

THE CO-CONSTRUCTION OF SONGS AS A TESTIMONY OF STORIES OF PSYCHOTHERAPEUTIC CHANGE

LA CO-CONSTRUCCIÓN DE CANCIONES COMO TESTIMONIO DE HISTORIAS DE CAMBIO PSICOTERAPÉUTICO

Alejandro Cifuentes-Muñoz

Universidad Autónoma de Chile. Chile

Agradecimientos a CONICYT Chile por beca de financiamiento para Doctorado Nacional

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-1767-5517>

This article was published in Spanish. This is the English version. (Extended Summary)

Link to the Spanish version: <https://doi.org/10.33898/rdp.v32i118.423>

How to reference this article:

Cifuentes-Muñoz, A. (2021). La Co-construcción de canciones como testimonio de historias de cambio psicoterapéutico [The co-construction of songs as a testimony of stories of psychotherapeutic change]. *Revista de Psicoterapia*, 32(118), 197-215. <https://doi.org/10.33898/rdp.v32i118.423>

Extended Summary

One of the most relevant phases in a psychotherapeutic process is the termination stage or closing phase, fundamentally, because in this stage it seeks to anchor the changes presented throughout psychotherapy, as well as to bear witness to them (Sluzki, 1995). That is, this phase is configured as a period to consolidate the psychotherapeutic changes and anchor them through a testimony.

A testimony is a statement that has the purpose of demonstrating or assuring the veracity of a fact by having been a witness to it. Consequently, the fact that is witnessed in a psychotherapy process is therapeutic change, or, particularly, the story of therapeutic change. As witnesses, both therapist and consultant can give an account of it in the form of testimony.

But in what ways can one witness in psychotherapy? How to do it is relative to each therapeutic approach and, not infrequently, to the creativity and innovation of the psychotherapist. This article aims to provide a theoretical-practical basis for the use and construction of songs –with their lyrics and music– in the closing phase of three psychotherapeutic processes. It is argued that a co-constructed song can be a form of testimony to the stories of therapeutic change that a client tells at

Received v1: 8-22-2020. Received v2: 10-24-2020. Received v3: 11-15-2020. Accepted: 12-8-2020.

Correspondence:

E-mail: alejandrocifuentes@uautonoma.cl

Postal address: 4 Norte #95, Campus Alameda, Talca, Chile

© 2021 Revista de Psicoterapia



the end of a successful psychotherapeutic process. In this way, an analysis of the epistemological assumptions underlying the proposal is carried out, first. Subsequently, three psychotherapeutic experiences are presented in which the proposal is applied, carrying out a content analysis of the consultants' report about their experience with the songs.

Epistemology of Constructivity

The experiences to be presented are based on constructiveness (Zlachevsky, 2008, 2015). This epistemological paradigm seeks to leave behind the historical intellectual confrontations between constructivism and constructionism, converging on their common points. Therefore, it highlights the importance of the observer's distinguishing operations in the act of knowing; the social and active construction of reality through language; the impossibility of reaching an objective and direct knowledge of the world, and; the possibility of knowing the phenomena based on the interpretation or meaning of the experience, thus questioning constructs such as truth and reality (Cifuentes-Muñoz & Rojas-Jara, 2018).

When a person goes to a psychotherapist it is because he has meant –or given an interpretation of– her experience through language in a particular way. Generally, these meanings are centered on pain or suffering, that is, an unpleasant emotion that leads you to ask for professional support. These particular meanings, when shared with others in the various contexts in which the consultant operates (partner, family, friends, work, etc.), generate a narrative, namely, a story that the consultant tells himself and to others, and that others tell about him. Therefore, this way of narrating (oneself) converges in a particular identity, a way of meaning (oneself) that is centered on the problems that afflict them, on their suffering.

To cope with such suffering, the visibility of alternative storie (White & Epston, 1993), healthier and less painful, that favors the deconstruction of the dominant storie or the change of its perspective must be promoted. This alternative, off-centered storie of suffering is co-constructed with the therapist throughout the entire process, as new meanings emerge from the experience. This new storie must be preserved, established and maintained, since it represents a new identity in the consultant, away from his initial suffering. For such a task, bearing witness, and how to do it, is relevant.

Song Co-construction

The song co-construction process takes as a reference various similar experiences documented by the narrative school (Denborough, 2002; Wever, 2009; Hegarty, 2009). Thus, there are a series of characteristics and / or elements that were considered in such a process, namely: extra-therapeutic dedication, which implies the use of the therapist's personal time; the use of letters focused on the resources of the consultants and not on their shortcomings; the consideration of narrations in the first person, respecting the gender of the consultants; the use

of textual quotes and incorporation of the consultants' belief system in order to represent their stories as accurately as possible; the representativity of the stories through constant feedback from the consultants, handing them the responsibility of assigning a title to the song; the presence of a chronological plot in the letter that places the problem in the past and the alternative storie in the present and / or future; the inclusion in the lyrics of significant third parties, in order to expand the narratives; the consideration of musical parameters such as rhythm, harmony, chords and musical genre, which must be related to the lyrics, particularly in choirs where new meanings are exposed, and; finally, the delivery of the story and song to the consultants through some technological means such as CD and / or e-mail.

Three Songs, three Stories, three Testimonies

In this section, the songs co-constructed in the final phase of three different psychotherapeutic processes –all with adult consultants and women– are exposed based on the previously exposed considerations (a link with the audio of the songs is attached). Each song is per se a storie of change that incorporates the contrast of the previous and current story, allowing the patients' stories to be understood without having high antecedents of the case.

Consultant 1: Blue Dragonfly (By C. G.) <https://soundcloud.com/alecifu07/libelula-azul>

Consultant 2: That's me (By F. L.) <https://soundcloud.com/alecifu07/esa-soy-yo>

Consultant 3: Renacer (By P. A.) <https://soundcloud.com/alecifu07/renacer>

Analysis of Experience

To account for the experiences, perceptions and / or meanings that emerged in the consultants about the songs co-constructed in the closing phase of their psychotherapeutic processes, a content analysis is carried out using a hermeneutical approach. The raw data to be analyzed correspond to: session notes of the therapist in the closing phase, written record of the non-verbal language of the clients at the time of presenting the song, emails referring to the songs and transcripts of a follow-up session to the patients. 2 months after discharge from therapy in each case. From the content analysis of the exposed data, 3 inductive categories emerge:

Emotions when listening to the songs. This category describes the emotions and / or initial stories associated with them after listening to the songs. In the 3 cases analyzed, the emotions described in the patients' report are associated with emotions of positive connotation. Among these, meanings related to gratitude, surprise –about the fact that such a product were not expected– and stories associated with feeling recognized and immediately identified with the sung story prevail.

Song function. This category is related to the usefulness or “what for” of the songs. It is appreciated that these are considered as a record of the psychotherapeutic process that summarizes and represents it, being synonymous with pride. It is also appreciated that the songs are configured as a reminder, word of encouragement

or advice from themselves for future situations, but, from their values and beliefs.

The audience of the songs. This category is related to the drift that the songs have followed from the therapeutic discharge to the follow-up session. The meanings that emerge regarding this are varied and respond to the characteristics of the consultants and their particular processes. On the one hand, two of the consultants report not having shown the songs to third parties since it is a personal, private element. Consultant 2 refers to having shared her song with different significant others, referring to various social effects that she has had. In this case, the drift of the song is not exhausted in the consultant, but rather has a positive impact on the socially shared meanings.

Conclusions

At the culmination of a psychotherapeutic process, there is a new story to tell, where well-being, and not suffering, takes precedence. From the epistemological perspective of constructivity, this is not trivial, since new stories or narratives reveal new identities, new shared meanings associated with a new version of oneself. Thus, the narrative that accounts for the change is the therapeutic change itself. Herein lies the importance that the new stories transcend, materialize in a friendly object or product, and take the form of testimony of the lived process.

The relevance of this experience is considered to lie in three invitations. The first is an invitation to innovation in psychotherapeutic processes, incorporating and considering the therapist's system of meanings and beliefs. The therapist's extra therapeutic skills would have the potential to be incorporated into the processes in a beneficial way for the clients, as long as their objective is clearly defined and their incorporation is founded. In this experience, music was used, however, various media can be considered: photography, poetry, performing arts, dance, painting, plastic arts, etc. All of them available to be used as innovative means in therapy, as long as they have a purposeful (not tax) nature, considering the abilities, interests, beliefs, and/or passions of the consultants.

The second invitation is for the therapist to bear witness to the client's stories of change by making appropriate use of the power that the profession sends him. The therapist has a significant share of power over another who comes to him in an emotionally disadvantaged position. However, beyond hiding it or pretending that it does not exist, what is relevant is to make good use of it. It is therefore considered that the therapist, in his capacity as a witness to the client's change, can –and in a certain sense must– give testimony of it, either through the materialization of a therapeutic product/object or verbally. Probably the success of the therapy is not related to the presence or absence of testimony, but it would undoubtedly be configured as a useful element that would favor the anchoring of the client's changes.

The last invitation converges on the therapist taking charge of the epistemological operation of his clinical praxis. Although this writing does not focus on the presentation of a particular therapeutic model that supports the interventions, it

does make explicit, deepen and support the epistemological premises that underlie this experience. This is precisely what gives meaning to the practice of co-building songs as a testimonial, allowing for the coherent and useful incorporation of music as an innovative and beneficial medium. Without the declared epistemological support, this practice lies empty, being nothing more than a whimsical experience of a therapist, which would be regrettable. Although epistemology and psychotherapy, unfortunately, do not always travel the same path, that a therapist is motivated to consider and recognize the epistemological assumptions that underlie and sustain his clinical operation, will not, under any point of view, be synonymous with harm.