

THE USE OF PHOTOGRAPHY IN PSYCHOTHERAPY

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A. Introduction

Photography was first used in psychiatry by Dr. Hugh Diamond, in 1856. Unlike the diagnostic tests in which several images are presented to the patient in order to assess the psychological distress (Rorschach, TAT, etc.), photography is used by many psychiatrists and psychotherapists as a means of therapy (Walker, 1982). Nowadays, photographs are widely used in a domain of psychotherapy, called phototherapy.

Phototherapy has its roots in various fields of psychology and science such as the Gestalt and Existential Psychology, theories of Communication and Perception, Linguistics, Anthropology etc. (Weiser, 1975). Phototherapy is an open process that allows access to blockages of the past, which are not reached by the conventional ways of counselling based, solely, on verbal communication (Weiser, 1983).

B. Emerging Emotions

The feelings that emerge when observing an image are inevitable. The optical part of the brain is much more primitive, thereby a picture reaches the 'heart' of feelings much faster (Walker, 2002). The pictures help the

person to relax and release any emotions that are oppressed and difficult to express. Using the photo as a pretext, the person begins to approach, discover and communicate feelings and memories that may have been buried for years and may address issues that require analysis or resolution (Weiser, 2008).

C. Diversity and Communication

Judy Weiser, working with deaf and indigenous teenagers in the United States, describes, through her experience, that both groups, although primarily dominant in the right hemisphere of the brain, were trying to adapt to the rules of a 'society of the left hemisphere'. It is very difficult for a child born with a dominant right hemisphere to live in a society dominated by the left (Weiser, 1983). Therefore, phototherapy can help, especially, people who face difficulties expressing themselves verbally. However, this does not limit the range of people who can benefit from it; even if there is no such issue, anyone can reflect on himself and his conflicts by participating in a phototherapy session (Weiser, 1983).

D. Existential Issues

During the engagement with one or more images, many clients are completely absorbed by the process (Walker, 1986). As it has been observed, they find themselves in a state of deep absorption leading to thinking and reflecting on important existential issues. According to the words of Nunez:

Our creative self has something divine, because when we create we have such a deep connection with ourselves that we can even anticipate the times and predict what will be and what human beings will need in the future. This should be the social role of the artist (Nunez, 2009: 56)

E. The Photograph as a Mediator

Analyzing the use of photography in therapy we see that photography acts as a stimulus, a tool that facilitates the process of storytelling and exaltation of the imagination of the client (Walker, 1986). The process occurs primarily unconsciously and the content of the narrative comes, with the aid of the photograph, from the unconscious mind (Wheeler, 2009). Therefore, we propose a new model for Creative Conflict Resolution (Ελουροboros),

which uses the image as a mediator. The model is still on a phase of exploration.

F. Conclusion

Photography is used as a medium that stimulates and enables the 'flow' of the mind in order to facilitate the healing process and conflict resolution. Phototherapy should be taken more seriously, since it is extremely helpful, especially, in situations where verbal communication is not enough or even possible.

References

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This research has been co-financed by the European Union (European Social Fund – ESF) and Greek national funds through the Operational Program "Education and Lifelong Learning" of the National Strategic Reference Framework (NSRF) - Research Funding Program: Heracleitus II. Investing in knowledge society through the European Social Fund.