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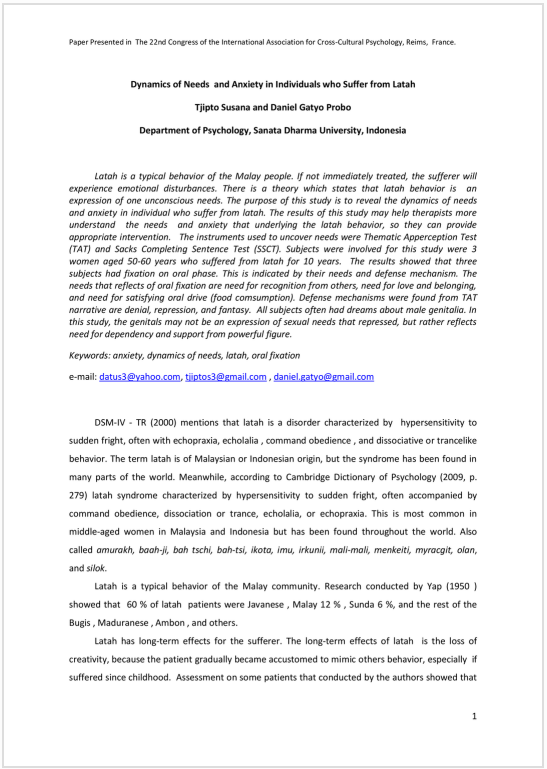

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Dynamics of Needs and Anxiety in Individuals who Suffer from Latah

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Latah is a typical behavior of the Malay people. If not immediately treated, the sufferer will experience emotional disturbances. There is a theory which states that latah behavior is an expression of one unconscious needs. The purpose of this study is to reveal the dynamics of needs and anxiety in individual who suffer from latah. The results of this study may help therapists more understand the needs and anxiety that underlying the latah behavior, so they can provide appropriate intervention. The instruments used to uncover needs were Thematic Apperception Test (TAT) and Sacks Completing Sentence Test (SSCT). Subjects were involved for this study were 3 women aged 50-60 years who suffered from latah for 10 years. The results showed that three subjects had fixation on oral phase. This is indicated by their needs and defense mechanism. The needs that reflects of oral fixation are need for recognition from others, need for love and belonging, and need for satisfying oral drive (food comsumption). Defense mechanisms were found from TAT narrative are denial, repression, and fantasy. All subjects often had dreams about male genitalia. In this study, the genitals may not be an expression of sexual needs that repressed, but rather reflects need for dependency and support from powerful figure.

Keywords: anxiety, dynamics of needs, latah, oral fixation

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DSM-IV - TR (2000) mentions that latah is a disorder characterized by hypersensitivity to sudden fright, often with echopraxia, echolalia , command obedience , and dissociative or trancelike behavior. The term latah is of Malaysian or Indonesian origin, but the syndrome has been found in many parts of the world. Meanwhile, according to Cambridge Dictionary of Psychology (2009, p. 279) latah syndrome characterized by hypersensitivity to sudden fright, often accompanied by command obedience, dissociation or trance, echolalia, or echopraxia. This is most common in middle-aged women in Malaysia and Indonesia but has been found throughout the world. Also called *amurakh, baah-ji, bah tschi, bah-tsi, ikota, imu, irkunii, mali-mali, menkeiti, myracgit, olan,* and *silok*.

Latah is a typical behavior of the Malay community. Research conducted by Yap (1950) showed that 60 % of latah patients were Javanese , Malay 12 % , Sunda 6 %, and the rest of the Bugis , Maduranese , Ambon , and others.

Latah has long-term effects for the sufferer. The long-term effects of latah is the loss of creativity, because the patient gradually became accustomed to mimic others behavior, especially if suffered since childhood. Assessment on some patients that conducted by the authors showed that

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by Susana Tjipto

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in the early days of suffering, the content of latah is male genitalia. But, at the next phase, they will repeating any other words or behaviors that heard or seen before. They also could follow the other people instruction impulsively.

There are several theories about of latah. The first theory states that latah is a shock response because of the person is accustomed to solitude in the jungle (Kenny , 1978) . There is also the theory that latah is a way to break socio- cultural rules that are very rigid (Geertz in Wen, 2001). Regarding the incidence of latah among Javanese, Geertz said that Java culture is characterized by four themes: the value of elegant and polite speech, a concern with social status,sexual prudery, and the dread of being startled. He stated that latah is a peculiarly appropriate means of communicating marginality to others. These theories indicate that latah is seen as result of habituation.

Geertz (in Kenny, 1978) and Winzeler (in Kenny, 1978) said that latah happen because someone stunned at European people who came to Malay region. According to Yap (in Wen, 2001), several scholars view latah as a primitive form of fera reaction or primitive psychoneurosis among uncivilized people. In addition, latah also appeared as a response to sexual anxiety (Yap , 1952). As point out by chiu and colleagues (in Wen, 2001), the traditional polygamous of extended family in Malay is male dominatioon. Within this tradition, latah is a socially accepted as a female attention-seeking behavior, one of the few permissible overt, excitable, aggressive, and/or sexual demontrastion. Latah is a culturally emotional outlet for females. In Java, latah case is more occur in women aged 50-60 years (Geertz, in Wen, 2001). Previous research found that 157 cases of latah found in women, only 4 cases in men (Van Loon in Winzeler , 1984). These theories assumed that latah are caused by anxiety. Latah women usually using sexual words and had a sexual dream (Van Loon in Winzeler , 1984).

An initial assessment of 3 latah women aged 40-50 years done by authors showed that they had dream about male genitalia. They said that latah was not occured simultaneously with these dreams. Latah emerged when the dream was forgotten. Based on these findings the authors assume that latah has the same function as a dream is as a means to bring drives that had been suppressed and become means of fulfilling desires. They dreamed about male genitalia becasue of their sexual needs were not being fulfiled, and further when their dream content has begun to enter into unconsciousness, the latah behavior was appeared. According to Freud (1958) dreams has a wish fulfillment function. The dream transforms thought into halusinatif experience.

Previous studies more talked latah as a cultural bound disorder. Winzeler (in Kenny, 1978) concluded that latah arise because of rigid limitation in cultural and religious systems. Geertz (in Kenny, 1978) assumed that why many women experienced latah is because of their the position in the structure of the Malay culture tends to be weaker, so it's easier being the object of jokes. While

Gimlette (1897) based on his study concluded that latah is a state of hysteria in which the patient is experiencing self hypnosis. What is interesting both Gimlette and other researchers findings is that the Malay community did not see latah as a disorder.

Based on previous explanation and findings as well as the results of our preliminary assessment, we assume that latah is driven by sexual need. These needs can not be accommodated properly and repressed by patients. This repression caused anxiety and manifested in latah behavior. Therefore, we still want to know is latah that initiated by dream about sexual content, solely driven by sexual needs are not acceptable or there are any other needs that drive the latah?

The purpose of this study is to find the dynamic needs and anxiety experienced by latah patients.The results of this study may help therapists more understand the needs and anxiety underlying the latah behavior, so they can provide appropriate intervention

Method

This study used a qualitative approach using narrative methods that focus more on the stories told by subjects. Subjects were asked to tell a story based on TAT cards. The dynamic of needs and anxiety will be interpreted from their story.

Instrument

Needs and anxiety were revealed using projective techniques. This technique or method can uncover the unconscious, tend to be free of norms, so that researchers can explore the depths of the data.

Instruments used in this study were SSCT (Sacks Completing Sentence Test) and TAT (Thematic Apperception Test). TAT is a technique that is used to view personality in interpersonal context and subject interpretation about his environment (Bellak & Abrams, 1997). By using TAT, we can see the dynamics of needs, mechanism of problems solving, anxiety, ego defense mechanisms and dynamics of the ego-superego. These data can describe the dynamics of personality in latah patients. Meanwhile, SSCT is a projective technique that aims to bring the individual attitude towards things or certain situations, so that the tester can determine the state of the dominant personality within testee (Sack & Levy in Abrams & Bellak, 1997). Although its main function is to look at the attitude that can later be used to determine the state of personality, some parts of the SSCT can also be used as a validation tool of TAT. For example, section about parents can also be used to supplement the data of TAT. So the use of TAT that is reinforced by SSCT is very useful to facilitate the authors to prove the dynamic needs and anxiety in latah patients.

The author used 13 TAT cards, covering 10 main cards (1, 2, 3BM, 4, 6BM, 7GF, 8BM, 9GF, 10, 13MF) and 3 additional card (3GF, 6GF, 8GF). The selection of the 10 main cards is based on the assumption that 10 main cards can bring up the basic relationships and strong emotions. In addition to the 10 cards can be used in both men and women (Abrams & Bellak, 1997).

Selection of 3 additional cards based on conformity to gender considerations and the belief of researchers that these cards are able to uncover patterns of relation and relationship problems of respondents with significant others.

Subject

Subjects were involved for this study were 3 women aged 50-60 years who suffered from latah for 10 years. Before suffered from latah, they often dreamed about male genitalia

Result and Discussion

All subjects began to experience latah after dreaming of male genitalia. Freud (1958) stated that the dream is one of the ways that humans used to meet their needs. Then it can simply be said that the dream of the male genitalia is the impact of their sexual needs thar were not fulfiled. In addition, they stated that their latah was getting worse because of people made their latah behavior as a joke.

Based on the interpretation of the TAT stories, there are indication that they have the type of Personality Compliant. This is apparent from their needs that are dominant, such as the need to be noticed, to be helped, to teach others, even appears also from oral needs, and aggression that emerged as a result of the desire to get close to others. This conclusion strengthened by the findings of SSCT. SSCT results showed that they fear of being abandoned by others, consider themselves as a weak person, and saw the leader as a protector figure.

According to Horney (in Schlutz & Schlutz, 1998), people who have Compliant Personality types have a need for affection, acceptance, and to be loved. People with this personality tendencies need a dominant figure who is able to protect and guide them. In addition, people with this personality type tend to manipulate their partner to meet all their needs. They tend to view others as superior, even on things they actually could do, they will see others are more superior (Schlutz & Schlutz, 1998).

For subject 1, needs related with Personality Compliant appears from responses to 12 cards, which are on the card 4, 10, 8GF, 8BM, 13MF, 7GF, 6GF, 1, 2, 9GF, 3GF, and 6BM. From the story in card 4, it appears that there is a need to do things that are favored by her partner and needs to be

accompanied by her partner. In this story can be seen also that, although the main character angry with her partner, she tried to suppress her emotion. On the subject 2, this tendency appears from responses to 10 cards, that are on the card 4, 7GF, 10, 6BM, 3GF, 13MF, 2, 3BM, 6GF, 8GF. People with this personality type will also tend to view others superior and can fulfill all their needs. As in 7GF card: "happy because he is successful, his desire may be fulfilled by his father." Meanwhile on the subject 3, her tendency emerged in responses to 9 cards, that are the card 2, 7GF, 10, 9GF, 8GF, 4, 8BM, 6GF, and 3BM. The themes of the stories told by the subjects showed a pattern Personality Compliant. From the themes of the story, it seems that she often felt anxious when their needs are not met. However, she tend to be waiting for someone to pity him.

It is apparent from the needs that tend to dominate, such as needs to be noticed, to be helped, to teach others, and oral-aggression needs associated with needs to be close to others. This finding is reinforced by the results of SSCT, such as fear of abandonment, see themselves as weak, and see the leader as a nurturing figure.

From the story of the subjects, we can see also neurotic needs, which are the need for personal achievement, for social recognition, for freedom, and for perfection. Some needs are mutually reinforcing, but some need inhibited other needs. It's like Horney said that the neurotic need influence each other. From responses of all subjects can be concluded that their needs caused anxiety. This anxiety emerged because they use denial, repression, and fantasy as a defense mechanism.

Based on the analysis using 10 variables Bellak, their problem-solving patterns tend to be similar, which are waiting to be helped. This problem-solving style leads to feelings of pleasure when their needs are met, and if not will cause the emergence of anxiety feeling, desire to contemplate, and sickness. Their needs to be considered also made them had multiple sources of anxiety, such as fear of distress and fear of abandonment.

As said earlier that people with type compliant personality tend to feel himself inferior and look for another figure which is superior. It is also apparent in the TAT stories that indicate that their super ego tend to give severe punishment when they made a mistake. Two of three subjects had lack of ego integrity that can be seen from their tendency to made story that was not realistic and did not execute well. The pressure from the super ego plus the fear of losing caused them are not able to meet their needs in a healthy way.

Based on the results of the analysis of TAT, it can be seen that all subjects have the need to have something, to accept something, or want to achieve something and need to be loved. This indicates that all subjects have a fixation on oral phase. According to Freud, satisfaction in this phase

is obtained through the process of receiving something, and their attachment object is the mother (Seimun, 2006).

Gimlette (1897) linked the latah with Hysteria based on common cause, that is anxiety. If we look at the definition of hysteria as a disorder in which sufferers experience instability of emotions such as fear and panic, which led to disturbance of sensory, motoric, and physical, then latah has similarities with the symptoms of hysteria, which is in terms of anxiety. Their anxiety emerged as a result of the conflict between the need and the super-ego.

Previous studies tended to associate the latah with socio-cultural conditions in a particular area (Winzeler, 1984) or anxiety arising from cultural and religious order which tended bind the individual, especially in women. This is why many women experience latah (Geertz, 1968). Based on TAT, we found that all seubjects have a very strong super ego. It is perhaps as a result of their cultural and religious rules. All subjects are middle aged women, may be they have same live experience. They were bringing up in a time when the social rules is still very strict. However, culture and religion as forming part of a super-ego that binding is not the only cause latah behavior. TAT showed that they tended to have a weak ego integrity. They tended to perceive themselves inferior and avoid their problem.

Conclusion

All subjects as previously described have some similarities. First, the needs which arises in the TAT stories if classified using the theory of neurotic needs Horney will converge on some neurotic needs. Dominant neurotic needs are a neurotic need for affection and acceptance, need for a strong companion figure, and to restrict their life. This indicates that they have a compliant personality types.

They have a fear of abandonment and fear of helplessness.This condition made them dependent on others. Their super ego are very strong and tend to suppress their needs. When their needs could not be accepted by the super ego, they tend to deny or did repression. The denial and repression mechanism that they did, caused their needs appeared as a dream and latah content.

Freud (1958) states that dreams arise because of the needs of individuals who are not completed in the real world. If using this theory, dreams about the genitals which led to the emergence latah behavior because of their sexual needs are not completed. However, the TAT results indicate that their dominant need is not the sexual need, but the need for love and superior figure to complement for their inferior feeling. Thus there is a possibility that Symbol of male genitals in their dream and latah, not merely because of their sexual needs, but rather reflecting

their need to depend on other people, need for love, and oral fixation. However, this conclusion needs to be proven by further research.

Recomendation

The present study involves only three women were married and middle-aged, who are all experienced latah preceded by a dream about male genitalia. For further research, preferably involving also the men and women of various ages and individu that their latah behavior wera not initiated by a dream about genitals. It is intended to look further if indeed latah behavior reflects compliant personality type.

Of all subjects, their latah behavior arised as a result of their psychological state. This behavior arised due to the strong super-ego, their helplessness feeling and fear of abandonment. This information is important, so that the therapist needs to help latah clients to overcome their inferiority and powerlessness. They also need to be helped to reflect on their experiences that make their extremely need the acceptance and support of others. It is possible these needs stems from the existence of conditional positive regard from their environment that causes incongruence between reality and expectations, and their defensive attitude towards reality (Rogers in Feist & Feist 2006). They need to be encouraged to accept themselves and build more realistic expectations.

For families and therapists, providing unconditional positive regard can be one way to alleviate the impact of latah behavior. Do not make latah behavior as an object of jokes because it could aggravate latah behavior.

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