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REFRAMING - 1492 CONQUEST OF PARADISE OR HAPPINESS IN THE HERE-AND-NOW PARADISE

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1. INTRODUCTION

In the 1960s A.T. Beck, who work with patients diagnosed with depression helped them to turn negative thoughts into positive thoughts, a process which he called cognitive restructuring. Because the process of reconfiguration of mental paradigm is one in continuous progress (also takes place between therapeutic sessions), involving also other psychic processes (Beck, 1997) later, it was renamed with a more general term, cognitive reframing.

Reframing is the therapeutic action by which the conceptual and/or emotional context of a situation is changed. Changing the perspective from which the situation is lived, placing it in a different frame that matches as well or even better the facts of this concrete situation can completely change the meaning of an action (Beck, 1997).

It is impossible to live in the world we live in without giving a meaning to things around us. This meaning is always dependent on the context. In the constructivist view of reality it is shown that the client’s map of reality is not also its territory (Balbi, 2008). While the territory cannot change, the map can be changed. To support this statement, here’s the following example: when we look at a painting, its understanding depends on where it is kept. This is why certain painting exhibitions are held in museums, while others in unconventional places, even outdoors. Furthermore, when you look at a painting without a frame you get a different meaning than when you look at the same painting with a thick, carved and gilded frame. The frame or the environment influences the meaning. Thus, sometimes the context is not change but the perspective can be widened. In our day-to-day lives, we prevalingly use such frames that are more familiar to us. These are called reference frames.

We can define the reference frame as being that part of reality that the mind can see at a given time. We cannot know reality as a whole, the same way as a camera cannot simultaneously shoot from several angles. When we look at a photograph, certainly there are parts of reality it does not include. Thus, as in a joke, “Picasso was approached by a visitor of an exhibition, who told him that he didn’t like the exhibited paintings at all”. The essential reason was that they did not reproduce reality with enough accuracy. To give an example, he took out a photograph of his wife from his pocket and said “See, this is how my wife really looks! This is how your portraits should look”. With a serious and very intrigued face Picasso, looking closely at the piece of cardboard on which the visitor’s wife’s face was printed, answered: “Are you sure this is how your wife really looks? She looks rather small and flat to me!”.

It wasn’t accidental that David Gordon stated that “Humans are meanings-making machines” (Jacobson, 2013).

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By the action of reframing, one learns using new frames of reference helping them to understand old behaviours/events from a new perspective. When the meaning changes, responses and behaviour also change.

In this respect, thought and metaphoric speech extend the understanding ability, by reaching directly into the unconscious, allowing difficulties to be understood profoundly, thus receiving guidance to the solutions.

Next, we will illustrate a reframing using cognitive-behaviour techniques and hypnosis. They were applied in a context of favourable circumstances that was inspiredly, immediately and effectively exploited by the psychotherapist.

We are at the third session with a 50-year old lady, with higher studies in piano and canto, married to a gentleman that is 16 years older, at the second marriage, who has serious health problems. She has two children, 23 and 18, boys. The client appeared with a moderate anxious depression. She describes her state using phrases like “I feel unhappy”, “I am frustrated”, “nobody loves me”, “I can no longer see the future”, “I feel a great weight pressing me and my chest hurts”, “I can’t sleep at night” and “I cry from anything”, “I see everything in black”. From the tests it appeared that she had an average to low ability to control and express tensions in a realistic manner. Under the pressure of the needs related to exercising sexual appetite, the need for consideration and fear of the situation, the client has above-average ergic tension manifested in emotionality, stress, irascibility. Unresolved internal conflicts (Manolea, 2013) reduce her assertive capacity and the power to make decisions and keep her in a depressive state.

The client, with real personal abilities in the musical field, has a sensitive and imaginative structure, with the sea as the most liked natural element. As a way to escape her daily problems she mentioned, in this order: travelling, tours, activities in other cities. She has a high degree of hypnotisability according to the tests, on different scales. In the last session a medium to deep hypnotic induction was performed using suggestions to strengthen her Ego.

In the current session, in a context that completely excluded suicidal ideation, she used the phrase “Only in Paradise you can be happy”.

The psychotherapist reframed the theme of “paradise as something illusory, unreachable” into the theme “paradise as something palpable, at hand and accessible” where you can feel happy “here and now”. For this, the psychotherapist used the client’s musical sensitivity, knowledge in this field and imaginative abilities. Using the proper moment and circumstances, the psychotherapist showed her and kept in her visual field the CD with the musical theme “1492 Conquest of Paradise” by Vangelis. The CD cover, particularly well made, suggests joy of discovery, fulfilling aspirations, defeating all hardships, explosive happiness.

Pleasantly surprised, the client presented non-verbal language that entitled the psychotherapist to ask the following question: “Do you think you could be happy in this paradise?” The client answered quickly, with a beaming smile and her eyes on the CD cover: “Of course I would feel happy in this paradise. This is very pleasant music and it always makes me feel better when I listen to it!”

Next in the session, the client was induced into a deep, cataleptic hypnotic trance on the musical background of the CD with the music of Vangelis and she was verbally “administered” the “conquest of paradise metaphor”.

The very next day I received a message with the following content:

“...I feel I am starting to “repair” and I believe I will no longer speak of myself in yesterday’s terms. Yes, I believe that what we are doing is helping me!”

2. DISCUSSION

The manner of realizing reframing involved a therapist's particular attention, that using elements of cognitive behavioral therapy has succeeded in bringing the subject in a situation to be aware of elements of intra psychic conflict. The subject manifested focused attention that allowed him to bring into the conscious, those parts of interior conflictuality which have facilitated him the recognition of dysfunctional behavior (Singer and Salovey, 1988).

Using music with appropriate psycho-emotional content, has facilitated the attainment of psychic profundities belonging to the subconscious, the manifestation place of intra psychic conflict (Manolea, 2013). The ambiance created has been used by the therapist to access other facets of intra psychic conflict which were not present in rational thinking (Ray et al, 2005). This was a preamble to the use of hypnosis, in order to access certain areas of deeper manifested intra psychic conflict. Condition achieved by the subject (Tart, 1975), was exploited by the therapist in order to implement a few elements of behavior and to strengthen the subject's own insights.
From the neuroscience point of view, it can be postulated that any intrapsychic conflicts have a correspondent in the activation of certain neural networks belonging to specific brain areas, whose functioning is synchronized and generates a particular type of behavior generally emotionally dysfunctional.

The applied cognitive behavioral therapy, managed to activate those neural network which caused a change in the perception of the subject on the content of the conflict, and to induce and maintain under control the behavior of the subject, by awareness rising.

Ecker and Toomey, (2008), showed that while this awareness it is carried out guided by the therapist, it happens the depotentiation of the involved neural networks, and so by the focus of attention, in a certain way these networks may be out of sync from a functional perspective.

In this way, the resulted emotional behavior, which is related to manifested intrapsychic conflict (Manolea, 2014) are amended conspicuously and sometimes surprisingly quickly and completely (Bailey and Chen, 1989), paving the way for the emotionally well being and even to the manifestation of happiness, as it was the case presented. Bailey and Kandel, (2008) have shown that memory depotentiation of the synapses which make memory encoding is followed by the disappearance of dysfunctional behavioral responses caused by this memories.

If the couple therapist-subject manages to maintain this state more than few seconds (typically 1-10s) (Teskey, 2001), this new configuration of the neural circuits generated by the new behavior, then occurs strengthening of the new positive behavior from the emotional point of view and a weakening of dysfunctional behavior. By applying hypnosis, this new configuration of connections of neuronal network due to neuroplasticity (Ecker and Toomey, 2008), is reinforced and secured to a lucrative level through the given suggestions.

3. CONCLUSIONS

Even if not always is likely to apply all the techniques mentioned, in the same therapeutic session, the therapist's role remains crucial in identifying those elements that promotes reconfiguration of the neural networks, generating new behaviors, new responses in the case of manifestation of the conditions conducive to the intrapsychic conflict. Finally, promoting the new behavior will result in the conflict depotentiation and even its cancellation (Ecker and Toomey, 2008), generating emotional the well being and perhaps happiness. The subject itself can amplify this process, if it manages to maintain their attention fixed on as much time to the cognitive behavioral elements, manifested during and after therapeutic session, i.e. being "here and now".

4. REFERENCES


