Whistle While You Work: The Role of Positive Factors in Therapy

Cameron Gordon, PhD
University of North Carolina, Wilmington

Overview

- Positive Psychology
- Increasing Life (and Job) Satisfaction
  - What is really important
  - Coping with difficulty
- Helping Clients
  - Building hope
  - Increasing motivation
  - Personal expansion
  - Post-traumatic growth
- Having Fun in Therapy

Positive Psychology

- Deficit Models in Health Care and Psychology
  - Identifying weaknesses
  - Treating and preventing disease and disorder
- Positive Psychology Perspectives
  - Identifying strengths
  - Promoting health, happiness, fitness, pleasure, fulfillment, and goal attainment
  - Use strengths to overcome weaknesses
- RT and Positive Psychology

RT and Positive Psychology

- Physician Training:
  - Deficit model
  - Outsource emotional support
  - RT is the positive side of health care
- Relationships Strongly Related to Happiness
  - RT provides relationship during distress
  - Relationship is a common factor in treatment
- Times of transition are times open to influence

Increasing Life (and Job) Satisfaction

- Societal Values
  - What really is important?
  - Recreational therapists are perfectly positioned to experience real importance

- Job-Specific Stressors
  - Coping with difficulty
  - Involvement with those experiencing major life struggles can be hard

Meaning vs. Materialism

- Society is conspiring against us!
- And they are winning because we drift

Increasing Satisfaction

- Finding Meaning
  - Intrinsic goals and values
  - “Direct path to happiness”
  - Personal growth, intimacy, contribution to the community
    - If only RT could help you attain these!
- Coping with Difficulty
  - Assess coping resources
  - Actively choose adaptive coping techniques

Helping Clients

- Building Hope
- Increasing Motivation
- Personal Expansion
- Post-Traumatic Growth

The Importance of Hope

- Hope is associated with:
  - Better physical health
  - Better mental health
  - Better problem-solving skills
  - Better performance in several domains

- Before clients invest energy in therapy, they must have hope that your treatment will help

Building Hope

- Gaining Confidence in Treatment
  - Clients will assess you first!
  - Competent, encouraging, and want to help?
  - Will provide a positive experience?
- Increasing Hope Itself
  - Conceptualize clear goals
  - Produce several pathways to attainment
  - Motivate energy to pursue goals
  - Reframe obstacles as challenges to overcome

Increasing Motivation

- Effort
  - A finite resource
  - Start-up vs. task completion
- Identifying Strengths: Positive Asset Search
  - Builds rapport and optimism
  - Identifies client interests
  - Helps open mind to risk messages
  - Positive affect helps confront negative info
- Shift to More Intrinsic Orientation

Intrinsic vs. Extrinsic Motivation

- Intrinsic activities are done because the individual finds them inherently enjoyable, rewarding, or valuable
  - Autonomous motivation
- Extrinsic activities are done because the individual sees them as a means to an end
  - Forced motivation

Benefits of Intrinsic Motivation

- Stronger Identification with Goals
- More Interest and Enjoyment in Activities
- More Effort
- Better Coping with Stress
- Increased Persistence
- Internalization of Treatment Protocols
  - Treatment adherence
- More Successful Treatment Outcome
  - Longer-lasting treatment efficacy
- Advanced Well-Being

Increasing Intrinsic Motivation: Self-Determination Theory

- 1. Increase Autonomy
  - Identify choices
  - Provide opportunities for self-direction
  - Acknowledge perspectives and feelings
  - “Doctor listens to how I want to do things.”
- 2. Increase Competence
  - Provide optimal and achievable challenge
  - Give positive feedback about performance
  - Avoid controlling language and evaluations

Increasing Intrinsic Motivation: Self-Determination Theory

- 3. Increase Relatedness
  - Provide a positive, relationally supportive context

- Autonomy, competence, and relatedness are not sufficient to create intrinsic motivation!
  - Inherent interest and enjoyment
  - Novelty, intrinsic value, excitement

Personal Expansion

- Inherent Drive Toward Growth
- Significantly Related to Positive Affectivity

- Novelty
  - Growth through breadth
  - Excitement from new experiences
- Augmentation
  - Growth through depth
  - Expanding in context of stability/familiarity

Post-Traumatic Growth

- Deriving Benefits From Trauma
  - Greater appreciation for life
  - Sense of personal strength
  - Spiritual growth
- Shifts in What is Important
  - Assumptions have been shaken
  - Redefine importance and satisfaction
  - Focus on struggle not trauma
- Can Take Years

Having Fun in Therapy

- Common Factors in Psychotherapy
  - Client strengths and other traits (40%)
  - Relationship – empathy, warmth, encouragement, acceptance (30%)
  - Hope and expectations (15%)
  - Specific interventions (15%)
- Your Environment is Their Environment
  - Staying in Treatment
  - Generalizing Behaviors Post-Treatment

So…..

- Whistle While You Work
- It will be more fun for you…
- …and more beneficial for your clients

Thank You!

gordonc@uncw.edu