

# EXPLORATION OF THE APPLICATION PATH OF POSTMODERN NARRATIVE THERAPY IN INDIVIDUAL SPIRITUAL HEALING

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**Abstract:** As a core school in the field of postmodern psychology and psychological counseling, postmodern narrative therapy breaks the rigid thinking of traditional psychotherapy that labels individuals with pathological traits and attributes problems to the individual themselves. It realizes the self-healing of the individual spirit and identity reconstruction by deconstructing individuals' negative narratives, exploring positive exceptional experiences, and reconstructing positive life stories. Based on the practical needs of individual spiritual healing, this paper sorts out the core theoretical connotations of postmodern narrative therapy, discusses the existing predicaments in combination with the pain points of clinical practice, and puts forward targeted optimization strategies. It also analyzes its practical application path in individual psychological intervention, aiming to provide theoretical reference and practical guidance for the standardized and localized application of narrative therapy in individual psychological counseling and mental health services, and help individuals get rid of psychological predicaments and rebuild inner strength and life meaning.

**Keywords:** Postmodern narrative therapy; Spiritual healing; Narrative reconstruction; Externalization of problems; Individual psychological intervention

## 1 INTRODUCTION

With the accelerating social rhythm and rising competitive pressure in the current era, individuals are increasingly plagued by psychological problems such as anxiety, depression, self-negation, and traumatic stress. The traditional psychotherapy model, which focuses on individuals' pathological defects and emphasizes the authority of counselors, is likely to trap visitors in a vicious cycle of self-negation, making it difficult to fundamentally resolve spiritual distress. The rise of the postmodern trend has driven the transformation of psychological counseling towards "empowerment and growth". Founded by Michael White and David Epston, postmodern narrative therapy, as a core school rooted in social constructivism, upholds the core concept that "the person is not the problem; the problem is the problem". Abandoning pathological labeling, it achieves spiritual self-healing by deconstructing negative narratives and reconstructing positive life stories. At present, relevant domestic research mostly remains at the level of theoretical interpretation and single case analysis, lacking systematic research on the application path of individual spiritual healing, and suffering from insufficient standardization in practice and poor localization adaptability. Based on this, this paper digs deep into the application logic and practical path of postmodern narrative therapy, analyzes practical predicaments and puts forward optimization strategies, so as to provide reference for its localized and standardized application and help individuals resolve psychological difficulties and rebuild inner strength.

## 2 CORE THEORETICAL CONNOTATIONS OF POSTMODERN NARRATIVE THERAPY

### 2.1 Philosophical Foundation: Social Constructivism and Postmodernism

The philosophical core of postmodern narrative therapy is rooted in the thoughts of social constructivism and postmodernism, which jointly lay the core stance of the therapy. Social constructivism holds that the "reality" perceived by individuals is not an objectively existing entity, but a product constructed by individuals in the socio-cultural context through language, interaction and narrative, and there is no absolutely unique truth or reality. An individual's self-identity and psychological state are gradually formed in the discursive interaction with others and society. Negative psychological problems are not the inherent pathological defects of individuals, but the result of the construction of negative social narratives and rigid discursive systems.

### 2.2 Core Concept: Separation of the Person from the Problem

The proposition that "the person is not the problem; the problem is the problem" is the core concept of postmodern narrative therapy and also the key that distinguishes it from traditional psychotherapy. Traditional therapy often binds visitors with psychological problems and randomly attaches pathological labels, which will further aggravate individuals' sense of self-negation and powerlessness. In contrast, postmodern narrative therapy advocates the externalization of problems, which separates individuals from the identity of "problem bearers" and makes visitors clearly realize that they are "people affected by problems" rather than "people with problems". With the help of the problem externalization technique, individuals can objectively examine their own troubles from a spectator's perspective, break away from the negative cycle of self-blame, and focus their attention on solving problems instead of

totally negating themselves. This not only safeguards the sense of self-worth, but also clears cognitive obstacles for the subsequent deconstruction of negative narratives and reconstruction of positive life stories, helping individuals achieve spiritual relief and self-healing. [1-4]

### **2.3 Core Logic: Deconstructing Negative Narratives and Reconstructing Positive Narratives**

Postmodern narrative therapy points out that the essence of individual psychological distress is that the dominant negative narrative suppresses diverse life experiences. Influenced by family, society, culture and other factors, individuals tend to form rigid negative narratives such as "I am good for nothing", which continuously strengthen negative self-identity and thus induce psychological problems. The core logic of this therapy is to first deconstruct negative narratives and break spiritual constraints, then explore positive exceptional experiences that contradict negative narratives, and connect scattered positive experiences into a complete new narrative to help individuals reshape their self-identity [5]. In this process, individuals transform from "prisoners" of negative narratives into "authors" of their own life stories. Relying on the self-constructed meaning of life, they break away from the shackles of negative cognition, arouse the inner power of self-healing, and ultimately achieve spiritual healing and self-growth.

## **3 EXISTING PREDICAMENTS OF POSTMODERN NARRATIVE THERAPY IN INDIVIDUAL SPIRITUAL HEALING**

### **3.1 Practical and Talent Shortcomings Restricting the Implementation of the Therapy**

The implementation of postmodern narrative therapy is faced with the dual predicaments of the lack of practical norms and insufficient professional talents, which seriously affects the therapeutic effect. Originating from the West and introduced into China a relatively short time ago, this therapy has not yet formed a systematic and standardized theoretical framework and practical process, and there are divergent interpretations in the academic circle. Some practitioners one-sidedly understand its core concepts and mechanically apply its techniques while ignoring the individual differences of visitors, falling into the misunderstanding of "emphasizing form over essence". Meanwhile, there is no unified standard for efficacy evaluation, which mostly relies on case descriptions and lacks a quantitative empirical system, making it difficult to verify the stability of the therapeutic effect. In addition, the therapy places extremely high demands on practitioners' abilities such as empathy and narrative deconstruction, but there is a shortage of professional talents in China [6-7]. Most practitioners have not received systematic training, so they tend to return to the authoritative counseling thinking, and even misinterpret the concepts, causing secondary harm to visitors, which further restricts the standardized promotion of the therapy.

### **3.2 Dual Barriers of Insufficient Cultural Adaptation and Limited Application Boundaries**

Postmodern narrative therapy also faces the dual barriers of insufficient cultural adaptation and limited application scope in its application, making it difficult to fully meet the domestic needs of spiritual healing. Rooted in Western individualistic culture, this therapy emphasizes individual independent narrative and self-expression, which is incompatible with China's traditional culture that values collectivism and advocates reserve and restraint. Directly copying it will easily lead to acclimatization. Restricted by traditional concepts, Chinese people are reluctant to open their hearts, and Western narrative expressions are not in line with the domestic context, which greatly reduces therapeutic compliance. At the same time, the therapy lacks pertinence in adapting to local social characteristics and psychological problems [8-9]. In addition, focusing on narrative reconstruction and cognitive empowerment, the therapy is only applicable to mild to moderate psychological distress. For severe psychological disorders such as major depression and severe trauma, the effect of single intervention is extremely poor due to the impairment of patients' narrative and cognitive abilities, and the lack of pathological correction support results in obvious application limitations.

## **4 OPTIMIZATION STRATEGIES OF POSTMODERN NARRATIVE THERAPY IN INDIVIDUAL SPIRITUAL HEALING**

### **4.1 Improving the System and Cultivating Talents to Lay a Solid Foundation for the Implementation of the Therapy**

To solve the application predicaments of postmodern narrative therapy, the primary task is to improve the theoretical and practical system and cultivate professional talents, so as to lay a solid foundation for its localized implementation. Based on the domestic needs of individual spiritual healing, we should integrate domestic and foreign research results, improve the theoretical system of the therapy, clarify core concepts and application boundaries, formulate standardized practical processes and differentiated intervention plans, and build a combined "quantitative + qualitative" efficacy evaluation system to scientifically verify the therapeutic effect and promote the standardized development of the therapy. At the same time, relying on universities and professional institutions, we should construct a systematic talent training system, set up special courses covering theory, practice and supervision in an all-round way, and focus on cultivating practitioners' abilities of empathic guidance and narrative deconstruction to correct the authoritative

counseling thinking. We should establish a normalized supervision and industry access mechanism, improve practitioners' professional quality through case discussion and practical exercise, and build a high-quality talent team to provide talent guarantee for the implementation of the therapy.

#### **4.2 Deepening Local Integration and Cross-border Integration to Broaden the Application Path of the Therapy**

To break the application limitations of postmodern narrative therapy, it is necessary to take into account both localization adaptation and cross-border integration of the therapy to broaden the implementation and application path in an all-round way. On the one hand, we should improve the therapy based on the local cultural context, optimize discursive expressions and integrate local elements such as family and interpersonal relationships in line with the reserved expression habits of Chinese people and the characteristics of collectivist culture. We should design intervention plans combined with high-frequency local psychological distress such as academic, workplace and family issues, break cultural barriers, and improve the adaptability and acceptance of the therapy. On the other hand, we should clarify the application boundaries of the therapy: apply the therapy alone for mild to moderate psychological distress; for severe psychological problems, build a comprehensive intervention model combining cognitive behavioral therapy, drug therapy and other methods, and carry out narrative healing after restoring patients' narrative and cognitive abilities. At the same time, we should develop online healing tools with the help of digital technology, expand application scenarios, make up for the shortcomings of the therapy, and facilitate its long-term implementation.

### **5 APPLICATION PATH OF POSTMODERN NARRATIVE THERAPY IN INDIVIDUAL SPIRITUAL HEALING**

The application of postmodern narrative therapy in individual spiritual healing follows a complete process of "empathetic listening - externalization of problems - deconstruction of negative narratives - exploration of unique outcomes - reconstruction of positive narratives - consolidation of new narratives". Each link is closely linked and progressive, taking into account both practicality and therapeutic effect, and is applicable to various individual psychological distress such as anxiety, depression, confusion of self-identity and traumatic stress.

#### **5.1 Basic Foreshadowing: Empathetic Listening and Building a Trustful Therapeutic Relationship**

A trustful counselor-client relationship is a prerequisite for the development of narrative therapy and a foundation for individuals to open their hearts and achieve spiritual healing. Abandoning the authoritative posture of traditional counselors, this link upholds the concept that "the visitor is the expert of their own life". Counselors listen to visitors' life stories with an open, curious and empathetic attitude, without judgment, interruption or hasty provision of solutions, and fully accept visitors' emotions and experiences.

Through empathetic responses and open-ended questions, counselors guide visitors to sort out their own experiences completely and express their inner feelings, making visitors feel understood and respected and gradually let go of their psychological defenses. At the same time, in the process of listening, counselors accurately capture the clues of visitors' negative narratives, the core of problems and the emotional pain points, laying a foundation for the subsequent externalization and deconstruction links. The core of this link is to establish an equal, safe and inclusive therapeutic field, allowing visitors to dare to face their inner negative experiences and opening the door for spiritual healing.

#### **5.2 Key Breakthrough: Externalization of Problems and Separation of the Person from the Problem**

The externalization of problems is the core technique of postmodern narrative therapy and a key step to break individuals' self-negation and achieve spiritual relief. Through language skills and concrete naming, counselors guide visitors to transform abstract psychological distress into an object independent of themselves, realizing a complete separation of the person from the problem.

In practice, counselors can guide visitors to give concrete names to problems, such as referring to depression as the "emotional black dog", anxiety as the "mist monster", and procrastination as the "procrastination imp", making problems perceivable and conversable through concrete naming. Then, counselors guide visitors to sort out the development context, scope of influence and manipulation methods of the problem through questions, such as "How did this problem enter your life?", "In what ways does it affect your emotions and behaviors?" and "How do you feel when it appears?". This helps visitors examine the problem objectively and break away from the rigid cognition that "I am the problem". This link can effectively reduce individuals' self-blame, arouse their initiative in coping with problems, and clear the way for the subsequent deconstruction of negative narratives.

#### **5.3 Deconstructing Negative Narratives and Exploring Positive Experiences: Consolidating the Core Link of Healing**

Deconstructing negative narratives and exploring unique outcomes are the core practical links of postmodern narrative therapy, which complement each other and lay a solid foundation for spiritual healing. Negative narratives are the root of individuals' spiritual distress. Through in-depth dialogue, counselors guide visitors to trace the causes of negative narratives, analyze the influencing factors such as society, family and interpersonal relationships, reveal their

subjectivity and one-sidedness, and break the shackles of rigid cognition. At the same time, counselors control the scale of deconstruction, respect visitors' painful experiences and avoid falling into cognitive nihilism. On this basis, the focus is on exploring positive exceptional experiences that contradict negative narratives. Through targeted questions, counselors guide visitors to sort out the moments when they resist difficulties and show resilience, and use the "thick description" technique to elaborate on the details of positive experiences, arousing the hidden inner strength and self-worth. This makes individuals clearly perceive their ability to cope with difficulties, laying a solid foundation for the subsequent reconstruction of positive life stories and the realization of spiritual self-healing.

#### **5.4 Ultimate Goal: Reconstructing Positive Narratives and Reshaping Life Meaning and Self-identity**

Reconstructing positive narratives is the ultimate goal of postmodern narrative therapy and the core focus of individual spiritual healing. Counselors guide visitors to integrate the explored unique outcomes and positive experiences into a coherent, complete and positive life story, replacing the original dominant negative narrative and redefining self-identity and life meaning.

In this process, visitors are the sole authors of the new narrative, and counselors only play the role of guides and collaborators without replacing visitors in narrative construction. Combining their own real experiences, visitors endow the new narrative with a positive value core. For example, reconstructing "I am a failure" into "I have experienced setbacks, but I have the courage to overcome difficulties and there are infinite possibilities in the future"; and reconstructing "I am unworthy of being loved" into "I have my own shining points, worthy of being treated well, and able to treat others with all my heart". The reconstruction of positive narratives can not only resolve the current psychological distress, but also help individuals establish a stable and positive self-identity and form inner resilience to cope with future difficulties.

#### **5.5 Long-term Consolidation: Diverse Witnessing and Strengthening the Stability of Positive Narratives**

The newly constructed positive narratives are relatively fragile in the early stage and vulnerable to the impact of the original negative narratives. Therefore, it is necessary to consolidate the therapeutic effect through diverse witnessing links and strengthen the stability of positive narratives. Counselors can guide visitors to find important people in their lives, such as family members, friends and teachers, as witnesses of the new narrative, who convey recognition and support for the new narrative to visitors. Visitors can also repeatedly strengthen positive narratives and internalize the new self-identity by writing narrative diaries and recording narrative audios.

At the same time, counselors can work with visitors to formulate subsequent practice plans, guide them to practice the new narrative in real life, verify the rationality of the new narrative through practical actions, further consolidate the therapeutic results, and realize the long-term effect of spiritual healing.

## **6 CONCLUSION**

With its unique core concepts and practical logic, postmodern narrative therapy provides a new idea and path for individual spiritual healing. Its characteristics of "de-labeling, emphasizing empowerment and reconstructing life meaning" are in line with the core needs of current individual mental health services. It can effectively help individuals break away from negative cognition, arouse inner strength, rebuild positive self-identity and resolve various mild to moderate psychological distress. However, in practical application, the therapy still faces predicaments such as an imperfect theoretical system, insufficient professional quality of practitioners, poor localization adaptation and limited application scope, which restrict its therapeutic effect and popularization and application.

In the future, we should base ourselves on China's reality, constantly improve the theoretical and practical system of the therapy, strengthen the training of professional talents, promote localized improvement, and integrate multiple intervention methods to make postmodern narrative therapy more in line with the practical needs of individual spiritual healing. At the same time, we should continuously deepen the empirical research and practical exploration of narrative therapy, explore more of its value in individual mental health services, help individuals get rid of spiritual distress and achieve self-growth, and provide strong support for the construction of national mental health.

## **COMPETING INTERESTS**

The authors have no relevant financial or non-financial interests to disclose.

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