

Covid-19 and Transitional Time Objects

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Abstract

Due to the pandemic of coronavirus and the necessity of quarantine, the process of analysis sessions inevitably has become remote. This change can be very noticeable, especially for those analysands who have participated in face-to-face meetings. In a way, that makes a difference in the analyst's usage as a transitional time object and in the analysis sessions as transitional time phenomena. Inspired by the concept of Winnicott's transitional object and phenomenon, Pajoohandeh has already defined the concepts of transitional time object and phenomenon in some papers. In this paper, the authors intend to explore the unconscious effect of coronavirus, by creating a physical distance between the analyst and analysand, on the sense of the passage of time in the analysis session. For this purpose, clinical examples have been pointed out and it has been found that the analysands understand the sense of the passage of time in remote sessions in various ways.

Keywords: transitional time object, transitional time phenomena, remote analysis, sense of time, pandemic situations.

Introduction

Aristotle (1941) has argued that time and change (or motion) are inextricably linked. Even mentally, if we are unaware of the passage of time, we are unaware of the change. We experience time and the passage of time only when we recognize a movement at least twice in different positions; a movement that is experienced from the outside and through the senses or is internalized introspectively (Meissner, 2007, p. 4). With the outbreak of the Coronavirus and the necessity of quarantine and communication restrictions, analytical sessions were changed; in a way, the meetings that had been held in person before were inevitably followed remotely. Remote sessions with technological advances have been considered as one of the methods of running analysis sessions, but with the outbreak of the coronavirus, this way has increased significantly so that a significant volume of sessions in the quarantine period are held in this way. These sessions have advantages and disadvantages over face-to-face sessions that have been researched extensively (Marzi, 2018. Gabbard, 2015. Caparrotta, 2013. Magagna, 2013. Byles, 2012. Scharf, 2012). Some of these features are as follows:

A. Benefits: reducing resistance for some patients, saving time and travel costs for the analysand and analyst, suitable

for patients in remote areas and outside the presence of analysts, suitable for situations where the patient or analyst immigrates. Maintaining the continuity of therapeutic communication, changing our perception of time and space in analysis.

- B. Problems: analyst's entrance to patient's home, not seeing the nonverbal behaviors of the analysand, unsuitable for paranoid and psychotic patients, the existence of a third person (the media itself, or intelligence-monitoring institutions), and the possibility of information being leaked as a real rather than an imaginary danger; what we call media resistance (Such as internet disruptions, problems with electronic devices, including the breakdown of a phone or laptop in the middle of meetings, problems with headphone and hearing wrong words by either person, running out of charge, time difference, disconnection, etc.) and finally incomplete understanding of the presence of analyst's body in the analytical space.

But regardless of the advantages and disadvantages remote analysis sessions can have, we believe that addressing this type of analysis from a time perspective can also be interesting and involve new insights, just as addressing the topic of time in face-to-face analysis sessions has led us to new findings. For example, Hartocollis (2003) believes that the sense of time in the session can be different for the analysand; the experience of slow or fast passing of a session is also a known phenomenon that can be explained in the context of transference. Also, the analyst's sense of time can be disturbed, indicating the existence of countertransference or emotional reaction to the analysand's utterances (p. 953). Therefore, the sense of the passage of time in analytic sessions is a familiar and debatable phenomenon that can be changed by changing the method of face-to-face meetings to remote sessions. One of the main differences between in-person and remote sessions is the change in spatial dimension and the spatial distance between the analysand and the analyst. Of course, this change can also be effective for meetings that are held remotely from the beginning, but for face-to-face meetings that inevitably turn into remote meetings after a while, it may have more tangible and different effects. This change can affect the function of analysis as a transitional time phenomenon and the analyst as a transitional time object. According to Winnicott (1953), a transitional object is a soft object or a form of object that is found and used by the infant for sleeping or defending against anxiety, especially depressive anxiety. Winnicott has called infant's self-relaxing behaviors transitional phenomena (p. 90). However, transitional time objects, by definition, are internal or external objects that, by absorbing libido, can evoke a sense of the passage of time, and transitional time phenomena include the ego methods of using these objects, or in other words, are the libidinal cathexis of the ego to pass through the present. The present time then is the time of tension and anxiety and represents the trauma of birth. The infant with the help of the first TTO (i.e. the mother or her breast) can resist and bear that situation (Pajoohandeh, 2021a).

Some of these objects and phenomena make the feeling of the passage of time faster and therefore have higher transitional power compared to other objects (Pajoohandeh, 2020). For example, playing can be a transitional time phenomenon and the device with which it is played is a transitional time object. Reading a book is a transitional time phenomenon and a book is a transitional time object. A relationship with a friend is a transitional time phenomenon, and a friend is a transitional time object.

On the other hand, according to the formula of time in physics, time is equal to the distance traveled divided by velocity. In

other words: $t=d/v$. Here d is the distance traveled, v is the velocity of the object and t is the time traveled. Doing some changes in this formula can be used to study time in the psychological dimension (Pajoohandeh, 2021 b). The difference is that here we mean subjective time or a sense of the passage of time. Also, time in the psyche is not linear. It can be said that time in the human mental apparatus begins with the movement of libido. The amount of libido that the ego can invest in the transitional time object depends on the distance between it and the object; whatever the distance between the ego and the desired object is shorter (d), and the amount of libido investment in it (v) is greater, the sense of time is shorter or in other words, the time will pass faster. Whatever the speed of libido or the degree of libido cathexis which goes out from ego is higher, the time goes faster, and whatever the speed from the outside world to the ego is higher (the ego faces with the less desirable object), the time passes slower. Also, between two objects that are equidistant from the ego, time will pass faster with the object on which more libido is spent (v more) (Pajoohandeh, 2021 b). But, what does distance mean? Is the distance physical or mental or both? In our view, both meanings are intended, but physical distance takes precedence over psychological distance because, as we will see below, unconsciously it reminds primal present experience. Let us clarify what we mean by an example:

Imagine that you have to spend time in another country to attend a scientific conference and suppose your relationship with your spouse is very close but you cannot get him or her. During this time, you may miss him or her very much. Here you have a great physical distance from your desired object, but psychologically there is a very small distance between you and him or her. It is clear that here you will feel the passage of time slowly if you cannot entertain yourself with other things. Here, according to the formula mentioned above, v means that the libido on the object has not changed, but d has increased, and as a result, t becomes a larger number. We know how strange it may seem to talk about numbers and formulas in psychoanalysis, and there is a high degree of resistance to accepting them, but this formula only acts as a topographical model to understand the topic. As in Freud's first topography model, different positions do not mean specific places in mind.

By comparing face-to-face sessions with remote sessions, we find that there is a difference between these two types of sessions in terms of the physical distance between the analysand and the analyst, and due to this physical change in spatial distance, it can be expected that the psychological distance between them will also change. Of course, depending on the psychological condition of the clients, these changes can be positive or negative. In other words, for an analysand, the physical distance created between him and his analyst may not change the feeling of his or her psychological distance; another analysand may feel more distant from his analyst at this physical distance, and an analysand may, on the contrary, feel closer and more comfortable with the analyst. Due to the difference in psychological distance that each analysand finds with his analyst during remote sessions, the amount of libido cathexis of the ego on the analyst as a transitional time object and on the analysis sessions as a transitional time phenomenon changes. Pajoohandeh (2020) believes that this is also true for the analyst because he or she also needs to use his or her analysand as a transitional time object and uses the treatment session as a transitional time phenomenon to be able to avoid getting stuck in the present.

Therefore, it can be expected that in remote sessions, compared with in-person sessions, transitional time objects and transitional time phenomena followed by a sense of the passage of time are perceived differently. To better understand

the reaction of clients to this category, it is necessary to refer to the clinical vignettes that we have made changes in their identity information due to confidentiality issues.

Vignette A

The first example was a 28-year-old single woman named Maryam, who participated for about two years in analysis sessions with the first author. The sessions were held face- to- face-based for a little over a year, during those face-to-face sessions Maryam delayed almost all of her meetings. Since the beginning of the corona quarantine, which inevitably changed the sessions remotely, Maryam called almost all of her meetings on time! The question that arose for the analyst was what was the difference between face-to-face and remote sessions for Maryam? Was there anything in the sessions that delayed it?

During her face-to-face sessions, Maryam expressed regret about her delays, because of the wrong fixing time of preparation, which also dealt with unforeseen traffic, leading to her usual delays. This regret was accompanied by reproaches for not being able to arrive at the sessions on time. On the other hand, she stated that she was worried that she would come to the office for a session but would not find the analyst, or in other words, the analyst would not be present. Although this had never happened before, the intensity of the fear and anxiety was so great. she had dreams about it and referred to it in the sessions.

This fear seemed to stem from a deep skepticism about being accepted and valued which she felt as an inner belief. In order not to face this deep feeling of fear of not being accepted, she had made being late her shield. And then this delay was justified by an inverted belief; that the joy of reaching the goal remains as long as there is the hope of achieving it; for her, happiness means trying to reach it, which means that happiness is lost when the goal is achieved!

Another explanation, from the point of view of the subject of this paper, can be provided for this case. Shortly before the pandemic of the coronavirus, at Maryam's request, the sessions increased from once to twice a week. It seemed that after a year and a half, gradually a sense of confidence was developed in Maryam about the space of the treatment room and could feel more in this space. Perhaps by increasing her sense of attachment to the analysis as well as (and) to the analyst, she was able to overcome to some extent the sense of rejection by the analyst and the worthlessness and to expose herself more to those feelings. This change helped her to spend more time in the treatment space and the presence of the analyst. In other words, Maryam was able to gradually accept the analyst as a transitional time object and the analysis sessions as a transitional time phenomenon. It can be assumed that with the beginning of the remote sessions, many arrangements for reaching the session were removed and therefore Maryam did not have to have a specific schedule to reach the session. To get to the session, it was enough to turn on the phone and call the analyst without having to leave her room. The way to the session was through her phone. The analyst was on her phone and somehow in his room. The situation that occurred, that is, making a phone call to the analyst could have led to a shift in the transitional time object, from the analyst to the phone. A phone that belonged to her, familiar and controllable! Therefore, it can be assumed that with this change in transitional time object, Maryam's concern for not being accepted by

the analyst will not be felt at least for a while and she will no longer have a reason to delay.

Vignette B

Another analysand was a 33-year-old married man named Bahram, who began his therapy with the first author of the paper about six months, once in a week, before the quarantine period. Bahram was a shy and taciturn person. He had faced an old problem that became a major crisis in his life due to insufficient attention to the subject and misunderstanding of the issue. He reported that one of the reasons for his failure to solve his problem was not continuing to execute a decision and doing a certain task. In his description, Bahram pointed out he usually abandoned personal tasks and decisions and did not continue any work until the end, and did not achieve the desired result. The inability to do certain things made him feel bad about himself and also a combination of the feeling of inferiority and ambiguity about such feelings made him lack self-confidence in front of others. Ironically, his big problem, which of course turned into a severe crisis, was also related to his marital relationship. A soulless relationship without the excitement and warm emotions that had led Bahram to distance himself from his wife and to reluctance to closeness ultimately resulted in his wife's dissatisfaction and complaint. In the meantime, pressures and blames from his wife and Bahram's failed attempts to improve the relationship also had a double negative effect on his low self-esteem. This situation persisted during the analysis sessions; So, he was present in the meetings with despair and guilt and without looking at the analyst, he spoke shyly and slowly.

Although this time, realizing that the situation in his relationship was becoming critical, Bahram determined to make a change, but the most important concern and the question of him in the initial sessions was whether can he walk this path completely this time?! What Bahram was talking about, seemed to be more than a lack of confidence or pragmatism. These can be considered as the consequences of a more fundamental feature. A thing which its lack would lead to reluctance, withdrawal, incapacity, or the like. It seemed that something was absent in Bahram, something of a vibrancy. A force that can lead him to mobility. In the absence of energy to move, stillness remains. You do not have to approach anyone or do anything. An idea, desire, or thought, even if it does not work, stops. And this could have immersed Bahram more in himself so that he could pass the time by immersing himself in his thoughts. In fact, for Bahram, the thinking was a transitional time phenomenon and thoughts were transitional time objects. An object within himself, without needing from outside and another. Continuing to come to sessions- something that started out of urgency and anxiety at first, continued with habituation, and gradually took on a form of willpower- enthusiasm arose in him. Of course, he experienced these good feelings along with doubt. Doubt how long it can last. There were sprouts of hope and joy in him, each of which could be destroyed without approval and attention. It can be said that he was able to accept the analyst as a transitional time object and, with his help, endure the passage of time.

With quarantine approaching and forced to hold remote video conferences, Bahram felt difficult to connect with this form of sessions. He felt he could not speak easily. He said he basically could not communicate much with cyberspace and avoided video calling. He went on to point out that he had a bad feeling about his face and body and even avoided looking in the mirror, and naturally, in remote sessions that were established by video call, he inevitably put his face in front of

himself and it was hard and disgusting for him. Having such a feeling for one image and facing it during the long sessions of remote analysis made these sessions difficult for Bahram. What could make him feel this way? Why was the presence of the analyst in the face-to-face sessions a factor for a smoother feeling of the passage of time in Bahram, but not in the remote sessions? Perhaps because this kind of confrontation with himself reminded him of his shortcomings. The shortage was so severe that it forced him to return. An empty interior that inevitably carried something else. In this face-to-face session with himself, the thoughts also stopped moving and could not play the role of a transitional time object. Thoughts that, by stopping them, could now heal older and deeper wounds! Therefore, he could not find any transitional time object, neither internal (his thoughts) nor external (analyst) and as a result, the passage of time for Bahram in remote video sessions became difficult and brought him resistance.

Analysand as a transitional time object for the analyst

According to the previous explanations, the analyst also needs to use the analysis session as a transitional time phenomenon and the analysand as a transitional time object. In the following, we will report a clinical experience in this field.

Vignette C

Behnaz was a 35-year-old married woman who, two years before the corona pandemic, began her analysis sessions with the first author. She entered the sessions with anxiety, restlessness, and mental confusion. Her inner world was turbulent, and the pressure of turmoil was beyond her control. In the meantime, she also complained about her husband's inadequate presence and support, believing that she would not support and understand by her husband as she expected. The remarkable thing for the analyst was that Behnaz was very sensitive to the end of the sessions and often looked at the clock and announced the end of the session.

In the face-to-face sessions, although the time was a little slower for the analyst, this slow passing of time did not bring any pressure. In other words, Behnaz played a role for the analyst as a transitional time object, focusing on her restlessness and turmoil and accompanying her through her superficial mental turbulences, as a transitional time phenomenon. After about two years, Behnaz had become less restless and agitated, and this was felt not only by the analyst but also for herself, as she referred to it in her description of her condition; During these internal changes, with the outbreak of the corona pandemic, sessions were followed remotely. Gradually, she was able to achieve a relatively clear and reciprocal dialogue with her husband, and as she was more satisfied with her supportive behavior than in the past, she was able to consider and see to some extent her parts in the relationship. But she still felt that she was far from her desired quality in the atmosphere of marital relations, and believed part of that issue would remain unattainable due to the fundamental shortcomings in her husband's personality, and she recounted it in despair. Step by step, the analyst felt that the sessions were slower than before, so that was difficult to bear the slowness, and at some point, it practically stopped moving. The pressure of these interruptions was sometimes so great that he had to try to advance the session and time by talking a little. But how can occur such a drastic change in the analyst's sense of the passage of time? For Behnaz, it

can be seen that by decreasing the intensity of superficial turbulence, her restlessness and impatience decreased and she was able to access deeper layers of her being. Explaining her new circumstances, she noted that she did not sleep at night and thought and preferred to stay in bed more in the morning. She did not have the patience and energy to spend time with his 3-year-old child and preferred to be alone. she linked her inner space to an unknown vacuum that she did not know how to enter. Behnaz's new situation seemed to have been effective in slowing down the time for the analyst. Under these circumstances, the bridges between the analyst and Behnaz were also about to destroy, and as a result, the analyst could not use her as a transitional time object as in the past and experienced the passage of time much more slowly than before.

Discussion

Why does one need a transitional time object? As Pajoohandeh (2020) says, transitional time objects and phenomena have been created to help us not get stuck in the present time. The present in this theory is the time that precedes the past. In this sense, the present is a time when there is no repression and the infant is fully experiencing everything unpleasant to him or her. Arlow (1990) writes in this regard:

"The beginning of time sense is associated with the awareness of enduring unpleasant sensations, which are part of a cycle in which need tension is followed

by pleasurable relief, which comes with the appearance of the need-satisfying object. A sequence of experiences is established, linking the unpleasant feelings of tension with a painful sense of duration, followed by relief and pleasure. It can be seen that the concept of the succession of events, which constitutes the second basic element in building up the time sense, evolves out of this fundamental biological cycle. Thus, from the very outset of mental life, the two basic components out of which the time sense is conceptualized, namely duration and succession, and the basic states of pleasure and displeasure are inextricably intermingled (p. 135 quoted in Meissner, 2007. P. 20).

In terms of time, perhaps this moment, the beginning of the sense of time, can be considered the moment of birth. After leaving the womb, where the infant may not have felt the slightest discomfort, the infant is suddenly confronted with a host of unpleasant sensory experiences and stimuli that create a wave of confusion for him or her. It can be said that this is the starting point of time or the present tense. Let's call this experience the primal present experience. This event can be considered in line with Otto Rank's (1924) trauma of birth, the most horrible human experience to the end of his or her life, a trace of which always remains in his or her fears and anxieties (Pajoohandeh, 2020).

The first thing that can remove this confusion, such as the mother's arms, her voice, or her nipple, will be the first transitional time object. This object is always with the child and expands in many objects. After the infant is calmed by the mother, this experience of tension and then comfort is recorded as the first emotional memory and the past tense is created. On the other hand, after the initial stress is relieved by the mother/caregiver, the renewal of that first satisfaction in the future is always desired by his or her; therefore, the future is formed as a desire to repeat the experience of the past, which we call the future past. According to this definition, the present is the time when the baby is experiencing that

tension, which is not pleasant at all. We experience this time when we are exposed to anxiety, pain, illness, and severe physical injury, that is when we have not found a transitional time object to relieve stress yet.

Previous clinical vignettes show that changing in-person sessions and making a distance between the analysand and the analyst can affect the sense of the passage of time. Part of this effect can be due to the different feelings of the passage of time in each of the forms of analysis sessions. The different perceptions of the analysts from the atmosphere of face-to-face and online remote sessions may affect their sense of the passage of time, and this has led to their different reactions after changing the shape of the sessions. Of course, we should not ignore the effect of coronavirus pandemic and the results of forced changes in the process of holding meetings; the different meanings and feelings that this phenomenon has for each of them, can itself be a factor in the way they relate to remote sessions during quarantine, including the feeling of the passage of time in these sessions. But how do these effects occur?

It must be remembered that for the analysand's use of the analyst as a transitional time object, a transference needs to be formed. According to Hartocollis (2003), transference in the state of analysis, and especially with the analyst himself or herself, with feelings and fantasies about the relationships of the primary object, is a time-based phenomenon. The principle of interpretation of transference lies in its temporal dimension. Patients do not like or hate analysts because of who their analysts really are or what they do, but they remind them of someone else in the past and their early relationships (p. 950). Based on this, it can be said that the phenomenon of transference helps the analysand to access his or her past and his or her initial relationships by passing through the present with the help of a very powerful transitional time object called the analyst. Therefore, transference can be considered as a transitional time phenomenon that allows the analysand to make the transition between the present and the past. Naturally, this platform is also achievable for the analyst by using the phenomenon of countertransference.

But the ego can use the analyst as a transitional time object when it can exert libidinal cathexis on him or her. According to the time formula mentioned above, the libidinal cathexis on an object depends on the distance of the ego from it. By changing the face-to-face sessions and creating a physical distance between the subject and the analyst, the amount of libidinal cathexis on the analyst can change his or her function as the transitional time object. For the analysand who feels more distant from the analyst by moving away from the analyst and not seeing him/her, the amount of ego's libidinal cathexis on the analyst is reduced and time in the remote sessions is slower for him. But for an analysand who, for any reason, by increasing this physical distance from the analyst, can increase his or her power over the analyst as in the case of Maryam in remote sessions, time can go faster than in the past.

In addition to the effect of the physical distance dimension, another reason that can be mentioned as a factor influencing the libidinal cathexis of the analysand's ego on the analyst is the cause of this distance, which is the coronavirus pandemic. In addition to creating a gap between the analysand and the analyst, this factor is itself reminiscent of death and destruction, which alone can be a cause of anxiety for individuals. The spread of the virus and its pandemic, the unknown and the lack of specific treatment, and, most importantly, the high mortality rate due to the virus, are various causes of anxiety. The American Psychiatric Association (2013) emphasizes that public health emergencies can affect the health, safety, and welfare of individuals and communities. These effects may be seen in people with the disease and the

general population. Extensive public research on mental health in times of crisis has shown that emotional distress is prevalent in epidemic-prone populations. A finding that is sure to be replicated in populations affected by the Covid-19 pandemic. Dealing with these severe and erosive anxieties can increase libidinal cathexis for clients. In other words, after emerging anxiety in the analysands and engaging them more and more with it, the ego seeks to find a way to reduce it and to gain calmness, so that it can use the transitional time phenomena and objects to get over the stressful time and reach the past, calm down and relax. Dealing with anxiety due to Covid's infection or death resulting from it increases the ego's cathexis power, and as a result, the ego can increase the libidinal cathexis of the analysis session as a transitional time phenomenon and the analyst as a transitional time object to make better use of it, and naturally, this event makes you feel like the remote analysis session and time goes faster during this period.

Another point that can be cited as a reason for influencing the sense of the passage of time in remote sessions is to pay attention to the common name used for remote sessions; that this name, at least for the Persian speaking analysand and analyst, can have a significant semantic load. Among Persian language users, the common term for remote sessions is absentee sessions. With a little reflection, it can be seen that the use of these names for the speaker and listener suggests that there is presence at face-to-face sessions and that absentee sessions are in themselves without presence. The use of such names can be unconsciously interpreted as the fact that remote sessions are absentee, which means, there is no presence, no analyst, so there is no object to connect, transmit and use as the transitional time object. As a result, the ego refrains from libidinal cathexis in absentee or remote sessions and feels the passage of time in remote sessions slower.

Thus, changing the course of analysis sessions due to the coronavirus pandemic can lead to changes in ego libidinal cathexis and the use of transitional time phenomena and objects, resulting in differences in the sense of the passage of time in remote analysis sessions. As mentioned, these consequences can occur for both analysands and analysts. In this paper, we tried to take a brief look at some aspects of this phenomenon, which should be considered given the complexity of the concept of time in the human psyche and the emergence of this pandemic, certainly has many shortcomings that can be considered in the future papers by those interested in this field.

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