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Ethics Codes Analysis

COUN 501-D01 – Counselor Professional Identity, Function, and Ethics

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Master of Arts in Professional Counseling

Spring 2009

Abstract

The current paper compares and contrast codes of ethics for the American Counseling Association (ACA) and the American Association of Christian Counselors (AACC) with respect to competence, confidentiality, and fees. Findings of the current study reveal that ACA and AACC guidelines call for boundaries of competence in terms of education, training, credentialing, and experience. The AACC, however, emphasizes the use of Christian counselors as referrals. Both associations ensure confidentiality with respect to limitations on sharing personal information. The AACC places emphasis on not using client information for preaching and related activities. Lastly, both associations stress that fees should be fair and commensurate to the client's ability to pay. The AACC, however, emphasizes the importance of counselors providing pro bono work.

Comparing and Contrasting American Counseling Association and the American Association of Christian Counselors Codes of Ethics

Introduction

The following discussion compares and contrasts the American Counseling Association (ACA) code of ethics and the American Association of Christian Counselors (AACC) code of ethics. More precisely, the codes of each of these associations are compared and contrasted in the areas of competence, confidentiality, and fees. In noting differences between the codes of these two associations, comments are provided with respect to the reasons why these differences exist.

Competence

Both associations emphasize that counselors practice within the boundaries of competence with respect to education, training, credentials, and experience. That is, both the ACA and AACC codes of ethics specify that counselors should not work in areas beyond their reasonable qualifications. The codes dictate, however, that counselors can expand their levels of competence by seeking appropriate education and/or training. Both codes also address topics such as the duty to monitor performance, refer clients to more qualified professionals when necessary, and seek continuing education and professional development (Ethics, 2005).

Interestingly, in addition to the similarities, the AACC code of ethics provides guidelines beyond the scope of the ACA code. Specifically, the AACC code of ethics emphasizes the importance of using Christian referrals. More exactly, when a counselor recognizes that a case requires expertise beyond his/her competence levels, the first course of action calls for referral to a more qualified counselor who is a Christian. In fact the AACC code of ethics states explicitly, in cases of referral, that Christian counselors should “seek out the best Christian help at a higher level of knowledge, skill, and expertise” (AACC Code of Ethics, 2005.). Clearly, the reason for

this policy is based in the belief that effective interventions should be based on Biblical principles and truths. Counseling clients in the deleterious effects of sexual immorality, for instance, can help them recognize that sin is the true source of their problems. Obviously, this viewpoint and approach is not used in the world of secular counseling.

Confidentiality

Both associations clearly understand the importance of confidentiality which one expert describes as “the most basic ethical duty of mental health professionals” (Ford, 2000, p. 36). In short, both associations recognize that the ethical obligation of confidentiality is based on respect for individual rights to privacy. Both associations also explicitly express the importance for counselors to use appropriate settings for communicating with clients. Moreover, the ACA and AACC both emphasize the importance of protecting client rights when it comes to sharing information with other professionals, institutions, insurance companies, family members and relatives, and the like. Lastly, both associations state that counselors must make clients aware of limitations of confidentiality when it comes to legal and/or court demands as well as the protection of third parties when it comes to threats of violence and other dangers posed by the client.

The most pronounced difference between the ACA and the AACC concerns the recognition of potential breaches of confidentiality by religious interests. That is, the AACC code of ethics mentions that counselors should not use client information for teaching and/or preaching (AACC Code of Ethics, 2005.). In other words, the AACC recognizes that many counselors are affiliated with religious institutions in the capacity of preachers, pastors, and leaders. It could be tempting for such individuals to use anecdotal accounts and stories gleaned

from their counseling services as content in sermons or Bible lessons. The AACC, therefore, explicitly admonishes against such practices.

Fees

The ACA and AACC have commonalities with respect to fees. For starters, both associations emphasize the importance of establishing fees that are fair with respect to the client's ability to pay based on personal circumstances and locality. The two associations differ by virtue of the fact that the ACA discusses issues related to bartering and gifts. More exactly, the ACA code of ethics states that "counselors may barter only if the relationship is not exploitive or harmful and does not place the counselor in an unfair advantage" (ACA, 2005). ACA guidelines also emphasize that counselors can accept gifts because certain cultures view gift giving as a token of gratitude and respect. The AACC differs from the ACA in terms of its espousal of pro bono work. In fact, the AACC code of ethics states that "Christian counselors are encouraged, beyond their fee schedule, to make a portion of their time and services available without cost or at a greatly reduced fee to those unable to pay" (AACC Code of Ethics, 2005). All considered, the basic principle underlying these differences is that Christian counseling is viewed as a form of service to others in the name of the faith. While this perspective does not preclude Christian counselors from being fairly remunerated for their work, counselors are encouraged to separate monetary concerns and interests from matters of service whenever possible. One expert refers to this as an "indicator of justice" (Sperry, 2002, p. 85).

Conclusion

The current study has compared and contrasted codes of ethics for the American Counseling Association (ACA) and the American Association of Christian Counselors (AACC) in the areas of competence, confidentiality, and fees. As shown, the ACA and AACC are similar

in many respects in each of these areas. More exactly, guidelines call for boundaries of competence with respect to education, training, credentials, and experience. The AACC, however, emphasizes the importance of using Christian counselors in the case of referrals. Both associations have similar requirements in the area of confidentiality with respect to assuring clients about limitations on sharing personal information. The AACC places special emphasis on not using client information for preaching and related activities. Lastly, both associations stress that fees should be fair and commensurate to the client's ability to pay. The AACC, however, emphasizes the importance of counselors providing pro bono work.

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