

THE COUNSELLOR'S SELF
IN THERAPY

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Abstract

The person of the counsellor, or what is sometimes referred to as the counsellor's self, is the focus of this thesis. How the counsellor's self is described and manifested during therapy constitute the two main research questions. Various perspectives are presented from psychoanalysis, behaviour therapy, cognitive behaviour therapy, person centered therapy and systems therapy. While issues pertaining to the counsellor's self have been explored predominately by systems therapists, this study extends previous research by involving interviews with counsellors from a range of orientations.

The study is conducted within an interpretative research paradigm, and data are collected and interpreted according to a qualitative approach. Semi-structured interviews with 16 counsellors, from a range of theoretical orientations, constitute the primary method of data collection. Other data sources include a short questionnaire sent to the same counsellors, the researcher's reflective journal as well as recorded meetings between a peer debriefer and the researcher.

Study participants describe the counsellor's self as a multifaceted, positive and integrated entity. The counsellor's self includes participant's professional knowledge and skills as well as their beliefs, values, thoughts, feelings, personal style and an unknown aspect of self that some participants referred to as their unconscious. While somewhat influenced by past relationships and the client, the counsellor's self is primarily autonomous and defined by the individual counsellor. Although the counsellor's self has the capacity to change over time, in different environments and with different clients, the self also includes notions of stability and consistency. The counsellor's self is involved in therapy as an inevitable presence, a deliberate tool and a stance. Participants highlighted the importance of self-awareness and various professional and personal constraints on the involvement of self. A central function of the self in therapy is in the therapeutic alliance.

The study has implications for the training and supervision of counsellors and future psychotherapeutic research.

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Statement of Authorship

Except where reference is made in the text of the thesis, this thesis contains no material published elsewhere or extracted in whole or in part from a thesis by which I have qualified for or been awarded another degree or diploma.

No other person's work has been used without due acknowledgement in the main text of the thesis.

This thesis has not been submitted for the award of any degree or diploma in any other tertiary institution.

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