

Therapy in Psychosynthesis

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SUMMARY: *Psychosynthesis counselling is based on three levels: the past with its instincts, drives, fantasies and defence mechanisms. These elements must be brought to consciousness and transformed. The present with behavior patterns, distorted and restricted ways of relating. The main goal is to formulate and clarify troubling issues. The future contains work with the potentials in the process of change. Psychosynthesis assumes that counselling aim is to achieve something more than solving the problem. A high value is placed on possibilities of growth (individual, social, spiritual). Personality of the counsellor is stressed in the process of therapy.*

Introduction

Roberto Assagioli was a Freud's student. In 1910 he started psychoanalytical therapy in Italy but soon discovered its limitations. Psychoanalysis doesn't contain work on higher aspects of human beings: creativity, understanding, sympathy, joy, doesn't consider human strive to finding a sense of life which, in Assagioli's opinion were basic for human nature. He was creating his theory which included elements of classical psychoanalysis, humanistic psychology of Maslow and transpersonal psychology as well.

The first visible goal of Psychosynthesis is to reduce pain, to empower, integrate a man with his world, to help him to gain strength to create his own life, to express himself and his needs. It is a great step forward to become a good and well-functioning person.

But what next? What can we do with this integration which he obtained during hard therapeutical work? Any moment we can ask these questions, any time we can start to dream about deeper and more satisfactory life. Transpersonal awareness can be revealed in any place, any time. It doesn't have to be of religious

character one can express it as "peak experience (Maslow), as feeling of union with the Universe of beauty or endless love. Sometimes one can reach transpersonal level in situations of trauma as divorce, bad accident, death of a friend or a close relative. One may than quit values he had been attracted to, he invested much time and energy in. These situations make one think about sense of life and start looking for other values

Psychosynthesis offers methods and techniques to integrate different aspects of a human psyche and human functioning (see appendix)

Levels of Therapy in Psychosynthesis

Past

To say that we are our history is exaggerated but still we can not deny that childhood has enormous influence on adult life. It determines the way of seeing the world, approach to love, self-esteem etc.

In order not to become a slave of the past "we first have to penetrate courageously into the pit of our lower unconscious in order to discover dark forces that ensnare and menace us - the phantasms, the ancestral or childish images that obsess or silently dominate us, the fears that paralyse us, the conflicts that waste our energies" (Assagioli; 1965; 21). Experience from the childhood is stored in lower unconscious (which corresponds to the unconscious in traditional psychology) (see: Figure). It has influence on the shape of the personality, which means on present behavior.

Hardly anybody is free from limits and negative conditioning of parents. Almost everybody has "unfinished problems". It doesn't mean that all parents are bad. They might have had no positive models or not have been mature enough to parent well. Difficulties can be created by the conditioning of the culture as well.

In order to reach the roots of psychological complex during therapy, childhood experiences are revealed. Because they don't stay quietly somewhere in the psyche. Denied or repressed feelings create big emotional stress. Defence mechanisms are formed. They may preserve the stability of the personality but later restrict growth. On a mental level, too the history influences attitudes, beliefs and philosophy of life. These basic but often unconscious opinions like "people can't be trusted" or "life is brutal" condition the image of the reality. Although neurotic patterns of behavior manifest in every person, they don't have to be permanent and inevitable. They can be changed.

Present

People look for help because in their everyday life they meet difficulties which make functioning unbearable. They react according to limiting and ineffective

patterns, feel that they can't go beyond their limits. A Psychosynthesis counsellor doesn't take the issue at face value, its breadth and depth must be explored as well as impact on the client's life. Problems are not simply pathological points to be eliminated but rather indicators of a hidden drive towards integration.

In Assagioli's differentiation the present corresponds to the "middle unconscious" which is formed of psychological elements similar to the waking conscious, containing memories, thoughts and feelings of everyday life. It points the state a person has reached.

Future

In Psychosynthesis future is regarded as possibility - what person can be. Potentials are values to be realized, chances to create positive forces and qualities. Superconscious is this level of unconscious which is higher but rather in developmental than in moral sense. It is a place for greater aspirations, intuition and artistic, scientific and ethical impulse to humanitarian action. From time to time each of us has a superconscious experience. Maslow defines it as "peak experience", the happiest moments of ecstasy and illumination. While the superconscious is often ignored by various schools of contemporary psychology, in Psychosynthetic work particular attention is given to even underdeveloped or episodic manifestations of these energies are used.

The counsellor

Freud asserted that the therapist must stay anonymous. Young maintained that the bound between the client and the counsellor is not only a professional relationship. Assagioli believed that this relationship is of a crucial value of the therapeutic process. In his opinion progress and development would be impossible without authentic human relating. The training of Psychosynthesis counsellor stresses both models and methods and the presence with the client to create intimate contacts. The essential part of the training of counsellors is to go through their own processes. It doesn't mean that they will know all client's experience but the journey he goes through and won't operate from abstract theories and technical impositions. "The capacity of the therapist for compassion, love, empathy and acceptance is of crucial importance in determining the level of the final outcome. The client learns as the therapist responds, learns to listen to himself as the therapist does. The more evolved, aware and opened the therapist is the more space the client is given for growth within the therapeutic relationship. This is just another way of saying that any psychotherapy (or counselling) is only as high as the psychotherapist (or the counsellor)" (Vaughan-Clark; 1977; 80). Effective counselling demands keeping holistic vision during work upon particular problem. It means that the client is more than his problem, that he is a person, not a problem to be solved. It is possible only with full acceptance and love. Otherwise the therapist is speaking only through his own Ego which has its pride and feelings of grandiosity to solve client's problem.

Methods and Techniques in Psychosynthesis

Psychosynthesis is not a closed system of theories and a set of techniques. In therapy one can find both elements of psychoanalysis of Freud and Young, and humanistic and transpersonal psychologies. Maslow and Rogers are often quoted. With no shame or guilt it is described not as another psychological school, but rather as a step in the direction of using different ideas, methods and structures in order to help a person to actualize his potentials.

"Critical Analysis"

An active dialogue in which the client is encouraged to active cognitive work, to change non constructive patterns of behavior after discovering their source.

"Psychological Journal"

Keeping the journal has double role: the client learns how to formulate thoughts, feelings and observations clearly and it allows him to release negative emotions in a harmless way (catharsis).

"Mental Imaginary"

Calling up visual images and then helping the client to discover and understanding symbolic meanings of stories and pictures pictorially represented.

"Free Drawings"

It gives the client a chance to express freely what is hidden in unconsciousness, to give it more light through a careful interpretation.

"Disidentification"

It enables to detach oneself from various aspects of personality (roles, attitudes, behavior patterns) one identifies with, to free from control of forces that dominate life, to experience a deeper sense of personal identity called in Psychosynthesis the "I", the center.

"Ideal Model"

The client creates an image and learns how to cultivate desired values.

Gestalt

Psychosynthesis incorporates aspects of Gestalt counselling facilitating the client to understanding himself and others deeper in the process,

Application of Psychosynthesis

Psychosynthesis techniques are used both in individual and in group therapy in different age groups. Still, the biggest group of clients is the one in their forties and

fifties. They feel the biggest need of psychological and spiritual growth not only to reduce pain. Mostly, they reached a certain level of stabilization both on financial, social and family field. They may be people who went through any life crisis but those as well who simply miss something, who came to a certain point and don't know what to do next, who they really are, what is the meaning and value of their everyday struggle.

They are offered week-end training on Personal Psychosynthesis (to free from emotional block, to get a clear awareness of own center, to facilitate the process of integration), Transpersonal Psychosynthesis (to move towards spirituality, higher feelings, creativity, intuition insight) and Interpersonal Psychosynthesis (to develop ability to relate consciously and authentically to others and environment). Psychosynthesis centers have on-going groups with an orientation towards personal growth in Psychosynthesis context

Psychosynthesis is effectively applied at work with youth children, regarding developmental stages, critical moments and natural tendencies of growth it offers a wide range of methods and techniques which can serve as a wonderful supplement to traditional education. Its aim is not to alternate but rather to enrich process of learning and growing though use of will, intuition, feelings, imagination, through increasing awareness of the body.

Psychosynthesis techniques are used to work with aggressive and shy, over excitable and blocked children, with especially talented ones, with adolescents who go through identity struggles, formation of self-image, who have problems with expressing themselves, creating relationships, deciding what is the next step to be made.

Since 1989 every summer International Youth Camps are organized in Great Britain. Trainers come from American, British, Dutch, Italian Psychosynthesis centers. During two weeks young people have a great opportunity to get in touch with all kinds of techniques not only learning them but learning through them as well.

Psychosynthesis is applied in the field of social work, health care (in Anonymous Alcoholics centers, helping cancer patients and their families) and business (Organizational and Managerial Psychosynthesis) In May 1994 in Kłodzisko near Warsaw a workshop for Polish manager on basis of Psychosynthesis was organized. It was led by John Cullen from California. The program was designed for organizational development of professionals who wanted to learn about applications of Psychosynthesis to managerial and organizational development.. (It was the fourth training on this subject in Poland within two years).

Conclusions

The goal of Psychosynthesis is much farther than just solving problems, reducing pain and fear although it is obviously basic first step. But synthesis, the integration of clashing, often competing elements, which are neglected or rejected sometimes, is possible later in therapeutical work. It is the essence of Psychosynthesis: harmonious integration of all elements (mind, emotions, intellect, intuition, imagination, memories and body) around the center (the "I").

Even if it tries to reach the stars, Psychosynthesis helps to become a very grounded person, aware of his limits and obstacles. So, there is no risk that he will get separated from the real life. That is why there are no contra indications for anybody to go for it. I wish it was possible more widely in Poland.

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Appendix

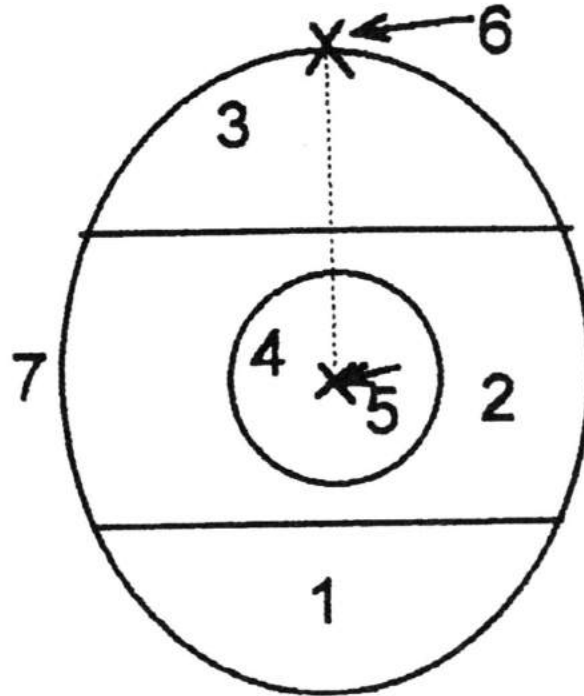


Figure 1. Assagoli's model of Human Psyche

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| 1. The lower Unconscious | 4. The Field of Consciousness |
| 2. The Middle Unconscious | 5. The Conscious Self or "the I" |
| 3. The Higher Unconscious or
Superconscious | 6. The higher Self |
| | 7. The Collective Unconscious |