

Whose Pain is it Anyway?

A qualitative research study about:

How counsellors come to feel/make sense of a client's physical pain.

Elizabeth Painting, Keele Counselling Conference 2016

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Background and context

- *Therapeutic modality/approach*
- *Practise sessions – 3 incidents*
- *Placement – 2 incidents*

Research Question

How do counsellors make sense of/feel a client's physical pain in a person-centred counselling session?

Methodology

- Qualitative research based on philosophy of Husserl (1859-1938) and Heidegger (1889-1976). Phenomenology.

Husserl, “studying the objects of conscious awareness” (Law, 2013: 253)

Heidegger, “that which is peculiar to human beings” (*Ibid*: 288)

- Constructivist paradigm and humanistic theory, whereby the world is constructed by knowledge and experience of the individual and reflected upon.

(Theorists: Maslow, Rogers, Perls, Bowlby, Assagioli, Rowan, etc.)

Methodology: Data collection.

- Interviews
 - Semi-structured, 1.5 hours
- Thematic analysis
 - Transcripts – 54 hours to transcribe, 63129 words
 - Research journal use – emergent words after initial transcriptions
 - Coding data – colour coding
 - Analysing data
- Ethical considerations
 - Interviewee psychological safety
 - Privacy and confidentiality

Results

Themes	
Main themes	Sub-themes
Receptiveness Un-knowing Client safety <i>Physical responses</i> Client therapeutic movement Becoming aware	Counsellor characteristics Occurring in relationship <i>Physical embodiment</i> Cognitive activity Internal sensory activity Emotional activity
Number of counselling encounters: participants 80, 20, 15, 100 and me 50.	
Discussion of results – 3 main themes: Receptiveness, Un-knowing, Physical responses	

Physical Responses

Breath physical responses:

“It was a knot, like a painful knot and I felt I couldn’t breathe.”

“I found that my own breathing and trying to stay calm was really difficult.”

Sickness physical responses:

“I get sick every now and then, telling me somebody’s really nauseous.”

“It was almost like a sick feeling.”

“It’s hard to explain that kind of sick stomach churning.”

Physical Responses

Body location physical responses:

“My chest was tight.”

“Gosh that hurts my throat.”

“The pains in the neck.”

“It almost felt like I’d been punched in the stomach.”

Embodied pain statements:

“It was unpleasant, as in not comfortable. I felt tense.”

“I’m thinking of my own kind of physical and emotional pain.”

“I get the physical sense from them.”

“It was more physically manifest in the room.”

Sub-theme

Physical embodiment		
Key words	Occurrences	Participants that stated it
Bodied experience	15	1 (2), 2 (2), 3 (6), 4 (1), me (4)
Body language	5	1 (3), me (2)
Breath	8	1 (3), 2 (4), me (1)
Experience	20	1 (5), 4 (6), me (9)
Fluid	4	2 (2), me (2)
Pain	24	1 (6), 2 (7), me (11)
Sensing	42	1 (1), 2 (6), 3 (5), 4 (8), me (22)
Shortness of breath	8	1 (3), 2 (1), 4 (4)
Tacit	2	2 (1), 3 (1)
Tightness	13	2 (1), 3 (6), 4 (5), me (1)
Visceral	8	2 (1), 3 (7)
Outliers		
Heavy	1	2
Mood	1	3
Tired	5	3

Literature Review

- No specific research in this area from a PC perspective.
- Provided a rationale for sensing/feeling a client's physical pain.

Selected areas:

Trauma & Post Traumatic Stress Disorder

The Transpersonal

Energy

Empathy

Synaesthesia

Implications of this research

- That counsellors using the person centred approach can and do feel/sense a clients physical pain.
- That this experiencing opens a different communication channel that may enhance the therapeutic process.
- It may be an inherent tool of therapy that contributes to the client's process of healing via the counsellor's self-awareness and sharing that awareness using immediacy. (Based on Wosket's use of self; "the apparatus of therapy" and Roger's 'being the instrument of therapy')

References

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