

Abstract

Psychosomatic countertransference is a common phenomenon in therapy when working with clients with eating disorders (EDs). While there is a breadth of research about this phenomenon in other modalities and settings, there is a lack of knowledge of the experiences of Integrative Psychotherapists. This study aimed to explore nuanced personal experiences of psychosomatic countertransference, how this is understood and utilised. Qualitative methodology using semi-structured interviews was undertaken with four participants. The resulting data was analysed using interpretative phenomenological analysis which illuminated five emergent themes: defining countertransference, the role of the body and countertransference, warning and threat, the therapist's sense of self and role, and the intersubjective third. The results showed that therapists largely interpreted these psychosomatic responses as a countertransference resulting from the client's projection. This was viewed as a form of communication that facilitated the understanding and management of relational dynamics in the therapy. The results illuminated the draining and complex nature of this work, the connectedness of therapist and client in a co-created process and feelings of warning and threat. In conclusion, this study demonstrated the powerful impact upon the therapeutic relationship and the client's relational needs when psychosomatic countertransference was understood and utilised.