

Integration of Faith and the Social Work Practice

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Worldview

A worldview is something that is made up of a person's beliefs, values, and experiences.

It is how a person looks at the world around them and bases their own experiences and knowledge off of what they believe about the world surrounding them. The two main worldviews being discussed in this paper is the Christian worldview and the scientific worldview. Along with what the dominant worldview is that guides the Social Work profession as a whole.

The first worldview being discussed is the Christian worldview. The core beliefs of the Christian worldview is that there is a creator/God who created everything in the universe. Also that this world is full of sin and that you can gain redemption through Jesus Christ. Christians also believe in there being life after death, but through Christ's salvation alone. Lastly, Christians believe that there is a higher power. That higher power is the Trinity.

The second and last worldview being discussed is the scientific worldview. The core beliefs of the scientific worldview is that there is not a creator and that things just sort of came about by coincidence. The scientific worldview also asserts that the nature of humanity truly does not have any purpose in this world. It also claims that there is not life after someone dies, along with believing there is no higher power in this world.

The core worldview that guides the Social Work profession is the Christian worldview. Although the Christian worldview guides the Social Work profession that does not mean that all social workers must be Christian or have the same beliefs. The fact that social workers all have different beliefs helps in seeing and understanding more from clients, as well as how others might look at the world around them. Keeping the Christian worldview in the Social Work profession helps guide each social worker in the direction of helping those around them and integrating the Christian beliefs into their work environments.

Epistemology

Epistemology is the investigation of the origins of knowledge, or, how we know what we know. There are many ways of knowing, so epistemology focuses on discerning truth from falsehood and the many ways in which we acquire knowledge. The study of epistemology is important, because it helps us to understand how we know what we know and why we think the way we do.

Ways of Knowing

As described in the first section, there are many different ways in which we acquire knowledge. Some of the most important, or prevalent, of these ways includes knowledge gained through first-hand experience, though other people, and through socialization. Within common ways of knowing, there are several sub-groups of the ways in which we gain our understanding of the world around us. Gaining understanding through other people includes what we learn from our parents, our teachers, and other influential people in our lives. Gaining knowledge and understanding through socialization is more complex than the first two groups, because it includes cultural and religious influences.

Reaction

For our group, the most important ways of knowing were the influential people in our lives, such as parents and teachers, and religious influences through our church/faith. It is these avenues of knowledge, introduced to us from birth, that shaped how we see the world today. In other words, they have affected how we think, act, and respond to experiences, even still today. As we grew older, we learned other ways of knowing, including history, personal research, and the greater society. But since our foundations of knowledge comes from our families and our faiths, it is through these lenses that we instinctively view all others.

Science and Religion

According to the Merriam-Webster dictionary (2018), the term scientific method refers to “principles and procedures for the systematic pursuit of knowledge involving the recognition and formulation of a problem, the collection of data through observation and experiment, and the formulation and testing of hypotheses.” Learning through the scientific method means learning from a natural worldview to make sense of reality. The scientific method is based on what can be observed and tested as matter of fact. There is evidence-based research to validate scientific discoveries. Majority of individuals that solely believe in scientific learning are not interested in God. These people believe that the scientific method is the only truth and way of knowing. On the other hand, there are individuals that believe scientific learning and learning through revelation coincide with one another.

According to the Webster dictionary (2018), the term revelation means “the act of revealing or communication through divine truth.” Revelation is God communicating with us and God discovering himself to us. Revelation learning is based on parental authority. Whether or not we continue to learn based on revelation is based on experiences, cultural beliefs, and how we view the world around us. The bible is the primary source for revelation learning and the belief is that the bible contains guidelines for ethical decision making. Some individuals believe solely in revelation learning and do not believe in scientific method. There are other individuals that believe that scientific learning and revelation learning are both necessary to understand the world. As social workers, it is important that we respect our client’s views on the world in which we live whether it be more scientific based, revelation based, or a combination of both.

The benefits of revelation learning are that there is purpose to life. There is a reason we have been born, there is a reason we have the careers we have, there is a reason for dying, and there is a larger plan that we cannot see. Another benefit of revelation learning is that there is the

bible to refer to in times of need. There is an ethical model to abide by and base your decisions on. The limitations for revelation learning is that there are a variety of contradictory interpretations of the bible on the matter of doctrine and ethics. Whereas, the scientific method way of learning provides research, statistics, facts, and proof that can be observed through the five senses. There is no right or wrong way to learning. The scientific approach and the revelation approach do not have to be mutually exclusive.

Hermeneutics

The Bible can be a very challenging book to read and understand at times. The Bible was written long ago and our world has since changed a great deal from the time the Bible was written. With that being said our interpretations of what the Bible is saying/means to us can be tricky at times. How literal can we actually take the Bible in what it says?

The fact that we cannot take everything literally brings us to hermeneutics. Hermeneutics is one way in which we can understand the Bible. “In its technical meaning, hermeneutics is often defined as the science and art of biblical interpretation” (Virkler, 2007). It can be said to be a science because of the fact that it has rules. Although, it can be an art because of that fact that the way in which things are communicated can be flexible. What hermeneutics does for the reader is it sort of breaks down barriers when trying to understand what the Bible is saying, because we are not from the same culture or time era as when the Bible was written. Also we must factor in the fact that the Bible was written in many different languages which can cause a great deal of confusion when interpreted (Virkler, 2007).

Trying to understand what the Bible is actually meaning can be hard. A person has to really research and look at many different interpretations from the Bible before fully understanding its true meaning. Although, in some cases the Bible still cannot be explained even with all the interpretations and so forth that have been made. The reader must be able to

understand that when reading the Bible that the Bible was written hundreds of years ago. Which means that the things that were going on during that time period are not necessarily going on now, much less talked about or handled in the same way. This is why we must continually look at interpretations to fully understand what we are getting from the Bible. We need to make sure that we are grasping the real context and meaning of what was written in the Bible, by looking at major principles for interpreting the Bible like context, historical background, and definitions, among others.

Diversity and Pluralism

When conducting competent social work practice, it is important to understand the role that diversity has for everyone. Diversity of culture and religion, among other aspects of diversity, can affect the ways in which a social worker and client not only interact with each other, but also how they perceive one another and the services that are being offered. To demonstrate this, the differences of U.S. American culture and another culture will be discussed in relation to their effect on social work practice. Additionally, the religion of the authors will be compared to another religion to seek out differences that might affect social work practice.

Culture

One culture that has differences from U.S. American culture is among the people of China. Chinese culture promotes humility over self-promotion as well as more subtle forms of communication. U.S. American culture tends to utilize self-promotion and more upfront, or direct, styles of communication. These differences can lead to misunderstandings and or hurt feelings of some Chinese people when interacting with U.S. Americans. Another way in which U.S. American and Chinese cultures differ is on authority and hierarchy. In Chinese culture, hierarchy is what dictates authority and determines how they interact with each other ("7

Differences between Chinese and American Culture You Should Know About Before Living and Working in China", 2018). For example, in a family setting, the younger individuals are expected to listen to and give more respect to the older individuals, even among siblings. This hierarchy extends to the workplace as well. U.S. Americans are more fluid in their views of hierarchy within the family and at the workplace. This can also contribute to hurt feelings and miscommunications among Chinese and U.S. Americans when interacting with each other. As a social worker, it is important to be culturally competent in order to understand these differences when working with diverse populations. No social worker wants to inadvertently offend a client, but differences in cultures are rife with the potential to offend and hurt, as well as to cause misunderstandings. Therefore, cultural competence is important within social work.

Religion

Islam is a religion that is often compared to Christianity for its similarities and differences. For the purposes of this paper, we will be looking at its differences to the Christian worldview. Three crucial Christian doctrines that Islam denies are the Trinity, the Incarnation and the Resurrection (Kreeft, 2018). Muslims acknowledge the existence of Jesus and commend his work, but reject the idea that He was God or that He rose from the dead. This can be a religious stumbling block between a working relationship between social workers and clients of Christian and Islamic faiths. While it is often more appropriate to remove personal religious ideologies out of the social worker/client relationship, they can sometimes overlap inadvertently. This can cause offenses between the client and the social worker or damage the working relationship by creating "walls." Similarly to why it is important for social workers to be competent of other cultures, it is also important to be religiously competent since religion is another form of culture and can affect the working relationship.

Social Work and Christianity

There are some tensions between the social work values and some Christian churches.

For example, the topic of homosexuality and abortion cause tension between social work and the Christian faith. Many Christians believe that homosexuality and abortion is wrong and sinful while social workers believe in self-determination and value clients right to choose. Another tension between social work and some Christian faith, the views and outlooks on mental illness and medication. Social workers work with mental illness through a culture lens looking at the person in their environment to better understand the nature of the mental illness. Some Christians believe that God is the only thing that can heal a person with mental illness and therapy and other interventions are not necessary. Social work and Christian faith are also at tension because social workers value the client and serving the client without other interest while Christian faith believes in serving God before all else. Social workers can serve God and others; however, it is unethical to project God onto clients. The client and their needs are most important in a professional relationship over spreading the word of God to the client. Dealing with these tensions can be challenging for some people that are both a Christian and social worker because their professional values conflict with their Christian values. In order to practice ethical social work, personal values should not supersede values of the social work profession when working with clients. In conclusion, Social work values self-determination and service to clients above all other interest and Christian faith values the word of God and service to God above all other interest.

Some Christian faith focuses on black and white thinking whereas social work believes the in between, they grey. Some Christian faith relies on the bible and the word of God to determine the black and white as definite. Social work is very grey. Every situation is very different, and every situation is handled differently according to the circumstances surrounding

the situation. Social workers do not think in black or white because social workers look at the client in their environment and consider other factors in their lives when determining solutions and interventions. Some Christian faith says that Christians must spread the word of God. For social workers that are Christians, this can be conflicting because it is unethical to spread the word of God without the client first initiating or identifying their religious beliefs. This is not a topic the social worker should bring up without the client first bringing it up. Social workers base their goals on the client's goals and do not instill personal values on the client for any reason even if the bible says to spread the word. On the other hand, Social workers and Christians both can spread the word through their actions each and every day without saying a word. Social workers can spread the values of Christian faith through their actions by being an example of Christ by showing love, compassion, joy, being non-judgmental, empathetic, and understanding however, it would be unethical to push Christian beliefs on clients.

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