Program Type: Symposium, Division 32

Title: How Therapy Helps Clients Identify their Needs: Empirically-Based Processes

Two Subject Index Terms: 10 (Clinical/Counseling/Consulting) 50.4 (Qualitative Methods)

Time Limits: 50 minutes

Brief content description: Findings from original qualitative research on EFT and metasyntheses across orientations describe how clients' needs come to light in psychotherapy and lead toward change. Presentations explore this issue from clients' and therapists' perspectives.

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Symposium Abstract (300 words)

Although clients routinely use psychotherapy to bring into awareness previously unrecognized needs, there is little research directly on the process of how this shift transpires. The first presentation in this symposium entails qualitative research investigating how depressed clients come to experience and articulate their needs. This analysis focuses upon transcripts of sessions within Emotion-Focused Therapies. The findings identify types of expressed needs that appear to underlie depression in clients. In the second presentation, findings from two meta-analyses of qualitative studies are brought to bear upon the question of the pre-conditions for identifying needs. The reviews were based upon clients' and therapists' descriptions of their experiences in psychotherapy. Finally, an expert discussant identifies common themes and points to future directions related to research on the identification of needs.

While the first presentation focuses upon the content of clients' needs, the second focuses upon the processes associated with needs coming to light in therapy. The symposium raises questions about the role of needs identification in psychotherapy and why it does not receive more attention. As therapists, we may be comfortable focusing upon our own efforts guiding the identification of obstructive patterns, which can be tied more closely to our interventions, than upon the moment of clients' identification of their needs, which is often located more within the realm of clients' development of agency and their processing (Bohart & Tallman, 1999; Rennie, 1994) – even though these activities might be seen as two sides of the same coin. In this symposium, researchers make the bridge between the internal world of clients and the interventions directed by therapists' intentionality. They describe empirically-based processes that can guide therapists to be more sensitive to clients' in-session experiences and to better direct clients to uncover and experience their needs, facilitating their route to personal change.

A Qualitative Analysis of Expressed Needs during Treatment of Depression.

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Emotion-focused therapy (Greenberg & Watson, 2006) theory views the experience and articulation of unmet needs as necessary for accessing adaptive emotion and resolving therapy tasks. However, little is known about needs that depressed clients express when they enter therapy. This study was an attempt to provide an initial knowledge base concerning early expression of needs in depressed clients seeking experiential treatment for their depressions. **Method:** The data corpus was 36 session two transcripts from 36 clients who received experiential treatment for depression in the York 2 Depression Study (Goldman, Greenberg, & Angus, 2006). The data set for the present analysis was 12 out of these 36 transcripts randomly chosen. Normally 8-12 participants are considered adequate to reach saturation of categories within a qualitative analysis. Initial pre-analysis began with employing ATLAS.ti qualitative software to search all 36 transcripts for instances of client narrative containing dialogue related to needs. ATLAS.ti automatically highlighted all instances. These highlighted segments were then consolidated into need narratives for use in the analysis. Transcripts were analysed for core themes following Braun & Clarke's five stages: 1) Initial familiarization with the data set by reading and memo-ing; 2) Generating open codes (brief gysts of narrative using client wording, kept at a very low level of abstraction in order to maintain grounding of data in actual client narrative) ; 3 and 4) Searching for and reviewing themes at the level of individual transcripts and the level of the whole dataset according to Rennie's double hermeneutic process (2012) in order to establish a higher order theme structure; and 5) Define and refine theme names. **Results:** Preliminary findings suggest 10 shared themes that relate to/provide support for several theories of depression and self-regulation. These included need for communion, a safe other, mastery, and emotion regulation.

Meta-Analytic Findings on Identifying Clients' Needs in Psychotherapy

Interviews on clients' and therapists' experiences in psychotherapy provide a window into the psychotherapy relationship and its mechanisms of change. Over the last three decades a body of literature has developed that uses qualitative methods to collect and analyze these accounts and to shed light upon psychotherapy processes (e.g., Elliott, 1985). This presentation is based upon two qualitative meta-analyses of this literature.

The first meta-analysis examined 64 research studies analyzing clients' experiences within adult individual psychotherapy. The second meta-analysis explored 78 studies of therapists' reports of their experiences. Both studies focused on broad experiences of psychotherapy (e.g., significant moments) as well as specific moments or interactions (e.g., moments of rupture) and integrated research from across psychotherapy orientations and different qualitative methods. The analyses were conducted using an adaptation of grounded theory analysis (e.g., Glaser & Strauss, 1967). These meta-reviews offer principles for practice based upon robust findings from this literature. The principles are context-sensitive formulations that guide therapists to generate interventions that maximize their attunement to their clients' needs.

Specifically, the presentations focus on the convergence between the clients' and therapists' analyses related to the process of identifying clients' needs. In particular, the presentation focuses upon two routes for the identification of needs. In the first pathway, therapy becomes a context for clients to be known and cared for. This acceptance then permits clients to identify vulnerable needs and the patterns that prevent their fulfillment. In the second route, therapy becomes a context for the identification and alteration of obstructive patterns, leading to increased acceptance of vulnerable aspects of themselves. The description of intertwined but separate processes underlying psychotherapy orientations is put forth as an alternative to orientation-specific descriptions that artificially divide discourse. These qualitative meta-analyses provide support for empirically validated principles to guide context-sensitive change across psychotherapies.

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