

ABSTRACT

This qualitative study investigated the phenomenon of non-verbal communication (NVC). It explored how Humanistic Person-Centred (HPC) Psychotherapists experienced their client's past significant relationships being communicated non-verbally and how they might, or might not, decide to use this information therapeutically.

A search of HPC literature and existing research revealed little had been written specifically about NVC and that there was a significant gap in the research into this phenomenon from a HPC perspective. The method used was Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) (Smith, Flowers and Larkin, 2009) and six participants were interviewed using a semi structured interviewing process.

Findings revealed four master themes regarding the participants' individual experiences of NVC within the therapeutic relationship and how they would choose to work with this phenomenon. The four themes were labelled: the therapist's experience of NVC, how the therapist made sense of their experience, the impact of NVC on the therapeutic relationship and finally, how the therapist utilised perception of NVC.

Overall, the findings were that the experience of receiving non-verbal messages was mainly a visceral experience. It was also discovered that the management of NVC

involved congruence, bracketing, keen observation skills and active reflexivity by the therapist achieved through both internal and external supervision.

It was also found that all participants did speculate about the client's relational patterns and previous significant relationships but remained aware that it was essential to achieve clear and open communication if the therapeutic relationship was to be successful. NVC might initially prevent this. However, it was found that when a strong therapeutic alliance was achieved, the therapist could, more often than not, raise any incongruence between verbal and non-verbal communication while keeping the 'necessary and sufficient conditions' in place. Until this was done congruence between the therapist and the client would not be achieved.

It is hoped that this research will encourage further debate and discussion amongst the therapeutic community resulting in greater understanding of the impact of NVC on the therapeutic relationship.