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New Zealand counsellors talk about ritual abuse:

A discourse analysis

A thesis presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree
of
Master of Arts
in
Psychology
at
Massey University, Palmerston North, New Zealand

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2009
Abstract

Research indicates that in the last five decades, claims of Satanic ritual abuse (RA), and the numbers of clients receiving counselling for RA, have increased in all Western countries. This has resulted in an increased corpus of related literature overseas, which includes studies in which facticity as well as aetiology, symptomology and treatment are debated. This present study focuses on a New Zealand context, and examines the talk of New Zealand counsellors in relation to their views regarding RA and the counselling of RA clients.

Social constructionist and positivist epistemologies were evaluated in terms of their suitability for this research, and the discourse analytic method developed by Potter and Wetherell (1987) chosen as the means by which participants’ talk might be analysed in such a way as to allow the inclusion of multiple constructions and the emergence of the many discourses and conflicting ideas which occur in overseas literature. A broad selection of the literature was first critically analysed to give an understanding of the topic.

Nine counsellors gave interviews, eight women and one man, all Pakeha, six of whom were ACC-registered (Accident Compensation Commission, 2009). The participants constructed RA as a physical reality, which was justified by the use of the credible client discourse. A traditional linguistic repertoire furnished a discourse of government backing, which was employed to warrant voice. A moral stake in counselling, named concern for the client, was shown to be present in all arguments. The participants constructed three truths relative to context: a legal truth, the counsellor’s truth, and the client’s truth. Recovered memories were given a dual construction which legitimised correct and incorrect recall. DSM-IV (American Psychiatric Association, 2000) labelling was debated in a discourse of ambivalence. Finally in a discourse of preparedness, the participants constructed the therapeutic skills needed to treat RA clients. The thesis concludes by highlighting the participants’ comments regarding the need for openness and awareness, and specialised literature and training for counsellors treating RA clients.
Acknowledgements

I wish to acknowledge and thank the nine professional counsellors who volunteered their time and expertise to give a fresh New Zealand insight into a topic which is often ignored. It was an honour to study their informative, thoughtful and intelligent contributions, born out of their lived experiences as counsellors and therapists. Without them, this study could not have taken place.

My thanks to my supervisor Dr Keith Tuffin, who cheerfully answered all my questions, gave constructive feedback and criticism, and challenged and encouraged me to enlarge my knowledge of discourse analysis.

My thanks to Massey for the scholarship which has helped me achieve this goal, to the library for the helpful communication and inexhaustible flow of articles and books, to the library Endnote advisers, and the staff at the Wellington School of Psychology for their efforts in providing post-grad students with information and fellowship.

I would like to acknowledge and thank my wonderful husband and our three equally wonderful adult children, who have been unfailingly supportive and vocal regarding their belief in my ability to write this. I also wish to thank the many friends who continually expressed curiosity, encouragement and affirmation.
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