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# RELATIONSHIP, LOVE, SEX AND IDENTITY: IN THE EYES OF NARRATIVE APPROACH TO COUNSELING

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# Content

2

- What is narrative approach
- Dominant stories about young people on love, sex and relationships
- New stories
- Meaning remaking

# Ben Law

3

- Social worker for more than 15 years in Hong Kong
  - ▣ Provide counseling in school social work setting, family service setting and for families with specific learning difficulties youth
- Training
  - ▣ Structural family therapy from Dr. Lee Wai-yung
  - ▣ Narrative therapy in South Australia
- Relevant research on narrative therapy
  - ▣ M. Phil. at CUHK under Prof. Joyce Ma (2000)
  - ▣ How to use narrative approach for youth cases in school social work setting

# Student team

4

- Five groups of students will present alternative stories on young people about love, sex and relationship diversity.

# What is a narrative?

5

- It is the story we have live with ourselves.
- Sometimes we can get through the pain but sometimes we are stuck with the stories
- Changes:
  - ▣ Understanding the themes -> allow rooms for new changes  
e.g. a story of family struggle to a story of caring

# Narrative is a vehicle leading to change in counseling

6

- **Studying** narrative
  - ▣ Beginning, middle, end (Aristotle, Poetics VII)
- **Doing** narrative
  - ▣ We organize our lives within a particular narrative
  - ▣ We **organize our experience and our memory** of human happenings mainly in the form of narrative – stories, excuses, myths, reasons for doing and not doing, and so on. (Jerome Bruner, 1991, p.4-5)

# Narrative by sociology (Richardson, 1990,p.117)

7

- displays the **goals and intentions** of human actors;
- makes individuals, cultures and societies comprehensible **as wholes**, it **humanizes time**;
- **contemplates the effect** of our action,
- **alters the direction** of our lives



# Narrative by anthropology (Oochs & Capps, 1996)

8

- Narrative is the fundamental means of **making sense of experience**.
- Narrative and self are inseparable in that **narrative is simultaneously born out of experiences and gives shape to experience**.
- Narrative activity provides tellers with an opportunity to **impose order on otherwise disconnected events**, and to create continuity between past, present, and imagined worlds.
- Narrative also **interfaces self and society**.

# For any narrative

9

- Basic content
- Higher level content, **meaning or theme**
- Emotion, belief, motivation and behavior attached to the narrative

# What is the uniqueness of approach in counseling?

10

- It starts from clients' stories, and we believe that story is the most fundamental
- It is the change of clients' stories that will affect lives
- It focuses on the **second order change** rather than first order change
  - ▣ We work with clients together for hope
  - ▣ A new **meaning** to the original problem
- We have to be aware of the obstacles that hinder our understanding of clients' stories
  - ▣ DOMINANT STORIES

# Dominant stories

11

- Sources
  - ▣ Societal assumptions
  - ▣ Cultural stories
  - ▣ Established theories and knowledge
  - ▣ Normative daily practice for an individual
- Importance of dominant stories
  - ▣ Provide a yardstick to assess a situation, a person, and a system
  - ▣ Provide the legitimacy of social control
  - ▣ Provide an easy referencing for every day lives

# Dominant stories in the world



facebook

Search

Home Profile Account



Ben Law

Wall Info Photos

What's on your mind?

Attach



Options

RECENT ACTIVITY

- Ben wrote on Kathy Lau's Wall.
- Ben commented on Katie Wong's status.  
6 more similar stories
- Ben and Bess Cheng are now friends. Like Comment

Ho Hosca 老兄, 你個網頁係你唔係口老題? X

November 28 at 7:30pm · Like · Comment

Ben Law Ho ho, 是呀, 試緊電話, 你話好嗎?  
November 28 at 10:26pm · Like

Ho Hosca ok lo you remember me??  
November 20 at 11:54pm · Like

Write a comment...

RECENT ACTIVITY

- Ben and Eric Cheung are now friends. Like Comment
- Ben wrote on Joanne Chan's Wall.
- Ben commented on Sandy Kuan's status.  
8 more similar stories
- Ben and Vanessa Law are now friends. Like Comment

Ben Law was tagged in Heidi Ng Hoi Yu's album.

Wall Photos

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# Some typical dominant stories

13

- A boy with a tattoo
- Stepfather and stepdaughter in Latino families
- The easiest way to get success for young people
- Parents in Hong Kong
- Afternoon session presentation
- <http://www.youtube.com/user/SunLifeFinancial?v=etirtR7-l9c>

# Dominant stories about young people's love, sex and relationships

14

- Society and cultures
  - ▣ Young people will have sex if they are in a relationships
  - ▣ Young people's relationship is unstable.
  - ▣ Studying is most important, puppy love wastes time
  - ▣ Only boys will approach girls; decent girls should not approach boys in relationships
  - ▣ Boys should pay the bill

Dominant stories about love, sex,  
relationship and identity:  
Adolescent psychology knowledge





# Theoretical Perspectives on Adolescent Intimacy

16

- Sullivan's developmental progression
  - ▣ Infancy: need for contact and for tenderness
  - ▣ Early childhood: need for adult participation
  - ▣ Middle childhood: need for peers and peer acceptance
  - ▣ Preadolescence: need for intimacy
  - ▣ Early adolescence: need for sexual contact and intimacy with opposite-sex peer
  - ▣ Late adolescence: need for integration into adult society



# Dating and the Development of Intimacy (Montgomery, 2005)

17

- Girls
  - ▣ Cross-sex relationships may provide a context for further *expression* of intimacy
- Boys
  - ▣ Cross-sex relationships may provide a context for further *development* of intimacy

# The Impact of Dating on Adolescent Development

18

- Impact of more serious dating is complicated
  - ▣ Early starters (before age 15)
    - True for both sexes, but research has focused on girls
    - Less socially mature, less imaginative, less oriented toward achievement, less happy with who they are and how they look
  - ▣ Late bloomers
    - Adolescents who do not date at all show signs of retarded social development and feelings of insecurity



# The Impact of Dating on Adolescent Development

19

- Romance has a powerful impact on adolescents' emotional states
- Adolescents' real and fantasized relationships trigger strong emotions



# Sexual Activity During Adolescence

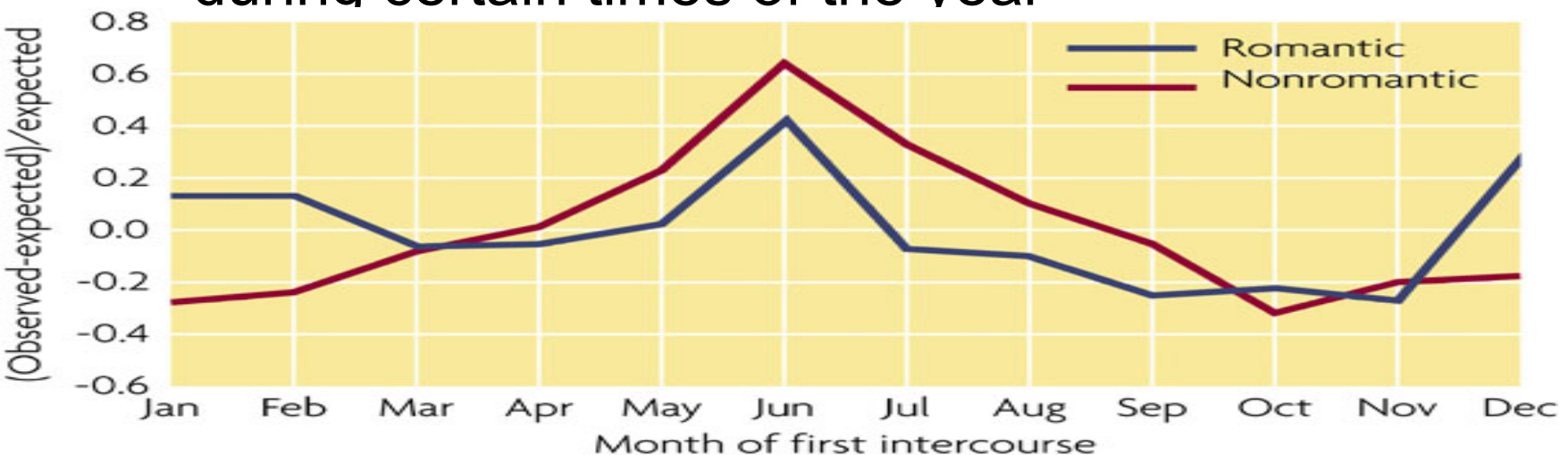
20

- Promiscuity in adolescence is rare
- Stages of sexual activity
  - ▣ Autoerotic behavior – sexual behavior that is experienced alone (e.g., having erotic fantasies, masturbation, nocturnal orgasms)
  - ▣ By high school, transition to sexual activity involving another person
- For many girls, first sexual experience is forced
  - ▣ Especially among girls 13 or younger

# Prevalence and timing of sexual intercourse

21

- Prevalence of sexual intercourse
  - ▣ Slightly fewer adolescents are having sex compared to previous eras
  - ▣ However, those who are do so at a somewhat earlier age
- Adolescents are more likely to lose their virginity during certain times of the year



# Pros and cons of dominant stories for counselor

22

## Good sides

- To check whether adolescents are at risk
- To normalize a situation
- To provide a professional judgment

## Bad sides

- To assume adolescents involve in intimacy acts
- Knowledge knows more than the adolescents
- Avoid the active understanding from youth's perspectives

In narrative approach, we intend to be the active listener to the clients, so that the clients can find a NEW meaning to their lives, relationships and identities



# Five alternative stories from young people

Relationship, sex and sexual diversity

# Let's work together

25

- From the start of the presentation to now, what aspect impresses you most?
- Among all the alternative stories, which new story impress you most?

# Meaning-remaking

26

- Understanding
  - ▣ Passive understanding
  - ▣ Active personal understanding
  - ▣ Dialogical understanding
  
- All narrative works aim at meaning re-making
- Meaning remaking aims to transform the life themes from “injury” to “hope”, from “dying” to “living”
- Meaning changes from active personal understanding and dialogical understanding

# When we adopt narrative approach to counseling young people about love, sex, relationship and identity

27

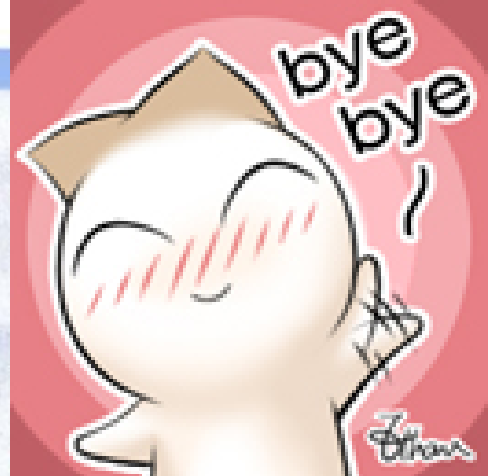
- We have to be aware of our own dominant stories about youth
- To listen carefully about young people about their own perspectives and the meaning
- We are aware of the problems, beliefs, behaviors of clients. We focus more on the personal meaning of the combo of attributes.
- Only through understanding that we can help young people explore new meaning to their lives

# Summary

28

- Narrative approach aims at listening to the meaning of stories told by clients
- Counselors should be aware of their own dominant stories, especially love, sex, relationship and identity are full of assumptions and ideas from adults' world
- Meaning-remaking is the key to narrative approach





Life is without meaning.  
You bring the meaning to  
it. The meaning of life is  
whatever you ascribe it to  
be. Being alive is the  
meaning.



(Joseph Campbell)

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