



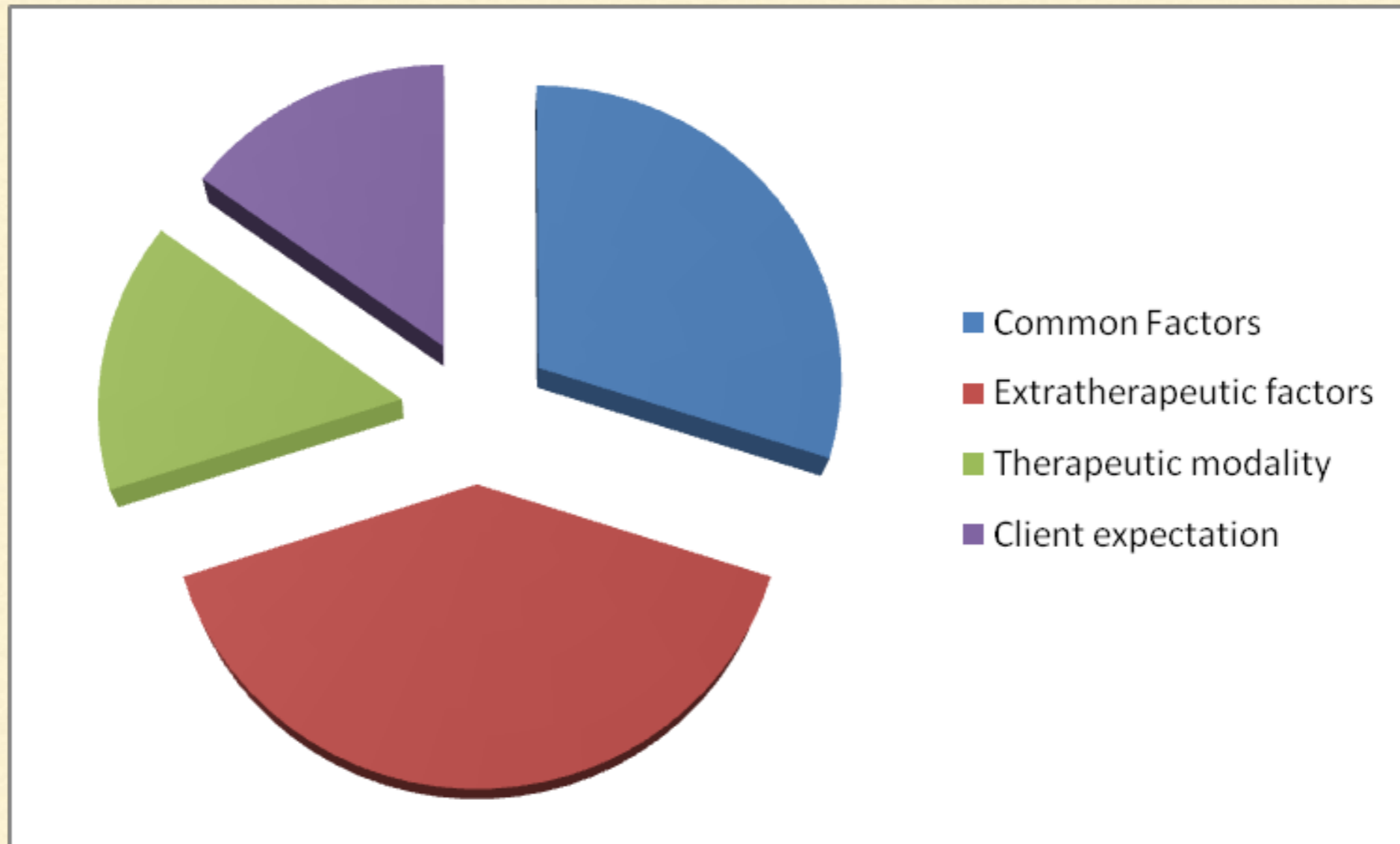
# STUCK IN THE MIDDLE

Client's Between-Session Change

By Dr. Todd Frye

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# MY STORY





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# BACKGROUND

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- “The methodology for change is developed in the office, but the actual attempt to change usually takes place outside the office in the real world” (Craigie, 1985)
  - “One element of consistent change patterns for clients was characterized by clients using the time between-session to reflect on insights and experiment with corrective experiences” (Cummings, Hallberg, Slemon, 1994)
  - Successful counseling extends beyond the counselor’s office and involves direct influence during the remainder of the client’s week. (Worthington, 1989)
  - Johnson (1998) suggests that there is a need to further explore outside variables such as stressors, social support, and family configuration to see if they have an effect on change prior to and between-sessions.
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# BACKGROUND

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- Most therapists emphasize the importance of between-session time through the assignment of homework, or what therapists call “**out of session work.**”
  - Many therapists would suggest that what happens out of session is at least, if not more significant, than what occurs in it. It is a way of “**taking the therapist home with them**”.
  - So what do you think?
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# QUESTION

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- What is your story with client's between-session change?
  - How have you successfully and unsuccessfully influenced client's between-session change?
  - Are all client's ready "to bring the therapist home with them"?
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# CASE SCENARIO

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Don and Charlene have been together for several years and are talking about separating and have come to see you for couple counseling at Charlene's insistence. They admit that they are arguing more than ever and that Charlene is displaying uncharacteristic jealousy of Don. Don says she is constantly bothering him about where he's going and why. She says he is constantly choosing to do activities that exclude her and that whenever they want to spend time with her. Don says that she watches his every move and that she is becoming too "mothering," which results in his withdrawing affection from her. Charlene's first attempt in getting Don to listen is to complain but when not responded to she retaliates by threatening to quit her job as this is the only way to shock him into awareness. Both admit that neither of them is willing to soothe the other when they are been arguing.

- What would you do in session to influence the couples between session change?
  - What suggestions/homework would you give this couple, if any, to influence their between session change?
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# READINESS

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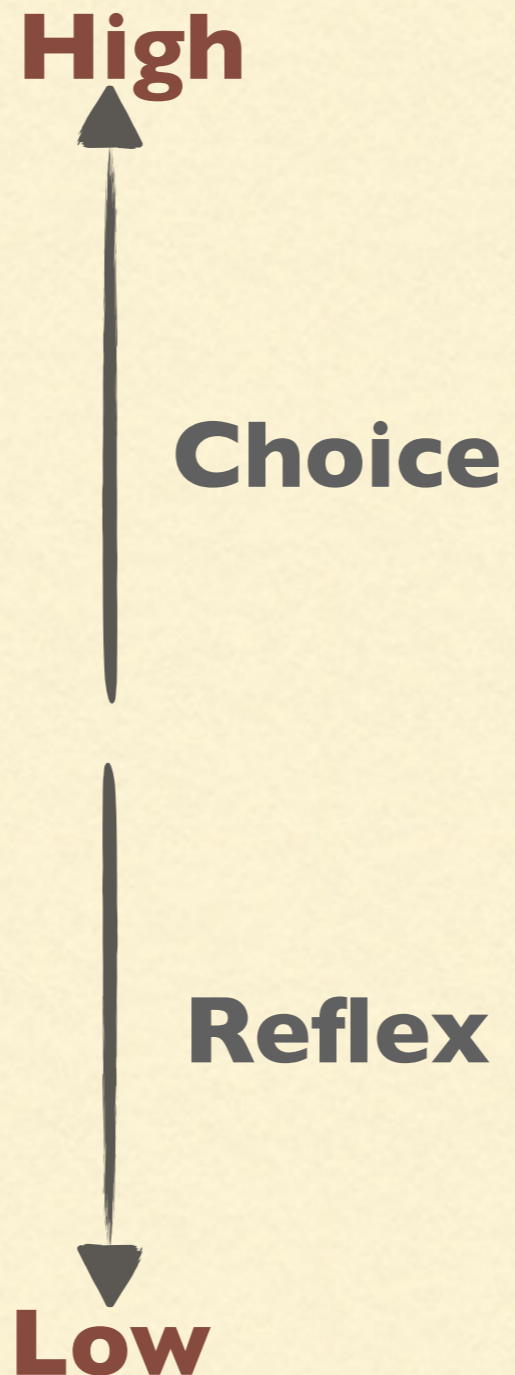


- Assessing the **readiness** of your client for between-session work.
    - What is my client capable of? Are all client's equally ready?
    - Experience something, notice something, do something. How do you decide?
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# FREEDOM TO CHOOSE

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# ASSESSING DON AND CHARLENE'S READINESS

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Don and Charlene have been together for several years and are talking about separating and have come to see you for couple counseling at Charlene's insistence. They admit that they are arguing more than ever and that Charlene is displaying uncharacteristic jealousy of Don. Don says she is constantly bothering him about where he's going and why. She says he is constantly choosing to do activities that exclude her and that whenever she wants to spend time with her. Don says that she watches his every move and that she is becoming too "mothering," which results in his withdrawing affection from her. Charlene's first attempt in getting Don to listen is to complain but when not responded to she retaliates by threatening to quit her job as this is the only way to shock him into awareness. Both admit that neither of them is willing to soothe the other when they are been arguing.

- How would you evaluate this couple's freedom to choose and readiness to take on between-session change?
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# Let's Take a Break





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# WHAT MY RESEARCH FOUND

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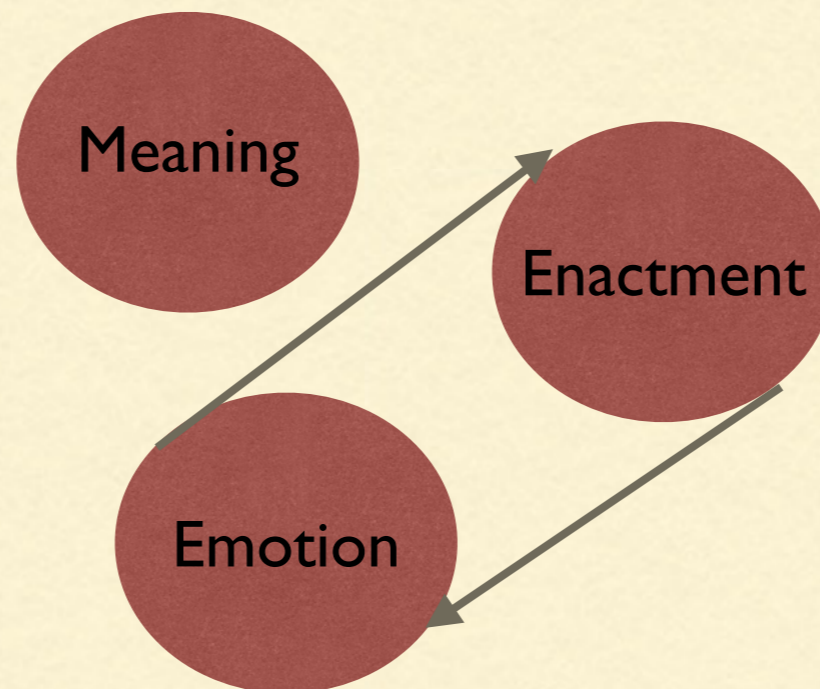
- Three main between session processes
    - Reflexive
    - Reflective
    - Regulatory
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# REFLEXIVE PROCESS



- A circular process that is **spontaneous** and involves **strong affective responses and enactments**.
- This is an **automatic process**, resulting in no explicit cognitive reflections or newly acquired meanings.
- This process most typically began with a **negative emotion**. The two most common noted emotions were anger and fear, with anger being the most common.
- Though these emotions were ones that most client's wanted to avoid, they were a part of patterns of engaging and responding that were familiar.





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# REFLEXIVE PROCESS

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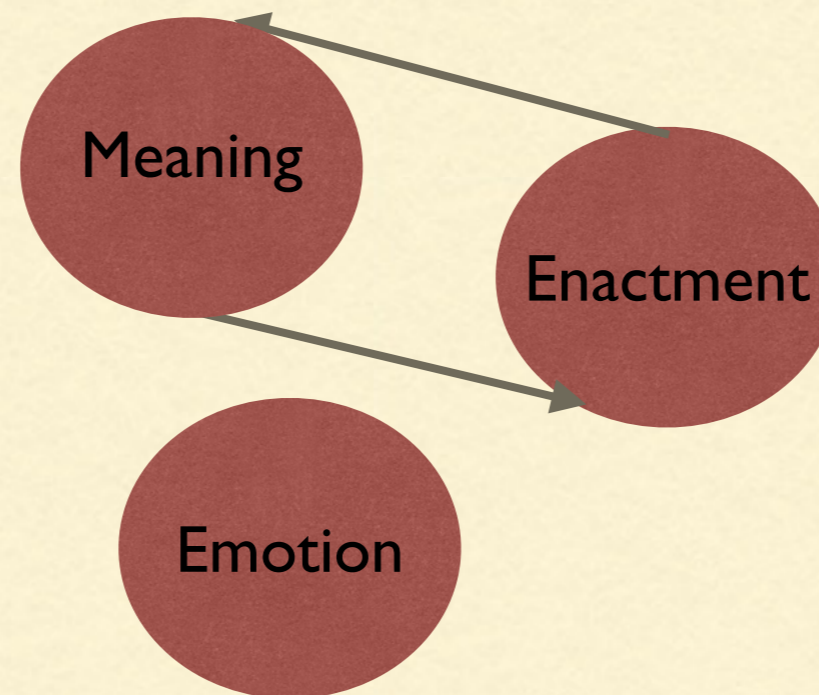
- Three main influences on the reflexive pattern
    - What they left with
      - Some client's reported feeling afraid or angry as a result of what was discussed or what they did not understand from session. This would initiate an emotionally primed familiar cycle.
      - Or they would leave with a cognitive understanding of what to do but they had not bridged the gap between insight and enactment.
    - External influences
      - Client's reported how their work , kids, and other routines left them feeling exhausted cranky, & stressed.
      - Client's did not have the space to disrupt the reflexive process. Client's described this as "old habits".
    - Set patterns
      - The well warn path. Even though unpleasant the path was familiar. Client's were in auto-pilot mode headed for a crash but in the moment not able to see it, to tired, or did not have the inhibitory strength to stop the nose dive.
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# REFLECTIVE PROCESS



- Clients reported a process of cognitively evaluating and rehearsing their in session experience and insights.
- They used terms like I “**recalled**” or “**replayed**” the meaning of the session or life event.
- Those clients often times moved into enactments based almost solely on the meaning that evolved from their time replaying their experiences. If it seemed reasonable then they were most likely to translate that into an enactment.





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# REFLECTIVE PROCESS

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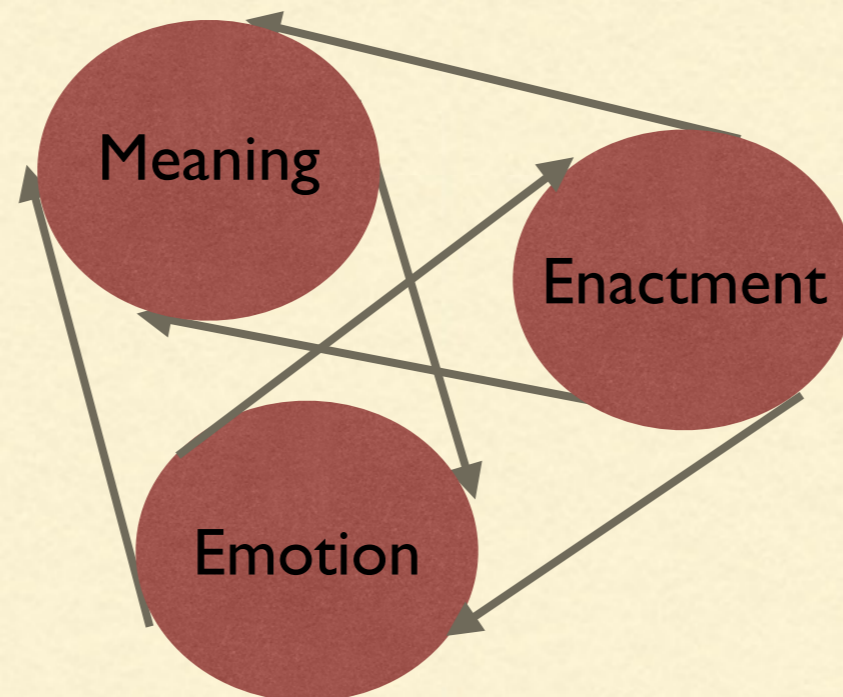
- This process seemed to be most influenced by what the participants were socialized to do.
    - **Family socialization**
      - Clients who had grown up in homes in which the family discouraged crying and labeled emotions as being unimportant would rely more on meaning as a reliable measure to determine how to act/change.
    - **Gender socialization**
      - Clients also seemed to be influenced by the boundaries society put around what are reliable sources for change and how does change look like based on gender.
        - Boys- “Don’t talk about, just suck it up and do it”
        - Girls- “Talk through it, feel it out”.
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# REGULATORY PROCESS



- This process included all three elements of **acquiring meaning, affective responding, and enactments**.
- This process was defined as an ongoing assessment and implementation of new behaviors based on evaluations determined by Enactments and Affective Responses.
- This process was unique in that it incorporated both the cognitive evaluation and emotional reaction to determine the enactments.





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# REGULATORY PROCESS

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- Example:
    - Client falls into old pattern of expressing anger.
    - Client is immediately aware of the emotional consequences of their anger.
    - Client recalls meaning derived from their in-session experience that relates to the expression of their anger.
    - Client recalls emotion derived from their in-session experience that relates to them replacing their expression of anger.
    - Client moves toward a new behavior driven by both insight from meaning, consequences of negative emotional states and pro growth emotions.
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# REGULATORY PROCESS

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- **Regulatory processes** appeared to be most influenced by the client's in-session experience.
    - When counselors followed a similar pattern of change in-session, the client's seemed more likely to model that pattern of change outside the session.
  - **Regulatory processes** were also influence by client's ability to access their emotions, thoughts, and behaviors at any given moment.
  - Safety and a healthy level of affect regulation influenced the client's ability to access all three dimensions.
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# INTRAPERSONAL VS INTERPERSONAL

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- Client's also experienced change on a dimension of intrapersonal vs. interpersonal change processing.
  - Some client's consistently included others as a part of their change process where some client's were more disengaged from allowing others to influence their change and depended mostly upon themselves.
    - Example **Intrapersonal Reflexive Process**: Husband leaves session while still angry at wife. He automatically withdraws from her without including her in his anger.
    - Example **Interpersonal Reflexive Process**: Husband leaves session while still angry at wife. Husband critically attacks wife in the parking lot. The wife, hurt, counter attacks the husband with critical words.
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# INTRAPERSONAL VS INTERPERSONAL

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- The three strongest factors that influenced whether individuals would process change interpersonally or intrapersonally was:
    - **External Influences:** Those who had high external demands had very little time or energy to engage others in their change. Involving others was too time costly and energy sucking.
    - **Familial Patterns:** Those who grew up in homes in which self reliance and independence were promoted, were less likely to include others in the change process.
    - **Counseling Session:** Client's who experienced change by the counselor valuing the therapeutic interpersonal experience as a catalyst for change were more likely to do this outside of the session. Also, so counselors encouraged interpersonal homework while some encouraged intrapersonal homework.
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# FORWARD LOOKING

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- At some point in the between-session experience almost all couples **forward looked**. By recognizing their upcoming appointment the client's would have a window of time to push for a change event.
  - Some clients would **forward look** almost the entire between session experience. “what will my counselor say?”, “I could share this with them”.
  - Other clients would **forward look** the night before or morning of their appointment. “Oh no, I didn't do my homework”.
  - Some clients would freeze and **forward look** in hopes that the next appointment would solve their problem.
  - **Forward looking** had an impact on emotions, thoughts, and enactments.
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# SUCCESSFUL CLIENTS

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- Client's who reported the **most success** in accomplishing change in their between-session experience had the following recipe.
    - The client used the regulatory process to negotiate change.
    - The client had lower external influences/stressors that created space in which change could occur.
    - The client addressed unhealthy change patterns that were established in their family of origin.
    - The client used interpersonal means in which to negotiate change. Interpersonal means created greater energy and strength to the change process.
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# SUCCESSFUL THERAPISTS

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- What does a **successful therapist** need to do?
    - A successful therapist will construct their session in a way that they want their clients to live out change between-sessions. Clients tend to mirror what goes on in session to their between-session experience.
      - **Example:** The counselor will be mindful of including elements of thought, emotion, behavior, and interpersonal learning in their session.
    - A successful therapist evaluates what current process a client is operating within to assess their level of readiness for between-session change.
      - **Example:** Those clients in the reflexive process are less likely to transition the session into their between-session time and are less likely to complete homework assignments successfully.
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# SUCCESSFUL THERAPISTS

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- What does a successful therapist need to do?
    - A successful therapist will adjust their session to address/grow areas of deficit in the way their client processes change.
      - **Example:** A therapist might include more emotional softening events to pull affect out to include it more in the change experience.
    - A successful therapist is aware of the external influences that limit client's ability to change. In light of this they are willing to challenge their client to adjust these demands in order to create more space for change.
      - **Example:** The therapist assesses the external demands of the client and dialogues with them about whether these demands inhibit the client's flexibility toward change between-sessions.
    - A successful therapist will identify the forward looking part of the process and identify how client's could use this toward enhancing change.
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# CASE SCENARIO

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- Now knowing what you have learned what would you do to influence this couples between-session experience?
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