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Exploring Authenticity, Prosocial Lying, and Power in Addiction Recovery Groups: A Conceptual Model

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Abstract

Previous literature suggests a connection between dispositional power and authenticity, where those with high dispositional power reported higher levels of authenticity than participants who had lower dispositional power (Kifer, Heller, Perunovic, & Galinsky, 2013). In addition, authenticity serves as a mediator between dispositional power and subjective well-being. There is little research about the intersectionality of prosocial lying, authenticity, and dispositional power, as well as their utility in group work. This session will introduce a conceptual model that explores the intersection prosocial lying, authenticity, and dispositional power in addiction recovery groups under the framework of narrative and existential theory. Narrative theory posits that people suffer from living under a dominant narrative that often ignores vital aspects of a person's personhood. When people live under a dominant narrative and not their own, personal narrative, their sense of dispositional power is lessened. Narrative theory argues that people gain power and lessen suffering through dismantling the dominant narrative and building a personal narrative that appreciates the vital aspects of their personhood. Existential theory posits that there are four existential concerns that affect humanity: death, freedom, isolation, and meaning. Each of these four existential concerns potentially drives people to utilize prosocial lying as a means to deflect from confronting the concerns. Existential theory argues that people live a more authentic life with less suffering if they confront the existential concerns. The conceptual model proposed in this session integrates narrative and existential theory to foster authenticity in addiction recovery groups; specifically, narrative theory will be used to instill dispositional power within the groups, whereas existential theory will be used to lessen the prosocial lying within the groups. By fostering authenticity within these addiction recovery groups, this conceptual model will potentially create protective measures against relapsing.

Definitions of Authenticity, Prosocial Lying, and Dispositional Power

We define a prosocial lie as a lie that is told with the intention of benefiting others in some way (Lupoli, Jampol, & Oveis, 2017). In a study on children's use of prosocial lying in in-group and out-group settings, researchers found that the majority of prosocial lies are used in in-group settings (Sierksma, Spaltman, & Lansu, 2019).

We define authenticity as "the degree to which individuals connect with and enact their true selves in various situations" (Kifer, Heller, Perunovic, & Galinsky, 2013, p. 281).

We define dispositional power as a relatively stable sense of power (Kifer, Heller, Perunovic, & Galinsky, 2013).

Intersection of Authenticity, Prosocial Lying, and Dispositional Power

Kifer, Heller, Perunovic, & Galinsky (2013) created several studies to explore the connection between dispositional power and authenticity, finding that participants who had high dispositional power reported higher levels of authenticity than participants who had lower dispositional power. The researchers also found that authenticity serves as a mediator between dispositional power and subjective well-being, which is "the affective and cognitive evaluation of one's own life in general and in specific roles" (Kifer, Heller, Perunovic, & Galinsky, 2013, p. 280).

Based on the definitions for both prosocial lying and authenticity, it can be extrapolated that the use of prosocial lying is an impediment to authenticity. Although the prosocial lie is used to benefit other people, its use precludes one from enacting his or her true self with other people. It is possible that lessening the use of prosocial lying may help remove the barrier to living an authentic life.

Narrative Theory and the Connection to Dispositional Power

Narrative theory is built on Michel Foucault's ideas on power and knowledge. Foucault's power can be positive or negative. Power is positive in the sense that is "constitutive or shaping of persons' lives" (White & Epston, 1990, p. 19). Whereas dispositional power is a stable sense of power within a person, positive power is using that power to construct ideas that form "truths" that shape norms that people constitute their lives around (White & Epston, 1990).

These truths form a dominant narrative about a person's life, a narrative that often ignores vital aspects of a person's personhood and sends him or her into suffering. This dominant narrative has clinical implications for the person's dispositional power. When people feel as though the narrative about their life is not in their control, it is possible that their sense of dispositional power is lessened.

Through utilizing narrative theory, we will assist the SUD population in dismantling the dominant narrative that they are powerless and potentially instill a greater sense of dispositional power within them. More specifically, we will utilize narrative theory to identify the unique outcomes, which are thoughts/behaviors of defiance against the dominant narrative of their lives. By identifying unique outcomes, it is possible for the SUD population to build their own narrative and gain more dispositional power.

Existential Theory and the Connection to Prosocial Lying

Existential theory posits that there are four existential concerns that affect humanity: death, freedom, isolation, and meaning (Yalom, 1980). Each of these four concerns can relate to the use of prosocial lying.

First, the death concern is the concern that death is a primordial source of anxiety, where humans fear the loss of self and the becoming of nothingness (Yalom, 1980). While literal death is one of the main stimuli for this death concern, there are other, more metaphorical deaths that can spark anxiety, such as: the death of a relationship, the death of love, and the death of innocence. It is through these metaphorical deaths that the use of prosocial lying potentially occurs; as an "extreme mode of defense," people may lie to their support system to benefit the support system and protect the connections, saving themselves from the death concern (Yalom, 1980, p. 121).

Second, the freedom concern is the concern that people are faced with the responsibility of their life, their actions, and their failures to act (Yalom, 1980). There are numerous defenses against taking responsibility for one's life and actions, for the responsibility is anxiety-inducing and uncomfortable to people. One manner of escaping responsibility for one's actions is to use prosocial lying when connecting to other people. By lying in a manner that benefits others, people shirk the responsibility of expressing oneself in an authentic and honest manner.

Third, the isolation concern is the concern that there is an unmeasurable gulf between oneself and others as well as a more fundamental separation of oneself and the world (Yalom, 1980). This gulf may drive people to utilize prosocial lying as an attempt to handle the threat of isolation anxiety. Through lying in a manner of benefitting another person, there may be hope of lessening the gulf between the persons and establishing a genuine connection.

Fourth, the meaning concern is the concern that life has no inherent meaning and that the purpose one creates for oneself does not prevent one from feeling that it is meaningless (Yalom, 1980). It is possible that prosocial lies are used in an effort to preserve meaning for people, where a person utilizes a prosocial lie to benefit the sense of community that he or she derives meaning from.

Implementation in Addiction Recovery Groups

This conceptual model will utilize narrative theory and existential theory to inform the addiction recovery group process. It will be a closed-group with a size of 7-9 clients. Since this conceptual model is for addiction recovery groups, clients without a diagnosed substance use disorder will be excluded from the group. Clients who cannot engage in the primary group activity due to any reason will also be excluded from the group. The group will meet three times per week for an hour and thirty minutes. The duration of the group will be for 2 months.

The primary outcome of the group is to assist the clients in achieving authenticity. This conceptual model theorizes that if clients gain dispositional power and lessen prosocial lying, then clients will achieve authenticity. During the forming stage of the group, the group leader will provide information to the group about the following: the primary outcome and the concepts of dispositional power and prosocial lying, the theories the group will use to reach the primary outcome, and the techniques that will be used to facilitate this outcome. The group leader will also utilize the narrative theory technique of "re-authoring" during this stage, where the clients of the group begin to develop the narrative of their personal stories.

During the norming stage of the group, the group will utilize the narrative theory technique of "externalizing," which is a technique where clients separate themselves from the problem behavior (i.e. addiction). The technique will be used to facilitate the improvement of the clients' sense of dispositional power; the conceptual model theorizes that assisting the clients in realizing that they are not the problem will improve their power to alleviate the problem.

During the working stage of the group, the group will utilize the existential theory technique of being in the "here and now," where clients will shift their focus from their personal narrative and externalized problem to the present group process. This shift will provide clients the opportunity to challenge their use of prosocial lying, for they will have a working relationship with the other group members that may pressure them to utilize prosocial lying to maintain the working relationship.

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