

Title of the panel: Qualitative perspectives on therapist development: From initial inspirations to sustained growth.

Organizer and Moderator: Thomas Schroder, University of Nottingham, UK.

1. Paper in a panel:

Title: The Whys and Wherefores of Becoming a Therapist.

Authors: Thomas Schroder, University of Nottingham, UK; Jan Pirke, University Witten/Herdecke; Ulrike Willutzki, Witten/Herdecke University, Germany; Louise Hentschel, Witten / Herdecke University; and Lea Nagel, Witten / Herdecke University.

Abstract:

Aspiring psychotherapists start their professional training for a variety of reasons, including personal and professional motives, theoretical and practical considerations, past experiences and hopes for the future. The SPRISTAD ‘Trainee Background Information Form’ (TBIF) elicits individual motivations in free-text format. Responses have previously been explored in qualitative inductive analyses by Messina et al. (2018) for an initial Italian sample, Serian (2023) for German language data, and Eilinghoff-Ehlers (2023) for non-German language data. A synopsis of these studies showed that identified themes partially overlap, providing the basis for a coding frame that can be used for a deductive content analysis of all TBIF data, once a category system has been created that can be reliably coded. The results would assign presence/absence ratings for each category relating to each individual response, allowing for quantitative analyses investigating associations with other TBIF variables. We present a coding frame that we have generated in German - using translations by native speakers of responses in other languages – together with its English equivalent. As a next step we will iteratively develop coding manuals to allow for reliable analyses of present and future data.

2. Paper in a panel:

Title: The “good trainee” from the perspective of psychotherapy trainers: a qualitative study.

Authors: Giovanna Trimoldi, Mercatorum University, Rome; and Irene Messina, Mercatorum University

Abstract:

The person of the therapist has received growing attention in psychotherapy research, suggesting that training effectiveness may also depend on the person of the trainees, with relevant implications in terms of candidate selection or tailoring training to the person. In the present study, we focused on how and how much psychotherapy training can be related to and effective in fostering trainees’ characteristics associated with successful therapists and contrast trainees’ characteristics that could represent limitations as therapists. To this aim, we interviewed 14 training program directors with different psychotherapy approaches. Audio recordings of these semi-structured interviews were transcribed verbatim and analysed using NVivo software. According to our findings, qualities such as self-insight, awareness, and the ability to embrace uncertainty are largely recognized as the main characteristics of “good trainees”. With regard to training effectiveness, psychotherapy trainers underscored the

importance to transition from rigid adherence to prescribed techniques toward a more nuanced approach built upon four foundational pillars: greater emphasis on experiential learning, a shift from rigidity to self-awareness, the cultivation of trust and affection in the trainee-trainer relationship, and a move from traditional supervision to a model of intervision.

3. Paper in a panel

Title: What are the significant events reported by therapists? A study exploring their personal and professional development

Authors: Hubert de Condé, Emmanuelle Zech et Jochem Willemsen (Université catholique de Louvain, Belgium)

Abstract:

Introduction: This presentation will lay out a doctoral study on therapists' personal and professional development. This project advocates for a self-integrated perspective on training, emphasizing the equal importance of nurturing personal development alongside professional skills cultivation. The concept of Significant Events (SE) was adapted from its original application for client change processes to the person-of-the-therapist. SE were defined as helpful or hindering events experienced in the therapy process. SE were adapted to the context of professional development (PD), because, similarly to therapy processes, PD is not a linear process of acquiring skills and knowledge. The goal of this study was to explore transformative moments in therapists' development.

Method: 230 participants completed an online questionnaire, evaluating: (1) therapists' personal and professional characteristics (TC), such as their age, gender, supervision, personal therapy, and their level of training and (2) therapists' SE. TC were measured by the DPPCQ. Participants were asked to report helpful or hindering SE that influenced their personal and professional development.

Results: Thematic analysis uncovered three main themes: (1) personal events (resilience, relationship dynamics, self-discovery, spirituality), (2) professional events (transitions, training and achievements, clinical experiences, shifts, peer-support, reflections on theoretical approaches), and (3) hybrid events where personal and professional aspects intertwine (health and well-being, loss and grief, life transitions, global awareness, ethical dilemmas).

Discussion: This research contributes to ongoing discussions on professional development, revealing the interplay between the therapists' personal and professional spheres. Findings suggest that some psychotherapy approaches focus more on the development of a more integrated person-of-the therapist.

Keywords: Personal and Professional Development, Person-of-the-therapist, Therapist Characteristics, Significant Events, Therapist Growth.