



North American Association of Christians in Social Work (NACSW)
PO Box 121; Botsford, CT 06404 *** Phone/Fax (tollfree): 888.426.4712
Email: info@nacsw.org *** Website: <http://www.nacsw.org>

“A Vital Christian Presence in Social Work”

MOTIVATIONAL INTERVIEWING: OPERATIONALIZED AGAPE?

David C. Herrman

**Presented at:
NACSW Convention 2007
March, 2007
Dallas, TX**

Abstract

Motivational Interviewing (MI) is a level A evidence based practice primarily used on the micro level. MI is defined as “a client-centered, directive method for enhancing intrinsic motivation to change by exploring and resolving ambivalence (Miller & Rollnick, 2002)”. The ‘spirit’ of MI is characterized by collaboration, evocation, and autonomy. Four basic principles of MI include expressing empathy, developing discrepancy, rolling with resistance and supporting self-efficacy. Evidence based practice (EBP) is defined as practices supported by good empirical research. The Bible is considered a valid interpretation of the human experience and is often used as the source book for framing intrapersonal and interpersonal interactions. The function of this article is to demonstrate the correspondence between using the Bible as the essential source book for clinical interpersonal interactions and empirically valid evidence based practice, using MI as an example. MI will be used to demonstrate the correspondence with the goal of encouraging Christian Social Worker to take a more aggressive approach to initiating, conducting valid research and implementing Bible sourced evidence based practices.

MOTIVATIONAL INTERVIEWING: OPERATIONALIZED AGAPE?

Introduction

The Scriptural concept of agape and Motivational Interviewing demonstrate that science and its offspring Evidence Based Practice (EBP) are in correspondence rather than competition. For some, therapeutic interventions with empirical science support are seen as oppositional to what are referred to as ‘biblically based interventions.’ This emphasis on an either/or perspective seemingly pits counseling interventions supported by scientific methodology against counseling based in Scripture. Thinking outside this either/or perspective leads us to find that Scripture is a basis for effective evidence based counseling interventions with research providing corresponding validation. Science and Scripture support rather than oppose each other. The outcome for Christian Social Workers is aggressive pursuit of gleaning from Scripture meta, macro, and micro interventions, designing quality research and producing valid evidence based practice.

Motivational Interviewing is used to demonstrate the correspondence between Scripture and evidence-based practice. Motivational Interviewing is considered a level-A evidence based practice with efficacy as an intervention that assists people in making changes in their lives. Using the Christian Bible as something other than a religious book we find that ‘biblically’ based interventions, therapy models, or psychology find correspondence with empirically based research.

Christians who have chosen Social Work as a means to express their abilities, passions, and concerns have a strong characteristic of Scripture centeredness from which arises their desire to interact with a client in a way that reflects how God is toward people. A Christian Social Worker would have some degree of awareness that all people

experience varying degrees of the corruption of the goodness of being and living that we were created to actually experience. Social Work in all its areas endeavors to remove the stumbling blocks to experiencing this goodness of being and living. Christian Social Workers by nature of the 'high calling' would be anticipated to provide the best possible practice available. In theory the most efficient, effective way to remove those stumbling blocks is to use evidence-based practice in our work. Evidence Based Practices (EBPs) are those practices that have valid evidence to support their efficacy in promoting change. Evidence-based practice is a tool for the Social Workers use in providing the client an efficient, effective means to bring about desired changes.

For definitional purposes and to set the context for the topic, we will briefly look at science and research, the idea of truth, and if there is validity other than preferred personal belief for using Scripture as a source book in any area other than religion. If there is then using the scriptural concept of agape, criteria for EBP and MI we can find out if there is truly correspondence between the three. If we can demonstrate the correspondence, then we can view Scripture as a book for something other than just religion, and find science and Scripture do not conflict.

Science

Science is the search for causes, according to Francis Bacon, the father of modern science. There are only two types of causes, natural and intelligent. Empirical research seeks causal relationships for repeatable, limited, contingent, changing events as a result of natural causes. Forensic science seeks causes of unrepeatable events that appear to be the result of intelligent design. Forensic science looks at specified and complex effects and surmises a cause.

Science, employing the scientific method, is valued for its ability to ascertain facts and causal relationships, to the degree that our ability to measure and discover allow.

Good science presents data, or in other words, just what is. The scientific method searches for causes by observation and repetition and induction. We observe and notice repetition and draw general conclusions. These conclusions have a degree of certainty to them and that is what empirical science and research present to us, a degree of certainty about a cause-effect relationship.

Science attempts to discover actual reality. The idea is that when we discover something about reality, such as the earth revolving around the sun, we change our idea of objective truth about reality. From that discovered knowledge we make adjustments so our thinking about things that exist corresponds with reality. If we hold onto what we want to believe rather than what actually is, we prove to be dishonest with self and life.

Science employs the standard of falsification in determining what is actually true about reality. This simply means that if an idea about a cause – effect relationship proves itself true over repeated tests, the relationship is considered true with a certain degree of certainty. Were a subsequent test with the same parameters not to produce the same results, the idea of the cause – effect relationship would be considered false. In other words, if true then true 100% of the time.

To keep science in perspective we also do well to remember it is only one way to find some kinds of truth about reality. For example, science cannot prove math and logic. Science presupposes the existence and reliability of math and logic to support its own ‘scientific method’. Science is not able to prove the existence of such things as other minds than my own, ethics, aesthetics, and even the scientific method itself cannot prove

the existence of the ‘scientist’ doing the research. Science is not the only source of objective truth.

We also need to be reminded that science is based in philosophy. Science does not exist on its own, as if it were some purely objective entity that we use to detect truth. Assumptions are made in the very search for the causal relationships the scientific method seeks to uncover. In fact the philosophical assumptions of laws of logic, causality, uniformity, and the reliability of observation are assumed to exist in order to formulate and run a successful experiment. Science is an important tool in the search for what actually exists. In our context, science is an important tool in the search for actual cause – effect relationships in assisting other people in reaching the desired experiences of enjoying the goodness of being and living life.

Research

Research is basically wondering about cause-effect relationships. From this ‘wonderment’ and idea is formulated, put into specific language and then conducting valid experiments to find if the cause-effect relationship is present and durable, meaning it could be replicated by others with the same results. When such replications occur they are noted as regularities and those cause-effect relationships can be anticipated to occur when applied in like situations.

An example of research from idea to empirical data is the idea that spousal involvement would be important to help a heavy drinker reduce their alcohol intake. Some might believe that the couple together will be more successful than the individual alone. So we might set up an empirical research study to find out if our idea is valid. We conduct a research project using the scientific method and find to our surprise that spousal involvement did not significantly contribute to successful drinking reduction. The

more studies conducted that repeat the same results, the higher the sense of certainty that it does not make a difference whether you include a spouse in a drinking reduction intervention with a heavy drinker.

Notice though that in our ‘scientific method’ to ascertain the ‘truth’ about spousal involvement, we have made several assumptions. In addition to all the assumptions made by science, we assume there is such a thing as heavy drinking, implying a standard we are using to determine a range of alcohol use that is acceptable. We are also making assumptions about relationships, about harm reduction, about choice, influence, cause and effect, and all that is involved with people making changes. Even with ‘good’ scientific methodology there are assumptions brought to the ‘objective’ study by the scientists conducting the study, as well as using science itself.

Given what we know about science and the scientific method as a search for truth or degree of truth, we know that a host of assumptions have been made that lay behind the scenes. We can also conclude that there are a host of possible variables that have not been tested that could have a significant affect on the outcome. We can say this because the ideas we have that cause us to conclude what to look into concerning life are coming from the limitations of our own thoughts. Our thoughts no matter how thorough are limited by knowledge we possess which is influenced by other finite minds. This corresponds with what was written around A.D. 56, ‘Now I know in part, one day I will know in full’ (St. Paul, First Corinthians, 13.12, A.D. 56).

So, we already see a correspondence between science and the Bible without even demonstrating the validity and reliability of the Bible. Both agree that our knowledge about anything we discover is limited and can be added to through more discovery. Any

reasonable scientist would affirm that what we know, we only know in part and knowing more ‘truth’ about reality requires willingness. The same willingness to discover more knowledge is lost when knowledge is used to impose and to rule over. According to the writer St. Paul (I Corinthians 13, A.D. 56) knowledge enables us to love (agape) more effectively. Good empirical research identifies what is noticed within the context of understanding there could be many other factors involved in the results of the research, and leaves the ‘why something happened’ to speculation or interpretation.

Research findings are just that, findings, data, facts of probability. Facts and data do not come with interpretations. Interpretations of findings reflect the world-view or perspective or belief of the interpreter. Well done scientific research presents findings. Whichever interpretation the findings correspond with would only indicate the systematic consistency of the interpretational system. Interpretational systems are what ‘tests for truth’ address.

Given that the best we can attain is to know part of reality, and never fully know reality, why then would we even care? And in our context here, going to all the trouble of concluding a degree of certainty about evidence based practice being effective in helping bring about a change for a client? As a Christian Social Worker some degree of certainty that each individual is valuable, meaningful and worthwhile is assumed because God gave each life on purpose. Revealing the goodness of God (glorifying God) happens when these individuals overcome stumbling blocks and accept the goodness of life and being.

Truth

What is this degree of certainty or ‘truth’ science and research seek? To quote another actual person of interest in history, the Roman Governor Pilate (Josephus,

Antiquities of the Jews, book 18, chapter 3, section 3, A.D.93) ‘What is truth’ or equally as valid ‘Is there truth?’ or ‘Can I know what is true about reality?’ This statement made at the time when Jesus was before Pilate is the same statement made today, ‘Can we know anything about reality or truth?’ and its sibling statement ‘each person creates truth and reality.’

Objective truth about reality, including the reality of the human experience, does exist and is knowable to a certain degree. Truth is “that which corresponds to its object” or “that which describes an actual state of affairs” (Geisler & Turek, 2001). We demand truth in virtually all areas of our life. We demand truth from our employers as to our pay, we demand truth from our medical doctors, people we have relationships with, our court system. We also expect people to recognize it and follow it such as in traffic lights, wheels down when landing in a plane, and having a room when we pay for it. Truth is discovered and then decisions made to live by it or not. The actual state of affairs is that a plane landing on wheels is safer than one landing without wheels. We then expect those who build and fly planes to abide by that truth.

Very simply put, to claim that we cannot know reality or cannot know truth, are self-defeating thus contradictory. In order to make the statement about reality that we cannot know reality is to make the claim that you already know enough about reality to say we cannot know the very thing you are claiming to make a knowledgeable statement about.

Likewise, to say that we cannot know truth is making the statement ‘It is true you cannot know truth,’ thus contradicting itself and proving to be a false statement. This ‘law of non-contradiction is used in the scientific method as a way to demonstrate what is

not true. Knowledge and truth about reality, the reality of human experience included, is able to be discovered and known.

Discovering and following truth leads to life or that which is beneficial for the experience of personhood and community. Discovering truth and not following it or following false ideas of truth does not lead to life, in fact it leads to the absence of life. Living life according to that which corresponds with reality brings with it benefit and blessing, whether one knows God or not. Truth is true whether we feel it or not, whether we experience it or not, whether we like it or agree with it or not. Relationship with Jesus Christ or not, living in correspondence with reality enhances the human experience.

Our question is whether an intervention corresponds with reality, the actual state of affairs when interacting with another human being. Why even care? We place ourselves in the position of influencing another person in the direction of experiencing the benefit and blessing of being a person and having life. From the 'Bible as description of human experience' perspective, we are coming alongside individuals and assisting them over the stumbling blocks that keep them from realizing the goodness of being a person and having life thus changing their ideas about the God who gave it to them in the first place.

If you have some concept of a theistic, humanistic universe it will be an inescapable conclusion that you must at minimum seek to do no harm to others because they have equal value and worth. And for someone claiming to be a representative of God and how God is toward people, there is a compulsion to assist others to experience the goodness of the gift of being a person and living life given by that God. So, it would be helpful, to say the least, if we knew with degrees of certainty what kinds of ways of being

with those who have been caused to stumble in experiencing the goodness of life, actually help them. If such interventions exist, we owe it to them to use it.

Evidence Based Practice

Evidence based practice refers to services or intervention methods that have empirical support for their efficacy via controlled clinical studies. EBP is not clinical or programmatic wisdom (secular or religious) to which no assessment of effectiveness or data been compiled to support its efficacy. In the context of the scientific method, evidence-based practice has high degree of certainty that a cause and effect has been observed. EBP means valid research has been conducted and a conclusion reached concerning the efficacy of a specific intervention. If a proposed cause can generate an effect and that cause-effect relationship be repeated by other researchers, the result is good evidence to support implementing the causal component in your helping relationship

Evidence based practice is classified using a series of levels intended to reflect the empirical validity of a service or practice (Wiechelt, 2004).

*Level A interventions supported by randomized, controlled clinical trials.

*Level B interventions supported by well-designed clinical studies without randomization or placebo comparison.

*Level C service and naturalistic clinical studies, combined with clinical observations, which are sufficiently compelling to warrant use of the treatment technique or follow the specific recommendation.

*Level D long-standing and wide-spread clinical practice that has not been subjected to empirical tests.

*Level E long-standing practice not subjected empirical tests yet used by circumscribed groups of clinicians.

*Level F recently developed treatment that has not been subjected to clinical or empirical tests.

Motivational Interviewing is considered ‘Level A’ evidence-based- practice. This ability to find knowledge (EBP) that corresponds with reality (degree of certainty) demonstrates the existence of objective truth. Were the Bible to prove to be as valid as an EBP using the same fundamental thought supporting the scientific method producing EBP’s in describing objective truth, a resource for understanding the human experience would be available to us, apart from preferred belief, and as something other than a source for religious instruction only.

Validity of Scripture

The Bible is more than a book for religion, it is a book for the description and interpretation of human experience on the micro, macro and meta levels. Instead of wrestling with the ‘straw man’ conflict between science and Scripture, we will see that science and Scripture do not conflict, rather we can *anticipate* that good research will prove out the validity of Scripture as the accurate interpretation of human experience.

Scripture presents itself as the true explanation of human experience. Taken on its own terms in its own context it reveals to us what is going on with being a human being in the kind of world we live within. Taking Scripture on its own terms in its own context simply means letting it be what it says it is within the context in which it makes a statement. A cookbook, or car repair manual are read for the context in which they make

statements. A cookbook written to describe traditional Southern dishes will likely not contain recipes for Buffalo Chicken Wings. Likewise, though you will find similarities, a car repair manual for a particular Mercedes Benz model will not be much help in repairing a domestic built pickup truck. Looking at the Bible as a description of the existence of something instead of nothing and within that context, specifically the human experience, is taking it on its own terms in its own context.

An example for this important point will help clarify. In the sense of taking the Bible in its own context on its own terms, when this Bible relates a story about Jesus, it does not matter whether you believe the story to be true or not. In its own context, taken on its own terms, the story read about Jesus would be understood from the perspective of him being God on earth, letting people know how God is toward them, as that is the context the Bible presents Jesus to us. You would read where he said ‘if you have seen me, you have seen the Father (God).’ The clear message is he is claiming to be God. Whether you actually believe he was is your opinion and you are entitled to that, in fact affirmed for having the power to form an opinion. Yet on its own terms, that book places that Jesus character as God with a body. So, on its own terms in the context it presents, you would read, ‘this book places this guy Jesus as God, and in that context he is saying that how he is with people is how God, the God this book says brought every thing into existence, is with people. Therefore, what do I do with this information from this book, taken on its own terms.’

We do this ‘taking it on its own terms’ approach with virtually every book we read. We would pick up the work of Albert Bandura, *Social Foundations of Thought and Action: A Social Cognitive Theory*, and read it as an interpretation of aspects of the human experience. We take it on its own terms in its own context and then apply that

interpretation to helping others. We anticipate and even assume without investigation that his work is grounded in ‘proof’ and not just some whimsical feeling he had one Spring morning. Using the Bible as an interpretation of human experiences is grounded in as good of evidence as any other reference book we might use to guide our understanding and practice. It is as good if not better psychology of intrapersonal and interpersonal interactions book as it is a book addressing religion.

The question at hand is whether or not the Bible is a valid document apart from just preferring to believe it is because of personal experience, or cultural shaping. There are ways of thinking that guide the scientific method used to arrive at an EBP. We can use the same ways of thinking to discover truth that science uses in its scientific method. Using the same rules as Science the validity of the Bible for use as an authoritative text on the explanation and interpretation of human experience, apart from religious matters, is accomplished.

A thorough study of establishing the validity of using Scripture as basis for understanding human experience is found in Geisler and Turek (2004) and Geisler (1976). We will just hit the high points here for the sake of time. The principle of causality (a principle that the scientific method is based on) states that every event has a cause, that nothing cannot produce something, that whatever has a beginning has a cause and whatever does not have a beginning does need a cause. Using forensic science that looks at unrepeatable events there is reasonable evidence of there being an uncaused cause of the reality that something exists rather than nothing.

The Principle of Causality (underlying the scientific method) states that every event has a cause, whatever had a beginning had a cause and what did not have a

beginning did not need a cause. The universe had a beginning. This is supported using facts discovered through the scientific method. Those facts are:

*Second law of thermodynamics – universe is running out of usable energy, therefore not eternal but temporal and finite.

*Universe is expanding which means it is changing which again means the universe is finite and not eternal.

*Radiation echo of the initial explosion, what is called the ‘big bang’ demonstrates there was a beginning.

*Great mass of matter from slight variations in the initial explosion means that there was a beginning and from that beginning extremely complex and specified systems developed, including people.

*Eternal means always was-is-will be. There is no beginning to eternal because eternal means outside of time and space. The universe we live in is not eternal and we know this by scientific facts, and because there were not an infinite number of days before today. An infinite number of days has no end, and we are at the end of all days before today, therefore, there were not an infinite number of days before today. To claim otherwise would be contradictory and thus false. This conclusion is reached using another basic law underlying the scientific method, the law or principle of non-contradiction.

Again, using Science, since the universe had a beginning and therefore had a cause and according to science there are only natural and intelligent causes we can conclude that the universe, including human beings are the result of an intelligent cause. Forensic science looks at unrepeatable complex and highly specified events and searches for the cause of the event. The highly specified and complex universe cannot be explained by natural law since natural law addresses material, non-personal, physical

objects. Since, as science agrees, something cannot come from nothing, the non-material that exists cannot come from something non-material. A rock cannot make a decision, have thought, or feel. Yet we find that we undeniably exist with those non-material characteristics. The conclusion that there was an intelligent cause is reached by using the same laws of thought underlying science and the scientific method, not because we want there to be an intelligence behind our existence.

So, we use the same principle of causality employed by science to reach scientific results, the same scientific assumption that an intelligent designer produces highly complex designs such as research projects, the use of ethics, measurements against a standard, and the drive for discovery employed in every scientific quest for knowledge, to demonstrate the existence of God. These underlying constructs used in all science are referred to as cosmological constructs (causes), teleological (designer behind designs) and moral constructs (the use of standards and reasons for discovery).

Very simply put, the universe had an intelligent, moral, designer who brought all finite, temporal things into existence. The important point to this is that the same underlying constructs of thought used in science are used in discovering the existence of an intelligent cause of what exists. Integrity as a person, scientist or social worker or landscaper or retail worker, has to do with adjusting my life to what is objectively true and how it is known to be true. Neither religious people nor naturalistic scientists invented these constructs for thinking that leave us face to face with objective truth. So the next step is to find out if this Cause is God and if so, the God the Bible presents.

Again, Geisler and Turek (2004) provide a thorough study, and again we just hit the highlights.

- * Undeniability is the only adequate test for the truth of a worldview or interpretation/description of what is objectively true.
- * Theism is the only worldview that meets the test of undeniability.
- * Therefore, theism is true.
- * In a theistic universe miracles are possible.
- * Historical events are knowable in a theistic universe.
- * Systematic consistency is the test for the truth of claims within a worldview.
- * The claim that Christ's coming was a miracle is the most systematically consistent position.
- * Therefore, it is true that Christ's coming was a miracle.
- * The claim that Christ is God is the most systematically consistent view.
- * Therefore, Christ is God.
- * Christ verified that the Bible is the word of God.

Studying, for yourself, each point made above gives you the experience of coming face to face with the existence of objective truth and God. The cost is high though, being one of giving up the notion of creating our own reality by way of what we prefer to believe about life, self, others and God and the Bible. The words used in the Bible do have intentional meaning. We know this by using the same rules of thought as science, because to say language and words are meaningless is a contradiction and therefore false. So, we can conclude that the Bible is as valid a source of knowledge as any evidence based practice. The biblical idea of faith is to understand content and as a result of that understanding, decide to adjust your life so that it corresponds with what is understood.

The primary context presented in the Bible is one of relationships. We exist in relation to God, self, and others, not independently of them. Our consideration of agape is

from this context. Agape is understood in the context of God giving it through creating life as a person, us receiving that agape for ourselves and then in return for what we have received we give back to God and others. Receiving and giving agape to others is real life affirmation of the value and worth and meaning we have as people. The crucial aspect of understanding agape can be put this way, 'I understand myself and make decisions about my life because I am acceptable as I am, rather than understanding myself and making decisions about life in order to be acceptable.'

Agape

The concept of agape used in this context comes the Bible on its own terms in its own context. The Bible presents the concept of agape as the ability to give something or someone the status of most important, most valued and most worthy. A person could agape another person or persons, God, family, self, or any kind of object, behavior or idea. Agape is an ability each of us possess that we get to direct toward self, others, God, objects and ideas. A sense of efficacy with directing this is an essential element of living an abundant life experience as a person.

Agape is a power in the sense of having the freedom and right to act, to decide to apply in a direction or upon an object. Power also indicates the authority of the one possessing the power over how that one directs or uses it toward an end. The 'authority or dominion over' indicates the ability to decide what experience is put upon the object of the action. The power can be used to take and get for the one exercising the power, or to give, to bless and to benefit the object of the action. Agape is a power we have authority for dispersing to bless and benefit or to take and diminish.

Operationally, agape manifests itself first as awareness of possessing the ability to bestow importance, meaning and value. Second is the selection of the object of the action

and third is the action taken as a result of giving the value, meaning and importance. A person can agape the results of using substances and hang on to using in the face of having lost family, home, income, and dignity. Other people will give their life for an idea or belief they have 'agape'd'.

Another interesting aspect of agape is that it is the giver of the agape that decides to whom or what the worth, value and importance is given. It is not the recipient, be it person or object or idea that determines worth for having agape given. The value the giver places on what agape is directed toward, is easily found out by exploring the givers reasons for deciding to give to the person or object. The reasons are that which the giver holds as important, meaningful and valuable to them about the object, person or idea.

In operational terms, God is agape toward us, because that is how God is. Apparently God determined that regardless of our perceptions to the contrary, we have value, worth and importance. Agape is unqualified in that it gives as a result of the decision of the giver to give rather than being conditional on the receiver response or the recipients personal evaluation of their worth. Agape touches the core of personhood, the intrinsic value, worth, and importance and meaningfulness of each persons existence.

Motivational Interviewing

Motivational Interviewing is "a way of being with people, that emphasizes personal responsibility and ability for change."(Miller & Rollnick, 2004) The approach focuses on creating an atmosphere where the participant can come up with their own good reasons for which they act, and make corresponding changes if they so choose. MI is a way of treating others "which is likely to be quite different from how others may have treated them in the past" (Miller & Rollnick, 2004, p.41). Motivational interviewing is about freeing people from the ambivalence that entraps them in repetitive cycles of

self-defeating or self-destructive behavior . . . and free them to positive behavior change.” (Miller & Rollnick, p. 41). Miller and Rollnick suggest that motivation can be defined as “the probability that a person will enter into, continue, and adhere to a specific change strategy” (p.19).

Motivational interviewing involves three characteristics, collaboration, evocation and autonomy. Collaboration involves honoring the other’s experiences and perspectives and creating an atmosphere that is conducive rather than coercive to change. Evocation involves enhancing the intrinsic motivation for change that lies within the other person. Autonomy refers to honoring the other persons right and responsibility for self-direction and power to make an informed decision (Miller & Rollnick, pp. 34-35).

Motivational Interviewing also involves four general principles, expressing empathy, developing discrepancy, rolling with resistance, and supporting self-efficacy. The empathic counselor is one who listens to the other person with an attitude of striving to understand and comprehend what it is like being that other person. Often this is thought of as acceptance of where the other person is in their life at that specific moment, without judging or demanding they be any other place. Acceptance does not mean approval, agreement, or anticipation that how they are now is how they will be for eternity. Skillful listening is essential to empathy as is accepting the person having two ways of feeling and thinking about something as normal.

Developing discrepancy involves mirroring the natural experience of ambivalence, or feeling/thinking two ways about something, that is a normal and typical experience for all people. This is a very directive aspect of Motivational Interviewing in that the counselor listens for “the discrepancy between the present state of affairs and

how one wants to be” (p. 38). Mirroring discrepancy gives the person the opportunity to make a more informed decision about their course of action.

Rolling with resistance is a powerful feature of Motivational Interviewing (Miller & Rollnick, 2002, pp.43-51, 98-110). In practice resistance behavior (denial, defensiveness) is used as an indication of running across something very important to the client they feel is or has been threatened or violated some time in the past. Rolling with their protective resistance enhances the safe environment being created and experienced with MI (Stasiewicz, Herrman, Nochajski, & Dermen, 2006, Herrman 2006). Collaborating with the person around their resistance facilitates change.

Finally, supporting self-efficacy involves imparting belief in the ability to manage one’s inner being, or at least to be able to learn how. This involves enhancing the possibility of change, allowing the person to initiate the possibility and hope for change, and communicating your belief in their ability to change. Self-efficacy is ‘a judgment of one’s capability to accomplish a certain level of performance’ (Bandura, 1986, p.391). Self-efficacy is different from an act engaged in to produce an outcome. Believing a change can be made is different from actions taken to make the change, which are different from the expectations of the outcome of engaging in the act.

Motivational Interviewing has good support as an evidence-based practice. A fair and thorough analysis of empirical studies using MI is found in Miller & Rollnick (2002, Chapter 16). Clinical studies involving MI were chosen based on specific criteria and then examined following the guidelines most commonly used to review the efficacy of psychotherapy interventions laid out by Kazdin (1992). Twenty-six studies involving the spirit and principles of MI met the criteria and were reviewed.

Of the 26 reviewed studies, the following are brief summations of the findings:
 In the areas of alcohol problems and drug addiction, Adaptations of MI yielded moderate to large effects and good maintenance over time.

- * Generally, AMIs are more efficacious than no treatment, and not significantly different from credible alternative treatments.
- * AMIs are efficacious as stand-alone treatments and as preludes to other treatments.
- * AMIs are efficacious with hypertension, diabetes, dual diagnoses, and eating disorders.
- * AMI outcomes have been statistically and clinically significant.

We can draw from the review conducted in Miller & Rollnick (2002), and an outside review (Dunn, DeRoo, & Rivera, 2001) that Motivational Interviewing as a style with adaptations for certain contexts is considered a Level A EBP.

We can use forensic evidence for reasonably concluding a God exists and consequently the Bible as an accurate interpretation of human experience, and its specific use of agape a valid ‘way to be toward others’. We can use the empirical evidence for our basis of concluding MI is a proven style of intervention into the human experience. Good reason suggests there would be a match between the two, that one would not contradict the other. If indeed the Bible is an accurate description of the human experience and useful apart from just a religious context, there will be correspondence between the Bible and the evidence-based-practice of motivational interviewing.

Agape in Action – Motivational Interviewing

We do in fact find that MI corresponds with the concept of agape as described in the Bible. Let’s remember the biblical concept of agape is that of having the ability with authority to make something or someone of utmost importance, value and worth.

The spirit of MI, collaboration, evocation, autonomy has correspondence with the Bible. The Bible presents an overall theme of working together, responses within relationships, and at the same time respect for individual decision. This theme is illustrated from Genesis to Revelation. Early illustrations include the dialogue between God and Adam and Eve, then Cain and God, all through Psalms and such well known passages as ‘come let us reason together,’ Jesus on road to Emmaeus (respecting first the thoughts and feelings of the travelers), certainly Paul at Mars Hill and what he wrote on love, and of course the description of Philip and the Ethiopian. In each example, working together without imposing – collaboration, eliciting and respecting thoughts of another – evocation, and accepting where the person was in their life without demanding they change – autonomy are present. In the Bible there is a bottom line sense of protection of individual existence within the context of community within the context of a universe created specifically for the community and individual.

The MI characteristic of collaboration is consistent with Scripture as illustrated in the description of Adam and Eve. There was collaboration between God and Adam and Eve as to how their freedom of choice would be used to bring the most benefit to them. In the description of Cain and Able we still see the power of making an informed decision and the freedom to not choose the good even with information and collaboration. In the New Testament the call to change ones mind concerning interpretation of life is framed as a call to repentance. The focus on ‘you’ deciding is a constant theme throughout the gospels and letters.

As much as those are examples of collaboration they also represent autonomy. For example, the well-known part of Romans tells us to ‘renew our minds’ which involves a decision to change from one thing to another. The classic presentation of

ambivalence in Romans seven, in the letter to the Ephesians, the fourth and fifth chapters emphasize the responsibility of the individual in regard to their decisions about behavior. In the first letter written to Thessalonians, in the fourth chapter, more specific encouragement is given to individuals regarding their choosing to accept or reject certain behaviors in life. Paul's appearance before Agrippa recorded in Acts 25 and 26 demonstrates the responsibility of each person to consider and decide. Further correspondence between the Bible and autonomy is found in Proverbs 4.20-27, as well as Paul's description of himself in Acts 24.16. We see the correspondence of collaboration, evocation and autonomy in each of these examples.

What of the four working principles in Motivational Interviewing, expressing empathy, developing discrepancy, rolling with resistance, and supporting self-efficacy? Is there a correspondence in the Bible with these?

The underlying characteristic of empathy is unqualified acceptance. Unqualified acceptance means understanding the person is as they are in that moment and given all the variables is exactly how they should be at that moment. There is no demand to change, no acceptance because of potential if they change, no qualifiers at all. This acceptance does not mean approval or agreement. It really means you adjust your expectations and how you would like reality to be, to how it actually is.

Unqualified acceptance is the facilitator of change. Consider the Bible story where the 'good' people throw another person in front of Jesus and tell him the person has such unacceptable behavior that the person deserves to be isolated and in fact not allowed to exist as a person anymore. Remember, in the context of the Bible this Jesus claimed to be God and claimed that his way with people was the same as Gods. So Jesus dismisses the crowd of 'I am better than you because I don't do the bad things you do'

people and looks at the person before him, knowing their past, present, and future, knowing them as they are with nothing hidden. Then he does a marvelous thing. He asks the person ‘where are your condemners for the way you are?’ The person looks around and says ‘they are gone.’ He then looks the person in the eye and says ‘as God neither do I condemn you for being the way you are. Now, knowing you are acceptable as you are, go and change.’

What an incredible, accurate description of human interpersonal and intrapersonal experience that corresponds with reality. Reading it non-religiously you find its description of human experience, psychologically, sociologically, philosophically, and scientifically to be accurate. So, in that context, on its own terms the message presented by Jesus is since God does not condemn for how we actually are, and gives unqualified acceptance as precursory to the possibility of change, it must be the way to be with people that corresponds with reality. In other words, the most powerful intervention to free a person to consider change is acceptance of them as they are with no qualifiers.

Coming alongside a person and being a co-protector of their personhood is unqualified acceptance. Being this way communicates an understanding of the condition of all people including the person coming alongside! This frees the other person to consider change in the light of their conscious awareness, their right and power to choose free of oppression, deception and coercion as possible. So we find powerful correspondence between the Bible and the MI principle of expressing empathy.

Reflective listening is a vital part of expressing empathy. Reflective listening is a vital component of MI. Reflective listening is observing-describing-non-judgmentally what you hear it is like being the other person. Remember the story of the rich young

ruler and Jesus? Jesus listened to him describe being himself and agreed with him without being judgmental.

Agape and the developing discrepancy characteristic of MI correspond.

Developing discrepancy is simply bringing to light the internal experience a person has when what they are experiencing is not what they want or at least different from what they want. This means the person is to some degree aware of there being something other than what they are experiencing available. Hearing it being said out loud and someone mirroring the conflict gives a chance to reflect on it and come to conclusions. The best examples from the Bible are the sections in Romans chapter seven and Galatians chapter five. Of course the description of Paul before Agrippa in Acts 24 and 25 demonstrates the emergence of discrepancy within Agrippa. Lest we forget, the discrepancy within Herod that caused him great distress and his eventual decision for the beheading of John the Baptist. Each time the Bible calls for consideration of change it is calling for discrepancy to be created between how things are and how they could be different.

Agape and rolling with resistance demonstrate a remarkable correspondence. The key for rolling with resistance is making what is important to the person important to you. It is seeing resistance as protection and joining in on that protection non-judgmentally with the other person. What is worth a person using resistance behaviors such as denial and defensiveness to protect? The sense of having their right and power to make informed decisions away from them is worth protecting. The sense of goodness of being a person with life is worth protecting in the face of awareness that corruption has diminished it. Making protection of the sense of goodness of being a person important to you for another person protects against the fear of being rejected for being corrupted. This ability to make what is important to another, important to you is illustrated

throughout the Bible and perhaps most specifically in Philippians chapter two and the description of Jesus making what is important to us important to him and being willing to change first in order to give that

Supporting self-efficacy is also found to have correspondence with the Bible. As noted before, self-efficacy is ‘a judgment of one’s capability to accomplish a certain level of performance’ (Bandura, 1986, p.391). Self-efficacy in the Bible is understood within the greater context of the existence of good and evil (the Bible defines evil as the absence of good that was designed to be there). There is no expectation that human beings are able to identify all forms of evil. One would need to be omniscient in order to know all good from evil. So we are referring to the ongoing learning process. The Scriptural passage that is representative of self-efficacy for our purpose is Proverbs 4. 20-27:

“My son, pay attention to what I say; listen closely to my words. Do not let them out of your sight, keep them within your heart; for they are life to those who find them and health to a man’s whole body. Above all else, guard your heart, for it is the wellspring of life. Put away perversity from your mouth; keep corrupt talk far from your lips. Let your eyes look straight ahead, fix your gaze directly before you. Make level paths for your feet and take only ways that are firm. Do not swerve to the right or the left; keep your foot from evil (NIV Bible, 1984).”

Notice in this passage the implied belief in the ability of the person to accomplish the tasks put forth. Noting that self-efficacy is differentiated from any action that a person may take to accomplish the task and differentiated from the outcomes of actions taken this is a clear illustration of the biblical stance on belief in the ability to accomplish a level of performance. Switching to the New Testament we find St. Paul operating freely

within self-efficacy when he outlines accomplishments he has achieved and then states, 'I put aside what I have accomplished and press forward toward the high calling of God' (Philippians 3). Additionally, he credits God as the Source of his belief in his ability to accomplish all things when he states 'I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me' (Philippians 4). Paul's conclusion as written in the second letter to the Corinthians, chapter 12 is awareness that the source of the belief in ability to accomplish is God, and he welcomes his weaknesses as he sees himself realistically.

What then do we pay attention to and reflect that affirms the goodness of being and having life? We reflect both the representation of any given topic or issue an individual presents and the abilities they received as a being with life. This involves their thoughts or interpretations of experiences, their physical and emotional feelings, their images about and toward whatever experience they are describing. What they are describing is what it is like being them with their history in the context they are operating. So any issues that affect human relations with self, others, God and the world system are applicable.

The goal is to understand what it is like being them and give them the sense of being understood from that position. This is both supported in Scripture and is what makes Motivational Interviewing a way of being with people rather than a set of techniques. This is not a matter of me feeling like I understand the other person and trying to convince them that I do, rather it is a matter of them feeling like they are understood for what it is like being them in their current context. This means common experiences and clinical expertise become a resource for reflecting more accurately. It is as Paul described in the first letter to the Corinthians, chapter thirteen. There he wrote that abilities, knowledge and resources are for making the giving of love more effective.

And Jesus himself said that people know the kind of God who actually exists by our agape or way of being with others.

Conclusions

Utilizing the underlying assumptions of science we arrive at the conclusion that the Bible is a valid, true interpretation of human experience. The same underlying assumption of the scientific method produce evidence based practice. Evidence based practices will find a correspondence with the Bible as both present reality. Unfortunately, researchers and clinicians and those given to religion confuse explanations for the causal relationships with the observed and proven cause-effect relationships. That some cause-effect pattern proves to be effective in assisting a person to realize the goodness of being and having life is separate from the explanation as to why. When we are trapped in arguing about the why, we miss truth and continue to stumble along ineffectively. The data and facts and truth and biblical presentation are just that - data, facts, truth, 'what is'. Discounting any of these because of an interpretation creates a severe limitation for the sake of personal comfort.

The benefit for Christian Social Workers in knowing how the Bible is valid apart from personally preferred beliefs is to live in more correspondence with truth. In that position comes the freedom to use evidence based practice and know there is a correspondence with the Bible.

It is the world-view, theistic or naturalistic interpretation of 'scientific facts' that requires tests for truth. But that does not negate 'scientific facts'. A thorough examination of this and viable tests for truth is available from many sources. Geisler (1976) provides as fair and objective a presentation as any. We can come to the rational and reasonable conclusion that there is no real conflict between Science, and in our focus

evidence based practice, and Scripture. Given the existence of objective truth, and the Bible as an accurate description of that truth about human experience, the question for Christian Social Workers is “What keeps us from being leaders in providing empirically validated interventions?”

Bibliography

- Bandura, Albert (1986). *Social Foundations of Thought and Action: A Social Cognitive Theory*. Prentice-Hall:Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey.
- Dunn, C., DeRoo, L., & Rivera, F.P. (2001). The use of brief interventions adapted from motivational interviewing across behavioral domains: A systematic review. *Addiction, 96* (12), 1725-1742.
- Gibbs, Leonard and Gambrill, Eileen (2002). Evidence-Based Practice: Counterarguments to Objections. *Research on Social Work Practice, Vol. 12 No. 3*, May 2002, 452-476. Sage Publications.
- Geisler, Norman (1976). *Christian Apologetics*. Baker Book House:Grand Rapids Michigan.
- Geisler, Norman and Turek, Frank (2004). *I Don't Have Enough Faith to Be an Atheist*. Crossway Books: Wheaton, Illinois.
- Hempy Jr., Robert, E. (1998). The Sufficiency of Scripture and Modern Psychology. *CTS Journal, 4* (1), Winter, 1998.
- Herrman, David, C. (2006). *Rolling with Resistance*. University of Rochester, Health Behavior Change Symposium, Winter, 2006.
- Kazdin, A.E. (1992). *Research design in clinical psychology* (2nd ed.) Needham Heights, MA: Allyn & Bacon.
- Miller, William and Rollnick, Steve (2002). *Motivational Interviewing: Preparing people for change*. (2nd Edition). Guilford Press:New York, New York.

New International Version Bible. International Bible Society, 1984. Zondervan: Grand Rapids, MI.

National Association of Social Workers (1996). *Code of ethics*. Washington, DC:

Author.

Rankin, John (1999). *First the Gospel, Then Politics . . . Volume 1: Only Genesis*.

TEI Publishing: Hartford, Connecticut.

Rollnick, S., Heather, N., & Bell, A. (1992). Negotiating behavior change in medical settings: The development of brief motivational interviewing. *Journal of Mental Health, 1*, 25-39.

Stasiewicz, P., Herrman, D., Nochajski, T., & Dermen, K. (2006). Motivational

Interviewing: engaging highly resistant clients in treatment. *Counselor, 7*(1), February, 2006.

Sanderson, W.C. (2002). Are Evidence-Based Psychological Interventions Practiced by Clinicians in the Field? *Medscape Psychiatry & Mental Health eJournal 7*(1), 2002. <http://www.medscape.com>

Stenger, J. (1992). The Face of Chaos, *Free Inquiry*, Winter 1992-1993.

U.S. News and World Report, March 26, 1990, 54.

Wiechelt, S. (2004). Introduction to Evidence Based Practice. State University of New York – Buffalo. *MSW Program, Summer Session SW973*.