

The Psychotherapy Taking Books as Medicines

Solving the Psychological Distress of College Students by Reading Therapy*

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Abstract—Reading therapy is a method for treating mental illness and solving psychological problems by reading books. It emphasizes helping readers solve negative emotional distress by reading books or touching other information materials to achieve a balance between body and mind. This paper analyzes the concept and treatment principle of reading therapy, and explores how to use it to help college students get out of psychological distress in combination with specific examples.

Keywords—reading therapy; treatment principle; specific measures

I. INTRODUCTION

At present, due to the pressure of academics, emotions, employment, interpersonal communication, etc., the mental health problems of college students are becoming more and more obvious. According to relevant research, in the mid-1980s, there were 23.25% of college students with psychological problems or obstacles. In the 1990s, the number rose to 25%. After entering the new century, it rose to 30%, and it is still growing at a rate of 10% every year. [1] In this situation, it is an important and urgent task in the current ideological and political work in colleges and universities to explore new and more effective ways to solve the mental health problems of college students and help them get out of psychological distress. Among so many ideas and methods, I think that reading therapy is particularly noteworthy.

II. THE CONCEPT OF READING THERAPY

Liu Xiang, a scholar of the Han Dynasty, once said in "Shi Shuo": "The book is like medicine. Appropriate reading can cure the disease." Lu You, a poet of the Southern Song Dynasty, also said in a poem "Zhenshangzuo": "The book is a good doctor when you are sick." Perhaps people will ask: Can reading cure a disease? The answer is yes. In the intersection of psychology and medicine and literature, there is a set of methods for treating mental illness and solving psychological problems by reading books. This is called reading therapy. It is generally believed that "reading therapy" is a kind of therapy that relies on reading books or contacting other information materials to help readers solve negative emotional distress and then achieve balance between body and mind. When referring

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to this word, people may feel strange and curious. This is because China has only been involved in this field of research since the early 1990s, and it started relatively late.

In fact, in the West, research and practice on reading therapy has been nearly a hundred years old. As early as 1916, American Samuel McChord Crothers first created and used the term in the Atlantic Monthly. By 1961, "Reading Therapy" was included in the Merriam-Webster New International English Dictionary as a proper noun. The specific explanation includes two aspects. One is to use reading materials for help in solving personal problems or for psychiatric therapy, and the other is to help people solve some personal internal problems through guided reading. After the 1990s, reading therapy was introduced to China. Under the efforts of scholars such as Wang Bo, Gong Meiling, and Chen Shumei, papers and books on the introduction and study of reading therapy came out. Reading therapy is receiving increasing attention.

III. TREATMENT PRINCIPLES OF READING THERAPY

Gao Song, a scholar of the Ming Dynasty, once pointed out in "Zunshengbajian": "Reading in the right way can achieve the magical effect of curing and conditioning the body." [2] In fact, reading does have the effect of "preventing disease" and "treating the disease." Examples of this are not uncommon. During the Three Kingdoms period, Cao Cao had been unable to eat and sleep well because of suffering from Tou Feng disease. Later, after reading Chen Lin's "A Declaration of War for Yuan Shao to Cao Cao", he was shocked by a cold sweat, and he miraculously no longer had a headache. In the Qing Dynasty, Qin Zikai was very painful because of the sore. However, the reading of "The Story of the Stone" made him forget the pain, and he eventually recovered without taking medicine. Modern writer Qin Xiaou said in "Reading and Resting": "I have been susceptible to illness since childhood, and I was most afraid of taking medicine and injections. Almost every time, I read "Journey to the West", "The Investiture of the Gods", "Legend of Yung Ching", "The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes" and other books to get a full rest and recuperate. [3] From the perspective of reading therapy, all of the above can be regarded as medical records through reading treatment.

Then, further exploration of why reading therapy can treat mental illness involves the treatment principle of reading therapy. On this issue, the author summarizes it into two

aspects: one is the principle of embryology, and the other is the principle of psychology.

First, from the perspective of embryology, it emphasizes finding the “starting point” or “end point” of things or phenomena. It believes that if something or phenomenon first originated for some reason, then in its long development, the thing should always serve this cause. Specific to reading therapy, after investigation, we believe that the act of reading books occurs to some extent for treatment.

In ancient times, the living environment of human beings was very bad. Experiencing the cold and heat, the wind and rain, the fierce beasts and even the sickness and death, test the human spiritual world all the time. Confusion, trepidation, fear, and horror attack the fragile soul of mankind day after day. In order to explain the origin of the world and various unknown phenomena, soothe the soul, man gave birth to religion and philosophy; in order to express thoughts and feelings, man created literature and art. Therefore, from the perspective of genesis, whether it is religion, philosophy, literature or art, the motives of these humanities are due to spiritual crises such as the emptiness, helplessness, fear and bewilderment of early human beings in the face of nature that needed to create spiritual pillars and value systems for healing. It shows that in a certain sense, the humanities itself is produced for the purpose of treatment. Innately, it has the function of treatment. Then reading the books as the carrier of the humanities can also be regarded as a kind of comfort, relief and compensation to the human mental crisis, so of course it has the effect of treatment, which is the principle of the occurrence of reading therapy. Through reading, people can be relieved of feelings of loss and loneliness, so that people can concentrate their minds, eliminate distracting thoughts, clear mindedness, and keep mind peace, thereby achieving the purpose of curing the disease, strengthening the body and maintaining mental health.

Second, from a psychological perspective, psychology believes that reading can enable people to produce psychological phenomena such as feeling, perception, memory, thinking, language, emotion, will, interest, etc. The meaning of reading is not only to satisfy the understanding of words, but more importantly, reading can give readers a rich spiritual experience, such as resonance, purification and understanding. When readers reading literary works, they always form a “expected vision”. That is, when they find that the people or things in the works are consistent with their own experiences, they will have strong recognition and resonance. At the same time, through the spiritual integration with the characters of the works, the negative emotions of the readers are comforted and relieved, and they will obtain a kind of “positive energy” to realize the purification and sublimation of their spirit. They may therefore have an aesthetic pleasure, or arouse lofty ideals, or change the attitude of being alive. As early as the Spring and Autumn Period, Confucius proposed that reading (reading poetry) has the functions of “xing” (expressing sentiment), “view” (observing the customs), “group” (learning from each other), and “resentment” (dissipating grievances). Coincidentally, the novelist Feng Menglong pointed out in the Preface to the Ancient and Modern Novels that reading popular novels can make “the sly people become brave, the lascivious people become dignified, the mean people become

honest, and the stubborn people become ashamed.” [4] --This is the charm of reading.

IV. TO USE READING THERAPY TO HELP COLLEGE STUDENTS GET OUT OF PSYCHOLOGICAL DISTRESS

In today's era of information explosion, the Internet, mobile phones, tablets and new media have dramatically changed people's reading habits. People are liberated from books, the whole world has become a study, and reading has become more and more simple and casual, especially for the group of college students, who have become the “first recipients” of these new things and fresh technologies. However, reading is a “double-edged sword”. A healthy works can make people energetic and progressive. In turn, unhealthy works can make people depressed and go astray. Under such situation, how should colleges and universities, as the main body of ideological and political education, carry out reading therapy to make it truly effective? I believe that the key lies in the following aspects:

A. *Promoting Ideas and Training Instructors*

Compared with developed countries where reading therapy has been popular for many years, the research and practice of reading therapy in China is still at a relatively preliminary stage, and people's awareness of reading therapy is relatively low. Therefore, in colleges and universities to carry out reading therapy, we must first promote the concept of reading therapy, so that college students can understand and accept the relevant principles of reading therapy, and form a sense of relieving psychological stress through reading therapy. With regard to specific measures, it is possible to popularize the knowledge of reading therapy via some activities, such as holding special lectures, conducting special exchanges, and organizing essays. At the same time, it is necessary to train a group of teachers who are familiar with reading therapy as “reading tutors” or “reading therapy guides”, who should guide students to effectively use reading therapy. The “reading tutors” should have a deeper understanding of reading therapy and should have relevant background knowledge in psychology and library science. They need to be familiar with the basic situation of the students and also the basic situation of the library's literature resources, in order to more accurately select the recommended reading list for students.

B. *Carefully Choosing Reading List and Read Classic*

The core of the implementation of reading therapy is to carefully select and recommend the “reading prescription”. The “prescription” here refers to the books for reading. Only reading the right books can help college students to solve their psychological problems. Regarding the choice of reading books, I believe that two basic principles must be adhered to. One is reading the classics; the other is different people need different books, and different books suit for different people.

On the one hand, the choice of the book for reading should insist on the classics. The so-called “classic” is the crystallization of the times and national culture, the essence of human civilization, and the source of the national spirit. Each country has its well-known literary classics, needless to say

China, one of the four ancient civilizations. The 5,000-year history of Chinese civilization has laid a solid foundation for Chinese culture and has accumulated into a profound soil of Chinese literature. Among the countless treasures of literature, there have been many classic literary works, such as *The Book of Songs*, *The Songs of Chu*, *Tang Poems*, *Song Poems*, *Yuan Drama*, and *Ming-Qing Novels*. These literary classics provide us with spiritual food and nourish the hearts of countless Chinese people with its rich cultural heritage and rich cultural connotations. At present, it is a certain urgency to advocate college students to read the classics, because the psychological problems of many college students are closely related to the distortion of values, the lack of faith in life, and the lack of motivation in life. Reading classics can help college students re-establish value ideals and faith in life. However, for both the value ideals and faith in life, it is necessary to have a rich cultural heritage. Only by combining the extensive reading of the classics and the massive absorption of spiritual resources

On the other hand, the choice of the book for reading should also pay attention that different people need different books, and different books suit for different people. The so-called "different people need different books" is to recommend different books for college students in different psychological states, just like "Use different keys to open different locks". For those who have nervous relationship because of their bad temper, you can recommend them to read books that make people calm down, like some beautiful classical poetry. Such as Tao Yuanming's "Picking chrysanthemums under the eastern fence, and leisurely see Nanshan.", and Wang Wei's "Go to the end of the water, sit and watch the clouds rise", they will make people feel happy and peaceful; For those who lack life goals and ideals, and who are slow-moving, they can be recommended to read celebrity biographies or successful inspirational works, such as Roman Roland's "Celebrity Biography", Stefan Zweig's "Three Masters" and "Sternstunden der Menschheit", Yevetarel's "Napoleon", Carnegie's "How to Stop Worrying and Start Living", and "How to Win Friends and Influence People", to inspire their courage and confidence; For those who are pessimistic, boring, and worried, they can be recommended to read the works of world humor masters, like Maupassant, O. Henry, Chekhov, and Mark Twain, as well as the Qing Dynasty's "Jest Books", Wu Jinglian's "The Scholars" and Qian Zhongshu's "Fortress Be sieged", they are all masterpieces of humorous literature. By reading these works, readers will understand what are the true, the good and the beautiful, and what are the false, the bad and the ugly. They can release their repressed feelings from reading.

The so-called "different books suit for different people" is to classify and recommend the books to different readers according to the differences of the content of the work and the effect of reading. For example, the British writer Bacon said in "Of Studies": "Histories make men wise; poets witty; the mathematics subtle; natural philosophy deep; moral grave; logic and rhetoric able to contend. *Abeunt studia in mores.*" It can be seen that different reading materials will bring different effects. Zhang Chao, a talented scholar of the Qing Dynasty, once wrote a remarkable article "Books as Herbals", which can be regarded as a classic reading therapy bibliography. This

article mimics the Chinese traditional herbal pharmacopoeia and analyzes the medicinal properties, curative effects and side effects of traditional Chinese classics by revealing their medicinal properties. [5]Here are three examples:

[The Four Books] includes "University", "The Doctrine of the Mean", "The Analects of Confucius", and "Mencius". All are natured, sweet, and non-toxic. Taking it can keep your head clear and control your desires. Taking it for a long time makes people broad-minded.

[Five Classics] includes "The Book of Changes", "The book of songs", "Shangshu", "Spring and Autumn Annals", and "The Book of Rites". All are natured, sweet, non-toxic, and the service is the same as the four books.

[Histories] It is of different types and its nature is almost the same. There only two kinds of "Historical Records" and "Han Shu" are sweet and others are lingering. You can increase your knowledge after taking it, but you need to suspend it when you are very angry, or crying, and then take it after you recover. But the price of this drug is so high that a weak home often cannot afford it. This medicine is not suitable for taking it from the beginning. It is better to take the Four Books and the Five Classics before taking this medicine. It takes a long time to take the effect to be obvious, not one day. The official publication is the best, most of the wild ones are counterfeit, and the effect is not good. It is better to get wine when serving.

Comparing the above three "prescriptions", we found that Zhang Chao has a very unique understanding of the reading efficacy of traditional books. For example, he believes that the "Four Books and Five Classics" are natured, sweet, and non-toxic, which can make people clear-hearted and broad-minded; and historiography can make people grow their knowledge and broaden their horizons, but sometimes they also have some "side effects", such as making people "very irritated" and "keep crying." Therefore, the merits of reading history should be based on the "Four Books and Five Classics", step by step, and should also distinguish between the official history and the wild history. In addition to the "Four Books", "Five Classics" and "Histories", Zhang Chao's "Books as Herbals" also commented on the ancient classics such as "Zhuji", "Zhuji", "Buddhist Sutra", Taoist Sutra", etc. The outline is simple and concise, and it can be called a prescription for ancient reading therapy.

C. Developing Habits and Striving for Effectiveness

In addition to carefully choosing reading list, guiding college students to develop good habits is also an important part of the implementation of reading therapy. In my opinion, the key to developing a good habit of reading is to deal with the relationship between "superficial reading" and "deep reading." The so-called "superficial reading" is an overview reading that does not require understanding; The so-called "deep reading" is to intensively and attentively read, and even make notes and write comprehension when reading. However, it is worrying that superficial reading has become the way of reading for most people, including college students. Whenever we turn on our computer or mobile phone, the information will flock and it will be overwhelming. However, in front of the

vast amount of information, we always read ten lines at one glance. It's hard to calm down and read quietly, let alone write notes and comprehension. For reading therapy, it is very difficult to achieve real curative effect if you use the reading method of giving a hurried and cursory glance. Therefore, deep reading is the meaning of reading therapy. Especially for some classic works of humanities, it is the product of the author's deep thoughts on the times, society and history. It has the eternal value beyond time and space. It needs to be read repeatedly to get the thinking. Therefore, guiding college students to learn to distinguish between different reading materials, using different reading methods and strategies to avoid superficial, fast and vulgarized reading methods, this is an important task that reading therapy needs to be completed.

D. Innovating Form and Focusing on Integration

The reading materials used in traditional reading therapy are mainly paper books. However, with the progress of the times and society, people's reading style has undergone great changes, which requires that when implementing reading therapy, it should also keep pace with the times. Specifically, it is necessary to enrich the way of reading, but also to expand the object of reading. On the one hand, in addition to the traditional paper literature, online reading and e-reading are also popular reading styles for college students. On the other hand, in addition to reading books, audio e-books, celebrity lecture videos, classic inspirational movies, TV series adapted from famous works, and even other art forms such as calligraphy, painting, music, etc. can be the object of reading. Through the integration of a variety of reading methods, we can adopt their good points and avoid their shortcomings and complementary advantages. In addition, we can also make full use of modern convenient communication methods, such as the establishment of QQ group, WeChat group, discussion area, etc., to encourage college students to exchange reading experience. Transferring from the past "one person reading alone" mode to the "multiple people read together" mode will maximize the effect of reading therapy.

V. CONCLUSION

All in all, colleges and universities, as the cradle of college students' growth and success, shoulder the heavy responsibility of management, training and education. Today, college students' mental health problems are becoming more and more prominent. The development of reading therapy in colleges and universities has important practical significance for solving the mental health problems of college students. It is conducive to adapting bad attitudes, alleviating the pressures of college students in learning, life, employment, love, etc. It is also conducive to improving the cultivation and quality of college students in a subtle way, to achieve their self-improvement and self-balance, and form a healthy and mature personality. Of course, for China, the exploration of this new type of treatment method of reading therapy, which integrates prevention and treatment, is still in its infancy, and its research prospects are very broad. It requires us to constantly improve, dig and expand in practice.

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