

ABSTRACT

A heuristic exploration of the experience and concept of 'warmth' in the therapeutic relationship

A heuristic research process was used and arguments were presented for the appropriateness of a qualitative research methodology. A pilot interview was conducted and a focus group formed with the primary researcher and three co-researchers. The focus group participated in three tape-recorded interviews.

The researcher sought to depict the felt experience of warmth and the concept of warmth in the therapeutic relationship. Psychotherapy and counselling literature was explored in relation to the emergence of warmth in the psychotherapeutic profession, the concepts of 'self' and 'personality' in Gestalt, and the significance of warmth in human development.

The transcripts from the interviews, and the material derived from the primary researcher's heuristic journey, provided the data which was formed into depictions of the experience and concept of warmth. The impact of the research process on the primary researcher was discussed, as well as the core themes emerging from the findings. The study explores the assumptions implicit in the use of the word 'warmth' in the therapeutic relationship. All the co-researchers referred to the difficulty in experiencing the therapist's warmth in the early stages of therapy. Genuineness and authenticity were found to be important to the participants. A link was made between the experience of warmth and Kohut's developmental concept of 'mirroring'. The connection of warmth with the unified field was suggested.

Keywords: Warmth, compassion, mirroring, dialogue, unified field, psychotherapy, Gestalt