Courage and Hope as Factors for Client Change: Important Cultural Implications and Spiritual Considerations

Mark Blagen
Adams State College

Julia Yang
Governors State University

Blagen, Mark, T., Ph.D., CAC, is an Associate Professor of Counselor Education at Adams State College. Dr. Blagen has been a Certified Addictions Counselor since 1990 and has taught addictions courses since 1992. His primary research interests include defining the spiritual dimensions of addiction recovery, understanding the therapeutic factors of 12-step recovery, understanding the nature of natural recovery, and investigating the relationship of purpose in life and the use of alcohol and other drugs.

Yang, Julia, Ph.D. is a University Professor of Counseling at Governors State University. Dr. Yang was an elementary school teacher and counselor, high school career exploration specialist, and vocational rehabilitation counselor prior to her career in counselor education. Her research and practice has focused on identifying and counseling at risk adolescents and understanding the concept of courage from an Adlerian psychology perspective.

Clients often enter counseling in a state of despair. Restoring courage and hope is an important aspect of facilitating client change. As a counselor it is imperative that we understand each client as an individual who will decipher the nature of courage and hope based on their own unique belief system. This belief system is influenced by their religion and spirituality, ethnicity and other multicultural influences.

In the recent development of positive psychology and in the integration of spirituality and psychology, courage and hope, along with other characteristics, are discussed as virtues, a state of mind, attitudes, emotions, strengths, or actions. In this article the authors present courage and hope as psychological constructs, cultural values, as well as spiritual gifts. This article concludes with practical implications of how counselors may engage the client in developing the characteristics of courage and hope.

Courage

Within the framework of positive psychology courage is defined as "Emotional strengths that involve *the exercise of will* to accomplish goals in the face of opposition, external or internal" (Dahlsgaard, Peterson, and Seligman, 2005, p.205). Courage, a moral virtue, is also defined by the character strengths of bravery, perseverance, authenticity, integrity, and vitality. Oddly, the authors of positive psychology have found that courage is missing, either explicitly or thematically implied, in the eastern traditions of Confucianism, Taoism, and Buddhism. Courage has a different meaning and is manifested as an integral aspect in these traditions. As discussed in a later section of this article, courage is located at the core of these traditions, and yet is still an action and willful strength.

To see courage as willfulness, we need to have an understanding of the concept of the *will to power* both within the existential and Adlerian psychology frameworks. Based on Nietzsche's concept of the will to power, Tillich (1980) described courage as "…the power of life to affirm itself in spite of this ambiguity…" (p.27). To Tillich, courage has a revealing power via our participation and individuation. To Adler, the will to power is a process of creative energy desiring to exert one's will in self-overcoming and interaction with the world. It leads us to either normal self-enhancement in the interest of others, or endless striving for perfection, the fictional goal of superiority. Influenced by Tillich and Adler, May, R. (1983) suggested that the concept of will to power implies 'self actualization', as an expansion of one's self. "Courage is not the absence of despair; it is rather, the capacity to move ahead *in spite of despair*" (May, R. 1975, p.3).

Adler put this willingness to act into a social context (i.e. community feeling), "But only the activity of an individual, who plays the game, cooperates and shares in life can be designated as courageous." (in Ansbacher and Ansbacher , 1973, p.60). To Adlerians, problems of social living are all about "the relationship of the individual to the problems of the outside world" (Adler in Ansbacher and Ansbacher, 1956, p.205). Our fear of not

making it or not belonging is heightened when we encounter the world around us, the world with us, and the world within us (May, R. 1983). We must have courage to meet the demands of work, love, and friendship, which are the three life tasks of social living postulated by Adler.

Hope

Within the framework of positive psychology hope is described in the following manner, "Hope, optimism, and future-mindedness are a family of strengths that represent a positive stance toward the future" (Seligman, 2002, pp.156-157). Other definitions and constructs of hope include the concept that hope can only exist in the face of despair as a way of coping (Godfrey, 1987), or that hope is a concept that allows an individual movement toward a goal (Erikson, 1964), and that hope is a way of thinking and believing that is goal directed that produces routes to desired goals with the motivation to use those routes (Snyder, 1994).

As can be seen from the above definitions, hope is both a cognition and an emotion. Having a sense of hope is in the affective domain, and yet acting on the hope requires motivation and a plan that is actively carried out.

As we consider the above definitions and think of what does hope mean to clients who have gone through devastating losses, it is easy to conclude that some clients possess a high degree of the affective domain of hope but an inability to take action, while other clients seem to possess neither a sense of hope nor the motivation to move forward in a hopeful way. What can a counselor do? A starting point is considering hope from a more comprehensive vantage point.

May, G. (1988) states that even in the most despairing of times each of us possess the power of choice and "We may go through a great deal of humbling, if not outright humiliation, before we come to this simplicity of hope" (p. 19). So in the tradition of Victor Frankl, Rollo May, and Carl Rogers, Gerald May suggests in the above quote, that hope is a choice and the more dire the circumstance the more likely an individual will make a choice to hope. As the last section of this paper concludes, there are many things counselors can do to encourage hope and to develop the motivation to be actively hopeful.

Courage and Hope in Cultural and Spiritual Context

From the positive psychology perspective, knowing our signature strengths and using those strengths in our relationships and in service of others is to acquire a good life and to discover the meaning of life which constitute two out of three paths to authentic happiness (Seligman, 2002). The authors would like to advocate that a critical task for a counselor is to understand the strengths of the client in respect to the client's cultural and spiritual background. This means understanding as fully as possible the individual's

adherence to the values prescribed by his/her cultural heritage and spiritual traditions. For example, family systems from east and southeast Asia tend to "hold-in" their tolerance and demonstrate a "quiet" and accepting resiliency to unpredictable life changes, hardship, disasters, and unhappiness they experience. Is that not a demonstration of courage and hope? From a cultural standpoint it is. Additionally, it is important to understand that many beliefs in the Christian tradition provide answers to the quest for courage and hope that are very similar eastern tradition core values.

For thousands of years, Confucianism, Taoism and Buddhism complemented one another in their far reaching cultural influence in China and the neighboring countries. Similar to the Adlerian concept of community feeling, Confucius' teaching of courage and hope shares the practical wisdom with a focus on moral quality that portrays the ideal individual ethical behaviors for his/her society. Taken from the French root of courage, *Coeur*, courage is a heart matter (May, R. 1975). The Chinese expression of courage is related to *Chi*, a spirit or a form of energy, transcending the emotional and intellectual experiences. Courage, a mature virtue, is preceded by compassion and wisdom. According to Lin (1937, 1998), wisdom, led by the passion (soul of life), leads to courage by rejecting the worldly values of wealth and power. Such discernment is based on an integrity in knowledge.

Embedded in the animistic world view, hope is seldom a word used in the classic Chinese text. Instead, perseverance and persistence are often the signs of will power in Chinese moral teaching and attainment of harmony is best achieved with the attitudes of naturalness, a strong work ethic, solitude, acceptance, and contentment. These thoughts are similar to the Rogerian view of quiet power (Eckstein and Cooke, 2005) and the Taoist view of soft courage by which the individual develops character by acting in harmony with The Way, the ultimate resource of all things. Embracing simplicity, patience and compassion as life's greatest treasures is the closest the Taoist masters come to outlining a moral or ethical code.

The theme of perseverance and patience of the soft courage in Chinese culture is clearly shared in the Christian virtues of faith, love, and hope. Hope implies waiting and stillness. Hope and courage are both spiritual gifts in Christian tradition. Hope and courage can produce endurance and encouragement for the individuals in the face of fear and despair. To conquer fear, courage becomes an expression of faith (Tillich, 1980). It is when we are most vulnerable and powerless we are given the most profound opportunities to risk believing that we are born in love, of love, and for love. The courage of faith allows the natural life force such as grace to do its work: Grace brings us hope as a manifestation of God's most supreme love (May, G. 1988).

Engaging the Client in the Change Process

What facilitates client change? Although the answer to this question is at the root of most counseling theories, counseling has yet to find a clear answer to this question. In this

section, the authors wish to present two case vignettes that illustrate the techniques of encouragement and motivational interviewing that assist the client in recovering courage and hope.

Adlerian psychology has the potential for bringing us to an optimal level of functioning for the life tasks of work, love, and friendship by use of encouragement. As a technique, encouragement can be used to motivate change and improve behavior. When defined using the root meaning of *courage*, encouragement is, "the process of facilitating the development of a person's inner resources and courage toward positive movement" (Dinkmeyer and Losoncy in Cheston, 2006). The following case illustrates the use of early recollection techniques in a dialogue that allowed the interviewer to develop insight about the interviewee's courage in helpless situations.

Case #1

Rodney was an 8 th grader attending an alternative school after being expelled from his school due to drug selling and bullying behaviors. He was referred to counseling after a recent confrontation with his step father who pointed a gun at his mother. Rodney reported the situation to the school. As a result, the step father was arrested. In a group counseling session, Rodney was invited to share with others his recollections while the group helped identify his strengths. The group was asked to listen and record strengths and assets. The group encouraged Rodney to use his strengths to avoid bullying and being bullied after school.

Recollections	Strengths
Share more about your self using any two of the following: Early memories, family story, childhood changes, a news headline, day/night dreams. *"I caught a snake in my backyard. I was very young and I was afraid. My mother was fearful. Well, I had to do it."* *A Headline story: "Another Black Male Escaped from the County Jail."* Is there a situation now you might use your strengths to meet a challenge? *"On my way home after school, there are guys waiting for me out there. I used my fist last time. They deserved that. You know, I am pretty*	• Brave • Willingness to protect others • Although feeling afraid, still go on doing what is necessary • Independent • Caring • Honest • Creative

big." Two weeks later. "*Guess what? I got a skateboard. I will use it finding another way home.*"	

As the above illustrates, encouragement is a natural way to assist a client in finding courage in times of despair. Another method in humanistic psychology, motivational interviewing, can also be very useful in encouraging a client's sense of hope. Miller (2000) stated that, in addition to Rogers' three critical conditions of acceptance, genuineness, and unconditional regard, other attributes such as patience and hope were also critical in facilitating client change.

To facilitate hope, counselors must demonstrate or model hope. In addition to being hopeful, a counselor should also facilitate client change by "locating" and enhancing the existing desire to be hopeful that most clients already possess. An example of this might be an alcoholic who has lost all hope of ever not drinking. By assisting the client in locating a reason for not drinking and allowing the client to "hold" the conflicting views, it becomes natural, through a process of encouragement, for the client to increase their desire to not drink. Once that desire exists, the counselor can assist the client in understanding how best to enact the change. Hope is ignited in the client and reinforced by the counselor. This is the basis of Motivational Interviewing which is both as hopeful as it is pragmatic. This approach has been shown to be effective for great varieties of client problems which includes such issues as anxiety (Slagle and Gary, 2007), depression (Swartz, Zuckoff, and Grote, 2007), and obesity treatment (Careles, Darby, and Cacciapaglia, 2007) to name but a few.

Obviously client change does not come easy. Facilitating hope in and of itself creates the opportunity for client change. For that opportunity to be realized, it requires patience by both the counselor and the client. One helpful model for understanding client change (and providing the opportunity to model patience) is the Stages of Change model developed by Prochaska and DiClemente (1982). This model allows the counselor to assess properly where the client is in the change process, meet the client at that place and provide interventions that encourages the client to make incremental changes. By making incremental change, the client can see tangible results and will begin to gain hope and the motivation to take the necessary steps to facilitate further change.

Case #2

James is a 29 year-old who is having difficulty "finding himself". James feels as though life is passing him by. James was raised in an Asian Caucasian bi-cultural home which has contributed to his difficulty with identity. He states that existing in two worlds is impossible, but belonging to either does not seem to be an option. To quiet the anxiety of

this existence, James has used marijuana off and on for over 10 years. James is intelligent and when motivated, a very hard worker; but his most significant achievement to this point has mostly been to evade and avoide responsibility. James seems stuck with little ability to demonstrate courage or hope.

After a session of building rapport and understanding cultural influences that are important to James, the counselor asks James to write a paragraph or two that describes what living a life that matters means to him. James was able to articulate that honoring both aspects of his cultural heritage (thus honoring his family) mattered greatly to him along with finding a place that he belonged. The counselor then asked James to identify three achievable short-term (obtainable within one-year), middle-term (obtainable within five-years), and long-term (obtainable within his lifetime) goals. This activity is the beginning of "locating" what hope resides in James so that the counselor can encourage him to bring his the overall life ideal to progressively manageable goals. In addition, the counselor uses reflection of meaning and positive asset search skills (Ivey, 2006) so that both the counselor and the client will have much to work on in the following sessions that will assist James in becoming more willful, thus connecting him to the emerging courage and hope that he possesses.

Conclusion

We live in a troubled world and we often work with individuals who struggle for meaning and spiritual direction. A primary goal of counseling is to creatively facilitate healthy changes that bring about courage and hope. The authors attempted to examine courage and hope not only as universal virtues as indicated in positive psychology but also as cultural values and spiritual gifts. An understanding of the client adherence to courage and hope as defined in his/her cultural and spiritual heritage allow us to better use these constructs to assist the client in times of adversity and difficulties.

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