COUNSELLOR RESOURCES

Differences between Eclectic, Integrative and Pluralistic Therapy

Resource created: 14 March 2022

Definitions

Feltham and Dryden (1993) define ‘integration’, ‘eclecticism’ and ‘pluralism’ as follows:

> **eclecticism** *any combining of approaches and/or techniques from different models of counselling*. (p. 56)
>
> **integration** *wholeness, making whole, relating to a holistic view … In the field of counselling and psychotherapy, integration or integrationism specifically refers to a movement which seeks to promote the theoretical convergence of diverse schools of counselling and therapy.* (p. 94)
>
> **pluralism** *any theory which acknowledges the multiplicity of stimuli and theories acting within and upon us. Psychological pluralism (akin to ‘psychological polytheism’) accepts, for example, that there are competing claims to therapeutic truth and potency and that these are not necessarily reducible to any ‘grand universal theory’.* (p. 137)

Eclectic, integrative and pluralistic therapy all combine different modalities of therapy, and so are all different from therapy that uses a single modality in a pure way. The three approaches are closely related – but how do they differ?

Key Differences

Eclectic therapy does not 'emphasise the need for conceptual unity' (Feltham and Dryden, 1993, p. 94). Thus, eclectic therapy doesn't concern itself with theoretical conflicts between models, and doesn't incorporate modalities into a new model. Instead, eclectic therapists draw on different approaches that they have studied (usually on separate courses), to create 'the judicious use of techniques (e.g. chairwork or visualisation) with different clients or with the same client at different times' (ibid., p. 56). This is rather like having a tool box of therapeutic techniques to draw upon when needed.

Integrative therapy, meanwhile, involves blending the theories of two or more approaches, to create a new theoretical model. Seligman (2006, p. 437) terms integrative therapy 'theoretical integration', reflecting the fact that it 'offers conceptual guidelines for combining two or more treatment approaches to provide a clearer understanding of clients and more effective ways to help them'. An integrative counselling training course will teach students a specific integrated theoretical model. Thus, the client would not be able to spot the 'joins' between modalities.

In 2007, the term '*pluralistic therapy*' began to be used by John McLeod and Mick Cooper to describe 'a specific form of therapy practice: one that drew on methods from a range of different sources, depending on what the client wanted and what the therapist was skilled at' (2019, paragraph 3). Whereas eclectic and integrative therapy tend to rely on the therapist's view of what combination of techniques should be used to work with each client's presenting issues, pluralistic therapists aim to empower the client by collaborating with them on making this choice, based on the idea that the client knows best what they need.

A Cooking Analogy

The differences between these three approaches can be illustrated using the analogy of a chef (the therapist) producing a meal (the therapy) for a diner (the client).

Working at a fusion restaurant, *the integrative chef* combines a number of ingredients into one culinary dish, which they then cook behind the closed kitchen door, perhaps tweaking the ratios of different ingredients and the cooking method to suit what they assess the diner's tastes to be. They emerge from the kitchen with a finished dish – which offers a complex blend of tastes and textures, drawing on a range of cultural traditions, seamlessly combined into a finished dish – and present it to the diner. All being well, the diner finds it delicious but doesn't know exactly what was in it. If they don't enjoy it, the chef may disappear back into the kitchen and adjust the mixture a little, hopefully producing a dish that's more to the diner's tastes.

Working at a cosmopolitan restaurant, *the eclectic chef*, meanwhile, cooks several separate dishes, again behind closed doors. Each dish is based on a different cultural influence, and each is traditional to the culture from which it is drawn, using minimal ingredients for simplicity. The chef then decides which dish they think would be most suitable for the diner today. They come out of the kitchen with the one chosen dish, having popped the rest into the fridge for another day or another diner. All being well, the diner savours the dish, and can probably recognise – or guess – what ingredients it contains. If the diner doesn't enjoy their meal, the chef returns to the kitchen, opens the fridge and brings out another that seems like it will be more to their taste.

Last but not least, working at a buffet restaurant, *the pluralistic chef* starts off in the same way as the eclectic one, creating several single-culture simple meals. Loading them all onto a large tray, along with a few separate raw ingredients too, they carry them out from the kitchen, and lay them on the table in front of the diner. The diner recognises some of the dishes and ingredients, which the chef names for clarity, but hasn't come across others before – the chef describes the latter, helping the diner choose which they'd like to try first. All being well, the diner enjoys their chosen dish – but if not, they can return to the buffet for something different.

References

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