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Abstract

The authors provide an overview of ethical decision-making models and address the role of counselor self-awareness in the process. The manuscript examines the importance of self-awareness in ethical decision-making and provides considerations for infusing this approach in counselor education and supervision. Practical recommendations for counselor educators to incorporate self-awareness and ethical decision making into the classroom are included.

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Keywords: self-awareness, ethical decision-making models

"Beyond the 'scientific' phase, a comprehensive approach to ethical decision making must embrace consideration of the decision maker" (Mattison, 2000, p. 207). The American Counseling Association (ACA) Code of Ethics (2005) serves as the counseling profession's foundation for professional practice and ethical responsibility (Ponton & Duba, 2009). However, just knowing legal and ethical standards is not enough; counselors must also apply these standards in practice, which can be challenging (Corey, Corey & Callanan, 2005). The Code of Ethics advises counselors who encounter an ethical dilemma to "engage in a carefully considered ethical decision-making process" (ACA, 2005, p.3). At the core of ethical decision-making lie the principles of autonomy, beneficence, nonmaleficence, fidelity, and justice (Beauchamp & Childress, 1994; Kitchener, 1984). These principles, foundational to ethical practice and indeed to the ACA Code of Ethics (2005), are cited as critical when exploring the context of individual decision-making preferences and values. The purpose of this article is to explore the individual nature of ethical decision-making and how this is applied in counselor preparation. It is the premise of the authors that knowledge of the decision-making models and professional ethical guidelines is the application of the foundation of self-awareness.

Ethical decision-making models (EDMM) were developed to assist counselors who are experiencing difficulties applying the ethical standards in their professional practice (Dufrene & Glosoff, 2004). EDMMs provide an analytical and strategic approach to making decisions when navigating through differing and competing variables (i.e., client needs, societal needs and informed consent practices). Ultimately, the primary objective of EDMMs is to provide "intellectual moral resources," for practitioners to use when confronted with an ethical dilemma to ensure that the decision is grounded in reason (Mattison, 2000, p. 205). EDMMs can be theoretical/philosophical, practice-based, and/or related to special populations and issues (Cottone, 2001) and are useful to graduate counseling students, practitioners,

supervisors, and counselor educators in understanding the principles of ethics (Bradley & Hendricks, 2008; CACREP, 2009).

Specifically within the classroom, EDMMs in counseling curricula assist counselor educators in introducing and reinforcing the ACA Code of Ethics and Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs CACREP 2009 Standards (CACREP, 2009; Lambie, Hagerdorn & Ieva, 2010). EDMM review and application alone, however, may not be sufficient for the transition from counselor-in-training to practitioner when faced with ethical dilemmas (Crowley & Gottlieb, 2012; Lambie, et al, 2010; Verges, 2010) due to the complexity of ethical decision-making. In spite of comprehensive EDMMs, counselors often respond to ethical challenges from a personal and instinctual perspective and on a case-by-case basis (Jennings, Sovereign, Mussell, & Vye, 2005; Mattison, 2000). Including these factors in the decision making process may assist counselors-in-training and practitioners in making appropriate decisions and in practicing more ethically. Sound ethical decision-making involves use of an EDMM and awareness of one's values as a counselor.

The synthesis of knowledge (development of applicable principles) and self-awareness has been identified as critical in counselor development (Remley & Herlihy, 2010). In counselor education programs, one suggestion in navigating ethical decision-making is to promote counselor-in-training self-exploration, individual responses to conflict, making decisions, and individual moral responses (Mattison, 2000). After all, decisions are made in the context of the individual's perspective and despite the analytical resources of EDMMs an individual interprets and assesses the dilemma using

his or her worldview (Abramson, 1996; Crowley & Gottlieb, 2012; Verges, 2010). This manuscript explores the concept of self-awareness in ethical decision-making and application of the concept in counselor-in-training learning environments. Practical recommendations to incorporate self-awareness and ethical decision-making within the confines of a counseling classroom are included. The authors use the term self-awareness to refer to the capacity for awareness of feelings, thoughts and behaviors in the immediate experience of the counseling relationship (Williams, 2008).

Ethical Decision-Making Models

Ethical decision making models (EDMM) include various components depending on the model. Common concepts and practices repeated in EDMMs are discussed throughout the literature. Consultation, culture and/or context, professional and personal judgment, and code and law are cited as common factors in deliberation of ethical decision-making (Cottone & Claus, 2000; Garcia, Cartwright, Winston, & Borzuchowsk, 2003; Garcia, Winston, Borzuchowska, & McGuire-Kuletz, 2004).

It follows that self-awareness during the ethical decision making process would be a common factor—direct or indirect/subtle—of any decision-making and therefore model. Self-awareness is key to competent counseling so it logically ensues that it is key to ethical decision making in counseling. However, current models do not delineate self-awareness as an obvious component; it may be considered inherent, but is not brought out.

Two key literature reviews exist on EDMMs: Cottone and Claus (2000) and Garcia et al. (2004). The review by Cottone and Claus (2000) provided a detailed examination of ethical decision-making

models within the seminal philosophies and/or theories of Hare (1991), Kitchner (1984), Beauchamp and Childress (1994); and Beauchamp and Walters (1994). These authors organized the current ethical decision-making models into three categories: a) theoretical or philosophical-based; b) practice-based; and c) specialty practice. The theoretical category emphasized Hare's (1991) model based in absolute and utilitarian thinking and included two levels of moral reasoning (intuitive and critical) that was later espoused by Kitchener (1984). The second category (practice-based) included models that are traditionally emphasized in graduate counseling ethics textbooks. The third category housed more than eight ethical decision-making models for special populations and issues. This category included working with families, children with special needs, and clients with AIDS; it involved integrative approaches and avoiding dual relationships. Readers are referred to Cottone and Claus' (2000) comprehensive review for further information about the categories and models.

In their literature review of ethical decision-making models, Garcia et al. (2004) provided a brief summary as a background to their study examining the efficacy of ethical decision-making models for rehabilitation counselors. They provided a summary of 14 models in the following five categories: rational (Corey et al. , 2005; Tymchuck, 1981; Keith-Spiegel & Koocher, 1985; Beauchamp & Childress, 1994; Kitchener, 1984; Forrester-Miller, & Davis, 1995; & Welfel, 2002); moral (Rest, 1983; Kohlberg, 1971; Van Hoose & Paradise, 1979); virtue-based (Jordan & Meara, 1995); social constructivist (Cottone, 2001); collaborative (Davis, 1997); and integrative (Tarvydas, 1998). Many of these models inherently require self-awareness on the part of the decision maker, yet, do not directly label self-awareness as a construct.

Overall, in the context of personal and professional factors, EDMMs enforce the consideration of multiple factors that impact decision-making, including, but not limited to, social-political influences and multicultural considerations (Cottone, 2001; Garcia, et al, 2003). Ethical decision-making is heavily influenced by the counselor's choices and the aforementioned models. Although counselors may not always agree on the appropriate course of action related to ethical decision-making, there is an assumption that counselors will be aware of and apply ethical decision-making models that can withstand community inquiry (ACA, 2005, p.3).

Self-Awareness in Ethical Decision-Making

Factors to consider when conceptualizing self-awareness are the individual's experiences, development as a professional, the system in which the person exists (i.e., academic environment, agency setting), work responsibilities (Holland & Kilpatrick, 1991); and culture, beliefs and value systems (Mattison, 2000). Irrespective of ethical practice, personal counseling and self-growth experiences developed to increase self-awareness are often recommended in counselor training programs (Burwell-Pender & Halinski, 2008; Gladding, 2008; Remley & Herlihy, 2010). A counselor's sense of self is important in determining how personal values are enacted with clients and their issues. In the absence of an ethical dilemma, counselors make decisions about how to interact with and what to recommend to clients. Self-awareness can facilitate ethical decision-making and could contribute to the tenets of beneficence and

nonmaleficence in services rendered through counseling. Encouraging counselors-in-training to consider questions such as, "Where do my decisions come from?" "What is it about myself that influences the decisions I make?" and "What do I need to understand or change about myself in order to make better decisions?" can provide a starting point for meaningful growth and change (Baum & King, 2006, p. 218).

Transformational Learning: Application of Self-Awareness and EDM in the Classroom

From a pedagogical perspective, it seems viable to introduce EDMMs to counselors-in-training in an effort to provide problem-solving strategies in a concrete format (Choate & Granello, 2006). After all, "thinking regarding ethical issues should be proactive and not reactive" (Bernard & Goodyear, 2004, p. 71). Considering this format, training could include educating counselors-in-training about common professional mistakes, personal concerns related to ethical slip-ups (i.e., regret, remorse), and assessing possible rehabilitative measures (Reynolds-Welfel, 2005). In addition, EDMMs assist counselors-in-training by providing professionally supported courses of action. These practices can assist counselors-in-training as they develop more autonomy in their professional counselor identities. The development of autonomy requires attention to cognitive development in much the same way that ethical decision-making abilities will grow with cognitive complexity (Granello, 2010).

In complicated ethical dilemmas with multiple variables (i.e., client safety concerns, financial constraints, opposing client requests), a counselor may not be able to successfully balance the situational demands (Rokeach, 1973). Some variables in the ethical dilemma may be attended to more equitably than others and often counselors must consider which variables receive more attention. Some philosophies promote that decision-making is deemed successful based on the consequences of the resolution and determining whether the end justified the means (teleological), while others question the morality of the situation and whether the decision maker considered what is right or just (deontological) (Mattison, 2000). These broad philosophies highlight the opposing differences in ethical decision-making and multiple perspectives of solving ethical dilemmas. As noted, ethical dilemmas must be attended to on a case-by-case basis; however, this leads to great subjectivity in decision-making (Mattison, 2000). When counselors rely on their individual judgment to resolve an ethical dilemma, they are less likely to adhere to ethical guidelines and agency procedures (Jennings et al., 2005). To combat the subjectivity and individual judgment in decision-making, the counseling profession recommends conferring with ethical guidelines and agency standard operating procedure; however, these standards and recommendations can be interpreted differently and are ambiguously defined, thus a clear solution may not be available (Jennings et al., 2005). Thus, the consideration of self-awareness as a tool to manage ethical dilemmas is recommended to blend EDMs with individual subjectivity.

The Role of the Counselor Educator

Self-awareness may best be learned through transformational processes; such learning relies heavily on the relationship between the educator and the counselor-in-training (Cranton, 2006). The most fundamental of these is the traditional use of case-based learning in ethics. Counselor

educators and supervisors may introduce case scenarios (Jordan & Stevens, 2001; Pettifor, Estay & Paquet, 2002; Storm & Haug, 1997) to imitate ethical dilemmas in a regulated environment or include other experiential learning opportunities to prepare counselors-in-training to utilize critical thinking skills and apply simulated situations to real-life occurrences (Choate & Granello, 2006). The efficacy of ethics instruction through vignettes and application of decision-making processes has long been established (e.g., Corey et al., 2005; Jordan & Stevens, 2001; Remley & Herlihy, 2010). Application through case-based learning around ethics requires critical reflection and personal involvement (Jones, Rivas, & Mancillas, 2009) and can serve as a tool to assist educators in introducing more complex ethical decision-making methodologies.

Counselor educators should be invested in their students' education and development(Baum & King, 2006). Providing emotional safety and encouraging free thought are both examples of educator encouragement of self-awareness (Baum & King, 2006). Counselor educators' intentional infusion of self-reflective questions and practices may assist counselors-in-training to explore their personal values and beliefs to determine their positions regarding ethical challenges they may face in practice. If counselor educators encourage counselors-in-training to remain authentic in the classroom and engage in discussions that promote critical thinking, future counselors will be challenged to engage in self-exploration and recognize that dilemmas may be solved in multiple ways. In 2006, Cranton published an article entitled "Transformative Learning" for educators and provided practical suggestions to incorporate self-awareness in the classroom. Considering Cranton's suggestions in the context of

counselor education, instructors could: a) chat with counselors-in-training prior to or after class about the individual's family, work, hobbies, and personal worlds; b) ask counselors-in-training to list and submit for review their reasons for enrolling in a class; c) ask about students' individualized learning needs; and d) ask counselor' (p. 9). Counselor educators are influential in developing the self-awareness of a counseling student and can accept this charge purposefully and intentionally.

Supervision Considerations

Self-awareness may be introduced in the classroom, but the practice must be reinforced through clinical training experiences and professional work throughout the career. Supervision continues to be a critical component in the discussion and processing of ethical issues. "Waiting for ethical issues to emerge in supervision seems to set up the conditions for crisis training, not ethics training" (Bernard & Goodyear, 2004, p.71). Tracey, Ellickson and Sherry (1989) found that counselors continue to prefer supervision opportunities that are in a controlled format regardless of developmental level. Thus, a supervision approach in which the supervisor introduces EDMMs and considerations prior to an offense seems ideal and requires the supervisee to remain active in self-reflective practices. "Through a chosen ethical decision-making process and evaluation of the context of the situation, counselors are empowered to make decisions that help expand the capacity of people to grow and develop" (ACA, 2005, p. 3). Reviewing ethical responsibility and decision-making can be conducted in a variety of formats, including supervisor modeling approaches (Tarvydas, 1995), professional development opportunities, and group supervision.

Ultimately the goal is to incorporate realistic ethical decision-making to increase the supervisee's awareness of his or her accountability as a practitioner (Bernard & Goodyear, 2004). As supervision is predominately sought by new and entry-level counselors to fulfill licensure requirements, it may be advantageous for supervisors to introduce self-reflection skills to further develop the practitioner's skills in appropriate self-supervision (Bernard & Goodyear, 2004).

The Role of the Counselor-in-Training

"Students learn best when they self-regulate—set their own academic goals, develop strategies to meet them, and reflect on their academic performance" (Murray, 2000). Although counselors-in-training learn best with these strategies, many counselor-in-training do not possess the skill set to initiate this approach (Murray, 2000). In the counseling classroom, counselor educators can clearly articulate the objectives of EDMMs by explaining the history of decision-making models and by modeling the application of these approaches. Teaching objectives for ethical decision-making could include assisting the counselor-in-training in transitioning from memorization of codes and steps to cognitive processes when considering ethical dilemmas (Neukrug, Lovell, & Parker, 1996). Through discussing ethical decision-making and presenting relevant models prior to an ethical dilemma, counselors-in-training can practice proactive behaviors in an effort to demonstrate ethical compliance.

Additionally, through self-reflective activities in the classroom, counselors-in-training can evaluate their performance and knowledge prior to experiencing an ethical dilemma in a supportive and safe learning environment (Baum & King, 2006, p. 218).

Counselors-in-training should be permitted to engage in self-discovery activities that challenge their cognitions and perceptions of clients and themselves. Developed for social workers, Mattison (2000) proposed a series of questions for personal reflection that focuses on values preferences. Of the eight questions provided in the text, salient examples for counselor preparation include: 1) to what extent did my personal values or philosophies influence the preferred choice of action; 2) to what extent did the legal obligation influence my decision in the case; and 3) was I willing to act outside of legal obligations if doing so meant serving the client's best interests? (p. 209).

Application: Ethical Decision-Making and Self-Awareness in the Classroom

Despite the prevalence of EDMMs, ethical decision-making appears heavily influenced by individual interpretation, values, instincts, worldview and counselor knowledge (Jennings et al, 2005; Remley & Herlihy, 2010). Thus counseling programs should introduce classroom activities that challenge individual self-awareness in addition to rote ACA Code of Ethics and EDMM memorization (Mattison, 2000; Neukrug et al., 1996). Just as counselors-=in-training will develop unique approaches to dilemmas given their personal worldviews and perspectives, so too do counselor educators develop unique activities and approaches to helping students self-reflect and apply ethical decision-making principles.

The authors feel that the key to successful application of ethical decision-making rests in counselor in training self-reflection and awareness. There are several approaches to encouraging awareness in the classroom. For example, following an introduction to ethical concepts, the ACA Code of Ethics, and ethical decision-making

models, the counselor educator can present a vignette with an ethical dilemma to the class with the following instructions:

"After reading the dilemma, take a minute to reflect before you come up with a solution for the counselor. What do you notice about how you are responding to the dilemma? What are your visceral reactions to the case? What seems to be most important to you if you were involved as the counselor, client, or another invested party? Write down your initial reactions so that you can share them with your peers."

Students can be moved into small groups to discuss their initial reactions to the case. This practice encourages students to continue their self-reflection while incorporating perspectives of others. Such infusion encourages students to consider different worldviews and expand their appreciation for mitigating factors both for the onset and solution of the dilemma (Mattison, 2000). Following a period of discussing personal reactions to the dilemma and the differing worldviews with one another, the instructor can direct the small groups to apply an identified ethical decision-making model to address the dilemma. EDMM application requires students to comb through the ACA Code of Ethics to apply professional guidelines. The students now enter this decision-making process more personally aware and informed. They can challenge themselves to consider the meaning and interpretation of their professional ethical guidelines and how they interact with their personal perspectives on the presenting issue.

This activity combines authenticity and self-reflection with knowledge of the ACA Code of Ethics and ethical decision-making models (Cranton, 2006). The reader is reminded that there are many activities that may be drawn from the literature, counseling ethics casebooks, and creativity through the counselor educator's own personal reflection. It is the authors' contention that self-refection is fundamental to the application of ethical principles. From this perspective, the instructor works collaboratively with students to merge knowledge with the personal perspectives from which students view the dilemma(Neukrug et al., 1996). Ethical issues in particular lend themselves to such learning and application. This classroom activity promotes individual responsibility and understanding to promote critical thinking and decision-making.

Conclusion

Cognitively, counselors-in-training are at a developmental point of seeking concrete answers (Granello, 2002). It can be challenging for academically prepared counselors-in-training to rely on themselves as moral compasses in professional decisions (Levitt & Jacques, 2005). It is important to respect counseling students' and counselors' cognitive development in the presentation and reflection of ethical dilemmas (Granello, 2002; Lambie, et al., 2010). Ethics education may begin with more conceptual issues and gradually move to principles-based perspectives, with experiential learning as the backdrop (Corey et al., 2005).

Providing counselors with a tangible alternative to individual opinion through the use of EDMMs promotes support within the profession while allowing counselors the opportunity to consider the individual needs of each client. This approach normalizes ethical dilemmas and allows practitioners to focus on the counseling process. Ultimately, a holistic decision-making approach that incorporates EDM consultation and

counselor self-awareness is recommended when confronted with a challenging ethical dilemma. Understanding the self as a decision maker through self-reflection in classroom and training activities as well as more personal practices is ideal. Reflecting on one's pattern of resolving dilemmas promotes an outcome-based resolution approach that incorporates an application of the self and ethical decision-making (Mattison, 2000). Thus, the application of self-awareness and ethical decision-making enable counselors to consider creative solutions to ethical dilemmas.

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