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Holistic approaches in counseling

Abstract

The concept of holism has several meanings according to this review of the literature; the origination and evolution is complex. The definitions and context of holism in counseling are specified. Moreover, the elements and models based in holism are examined. Finally, the areas in which holistic based counseling occurs are outlined and investigated.

HOLISTIC APPROACHES IN COUNSELING

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Abstract

The concept holism has several meanings according to this review of the literature, the origination and evolution is complex. The definitions and context of holism in counseling are specified. Moreover, the elements and models based in holism are examined. Finally, the areas in which holistic based counseling occurs is outlined and investigated.

Holistic Approaches to Counseling

Holism has been associated with alternative medicines as well as unscientific practices designed to achieve well-being. However, the term "holism" has many different meanings, of them many based on empirical evidence. The focus of this literature review was to provide understanding into the different meanings of holism. Also, this review was conducted to provide clarity into how holism has been used with counseling. In addition, the components of holism, as well as the models based in holism, have been outlined to present the ways in which this concept has been applied to counseling situations. Finally, this review highlighted the areas as well as how this concept has been applied with clients.

What is Holism?

Baer, Hays, Mc Clendon, Mc Goldrick, and Vespucci (1998) presented an overview of the holistic health movement that comprehensively addressed the beginnings of holistic health as a concept and the changes of holistic health through time until today. Baer et al. (1998) asserted that San Francisco has been the major locus of the holistic movement from its conception and focused their review on the evolution of holism in that city. The beginnings of holistic health grew out of the late 1960s counterculture. This cultural movement emphasized nature over industrialism. In addition, the New Age movement—which emphasized inner tranquility, wellness, unity, self-actualization, and striving for higher levels of consciousness—was occurring at the same time as the cultural movement towards nature (Baer et al., 1997). A major part of the New Age movement was its healing and therapy practices, including a wide variety of techniques: centering, channeling, astral projection, guided visualization, iridology, reflexology,

chromotherapy, rebirthing, shiatsu, and crystal or pyramid healing. The combination of the natural movement and the New Age movement provided the groundwork for the holistic health movement to emerge. Baer et al. (1997) stated that the holistic movements began as a reaction to the medical inadequacies present in the late 1960s. Although holism was a reaction to the medical model in the 1960s, it currently encompasses various medical settings. Included in those medical systems are humanistic medicine, parapsychology, folk medicine, herbalism, nutritional therapies, homeopathy, yoga, massage, meditation, and martial arts. The practitioners of holistic medicine also vary with lay alternative practitioners, psychic or spiritual healers, New Agers, holistic medical doctors, osteopathic physicians, chiropractors, and naturopaths.

As the holistic movement has progressed, a split has occurred among the people who subscribe to holistic healing modalities (Baer et al., 1997). Currently, some proponents of holism adhere to a professional model and push for holism to become part of the existing medical model, making this model more of a biopsychosocial approach to the treatment of disease. Other proponents adhere to a counterculture and resist becoming a part of the professional medical view. This ideological split in holism provides the basis for the wide variety of views and uses of holism presented in this paper (Baer et al., 1997).

Definitions of Holistic Counseling

Many people of different theoretical backgrounds have conceptualized holism. It has been defined in numerous ways to fit the area in which it is being used because it has been examined by people of different orientations. In holistic counseling, many authors use holism as the basis of their style of counseling (Foss, 1999; Harper & Stone, 1993;

Lair, 1996; Robbins, 1998; Russo, 1984; Ryff & Singer, 1998; Schafer, 1998; Wapner, 1984; Whines, 1999). One definition of holistic counseling is, “a process of enabling individuals and communities to increase control over the determinants of health” (Schafer, p. 48, 1998). The perspective influencing this definition of holism is the view that holistic approaches are not completely holistic when they promote the view that well-being is within the individual and not influenced by social factors. Schafer (1998) encouraged holistic counseling to look at the social factors as having as much influence as individual factors in affecting a person’s life.

A similar definition of holistic counseling including social factors was given by Lair (1996) who stated that holistic counseling is based on a belief that each person is an integrated whole. This integrated whole includes physical, social, psychological, and spiritual concerns. Although Lair (1996) reported social factors as a part of his definition, he described each area as interacting with all the other areas within the person. Another similar definition of holism was stated by Ryff and Singer (1998): “what deeply engages the mind and the emotions also likely influences the body without excluding the social structures influence on the person’s definition of how to express good health” (p. 73).

Some authors have described holistic counseling with different definitions. One definition of holistic counseling characterizes it as a part of hierarchical communication that moves from direct counseling to indirect counseling (Russo, 1984). This view of holistic counseling is based on a non-Western orientation, promoting the use of metaphor to reach connections within the person. Another variation of the definition was reported by Wapner (1984) who defined holism as parts of a whole within the framework of the environment, psychology, and the practitioner. Additionally, Harper and Stone (1993)

defined it as “a state of physical, psychological, and spiritual health developing primarily from a lifestyle of wellness, disease prevention and a respect for life and earth’s resources” (p.88). Other authors have defined holism in their own terms, but the one constant is a specific mind and body connection (Foss, 1999; Rioux, 1996; Robbins, 1998; Whines, 1999).

Components of Holistic Counseling

All those who attempt to define holistic counseling report that it is not easy to tease apart the definition to gain understanding of the aspects involved. Just as there exist numerous definitions and conceptualizations of holistic counseling, along with the numerous definitions and conceptualizations of holistic counseling, there are even more different components within these definitions and conceptualizations to consider. It seems to be composed of several parts, and the number of parts as well as the identity of those parts differs among authors. The most basic components stated were the biological, psychological, and social aspects involved in a person (Dwairy, 1997). Dwairy (1997) has defined the biological aspect as the physical reaction by the body to the mind's perception of reality. Also, the psychological part was considered as a window to reality that is filtered through the minds' subjective perception. In addition, the social aspect was defined as the community's socially prescribed way of allowing individual expression of problems. Another basic view of important components involved in holistic counseling consisted of personal, interpersonal (social), and environmental aspects (Schectman, 1993). Personal aspects were interpreted by Schectman (1993) as promoting self-acceptance and self-recognition as well as the person's search for inner strengths. The interpersonal component has been described by Schectman (1993) as

being social, having responsibility and engaging in listening skills. Additionally, the environmental aspect has been delineated by Schectman (1993) as the physical atmosphere that affects a person.

Several authors consider four components in holistic counseling (Harper & Stone, 1993; Robbins, 1998; Witmer & Sweeney, 1992). Witmer and Sweeney (1992), in their view, determined that the mind, body, spirit, and community are the important components of holism. Moreover, they described five life tasks, which are characteristics of the holism components and define wellness within a person. The five life tasks were considered as a person possessing spirituality, self-regulation, work, love, and friendship. However, Harper and Stone (1993) proposed four parts of holistic counseling which are biological, psychological, spiritual, and environmental. Simply defined, the biological aspect involves the body, psychological has been determined to be the mind, the spiritual aspect was described as personal philosophy of life, and the person's life style influences. Robbins (1998) reported the self, psyche, personality, and system should be considered the important parts of holistic counseling. The self has been described by Robbins (1998), as the evolving personality of a person (Robbins, 1998). The psyche has been defined by Robbins (1998), as the person's internal mediator (conscious). Moreover, Robbins (1998) considered the person's personality as the way in which a person identifies with the world. Finally, the system has been detailed by Robbins (1998), as the belief system of the person about the world around him/her.

Other authors state that five or more components comprise holistic counseling (Herman & Hazler, 1999; Rioux, 1996; Whines, 1999; Wapner et al., 1997). Rioux (1996) reported five factors as parts of holistic counseling. These factors included the

biological processes, psychological processes, social aspects, spiritualism, and the environmental aspects. The biological aspects have been described by Rioux (1996), as a person's biological traits or make up. The psychological processes were defined as the person's thoughts and emotions (Rioux, 1996). Rioux (1996) detailed the social aspects as a person's socialness--need for others. Spiritualism has been defined by Rioux (1996), as the values of a person that give him/her direction. Finally, Rioux (1996) described the environmental aspect as the person's location within space and time as well as their connection with the earth. Herman and Hazler (1999) encompassed five different parts in their view of holism: spirituality, self-regulation, work-recreation-leisure, friendship, and love. These five parts were defined as life tasks and served as the independent variables in their study. The life tasks were considered as predictors of psychological well-being in college students. They found that self-regulation and work-recreation-leisure are the best predictors of psychological well-being in college students. Whines (1999) reported five important and altogether different components. Those elements included unique existence, awareness, choice and responsibility, orientation towards a goal and search for meaning. According to Whines (1999), the person is viewed by the counselor as whole and not as separate parts of biology and psychology. Whereas, the elements of holistic counseling have been delineated, these elements are intertwined within the person and separated as therapeutic goals for the client to strive toward. Wapner, Fujimoto, Imamichi, Inoue, and Toews (1997) split the components into two areas. These two areas are each comprised of three parts. One area included the person, which was made up of biological, psychological, and sociocultural parts. The other area was the environmental aspect, including the physical, interpersonal and sociocultural parts. The person was

looked at as affected by his/her biological, psychological, and sociocultural parts as well as within the context of his/her environmental atmosphere.

The most common components found to be incorporated within the concept of holistic counseling were the biological, psychological, and social aspects (Dwairy, 1997; Harper & Stone, 1993; Rioux, 1996; Wapner et al., 1997; Witmer & Sweeney, 1992). Additionally within the literature, spiritual and environmental or cultural components were frequently included as parts of holistic counseling (Herman & Hazler, 1999; Harper & Stone, 1993; Rioux, 1996; Schectman, 1993; Witmer & Sweeney, 1992). In contrast, some of the authors identified components of holistic counseling that were unique from the commonly cited parts. Herman and Hazler (1999) and Whines (1999) identified components in their holistic concepts that were uniquely different as parts to consider important in holistic counseling. Those components included spirituality, self-regulation, work, recreation, leisure, friendship, love, unique existence, awareness, choice and responsibility, as well as orientation towards a goal. These components were different because they were not commonly considered as parts of holistic counseling.

Integration of Holism Components

A basic premise of holism is the view that a person is affected by different components, each part is connected to the other, and this makes up the whole person. Westbury and Tutty (1999) stated that, for a person to be whole, he/she needs a balance to exist within each part of himself/herself. Additionally, if one part is not in balance, then the person experiences problems physically and psychologically. Some authors (Stensrud & Stensrud, 1984; Witmer & Sweeney, 1992) reported the idea that all parts of the person need to be in balance for the person to be considered healthy. Other reports

(Berg, Landreth, & Fall, 1998; Harper & Stone, 1993; Lair, 1996; Rioux, 1996)

suggested that integrating the parts of a person into the whole is important for growth in the client. Berg et al. (1998) reported this integration as the most important factor in producing growth within the client. Along with the importance of integration, Rioux (1996) stated that recognition of the interdependence of the parts upon one another is also significant.

Another view of integrating the components of holism was reported by Whines (1999). This view Whines proposed that a patient is more than just the sum of his/her parts and a patient who is receiving treatment should be recognized as needing more variety with numerous approaches of treatment to have the best outcomes. More simply, the mind and the body are the components that are connected and each influences the other. Foss (1999) stated the need for awareness of this interconnection between mind and body within the medical setting. Lair (1996) proposed that dealing with the concerns of the client in an additive or synergistic approach of the mind and body connection was the best way to produce growth in the client. Lair also stated that only treating a symptom keeps the client at one level when the client is not approached in a synergistic philosophy of change. Harper and Stone (1993) reported that the client benefits psychologically when the balance of all the parts as a whole produces a feeling of well being within the client.

Models of Holistic Counseling

Holistic counseling has a variety of models that have been proposed for working with diverse populations. The range of models presented in the literature fall into a continuum of simple and straightforward to complex. The following models will be

included: spiritual model, holistic, developmental, and systems model, integrative body psychotherapy model, interpersonal skills development model, unified model, shaman based model, biopsychosocial model, interdisciplinary model, general practice model, and the therapeutic presence model.

Spiritual Model

One of the simple models involving a holistic framework was a model for enabling counselors to address spiritual issues with clients (Russo, 1984). It was reported that most counselors stay away from addressing spiritual issues with clients because they are not trained in ways to incorporate this into their counseling skills in a manner most helpful to the client. Russo (1984) proposed that a person must proceed through three levels of learning. The first level, which a person must pass through, is oriented around behavior and logic. Next, the person must proceed through the second level involving learning new contextual behaviors and skills; the second level is more cognitive than the first. Finally, a person has to advance through the third level learning, a deeper intensity of meaning through the use of metaphor and indirect counseling techniques. The use of metaphor is helpful because it challenges a person to evaluate the meaning behind the metaphor. The use of metaphor is appropriate with spiritual counseling because the client can be guided through his/her impasse without the therapist's direct involvement in the process.

Holistic, Developmental, and Systems Model

Another straightforward model utilizing a holistic basis was presented by Wapner et al. (1997). This model was described as a holistic, developmental, and systems-oriented approach. Holistic was defined as having biological, psychological, and

sociocultural aspects. The developmental part of the approach involved conceptualizing the person in relation to others of the same age group. The last part of the approach took the systems outside the person that affected him/her. Wapner et al. (1997) explained their model as examining the person in relation to his/her biological, psychological, and sociocultural aspects. Furthermore, the person was studied within the environment physically, interpersonally, and socioculturally (Wapner et al., 1997).

Integrative Body Psychotherapy Model

A different model with holism serving as the basis was reported by Westbury and Tutty (1999). This model was labeled the "Integrative Body Psychotherapy." The premise of this model is the integration and balance of the cognitive, emotional, physical, and spiritual aspects of concern to the client. Integration and balance are achieved through activities involving all areas with clients. This model was developed for group treatment with survivors of childhood sexual abuse.

Interpersonal Skills Development Model

A model developed by Berg et al. (1998) was identified as "Interpersonal Skills Development." Berg et al. (1998) integrated the person, the physical image, and the emotional aspects of interpersonal and intrapersonal skills. The focus of this model was to integrate the parts of the person, teach him/her skills as well as keeping conscious growth in mind to serve as a motivation for change.

Unified Model

Stensrud and Stensrud (1984) proposed a model calling for unification of holistic health and counseling. This model's main premise is that the client's behavior is based on choice, perceptions and values, which are derived from expectancies by the client.

The goal of counseling in this model is to increase the client's self-efficacy to move him/her toward a state of aliveness or well-being. The counselor's purpose is to change the attitude of the client in his/her thoughts and feelings through techniques that are behaviorally and teaching oriented. In addition, the feelings are changed through teaching of skills in thinking, behaving, and feeling. Stensrud and Stensrud (1984) characterized the therapeutic process as helping the client move from one end of a continuum that objectifies feelings in a cognitive state called emotions to the other end of the continuum where the client has separated the thoughts and feelings and now is "alive."

Shaman Based Model

A more complicated model was proposed by Rioux (1996), who utilized a holistic base for substance abuse counseling. This model incorporated healing techniques of shamans. Shamans are healers of physical and psychological ailments in non western cultures. These healers do not separate the mind and the body as having problems interdependent of each other. Shamans journey into the inner self to find healing, harmony, and balance. When shamans work with a person who has a problem, they help the patient with his/her journey to the inner self. The shaman serves as a teacher and a model for the people of his/her cultures. In addiction counseling, counselors are promoted to take on a shamanistic role to both teach as well as model for clients ways of healing and finding the inner harmony. This approach to addiction counseling may be more helpful to clients because of the search for inner harmony and balance to replace the search for this balance from a substance.

Biopsychosocial Model

A complex biopsychosocial model of metaphor therapy was proposed by Dwairy (1997). This type of therapy was reported as best suited for people from non western cultures. The model is rooted in the use of metaphor and imagery techniques as effective ways of helping the client. The counselor can use metaphor and imagery with the biological processes, psychological processes, and sociocultural aspects of the client because each of the aspects in the client responds to those techniques. The body responds to imagery as if it were realistic; the reality of clients is found in the subjective inferences responded to with metaphor and imagery techniques; and the sociocultural aspect is how the client responds to problems in a socially prescribed manner. This biopsychosocial model enables the client to move because of its reliance on metaphor and imagery as well as on how metaphors interact with the body, mind, and society.

Interdisciplinary Model

A model reported by Lair (1996) was described as an interdisciplinary approach with a holistic basis. This author specified how the physical, emotional, and spiritual components interact with each other in a synergistic manner within the individual. For example, if a client has a tumor, this physical ailment will produce physical problems, which affect the emotional experience and over time will impact the person's spiritual beliefs. The major principle of this model was stated as, "there is now considerable evidence that consciousness is a key controlling factor in both health and disease, and therefore, it should be possible to use the mind to bring about health" (Lair, 1996, p.7).

General Medical Practice Model

A unique application of holism to counseling was described in a model by Whines (1999). This approach to holistic counseling was reported within the context of the medical setting. The client was viewed as being affected by many outside forces. The model promoted exploring the client's view of him/herself without interpretation of this view. Additionally, establishing the therapeutic relationship on the same level as the client with honesty was promoted. Keeping the focus in the present tense was described by Whines (1999) as part of the model. The counselor is encouraged to help the client get in touch with his/her body processes. Finally, the counselor is encouraged to help the client experiment with new behaviors.

Therapeutic Presence Model

The most complex model was reported by Robbins (1998), who stated that his model postulates six principles for a counselor: process, authenticity, the self as a part of the process, self-control of the reactive mind, developmental order of the client, and the functional unity of body, mind and spirit. Other parts of this model's conceptualization of holistic counseling include having a view of spirituality within the mind/body wellness and a knowledge of systems.

Similarities of Models

A similarity found between all of these models in the literature was the use of metaphor as a main technique with which to help clients (Dwairy, 1997; Rioux, 1996; Russo, 1984). These authors described their use of metaphor as the way to understand the client's subjective experience. The authors proposed that the use of metaphor was the best way of helping the client identify the problem and its solution. Another similarity

was incorporating shaman beliefs into the basis of some of those models (Dwairy, 1997; Rioux, 1996).

Each model uses holism as a basis. The models use holism to examine a client's inner as well as outer experience. They also take into account the impact these experiences have on the client's life. All the models are similar in that client's experience problems when one part of his/her life is not in sync with the other parts.

Differences Between Models

The difference between the various models of holism begins with the split in the healing movement. Some of the people who subscribe to holism view this concept within the realm of professionalism. The other people who adhere to a holistic model that is a branch of the counterculture of America. The differences between models of holism can be categorized into two areas, definitions and models.

Definitions

Currently there exists a range of differences in the definition of holism. Some explanations are based on the influences upon areas of an individual's life. Other definitions of holism are focused on the inner state of being of the person. More specifically, one definition of holistic counseling was that it empowers a person to gain control over his/her life (Schafer, 1998). Whereas another definition was based on the notion that a person is a part of an integrated whole, which includes their environment (Lair, 1996). Conversely, Ryff and Singer (1998), stated their definition of holism as a mind-body connection, influenced by social factors, and a person expresses good health according to the influences of the social factors. Another definition of holism was based on a hierarchical communication process involving direct and indirect communication

(Russo, 1984). Wapner (1984) defined holism as a connection of a person's environment, psychology, and other people as one whole influence on functioning. Another definition was a state of existing wellness, which is developed from a lifestyle (Harper & Stone, 1993).

Models

In the review of the literature, numerous models were proposed that utilize the concept of holism: a model based in spirituality was described with the purpose of enabling counselors to address spiritual issues with a client (Russo, 1984); a model with an emphasis in shamanism to help the client has been detailed (Rioux, 1996); a model emphasizing internal integration and balance has been proposed as holistic (Westbury & Tutty, 1999); a model featuring the integration of interpersonal skills utilized holism as a basis for the approach (Berg et al., 1999); and a for use in generalist medicine as a way to best serve patients needs (Whines, 1999). Another variation on the use of holism in counseling is a model with an emphasis on the therapeutic presence the counselor needs to bring to the counseling session to best help the client (Robbins, 1998). Some models were characterized as multimodel approaches incorporating many existing models into a comprehensive model (Lair, 1996; Wapner et al., 1997). Those models incorporating existing models included: holism, developmental, and systems theories, holistic health and counseling, biopsychosocial theory, as well as medical, psychological, and religious establishments.

Settings of Holistic Counseling

The settings in which holistic counseling can be used are as numerous as the models. In some settings, counselors use holistic approaches to improve the student. In

other settings, counselors focus on holistic biomedical practices. Counselors also use holistic approaches in the mental health areas of group work and individual therapy.

Students

Holism has been used in a study of college student adjustment (Herman & Hazler, 1999; Wapner et al., 1999). Those studies were exploring what enabled the adjustment of college students to their lives away from home. One study was about the lifestyles and aspects of student's lives that promoted adjustment (Herman & Hazler, 1999). Herman and Hazler (1999) found that self regulation and work-recreation-leisure areas were the best predictors of psychological well-being. The other study was about this adjustment in another culture (Wapner et al., 1999). Japanese students in the United States and American students in Japan were studied on their adjustment to numerous areas of their lives. Wapner et al. (1999) found that the student was affected by the biological, psychological, and sociocultural aspects of his/her life as well as the within the context of the environmental atmosphere in which he/she lived. However, Schectman (1993) described the use of a holistic approach in an elementary classroom to teach democratic values. In this approach, teachers incorporated numerous components into the teaching of democratic values to students to enable them to apply democratic values outside the classroom. Schectman (1993) found no conclusive evidence that teaching democratic values enables application of those values outside the classroom because of the lack of control for outside influences affecting the study.

Biomedicine

Another area involving holism has been in the medical setting (Whines, 1999). The medical practice was reported as increasingly incorporating traditional therapists into

this setting as a way to holistically treat the patient (Colpin, 1994; Lair, 1996; Stensrud & Stensrud, 1984; Whines, 1999). Holistic counseling was also promoted with infertile couples seeking alternative reproductive methods (Colpin, 1994). This method of reproduction was discussed as an extreme measure for infertile couples. Holism was promoted in the counseling of these couples to prevent unrealistic expectations from occurring during the time that they are engaged in alternative reproductive methods. The methods of the counseling intervention were not fully presented by Coplin. However, Coplin did report that all areas of the couples' lives need to be included in counseling those using alternative reproductive methods.

Groups

The specific uses of holism with groups differed in the literature. One area of holism using a group approach focused on treating sexually abused women (Westbury & Tutty, 1999). The approach with this group was involvement of activities that promoted the integration and balance between cognitive, emotional, physical as well as spiritual needs. Another area of using holism with groups has been with leadership training (Berg et al., 1998). This group approach was psychoeducational in its focus. The leadership training involved teaching skills to people in a work or school capacity. A group format was utilized with the student population in Schectman's (1993) study of elementary students, which taught democratic values in a holistic approach.

Mental Health

Holism has been used as a basis for many areas of counseling. In one area, holism has been used as a basis for addiction counseling (Rioux, 1996). Another variation on the use of holism in counseling was with spiritual concerns of clients (Russo, 1984). In

addition, transcultural counseling was reported as an area of counseling with a holistic basis (Harper & Stone, 1993). Moreover, groups of sexually abused women have been a population in the mental health area in which a holistic approach has been applied (Westbury & Tutty, 1999). Finally, holistic counseling was found within hospice's approach to working with the terminally ill (Lair, 1996).

Conclusions

Holism as a concept developed from the ideal of naturalism and multiple components affecting a person. This concept has developed into an idea of multiple definitions, components, models, and settings to help a person receive treatment. There does not exist any one definition or model of holism to date. In the literature, seven different definitions of holism were reported. Also, twelve models of counseling were reported using holism as a basis. Furthermore, twelve settings were used in the application of the different models. Authors have defined holism, its components, models for use, and settings for use in manners to support their particular view of holism. Though common themes and uses of holism were apparent in the review, no cohesiveness in this concept exists. This lack of cohesiveness has allowed authors and therapists to tailor this concept to meet their academic and counseling needs. Some authors detailed parts of their model and how it was used with a client. Others described the components of the model without explaining how it was applied. Furthermore, authors reported using a holistic basis to their approaches with no details about the parts of the basis and how it was applied. A concrete definition of holism needs to be developed to provide cohesiveness and less subjectivity to use of this concept.

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