

Free association of psychoanalysis: an effective counseling technique for Vietnamese local religious clients on “beginning” counseling

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Abstract: *Counseling is an important and necessary field in life, especially for people with psychological and spiritual problems. However, not everyone understands counseling and uses it well. Most of the local Vietnamese have never come to counseling, even though they have many psychological problems. It will be a big challenge for counselors when giving counseling to those who come to counseling for the first time like this. They have to choose a counseling technique that is appropriate for these clients. The Free Association technique of Psychoanalysis is an excellent choice for first-time clients to counsel. As a future counselor as well as a sister in the local area, the researcher wants to research and find out the best counseling methods and techniques for primary clients who are coming to counseling with experiencing anxieties for the first time. However, in the limitation of the article, the researcher just focuses on specific clients, they are religious brothers and sisters who live the local religious life and never get official counseling with a psychologist.*

Key words: *counseling, techniques, primary client, local area, and free association.*

1. Introduction

Health is the most valuable asset for each of us (Seligman et al., 2020). Without health, everything in this world is considered as nothing (Amrita Dwivedi and Arvind Kumar Singh, 2019, p. 67). It includes physical health and mental health. In particular, mental health plays a key role in the overall health of a person (Levine et al., 2021). Unstable mental health affects the ability to make decisions, the ability to caught opportunities, and the ability to do well the individual's responsibilities towards family and other social relationships with friends, workplace, and community (Elliott, 2016). A person with good mental health will surely always see the positive side in every matter. As a result, life will be calmer and even if there are difficulties or obstacles, you can also face and overcome them. If you have a healthy mind, you are a person who greets the new day with bright smiles, eats well, sleeps peacefully, lives in harmony with everyone, and is always confident in yourself. On the contrary, if a person has unstable mental health, they are facing a lot of bad and negative things. Even

this condition also directly affects physical health, ability to handle work, and surrounding relationships. Between physical and mental there is always an extremely close connection (Aperribai et al., 2020). The body will often react according to our feelings and thoughts.

Life is considered complete only when we have a healthy mind inside a healthy body (Lama Yeshe, 2020, p. 23). However, most Vietnamese people, especially those who are living in local areas, always have a nonchalant attitude towards their mental health (MB Ageas Life, (Mar. 2021). They have many pressures in life, economic, emotional, family, community, custom, and culture, but they do not have the concept of mental health care. They only go to the medical doctor when they have serious physical health problems. They usually go to shamans when they have serious spiritual and psychological problems such as depression and madness because they think these people are haunted or some dead souls are harassing them. On the other hand, so far it is very rare to have psychologists, therapists, or counselors in the Vietnamese local areas, although the population here makes up the majority of the total population of the country. The population of urban areas in 2019 in Vietnam is 33,059,735 people, accounting for 34.4%; while in rural areas is 63,149,249 people, accounting for 65.6%. (According to the report of the Ministry of Labor, Invalids and Social Affairs, 2019).

According to psychotherapists, to have good mental health, we need to take care of both physical health and combine the application of psychotherapeutic or counseling methods. For physical health, we can promote health by adopting healthy living habits such as eating well, regularly exercising gently, and resting in moderation. Having a healthy physical state will help improve our mental state. For mental health, Psychologists say that sharing and talking with experts and with professional people in the field of counseling and psychology can help us release negative emotions and thoughts. They will use the right techniques to help us see the problem in the right way and come up with a way of life that is relevant for us. However, the problem here is that people living in Vietnamese local areas do not have the concept of counseling or psychotherapy. They are very afraid to see psychologists and they do not know what to say or how to present the problem. Therefore, even if they have the opportunity to see a counselor or psychologist, they also do not know where to start, even though they have a lot of mental problems that need help. This is also a challenge for psychologists and counselors for doing counseling with people living in the local areas.

Driving from those facts, plus the restlessness and concern as a future counselor in the local area, I want to research and find out the best counseling methods and techniques for primary clients

who are come to counseling with experiencing anxieties for the first time. In the confines of the article, I just want to focus on specific clients in the local area, who have more opportunities to see counselors easier than others in the locality. That is those who live the local religious life (religious brothers and sisters).

There are many good techniques or methods of different theories that can be used to counsel these clients. However, I think that the Free Association of Psychoanalysis is the most effective technique to do counseling for Vietnamese religious clients. In order to complete the article and prove that the Free Association technique of psychoanalysis can bring great effects to Vietnamese local religious clients in beginning counseling, we must first know the background and religious clients' perspective on counseling to understand more about the context, causes, and origins of their anxieties problem. Second, we will discover the free association technique to know why this technique is suitable and effective for these clients. Third, to justify the above, some demonstrations, which use the free association technique are given as evidence. And finally, it is the conclusion.

2. Background Vietnamese religious clients' perspective on counseling

According to statistics at the beginning of 2019 of the Religious Committee of the Vietnam Bishops' Conference, in Vietnam, there are 307 religious orders, congregations, institutes, and associations with a total of 33,087 religious, including 28,099 women and 4,988 men. Religious includes 1,670 religious' priests. Most of them are in rural areas. Religious people in urban areas are mainly for study. (Nguyen Ngoc Son, 2020). Nevertheless, official counseling service here seemingly is not available yet in these places

Psychological counseling and spiritual counseling are very necessary and important activities in the consecrated life. Because more than anyone else, religious people in Vietnam have many psychological problems. They have to live far away from their family, parents, and relatives. They are also not allowed to freely call or join the family. On the other hand, community life is also a big pressure. From strangers, different in personality and culture to living together in a community is not an easy matter. In some countries with developed education systems such as the Philippines, the United States, and developed countries, counseling is a habit of people live religious life. It seems to be done weekly or monthly. Since counseling can help religious clients deepen their understanding of

how their beliefs and core values are reflected in their behavior. So that, they explore their life, their legacy, their wisdom, truth, and values in life. If they have a chance to come to counseling regularly, they can better manage their emotions and spirits, so life will be more peaceful. However, it is very difficult to find a professional counselor in Vietnamese rural and local areas. The person who wants to be consulted (counselees) does not understand what counseling is? How is it working? to trust and share their problems.

Actually, religious people in local Vietnam are facing many psychological problems. They are hidden in many forms and very dangerous. These problems come from the strict rules of religious life and the concept of life. They are not opening and are somewhat antiquated. They believe that going to religious life is mainly to pray and sacrifice to serve. We are living in an age of technology and social media, but most people in local religious life in Vietnam don't know what Facebook is? And how to use a smartphone? For them, social media is a sin, so most local congregations forbid members from using modern media, and social media except for those who have important responsibilities in the congregations. On the other hand, the education and level of education in the local congregations are also poor. With the above concepts, the subjects that they are focused on in training and education are biblical, moral, and humanistic. The subjects relate to psychology were a strange and unnoticed thing.

Nowadays, some Congregations are more open. Every year they invite psychologists from big cities to talk in general in the congregation for about two to three days. Nevertheless, it Just likes "riding a horse to see flowers". It is rare for an individual to see a professional psychologist for counseling. Our Congregation is an example, we are a local women's congregation in a diocese in central Vietnam. Our Congregation I have a total of nearly 1500 sisters. But we never had a program in psychology or counseling. If any member needs consultation or advice, just see the formators who are chosen people with good moral character or behavior. But they have no professional or experience in counseling psychology. To be honest, we do not dare to share all the facts of life with formators, because they are the ones who decide our vocation. Currently, our Congregation as well as other local Congregations are sending some sisters to study abroad in the psychological and counseling field. Hopefully, in the coming years, we will have local psychologists to serve people in these local.

3. Free association of Psychoanalysis, an effective Counseling Technique for Local Primary

Religious Clients in Vietnam with Experiencing Anxieties

Free Association of Psychoanalysis

Free association is a central and fundamental technique in psychoanalytic therapy and counseling, and it plays a key role in the process of maintaining the analytic framework. It is considered one of Freud's greatest discoveries between 1892 and 1898. (Hristeva, G. 2018). The great discovery of Freud lies in both directions are substance and method. The method of free association was taken into consideration by many people to be the most important contribution of psychoanalysis, and the methodological key to its results (Freud, 1931, P. 403). This is a method to recognize the unconscious, that is to see something which usually cannot be seen because the unconscious is not open to inspection. Along with the interpretation of dreams and the analysis of transference, the free association was Freud's method "for the observation of the unconscious effectively, it is likened to the royal road to the unconscious. (Fromm, 1955, pp. 128-129 & 160). Freud and subsequent psychoanalysts widely used this technique as they considered that it provides important clues to the workings of the unconscious mind. They believed that mental events are meaningfully associated with one another and those clues to the contents of the unconscious can be found in the ongoing stream of thoughts, memories, images, and feelings that clients experience.

In the Free Association counseling session, a counselor asks the counselee to freely share thoughts, words, and anything else that comes to mind. The thoughts need not be coherent. But it may help if they are authentic. Clients are encouraged to say whatever comes into the client's minds without censoring or editing the flow of memories/ideas. The client says whatever comes to mind, regardless of how painful, silly, trivial, illogical, or irrelevant it may seem. In essence, clients try to flow with any feelings or thoughts by reporting them immediately without censorship (Gerld Corey 2016, p.73). In that way, the client's unconscious is explored by eliciting words, thoughts, and memories. This is known as the "fundamental rule." This technique is intended to help the patient learn more about what he or she thinks and feels, in an atmosphere of non-judgmental curiosity and acceptance. Free association is one of the basic tools used to open the doors to unconscious wishes, fantasies, conflicts, and motivations. During the free association process, the analyst's task was to "enhance" the free associations of the analysand to identify the repressed material that is locked in the unconscious (Hristeva, G. 2018). The sequence of associations guides the therapist in understanding the connections clients make among events. As analytic therapists listen to their clients' free associations,

they hear not only the surface content but also the hidden meaning. Nothing the client says is taken at face value. For example, a slip of the tongue can suggest that an expressed emotion is accompanied by a conflicting affect. Areas that clients do not talk about are as significant as the areas they do discuss (Gerld Corey 2016, p.74).

Usually, the client is given a prompt like words, phrases, descriptions, and images without context. Then, the client says what it makes his/her think of. The counselor leading the exercise tries to create links between the prompt and the client's response to learning about how his/her brain makes connections between ideas. Some therapists or counselors may use a different free association technique by giving clients more instructions. They might tell clients to think of a certain situation and share the thoughts that arise from that suggestion (Jon Jaehnig, 2020). The nature of responses made during a free association session indicates the concerns and preoccupations of a person's unconscious as there is no censorship by the conscious mind, the Ego. The client reports immediately without censoring any feelings or thoughts. The client is encouraged to relax and freely recall childhood memories or emotional experiences. In this way, unconscious material enters the conscious mind, and the counselor interprets it. At times clients resist free association by blocking their thoughts or denying their importance. In this case, the counselor makes the most of these moments by attempting to help clients work through their resistance. The counselor will encourage the client to speak freely to help his/her return to an earlier emotional state so they can better understand any recurrent patterns of conflict the client may be experiencing (Syed Muhammad Sajjad Kabir, 2017, pp. 121-122).

The goal of free association is not to unearth specific answers or memories, but to instigate a journey of co-discovery which can enhance the patient's integration of thought, feeling agency, and selfhood (Lynn Cunningham, 2017). The main goal of free association is to reach the depth of a human's psyche and to increase the freedom of the patient because it helps to reach deeper layers of the psyche and focus on the evocation and exploration of visual pictures and images of clients. According to Lothane free association is "the method of facilitating, discovering, studying, and handling unconscious ideational and emotional processes, both intrapersonal and interpersonal" and it aims to offer "access to unconscious mental processes" (Lothane, 2010). Free association is likening a searchlight to investigate the Unconscious (Hristeva, G. 2018). The importance of free association is that the patients spoke for themselves, rather than repeating the ideas of the analyst; they work

through their material, rather than parroting another's suggestions. (Pamela Thurschwell, 2009, p.24). Dominique Scarfone, M.D., (2018) also affirmed that the practice of free association is not something that analysts can simply opt out of. It is not a mere technical device or a trick of the trade, but a method involving two human beings, with all the complexities that ensue, at once ethical and practical. Free association is really a most distinctive and foundational part of the procedure we call psychoanalysis. This author strongly says that "Upholding free association in contemporary psychoanalysis may sometimes seem an uphill battle, but I contend that free association, far from being outdated (Dominique Scarfone, 2018).

Free association counseling starts with instructions from the counselors. Counselors instruct the clients to share their thoughts freely, without embarrassment. They tell clients not to censor themselves, but to say any words that come to them. Counselors are to listen carefully, give clients words. Then, clients interpret their thoughts freely. The counselor as much as possible should not influence the client. Counselors just simply choose the words that come from the client (Galina Hristeva 2018). After listening to their patients' random thoughts, counselors the information to find the hidden meaning. Some therapists or counselors may use a different free association technique by giving clients more instructions. They might tell clients to think of a certain situation and share the thoughts that arise from that suggestion. The goal of the free association of psychoanalysis is to find the source of clients' problems and reveal it to them. For, according to Jon Jaehnig, (2020), "Freud's thinking was that once you understood what was causing you to think or behave in ill-adaptive ways, the problem would naturally resolve for you".

Therefore, when counselors do free association, they get to know the clients better, without putting up so much pressure, seem just follow what the client is saying. And then the free association follows word per word, sometimes phrases by phrases, or a group of words that the client said. As a counselor is important to take note of the words used by the client. Any word we have mentioned, they are connected to the client. Just pick up any words, from the client, of course, it is good that the counselor picks up the words connected with what you are already collecting from the client. It should follow the forming the story of the unconscious of the individual. When the counselors feel enough, they will not give words anymore. They move to the last part is to give the interpretation or analysis. This is very important because during express the words that were given by the counselors, the clients may forget what they were saying. The interpretation or analysis helps clients to feel more deeply

about the problems they have encountered. From there they can draw lessons for themselves. If their old problems will repeat in the future, they will safely experience them.

Free Association with Vietnamese local religious clients experiencing anxiety

Anxiety is the feeling of fear that occurs when we are faced with threatening or stressful situations. They said that it is a normal response when people are confronted with danger. Nevertheless, if it is overwhelming or the feeling persists, it could be regarded as an anxiety disorder (Dean, E., 2016). Especially for women because anxiety disorders affect almost twice as many women as men. The fear and anxiety are marked and associated with impairments in social, occupational, community life, and other important areas of functioning (Craske M. G., & Stein, M. B., 2016).

For Vietnamese religious clients who are come to counseling with experiencing anxieties for the first time. They have many anxieties in life, but they don't know where to start a counseling session? They seem to have emotional disorders, anxiety disorders, and many disorders but do not know how to talk to a counselor. Live in an environment with many strict rules, conservatives, and cultural prejudices. Vietnamese local religious people are under a lot of pressure from many sides such as society, culture, community, and relationships with others in the community and society. They always repress themselves because of the religious concept that they have to work hard and sacrifice, and should not share difficulties with others. They usually and bury the event and the associated pain deep into their minds. They also have never had the opportunity to speak to a formal psychologist, so they are reluctant to initiate a consultation. In order to do counseling for these clients, counselors have to go ahead for giving instruction and create the belief and relationship.

There are methods and techniques from many different theories that can be applied to these clients. However, for those who are wearing anxiety to counseling for the first time, the Free association technique of psychoanalysis by Sigmund Freud is the most appropriate and effective method. For, this is a simple technique, easy to implement, and brings great results for clients who are strange new to counseling services or are unfamiliar with counseling for the first time. "Free association is not for everyone, but it's a good start for people who don't know where to begin" (Jon Jaehnig, 2020).

Using free association in beginning counseling will definitely work well for religious clients like this. This technique will surely bring many positive effects for counseling or therapy because it

is a valuable tool to discover the people-self to release blockages in the human psyche to make a more meaningful life. By words or images, which are picked up from previous client's saying by the counselor to asked clients to express what present thoughts in their mind is a good way for those who have fear to counseling. By this way, clients can express their repressed feelings easily, without thinking or pre-writing because words come from themselves. Giving words to the client continuously will limit the fact that clients hide things while sharing because there is not much time to do it. Free association helps clients themselves can tap into their deeper feelings about the problems that they are mentioned. So that, clients can find where the problems began and experience them in safety and move on, as Jon Jaehnig, (2020) asserted "Free association is central to the process of getting to the root of serious mental health issues". Cieri and Esposito (2019) also said "free association offers a clear and sharp path with cognitive science." The fact that counselors always listen, ask questions, and give words, then clients respond helps clients think about their problems more deeply. Since free association allows for hidden content allows hidden content, which is related to the important and mysterious elements of life to emerge. In this sense, it allows clients to recognize traces of traumatic experiences that have caused disturbances in the past (Holmes and Nolte, 2019, p. 6). Especially with the interpretation or analysis of counselors in the last part will help clients link everything that they just said into a meaningful story or topic to recognize their problems generally. Then, they understand themselves and know what they need to do to become a better person than he/she wants to be.

4. Cases Illustration

Case1: My experiencing as a client in counseling with Free Association technique

As a client for demonstration in the technique of counseling class, I was demonstrated counseling by Fr. Arsenio, a Filipino counselor with many years of experience in professional counseling and He is also our teacher on main subjects related to counseling, therapy, and psycho-spirituality. Under the name of a candidate to demonstrate for a lesson in techniques of psychoanalysis, but for me, this is not role play, not demonstration. I was completely serious and wanted it to be real counseling because I have a lot of problems that need advice. Moreover, I know that the opportunity to be a counselee under an experienced and professional counselor like him is a

precious thing, so I treasured this consultation very much. Therefore, what I said during the counseling was absolutely true.

To be honest, this was my first exposure to counseling, was the first lesson in techniques of counseling class, and was also the first demonstration in the class; thus, when the counselor (Fr. Arsenio) called my name and said "let's start counseling demonstration". At that time, I was really confused, I didn't know what to say and where to start for I never came to counseling in Vietnam. While I was faltering, not knowing what to say, the counselor opened up and said: *"so I would like you to just say without thinking. I will be giving you words or groups of words. And then you just say whatever you remember, whatever comes to your mind. Do not edit, you don't have to philosophize, you don't have to analyze, just say freely what comes to your mind"*.

Counselor (Arsenio): The first word is "dog" what do you remember when you hear the word "dog"

Counselee (Lan): I really don't like the dog; I don't like to take care of the dog because I had the experience that I saw many people they love dog than people. People are around them; they don't care. So, I don't like the dog, at the same time but I never make them be hurt

Arsenio: The next word is "they don't care"

Lan: when I see someone who does not care about anything, others, or the environment around them, I feel hurt and not comfortable because I am a responsible person.

Arsenio: The next word is "hurt"

Lan: "hurt" is a word that I had many experiences within my life. They come from my family, friends, and people around me. Many times, they made me be hurt by making up stories, which are not true about me. Thus, this word is, even just say it, I also feel hurt.

Arsenio: The next word is "making up a story"

Lan: I don't respect the people who are making up stories to harm me and others. For me, the truth is very important in life. even it can make me hurt but if it is true, I like it and accept it more than the one who tells a lie. Maybe we will hurt at that moment but later we can learn and recognized some good things from the truth. So, I hate the people who make up stories.

Arsenio: the next word is "hate"

Lan: "hate", I know this word is a negative meaning, but I used much time in my life, as I am a straight person. When I don't like anyone or anything, I don't hesitate to say "I hate you, I hate this, and I hate that". This is a strong word and not polite, so I think I should change the way

when I am talking to others. Since, if I always keep saying directly and straightly to others, I will make others be hurt and misunderstanding about me because sometimes, my heart is different from what I am saying.

Arsenio: The next is “do not say”

Lan: I will not say it if it protects others. Nevertheless, if that thing is important for others and me, I will say it. Even that may be not good at that moment, we still should say it

Arsenio: The next word is “should say it “

Lan: We have to be careful when we say something, when should we say it? Who do we say with? We should concern what we say to be hurt other people or not. Then, we decide to say it or not.

Arsenio: The next word is “careful”

Lan: Honestly, I am a careful person. When I do anything, I prepare and do it carefully, in the hope that the result will be good. That is why I usually ask questions to clarify whenever I have concerns in the class.

Arsenio: The next word is “asking questions”

Lan: I think I am a brave person. I can ask anything whenever I question it. I do not like to keep in sight and think it alone. We should ask when we do not know it.

Arsenio: The next word is “keeping insight”

Lan: Some important things or secret stories, we have to keep them in sight to protect me and others. For me, keeping insight is also important in life.

Arsenio: The next word is “protecting me”

Lan: I don't concern or protect myself much. For me, protect others is more important and first, then come to protect me. Even I myself can be hurt, but if I can do anything to protect others, I will do for them first. Actually, sometimes I was misunderstood by others because I just do it in silence, so the thing that I do it for showing myself or looking for my name.

Arsenio: The next word is “understanding”

Lan: Understanding is very important and necessary in life, study, and work. Everything should be understanding. So that we can avoid misunderstanding.

Arsenio: The next word is “avoid misunderstanding”

Lan: This is challenging for me. I am usually misunderstood by others. Maybe because of the way I express life. I do not know why many times I do good things, but others think that is bad.

Arsenio: The next word is “not knowing”

Lan: I know that many things that I did not know yet. I always thank God for sent me here to study more. I know lots of new knowledge from other, schools, and cultures.

Arsenio: The next word is “knowledge”

Lan: For me, knowledge is not important as practice in reality. Doing things in life is more important.

Arsenio: The next word is “life”

Lan: Life is whatever around us all time and all things. For me life is all, everything is life. Actually, life is not easy.

Arsenio: The next word is “not easy”

Lan: many things in life are not easy. Sometimes we thought that is easy, but when we do it, is not easy. Not everything is easy, but not all things are difficult. If I do my best, I can do it.

Arsenio: the next words are “I can do it”

Lan: "I can do it" is a mantra of my life. I think that anything that other people can do, I also can do it. That sentence I repeated in my life. However, because of this, many people think that I am not a humble person. They think that I am showing myself. Actually, I deprived other's opportunity. Usually, I let others do it first, then if no one can do it, I will try my best to do it.

Arsenio: I go back to the word that you mentioned earlier, "family".

Lan: I have many bad experiences in the past. From I was young until I entering the religious life, I felt not really happy in my family. I thought if I get married, I could not make a good family. I cols not become a good wife or good mother. Thus, that was why I chose religious life.

Arsenio: "Bad experiences is the next word.

Lan: "Bad experiences", that make us be painful sometimes. However, after all the bad experiences, I learn many things. I become stronger and more mature. So, I can learn some things from bad experiences. They help me to improve myself.

Arsenio: the word “improving myself”

Lan: I always try my best to improve myself in many fields in life as knowledge, skills, works. However, I think that improving characters are most difficult. I have to try day by day to

change myself to become better and be humbler.

Arsenio: The next word is “humble”

Lan: The concept of humble is different. It is depending on the one who defines it. For me, humble is the truth about you. If you have the capacity to do it, just do it. Do not say I cannot do it, while you have abundant capacities to do it. Just live as you are. Nevertheless, because of this concept, I have many challenges in life.

Arsenio: The last word is “challenges”.

Lan: For me, life is challenging, it never stops. Each period has different challenges. So, we should not think seriously about challenges. Then we can overcome the challenges in simple ways and lighter.

Arsenio: Now. I will give **the analysis or interpretation**, what seems to be important for you (counseled) is to care for others and nature. There are things that hurt you. So, what you do is try to protect others. Sometimes your family, friends, and others make you hurt, especially when they make up stories or things, that really hurt you. You also mentioned that you like to ask questions in order to clarify things confidently. Sometimes you are misunderstood by others because of that. You also mentioned the part of your mantra is “I can do it”, you allow others to do it first, if it is not, you will do it. You said you entered religious life because of some thinking before that maybe is difficult to have a good family. But later on, you understood; it is the way that God called you. You also mentioned you learn something from bad experiences, what you do is try to improve yourself. And it is part of improving yourself is try to become humble. There are challenges that you faced and some of them make you hurt.

So, what do you feel now?

Lan: I feel very comfortable, relieved, and at peace from my heart when I can freely express myself. I seem to have vented my heart, which I always keep in my heart. Before I felt lonely, I had the feeling that no one understands me. I am afraid to share myself with others. But, through free association I can express myself most naturally, I am not afraid of others to whisper about me anymore. I also learned lessons for myself on how to become a better person. Indeed, now, I feel very light, comfortable, peaceful, and confident for the next counseling sessions.

Case 2: On Case of Sr. Anh

After observing me (counselee in case 1, Lan) she asks the teacher (counselor of case 1) that: For Sr. Lan is a straight and expressive person. She can easily express her feeling and she thought freely. So, free association technique counseling is very effective for her. How about those who are

shy and impassive like me (Sr. Anh)? In Vietnam, we are not familiar with counseling yet. Most Vietnamese people, special religious sisters, and brothers. They are shy and not impressive. So, is Free Association effective on them?

In order to answer her question, the counselor said "let try on your case, then we will see because you said you are not expressive. Free association counseling started on the case of Sr. Anh

Arsenio (Counselor): Let start with the word "not expressive" what comes to your mind when you hear the words "not expressive"? tell me what comes to your mind when you hear the words "not expressive"?

Anh (counselee): I always meet difficult when I express my thought and feeling because I am afraid the other's opinion about me, so usually keep them insight my heart until I meet the close friends, then I share it with them.

Arsenio: the next word is "afraid"

Anh: I don't know why I am usually afraid, maybe I have a known fear by my heart. My mother said when she conceived me, she was repressing by some negative events. Then she feels hurt and she is afraid of those things. So, maybe they affect me.

Arsenio: The next word is "mother".

Anh: My mother is my idol. I imitate her treatment, strength, manner.

Arsenio: the next word is "imitating"

Anh: I easily imitate the person who has some things that I admired and love as Jesus, my mother. I try to imitate their qualities.

Arsenio: the next word is "admired"

Anh: The person that makes me admire to be people who have good values, qualities, characteristics, and kindness.

Arsenio: the next world is "kindness"

Anh: I feel that most people that I met in my life are kind people. They affect my lifestyle very much. I felt graceful because of that.

Arsenio: The next word is "graceful"

Anh: I am a graceful person, that is my strength because whenever I wake up in the morning for the new day, I already feel grateful. Then I thank you God for giving me a new day and try my best to make the new day to be better than in the past.

Arsenio: The set of the word next is "better than the past"

Anh: I am 35 years old; I still have many mistakes. Sometimes, I torment my mistake in the past. Then I try to avoid my mistake, which comes from the past to be a better person.

Arsenio: The next words are "better person"

Anh: to become a better person is one of the goals of my life. I also recognize that is also God's plan for me and everyone.

Arsenio: The next words are "God's plan"

Anh: I deeply believe that God has a special plan for me and each of us. I am fulfilling God's plan on me that is to become a good sister.

Arsenio: The next word is "fulfill"

Anh: I always think about how I can fulfill my life as God wants me to be. It is not easy to fulfill but try to pick up anything that God gives me through everyone that I meet, every moment of my life. I believe that God wants me to fulfill through them.

Arsenio: The next words are "moment of my life"

Anh: I am memorial person. I always keep the memory in my mind. So, the moment is the crucial thing for me to progress, develop myself.

Arsenio: The next word is "memory"

Anh: My memories have a lot of fear, but above all, think that is graceful things. Even sufferings in my life, are potential for me to develop myself.

Arsenio: The next word is "suffering"

Anh: I always look at Jesus and follow him because I was suffering for me and everyone. His suffering is for love. So, my suffering is not a thing comparing with Jesus.

Arsenio: This is the last word; the word is "love"

Anh: "Love", it covers all my life. I desire to love and to be love.

Arsenio: I do the **interpretation or analysis** now.

"You mentioned that you are not an expressive person but you just have quite a long free association. Due to the limited time, we stop here, but seemingly you are still eager to talk. You also mentioned there are idols in your life. Your mother is one of your idols. And in fact, you are imitating

your mother. You were saying that properly is the reason why you were not expressive or fearful. it is because, during pregnancy, your mother faced many negative things, so you affect it when she was caring for you in her womb. However, you mentioned that you imitate her so much and you admire her. Other persons that you admire are the people who are kind and graceful. You also were saying that you want to become a better person. So that you can know God's plan, to fulfill God's plan in your life. Especially, different moments of your life you try to imitate what God wanted you to be. However, there are still memories sometimes that you remember some sufferings. But as much as possible you go back to your model that is Jesus Christ that as you said whom you love so much."

So, how **do you feel now? After free association**

Anh: I feel comfortable sharing everything. I am no longer fear counseling. I opened to express myself to explore my unconsciousness to know myself better.

In this case, even if the person is seemingly not expressive. Free association counseling is also very effective. Because the words come from the client. The words that the counselor chose to be continuous of thoughts of the client, words that are associated with the individual. In that sense, it is not difficult. Counselors as much as possible try to just simply state the words that were mentioned by the client. In that sense, the client gets easy to talk about continuously and express them freely. She is no longer too shy. This free association help her to exploit unconsciousness about why she was shy to share her life with someone. She affirmed that was confident and comfortable to share everything.

Case 3: Case of Mary

Mary is a Vietnamese sister who is studying in the Philippines. Her study is almost finished. when she come to me (counselor, Lan) she said, "I have many concerns, worries, and anxieties". She also said that she never came to counseling. So, she does not know how to share and express her problem to me for help.

Lan (counselor): ok, don't worry, now I will give you the word, or group of words; you just say whatever you remember, whatever comes to your mind without thinking and analyzing. Do not edit, don't have to philosophize; just say freely what comes to your mind.

Mary: I worry about study, vocations, future mission, relationship with other sisters especially with my superior, how I can obey my superior freely, and many things else. The worry right now is about how this conversation of counseling will be because this is the first time I have come to counseling.

Lan: the second word is “vocation”

Mary: for me, vocation is the call of God. God called me to follow Jesus, to live with Jesus, to stay with him for understanding God first. Jesus sent disciples to go out to proclaim the Good News to other people, not only stay with Jesus in the chapel. We have to go out to serve the needy.

Lan: the third words are "go out"

Mary: "go out" has many meanings, it can be gone out of geography, means we go outside to do mission, to the poor, the needy. Another meaning is to go out of our body, our thought, our shellfish. We should open ourselves to share with other sisters in the congregation also.

Lan: the next word is “share”

Mary: sharing is important in life when we share with all our hearts and love. We share the truth in the spirit of understanding and listening,

Lan: the next word is “understanding”

Mary: for me. Understanding is not easy. When I want to understand anything, I need to concern about the situation, I need to know the background, the purpose, and the meaning.

Lan: the next word is “purpose”

Mary: when I do anything, I usually have intention, purpose; so that I can focus on it easier. I need to put the purpose first; I do this for what and whom. The purpose is the goal that we have to follow.

Lan: the next word is “following”

Mary: Jesus said if you want to follow to Jesus, we have to go narrow way. Mean that we have to sacrifice our health, opinion, ideals, and ourself to follow the will God’s will through superior, formators, and others.

Lan: the next words are "sacrifice"

Mary: in other to sacrifice, we need to be patient and have sympathy to understand each other. As a sister, I should sacrifice myself to serve other people. Especially, in community life, I do not live alone.

Lan: the next word is “patient”

Mary: the patient is an important character in life. In order to be patient in community life, I need to listen and concern my sisters first. Do not hurry to judge others without listening to the whole story. To be patient is not easy.

Lan: the next group of words is “concern to your sister”.

Mary: in other to concern my sister, I need to observe them. By that I will recognize their needs and what they want me to do for them so I can help them.

Lan: the next word is “observation”

Mary: For me, when I observe others, it means I am not only focusing on myself. I need to go out of myself to see what is happening to our sister. Are they happy or sad?

Lan: the next words are “not focusing yourself”

Mary: I mean, we need to focus on ourselves, but not so much, if I focus on myself only, I will forget others around me. That is selfish

Lan: now, I will give you another word. That is "obey your superior" because as the first you shared your worry about how to obey your superior also.

Mary: I believe that my superior is the one that God chose. So, when I obey my superior as I obey God's will. I want to obey with all my heart freely. However, sometimes, I confuse because my superior's opinion is different from my opinion. Seemingly, she did not understand me and I don't dare to share with her all my thoughts or opinions. Thus, it is difficult to obey her freely. Sometimes I was a force to obey.

Lan: the word I want to hear now is “difficult”

Mary: many things in this life are difficult for me. There are many things that I want to do but I cannot do it.

Lan: the next words are “cannot do”

Mary: in religious life, we have the rule, own law, the constitution that limit me to do some things. Sometimes, I want to do this, to do that but the congregation's law stops me.

Lan: the next word is “the law”

Mary: there are many laws. Law of God, the law of congregation, and the law of society. The law helps us and guides us to do good things.

Lan: now is the words “the law of congregation”

Mary: the laws of congregation guide me and others to live right charism and become good sisters

Lan: the last words are “become good”

Mary: anything is good is depend on the thought of each person. A different person is a different concept of good. For me, a good person is kind, lovely, and helpful.

Lan: (for **Interpretation or analysis**), now I will give the interpretation or analysis. First, you said you worry many things about study, vocations, future mission, relationship with sister, about how you can your superior freely. Even with this counseling, you also worry about it because this is the first time that you have come to counseling. Seemingly you have valued your vocation, as it is the call of God. To reply to God's call, you follow Jesus, live with Jesus, and stay with Him. As disciples went out to proclaim the Good News to other people. You also want to go out to serve the needy. Another meaning of going out for you is going out your body, your narrow thoughts, your selfishness to open yourself to share to other sisters in the congregation. When you share with others, you share with all your hearts and love, you share the truth in the spirit of understanding, listening, and patient. In order to do that you have to sacrifice and concern others by observing what they need to help them. However, you also have some difficulties on relationship with other, especially with your superior because of different conception on life, so it is difficult to share with her. It seems, sometimes, you force to obey your superior but you still obey her because you believed that God's will is present through her. You really hesitate to share with her. The way of obedience that you want is free, obey with your heart. And there are many things you want to do, but the law of congregation stops you and you believe that the law of congregation helps you to become a good sister.

So, after sharing with me (counselor) how do you feel right now?

Mary: there are many things that I have kept in my mind for a long time. After sharing them I feel relaxed, peaceful, and comfortable. Now I know what I should do. First, it is very important for me to take time to be with Jesus in silence to listen to God's will, to know what God wants me to do. And then, if I feel all ready to share with my superior. I will share all my thoughts and my opinions. Because If I keep everything, maybe my superior will not know and understand me. I will share with will as soon as possible. Whether she accept my opinions or not, it is ok, nor the problem.

Lan: now, please repeat the words 'I will share' (three times)

Mary: I will share! I will share! I will share!

Lan: how do you feel now?

Mary: I feel confident to share with my superior now. Thanks!

In the last sharing from Mary of the counseling section, we also clearly see the wonderful effect that free association brings to the counselee. The special thing in this counseling section is, the

counselor is none other, it is me, a student is practicing counseling only. But we agreed in advance that we do real counseling, it was not role-play counseling. Thus, we didn't have any discussion together before going to the counseling section. Although we are both Vietnamese, I did not know her before. A friend of mine introduced her to me; he said that she was also looking for a counselor for help.

After the counseling section, the counselee confessed to me (counselor) that " honestly, before counseling section starting, I (counselee) do not trust in you (counselor) because you are not a professional counselor yet. I am afraid you cannot help. However, when you started the counseling section, you surprised me. With just the simple words you gave me, I was able to let go of the things that had been buried in my heart for so long. I realized who I am? and what do I need to do now? Please give me a follow-up counseling appointment, I'd love to continue this counseling journey with you." Then, we have done another section with other techniques, which come from other theories. it is being very nice. We will continue the counseling journey until the counselee (Mary) feels enough.

We can see that the Freedom association is not only easy to implement for clients who are a beginner in the counseling journey but also easy to apply and implement for counselors who are in the early stages of counseling practice. The counselor only needs to pick up the words or images that the counselee just mentioned, as long as they carry a link meaning that creates a topic or story related to the counselee. If we know to combine with some counseling skills free association I great technique for those who are first time come to counseling, or who are in the beginning counseling journey whether they are often coming with counseling or not. Because free association helps the counselor to know better clients in counseling and therapy journey.

5. Conclusion

The common feature of all three cases just mentioned above is that the counselors are all local Vietnamese religious people, who are experiencing true counseling for the first time. They have many fears and anxieties. They meet abundant pressures and difficulties in life, but they do not know whom to share with? how to share? what do they share to be kept secret? Does the counseling help them? ...

Since in Vietnam we have never been given proper and professional counseling. Even many people do not know what counseling is and what it is for. Especially for those who live in the local religious life. We were always taught to make sacrifices, not to speak badly to others. We are afraid of others judging and gossiping about us. We usually keep the sad things in life as secrets. Therefore, when we come to counseling, we often have a feeling of fear. It is difficult to express. However, when experiencing counseling with free association techniques, the fears and anxieties disappeared. We are completely led by counselors and we were freely sharing everything.

I am honored to have experienced both as a counselee and counselor to demonstrate free association in counseling. It is truly a technique that brings great effect for both counselee and counselor. Especially those who come to counseling for the first time like us. In some cases or countries, this technique may not be very effective and it might be already outdated. But for local people in Vietnam, who seem to be outdated about mental health counseling like us, this is a suitable technique for clients like us as local Vietnamese clients who are in the first time come to counseling. For, with free association, clients (couselees) easily express and address their mental health concerns with their psychologists (counselors). For counselors, by using this technique, they also get to know this kind of client better simply. Then, they can have better plans with other methods for the next sections in a journey counseling or therapy for clients. Jon Jaehnig, (2020) was not wrong when saying that “Free association is not for everyone, but it is a good start for people who don't know where to begin”. Dominique Scarfone (2018) also affirmed “Upholding free association in contemporary psychoanalysis may sometimes seem an uphill battle. But I contend that free association, far from being outdated.” It is still very relevant for local Vietnamese people, especially for those who are living in local Vietnamese local congregations.

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