Sailing the 7C's of Courage – Away from the Practice of NLP and Towards a Novel and Cohesive Theory of Change. A Single Case History

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Abstract

Introduction: *7C's is a framework to develop out of a 25 years professional existence within the NLP community. It is a pluralist modality incorporating perspectives from Ontology, Phenomenology, Constructivism, Cognitivism, Behaviorism and many more. The 7C's Framework believes the best evidence for the validity of its approach is the lived lives of clients and trainees. Taking an Action Research approach, 7C's recognizes the utility of embedding more quantitative methods to discover what works in its research design, however, is in itself more skewed towards an inductive ideographic methodology.*

Objectives: *The purpose of this paper is to build upon a previous article, published in "Journal of Experiential Psychotherapy", and to explore specifically how a therapist using the 7C's approach would operate. This is in contrast with the previous paper which described how 7C's had developed from within the NLP community. The intention is to begin to build a theory of 7C's with reference to the psychological literature.*

Methods: *With the use of a single case study, the author describes a new framework and method for working therapeutically, which has emerged from his 25 years practice as a psychologist specializing in psychotherapy. In this paper he provides a broad step by step guide and rationale for working with clients.*

Results: *The results of this case study were positive and supported by appropriate psychometrics. The process shows how the client's previous existence was explored, marking out key areas of work in bold which emphasized the inductive nature of 7C's and the discovery and creation of new resources, known within 7C's as "Super-Heroes".*

Conclusions: *This case history represents just one way of working within the 7C's Frame. However, it also signposts the importance of recognizing context and the inductive creation of "Super-Heroes" to generate authentic resources to deal with the problems within each context as a general process common to all 7C's work.*

Keywords: *7C's, Experience, Context, Super-Hero, Model/ Modelling, Well Formed Outcome, multiple selves*

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I. Introduction

The 7C's frame has been developed over a period of 25 years of clinical practice and was first published for consideration in the NLP journal "Rapport" (Grimley, 2002) and the coaching journal "AC Bulletin" (Grimley, 2005). A more comprehensive introduction to 7C's is provided in Grimley, 2013, 2020 and 2021. This paper supplements these earlier texts by presenting 7C's in such a way that emphasizes the distinctions of Bostic St. Clair and Grinder between primary sensory experience and then the influence of language (which operates by a different set of rules) upon that primary experience to produce unconscious sensory maps distorted through the influence of language.

Sensory Experience and Context

In adopting a phenomenological perspective (Merleau-Ponty, 1962), 7C's initially was focused on the client's subjective experience. As Gendlin (1966) tells us: "human experiencing is approached directly rather than studied after it has been translated into theoretical machinery." However, even Merleau-Ponty (1962) points out:

> "the perceptual 'something' is always in the middle of something else, it always forms part of a 'field'. A really homogenous area offering nothing to be, cannot be given to any perception".

7C's therefore also inculcates both existential and experiential themes which introduce the importance of context and is concerned with an understanding of people's position in the world, and what it means to be alive (Kierkegaard, 1944, 2009; Nietzsche, 1974, 1996, 2006; Husserl, 1960, 1962). In terms of pluralism, this supplements the phenomenological theme of "the 'sensation' as the unit of experience" (Merleau-Ponty, 1962, p. 3) with the systemic understanding of difference as being the fundamental unit of experience in the abstract world:

> "A difference which makes a difference is an idea. It is a 'bit', a unit of information." (Bateson, 1972, p. 272)

So, the natural world and the world of ideas collide, taking from Bateson that what drives these ideas of difference along our neural pathways is an energy, and from a 7C's perspective this energy is ideally created and sustained by the client's Well-Formed outcome. It is suggested that these ideas of difference must adhere to 7C's process variables (Figure 1).

Gendlin (1966) sees the 200 to 400 different theories of therapy (Edelstien, 1990, p. 1) not as logical and empirically proven concepts, but simply vocabularies which are transcended by **the only thing** they have in common, which is their reference to specific differentiation of felt experiencing. In moving through therapy, concepts only have meaning in terms of what they point to, and that is felt experience within a specific context. So, the type of thinking in 7C's does not move from concept to concept through logical connection, rather, it moves through experiential detail, framed within concepts which make sense in the context of what is valued and what is wanted by the client.

That a felt intuition could thus provide the basis for a sound and structured methodology is alluded to by Bostic St. Clair and Grinder (2001), when they unequivocally say yes it can. They point out that native speakers of any language can intuitively and consistently accurately ascertain the complex differentiation between competency and performance variables in a spoken sentence. To Bostic St. Clair and Grinder this is even more remarkable in that this intuitive capability is independent of educational level (op. cit., 2001. p. 71). In a similar way, in either coaching or therapy, when a 7C's practitioner invites a client to consider a particular scenario, their immediate intuition is regarded as the most reliable indicator of which internal structures are authentically associated with that scenario and it is these which need to be accessed in order to develop and reframe, so as to move forwards in a flow-like manner (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990).

A native speaker of English will have a different felt intuition after reading the following sentences:

1. A competent utterance: "David hit the ball with a cricket bat."

2. An utterance distorted by performance variables: "The David hit cricket bat ball."

Just as a native speaker of English "knows" the second sentence is grammatically incorrect intuitively through felt experience, so the client, when you ask them to enter into the context of the problem they bring to therapy or coaching, also intuitively knows what their problem is and indeed may even know what the solution is.

Returning to Bateson, we see he regarded stimulus simply as an elementary signal, what classified that signal was the context acting as a meta-message, and indeed that context could be within a further context acting as a meta-meta message. It is only in the world of ideas we find difference and distinction, and Bateson

quotes William Blake to this end: "without contraries is no progression" (1972, p. 303).

These meta-messages either enable further experience for exploration and consideration or they do not. Calibration is therefore a key skill within 7C's, testing as the client explores with the therapist whether or not the conceptual framing is taking the client further towards or further away from their goal. New and bespoke concepts can arise from this process and within 7C's new parts are either discovered or created, and then named at the level of identity, creating a resource of internal "Super-Heroes" to deal with each of the 7 contexts as the day unfolds (Figure 1). The language of "Super-Heroes" emerged in the development of 7C's when a client started to call her internal resources "Super-Heroes", and this positive language was regarded as appropriate and reinforcing in a positive way. Thus, with permission from this client the language or Super-Heroes was integrated into 7C's. Switching between these parts then becomes a fundamental skill, as neuropsychology has shown the concept of multi-tasking to be a myth (Nass, 2009; Charron & Koechlin, 2010; Szumowska & Kossowska, 2016, 2017). The unique cluster of Super-Heroes for any of the specific 7 contexts are then derived from felt experience and thus acquire their meaning from that special place **rather** than the felt experience, being derived from top-down concepts, popular within psychology, and in a top-down way. The concepts which do arise from felt experience and take form in the shape of Super-Heroes or clusters of Super-Heroes may indeed match what a more quantitative approach may predict. However, a 7C's therapist will always allow such conceptual framing to arise in a bottom-up way rather than to impose it in a top-down way. The intuitive connection between these primary felt experiences and secondary conceptual descriptors is nicely described by Einstein:

"I see on the one side the totality of sense experiences, and on the other the totality of the concepts and propositions that are laid down in books. The relations between the concepts and propositions among themselves are of a logical nature, and the business of logical thinking is strictly limited to the achievement of the connections between concepts and propositions among themselves according to firmly laid down rules, which are the concern of logic. The

concepts and propositions get 'meaning' or 'content' only with their connection through sense experience. The connection of the latter with the former is purely **intuitive** *(my emphasis)*, not itself of a logical nature. The degree of certainty with which this connection or intuitive linkage can be undertaken and nothing else differentiates empty fantasy from scientific 'truth'." (Schilpp, 1979, p. 11-12)

One can see here again the use of intuition as a methodology, however what is very important if we are to take a scientific attitude to an experiential modality is that we should establish the **degree of certainty** Einstein calls for. Thus, for each individual who takes a 7C's journey, it is incumbent upon them to keep an accurate record of the concepts which inductively arise from sensory awareness and how they become embodied as a "Super-Hero" to act effectively in the external environment.
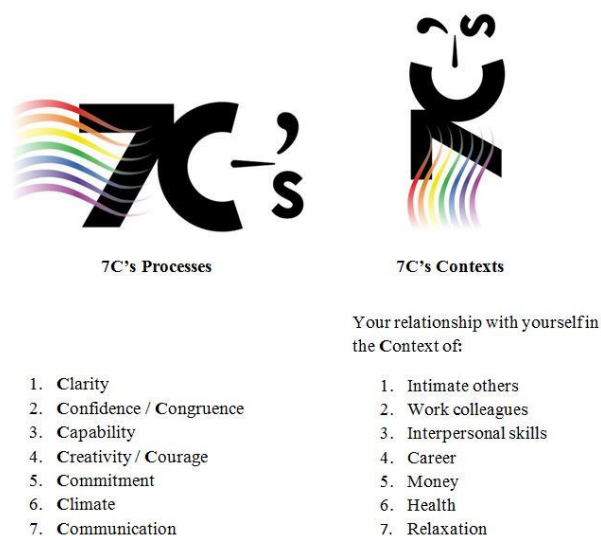
Framing

As mentioned above, 7C's is inductive with concepts being derived from felt experience. As each individual client is different, a 7C's practitioner will always be working therefore within a different conceptual framework. However, there must be a basic syntax within which to work. For 7C's this is attention to the context at hand and the client's relationship with themselves, within that context when working towards what they values, namely their Well Formed Outcome.

What Grimley (2005) found by putting 26 items of the 7C's core code questionnaire through a principal components analysis was that the only context that reliably related to a perception of experienced stress was the context of a person's relationship with themselves. 8 contextual themes thus became 7 Contextual themes, with each of the 7 Contextual themes being subordinate to the key superordinate theme, which was the client's relationship to themselves. If a client thus enters the therapeutic relationship with a problem in his career, in fact for the therapist working from the 7C's frame this is not where the problem lies, the problem is in the client's relationship with himself in the context of his career. The context of career is assumed to trigger negative and unsupportive cognitions and affect, and it is these felt experiences which need to be explored, differentiated and re-framed in an embodied way (Figure 1).

Multiple selves rather than a unity

Radden (1996) explores the self as a "Succession of Selves", each with their own purpose and set of outcomes, rather than an integrated unity; this is a perspective shared by Watkins & Watkins (1997) and adopted by 7C's. The "self" therefore is always a multiplicity and not a unity. Often when a 7C's therapist works with a client, they will begin to notice the signature strengths of a Super-Hero coming out at different times of either coaching or therapy. The author has found, in his experience, that therapy is always going well when both therapist and client enjoy naming these Super-Heroes with idiosyncratic and endearing names to anchor the positive felt experience. The author for instance is currently working with a world class indoor rower, and he has a Super-Hero called "Billy the Rock". This part of the client was discovered and created when his felt experience was that he always used to throw in the towel and give up during competition. We discovered other contexts where the client never gave up and would always see something through to the end, we modelled that and then made use of this set of internal resources to act in the context of indoor rowing performance. We also modelled other top-class athletes and in this way "Billy the Rock" was born. The author's client now whenever signing emails will sign as "Billy the Rock".

Figure 1. (Grimley, 2002, 2005)

7C's Processes

7C's Contexts

Your relationship with yourself in the Context of:

7C's Processes	7C's Contexts
1. Clarity	1. Intimate others
2. Confidence / Congruence	2. Work colleagues
3. Capability	3. Interpersonal skills
4. Creativity / Courage	4. Career
5. Commitment	5. Money
6. Climate	6. Health
7. Communication	7. Relaxation

What struck the author as interesting is when Alter Egos are triggered in a client who has Dissociative Identity Disorder (DID), they are usually authentic and congruent in their expression and capability. Indeed, when the treatment of Billy Milligan, who was the first person acquitted from a court with the defense of DID, was underway, therapists recognized that when Alter Ego's fused together with the ultimate intention of integration, the capability they once had individually diminished. This was also an existential concern for Billy Milligan:

> "Donna Egar reported that Milligan told her he was worried about the fusion because he didn't want to let any of the others die or any of their talents or strengths be weakened… Rosalie Drake watched and listened as Tommy played the drums. She knew that only Allen had played them before. In the fused state he was obviously not as good as Allen had been on his own." (Keyes, 1995, p. 92)

Indeed, towards the end of the book, Dr. George Harding is cited as saying the fused 23 personalities would probably be less than the sum of their parts (op. cit., 1995, p. 368). These clinical observations support precisely what neuroscientists are currently discovering about the myth of multi-tasking and the need to focus within any context only on the task at hand to completion without interruption or intrusion from other life requirements. If one is to have as a methodological concern, as 7C's does, a focus not just on the structure of subjective experience, but also on the structure of excellence (Ericsson, 2016), then this is a fundamental concern.

Therefore 7C's is based upon the idea that if we can be sufficiently clear in each of the seven life contexts of exactly who we wish to aspire to be, and be sufficiently creative to work with parts that are triggered as we enter those contexts, we are then in a position to first consistently recognize the context within which we are operating, and secondly be sufficiently cognitively and affectively flexible to make the appropriate change in a very clean way with respect and attention to ecology for the whole system. If we can do this, then fusion or integration with the attendant reduction in capability is not necessary, and the integrated whole can then be much greater than the sum of our parts. The key skill in 7C's is not integration therefore, but context awareness and switching to appropriate state at the level of identity. It is assumed in the 7C's model that some higher-level cognitive processing, such as the Hidden Observer (Hilgard, 1997), is responsible for the ultimate integration of Super-Heroes into an ecological whole.

A typical 7C's syntax

Even though 7C's is a framework within which a therapist or coach would work in a fluid way, often in training, trainees like steps to follow, so below is a typical 4 step process within the 7C's frame.

First step follows Bolstad (2002): ensure you have rapport with yourself and then with your client.

Secondly, one enquires about what is wanted and what the barrier is. This will offer rich information about the client's map of the world and provide an initial model. One focuses specifically on the context and how in this particular context a different feeling is experienced compared with similar behaviors in another context. A typical example would be talking to an audience behind the breakfast table (Intimate Others context and resourceful model), and then talking to an audience behind a lectern at an important conference (Career Context and problem model). Finally, the client models someone they admire who does this behavior in the problem context consistently in an excellent fashion. These 3 modelling projects are spatially anchored. At this stage too, the client formally models these 3 anchored states using Alter Ego and Core Code questionnaires, which measure personality and context.

This second step is the first part of the change process. By modelling the successful behavior in the other context, the client appreciates they have the necessary resources, it is simply they have become disconnected with them in the specific context they are bringing to therapy. Also, by modelling somebody they admire, they can bring extra resources to the party, which they had not considered. This provides data for modelling further along.

Third step is to acknowledge the problem state, and then variants of the affect bridge technique (Watkins, 1971) are used to regress through time to the earliest memory of experiencing this specific feeling. This often takes time, however when at the earliest point a managed dissociation is encouraged so the client can see themselves as well as all other players in the system at that earlier time. At this stage of therapy what can best be described as a dance takes place. The client is encouraged to examine both the needs, secondary gains and positive intentions of all parties. A typical question would be: *"What specifically do you want at this time in this **context**?"* This process when recycled eventually accesses the embodied blues (Figure 2) and provides a space within a particular context to reframe and build appropriate capability: "Super-Heroes". This reframing is in accordance with who the client was before they were interrupted, according to their own ecology and the values they hold deeply within their own neurology. The client is also encouraged to learn from the modelling projects they have conducted earlier in the sessions and the felt experiences they have witnessed as a result of them. The client is encouraged to act as if they could experience these in the moment, to witness the effects on the other "participants" in the system during the past. The primacy of **context** in 7C's is to ensure the client does not wander during this phase to associated neural networks which are not related to the problem context, creating a pseudo recovery.

One continues in this dance until each of the 7C's processes are effectively addressed and when this is the case, this new felt experience is anchored and brought fully into the present and rehearsed in the problem context.

This stage of 7C's work can be described in a nutshell as:

a) Find the context.

b) Minimally access the blues.

c) Build capability by the use of modelled resource.

d) Integrate the positive intention of the core expression of who you are and what you value in that context before the negative interruption.

e) Anchor the felt experience.

f) Future pace (see Figure 2).

Fourth and final stage occurs when this rehearsal is projected into the future and the client is asked such questions as "What could go wrong?", "What are the next steps?" and "What does this mean now?". When the client knows nothing can go wrong, they know their next steps, and paints an authentic, positive and ecological vision for their future, then the client is ready to be discharged. The above process in a nutshell can be seen in Figure 2 below.

II. Case study

The best way to demonstrate to the reader how the dance and flow of 7C's unfolds is to provide a case history. Names and identifying features for this case have been changed to ensure confidentiality and permission to use this case has been granted. Parts of the therapy which allude to the above 4 steps are marked out in **bold**, so the reader can see how in a fluid way the syntax was being addressed.

Josephine was referred to therapy suffering from DSM-V 309.81 PTSD. She had been assessed previously by a doctor of clinical psychology for the courts. She had read the book "The body keeps the score" (Van Der Kolk, 2015), so was self-educated

concerning how the mind and body deal with anxiety and trauma. What was interesting about Josephine was even though the index event deemed to be causal, in this case was a fatal road traffic accident (RTA), she managed to drive to the therapeutic practice quite easily in a large 4 x 4 vehicle. When talking about the event which had happened just over a year previously she was quite calm and relaxed and capable of recollecting detail with little hesitation.

This was strange in the experience of the author as often when assessing for PTSD himself using the Detailed Assessment of Post-Traumatic Stress (Briere, 2001), sometimes it took him a few sessions to effectively administer the whole psychometric which consists of 133 items in 3 parts. This is because to answer the questions necessitated the client thinking about the index incident and often this is extremely anxiety producing, meaning the client will become tearful and feels they cannot proceed.

Administering the 7C's stress inventory (**Core Code,** Figure 3) seemed to support this strange presentation with the client reporting experiencing very little stress or anxiety, yet according to the core stress score, which included key items concerning **her relationship with herself,** she was very anxious.

That this calm presentation seemed to mask considerable anxiety was supported by an administration of the Impact of Event (revised) questionnaire (Weiss & Marmar, 1997). A score which had reduced from 75 in the summer of 2019, to 49 by January of 2020, was still well above the cut off score for a diagnosis of PTSD, which is 33. Further to this, previous counselling which had reduced anxiety and depression did not seem to have been efficacious over time with scores for GAD-7 (Spitzer et al., 2006) and PHQ-9 (Kroenke et al., 2001, 2002) returning to 19 and 23 respectively, indicating severe anxiety and depression.

Figure 2.

"Find the context. Minimally access the blues. Build capability through the use of modelled resource. Integrate the positive intention of the core expression of who you are and what you value in that context before the negative interruption. Anchor the felt experience. Future pace".
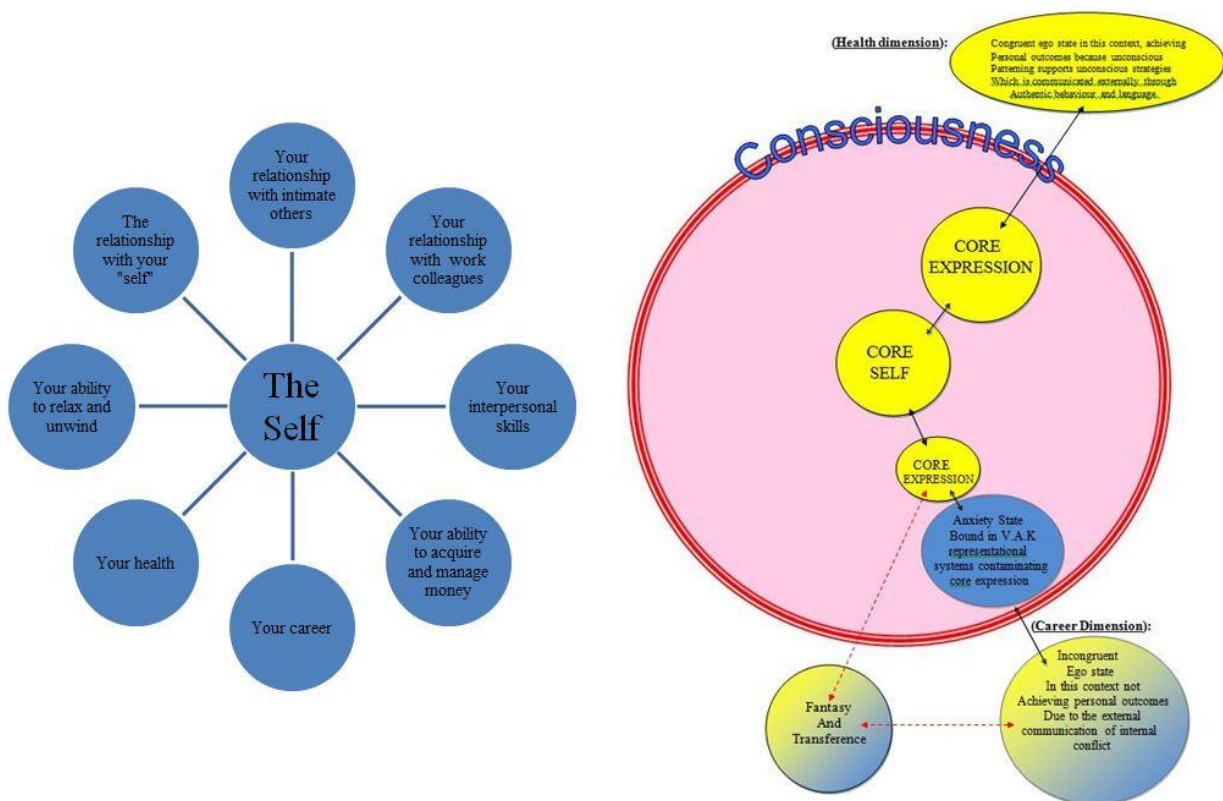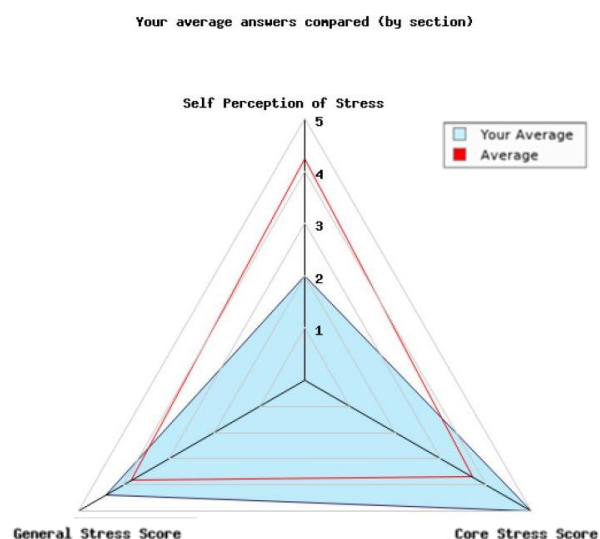
Figure 3. Josephine Core Code Profile N=247, January 2020

Your average answers compared (by section)

In feeding back these scores to Josephine and enquiring about the discrepancy between her calm demeanor when talking about the index event and the very high anxiety scores with a co-morbidity of depression, she became tearful and spoke of being raped when she was 12 years old. What had really exacerbated this event was that her mother provided absolutely no support after the rape, consistently being quite critical, and was reported as treating Josephine more like an accessory handbag to show off to friends rather than a daughter. Continuing to build **rapport** helped Josephine tell her own story and separate personal history into **contexts**. During this time the author commented on how Josephine presented as almost child-like when talking about her life before the rape, full of innocence, joy and friendship, yet afterwards, as supported by her **7C's Alter Ego personality profile**, she had become quite hard and untrusting. I pointed out how when she talked about doing her job as a senior operations manager, she was almost somebody else, who appeared confident, did not suffer fools gladly, could make important decisions quickly, and was very achievement oriented with a "Towards" stance. Having agreed with my calibration of the **two states**, I asked Josephine to associate into each one and report on what she discovered. She said the part of her who we came to call **Little Girl** was very friendly, enjoyed playing, loved animals and was very relaxed in who she was. The other part she called **Zena** and was a warrior type. As we continued to talk, we discovered that it was **Zena** who had been carrying all the anxiety for both the rape and for the RTA and that she had needed to come into

therapy because even she was at breaking point. In this parts party we discovered Josephine had other resources. There was a part called **Party Josephine**, who enjoyed going out, and also there was another part called **Expletive Josephine**, who was responsible for the depression Josephine often fell into.

As Josephine continued, she recognized, as pressure was put upon her to return to work as she was needed there, it was important that **Zena could model Little Girl**. This was because Little Girl had a developed intuitive sense which Josephine valued in the workplace. Also, Little Girl had much better social skills and as Josephine was actively seeking to settle down in a stable relationship; she had discovered Zena often frightened men away.

Originally Josephine was very wary of adopting an Ego State approach and did not like the idea of having parts within her being triggered in differing contexts and often being in conflict with each other. However, as we continued to work, calling these "resources" instead of parts, Josephine recognized that, in order to really make these resources work in the real world, and to obtain the necessary responses from other people, it made sense to admit that they did quite literally have different identities and valued different things. As a consequence, they were very capable within the contexts they valued, yet not necessarily so in other contexts, where in some cases they actually could be a liability. As Josephine warmed to the Super-Hero concept we began to develop a **"Work" Josephine** and whilst she consisted of Zena capabilities, this personality was softened through modelling Little Girl and integrating some of her capabilities. We used to joke with each other that nobody could party like Party Josephine and when good rapport had been built, we started to laugh at the fact that Expletive Josephine really had just thrown the towel in.

Developing an advanced awareness thus of how Josephine was structured internally enabled some success in re-framing the rape incident and the lack of support from family and friends. This allowed Josephine to go through the V/ K dissociation process (Arroll et al., 2017) for the RTA index event without a hitch. Thus, over a period of 22 therapy sessions substantial gains were made in many different contexts.

"Work" Josephine began to negotiate return to work conditions with H.R. and Occupational Health which were favorable to her and scores on the key psychometrics can be seen in Table 1 below. What was most pleasing was that during the months of July to October, when Josephine returned to work and she was

under pressure, the psychometric scores held up well and she reported that "Work" Josephine was beginning to operate at a level of Unconscious Competence.

Table 1. Anxiety, Depression and Impact of Event scores for Josephine

	GAD-7 (out of 21)	PHQ-9 (out of 27)	IES-r (out of 88)
Pre-Treatment. 02/12/2019	19	23	49
Mid-Treatment 29/07/2020	10	13	17
Post-Treatment 23/10/2020	8	13	18

Feedback from Josephine immediately after therapy can be seen below, in Figure 4. As some of the therapy was conducted via teleconferencing during the Covid-19 pandemic, this impacted upon the therapeutic environment ratings.

Figure 4. Feedback from Josephine

Name: Josephine   ACHIEVING LIVES *Achieve Life*   Date 23ʳᵈ October 2020

THERAPY FEEDBACK FORM

PLEASE RATE FROM 1 TO 10 AS YOU FEEL APPROPRIATE:

Please highlight or underline responses below that apply to you. 1=Terrible, 10=Excellent

1. Suitability of therapeutic environment. 1-2-3-4-5-6-7-**8**-9-10

2. Explanation of therapeutic process. 1-2-3-4-5-6-7-8-**9**-10

3. Use of questionnaires / psychological models when appropriate. 1-2-3-4-5-6-7-8-**9**-10

4. Usefulness of therapeutic exercises. 1-2-3-4-5-6-7-8-9-**10**

5. Professionalism of service. 1-2-3-4-5-6-7-8-**9**-10

6. Relevance of Therapy to meet your needs. 1-2-3-4-5-6-7-8-**9**-10

7. Value for Money. 1-2-3-4-5-6-7-8-9-10   **(N/A this was an insurance case)**

8. Ethical Conduct of Therapist. 1-2-3-4-5-6-7-8-9-**10**

9. Did you achieve what you wanted from therapy? 1-2-3-4-5-6-7-8-**9**-10

10. Were questions answered satisfactorily? 1-2-3-4-5-6-7-8-**9**-10

11. Learning Culture Produced. 1-2-3-4-5-6-7-8-9-**10**

12. Would you recommend a friend to this therapeutic practice? 1-2-3-4-5-6-7-8-9-**10**

13. Level of support throughout therapeutic intervention. 1-2-3-4-5-6-7-8-9-**10**

14. Pace of therapeutic intervention. 1-2-3-4-5-6-7-8-9-**10**

15. Level of belief that gains created are sustainable? 1-2-3-4-5-6-7-8-**9**-10

III. Conclusion

This paper has outlined just one of many ways in which a therapist can work within the framework of 7C's. In this instance, the creation of Super-Heroes, also known in clinical work as Ego States, assisted the client in creating Clarity, Confidence, Commitment, Courage, Capability, Congruence and effective Communication in the contexts of "Interpersonal Skills" and "Career". There was a big step forward too, in beginning to build supportive relationships again in the context of "Intimate others". Of course, the ultimate and most important context was the client's relationship with herself as she processed that relationship in each of these contexts, as they unfolded throughout the days and weeks of her life in the future.

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