

Section: Modern PPT practice

THE USE OF PROJECTIVE METHODS IN POSITIVE PSYCHOTHERAPY WHILE WORKING WITH CLIENTS WITH PSYCHOSOMATIC DISORDERS



Igor Olenichenko

Basic Consultant of PPT,
private practice (Odesa, Ukraine)

Email: ov.psyhelper@gmail.com

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Abstract

This article discusses the use of projective methods (introduced by Lawrence K. Frank) while working with clients with psychosomatic disorders. In particular the use of the Positive and Transcultural Psychotherapy method (PPT) is presented. PPT provides tools to explore hidden aspects of the client's personality and conflicts, aiming to ensure a balanced therapeutic process. We will demonstrate great synergy achieved by combining projective methods with the five-step strategy, PPT and balance model.

Keywords: positive psychotherapy, psychosomatics, projective methods, balance model, metaphorical maps

Introduction

Positive and transcultural psychotherapy (PPT) is an approach aimed at achieving psychological well-being by integrating cultural factors and encouraging positive emotions. It recognizes the influence of culture on people's perceptions, values, and experiences and aims to promote therapeutic growth in diverse cultural settings. Ergo, it can be defined as a form of humanistic psychodynamic psychotherapy that is grounded in a positive perspective of human nature. "Humanistic psychodynamic psychotherapy" is an integrative therapeutic approach that combines elements of humanistic and psychodynamic theories.

Humanistic Psychology: This perspective emphasizes individual growth, self-actualization, and the inherent goodness in people. It focuses on the present moment and the person's subjective experience.

- **Psychodynamic Theory:** This theory, often associated with Sigmund Freud, explores the influence of unconscious thoughts and past experiences on present behavior. It delves into

the role of the unconscious mind, defense mechanisms, and early childhood experiences.

The integration of these approaches in humanistic psychodynamic psychotherapy seeks to address both the immediate concerns of the individual (humanistic) and the underlying, often unconscious, factors influencing behavior (psychodynamic). The goal is to foster self-awareness, personal development, and a positive understanding of human nature. PPT is an integrative method that includes humanistic, systemic, and psychodynamic elements. It is also a transcultural approach that considers the cultural diversity and resources of clients.

Positive psychotherapy strives to help a person reveal his hidden potentials, develop his strengths and resources, and cope with difficulties and problems in life.

One of the powerful tools used in the PPT system is the use of projective techniques.

Projective psychotherapies are methods that are used to reveal hidden aspects of personality, based on the assumption that a person projects his internal conflicts, motives, feelings and attitudes onto vague or ambiguous external stimuli, revealing aspects of his personality that

may be hidden or suppressed. Projective techniques are psychotherapy methods that use ambiguous stimuli, such as pictures, words, stories, or drawings, to reveal the client's unconscious thoughts, feelings, and conflicts. Based on their results, the therapist interprets these reactions and helps the client understand and resolve them. Examples of projective techniques are the Thematic apperception test, Rosenzweig Picture Frustration Study (P-F test), Szondi test, House-Tree-Person (HTP) technique and others.

Projective psychotherapy techniques for various disorders can be used as part of positive psychotherapy to:

- Diagnose the causes and factors of anxiety, identify the type of anxiety disorder and its severity.
- Help the person become aware of unrealistic or irrational thoughts, beliefs and expectations that cause or maintain anxiety.
- Promote the development of positive thinking, self-esteem, and self-acceptance in an individual.

Projective methods are often used in combination with other psychotherapy techniques. They can be helpful for clients who are experiencing difficulties express their thoughts verbally, have high levels of resistance or defensiveness, or suffer from complex or chronic anxiety disorders.

One of the projective methods is metaphorical cards. They provide a creative and versatile means of expression, allowing therapists to engage clients in a deeper exploration of their thoughts, emotions, and cultural identities. In this article we will look at the meaning and benefits of metaphorical cards within the framework of positive transcultural psychotherapy when working with clients with psychosomatics.

Psychosomatic disorders represent a serious problem for the health and well-being of people, as they include physical symptoms caused by psychological factors. In such cases, psychotherapy can play an important role in alleviating symptoms and improving the quality of life of patients. One of the effective approaches in psychotherapy are projective techniques that allow one to explore unconscious processes and emotional conflicts.

There are several theories of psychosomatic disorders.

The main theory connects psychosomatics with heredity, which does not at all exclude other versions. The influence of the genes of ancestors, when stress affects a person, leads to malfunctions in the body in weakened organs and functions. When the human body is at rest, it is controlled by the parasympathetic nervous system. When there is any load on the body, the sympathetic nervous system is activated. During stress, an increased amount of cortisol and adrenaline hormones are released into the blood. The emotional tension that appears at the same time, if it does not find a way out, may have a negative effect on a patient's nervous system. It manifests itself in many aspects: from changes in blood pressure and heart rate, to the level of metabolism and sexual functions. Also, it can lead to changes in body tissues, and even irreversible damage to organs. The autonomic nervous system responds to various emotional experiences in specific patterns. The choice of the affected organ is determined to a certain extent genetically (Golbidi, et al., 2015).

Crucial information for therapy includes details about hereditary chronic illnesses. Many of them may not manifest themselves throughout life, but under the influence of any events that cause stress and distress, they may manifest themselves in an unexpected way in the form of psychosomatic disorders. In addition, psychosomatics can aggravate existing diseases, such as stomach ulcers, hypertension, psoriasis, eczema, and heart disease (Jindal, & Jennings, 2010).

In addition, psychosomatic disorders often develop against the background of post-traumatic stress, for example, in people who have survived war or repression. Thus, after the end of the Second World War, British doctors drew attention to a serious outbreak of stomach ulcers among soldiers and officers. Further research showed that this epidemic was not connected with the diet of servicemen or smoking - its main cause was emotional upheavals associated with hostilities (Jackson, 2015).

People with the personality characteristic of alexithymia, that is, with difficulties in defining and describing their feelings, emotions and bodily sensations, are at risk of psychosomatics. Alexithymia can make a person with stress and suppressed emotions, capable of causing psychosomatic phenomena, consider himself completely healthy. Therefore, there are great

difficulties with such people in psychotherapeutic work.

Case

Client Inna S., 32 years old, a refugee from the war zone (Kherson, Ukraine). She complained about the instability of her emotional state, poor sleep, chronic headaches that often appear after serious emotional stress. During the survey, other external symptoms were revealed: atopic dermatitis, excess weight.

Before that, she had consulted specialists: a neurologist, a dermatologist, and an endocrinologist. All clinical studies did not reveal obvious pathologies or confirmed diseases corresponding to the symptoms. The attending physician recommended consultation with a psychologist and work with him, due to the presence of clear signs of a psychosomatic disorder.

According to her, the clear symptoms listed above appeared after leaving Ukraine at the very beginning of hostilities. She left alone; she has no close relatives. She lives only on help from the state, cannot find a job, rarely leaves her apartment. Even though she left for a favorable and safe country (Ireland), the physical symptoms manifested themselves more intensively. Externally, in her opinion, she had no serious grounds for concern.

At the observation stage, in the client's spontaneous stories, it was possible to identify the actual and basic conflicts, the engaged actual abilities, and how she relates to herself. Although the main complaints centered around physical discomfort and poor health, other collected information in addition to physical signs, indicated an internal conflict. "The linguistic material often contained concepts voiced by such phrases as: "I have to cope on my own", "I'm ashamed to ask for help", "I don't admit that I'm not capable of (anything)", "I go out of my way to achieve."

I decided to use projective techniques to explore the emotional and psychological factors associated with headaches and other symptoms.

She was asked to complete the Rosenzweig Frustration Test [9], skin disease and obesity questionnaires (Peseschkian, 2006: p. 254, p.13)], and rate her satisfaction with each area using the Balance Model.

The client's conflict processing took place in the body/senses sphere. This manifested itself not only in headaches, but also in skin problems.

Abilities in the field of activity were practically blocked by self-doubt and self-pity. In the area of contacts, the client was influenced by ambivalent attitudes regarding communication. She had a need for communication and close relationships, but at the same time she was afraid to get close to people. In the realm of fantasy, she was dominated by negative attitudes and ideas. The client felt lonely and abandoned, worried that she would not be able to start a full-fledged family, that she would not marry for love, that she would never have her own home.

In the process of working with psychosomatic disorders, projective methods were mainly used: metaphorical cards, art therapy, fairy tale therapy.

One of these techniques was to invite Inna to draw her headache. Another was the technique of writing her own fairy tale. I asked the client to write a fairy tale that reflected her problem. We then analyzed the story together using symbols, metaphors, and cultural references. "Stories serve the function of expanding concepts and... opening doors for fantasy," as Nossrat Peseschkian often emphasized (Peseschkian, 2016a).

Based on the fact that the main psychological cause of psychosomatic disorders is the suppression of emotions, it was necessary to identify these emotional blocks.

When describing images using the Rosenzweig test, it was noted that relatively neutral descriptions were accompanied by noticeable emotions and feelings. The overall reaction seemed externally accusatory. She attributed her troubles to external factors perceived as threats and obstacles to meeting her needs. A consistent tendency toward frustration was identified. Disruptive emotional states manifested as frequent and prolonged periods of unfavorable physical and mental well-being, which almost constantly colored various aspects of her life.

The questionnaire (Peseschkian, 2006: p.254, p.139) confirmed the information received at the observation stage about Inna's deficiency of some of the most important abilities, such as trust, social connections and a sense of justice. Hyperbolic frugality stimulated self-restraint, both material and spiritual.

During the process of drawing a headache, working with metaphorical cards, and writing a fairy tale, Inna was able to express her emotions,

fantasies and conflicts through the images and metaphors of the cards and her own fairy tale. She described her sensations and feelings associated with physical problems. This made it possible to process the request at the verbalization stage and help the client realize that headaches, excess weight, and skin problems are a physical expression of her emotional problems and negative attitudes. In addition, it helped her open paths to new meanings and perspectives.

We went back to the “balance model” and I asked her to sketch out ways she could improve her balance. This method helped Inna to understand her needs, values, potential, and to achieve harmony and integration. Examining the client's complaints through the lens of psychosomatics helped clarify which current needs were unmet. These needs were identified as Trust and Justice.

My task was to teach the client effective ways to relieve anxiety, relaxation, and self-control, manage her emotional reactions, express feelings, discuss psychological difficulties with other people, make decisions, build personal boundaries, step over feelings of shame and guilt, and manage her childhood's automatic reactions and replace them with more mature ones.

Discussion

One way or another, disasters and crises are part of life, regardless of the cultural, natural, and social environment. Many people are exposed to the consequences of both social crises and persecution, armed conflicts and various types of disasters, and individual crises and losses. And even those “who survive such disasters are often left feeling helpless or depressed, wracked with guilt or anger, caught in a maelstrom of trauma” (Ayalon, 2007). And they need a huge resource to get out of this whirlpool of despair and helplessness. One of the effective tools in positive psychotherapy is projective methods that consider the cultural, social and ideological characteristics of patients.

From this point of view of cultural sensitivity and inclusiveness, the number 1 issue in today's psychotherapy and psychiatry is the concept of the human being, the system of his/her vision, since all other tasks and problems stem from this issue. In turn, this cardinal question relates to the image of the psychotherapist him/herself, as well as the corresponding features of the

method he/she uses, representing a certain psychotherapeutic school or direction (Peseschkian, 2022).

Positive psychotherapy is primarily aimed not at eliminating certain violations (conflicts, disorders, problems), but first, at identifying and mobilizing the client's abilities and resources, revealing his potential for self-help. The positive approach is based on a positive vision of the person, a positive interpretation of the problem, a transcultural approach and the use of metaphors, legends, and parables in therapy.

Projective techniques are a valuable diagnostic and therapeutic tool in positive transcultural psychotherapy, providing clients with the opportunity to explore their emotions, cultural identity, and personal experiences. Additionally, they allow clients to express their thoughts, feelings, and perceptions through direct projection onto materials such as drawings, word associations, games, and shapes. By incorporating culturally sensitive imagery and promoting intercultural dialogue, these techniques promote deeper understanding between therapist and client and allow the patient to express and acknowledge emotions and internal conflicts, which contributes to psychological and physical recovery. In addition, the use of these techniques helps to increase resilience and positive emotions, empowering clients in their therapeutic journey. By integrating projective techniques into the practice of Positive and Transcultural Psychotherapy, therapists can increase the effectiveness and cultural responsiveness of their interventions, ultimately promoting the holistic well-being of people from diverse cultural backgrounds.

An example of a projective technique of psychotherapy for anxiety and somatoform disorders in the method of positive psychotherapy can be the “Tale of Oneself” technique, in which a person talks about him/herself in the form of a fairy tale. This allows him/her to express his/her emotions, experiences, desires, and fears in a safe and distanced manner. A psychotherapist analyzes the content of a fairy tale, identifies key symbols and motifs, and helps the person find positive solutions to his/her problems.

Researchers of psychosomatic disorders argue that at their core there is a blockage of emotional energy, which for various reasons cannot be realized through consciousness, and,

remaining in the unconscious part of the psyche, affects the functioning of the body. That is, almost all acquired diseases are an internal conflict manifested at the biological level or a kind of “failure in the mechanics of the body.” (Peseschkian, 2016b; Kirillov, 2020; Jindal & Jennings, 2010).

Therefore, the methods used in PPT, which stimulate a person to participate actively and creatively in life, to have meaning and purpose, and develop his/her interests and hobbies, are highly effective in the treatment of psychosomatic disorders.

Conclusions

Using the example of the case described in this article, we see how projective methods can be effectively used to help patients with psychosomatic disorders. These techniques allowed the exploration of emotional factors associated with physical symptoms. They helped our client to recognize and express her emotions, conflicts, and coping strategies, which contributed to her psycho-physiological recovery.

Psychosomatics cannot be cured by acting solely on the body. It is treated through a combination of psychotherapy to relieve stress and anxiety and treatment of physical symptoms.

Giving the term “positum” a broader meaning, Nossrat Peseschkian emphasized that the positive aspect of the disease is just as important for understanding and clinical treatment of the disease as the negative aspect. Therapy aims to mobilize existing abilities and potential for self-help and focuses on positive aspects of personalities of people involved, rather than simply viewing them as a collection of symptoms to be treated. Peseschkian believed that symptoms and disorders are reactions to conflict, and therapy is called “positive” because it takes the integrity of the individuals involved as a given (Kirillov, 2020). In PPT, disorders are viewed through a “positum” lens. Depression, for example, is seen as “the ability to respond to conflict with deep emotions”; fear of loneliness is seen as “the desire to be with other people”; alcoholism is reconceptualized as “the ability to provide oneself with warmth (and love) not received from others”; psychosis is seen as “the ability to live in two worlds at the same time”; and heart disorders are seen as “the ability to

hold something very close to the heart” (Peseschkian, 2006).

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