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Abstract

This study examined how clients discursively constructed non-agency in their first session of individual psychotherapy. The data comprised videotaped and verbatim transcribed first sessions from nine therapies and was analyzed by open reading and focus on the linguistic exposition of the therapeutic dyads' expressions. Using theory-based considerations and data-based analysis of the expressions of both clients and therapists in their talk, we created a model of discursive means for ascribing agentic or non-agentic positions, the 10 Discursive Tools model (10DT). Here we focused on how the client, when presenting his/her issues, displayed problematic or lacking agency by ascribing him/herself a non-agentic position using the non-agency tools. There was large variability in the frequency of use of the non-agency tools, in how the tools were used in combination with each other, and in how the clients moved from one tool to another. The clients could not be classified according to their non-agency tool use patterns. The content of the clients' problems did not determine which tools were used to construct the non-agentic positioning, that is, the client could speak about the same problem with a variety of different non-agency tools, and the same tools were used when positioning towards a variety of issues. The study shows the potential of the 10DT model for the detailed examination of presentations of "not-being-able" produced by clients in psychotherapy discourse, and it suggests that therapists pay close attention to this diversity of expressions.

Keywords: psychotherapy; discourse analysis; problem talk; agency

Constructing Non-Agency at the Beginning of Psychotherapy: The 10DT model

People seek help from conversational therapies when they experience some kind of loss of mastery in their lives. Theoretically, this can be defined as a disturbed sense of agency (Adler, 2012; Anderson & Goolishian, 1992; Dimaggio, 2011; Mackrill, 2009; Wahlström, 2006a, 2006b). From this standpoint, the work on clients' agency problems and advancing their sense of agency becomes the prime mission in counseling and psychotherapy (Adler, 2012; Avdi, 2005; Avdi, Lerou & Seikkula, 2015; Kurri, 2005; Kurri & Wahlström, 2007; Seilonen & Wahlström, 2015).

In this multiple case study, we present a model of how clients use different discursive means, or “tools,” in their first psychotherapy session to create a presentation of loss of agency. Taking a situational, language-focused, and post-psychological point of view, we highlight lost agency as a language-mediated interactional phenomenon (e.g., McLeod, 2006). This is not to say that the experience of lost agency would not be “genuine” in a psychological sense, but we aim to examine in detail how clients achieve the institutionally framed objective of positioning themselves as credible users of psychotherapy (Wahlström & Seilonen, 2016).

Agency and Non-agency

Aspects of Agency

The literature on the concept of agency includes various aspects, such as the sense of separateness, intentional influence, mental ownership, reflectivity, coherent narration, and intersubjectivity. From a more quantitative perspective, a review of six psychometric measures of subjective client agency, understood as the clients' expectations related to their active role in psychotherapy, has been presented by Coleman and Neimeyer (2015).

Sense of separateness. The notion of being separate from one's surroundings is a prerequisite of having any kind of a personal relation to issues. It lies at the basis of a sense of agency (Avdi, 2005; Gillespie, 2012; Kögler, 2010).

Intentional influence. In philosophical discourse, agency has traditionally denoted "the power to do" or "the force that causes effects" (Pope, 1998, pp. 242–243). According to Kögler (2010, 2012), core features of agency are, first, being able to intentionally cause change in the world and, second, to differentiate between actions and events caused either by oneself, or by conditions attributable to external causes.

Pope (1998) states that the notion of an agent refers to someone capable of doing things and making things happen politically and psychologically, implying a degree of activity and independence. Harré (1993) holds that to recognize someone as a social actor means to acknowledge that the person's actions are informed by that individual's intentions

Furthermore, agency is related to affecting things, others, oneself, or one's life (Mackrill, 2009) and to being able to exert an influence over one's own experience (Adler, 2013). Motivation, incentive, and acknowledging oneself as capable of starting action that affects one's surroundings are recognized as essential features of agency (Avdi, 2005; Dimaggio, 2011; Gillespie, 2012; Kögler, 2010, 2012), as are making intentional and constructive choices, changing the course of one's actions, and potentially reaching one's goals while genuinely creating one's life (Avdi, 2005; Emirbayer & Mische, 1998; Jenkins, 2001; Jolanki, 2009).

Mental ownership. Achieving a sense of agency requires the actor to see his/her own mind as autonomous and different from the minds of others (Semerari et al., 2003). It also includes viewing one's psychological experiences as mental phenomena (Bateman & Fonagy, 2004). Thus, the actor can recognize him- or herself as the creator of his/her own thoughts, feelings, actions, and experiences instead of treating them as outside entities (Dimaggio, 2011; Salvatore, Carcione & Dimaggio 2012; Ogden, 1986).

Reflectivity. Agency entails assuming a degree of distance and a critical self-observing or reflexive stance towards one's thinking, actions, or other aspect of oneself (Dimaggio, 2011; Georgaca, 2001; Kennedy, 1997; Rennie, 2010). This includes the possibility of viewing certain impulses or desires as problematic, unwanted, or inauthentic (Kögler, 2012). According to Rennie (2004, 2007), reflexivity is self-awareness, thinking about one's thinking and feeling. Rennie (2004) states that people can have an agentic effect on themselves and on others, either being aware of it or not being aware of it. According to him, radical reflexivity, the awareness of one's self-awareness, forms the basis for true agency, as people can develop a relationship with what they find when they are self-aware (Rennie, 2010).

Coherent narration. Assuming a reflective perspective allows speakers to display their present experiences and/or actions as related to either past events, experiences, or actions, or assumed/expected future ones, and thus to produce continuity in their personal life stories (Georgaca, 2001). This notion highlights agency as a temporally embedded process where the narrated past is reconstructed within the present and carried further into alternative future possibilities (Emirbayer & Mische, 1998; Kupferberg & Green, 2005; Ogden, 1986). Adler (2012) sees agency as a storied representation of a belief that one is able to influence his/her circumstances and as a narrative theme including the individual's sense of autonomy, mastery, achievement, and therefore also their sense of meaning and purpose in life.

Intersubjectivity. From the standpoint of social interaction, intersubjectivity has been suggested as the basis of agency (Gillespie, 2012; Kögler, 2012; Markova, 2003). Agentic actors, while embedded in one situation, transcend this and take a more general perspective (Gillespie, 2012). In psychotherapy, this may imply that the clients incorporate the therapist's position into their own reflective understanding (Georgaca, 2001) and that they are aware of their relationship with the therapist as an autonomous agent (Rennie, 2010).

Loss of Agency

Non-agency or the loss of a sense of agency is experienced as the feeling of losing mastery in some realm of one's life. It has been conceptualized in terms of the person being in the position of an object or victim of some "alien" entity that is initiating the action or controlling him/her (Kupferberg & Green, 2005). Not infrequently, therapy clients do depict themselves as being affected by an illness or an experience as if these were such alien entities (Avdi, Lerou, & Seikkula, 2015; Karatza & Avdi, 2011; Ogden, 1986). Discursively, clients may display what has been coined "agentless talk" by speaking about their unwished-for experiences and actions as just happening to them, thus taking the position of the receiver of their own experiences, or about their present actions as having followed some particular rule or as being the effect of some causal process (Kurri & Wahlström, 2007). According to Wahlström and Seilonen (2016), loss of agency is on one hand an actual state of affairs in a person's life, and on the other hand a discursive presentation or display of oneself as being in a non-agentic position.

Agentic and Non-Agentic Positioning

In everyday discourse and social interaction, people tend to show to themselves, as well as to others, that they will their actions and are the authors of their own deeds and speech (Harré, 1993). The challenge that people face when entering psychotherapy, however, is more complex. The institutional invitation is to present themselves in want of therapeutic help. To answer this call, the clients need to describe and make understandable situations where they either do not initiate actions they wish to or are expected to assume, or where they undertake actions not expected nor wished for either by themselves or by their close community (Wahlström, 2006a). These descriptions—or discursive displays—contribute to the adoption of a non-agentic position in respect to some aspects of one's life. In such non-agentic positions, the speaker's opportunities to influence situations and actions are depicted as reduced, while in adopting an agentic position the speaker is showing him- or herself as taking an active and responsible stance (Wahlström, 2016).

Positioning refers to how people in situated talk place themselves in various ways with regards to different aspects of their experience and life situations, thus creating different positions for themselves (Davies & Harré, 1990; Jolanki, 2009). According to Wahlström (2016), positions are always taken in relation to something or somebody, and they suggest the positioning of both self and others. Positions change when speakers vary the accounts they give of events and the descriptions of the characteristics, rights, and duties that can be attributed to those involved. This situated notion differs from the concept of subject position as used by Guilfoyle (2016), who defines it as a place filled with personally resonant historical experience, storylines, and categories that form a historically coherent and socially sustainable sense of self. The linguistically detailed and situationally sensitive approach adopted in this study, in line with Avdi (2016) and Winslade (2016), defines the concept of position in a way that leaves space for discursive nuances and their variance.

Earlier research on positioning and agency in psychotherapy has shown that disclaiming one's own agency is a relatively common discursive practice adopted by clients, and that positionings evolve and change throughout the course of the therapy process (Avdi, 2012; Kurri & Wahlström, 2005, 2007; Suoninen & Wahlström, 2009). Discursive approaches to therapy research, in particular, have emphasized the availability of multiple subject positions and suggested that the aim of therapy is to introduce new discourses and enhance the client's ability to adopt various subject positions (Avdi & Georgaca, 2009; Avdi, 2016), pointing also to the importance of greater flexibility in position use as a result of therapy (Avdi, 2016).

In problem talk, positioning is multifaceted. It includes constructing positions with regard to the trouble, the therapist, the treatment institution, and the "self," as well as the relation between these positions. The discursive positions clients create may be more or less agentic or non-agentic. Furthermore, the act of presenting oneself as having problems in life (i.e., as non-agentic) is an active discursive deed in itself, and is in that sense a display of agency. In this research, the

construction of agentic or non-agentic positions is considered as giving oneself or others ascriptions of agency or non-agency with the use of discursive devices, which we will refer to as agency or non-agency tools. The clients use such tools to ascribe (non-)agency to themselves and the therapists to ascribe (non-)agency to the clients. In this paper, the focus is on how the clients give ascriptions of non-agency to themselves, that is, how they use non-agency tools in self-referring accounts. The notion of tools is used as a metaphor to underline that taking a non-agentic position is also an active discursive act. This does not mean that presenting oneself as a non-agent would be necessarily intentional in the psychological sense.

The ascription of agency or non-agency for the client—in other words, constructing for him/her an agentic or non-agentic position—is performed by the client him- or herself with self-ascriptions or by the therapist with other-ascriptions. A simple example of self-ascribing non-agency and creating a non-agentic position could be “The panic attacks just spiraled out of control.” The speaker positions himself as the object of panic that acts on its own, and does not refer to himself in the expression in any way, not with a personal pronoun or any other verbalization that would suggest that the speaker is the one who experiences the panic attacks.

In this study, we asked how clients discursively constructed their presentations of non-agency in the first session of psychotherapy. Answering this question entailed creating a model of discursive means with which problematic or lacking agency can be displayed. This model, called the 10 Discursive Tools model (10DT), is presented as the result of the study. The model consists of ten discursive tools of agency and non-agency, and was created using both theory-based considerations and data-based analysis of the discursive means used by clients and therapists in their talk. As stated before, in this study we focused only on the ascriptions of non-agency given by the clients to themselves. Hence, self-ascriptions of agency given by the clients and ascriptions of both agency and non-agency given to the clients by the therapists were left to further research.

Method

Participants and Data

The primary data of this study consisted of the first sessions of nine individual psychotherapies (their length varying from 19 to 78 sessions) conducted by five different trainee therapists who studied in a university-based program of integrative psychotherapy. In one of the nine sessions there was a more experienced therapist conducting the session with the trainee and in two sessions there was a psychology student observing. Eight of the clients were female and one was male. The clients were between 19 and 45 years of age. All of the clients were self-referred to the therapy, which took place at a university psychotherapy clinic in Finland. The clients' presenting problems, reported in their first phone call when booking the session, included depression, fatigue, social anxiety, stress, panic attacks, coping with divorce, and bingeing and purging. The sessions were conducted in Finnish. Videotaping and the use of the sessions for research purposes took place with the informed consent of the clients, using a protocol reviewed by the Ethics Committee of the university. Eight of the sessions were transcribed in Finnish by the first author, and one had been previously transcribed by a psychology master's student. All analyses were performed on the original Finnish transcripts.

Analysis

Open reading. The analysis started by watching and listening to the nine first sessions of the psychotherapies. In the continuous reading and re-reading of the transcribed sessions, attention was paid to the different ways the clients and therapists used language to depict the clients, in a broad sense, as non-agentic. We noticed that there were also agentic discursive constructions in the data and started to look systematically for the agentic counterparts of the non-agentic ways of speaking. Passages identified by the first author as representing varying ways of displaying non-agency and agency were read together in consensus meetings by all three authors. The cycle, including the first author re-reading the material and the evolving categorization being discussed in consensus meetings, was repeated several times.

Criteria construction. During the analysis, we did not primarily pay attention to the content of the presentations but to the more formal side of the linguistic exposition. Attention was paid to: (a) who or what was in the place of the grammatical subject and was thus the *performer of the action* denoted by the verb in the expressions; (b) whether the client represented *mental ownership of his/her experiences* and if so; c) where exactly the problem was constructed to lie—in the *initiation, continuing, or stopping the action*, or, on a more abstract level, in *how a reflective or critical position* towards some aspect of one’s action, experiences, life story, or social relations was taken.

Grammatical composition. We observed what or who was constructed as the agent, subject, or initiator of action both linguistically and semantically in the expressions. We looked for the grammatical subject, the word that defines how the verb is conjugated (Finnish Literature Society, 2004; Mäkelä, 2011), and the semantic agent, typically a person who intentionally initiates and carries out an action (Finnish Literature Society, 2004; Langacker, 2008). Often, the grammatical subject—the word linked with the verb—has many characteristics of the semantic agent (Finnish Literature Society, 2004), but the semantic agent does not always coincide with the grammatical subject (Mäkelä, 2011). Attention was paid to instances where some behavior, feeling, experience, situation, or event was the grammatical subject of the expressions. When the semantic agent of the expressions, often the client, was different from the grammatical subject, we emphasized the grammatical subject. Hence, in our analysis it was meaningful if the client said “The panic attacks came,” thus putting the panic attacks in the place of the grammatical subject performing the action denoted by the verb.

In addition, we analyzed the use of verb forms (e.g., zero person, active first person) and personal pronouns, and paid attention to the vocabulary used by the client. Special attention was paid to agency-fading constructions such as passive voice, zero-person construction, and verbs with iterative aspects, all of which can cause the agent of the described actions to be left unspecified

or “weak,” implying not having control over one’s actions (see Kurri & Wahlström, 2007). Iterative verb aspects refer to repeated action (see e.g. Cowan, 2008 ; Karlsson, 2004). The zero-person construction in Finnish is a nonspecific person reference type where only the verb form in the third-person singular is expressed, and there is neither an overt subject of the action nor explicit references to any persons (Jokela, 2012; Laitinen, 1995). It would usually translate into English as impersonal constructions with *one*. In Finnish, the use of zero person often occurs in constructions where the verbs express undergoing a change, receiving something, or being influenced by something and/or describe events that are somehow uncontrollable (Laitinen, 1995).

Reflective versus non-reflective positioning. We chose the term *reflective* to refer to linguistic constructions where some aspect of the speaker, his/her life, or social world was looked at from a contemplative and/or critical stance. Such constructions were identified from the use of verbs referring to knowing, understanding, perceiving and so on; from expressions where a perspective towards past, future, or other people was taken; and from the lack of the previously mentioned linguistic ways of fading agency, such as zero person and lack of personal pronouns.

Categorization of tools. All the different ways of constructing non-agency and agency were differentiated from each other, organized systematically as pairs of discursive tools, and the emerging tool categories were named. Finally, conversation extracts—chosen as illustrative examples for the purpose of presenting our findings in this article—were translated from Finnish to English. The translation seeks to follow the word order and grammatical structure of the Finnish original as closely as possible without compromising the fluency of the English expression.

Results

The results of the analysis are presented here as the 10 Discursive Tools model (10DT) of ten discursive means, denoted as “tools,” used by the clients and therapists when ascribing agency or non-agency to the clients. Specifically, we present the non-agency sides of the ten tool-pairs of the model and how they are used in the clients’ talk. The definitions of these non-agency tools expound

the non-agentic position that the use of each tool constructs for the speaker in relation to what is explicated as the problem. The ordering of the tools does not imply a strict hierarchy discursively or in any psychological sense, but it is not random. The order of the tools is based on our conception of how their use displays self-awareness or taking a reflective stance towards one's own experiences and actions, as defined in the earlier sections. In the presentation of the model, we provide the name of the equivalent agency tool in parentheses after the name of the non-agency tool. A short definition of each non-agency tool and examples of its use in the data are given and commented upon. To save space, the definitions of the agency tools, the conceptual opposites of the definitions of the non-agency tools, are not given. The client names in the data extracts are pseudonyms.

1. Dismissing (accepting). Clients constructed a position where something did not concern them in any way or was not related to them personally. *Dismissing* was used in constructing a display where a personal relationship with a supposed issue did not exist, either because there was no indication of a separate self that could be in relation to something that is “not me,” or because such a connection was simply denied or mitigated.

Extract 1. Anna

But still there is this feeling that why should I go and get any help because basically nothing is wrong, this is just kind of a teenagers' game.

Here, Anna mitigates the importance of her eating problems by insisting that nothing is really wrong at all and likening them to a game. In the data, this tool appeared only once: in the beginning of Anna's first session, when she was displaying her basic dilemma about whether she has severe enough problems to enter therapy at all. Dismissing was thus a discursive display where the client in a way said both that there is a problem and that there is not a problem, the supposed issue is of no importance, or it is not related to her personally.

2. Other as actor (free to act). Clients constructed a position where they were

objects, victims, or stooges of something or someone else who initiated the action. In the data, the *other as actor* could be anything that was displayed as executing an action or creating the circumstances: childhood home and family, a life event, such as a divorce or the death of a loved one, current life situation, previous treatment, a diagnosis, or a behavior.

Extract 2. Risto

The first panic disorders came, rather strong ones, and well, at the same time the alcohol consumption grew quite a lot, let's put it that way.

Risto presents his panic attacks as just "coming" to him as independent actors, while his "alcohol consumption" grows by itself without him being in the position of the consumer of the alcohol. Here, the remark "let's put it that way" is not considered to be reflective; it is a mere phrase used to create distance between the speaker and the description in a manner that avoids accepting full responsibility for his views.

Extract 3. Tiina

Yeah well, such a thing occurred to us three years ago and it was quite a big shock. It came totally out of the blue.

Tiina talks about her divorce using the word "thing" and presents the divorce as an actor of its own, coming out of nowhere.

3. Exteriorization (interiorization). Clients constructed a position where their thoughts, feelings, experiences, or actions were presented as objects with their own locations, foreign to the client's own mental realm, and not as being created and experienced by the client him- or herself in any psychological manner. In the use of *exteriorization*, possessive structures were common; in them, the before mentioned objects became presented as in some sense the "property" of the client, whilst an impression of placing something outside the client's mind was created.

Extract 4. Arja

And well, I have also thought about the fact that this whole process of mine is not any typical burnout case. First, I have this illness, and second, this is like a life management problem.

Arja talks about her issues as something owned by her, “this whole process of mine,” and also presents her problems as a totality not created and experienced in her mind but existing on its own as a “burnout case.” She continues using the possessive form in “I have... this illness,” locating her experiences and suffering outside her as something she *has* instead of something she experiences. She also names her issues as a “life management problem,” again an entity with which she has a possessive relation.

Extract 5. Mari

But anyhow, I wouldn't want symptoms like this.

The short example above shows how Mari's seemingly neutral way of formulating something reveals a non-agentic construction where her social anxiety and panic attacks are reduced to “symptoms” and objects of owning. They are not presented as her experiences that can be talked about as the substance of her experiential world.

4. Not initiating action (initiating action). Clients constructed for themselves a position where desired action was not initiated.

Extract 6. Helena

And then the telephone is one thing that I have now... It is, like, difficult to answer the phone and speak on the phone.

This extract shows how *not initiating action* is used when Helena describes her recent difficulties answering and speaking on the phone. Obviously, it is not a question of not being able to do something, in this case, answer the phone, but a problem of commencing the said action.

Extract 7. Mari

It is insanely difficult to go there.

Mari's utterance illustrates the use of not initiating action when she describes her difficulties leaving for school in the morning. In the previous turn, her therapist has speculated how she has difficult feelings in advance before going to school, but instead of continuing to ponder her feelings, Mari presents her issue to be about the concrete action of going to school. She continues to say that being at school is not a problem at all, only leaving for school. Other similar examples of the use of this tool in the data are, for example, not being able to go to work or to go and take an exam.

5. Not stopping or curbing action (stopping or curbing action). Clients constructed for themselves a position where they did not stop their thinking, experiencing, or acting even though that would have been the desired action.

Extract 8. Risto

Then my condition in a way just got worse and I started to be already in quite bad shape.

Risto is talking about how his alcoholism spiraled out of control. By talking about "my condition" and getting into bad "shape", he presents himself as getting into worse and worse health in a process that he is unable to stop. He uses personal pronouns and first person verb forms, thus displaying himself as the center of the action instead of talking about some phenomenon dominating him from outside his person. Expressions about how his condition "just got worse" and the following remark of starting to be in bad shape deliver the impression of an ongoing action that cannot be stopped.

Extract 9. Laura

And then I start to plan the next day's work, whatever there is, and it might be that it goes on until one or half past one.

Laura tells how her working in the evenings is something that goes on until late night without her being able to control it. She first verbalizes what it is she does using the first person verb form—“I start to plan”—and then uses the expression “it goes on until one or half past one” to refer to the uncontrollable nature of the action. In the use of *not stopping or curbing action*, dramatic presence, iterative verbs and time expressions such as “always,” “again and again,” “the whole summer,” and the like were important in creating the impression of ongoing action the speaker could not stop.

6. Not modifying action (modifying action). Clients constructed a position where, contrary to what would have been desirable, they did not change the way they act or did not modify the course of their actions by making intentional choices.

Extract 10. Arja

And then I tried to hang on in some way but it got to the point where I was barely able to survive from everyday life.

Arja is talking about a previous depressive episode where she was not able to manage her life in the way she wanted. She uses personal pronouns and active first person verb forms to present herself as someone who is only “hanging on” and “barely able to survive.”

Expressions where the client stated that he/she was not able to “survive” from something, such as returning to work, tackling, for example, withdrawal symptoms, or being friends with their ex-partner, were quite frequent in the occasions where *not modifying action* was used.

Extract 11. Laura

And then I [said] that I’m just like nervous, like I am somehow so anxious about whether I will survive.

Laura is talking about a conversation she had with her husband in a situation where she burst out crying because of stress related to returning to work. This is another example of not modifying action taking the form of a verbalization where the speaker is not able to survive

from something. She occupies a position where she potentially cannot manage the beginning, more challenging year at her work. Whereas in the use of non-agency tool 4, not initiating action, the displayed issue was specifically about not being able to launch desired action, not modifying action was used in more complex presentations of situations where one is not able to choose, change and/or complete one's chain of actions in the preferred way.

7. Non-cognizance (cognizance). Clients constructed for themselves a position where they were looking at their experiences and actions from a perspective of not understanding, perceiving, knowing, or noticing, or not having a feeling or sense of their experiences and actions. This tool represents a qualitative jump from the preceding six tools. This and the following tools were used to construct displays of how speakers think about their own thinking and feeling, and hence, they were named *reflective tools* in contrast with the previously presented *non-reflective tools*.

Extract 12. Susanna

How is this so confusing like how has my life gone into this or like why can't everything be clear to me.

Susanna is constructing her non-agentic position as a place of not knowing why her life is the way it is. She has previously talked about her recent move back to Finland from abroad after a break-up and how she still does not know what the situation in her relationship is going to be. She is not merely reporting that her life is confusing but is asking how and why she got to this point, representing a reflective stance where something can be *thought* about her situation.

Extract 13. Anna

There indeed is the fact that I have that goal that I should always make it under a thousand calories per day and then it does come true on quite many days and that is like totally clueless because one needs at least two thousand calories. It has just come to my

head that a thousand calories is like the maximum and I really don't know where it came from.

Non-cognizance is used in Anna's display of her limits for her daily calorie intake as irrational. Even though she uses the expression "it has just come to my head" when referring to her calorie rule, this verbalization is part of a more complex presentation where she clearly takes a critical reflecting position towards the self-established limit. She says that she does not know the reason for the rule and sees it as being against her own better understanding and general knowledge that humans need at least two thousand calories per day, deeming her calorie limit as "totally clueless."

8. Reflected dysfunction (reflected function). Clients constructed a reflective stance towards their position in relation to their experiences, problems, or choices of action, and presented this positioning as dysfunctional. Thus, this tool denotes a metaposition from which the client is looking at the position he/she has taken in respect to some experience or way of acting.

Extract 14. Eija

At some point there was a little bit of, how would I say, clinging from my side so that perhaps the relationship would have ended earlier, but then my own mother died suddenly and I was very dependent on him then. So that, in that situation, even though there had already been violence and I knew very well that nothing good will come from this, I wasn't able to let go, and then it in a way got more and more dangerous to me.

Then he also abused me financially.

Eija describes her staying in her previous relationship as "clinging" that left her the victim of more severe violence. She presents reasons for why she was not able to let go and argues that not leaving was a problematic choice because the abuse in the relationship just got worse, thus taking a reflective stance towards her choice of action in the situation.

Extract 15. Tiina

The problem here has perhaps been that when I feel bad, I in a way start running. I run away from things. I do a lot of things and I also physically run. So I have exercised.

Tiina defines her usual way of dealing with her issues, running away, as problematic. At least implicitly, she presents herself as now knowledgeable of this manner and as ready to change it in therapy.

9. Discontinuance (continuance). Clients constructed a position from which they looked at their life in terms of historical discontinuity with regards to their experiences, actions, life events, or circumstances. Clients presented these as not coherently connected to each other on a timeline that involved the here-and-now and past or future. In the data, *discontinuance* was used in constructing such positions from which the client expressed his/her inability to connect his/her actions and experiences into a life story and displayed him-/herself as living in a discordant historical mini-narrative.

Extract 16. Eija

One would think that also life experience would help in that thing so that there are no longer any new or exciting situations. One has lived through and seen everything at least once and then despite that one is all hyper.

Here, Eija implicitly assumes that her social fears and nervousness should have diminished after her accumulation of life experiences because there is nothing to be nervous about anymore. However, she cannot organize her life narrative according to such a theory—she still suffers from her anxieties at this point of her life. She thus constructs a position where she cannot form a coherent and understandable life story in terms of why she is nervous.

Extract 17. Susanna

And, of course, then perhaps a kind of loneliness. And then about those relationship issues like somehow will I always be alone and then of course the fact that I have in this situation this horrible pressure. I have like so much pressure about it, like this clichéd

thirties crisis, because my friends are beginning to have a family and all and then I myself would want so much to have a family, perhaps not right away but anyhow like in the near future. And then if one in a way has that kind of dream and then anyway everything has to be started anew in life and the relationship ends so then in some way from that comes the kind of fear or anxiety like do I ever get, do I ever have time to, and like was this it, and have I lost all my chances.

Discontinuance is used in the construction of a position where Susanna's earlier break-up is making her future plans, entertained during the relationship, uncertain from the perspective of the present. Discontinuance thus applies to Susanna's dreams and future plans that do not form a sustainable life narrative from the perspective of the present: her recent separation has led to the shattering of the plan to have a family with this particular person.

10. Presumptive positioning of others (perspectival positioning of others). Clients constructed a position where other people and their relation to the client was included, but where the other people's own perspective was not truly taken into account. The other person was not presented as independent, with his/her own point of view, but rather, his perspective in respect to the client's situation was presented as a certainty already known by the client.

Extract 18. Helena

Probably one very central thing in our family is one sad event, the death of my little brother, which is in an important way connected to me. So they ((the parents)) probably now had thought about that first. The thing is that they did not back then relate to me in the right way.

By making an assumption of what her parents had thought when they heard of her recent depression, Helena is here displaying herself as knowing what goes on in other people's minds and how they relate to her. She says that now that she is depressed, her parents probably first sought fault in themselves and in how they were not able to deal in an appropriate way with her during the

tragic event of her little brother's death. However, Helena is not referring to anything that the parents themselves would have said about the situation. Treating other people's minds as something transparent to her makes this an example of *presumptive positioning of others*. This then constructs for her a non-agentic position, because when she does not position her parents as having their own independent minds, there is no room for negotiating different points of views or reflecting the other person's perspective.

Extract 19. Anna

I have not told, for example, to my dad because he would lose his mind totally. So that basically I have talked with mom about this, and it is so horrible to hide this from a family member but dad would not be able to deal with it. Perhaps he does know it in some way, he always asks that is Anna sick and such. He perhaps knows but he just does not want to deal with it.

This extract from Anna shows how she does take into account that her father has a position with respect to her eating disorder, but presents his views as something she knows for sure. Even though she is not even certain whether her father knows that she is ill, she claims that he actively refuses to deal with it. She also presents it as a fact that her father would lose his mind if he knew about his daughter's condition.

A summary of the non-agency tools is given in Table 1. The abbreviation NAT refers to *non-agency tool*.

Insert Table 1 here

Discussion

The aim of this study was to create a model to capture the variety with which psychotherapy clients in their first psychotherapy session tackle the institutional task of presenting

themselves as sensing a lack of agency in some realm of their lives. Based on theoretical considerations and the clinical data of this study, we constructed the 10 Discursive Tools model (10DT), consisting of 10 discursive means, or devices, the clients used to ascribe themselves agentic or non-agentic positions. We referred to these devices as agency or non-agency tools, a metaphor to underline that taking a non-agentic position is an active discursive act achieved with specific means. Constructing non-agency was defined as any discursive act where the client, when presenting his/her issues, ascribed him/herself a non-agentic position in relation to him- or herself, his/her experiences, circumstances, life situations, history, or social relations, with the use of some of the discursive non-agency tools (NATs) of the 10DT model.

The 10DT model consists of ten pairs of discursive tools, each pair including an agency and a non-agency tool. In this paper, we have presented the non-agency part of the model; in other words, we have focused on detailing how the clients used the non-agentic tools that explicated varying non-agentic positions. The order of the ten tool pairs does not imply that their organization would be strictly hierarchical in any psychological or discursive sense. However, it is not random either, because it reflects our suggestion that, as the number of the tool increases, so does reflectivity.

There was a qualitative difference between the first six tools (NAT1 to NAT6) and the four last ones (NAT7 to NAT10). The tools NAT1 to NAT6 were used in displays where the client was ascribed a position of, for example, not being able to initiate a desired action, stop an undesired action, or change the course of one's actions. These descriptions were given in a reporting manner, stating the issues as matters of fact and without approaching them from an introspective point of view. The tools NAT7 to NAT10 were, on the contrary, used to create an impression of the speaker looking at the problematic experience or situation from a distance, and the non-agentic position was constructed as resulting, for example, from the client's acknowledged lack of knowing or understanding, or from retrospectively perceiving one's previous stance to something as

problematic. Thus, we refer to the tools NAT1 to NAT6 as non-reflective, and to the tools NAT7 to NAT10 as reflective non-agency tools.

There was large variability in the frequency of use of the non-agency tools, but there were also some noticeable tendencies. The non-agency tool that the majority of clients used most frequently was NAT6, not modifying action. The second most used tool was NAT2, other as actor. Otherwise, there was a large variation in how the tools were used in combination with each other. This meant firstly that the clients could not be classified according to their tool use patterns. That is, it did not appear that the uses of different tools could be attributed to a distinctive personal style or reported trait. Secondly, no patterning in how the clients moved from the use of one tool to another was observed. In some cases, change did occur during the session in tool use, for example, when some clients moved from non-reflective tools towards more reflective ones by the end of the session.

Another main finding was that the content of the clients' problems did not determine which tools were used to construct the non-agentic positioning. The client could speak about the same problem, such as divorce or binging, with a variety of different non-agency tools. In addition, the same tools were used when positioning towards a variety of different issues. Similarly, the use of non-reflective tools and reflective tools did not differ according to the contents of what the client presented as problematic. Hence, the results did not suggest the plausibility of any diagnosis- or problem type based categorization of tool use patterns. The non-reflective tools were not used solely when the clients talked about matters outside their mind, and the reflective tools were not reserved only for talk about thoughts or experiences. Non-reflective tools were occasionally used in self-positionings with respect to feelings or experiences that were discursively displayed as if they were outside objects with their own independent existence. Likewise, in a few instances reflective tools were used in talking about something that was not an experience, or some other matter of the mind, but more of an outer event such as a divorce. In such instances, when using reflective tools,

the client took a critical perspective towards his/her own actions. Reflective tools could thus also be used when the client was taking a distanced pondering stance towards something that was not originally a product of his/her mind. Thus, the semantic content of experiences or occurrences did not determine how the clients spoke about them.

Still another interesting observation was that the 10DT model implicated two different dimensions on which the clients' self-positioning took place. The first one was agentic vs. non-agentic and the second one reflective vs. non-reflective, and these dimensions appeared to be independent of each other. This means that a discursively ascribed position can be non-agentic but still reflective or agentic but yet non-reflective. The tenth tool pair, presumptive positioning of others (NAT10) vs. perspectival positioning of others (AT10), demonstrates this. With these tools, the clients positioned themselves with respect to another person's thoughts and feelings. Using the non-agency counterpart of this tool, the client claimed to know what another person was thinking about the client or his/her actions. Because the client was referring to his/her own knowing and relation to that other person, this is a reflective positioning. However, by treating the other person's mind as a transparent object that he/she can fully know, the speaker closed out possibilities to question and evaluate whether his/her understanding actually corresponded to that of the other person. Such a positioning evades the possibility of negotiating the other person's view and is thus depriving the speaker him-/herself of an active, agentic stance. Using the agency counterpart of the tool, perspectival positioning of others, the client positioned him- or herself as *not* really knowing what some other person was thinking, but as taking into account the other person's perspective. Such a self-positioning of not-knowing is then actually agentic, because the client is mentally conferring with the other person, taking into account his/her independent mental state and intentions.

In this study, agency could be distinguished from reflectivity. This suggests the possibility that agency is not the same as reflectivity (or reflexivity, see, e.g., Rennie, 2010). Self-

ascriptions of both agentic and non-agentic discursive positions can be reflective. For instance, the client can display herself as either knowing exactly why she feels the need to binge and vomit (cognizance, AT7), or as not really understanding why she does that (non-cognizance, NAT7). However, in both instances—in the first one ascribing herself an agentic and in the second one a non-agentic position with respect to her eating behavior—she would still be taking a reflective perspective, including the dimension of knowing or understanding, in relation to her way of acting. Additionally, the client can take an agentic position towards something without being reflective. In that case, the client would be, for example, displaying herself as being able to initiate an action or stop doing something she does not want to do, but this would take the form of a mere telling of her actions without including any notion of how she thinks about her ability to influence her actions, or how she relates to that ability. These findings contrast interestingly with the view that reflectivity is a prerequisite for increased agency (Rennie, 2004, 2010), and call for further investigation of how assuming a reflective stance in therapy discourse can take place on different levels, as suggested by Penttinen, Wahlström, and Hartikainen (2017).

In previous research the issue of clients' agency at the outset of psychotherapy has been approached through the notion that people come to therapy with a disturbed sense of agency (Anderson & Goolishian, 1992; Dimaggio, 2011; Mackrill, 2009; Wahlström, 2006a, 2006b). Therapy clients have been described as entering treatment occupying an "object position," which as a result of successful therapy is expected to be transformed into a "subject position" (Leiman, 2012; Todd, 2013). While subscribing to these somewhat abstract notions, we perceive the 10DT model as a novel attempt to display in detail the variety of how non-agency is talked into being in actual therapy conversations.

In the literature there are several descriptions of specific positions therapy clients occupy, and these frequently suggest that they are an object or victim of experiences that affect them as alien entities (Avdi, Lerou & Seikkula, 2015; Karatza & Avdi, 2011; Kupferberg & Green,

2005; Ogden, 1986). The 10DT model, however, includes only one tool (NAT2, other as actor) with which such a subjugate position can be expressed, while the nine other tools afford different expressions of loss of agency. Non-agency has also been depicted as a position of not being able to initiate wished-for actions or undertaking undesired actions (Wahlström, 2006b), or where the client's opportunities to influence some situation and his/her possible actions are reduced (Wahlström, 2016). In the 10DT model, the first mentioned ascription of non-agency is most closely represented by NAT4, not initiating action, and the second one by NAT6, not modifying action. The analysis of the present study shows production of non-agency in the clients' talk to be a much more varied and multi-dimensional phenomenon than the singular position of an object to an alien-like experience or one of not being able to initiate actions or influence a situation. Those non-agentic positions are also represented in the 10DT, but they form only a part of all the possible self-positionings.

In narrative therapy literature, "externalizing the problem" is a therapeutic process where clients' issues are, discursively speaking, changed from inherent qualities to separate entities external to the clients (White & Epston, 1990), the aim being to enable people to realize that they and their problem are not the same thing (Carey & Russell, 2002). The context of this kind of externalizing, a therapeutic technique used by the therapist in a longer process, is different from the momentary discursive position explicated by NAT3, exteriorization, in our model. In the hierarchy of the 10DT, NAT3 represents a discursive position where the existence of an issue is not denied, and this issue is not displayed as something that has power over the client (as happens with NAT1 and NAT2). However, with NAT3, issues are not displayed as something that has to do with the client's ways of thinking, experiencing, and acting. It can be hypothesized that from the perspective of the 10DT, therapeutic externalizing could be conducted with many of the tools and their varying combinations.

Even though some non-agentic positions are descriptions of the client not being able to initiate action or act in a productive way, the 10DT model draws attention to the finding that expressing non-agency is not only a description of not being somehow active or not being able to perform a concrete action. Non-agentic positioning is more than merely a display of a lack of action; it is an active discursive act that includes a multitude of possible discursive positions. For example, even though a lack of personal pronouns is typical for NAT2, other as actor, it also includes the active presentation of some experience or event coming to the client as an outer force. The characteristics of the non-agency tools are not solely the lack of something, linguistically or otherwise. With the non-agency tools, a wide spectrum of linguistic possibilities is employed to display a very particular discursive position. This approach contradicts any attempt at conceptualizing (non-)agency as some type of an entity, trait, or dimension of psychological functioning that an individual can possess more or less of.

The primary contribution of this article has been to show the variety of discursive self-positionings performed by clients when presenting a lack of agency in their very first psychotherapy session. Even though our focus has been on the detailed description of how non-agentic positions were discursively constructed, this does not preclude seeing the clients as providing expressions of their genuine distress. However, the specific argument underlying the 10DT model is that it does matter *how* the clients position themselves in relation to their problems, not only *what* they describe as difficulties in their lives. We suggest that we have provided new insight into the multifaceted nature of the non-agency work clients undertake already in their first psychotherapy session. First, we have suggested that the clients adopt various different non-agentic positions, and that, second, the adopting of those positions does not depend upon the semantic content of the problem to which they are positioning themselves. Because these views are emerging from a new model, they should naturally be subjected to more empirical validation.

This research with its discursive, post-psychological perspective adds to the understanding of the actual, nuanced ways clients produce agency in the here-and-now of the language-mediated therapy interaction, a level that can easily become obscured in the quantitative study of multifaceted phenomena created in language. Our contribution opens up a possibility to go beyond categorizations of the clients or their issues whilst tackling the multiple discursive aspects of which the clients' problems are constructed.

One limitation of this paper is that even though the therapists' speech was analyzed in the construction process of the 10DT model, the dialogical perspectives were put aside in this paper in favor of a clear presentation of the total variety of the possible non-agentic positions. We believe it is also valuable to look, in a detailed manner, at how clients display their sense of non-agency, one speaker at a time. The use of the model in more dialogical analyses of agency construction has been left for further research. Furthermore, we have only presented one half of the model, the non-agency tools, and left the agentic side of the model largely untouched. We acknowledge that this might compromise the reader's understanding of the model and we therefore emphasize the need for more research on the agency tools.

The heterogeneity of the clients in the data can be seen as both limitation and strength. The clients are of different ages, come from different stages of life, and have reported varying issues when booking their session. One of the clients was male and eight were female. We were not able to form client-based profiles of non-agentic constructions. Our aim was to create a model that is not limited to any specific client group, and we wished to detail, without pre-set limitations, all the various positions clients can take when talking their issues into being. However, one interesting question for further research would be to study whether a gendered approach to constructing non-agency could be identified. This would naturally require additional data to be collected from male clients.

The 10DT model provides an understanding of the skeleton, that is, the basic discursive devices, of the display of agency and non-agency in the first psychotherapy session. The clients use a large and varied repertoire of positionings to present themselves as “having problems.” In future research we anticipate using the model to analyze the full body of interaction between the therapists and clients, aiming at detailed descriptions of how the different non-agentic positionings evolve and develop in the course of the conversation, and perhaps transform into agentic ones. The variation and evolving of agency positionings should be studied as an interactional phenomenon constructed in dialogue, not as a static style or a fixed position. The 10DT model contributes to future research on subject positioning in therapy and to how different positionings may be related to psychotherapy outcome. One interesting question for further research is whether specific (non-) agentic positions or combinations of them can be related to discourses in different types of psychotherapy.

We conclude that the present study already shows the potential of the 10DT model to contribute to a detailed description of how presentations of not-being-able are being achieved by clients in psychotherapy discourse. As a clinical implication, we propose that therapists pay close attention to this diversity of expressions.

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