Therapeutic Implications & Strategies:

Security Priming and Applications

1

Security Priming

- Research over the two decades has examined enhancing people's sense of security (i.e., enhanced sense of feeling loved, valued, and cared):
  - As a means of temporarily shifting a person's attachment
  - As a means of augmenting behaviour and aspects of psychological well being
- There are various techniques for enhancing a person's sense of security
  - A common way is to get a person to think about relationships where have felt loved or comforted.
    - *A structured approach is to do this through a guided imagery*
    - *Though recent works suggests images and words work well*
- To date priming attachment security has been found to have quite consistent effects
  - Gillath, Karantzas, Karantzas, & Romano (2022) found that in 120 studies that security priming was associated with positive mental health outcomes and relationship functioning (see also Gillath & Karantzas, 2019)
- Security priming works on the principles of spreading activation within the semantic network
  - Inhibits insecure cognitions and schemas
  - Enhances secure cognitions and schemas
- The upshot of priming is that is can modulate the deactivating and hyperactivating tendencies of insecurely attached individuals
  - Creates an internal environment where defensiveness and sense of hypervigilance can be turned down
  - Creates a cognitive and affective environment where people can be open and feel more competent to deal with difficult issues



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Security Priming: Applications in Schema Therapy

- Transitional objects
  - Record voice messages, reminding you are still there, still care about the client
  - Provide an object as a reminder of the therapist as a stronger and wiser other
    - *Whenever the vulnerable child emerges, the object can be held/seen as a symbolic representation of the stronger and wise therapist (their face, their voice)*
    - *Help internalise the therapist as secure attachment figure*
  - Flash cards - written statements referred to by the patient in-between sessions
    - *Developed by the therapist or a co-creation of therapist and client*
    - *Statements that would be similar to those made by a parent to a young child at the developmental age that the client experiences their Vulnerable Child Mode*
    - *The messages and sentiments expressed in the cards are gradually internalised and, thus, are very helpful in developing the Healthy Adult Mode*
      - *Heightening the accessibility of security enhancing thoughts and images within the semantic network*



3

Security Priming: Applications in Schema

- Priming can also occur in a waiting room in preparing insecure individuals for therapy:
  - Have them read stories in waiting room
  - Have security priming messages around the waiting area (Gillath, Leise, & Karantzas, in prep)
  - Provide images (hand-holding, people hugging, etc.)
  - Have them complete a word find puzzle that contains security enhancing words in addition to neutral words (Karantzas et al., in prep)
    - *(e.g., Love, hug, care, comfort)*
- These options may work especially well for avoidant individuals because they don't think its being specifically directed at them
  - May also bypass conscious awareness



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