

8.1

CLASSIC CONFLICTS

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Supplementary material for Integrating counselling and psychotherapy: Directionality, synergy, and social change (Sage, 2019).

Across the therapeutic literature, a number of 'typical conflicts' have been posited to exist (Caspar, 1995, p. 205).

LONG-TERM VERSUS SHORT-TERM

Many of these, however, boil down to an essential conflict between short-term and long-term desires and goals (see Chapter 5, this volume). This may take the form respectively, for instance, of a conflict between id and superego (psychodynamic), heuristic and rational thinking (cognitive), or compliance and finding our own path (humanistic).

We can see this basic short-term versus long-term conflict throughout every moment of our lives. Should I have a biscuit? Should I go for a run? Shall I work on this essay now or later? Shall I watch a decent foreign language movie or just vegetate through *Love Island*? Should I talk nicely to my partner or let my anger out? All these decisions are essentially choices between short term benefits and longer term gains.

Here, short-term goals – as immediate, embodied directions – are likely to be related to the highest-order goal of pleasure, or the avoidance of pain. Longer-term goals may also be pleasure-related: for instance, 'I don't want to go out for an expensive meal this evening because I want to save my money for a pleasure cruise.' However, longer-term goals may be more likely linked to more abstract highest order goals, like community-mindedness or spirituality. Here, for instance, Frankl (1998) writes about the power of the spirit to oppose the person's physical desires: to stand back from effort or pain and make a decision to do otherwise.

CONSISTENCY VERSUS CHANGE

A closely related conflict, of particular relevance to the therapeutic field, is between the consistency and change. In many instances, this may map on to the conflict between short term and long term wants, respectively, in that consistency evokes less immediate effort or anxiety, but at the cost of positive longer term improvements. This desire for consistency may be in relation to one's actual environment (such as one's job, relationships or hobbies); but it may also be in relation to one's perception of the world: that is, the desire to see self, others, and relationships in a particular way. This is the basis behind the formation and maintenance of 'internal working models' (Bowlby, 1979) 'cognitive schema' (Beck, John, Shaw, & Emery, 1979), or 'sedimented self-concepts' (Spinelli, 2006) which, if held on to too tightly (despite evidence to the contrary), can be the source of psychological difficulties.

PLEASING OTHERS VERSUS PLEASING SELF

Across the therapies, a third commonly posited conflict is between *the desire to please others versus the desire to please one's self*, closely associated with the conflict between

extrinsic and intrinsic goals (Chapter 5, this volume). This conflict is particularly central to the humanistic field. Maslow (1968, p. 52), for instance, states that, 'The primal choice, the fork in the road, then, is between others and one's own self.' Other therapies, however, also talk about the 'Doing what others want' trap (McCormick, 2012). Framed in this way – and, as supported by the evidence (see Chapter 5, this volume) – therapies tend to emphasise the benefits of intrinsic over extrinsic goals. However, as discussed in Box 5.1 (this volume), doing things to please others is not the same as doing things for others, and we can also draw a distinction between personal goals (such as going for a run) and interpersonal goals (such as volunteering at a homeless shelter). And, as the research suggests, the latter may actually be of more benefit to our psychological wellbeing.

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