

Application and Treatment Mechanism of Storytelling in Sandplay Therapy

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Abstract: Sandplay therapy, named Sandspiel therapy, gradually became an effective psychological therapy, it plays a pivotal role in psychological counseling. This review summarized the cure factors for individual treatment in the Sandplay therapy, based on the treatment hypothesis proposed by Kalff and Zhang Risheng's proposal including the relationship of consultant and client, self-healing power, general unconscious images, symbolic meaning of toys and the usage of sand and water, in sandplay in the case of the treatment. Meanwhile, this paper also complemented the effects of sandplay storytelling therapy on individual psychological development and healing in perspective of post modernism psychotherapy. In addition, to show the positive role of individual cognitive restructuring during treatment, this review innovatively introduced storytelling pattern into treatment hypothesis of sandplay therapy, which will enrich the theoretical basis of the sandplay therapy and also improve the application value of sandplay therapy in clinical practice.

Key words: Sandplay Therapy • Therapeutic Mechanism • Storytelling

INTRODUCTION

Sandplay, named Sandspiel therapy, is a kind of psychological therapy that client selects toys from toyshelf freely and puts them in a sand-filled special stry for self-expression, accompanied by the therapist at the same time [1].

Sandplay therapy is a kind of psychological counseling and treatment for client to experience and express themselves. It was originated from Lowenfeld's the world technique, then Dora Kalff developed this technique based on her and named it "Sandspiel". Kawai Hayao introduced it to Japan and named sandplay therapy. Then Zhang Risheng introduced it to China in 1998 [1].

As a mainstream therapy in America and Japan, sandplay therapy has been widely applied in schools, hospitals, social services, private counseling and so on for more than 50 years among children, adolescents and adults. It serves as a bridge between language therapy and expressive therapy. Sandplay works in a safe and nature way to touch person's deeper mind and reduces individual behavior problems effectively. It can not only be used as a tool of diagnosis but also of treatment [2].

With the further development of sandplay therapy research, a lot of researchers and psychologists have been explored the effectiveness of sandplay therapy in

the treatment of many kinds of psychological problems from the diagnostic role and clinical therapeutic significance. Based on this, this paper took sandplay therapy mechanism proposed by Kalff as the starting point, summarizes Zhang Risheng's therapeutic effect of treatment hypothesis on individual behavior problems and tried to combine storytelling with traditional sandplay therapy's therapeutic factors. Meanwhile, this paper discussed the therapeutic mechanism of storytelling in sandplay therapy from the perspective of post modernism psychotherapy.

The Application of Sandplay Therapy: Within the free and protected space that provided by the therapist who hold an attitude of no evaluation and intervention, the relationship established between therapist and client is like the unity of mother and child, so that the individual can get rid of the negative impact of psychological conflict and reduce the fear of being evaluated. Meanwhile, the individual can be free for inner exploration to awake the power of self-healing and self-development in the deep body gradually enhancing the sense of control and security at the same time [3]. The symbolic meaning of toys in sandtray represents current problem faced by client, which reflects the problem encountered in the real life. Children express emotions and events that cannot be expressed by words and deal with their inner

problems through toys. For them, children can express themselves words by toys and play that are language of expression [4]. At the same time, Kalff believed that the healing energy will be activated through giving unconscious visible image in sandplay therapy [5]. The study of Li Rongbei also emphasized that the key point of sandplay therapy effectiveness lies in shaping image, therefore the unconscious becomes conscious, so that the individual can release creativity during the play and fully engage sensation, perception and memory for multi-aspect experience. The series of images in the sandtray constructs the continuous dialogue between conscious and unconscious of client could activate the healing process and personality development [6]. In addition, Bradway thinks another important factor for individual healing is that client can integrate experiences by using sand and water, the individual makes use of sand and visible touchable toys to express the emotion and cognition of the subject world, which reflects the relationship between his own world and all kinds of social reality [7]. Bowyer found that sand provides an important dimension for client to explore past experiences as well. Individual's traumatic experiences can be triggered and transformed through these mediums: "The mix of sand and water seems can guide individual deduct memories of fear and pain in the play" [4].

By using toys and sands in sandtray, client's inner world becomes visible. During the process of moving and placing, client can control of himself in order to activate their creativity, then affirmation of self to make it become a promoter on the road of self-improvement. The combination of conscious and unconscious means entirety and the gradual emergence of the entirety awake individual's healthy development of inner order [1]. At the same time, the change of the work can improve individual's self-esteem and self-worth. Client can also communicate with unconscious world, absorb the energy of psychological growth to achieve the support and reconstruction of treatment through sandplay [8].

Sandplay therapy is a kind of expressive therapy that emphasized the metaphorical language as well as a form of play therapy [9]. It has the characteristics of play therapy, art therapy and psychodrama therapy. Different psychotherapy schools' scholars have integrated sandplay therapy and their own theories for many new applications [10]. In addition to basic treatment factors of sandplay therapy above, the role of sandplay storytelling cannot be ignored neither. Kalff has emphasized that nonverbal and playability of sandplay therapy emerge in the early stage of treatment, whereas the value of verbal and psychoanalysis is reflected in the later stage [4].

The Storytelling in Sandplay Therapy: As a way of conveying information, story can affect individual's emotion and cognitive field. The process of storytelling allows client and therapist to share and understand something that may be new but they didn't realize in the past and express client's unfinished and unfulfilled desire at the same time [11]. The metaphor in the story can be seen as a "symbolic language", a more meaningful way of communicating and expressing individual ideas in an indirect way. Jaynes [12] said, in the metaphor, the individual experience can make the client at the current level of consciousness to describe their experiences.

Frederiksen [13] pointed out that telling stories means that client picks up toys and tells stories about them. Describing the scene created in the play is the text analysis part of the treatment, the individual can not only give symbolic meaning to all kinds of toys and placement of objects in the play, but also tell stories about the scene composed by toys according to sandplay work [14]. The individual becomes their stories' host, using a series of sand worlds to reflect their growth and change [7].

The sandplay can also be used as a tool of narrative story to help people make their problems specific [7]. Description of stories is a necessary part of sandplay therapy, client uses toys in sandtray to present unconscious world in the form of play and describes visible scene through story. According to Neimeyer [15], people build their own lives through stories in lives. Therapist can understand client's thinking process through listening to the client about the symbolism of toys, the emotions, the themes and the ending of the story, then promotes client reconstruct the cognition and re-experiences inner emotion [4].

When therapist uses Carl Jung's theory to analyze the imaginary stories or sandtray works, he will explore the inner world of the client on the basis of the characters and plots in the stories or works. And client shows the inner process of mind, the interaction mode with outside world, the development of individual personality and spirit in the same way [16]. The combination of expression and construction provides a unique medium that can not only help client to express the important aspects of the personal deeper reality, but also change in the real life [17], which enable to facilitate the natural capacity of self-healing.

The Influence of Storytelling on Clients in Sandplay Therapy

The storytelling in Sandplay therapy promotes the improvement of Client's ability

The storytelling in sandplay therapy can promote the development of individual from various aspects. First, in terms of individual expression ability: the combination of the create sandplay and the storytelling can trigger client's healing power by these processes, the story of sandplay will be told in the form of the story, to help individuals to establish effective communication skills [4]. The Carey's study suggested that sandplay therapy enhances client's ability of expressive and narrative [18]. Second, it promotes the development of individual cognitive ability: the storytelling of sandplay improves the individual's cognitive level, releases their pressure and develops the ability to deal with the outside world. Storytelling can also promote individual's self-introspection, help them recognize their role in the organization, view of problem, goals and values. Finally, enhance the ability of individual to deal with problems: conveying their own goals and the meaning to be expressed through storytelling, individuals get a lot of ideas and skills, so that they can realize how they take a new way of behavior [19] [20]. Other researchers have pointed out that the creation of the story can be interpreted in terms of the emotional and personal needs of client, as well as the problems that cannot be dealt with in the real life, but through sharing stories, we can help client develop ways to deal with problems [21].

The storytelling in Sandplay therapy can promote the Cognitive reconstruction of client

Telling the story in the sandplay is not client's monologue, it is often in the form of a dialogue with both the neutral and the "others" words to describe the sandplay story and their experience, thus projecting the inner world of client. Moreover, the narrative of the story in the sandplay also leads to additional information about the story. The client narrates the life stories in sandplay, creating a new meaning of these events, which is renewed in the story of the description, and the previously forgotten story details are presented or described in the sandplay, allowing client standing on a objective perspective to experience the feelings to integrate their experiences [22] through narrating the story repeatedly can inspire creativity, which will improve the effect of treatment. Finally, under the framework of the fictitious story in the sandplay, the clients perceive their cognitive style, own irrational cognition of emotion and behavior and think about the reconstruction of reasonable cognition at the same time [7]. When the individual begins to realize the premise of the development by narrating

stories, the client can organize and rebuild their internal world, so that the results will bring hope for recovery [23]. Therefore, the combination of expression and construction is an effective mechanism of storytelling in sandplay therapy. Clients begin to express their inside or outside world through sandplay, they also begin construction of the new concept of self [24]. The individual's ego is constructed through personal stories and descriptions, which is flow, change and developmental. The natural characteristics of the sandplay also provide a protected space for the individual, the individual's inner beliefs and the story in the sandplay can be described, tested and verified through a variety of conversational styles [23].

The Role of Storytelling in Sandplay Therapy to Therapist:

From the therapist's point of view, in the Sandplay therapy, the individual expresses the story in the sandplay, can effectively help therapist to observe the client, retelling the story of the client through the way of "Solving problem" to the client to confirm his feeling. Through the description of the individual stories, the therapist focuses on how they can help the client to rebuild their lives. The storytelling promotes client to the release nervousness, In particular, the horrible emotions that can't be described directly can be expressed by the storytelling, project the prototype of the mind into the sand world and therapist can learn about the client's self-image and their expectations for the future from the storytelling of the sandplay. A case study of six students from Russo *et al.* [22] indicated that storytelling in sandplay therapy enables the therapist to gain insight into the social construction of clients, they regard play as their own language to present their real world, express their feelings to the therapist and present their living environment through the narrative. At the same time, through the definition and interpretation of the theme of the storytelling, the therapist can judge the growth of each stage of the clients. The theme of the storytelling in sandplay expresses the client's inner world's perception of the environment, the change of cognition is a symbol of the change and development of the internal emotion and external conflicts. On the other hand, it is helpful for the therapist to establish a good relationship between therapist and client in observation of client's sandplay work and their storytelling about it [18]. However, a large number of studies have shown that good counseling relationship really has therapeutic effect, the therapist can give more emotional support to the client in this relationship.

Forward

The Storytelling in Sandplay Therapy and Artistic Expression:

Sandplay therapy is a kind of art, symbolic thinking, non-linear, non language and integrated intuition of a treatment, visualization of the image and creative are characteristics of Sandplay Therapy. The qualitative research method based on art therapy is another way to explore and analyze the sandplay therapy [10] [25]. The individual uses toys as a medium to help him express emotions or cannot dare to explore, through the manipulation of the transitional object, integration the inner and outer world, so that the individual can express the feeling of rigidity through artistic activities and develop a successful coping behavior [26]. In the future research, we can combine the qualitative research methods of artistic expression to analyze, explain and integrate the sandplay. For instance, by collecting the reflection and cognition of the client to his experience, the author draws out the universal rules that exist in the life of the client; the client's visual description of the sandplay could help the therapist to be aware of the changes that are taking place in the course of the treatment. Through the comparison between the client's general rules of the unconscious and the process of the change in sandplay, the therapist summarize the possibility of psychological cure for clients in sandplay therapy [27].

The Perspective of Constructivism and Narrative Therapy in Sandplay Therapy:

By combining constructivism and narrative therapy, we can evaluate and diagnose sandplay therapy [28]. Knoetze [29] pointed out in his study that as an evaluation tool for the meaning construction of the individual world, the sandplay has produced the deduction of the post-modern mode. The combination of sandplay therapy and narrative therapy is also a course of future research. We can try to set up a framework for the reconstruction of the life events by the client in the narrative of the story and edit the narrative process of the sandplay therapy together, summing up client's regular pattern of inner cognitive changes. The rules of the cognitive change of the client will be fed back to the client for verification, so as to achieve the effect of diagnosis and evaluation. In this way, understanding of the events that occur in our lives and constructing our cognition will be the typical of the postmodern treatment model.

The Limitations of Storytelling in Sandplay Therapy:

In this paper, based on the previous literature, we combined the experience of psychological counseling

practices to discuss the mechanism of the therapeutic effect of various factors in sandplay therapy. Although the storytelling in the sandplay provides client with a way to deal with the current problem at the unconscious level rather than bring the problem into the state of consciousness directly, the role of storytelling only provides a way to deal with the real life which cannot be faced and supported [20], because the level of cognitive development is inadequate among the younger children, the toy is the only as a transitional tool to express their experience. It's difficult to integrate the symbolic meanings of their stories in the form of storytelling. In addition, because of the description ability differences and barriers to emotional expression of the individual's events, individual is difficult to description and expression of their own problems through the storytelling. But overall, sandplay therapy in visual form in front of the client to verbal communication than traditional counseling approach can better to enhance the client's willingness and ability of language expression, promote the expression of their own experiences.

CONCLUSIONS

Sandplay therapy contains the unity of the mother and child, the self-healing power of the individual, the universal unconscious image and the symbolic meaning of the toy, as well as the role of sand and water, which have played important role in individual psychotherapy. In the course of treatment, the storytelling in sandplay further promote the individual's self-expression and cognitive reconstruction, this process provides client a perspective to observe their inner unconscious world and examines the relationship between inside and outside world. This paper embarked from the sandplay therapy theory, combined the traditional treatment hypothesis and sandplay storytelling from the perspective of qualitative research and postmodern psychotherapy. We also expounded the development of sandplay therapy theory and clinical practice, bringing into other theoretical models and treatment techniques and make the theory and practice of the sandplay therapy enriched and integrated. In addition, as a kind of effective therapeutic technology, combine sandplay therapy with different counseling schools in the following study and according to the theoretical basis to develop the effectiveness treatment of sandplay therapy, to discuss the role of sandplay therapy in psychological counseling and treatment more specific and clearer.

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