



How Does Psychoanalysis Work With Persons Afflicted By Schizophrenia?

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ABSTRACT:

I make use of Lacan to understand schizophrenia. I then explain, from a Lacanian point of view, the success of three therapists treating persons afflicted by schizophrenia. I refer to the Finnish "Open Dialogue" method where up to 85% of persons, afflicted by schizophrenia, are successfully treated. In this paper I will concentrate upon the question as to how psychoanalysis, in modified form, works with patients afflicted by schizophrenia and psychosis. I will start by mentioning the "Open Dialogue" method used in Finland. I will point to the success of the "Open Dialogue" method to prove that schizophrenia can be cured by using talking therapy. Next, I will present Lacan's theory of schizophrenia. From Lacan's theory I will extract the concepts of the imaginary and the symbolic. I will then use Lacan's theory to explain the success of the methods to treat schizophrenia developed by Bertram Karon, G. Prouty and Palle Villemoes. I will argue that their success lies in the fact that these three therapists start by accepting the imaginary aspects of the patient. Only in a second step do they introduce the logic of language in their therapy.

In the abstract of their article "The Comprehensive Open-Dialogue Approach in Western Lapland" the authors, Jaakko Seikkula, Birgitta Alakare & Jukka Aaltonen, write: "In a two-year follow-up of two consecutive periods during the 1990s (1992-3 and 1994-7) it was found that 81% of patients did not have any residual psychotic symptoms [...] 84% had returned to full-time employment or studies. Only 33% had used neuroleptic medication". dialogue in the joint therapy meetings, in order to create new words and a new joint language for experiences that previously did not have words". Let us start with a couple of cases. One schizophrenic patient told her therapist that she had no hands. When the therapist asked the patient how she knew, the patient said that her father had told her so, that very morning. To the question by the therapist as to what the father had said, the patient answered: "My father told me that I was handicapped." The conversation was in Dutch where the words for "handicapped" sounds like "handicut.", the patient had interpreted the sentence of the father literally. She interpreted "handicapped" not metaphorically as being

disabled but literally as having one's hands cut. The case of this patient illustrates Lacan's theory that schizophrenic persons have a deficient relationship to language. In the case of this first patient, language could not be fully used in its metaphorical dimension. What is worth noticing in the "Open Dialogue" method is the unusual form of communication. The three mental health professionals do not talk in a normal way to the mentally ill person. Instead, the three mental health professionals talk to each other. They talk in the presence of both the mentally ill person and his or her family. Then they ask the mentally ill person and his family what he or she picked up from the conversation. Garry Prouty calls his method "pre-therapy" He considers his therapy a specification of the patient centered therapy developed by Carl Rogers. Like Rogers, Prouty recommends two attitudes for the therapist. These two attitudes try to make the dual relationship of patient/therapist the sole relevant relationship. These attitudes try to make irrelevant the considerations of a third party. the parents, might push the patient to respect the currently accepted civilized behavior patterns.

Keywords: Prouty; Karon; Villemoes; Lacan; Schizophrenia; Psychoanalysis; Psychosis; Psychotic symptoms; Breakdown; Mental health; Psychodynamics; Paternal metaphor; Self-conception; Psychic structure; Congruence; Ego-structuring; Narcissism