

Psychotherapy Guidebook

HYPNOSYMBOLIC PSYCHOTHERAPY

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Hypnosymbolic Psychotherapy

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DEFINITION

Hypnosymbolic Psychotherapy is a method that uses hypnosis to guide the client to interpret his own highly charged affective symbolic materials (his own fantasies and nocturnal dreams) as an aid and facilitant to effective treatment.

HISTORY

When Freud published the *Interpretation of Dreams* (1900), he regarded dreams as being “the royal road to the unconscious.” In a later foreword he wrote, “Insight such as this falls to one’s lot but once in a lifetime.” At the same time he lamented that the only experimental evidence produced thus far was by a physician, Schroetter (1911), who used hypnosis as a technique in the investigation of dreams. Schroetter was later joined by two other Viennese physicians, Roffenstein (1924) and Nachmansohn (1925), using the same technique to explore the function of dream distortions to preserve sleep. These first imaginative studies were not actively pursued until the later works by Erickson and Kubie, Farber and Fisher, and still later

by Wolberg, Watkins, Schneck, Saradote and others.

Hypnosymbolic Therapy grew out of my effort to integrate all such studies into a concise, intensive, time-limited psychotherapy that makes use of hypnosis as a means of at first reducing and then eventually eliminating the therapist's projections from dream interpretation. The second contribution was the attempt to further objectify dreams (and their analysis) through relating them to Charles E. Osgood's Mediation Theory of Learning and using his semantic differential technique to measure dream symbolism. (My orientation throughout was fundamentally that of a researcher into the quantitative measurements of unconscious meaning; only secondarily as a direct intervention to clients. Fortunately both goals seemed obtainable.)

TECHNIQUE

The therapist is directive in structuring the situation initially and training the person in hypnosis; he must then become highly nondirective in either attempting to produce the content or in the interpretation of the dreams themselves; and he becomes once more fairly directive in the final effort to integrate the translation of the symbols back into the client's conflicted life pattern.

The therapist can make use of this method either when resistances display themselves in the conduct of regular psychotherapy or, better yet, if

the client seems disposed to utilize symbolic material to speak of things he is not yet ready to commit to conventional language or even to think of in the usual waking manner.

A cardinal point in Hypnosymbolic treatment is that in dealing with a person's dreams, the therapist is dealing with content that contains a very high degree of emotional imagery. There is no such thing as a neutral symbol — they are highly charged with affective (emotional) meaning. Dealing with dreams under hypnosis brings these feelings alive again and, if handled correctly, Hypnosymbolism provides a corrective emotional experience.

Whereas psychoanalysts value dreams as providing access to infantile sources of conflict, the Hypnosymbolic technique instead deals primarily with the immediate meaning of each dream element; that is, how it relates to the here-and-now of current problem situations.

Finally, once the therapist knows what the symptoms represent, he is then in a position to employ in fantasy or real life what behavior therapists call “reinforcement principles” to remedy the underlying pathology.

APPLICATIONS

As stated, this method is an intensive, time-limited, crisis-oriented type of psychotherapy. The total involvement is, typically, a dozen sessions or so. If

the client does not possess the ability to produce and to translate his dreams under hypnosis, then some other method of dealing with his primary problems should be used, such as Gestalt dream analysis or various behavioral interventions such as desensitization.

On the basis of twenty-five years of experience, it is estimated that one out of four clients would benefit from this timesaving method.

The basic premise underlying this crisis intervention approach is that successful resolution of even one major immediate problem can lead to an enhancement of the client's psychological equilibrium. This is a method used on typical neurotics; it has not been used extensively with psychotics, although exploration recently began with character disorders, i.e., adult male inmates.