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Narrative Theoretical Framework

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Narratives are subjective accounts of personal events told to listeners. They are linguistic forms of “lived experience” affecting both the narrator and the listener. Within the narrative theoretical framework, there is an underlying assumption that the way in which individuals experience themselves and their situations is “constructed” within culturally mediated, social interactions. Much more than short stories or quotes, narratives are employed in psychotherapy, particularly narrative therapy, as a tool for exploring and interpreting clients’ experiences.

Narrative therapy is an eclectic therapy derived from the family and individual psychology traditions. It is influenced by a variety of sources, including literary philosophy, poststructural theory, feminism, anthropology, and ethnology. Narrative therapy draws from humanistic concepts, highlighting respect and confidence in the client, emphasizing his or her problem-solving abilities, and recognizing the significance of interactions, context, and appraisals. It employs systems theory, with an underlying theoretical assumption that identity formation is strongly informed by cultural influences.

The predominant tenets of the narrative theoretical framework are outlined as follows. First, drawing from postmodern concepts, there is no absolute truth, only varying interpretations of reality. Thus, it is the appraisal or meaning derived from these interpretations that becomes significant, and this meaning is constructed within the social, political, and cultural milieu in which the person resides. Second, creating meaning through narratives is an inherent human characteristic. Thoughts are linked to actions, which are linked to behavior; thus, people’s actions are informed by the narratives they tell themselves and those that others tell about them. Third, people are not defined by a single narrative; rather, they live many narratives simultaneously, such as work, sport, socializing, and family. Fourth, culture may be defined as the collected narratives of a distinct group. In narrative therapy, culture is operationalized as the most influential factor affecting people’s lives. Finally, within the narrative framework, the problem is externalized from the self. It is a problem story, and the person himself or herself is never seen to be the problem. The narrative therapist does not attempt to transform the client; rather, the therapist attempts to transform the impact and effects the problem is having on the client.

On the basis of these theoretical tenets, narrative therapy highlights the importance of collaboration, curiosity, and culture during the therapeutic process. Narrative therapists do not situate themselves as experts. Rather, they assume that clients are the experts of their own lives, distinct from their problems, and that clients possess an arsenal of skills, competencies, and knowledge garnered from past experiences that enables them to overcome the current challenges they are facing. Narrative therapy helps clients identify what they want in their lives, facilitating reconnection with their own knowledge and strengths. As such, this theoretical framework is particularly applicable for cross-cultural counselors and the diverse clients with whom they work.

See also [Culturally Competent Treatment](#); [Narrative Therapy](#)

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Further Readings

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