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*"A Vital Christian Presence in Social Work"*

## **VALUES CLARIFICATION AS A THERAPEUTIC PROCESS**

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Social workers and other mental health professionals are challenged to help clients establish social, emotional, and spiritual equilibrium in an era that has many competing worldviews. A broad conceptualization of dominant worldviews could be described by three general paradigms, (1) Pre-modern (2) Modern and (3) Post modernism. The pre-modern philosophical view of reality includes theism, divine revelation, divine intervention and a divine purpose and design for people, society and the world. The modern philosophical view of reality revolves around the scientific method, cause and effect and finite rules of the universe. The post-modern philosophical view of reality suggests that individuals help construct truth, reality, and what is right and moral in a subjective, relative universe (Murphy & Pardeck 1998; Weick, 1998).

There are several models that may fit within each of the broader paradigms mentioned above. The Christian mandate for helping the less fortunate and the acceptance of the premise of a divine calling for one's life may be viewed as within the pre-modern view. The capitalistic view that suggests profit is the primary motive for progress and social

change for individuals and society may actually be conceptualized as an expression of modernity. The feminist theories of human development, institutional racism as an explanation of an alternative social reality as well as existentialism have explanations for the underlying cause for low self-concept, motivation and behavior. These views may be categorized as part of post-modernism because reality is subjectively perceived.

The *Cultural War* of the twenty-first century is characterized by debates about homosexuality, euthanasia, the definition of families, role and authority of parents, sex education, authority of religious systems, and the role of educational systems in teaching values. The *Cultural War* has more than two major opponents. People that subscribe to various philosophical models that explain social reality form alliances for each issue.

Educational systems, families, religious organizations and government systems are struggling to bring stability and direction to what seems to be wide-spread social chaos. This is the context for social work practice in contemporary society. This social work educator is suggesting that the absence of individual, well-established value systems may lead to inconsistent, irrational, and destructive behavior. Therefore, values clarification can be used as a therapeutic process to enhance stability, or promote social, emotional, and spiritual equilibrium that can lead to a constructive direction for dysfunctional people.

## **Social Disorganization Impacting The Lives of Youth:**

Youth that runaway, school violence, substance abuse, and sexually acting out behaviors are expressions of chaotic social situations for young people. The emotional distress, vulnerability, and anomie experienced by the troubled youth, suggest that there are related problems in educational systems, families, religious organizations and the various levels of government that must deal with the impact of social dysfunction.

Youth that runaway from home represent an ongoing pattern for young people struggling with abuse, family conflict, problems with school, poverty, substance abuse, death of caregivers, abandonment and rejection. (Bradley, 1997; Kurtz, Jarvis, & Kurtz, 1991). The number of runaway adolescents has continued to increase in recent years. The runaway youth typically are responding to environmental stress. The most frequent reported stressors indicated in their research findings were related to disrespect. The situations in the disrespect category included being made fun of, being cursed at, or being ordered to do something. (Chun & Springer (2005). One organization that deals with runaway youth estimated that over one million youth runaway and / or are forced to leave home each year (National Runaway Switchboard, 2001).

Thompson, Zittel-Palamara, and Maccio (2004) found that in addition to poor interfamily relationships, runaway youths reported experiences of physical, sexual, emotional abuse and neglect. Adolescent females were found to be more vulnerable than males. Often the runaway youth, particularly the females had a mother who abused

substances. The substance abuse by the mother typically meant that she was unable to protect her daughter from various sources of abuse. Many of the runaway youths attended school on an irregular basis or had been suspended or expelled.

School violence may be gang related as well as an expression of individual acting out among adolescents. Decker and Curry (2000) found that many youth believed that joining a gang would result in gaining status. Also, the gang was viewed as a family by many of the youth who joined.

Violence in schools has recently been given much attention in the media. Because of the media coverage of school violence, it is typically understood to be on the increase. However, an analysis of the data from the U.S. Departments of Justice and Department of Education indicates that there was no increase or only a slight increase in four of the six categories of school violence studied in a comparison of 1989 with 1995. School violence has been prevalent in the United States for a long time. However, until recently, school violence primarily occurred in poor, black, Hispanic and other minority urban areas. Now school violence is common in small communities, as well as white suburbia. (Shafii and Shafii, 2003).

Substance abuse is a widespread problem with adolescents in our contemporary society. According to research data compiled by Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (2004), youth 12 to 17 years of age of each ethnic group studied

used illicit drugs at an alarming rate in recent years. When asked if they used illicit drugs in the past month, the following results were found:

White .....	11.8%
Black / African-American .....	9.6%
American Indian or Alaska Native .....	19.3%
Asian .....	6.5%
Two or More Races .....	15.1%
Hispanic or Latino .....	11.0%

The most prevalent illicit drugs used by the 14 and 15 year olds were Marijuana, misuse of prescription drugs, and inhalants in that order. The 16 and 17 year olds used Marijuana, misuse of prescription drugs, hallucinogens, and cocaine in that order.

Sexual acting out behaviors for adolescents are manifested in teenage pregnancy and sexually transmitted disease rates. Analysis of the rates for unmarried girls, under age 20 giving birth in 165 large cities found that 42 of the cities had a 90% or higher rate and 75 of the cities had a rate of 85% or higher (National Center for Health Statistics (2002).

The city of Cleveland reported that one in nine females and one in thirty-seven males ages 15-19 were reported to be infected with Chlamydia in 2003 (Cleveland Department of Public Health, 2005). The infection rates for African-Americans were higher than that of White non-Hispanics as well as for Hispanics of that age group. The rate in infection for females as well as males increased in comparison with the 2002 rates.

If inconsistent, irrational, and destructive behaviors are associated with the absence of commitment to a well-defined or well-established value system, then therapeutic intervention to address the social dysfunction should include techniques to help the troubled youth develop a meaningful value system.

When variables are associated or correlated with one another, that relationship does not prove that one causes the other. Such a correlation may be a *spurious relationship*. That means a third or more variables cause the correlation between A and B. The cause of the inconsistent, irrational, and destructive behaviors may be linked to various sources such as general family dysfunction, poverty, low academic achievement, child neglect, or sexual, physical and emotional abuse. However, the point of intervention may be where the various problems converge as manifested in the correlation.

In this situation, the point of convergence is the absence of a strong or well-defined value system. The inconsistent, irrational, destructive (including self-destructive) behaviors may not be the manifestation of commitment to an evil or Machiavellian value system. But such may be the manifestation of no identifiable value system accepted by the individual. This is consistent with theories of cognitive development. Cognitive theorists suggest that the development of a value system is part of the cognitive development process.

As the vulnerable child seeks to find meaning in a chaotic environment, she / he must develop *cognitive schemas* to explain reality. Adaptation or adjusting to the environment is basic to cognitive development. The process of assimilation requires taking new information then integrating it into a schema or mental patterns that becomes an explanation for reality. The process of accommodation includes the development of a more abstract level of reasoning. Cognitive theorists suggest that the learning is not from the environment per se, but rather from the development of mental conceptions, growth in reasoning ability, and problem solving. (Piaget, 1952)

The development of a value system and one's moral development is part of one's cognitive development. Kohlberg theorized that individuals begin with a pre-moral or pre-conventional level of reasoning with external controls being the primary source for decisions to do what is right or moral. If one continues to grow in moral development, then the individual may eventually reach the stage where moral decisions are internally controlled. At the highest level, morality involves higher-level principles greater than merely observing law and it exceeds self-interest. Decisions at this level are based upon moral principles. This becomes the expression of a well-developed value system that has grown through the moral-cognitive developmental process (Kohlberg, 1969).

Thus, regardless of the cause of the social dysfunction, there is a challenge for the child to develop a cognitive foundation to support her / his view of the world as well as her / his place in the society. The inability to develop a firm cognitive moral code could lead to an increase of inconsistent, irrational, and destructive behaviors. Therefore, logic

would support the need for a cognitive therapeutic approach that helps the client explore various value issues and to develop a personal value system that she / he can emotionally embrace.

### **Values and Their Importance:**

According to the Social Work Dictionary (Barker, 1999) values are the customs, standards of conduct, and principles considered to be desirable by a culture, a group of people, or an individual.

Some scholars suggest that values are central to the establishment of ongoing behavior patterns. Values represent strongly held beliefs about how the world should be, about how people should normally behave, and about preferred conditions of life (Hepworth, et al. 2002). Therefore values are not simply philosophical views. They are related to behavioral goals and behavioral expectations.

Cox (2002) suggests that the underlying factor that adds strength to a family is a strongly held and mutually shared value system. Such a value system allows individuals to have a wider vision of life than just personal success and it enables them to reach beyond themselves. Families that share a strong value system experience spiritual wellness. This conceptualization of values that are organized into a system suggests that the value system influences the behavior of the family unit. Also, a well-established value system for an individual may be manifested in what is viewed as a sense of spiritual well-being.



Once a value is internalized, it becomes either consciously or unconsciously, a standard for guiding actions and making choices. The value then determines behaviors or modes of conduct. Because values are at the basis of choice, the choices that people make reflect their perception of what is right, just, or what is cherished at a particular time (Popkin and Souznan, 2002).

If values affect so many decisions and actions in an individual's life, then it is best that values are understood and behaviors are in line with one's values. Internal emotional tension or value incongruence may result if one makes choices that conflict with the individual's value system. Individuals must cognitively and emotionally determine to what degree their conscience will allow them to deviate from their ideal perspective (Sherwood, 1993).

There is a limited range in which one can effectively vary her / his behaviors in regard to the personal value system. However, within that limited range there is room for some deviation. Behaviorally acting outside of that range would create problems related to one's sense of worth, dignity, integrity, and emotional well-being.

### **Values Clarification:**

As the values approach was developed, it was conceptualized as neither sensitivity training nor psychotherapy, but rather a process that provides a learning experience which leads participants to reflect of life and actions as they examine behavior, ideas,

feelings and personal values (Hall, 1973) These values are basically and uniquely accepted by an individual and seems to be at the very center of one's existence.

Values clarification is a method of education in morality and ethical principles that occurs by bringing together people to share their opinions and value perspectives. This exposes the participants to different ideals and permits them to appreciate the relative nature of values (Barker, 1999).

### **Values Clarification and the Cognitive Therapeutic Process:**

This researcher / practitioner is suggesting that inconsistent, fluid, irrational and destructive behaviors may be related to the lack of commitment to a well-defined and functional value system. It is very possible that individuals have been exposed to elements of various value systems that are socially acceptable and conducive to an organized, functional society and yet, still resist commitment to the values. The level of commitment to the various values may vary. Therefore, a clarification process may be necessary to help the individual explore the extent to which specific values should be embraced.

This process is more than an educational experience. It is not a didactic process using a teacher to explain to the client what is good and acceptable. Values clarification can be a therapeutic process used to remedy emotional disturbances that are rooted in faulty thinking. It can be used as a cognitive therapeutic process.

Cognitive Therapy as conceptualized by Aaron Beck is a method of restructuring faulty thinking patterns that may impair the emotional well-being of individuals. The faulty thinking patterns may include what people think about themselves, others and the world. The faulty thinking can be reversed and consequently eradicate behavioral and emotional dysfunctions that result from the faulty thinking patterns (Beck, 1986)

Cognitive Therapy is based upon a theory of personality, which maintains that how one thinks, will primarily determines how one behaves and feels. The therapy is a collaborative process with the therapist and client exploring the assumptions or hypotheses that guide the client's life. Reality testing and problem-solving are central to this process. The client's maladaptive interpretations of reality are treated as testable hypotheses. Verbal exploration is used to examine alternative interpretations as well as to generate contradictory evidence which may support other views and consequently lead to therapeutic change (Beck and Weishaar, 1995).

The utilization of values clarification as a therapeutic process should include guiding the client through three phases. The three phases are (a) The discovery / awareness phase, (b) The claiming / reclaiming phase, and (c) The acceptance phase.

*The Discovery / Awareness Phase:*

The client is encouraged to identify certain primary values that may be acceptable to her / him. The value is determined to be primary if the client believes that it is definitely represents what is good or worthy of cherishing. The exploration includes examining

whether the value is good for one's self, for one's family, for significant others, for the community, society, and or the world. During the discovery / awareness phase, the client begins to accept particular values through a cognitive growth process. The client must cognitively grow to comprehend the value in action. After the conceptualization of the value as good, then it can be emotionally embraced.

At this point, the value is identified as essential for a good life. However, the particular value(s) being considered may not necessarily be manifested as central to the client's current lifestyle. Therefore, some discomfort may be evident in the therapeutic process. The particular value(s) being considered may correspond with or be reminiscent of aspects of a value system, code, religious doctrine, or lesson that the individual was exposed to at an earlier point in time.

*Claiming / Reclaiming Values Phase:*

At this point in the process the values being considered move more into the emotional realm and are more than mental constructs. The values become more than an intellectual rule, model, spiritual principle, moral principle, or desirable guide for self, significant others, family, community, society, and the world. The values being examined becomes the focus of an internal struggle to integrate something new or something that is missing into the personality system. The process of integration typically will include emotional discomfort because it requires reconciling a belief with behaviors and lifestyle that are incongruent with what has been accepted as good. As the individual claims or reclaims a particular value, she / he must be encouraged to examine past experiences. This process

includes (1) how other treated the individual, (2) how the individual treated others, (3) what was the meaning of the social interaction, (4) how does the value relate to goals, pleasures, and opportunities.

Frustration, ambivalence, and anger can emerge and possibly lead to transference of unresolved conflicts to the therapist. But, the claiming and incorporation of the values must be pointed out as therapeutic growth.

*Acceptance:*

The particular values that are being examined will be referred to by the client as now central to the client' worldview and lifestyle. The client will be able to refer to tangible expressions of the value through daily interaction. The particular values that have been accepted will be expressed as having a clear prominent position in the individual's hierarchy of ideals and ideas. There should be evidence of new affiliations with friends and / or a religious / spiritual community that embraces the set of values that the client has accepted.

**Examples of Values Clarification Exercises Used for Cognitive Restructuring:**

**Values Clarification Exercise**

***On the Right Track***

**Question for Girls:** Which of the guys described below would you select as a boyfriend if you had to choose one from this list?

**Question for Guys:** Which of the guys described below do you have the most in common with?

**Jason:** He is 19 years old and considers himself a *player*. He dropped out of high school at age 15 because he believed that he could learn more from the *street* than in school. He boasts of having babies by three different girls. He is regarded as handsome by most people. He does not have a steady job. But he earns \$400 - 700 each week as a pool hustler. He lives in a three-room apartment and drives a car that is two years old. He paid cash for the car a few months ago after having an extremely good month playing pool. Even though he says that he is a *player* he wants to have a relationship with a young woman on a steady basis. He said that he would treat his *main woman* differently than he treats other females.

**Mark:** He is 18 years old and does not believe in God. He works hard in a warehouse and makes enough money to pay for his rent as well as make payments on his two-year old car. He dropped out of high school but is studying in an evening program so that he will be able to earn a G.E.D. He does not visit his mother because they have an ongoing stressful relationship. He is regarded as handsome by most people. His former girlfriend is six months pregnant and wants to have an abortion. Mark acknowledges the fact that is the "father" but says the decision about birth or abortion is the primary responsibility of the woman. Even though he would prefer that the young woman (age 17) reject abortion as an option, he will not try to influence her in the decision-making process. He has been

getting drunk and using marijuana nearly every weekend since he learned of the pregnancy.

**Leroy:** He is a young man that is not handsome but is average in physical appearance. He is 18 years old and expects to graduate in the spring. He earns average grades. He is not very popular in school, but he has a good sense of humor. He lives at home with his parents. They allow him to drink beer at home as long as he limits himself to one can. His girlfriend is six months pregnant. Leroy does not plan on marrying the (17 year old) girl after he graduates from high school. He believes that he is too young to get married even though he and the girl are very close emotionally and romantically. They have not dated anyone else for over two years. He is willing to take care of the baby financially after he becomes employed. He describes himself as very religious.

**Kenny:** He is 21 years old and is a high school graduate. He was convicted of burglary and spent three months in jail. However, he said that he realized his mistake and has been forgiven by God. He has a part-time job and is enrolled part-time in college. He hopes to become a social worker and help troubled youth. Kenny is still associating with his old friends that he was involved with during the period of time that he was a chronic thief. He has a (male) roommate to help share the expenses with their apartment.

## **Values Expressed By or Not Embraced**

### **By the Characters and to Be Discussed By Client**

- |                                   |                       |
|-----------------------------------|-----------------------|
| 1. Fidelity / Monogamy            | 6. Belief in God      |
| 2. Appreciation for Education     | 7. Honesty            |
| 3. Acceptance of Alcohol / Drugs  | 8. Work Ethic         |
| 4. Value / Respect for Human Life | 9. Family Unity       |
| 5. Respect for Others             | 10. Care for Children |

## **Values Clarification Exercise**

### ***Developing a Menu For Yourself and People Important In Your Life***

**Directions:** This is an opportunity to plan a menu of experiences, qualities, or values for yourself and people that are important to you. You are to select things from each category that will make life better.

#### Main Course (Select three)

Ability to get along with others

Appreciation for Education & Encouraging Others to Achieve



Desire to Grow Spiritually & Demonstrate Religious Principles in Life

Ability to Maintain a Committed Relationship with One person at a Time

Ability & Desire to Be Free of Legal Problems

Ability to Reject Use of Mind Altering Drugs

Love for Family

Side Dishes (Select two)

Ability to Be a Good Sex partner

Ability to Be a Good / True Friend to Others

Having Courage to Tell Others What You Believe In

Ability to Fight / defend One's self & Family

Being Patient With Others

Being Loved By God

Being dependable

Deserts (Select One)

Ability to Dance Well

Being Popular With Males & females

Having Physical Beauty / Attractiveness

Ability to Drink Without Getting Drunk

***Discussion Issues:***

Why are these qualities important? Is some type of diet (change of behavior) necessary before you can include some of these things on your plate?

### **Implications for Social Work Practice In a Secular Setting:**

The utilization of values clarification as a therapeutic process will allow Christian social work practitioners to address moral, ethical, spiritual issues without violating rules against proselytizing. Utilization of this therapeutic process will enable Christian social workers and other mental health practitioners to combine the utilization of an accepted therapy with a process that encourages the client to examine the need for a basic, comprehensive worldview that goes beyond mere behavior. Clarifying one's values and incorporating functional concepts such as forgiveness, renewal, and repentance helps the client move forward rather than dwell on past injustices, pain, abuse, and lack of success.

Values can become the foundation for renewal of life. Social and emotional dysfunctions can be healed through the *renewal of the mind* (Romans ). The cognitive restructuring can be the framework for social and emotional renewal. The utilization of values as a cornerstone of the cognitive process enriches the Cognitive Therapy.

The quest for developing a new value system as envisioned in this approach may be consistent with a client's search for the true meaning in life. Youth involved with alcohol abuse, other drug use / abuse, sexually acting out and violence through gang activity are often manifestations of family dysfunction, academic / school failures, poverty and other environmental problems. However, the anomie and the reality of being socially and emotionally disconnected may lead the troubled youth to search for a meaning in life or to attempt to fill an emotional void, or even attempt to numb the emotional pain.

The values clarification used as a therapeutic process can be the vehicle to help the client, particularly troubled youth, find wholeness. The therapist can actually serve as a spiritual guide without violating social work ethics, which prohibit *imposing personal values on the client*. In this process, the client is the key person in the exploratory process. The practitioner does not impose Christian principles on the client. However, when a client finds that the values that are good are also consistent with the Christian religion / worldview, then the client may make the next steps independently in the quest for spiritual renewal.

### **Conclusion:**

Our contemporary society has witnessed post-modernity take the place of the Judeo-Christian philosophical foundation for our social order. The pre-modern view of reality, which included a theistic view, was exchanged for the scientific oriented modernity. However, the Judeo-Christian philosophical foundation continued to co-exist with modernity. But with the advent of subjective, relative oriented, post-modernity, the Judeo-Christian heritage has become minimal.

Even though the typical citizen does not use such academic constructs, there is a dominant expression of subjectivity and relativism in our society. The subjective / relative view hinders some individuals from developing a strong, well-defined value system. Consequently, vulnerable, troubled youth may possibly have a greater struggle

with the process of developing a strong, well-defined value system. Therefore, values clarification as a therapeutic cognitive process may be appropriate for many of these individuals that suffer from social, emotional dysfunction.

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