

Impoverished psychology:

Concern about standardization of therapy

By Nancy Mroczek, Ph.D.

"Standardizing" therapy, therapeutic "process" and therapeutic outcome is a stupid and ignominious idea. It might be seen to indicate a lack of confidence in the practice, science and art of psychology. We are human, only human, and psychology, of course, is about being human. As such we are full of fallacy, ingenuity, and, the possibility that if we study hard, read between the lines, suffer a bit, THINK – on the spot and spontaneously – and "figure out" what to do, we can be capable of judgment and some kind of wisdom or finesse in trying to help others with their difficulties.

It is so individualistic that it can almost take your breath away. Not to wax poetic, but there is singularity to each person, each psychologist, each assembled group, each experience, each environment, etcetera, etcetera. No, people are not carbon copies or mass imprints.

To be more accurately technical about it, "empirical" measures of what occurs in therapeutic process are radically incomplete, unable to account for the subtle appearing multiple nuances that – were they to be catalogued – would be vast and require each their own specifications as to what they stand for "operationally" or by standards of reference.

Standards of reference are what we have: standards of reference to go by if we have been doing our homework in trying to learn what to do and trying always to perfect the art and skill. Those standards are the study of psychology. But the art and skill is to take what we have learned in the best way we see fit and to put it into practice. (Remember the idiom that it is practice because one is practicing on someone?)

The last thing that should be permitted to happen is to stifle approach with a notion of standardization, a standardization which parades as empirical because it is researched. The research cannot match the reality of living process, the motives of all parties at any given time, and the meeting of the minds (hearts, souls), so to speak.

That requires a language and didactic of its own in order to be communicated – a language rightfully peculiar to psychology in its scope, nature and style. (The rampant and gross assumptive, framing and definitional errors contained in attempting to perform research and do quantitative/qualitative analyses to elements of living behavior cannot begin to be addressed here.)

Psychology continues to take

decades to know itself and to walk tall, and continues to be tossed to and fro by capitulations and categorizations from outside its area of inquiry regarding what it should be. It continues to suffer problems of identity and to be complacent with reduction, reduction, reduction – e.g., to only chemistry, or to suggested menial or standardized techniques and outcome, or to a shortchanging – even negation – of the worth and validity of the human psyche and behavior in all its intricate manifestations.

Psychologists stand to become more paraprofessional as such trending continues. What therapy – and people – can be, as found through the study of psychology based on original inquiry, openness and rigorous scholastic endeavor, is distinctly different from the progressive diminution in great knowledge and practice that has battered the art and science for any number of recent years.

At the same time, financial pressures on schools and prospective candidates, nebulosity and watering down in the field, as well as both a tendency to refrain from causing ripples simultaneous with an aversion to making waves, provide either serendipitous or intended impetus to the outlandish idea of standardizing therapy. Standardization and paraprofessionalism go hand in hand with simplified, rote, trifling and generic tasking.

Poor psychology is impoverished with respect to its true meaning, true significance and true import – integral to the broad and complicated canvas of all life itself as it is – and to all ways of seeing – and to its incontrovertible relevance to life at large. It is best to be ever inspired and motivated to see one's way through trying to achieve results with each new challenge in psychological practice as it occurs over and over again. (On that note, "psychologist" and "psychological practice" could be more suitable terms than "therapist" and "therapy" to delineate the specific role of psychologist and her practice.)

Finally, if corporations (insurers) are a significant force behind the push for standardization, that would be the most pathetic causal influence and rationale to effect the art and the science of psychological practice. If it is so, I am reminded of an expression in an old pop song that regrets "giving it all away."

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