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**THE USAGE OF THE NARRATIVE APPROACH IN THE  
PSYCHOLOGICAL CONSULTING BY MEANS OF THE METAPHORIC  
ASSOCIATIVE CARDS (MAC)**

*The article is dedicated to the analysis of the possibilities of the metaphoric associative cards usage when applying the narrative approach in the psychological consulting. The cards are considered as the instruments for the multimodal stimulation of the client towards the comprehension of his intentions (beliefs and values) and the intended choice of the preferred life stories.*

*Narrative exercises are a partnership between psychologist and the patient. These exercises enable a patient to switch from the familiar and well-known being to the "possible" state. Narrative consultant uses various communicative methods to let the partner applying to his strengths or weaknesses. Metaphoric cards stimulate the associative thinking and encourage the client's story. The cards are the external mechanism for structuring the self perception of the particular situation. The metaphoric nature of the pictures lets a client to perceive the problems in a dissociated manner. This reduces the resistance and allows to overcome the psychological defense. The visual metaphors carry multiple impacts on the client's inner world. Being underpinned with the verbal metaphors, the impacts become even stronger.*

*The metaphoric nature of the cards is revealed both on the image-perception level and during the communication with the psychologist. A client may easily tell about the negative images without binding this image with himself. The problem can be analyzed with the help of the hypothetical heroes and their stories; the way-outs can be analyzed and investigated. The result of such consultancy is the fact that a client considers himself as the subject in his story. The "safe territory" is formed so that a client can consider his life from the resource position and distance himself from the true to life experience which can be rather traumatic. Such position can help a client to take the right choice and the his life towards the needed direction.*

**Keywords:** *narrative approach, metaphoric associative cards, communicative methods, safe territory, preferred life stories.*

The fact that the person speaks to psychologist-consultant means that undesirable events take place in his or her life, which he or she hopes to solve with the help of an understanding, i.e. explanation of their reasons. The client usually has an explanation of these reasons. However, it is not satisfactory from the point of view of the possibilities to change the situation.

Important features of client's perception and understanding of circumstances and possibilities of their transfer to a consultant should be taken into consideration during psychological counseling:

- a person is not always able to clearly understand and explain his or her position.
- explanation of client's life circumstances (part of the narrative) depends on both the reflective capacity of the client, and the degree of the contact and the alliance between the client and the consultant (trust relationships, emotional involvement, rational orientation, etc.).
- the main way of offering clients' difficulties during psychological counseling is a report of relevant stories of life, based on subjective assessments and basic facilities of the client.

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Thus, during the process of psychological counseling it is necessary to solve the problems of the client's stimulation towards thinking about the situation from different angles and then to tell about it. In our opinion, described counseling tasks are efficiently solved in the framework of the narrative approach with the use of metaphorical cards of association (MCA).

**The aim of this investigation** is to analyze the possibilities of application of metaphorical cards of association in the implementation of narrative approach in psychological counseling as a tool for multimodal stimulation of the client for realization of his or her intentions (affective and personal assessments of events, beliefs and values) and the conscious choice of preferred life stories.

**Basic material.** Important counseling tasks in providing psychological assistance in the framework of the narrative approach are: creation of the necessary conditions for psychological contact and alliance between the client and the consultant; ask the client to tell stories with further analysis of restricted attitudes; assistance in the establishment and adoption of the "preferred story".

The term "narrative" is formed from the Latin "narrare" that means "to narrate, to tell". The Australian Michael White (1948-2008) and the New Zealander David Epston (1944) lie at the root of the narrative approach in psychological counseling. Narrative practice has been efficiently used with people and communities who have experienced trauma (in hot spots, in case of invasion, in refugee camps, etc.), with marginalized groups (including various minorities), as well as with those people who can not practice traditional psychotherapy (e.g., in prisons), or for whom conventional therapy is not acceptable for a variety of reasons related to culture, beliefs, etc [4, 5, 8].

The focus of the narrative approach includes, on the one hand, the relationship between perceptions of people about themselves, their ability to influence their life, position in relation to author's story, and social (cultural, economic, political) factors, on the other hand. Many of the problems, faced by people, are results of the total practice of comparison of themselves and others with the norms and standards of a successful life, adopted in different social groups. Narrative consultants make an influence of the "normative judgments" on the people visible that often make people feel inadequate, frustrated, worthless, and help them to create and implement their own unique ways of development, gathering like-minded people.

That is why the narrative practice is very popular among members of minorities who undergo ethnic, religious, racial discrimination, or due to disability, sexual orientation, etc. In modern Ukraine segments of the population, which have problems, are refugees from ATO zone and persons who emigrated from Crimea. The experiences of these individuals are extremely negative, in many respects they are experiencing symptoms of stigma, not feeling social support [6].

The aim of the narrative practice is to create the conditions for the description of the preferred history of the individual, who is counseled. The existence of problems in a person's life is stated precisely when the story that dominates closes opportunities. However, human life always has many stories. In addition to the dominant one, there are also alternative stories. Any problem can not fill a person's life by 100%, there are always some areas or moments of life, where there is something else apart from the problem. There is always some kind of experience that is not spoken and not yet included in the story. Those stories that lead to the realization of the intentions and goals of the person are the preferred ones.

Thus, the aim of the narrative practice is to create conditions in order to make a subject with whom a counselor is working (individual, family or community) be able to:

- realize the limited influence of the dominant problem story,

- identify exceptions, build an alternative story of them, make sure that it is the preferred story,
- create a multi-dimensional, bright, vivid description of the preferred story (sequence of events in the past, present and possible future, united by the common topic)
- help to find or create a community of support of the preferred story that will help counter the effects of the influence of the problem on human life and support the movement in the preferred direction.

J. Bruner stated that human thought could be divided into two modes: logical paradigm associated with the context of events and extra-contextual narrative, which is the primary means of understanding life events and experiences of people. Accordingly, in the story told by an individual, there are two so-called “landscapes”: landscape of action and landscape of consciousness.

Events and actions are located on the landscape of action, i.e. all the answers to the questions “what is done”, “who did”, “where”, “when”, “how”, “under which circumstances”. Intentional identity categories are located on the landscape of consciousness: meanings, values, desires, hopes, dreams, expectations, life principles and voluntarily undertaken obligations. In the “good” story landscapes of action and consciousness are closely intertwined. We can see not only what the hero makes, but we also know, what reasons make him one or another thing, and what different variants of the outcome of the situation mean for him [1].

In solving the counseling tasks within the narrative approach it is advisable to involve metaphorical method of associative cards in order to establish the necessary psychological climate for all kinds of stimulation of the client to find resources to solve problems.

Metaphorical card of association are pictures that have the size of a playing card without clear values and interpretations, which allow obtaining the necessary amount of information for high-quality work with a client in a very short period of time. They were offered by E.Raman, J. Schlichter, M. Egetmeyer (1985). Then, they were developed by psychologists from different countries and scientific directions [3, 7].

Operations with MCA have no strict rules, allowing the psychologist to vary instruction, giving the opportunity to see the card on another way each time. This allows operating many times with one set of cards. The image of the picture is not so important. It is important what story is perceived by the client and what he or she can tell. Each time the pictures on the cards revive memories, feelings, actualize unconscious, suggest solving problems of the client. The client fills the picture by his or her meaning, so it is very important that the psychologist should not impose his or her own vision [3].

Referential activity appears due to stimulation using MCA. Referential activity is a term coined by W. Bucci to mean an active interaction between two different levels of storage and processing of information in humans - symbolic (i.e., verbal) and subsymbolic. During psychotherapeutic counseling verbal system of the person (symbolic level) is associated with the images, ideas, un verbalized fantasies, etc. As a result, the emotional circuits are activated and become a subject of discussion in the psychotherapeutic dialogue. The phase of high referential activity corresponds to the activation of emotional circuits and appears phenomenologically as a special form of discourse; it has such characteristics as clarity, imagery, concreteness and specificity of presentation. It is assumed that the activation of emotional circuit (and therefore the peak of referential activity) occurs in the process of storytelling, memories, dreams that reflect unconscious processes. Symbols tend to bring to light what is irrational and involuntary, so it can be transformed into a suitable relationship with the rational side of the personality [2].

Operation with MCA in narrative approach has several advantages.

First, many clients are not able to reach an emotional level. They are closed, rational. Metaphorical cards are able to immerse such an individual in the sensible world through the processes of identification and projection. Quite often the client is ready to neither tell everything about his or her “skeletons in the closet” nor accurately describe what is happening to him or her. In such cases, MCA would operate without content: the client is invited to find a card that metaphorically reflects the problem or condition, and then describe them. Cards can be viewed as a multi-modal stimulation that causes various associations: on the one hand, there are visuals; on the other hand, there is a narrative practice, which is a source of further interventions in the counseling process.

Second, certain effects are achieved with the help of MCA in the counseling process: forming confidence; actualization of client’s experiences; self-disclosure; establishing contact with the internal parts of the personality; study of values and motives; identification of displaced material; insight, reframing, structuring the problem; finding solutions and resources; enrichment of personal meanings; expansion of the world picture; getting metaphorical feedback. These effects are possible on the basis of psychological phenomena, which are involved in the MCA: projection, identification, association, insight, allocation of the material figure and ground, the dissociation of the problems, reducing the level of defense mechanisms, metaphorical effects [7].

Third, the use of cards creates a safe environment for the study of the projections of the client. Ability to work with the projection allows the psychologist to understand the reasons that led to the problem of the client in a short period of time and find the most efficient ways to solve it. With MCA the psychologist has the ability to quickly remove resistance of the client, reach an alliance (degree of closeness and trust) and work with any topic and problem of the client.

For example, the narrative technique that is called “externalization” is successfully supported by the work with MCA. Metaphorical cards help to present the problem as a kind of entity that within the metaphor of narrative serves as the enemy. This entity has its own intentions, plans, views of human life other than his or her own, as well as some tricks, strategies and tactics that prevent the person from moving in its preferred direction and make him or her to stop opposing the problem. From a linguistic point of view, externalization is a description of the problem through a noun (not “lethargic” and “under the authority of lethargy” or “captured by lethargy”). The client, choosing an image of his or her problem, extrapolates it, “looks into its eyes”, sees the details, structuring his or her own understanding of the situation. Dissociating function of MCA is “objectification” of the problem and its externalization, i.e., “moving” the problem of the patient's “internal field” to the “external one”, which allows the client to “see from outside” the problem and to find ways to solve it, and it allows a psychotherapist to perform therapeutic manipulation of the metaphorical character.

Problems of people are freed from the paralyzing influence of negative feelings (shame, guilt and self-loathing) and can take more responsibility for their deeds during operations using MCA due to dissociating perception. Meanings, values, thoughts, dreams, abilities and opportunities of people are clarified. The history of their origin and development is traced. As a result, a “safe area identity” is formed. A person can look at his or her life from the resource position, to distance himself or herself from direct experience, in particular, the traumatic one, and make an informed choice, changing the life in the desired direction.

Metaphorical cards of association serve as a trigger to start the story, offering opportunities for creativity of the client and psychologist, consultant, leader of groups and coach. Cards allow receiving access to a complete picture of the person’s “Ego”, his or her personal myth about the world and himself or herself, as well as about a subjective image of the situa-

tion. Operation with MCA helps a specialist to clarify fast enough the actual experiences, the needs of the client, his or her unfinished internal processes. They help to understand the psychological causes of events that happen to people and to find a solution for the most complicated situations. It has been known that while drawing and the following description of the own picture the person extrapolates his or her feelings, attitudes and conditions of life. Similar processes occur when a certain picture is chosen from a large number of cards. And then, describing a particular card, the person involuntarily describes his or her life.

Various communication techniques to encourage stories are used while working with associative cards. One of the easiest methods is the return of the client's own words. The effect consists in receiving additional stimulation by the client to continue the story, keeping contact, showing attention from the consultant to the client.

General stimulation of the client to think about selected images is important at the beginning of the choice of cards, for example, in the following way:

“Firstly, carefully view the picture. Think what is present beyond the visible fragment, what is happening in this situation, what story is behind the image on the card. Pay attention to questions that may arise while viewing the picture. Where it responds to you? Where did it meet you in your life? If the card is accompanied by the inscription, read the inscription after the work with the visual image. Feel your inner response to these words.

Try to mentally draw your own image, which arises when you read these words. Compare your mental picture to the card”. Such operation with each card awakens the unique associations of the client, stimulates his or her imagination.

While working with MCA a free story of the client about the picture is possible, as well as more narrowly focused, structured techniques that allow the client to produce associations on selected images.

There are various algorithms that encourage the client to the story that structures the history. For example, you can use a structure consisting of six consecutive steps:

1. The hero appears;
2. The hero starts on a journey to complete a certain mission or fight with someone or something;
3. The hero meets assistants;
4. The hero faces obstacles;
5. The hero copes with obstacles;
6. The end of the history.

Cards are selected for the listed items. Card layout allows an individual to associate, comprehend and process experience. There are other schemes for conversation, which is accompanied by a selection of MCA.

Authors Nkazelo Ncube and David Denborough [9] offer a variety of techniques that structure the story of the client in line with the narrative approach in providing psychological assistance in working with people and communities who have experienced trauma. For example, a method of double description, which is effectively combined with a choice of metaphorical cards. The idea of this method not only aims at the description of the severe events, but also at how people cope with it. The consultant asks a series of questions during telling the story of the client about events in the life: Is it something to survive for? What gives your power to talk about it? Did you have some ways to make it easier? If you talk about the loss, what did appear in your life? Did somebody help you? What did this person do? What helped you to return to normal life? If someone had to go through the same thing, what would you recommend? What stories should be told? What steps should be taken to get out of this situation? What important things did you understand? According to the above-mentioned list of

questions, a choice of cards associated with things or persons supporting an individual may be offered. What are the vital things that support the client? What he or she could learn as a result? What values helped, who supported him or her? How this situation could be useful for other people? Thus, a person comprehends the positive aspect of the experience that contains the resource for future life prospects.

**Conclusions.** Narrative practice is a partnership and cooperation psychologist and an individual who asked for help. It is based on already existing knowledge and skills and allows going from familiar and accustomed things to possible ones. The consultant who works in the narrative approach neither takes a position of the "expert of life content" of the client, nor judges the "rightness" or "wrongness" of his or her deeds. He just asks questions that help to develop the desired and preferred things for human life direction. This occurs due to more and more full, rich, multifaceted description of the preferred history. Narrative consultant asks questions differently, allowing the partner to contact his or her strength or weakness. The result of this work is the fact that the person feels a subject of his or her life. Metaphorical cards serve as stimulators of association, encourage the client to tell the story, which is external support for the structuring of their own perception of the situation. Metaphoric images of MCA allow the client to perceive problems dissociatedly, reducing resistance, allowing consultants to bypass psychological defenses. Visual metaphors of cards carry multiple opportunities to influence the inner world of the client, and become even stronger backed up by verbal metaphors. Metaphoricity of cards manifests both at the level of perception of pictures and at the level of the client's dialogue with the psychologist: it is possible to talk freely about the negatives in the image without linking it with yourself; it is possible to make up stories about heroes, investigate their problems and seek a way out of difficult situations.

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### РЕАЛІЗАЦІЯ НАРАТИВНОГО ПІДХОДУ В ПСИХОЛОГІЧНОМУ КОНСУЛЬТУВАННІ ЗА ДОПОМОГОЮ МЕТАФОРІЧНИХ АСОЦІАТИВНИХ КАРТ (МАК)

*Статтю присвячено аналізу можливостей застосування метафоричних асоціативних карт при здійсненні наративного підходу в психологічній консультації. Карти розглядаються як інструмент для мультимодальної стимуляції клієнта до усвідомлення ним своїх інтенцій (афективно-особистісних значень подій, переконань і цінностей) і усвідомленому вибору бажаних життєвих історій.*

*Наративна практика – це партнерство психолога і людини, що звернулася за допомогою, яке, базуючись на вже наявних у людини знаннях і уміннях, дозволяє перейти від знайомого і звичного до того, що можливо. Наративний консультант застосовує різні комунікативні прийоми, дозволяючи партнеру звертатися до своєї сили або до своєї слабкості. Метафоричні карти при цьому є стимуляторами асоціювання, спонукають розповідь клієнта, є зовнішньою опорою для структурування власного сприйняття ситуації. Метафоричність зображень МАК дозволяє клієнту сприймати проблеми дисоційовано, що знижує опір, дозволяє обійти психологічний захист. Зорові метафори карт мають множинні можливості впливу на внутрішній світ клієнта, а, підкріплені словесними метафорами, стають ще сильніше. Метафоричність карт виявляється як на рівні сприйняття клієнтом картинки, так і на рівні його спілкування з психологом. Карты дозволяють вільно говорити про негатив на картинці, не зв'язуючи його із собою; складати історії про героїв, досліджувати їхні проблеми, шукати шляхи виходу зі складних ситуацій. Підсумком такої роботи є те, що клієнт відчуває себе більшою мірою суб'єктом свого життя. В результаті у людини формується “безпечна територія ідентичності”, він може поглянути на своє життя з ресурсної позиції, дистанціюватися від безпосередньо пережитого досвіду, зокрема травмуючого, і здійснювати усвідомлений вибір, змінюючи своє сприйняття життя в бажану сторону.*

*Ключові слова:* нарративний підхід, метафоричні асоціативні карти, комунікативні прийоми в консультуванні, безпечна територія ідентичності, бажані життєві історії.

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### **РЕАЛИЗАЦИЯ НАРРАТИВНОГО ПОДХОДА В ПСИХОЛОГИЧЕСКОМ КОНСУЛЬТИРОВАНИИ ПРИ ПОМОЩИ МЕТАФОРИЧЕСКИХ АССОЦИАТИВНЫХ КАРТ (МАК)**

*Статья посвящена анализу возможностей применения метафорических ассоциативных карт при осуществлении нарративного подхода в психологической консультации. Карты рассматриваются как инструмент для мультимодальной стимуляции клиента к осознанию им своих интенций (аффективно-личностных значений событий, убеждений и ценностей) и осознанному выбору предпочитаемых жизненных историй.*

*Нарративная практика представляет собой партнерство и сотрудничество психолога и человека, обратившегося за помощью, которое, основываясь на уже имеющихся у человека знаниях и умениях, позволяет перейти от знакомого и привычного к тому, что возможно. Нарративный консультант применяет различные коммуникативные приемы, позволяя партнеру обращаться к своей силе или к своей слабости. Метафорические карты при этом выступают стимуляторами ассоциирования, побуждают рассказ клиента, являются внешней опорой для структурирования собственного восприятия ситуации. Метафоричность изображений МАК позволяет клиенту воспринимать проблемы диссоциированно, что снижает сопротивление, позволяет обойти психологические защиты. Зрительные метафоры карт несут в себе множественные возможности воздействия на внутренний мир клиента, а, подкрепленные словесными метафорами, становятся еще сильнее. Метафоричность карт проявляется как на уровне восприятия клиентом картинки, так и на уровне его общения с психологом. Карты позволяют свободно говорить о негативе на картинке, не связывая его с собой; сочинять истории о героях, исследовать их проблемы, искать пути выхода из сложных ситуаций. Итогом такой работы является то, что клиент чувствует себя в большей степени субъектом своей жизни. В результате у человека формируется “безопасная территория идентичности”, он может взглянуть на свою жизнь с ресурсной позиции, дистанцироваться от непосредственно переживаемого опыта, в частности травмирующего, и совершить осознанный выбор, меняя свое восприятие жизни в желаемую сторону.*

*Ключевые слова:* нарративный подход, метафорические ассоциативные карты, коммуникативные приемы в консультировании, безопасная территория идентичности, предпочитаемые жизненные истории.

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