

THE THERAPEUTIC FAIRYTALE.

A STRATEGIC CHOICE

FOR A PSYCHOLOGICAL COUNSELOR

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The strategies employed by psychological counselors are meant to allow the latter professional group to establish rapport with the people in difficulty, as well as to solve problematic situations. Therefore, the current article focuses on the role of the therapeutic fairytale in enabling the target of the counseling process to learn, accept, appreciate, and understand oneself. Its accessibility and credibility scores from the unofficial list of psychotherapeutic methods and techniques applied by a counselor make the therapeutic fairytale a proper instrument not only for working with children, but also with adults. In this respect, given the "moral profit" yielded by this technique, the author of this article views and recommends the choice of the therapeutic fairytale as a strategic one.

Key words: psychological counseling, therapeutic fairytale, counselling strategies.

1. INTRODUCTION

The therapeutic fairytale is based on a narrative that contributes to highlighting a **problematic situation, a specific experience, some specific circumstances** and thus to finding **solutions**. Its incisive manner of conveying information on its characters to its readers contributes to a maximum openness towards it and, regardless of age, it allows them to understand how pain, sickness and even hope can metaphorically balance and yield acceptance.

Words are magical [1] and can cure if uttered by the appropriate person, in the right place and in the right manner. Therefore, they play a major therapeutic role.

The therapeutic fairytale must be told and not read. It must be the link between body and soul, thinking and acting, living and expressing. It cannot be told just by anyone, anywhere

or anyhow. Starting from a real or fantastic case, the therapeutic story is a mediator of pain and suffering. Thus, by liaising the verbs "to will", "to be able to", "to wish" and conjugating in the Present Tense, it brings the person in difficulty closer to a world in which the laws that govern can release vital resources to defeat fear, anxiety, inability, uncertainty and to discover hope. Its usefulness is proven when the one in pain begins to perceive the world through a different cognitive understanding rendered by the story.

The therapeutic fairytale is a precious instrument that unveils emotions and feelings such as anxiety, fear, obsessions, guilt, envy, or questions that have never had/received an answer and that tend to remain covert. Thus, fairytales along with metaphors can help the "listener" to balance one's own urges with the requirements of the external world and the rules of society.

2. KEY INGREDIENTS FOR THERAPEUTIC FAIRYTALES

The content of the allegories depicted by the fairytale does not necessarily need to be an aesthetic one. However, if they are also likable, acceptable and accepted, they bring a much greater contribution to the therapeutic endeavor. Thus, the subject of the therapy is more likely to perceive in a covert and successful manner to link between the narrative of the fairytale and his/her own problems. Most certainly, the subject will gain an “insight” into the message of the story much later and that will be the moment when the curing process starts.

The therapeutic fairytale is useful for any age and education group. Moreover, the story needs to be narrated in the right tone, with the right pitch, mimic and gestures. Thus, the psychotherapist becomes and actor performing several roles.

There are some key ingredients for assuming these roles and for detecting and conveying the message of the story. First, **empathy** is required. Second, the story must not be explained. If the algorithm underlying the story is missed or unknown to the therapist and the latter is trapped into answering the queries of the listener and into translating the story to the latter, the effects of the fairytale on the unconscious of the listener can dramatically flop. Moreover, the story can generate voluntary resistance and objections and the ultimate effect envisaged initially can no longer be achieved. Therefore, any allegory chosen by a psychotherapist must be anchored into a specific value (i.e. moral, social, etc.). last but not the least, it must be reminded that there is no rule that can measure the effectiveness of the allegory. The only certainty is that the effect/ change is to occur in time given the uniqueness of individuals.

The subjects of therapeutic endeavors are sometimes the ones requesting the choice of therapeutic fairytales [1] since

they identify more with these. In this context, the basic elements that need to support the use of therapeutic fairytales with adults are:

- optimism;
- positive thinking;
- healing will;
- self curing;
- problem solving.

The therapeutic story involves a certain degree of **flexibility** and that allows it to unveil a plethora of feelings and emotions that highlight life time experiences and attitude and behavior changes in adults.

Its lack of a given pattern by which to unfold renders its positive effects on the subject of therapy. The therapeutic message is the same, but its narrative can vary since a therapeutic fairytale must:

1. be enjoyed and raise interest
2. directly involve the listener into the plot;
3. short, concise, clear and comprehensive so as not to dilute the message.

With a view to all of the above, the therapeutic fairytale could only include:

1. an identification of the situation/ emotion: joy, hope, understanding, acceptance, problem solving situations, behavioral patterns, fear of not making mistakes, etc.

2. identity elements:
 - a. therapeutic goals (e.g. difficulties in complying with group rules);
 - b. expected effects (such as development of solidarity, team work encouragement, discipline encouragement, commitment to taking responsibility for tasks in group work).

A therapeutic fairytale can also be told by a clinically healthy adult that underwent a traumatic experience such as imprisonment, sickness, etc. and thus uses the story as a boundary situation and a therapeutic means to overcome the given context.

3. ADVANTAGES AND FUNCTIONS

According to Filipoi S. [2], there are a number of advantages of using the therapeutic fairytale in a conscious and purposeful manner in psychological therapy. First, this is an instrument for conveying moral values and behavioral models, while indirectly and jocularly suggesting a change of attitude. Second, the solutions it proposes are completely unexpected, contradict logic and habits, but focus on a positive emotional effort. Third, it can be used together with a communication instrument and thus it allows the targets of the psychological counseling session to feel protected and learn how to understand and positively appreciate themselves, as well as to unveil their inner power to "cure" by themselves.

Therapeutic fairytales fulfill a number of functions: **mirror, model and mediator** [2].

As a **mirror**, a therapeutic fairytale projects the emotional needs, thus triggering a plethora of images. Similarly to an image reflected in the mirror, it allows the counseled subject to separate and distance oneself from conflict situations and one's own life experience, and thus to succeed in no longer being a victim.

As a **model**, this psychological counseling strategic choice reveals possible solutions and encourages active learning of one's own models. Therefore, the application of the fantastic solutions is an experimental model that is completely unusual for the subject.

The therapeutic fairytale also acts a **mediator** between the subjects' resistance to therapy and the confrontation of their misconceptions and self defense mechanisms. It thus underlines that the hero of the narrative is the subject and not the patient and in this respect, the counseling psychologist needs to show creativeness in altering the fairytale

narrative on a case by case basis.

To yield the expected result, the use of the fairytale in psychological counseling requires **right timing and an adjusted narrative**.

4. CONCLUSIONS

The subject of psychological counseling needs to learn how to be a survivor and the therapeutic fairytale can be the first step towards the healing of the soul.

"What matters is people's opinion of themselves. They need to find during their lifetime the role that fits them and then they need to stop acting. People's profession is that of 'being', as Quentin Crips reminds in his 'Naked Civil Servant' play." [1]

Individuals can only act naturally when they discover spirituality, which is the capacity to find peace and happiness in an evolving world along with the awareness that their own personalities are flawed but acceptable. This acceptance gives rise to creativity and selfless love, and along with faith, forgiveness, peace and love are descriptors for spirituality and for those who manage to get cured inwardly and outwardly. The motto of the latter could be expressed as follows: *"I believe in sun even when it does not shine; I believe in love even when it is covert; I believe in God even when He does not speak."*

Once acceptance achieved, the effect of the therapeutic fairytale begins to work since the individual feels that it **helps, wills** to heal, identifies with its message and needs to express one's own identity.

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