

PART ONE: A LITERATURE REVIEW.

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION.

This study evolved from the researcher's personal interest while practising psychotherapy. The study commenced with a literature search. At first glance, the literature on therapist self-disclosure appeared to be meagre. However, upon implementing various avenues of entrance into the territory, the researcher became cognizant of a vast number of references.

A very complex, variegated, and multi-faceted phenomenon emerged. To illustrate the nature and expansiveness of the concept, Goldstein's (1994: 419) definition is cited:

(therapist self-disclosure) ... defined as the therapist's conscious verbal or behavioral sharing of thoughts, feelings, attitudes, interests, tastes, experiences, or factual information about himself or herself or about significant relationships and activities in the therapist's life. Self-disclosure takes many forms: wearing a wedding band; decorating an office according to personal tastes; dressing stylishly or not as the case may be; revealing birthday, wedding anniversary, astrological sign, age, marital status, and the ages of children; telling about a vacation or week-end location; communicating the nature of the countertransference; commenting on good restaurants, politics, or important subjects; sharing interests in music, theatre, movies, art, computers, tennis,

skiing, or other pursuits; mentioning the illness or death of a significant person; discussing events such as one's marriage, pregnancy, illness, hospitalization, speaking engagements, or professional achievements; talking about one's ethnicity, sexual orientation, birthplace, whether one is a survivor of sexual abuse or the holocaust, or whether one is in recovery or a 12 step program; revealing feelings, experiences, or problems that are similar to those of the patient; talking about how one has solved problems, handled situations, or thought about life; and going to events where a patient will be present and/or has invited one, such as weddings, professional conferences, or artistic performances where it is impossible not to reveal aspects of one's personal self.

Due to its **multi-faceted nature**, therapist self-disclosure is a difficult concept to describe. This has fundamental implications when considering how to research this phenomenon. Weiner (1983) has for instance listed up to thirteen kinds of self-disclosure. These include, feelings, attitudes and opinions, formulations and interpretations, associations, mental imagery and fantasies, experiences, nudity, physical contact, history and other personal data, and relation to others.

Controversy is heightened by the conflicting indications and contraindications for the use of therapist self-disclosure as a critical psychotherapeutic intervention. There appear to be no consistent guidelines to answer fundamental questions pertaining to the use and advisability of therapist self-

disclosure (Buechler, 1993; Maroda, 1991). As Glazer (1981) has stated, while there will always be a difference of opinion concerning appropriateness, timing, and extent of therapist self-disclosure, most experienced therapists admit that it is an issue that they are forced to confront on a regular basis.

The confusion pertaining to the advisability of self-disclosure can be partially explained by the fact that indications and contra-indications are intricately tied to the therapist's theoretical orientation and his or her beliefs about how to practice therapy, and how to be present to one's patients.

Theoretical orientation is one contextual variable. There are others that pertain to, for instance, the therapist's personality, the conditions under which he works, and the psychic structure of the patient (Glazer, 1981). For this reason, Kempler (1987:114) has called for a **contextual approach** in the following way:

the meaning and value of self-disclosure can be understood only when we know its full context. When we discuss self-disclosure in the abstract it cannot be properly evaluated. We need to know what is being said, by whom, to whom, in what time and place, and circumstance, and perhaps, most important, for what purpose. Awareness of context gives meaning to the act of self-disclosure.

Contemplating a contextualized approach raises crucial questions pertaining to research methodology, and this regards the accountability of all of the contextual variables

in a single research design. This is an important motivational factor for an alternative framework for conducting research on psychotherapy.

Due to the fact that the inquiry into therapist self-disclosure ultimately delivers an abundance of information, and bearing in mind all the types of self-disclosure, and the different contexts in which it could occur, for instance, group psychotherapy, family therapy, child psychotherapy, and marriage therapy, it was deemed necessary to limit the field of study. It was decided to formulate an exclusive focus on **verbal self-disclosure during adult individual psychotherapy.**

The researcher's excursion into, and journey through the realm of literature can briefly be portrayed. This will illuminate the various avenues of exploration taken to facilitate an awakening awareness of the multi-dimensional nature of therapist self-disclosure. This will also elucidate the problem formulation for this research endeavour, which serves as point of departure for a description of, and motivation for a phenomenological research strategy.

After a thorough literature review the researcher became familiar with various points of access into the field of therapist self-disclosure. There are numerous **quantitative research reports** in various journals on counseling. The *Journal of Counseling Psychology* is particularly prominent in this regard. These reports address specific issues, such as the reciprocity effect of self-disclosure and the effect that self-disclosure has on clients' perceptions of the counselor. These findings highlight the enhancing effects of self-disclosure on the working relationship during counseling.

There are books and journal articles that address specific

theoretical issues such as **types** of self-disclosure and **indications and contra-indications** for the use of therapist self-disclosure. These are based on research findings, literature reviews, as well as authors' personal accounts of the phenomenon. Sidney Jourard, for instance, is a prominent author and researcher in this regard.

Reviewing these books and journals prompted the researcher to consider the importance of theoretical orientation. Self-disclosure was thus also approached from this angle. Journals such as *Contemporary Psychoanalysis*, *The International Journal of Psycho-Analysis*, *Review of Existential Psychology and Psychiatry*, and *Journal of Humanistic Psychology* to cite a few examples, were consulted.

These approaches will comprise the format of the literature study (part one) for this thesis. Part one (chapters two to four) will close with a re-appraisal of the problem formulation which calls for a new research approach. Part two will be concerned with the philosophical assumptions fundamental to empirical phenomenological research, the pilot study, the presentation of protocols with their analyses, and the results and contributions.

1.1. The unfolding of the research problem.

The research problem will unfold during the course of chapters two, three, and four. For purposes of this introductory chapter, a summary of the emergence of the research problem will be presented. Following this introductory chapter, *chapter two* will focus on the empirical and **quantitative research** that has addressed the issue of counselor-disclosure. This chapter's contribution is, in a sense, limited in that it succeeds only in demonstrating the paucity of research that adequately reaches the **lived-world**

of psychotherapy. Only a few studies could be traced that empirically researched therapist self-disclosure during psychotherapy. This is confirmed by Mathews (1988) who reports a dearth of studies concerning actual psychotherapy.

An abundance of studies were traced that pertained to **counselor** self-disclosure. These studies were designed and structured to assimilate counseling contexts. The Jourard Self-Disclosure Questionnaire, the Self-Disclosure Inventory, and the Self-Disclosure Situations Survey (Hendrick, 1987) are examples of measurement devices that were implemented. In spite of the fact that these studies were concerned with the counseling context, the researcher deemed it necessary to review them, and the reason for their inclusion will be explained in the chapter.

Taking into account that self-disclosure is a **lived interpersonal phenomenon**, chapter two will illuminate how, regardless of whether the context is psychotherapy or counseling, the studies have by-passed and neglected the **interactive and processional nature** of self-disclosure. This has important implications for research methodology, and the evolution of an appeal for an alternative method for conducting research commences in this chapter. In addition to this, there has been an exclusive focus on the client's perceptions, with a neglect of the disclosing counselor's experience.

Chapter three is devoted to a review of therapist self-disclosure from the perspective of theoretical orientation. Two traditions will be discussed, namely, the existential-humanistic, and the psychoanalytic framework. The polarization of thought concerning the therapist's listening stance and specifically the use of self-disclosure, namely where a humanistic approach espouses self-disclosure, and

where a psychoanalytic approach eschews it, will be clarified, mediated, and re-appraised. The emergence of an existential-humanistic tradition will be portrayed. This emergence occurred in the context of a growing dissatisfaction with orthodox psychoanalysis, specifically the concept transference and its ramifications for the nature of the therapist's involvement. The concepts fundamental to understanding the nature of the existential-humanistic therapeutic relationship will be discussed with their implications for self-disclosure.

Within the psychoanalytic tradition, various trends, such as object relations theory, self psychology, and the intersubjective approach, will be discussed as they have depolarized the beliefs about self-disclosure as mentioned above. This chapter will discuss how the conceptualizing of the therapeutic relationship within psychoanalytic theorizing has been subject to major shifts which bear profoundly on the nature of the therapist's stance and participation. To assist in organizing this literature, certain paradigms and models will be implemented. The concepts neutrality, transference, countertransference will then be discussed as each has significant bearing on the nature of the therapist's participation.

A key issue in this chapter is the trend within certain psychoanalytic approaches to advocate the disclosure of the therapist's countertransference feelings with certain diagnostic groups. Although, this points towards a "humanizing" of the therapeutic encounter, it narrows and marginalizes the concept self-disclosure, as well as the therapist's **experience** of the encounter.

The apparent deviations in technique within psychoanalytic thought have significant ramifications for the use and

appropriateness of therapist self-disclosure. An important contribution of this chapter towards the research problem, is the illumination of a progressive "humanization" of the therapeutic alliance. This is a lengthy discussion, and its bearing on the research problem and its influence on the research strategy selected for this study will unfold in the course of the chapter. However, it could suffice at this stage to mention that a "humanizing" of the therapeutic relationship calls for a "humanized" research procedure, that can more adequately account for human subjective experience.

Chapter four attempts to integrate chapters two and three as it addresses various practical issues pertaining to therapist self-disclosure. In a discussion of the types of self-disclosure and specifically the indications and pitfalls, the primacy of the context in which self-disclosure arises becomes evident. One aspect of this context is the nature of the therapeutic relationship and the therapist's theoretical orientation. This implies that when pondering the appropriateness of an intervention, such as therapist self-disclosure, one must take into consideration the therapist's conceptualizing of the relationship. The intimate link between chapters two, three, and four will become evident, and taken together the need for an alternative way of conducting research will unfold.

Part one concludes with a formulation of the research problem which motivates the need for an alternative method of conducting research. In this regard, a phenomenological research approach has been selected to unveil the complexities of the **therapist's experience of self-disclosure**, and to meet the demands that each chapter submits. Phenomenology recognizes the unique nature of phenomena and does not superimpose a single method which must be applied rigidly under all circumstances (von Eckartsberg

(1986) cited in Adams (1992). This method is therefore suited to overcome the methodological flaws encountered in chapter two, and to expound a dimension of self-disclosure, (that is, the therapist's unique experience, with its contextual engulfment), that has not yet been unmasked in a systematic way.

The chapters in part two address the actual research conducted for this thesis. **Chapter five** briefly describes the philosophical assumptions underlying phenomenological research. This is a brief discussion because, as Giorgi (1992) has stated, the qualitative research movement has established itself sufficiently so that its status as a submovement of science is irreversible. The pervasive use of empirical phenomenological research within universities throughout South Africa, as well as accumulating phenomenological studies in journals such as *Methods*, the *Journal of Phenomenological Psychology*, and *Humanistic Psychologist* confirm widespread acceptance of empirical phenomenology as a method of conducting research.

This study implemented a preliminary or a pilot study with the sole intention of formulating a research question that would adequately reach the therapist's experience of self-disclosure. Due to the fact that psychotherapists comprised the population of co-researchers, the researcher anticipated that the question would have to be well-formulated so as to elicit naive everyday descriptions.

Chapter six intimately describes the researcher's "bracketing", that is a suspension of beliefs about therapist self-disclosure, in the attempt to formulate a research question. The pilot study, and its contribution towards assisting the researcher with interview management and moulding the research question is described at length in this

chapter.

A fundamental contribution of this study is a unique method of data analysis, which is presented in *chapter seven*. The complexity of the term therapist self-disclosure and its embeddedness in the therapist's conceptualizations of the therapeutic relationship, as well as its embeddedness in a unique psychotherapeutic context and procession, were borne out in the descriptions.

A method had to be sought to illuminate and to systematize the wealth and intricacies of these narrations. This necessitated a method that, although rooted in the Duquesne method of conducting phenomenological research, departed radically at crucial points. These departures will be explained and motivated in chapter seven.

One of the protocols will be presented in *chapter eight* with its analysis. The other three that were analyzed will be presented in the addendum. This chapter concludes with a binding text which organizes and systematizes the intersubjective and validating structures and experiences of therapist self-disclosure.

Chapter nine comprises concluding reflections. The methodology will be reflected on, and the method of analysis will be sketched. This reflection is considered to be the binding ingredient of the thesis, in that important aspects to consider when conducting phenomenological research with psychotherapists are formulated. Various ties are made to the problem formulation in part one, and the contribution of the study in attaining its goals is formulated. This is followed by a discussion of the results, wherein the pre-eminent constituents of the experience of therapist self-disclosure are presented. This will lead to a presentation

of the neglected dimensions of self-disclosure. This represents the undervalued and marginalized side of self-disclosure encountered in the literature.

In conclusion, a brief overview is presented with recommendations concerning methodological issues and the concept therapist self-disclosure. Alternative methodological probabilities are contemplated which might have facilitated a richer result. The validation of research results comprises an important part of this discussion and serves as point of departure to extending the results of this study.

Regarding therapist self-disclosure, suggestions are made concerning its conceptualization and management during training and supervision, as well as for the practising psychotherapist.

1.2. Bibliography.

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