Can we heal with metaphor?
Figurative language in psychoanalytic approaches to trauma

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Introduction

Chronic Post Traumatic Stress Disorder develops following prolonged subjecting to totalitarian control with actual or perceived inability for the victim to escape.
- Developmental Trauma: early childhood experiences (sexual, emotional or physical abuse, neglect)
- Complex Trauma: one experience prolonged in time (imprisonment or torture)

Psychological symptoms include helplessness, lack of control, and deformations of identity and sense of self (Herman, 1992)

The death of language

“The occurrence of senseless events [...] fundamentally questions the semantic dimension” (Grubrich-Simitis, 1984)

Dehumanization leads to “a world without metaphor” (Herzog, 1982)

“The camp had dried up my brain and I could not squeeze another word from it. [...] in those folds of my brain where ecstatic adjectives were stored, there was nothing but hatred” (Shalamov, 1994)

The reconstruction in psychoanalysis

A highly intimate, long-term relationship enhances safety, postive affect, and the empathic bond with others (Connolly, 2011)

Analyzing metaphor

   - For each lexical unit, establish meaning in context
   - Determine whether the unit has a more basic meaning e.g. more concrete, precise, or related to bodily action.
   - Decide whether contextual meaning contrasts with basic meaning but can be understood in comparison with it.

2. Text mining with NVivo
   - Similes (like, as)
   - Common verbs (make, give, put, think, part, way)
   - Prepositions (in, on, up, down, within, between, out of, from through, onto, over, behind)

Objectives

Identify literary tropes and narrative structures that emerge and evolve in a completed psychoanalysis and investigate the emergence of a narrative identity and the role of creativity in psychoanalytic treatment of trauma.

Methods

Subject: The subject was selected through oral interviews and written submissions based on need for treatment, suitability for psychoanalysis, and creative promise. Both analyst and patient are deceased.

Materials: A complete psychoanalytic treatment over 8 years, for a total of 968 recorded sessions. Analyses include a sample of sessions equally distributed across time.

Number of sessions completed per month of therapy

Other measures: the subject completed a battery of psychological testing including Attachment Inventory (AAI), Rorschach Test, Minnesota Multiphasic Personality Inventory (MMPI), Bender-Gestalt Test and Thematic Apperception Test (TAT).

Lexical Choices

Word usage frequency summaries over the course of treatment

Patient:

Analyst:

References


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