Quick Study: Narrative Therapy

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Underpinnings
• Our identities are shaped by the stories or narratives of our lives.
• Problems are experienced as a result of negative social, political, and cultural influences also known as dominant cultural discourses. These problems are not “internal” to people, but are rather viewed by the therapist as being problems within an external context.

Theory of Change
• Narrative therapy views individuals as the experts on their own lives. Problems are viewed as separate entities from the client and change occurs by creating a new narrative or story that emphasizes the client’s competencies and strengths.

Role of Therapist
• Collaborates with the client in order to develop richer narratives based on the idea that the client is the expert of their own life.
• Helps the client examine their story and then look at other ways the story could be told or understood differently. The client is then able to look for unique outcomes or positive events rather than see a problem-focused story.

Main Concepts
• Problem-Saturated Stories: Dominant stories of the client’s life. Usually the story that brings them to therapy.
• Externalizing the Problem: Separating the person from the problem story.
• Unique Outcomes: Times in the client’s life where they were able to resist the effects of the problem.

Treatment Goals
• Understanding the problem-saturated story and externalizing the problem.
• Look at the client’s experiences and find ignored elements that contradict the problem-saturated stories (unique outcomes).
• Deconstruct problem-saturated stories in order to create more helpful stories.
Interventions

- **Deconstruction Questions**: Externalizing the problem.
  - “What is your anxiety trying to tell you to do?”
- **Opening Space Questions**: Uncovering unique outcomes.
  - “Has there been a time in your life where shame did not take control of your life?”
- **Preference Questions**: Determine if the unique outcome is preferred.
  - “Do you think this was a better or worse way of reacting?”
- **Story Development Questions**: Developing a broader story based off the unique outcomes.
  - “Who will notice your new way of handling these situations?”
- **Meaning Questions**: Creating a more positive view of self.
  - “What does this new reaction say about you?”
- **Questions to Extend the Story into the Future**: Reinforcing the positive changes.
  - “How will your life be different now that fear is not in control?”