

Psychology 460 Counseling & Interviewing

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POSTMODERN APPROACHES

Chapter 13

Introduction

- No single founder; rather collective efforts by many
- 2 co-founders solution-focused brief therapy are Insoo Kim Berg & Steve de Shazer
- 2 co-founders of narrative therapy are Michael White & David Epston
- Some of major postmodern approaches include
 - Social constructionism,
 - Solution-focused brief therapy, and
 - Narrative therapy

Introduction

- Therapist disavows role of expert (*not knowing position*), preferring a more collaborative & consultative stance
- Focus is not on discussing problems but on creating solutions
- Focus in narrative therapy is on:
 - searching for times when clients were strong or resourceful &
 - helping clients separate from dominant cultural narratives they have internalized so as to open space for creation of alternative life stories

Constructivist Narrative Perspective (CNP)

- Focuses on the stories people tell about themselves and others about significant events in their lives
- Assume realities are socially constructed
- No absolute reality
- Therapists should not impose their vision of reality or their values on an individual
- Therapeutic task:
 - Help clients appreciate how they **construct** their realities and how they **author** their own stories

Social Constructionism

- The client, not the therapist, is the expert
- Dialogue is used to elicit perspective, resources, and unique client experiences
- Questions empower clients to speak and to express their diverse positions
- Therapist supplies optimism and the process

Social Constructionism Therapy Goals

- Generate new meaning in the lives of clients
- Co-develop, with clients, solutions that are unique to the situation
- Enhance awareness of the impact of various aspects of the dominant culture on the individual
- Help people develop alternative ways of being, acting, knowing, and living

Key Concepts of Social Constructionism

- Postmodernists assume there are multiple truths
- Reality is subjective and is based on the use of language
- Postmodernists strive for a collaborative and consultative stance
- Postmodern thought has an impact on the development of many theories

Key Concepts of Solution-Focused Brief Therapy

- Therapy grounded on a positive orientation --- people are healthy and competent
- Past is downplayed, while present and future are highlighted
- Therapy is concerned with looking for what is working
- Therapists assist clients in finding exceptions to their problems
- There is a shift from "problem-orientation" to "solution-focus"
- Emphasis is on constructing solutions rather than problem solving
- Focus on keeping therapy simple & brief

Basic Assumptions of Solution-Focused Therapy

- People can create their own solutions
- Small changes lead to large changes
- Client is the expert on his or her own life
- Best therapy involves a collaborative partnership
- A therapist's not knowing afford the client an opportunity to construct a solution

Questions in Solution-Focused Brief Therapy

- Skillful questions allows people to utilize their resources
- Asking "how questions" that imply change can be useful
- Effective questions focus attention on solutions
- Questions can get clients to notice when things were better
- Useful questions assist people in paying attention to what they are doing
- Questions can open up possibilities for clients to do something different

Three Kinds of Relationships in Solution-Focused Therapy

- Customer-type relationship: client and therapist jointly identify a problem and a solution to work toward
- Complainant relationship: a client who describes a problem, but is not able or willing to take an active role in constructing a solution
- Visitors: clients who come to therapy because someone else thinks they have a problem

Techniques Used in Solution-Focused Brief Therapy

- Pre-therapy change
 - (What have you done since you made the appointment that has made a difference in your problem?)
- Exception questions
 - (Direct clients to times in their lives when the problem did not exist)
- Miracle question
 - (If a miracle happened and the problem you have was solved while you were asleep, what would be different in your life?)
- Scaling questions
 - (On a scale of zero to 10, where zero is the worst you have been and 10 represents the problem being solved, where are you with respect to _____?)

Key Concepts of Narrative Therapy

- Listen to clients with an open mind
- Encourage clients to share their stories
- Listen to a problem-saturated story of a client without getting stuck
- Therapists demonstrate respectful curiosity and persistence
- The person is not the problem, but the problem is the problem

The Therapeutic Process in Narrative Therapy

- Collaborate with the client in identifying (naming) the problem
- Separate the person from his or her problem
- Investigate how the problem has been disrupting or dominating the person
- Search for exceptions to the problem
- Ask clients to speculate about what kind of future they could expect from the competent person that is emerging
- Create an audience to support the new story

The Functions of the Narrative Therapist

- To become active facilitators
- To demonstrate care, interest, respectful curiosity, openness, empathy, contact, and fascination
- To adopt a not-knowing position that allows being guided by the client's story
- To help clients construct a preferred story line
- To create a collaborative relationship --- with the client being the senior partner

The Role of Questions in Narrative Therapy

- Questions are used as a way to generate experience rather than to gather information
- Questions are always asked from a position of respect, curiosity, and openness
- Therapists ask questions from a not-knowing stance
- By asking questions, therapists assist clients in exploring dimensions of their life situations
- Questions can lead to taking apart problem-saturated stories

Externalization

- Narrative therapists believe it is not the person that is the problem but that the problem is the problem.
- Living life means relating to problems, not being fused with them
- Externalization is a process of separating the person from identifying with the problem
- Externalizing conversations help people in freeing themselves from being identifying with the problem
- Externalizing conversations can lead clients in recognizing times when they have dealt successfully with the problem
- Externalization is one process for
 - deconstructing power of a narrative &
 - separating the person from identifying with the problem & sometimes giving it a name

Deconstruction and Creating Alternative Stories

- Problem-saturated stories are deconstructed (taken apart) before new stories are co-created
- Assumption is that people can continually & actively re-author their lives
- Unique possibility questions enable clients to focus on their future
- An appreciative audience helps new stories to take root

Deconstruction and Creating Alternative Stories

- Documenting the Evidence
 - Narrative therapists believe that new stories take hold only when there is an audience to appreciate & support them
 - Thus, an appreciative audience to these new developments is consciously sought out
 - Gaining an audience for news that change is taking place needs to occur IF alternative stories are to stay alive
 - Technique for consolidating gains client makes is by writing letters
 - Narrative letters written by therapist record session & may include an account of client's strengths & abilities identified in session
 - Letter highlights struggle client has had w/ problem & draws distinction between problem-saturated story & developing new & preferred story
 - Letters frequently mailed to client between sessions (I.e., carrying on a therapeutic dialogue between sessions)

Contributions to Multicultural Counseling

- Social constructionism is congruent with philosophy of multiculturalism
- Emphasis on multiple realities & assumption that what is perceived to be truth is product of social construction, makes postmodern approaches good fit for client with diverse worldviews

Limitations for Multicultural Counseling

- Potential limitation pertains to "not-knowing stance" and "client-as-expert" wherein clients from different cultural groups tend to elevate professionals as experts expecting guidance and solutions (may engender lack of confidence)
- To avoid this potential problem, therapist needs to convey to clients that he or she has expertise in process of therapy but will not direct clients to engage in behaviors that are contrary to clients' underlying goals