

Impression Management in Psychotherapy

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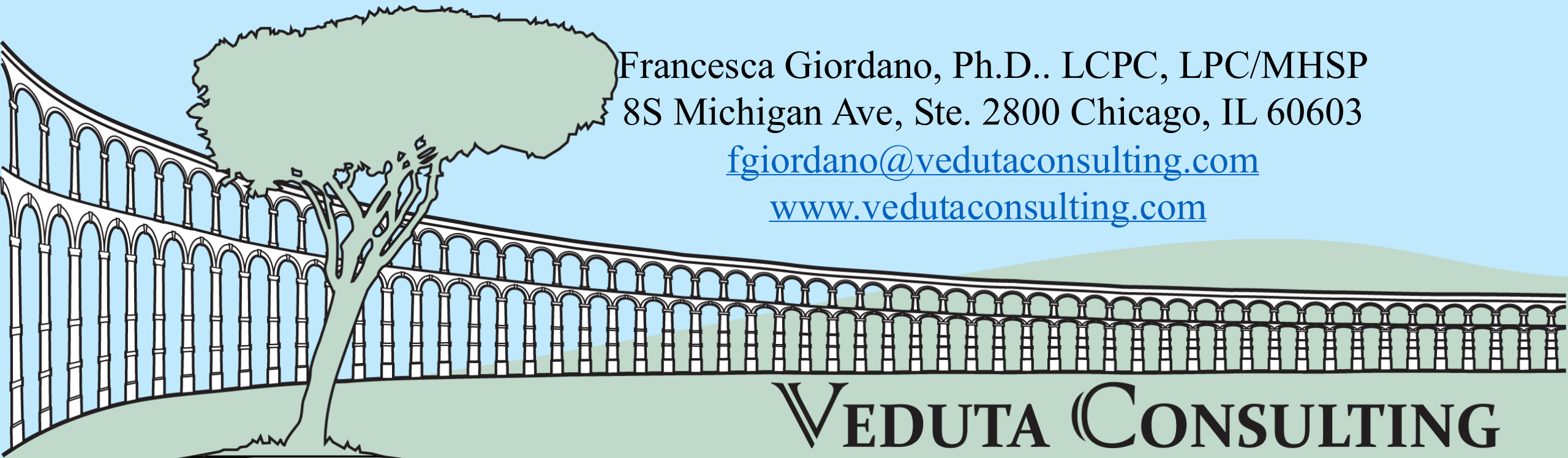
How to use yourself as an effective therapeutic tool

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VEDUTA CONSULTING

Introduction: Myself and Presentation

- 30 years a faculty member in Counselor Education and Supervision (Northern Illinois University and Northwestern University)
- Currently, owner of a private practice: Veduta Consulting, LLC
- Recently retiring to Sweetwater TN (outside Knoxville)



Introduction: Myself and Presentation

Introduction to Concepts: Impression, Rapport & Alliance

Characteristics of Impression: Voice, Words, Bias, Other

Ways to Use Impression: Attachment, Self-Disclosure, and Immediacy



Introduction: Workshop Origins

- Rooted in psychodynamic work: Self as instrument
- Rooted in my observations of supervisee/colleagues
- Rooted in coaching experiences:
 - Stand-up comic
 - Speaking with Presence



Introduction: Participants

Can you bring to mind.....

- An experience/case that has suggested you need to examine the impression you make on clients/other professionals?



Introduction Concepts: Impression

Impression: An idea, feeling, or opinion about something or someone, especially one formed without conscious thought or based on little evidence. The impression you make on a client can be both momentary and long-lasting. It is very important at the start of the relationship and evolves over time.

Everything about us makes an impression: Voice tone, language use, facial expression (or lack of), clothes, body language. All these things together are the “impression” you make on the client.

It is important to be self reflective about your impression. It is only through self-reflection that we can use our impression to increase our impact and facilitate change.

Impression isn't right/wrong; good/bad; managing your impression is about intentionality
(purpose and control)



Introduction Concepts: Definitions

Rapport: A friendly, harmonious relationship especially a relationship characterized by agreement, mutual understanding, or empathy that makes communication possible or easy. The feelings of connection, safety, and being understood that the client feels for the therapist. These feelings facilitate honest disclosure and are connected to effectiveness.

Difference between Impression and Rapport: Impression is more transient and potentially unconscious; evolves over time and under the therapist's control; it can be managed to facilitate change. Impression is more connected to transference and the corrective emotional experience. Rapport is the feeling of connection; it is the foundation of treatment but is not treatment itself.

Alliance: The measure of collaboration and partnership between the therapist and client. It has been characterized by three features including: Mutually developed treatment goals, Alignment on treatment tasks, Effective working relationship.



Introduction Activity: Impression

What impression do you think you make on clients?

- Personal characteristics
- Clients that you easily develop rapport with
- Clients that never come back after the first session
- Influence of your FOO
- The way you trigger cultural assumptions
- Hard-to-place, out-of-sync characteristics between your body and your voice
- Powerful ways in which you intentionally use your body and your voice



Characteristics of our speaking voice: Tone, Pace, Pitch, and Pause

Pitch: Sound of voice from high to low (including monotone). When we are on a roll, we broaden our pitch; when we are anxious, we flatten it

Tone: “The style or manner of expression in speaking.” The small shifts in shade and feeling we give words and phrases. Tone can be associated with the overall characteristics like strength or warmth. Tone can also be associated with sarcasm

Pace: The speed with which we speak. For many people, it is often too fast. When speech is well paced, it is often called a deliberate delivery. Pace is also associated with **Pause**

Pause: A moment stop or silence often at the end of a sentence or utterance. Often associated with taking a full breath. Breath after an utterance indicates its importance and power



Impressions Associated with Voice: Problems

1. Breathing and the Vocal Fry: When we are nervous or reactive, we speak without taking a deep breath. As a result, we hold our breath and our voices can come out stifled, raspy, or flat
2. Upspeak (pitching up at the end of a sentence), sounds like a question and can convey insecurity or doubt, hesitancy, or uncertainty
3. Common (but maybe overused) phrases. Phrases can get dulled by overuse. (What are yours?)



Impressions Associated with Voice

1. Tiny, subtle shift in intonation can suggest attachment or concern
2. English speakers tend to front-load our utterances. Starting out with energy when we move from speaking from not speaking; Stronger when we are nervous or uncomfortable
3. Hedging is using a filler word to soften the impact of a statement. While it might undermine credibility it can also soften impact
4. Quieter and slower speech suggests being private, intimate, and deliberately causal. Careful not to do this when you don't really want to (presentations vs therapy)



Impressions Associated with Voice: Conveying Emotions

1. Pleasantly nonresponsive face vs facial mobility
2. Connection between emotion and facial expression
3. Being emotional with purpose; Using your emotions rather than simply having them
4. Generation of personal power: Prime yourself for feeling powerful by thinking of a previous occasion when you felt great
5. Low tone can be an intimacy signal



Impressions Associated with Voice: Conveying Emotions

1. Ears have evolved to hear the emotions in others' voices and feel roused by them.
In the same way, softer, no emotional tones can be calming
2. The role of vulnerability: "The heart we are used to hiding." What is the connection between vulnerability and credibility?
3. Role of authenticity: "Revealing what matters to you like it matters to you"
4. Speaking in a relaxed state



Impression Associated with Voice: Words

1. The use of words. Words create power, add dimensions, and create insight. This is the connection between use of words and hunches when word capture the exact experience. Words work to increase awareness and convey empathy
2. Tell stories; Don't dodge, deflect, or demur. This is the advice given to professional speakers. What does this advice suggest about self-disclosure?
3. Words can be precise or vague; Can be full of jargon and intellectual which can convey the impression of intelligence but also indicates tribe membership or that knowledge/thoughts are more important than emotions.



Other Impression Management Issues: Bias

1. Understanding the role of bias in impression management is a different issue that skills associated with cultural competency. Impression management includes understanding the impression you may make on clients based on the demographic characteristics you have (or appear to have). This may include the intentional manipulation of these characteristics
2. Your communication style signals your identity and tribe
3. Bias of accented speak
4. “No one actually intends to take their parents into a job interview, but it seems they sneak in anyway” Research suggests speech patterns communicate social class



Other Aspects of Impression:

1. Clothes
2. Jewelry, and make-up
3. Office
4. Use of technology
5. Others?



Impression Management and Treatment: Attachment

Connection between therapist's impression and client's attachment:

One of the most important characteristics of modeling a secure attachment for the client is being inclusive. By varying our facial expression, voice tone, body posture and gesture; contours of speech and behaviors, we make as much space as possible for the full subjective experience of the client

We reflect not only what they tell us, but what they show us. Attachment is a “Conversation between limbic systems”

This suggests that the calmness, focus, and intensity of our impression is important; What about our impression effects this? Concerns about being “too intense” or “too distracted”

Nonverbal choreography or mirroring is important for attachment. We understand the relationship between attachment and impression when we reflect on ways in which our impression feels different based on different clients.

- For example, variations in eye contact.....



Impression Management and Treatment: Attachment

The goal in therapy is to be attuned, inclusive and collaborative; paying attention to the emotional, relational, and visceral/somatic aspects of our clients

How are we participating and what is the role of our impression?

This kind of self-awareness prompts intuitive interventions that foster an increased sense attunement and collaboration in our pursuit of shared goals. This allows the therapist to progressively deepen the fittedness and transform insecure working models to secure ones



Impression Management and Treatment: Immediacy and Self-Disclosure

Definition of Therapist Self-Disclosure: (TSD) Therapist statements that reveal something personal about the therapist. The revelation can be verbal and non-verbal (e.g., a family photo on the desk).

TSDs can be about feelings (e.g., “I get angry when someone pushes in front of me like that”), similarities (e.g., “I also had an anxiety disorder”), insight (e.g., “When I was a student, I realized that I had difficulty studying because I was distracted because of my parents’ divorce”), or strategies (e.g., “I try to eat fruits and vegetables and walk every day”).



Impression Management and Treatment: Immediacy and Self-Disclosure

Definition of Immediacy: A discussion of the therapeutic relationship by both the therapist and client in the here-and-now, involving more than social chitchat (e.g., ‘It’s nice to see you’) as well as any processing of what occurs in the here-and-now patient-therapist interaction”

Immediacy can involve therapists talking about the therapy relationship in the present moment with the client and includes asking about immediate feelings and thoughts (e.g., “How are you feeling talking about this with me?”), expressing immediate feelings (e.g., “I’m feeling annoyed that you are frequently late for sessions”), drawing parallels with other relationships (e.g., “You said no one seems to care about you. . . . I wonder if you feel that I don’t care about you?”), making the covert overt (e.g., “You seem so quiet. . . . I wonder how you feel about being here?”), acknowledging a breach in the relationship (e.g., “We seem to have reached an impasse”), and trying to repair ruptures (e.g., “I apologize for saying something offensive to you”).



Impression Management and Treatment: Immediacy and Self-Disclosure

Other ideas about Immediacy:

Some see the concept of immediacy to be focused on everyday experience that is more immediate, less reflective (in this sense, more real and spontaneous)

There is also the concept of mostly nonverbal immediacy

Temporal immediacy suggests that the quality of experience as now versus past or future

Research suggests that immediacy is a very advanced therapeutic skill and is used most effectively by experienced therapists.



Impression Management and Treatment: Immediacy and Self-Disclosure

Immediacy and its possible connection to intuition:

Immediacy can be seen as part of an intuitive system—that seemed to fit with recent ideas on mindfulness to access intuitive wisdom; Although the intuitive system is often described as the less rational driver of behavior, it also has important strengths. Intuitive thinking is quick and effortless and can deliver excellent results even without conscious awareness



Thank you!

Questions?

Comments?

Concerns?



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