

Introducing Myself

- ▶ Catherine O'Riordan
- ▶ Full-time private practice
- ▶ Training organisation

Research part fulfilment of

- ▶ MSc Integrative Psychotherapy
- ▶ Sherwood Psychotherapy Training Institute
- ▶ Coventry University
- ▶ 2013



Research Community

Integrative Psychotherapy: Focus

- ▶ HOW the healthy SELF develops over a life-time in and through relationship
- ▶ Healthy Self: relational needs
- ▶ HOW we react to deficit or trauma
- ▶ HOW we can help the 'Self' grow

Aims today

- ▶ Research findings
- ▶ Implications for clinical practice
- ▶ Safe, effective and efficient approach to working with clients struggling to reconnect with their Self

Key point from my research

- ▶ Work with the client's felt-sense of something **IMPORTANT** but not understood



Motivation: why I conducted this research

- ▶ Personal experience as client: it's so difficult!
- ▶ Professional experience: it's so difficult!

- ▶ Risk: premature ending
- ▶ Risk: not getting the reconnecting work done

Motivation

Why is it SO difficult?

- ▶ Working with very 'hidden' underlying / unconscious processes
- ▶ Powerful / dynamic

► **Poltergeist**

“what is not
owned is
acted out”





▶ Pandora's Box: fear of being overwhelmed

- ▶ re-traumatise
- ▶ dissociation
- ▶ parallel processes

Motivation



- ▶ Understand the psychological territory better
- ▶ Identify key landmarks
- ▶ Be clearer about what we are reconnecting with
- ▶ Safer and more effective

Spotlight



- ▶ Understand
- ▶ client's experience
- ▶ becoming aware
- ▶ aspects-of-self
- ▶ previously hidden

Literature Review

- ▶ Therapists perspective / theoretical
- ▶ Client's perspective: *experience of counselling relationship*
- ▶ Dynamic defences: repression, dissociation, regression, shame.
- ▶ The client gets lost



How I did my research



- ▶ Qualitative paradigm
- ▶ Staying close to experience
- ▶ Method Giorgi's (2009) Descriptive Phenomenological Method in Psychology: A Modified Husserlian Approach
- ▶ Attitude and a method of analysis
- ▶ Systematic distillation of meaning
- ▶ Aim: to arrive at the essential qualities of the experience

POSTER

“Hide and Seek: Discovering Your Hidden ‘Inner-Child’”

Mae, K. 1975

[http://h-s.o.net/shihi/
en/drawings/index.html#pict06](http://h-s.o.net/shihi/en/drawings/index.html#pict06)



How I did my research

- ▶ 7 self-selecting participants
- ▶ all therapists / in-training
- ▶ therapy for several years
- ▶ access to support
- ▶ semi-structured interviews

Research Question



“What is your experience of discovering and reconnecting with hidden aspects of your ‘Self’ or ‘inner-child’ within the context of Humanistic / Integrative Psychotherapy?”

Sub-questions

- ▶ HOW did you first recognize hiding inner-child?
- ▶ HOW did discovering affect you?
- ▶ What helped / did not help you?

Critique of research

- ▶ Participants = therapists: common language
- ▶ Retrospective
- ▶ Ethics: researcher Self-care
- ▶ Valid: transparent / systematic
- ▶ Experience-near, texture rich descriptions
- ▶ Produced what it said on the tin: structure of the experience of reconnecting

Findings

- ▶ 3 stages
- ▶ The Liminal
- ▶ The Emergent
- ▶ The Reconnecting
- ▶ The structure of the client's experience of discovering & reconnecting



The Liminal Stage

- ▶ The key feature of this stage is that the person gets a powerful felt-sense of something IMPORTANT but not understood
- ▶ Important Record Information For:



The Liminal Stage

- ▶ “I didn’t know what it was I wanted to connect with ... an early sort of sense was in a dream” (P6:38-41)
- ▶ “I’ve always had a sense of there being some other part of me that I haven’t yet understood” (P3:108)

The Liminal Stage

- ▶ “It’s like a sense of absolute certainty that if I didn’t do something ... I was never going to be happy” (P3:108)

Key Feature



- ▶ So the key feature of The Liminal Stage is a profound and unfamiliar felt-sense which feels really, really **IMPORTANT**
- ▶ From the ground of their being / visceral core

The Emergent Stage

Stage 2:
characterised by
internal conflict &
fear



The Emergent Stage

- ▶ “So I went there I suppose knowing I had this part, but wanted to get rid of it, thinking it was wrong” (P1:189-192)
- ▶ “Really hard, secretive, shame, shameful, shaming infused kind of stuff

The Emergent Stage

- ▶ “I was ...very hyper vigilant really and quite protected, I felt quite conflicted” (P6:146-148)
- ▶ “I’m not going to get attached or dependent on you because it’s too much and too painful” (P1:62,163)

Key Feature

- ▶ So the key feature of the Emergent Stage is a profound experience of internal conflict, ambivalence and resistance to reconnection





Reconnecting Stage

Stage 3 ever more
intense affect:

ambivalence

inner-conflict

vulnerability

shame

regression



Reconnecting Stage

- ▶ “I wanted to hide ...and again, felt utter shame and humiliation and just wanted the floor to open up” (P5:302-304)
- ▶ “it’s so hard to get this person out there and actually being in conversation with the therapist ... I know that’s where I need to go, but I’ve got an awful lot invested in, you know, in trying to block that” (P3:316-365)

Reconnecting Stage

Stage 3 To tolerate reconnecting:

the client needs to feel that what is IMPORTANT to them is equally IMPORTANT to the therapist



Reconnecting Stage

- ▶ “my therapist suggested I bring some photos of myself ... she really wanted me to look at them with care and attention and slowly ... looking at them in that context was really powerful” (P4:567-570)

Reconnecting Stage

- ▶ “It’s a real sense that she related to this part of me, this younger me and was on my side and was sort of cheering” (P6:286,284)

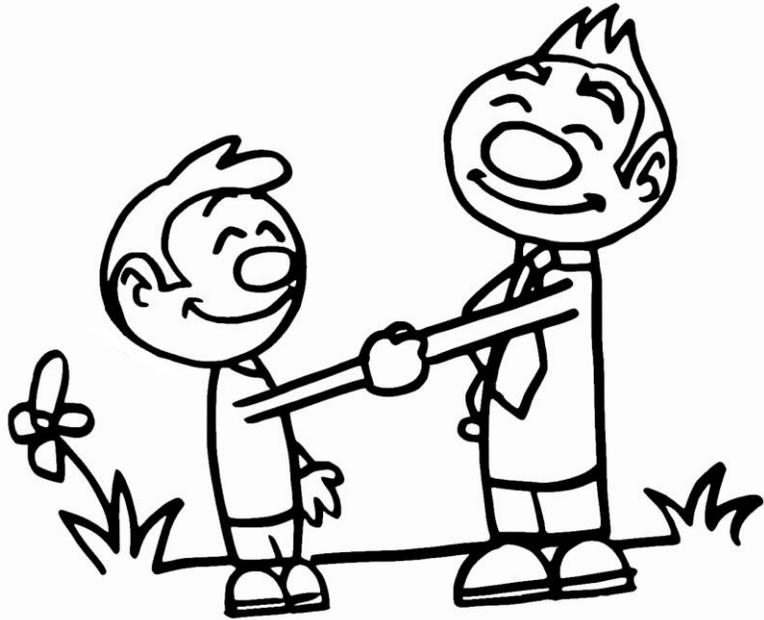
Reconnecting Stage

- ▶ “Probably after about a year, she asked if she could sit next to me and would it be ok to hold my hand, or hold me. And of course that’s what I’d wanted ever since I’d stepped into that office, without really realizing it. So it was a massive moment” (P1:330-333)

Reconnecting Stage

- ▶ “There wasn’t a sort of normalizing of sex I think you need permission and encouragement in that place ... maybe that was why it didn’t get done” (P6:417;421-422;426)

Reconnecting Stage



- ▶ the client needs the therapist to really grasp how **IMPORTANT** it is to the them
- ▶ If not the therapy halts

Key Feature

Key feature of the Reconnecting Stage:

▶ Experiencing:

- 1) visceral defences in action
- 2) memories of past traumatic experiences

▶ If the therapist is able to keep connected with & respond to the client's felt-sense of something **IMPORTANT** the client is able to work through

Clinical Implications

▶ What does the client seem to be reconnecting with?



- 1) inner felt-sense / sense-of-Self
- 2) visceral defences in action
- 3) trauma memories

Clinical Implications

Inner felt-sense: something IMPORTANT but not understood

“it is an unfamiliar deep-down level of awareness; it doesn’t come to you in the form of thoughts or words or separate units, but as a single (though often puzzling and very complex) bodily feeling”
(Gendlin 1978:33)



Clinical Implications

- ▶ Reconnecting with Self
- ▶ Sense of their own importance: dignity
- ▶ Seat of their relational needs
- ▶ Organismic Self (Rogers 1967)
- ▶ True Self (Winnicott 1965)
- ▶ Visceral core (Bowlby 1969)



Clinical Implications



- ▶ Draw close to the client in this new and unexpected safe-ground
- ▶ Defences neutralised
- ▶ Feeling solid / real

Clinical Implications

- ▶ Expand safe-ground
- ▶ Be like a truffle hunter
- ▶ Celebrate
- ▶ Explore positive affect, physiology and cognitions together
- ▶ Signpost major achievements!



Clinical Implications

Client learns:

- ▶ Turning inwards feels ok
- ▶ Feeling positive is ok
- ▶ Important information for: compass
- ▶ Feeling connected to Self feels good
- ▶ Feeling connected with therapist is ok

Working through painful feelings:

- ▶ defences in action
- ▶ trauma memories



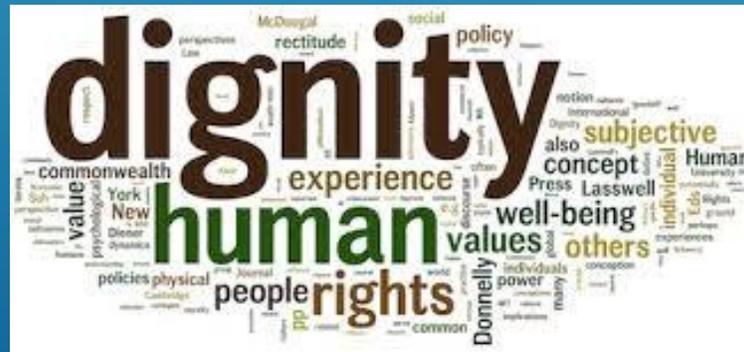
Clinical Implications



- ▶ Safe-ground: protects
- ▶ the client
- ▶ the therapist

Clinical Implications

- ▶ Utilise the client's felt-sense of something **IMPORTANT** but not understood
- ▶ Let what is **IMPORTANT** to them be **IMPORTANT** to you
- ▶ Relational depth: doesn't have to be 'so difficult' or so risky
- ▶ Don't miss the client by overly focussing on the relationship



How the findings can be generalized

- ▶ Approach relevant to practitioners generally
- ▶ Broad spectrum of clients: flooded / dissociated

Future research

- ▶ Whole reconnecting process in all its complexity
- ▶ Descriptive Phenomenological study of therapist's experience
- ▶ Use of 'positive psychology' within Integrative Psychotherapy

To sum up: 1st reconnect inner-self

- ▶ Spotlight client's felt-sense of **IMPORTANT** let this be your guide
- ▶ Honour the client's felt-sense of **IMPORTANT**: it's their inner compass
- ▶ Signpost: **IMPORTANT** achievements
Then: process defences, memories & relational needs



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Workshop: How to help clients safely reconnect with hidden aspects-of-self and care for yourself too

- ▶ London W8, Sunday, 27th September 2015
- ▶ Nottingham NG1, Sunday, 15th November 2015
- ▶ London W8, Sunday, February 2016
- ▶ Liverpool L3, Sunday, April 2016
- ▶ Cardiff CF10, Sunday, June 2016

