

A Critical Reflection of My Values and Beliefs

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Throughout this essay I aim to critically reflect upon my own personal values and beliefs whilst taking into consideration the British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy (BACP) Ethical Framework for the Counselling Professions (2018). This will be done by firstly outlining my understanding of reflection and reflective practice, my view on its importance within the field of counselling, and how it might be applied to my own values and beliefs through my own personal process of reflection. This outlining of reflective practice leads me to go in depth on a model that I personally feel resonates with me, that model being the Gibbs reflective model (1988). Following on from that through means of a reflective evaluation using the Gibbs reflective model (1988), I will assess my values and beliefs by using a professional experience that I believe best highlights them in action. This will see me explore a situation at a former workplace where I saw a colleague put in harm's way due to the development of the service provided, which in turn pushed workers outside of the scope of their capabilities and into the path of potential harm. I will discuss how this called into question my values and beliefs and how I used them to deal with this ethical dilemma. Some of the core values and beliefs that are expanded upon are the safeguarding of clients, colleagues and the self, upholding ethical frameworks and guidance, the ability to improve personally and professionally, the delivery of quality service through improvement. Having mapped out my understanding of reflective practice and its uses within the field and to me personally, I will critically discuss the model used to see what works within its scope and what does not, bringing attention to my perceived limitations and offering supporting evidence through papers and research such as Ahmadi et al. (2022), Bassot (2016), and Willis (2010) to back up and offer counterpoints to my critique. Some of the main critiques that were discussed include the lack of direct questioning on ethics, the nature of implementing the model in the moment and in scenarios where a faster reflection needs to take place. A counterpoint is made about my use of Gibbs (1988) with the importance of understanding

emotions being highlighted. Closing out the essay will be a conclusion to discuss and highlight the main themes that were present during the rest of the text.

Historically, reflective practice has been present throughout many eras, with connections back to Greek philosophers such as Socrates where knowing oneself became an underpinning theme of their philosophical theory (Taylor, 2020). This ancient presence of reflective practice in its earliest documented stages would be the study of many academics throughout the 1900's, developing the practice into what it is known as and applied as today, with the likes of Freud, Dewey (who went on to influence Rogers' educationalist approach), Schön (1983), and Gibbs (1988) to name a few (Taylor, 2020; Wigg et al., 2011). In its modern-day presence, reflective practice is informed through numerous different models or frameworks of application such as Gibbs' reflective model (1988), Schön's model (1983), Johns' Model (2011), Kolb's model (1984), and has even been adapted into a values-based model like the one presented by Wareing (2017). It is, as suggested in the name, a practice of reflecting on instances already past, asking sequential or cyclical questions present in a selected model in order to look at the self and an occurrence in order to garner a better understanding of what has happened, why, what the person feels and what can be learned from it to improve the self and future events. This implies that at its core, reflective practice is a method of personal development, a notion which is supported by Bager-Charelson (2012), who states that personal development is an 'essential shared capability', with self-awareness as one of the underpinning elements of that development. Stedmon and Dallos (2009) presents the concept of messiness of practice within therapeutic and psychological fields that requires lines of questioning to identify what 'problems' are present within the self, the practice, and possibly even the person who is receiving the support. The British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy (BACP) is one of the leading associations in

the United Kingdom for chartered/registered practitioners, who agree to abide by the ethical values and beliefs of the BACP in order to gain membership/chartership. As part of the BACP's (...) formative ethical guidelines and part of their values and beliefs, it directly stated that reflective practice is a part of that through the means of regular supervisions (supervisions being a space where one professional undergoes a reflective session with another professional for supportive purposes). These supervisions allow for models of reflection to be applied on all areas of practice to ensure the safety of the practitioner and client, the continued development of the practitioner, as well as maintaining levels of good practice, amongst other things.

Personally, I feel there is a lot of overlap with what has already been explored in this essay and my own personal views on reflective practice. I feel I am someone who intrinsically strives to be the best I can be, questioning, reviewing, and learning from each involvement and circumstance in order to improve. Throughout my life I have come to place a high emphasis on quality and a lot of my values and beliefs are embedded in quality. I discovered in my teen years that I am my happiest working when I can help people to the best of my ability and I am of the belief that help in the context of the path I have chosen (counselling and psychotherapy), cannot come from a source that is untrained or uneducated as it can do more damage than good, therefore the overlap of my desire for quality and my belief in this type of help only being able to come from a place of quality is extremely beneficial. This need to find the best option might be detrimental at times though with someone who might just need a little support in the moment being overanalysed to get them the best support further down the line. I feel that within the existing research and guidelines of reflective practice laid out by those who have investigated this subject before me, is the stated theory of something I unknowingly began to apply to myself as a young person. Having developed my own way of processing events and thoughts in order to learn and

improve before delving into the theories present in research, I have found some mild confusions in the way I approach my process to how the literature suggests going about it. This sometimes leads me to feel that to apply a model of reflective practice in the current day, it would hamper my process through over-questioning and contemplating too much on something that has happened where I begin to a point where second guess myself and could sometimes lead me to a different conclusion through over-analysis. On the contrary, were I to sometimes apply a shorter more concise model of reflective practice then I may run the risk of under-analysing and skipping over key details that could have brought me to an important point of development or understanding that would have given me a greater level of development. An example of the dichotomy mentioned in models can be found when comparing Borton's (1970) 'What' model (a model comprising of the three questions, "what?", "so what?", "now what?") that can leave a lot of room to expand or to simply answer shallowly, to Gibbs' model of reflection (1988) (a model with six steps that goes in depth into feelings and adding an action plan) which can be quite extensive and time consuming. I find that my process does not typically align with one application of reflective practice but an amalgamation of several in order for me to adapt and apply the right amount of questioning and timeframe necessary to suit the situation. Burkholder et al. (2020) highlight the level of ambiguity that can come from simply focusing on one ethical approach when faced with ethical dilemmas, supporting the concept of focusing on one's own approach that has been informed by diverse ethical understanding and high level of varied experience in application. This would support my understanding that when dealing with ethics, values and beliefs, there is no 'one size fits all' approach and it is important that I am able to diversify my understanding of various models to apply what is right for the situation as part of my own process. Taylor (2020) concludes that whether the model being used is artistic or scientific in nature, it is simply important to practice reflection as a practitioner in

order to develop, leading suggestion that the act itself is more important than the exact process followed, so long as a process is present.

Although my process has grown organically to branch over several models and used to fit the situation, there is one singular model I find resonates with me more than some others, that model being Gibbs' model of reflection (1988). I feel this resonates with me as my emphasis and approach to attaining as well as delivering quality typically brings me to explore in depth and attempt to answer all questions to get a broader range of information to work with. With six steps involved, asking the reflector to consider a description of what happened, a review of their feelings throughout that time or event, an evaluation of what happened, analysis of what happened, a conclusion of the time or event, and finally an action plan to take forward what was learned from this time or event. Having this level of coverage in a single model would allow me to explore many areas to a depth I perceive as adequate for the situation. Having to consider an action plan at the end really aligns with my process of trying to be the best I can by giving me an opportunity to analyse in a prior step and then bring my key takeaways in the form of actionable steps and considerations to make sure the next time I am in a similar situation, I am better equipped with more information and experience to deal with it. In a counter point to my current perception, Ahmadi et al. (2022) provide some critique on the model and in their suggestion of applicable use for each model, it is suggested that Gibbs' reflective model (1988) is better suited for beginner reflectors (like me) who have just started out on their educational journey. This might suggest some more development and exploration for me to go down in order to better understand the application in a practice setting whilst trying out other models to continually build on my process. However, for now, Gibbs' (1988) resonates well with the stage I am in.

With the aid of Gibbs' reflective cycle (1988) as a model, I would like to reflect on a time when my values and beliefs were most on display in a professional setting and look back on a situation that truly revealed to me what I believe.

In a previous workplace I found myself supporting service users through some low-level behavioural changes, such as procrastination. After showing my abilities for a few months, I found myself in an elevated position where I began to support and guide my colleagues. With the organisation looking to grow to offer more support, new partnerships were established as we looked to broaden our horizons. One particular partnership was set to become detrimental to what the aims of our organisation were. Some of my colleagues soon found themselves being exposed to much more severe issues, with one in particular being exposed to severe mental health conditions and explicit content document that clients struggle. The level of support we were able to offer did not come close to the level required by this person's needs, leaving the colleague in a state of fear, shock, and feeling like they were out of their depth. This issue was quickly presented to a colleague of mine who was in equal standing with me and shouldered the same responsibility that I did, who immediately informed me and our superiors within the organisation. A meeting was called straight away to discuss and review this incident, forcing us to bring into discussion the implications of how to deal with a client who was in such severe need of support, how to react to protect the colleague and other colleagues who are involved in this new project and where we went wrong. Our processes needed to be reviewed, the agreement with the other organisation needed to be reviewed, and our relationship with them in general needed to be considered. We came to the conclusion that the ties with the other organisation needed to be put on hold while we reviewed the documentation and agreement as it had not been done properly and in line with the correct ethical guidance, however, the superiors gave pushback as they wanted this relationship to flourish in order to offer a more expanded range of services. My colleague

and I found a way to get some urgent supervision for the co-worker involved in the incident and we worked into the night to coordinate with the other organisation to get their trauma team involved for the client. This caused a wave of uncertainty and worry amongst the whole organisation. The management's handling of things left a lot to be desired and caused a feeling of the situation being improperly dealt with. A list of demands were made by my colleagues and I, of which most were not dealt with in the immediate, most demands relating to further protecting the clients, ourselves, and the organisation from future harm in similar situations. The demands were not met, and I decided I needed to step away from my position as I could no longer ethically allow myself to continue.

The immediate feelings were all unpleasant. There was worry for the client and the colleague and the damage this situation had caused. A strong feeling of responsibility to look out for the individuals involved and to get them helped took precedent upon hearing the details. There was a sense of anger present that this could have happened in the first place and that management had not done their due diligence ahead of time. There was a fear that this could befall harm on all involved. This slowly grew into confusion and anger over time as the details came out and we could not fathom how this had slipped through to us. There was a feeling of urgency to protect and support those already harmed. Once it became apparent that there was so many negatives coming out of this situation, a feeling of confliction grew within me, a feeling of what I believe to be right, what I believe to be ethical, I felt I had to choose between my job and my morals, and my morals won in the end. I felt the damage done by the situation and the reaction by management after that was disappointing and failed to give me confidence this was a resilient place to work. Following my departure, I felt a strong sense of pride for following my beliefs and values and stepping away which imbued a lot of confidence in myself to stick true to those values and beliefs.

Whilst my industry experience is not extensive, I feel this was not a usual occurrence to take place due to the nature of training and importance placed on ethics within the industry. The problems faced by the individuals involved and the communal wave of concern it set off was quite damaging to those involved and was not able to be recovered from in a manner that empowered the employees (me included) to remain as a part of the vision moving forward. Whilst all roles and industries carry risk of the unexpected happening, the lack of due diligence ahead of time was the thing that set this apart from a standard incident and showed me the value of risk assessments, good practice, ethical frameworks, and proper conduct.

There were several factors that caused my eventual departure from the organisation. Firstly, was the improper planning that came in ahead of time by the management team that allowed a severe case through to such a low intensity service. This seems in hindsight like a rushed job where corners were cut in order to propel the service to a larger scale. The second factor was the subsequent reaction from management where they failed to react to right the systemic issues that allowed this to happen in the first place. The third was a failure by management to understand the feeling of the group and the impact the incident had on us. One positive factor was the effort made by the team to ensure the safety and quick support of the client and involved individual in a moment of negativity and discourse.

In conclusion, a multitude of elements made up my departure from a previous role through a failure on the part of management, my actions and the actions of the team however, provided a positive note because we managed to maintain focus on our goal and beliefs to protect the client and colleague and moved swiftly to ensure they got all the support we had available to us to give. This event brought to the forefront a lot of my values and beliefs and called them into action. Putting the safety and support of the client and involved colleague first to ensure they received the quality of support they truly needed, understanding my

ethical stance on how I feel comfortable working and acting upon that when the conditions I needed to work ethically were not met, my focus on improving to be better came from the reflection that took place at the time and my decision to step away to move to an environment where I felt I could grow in the right way, and the desire to ensure a quality service is delivered to meet the needs of clients appropriately.

Moving forward, I learned to put importance on the level of planning when entering into agreements to support clients and work with others in order to ensure the safety of all involved. I learned to carry forward my integrity and ethical standpoint to ensure I am in an environment to be able to deliver quality work that is appropriate to those who need it. I learned just how quickly a support network can be set up when needed but that these things should already be in place ahead of time. I learned that ability to reflect, understand and act on the outcome is one of my most important skills.

The Gibbs reflective cycle (1988) allowed me to look back on the events that occurred during my time in my previous workplace both soon after the incident and again now whilst writing this essay. It has allowed me to question and explore the events that took place and brought me solace in my decision. Looking back, I can see many things that could have been changed ahead of time, I can see the emotions that were involved throughout the entire process and how they are congruent with the path I ended up taking, it allowed me to analyse the situation in clear terms and take away an action plan to better prepare myself going forward. The model however, as mentioned previously, has some shortcomings. I mentioned previously that my personal process typically involves an amalgamation of different models to find what best suits me to arrive at all the answers I need in the timeframe I have to work in, so for me, although I resonate with Gibbs' reflective cycle (1988) well, it is not a one size fits all. Formerly referenced in this work is Ahmadi et al. (2022), who offer the

criticism that it is a model better suited to beginner reflectors and those with inexperience. They give explanation to its shortcomings to being present in the models lack of ability to work in the present and to be flexible in the moment when people are often said to be looking to already correct their wrongdoing should it be recognised. This criticism would support my own observations that it would not have helped me to reflect in the moment and adjust my course of action, but purely allowed to evaluate after everything had been said and done. I found that whilst I was able to garner good answers in the greater reflection of the entire event, this would simply not be possible to apply to the micro-instances that occurred. In this case a model such as Borton's (1970) might offer more agility to quickly review and adapt after a micro-instance. The quick nature of the three questions would allow for sharp and concise reflection to take place to centre my thoughts and assess in the moment. Willis (2010) offers a contrasting look between Gibbs (1988) and many other models, pointing out that a model such as Johns' (2011) is able to delve deeper into ethical questioning and consideration. Having the ability to explicitly reflect on ethics might have given me an even deeper look into my own ethical beliefs and values, allowing me to have a stronger knowledge base to inform my decision in this instance. Not all is negative though about my utilisation of Gibbs' model (1988), Bassot (2016) talks about the importance of processing and understanding feelings and uses Gibbs (1988) as an example of just how that can be accomplished when using reflective practice. For me, this model allowed for the introspection on my feelings to take place and a clear overview of the range of emotions felt throughout the incident. This overview on emotions and feelings gave me a sense of peace when reflecting on the decision I made because it gave me insight into what the alternative might have felt like, had I made a different decision.

In conclusion, I was able to learn a lot about my own ethics, values and beliefs through my reflective process. I began this essay trying by outlining the historical links within modern day reflective practice, introducing papers by Taylor (2020) and Wigg et al. (2011). This brought me to look at the more contemporary approach of reflective practice, introducing the models available such as Gibbs (1988), Johns (2011), Schön (1983), Kolb (1984), and Wareing (2017). Directing the vision from what is available to how it is import within contemporary application, I looked at Bager-Charelsen (2012) and Stedmon and Dallos (2009) who discuss the use of reflective practice as part of best practice, aligning with the BACP Ethical Framework for the Counselling Professions (2018). I then put across what my reflective process is, looking at how I have used this information to inform my application. That ended up being an overview of how I believe reflective practice informs my process, by using a combination of different models and frameworks in order to adapt my process to suit the situation which can be highlighted in the comparison between Borton (1970) and Gibbs (1988). This notion is further supported by Burkholder et al. (2020) who suggests a mix of models is more sensible method of application. All of this informs the crossover between my own ethics, values and beliefs with the BACP Ethical Framework for the Counselling Professions (2018). I outlined this by exploring my understanding of my own values and beliefs, discussing my desire to provide quality and be the best I can be in order to provide suitable service to those I support.

Gibbs' reflective cycle (1988) was the next focus for me, bringing into a bit more detail how the model works and how I feel I resonate with it, stating that I feel its comprehensiveness allows me at my current stage to best allow myself to reflect with the most depth. Ahmadi et al. (2022) provide some clarity on that, suggesting that it is a model better suited to beginner reflectors.

Using Gibbs' reflective cycle (1988), I then reflected on an experience from my professional past in which a situation of mismanagement brought about a situation that posed a risk to a client and to the colleague supporting that client. I discussed how that made me feel at the time and evaluated and analysed the outcomes of the situation which caused me to step away from my position within the company. I concluded and added some steps for action at the end that I will continue to take forward with me.

Finally, I looked at how Gibbs' reflective cycle (1988) performed as a model for my reflection, bringing in critique from Ahmadi et al (2022), Bassot (2016), and Willis (2010). Some of the main critiques included the lack of direct questioning on ethics offered in the Gibbs model (1988), how applying the model in the present moment where a faster reflection needs to take place can be difficult.

As an overview, I feel this essay really brings into focus my desire for best practice and being the best I can be in order to help others. It displays my process at the forefront and utilises an instance I still feel strongly about to this day to highlight my application of my process and my values and beliefs.

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