

Testing Depression in Awareness Space: A Proposal to Evaluate Whether a Psychotherapeutic Method Based on Spatial Cognition and Imagination Therapy Cures Moderate Depression

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Abstract : Background: The method Depression in Awareness Space (DAS) is a psychotherapeutic intervention technique based on the principles of spatial cognition and imagination therapy with spatial components. The basic assumptions are: mental space is the primary organizing principle in the mind, and all psychological issues can be treated by first locating and by next relocating the conceptualizations involved. The most clinical experience was gathered over the last 20 years in the area of social issues (with the social panorama model). The latter work led to the conclusion that a mental object (image) gains emotional impact when it is placed more central, closer and higher in the visual field - and vice versa. Changing the locations of mental objects in space thus alters the (socio-) emotional meaning of the relationships. The experience of depression seems always associated with darkness. Psychologists tend to see the link between depression and darkness as a metaphor. However, clinical practice hints to the existence of more literal forms of darkness. Aims: The aim of the method Depression in Awareness Space is to reduce the distress of clients with depression in the clinical counseling practice, as a reliable alternative method of psychological therapy for the treatment of depression. The method Depression in Awareness Space aims at making dark areas smaller, lighter and more transparent in order to identify the problem or the cause of the depression which lies behind the darkness. It was hypothesized that the darkness is a subjective side-effect of the neurological process of repression. After reducing the dark clouds the real problem behind the depression becomes more visible, allowing the client to work on it and in that way reduce their feelings of depression. This makes repression of the issue obsolete. Results: Clients could easily get into their 'sadness' when asked to do so and finding the location of the dark zones proved pretty easy as well. In a recent pilot study with five participants with mild depressive symptoms (measured on two different scales and tested against an untreated control group with similar symptoms), the first results were also very promising. If the mental spatial approach to depression can be proven to be really effective, this would be very good news. The Society of Mental Space Psychology is now looking for sponsoring of an up scaled experiment. Conclusions: For spatial cognition and the research into spatial psychological phenomena, the discovery of dark areas can be a step forward. Beside out of pure scientific interest, it is great to know that this discovery has a clinical implication: when darkness can be connected to depression. Also, darkness seems to be more than metaphorical expression. Progress can be monitored over measurement tools that quantify the level of depressive symptoms and by reviewing the areas of darkness.

Keywords : depression, spatial cognition, spatial imagery, social panorama

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