Constructivist-Adlerian

and the Role of Encouragement in the Therapy Process

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Constructivism

A meta-theory and/or philosophy of:

- knowledge acquisition
- human development (personality, morality)
- Psychology and psychopathology
- understanding others and events
Constructivism

Constructivist therapy is more of a theory of knowledge than a system of therapy. Constructivist theory holds that humans are meaning makers, and in a very real sense the meaning we create in turn creates our experience of the world.

In this approach, therapists pay close attention to where the client wants to go, both within the therapy session overall and moment-to-moment during the session. The client is central, and the therapist's job is to ask questions that will lead the client toward his or her own answers, not toward answers the therapist may have. Constructivists refer to this as "leading from one step behind."

Because of the centrality of the client, constructivist therapy has no fixed structure, seeking instead to follow the "affect trail" efficiently toward a rapid and deep contact with the client's central issues. In each conversational turn, therapy takes its orientation from the client, so it is important for the therapist to empathically enter the client's world of constructed meaning, whether conveyed verbally, coverbally or nonverbally in the client's responses.

However, the therapist is by no means a passive visitor to the client's experiential world but, rather, subtly directs the process of their exploration toward emotionally significant "growing edges" of the client's awareness, fostering greater contact with the painful discrepancies in the client's story and the often hidden purposes served by the problematic feeling, pattern, or behavior.

Discovering the significance of the symptom typically fosters the symbolization and articulation of new meaning, and an emerging sense of wholeness and possibility that permits the client to move forward in novel ways.
"As humans, we not only experience life directly through our senses, but we also transform it in an effort to make meaning out of what we experience. We live constantly with other human beings, and as such, we frame all that we do in the context of social relationships. The ordering of the meaning we experience in our lives with others most often takes the form of a story or narrative about who we are; who others are; what we are worth to ourselves, others, and the world; and what conclusions, convictions, and ethical codes will guide us. . . . Adler was one of the first to recognize this process in human development. He called the ordering of our experiences into a teleological narrative our lifestyle, our unique way of being, of coping, and of moving through (and approaching) the tasks of life" (Disque & Bitter, 1998, p. 431)
Constructivist Psychotherapy

We construct & order our world through:

- Feeling
- Thought
- Behavior
- Symbol and Metaphor
- Context – historical, cultural, social

The whole person

Emphasis is given to the interaction between the actor (client), what is known (about and by the client), and the observer-participant (therapist)
Constructivism vs. Phenomenology

- Phenomenology – shared experience
  - Uni-directional: event-perspective-reality
- Constructivism – meaning and knowledge
  - Multi-directional: event-perspective-context-dialogue-dialectic-organization around the self-anticipation
  - What is understood as the “constructed” is itself a construction, an intersecting of intra- and inter-personal relationship

Raskin, 2002; Rasmussen, 1998
Key Concepts of Individual Psychology

- Encouragement vs. Discouragement
- Feelings of inferiority
- Adoption of a lifestyle
- Striving for superiority (significance)
- Social interest
- Purposeful behaving
- Birth order
- Fictional Finalism

Dinkmeyer & Sperry, 2000; Mosak & Maniaci, 2008
Micro-Concept Map of The Striving for Significance

Developed by Henry T. Stein, Ph.D.

(Map reads from bottom to top)

(Direction Concretized as a Fictional Final Goal)

Connection
Cooperation
Contribution
Other/Task-Centeredness
Self-Development
Mutual Benefit
Completion
Perfection
Self-Enhancement
Improvement
Overcoming Difficulties

Positive Direction
(More Social Interest)

Striving for Significance

Negative Direction
(Less Social Interest)

Self-Protection
Power Over Others

Creative Power

Inferiority Feelings

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“people give meaning to their lives through the stories of their experiences. The description an individual gives in her storytelling is her unique reality, and that reality directs the way she lives life” (Metcalf, 2008, p. 29).
Constructivist Themes Applied to Psychotherapy

- Active agency – purposeful movement
- Order – structure and meaning
- Self – striving for personal identity
- Social-symbolic Processes – person-in-context
- Development across the lifespan (nonlinear)
  “meaningful action by a developing self in relationship” (Mahoney, p.5)

Mahoney, 2003
Key Concepts of SFT and Narrative

• “Pathology” is found in the way we talk and think about our life experiences and our self

• A pathological description leads to the perception of past, current, and future problems as being fixed.
  – Failure to notice exceptions and unique outcomes
  – Temporary disruption to living to one’s inherent potential

deShazer, 1985; Metcalf, 2008;
White & Epston, 1990
Constructivist-Adlerian Integration – common factors

• People are creative and responsible
• Ordering of Experience – meaning making
• Teleology and Purpose - Capable of Self-direction
• Non-pathological & non-permanent
• Encouragement
• Non-expertise & Collaboration
Constructivist-Adlerian Integration – Elements of Change

• Collaborative, mutual, equal, respectful, relationship
• Problem/failure focus □ Solution/success focus
• Discouragement □ Encouragement
• Engage “latent assets, resources, and strengths” (Watts & Pietrzak, p. 443)
• Change the doing & viewing of the situation perceived by the client as problematic
Summary

Constructivist-Adlerian therapy emphasizes:

• Knowing the person-in-context; centrality of self
• Accepting the person’s reality as true – contains evidence of current and future striving/purpose
• Searching for meaning in metaphor and symbol
• Working with thought, feeling, behavior, and meaning
• Understanding of the client guides solution-finding AND depth work (insight) as needed
Encouragement

- The essence of therapy – Adler
  “Every improvement comes about solely by encouraging the sufferer”  (Stein, 1998, para.4)
- Most important change-promoting element
- People “need encouragement like a plant needs water” - Dreikurs
Encouragement

- **Courage (belief + action)**
  - Judicious and purposeful movement (useful)
  - “I believe I can deal with whatever comes”
  - Activation of inner resources to overcome

- **Discouragement (condition + process)**
  - Retreat from life tasks
  - Adoption of mistaken goals
  - Intolerance of imperfection, failure, inferiority
  - Movement towards useless living
  - Overuse of safeguarding tendency

Carns & Carns, 1998; Dinkmeyer & Dreikurs, 2000; Dinkmeyer & Losoncy, 1996
Encouragement

- Possession and use of courage (condition + process)
- Activity + courage + social interest
- The activation of social interest
Encouragement

- Philosophical Attitude
- Skill Set
- Treatment Outcome
- Encouragement & Social Interest
Encouragement

- Philosophical Attitude of the Therapist
  - Accepting the client as-is
  - Honoring client's ability to self-direct creatively
  - A belief in humans as purposeful, striving, and innately courageous towards overcoming life's challenges in the spirit of cooperation

- Adopted by the Client
  - Attitudes towards self, others, world, major tasks
Encouragement

❖ Skill Set

- Core conditions & communicating hopefulness
- Showing faith in the client
- Expecting the client to show faith in self
- Recognizing effort (over achievement)
- Solution-focused language
- Reframing liabilities as assets
- Securing commitment to specific goals

Dinkmeyer & Losoncy, 1996; Dinkmeyer & Sperry, 2000; Metcalf, 2008; Stein, 1998
Encouragement

Expected Treatment Outcome (for the client)

- “Encouragement should make him capable of unimpeded contact with his fellows and the real problems of life, by the development of his social feeling” (Stein, 1998, para.1)

- Psychological Tolerance – can handle threat – a positive and realistic view

- Courage to be Imperfect - “gracious acceptance of one's inevitable imperfections” (Dinkmeyer & Dreikurs, 2000, p.34).
Encouragement

- Encouragement & Social Interest
  - Social interest as a measure of mental health
  - An interdependent condition: increasing social interest increases courage

- Stein (1998) quote
Encouragement

Stein (1998)
Phases

Relationship
Investigation
Insight
Reorientation & Action
Relationship

- Attending to the Story
- Validation
- Collaboration
- Respectful Curiosity
- Modeling Social Interest
- Courage to be Imperfect
Disturbances to the Relationship (Shulman, 1973)

- Fear of being defective
- Fear of being exposed
- Fear of disapproval
Investigation

Lifestyle Themes and Early Recollections
Personality Priorities
Crucial C’s
Private Logic
Exceptions
Subordinate Storyline
Positive Intention
Symptoms are selected because they are perceived as facilitating movement toward a desired goal. Symptoms are not reactions to situations. They are attempted solutions.
The intensity, frequency, severity, and persistence of pain and symptoms function to display the significance of what was experienced, to give it a voice, and to preserve the self and what the self values.

White (2002)
Investigation: Working with Metaphor

- The metaphor often contains the solution!
- Pancakes & Trucks
Insight

Assets and Resources
Awareness – feelings, thoughts, behaviors
Noticing patterns
Miracle, Blessing, Stroke of Good Luck
Cooperating with the Problem
Reorientation & Action

Psychoeducation
Miracles and Preferred Solutions
Acting As-if
Externalizing – teaming up to win
Social interest
References

See Handout
Solution-focused brief THERAPY is still THERAPY!

- SFT retains the elements of “good therapy”
  - Relationship (what % of outcomes?)
  - Hearing and validating the client's story
  - Reflecting feelings, empathy, core conditions (Rogers)
  - I-Thou (Martin Buber) stance