

## Theoretical Framework and Application

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### Theoretical Analysis

Postmodernism can be called a major philosophical theory that determines the contemporary solutions. It is based on the idea that there is no absolute truth and that the world, just like the reality, is composed of various details. The reality itself cannot exist without personal observation and is relative. It is not strange that such philosophical approach was applied in the psychiatric practice. In the current essay an attempt to describe the theory of the postmodern approach and practical application of this theoretical framework to the case study of Margarita will be made.

The main issues that the postmodern therapy deals with are the deconstruction of traditional beliefs and analysis of their impact on the life of an individual. Among the most popular questions that are asked by postmodern therapists are the nature of mental health or success. The key notion in the postmodern therapy is deconstruction. In the psychiatric sense, it is supposed to inculcate the traditional values that are regarded as the absolute truth. For example, the person not moving from his/her parents' house when he/she is a young adult is a sign of hopelessness. Another example is a woman in her late 30s who is not married and does not have children. The reason for her loneliness is most likely her unattractiveness or abrasive character. The main goal of the postmodern therapy is to understand whether such assumptions are true for the client and to help him/her understand that it is not necessary to live the traditional life imposed by the society, if it does not make him/her happy. It is crucial to remember that the use of the authority of the professional counselor is prohibited, because the client needs to understand by him/herself what should be changed. For this reason, there cannot be any advice from the experts.

The postmodern therapy is divided into two main types, which are the narrative thera-

py and the solution-focused therapy. The solution-focused therapy is characterized by increased attention to understanding the ways of escaping the already existing problem rather than assessing its roots. The main branch of the postmodern approach to therapy is the narrative one. According to it, the specific behavioral patterns and thoughts that bother the client are evaluated in the context of the story the client has created for him/herself, and his/her culture (Winslade & Monk, 2000).

During the course of the solution-focused approach, brief therapy, or SFBT the psychotherapeutic effect, is achieved by of asking the client a series of individually constructed questions and analyzing the responses to them. Such method was developed on the basis of the Wittengensteinian philosophical thought and constructionist way of thinking. It was created by the group of American social workers from the Milwaukee Brief Family Therapy Center with Insoo Kim Berg and Steve de Shazer (1993). The solution-focused therapeutic approach was developed by observing the lives of the control group and recording their sessions of therapy. Therefore, it is possible to state that the theory was developed in the inductive way (Berg & de Shazer, 1993).

The narrative therapy was introduced by David Epston, the social worker from New Zealand, and his Australian colleague Michael White (1990). It was developed in the 1970s-1980s in Australia and gained popularity in the United States only after the book that described the main principles of the narrative approach was published. Before that the theory was probed in smaller groups (White & Epston, 1990).

Both the narrative approach and the solution-focused approach share the same beliefs. There are several most important issues that form the basic assumptions of the solution-focused and narrative approaches. They are the beliefs that the main experts of the problems are the clients themselves, all stories that people tell the counselors are of particu-

lar meaning to understanding the problem, and there is no absolute truth, as well as there is no absolute reality (White & Epston, 1990).

According to the point of view of counselors who practice solution-focused therapy, people are initially able to construct alternative ways to improve their living and to create solutions by themselves (Greenberg, Ganshorn, & Danilkewich, 2001). They are resourceful and competent enough to cope their problems in a healthy way (Greenberg, Ganshorn, & Danilkewich, 2001). The counselors help the clients understand their strong sides and assist them with starting to use their potential in the most effective ways (Berg, 1994). According to the main principle of the narrative approach, every client and his/her story are unique, just like his/her cultural background (Berg, 1994).

The therapeutic relationship between the client and the counselor can be described as liberal. Both during the narrative and the solution-focused therapy the counselor is working with the client without imposing his/her authority and expert advice (Greenberg, Ganshorn, & Danilkewich, 2001). It is supposed that the therapy is the process of collaboration, as all ideas, strengths and weaknesses of the client are accepted. The counselor remembers that only the client is the expert of his/her life (Greenberg, Ganshorn, & Danilkewich, 2001). Such naïveté stance is considered to help the clients mobilize their inner resources in order to cope with the problem. The clients interpret the life experience they had and on the basis of understanding their strong sides. They try to construct the ways out of their problems. It is also necessary to mention that the counseling process supposes that there are no interpretations, predictions and pathologizing from the expert. Such approach helps the client feel the sense of responsibility and improve his/her experience of integrating back into the society (Greenberg, Ganshorn, & Danilkewich, 2001).

The postmodernist theory has many examples of efficient application, which explain

its popularity during the past decades. According to Silver, Williams, Worthington and Phillips (1998), an experiment was conducted with 108 children with family problems. Half of them were treated by postmodern approach and the other part underwent traditional clinical treatment. The group who underwent narrative and problem-solving therapy showed better results. It is also believed that the chosen therapeutic method improved the relationships in those families.

This theory aligns with my own philosophy, values, and views of the therapeutic process greatly. To start with, postmodernism is the dominant way of thinking nowadays and it is implicitly present in all aspects of life. I do not think that there is an objective point of view and absolute reality, because people are unique, and their choices depend upon a great variety of circumstances that are to be examined by the counselor. The postmodern approach to therapy activates positive thinking, because there are no wrong answers to the questions. In fact, many people suffer from being unable to give the right answer to their life problems, and it makes them frustrated and depressed. In addition, such approach can be helpful for diverse populations, as it is liberal enough not to despise even those problems that seem to be minor from the objective point of view. In fact, there is no objective point of view, which makes the theory applicable to all people.

### **Theoretical Application**

Margarita is suffering from the following predicaments: anger outbursts towards her husband, hard work that requires much responsibility, problems with socializing, and the

responsibility for two small children, who require attention and care. She is deeply depressed and lives in the state of constant stress. For this reason, it is crucial for her to start working on the priorities to cause a positive change. The postmodern approach will be used for this analysis. In addition, it might be efficient to combine both the narrative and the solu-

tion-focused therapy to achieve satisfactory results.

It is possible to set the following goals to work on with Margarita. The narrative part of therapy should include new details. I plan to ask Margarita to describe her major life experiences that we have already talked about in a fresh new language. It might be useful to look at her experience from a different perspective in order to help Margarita change the usual way in which she thinks about her life. It is possible to assume that the client does not pay enough attention to her children and husband, because she is constantly working, which might have led to deep dissatisfaction with her family life.

Then, the solution-focused part of the therapy will include four goals. The first aim is to establish the atmosphere of mutual respect, affirmation, inquiry and dialogue. It is crucial to reinforce this goal every session, because it is difficult for Margarita to talk freely about her intimate problems. The second step is to ask Margarita so-called miracle questions, which constitute the indispensable part of the solution-focused therapy. Margarita is supposed to imagine what her life might have been like without problems. Such approach might make the goals she wants to achieve clearer. Then, Margarita needs to set her own preferences and goals she has been thinking about after the previous counseling session. The last goal that might be achieved during the fourth session is analyzing how to combine her desires with societal expectations and standards without stress.

The techniques that will be used in the case of Margarita are oriented towards the future and the need to solve problems. There is no need to ask about the reasons that have led to the nervous breakdown. The first technique is to externalize the problems, as it helps to talk about them more specifically. Then, it is necessary to understand what unused resources and strengths Margarita has. For example, it is possible to emphasize that she is an intelligent woman with good work ethics, a healthy family and children. These factors can rejuvenate her happiness.

The questions technique will be also used. Miracle questions that include imagining life without problems, exception questions that exclude problems, and scaling questions that assess the progress of therapy might help Margarita pay attention to details. Homework will be used to allow her to re-think her life from another perspective.

All things considered, it is possible to assume that the strengths of postmodern approach and narrative problem-solving theories with Margarita prevail over the limitations. However, it is necessary to keep in mind that Margarita's second child was born only a year ago, and her active work apart from home makes her a nervous mother. Therefore, she might also suffer from postpartum depression. Although, the strengths of this approach are evident. Margarita is a rational and intelligent woman, who is able to analyze everything by herself. She needs postmodern counseling with respectful alternative questions in order to look at her life situation from a different perspective. Her problems are not considered to be of psychiatric character. Therefore, the client is not an ill person. According to this approach, it is crucial to start thinking more freely and more positively without paying much attention to strict social norms and expectations of the others. This task might be hard for the given patient, who is a cultural minority in her place of residence. The essence of Margarita's depression and anger outbursts might be her reaction to the numerous expectations of the society. For example, she is used to thinking that she is a strong modern feminist woman who has to work hard and be adored by her friends. She is also a young woman who has two children and a husband, and it is her responsibility to be a good mother and wife. The nature of being a good mother, wife and successful worker are vague, and it might lead to constant stress.

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