FOUNDATIONS OF COUNSELING PEOPLE

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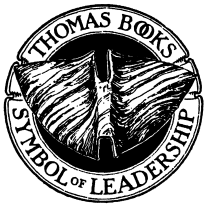
A Guide for the Counseling, Psychological, and Helping Professions

By

MICHAEL E. ILLOVSKY, PH.D.

Western Illinois University
Macomb, Illinois



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PREFACE

The United States, like the rest of the world, is interacting more with people from other cultures. U.S. influence is spreading globally. We are increasingly providing services to clients who are not Caucasian or of European heritage. Our educational programs have been active in training both domestic students of diverse ethnic backgrounds as well as foreign students. These factors contribute to the need for those who provide counseling to understand the elements involved in interacting with a wide spectrum of people.

This book provides a brief synopsis on such topics as common factors, values, universals, cross-cultural competence, and models, approaches, and psychological perspectives of human behavior (theories of personality). The emphasis is on material that relies more on the use of the scientific method and data instead of anecdotal and experiential literature. Material is provided in the form of results and conclusions, and not – usually – in the form of describing the research itself. For the reader who is interested in obtaining information from which statements are derived, there are references to investigate the material further. Information is garnered from such fields as animal studies, counseling, cross-cultural ethnology, education, evolutionary psychology, linguistics, medicine, medical anthropology, physics, psychology, psychological anthropology, and religion.

There are frequent cross-cultural examples in this book. This does not mean that the material is relevant only for those from other cultures. We are all members of cultural groups. What is appropriate for other cultures is usually appropriate for domestic service providers and their clients. Such a perspective enables those who do counseling to consider the cultural aspects of their clients when they provide services to Euro-Americans and to non-Euro-Americans.

The psychological, counseling, and cross-cultural literature often warn the reader of the problems involved in counseling people of different ethnic groups. There are caveats concerning racism, ignorance, ethnocentricity, bias, and so forth; these statements are often directed at Caucasian and middle-class counselors. This is one perspective. Another perspective can also be con-

sidered. That is, many counselors have personal and professional characteristics that are helpful in their interactions with those who are apparently dissimilar from them. In many other fields of study (e.g., linguistic, anthropology, and education), there are those who advocate the relativistic view and those who advocate the universal view. The relativist view is that each culture is unique and general approaches are viewed as inappropriate and inaccurate. The universal view is that there are commonalities (universals) among peoples and these commonalities can serve as a basis for interacting with a wide range of people. The psychological and counseling literature has focused on the relativistic view and neglected the universal view. This book presents the view that many counselors have some of the skills, life experiences, and knowledge to provide services to diverse groups of people. However, this does not mean that everyone should be providing counseling – certainly not: providing counseling entails doing so in an ethical and competent manner. When they counsel others, professional counselors have to abide by the ethical and professional standards of the American Counseling Association (2005), and psychologists have to abide by those of the American Psychological Association (2002a). That is, they have to provide services within the boundaries of their training, experience, competence, skills, and credentials. These are important standards that need to be adhered to. When interacting with any client, those who provide counseling have to examine their knowledge and skills and determine if they are the appropriate providers of care.

Various terms are used frequently in this book. The term "counselor" is used in two ways: it is used to refer to professionals whose role and function is to specifically provide counseling services, and it is also used in a more generic sense to refer to a person who gives advice especially professionally (Counselor, 2011). Similarly, the term "counseling" can refer to professional counselors' interactions with clients (American Counseling Association, 2010; Counseling, 2011), or it can refer to more generic interactions: "advice given especially as a result of consultation" (Counsel, 2011). People in many fields engage in counseling in the generic sense – especially those in the helping professions, e.g., medicine, education, social work, and the ministry. The term "U.S. Americans" is used to refer to people living in the United States. These people are predominantly influenced by European ways of thinking and perceiving. The term "Euro-American" is used in reference to U.S. Americans of European ancestry. The term "cross-culture" (and cross-cultural) is used to describe interactions with those of other cultures – this is just one of many terms used by different authors (Gerstein, Heppner, Ægisdóttir, Seung-Ming, Norsworthy, 2009a). Another term that is used in this book is "therapy." This refers to treatment especially of bodily, mental, or behavioral disorders (Therapy, 2011). This work is often done by psychologists. Counselors and counseling usually do not entail working with clinical pathologies; whereas, psy-

chologists and therapy do. However, many psychologists do counseling, and many counselors do therapy. In this book, the terms "counselor" and "psychologist" are used interchangeably, just as the terms "therapy" and "counseling" are used similarly. The term "client" shall be used to refer to the person receiving counseling services. Occasionally there will be changes in the terms used to describe similar groups (e.g., referring to a group as Caucasians or Whites, or to African-Americans as Blacks); this is usually done in order to keep the same terms as the authors of the studies used. In regard to the use of the word "culture," there are many definitions (Kroeber & Kluckhohn, 1952), and there are many forms and dimensions of it (Cohen, 2009). In the professional psychological and counseling literature in the U.S., the term culture is often used in reference to ethnic groups (for example, when used in the context of cross-cultural studies, it most often refers to studies of different ethnic groups). However, culture has a more general meaning, and the term is used in this book both in reference to ethnic groups as well as in reference to factors in the person's environment. One set of definitions of culture refers to the values, conventions, or social practices associated with a particular field, activity, or societal characteristic (Culture, 2012a). It can consist of language, ideas, beliefs, customs, taboos, codes, institutions, tools, techniques, works of art, rituals, ceremonies, and symbols (Culture, 2012b). This term overlaps with other terms that can be used similarly, such as ecological counseling (Conyne & Cook, 2004), ecological psychology (Gibson & Pick, 2003; Heft, 2010), ecological psychotherapy (Fuchs, 2007; Willi, 1999), ecological systems theory, and bioecology (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, 2005), environmental psychology (Barker & Gump, 1964), and naturalistic psychology – of William James and John Dewey (Chemero, 2009). These terms are used by different people at different times but usually refer to environmental influences on the person. One aspect of culture is clear: it is not a static phenomena, it is constantly changing (Nanda & Warms, 2009).

The focus of the material in this book is on the aspects of humans that are conducive to interactions. For the most part, it ignores those aspects we often do not view favorably – e.g., the "killer ape" parts of us that are aggressive and destructive (Ardrey, 1961; Dart, 1953; Vendramini, 2009). This is not to say that these elements are not within humankind. In fact, humans have these propensities. We frequently experience these feelings and behaviors, and we often treat clients with problems in these areas. However, if the propensity to kill and destroy were the dominant features of humans, then they would not exist today. The fact that humans have not perished and have multiplied exponentially, suggests there are other factors (such as cooperation and caring – along with availability of resources) that allowed them to survive through the millenniums. It is understandable why the aggressive aspect of humans has received so much attention in history and in our everyday lives: it is strident,

and the consequences can be horrendous. However, in recent years, there has been greater awareness and research on the cooperative and prosocial aspects of humans (Axelrod & Hamilton, 1981; Burtsev & Turchin, 2006; Frank, 1998; Hamilton, 1964; Lumsden & Wilson, 1981; Sachs, 2004; Skyrms, 1996; Wilson, 1975, 1979).

The reader is reminded that the focus of this book is on the concepts. The concepts are of long-term relevance – concepts such as: helping behaviors are ingrained in humans and in many other animals; humans have a long history in learning about others; in learning about others, we are learning about ourselves; in counseling, in addition to the therapeutic interaction, there are a myriad of other factors occurring; mental health professionals have a responsibility to examine what they are doing and to be aware of the influences on them; and mental health professionals have an obligation to seek ways to improve their services.

M.E.I.

CONTENTS

FOUNDATIONS OF COUNSELING PEOPLE

Chapter 1

FOUNDATIONS OF HELPING BEHAVIORS

Helping others is the basis of counseling. Helping behaviors have their basis in genes and early behavioral patterns. Animals exhibit these behaviors, including those most similar to us: monkeys and apes. In addition, our early ancestors, the Cro-Magnons, and those related to us, such as the Neanderthals, also exhibited helping behaviors. These helping behaviors provide a basis for one person helping another. These helping behaviors are exhibited in all cultures. In terms of cross-cultural counseling, this means people have the capacity to understand why someone (e.g., the counselor) may want to help.

There are many terms used to describe helping behaviors. And there are many forms of helping behaviors. For example, altruism has been defined as a helping behavior. Among the definitions of "altruism" (2010) is that it is behavior that is not beneficial to or may be harmful to itself but that benefits others. This differs from other helping behaviors – which may or may not entail sacrifice. Other terms used to describe helping behaviors include: prosocial, benevolent, caring, compassionate, and humanitarian. There are differentiations among these terms but for the sake of parsimony, I will not go into the details. For the most part, these terms, along with the terms "helping behaviors," will be used similar to the various definitions of "help" (2011) from *Merriam-Webster's dictionary*: 1: to give assistance or support; 2a: to make more pleasant or bearable: improve, relieve; 3a: to be of use to: benefit; b: to further the advancement of: promote; 4a: to change for the better.

ANIMAL STUDIES (ALTRUISTIC BEHAVIORS)

Among the many forms of helping are altruistic behaviors. Arguably, most therapists do not usually engage in altruistic behaviors; that is, they get gains

from helping others – such as getting money and appreciation. However, studies on altruism provide insight into some of the foundations of helping behaviors. In the studies that follow, researchers sometimes use the term altruism to describe altruistic behaviors and at other times the term is used to describe helping behaviors. Origins of what has been defined as altruistic behaviors have been traced to the cellular level. For example, Nedelcu and Michod (2006) found the *Volvox carterii*, a primitive multi-cellular creature that has the capacity to reproduce, gives up this function to take on other functions (such as swimming) to help the larger organism survive. The RegA gene causes this to happen. They found genes similar to RegA in a one-celled creature, *Chlamydomonas reinhardtii*. This organism is believed to be closely related to Volvox's single-celled ancestor. The most similar DNA sequence they identified was Crsc13. Of course, one distinction between the behaviors of these organisms and humans is the matter of volition: the behaviors of these organisms do not entail thinking, will power, and decision-making, whereas, these features are present in humans.

Dawkins (1976) used the term "selfish gene" to describe why an organism might sacrifice itself to perpetuate its genes. According to this theory, the gene uses the organism to perpetuate itself, rather than the gene serving as a vehicle to perpetuate the organism. Thus, organisms might cooperate and help others because the other organisms have genes that perpetuate the altruistic organism.

Studies have found helping and altruistic behaviors in many species. For example, these behaviors are exhibited in insects (Hamilton, 1975) and birds (Gould & Vrba, 1982; Jamieson, 1989; Sherman, 1988; Sober, 1984; White, Lambert, Miller, & Stevens, 1991; Williams, 1966). Okasha's (2008) statement of altruistic behaviors is informative and provides perspective: "Altruistic behavior is common throughout the animal kingdom, particularly in species with complex social structures" (para. 2), e.g., ants, wasps, bees, termites, vampire bats, and numerous bird species. An example of animal studies indicating altruistic behaviors is that of Burkart, Fehr, Efferson, and van Schaik (2007). They studied altruistic behaviors among marmoset monkeys. The monkeys were in two separate cages, with one monkey able to provide food (crickets) to a nonfood monkey. The monkey with the food would provide food to the nonfood monkey even though the food-distributing monkey received no gain from doing this. These monkeys spontaneously provided food to nonreciprocating, nongenetically related marmoset monkeys.

Thus, there is evident that helping behaviors, in this case altruistic behavior, exist on cellular to more complicated levels. It is evident through naturalistic observation as well as through experimental conditions in laboratories.

EARLY ANCESTORS

There is evidence that early hominids took care of their injured and sick. Their remains indicate they survived medical conditions and injuries because they were helped and sustained by others. The evidence is based on such studies those of Gracia et al. (2009). They studied the remains of Homo heidelbergenis living about 530,000 years ago. Lebel et al. (2001) investigated Neanderthals living 175,000 years ago. Solecki (1972) reported on the remains of a Homo erectus who lived 1.7 million years ago. And Zollikofer, Ponce de León, Vandermeersch, and Lévêque (2002) investigated the remains of Neanderthals living 36,000 years ago. These are among the many studies (Alper, 2003; Bailey, 1987; Constable, 1973; Schwartz, 1993; Smithsonian Institution National Museum of Natural History, 2009; Tattersall, 2007; Winkelman, 2000) indicating evidence of early prosocial behaviors.

Spikins, Rutherford, and Needham (2010) wrote that their research and their review of the archaeological evidence indicate a four stage model for the development of human compassion. The first stage began six million years ago, it was at this time that the common ancestor of humans and chimpanzees first experienced empathy for others and motivation to help them. In the second stage, from about 1.8 million years ago, Homo erectus' emotions became integrated with rational thought – compassion and grieving behaviors were exhibited. The third stage, occurring 500,000 and 40,000 years ago, showed evidence that humans such as Homo Heidelbergensis and Neanderthals committed to the welfare of others. There was long-term investment in adolescence; hunting behaviors indicated cooperation and dependence on each other, and there was evidence of the caring of others over long periods of time. In the fourth stage, starting 120,000 years ago, modern humans extended compassion to strangers, animals, objects, and abstract concepts.

GENETIC AND NEUTROLOGICAL BASIS OF HELPING BEHAVIORS

The ubiquitousness and importance of prosocial behaviors suggest that these behaviors are ingrained in humans. There are indications that altruistic behaviors are part of human genetic DNA as well as that of other species (Batson & Shaw, 1991; De Waal, 2009; Gardner, West, & Barton, 2007; Hamilton, 1972, 1975; Kerr, Feldman, & Godfrey-Smith, 2004; Lehmann & Keller, 2006; Maynard Smith, 1998; Nedelcu & Michod, 2006; Pizzari & Foster, 2008; Rosenberg, 1992; Rushton, 1991; Sober & Wilson, 1998; Toth et al., 2007; Trivers, 1971, 1985). Considerable research has been conducted on the neu-

rological aspects of prosocial and empathetic behaviors (Decety & Jackson, 2006; Hoffman, 1981; Jackson, Brunet, Meltzoff, & Decety, 2006; Kalisch et al., 2005; Levenson & Ruef, 1992). Studies indicate many areas of the brain are involved in these behaviors, e.g., functional magnetic resonance imaging (fMRI) brain scans indicate the posterior superior temporal cortex (pSTC) is involved in altruistic behaviors (Tankersley, Stowe, & Huettel, 2007). Members of the Pongid line (the great apes – which include the chimpanzee, gorilla, and orangutan) show evidence of engaging in comforting and helping behaviors toward other primates that are suffering (Boesch, 1992; Goodall, 1986; DeWaal, 1996). In primates, the call for help is mediated through neurological and chemical processes – limbic and prefrontal regions: increased [18F]-fluoro-2-deoxy-d-glucose uptake in the right dorsolateral prefrontal cortex and decreased uptake in the amygdala (Fox, Oakes, Shelton, Converse, Davidson, & Kalin, 2005). Such mechanisms would not exist unless it serves a function to elicit another basic response – in this case, a helping response from another primate. Keltner (2009) stated that our mammalian and hominid evolution consist of tendencies toward kindness, generosity, compassion, gratitude, and self-sacrifice. These are part of our neurological and genetic composition, as well as part of our social practices. Keltner wrote that the vagus nerve seems to be adapted for altruistic behavior. It activates such parts of the body as the heart, lungs, liver, and digestive organs. Activating the vagus nerve can produce a feeling of expansive warmth in the chest. Some refer to the vagus nerve as "the nerve of compassion" (Porges, 2003, 2005). It may connect to the release of oxytocin, a neurotransmitter involved in bonding. Children with high vagus nerve activity are more cooperative and likely to give to others (Eisenberg, Fabes, & Spinrad, 2006). Keltner (2009) wrote that our capacities for virtue, cooperation, and our moral sense are old in evolutionary terms. Carter, Ahnert, Grossmann, Hrdy, Lamb, Porges, and Sachser (2006) state that it is deep in the neural circuitry of our mammalian roots.

The propensity to share the same feelings that others are experiencing (i.e., the feeling of empathy) is an aspect of emotions that can facilitate helping behaviors. Empathic responses have been found in mammals. For example, mice that see other mice in pain become more sensitive to pain when it is inflicted on them (Jordan & Mogil, 2006). Humans react similarly when they see pain inflicted on others (Danziger, Faillenot, & Peyron, 2009). Researchers have found that when monkeys observe other monkeys performing a task, the same neurons ("mirror neurons") activate in the observing monkey as in the monkey performing the task (Rizzolatti & Craighero, 2004). The same effect has been found with humans, not only with behaviors but also with emotions and sensations (Gallese, 2003; Goldman, 2006; Iacoboni, Molnar-Szakacs, Gallese, Buccino, Mazziotta, & Rizzolatti, 2005; Iacoboni, Woods, Brass,