

Solution Focussed Therapy Certificate – Unit 3 Essay

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The scenario to be deconstructed in this essay relates to an informal 'helping session' with a friend. The 'client' had sought support with a family problem; she had been asked to loan a substantial amount of money from her father to contribute to buying the family home. She was reluctant to agree to the loan and this was causing her a considerable degree of distress.

How did the discourse emerge in the session?

The discourse emerged by the client describing through language what she constructed as her 'problem'. The context of our social interaction also contributed to this construction. She had initially contacted me to say she was 'stressed' and wanted to talk. Our 'session' lasted approximately one hour over a lunch break. The client narrated her story, describing the incident that had happened with her father the night before. I asked questions to gather more details about why she was troubled by her father's request. She described how she was particularly annoyed because he had not said that he would also be contributing his savings for the purchase, but had instead asked her and other family members for theirs.

Strong (2005) describes how the therapeutic context can be an appropriate setting in which to explore how understanding is constructed. Our understanding was constructed by our use of language. I reflected back some of her own feelings of injustice to her, and verified whether this was why the incident was causing her 'stress.' Using the terms (e.g. 'stress', 'annoyed', 'unfair') that she had used was an important mechanism for generating a shared understanding – and this shows the performative function of language (Fairclough, 1999). By using shared terms I was able to co-construct her reality with her. She confirmed that this was the 'correct' situation and repeated that she did not know what to do. We had reached a shared understanding of the 'truth' of the situation: her father was being unfair in making this request and this was causing her anxiety, resulting in a personal dilemma for her, of how to respond to his request.

How did the counsellor assist in the construction of a 'new' discourse?

After the initial story had been elicited from the client, I started to try and support her in resolving the dilemma she had described. I was conscious that we only had an hour together and that I would need to move her quickly onto thinking about her options for action. The new discourse was simply created by the questions that I asked – these directed her to think beyond the anger she was feeling at her father and move towards trying to think about how she would respond to his request. This was similar to the exception-finding technique as I was looking for alternatives to the discourse which had generated anger. I asked her what her siblings thought of the situation; she responded that her sister had offered a contribution of her own accord, and that her brother had not yet responded.

I then moved on to ask her about her mother. This line of questioning seemed to generate a more positive reaction in the client so I decided to stay with this topic for a while. Talking about her mother allowed for some problem-free talk. She discussed how her mother had certain wishes for her, and her future. The discourse framing our discussion had now become one of love – the love between a mother and daughter. This highlighted for my client that she had her mother's support in whatever she decided to do about her dilemma. This was a very interesting transformation and showed a good example of Foucault's assertion that not only can discourse be transformed, but that power too can be both accepted and resisted, (Foucault, 1981). When my client had begun the session she was feeling like her power had been taken away in the financial threat posed by her father; this has parallels with Wrong's (1988) assertion that power may function in the presence of scarce resources. However towards the end of the session she was feeling more assertive with the knowledge that her mother's support was a strengthening resource for her.

What is the dominant belief in the client's 'old' discourse?

The dominant belief for my client was fuelled by a discourse of justice; she believed that her father was being unjust in making this request. However this belief was also made more complex by an equally dominant belief that she was being unkind in her desire to resist her father. My client's feelings of guilt could have been constructed through her earlier life experiences; religious belief systems had been embedded in her reality from an early age; these had taught her to be 'good' and respectful to parents. These could possibly have been further entrenched by her traditions of growing up within a Pakistani culture, where family values are a strong feature. She described for example how her family had a shared 'truth' of pulling together in a crisis.

What is the dominant belief in the client's 'new' discourse?

In the new discourse the client had formed the belief that she was capable of being assertive and that crucially – this was 'ok'. The belief was therefore one of entitlement; she had worked hard for her money, had already previously contributed financially, and now deserved to enjoy her savings for herself. This belief had been constructed by problem-free talk centred around her relationship with her mother. The construction of this belief may also be seen as an example of a specific type of power which we both co-constructed. Rowan (1978) refers to seven different types of power, with one of these being 'normative-legitimate' power. This type of power is used and maintained through referring to norms, rules, and values. The way in which the client and I constructed this belief may be traced to the normative values of the individualistic society in which we live – in this society we normalise individualistic values, where part of the rules of this system dictate that it is acceptable to further one's own interests. By comparison the discourse of a more collectivist society may construct the opposing belief that it is better to sacrifice one's own interests for the sake of a group, family, or society.

How did the counsellor assist the client to reposition herself in the new discourse?

By the end of the session the client had reached a more powerful position from drawing on a loving discourse within which she and her mother were positioned. I assisted her to reposition herself in this way by trying to encourage her to draw on her own pre-existing resources. Talking about her mother in a problem-free manner struck a chord with her as her mother's role in her life is very important to her. She was able to see herself through her mother's eyes and draw her own sense of self-worth and strength from this position. In addition, by not offering my own solutions for her I was able to support my client in realising her own empowerment.

From another perspective, the session could be viewed as a conflict between the norms of a collectivist and an individualistic culture – it was by positioning herself in the latter that the client was able to change her dominant belief, feel more empowered and arrive at a potential solution to her constructed problem.

References

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