

“Been There, Survived That”; Emotional Labor and the Dual Role of Counselor/Survivor: An Examination of Counselors’ Narratives and Methods

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Abstract

Each year millions of women suffer from violence and abuse within their relationships. With the massive number of women affected, counseling provides a great opportunity to assist victims in moving past such trauma. Previous research examined areas concerning domestic violence counseling. However, the current study provided a unique opportunity to interview counselors who were also survivors of domestic violence. The study examined how counselors/survivors handle emotional labor within the counseling field, their use of stories within counseling sessions, as well as the communication adjustments made to suite the needs of their clients. Two different research questions concern the use of stories and the emotional labor experienced by counselors. The counselors used stories to educate clients, form positive role models, and empowerment. Counselors noted the importance of emotional labor within their field and focused upon keeping their personal and professional lives separate, the coping strategies used, and how they believed they were better prepared for their job because of their own personal experiences.

Introduction

Domestic violence constitutes a serious problem affecting couples and families all over the world. A person is more likely to be hit or killed in their home by another family member than anywhere else or by anyone else (Feldman & Ridley, 2000). Research shows that husbands or intimate partners commit approximately 25% to 30% of all rapes, and researchers estimated that intimate partners abused 1.9 to 4 million women in their homes each year in the United States (Howard, Riger, Campbell, & Wasco, 2003).

Defining domestic violence proved to be a difficult task regardless of how frequently it occurs throughout the nation. For this study Rydstrom (2003) best defined violence as, “A physical force or power that either will result in or more likely will lead to physical and/or psychological injuries” (p. 677). Other definitions of violence noted that violence within intimate relationships often resulted in physical injuries and health problems, psychological anguish, and in severe cases, death (Stroshine & Robinson, 2003). Although domestic violence affects both men and women in the relationships, the majority of abuse, 90% to 95%, occurs against women (Melton & Belknap, 2003).

The number of women affected by domestic violence illustrates the severity of the problem of abuse within the United States. Counseling sessions offer a safe place for women to disclose their stories to a safe person who can assist in understanding the situation fully and

preparing them to take positive steps towards a better future (Faulconer, Hodge, & Culver, 1999). Over time survivors realized and understood that the counseling sessions offered a safe environment to express what they experienced and how they truly felt with the situation and feelings concerning their own well being.

Despite the benefits of counseling for survivors of violence, the stress of working as a counselor causes great turmoil within their own lives, particularly if they survived a similar situation. Many researchers examined these types of situations and looked specifically at the stress each person carries in and out of work each day (Sass, 2000). The current study examined the combination of stress and the effects of working in a high emotional labor environment for counselors who survived domestic violence and now work to help others through their own situations of abuse.

Rationale

With the number of women affected by domestic violence it is important for researchers to continue digging deeper in the area of abuse for several different reasons. Multiple areas exist for researchers to examine when discussing domestic violence such as the role of conflict, emotional labor, and counseling.

Specifically in the area of domestic violence and abuse counseling, future research needs to examine the positive and negative effects of emotional labor with employees and how experiencing such labor affects job performance. Multiple articles highlighted the need for further research in areas that work specifically with other people (Gray, 2002; Sass, 2000). Research showed that working with people could lead to a sense of healing and resolve for employees. However the cost may be greater to the patients whose needs must remain the priority during the healing process. Further research needs to examine the amount of emotional labor and stress felt by counselors of domestic violence who have also survived abuse themselves to determine the role either emotional labor or their past experience plays in helping others through their own situations.

Despite all the research on domestic violence, counseling, emotional labor, and the importance of telling stories, the problem lies in that no research has specifically examined the counselor who plays a dual role as counselor and survivor and the stress that occurs with their position. Emotional labor is a difficult task for everyone working directly with other people. However, the stress for counselors helping others move past a similar situation may cause additional pressure and even a recurrence of their own past trauma.

Review of Literature

The previous sections touched briefly on the ideas of domestic violence, counseling, giving voice to experiences, and emotional labor. The need for further research exists to combine the areas. Multiple research studies examined each of the elements in a variety of ways provide a solid base of understanding to move forward with a research project that intends to combine such areas of study.

So why do survivors of domestic violence and abuse choose to share their stories? Faulconer, Hodge, and Culver (1999) found three answers to this question. The survivors “felt safe with their confidant, they felt they needed help, and the opportunity presented itself” (p. 170). Whether the confidant was a friend or a health care provider, the participants felt that they could express what had happened to them regardless of the motive to speak.

One other important area concerning domestic violence and counseling is the possibility for the counselors to also be affected by the sessions (Lemoncelli & Carey, 1996; Miller, Wagner, Britton, & Gridley, 1998). Many counselors experienced violence and abuse themselves and now work to help others going through similar situations. The authors discussed how the Western culture expects healers to be without a personal history of violence. However in other cultures, such as Shamanism, healers do not conceal their wounds but display them as marks of their skills and knowledge. In other words, by acknowledging their survival they become more credible to their patients and other survivors.

Miller et al. (1998) described how it is necessary for counselors to deal with their own past trauma in order to fully assist survivors in the future. Without recognition and proper healing of the self the counselor may experience stress and possible burnout on the job. Miller et al. (1998) noted the importance of a referent power where individuals identified with a group and their behavior became consistent with that of the group. Therefore it is important to create a healthy work environment where the group assists in supporting one another within the stresses of the system.

After examining past research on domestic violence two communication theories helped form the questions in why to perform the research project: narrative theory and accommodation theory. Narrative theory directly relates to violence through examining the effects the negative act causes to the individual and considering what effects telling a story on violence both for the narrator and the audience.

This study examined the narratives told by survivors in collaboration with the narrative paradigm theory. Fisher (1984) first conceptualized the notion of the narrative paradigm. Stutts and Barker (1999) outlined Fisher's five assumptions within their own study to bring to light the number of research possibilities available when using narrative theory. The researchers included that people are storytellers in their everyday life, the basis of communication occurs through stories, people use stories to evaluate their own communication styles, people justify their actions through stories, and the "world as we know it is a set of stories that allows each of us to construct and adapt our realities" (Stutts & Barker, 1999, p. 214).

A narrative approach provides the best way to analyze and examine counselor stories for several different reasons. Bruner (2002) examined how narratives form, create, and maintain a sense of self. Bruner described the process of creating the self as a "balancing act" (p. 78). This refers to the desire to have power and control over situations but with an understanding the impossibility of planning for each and every event that occurs. What is important to take from narrative is the realization that people use narratives to make sense of their life, their world, and the people surrounding them (Bruner, 2002; Stephenson & Haylett, 2000).

Accommodation theory also adds a great deal of insight to the research project in addition to narrative theory. First communication accommodation theory, CAT, states, "communicators have motivational reasons for adjusting their speech toward one another," and secondly people "behaviorally and evaluatively respond to one another with respect to perceived characteristics of these adjustments" (Putman & Street, 1984, p. 97). Therefore communicators have motives for communicating what and how they do and evaluate what is communicated to them in return to adjust to the specific context.

Completing a study concerning narratives and accommodation within situations of domestic violence becomes easier with an understanding of the two theories, their application,

and examples of previous research. Through taking positive steps such as the use of counseling, and specifically narrative counseling, helping survivors move past the violence experienced becomes an attainable goal. With this goal in mind the following research question was formulated to ask of counselors working with survivors of domestic violence and abuse:

RQ1: What are the perceived benefits of telling one's story of domestic violence and abuse from a counselor/survivor perspective?

The question considers gaps where future research can address the positive aspects of including the use of narrative within counseling sessions to help those who suffered from instances of domestic violence and abuse. Although examining the stories and needs of the clients is important, it also leaves an area concerning the effects such work has on the counselors, particularly if the counselors are also survivors of domestic violence.

Hochschild (1979) first examined the idea of emotional work within a social psychological study examining social rules and regulations. Hochschild noted emotional work means, "working on or managing an emotion" (p. 561). This type of work only referred to the means by which people try and control their emotions and not the outcome that such emotional work causes in specific instances. This definition developed into emotional labor which Hochschild (1983) defined as "the induction or suppression of feeling in order to sustain the outward appearance that produces the proper state of mind in others – that of being cared for in a safe and convivial place" (p. 7). Hochschild also identified that particular jobs that require emotional labor usually include "face-to-face contact with others, ask the employee to produce an emotional state in another person, and allow the employee/employer to maintain control over their own personal emotions" (p. 147).

Emotional labor appears most frequently in what Leidner (1999) called "interactive service work—jobs that require workers to interact directly with customers or clients, regardless of economic sector" (p. 82). Studies examining service work often focus on the employer and their ability to manage and/or control the emotional labor of their employees (Korczynski, 2003; Leidner, 1999). The job training often includes introducing the employee to the company, expectations of the worker as a whole, and teaching trainees how to use scripts and control feelings when on the job (Leidner, 1999).

Researchers also noted how much work goes into controlling emotions. James (1989) discussed how at times the labor could be painful and very difficult to handle on a daily basis. She goes on to say that emotional labor requires employees to give something different of themselves with each situation and no circumstance ever has the same solution. Although every woman that counselors meet professionally has been abused, there are multiple types of abuse and thousands of different ways in which women handle what has happened to them. The stress of giving something different with each client, every single day can be extremely difficult for a counselor to handle.

Emotional labor can lead to consequences such as stress and/or burnout that may ultimately affect the worker's ability to cope with such stressors on a day-to-day basis (Sass, 2000). One major problem such workers face includes the never-ending situations that arise at their jobs. Although people survive abuse and move on after counseling, many times women return to their abusive partners and begin the abuse cycle all over again.

Emotional labor affects many different working environments as discussed previously. The following research question stemmed from an interest in how and if

emotional labor plays a role within the counseling field, and whether the effects of emotional labor occur more with being a survivor.

RQ2: How do counselors characterize emotional labor?

This section illustrated how the prominence of domestic violence affects individual relationships, self-esteem, and those around abusive situations such as family, friends, and even counselors. Specifically with counselors the stress of dealing with survivors of violence everyday increases the amount of emotional labor they handle at work. How counselors handle their emotions and whether dealing with emotional labor everyday has positive or negative side effects needs further examination within the communication field.

Methodology

Several questions arose after a thorough examination of past research in the areas of domestic violence and counseling, mainly the concern for how counselors handled dealing with difficult situations everyday both in and out of their work environment especially with living as a survivor of violence. The following section illustrates the procedure in obtaining participants, discussion of interview process and method of analysis used.

The present study included interviews with survivors/counselors who survived abuse and moved to a point where they can now assist others with the healing process and moving on with their own lives. Interviewing counselors who also survived domestic violence provided a unique perspective on the topic because of their own personal experience. All counselors survived domestic violence at some point in their life whether the abuse occurred during their childhood or as an adult. All participants were women, counselors, and survivors of abuse between the ages of 24-55 totaling 25 participants.

Results

After conducting interviews, coding began by transcribing each respondent's answers and then grouping common occurring themes into categories. This section illustrates the categories formed from responses in relation to the initial research questions posed.

The first research question focused on what benefits occur from telling stories. This study focused on storytelling benefits from the unique perspective of a counselor and survivor of domestic violence. Participants could relate to their clients feelings because of their own previous experience. The participants also provided insight to working as a counselor and listening to traumatic stories everyday. Therefore the researcher posed the following research question:

RQ1: What are the perceived benefits of telling one's story of domestic violence and abuse from a counselor/survivor perspective?

Several categories emerged from questions involving the telling of stories and their importance within the counseling field. The following categories developed in discussing the use and benefits of stories with victims including educating clients, positive role models, and fully understanding the client's situation.

One common theme discussed within the interviews concerns the ability to educate clients on how to cope with their situations, ways to handle the situation now, and discussing choices for the future. Eighteen counselors (72%) noted that stories assisted in educating clients on several different aspects both within the healing process and steps to take after leaving counseling sessions.

So once I interview a client, I make a list of objectives, plans, and goals for the client and myself to start approaches.

This participant mentioned one of the elements of counseling included making a list of objectives and goals for both the counselor and the client to share with each other what they each want to accomplish with counseling. By sharing goals with each other the ability to remain on the same pace was easy because of the knowledge of what each individual wants. Accomplishing set plans became easier when clients and counselors both understood the individual goals.

What's important to me is the support and the resources, and the family system that they have available to them as far as supporting them, which with any type of therapy, that's one of the first things that I find out.

Another element in educating clients concerned informing the client of types of support systems available. Finding out who else plays an important role in clients' lives affects how they cope with situations outside of the counselor's office. Understanding what role family and friends play in the victim's life may help the counselor see who the client can turn to if they feel lost or troubled by something that happens in the future. Those bonds assisted counselors in building a support system for clients to rely on when counseling ends.

Another area frequently mentioned within the interviews showed that stories provided information about a role model for women to relate to, to see that they are not alone, and that even their own counselor experienced abuse and moved on. Seventeen counselors (68%) discussed how using others' stories or their own personal stories aided in helping clients realize that they can move on from their situation.

I give 'em examples of other women that I've dealt with, you know, to just kinda give them an idea that they're not out there alone in this situation, and you know, this isn't the first time that we've dealt with people in the same situation that they're in.

This first example illustrated how stories show clients that they are not alone in their situation, and they are not the only person who survived victimization within a relationship. It relayed the importance of communicating to victims that others have experienced a similar situation and there are people who understand and can help them move on with their lives and be successful.

The next example shows that the counselor's own personal history with violence can serve as a useful tool in helping their clients see that people move on from troublesome situations.

It just depends on, you know, what has happened in their lives, and if it's something that's happened to them, if it happened to me also, then, you know, I may tell them how I'm not a victim anymore, I'm a survivor. It kinda helps them.

The participant used their personal story as evidence for victims who might question the possibility of getting out of their abusive situations. The clients see women who went through a similar situation, moved on, and now help others and lead a successful life on their own. The use of personal stories also aids in forming a connection between the counselor and the client while in counseling sessions. It helped the client to realize they too can survive and move on.

Counselors also talked about using stories to try and fully understand their client's situation as to what they have been through, finding out if abuse occurred before, and assessing the situation to the fullest. Eight counselors (32%) mentioned how stories work well to gather information about what the client experienced.

I will have a little bit of information before they get here so that I know whether we're dealing with something that's just happened, and they're going to be very upset, and whether it's something that's ongoing, which is oftentimes very, very difficult to talk about, so it really just depends on the situation.

In the example above the counselor tried to understand the client's situation and where they were coming from. The participant commented on her attempt to know what the client's situation was as far as the time frame in which it occurred. Some clients come in directly after an abusive situation where others take years to come to terms with what has happened and look to counseling to help them sort out their feelings. Either way the counselors need to understand the mindset of the client to know how to best approach their time together.

After examining the stories told it is also important to examine how counselors handled their emotions on an everyday basis. Previous research indicated that doctors and therapists make an effort to accommodate their patients' needs within their visits or sessions (Ferrara, 1991). The research showed the need for future research in the area of accommodating others for the sake of the client or customer. Addressing this call for research the second research question asked:

RQ2: How do counselors characterize emotional labor?

In addition to explaining their use of emotional labor counselors discussed side effects or consequences of emotional labor and working in such a stressful field. Below are the categories that formed concerning how counselors handled their emotions in such a stressful field and how being a survivor possibly affects the performance of emotional labor on the job.

One important aspect of handling emotional labor included counselors keeping their private lives separate from work as much as possible. Nineteen (76%) counselors discussed how important keeping the two roles separate was for them personally as a survivor and professionally as a counselor. One aspect mentioned involved dealing with their own issues before ever becoming a counselor. One subject used the analogy of 'taking out the trash' to explain working through her own personal issues. Listening to traumatic stories of violence and abuse can have an affect on counselors especially if counselors are also survivors. It is important for counselors to take initiative to ensure their readiness to hear and help others with their own cases of abuse.

Well, I think it's just a matter of you dealing with the stuff that you went through. If you yourself are healthy, if you have dealt with all the trash, then you'll be alright. And, you know, if you need counseling, go get it. Counselors need counseling just like anybody else.

Another element in separating personal and professional life concerned a constant awareness that the purpose of the session is to help the clients and not themselves. The participant discussed how she keeps her emotions in check in order to remain focused upon her clients. Although she understood the frustration and heartache that her clients go through, she cannot take on their emotions or feelings.

Well I have to remember that it's not about me. It's about the victims. I see some of the same frustrations when I was a victim, trying to get through the system, so some things have changed, some things haven't. So I know how to keep my emotions pretty well in check.

Despite the importance in separating professional from personal life sometimes counselors felt the affects of working with tough cases day after day. Several counselors, thirteen total (52%), mentioned how they personally cope with such a tough work

environment. Counselors discussed the importance of debriefing with others, having good mentors and support groups to turn to, and even having hobbies to keep their mind off of work.

There are certain cases that hit you really hard and usually if that's the case, I'll look to a co-worker or talk to my supervisor or just, you know, the just so I can get it out and let them know how I feel without breaking, you know, the confidentiality of anybody else.

One thing that worries me in this industry is burnout. I have to hope that my venting network and support group and so forth keep me from, from that.

The first example showed instances where the counselors used support groups and/or co-workers to vent their frustrations. Discussing cases with co-workers enabled counselors to speak freely about their clients because other counselors related to the experience through their own work. Using co-workers as a support system provided a close-knit group that understood the stress that comes from counseling, someone to listen to your complaints, and others who may provide ideas for how to handle stress both in and out of the workplace. The second example introduced burnout within the workplace. The counselor believed that having a good support system around her provided the opportunity to vent her frustrations to others dealing with similar cases. Without a good support system she feels burnout may occur.

Counselors agreed that emotional labor played a huge role within their field and working one on one with clients. Twelve (48%) counselors believed it necessary to mask their own emotions while working with clients.

They may tell me something completely shocking, and you are trained as a therapist to keep a neutral expression on your face, because if you react in some way, they may perceive that as not accepting them, or judging them in some way, so you do have to be very careful.

Through masking their emotions counselors gave clients the opportunity to speak freely about what happened to them and not fear being judged or ridiculed by the counselor during the conversation. If counselors reacted shocked or surprised by something a client says the chances of the clients shutting down and not talking any further increased.

It's possible for a survivor to love the person that abused them; they just don't like the behavior they did to them. So sometimes, you know well we're gung-ho, we're gonna get him, so you have to watch what you're saying to victims because just because you feel that they may be feeling that way, you don't have the right to project that and push the victim, because they'll back down.

When masking emotions counselors need to be conscious of what the client wants to happen when the counseling sessions are over. Although counselors work to remove women from dangerous situations instances occur where the client wants to remain in the relationship. The participant discussed how she remains cautious in discussing options and future plans with clients because she cannot overstep her boundaries and lose the client's trust in the counselor.

The bad thing is that eventually I guess you kind of get numb to the...I hate to say that, but you do, you see it so much that it eventually it's not as emotional as much as it was when you first started.

The participants talked about how over time masking becomes easier to do on the job. The more cases each counselor sees the less likely they react shocked or surprised to what clients share with them about their experience. Although the last participant and other counselors believed this to be a negative side affect, many counselors thought the more

exposure they had to difficult cases the better they could remain a neutral person for clients to talk to openly and honestly about their lives.

One area of particular interest concerns the fact that each individual counselor survived domestic violence. When discussing concerns with emotional labor counselors felt their experiences helped to make them better counselors in the long run. Many counselors noted that others helping them through the healing process inspired their choice to go into counseling and the opportunity to help others. Eleven counselors (44%) noted how their own experiences paved the way to becoming a counselor.

I feel that I have been through a lot. So I just kinda sit and reflect as far as...I don't think it hinders, my past experience, it helps out a lot.

The respondent noted how her own survival forced her to make a positive out of a negative situation. In changing her perspective she overcame the abuse and went on to now help others overcome their own experiences. Through her own story she communicated to other victims that this concept occurs when the client makes the choice to do so. Clients recognize similar hardships through their own counselor and make the connection that they too can make a positive out of a negative situation.

And like I said, once you have been through that situation, it's something you don't forget. But when you look into someone's eyes and you know their Dad has been raping them or abusing them and they're so ashamed, you've got to get to the point with them, and let them know it's not your fault, you know. You haven't been ruined, you've been abused; you did nothing wrong. That's, that's one of my biggest things is to let them know they did nothing wrong.

One thing many counselors noted concerned their ability to identify quickly women suffering from abusive husbands or partners. The participant discussed how this ability both helps and hinders with her job as a counselor. She felt it helped because she could quickly identify certain characteristics and emotions that clients may be feeling but cannot find the words to express. However, she believed that her own experiences hindered the process because it can bring back old memories and personal feelings within counseling sessions. Although many counselors expressed dealing with their issues before becoming counselors, several noted that some cases bring back what they went through.

Discussion

This section examines the results in comparison with past research and identifying the steps necessary for counselor/survivors to perform and maintain their own personal wellness in working within the counseling field. The participants addressed many different issues in their responses but several main categories emerged. The current study focused specifically on counselor/survivors to discover what they felt made an impact on their counseling approach and whether they believed their own personal experience to cause harm or actually help in counseling others through a similar situation.

Through storytelling counselors empowered clients to make choices for themselves and write a different ending to the story about themselves. Counselors first addressed the client to understand their situation. The participants noted the importance of finding out why the client wants counseling so that the counselor maintained the same mindset and understood the victim's desires. Many times victims do not want to leave the abusive relationship. The review of literature discussed how many times the women feel that abuse is something they have to deal with in the relationship (Stroshine & Robinson, 2003). They still love their

partner, but do not want the abuse to continue either. Victims see counseling as an opportunity to remedy that situation within their home life. Through understanding the victim fully, the counselor allowed the client to voice their wants, needs, and feelings about the situation, therefore giving them a voice in the matter. Research displayed how the first step in many sessions includes clients having a voice and giving voice to their experiences (Turnage, Jacinto & Kirven, 2003). Stories provided an effective way to allow clients to find their own voice and take it upon themselves to decide what end results they want to see from counseling sessions.

Stories also provided role models for clients to see that they are not alone. Several studies suggested that victims remain within abusive relationships because they feel that no one would believe them or even that they deserve the abuse occurring (Miller, 2003; Rydstrom, 2003). Participants often mentioned the fear clients experienced because they feel alone and their partner communicated that no one would believe them if they asked for help. Clients see someone firsthand who survived and moved on with their own lives. The participants noted how their own experience served as a goal for victims to strive for and become themselves. Many of the counselors shared their own stories with clients and expressed the feelings and the pain they went through, just like the victims.

Through understanding the client's situation and sharing stories, the counselors created a plan of action for the client based on their needs/goals. Previous research noted the ability to understand and acknowledge their role in the situation and then prepare a game plan for what steps to take next (Boylstein & Rittman, 2003; Phipps & True, 1999). Several participants discussed setting a road map for victims to help them move through the healing process. Goals included victims reminding themselves it is not their fault, moving to a shelter to protect themselves and their children, or finding a job to start earning their own money within the home. Smeltzer, Vlases, and Wilhoit (2004) discussed how narratives served to influence others into performing certain goals. The study found that narratives provided a way to help patients envision the end results of therapy or their hospital stay.

RQ2) How do counselors characterize emotional labor?

The first category involved making an extreme effort to keep work and home separate from one another to avoid overlap and stress in the other area. Many of the participants discussed the need to distance themselves from their work and not get "too involved" with their clients and their situations. However, the counselors contradicted themselves within the category. Participants discussed the importance of keeping their private lives separate but also advocated using their own stories of abuse as a way to connect with their clients. The concern is how much information sharing is too much if in the end it ultimately hurts the counselors and prevents them from helping other victims in the future. If the use of their own personal story benefits the client but harms the counselor, then it leads to the possibility of rehashing old memories or even causing burnout.

The possibility of burnout occurring in using one's own story leads into the next category mentioned in counselors being prepared due to their own personal experiences. Past research showed the necessity in counselors dealing with their own past traumas in order to assist survivors in the future (Lemoncelli & Carey, 1996; Miller et al., 1998). The current study also presented the importance of dealing with past issues before becoming a counselor and to know when additional help is needed. The importance lies in counselors choosing to begin in their profession as prepared as possible, including taking care of past issues so that the chance of burnout or additional stress occurring decreases because of the preventative

measures taken. However, many counselors identified that “some cases get to you” regardless of the preparation taken. Certain aspects of cases or clients dredge up old memories or feelings from when the counselor went through the healing process. It is important for counselors to recognize and identify such feelings immediately to determine whether it happened only once, or if the recurring emotions continuously appear when working with clients.

Multiple ways exist to assist counselors in dealing with stressors felt at work include the coping strategies mentioned within the second category. Previous research identified several ways to help counselors work out their emotions to maintain a sense of wellness in their own lives including desensitization, spirituality, physical activity, and a good support network of friends and coworkers (Figley, 2002). The results from the current study also identified similar methods of coping from exercise, getting a massage, journaling, praying, or just going out with friends to let off some steam. Counselors need to take active steps to ensure their health, both mental and physical, to maintain good sessions with their clients and to avoid instances of burnout or compassion fatigue.

The final category presented includes the specific act of masking emotions to benefit the victims in counseling. Each participant believed that emotional labor played an integral role everyday when working with victims of domestic violence and abuse. Past research discussed the importance of displaying a lack of emotions when working with clients (Shuler & Sypher, 2000). The participants for the current study talked about the adverse affects of showing emotions such as clients not disclosing further, feelings of shame or embarrassment, or possibly losing the client all together and not having further sessions with them. It is important to keep personal feelings separate from the workplace in order to maintain the safe place that Hochschild discussed.

For this research project both the narrative paradigm and communication accommodation theory applied. Both concepts applied directly to the research because of the use of stories within counseling sessions and the counselors use of different approaches to each individual client they came in contact with. Stutts and Barker (1999) discussed the assumptions of the narrative paradigm including that people are storytellers, basic communication occurs through narratives, and stories help to build and change our reality. The first two ideas addressed how people are storytellers and that basic communication occurs through stories. Narratives, examples, stories, and innuendos all played an important role between the counselors and their clients. Counselors discussed how stories allowed them to fully understand their client and everything that she had been through to how she ended up in the counselor’s office. Stories allowed clients to speak freely about their situation and provided a mental image for the counselors to truly see what they survived.

Along with understanding their clients, counselors found that stories were an easy way to approach clients both with information and role models of other women who survived a similar instance and had now moved on with their lives. Sometimes such stories were of the counselors own experiences. Clients became more willing to talk to a counselor who could share in their own experience and the emotions felt from dealing with violence within their relationships. Counseling sessions provided a place to swap stories for clients and counselors took that opportunity to share their own story as well as educate clients about future possibilities.

The narrative paradigm also addresses how stories assist in the construction and adaptation of our world. Research showed that victims of domestic violence experience

feelings of being alone, helplessness, and believing that no one has experienced anything similar. However, through meeting with counselors who have survived violence and can share stories enables victims to recognize that they too can overcome and move on just as their counselor did. The counselors' narratives provided clients with a perfect example of how good can come from bad situations.

Along with narratives, the current study also examined the emotional labor that occurred from counselors working with survivors of domestic violence while also living as a survivor. Research showed that accommodation builds a sense of rapport between two people or groups in order to establish a relationship (Ferrara, 1991). As previously discussed, counselors must find a way to connect and communicate with their clients and build trust between them. Through the sharing of their own personal story, counselors believed they were more able to connect with their clients because of the shared experience with violence. Several counselors noted that someone does not have to experience violence to help survivors of abuse. However, all of the participants believed that they were better at their jobs because of their own personal survival.

While working to create a supportive, trustworthy environment, counselors also discussed the need to keep their personal and professional lives separate, masking their own emotions, and even how certain cases affect them personally. Such elements describe divergent communication and the need to create and maintain space between the two parties. Although the counselors described ways in which to separate work from home, they sometimes worked with clients that affected them on a more personal level.

Summary

Several conclusions formed from each of the research questions posed. The first research question addressed the use and benefits of stories within counseling sessions. Each of the categories displayed a unique aspect of why stories are so important and valuable within the counseling field. Stories gave clients the opportunity to express what they experienced, how they felt, and what they wanted to happen in the future concerning themselves and their abusive partner. Stories also provided a chance for victims to hear of others who experienced abuse and moved on to a point where they do not let the abuse become a dominating part of their lives anymore which empowers clients to follow in the same footsteps of other survivors. Finally, stories provided the chance for counselors to educate clients about what abuse is, how it can be stopped, and hopefully prevent clients from entering another abusive relationship. It is important for counselors to recognize the power in using stories both for their own use as a counselor and the benefits experienced by their clients.

After understanding the benefits of storytelling it is important for counselors to remember to take care of themselves before, during, and after entering the counseling field. It is important for counselors to recognize possible side effects from masking their emotions on a daily basis. Both the current study and previous research noted the importance of debriefing among peers and coworkers, keeping a self-check system, and having ways to release stress whether through hobbies or entering counseling themselves. Counselors need to understand possible consequences in entering their professional field, knowing what signs to look for concerning emotional labor stressors from working with clients, and being able to take the proper steps and/or precautions to avoid cases of burnout from occurring.

This study displayed the need for counselor/survivors to take active steps in preparing for the role of counselor, maintaining a sense of wellness throughout their careers

with coping strategies and separation of personal/professional life, and knowing warning signs for extreme levels of stress affecting other areas, possibility for burnout, and even cases of compassion fatigue or countertransference in their lives. Unfortunately such cases of domestic violence and abuse continue occurring around the world. However, with counselors willing to help victims of abuse, educate people around them, and work to maintain their own self, everyone benefits.

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