The use of self: Towards an expanded critique and paradigm in counselling psychology

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The use of self in counselling psychology is a term both widely used in terminology and yet highly debated over with regards to its place in counselling psychology and even its definition. This review seeks to gain clarity from the small body of literature that attempts to quantify the use of self in counselling psychology. The fundamental aim of this paper is to inevitably seek clarity in this topic by looking at the historical significance of counselling psychology and philosophical considerations of counselling psychology in order to better understand the use of self. This work also seeks clarification from analysing the multiple psychological and empirical paradigms in counselling psychology to illustrate the place for the use of self and the inevitable need for further study.

Keywords: counselling, counselling psychology, paradigms, philosophy, self

The use of self is a concept widely used within numerous therapeutic disciplines but it remains challenging to both define and understand within counselling psychology. This is largely due to limited literature that focuses on the use of self in counselling psychology, perhaps this can be explained in part by the established concept of the use of self being incorporated and utilised into this relatively new model of therapy. Regardless, counselling psychology remains as a neglected phenomenon in fully understanding the use of self. In order to fully appreciate the value counselling psychology has on the use of self I will analyse the already established literature that outlines the therapeutic use of self in this therapeutic field. In addition to this I will consider the definition and philosophy of the self and counselling psychology while outlining the empirical and psychological paradigms that attempt to quantify what the self is. My analysis will inevitably consist of the views and perceptions of other related therapeutic disciplines perceptive on the self but this will be utilised only to deepen the appreciation of the therapeutic self in counselling psychology. What will be clear is that the literature that is in place can often leave more questions for the reader than answers given. In my assessment I will also look at the ethical framework that counselling psychologists must adhere to. What will be found is that there is a distinct place for the therapeutic use of self in counselling psychology but that more research and literature must be conducted in order for there to be a fuller consensus.

What is the use of self?

Numerous inconsistencies lie in our understanding of the use of self in counselling psychology largely due to the multiple perceptions of different therapeutic disciplines. These definitions can assist with our knowledge of the use of self in counselling psychology but may also lead to further confusion. What seems to be lost in the vast literature of the use of self is the place of counselling psychology. Although the literature from sister professions can give insight (Relojo, 2017), it must also be analysed with caution. Many, such as Raines (1996), with regards to social work, go as far as wrongly claiming that the use of self is what differentiates them from other therapeutic disciplines, an argument that only has credibility in highlighting the absence of insight in how the use of self fits into counselling psychology. What is evident, regardless of narrow perceptions such as Raines', is the value that the therapeutic use of self holds in a range of therapies. Baldwin Jr (1987) states that the use of self is vital in developing a therapist's knowledge and practical application of effective therapeutic work. We therefore are in need of a deeper understanding of what the self is in counselling psychology and how it is manifested.

There are academics who illustrate that our perception of what the use of self is has been misunderstood. Dewane (2005) states that it is hard to decipher and illustrate what the use of self actually is, how it is used and what characteristics it possesses (Dewane, 2005). I agree with him in part, it is challenging for us to comprehend how the self is used and what attributes it possesses, largely due to the individualism of the therapist in question. However, I feel the use of self can be defined. Tester (1992) defines the use of self by the therapist as the utilisation of personal characteristics that contribute to assisting the client towards positive change in therapy. Tester outlines a basic understanding of what the self is and although the use of self transcends multiples disciplines, this basic definition gives us a comprehensive understanding of how the self is manifested in counselling psychology. Reinkraut (2008) enhances the points made by Tester by arguing that the self of the therapist encompasses a number of features, such as experiences, moral judgments, intellect and theoretical understanding as well as identity. Perhaps it is not the definition of the use of self that is challenging but understanding how it is applied to different disciplines, this is especially the case in counselling psychology. Counselling psychology finds itself in a difficult position as it is a relatively new discipline that is incorporating the longstanding concept of the therapist's use of self, a point argued by Neimeyer (2006). As a result, our understanding of the use of self in counselling psychology is derived from limited research. However, establishing a consensus can be aided by an appreciation of the perception of other closely related disciplines.

Counselling psychology has only become an established field of psychology recognised by the British Psychological Society (BPS) over the past 30 years (Orlans, 2009). However, with this recent recognition comes a number of challenges. In September 1979, an interest group was formulated and was asked to consider concepts and attributes and how they could merge together from two different, and then separate, fields (Orlans, 2009). Prior to 1979 a number of counselling organisations and establishments had already been developed. Counselling was already a long standing and recognised therapeutic profession in the United Kingdom (Orlans, 2009). With the historical consideration of counselling psychology as a whole, one can see the challenges that develop when considering how counselling psychology appreciates conventional concepts such as the use of self. The use of self was an entity already fully utilised in counselling and so was difficulty to understand its meaning in a new therapeutic chain such as counselling psychology, a challenge that we still face today.

Philosophical considerations of the self and counselling psychology

Early modern philosophers such as Descartes and Hume outlined their belief that the self was very much detached from the rest of the world (Russon, 1994). This philosophical perception that the self and the world are completely separate is highly disputed by phenomenology (Flores-Gonzalez, 2008). This concept driven primarily by the likes of Husserl and Heidegger sought to understand the self in a more relational context. Russon (1994) states that phenomenology views the self in the world as opposed to out with it. Both Merleau-Ponty (2013) and Zahavi (2003) were advocates of the separate self being totally abandoned and a phenomenological appreciation adopted instead.

Husserl and Heidegger reinforced the philosophical standing that the self belongs in relationship with the rest of the world (Thompson, 2005). These philosophical considerations highlight numerous points regarding the use of self in counselling psychology. Firstly, the phenomenological approach to the self implies that in order for a person's self to be fully functioning and fully utilised then it must be in relationship with another, much like the therapeutic contexts experienced in work in counselling psychology. Secondly, it also highlights the difficulty one has in establishing the place of the use of self in counselling psychology as the self is clearly a long established entity debated over hundreds of years. Indeed, counselling psychology is a much newer phenomenon that has incorporated the self in its practice.

When gaining an appreciation for the philosophy of the use of self in counselling psychology, epistemology cannot be ignored. Ponterotto (2005) defines epistemology as the study and acquisition of knowledge and the relationship and connection between the individual who knows and the individual who does not know. Ponterotto states that positivism sees this relationship between the person who knows and the person who does not know as a combination of dualism and objectivism. Dualism being that there are two entities that are independent of one another and objectivism being that the person who knows gains a deeper understanding of the person who does not know and studies this (Ponterotto, 2005). The epistemology of the self outlines to me that by the utilisation of the self, we in turn are making attempts to acquire more knowledge about the client. In addition to this, the epistemology of the self also gives insight into counselling psychology as a whole. The relationship between the person who knows and the person who does not know is intrinsic in counselling psychology, depending of course from the modality that the therapist is working from. A person-centred counselling psychologist may likely view the epistemological concept of the self as the therapist being in the position of not knowing, and the client being in a position of knowing. The argument being that the client will know themselves better than the therapist does. Other modalities such as cognitive behavioural theory and psychodynamic theory may view this differently.

Sleeth (2007) argues that although the concept of the use of self within counselling psychology is widely recognised, there is no one single theory that establishes its validity in therapeutic sessions or allows

researchers or therapists to measure its impact (Sleeth, 2007). Hoffman, Stewart, Warren, and Meek (2008) illustrate that this difficulty in measuring the use of the self's value stems from the fact that the therapist's self is ever changing and adapting to the situation it faces within the client. Hoffman goes on to say that this in turn has led some psychologists to even question the true existence of the self. As much as I agree with Hoffman that a large part of the challenge in quantifying the use of self in counselling psychology is due to the uniqueness of each individual therapist, I cannot argue that this in turn suggests that it does not exist. I am in agreement with both Sleeth (2007) and Hoffman and colleagues (2008) in explaining the difficulty with the ontology of the self in therapy. The challenge lies in the individualism of the self of therapists and the difficulty there is in actually measuring it. However, I feel that research is perhaps trying to conceptualise the self in too rigid a format and instead of attempting to establish a formula that can help illustrate what the self is and how it is used we should instead enforce ideology such as Reupert's (2008) statement that the self is valued in multiple ways in counselling psychology.

How is the self 'used'?

Reinkraut, Motulsky, and Ritchie (2009) state that it is important to utilise the attributes that make up the self in a practical way. When discussing the importance of educating counselling psychology doctoral students on the use of self, he highlights how reflection and a full understanding of the self is vital when utilising this phenomenon in therapy. Cain (2007) also advocates the importance for the self in therapy by illustrating that a therapist who fully understands themselves and can use this understanding in a therapeutic context will be more attune to use vital skills such as empathy and active listening whilst in a session. Cain goes as far to say that this understanding and utilisation of the self by the therapist is more impactful than the therapist's theoretical ideology. Cain is not alone in his appreciation for the importance of the use of self, Reupert (2007, 2008) goes as far to say that the therapist's use of self is the foundation to which effective positive change develops in a client whilst in therapy, a point that I am in agreement with.

This debate by some as to the existence of the self has led me to think about how I experience and incorporate the self in my daily life and practice as a counselling psychologist in training, this may be different from others on the counselling psychology course. As a part-time student I rely heavily on the theoretical teaching and less so on practically applying it, due to the nature of the schedule for part-time students on this course. However, I do not feel at an extreme disadvantage when writing an essay on the use of self. Instead I can assess where I use the self out with my counselling psychology training. I incorporate the self in many aspects of my daily life, in my work for example where I conduct Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) interviews for research articles with Glasgow Caledonian University. I rely on the self here to engage with the interviewee and establish an understanding of what is being disclosed to me. Throughout my professional life I have experienced the use of self. As a telephone counsellor I had direct experience in developing my understanding of what emotions and feelings engaged when discussing issues with callers. Although my theoretical understanding of the use of self in counselling psychology cannot be directly applied in practice yet, I have experienced how the self is used and how it develops in work I have conducted in the past.

The use of self and theory

The ways in which the use of self and theory work together in the therapy room is an argument that can shed light on the place of the self in counselling psychology but requires a more in depth analysis of scholar's opinions and their research. Renik (1997) illustrates the use of self by a therapist as being reactive and empathic and not being bound by theory or technique. I agree in part with Renik here, I feel that the self of the therapist, when used appropriately, can positively influence clients to a greater extent than the theoretical framework the therapist works to. Although there is an appreciation for the need for,

and positive impact of, the therapeutic use of self, MacLaren (2008) argues that this must be combined with a sound understanding of theoretical approaches in order to help facilitated positive change in a client. MacLaren uses Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT) as an example and states the therapeutic use of self has to be met with the CBT principles in order to best work with the client. Although MacLaren outlines accurately that there are psychological paradigms in understanding the use of self, her argument that the use of self and theoretical knowledge is somewhat of a 50-50 split is not fully compelling for me. I feel instead that when effective therapy takes place then there is a coupling of theory and the use of self, that one enhances the quality of the other and that there should be a flowing relationship between the two. I feel that in arguments such as this that the clients experience in therapy is over looked. Is theory and the use of self an even split for the client in therapy, or is one more impactful and prevalent than the other? I feel the question remains unanswered and the answer harder to find.

Edwards and Bess (1998) has established an argument about the conflict between the use of self and theory. He contends that in order for the theoretical ideology of the therapist to be of any use then there must be an understanding of the self on the part of the therapist. Thus giving some priority to the therapist's use of the self that facilitates and communicates the knowledge the therapist already holds.

Empirical critique and empirical paradigms of the use of self studies

The difficulty experienced in establishing the ontology of the self has already been discussed. However, this difficulty is enhanced by some literature that attempts to better understand the use of self. Nutt-Williams and Hill (1996) conducted a study where they found that trainee therapists established their therapeutic input and their client's experience of their session as negative when they became more aware of their own perceptions and emotions. The basis of this being that the trainee therapist found the conscious self-awareness of themselves a distraction to conducting an effective therapeutic experience for the client. Nutt-Williams and Hill's study therefore argues that the use of self in therapy may be a hindrance in the therapeutic process. However, it can be argued that using trainee therapists as the participants in this study opens it up to critique. Lack of training and experience in a not yet qualified therapist leads me to believe that they are not yet fully competent in utilising the self to its full effect in therapy. Had this study been conducted with trained and experienced therapists then the outcome may have shown a more positive view on the value of the self in my opinion. Our diluted understanding of the self in counselling psychology continues with other limited studies. Orlinsky and Ronnestad (2002) conducted a study where attempts were made to better understand the self of therapists by asking them what qualities they most often presented in their friendships outside of the therapy room. Over 4,600 therapists took part in the study, nearly 50% of the participants stated that they had characteristics that helped facilitate growth in others, such as being engaged, being open and honest and being an effective listener. However, Orlinsky fails to recognise that this is how the therapists view themselves and how their core characteristics impact on others (i.e., their clients). The person receiving the therapy may view these therapists as something totally different. This study clearly illustrates our skewed perception of the use of self in all forms of therapy.

Research on the use of self is grounded in how the therapist actively uses the self, with minimal consideration to how the self can also encapsulate a therapist's ability to withhold or bracket certain emotions that are invoked in a therapeutic relationship, a skill which in my developing understanding of the profession of counselling psychology appears to be useful when in a session. Reinkraut and colleagues (2009) does touch on this and states that the use of self in therapy also encapsulates an understanding on the therapist's behalf when that self may be detrimental for the client. However, this is another part of the use of self in counselling psychology that remains under-researched and not fully understood.

Meta-analytic studies have attempted to give account for the role the therapist's self has to play in therapy. Luborsky and colleagues (1986) compared four studies and determined that the differences between therapists accounted for more of an impact in therapeutic outcome than the modality to which these therapists were aligned. Wosket (1999) states that Luborsky's study gives credit to the significant role the therapist's self plays in therapy, and that it can contribute even more so than the school of theory in which a therapist works. Crits-Christoph and colleagues' (1991) meta-analysis of 15 studies again illustrates the effectiveness of the therapist's self, superseding that of the modality under which a therapist works. Although these meta-analyses outline that there is significant value in the self of the therapist that contributes to effective therapy, it does not give us an understanding as to how that might be, a point that Blow, Sprenkle, and Davis (2007) identify as a limitation of such studies. These studies that outline that the modality a therapist works under does not fully contribute to the change experienced in the client, leads me to establish that one other major factor that can contribute to this change is the therapist themselves, how they respond and what is instilled in them from the client.

Although there is quantitative research that attempts to outline the therapist's self in counselling psychology, qualitative research is severely lacking (Shadley, 1987; Horne, 1999; Wosket, 1999). This therefore imposes significant limitations in appreciating what the use of self means in, and how it is utilised in, counselling psychology. According to Roth and Fonagy (2005), qualitative study can illustrate key points in research that quantitative cannot.

Psychological paradigms of the use of self in counselling psychology

Understanding the empirical paradigms of the use of self in counselling psychology do outline some key difficulties in fully understanding how the use of self fits into counselling psychology. However, the difficulty in the definition and utilisation of the self in counselling psychology continues to be challenging when analysing the multiple psychological paradigms that incorporate the use of self.

McLaren (2008) states that CBT has never given a full appreciation for the use of self in therapy. The term 'use of self' may not be readily expressed in CBT, but due to the level in which a CBT therapist is influential in a session, the way in which the self is utilised and experienced by the therapist cannot be overlooked (Hayes, Hope, VanDyke, & Heimberg, 2007). Although there is limited research on the way in which CBT understands the use of self, Dewane (2005) has outlined five principles which illustrate how it is applied and understood in CBT. These five principles encapsulate the CBT clinician's use of personality, relational dynamics, belief systems, anxiety and self-disclosure. Although Dewane (2005) outlines ways in which the CBT therapist does utilise the use of self in therapy, she gives little appreciation for why the self is not more readily understood other than stating that, due to the vast acceleration in popularity of CBT, some therapists are not trained fully in attempts to qualify more CBT clinicians to meet demands. However, I feel that the problem seems much bigger and that the issues are more intrinsic in the modality as a whole as opposed to just the way that it is often taught.

One study (Omylinska-Thurston & James, 2011) has been conducted of how person-centred counselling psychologists practically incorporate the use of self. It has outlined that the term 'congruence', meaning the level to which an individual is fully transparent and honest, is intrinsic in the person centred approach and identifies a therapist's ability to assess and utilise their own emotions and feelings in order to facilitate positive change in the client. The researchers wanted to better understand the processes in which a person-centred therapist facilitates congruence. They established that the person-centred therapist incorporates four processes, namely receiving, processing, expressing and confirming. Although this study might give us some understanding of the ways in which the use of self is understood in person-centred counselling psychology it gives little insight into how effective person-centred counselling psychologists view the use of self, or 'congruence'. In addition to this, there is little consideration given in establishing that the two other therapists core conditions are also evidence of the

use of self by person centred counselling psychologists, namely empathy and unconditional positive regard.

The psychodynamic approach to counselling psychology has often discredited the use of the therapist's self. However, there are aspects of psychodynamics that illustrates how a therapist uses the self in practice. The concept of transference, which fundamentally means when a client identifies feelings and emotions from their therapist that were elicited in them from another figure in their childhood, highlights to a psychodynamic therapist how their 'self' can impact on a client. Countertransference is the emotional reaction of the therapist to what the client has disclosed when experiencing transference. Again, it is clear that countertransference forces the therapist to consider the 'self' in their psychodynamic practice. Pagano (2012) illustrates how transference and countertransference is evidence of the use of self in this school of therapy, but highlights that this concept is still a developing one for this school of therapy.

It is clear that a consensus for the definition of the use of self and an explanation of how it is appropriately applied in counselling psychology will not be found when analysing psychological paradigms. However, it is effective in developing our understanding of its complexity. I myself align more with the person centred perspective of the use of self. I am aware that my developing understanding of counselling psychology as a counselling psychologist in training is in its infancy, but I do not believe that the self is either less important than theory, or that the self should be ignored and restrained. The person-centred concept of the self is, I believe, a vital part of therapy crucial in effecting positive change in a client.

Self-disclosure and the use of self

The use of self-disclosure in therapy and how it helps us understand the use of self in counselling psychology is an aspect of this argument that may give some clarity and may also open up more questions. When outlining his psychodynamic approach, Freud warned against the self-disclosure of therapists towards their clients. Freud believed that self-disclosure on the therapist's part would lead to the focus of therapy being taken away from the client. (Freud, 1912). Freud's refusal to accept the impact the self of the therapist has no real weight to it in modern therapy. A study (Castonguay, Goldfried, Wiser, Raue, & Hayes, 1996) revealed that therapists from the same schools of therapy conducted sessions in a variety of approaches and with varying degrees of success, thus outlining that in part the therapist's self always has an impact. In contrast to Freud, Rogers and the person-centred approach to therapy was of the opinion that self-disclosure of the therapist was a necessity for a congruent therapeutic relationship with the therapist and client (Rogers, 1995). Rogers' theory is backed by more recent literature that also establishes that the therapist's self enhances the relationship between client and therapist (Dewane, 2005; Edwards & Bess, 1998; Ganzer, 2007).

The discussion around use of self and self-disclosure is evident even in literature that advocates the use of self, and is reserved not only for those that discredit it. Lum (2002) highlights a concept known as the Satir Model (Satir, Banmen, Gerber, & Gomori, 1991) which outlines how therapist can effectively use themselves to benefit the client. Although Lum and Satir are ambassadors of the effectiveness of the therapist's self, they both conclude that self-disclosure is not part of the use of self in therapy and should be totally avoided, arguing that it detracts from the clients own self exploration. It is challenging enough to determine the effectiveness of the use of self in counselling psychology when viewing the literature that agrees and disagrees with the importance the self has in therapy, without getting confused by literature that actually advocates it. Again the argument of how the use of self can be applied to counselling psychology remains unclear and no progress made with contradictory arguments such as this.

Carew (2009) illustrates how psychological paradigms within counselling psychology can make it challenging to establish a consensus of the use of self in counselling psychology. Carew (2009) highlights that Freud was adamant that the therapist must be a 'blank screen' when in therapeutic contact with a client. However, there is argument to suggest that Freud's position on deterring therapists from using the self is based largely on context. Freud was of a time when his theories could only be deemed credible if there were diagnostic elements that required the facilitator to be inflexible and rigid in their approach. Sherby (2005) argues that this in turn led to Freud determining the use of self from the therapist as counterintuitive, deterring from real effective therapy. Thus perhaps Freud's negative view of the use of self, stemmed largely from his environment as opposed to true empirical backing.

My personal view on self-disclosure is that it is an integral part of the use of self in counselling psychology. What much of the literature that discredits self-disclosure as part of the use of self dismisses is that self-disclosure is often out with the control of the therapist. Freud (1912) urged therapists that their emotions, feelings and interpretations should be ignored in order to allow the client to focus solely on their own issues. What Freud failed to acknowledge was the unconscious nature of therapist's disclosure. The fact that a therapist wears a wedding ring, the way they have decorated their working space or the expensive watch that the therapist wears is all evidence of inadvertent self-disclosure, evidence that I feel is lacking in arguments that discredit it and in the literature as a whole.

Ethical dilemmas and considerations of the use of self in counselling psychology

When discussing the use of the self in counselling psychology it is natural that ethical questions will arise regarding the extent to which a therapist inputs their own emotions and feelings and the degree to which the client is affected. The Health and Care Professions Council's (HCPC) Standards of Conduct, Performance and Ethics (HCPC, 2016) outlines in section 1.3 that clients are to be supported and helped wherever possible by the therapists to facilitate effective therapy. In addition to this, the same guidelines also implore in section 1.7 that boundaries must be adhered to in order to keep the relationship between the client and the therapist professional (HCP, 2016). Both of these points give counselling psychologists a better understanding of the ethical framework that should be employed in their practice, especially with regards to the use of self. However, as the HCPC encompasses numerous professions that include the likes of occupational therapy and speech and language therapy, as well as counselling psychology, it can be challenging to highlight with any real specificity the ethical guidelines of counselling psychology in general but especially the ethical guidelines of the use of self in counselling psychology.

The Division of Counselling Psychology Professional Practice Guidelines of the BPS outlines that it is the ethical responsibility for counselling psychologists to participate in supervision, according to section 2.1. This section goes on to state that supervision can facilitate effective understanding of the use of self (BPS, 2017). In these guidelines we can therefore see that there are ethical dilemmas that arise when the use of self is employed in counselling psychology, ethical dilemmas that counselling psychologists must be aware of and arrange supervision in order to better appreciate the use of self in their practice (BPS, 2009). The BPS requirement for a minimum of 40 hours from counselling psychologists in training over their studies highlights the ethical requirement a counselling psychologist has to understanding themselves. It also highlights the importance and ethical value the BPS hold of the therapist's self. (BPS, 2012). I feel that a major part of the ethical issues with the therapeutic use of self in counselling psychology is appreciating that regardless of the level of training a counselling psychologist has obtained, each therapist is human. Understanding that because of this then each therapist will bring their own level of emotional response to a therapy session highlights both the ethical dilemmas and the difficulties in establishing a coherent and consistent ethical framework that all counselling psychologists can work with when utilising the self in therapy.

CONCLUSION

From the extensive analysis of the definition of the use of self in counselling psychology, how it is utilised, and the empirical and psychological paradigms that attempt to quantify the use of self in counselling psychology and other therapeutic professions, it is clear that more research is needed in order to develop an understanding of what the therapeutic self really means to counselling psychology. Some studies have been conducted and some academics have made comment to what the use of self means for counselling psychology but it does not go far enough. Often we have to rely on perceptions and studies conducted by other related therapeutic professions in order to appreciate the self and its potential place in counselling psychology. From my own perceptive I see these contributions from sister professions as effective in establishing a consensus for the use of self in counselling psychology, these contributions have led me to appreciate where I value the self in my daily life and work also. I feel that the use of self is a very individualistic feature that transcends multiple fields. However, there can be no argument that there is a desperate need for more research from counselling psychology on how it incorporates and appreciates the self in its practice. In my early career as a counselling psychologist in training I feel that the therapeutic self is a commodity that when utilised within the appropriate ethical frameworks can be of substantial value to clients but requires further study in order to solidify this.

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