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Cognitive-Behavioural Clinical Psychologists in Training of Personal and Professional Development By Means Of Expressive Arts Activities Manifest Repetitive Flows Of Conditioned Negative Automatic Thoughts

Rosangela Bertelli¹

ABSTRACT

Do cognitive-behavioural clinical psychologists in training manifest the flowing of freshening up automatic thoughts or just repetitive streams of maladaptive thoughts? Three female cognitive-behavioural clinical psychologists in training took part in the eight sessions of training of personal and professional development. Each session comprised an individual activity of expressive arts and a written report on one's unique mental experience with the activity. Qualitative data obtained from differing sources (Written Reports of Reflection and The Three Columns Thought Records) were triangulated in search of convergence and systematically confirmed the theory that thought is brought into existence from one's past knowledge known that recapitulates itself. Cognitive-behavioural clinical psychologists in training did not manifest streams of pleasantly new or different automatic thoughts, but just old conditioned flows of thoughts of incompetence, amateurish and recollections of the past, so nothing new, novel, or refreshing.

Keywords: Cognitive-Behavioural Clinical Psychologists in Training; Expressive Arts, Automatic Conditioned Thoughts, Thought Modification Strategies.

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1. Introduction

The conclusion section of an article recently published by the Advances in Social Sciences Research Journal conveys the detection of something strange, surprising and at the same time a state in which one wants to learn more: "How come that the design of more thoughts (rational thoughts as intellectual

¹ Universidade de Trás-os-Montes e Alto Douro, Escola de Ciências Humanas e Sociais, Quinta de Prados, 5001-801, Vila Real, Portugal. Email: bertelli@utad.pt,

answers to maladaptive automatic thoughts) would produce therapeutic results?" (Bertelli, 2019, p. 480). The article's strikingly odd realisation was that on the one hand the cognitive-behavioural description of a complex process of learning is based on the theoretical concept of one's maladaptive automatic cognitions flowing and producing equally dysfunctional associated emotions and behaviours, on the other hand the cognitive-behavioural interventions derived from that description include strategies which involve one's creation of thoughts or introduction of new thoughts or the unveiling of thoughts that would supposedly provide (to one's own maladaptive cognitions) a reply being guided by one's intellect (one's thoughts, one's cognitions).

The composite process of cognitive-behavioural learning introduced by Aaron Temkin Beck (Beck, 1991; Beck & Dozois, 2011) shares features with Siddhartha Gotama and Jiddu Krishnamurti's teachings (Bertelli, 2019). When it comes to interventions however cognitive-behavioural practices split from those two other practices (Sheldrake, 2017). Do clinical psychologists, alert, fully informed of, thoroughly acquainted with, having extensive information and understanding of the cognitive-behavioural psychotherapies and experiencing training of cognitive-behavioural personal and professional development, manifest or provide any evidence for the flowing of freshening up automatic thoughts or of thoughts imparting vitality and energy?

1.2 The cognitive-behavioural model of learning

The inquiry above introduces itself as an outcome of the realisation that if, according to the cognitive-behavioural model of learning (Beck, 1991; Beck & Dozois, 2011) which guides cognitive-behavioural psychotherapies, thought is mechanical and conditioned, if when thought is operating emotions arise, and if thought tends to focus on negative information and consequent maladaptive emotions, how then to make sense of cognitive-behavioural strategies which use thought itself as a means of changing dysfunctional cognitions? Such strategies would include, for instance, The Questioning of Automatic Thoughts and The Five Columns Thought Records both made plain and comprehensible by Judith S. Beck (Beck, 1995).

How can anyone seriously examine the validity of one's own automatic thoughts, gain distance from those thoughts, and produce rational answers to those thoughts when one is bearing psychological pain or afflicted with or marked by anxious uneasiness or trouble or grief or even fear? The Five Columns Thought Records strategy is a written register aiming at thought modification, that is, a procedure where noetic thoughts are produced in order to provide an answer to dysfunctional thoughts (Beck, 1995). However, if thought develops into a distinctive entity from one's schemas, that is, as a reaction to one's past memories, knowledge, feelings, as the psychological reaction to one's conditioning and presently existing in fact perceptions, the production of those so called rational thoughts will in fact be just the creation of labels to what one observes inwards or to the result of one's dysfunctional mental analysis and interpretations made by one's dysfunctional thoughts or from one's present psychological pain, uneasiness, grief or fear.

Cognition, at its three strata of thought streams, that is, schemas (the innermost layer 3), automatic thoughts (layer 2), and consciousness (the outer boundary layer 1), activates emotions that feast, feed in, fertilize automatic thoughts and controls one's behaviours (Beck, 1995; Beck & Dozois, 2011). One's activities are based on thoughts and as such one is caught in a vicious cycle of old habits, old memories, worn interpretations of events, persistent feelings or, in other words, in a vicious cycle where nothing new, original, anew, afresh ever occurs. Psychologically distressed human beings would thus be kind of stitched up in a black hole (Castelvecchi, 2019), that is, in a kind of crucible of thoughts / emotions / behaviours / emotions / thoughts beyond which maladaptive repetitive negative thoughts and sad emotions would be so firm, steadfast, potent, and resistant that nothing that passes over it, even having specific knowledge of the mechanics of the vicious circle, could ever climb back out without being framed inside the same motion.

1.2 Expressive arts activities

The use of expressive arts activities for the training of personal and professional development of clinical psychologists seem to provide a clear illustration of how present circumstances, when associated to one's childhood experiences, are recognised and produce reactions to memories, that is, produce movements of thoughts (activating flows or streams of automatic cognitions). Such expressive arts activities thus represent facilitating tools in the process of learning to detect and watch one's movement of automatic thoughts not only in the context of educating psychologists (Bertelli, 2017a; 2017b; 2018) but also in the therapeutic environment.

Acquiring and using knowledge on how to detect or determine the existence or presence of one's flowing of thoughts allows one to bring out the content of one's schemas / experiences / knowledge / conditioning / core beliefs (the innermost layer 3) to the level of consciousness (the outer boundary layer 1). Schemas are the past and automatic thoughts are reactions to schemas, that is, reactions to past memories. Being able to notice one's core beliefs can be therapeutic, but it is still not enough to calm down one's mind, one's mental conversations, those repetitive negative thoughts and associated distressful emotions. If it were, one would be able to break free from the black hole, that is, from the repetitive, insistent, demanding, weary, and total lack of refreshing, pleasantly new or different flows of thoughts.

1.3 The research question

Do clinical psychologists, alert, fully informed of, thoroughly acquainted with, having extensive information and understanding of the cognitive-behavioural psychotherapies and experiencing training of cognitive-behavioural personal and professional development, manifest or provide any evidence for the flowing of freshening up automatic thoughts or of thoughts imparting vitality and energy?

2. Method

2.1 Participants

Three female psychologists, all knowledgeable of the cognitive-behavioural model of learning, were taking part in the training of personal and professional development of cognitive-behavioural clinical psychologists as part of their studies for their Master's Degree in Clinical Psychology.

2.2 Materials and procedure

Those three psychologists experienced eight sessions of training of personal and professional development of cognitive-behavioural clinical psychologists. Each session comprised an individual activity of expressive arts, followed by the possibility of sharing with the group one's conscious mental experiences that resulted from direct participation in that particular activity, followed by a Written Report of Reflection on one's unique experience with that particular session of training.

In describing their unique mental experiences with expressive arts activities, the subjective nature of the experience received by the trainee is extremely valuable as a source of information on their automatic cognitions.

2.2.1 Training sessions

Session 1 - The three female psychologists in training (Acacia, Acantha, and Adelpha - fictitious names) were provided with a sheet of paper containing the contours of images of the natural physical world or of objects of daily use, dozens of colouring pencils, crayons, pencil and crayons sharpeners, erasers and they were asked to add colour to the images. Besides that, they were instructed in relation to the aim of the training of personal and professional development of cognitive-behavioural clinical psychologists, that is, cultivating the ability to identify and recognize the present moment, to direct one's alert attention to the activity being executed, to silently observe one's streams of thoughts without judge the thoughts, without reacting to the thoughts, and trying to recognize the emotions experienced.

After 40 minutes dedicated to the activity just described, Acacia, Acantha and Adelpha were asked to end the task, to return all the materials (colouring pencils, crayons, pencil and crayons sharpeners, and erasers) which they had freely chosen for that particular activity. They were then invited to share with the

group their coloured images and the mental experience that resulted from direct participation in the activity. After that, they returned their painted images and were provided with a lined sheet of paper and a pen and asked to write down their Report of Reflection where they would register their conscious mental experiences during that training session.

Session 2 - The three female psychologists in training, Acacia, Acantha and Adelpha, were provided with a sheet of lined paper, pen and asked to recall and describe, through the use of The Three Columns Thought Records, that is, a written register aiming at thought identification (Beck, 1995), the conscious mental experience they went through during the Training Session 1.

After 40 minutes dedicated to the activity just described, Acacia, Acantha and Adelpha were invited to share with the group the mental experience that resulted from direct participation in that Training Session, that is, Session 2.

Session 3 - Acacia, Acantha and Adelpha were provided with A4 blank sheet of paper, dozens of colouring pencils, crayons, pencils and crayons sharpeners, erasers and were asked to draw a tree specific to that region during that particular season - fall.

After 40 minutes dedicated to drawing, the psychologists in training were asked to end the task, return all the drawing material that they had chosen for that particular task, and were then invited to share with the group their artistic work. After that they were invited to share their mental experience associated to that expressive activity.

After handing over the drawing, they were then provided with a lined sheet of paper and pen and asked to prepare the Written Report of Reflection on that particular session of training, where they could describe their conscious mental experience during Training Session 3.

Session 4 - The three master's students were provided with a lined sheet of paper, pen and asked to recall and to describe, using The Three Columns Thought Records, their conscious mental experiences during the previous Training Session (Session 3).

Session 5 - The coloured images that Acacia, Acantha and Adelpha began colouring during Training Session 1 and which were unfinished works of art were returned to them. They were also provided with dozens of colouring pencils, crayons, pencil and crayons sharpeners, erasers, and they were asked to resume colouring the image.

After 40 minutes they were asked to stop the task, return all the material provided, and invited to share with the group the coloured image and invited to share their mental experiences with Training Session 5.

After that, they handed over the coloured image and were provided with a lined sheet of paper, pen and asked to write down their Written Report of Reflection where they could talk about their conscious mental experience during Training Session 5.

Session 6 - Trainees were provided with a lined sheet of paper, pen, and asked to recall and describe, using The Three Columns Thought Records, their conscious mental experiences associated to Training Session 5 (the previous session).

Session 7 - Acacia, Acantha and Adelpha listened to the reading of a text on Greek Mythology ("Eros and Psyche"), were then provided with a lined sheet of paper and pen, and were asked to reflect about whether and, if so, how the perceived changes in their behaviours during all those years of studies in psychology altered their thinking and feelings.

After 40 minutes they handed over their reflection and were then provided with another sheet of lined paper and were asked to write down their Written Report of Reflection on that particular session of training, that is, their conscious mental experiences during Training Session 7.

Session 8 - In the final Training Session trainees were provided with a lined sheet of paper and pen and were asked to use The Three Columns Thought Records in order to recall and describe their conscious mental experiences during Training Session 7.

2.3 Results

Data obtained from differing written sources (Written Reports of Reflection and The Three Columns Thought Records) were triangulated in search of convergence, confluence. The hypothesis being tested was: Even clinical psychologists, alert, fully informed of, thoroughly acquainted with, having extensive information and understanding of the cognitive-behavioural psychotherapies and experiencing training of cognitive-behavioural personal and professional development do not manifest or provide any evidence for the flowing of freshening up automatic thoughts or of thoughts imparting vitality and energy.

Data were considered in detail and subjected to an analysis in order to discover essential features and it was observed in a consistent manner the following tendencies:

a) All along the eight training sessions the three psychologists in training (Acacia, Acantha and Adelpha) tended to report, describe or portray the training context and activities in the same manner and using similar language (for instance: Calm, Comfort, Cosy, Focus, Freedom, Protection, Serenity, Silence, Well-being);

b) All along those expressive arts activities sessions of training Acacia, Acantha and Adelpha's cognitions converged onto three main categories: 1) "...I need to make it better..." (Incompetence); 2) "...memories of the past..." (Recollection); and 3) "...We are always talking about other people's minds; little we turn to our own mind; I do not realise any changes in me; It is extremely difficult not to shout to the brain to be quiet; It is very difficult to resist the temptation to judge the content of our own automatic thoughts..." (Inexpert or unskilled).

Data obtained converged on the way to corroborate the hypothesis that even clinical psychologists, alert, fully informed of, thoroughly acquainted with, having extensive information and understanding of the cognitive-behavioural psychotherapies and experiencing training of cognitive-behavioural personal and professional development do not manifest or provide any evidence for the flowing of freshening up automatic thoughts or of thoughts imparting vitality and energy.

3. Discussion

The answer to the research question is: No, they do not. Cognitive-behavioural clinical psychologists in training of personal and professional development by means of expressive arts activities manifest repetitive flows of conditioned negative automatic thoughts. They do not manifest or provide any evidence for the flowing of freshening up automatic thoughts or of thoughts imparting vitality and energy. In fact the evidence that supports the hypothesis revealed the presence of categories of streams of dysfunctional thoughts, thoughts of incompetence, thoughts of lack of expertise in one's own area of intervention, and thoughts about the past.

Colouring the contours of images is a familiar activity to most adults and it is thus part of one's past memories. Such well known or easily recognisable situation produces reactions to memories or, in other words, produces automatic movements of thoughts that spring out from one's schemas (the innermost layer 3). Thought is mechanical and is based on one's beliefs, experience, knowledge, memory or, in other words, on one's past and thus thought / thinking is movement of time.

Having knowledge of one's automatic pours of thoughts means being aware or conscious of those flows and consciousness also is just the movement of the past (Beck & Dozois, 2011). According to the cognitive-behavioural model of learning, consciousness is part of cognition: a) Cognition's outer boundary layer 1 is the level of consciousness; b) Cognition's layer 2 is the level of automatic thoughts; c) Cognition's innermost layer 3 is the level where one's schemas are consolidated. It makes perfect sense that participants did not manifest or provide any evidence for the flowing of freshening up automatic thoughts or of thoughts imparting vitality and energy, because thought is conditioned, programmed, and thus thought is never new, novel, refreshing. In that way, the curiosity remains: "How come that the design of more thoughts (rational thoughts as intellectual answers to maladaptive automatic thoughts) would produce therapeutic results?" (Bertelli, 2019, p. 480).

Can one become free of all the cognitive content that streams mechanically, freely and abundantly on one's mind? Is the thinker/observer different from his/her thought/observation? The thinker/observer

seems to be his/her own past, that is, his/her own schemas, experiences, knowledge, conditioning, reactions, core beliefs, interpretations of events, and patterns of behaviours. In other words, the thinker seems to be the thought. Thought is the thinker (Roth, 1974). Thought seems to be time and time seems to be thought. Will thought itself be able to challenge the interpretations, accuracy, probity, or propriety of automatic thoughts (Questioning Automatic Thoughts) or to create adaptive responses (The Five Columns Thought Record) to automatic thoughts without worn interpretations, past memories, remembrance, reactions? Can thought see its own movement? Will these measurements (Questioning of Automatic Thoughts and The Five Columns Thought Record) allow one to go beyond measurement, beyond the measurable?

Considering the present results and discussion it appears unconvincing that anyone, let alone people bearing psychological pain or afflicted with or marked by anxious uneasiness or trouble or grief or even fear, would be properly qualified to come up with sound thoughts as moderating logical arguments to one's dysfunctional streams of thoughts.

4. Conclusion

The application of expressive arts activities during the training of cognitive-behavioural clinical psychologists is known to facilitate the trainees' comprehension of concepts such as circumstances, automatic thoughts, emotional reactions, and operant behaviours, the trainees' initial experiencing with identifying and observing their own cognitive flows, and the trainees' recognition that the psychotherapeutic process of treating mental, emotional, and behavioural problems requires great active effort on the part of the person who wants to undergo a change. Such application of expressive arts activities does not however represent any psychological method for the treatment of mental or emotional problems, that is, healing will not take place, even though the trainees reported that both the training environment and the activities set in motion a sense of well-being, for instance calm, comfort, and freedom.

Qualitative data gathered systematically converged in the way to disclose that thought is brought into existence from one's past knowledge known that recapitulates itself and that one clings into certain thoughts that stay around and even one with advanced knowledge, such as a clinical psychologist in training, will not manifest streams of pleasantly new or different automatic thoughts. Considering these findings it becomes bunglesome that anyone, let alone people bearing psychological pain or afflicted with anxious uneasiness, trouble, grief or even fear, would be properly qualified to come up with sound thoughts as moderating logical arguments to one's dysfunctional streams of thoughts. Can thought become aware of itself?

Some different kind of practice or psychotherapeutic approach seems to be urgently needed in order to allow one to learn how to see or to be aware of one's cognitive movements of accumulated knowledge, without reacting mechanically to these, if human beings truly want to help themselves to become able to break free from the black hole.

4.1 Policy implications

The inclusion of expressive arts activities as psychological means in the treatment of mental or emotional or behavioural problems requires the expertise of a properly trained psychologist, a psychologist that substantiates or embodies awareness and not just someone with abstract knowledge on the mechanics of automatic cognitive streams.

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