



**AN EPISTEMOLOGICAL JOURNEY IN SEARCH OF REFLEXIVITY AND
THE AUTHENTIC SELF: FAMILY THERAPY THEORY AND
INTERVENTION**

BY

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SUMMARY

TITLE: An epistemological journey in search of reflexivity and the authentic self: family therapy theory and intervention.

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The study emanates from the need to explore the perceptions, opinions and experiences of family therapy practitioners with regard to the epistemological shifts in family therapy theory and intervention, reflecting team practice, and the development of the personal/professional self. The need arose as a result of the evolution of family therapy from first-order cybernetics to the postmodern theoretical environment and the potential impact of such a shift on the capacity for reflexivity and authenticity in practice for family therapy practitioners at Family Life Centre.

Family Life Centre provides training for staff members, sessional workers and students (social work and psychology) who have an interest in the practice of family therapy. In the past however, such training has focused more on the experiential dimension, specifically within the context of reflecting team practice. Theoretical training has been inadequate, with practitioners' knowledge typically gained from under- and post-graduate studies. Knowledge of family therapy theory in terms of approach and extent is varied. While the diverse theoretical backgrounds of counsellors at Family Life Centre adds texture and depth to the practice of family therapy, the possibility of confusion exists, and may create a lack of confidence and authenticity in practice. Family therapy practice at Family Life Centre leans towards a postmodern paradigm, although eclecticism is valued.

The multiplicity of approaches to family therapy necessitates an awareness of one's chosen paradigm, and understanding of the potential impact of the self of the family therapy practitioner upon the therapeutic encounter with a client family. A theory or

theories that represent a personal embodiment for the practitioner are more likely to be experienced as authentic to the self of that practitioner and thus impact positively on the development of the therapeutic relationship with the client family. The significance of this therapeutic relationship with regard to healing is well documented in the literature. The capacity of the practitioner for reflexivity regarding the development of the personal and professional self is both essential and ongoing, a journey that should never end.

An exploratory design was used to explore the impact of epistemological shifts and reflecting team practice on the development of the personal and professional self of the family therapy practitioner. Exploratory designs are used when the phenomenon is little known. The study can be seen as applied research, aimed at extending the knowledge of human behaviour relating to intervention in the field of family therapy. In order to achieve insight into the perceptions, opinions and experiences of family therapy practitioners, an interview schedule was used to collect the relevant data which was then analysed and from which conclusions were drawn.

From the conclusions it is apparent that family therapy practitioners are not always clear on the difference between the modern and postmodern paradigms, although they are certain of the approach they use in practice. It is evident that the approach used is not necessarily 'chosen' and that many respondents are actively engaged in contemplating their own professional development. The experience of reflecting team practice in family therapy is seen as extremely valuable to the respondents in terms of the opportunity for learning on a number of levels, including theoretical awareness, skills development and self-awareness. However, reflecting team involvement seems to evoke anxiety for many of the respondents, relating to issues such as evaluation, team composition, power dynamics, fit with the self, as well as the fit for different client families. The development of the personal and professional self is seen as both essential and ongoing, highlighting the necessity of this crucial task in the complex arena of family therapy practice.

KEY WORDS

Epistemology

Authentic/Self

Reflexivity

Family Therapy Theory and Intervention

Family Therapist/Counsellor/Practitioner

Postmodernism

Social constructionism/constructivism/narrative

OPSOMMING

TITEL: ‘n Epistemologiese reis in die soeke na wederkerendheid en die egte self: gesinsterapieteorie en intervensie.

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Die motivering vir die studie spruit uit ‘n behoefte om die waarnemings, menings en ervarings van gesinsterapiepraktisyns te verken – met spesifieke verwysing na die epistemologiese verwickelings en fokusverskuiwings met betrekking tot gesinsterapieteorie en intervensie, ‘n reflekerende spanbenadering en die persoonlike en professionele ontwikkeling van die terapeut self.

Hierdie behoefte is geïdentifiseer na aanleiding van ‘n klemverskuiwing in gesinsterapie vanaf eerste rangse kubernetika na die post-moderne teoretiese omgewing. Navorsers wou bepaal wat die potensiële impak van hierdie denkverskuiwing op die vermoë tot wederkerendheid en betroubaarheid in die praktyk vir gesinsterapiepraktisyns te Family Life Centre is.

Family Life Centre verskaf opleiding aan voltydse en deeltydse personeel sowel as maatskaplikewerk- en sielkunde studente wie se belangstellingsveld geleë is in gesinsterapie. In die verlede het hierdie opleiding-sessies hoofsaaklik gefokus op die ervarings dimensie – spesifiek binne die konteks van ‘n reflekerende spanbenadering. Teoretiese opleiding was ontoereikend daar die praktisyns se kennisbasis hoofsaaklik gegrond is op voor- en nagraadse studies. Kennis ten opsigte van gesinsterapieteorie met verwysing na benadering en omvang, is gevarieerd.

Alhoewel die uiteenlopende teoretiese agtergronde van terapeute by Family Life Centre bydra tot die samestelling en diepte van die gesinsterapiepraktyk, bestaan die

moontlikheid van verwarring. Dit opsig self kan weer aanleiding gee tot gebrekkige vertrouwe en egtheid in die praktyk. Ten spyte daarvan dat gesinsterapiepraktyk te Family Life Centre sterk oorleun na 'n post-moderne paradigma, word elektisisme waardevol geag.

Die veelvuldige benaderings tot gesinsterapie noodsaak 'n bewustheid van elke terapeut se verkose paradigma asook begrip vir die potensiële impak hiervan op die terapeut self in sy/haar terapeutiese ontmoeting met die kliënt-gesin. 'n Teorie of teorieë wat 'n verpersoonliking van die terapeut verteenwoordig, sal as meer eg ervaar word en gevolglik 'n positiewe impak hê ten opsigte van die ontwikkeling van 'n terapeutiese verhouding met die kliënt-gesin. Literatuur ter staving van die verband tussen hierdie terapeutiese verhouding en die herstel van die kliënt-gesin, is goed gedokumenteer. Die vermoë van die terapeut tot wederkerendheid in die ontwikkeling van sy/haar persoonlike en professionele self, is sowel 'n noodsaaklike as 'n voortgesette reis wat nooit eindig nie.

'n Verkennende navorsingsontwerp is benut ten einde die impak van die kennisverskuiwings en reflekerende spanbenaderingpraktyk op die ontwikkeling van die persoonlike en professionele self van die terapeut te verken. 'n Verkennende ontwerp word juis benut waar die fenomeen onbekend is. Hierdie studie kan beskou word as toegepaste navorsing wat daarop gemik is om kennis ten opsigte van menslike gedrag betreffende intervensie met behulp van gesinsterapie te verbreed. Ten einde insig te verkry in die waarneming, mening en ervarings van gesinsterapiepraktisyns, is 'n onderhoudskedule benut as data-insamelings metode. Uit die ontlede data is gevolgtrekkings geformuleer.

Uit die gevolgtrekkings het geblyk dat gesinsterapiepraktisyns nie altyd bewus is van die verskil tussen moderne en post-moderne denkrigtings nie, alhoewel hulle wel sekerheid getoon het ten opsigte van die benadering wat hulle in die praktyk toepas.

Dit is duidelik dat die benadering wat benut word nie noodwendig gekose was nie. Baie respondente is wel aktief betrokke in die oorweging van hul eie professionele ontwikkeling.

Respondente het die reflekerende spanbenadering in gesinsterapie ervaar as waardevol, en spesifiek omrede dit bydra tot kennis op verskeie vlakke naamlik teoretiese bewusheid, vaardigheidsontwikkeling en bewusheid van die self. Nietemin skyn die reflekerende spanbetrokkenheid angs mee te bring vir baie respondente met betrekking tot aspekte soos evaluering, spansamestelling, magsdinamika, passing van die self sowel as passing vir verskillende gesinne. Die ontwikkeling van die persoonlike en professionele self is gesien as noodsaaklik sowel as onophoudelik - met beklemtoning van die kritiese taak in die ingewikkelde arena van gesinsterapiepraktyk.

SLEUTELWOORDE

Epistemologie

Egte self/ware self

Wederkerendheid

Gesinsterapieteorie en intervensie

Gesinsterapeut/berader/praktisyn

Post-modernisme

Maatskaplike samestelling/konstruksie/vertelling

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