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Narrative Therapy – A tribute to Michael White
co-founder 29 Dec 1948 † 5 April 2008
David Epstein

Extraordinary person, philosopher, scientist

Opened alternative opportunities of hope
Mourned by many – celebrated by millions



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Discussion



Picture – house

Not specific sequence – rather guideline

Makes way for individuality

Authorizing individuals → re-author lives

Resist problem-saturated stories

Poem – Jannie Becker

Definition

With narrative therapy problems are objectified and metaphorically externalised as separate from the individual



- the problem is seen as the problem
- the person is not regarded as the problem

MODERN MEDICAL VS POST-MODERN NARRATIVE

Modernistic



- Expert knowledge
- Psychoanalyst knowledge = psychiatric expert language
- Patients are seen as “sick” or pathological
- Limited to thin descriptions
- Problem inside individual
- Limited by definitions of psychiatric illnesses

Post-Modernistic

- Not-knowing non-expert language
- Respect for idiosyncrasy
- Deconstruction of discourses
 - Socially constructed
- Thick descriptions
- Problem outside individual
- Re-construction defeats problem-saturated stories

Discourse

Discourses are formed
through language
within social settings,
leading to shared
beliefs
claimed by the
dominant voices as
being truthful
and objective



Discourses are known as being

- (1) socially constructed
- (2) constituted through language
- (3) organised and maintained through narratives
- (4) without essential truth

(Freedman & Coombs, 1996)



Potential danger of discourses

- They are seen as universal truths
- Cannot be questioned
- Is part of the identity of an individual
 - therefore influencing attitudes and behaviours



Narrative therapy enables a person to

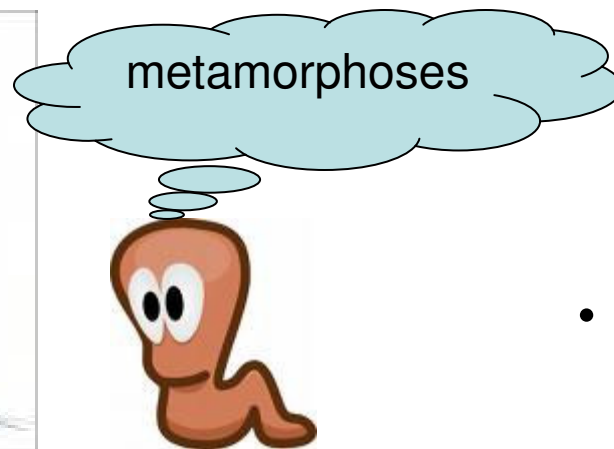
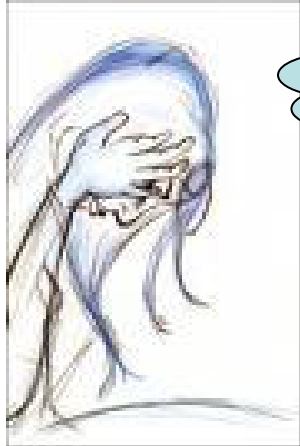
- creatively deal with discourses that support the problem
- deconstruct and externalise an alternative plan of action



Thin versus thick descriptions



- Thin descriptions:
 - prevent alternative possibilities
 - leads to problem-saturation



- Thick descriptions through deconstruction allow the individual:
 - to resist the notion of having a 'fixed identity'
 - allowing the client to develop a solution-orientated view In this way a new lens of competence and self-respect is formed
- Utilising exceptions allows the individual to build a competent self-view

How do we deconstruct discourses?

Sensitise the individual to the possible entrapment of the

- deceptiveness and ambiguousness of language
- temporary and socially construction
- should not be given a literal and permanent interpretation



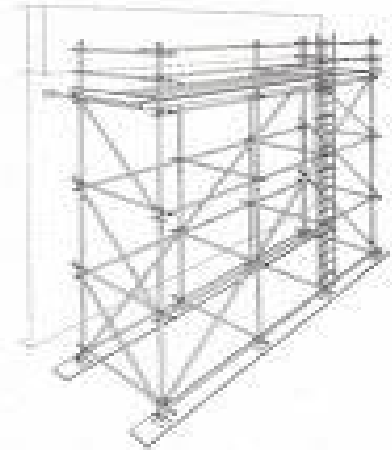
(Payne, 2006; White, 1991)



- The deconstructionist should:
 - search for gaps of generally accepted meanings of discourses
 - thicken the stories of unique outcomes
 - identify ambiguities in the problem-saturated story
 - thicken experience of ownership of unique outcomes as controllable and not just a coincidence

Deconstructive listening and the identification of unique outcomes follow from attentively listening “Not Knowing”

Scaffolding



Eagle's flight



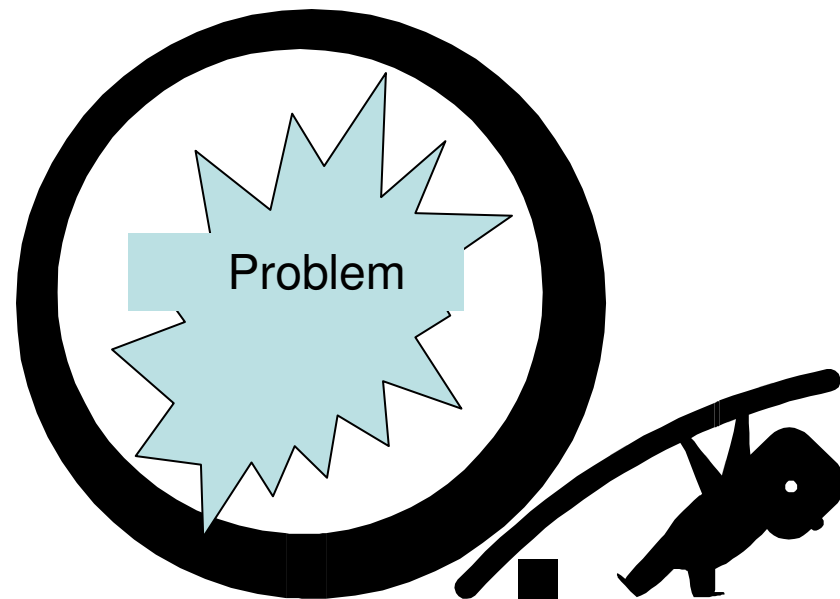
Deconstruction through externalisation

describing and
distinguishing the
problem as an entity
outside the person

(Durrant & Kowalski, 1998)

enables an individual to
objectify and personify an
oppressive problem

(White, 1989)



Deconstruction and externalisation through metaphor

- Give the problem a metaphorical name – (negotiated between the therapist and the client)
- Objectify the intimidating and rigid problem
- Empower the individual to purposefully
 - manage the problem
 - verbally reflect upon the counter images of the problem



Deconstruction: the problem is the problem; the person is not the problem

When the problem is identified as the problem (the antagonist), the person is empowered, as protagonist, to take the lead in creatively taking control of the problem (Semmler & Williams, 2000)



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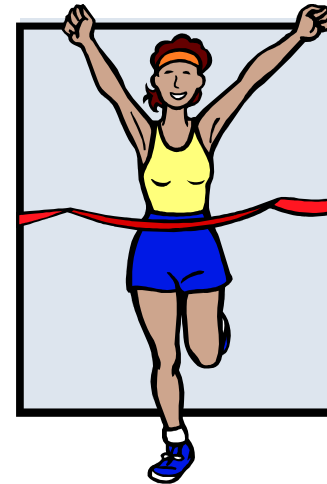


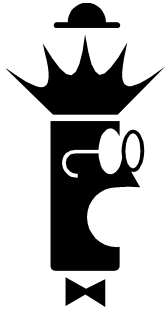
As soon as deconstruction has been established, the door is opened for individuals to commit themselves to disapproving the restrictions of historical discourses and re-storying their lives



Forming of new identity

- Externalisation can similarly be used to name positive newly developed narratives for individuals
- Externalisation also lends authority to:
 - reconstruct strengths
 - form positive characteristics
 - form a new identity





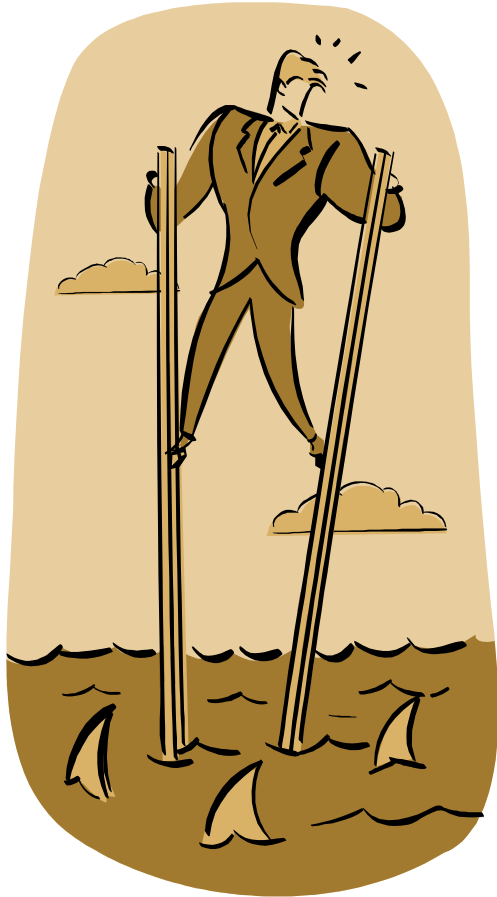
Unique outcome



- *Sparkling moment*, a situation in which the problem does not feature, indicating:
 - self-efficacy in creating solutions
 - not being intimidated by the problem
- Encourage story teller to give a thicker description of a unique outcome
- Caution! Identification of unique outcomes does not simply imply ‘pointing out positives’. It is rather a discovery of inherent hidden strengths

White (1989, p. 38)

Exploring the never
yet
thought of



By metaphorically naming the
alternative story helps the
individual to:

- Objectify the problem
- Separate the self from the problem
- Allows space for alternative stories
- Act out choices
- Use a framework to map and plan future events

Morgan (2000, p. 72)

Unlocking future possibilities by deconstruction and re-negotiation forming thick descriptions of alternative stories



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Ghosts from the future



A friendly ghost is fictionally invited from the future to haunt the client in the present, inviting the client to imagine - at present - resourcefully dealing with the problem

Epston, Lakusta, & Tomm (2006, p. 65)

Re-membering



Individuals supporting the alternative story, are invited to help re-construct the individual's resilient future

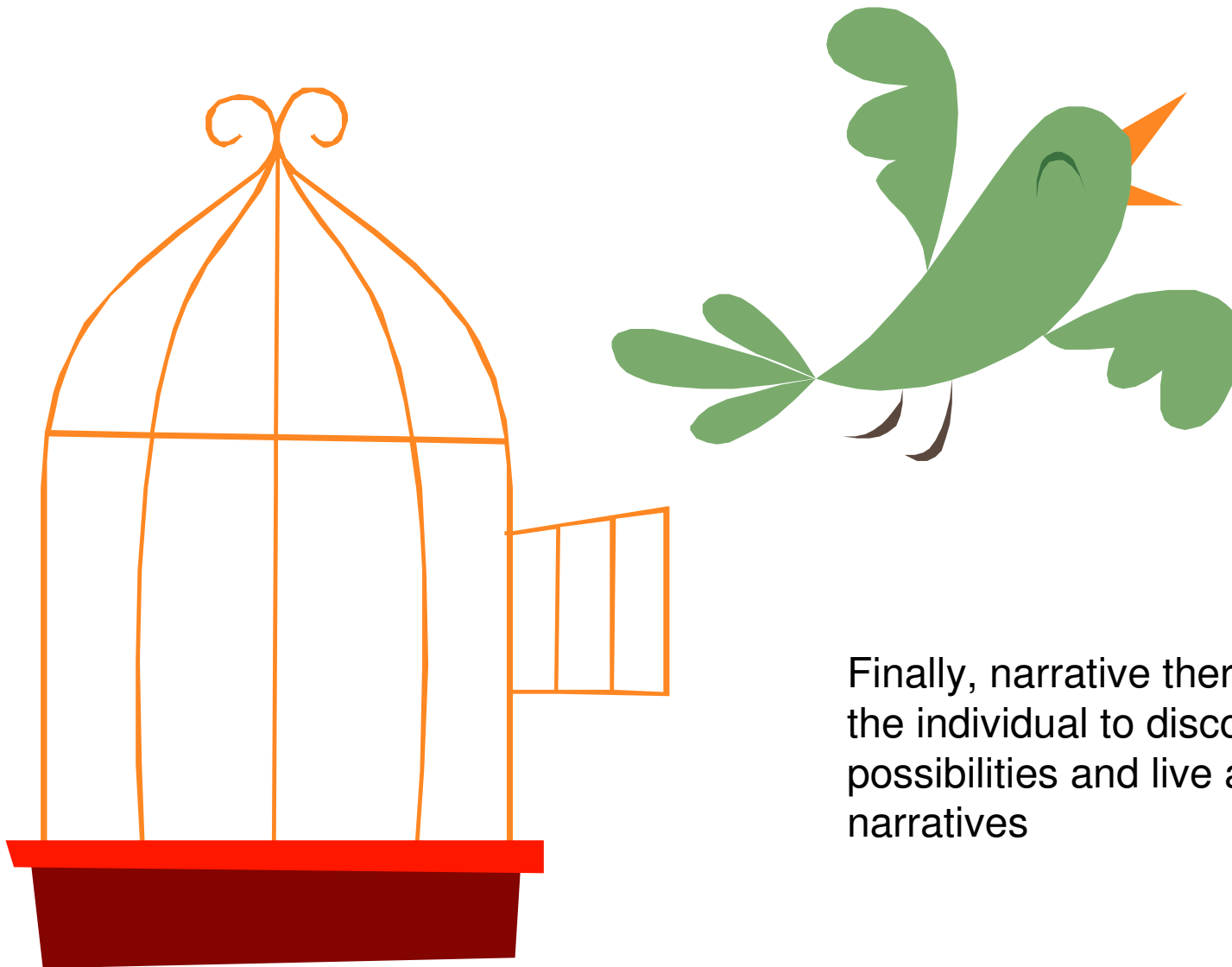
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Rituals

Celebrations of a person's victory in taking charge of the problem, authenticating the identity of the individual doing so



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Finally, narrative therapy frees the individual to discover new possibilities and live alternative narratives