VERBAL PUNISHMENT IN BEHAVIORAL THERAPY.
WHAT DOES THE THERAPIST PUNISH?

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Introduction

• Psychological research on punishment is limited, sometimes tendentious, inconsistent and difficult to interpret.

• Psychology in general, and Clinical Psychology in particular, showed:
  – A clearly unfavorable attitude towards punishment study and use
  – A complete series of widely accepted misconceptions about punishment and its consequences

• Our goal is to contribute to the development of a deeper and more accurate knowledge about the punishment process

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Methodology

**PARTICIPANTS**
21 therapy sessions recordings from 9 clinical cases led by 4 behavioral therapists with different grades of experience

**VARIABLES**
Therapist’s Punishment Verbalizations
“therapist’s verbalization which, interrupting or not the client’s verbalization, shows disapproval, rejection and/or non-acceptance of the behavior performed by the client” (Ruiz, 2011)

Client's Punished Behaviors
those client’s verbal or non-verbal actions preceding immediately the therapist’s punishment verbalizations

**MATERIALS AND INSTRUMENTS**
- Close-circuit cameras and video system
- Software *The Observer XT 6.0* (by Noldus Information Technology)

**PROCEDURE**
1. Location and selection of a big enough sample of therapist’s verbalizations categorized as punishment according to SISC-INTER-CVT
2. Independent observations of the client's behaviors preceding the selected punishments and first informal register of them
3. Analysis and discussion
4. Process of building the categorization system
Results

1. The therapist punishes a range of the client’s behaviors, both verbal and non-verbal - it was only possible to infer it from conversation since cameras were not recording the clients and it was not possible to watch their non-verbal behavior.

2. In relation to the client’s verbalizations, the therapist can punish them because of its content (its meaning, what they are expressing) or because of its form (how and/or when they are produced).

3. Frequently, the therapist uses punishment verbalizations to stop the client’s speech, speak and call their attention to something or emphasize something important.

4. The therapist can also apply punishment to those behaviors which are produced out of the clinic, but only in an indirect way through the account of those behaviors told by the client. When the therapist punishes the client’s account about their behavior out of the clinic, what the therapist is doing is punishing that behavior in an indirect way, using the connection established between the subject’s behavior and the description that he or she makes about it.
### Results

#### SYSTEM OF CATEGORIES OF THE CLIENT’S PUNISHED BEHAVIOR

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Anti-therapeutic verbalization (Content)</strong></td>
<td>Those client’s verbalizations expressing interpretations, ideas or beliefs against the therapy goals (both general and specific) and complicating its progress.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Anti-therapeutic verbalization (Form)</strong></td>
<td>Those client’s verbalizations complicating or making difficult the therapy progress because of how or when they are produced and independently of what its concrete content is.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Speech</strong></td>
<td>Client’s verbal behavior, regardless of its content or form, when the therapist wants to stress or to call the client’s attention to something important.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Anti-therapeutic behavior</strong></td>
<td>Those client’s actions complicating or making difficult the therapy progress and cannot be considered as anti-therapeutic verbalizations. It is included within this group both the behaviors happening directly in session and the client’s verbal report about them in case of happening out of session.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Results

DISTRIBUTION OF THE CLIENT’S PUNISHED BEHAVIORS ACCORDING TO THE SYSTEM OF CATEGORIES

**Figure 1.** Client's punished behaviors by categories (absolute frequencies)

**Figure 2.** Client's punished behaviors by categories (relative frequencies)
Conclusion

• It has been observed that the therapist applies their punishments to a range of client’s behaviors, either verbal or non-verbal, and which can happen either in or out of the clinic, that impede or complicate the therapy progress and/or the achieving of the therapeutic goals (“anti-therapeutic behaviors”), since they would impede the optimal development of the intervention. Thus, verbal punishment is a resource used by the therapist to control the client’s behavior, stressing those behaviors meaning an obstacle in the therapy progress.
Conclusion

• The behaviors punished by therapists can be grouped into four categories: Anti-therapeutic verbalization (content), anti-therapeutic verbalization (form), Speech, anti-therapeutic behavior. This categorization system can become a base for different investigations on the dynamics followed by the clients’ anti-therapeutic behavior in the course of the therapy, the therapists’ answers to those anti-therapeutic behaviors, and the interaction between both of them.
Conclusion

• The categories have been set from systematic observation and subsequent discussion of the clients’ behaviors, but they have not been applied to a new sample and its reliability has not been determined. Thus, the next natural step in this line of research would be optimizing the system of categories by being tested by different observers in a new sample with the goal of detecting and solving possible problems (definition, number of categories, reliability, completeness, and exclusiveness of the categories...). Once this is done, the system of categories will be able to be used to research with scientific precision the connection between the clients' anti-therapeutic behaviors and the therapists’ punishment verbalizations.
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