Therapist Attachment & Therapy Alliance

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Overview

- Research has consistently shown the alliance between therapist and client to be related to therapeutic outcomes (Horvath et al., 2011).
- Attachment theory details the reciprocal nature of attachment interactions, suggesting that therapist attachment style will also affect the therapeutic relationship.
- Client attachment has shown to affect the alliance. However, therapist attachment has been relatively less explored.
- Therapist attachment has shown to influence the supervision alliance, which has guided the research questions to be addressed.
- This exploratory study was to examine the relationship between therapist-in-training's attachment style and the therapeutic working alliance.

The Therapeutic Alliance

- Therapeutic alliance describes the relationship between therapist and client.
- In present study, the therapeutic relationship consisting of three parts: therapy relationship, goals of treatment, and the method used for therapy.
- Research consistently demonstrates the influence of the therapy alliance on therapeutic outcomes.
- It stands to reason that therapists also influence the therapeutic relationship.

Adult Attachment Theory

- Attachment Theory (Bowlby, 1973, 1988) posits the internal working model is formed by interactions with primary caregivers.
- The internal working model influences interpersonal relationships into adulthood by way of attachment anxiety and avoidance.
- Findings indicate the alliance is significantly influenced by clients' adult attachment style (Marmarosh et al., 2009).
- It stands to reason that therapist attachment may affect the alliance, as therapists act as a secure base to repair client attachment injuries (Waller, 2017).
- Preliminary analyses have found an association between therapist attachment and the working alliance (Dinger et al., 2009).

Participants

- Therapists
  - n = 5 unlicensed MFT clinicians (4 - students; 1 post - graduate)
  - Hours completed: Students (58-430) Post-graduate (26)
- Clients
  - n = 32 included (13 men; 19 women)
  - Age = 18-70 years
  - Residing in rural New England community

Therapist Avoidance & Alliance

- Table 1: Therapist Avoidance & Alliance

Therapist Anxiety and Alliance

- Table 5: Therapist Anxiety and Alliance

Discussion Points

- There was an inverse relationship between therapists' avoidance and the therapy alliance.
- There was an inverse relationship between therapists' anxiety and the therapy alliance.
- Avoidance demonstrated a more substantial decline in the alliance than anxiety.
- The relationship that was revealed suggests attachment-related interpersonal qualities may be relevant to supervisor in the training of MFT students and post-graduates.

Limitations

- The small sample size poses a threat to internal validity.
- The homogenous sample limits the generalizability of our findings.
- There was a negatively skewed distribution of scores for therapist anxiety.
- Therapy alliance was only collected at Time 1, which does not allow for the change in the therapy alliance over time.

References

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