

Abstract

Therapist self-disclosure receives little attention in the psychotherapy literature. A significant reason for this is that the traditional psychoanalytic dictate that the analyst should be a 'blank screen' lingers on, leaving disclosure still cloaked with taboo. Further, within the literature on integrative psychotherapy, any discussion on self-disclosure has been limited to verbal disclosure, so that non-verbal aspects have been neglected. The purpose of this study was to investigate the wider concept of therapist self-disclosure in integrative psychotherapy, including non-verbal disclosure, unintentional disclosure and therapist attitude towards disclosure.

The method of heuristic inquiry was used in order to encourage in-depth personal explorations, utilising the principle that "disclosure begets disclosure" (Jourard, 1968). In this way the research process was seen to mirror the subject under investigation.

The findings from this study provide open and honest insight into integrative psychotherapists' thoughts, beliefs and attitudes towards self-disclosure. It is shown that integrative therapists consider that the way in which they disclose themselves emerges from their fundamental way of being. Self-disclosure is the therapist's expression of his or her being within a dialogic therapeutic relationship.

An important outcome of this study is the recognition that therapists need permission to reduce their shame about self-disclosure, and support to develop the confidence to use themselves creatively in the service of their clients. Recommendation is made that guidance should be provided within training and supervision, and from within the literature.