the client is out (physically away and/or as just another member of a community somewhere outside of the therapist's reach). Moving from bottom into the top right or left circles at any point during the therapy session is essential. This is because either the therapist and the client are able to view a bigger picture where they are moving closer as part of both worlds (both understand that they are in the therapy room and also part of a larger online community of people brought closer via technological means). Moving to the top two circles is available if we help the client view cyberspace as a place where the client could be more integrated into the community with the help of the therapist (also a part of the upper left circle) and at times able to be receiving personalized care (upper right circle) as if s/he is in any physical therapy room.

As we train a younger generation for opening their hearts and minds via online

communication, we can understand how we could all benefit from examining things form a distance. And if problems with social isolation and internet addiction could be mediated this could open up a new understanding for us as humans. Even is we are moving online our training is still based on existing psychological methods. We believe in combining these with our own training approach of integrating Perspective Taking for cooperation between clients and their surrounding environment. This is a great way that social responsibility is incorporated into counseling to ultimately help us transcend the common psychotherapy business, to benefit any community, regardless of its geographical location.

Outspreading beyond any psychotherapy theory we call for social awareness in counselor training, for instance, to supplement Virginia Satir's stances for visual imagery as well as any other theory with elements that deal with family dynamics. We also use these techniques to supplement a Bowen oriented family therapy with differentiation of self in marital relationships and as far as authenticity in these areas will be indispensable (Peleg, 2008; Peters, 2014). The family dynamics that Satir and Bowen propose goes hand in hand with our Perspective Taking in promoting ethical behavior and social responsibility in family friendly ways, not only within any psychotherapy business that we train our student to be working in but as could be extended to the public in general. As far as seeing the bigger picture with interpersonal relation the training aims to enhance social awareness in the community through fostering in treatment cooperation between the clients and their surrounding environment.

The call for ethical behavior and social responsibility in any psychotherapy business goes along with the not too distant future that is set for our trainees. We believe that we are entering an era where humanity is, at last, realizing because of technology and connectivity that we can all have a better existence when we cooperate and collaborate.
It is our hope that, at the level of global politics, that Perspective Taking will also take place, that

the world will be entering a period of peace and tranquility and that intercultural conflict will be reduced through people seeking reconciliation instead of vengeance. But of course it does not matter what we personally believe about people's abilities or intentions to cooperate. Cooperation depends on whether others decide to come to the table, or walk away from it. We train for developing an ability to see, if just through a little pause for a mindful examination, of other's perspectives, so people can quickly determine whether a dispute can be approached through cooperation.

This very ability may involve training for a better future, for developing in the community strong academic achievement that relies on a strong collaboration between children and their parents. Collaboration between families and schools and the community at large can also promote academic success for life (Suizzo et al., 2013; Willit, Broidy, and Denman, 2013).

Beyond the 'talk' we aim to teach Social Responsibility with student actually 'doing'. Every aspect of our training involves a practical online assignment and working with someone in the community, or students practicing sessions with one another. Through video conferencing we were able to train our students to work in underserved and underrepresented communities. For example, we trained rabbis to work in an ultra-Hasidic community where there was a stigma attached to counseling. The word got out that a couple could skype with one of the rabbis we trained for marriage counseling. They would not be seen going into a house and in this way no gossip would spark in the community. In addition, attending university courses in person were difficult for the rabbis because it would involve being in close proximity to females (in their house of worship there is usually a curtain separating the sexes and it created a complicated situation whenever they had to come to class in person). This is where e-mental health provided us not only solutions for outreach in our field of counseling but also where training was provided online and necessary for reaching out to community practitioners who would otherwise be left

untrained, all while making them comfortable with the technology so they are able to provide confidential online counseling session. When counseling outside of the community in a remote physical location video technology also made it easier to contact Hasidic couples for marriage counseling in parts of the USA where access to a counselor who is also Hasidic was near to impossible. During hurricane Sandy we came to realize that the video technology became useful for all our counselors in training, weather related issues could not prevent the training to continue and trainees were also able to continue their internship hours and provided much needed online counseling.

Students were trained to keep matters confidential because no conferring by video was ever recorded. Students were also taught to screen clients for internet addiction and they would not provide any online counseling where it enabled online addiction.

Technology related difficulty have to be covered in the informed consent. Prepare to refer clients to a medical professional for treatment.

It is important for us to continually promote ethical behavior and social responsibility by actually doing it in a community context and not just having it as a talking point. Perspective taking is truly effective when we are able to not only think and talk about it, but to actually do it. It requires engagement with the world. For example, as a school psychologist Dr. Maman devised with teacher education interns an after school program to help children complete their homework. He would often step in homework helping sessions and ask children to make a list of what they think they are doing in order to create a collaborative atmosphere in their school life and in life in general. He would say: "If you are doing more than talking, you are doing a great job!" Our interns would often use this encouragement skill to motivate the children to complete their homework.

The philosopher, Ludwig Wittgenstein, contended that no one can really know what it is like to experience what another person is experiencing. This may be existentially correct, but we believe that when doing something or performing an action to experience it as another would, you are much closer to gaining an understanding of the reality of another's experience. Dr. Gardere is well known on American television and his interjections as one of America's known psychologists allows people in any of his reality shows to gain much perspective on their life problems. From his many travels and television appearances students can clearly see that he is in a mode of doing and is not there for only advising. Dr. Sharir also inspires the students with gaining perspective and with being in a mode of doing, he often does volunteer work with the poor. He tells students that this may involve sleeping for a night with homeless people, or attending a funeral and consoling someone in a time of grief. He stresses to students that rather than start by advising others what they should be doing is first going out there and seeing how people really live and gaining experience from the perspective of others in their physical living space before advising online.

It is incumbent on business and mental health providers to engage in activities that demonstrate and enact their real beliefs. So having all this perspective taking helped us finally realize that we needed to change the ways we think about e-mental health and its practical applications. This could involve a trickle up effect to the home life of children as well. To really increase people's happiness and reduce sadness required one to put oneself in someone else's shoes. If we can do that effectively online, just being talking heads, who act in a no- threatening manner, who provide effective and efficient mental help, then we should definitely be doing that.

At the end of training some of our students confront us with questions that related to decreasing sadness and increasing happiness in their life. When we did not have the right answer for the occasion we would just say that developing critical thinking through Perspective Taking is a step in the right direction.

If we are to be truly socially responsible in a business that is therapeutic and is intended to take suffering away from people then we need to do just that. We believe at looking at the bigger picture and taking the viewpoints of not only the colleagues in our field but of all of our clients as well. After all, happiness can only be truly achieved through the process of looking at problems from multiple viewpoints. We are able to make appropriate changes in our lives based on our own perspective taking and the feedback that we receive from peers. As socially responsible therapists, we encourage clients to interact and communicate with each other, and to engage with their wider community. Bohdanowicz & Zientara (2009) show that by engaging the wider community socially responsible corporations ultimately influence the well-being of their employees.

4. CONCLUSION

As we train counselors but are also in the psychotherapy business, we endeavor to stimulate debate among colleagues about the constraints of traditional practices of psychotherapy. We often try to engage them with our model of training in e-mental health and how it would possibly work if we were all part of the corporate world. We try to make everyone think of a world where cooperation and striving towards happiness in the workplace sets the stage for everyday business. To our mind psychology, psychotherapy and the business of mental health treatment in general should not be confined within any business model ivory tower or locked in the treatment room. The discipline should be meritocratic and open to suggestions from everyone that could contribute to how we view and approach life. We encourage our clients to be ambassadors of fresh ideas, to open up new avenues, and help people gain perspective on their life problems, who would otherwise remain isolated in one-dimensional living.

Our Perspective Taking model is a form of monitoring our ethical behavior in the ways that we applied it in each psychotherapy business we were part of. It could clearly serve as a model that could be adopted by both domestic and international psychotherapy businesses. Corporate responsibility advocates and corporate leadership could benefit from adhering to the well-being of workers when involving the mental health of all employees. In companies where there are counselors on board our model for enhancing treatment (which involves Perspective Taking as a form of monitoring online counseling) with the social responsibility elements discussed here could prove beneficial to the overall health and wellness of everyone in the company. Just as clients in a private psychotherapy business could be encouraged to see the bigger picture and to be ambassadors of fresh ideas, managers can help their employees to gain perspective on daily occurrences in life and at work.

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