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The Mormon Psychotherapists: An Addendum

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THE MORMON PSYCHOTHERAPISTS:
AN ADDENDUM
Genevieve De Hoyos,* CSW, Ph.D.
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In an earlier article, (AMCAP Journal, July, 1982, pp. 21-28) we analyzed the contents of the AMCAP Journal and identified the extent to which Mormon therapists are trying to integrate their professional training and the gospel. In so doing, we found that the issue is not so much whether or not to integrate but rather how that integration can be reconciled with professionalism.

In the conclusion of our previous article, and in order to provide a frame of reference both for the theoretical justification and the methodological procedure in reconciling the gospel and professional knowledge and training, we suggested the need to consider the existence of three levels of therapy, each reflecting a different value or moral orientation:

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<th>THREE TYPES OF THERAPY AND THEIR IMPLIED VALUE ORIENTATIONS</th>
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<td><strong>Types of Therapy</strong></td>
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<td>Encourages fulfillment of individual, self-centered needs:</td>
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<td>ignores social needs and values</td>
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<td><strong>Implied Value-orientations</strong></td>
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Thus each progressive level of therapy simply introduces a wider frame of reference within which problems can be solved: from the self-centered individual, to the secular temporal society, to spiritual eternal relationships.

Our religious clients, when aware of our own religiosity, often move on their own from one level to another simply by wondering aloud: "Why would God allow this to happen to me?" But sometimes the celestial frame of reference can only be reached if we bring it up. Although the senior author has many times spontaneously moved from the terrestrial level to the celestial level in interviews, the appropriateness of the therapist introducing the move was dramatically called to her attention in an interview a short time ago.

One day, a former client called frantically. Her husband had been asked by their bishop to shave his beard. He had resisted and statements had been made around the possibility of losing not only his Church call but his temple recommend. Coming from a painful, inactive background though active herself, the young wife was very upset. However, she felt pressured to join her husband in rebelling against the bishop's demand. The three of us met.

For some time, the husband vented his negative feelings, blaming the bishop for not warning him that his call (working with the youth) would demand shaving his beard. Feeling my acceptance, he eventually admitted that the bishop was only following an area directive that men working with the youth should not have beards. He realized that his early experiences with an autocratic, arbitrary father had led him to argue and dispute. He admitted that the bishop had actually been very kind and accepting. Now the next move was his. He was to make a decision and go discuss this decision with the stake president, whom he did not know well.

I had participated in many such exchanges during the sixties and seventies, and at first I was not worried as, in most cases, active members have too great an investment in the Church and the gospel to jeopardize it for the sake of growing hair. But I soon realized that accepting his feelings and then looking at alternatives and their consequences was not helping him solve the problem. His decision was to face the stake president and challenge him to prove to him the need for his shaving his beard. We had reached an impasse.

Troubled, I quickly prayed for help. An idea came to my mind: with this client, the terrestrial approach would not work. I had to help him look at the problem in terms of his relationship to the Lord. I asked him, "Do you believe that we are tested while here on earth?" and was greatly relieved when he answered that he certainly did. Together we went to D&C 98:12-15 where the Lord warns us that He would test us in everything, even unto death. We read from D&C 132 and talked about sacrifices in obedience (verse 50), the rewards the obedient receive (verses 49-50, 53, 55) and the loss suffered by those who cannot accept specific personal commandments (verse 54). He was touched, and he related an event during his mission when he was greatly blessed for having "blindly" obeyed. Suddenly he saw

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the situation as an opportunity given to him to declare
his faith in God, and he agreed that by shaving he would
greatly upgrade his relationship to our Father in
Heaven, solve his problem with his ward and stake
leaders, and make his wife happy again. He saw the
whole event as a test and an opportunity for him to
exercise faith and gain spiritual strength.

This experience, coming soon after the completion
of our earlier article, helped us to devise a simple schema to
visualize the possibility we all have to widen our clients’
frame of reference:

There are some therapists who help the client reject
his social obligations and thus attempt to find
adjustment in a self-centered approach to satisfy
individual needs. Most of us, however, have been
trained to help clients move from that useless to a socially responsible terrestrial level.
Mormon therapists can help even more by moving the
focus to an even higher level.

To achieve this, Mormon therapists can use, besides
their traditional skills, love, respect, and gentle
persuasion. This does not imply imposition of values.

Teaching higher principles needs no apology. At any
rate, whenever a therapist follows a persuasion he
believes to be true (be it Behaviorism, Gestalt, T.A.,
or the Gospel) he naturally starts teaching that persuasion.
Thus, choosing to teach the Gospel is no different in
procedure from choosing to teach any other ideology.

Combining the best methods with the best value
orientation can only result in the best outcome.

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Evans, R.L. Quoted in S.F. Cox Our Leaders Speak. Salt Lake City:
Lee, R.E. Commencement Address. Brigham Young University,
Provo, Utah. April, 1982.
Shostrom, E. “Group Therapy: Let the Buyer Beware,” in R.C.
Diedrich & N.A. Dye (Eds.), Group Procedures, Purposes, Processes &

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Broderick would choose the competent therapist every
time. The secret is not to choose competence or
spirituality, but to combine the two.

As therapists we must know what we are doing and be
good at our craft. Elder Packer told the story this
morning about the clock repairman who could hear
things others couldn’t hear and who knew what needed
to be done. The analogy suggested that as therapists we
must have knowledge and skills and do our work with
competence.

One element in the understanding we must develop, it
seems to me, is an ability to look at our Mormon culture
and social system with an objectivity which will allow us
to hear those revealing sounds that others do not hear;
to be able to comprehend the strains and stresses under
which we as Mormons operate so that we can help
people understand and deal with them effectively
without finding it necessary to abandon the Church or
reject its teachings. It is my prayer that we might work
to thus improve our skills and become more effective
tools in the Lord’s hands to carry out His purposes.

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of Kentucky Fried Chicken. My Primary class served the dinner.
I dropped a plate of chicken in the hall. I scooped it up, and was
going to take it out and serve it. A lady came up behind me and
realized what I was doing. She made me throw the food away.
The floor looked clean to me. There was enough food to feed
our whole family for one whole day. I couldn’t understand
what was the big deal. I felt foolish and stupid that I didn’t
understand. I felt like everyone would talk about me and our
dirty family.

Interpretation: The interpretation of ER’s is a very
subjective process. It is a process of discovering patterns
of meaning that are unique
to each individual.

The interpretation is not done statically—in terms of a
person’s present position—but is, instead continually related to
one’s movement. It refers to the direction and cause of the
person’s transactions with others. It also alludes to where the
person is going and to what the person expects to get by his or
her behavior—to be special, to be in control, or to obtain special
service. Thus, the interpretation enables the person to see the
pattern of movement and its meaning (Dinkmeyer, Pew,
Dinkmeyer, 1979, p. 95).

Thus, the interpretation of the ER is interconnected
with the interpretation of the whole life style.

This ER would suggest a person who feels extremely
inferior. She sees herself as clumsy, dirty, and stupid.
She sees others as more competent, capable and
worthwhile. The world is unpredictable and full of
unhappy experiences. She really isn’t good enough to go
to church.

Recollection B: I went to church with an adult (Jance was
uncomfortable with the word “friend”). I was in the sixth grade.
During the closing prayer, I suddenly got a terrible bloody nose.
I was afraid to get up because I would bleed all over everybody.
So, I leaned over, cupped my hands over my nose, and caught the blood. My hands filled up, and it started dripping. I kept thinking the prayer would never come to an end. It finally did. The person (once again avoiding the word “friend”) took me to the kitchen and got the bleeding stopped. I felt embarrassed and helpless. I should be able to take care of myself. I felt angry at myself for not knowing what to do.

Interpretation: The actual event, whether it happened as recorded or not, is not as important as the subjective meaning of the event. Here we see a person, perceived as being incapable, needing someone else to take care of her. She must not get too close to others because the dirt (blood) might rub off on them. From her point of view, she doesn’t belong in the church because of her inferiority. She needs others to take care of her but they risk being tainted by her.

Summary of ER’s: These ER’s were collected for the specific purpose of understanding Janice’s reluctance to attend church. They also demonstrate her overall outlook on life. While she was making progress in other parts of her life, Janice still resisted church attendance. It was clearly understood and, most importantly, by Janice that she resisted going to church because she would be an outsider, one who was not good enough to worship there.

Conclusion

Early recollections represent an important contribution for counselors. They can be obtained quite easily and they provide a wealth of therapeutic information. By using ER’s, the counselor is quickly able to develop rapport with the client. They help to focus on probable reasons for certain behaviors. ER’s also help the counselor to formulate counseling objectives (Kopp & Dinkmeyer, 1975).

The purpose of this paper has been to acquaint the reader with the use of early recollections in counseling. Hopefully, it has sparked an interest in one additional technique that can be used successfully in a counseling relationship.

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