UNIVERSITÀ DEGLI STUDI DI PADOVA

Dipartimento di Psicologia dello Sviluppo e della Socializzazione

Corso di laurea in Psicologia di comunità, della promozione del benessere e del cambiamento sociale

Tesi di laurea magistrale

Psychotherapy under neoliberalism

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Anno Accademico: 2023/2024

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Introduction

This thesis aims to investigate the impact of neoliberal ideology on psychotherapy's practice. Neoliberalism, initially developed as an economic doctrine focused on market deregulation and promoting the free movement of capital, has gradually infiltrated every aspect of society and reality. This profound influence of neoliberal culture has given rise to new cultural configurations and significantly reshaped individual identities. Neoliberalism has thus become an endemic force, highlighting the need for social sciences to address these changes and transformations. Psychological science, along with research and practice in the field of psychotherapy, has become an active agent in promoting and sustaining these cultural and social arrangements, often without fully realizing its responsibility in this process and consequently not seeking alternatives to the current conditions.

As Rimke (2016) points out, it is essential for the human and psychological sciences to address not only the negative effects of neoliberalism but also of other forms of social injustice, such as sexism, classism, racism, heterosexism, colonialism, and ageism. The central focus of this thesis is to bring attention to the strong interdependence between the individual and collective spheres, as well as the close connection between social factors and their consequent effects on the mental and psychological health of individuals. Moreover, the aim is to depict a comprehensive picture of the phenomenon, including both its negative and positive effects on psychological science and psychotherapy practice. Despite the attempt of this thesis to provide a general framework on neoliberalism aimed at

maintaining its complexity, it's undeniable that nowadays the current literature is leaning towards a negative conception of this economic and political movement. Neoliberalism in fact, in addition to being a risk factor for the development of psychopathological conditions and general dissatisfaction in various areas of life, has deeply altered the concept of the self, making it increasingly individualistic, competitive, performance-oriented, and less inclined to think in collective terms. At the same time, neoliberal ideology has profoundly shaped psychological research and psychotherapeutic practice, emphasizing the standardization of clinical practice, its consequent detachment from the cultural and social context, and from the specific subjective needs of individuals. It has also promoted scientific research based on experimental samples that are often not representative, as they predominantly come from privileged and Western contexts.

This thesis conceives both neoliberalism and psychotherapy as deeply multifaceted cultural objects, which are themselves subject to constant transformation. This underscores the importance of greater awareness in research and clinical practice regarding the transformative potential these fields hold: while psychological sciences may contribute to the spread of neoliberal ideology and other forms of oppression, they also represent a potential key to addressing and resolving these oppressive systems. In addition to offering a critique of the status quo that permeates the psychological field and the broader systems of care, this work proposes a possible solution: the urgent need for Western scientific research and psychotherapy to open to alternative forms of

research and psychotherapeutic practice, typical of Eastern contexts or other cultural traditions. These approaches, which are often more attuned to the importance of context for individuals' physical and psychological health, can foster a process of cultural integration between different approaches and traditions. At the same time, they encourage seeing society as the result of both the individual and the collective level, allowing for a mitigation of the negative effects and positioning psychotherapy as a form of emancipation and political and social change. Lastly, the heterodox economy's approach is briefly discussed, representing an example of how economic and political policies can benefit directly individual's well-being.

1. WHAT IS NEOLIBERALISM?

1.1 Introduction

In his series of lectures at the Collège de France, Michel Foucault analyzed the so called “neoliberalism turn”, underlying the strict connection between neoliberal styles of government and subjectivity, giving life to the concept of “governmentality”, referring to how the different features and functions of political institutions shape the psychological experience and life of individuals (Sugarman, 2015). Foucault, as Sugarman (2015) emphasizes in his paper named “Neoliberalism and psychological ethics”, explains how the main neoliberal element of “enterprise” sets up a strong bond between economic well-being and individual fulfillment. The first chapter initially focuses on defining neoliberalism as an economic doctrine and a social and cultural movement of endemic scope. After describing the differences between neoliberalism and classical liberalism and its role as a distal stress factor in determining a number of mental health outcomes, the core psychological values of neoliberalism that permeate society are described.

1.2 What is neoliberalism?

The “neoliberalism” expression refers to an economic and political movement that took hold in the 1970 (Adams et al., 2019), which is often named as “market fundamentalism” and was initially conceived as an economic doctrine by Friedrich Von Hayek and Milton Friedman (De Vogli, 2011).

Going more into depth, according to Venugopal (2014), the neoliberalist movement can be divided into 2 main periods: until the 1970, the term - mainly used by economists, referred to a specific set of economic theories that started to arise back to 1960s-30s due to the work of the Mont Pelerin Society, of Friedrich Hayek and the Counter-Keynesian economics of the Chicago School. After 1980 though, it became a broader phenomenon, mostly as a consequence of the rise of Donald Reagan in the United States and the rise of Margareth Thatcher in the United Kingdom; at this point, these events fast actualized these sets of policies, giving life to a global change that some defined as a “revolution of the powerful against the weak” or “a neo-conservative revolution” (De Vogli, 2011; Gill, 2015).

The key policy points of this economic movement were the following: privatization, low inflation, reduction of government bureaucracy, balance of the budget, liberalize trade, deregulate foreign investment, deregulate capital markets, make the currency convertible, reduce corruption and privatize pensions (Friedman, 1999). As Harvey (2005) underlines, this economic agenda emphasized fluidity, globalization, the deregulation of markets and free movement of capital.

1.3 Classic liberalism, neoliberalism and capitalism

Neoliberalism is hence both an economic theory and a political ideology that defines capitalism and its developments, with capitalism being a presiding force in western societies since the end of the Middle Ages (Rustin, 2014). Despite classic liberalism deeply affecting the neo-liberal theorizations, neoliberalism

itself presents substantial differences from classical liberalism, as its emphasis on freedom, especially from constraints on growth and self-expression (Deleuze & Guattari, 1980/2004) in comparison to other liberal values such as equality and civic obligation (Adams et al., 2019). In classical liberalism, people see themselves as properties full of abilities that could be offered to the market to obtain labor, while neoliberalism erects a new ideology that designs the individual as entrepreneur of a business, with the addition that the individual is expected to "create an economic activity, not just to engage in it" (Sugarman, 2015).

1.4 The positive effects of neoliberalism

Although neoliberalism is often conceived as the root of most problems in contemporary societies (Bettache & Chiu, 2019), as an economic movement it has certainly led to some benefits. For instance, according to Huber and Solt (2004), neoliberal ideologies are often credited with promoting economic growth; in fact, countries like Chile and Peru saw increased GDP and productivity growth due to foreign direct investment and trade liberalization (Huber & Solt, 2004). Moreover, several Latin American countries achieved lower inflation and more stable economic policies under neoliberal reforms, which in turn strengthened their international credit ratings; this financial credibility attracted more foreign investment and laid the groundwork for sustainable growth over time (Huber & Solt, 2004). However, despite some studies and researchers have highlighted the benefits of introducing and applying neoliberal ideologies, most literature focuses

on its deleterious effects not only at economic level, but above all on individual and society's health.

1.5 Neoliberalism, its impacts and its influence

With neoliberalism, there is a consequent progressive conceptualization of civil society as a collection of individual entities that relate to one another as competitors who pursue their own interests (Adams et al., 2019).

The neoliberal movement, through a deep and impacting propaganda's process, introduced itself as the only option to free individuals from the domineering presence of states in their lives; however, the only freedom promoted by it was consisting in the profits of transnational corporations and wealthy investors (De Vogli, 2011). In fact, another main element brought into vogue by this economic and political doctrine is the centrality of freedom, and therefore of choice, both elements that are profoundly conditioned and therefore not real. This idea perfectly follows the concept promoted by Rousseau about people "being forced to be free" (Cerny, 2008).

As Sugarman notes (2015), the core psychological values of neoliberalism promptly started to impact every aspect of life, becoming an invisible force that influences people's identities, selfhood, interpersonal relationships, moral and ethical responsibility, to the point that nobody would actually define himself or herself to be a "neoliberal": neoliberalism is not a doctrine or a theory anymore, but it has rather became common sense or, as Bal and Dòci (2018) explains, a fantasmatic logic.

Neoliberalism has consequently assumed the form of the *zeitgeist* of our time (Venugopal, 2014), that despite its initial premises of ensuring greater wealth and freedom, it has caused a large scale of negative effects. For example, the growing social inequalities in the last 40 years in advanced capitalist economies, as noted by Bettache & Chiu (2019), promoted negative outcomes both on physical and psychological health: in fact, an important amount of evidence found that neoliberalism reforms tend to depress economic growth (De Vogli, 2011). Moreover, the economic inequalities followed by the rise of neoliberal policies represented the catalyst for the rise of populism, which accuses a specific part of the population, namely migrants and social minorities, only to shift the public's attention from real problems (Bettache & Chiu, 2019).

1.6 Neoliberalism as a distal factor

Aside from personal and individual processes, there's a broad variety of determinants that can impact people's mental health, including economic and cultural ones (Bhugra & Ventriglio, 2023).

Different authors proposed different conceptualizations of neoliberalism: some defines it referring to social psychology, to obtain a variety of axioms that synergically constitutes this construct (Bettache & Chiu, 2019); others, define neoliberalism using the lens of cultural psychology, tracing how the engagement with the neoliberalism system evolves into characteristic tendencies (Adams et al., 2019). The term "distal factor" is drawn from Ilan H. Meyer (1995) Minority Stress Model, which is commonly used to study sexual and racial minorities. In

this model, "distal factors" refer to external elements such as cultural influences, social structures, or specific life events, while "proximal factors" pertain to more personal elements arising from the internalization of experiences (Meyer, 2015). In this context, neoliberalism clearly emerges as a distal factor that impacts individual's health and behaviors.

The idea that human beings are not detached by their own environment but rather deeply intertwined with it it's not new to human sciences. As Michael Rustin noted, the work of Emile Durkheim represented an important breakthrough in sociology, showing how individuals are outcomes of complex processes between social arrangements and relationships (Rustin, 2019).

In the psychology field, the work of Urie Bronfenbrenner has drew attention to the strong relationship between different systems and the individual subjectivity; the author extended the famous field theory promoted by Kurt Lewin (1935) that conceives behavior (B) as the result (f) of the interaction between person (P) and environment (E), formulating his own theory named the Ecological Systems Theory of human development (Härkönen, 2017). This ecological theory postulates that human development is influenced by a set of different and interconnected systems. The main systems are the following:

1. Microsystem = it refers to the more proximal level, which has a direct influence on the individual's life.
2. Mesosystem = it refers to the different relationships that occur among the different microsystems.

3. Exosystem = namely a range of contexts that indirectly influence human development.
4. Macrosystem = the broader contest in which the individual lives, and it included both ideologies and the political and economic policies of a specific context.
5. Chronosystem = it describes the comprehensive concept of temporality, including cultural and historical events.

Hence, according to this model, neoliberalism takes the form of a distal factor that by influencing the individual on all levels has a huge impact on his subjectivity and his experience.

Another main theory that can offer an extensive explanation of these processes can be found in the work of Erich Fromm and particularly in his conceptualization of the social character. Fromm's work is deeply influenced by Karl Marx's theory and by Harry Stack Sullivan's theory of interpersonal relationship, and it brought to the development of his own psychoanalytic approach within the context of the Frankfurt Institute for Social Research (Funk, 1998).

According to Marx's view positing human beings being mainly characterized by a social nature, Fromm accentuates the importance of social environment over instincts in the development of human personality (Foster, 2017). Namely, the social environment represents the main driving force in Fromm's formulation, a social environment that through the mutual influence of material conditions and political ideas originates the social character. The social character can be defined

as a set of strivings and impulses, both conscious and unconscious, that every person has in common with one another under the same socio-economic conditions (Funk, 1994). The key point is that the social imperatives of capitalistic and neoliberal societies result in a distortion of human needs, where not only following these imperatives but also acting according to them produces a form of gratification: there's thus a shift from "being" to "have" (Foster, 2017; Fromm, 1976)

1.7 The Homo Neoliberalus

Many authors had analyzed the impact of neoliberal ideology on social cohesion (Coburn, 2000), workplace organization (Bal P.M. & Dòci, 2018), response to trauma and victimization (Stringer, 2014) and feminism (Fitz, Zucker, & Bay-Cheng, 2012).

In the United States, neoliberalism is strictly linked to the concept of the *self-made man*, referring to an individual that achieved success (usually in monetary terms) through their own endeavors. The image of the self-made man recalls the concept coined by Marcuse (1964) on *the one-dimensional man*, who has absorbed the emerging attributes of Western society (Teo, 2018).

Thomas Teo in his paper named "Homo *neoliberalus*: From personality to forms of subjectivity" (2018) examines the ways in which neoliberal thinking, which is largely permeated by utilitarianism and individualism, promotes and originates new core psychological values that direct people's choices and behaviors. The neologism proposed by Teo (2018) recalls the mentioned ideas of the *self-made*

man and of the *one-dimensional man*, underlying the maleness of this archetypical figure; although culturally it is usually the man who shows these tendencies, a female literary figure that also fits this role is the Juliette depicted by the Marquis de Sade (1968).

The author explains the concept ideated by Ludwig Wittgenstein of the “form of life”, that referrers to how the cultural background permeates so deeply the individual’s subjectivity to the point that these cultural assets become the whole personality; hence, being the form of life not connected to biology but to culture, is always transforming (Teo, 2017b). Specifically, Lucien Sève (1978) came up with the concept of “forms of individuality” rather than “forms of life”, to describe the psychological link between economic society and the individual: the form of individuality is not a choice but rather the outcome of existing production relations (Teo, 2018). Teo (2018) continues his analysis by depicting the so-called “NLFS”, that stands for neoliberal form of subjectivity: according to this theoretical formulation, NLFS colonizes all of the other forms of subjectivity, taking the role of a hegemonic form of subjectivity.

What is homo *neoliberalus* characterized by?

According to Adams and collegues (2019), there are four main central themes or psychological values. First, there’s a marked *radical abstraction from the context*: the idea of freedom from constraints promoted by neoliberalism is strictly intertwined with deterritorialization and fluidity, with the aim to enhance and encourage capital growth and movement (Deleuze & Guattari, 1980/2004).

The cultural and psychological impact of this neoliberal approach results in a sense of radical detachment from the local context (Oishi et al., 2015). On one hand, this feeling of freedom from constraints can provide greater opportunities, an increased sense of agency, and the ability to form fulfilling social relationships (Sen, 1999; Oishi et al., 2015); additionally, it promotes the possibility of new multicultural interactions and a general sense of openness. Though, on the other hand, a direct consequence of these phenomena are processes of cultural standardization, namely the chain stores - that recalls the concept described by the french sociologist Marc Augè on the “non-places”: this term refers to the progressive increase in Western societies of places without a history, an identity, and therefore non-relational (Buchanan, 1999). These cultural standardization processes eradicate local identities and these patterns of economic consumption become cultural hegemonic assets: as a result, it’s more demanding to implement processes of thinking and critique towards the status quo (Sugarman, 2015; Teo, 2018). There’s therefore a collective idea of neoliberalism as the guardian of freedom and as a force that inhibits oppression and paternalistic forms of control - a concept that Bal & Dòci (2018) call neoliberalism’s freedom fantasy.

Secondly, the authors focus on the *entrepreneurial self*. In the neoliberal society, improving the self is the main project, and the entrepreneurial self as a concept is derived by two opposite school of thoughts: on one side, the *utilitarian* or *vertical individualism,* mainly focused on the economic freedom to buy private property, and on the other side the *expressive* or *horizontal individualism*, rooted

in movements such as the Romantic one, that on the contrary emphasizes political and social freedom; neoliberal ideology is the outcome of the interweaving between these two different schools of thought (Adams et al., 2019). The neoliberal context has made James's distinction between the “self” and the “ego” disappears: there’s no more “I” or “self”, but rather a “myself” intended, again, as an entrepreneurial entity (Teo, 2018). The clear consequence of these changes is that the business vocabulary has become an integral part of the common language, as well as words related to self-improvement, such as self-regulation, self-management, self-promotion and so on.

On top of that, some longitudinal data have actually showed that in the last 40 years there has been an increased number of words related to the entrepreneurial self and the general neoliberal ideology (such as “choose” or “entitlement”) with a parallel decrease in the use of words that are based on community (like “obliged”, “communal” or “act”) (Greenfield 2013; Nafstad et al., 2007). Thus, there is a constant and growing tendency to perceive the self as a product in which to invest and focus efforts and energies.

Subsequently, the third core aspect described by the authors is related to the *growth imperative*. Plus, Teo (2018) emphasizes *agency* as another dominant concept. The entrepreneurial self must always pursue growth and improvement, and neoliberal society provides not only the centrality of the freedom of constraints, but also the centrality of freedom of choice: the implicit message is that you can always pursue something more, and you're actually supposed to do so: in fact, neoliberalism forces individuals to choose a neoliberal form of life (Teo,

2018). Happiness is hence interpreted as a constant movement to seek new goals and aspirations to ultimately obtain success, which is potentially endless and therefore always frustrating: the choice is hence not a choice, but rather a constraint transformed into the freedom of choice (Teo, 2018).

If on one hand choice requires an elaboration of one's individual preferences and thus fosters an individualization process, the *homo neoliberalus* is stuck on a daily basis on this constant strive for new opportunities. The psychological benefits derived by having free access to a broad range of possibilities are well established, but an excess of choice is also associated with a sense of paralysis and perpetual dissatisfaction (Botti & Iyengar, 2004). Plus, the just mentioned positive consequences are not distributed equally across socioeconomic contexts and a greater accountability of the individual is a direct consequence of the focus on choice, increasing victim blaming attitudes.

The last point examined by the authors is *affect management*. Neoliberal society is permeated by an attention to feelings, that some authors have defined as the "affective turn" in social sciences and psychology (Anderson, 2016). The fundamental issue is that individual and collective emotions are strictly related, and therefore society provides form of feelings that are inherently connected to neoliberal forms of life; in this society, it's much easier to trust one's own feelings, and these feelings are once again instrumental: thus, there's a stress on a turn towards private feelings and not collective ones, aimed at obtaining solutions to personal or at least family's matters rather than trying to achieve generalizable solutions (Adams et al., 2019). Besides, neoliberal ideology demands a constant

state of stress, that appears as a form of life and existence: stress becomes a socially accepted consequence of NFLS, with the hidden and implicit message that you have to be under a constant state of stress to reach your own goals; on top of that, negative reactions to high stress levels are not socially accepted (Adams et al., 2019).

To conclude, an interesting aspect to cover is related to the neoliberalist notion of love as a form of fulfillment: neoliberal individualism generates connections, whether friendly or sentimental, that in reality are aimed at increasing one's own value and personal satisfaction (Adams et al., 2019). Zucker and Bay-Cheng (2020) conducted a survey to analyze the extent to which neoliberalism has permeated sexual preferences and relationships in general. The authors collected a sample made of 249 US young adults, and their findings were definitely ambivalent: if on one hand strong neoliberalism beliefs appear to be associated with better self-affirming sexual attitudes, on the other hand the same beliefs concur to determine gendered sexual double standards, as well as a general tendency to judge others (Zucker & Bay-Cheng, 2020).

1.8 Neoliberal ideology and mental health outcomes

As noted by Zeira (2022), the economic policies implemented by neoliberal ideology have modified the collective ideology and the social order: instead of social connection and community, neoliberalism has favored individualism, materialism and consumerism (James, 2008). Namely, an important amount of data showed that neoliberalism has led to income inequality (Navarro, 2007). For

instance, the wages of the working class either decreased or remained the same, while the richer part of the population became even more wealthy (Mishel & Kandra, 2020). A report drawn up by the World Health Organization, named “The social determinants of mental health” (Allen et al.,2014) underlined how people with lover economic status are more likely to experience Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE), that represents a risk factor for the development of mental illnesses - the ACEs acronym refers to a broad range of psychosocial factors that can have a significant negative impact on both mental and physical health, usually consisting in abuse (either physical, emotional or sexual), neglect (physical or emotional) and household dysfunction (such as substance abuse, mental illness, domestic violence and incarceration (Petruccelli, Davis & Berman, 2019). Plus, the main issue as brought up by Wilkinson and Pickett (2011) is that inequality represents a distal and stressor factor that impacts everybody despite the social class.

This cultural and values switch that leads to consumerism and individualism has a direct effect on mental health: James (2008) shows how individuals who engage in consumerist tendencies show higher levels of depression, anxiety, low self-esteem and also experience poorer relationships. In this regard, Tim Kasser showed that people who see happiness as mainly derived from objects accumulating tendencies, once again show increased depressive and anxious symptoms: in fact, over the past 15 years, the use of antidepressants increased by nearly the 65% in the United States (Hari, 2019).

An interesting case is represented by social anxiety. As reported by Sugarman (2015), social anxiety has received increasing attention in recent decades, partly due to its growing prevalence: social anxiety is the third most widespread psychological disorder, after depression and alcoholism (Horwitz, 2002). The spread of this mental condition can be explained by referring to neoliberalism: our current society in fact rewards enterprising and extraversion, considering them as fundamental elements to navigate the world and to obtain the most functioning version of the self: considered the context, it is therefore evident that timidity and social discomfort are perceived as problematic (Sugarman, 2015).

Lastly, another key point is related to suicide. Eskin & Baydar (2022) conducted a study to determine if neoliberal ideologies may be related to suicidal ideation. According to the researchers, suicidal ideation may arise due to a need for support from others and the internalization of the neoliberal ideal of self-reliance. Their findings provide empirical evidence that the relationship between neoliberal values and perceived stress is fully mediated. Neoliberal values were linked to suicide stigma, which in turn was connected to negative attitudes toward helpseeking, which represents a risk factor for higher levels of perceived stress that is also associated with increased suicide risk (Eskin & Baydar, 2022).

2 WHAT IS PSYCHOTHERAPY AND THE NEOLIBERAL PSYCHOLOGY

2.1 Introduction

In their book “Psychotherapy Research: foundations, process and outcome”, Omar C.G. Gelo, Alfred Pitz and Bern Rieken (2014) state as their first assumption that psychotherapy practice as well as its research are “socially negotiated and institutionally legitimated cultural products, rooted on the different values and beliefs shared by members of a specific community at a certain time and place”. This definition allows us to understand how the practice of psychotherapy, being a potential cultural object, is shaped by different elements, both historical and cultural, as a practice and a science mutable and in constant change. This chapter, after an initial definition of what psychotherapy is, its developments from a historical point of view and how it functions, offers critical reflections respectively on the Western conception of health, the consequent categorization between normality and pathology, the effects of neoliberal ideology on scientific research in the psychology field and on the academic world in a broad sense. Two phenomena closely related to the present subject of reflection are also described, namely the self-help culture and the so-called "happiness studies".

2.2 What is psychotherapy?

An extensive amount of definitions of psychotherapy have been provided by time, aiming at depicting the complex processes that characterize these types of practices. Fonagy (2015), for example, defines psychotherapy as a group of treatments, some directed to specific disorders and others more general, based on a global understanding of human subjectivity interacting with the relationship between individual and environment, both external and internal. Frank (1973) described psychotherapy as a "type of social influence exerted by a trained and socially sanctioned healer on a person or persons who suffer and are seeking relief, through a series of defined contacts"; again, Winnicott conceives it as "two people playing together", while Butler and Strupp (1986) see psychotherapy as a "systematic use of a human relationship for therapeutic purposes". There are different schools of thoughts in the psychotherapy field, as well as different ways to approach human suffering, to the point that psychotherapy nowadays is lacking a shared framework and appears to be more a multifaceted field (Gilbert, 2019): the various psychotherapeutic approaches have indeed different target objects, such as the body, the unconscious, behavior and so on (Marks, 2018).

A central idea though, is that not all forms of healing are psychotherapy (Kirmayer, 2007).

While Western medicine specializes in the treatment of isolated symptoms, traditional cultures focus also on the broader context of the disease, according to the theory that the human being is an open system in interaction with the environment (Gelo, Pitz & Rieken, 2014)

At first, a common misconception among both psychotherapists and psychiatrists was regarding the impossibility of testing psychotherapy ‘s efficacy (Weissman & Cuijpers, 2017). The first randomized clinical trial on the effectiveness of psychotherapy is from 1970 and nowadays it’s broadly confirmed that psychotherapies can treat in an effective way mental disorders (Weissman & Cuijpers, 2017; Cuijpers, Reijinders & Huibers, 2018). Furthermore, numerous scientific studies have shown that psychotherapies are just as effective as pharmacotherapies. More recent research has revealed that combining psychotherapy with pharmacotherapy offers the most effective approach for treating a wide range of disorders and mental health conditions (Cuijpers et al., 2017).

2.3 The history of psychotherapy

Psychotherapy was designed as the result of European modernity, and its history and development are closely tied to the transformative cultural and political events that occurred during history, such as World War II, the establishment of Welfare states and the proliferation of neoliberal ideologies (Marks, 2018). Despite its modern developments, psychotherapy practice is rooted in very longstanding traditions in the Folk culture, namely shamanism and archaic medicine in general (Gelo, Pitz & Rieken, 2014). Several authors have tried to define the figure of the shaman, and the currently most shared definition sees in this figure an individual who, through altered states of consciousness, manages to mediate between human beings and the supernatural world (Price, 2001). As

described in the book by Gelo and colleagues (2014), Müller (2006) indicates different features of the shaman, such as a willingness to use his powers and knowledge for the public good, the apprenticeship with another shaman, a vocation often due to social exclusion and an unbalanced and nervous nature as a child. These elements clearly overlap with the modern conceptualization of the psychotherapist as someone who transformed their emotional wounds to help others - the archetype of the wounded healer, and in general takes responsibility for others' well-being and health. As the shaman, the psychotherapist digs into the *undiscovered country of the soul* (Gelo, Pitz & Rieken, 2014). A key element that must be stressed is the fact that in the prehistory of psychotherapy, there was no distinction between physical and mental distress, but rather the main idea was focused on the integration of the mind, the body and the spirit; in addition, traces of practices implemented by shamanists and other healer figures during the ancient history can actually be found in the way researchers and clinicians conceptualize the structure and the practice of psychotherapy (Gelo, Pitz & Rieken, 2014).

In more recent days, hypnosis, suggestion and trauma discourse (Carroy, 1991; Micale, 2020) marked the beginning of theorization that would have led Sigmund Freud to develop psychoanalysis; the spread of behavioral theories happened later on especially in France, due to the skeptical associations with the American culture (Marks, 2018).

As mentioned earlier, several historical events have marked the development of psychotherapy, namely the Logotherapy founded by Viktor Frankl that was a

direct consequence of the psychologist's experience in a Nazi concentration camp, or the post-war context in the United Kingdom that hosted at the Tavistock Clinic pioneers of group therapy such as Wilfred Bion or S.H.Foulkes (Marks, 2018; Carter, 1992). As mentioned above, nowadays there's a plurality of different approaches and theorizations that may target a specific set of symptoms or psychological conditions, a plurality that reflects the complexity of our time and subsequently the complexity of the human being.

2.4 How psychotherapy works?

Psychotherapy's main feature is related to its emphasis on self's explicit talk: it demands in general a motivation and an ability to take part of a conversation in which private experiences and personal events are discussing, with the aim of depicting the complex processes that occur in one's own mind (Kirmayer, 2007). According to Tuckett's categorization, psychotherapy's practice can be mapped through the individualization of three main elements: 1) listening and observing 2) conceptualizing what have been listened and observed 3) communicating what has been understood to the patient; psychotherapy is viewed as a strictly personal and individual matter; as Jung stated, what works for one patient may not works for another one (Colman, 2020).

A key point that will be discussed later on is the fact that different therapeutic techniques and approaches vary widely based on the social and cultural contexts and patterns (Kirmayer, 2007).

As noted by Ritvo & Papilsky (1999), the theoretical framework also determines the type of interventions and techniques that are used by the therapists. Despite

the already mentioned variety of schools of thoughts and outlooks of human experience, some authors tried to define models aimed at including the principal features that are common to all types of therapies, and most importantly in which ways psychotherapy works.

Regarding this issue, as described by Cuijpers and colleagues (2018) there are two main school of thoughts among researchers and clinicians: a first group draws attention to specific effects, related to the theoretical foundation of the therapeutic approach - for example, according to cognitive therapies the patient's growth is derived by modifying maladaptive cognitions; another group though stresses the importance of common, nonspecific or universal factors, that are common to every therapeutic approach, such as the salience of the therapeutic alliance or the expectations both of the patient and the therapist.

The common factors conceptualization is better explained by the so called "Dodo Bird Verdict" (inspired by Lewis Carroll's Alice in Wonderland's novel): as stated by this formulation, different therapies have all comparable effects and do not differ in a significant way from one other (Cuijpers, Reijinders & Huibers, 2018).

Among all the models proposed by research during the years, the best developed one is the contextual model (Wampold, 2015); this model represents an alternative option to the medical model - which will be discussed in the following paragraph. In the contextual model, therapy begins with the patient and therapist establishing a fundamental bond that allows them to work together effectively (Cuijpers, Reijinders & Huibers, 2018).

Once this bond is formed, therapy works through three different pathways (Cuijpers, Reijinders & Huibers, 2018): the relationship, the patient's expectations and the specific components of different therapeutic approaches.

First, the relationship provides a safe environment in which the patient or the client can experience compassion and empathy and a genuine interest from the clinician (Gelso, 2014, p.119). Secondly, the patient's expectations and general sense of hope represent crucial elements for the positive outcome of the process. Lastly, the contextual model identifies the different techniques of each theoretical approach: for instance, while interpersonal psychotherapy focuses more on social relationships, cognitive-behavioral therapists may stress more the importance of maladaptive cognitive distortions or dysfunctional behaviors.

2.5 What psychotherapy works for?

Psychotherapy is effective for a wide range of mental disorders and psychiatric conditions, such as depression (Cuijpers et al., 2020), anxiety disorders (Bandelow et al., 2015), eating disorders (Linardon et al., 2017), obsessive compulsive disorders (Carpenter et al., 2018), personality disorders (StofferWinterling et al., 2022) and relapse's prevention in schizophrenia (Bighelli et al., 2022). Moreover, there's strong scientific evidence for the positive effects of both long-term psychotherapy and short-term psychotherapy. Regarding the first point, long term psychotherapy is effective for loneliness and social isolation: both of the two are significant public health challenges for older adults, stemming from physical, cognitive, and psychosocial changes that accompany aging

(Hoang et al., 2022); short term psychotherapy is effective in the treatment of functional somatic disorders (Abbass et al., 2021) among others. Besides, it's proven that psychotherapy is beneficial for every age group, including adults (Cuijpers et al., 2014), children and adolescents (Lee et al., 2022).

2.6 Neoliberal psychology

In the paper "The road to Psychopathology: neoliberalism and the Human Mind", Beattie (2019) describes the core neoliberal psychological assumptions and proposing a higly critical point of view on neoliberal psychology: first, human are considered to have limited cognitive abilities to understand complex systems; plus, they manifest an intrinsic desire for freedom (especially economic freedom) and economic inequality as a motivating factor that enhance productivity and innovation, despite the more recent findings that underline its detrimental impact on mental and physical health. Despite these implicit and cultural biases in the psychology field, research shows how humans dispose of an egalitarian syndrome, meaning a natural inclination towards equality. Moreover, other studies show how humans have a psychological aversion against inequality.

According to the definition provided by the World Health Organization (WHO):

<< Mental health is a state of mental well-being that enables people to cope with the stresses of life, realize their abilities, learn well and work well, and contribute to their community. It is an integral component of health and well-being that underpins our individual and collective abilities to make decisions, build relationships and shape the world >> (WHO, 2022).

Therefore, even the definition of mental is therefore impacted by neoliberal forms of governentality, considering the stress put on the ability to take decisions and on realizing their abilities, learning and working processes.

2.7 Psychological research under neoliberalism

As discussed before, neoliberalism's ideology has created the conditions for the spreading of neoliberal forms of life in every aspect of our society, including scientific and psychological research.

As reported by Adams and colleagues (2019), the hegemonic forms of psychological science that derives from neoliberal thinkings fully fit what some researchers have called the WEIRD paradigm: most psychological researchers in fact use as samples people in settings that are Wester, educated, industrial, rich and democratic. Despite the WEIRD paradigm seems to be more linked to colonialism, it's important its description for two main reasons: first, as Rimke (2016) points out, it's fundamental to seek for an intersectional approach that is comprehensive of all of the different oppression's systems; secondly, the concept described by Maldonado-Torres (2007) about "coloniality" is fundamental to understand how neoliberalism can be conceived as a new, or derived form, of colonialism. The central idea is that neoliberalism has become a form of coloniality: if colonialism refers to the superiority of a nation over other populations considered inferior, the concept of coloniality instead highlights the presence of power patterns, which are results of colonialism itself, but that go to

define culture, interpersonal relations and knowledge production (Maldonado-Torres, 2007).

Henrich, Heine and Norenzayan (2010) in their paper named “The weirdest people in the world?” describe how the most common sample’s participants to a broad variety of experimental researchers, either in psychology, cognitive science or economics, are western American undergraduates. The authors conducted a comparative review among different behavioral and psychological science database to determine if this specific type of population which is usually and implicitly considered by researchers to be the “standard subjects” is actually a representative sample. Their findings show how members of the WEIRD societies are actually the least representative populations: in fact, their empirical results prove that generalizing results from a slice part of humanity is not the finest and best method to obtain scientific and representative knowledge on the human experience (Henrich, Heine & Norenzayan, 2010).

The WEIRD population’s matter is strictly linked to the so-called evidence-based psychotherapies. The insistence of the evidence-based model in medical and psychological care is another example of the extent in which neoliberalism has permeated society (Rustin, 2014). The term “evidence-based” it’s usually referred to a set of best practices derived from meta-analyses data, randomized controlled trials, systematic case studies and so on, that it’s supposed to represent the best techniques to treat a specific medical or psychological condition (Cook, Schwartz & Kaslow, 2017). Shedler (2017) explains how the term represents code word for a manualized form of therapy - usually a cognitive-behavioral form of therapy

(CBT); it's thus conducted by following a manual or scripts that often don't allow to focus to the patient's specific needs and follow a general "one-size-fits-all" idea (Shedler, 2017). Despite evidence-based therapies have provided positive results in the treatment of a wide range of psychiatric conditions, they also present a series of limitations, such as the rigidity in which the rigidity with which they are applied and the under-representations of different minority groups in the experimental samples (Cook, Schwartz & Kaslow, 2017).

The main points described by Adams and colleagues (2019) to describe psychological science under neoliberalism are the same used to describe the main values characterizing *homo neoliberalus.*

Psychological science has also undergone a methodological abstraction, paralleling its radical detachment from context. Recent methodological advancements reveal a trend focusing on isolated phenomena, rather than considering the broader cultural and historical factors (Adams et al., 2019). As psychological science increasingly emphasizes the study of variables (Schiff, 2017), experiments are often conducted in artificial settings to enhance measurement accuracy, aiming for a neutrality that tends to reinforce the status quo. Moreover, as previously noted, these experimental studies frequently rely on WEIRD populations, neglecting non-WEIRD groups (Adams et al., 2019).

The second point described by the authors is ontological individualism. Stryker (1997) defines ontological individualism as the tendency to see sociocultural phenomena as just the outcome of the assemblage of independent individuals. There's a "collective fear of the collective" (Markus & Kitayama, 1994) especially

in the social psychology field: social psychologists frame in a negative connotation normal tendencies of human experience such as obedience, conformity and social influence. Racism represents a clear example of this trend: the common theorization of racism sees it a result of individual biases (Gordon, 2015), rather than an outcome of a set of cultural and historical patterns. The idea that individuals are responsible for their own racist prejudices, enables people to ignore the wider context, prevents criticisms of the status quo, and in the case of racially victimized people forces them to adapt to the discriminating context, causing negative impacts on their health and well-being (Adams et al., 2019).

Psychological science fosters the entrepreneurial self through two distinct processes, namely psychological essentialism and responsibilization. Psychological essentialism consists of an understanding of mind and behavior as the result of individual traits (Fiske et al., 1998). Moreover, hegemonic forms of psychological science provide tools to measure these traits, such as the field of psychological testing, which enable both an ability assessment and the assessment of traits and interests: in the case of business and organizational psychology, these tests are essential not only in the selection of personnel but also to implement processes that allow the achievement of specific goals (Adams et al., 2019). The second mechanism of responsibilization involves holding individuals accountable for their own choices and the negative outcomes that follow. This is particularly evident in issues like overconsumption, such as obesity and substance abuse, which are often attributed to poor decision-making and a

lack of willpower (McDonald et al., 2017), as well as in cases of poverty and misfortune (Adams et al., 2019).

Regarding the growth imperative, personal growth and development are considered by psychological science as a marker for well-being: examples of this conceptualization can be found in lots of different psychological theories, such as the flow theory (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990) or the self-determination theory (Ryan & Deci, 2017). The self-determination theory (SDT; Ryan & Deci, 2017) postulates the existence of specific psychological needs such as competence, autonomy and relatedness that represent the driving force and the basics of human motivation: according to this idea then, affect management is largely intertwined with self-actualizing behaviors and individualistic forms of romance (Teo, 2018).

2.7 The effect of neoliberalism on the psychological education

It's fundamental now to introduce the concept of marketization of knowledge. The expression marketization of knowledge refers to the meeting between market and knowledge and the consequent transmission of the latter: in Western contexts, the main institutions that form and encourage the dissemination of knowledge are the universities (Wedlin, 2008). According to Wedlin (2008), there is growing market influence on universities, and consequently also the values and political ideologies arising from the market itself. Although many authors see this set of movements as a benefit, there are numbers of negative consequences that are often underestimate, such as the ones described by Gezgin (2019).

Gezgin (2019) published a fundamental paper that deeply analyzes the effect of neoliberalism ideology on psychological education. The author emphasizes 10 key points. First, she cites the phenomenon of the privatization of psychology degrees, pointing out how these high costs may lead to increased social inequality. She then emphasizes what she calls quantity fetishism, referring to how quantity outweighs quality, both in terms of students enrolled in psychology courses and the high number of psychology courses offered. It also describes the tendency of individualistic mold to study for own wealth and own gain rather than valuing the social values and public interest embedded in the profession of psychology itself. Furthermore, there is a persistent idea about the superiority of clinical psychology over other branches of the discipline, considering also how there is a progressive standardization of the teaching practices and the courses themselves that erase student's creativity and critical thinking skills (Gezgin, 2019).

2.8 The self-help movement, happiness studies and positive psychology

A crucial element that must be analyzed is linked to the self-help movement and the happiness studies (Adams et al., 2019). As described above, considering that neoliberalism reshaped the sense of self of individuals, it is clear how the self of the *homo neoliberalus* is mainly focused on achieving happiness and well-being, due to the performative imperative that characterizes this economic ideology: therefore, the spreading of the self-help movement is a direct consequence of this societal changes.

The self-help movement, as observed by Rimke (2016) can be described as a diverse array of approaches, media, and products centered on the self as the primary focus of intervention; subjects are in fact pushed to achieve improvement or enlightenment by engaging in self-help projects that maintain the status quo and the individualistic and consumeristic trends. The chance of self-improvement is presented in the form of different media (such as applications or audiobooks), specific practices like meditations or journaling and specific messages like “be resilient” or “love yourself”: the recent spread of the self-help movement and industry are reflection of the neoliberal therapeutic hegemony (Rimke, 2016). Self-help discussions are not confined to the private sphere, but also proliferate on television, internet and social media, to the point that self-help itself becomes a form of popular entertainment.

Although there are some manuals or specific techniques in the scientific literature that have proven to be effective in treating a number of psychological conditions and a general sense of malaise, these traditions of self-help often stem from new age movements. As reported by Rindfleish (2005), in recent years there has been an increase of new-age traditions and movements in Western societies, due also to the growing popularity of new age spiritual thinkers: however, these theories do nothing but carry on consumeristic and individualistic behaviors, which oversimplify the reality, offering a superficial reading of it and zeroing out the intrinsic differences not only in people but also in the conditions that they try to modify (Rindfleish, 2005).

The self-help genre represents an important part of the modern culture of therapy in neoliberal societies: Rimke (2016) defines it as the culture of recovery.

According to the author, in the culture of therapy most individuals engage in what Foucault called “techniques of the self” (Foucault, 1961): these techniques are used to diagnose one-self and others, in order to remain emotionally healthy and perform in society.

Another aspect to be considered is the happiness studies and in general the attention of hegemonic forms of psychology on the construction of happiness: although positive mood states are fundamental for psychological well-being and health, the current trend often leads people to suppress their negative emotions in favor of positive ones; scientific research has shown that the suppression of negative emotions is related to the development of depression (Yoon et al., 2018). Furthermore, these behaviors lead people to feel wrong for experiencing these negative emotions that are physiological and integral parts of human experience, without considering that an excessive emphasis on happiness and positive emotions is unsustainable at both individual and collective levels (Kjell, 2011; Adams et al., 2019). The so-called happiness studies are related to the movement of Positive Psychology (PP): it originated back in 1990, due to the work of Martin Seligman, with the goal of emphasizing health, optimal performance and human flourishing rather than focusing on diseases and mental distress (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). Positive psychology is focused on shifting the attention of research from what does not work in the human being, to valuing his resources and strengths as to achieve a state of happiness and well-being; this approach is

based on theories such as Rogers' and client centered therapy, Gestalt therapy, Berne’s transactional therapy and cognitive behavioral therapy. The aim of these approaches is to work on the self to achieve a greater degree of autonomy (Sugarman, 2015). As Sugarman (2015) notes though, these aspects have become central elements of psychological and psychotherapeutic practice, in ways that are consistent with the neoliberal hegemonic forms of psychological science.

3. PSYCHOTHERAPY UNDER NEOLIBERALISM

3.1 Introduction

As previously described, the neoliberal ideology has profoundly modified the cultural, social and individual structure, affecting at the same time scientific research and the psychology field. As noted by Clément (2019), the endemic spread of neoliberal values represents a rich field for human science researchers: this phenomenon, as described in the previous chapters, impacts both the social world and human subjectivity and its relationships. A few authors have tried to understand the impact that neoliberal forms of hegemony have had on the conception and practice of psychotherapy.

The first part of this chapter focuses on a fundamental concept to understand how psychotherapy unwittingly supports the status quo and neoliberal ideology. The effects of neoliberalism on psychotherapy itself and the way in which human beings and their care are conceived are described more analytically. The second part of the chapter presents some specific forms of psychotherapy, some not inherent to Western thought and culture, which represent possible alternatives to the current models or which aim at changing or increasing awareness towards the status quo, and consequently feed its reformulation.

3.2 Psychocentrism

A key concept to begin this chapter is Rimke's notion of psychocentrism (2016): according to psychocentrism, all human problems are viewed as stemming from

internal pathologies, whether physical or mental, making individuals solely responsible for their own health and illness. This concept is closely tied to what Rimke describes as the "culture of therapy," discussed in the previous chapter, which refers to a specific ethos of psychotherapy that influences the broader social order. The widespread notions of psychotherapeutic practices, both professionally and publicly, while contributing to the de-stigmatization of mental health issues, has also turned therapy into a consumable commodity. As a result, it risks losing its inherent healing and reflective value, becoming more of a pop culture product. As a matter of fact, psychotherapy under a neoliberal ideology assumes the form of a luxury good or a form to foster the self (Rustin, 2014). In particular, the implicit idea brought in vogue by neoliberalism is that individuals aren't really seeking support from the government, especially in relation to mental health matters (Rustin, 2014); this is in line with the fundamental values of neoliberalism, such as an absolute individualism and the constant strike towards a full self-reliance.

Before outlining the key elements that constitute the concept of psychocentrism, it is important to define what Rimke (2016) calls "psy complex", or the way in which the field of psychotherapy, of psychology and psychiatry has colonized contemporary society. This psy complex is closely interrelated with the diffusion and maintenance of the neoliberal culture, which, as described above, sees individuals as responsible for their own health and illness (Rimke, 2016).

Psychocentrism can be defined as the idea that human problems are derived from deficits both in the individual's mind and body and can be considered as a form

of social injustice, because it leads to individual change rather than political or economic transformation (Rimke, 2016). As reported by the author, the main points that make the concept of psychocentrism so multifaceted and multidimensional are the following (Rimke, 2016):

1. reductionism, meaning the tendency to considerate human experience referring to simplistic explanations.
2. determinism, meaning the statement that human behavior is caused by elements such as the genetics, hormones, neurochemical imbalance and so on.
3. essentialism, hence, the tendency to categorize individuals using rigid and strict classification models.
4. presentism or ahistoricism, so the spreading tendency to not take into consideration the role of historical factors in determining and influencing human conduct.
5. naturalism, meaning viewing humans as naturally shaped rather socially and culturally shaped.
6. ethnocentrism, that refers to the inclination to that some cultural practices or beliefs are better than other ones.
7. double-standards, so a specific collection of principles that are unequally applied between two or more groups - namely the gendered double standard.
8. victim blaming, that refers to the predisposition to hold individuals responsible for the negative outcomes that they may encounter.

9. positivism, meaning the trend to conceive emotional and mental distress in the same way that physical health is considered.
10. Lastly, pathological individualism refers to the classification and the clearcut distinction between normality and abnormality and health and illness - which has been discussed in chapter two.

Thus, psychocentrism becomes an epistemological framework that allows to observe in a critical perspective as psychotherapy, together with other branches belonging to the psy complex such as psychology and psychiatry, maintain and nourish neoliberal ideologies (Rimke, 2016).

3.3 Psychotherapy as a cultural construct

As discussed in the second chapter, psychotherapy is nothing more than a socially negotiated and institutionalized cultural object (Gelo, Pitz & Rieken, 2014). For this reason, it is subject to constant transformations due to social, political and economic changes. As already described, neoliberalism has permeated every aspect of reality, including the psychotherapeutic practice itself. It is therefore necessary to ask and reflect on the ways in which psychotherapy has changed due to neoliberal influence. As described by Kirmayer (2007), any psychotherapeutic approach depends on the way in which the self is conceptualized, which in turn is based on cultural aspects. Thus, psychotherapy in western societies is characterized by a strongly individualistic vision of Euro-American type. However, this biased view can be changed by referring to a more sociocentric, ecocentric or even cosmocentric approach. Going into detail, people in neoliberal societies are considered as preeminently rational actors: their selves

are rationalistic and monological, totally separated from the wider context but rather focused on obtaining personal benefits and increasing one's own performativity. People are thus regarded as coherent and reliant is their self: they are constantly engaged in the search for uniqueness and exceptionalism; thus, neoliberal ideology makes individuals fall into the paradoxical trap of consumerism, which offers the achievement of such promises through mass-produced choices (Kirmayer, 2007). Therefore, the spread of evidence-based forms of therapy, usually forms of cognitive-behavioral therapies (CBT), becomes a logical and consequential step, applying the psychotherapy practice through a utilitarian lens (Kirmayer, 2007).

TABLE 1
Cultural configurations of the self

	Self Defined By	*Dominant Values*	*Locus of Agency*	*Mode of Narration of Self*	*Healing System*
Egocentric	personal history accomplishments	individualism autonomy achievement materialism monotheism	individual	univocal monological	psychotherapy
Sociocentric	family clan lineage community	collectivism interdependence cooperation honor filial piety familism	group	polyvocal dialogical	collective ritual family therapy
Ecocentric	environment ecology	balance harmony exchange animism	animals natural elements	univocal mythological	shamanism
Cosmocentric	ancestors	cosmic order holism polytheism	gods and spirits	polyvocal mythological	possession divination

Kirmayer (2007)

Kirmayer (2007) offers a description of the various cultural configuration of the self, defining the egocentric self of western individuals as being mainly characterized by individualism, autonomy, materialism and more neoliberalist values; the interesting point provided by the author is the fac that individual psychotherapy culturally represents the most eligible healing form (Kirmayer, 2007).

3.4 The impact of PP on neoliberalism

Positive psychology has profoundly changed the practice of psychotherapy (Sugarman, 2015). Sugarman (2015) provides as an example the work carried out by Binkley (2013) on the profession of the life coach. The life coach profession and its constant diffusion represent the umpteenth example of the effects of neoliberal forms of governance in the practice of therapy and in general in the field of mental health. As argued by Binkley (2013), the concept of psychotherapy as a tool for healing is totally reversed from the perspective of life coaching, according to which patients, often called clients, have to be supported in their journey of growth towards happiness and self-fulfillment. The purpose of the life coach would therefore be to provide the client with strategies for achieving their future goals, employing a series of pragmatic strategies that derive from business consulting advice (Sugarman, 2015). As pointed out by Sugarman (2015), the goals that the client sets are often derived from the neoliberal ideology itself, but they are conceived as obstacles that can be overcome by using the psychological resources of the individual. The approach of life coaching is therefore strongly

based on the current of Positive Psychology (PP) and the so-called happiness studies in general and appears as another way through which a space that should be of growth and healing feeds the dominant ideology, without questioning it. The main point is therefore not to criticize the approach of life coaching in itself, which according to some studies may have indirect positive effects on individual's mental health, exercising for example their self-efficacy and self-empowerment (Ammentorp et al., 2013); however, as mentioned above, these practices are the result of a movement within mental health that shifts all attention to a performativity of the Self that strengthens the current hegemonic forms of governmentality.

3.5 The marketization of knowledge and the clinical practice

As described in the previous chapter, the marketization of knowledge is another example of the strong impact of the neoliberal ideology. Gezgin (2019) provides a series of examples of this strong interaction between market and knowledge applied to the clinical context. In fact, private practice, as also argued by Rustin (2014), represents a form of luxury that not everyone can afford. In addition, the clinical practice in public is strongly privatized, often overcrowded, and the clinicians themselves due to pressures of the company itself are often forced to operate in a limited way, again favoring the quantity (in this case of patients consulted) rather than quality. Moreover, the privatization of psychotherapy is evident in its relationship with money, which assumes a dual function: while on the one hand it represents a fundamental means for the clinician to pursue his

own (expensive) training, on the other hand becomes a tool to measure one's own value and professional ability, in the idea that the more money you make the more successful you are.

3.6 Neoliberal governmentality and therapeutic interactions

The concept of governmentality derives from the philosophical tradition of Michel Foucault (1979) and is defined as the ways in which power spreads among the population rather than residing in a specific authority that holds power, such as the state or institutions (LaMarre, Smoliak, Cool, Kinavey & Hardt, 2019). Consequently, from a Foucaultian perspective, power is not imposed from above but rather acts on an individual level, through social interactions and the various relationships that occur between systems - for example, the systems described by Bronfenbrenner's ecological theory. As described above, individuals are thus forced to behave as rational economic actors (Hamann, 2009), assuming the characteristics and behaviors of the *homo neoliberalus* described by Teo (20189. This assumption is closely related to what Rose (1998) theorized, namely that forms of governmentality and in general the strong interdependence between subjectivity and the collective sphere lead into shaping individual's identity.

LaMarre, Smoliak, Cool, Kinavey and Hardt (2019) in their paper entitled "The Normal, Improving, and Productive Self: Unpacking Neoliberal Governmentality in Therapeutic Interactions" describe how psychotherapy may be conceived as a site of reproduction of neoliberal ideology: in fact, as described by Pavòn-Cuéllar and Orozco Guzmàn (2017), since capitalism includes and influences every

aspect of reality, psychotherapy and its methods are, on one hand, elements already preformed according to capitalist logics, and on the other hand elements that reflect the ideology itself.

The authors offer a series of examples of how neoliberalism has shaped psychotherapeutic practice, for instance the work of Layton (2014) that shows the spreading diffusion of narcissistic and grandiosity traits may be read as a direct consequence of neoliberalism, and in the same way depression (Binkley, 2011) could represent the result of the neoliberal conceptualization of happiness as a goal that has to be reached in order to work as a functioning individual in society. Moreover, psychotherapists often push their patients to reach their goals, in a manner that unintentionally becomes strongly performative and a reproducing element of neoliberal forms of governmentality (Carr & Batlle, 2015).

Bondi (2005) underlies an important quote from Rose (1990) that clearly confirms the main point:

<< (psychotherapeutic) technologies for the government of the soul operate not through crushing subjectivity in the interests of control and profit, but by seeking to align political, social and institutional goals with individual pleasures and desires, and with the happiness and fulfillment of the self. Their power lies in their capacity to offer means by which the regulation of selves – by others and by ourselself – can be made consonant with contemporary political principles, moral ideals, and constitutional exigencies. They are, precisely, therapies of freedom. >> (1990:257)

Furthermore, the authors propose a heuristic aimed at exploring the ways in which neoliberal governmentality subtly operate in the clinical space and in the clinical session. First, they define three main definitions of the self that are a direct consequence of neoliberalism:

1. The normal self, which refers to the self-in-relation, by conceptualizing a sort of deficiency in the self which is attributed to the individual. Consequently, the emergence of the normal self can be observed by the clinician in moments when the patient enacts a normality that is nothing but the product of neoliberal governmentality; as indeed described by Foucault (1979), to practice and adapt to normality is an imperative of Western and neoliberal societies, and as a result the patient is forced to become normal and consequently healthy and performing. This way of making people normal is actively expressed through the process of medicalization, which pushes people to take care of their own diseases so as to fall into the so-called "norm" and not be deviant individuals (Novas & Rose, 2000; Rose, 2007)
2. The improving self, meaning the self that is always striving to solve this intrinsic deficiency, actualizing the actions provided by neoliberal governmentality meant to achieve self-improvement. As for the improving self, neoliberal subjects are forced to be constantly engaged in a work of self-improvement; the same concept of health fits perfectly into a framework of a neoliberal type, this being the result of individual effort and self-discipline (Shea & Beausoliel, 2012). The drive to improve, as described by the paper’s authors, is not in itself wrong; However, this aspect is inserted in a wider and more systematic dimension which establishes a hierarchy and consequently conceives negatively the

eventual failure of this process. The very concept of resilience is therefore questioned, since it is conceived as another form of performativity.

3. The productive self, that refers to the self aways busy in consumeristic and capital accumulation's tendencies brought up by neoliberal ideology. As mentioned in the previous point, the neoliberal society creates the conditions for a consequent hierarchy among individuals, going to develop an apparently meritocratic climate (Giroux, 2005) that does not really consider the different social conditions that characterize individuals: It is not a race between equals, which would be the case if individuals all started from the same conditions. Another paradox of neoliberal societies is to place individuals in a constant race, without taking into account the differences of economic and social classes that are nothing more than the products of the same neoliberal society.

These different self's descriptions are used to map how neoliberal forms of governmentality could potentially show up during the clinical work. An interesting point described by the authors is derived from the work of Winslade (2018) that shows explains how therapists shouldn't abandon their training and knowledge and focus their therapeutic work solely on macro-level issues: they should focus on formulating therapeutic interventions that are directed at the micro level but also at the macro level, making the circularity of influences that are needed between the social and individual spheres an integral part the therapeutic work. This new development in psychotherapy would also show the patient himself the

close interdependence between the different social levels, making him aware of these influences and promoting his critical thinking of social deconstruction.
In conclusion, the authors do not promote a new psychotherapeutic approach, but rather the need for clinicians to work with their patients on the oppressive systems of power that inevitably determine their life conditions.

This second part of the chapter focuses on one hand on psychotherapeutic approaches widespread in western societies, such as relational psychoanalysis or art therapy, and on the other hand on alternative forms of psychotherapy, such as Naikan and Morita psychotherapies. All these approaches are examples of how therapy can actively act against oppressive forms of power, and thus may counteract the effects of neoliberal forms of governmentality.

3.7 Relational psychoanalysis as political resistance

Philiph Cushman (2015) in his paper named “Relational psychoanalysis as political resistance” describes how the movement of relational psychoanalysis is a fundamental element that allows both clinicians and patients to exercise some form of political resistance against the status quo, through specific aspects of the relational technique that allow to lay the foundations for a freer, more critical and above all authentic thinking. In detail, the practice of relational psychoanalysis nourishes and emphasizes ways of living based on honesty, humility and a general motivation to learn from differences in a curious and compassionate way.

Although these benefits may represent the outcome of different psychotherapeutic approaches, relational psychoanalysis is specifically interested in developing these qualities (Cushman, 2015). Relational theory has been gaining ground in the 1980s, particularly thanks to the work of theoretical integration by Jay Greenberg and Stephen Mitchell. The turning point of relational theory lies in the emphasis placed on relation: it becomes the main motor that guides human beings, In contrast to the classical Freudian theory which postulated the existence and centrality of drives as the motor of human behavior; hence, the founders of the relational movement modified a series of psychoanalytic axioms of the time, going beyond the Cartesian distinction between mind and body, the one-person psychology and scientist tendencies (Cushman, 2015). The relational theory in psychoanalysis is the result of the union of different currents of thought and theoretical approaches, such as feminism, critical theory and interpersonal and object relations and self psychology in psychoanalytic theory (Seligman, 2005).

To describe the potential political value of this psychoanalytic theory, Cushman (2015) refers to the hermeneutical concept of the self, or rather the embodied cultural understandings about the correct ways to be human. In the western and neoliberal societies, a multiple Self is spreading, that is purely oriented towards consumeristic and individualistic purposes - this concept recalls the image of the *homo neoliberalus* described in chapter two. It's described how in recent years there would have been a shift from an empty self, which determined consumerist and accumulation behaviors aimed at filling such a vacuum, to a self that is

shallower and flatter, characterized by anxiety in relation to the dangers of social interaction and constantly striving for entertainment and satisfaction. Going more into details, according to Cushman (2015), the multiple self engages in consumerist behaviors on one hand as a result of a shape-shifting process, in which the fear of experiencing negative interpersonal situations is transformed into a tendency to accumulate objects, and on the other hand with the purpose of impressing the Other and to be entertained. Consequently, relational psychoanalysis provides the tools to overcome such aspects, namely changing the configuration of the self (Cushman, 2015). Examples of such political change drives can be found in the history of the relational movement, as in the case of feminism (Benjamin, 1988) or racial issues (Altman, 1995).

Cushman (2015) underlines an important point, namely trying not to use and believe a specific theory in a way too rigid extension: the risk is to become blind to the interweaving of all of the factors which contribute to a given condition; it is therefore necessary to give space and importance to nuances and complexity, to avoid perpetuating the status quo without even being aware of it. There's a strong tendency to "see appearance and call it essence" (Laiyton, 1990), thus the initial premises of releasing and liberation could foster the political and moral status quo: psychotherapy would therefore become a decontextualized and political disengaged driving force (Cushman, 2015). To conclude, the author emphasizes the importance of a therapeutic process less rigid and more egalitarian, that takes into consideration not only the complex processes that occur among the therapist-patient dyad and that strives for overcoming the tendency to split typical

of our Carterian society, thus focusing on integration and complexity (Cushman, 2015).

3.8 Naikan and Morita psychotherapies

Naikan is a form of contemplative self-observation, derived from Shin Buddhism, initially conceived for the treatment of sociopathy and later applied to other pathological conditions, such as depression, substance abuse and somatic disorders (Reynolds, 1983; Ding et al., 2018). The main goal of this form of therapy is to gain insight on oneself and others through a comprehensive perspective of the larger context, rather than through a self-centered perspective; originally developed by Ishin Yoshimoto (1981, 1985, 1997), it is based on the Buddhist concept of *mishirabe*, or self-examination (Ding et al., 2018). According to Kirmayer (2007), the main goal of Naikan psychotherapy is to make the patient aware of the effect of his condition and pathology not only on himself, but also on the wider context, such as the parents. This idea is not applied in a judgmental or sadistic way, but rather with the aim of allowing the person to operate a decentralization from his pathological condition, so that he can experience both a healthy sense of guilt and a sense of gratitude towards the broader social environment. The founder of Naikan therapy, Yoshimoto made what was initially a religious practice that also included fasting of food and water, a meditative type therapeutic practice, applying it for the first time in a youth prison in 1954 (Ding et al., 2018). Nowadays, this therapeutic form of self-reflection is broadly diffused and applied in a variety of contexts, with findings that show its efficacy on the treatment of alcohol addiction (Suwaki, 1979), depression (Sengoku et al., 2020),

anxiety disorders (Nukina et al., 2005) and of male offenders (Ding et al, 2018). How does the Naikan actually take place? the patient spends a week in an isolated place, and must contemplate and reflect on his existence from 6 am to 9 pm; to guide such contemplative practice, the patient must consider a significant relationship of his life and reflect respectfully on what this person has done for him, what the patient has done for the person and what problems the patient has caused to the significant other (Ding et al., 2018). The Naikan psychotherapist aims to produce in the patient a deconstruction of the rigid conceptions that the latter has about himself and others (Ozawa-de Silva, 2007) and to increase awareness of the good that was done to the patient by other people (Tanaka-Matsumi, 1979). In order to achieve these goals, the Naikan psychotherapist listens to the patient's answers to the three questions mentioned above for 3-5 minutes interspersed with 90 minutes at a time, without providing any form of interpretation to the patient's content (Ding et al., 2018). Kirmayer (2007) points out that such a decentralization by oneself would be almost impracticable in Western societies, because of the strong individualism which permeates individuals and the conception of therapy itself.

Morita psychotherapy (MT) is another form of japanese therapy that derives from japanese indigenous traditions (Kirmayer, 2007). MT existed for over 100 years and has undergone a number of changes over time which have adapted the model, especially due to its spread in the Western context (Nakamura & Kitanishi, 2022). The therapeutic end of Morita psychotherapy consists in the so-called *arugamama*, that is the total acceptance of emotions and fears on one side, and

the desire to live on the other, following the idea that the patient must go through a process of radical acceptance of what is frightening and disturbing in such a way to achieve their own will to live fully both past and future experiences (Nakamura & Kitanishi, 2022). As reported by Kirmayer (2007), if the western psychotherapeutic tradition of instrumental type aims to make the patient's self able to change its context, the Japanese therapeutic conception of TM aims at implementing an opposite movement: it must be the patient's Self that accepts the limits imposed by external reality, accepting them so as to experience in a more authentic way and in agreement with its own internal world. Morita therapy conceptualizes human suffering as an integral part of the natural cycle and life itself, rather than in terms of a causal relationality typical of Western tradition, while offering a vision of psychopathology as the result of a vicious circle (Nakamura & Kitanishi, 2022). the practice of Morita therapy has a number of similarities especially in the application aspect with the tradition of mindfulness that has taken hold also in the West; however, if mindfulness focuses on emotional regulation as a central factor in objectifying and controlling the emotional state of a patient, TM does not attempt to control or objectify the emotional content (Nakamura & Kitanishi, 2022). In general, MT focuses on discipline and action (Feng et al., 2020), relief and rest in a familiar environment (Levine 2017; Levine 2020) and the stress on the therapist-patient dyad and their relationships (Mashima, 1992; Ogawa, 2013; Tateno, 2016). As it appears from the brief description of Morita psychotherapy, the healing and transforming power is not derived from making the self more competent in adapting to social

demands, rather, healing and health can be reached by enabling and implementing acceptance processes which are clearly different from Western conceptions aimed at an instrumental objective.

3.9 Art therapy, Jung and social action

As reported by David Edwards in his book “Art Therapy”, the British association for Art Therapists define art therapy as:

<< (…) the use of art materials for selfexpression and reflection in the presence of a trained art therapist. Client who are referred to an art therapist need not have previous experience or skill in art, the art therapist is not primarily concerned with making an aesthetic or diagnose assessment of the client’s image. The overall aim of its practitioners is to enable a client to effect change and growth on a personal level through the use of art materials in a safe and facilitating environment >> (BAAT, 2023)

Another definition is provided by the American Art Therapy Association, that defines art therapy as:

<< the therapeutic use of art making, within a professional relationship, by people who experience illness, trauma, or challenges in living, and by people who seek personal development. Through creating art and reflecting on the art products and processes, people can increase awareness of self and others, cope with symptoms, stress, and traumatic experiences; enhance cognitive abilities; and enjoy the life-affirming pleasures of making art >> (from the AATA website, 2003)

A significant amount of research has shown the positive effects of art therapy on a wide range of both physical and mental conditions, such as schizophrenia (Ruiz et., al, 2017), anxiety, depression and fatigue (Newland & Bettencourt, 2020), on cancer care (Jiang XH et al., 2020), anxiety in children and adolescents (Zhang B et al., 2024) and mild or major neurocognitive disorders (Batubara SO et al.,

2023), among others. Although art therapy appears as a different mode of healing from traditional approaches and therefore potentially less bound to capitalist and neoliberal ideologies (Kalish-Weiss, 1996), in reality art therapy itself is subject to such influence. As described by Gipson (2017), there are many ways in which art therapy feeds neoliberal ideologies, such as focusing on personal growth as a possible outcome of an art-therapeutic path is yet another means through which to promote these ideologies; at the same time, the fact of promoting art therapy through self-care coloring books, as well as the discipline's own tendency to achieve of evidence-based results, are all aspects that recall and reflect strongly neoliberal concepts (Gipson, 2017).

However, different authors managed to make art therapy an emancipatory practice and in general an act of political struggle aimed at changing the social order. Hocoy (2005) proposes an integrative and conceptual framework that strikes to operate an integration of art therapy and social action, suggesting the field of art therapy should start taking into consideration the potential benefits that art detains to foster a social and political change. Going more into details, the author explains how the image could potentially mediate between the individual and the collective. According to Jung, the image represents a potentially transformative object due to two different mechanisms: on the one hand, the image makes it possible to become aware of an aspect that was previously denied, and on the other hand by leveraging on what Jung calls the central archetype of the Self, which allows to feed a healing process of the psyche

(Wallace, 1987). In addition, Jung emphasizes another aspect, that the image can activate both individuals and the collective to consider marginalized aspects of human experience, and consequently of reality itself (Hocoy, 2005). The transpersonal framework offered by Hocoy (2005) is based in the Jungian formulation of depth psychology (Jung, 1961): according to this theory, there's a *unus mundus* (one world) in which both the inner psychological experience and the external physical world coexist and are actually intertwined, and the self are deeply interdependent with one another. According to Lichtman (1982), when disparities spread across a specific society, the disturbing elements as well as the elements that may potentially disturb the status quo are unconsciously repressed. Therefore, the aim of art therapy should be to bring back to awareness the repressed elements, to make the unconscious conscious, order to set the ground for both a personal and collective flourishment.

Hocoy (2005) puts the emphasis on the need for art therapy to start to interest you and move towards social change; as Junge et al., (1993) suggested: << it is time for art therapist to take (a) conceptual leap – an activist leap. To begin, we must recognize ourselves and those with whom we do therapy as deeply interrelated. Next, we must acknowledge that we and our clients are part of larger systems…. And we must see that struggle clearly and engage in it strategically end effectively beyond the boundaries of office walls and the psychic limitations of our own consciousness and denial >> (pp. 150-151).

Hence, considering the interdependent self as well as the strict bond between the individual and the collective sphere, getting involved in a clinical work being

aware of its societal implications represents a form of social action, and being politically active is doing therapy (Hocoy, 2005).

Art therapy must also be able to adapt to the various cultural contexts in which it is applied, taking into account accordingly the values, beliefs and healing traditions of the local culture so as not to assume the role of an oppressive force (Hocoy, 2002). The author proposes to use art therapy in the same way as action research (Stringer, 1996). The three key points of action research are power, people and praxis (Finn, 1994). The research action in art therapy would make the latter much more flexible, self-critical and able to blend local and social identities but at the same time to maintain their separateness (Hocoy, 2005).

4. NEW AGENDA FOR PSYCHOTHERAPY'S RESEARCH AND PRACTICE

4.1 Introduction

The purpose of this final chapter is to offer potential solutions that psychotherapy can adopt in order to counteract various forms of oppression and work synergistically with other social sciences toward the achievement of social justice. As discussed earlier, the effects of neoliberal thinking have deeply impacted both psychological research in general and psychotherapeutic practice specifically. One way in which psychological research could become an active agent of social change is by increasing the inclusion of non-WEIRD populations (those from non-Western, Educated, Industrialized, Rich, and Democratic contexts) in experimental sampling processes. This could be achieved through the use of *indigenous psychology*, an approach to psychological research that is inclusive of and respectful toward diverse cultural contexts and differences.

Incorporating indigenous psychology would allow for more culturally sensitive and representative research, which could lead to more equitable and relevant findings that better address the needs of marginalized communities. By broadening the scope of psychological inquiry to include perspectives and experiences outside of the Western mainstream, psychology can challenge the biases inherent in neoliberal frameworks and contribute to a more socially just field of study.

In terms of psychotherapeutic practice, the application of socially conscious approaches offers a path forward. An example of this is the use of psychology that actively engages with social issues, integrating them into clinical practice.

Such an approach encourages therapists to not only focus on individual pathology but also to recognize and address the broader social, political, and economic factors that contribute to mental health issues. By doing so, psychotherapy can play a critical role in empowering individuals and communities, fostering resilience, and challenging the systemic inequalities that underlie much of the distress experienced by clients.

Moreover, psychotherapeutic practices could incorporate more collective and community-based healing modalities, inspired by non-Western traditions, which emphasize the interconnectedness of individuals within their social environments. These practices can help shift the focus from the individual to the collective, promoting a sense of shared responsibility and collective well-being. This, in turn, challenges the neoliberal emphasis on individualism and competition, instead fostering collaboration and mutual support within communities.

4.2 Psychological research and future adjustments

As described by Adams and colleagues (2019), most studies conducted in psychological studies are based on samples - called WEIRD, which are not really representative and therefore do not produce results that can be generalized; or, to put it more accurately, they have been generalizable to the same subjects involved in research which belong to highly privileged contexts. As described in

previous article, neoliberalism has produced a strong social and class disparity, and in general subjects belonging to minority groups or in general non-WEIRD are not considered as possible samples for scientific research; As a result, this trend leads to basing one's scientific findings on a small part of the population, thus affecting an effective and understanding knowledge of human behavior. One possible solution to this problem is represented by the current of indigenous psychology. Indigenous psychology represents an emerging field that aims to broaden and enrich the knowledge of psychology; in particular, indigenous psychology, unlike the more general approach to psychology which seeks to identify mechanical principles and develop universal theories (Kim & Berry, 1993; Yang, 2000), it attempts to move in the opposite direction: it calls into question these theories, by contextualizing them in the different and cultural contexts (Uichol Kim, Kuo-Shu Yang & Kwang-Kuo Hwang, 2006).

In their book "Indigenous and Cultural Psychology: Understanding People in Context", Uichol Kim and Kwang-kuo Hwang (2006) offer an overview of the potential offered by indigenous psychology: they emphasize the effort of this discipline into considering and incorporating both the values and the meanings with the familiar, social, cultural and ecological contexts. Indigenous psychology aims to analyze how the first aspect just mentioned, that is values and beliefs, both in deep and synergistic connection with the wider context. The fundamental premise is that if general psychology were truly universal, there would be no need for the work of indigenous psychology. According to the authors, there are ten main points which distinguish this approach:

1. Indigenous psychology stresses the importance of conceptualizing psychological elements in their context.
2. Indigenous psychology does not consist in the study of indigenous and Native populations, but it rather represents a comprehensive approach aimed at taken into consideration all cultural, native and ethnic groups, including the Western societies.
3. Indigenous psychology does not offer of a universal method, but the aim is rather trying to depict a specific framework for every context under investigation.
4. Indigenous psychology emphasizes the fact only the natives of a specific culture are able to understand a specific phenomenon happening in their specific cultural context.
5. The previous statement does not refer to a form of naïve psychology (Heider, 1998), but rather that the aim of indigenous psychology researchers is to transform episodic and cultural-specific contextual knowledge into analytical knowledge, in order to test it with a scientific approach.
6. A broad variety of indigenous concepts have been taken as examples of indigenous psychology – such as the Japanese concept of *amae* coined by Doi (2024); however, they are examples of a superficial research that do not progress scientific knowledge.
7. Indigenous psychologists use philosophical and religious texts to explain indigenous phenomena.

8. Indigenous psychology is identified as a part of the cultural sciences tradition (Kim & Berry, 1993).
9. Indigenous psychology has the goal of intertwining humanities (such as philosophy, history, religion) with social sciences.
10. According to Enriquez (1993) there are two elements that represent the theoretical base of indigenous psychology: on one hand, indigenization from without, that refers to taking existing psychological theories and fi to the local context, while on the other hand indigenization from within refers to developing the theories and the concepts inside of the local context, which actually represents the main source of knowledge for this approach. (Enriquez, 1993).

Related to indigenous psychology, Adams and colleagues (2016) describe a particular set of perspectives, falling under the name "theory from the South" (TFTS), which presents a very similar objective to that of indigenous psychology, or the need for science to work towards unifying the experiences of the Majority World communities of the Global South, which are poorly considered, with those of the Global North. This approach proposes a set of techniques that overlap with the ones proposed by indigenous psychology, such as indigenization, where researchers in marginalized settings criticize hegemonic forms of knowledge by providing their specific and cultural-set theories and approaches.

As can be seen from this brief description of indigenous psychology and TFTS practices, these disciplines are a clear example of how it is possible to combine the individual and collective levels, obtaining a psychological and scientific

research truly universal and not based on the exclusion of groups that are considered as minorities by neoliberal thought.

4.3 Decolonizing psychological curriculum

Phiri, Sajid and Delanerolle (2023) underline how the decolonization psychology approach can and should also be applied in the academic context. As was already described earlier in the chapter two, neoliberalism has resulted in a mainstream psychology, focused on the individual rather than its context, with excessive focus on quantity as opposed to quality (Gezgin, 2019). The ideas brought forward by the decolonialist approach are conceptually very close to those of indigenous psychology and TFTS (Theory from the south) described in the previous paragraph.

The idea of decolonization is about trying to understand the effects that colonization, as an overarching framework, has had and continues to have on individuals, on various social structures (family, nations, institutions) and on the production of knowledge itself (Bhatia, 2020). As argued by Fanon, one of the main thinkers and theorists of decolonial theory also in the field of psychoanalysis, the ultimate goal of the decolonial approach is to rethink the damaging colonial discourses on selfhood (Fanon, 1963). Although the main theme of this thesis is not specifically related to racism, it is important to move towards an ever-increasing systematic and intersectional understanding of the various power structures that are interconnected and acting in synergy with each other.

A study by Mashiyi and colleagues (2020) which aimed to investigate the perception of lecturers about the possibility of implementing decolonization processes showed that there was great misinformation about this issue. As reported by Phiri and colleagues (2023), previous attempts to counter this phenomenon have failed, and it is therefore necessary to implement a radical and structural change, starting from the way in which Western history is told by reporting the direct experiences of those who suffered colonialism.

4.4 The future of psychotherapy practice

As described in the previous chapters, neoliberal ideology is so widespread that it manifests itself at the level of individual relationships and interactions, including therapeutic ones: following a foucaultian logic, it is then possible to identify the different ways in which this set of processes takes place (Foucault, 1979; LaMarre, Smoliak, Cool, Kinavey & Hardt, 2019). Pavòn-Cuéllar and Orozco Guzmàn (2017) question whether psychotherapy can confront neoliberal ideology in a way that may counteracts it; as analyzed by Butler (1993) and Wandel (2001), the fact that there is a dominant ideology does not prevent the creation of alternative modes of thought, but rather it strongly expresses the need for such approaches to thinking which go against the status quo (LaMarre, Smoliak, Cool, Kinavey & Hardt, 2019). Conceiving neoliberalism as a cultural and social construct allows it to be identified in a more clear and precise way, and at the same time allows it to be questioned through different forms of opposition, including therapeutic work; it’s therefore necessary to consider all

those micro-interactions, and the consequent micro-shifts, that take place in the clinical setting which allow specific individual trends to be modified: this aspect can create a virtuous circle based on an understanding of what it means to be in a specific body at a given time and place (LaMarre, Smoliak, Cool, Kinavey & Hardt, 2019). Psychotherapy under neoliberalism, as reported by, is characterized by an intrinsic and paradoxical contradiction: if on the one hand psychotherapy represents, as described above, another form for the dissemination of neoliberal ideology, on the other hand provides the possibility of cultivating subjectivities that go to disturb and oppose the dominant ideology (LaMarre, Smoliak, Cool, Kinavey & Hardt, 2019). As pointed out by Sugarman (2015), it is necessary for therapists to become more aware of their role in these processes. However, considering the close interconnectedness that persists between various oppressive systems such as racism, heterosexism, ageism, colonialism and classism (Rimke, 2016), it is necessary for the clinician to broaden his horizons and recognize his own role in care, which is therefore a political role. The conception of the political value of psychotherapy should not be understood in a partisan sense, but rather in the sense of a practice that practice that promotes constant critical thinking and truly emancipatory.

This conception of psychotherapy as an emancipatory and liberating practice recalls the theorization coined by Ignacio Martìn-Barò (1942-1989) on the psychology of liberation (*Psicologìa de la Liberaciòn*). Martìn-Barò was a Spanish social psychologist and Jesuit priest who dedicated his life and clinical and social research to helping the people of El Salvador and Latin America; the purpose of

liberation psychology is to constantly question the fact that a science which has devoted itself to the analysis of human behavior, has conceptualized this element in a dimension totally separated from the cultural, societal, spiritual and historical contexts (Sloan, 2002). Thus, there's the need for a psychology - and consequently for psychotherapy, which allows to counter economic inequality and political oppression, and at the same time to create a new epistemology that is inclusive of human suffering on a large scale (Sloan, 2002).

As reported by Sloan (2002), Martìn-Barò has developed a theoretical framework similar to the work of Fromm and Adorno, emphasizing the close dialectical relationship between political structures and social relations and individual subjectivities: these hegemonic forms of power are assimilated into the personalities of individuals in the form of traits of passivity and submission.

Therefore, it's necessary the figure of a psychologist truly engaged in his work of liberation and emancipation, working closely with individuals and participating actively with them in these processes of transformation (Sloan, 2002).

Similarly to what has just been argued, Sorrell (2018) describes how a possible way to make psychotherapy an emancipatory practice is represented by an empathic connection with the Other; this element would thus support and fuel the courage for independent and critical action. At the same time, the psychotherapist should emancipate himself from the limitations imposed by the technique itself and the bureaucracy (Sorrell, 2018). Consequently, a new conception of professional ethics is required: if on the one hand the therapist has the ultimate goal to avoid causing harm to the patient, on the other hand, the clinician should

discourage the underlying power dimension inherent in the therapeutic relationship so as to promote an intersubjective encounter that would be truly transformative (Sorrell, 2018). Speaking of professional ethics, Sugarman (2015) stresses that the clinician and psychologist in a broad sense have the duty to confront their role in perpetuating hegemonic forms of power and control, because of the potentially liberating nature of the profession itself.

4.5 The heterodox economy

Lee (2008) explains how during the 20th century a clear distinction between two different theoretical approaches was slowly developed: on the one hand, the mainstream economic, and on the other the heterodox economics. Heterodox economics refers to a set of theories developed by various economists that represent an alternative to the so-called mainstream economics, therefore to the current neoliberal economic model: this approach derives Austrian economics, feminist economics, Institutional-evolutionary economics, Marxian-radical economics, post Keynesian and Sraffian economics (Lee, 2008). The interesting aspect is that heterodox economists broaden their theories to explore issues tied to social processes, including areas like racism, gender, and the influence of ideologies and societal myths (Lee, 2008). Moreover, the ultimate goal of the heterodox economics approach is to try to develop a series of policies that have an ethical value, that implies the seeking to improve human dignity and consequently human well-being (Lee, 2008). The example of the heterodox economy is therefore an alternative to the current economic model (Lee, 2008)

and represents an example of how it is possible to develop policies that are as directly engaged in improving the well-being of citizens. Therefore, it is important to investigate how public health, including the practice of psychotherapy itself, can benefit from the implementation of these alternative policies.

5. LIMITATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

This thesis aims to increase awareness and the importance of the effects of social organization in psychotherapeutic practice. In particular, the neoliberal ideology is considered as one of the main hegemonic forms of power that permeates society in a deeply rooted way. Both neoliberalism and psychotherapy are conceived as cultural objects, consequently changing, subject to constant transformations, and therefore potentially modifiable. The need for new perspectives in both psychological scientific research and clinical practice that take into account the complex interweaving of cultural and social factors on the one hand, and individual factors on the other, is discussed. However, despite the fact that several authors have been interested in these aspects over the years and have consequently tried to propose alternative solutions, there is little literature on this topic; this element on the one hand represents the strong underestimation of hegemonic systems of oppression by psychological sciences, and on the other hand clearly shows the need for a new approach in the discipline that is coherent and aware of the constant changes taking place at the social and cultural level. In addition, the lack of literature on the subject does not allow clear indications as to how these problems of the discipline can be tackled.

Though, it must be underlined that empirical research, despite its precision in carrying out controlled experiments and research studies, it's hardly capable of studying power dynamics.

However, some possibilities are proposed, which can be summed up in the attempt to produce an integration not only of knowledge but mostly of a cultural

type, that could potentially allow an epistemological modification. Consequently, this epistemological change could lead to a new conception of psychotherapy not only as a healing practice operating at the individual level, but rather as an agent that in synergy with other factors could help individuals in their process of emancipation, not only from themselves and their suffering, but also from the set of systems of oppression which are often the hidden cause of their mental state. Psychotherapy and psychological science in general have the task of moving more and more towards a reparative type of social justice, which allows laying the foundations for a more equitable and conscious society.

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