Instrumental support for increasing personal resilience against destructive manipulations

Aleksandr S. Ognev

Financial University under the Government of the Russian Federation, 125167, Leningradsky Prospekt, 49/2, Moscow, Russia

*Corresponding author
ASOgnyov@fa.ru

Abstract
The article confirms the possibility of metaphorical description by clients of options for manipulating their behavior that are significant to them. It has been shown that Sandplay Therapy can be used to successfully design and rehearse the desired forms of behavior and form associated sensory standards for subsequent ideomotor training. Evidence is presented of the validity of an assumption that the very elements of such materialized displays of the existing orientation schemes and their photographs support to quickly assess the intensity of the emotional experiences accompanying such modeling and the physiological processes associated with them. It has been established that cardiac measurements followed by calculation of the stress index of the various components of the autonomic nervous system make it possible to assess the level of stress caused by the client’s imagination of a problematic situation for him/her, where he/she is facing a traumatic manipulation. It is noted that measurements of changes in galvanic skin reactions also allows judging the intensity of experiences that accompany the rebuilding of the associative connection of the depicted items with those manifestations of manipulation of which it is a metaphorical representation. Another assumption has also been confirmed that Sandplay Therapy can be used to effectively prevent some undesired manipulative influences on the client’s personality. At the same time, in addition to establishing the effectiveness of therapeutic procedures, cardiac measurements and recording of electrodermal activity for the client himself/herself serve as a kind of bio-feedback. Using the latter, the client gets an opportunity to assess how much the response to metaphorical representations of manipulative influences corresponds to how exactly he/she would like to act if they are detected.

Keywords
Cardiometry, Oculometry, Instrumental psychodiagnostics, Sandplay Therapy, Psychocorrection, Semantic self-regulation

INTRODUCTION AND STATEMENT OF THE RESEARCH PROBLEM
With the intensification of an information impact using digital technologies, the need for an individual to successfully resist various types of manipulation becomes more and more acute [1, 2, 7]. This need is growing rapidly, for example, due to an increase in the computing capabilities of modern search engines, which are capable of recording the likes and dislikes of each individual user and, with their help, identify the specific features of his/her communication profile. In this case, a fairly accurate assessment of not only personal cognitive schemes and communication scenarios, but also interactive programs that complement them is possible. The danger in this case is that a number of such programs can act as triggers that, at an unconscious level of a person, encourage him/her to take certain stereotypical actions. Thus, from the works by E. Shostrom, it is well known that the tendency to even a counterproductive desire to manage and command someone can be provoked in authoritarian individuals by a deliberate demonstration of their partners’ subordination, their demands to lead the subjects and give the necessary orders [7]. The desire to undertake the role of an expert, even when there is no ground for this in people with elevated intellectual ambitions, can be provoked by urgent requests to express their own opinions. An objectively unjustified aggression in some individuals prone thereto may be a consequence of an activation of corresponding scenarios under the influence of someone’s deliberate desire to make peace. Suspicion and excessive distrust can be actualized in people prone thereto by a deliberate desire to defend someone, to unnecessarily patronize someone who has already attracted increased attention. And without the ability to effectively eliminate manipulations, based on this kind of dependency, a person in the modern world is unlikely to succeed in negotiating under the conditions of fierce competition or in the presence of a pronounced con-
flict of interests with various partners to achieve his/her own vital goals [3, 4, 7].

All this is aggravated by the fact that the complementary pairs described above are ambivalent in their nature. Thus, the dictatorial habits of someone without much difficulty activate the often unconscious desire to follow such a person in those who are inclined to submit to others. A confident manner of talking about something, a demonstration of awareness often evokes a desire to follow this kind of recommendations among those who are characterized by an increased dependence on the opinions of others. Someone's aggression will encourage negotiations, the search for compromises, and the smoothing out of conflict situations among those who unconsciously follow the peacemaker's scenario. Accusations against someone, demonstration of suspicion of someone will easily push to defend the suspects and oppose the accusers of those who have increased generosity and react painfully to any oppression of someone.

Each of the above listed pairs represents the poles of generally extremely useful constructs for a society. In many situations, the manifestation of such scenarios turns out to be acceptable and appropriate. But adherence to any of these scenarios, not subject to control, creates the preconditions for their inappropriate activation. There are also frequent cases of deliberately inducing someone to rashly and even absurdly follow their usual behavioral patterns.

Conventional, prevention of such destructive manifestations of cognitive schemes, life scenarios, and behavior patterns is carried out in the form of oral consultations. Usually, in a dialogue with a therapist, the client examines some specific cases of traumatic events caused by uncontrolled adherence to such automatisms. During the discussion, some ways to prevent such events are outlined, and sometimes specific options for optimal behavior are discussed [5-7]. The effectiveness of therapy in this case is assessed at the first stage on the basis of the client’s subjective satisfaction with the results of the consultations. In the future, the presence and absence of relapses of undesired behavior and accompanying emotional reactions is added thereto.

As we have already repeatedly shown, various types of multimodal game modeling provide good opportunities for simulating the situations under discussion, designing and rehearsing some desired forms of behavior, forming associated sensory standards and ideomotor training for their actualization [5, 6, 8-26]. The kinesthetic component of such states can be successfully rebuilt and, if necessary, corrected using kinetic sand. Visual components of life scenarios associated with existing cognitive schemes as an indicative basis for the client’s behavior are successfully identified and corrected while working with metaphorical associative cards. And almost all of the listed components, as well as other modal variants of the orientation schemes involved, can be detected and corrected during sand game modeling. At the same time, both the elements themselves of such materialized displays of the existing orientation schemes and their photographs provide support to quickly assess the intensity of the emotional experiences accompanying such modeling and the physiological processes associated with them. Thus, cardiac measurements followed by calculation of the stress index of various components of the autonomc nervous system make it possible to estimate the level of stress caused by the client’s imagination of a problematic situation for him/her [9, 14, 17, 18, 20].

Measurements of changes in galvanic skin reactions make it possible to judge the intensity of experiences that accompany the rebuilding of the associative connection between the image and those events of which it is a metaphorical representation [11, 15, 21-27]. Therefore, it can be assumed that the prevention of undesired manipulative influences on the client’s personality can also be carried out using multimodal game modeling. And taking into account the already rich experience of instrumental diagnostics, the hopes are fully justified that in assessing the effectiveness of such prevention, measurements of the Baevsky stress index, as well as indicators of electrodermal activity, which can be recorded using recorders of physiological reactions of clients to presented stimuli, can play a significant role.

EXPERIMENTAL PROCEDURE

In order to assess the validity of the hypotheses formulated above and evaluate the effectiveness of these procedures, elements of Sandplay Therapy were used as the main means of identifying and correcting susceptibility to manipulative influences. The protocols for applying Sandplay Therapy included at the first stage the selection of toy miniatures, which were associated in each of the clients in this study with the types of stereotypical forms of manipulative behavior described
above according to E. Shostrom and/or according to a similar classification by T. Leary. Some examples of the clients performing this part of the work are shown below in Figure 1 herein. The clients were then asked to build a metaphorical picture of the fictitious world, where their chosen characters live. This stage of their work corresponds to an example presented in Figure 2 herein. After this, they were asked, if necessary, to make additional transformations if it was necessary to ensure maximum living comfort for all characters involved.

Later, an instrumental assessment of the reactions, which the photographs of the compositions they created evoked in each subject, was carried out. At that stage, computer-aided cardiometers Cardiocode, polygraphs Barrier-14 and KRIS were used. Based on the results of the measurements, the Baevsky stress index was calculated, and the intensity of galvanic skin reactions was assessed as a response to the presented stimulus. Later, a discussion of the obtained results was performed, combined with the classical methods of Sandplay Therapy [3, 5, 6, 26]. A total of 103 respondents aged from 18 to 59 years took part in our study.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

From the Figures presented below herein it follows that in performing the first part of their task, the experiment participants chose toy miniatures that quite eloquently characterized their attitude to the designated types of manipulation. At the same time, it turned out that with a high degree of probability it is possible to predict at a given moment the significance of a particular miniature and the associated scenario pattern, taking into account even external physical characteristics: weight, overall dimensions, degree of preservation. The range of the possible role-playing behavior denoted by a toy becomes even more obvious, taking into account what character, object, event, type of activity it denotes.

The completed experiments showed that, as a rule, the most pressing questions from clients arose precisely in relation to those variants of the manipulative behavior, which were metaphorically designated by the largest figurines and which were placed with pronounced signs of specific dominance in the compositions. The preliminary determination of their operational significance in the study was supported by the client’s subjective assessment of his/her bodily sensations, emotions, mental associations, and impulses to certain actions caused by various elements of the created compositions.

It should be noted here that, apparently, it was precisely this situational obviousness that became the reason that a number of psychotherapists over time began to look for universal meanings in the toy miniatures used by clients and in the landscapes they created in sand containers. But practice shows that the recognition of a certain range of the most probable associations, which can be generated by certain toy miniatures or compositions created therewith, is closer to the truth. The metaphors associated with the selected toys and displayed with their help in such compositions are not inherent in them initially. They simply play the role of tools through which a person expands the boundaries of his/her own self-awareness or self-consciousness.

A mediator in the hands of a guitarist is just a tool that makes it easier for the musician to produce sound when hitting the strings. Initially, no melody exists either in the strings themselves or in the mediator. But it exists potentially, or even already virtually, as a mental phenomenon, as one of the orientation schemes that exist in ideal form for the musician himself/herself to play the guitar. Similarly, toy miniatures and the toys included therein are just a means that helps, like a guitar with its strings and the mediator used to play it, to clarify and make more obvious the essence of the orientation schemes usually used by the client at his/her subconscious level, which play the role of scenarios in various types of life activities of a human individual.

Instrumental diagnostics provides a good assistance in clarifying what kind of semantic load exactly is carried by toy miniatures with diverse semantic connotations and the compositions created with their help. Indeed, the most significant elements of the current life scenarios and the forms of behavior personified by toy miniatures at the moment evoke the most noticeable response in terms of changes in the physiological indicators of the functioning of our body. It is the focusing of attention on their images that correlates with the greatest deviations of the stress index from its normal values. A similar connection was recorded in relation to the galvanic skin reactions in the experiment participants.

Of the same great value was the assistance rendered by instrumental diagnostics at the final stages of the work to increase the client’s resistance to hidden
manipulations. This was facilitated by a comparison of the results of his/her reactions to the images of the initial composition and the final composition, as well as his/her reactions to the miniatures selected at the first stage before the final transformation of all compositions and after it. Using such measurements as an element of bio-feedback, psychotherapists as facilitators encouraged the clients to achieve, through the metaphorical transformation of their compositions, a reflection of the internal coordination of different attitudes, values, and internal motivations.

For the experimenters themselves, the basis of comparison was the reactions that neutral toy miniatures evoked in the test subjects. That methodological technique was especially important when using polygraphs, the software of which provided for changing the area under the curve of changes in galvanic skin response in the event of a change in the image scaling ratio. The comparison of the recorded signal with that one that was selected as a reference at the same scaling ratios allowed experimenters to adequately assess the degree of changes in the physiological reactions.

Figure 1. The client's representation, using toy miniatures, of his/her ideas about what manifestations of manipulative scenarios of interpersonal interaction represent for him/her, corresponding to the typology by E. Shostrom and T. Leary

Figure 2. The final stage of the client's work, when the task of increasing his/her readiness to effectively resist external manipulative influences was solved.
Reaching the reference reaction level by the recorded reaction that occurred at the final stage of the work helped determine the moment when the training effect could be considered satisfactory and the post-test conversation could be started. The final result was considered successful if such instrumental diagnostics results coincided with the clients’ congruent positive descriptions of their physical sensations, emotions, thoughts and behavioral attitudes associated with the composition they finally created.

In essence, the results obtained herein were similar to what psychotherapists usually achieve in the process of sensory desensitization. The difference lies in the fact that, firstly, in addition to the client’s subjective sensations, our experiments have also actively used objective indicators of his/her physiological reactions. In the described experiments, indicators of galvanic skin reactions and cardiometric measurements have been employed for this purpose. Secondly, during the construction of sand compositions, the reference standard values have been identified, which both the therapist and the client have been guided by as the desired final indicators. Thirdly, in the given version of psychotherapy, the post-test conversations have become an important element. Their main task for the client himself/herself was to realize and deepen his/her understanding of the components of orientation schemes that usually operate at a subconscious level in the form of a certain kind of life scenarios, behavioral patterns and cognitive schemes included therein. By making such knowledge available to the client’s self-awareness or self-consciousness, facilitating to launch internal dialogue, the psychotherapist, in fact, according to the data obtained, has increased his/her client’s ability to resist manipulative scenarios by elevating the level of the semantic self-regulation.

CONCLUSIONS

The results obtained have confirmed the possibility of metaphorical description by the clients of options for manipulating their behavior that are significant to them. It has also been empirically shown that Sandplay Therapy can be used to successfully design and rehearse some desired forms of behavior, form sensory standards associated with them, and carry out ideomotor training to internalize orientation patterns corresponding to the preferable behavior.

Our assumption has also been confirmed that the very elements of such materialized displays of existing orientation schemes and their photographs help to quickly assess the intensity of the emotional experiences accompanying such modeling and the physiological processes associated with them. It has been found that cardiac measurements followed by calculation of the stress index of various components of the autonomic nervous system make it possible to assess the level of stress caused by the client’s imagination of a problematic situation for him/her, where he/she is facing traumatic manipulation. It has been also empirically confirmed that measurements of changes in galvanic skin reactions make it possible to judge the intensity of the experiences that accompany the rebuilding of the associative connection of the depicted items with those manifestations of manipulation of which it is a metaphorical representation.

The research has also confirmed the assumption that Sandplay Therapy can be used to effectively prevent some undesired manipulative influences on the client’s personality. It has been established that in assessing the effectiveness of such prevention, measurements of the Baevsky stress index and indicators of electrodermal activity as a client’s reaction to presented stimuli can play a significant role. In addition to establishing the effectiveness of therapeutic procedures, such measurements for the client himself/herself play the role of a kind of bio-feedback. With its help, the client gets an opportunity to assess how much the response to metaphorical representations of manipulative influences corresponds to how exactly he/she would like to act if they are detected.

The article was prepared based on the results of research carried out in accordance with a State Assignment by the Financial University within the framework of budget funding.

REFERENCES

15. Ognev AS. The use of visual stimuli in combination with measured cardiometric and galvanic skin reactions to identify the hierarchy of moral and ethical regulators in individual’s social behavior. Cardiometry. 2024;30:55-61. EDN: TPBJZS.