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Transforming the Managerial Class: Binary and Dialectical Thinking in Counseling

Paper based on a program presented at the 2009 American Counseling Association Conference, Charlotte, NC, March 19-23.

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Many counselor conceptualizations of client issues as well as interventions with clients are replete with binary thinking. The subtle result can be a type of management of clients which serves to both create change on some levels and to thwart change on other levels. Clearly, this is in direct opposition to the fundamental tenets of professional counseling. Dialectical thought is defined as the "developmental movement through forms." Dialectical thought is a type of "both/and" thinking that includes binary thought as a subset of advanced systems theory. In essence, dialectical thought puts motion into the binary thought process. This article will provide information about the concept of the Managerial Class and use the concept to structure a discussion that examines binary and dialectical thinking in counseling. The purpose of this article is to demonstrate how binary thinking reinforces status quo and how dialectical thinking can help transform change in both counselor and client. Readers will learn about the concept of the Managerial Class and its presence in the counseling profession; what binary thinking is and how it is infused into the counseling profession through the Managerial Class; how binary thinking potentially serves to alienate counseling clients- especially, racioethnic minorities; and about how dialectical thinking offers new perspectives to embrace diversity.

The National Institute of Mental Health (2006) states that *26.2% of all adults living in the United States have a diagnosable mental disorder. Moreover, one-half of that population is said to have at least one co-occurring disorder.* Such a statistic communicates that a large group of people are seen as *either* mentally ill *or* non-mentally ill. Furthermore, with the newest edition of the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (5th ed.; *DSM-5*) due in 2013, there has been widespread controversy surrounding the proposed revisions. Warnecke (2011) stated “opponents are particularly alarmed that the proposals for the forthcoming edition will further medicalize the normal variability of human life and social experience” (p. 25). While most, if not all, counselors are familiar with managed care, few are familiar with the larger cultural narrative from which managed care is derived. This grand narrative was thoroughly addressed by Gouldner (1979) in his work, *The Future of Intellectuals and the Rise of the New Class*, and extended through the works of Darity (1983). The New Class, also referred to as the Managerial Class, is structured by a phenomenological perspective that sees society needing to be organized by those “...who possess the requisite expertise, intelligence, and wherewithal to direct a society” (Darity, 1983, p. 57). The Managerial Class is comprised of those having specialized, expert knowledge, combined with advanced educational credentials. Occupations that best exemplify the Managerial Class include the media and publication houses, various forms of government, the clergy, engineers, information technologists, the banking and insurance industry, think tanks, public school educators, and those in the mental health fields.

The public educational system and counseling are both considered “petit” Managerial Class members, while universities are more centrist and primary members. Darity (1983) maintained that the main reason for the inclusion of these two fields is due to the heavy emphasis upon the characteristics of the presenter rather than emphasis upon the content. In Managerial Class thinking, teaching and counseling are professional occupations requiring specialized knowledge, advanced degrees, and expertise. Both professions require a minimum of a college degree and continuing education to obtain and maintain their respective professional licenses.

According to Darity (1983), the Managerial Class has no morality. Is it moral to construct a system that is designed to classify individuals as either mentally ill or non-mentally ill? This is the very issue to which Darity refers. Counseling as a “petit” Class member operates under the Managerial Class’ level of morality, or lack thereof. The Managerial Class is exogenous to the right or left intellectual swings of government. Its structural paradigm includes no inherent strategy other than to manage. To accomplish its aim, this Class uses a binary epistemology in its quest for knowledge, which is focused exclusively on enhancing its own abilities to identify, classify, study, explain, and offer solutions to social problems. Given the nature and structure of the Managerial Class presence in modern cultural narratives, it would be quite difficult for most professions, including counselors, to be excluded from membership in the Managerial Class. Curiously, to suggest that counseling is an occupational member of the Managerial Class is polemic: It affronts clients and therapists alike, whose psychological contract is to address the affective, cognitive, and behavioral structures of clients’ lives in order to free them up from psychic bondage. If, as the Managerial Class would have it, the goal of counseling is to truly manage clients rather than truly freeing them, then counseling and psychotherapy arguably act as the psychological enforcers for the Managerial Class.

Their respective meta-managerial professional associations (The American Counseling Association, The International Association of Marriage and Family Therapists, American Psychological Association, and various other branches of professional organizations), act as the psychic police—enforcing the enforcers. Hence, from a Managerial Class perspective, counselors act as the Greek Chorus for the Managerial Class.

The Managerial Class and Postmodern Binary Thinking

The Managerial Class is itself a binary structural combination of two classes that relies upon postmodernism to accomplish its aims. According to Gouldner (1979), the Managerial Class has an elite class that creates and configures paradigms, and there is a “petit” Class making up the “technical intelligentsia.” This latter class is comprised of individuals, agencies, and organizations that make the paradigm work. These are the symbolic tendrils of the Class. Because the Managerial Class manages large groups of others, it is important to understand the relational space that is created and maintained in such a system. For the most part, the Managerial Class uses binary thinking and concepts to create the relational space. The binary perspective and postmodernism both structure the Class as well as structuring those whom it manages.

The operations of the Managerial Class are isomorphic and can be conceptually applied across social venues. When viewed from this perspective, it is easily understood how Darity (1983) could claim that the real aim of the Managerial Class is to be the only Class. For example, while managed care is the most obvious arm of the Managerial Class, there is no place that the Managerial Class operates more significantly in counseling and mental health than in the area of diagnosis. Classifying people dichotomously into binary categories of “mentally ill or mentally healthy” requires diagnosis to differentiate the two groups. The American Psychiatric Association (*DSM-IV-TR*, 2000) is used to place individuals into one group of mentally ill persons and other individuals into another group on non-mentally ill persons. While diagnosis has been around for millennia, the use of diagnosis is changing with the Managerial Class operative.

In general, the Managerial Class needs to possess various publishing houses and other media outlets in order to be able to influence the cultural narrative. Once a concept has been “created,” it must be disseminated to gather momentum and approval. With strategic and effective media involvement, phenomenon can become “true” regardless. Once true, the Managerial Class goes about creating solutions to the problems they have identified. To back up its claims and to drive the symbols of its ideology, the Managerial Class uses scientific studies published in professional journals, which offer postmodern “truths” in practice. For instance, The National Institute of Mental Health (2006) states that *26.2% of all adults living in the United States have a diagnosable mental disorder. Moreover, one-half of that population is said to have at least one co-occurring disorder.* By claiming such a statistic, a large class of individuals, who can be diagnosed as mentally ill, is created. This group of mentally ill persons can then be treated by another large group of professional providers (technical intelligentsia). Both groups can be managed through the influencing of various accrediting agencies and licensing boards. Finally, the whole paradigm can be managed by the insurance industry. Another example of the Managerial Class at work is found in the way the boundaries between the middle-

class and working class have become blurred and then distorted into an issue of race. Deresiewicz (2006) says, “First we stopped noticing members of the working class, and now we’re convinced they don’t exist... It is as if the vast space between the poor and the middle-class didn’t exist. The term, “working class” has been erased from our political discourse” (p. 22). According to this same author, what has replaced “working class” is the term, *working poor*, and it is this re-labeling that has allowed the issue of class to shift to the issue of race. Once it becomes an issue of race, West (1993) says, “...we confine our discussions...in America to the ‘problems’ black people pose for whites... This paralyzing framework encourages liberals to relieve their guilty consciences by supporting public funds directed at ‘the problems’” (p. 6). This is because the issue has been now construed as “fact.” As depicted in both Deresiewicz’s and West’s work, embedded deepest within the Managerial Class culture’s grand narrative lies an interest not with *difference of the “other”* as much as concern with how to *manage the “other.”* Through a postmodern epistemology, the Managerial Class replaced the term, “working class” with “working poor” and thus shifts the prevailing epistemological grand narrative which has been primarily concerned with propositional knowledge—*that such-and-such is true* in the world to knowledge of *how to do such-and-such*. When a prevailing epistemological grand narrative shifts truth from the ‘*what is*’ to the ‘*how to*,’ an element of enforcement is introduced.

According to some scholars and researchers, the significance of the shift in such an epistemological counter-narrative produces sub-narratives that affect every level of culture. The punctuation of a Managerial Class narrative reveals a desire for all that is intellectual, scientific, and beneficent. Alone, this perspective has clear strengths and inherent validity. It is also arguably a grand narrative that is divisive and immoral. Ultimately, it becomes parochial and violent because its binary epistemological paradigm mandates the “other” to be either a manager or one who is managed with the supposition that the manager has more than those who are managed (e.g., managed care [manager] managing the client [other]).

The danger of the Managerial Class is that its true aim is to leverage others through the creation of binary paradigms and concomitant words/labels aimed at beguiling the general population into seeing the “problem” while at the same time suggesting *how* this problem can be resolved. Help for the problem is carried out and enforced by the subclass of Managerial Class technicians, who themselves are required to adhere to the Class tenets in order to be able to do what they have been trained to do. In the case of counseling, counselors are bound to act in accordance with the categorical requirements (assessment/diagnosis) set forth by the managed care system, in order to carry out treatment for their clients. The insidious nature of this enforcement is seen through a *shift in language*. Once promulgated and accepted as “fact,” this shift in language can lead to the progressive elimination of undesirable populations. This circular thinking begs the question and essentially acts as a type of psychological gridlock in which the managerial class sees categorically that there are always problems with the “other” class. In the example of the working poor, West’s notion that the “other class” is now portrayed as a racioethnic class is deemed irrelevant and ignored in pure Managerial Class ideology. For counselors, one’s culture is of paramount importance. So, when one deems the client’s cultural background as irrelevant, it becomes easy to ignore it. Moreover, on a more subtle level, the fact that the clients *must* have problems is also

irrelevant and ignored. It is not as important that clients differ from one another as much as it is important that all clients have problems.

Binary and Dialectical Epistemological Structures in Counseling

The epistemology of the Managerial Class is linear and binary. What this means is that “knowledge” is comprised of words, concepts, and solutions and is narrated through an intra- and inter-personal binary language. Binary thinking for the Managerial Class has its roots in the Age of Enlightenment. Binary thinking is expressed in a post modern narrative of polemic relations that utilizes words and language punctuating *difference and exclusion*. In essence, binary thinking is “either/or” and “more than/less than” thinking. The generic binary structure can be depicted on an X and Y graph, where “X” axis is anchored on one end by the “Either This” and anchored on the other end of the axis by “Or That.” Expressed in a different way, binary thinking is laid out on the “X” axis as “*either this or that.*” The “Y” axis is anchored on one end by “More Than” and anchored on the other end by “Less Than.” As depicted in Figure 1, binary language can then be plotted as being “either this or that; *and either more or less than.*”

As mentioned earlier, the influence of any cultural epistemological narrative essentially defines *relational space*. An “X by Y” graphing of binary language reflects relational space that is derived and maintained through polemic relationships: In other words, one is either A or non-A; and, A is more or less than non-A. Or, to put it another way: One is either part of “us” or part of “them;” and, “us” is either more or less than “them.” The relational space is derived from the tension between the poles. For example, “depressed” would incorporate both exclusion and amount. One is either depressed or not; and given depression, one is either “more depressed or less depressed.” The implications of binary structures on configuring the counselor/client relationship is only

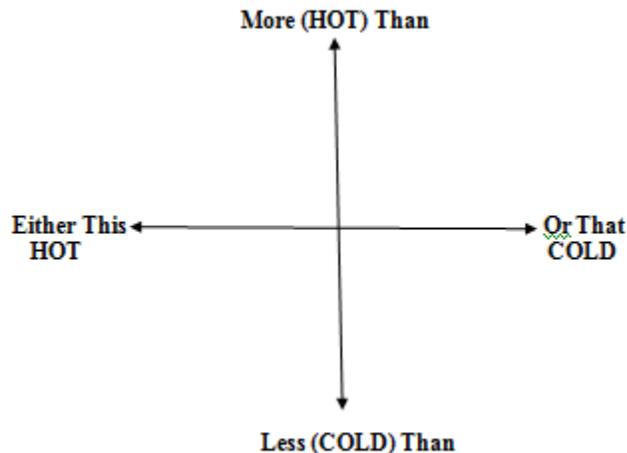


Figure 1. Graph of Binary Language.

one level of the issue. In a Managerial Class paradigm, counselors have structural power over their clients, and counselors work to maintain that structural power. Using the same graph as described above to plot binary language in terms of exclusion and amount, it can be seen that one is either a *counselor or not*; and, *counselor is more than client*. This structural chasm posits counselors and clients into a type of “us versus them” structure

which is consistent with a Managerial Class binary narrative. It is critical to note that binary thinking pays more attention to the poles rather than to the space between them.

Relational space is different in theories of dialectical thinking. Both binary and dialectical thinking presuppose the existence of the “other” or “object” (Fichte 1982; Husserl, 1969, 1970). Whereas, binary thinking and the Managerial Class focus on the poles to describe relational space, a dialectical epistemology values *motion* between the poles and bases its aim on Laws of Thought. These Laws of Thought presuppose a type of *participation* between the poles of X and non-X and Y and non-Y. To put it succinctly, the Laws of Thought maintain that one object always implies its opposite, and one object always “motivates” the movement to the “other,” with the opposite being true as well. That is, identity is always an identity of differences, or identity in difference (Harris, 1987). Thus, dialectics punctuates the motion between two. In dialectical thinking, each “other” has an “other” that both defines each “other” as well as the relationship between the two “others.” Dialectical thinking both values the polemic nature of the objects (binary) as well as valuing the motion between them. This Law of Thought can be likened to Martin Buber’s *I and Thou (Ich und Du, 1923)* philosophy of personal dialogue (1958). Buber (1958) posited that the way in which people experience reality/existence is based on the ways in which human beings communicate with each other. In the *I-Thou* relation, the *I* is unified with the *Thou*, but in the *I-It* relation, the *I* is separate from the *It*. The *I-Thou* relation is akin to dialectical thought, as the *I-It* relation to binary thought. For example, as shown in Figure 2., the wrd “warm” is a dialectic word because it emphases the motion between hot and cold.

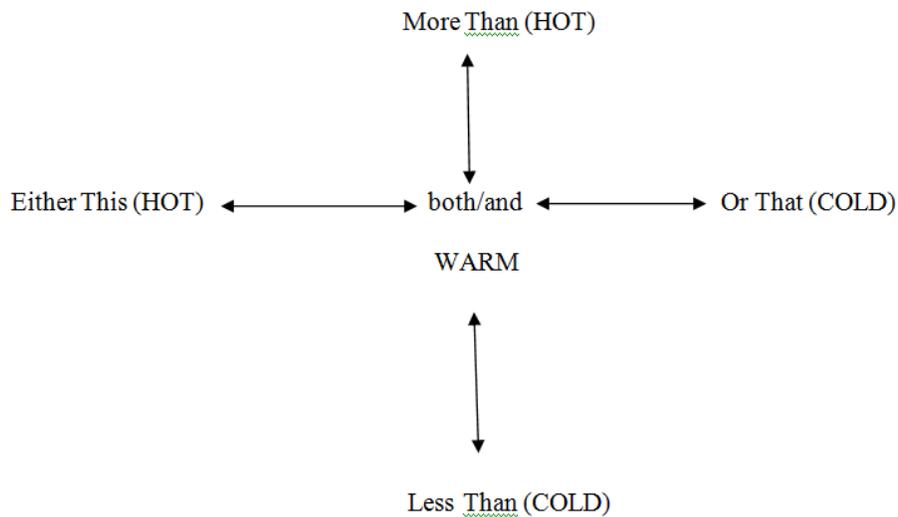


Figure 2. Graph of Dialectical Thought.

This adherence to the Class perspectives is clearly seen in the heavy emphasis upon scientific research in university counseling doctoral programs. Scientific research is central to the field of counseling. While qualitative research is obviously valuable to the counseling field, many academicians and professional practitioners continue to cast a furtive glance at the value of qualitative research. One of the issues relates to the proximity of the research and object/subject. In quantitative research, there is a binary distance between the two. This binary relationship continues to prevail because it is seen as revealing data that is more accurate (truthful) and meaningful than qualitative

endeavors. The quality of the researcher is less important than their respective relational space measured by objectivity and observation.

The essential qualities of scientific investigation fit congruently with the Managerial Class. Both are binary. Both require an object to either manage or to study. Attempts are made to distance the researcher from the object in the same way that managing distances those who are managed. Exactness in science is preferred to ambiguities. Both scientific inquiry and the Managerial Class revere control: In science, experiments are configured to eliminate or at least aimed at controlling confounding variables. The Managerial Class attempts to provide control over large groups through various legal (and exacting) venues aimed at regulating such Managerial Class symbols as welfare, euthanasia, executions, prisons, and the like. Science and the scientific methodology provide counselors with research that is seen by the profession as “fundamental” to counselors’ knowledge.

Implications for Counseling and Dialectical Thought

The essential intersections between binary and dialectical thought are complex, profound, and significant. Dialectical formulations are inextricably woven into morality and ethics. Dialectical thinking is structured by difference *and* sameness, exclusion *and* inclusion, and motion *and* inertia. It does include the importance of binary thought. However, the obverse is not true. Such dialectical thinking is inherently seen as not only antithetical to the Managerial Class, it is seen as apocalyptic to that Class.

Counselors need to attend to their own binary thinking in the work that they do, lest they find themselves simply “managing” their clients. This will become all the more important in the face of the proposed revisions of the *DSM-5*. Counselors will be challenged to find a way to treat their clients dialectically in the midst of a binary classification system. Conceptualizing clients as “either this or that” and using binary concepts and language in their interventions will maintain the Managerial Class values which have an arrested interest in the structure of “us and them.” In line with Buber’s (1958) philosophy, counselors and clients would benefit from an *I-Thou relation versus an I-It* relation. The adversarial and exclusionary relationship that develops between counselors and clients as a result is essentially structural. The reason for this is because counselors are responsible for the structure of counseling sessions. Positing an “us and them” structure for clients always reinforces the structure for both counselors and clients. Given this, clients themselves experience the “us and them” from their own perspective. What results will fall short of a more true connection between them. Counselors are not able to transcend the structure; nor are clients. Hence, counselors resolve client’s issues using a grand discourse that values both separation from others and inclusion into a “we.” Counselors can fail to make a difference that makes a difference. Instead, counselors push clients back into the grand narrative and, when this happens, what difference do counselors really make?

Normalizing clients’ experiences is a dialectical method which attends to both the client’s “problematic” issues in the counseling room and joins the client with the larger population that exists outside of that room. *Assuming the verity of oppression* for women and racioethnic minorities also helps because it allows counselors and clients to deal with both the personal as well as larger social problem at once. Counselors are likely familiar

with the Chinese words, “yin” and “yang.” Here, the relationship between opposites is inherent. Counselors need to learn how to work with opposites. This means that they need to emphasize the relationship and motion between opposites. One way is to see the “me in you” while recognizing and concomitantly valuing the “you in me.” Another way is to increase the use of simple words such as “and, both, and sometimes”; as well as the phrase “in spite of and because of.” The use of such language will transform the Managerial Class influence in counseling by structuring motion in counseling.

Binary thinking freezes clients structurally. Dialectical discourse allows for clients to become unstuck in the tundra of the binary freeze. Dialectical thinking more closely approximates healthy reality: In reality, nothing is really black or white. Black is both presence of black and absence of white. There is an inherent relationship between the two. Finally, counselors should remember that there are no lines in nature. There are only edges.

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