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HYPERCONTROL AS A COMMON MECHANISM IN ANXIETY DISORDERS

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Background: In the scientific literature in general the symptom of hyper-control is associated with obsessive compulsive disorder; in reality an increase in the cognitive mechanism of control is found in all types of pathological anxiety. The hypothesis is that all anxiety disorders have in common an accentuated attitude of control over the external or internal environment with the aim of minimizing possible threats.

Methodology: The different approaches of cognitive-behavioral therapy attribute the behaviors to profound elements of the personality: the basic beliefs in Beck, the universal emotional needs in Schema therapy and the priority interests in the Cognitive causal therapy of Tamburello. Starting from the principle that cognition is assimilated to protect a motivational drive, we could say that every behavior responds to cognition and tends to protect deep needs and interests. The studies of the Cognitive causal approach have highlighted that a motivational structure is formed over time through the stratification of priority interests. Pathological anxiety would be the result of an automatic self-defense response that is activated when the personality is threatened in its deepest levels, according to this mechanism: the mind perceives the threat to the survival of the structure; the mind reacts by trying to identify vulnerable points and incoming external attacks; to better protect the integrity of the person, the control behavior is increased and applied to both real threats and irrational threats; the occasional positive outcome of the control intermittently reinforces the controlling behavior which is also generalized to "uncontrollable" situations; finally, a vicious circle is established in which any increase in control produces a temporary reduction in anxiety, due to the erroneous conviction of feeling safer. This mechanism is evident in Obsessive compulsive disorder but is found in all anxiety disorders.

Results: Research on 21 subjects suffering from various anxiety disorders (Panic attacks, generalized anxiety, social phobia and Obsessive compulsive disorder), treated with cognitive causal psychotherapy, significantly highlights the presence of control behavior in all anxiety disorders.

BIOGRAPHY

Paolo Scapellato graduated in Psychology at the University of Bologna, Italy in 1998 and then specialized in Cognitive-Behavioral Psychotherapy at the Skinner Institute in Rome. He is active in psychotherapy privately in Macerata, where he lives and since 2006, he is a Contract Professor of Clinical Psychology and Fundamentals of Clinical Investigation at the European University of Rome. He is Professor and Supervisor of the School of Specialization in Psychotherapy of the Skinner Institute in Rome and Naples. He is the author of numerous national and international publications and books, "Panic Attacks and Acute Anxiety: Basic Psychological Help". (Giunti ed., 2017), "Foundations of Clinical Investigations" (Editori Riuniti, 2014), "Prevention and Treatment of Addictions: The Hope That Does Not Give Up". (Editori Riuniti, 2014).

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