

Psychotherapy Guidebook



**MIRROR IMAGE
THERAPY**

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Mirror Image Therapy

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Mirror Image Therapy

Richard E. Frenkel

DEFINITION

Many years ago, while analyzing a patient, I noticed her facial expression becoming distorted while she free-associated material about her mother. Since I found it difficult to accurately describe this change to her, I asked her to look in a mirror.

She was instantaneously shocked: “My God, I look like my mother! It’s her mopey look,” she retorted.

For many years thereafter, on almost a daily basis, I used a mirror to analyze this patient’s transference and resistance until she completed her analysis.

HISTORY

At that time, the psychiatric literature showed no reference to the use of the mirror as a diagnostic-therapeutic tool. However, many articles existed on the mirror for other purposes. I then continued to research the use of the mirror as a diagnostic-therapeutic tool in psychiatry.

TECHNIQUE

The Mirror Image Projective Technique (M.I.P.T.) is a diagnostic-therapeutic instrument that is in easy reach of any psychotherapist.

The patient is asked to focus on his mirror image. When the patient becomes inducted into a “mirror trance,” he is then asked to free associate to his image. Defenses are unblocked and the unconscious mind is permitted to flow, bringing forth vital feelings and thoughts of recent and past experiences. Intermittently, the patient focuses and unfocuses his eyes upon his image, as he ventures from reality to the unconscious and back. He is a participant observer while using the mirror. In some cases, immediate interpretations can be made from the data gathered. Occasionally, primary instantaneous insight is gained by the patient.

While the ordinary “black-and-white mirror” is used for the diagnosis of mental illness, and used as a therapeutic tool, the “multicolored mirror” is employed to decipher the emotional meaning of color for the individual patient. Emotion appears to be directly related to color.

Since the M.I.P.T. accomplished therapeutic change, I termed this treatment Mirror Image Therapy. Sound-recording equipment and videotapes have proved themselves to be invaluable in aiding the therapeutic process. I have found the M.I.P.T. to be applicable to all types of psychopathology. Thus

far, in my practice, no type of pathology has been resistant to the M.I.P.T.

APPLICATIONS

The M.I.P.T. is very useful in combination with other therapy modalities.

Child Mirror Therapy was employed with five child stutterers. The seven-year-old children all took turns using the mirror in the classroom. They free-associated to their mirror image rather easily as if it was play therapy. They exposed their problems to their fellow students and teacher. I supervised their teacher, as we reviewed together tape-recorded sessions of the children using the mirror. Many simple problems were solved rather quickly for the children.

Adult Group Therapy with the M.I.P.T. was also readily accomplished. Each patient was asked to free-associate to their mirror image before the group whenever it was deemed necessary. Many startling and unexpected thoughts and feelings were brought out in a natural manner before the group. Some remarked that it was like having individual sessions during group therapy.

Family Therapy with the M.I.P.T. also proved to be very rewarding therapeutically-Mentally retarded patients reacted to the M.I.P.T. rather well. The M.I.P.T. helps differentiate between organicity and other nonorganic

conditions.

Symptomatic Treatment

Depression. The M.I.P.T. is most useful in decreasing depression. The mirror is an antidepressant instrument. At times it will provoke the patient to cry, and thus relieve anger. This reduces the depression in the individual. The patient acquires symptomatic relief from the depression.

Suicide prevention. Since the M.I.P.T. decompresses depression, this reduces considerably the chance of the patient acting in a suicidal manner.

Controlling hallucinations. The mirror is antihallucinogenic. When a patient is actively hallucinating, he is asked to look at his image in the mirror and to constantly focus on his image. Invariably the voices disappear from the patient for a period of twenty-one to twenty-six seconds. Ambulatory schizophrenic patients are taught to carry pocket mirrors with them so that they can control the “voices” anytime they wish.

Reducing anxiety. The mirror precipitously reduces a patient’s anxiety. Mirror responses “gush out” from the patient and anxiety disappears. I term this the “gushing phenomenon.” Panic states are thus obviated. Phobic patients are helped by this mirror maneuver.

New Horizons in Mirror Research

A new clinical theory of vision. From the present data at hand, it appears that the rods of the retina register the visual structure and function of experience. The cones deal with the individual's emotional reaction to experience. Both the structural aspects of experience and the emotional reactions to experience are integrated in the retina. Then these integrated impulses pass through the visual tracts and are deposited in the memory bank of the brain.

The mirror experience causes the unconscious mind to release both the structural (black-and-white mirror experience) and the emotional (colored experience) reactions from the brain via the process of videotape recall.

Meaning of color in dreams. The multicolored mirror instrument consists of diverse colors in plastic that move across the surface of a mirror. Seeing one's image in a different color appears to be different from viewing color in the environment. A multicolored image response brings forth strong feelings relating to people and objects. If a specific color represents one's feelings to a definite person, such as a mother or father, then this same color may be color-specific in colored dreams. If further research validates this observation, the meaning of color in dreams could be unraveled.

The creativity center in the brain. The ordinary mirror and the multicolored mirror permit the therapist to sense the degree of creativity

possessed by the client during the M.I.P.T. experience. A creativity center definitely exists in the brain.

M.I.P.T., drugs and mental illness. Future research will combine the use of drugs with the M.I.P.T. so that symptoms that describe mental illness can be reduced. In turn, this might be an indirect way of determining what biochemicals cause mental illness.