Temporal stability of the changes produced by the holorenic breathwork in a psychotherapeutical context.

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INTRODUCTION

In the middle 70’s, after two decades working with LSD and other psychedelic substances in psychotherapy, Stanislav Grof developed the holotropic breathwork. This method was designed as a non-drug way of accessing non-ordinary states of consciousness or “holotropic states” (Grof, 2000). The holotropic breathwork involves a number of diverse elements, including music, eclectic bodywork and accelerated breathing. To date, few studies have examined empirically the therapeutic potential of this hyperventilation procedure (Sinarova, 2003, Hanway, 2002; Holmes, 1996; Pressman, 1993).

Other similar hyperventilation procedures have been developed afterwards. In the late 80’s the anthropologist Josep Maria Fericgla developed the holorenic breathwork, based in the Kapalabhati breathing, different shamanic and sufi breath methods and the holotropic breathwork. This hyperventilation technique consists in an increased breath rhythm, reaching to 140-160 breaths per minute, involving also other elements (Fericgla, 2000). The present study explore the effects and efficacy of this hyperventilation procedure in a psychotherapeutical context.

METHODOLOGY

Objectives: To analyze the effects of the holorenic breathwork (HB), in the context of a experiential workshop, the “Workshop on Experiencing the Integration of One’s Death”. This study analyze:

a) the effects of the HB in levels of distress, meaning of life and certain personality properties, measured with different psychometric test;

b) the temporal stability of the possible changes produced by the HB.

Participants: A total of 76 subjects, aged between 16 and 35 years.

1) Experimental group or HB group. Subjects (N=45) were selected from the participants in a weekend workshop where the hyperventilation procedure was used and who “breathe” for first time.

2) Control group. Subjects (N=31) were recruited from the students of the UAB University. The control group subject’s didn’t receive any alternative treatment.

Materials:

1) Symptom Checklist-90-Revised (SCL-90-R). This test measure aspects of psychiatric and psychologic distress. The Global Severity Index (GSI) provide a measure of the global level of distress (higher scores indicate a higher distress and symptomatology).

2) Purpose In Life test (PIL). This test provides a measure of the extent to which an individual perceives life to be meaningful.

3) Temperament and Character Inventory- Revised (TCI-R). This test measure 7 dimensions of personality: 4 Temperament dimensions (Novelty-seeking, Harm-avoidance, Reward dependence and Persistence) and 3 dimensions of Character (Self-directedness, Cooperativeness and Self-transcendence).

Research Design: Cusı-experımental design. A repeated-measures, Pre-Post test design with a 6-month follow-up timepoint. Four different measures were taken in both groups:

1) Pre-test. The first measure was taken, in the experimental group, the previous day(s) before the workshop and their first hyperventilation session.

2-3-4) Post-test. Three new measures were taken after the workshop: one week (Post1), one month (Post2) and six months (Post3, follow-up) after the workshop.

In the control group, the four measures were taken with the same timing.

RESULTS

We present : A) a comparison between the scores of both groups (HB and control group) in the first 3 measures: Pre (before the workshop), Post1 (one week after it) and Post2 (one month after it),

B) a comparison between the scores of the HB group in the 4 measures, including the 6 months follow-up (Post3).

CONCLUSIONS

• The groups of the present study differ at baseline in diverse measures. The HB group showed: 1) higher symptomatology and a lower meaning of life and 2) different traits of personality (higher novelty seeking and self transcendence, and lower reward dependence, self-directedness and cooperativeness) compared with the control group.

• The HB group showed significantly greater changes over time on dependent measures compared with the control group. The HB group showed, one week and one month after the workshop:

1) a significantly greater reduction in the Global Severity Index of the SCL-90-R;

2) a significantly greater increase in the total score of the Purpose In Life test (PIL);

3) a reduction in the harm avoidance and significantly greater reductions in self directedness, cooperativeness and self transcendence of the TCI-R.

• The changes produced in the HB group (first breathers) are maintained in the follow-up measure, 6 months after the HB workshop.

• Our future projects included: 1) To validate these results with a bigger sample. 2) To make another study with qualitative methodology and compare the results. 3) To develop similar studies in other contexts where hyperventilation procedures (holotropic breathwork, holorenic breathwork and other procedures) are used: week-long workshops, GTT training, individual psychotherapy.

References