

Psychotherapy Guidebook

MYTHOSYNTHESIS

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Mythosynthesis

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e-Book 2016 International Psychotherapy Institute

From *The Psychotherapy Guidebook* edited by Richie Herink and Paul R. Herink

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Table of Contents

[DEFINITION](#)

[HISTORY](#)

[TECHNIQUE](#)

[APPLICATIONS](#)

Mythosynthesis

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DEFINITION

Mythosynthesis is a mode of growth and development therapy using personal and social myth as a means of discovering important and hidden aspects of the personality. It is based on the observation that human beings in the maturation process create frames of reference, belief structures, which become for them patterns of reality. These belief structures make sense out of their world and become almost like an envelope of assumptions through which reality is filtered and limited. This frame of reference is both personal and cultural, created by the person out of both unique experiences of the individual and the accumulated experience of the culture. We call this frame of reference a myth, and the mythic envelope through which here and now experience is filtered is the mythosphere.

We use the term “myth” not in the sense of anything false or misleading, but as a creative ordering of the world. All human beings exist within their own mythosphere, and in that sense we create the world we live in. It is not a question of having or not having a mythosphere; it is only a question of how well our mythospheres function in helping us get our needs met and

enhancing our lives and potentials.

Because each individual creates his or her own mythosphere, the individual can reorder or re-create it once it has come to awareness. Since the original mythosphere is created at a very young age, say, before the age of six, and because many old patterns are now obsolete, the mythosphere is frequently based on inadequate or distorted external information. It may have been the best the child could do with the data he or she had then, but it becomes a limiting and inadequate system for dealing with the here and now.

Mythosynthesis works with bringing the mythosphere to awareness using fantasy, imagery and metaphor to make the world picture concrete; and in a nurturing small group setting invites the person to look at his/her myths, value her/his creativity, and to own and enlarge the mythosphere, bringing it up to date as he/she chooses. Any decisions can be affirmed in the group.

HISTORY

We developed Mythosynthesis after teaching poetry for some years and doing psychotherapy in which our primary model is Eric Berne's Transactional Analysis. We accept Berne's tripartite structure of the personality, and find the concepts of the Parent, Adult, and Child very useful in our work. We focus a great deal on the Child ego state with its own three-part structure: the Free Child, the Little Professor or Creative Child, and the

Adapted Child. And we find the language of poetry, which is concrete, imagistic and metaphorical, to be the language of the Child.

Mythosynthesis has some grounding in Carl Jung's concepts of the integrated personality and the archetype. It is also indebted to Fritz Perls' Gestalt Therapy and to the work of A. Maslow and R. Assagioli. Also important is the rededication work of Robert and Mary Goulding. The term Mythosynthesis and the concept of the mythosphere are our own and will be more fully developed in a book length manuscript we are now preparing for publication.

TECHNIQUE

Mythosynthesis works best in a small group setting, either in an on-going therapy group or in special weekend or weeklong intensive work. The mythosphere is created early in a person's life and the energy holding it together is Child energy. For that reason significant redeductions about the content of the mythosphere are made in the Child ego state by the Creative Child, i.e. Little Professor. Therefore, the technique of Mythosynthesis requires cathecting the Child ego state and encouraging Child creativity. It is a form of controlled regression centered around words, images, developing metaphors and defining one's space through stories, drawings and poetry.

Since we work with cathecting the Child ego state it is important that

the therapists provide a nurturing and protective environment and have their Adult available. The members of the group provide a variety of personal myths and models of reality, which helps in expanding, and modifying individual mythospheres. It is important that the group and the therapists do not pressure the individuals to change; rather the atmosphere and the techniques must invite and allow for change and affirm the individuals' O.K.ness and ability to make their own decisions. Conflicts within the group are seen as differences in individual mythospheres, each member being reminded that her/his mythosphere is self-created and therefore he/she is responsible for its contents. We also stress that the myths are valuable and creative, not to be denied but possibly to be changed and enhanced. The oyster doesn't get rid of the sand; rather it builds a pearl from it.

By bringing the mythosphere to awareness, the client can claim it and her or his own creative powers. The desired result of the Mythosynthesis techniques comes about when the client accepts the mythosphere as his/her own creation, makes a decision to change it, modify it, or keep it, and accepts the responsibility for living in the world of his own making. A synthesis is achieved between what she/he wants and what he/she believes is possible.

APPLICATIONS

Mythosynthesis is a mode of therapy which helps people to realize more

of their own potential and to achieve greater awareness and self-acceptance. It has proven effective in helping people change destructive and self-defeating neurotic patterns of behavior. It is growth oriented and is firmly based on Maslow's assertion that all neurosis is a failure of personal growth. It has not been tested with severely disturbed or psychotic clients; but if one assumes that some psychoses are manifestations of severely distorted mythospheres, there is no reason to believe that it could not be a helpful adjunct in treatment. The techniques are very useful in raising the level of self-esteem and self-acceptance as well as encouraging personal responsibility for the conduct of one's life.