To Assess or not to Assess

The place of assessment in the person-centred approach

Huw MacRae Jones

'Learning Outcome'

Critically engage with a model of assessment compatible with their core theoretical model in order to determine the client's therapeutic needs, while maintaining an awareness of other assessment strategies.

From ECHCS900 module description (UWTSD, no date)

Assessment

What are the *good* and *bad* connotations of this term?

Definition

Assessment - "*the act of judging or deciding the amount, value, quality, or importance of something, or the judgment or decision that is made*" (Cambridge Dictionary, no date)

PCA view of Assessment

Assessment, at least in a formal sense, is not seen as part of the PCA (Person-Centred Approach)...

"The whole question of client 'assessment' runs entirely counter to person-centred theory and fits those approaches to counselling which more closely align to the diagnostic 'medical model'." (Mearns, 1997, ch.6)

however...

PCA view of Assessment (ctd.)

What about assessment in a less formal sense - of the ongoing relationship and of the therapist's own feelings?

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Critically engage with a model of assessment compatible with their core theoretical model in order to determine the client's therapeutic needs, while maintaining an awareness of other assessment strategies.

From ECHC5002 module description (UWTSD, no date)

Assessment

What are the *good* and *bad* connotations of this term?

Definition

Assessment - *"the act of judging or deciding the amount, value, quality, or importance of something, or the judgment or decision that is made"* (Cambridge Dictionary, *no date*)

Assessment in Counselling

The term assessment does not have a precise definition in Counselling but rather a range of meanings e.g.

- *A formal assessment taking place prior to the counselling process.*
- *A part of the therapeutic process - e.g. "The very first emotion assessment therapists probably make is whether clients have too much or too little emotion..." (Greenberg, 2011)*
- *An initial impression - ""Assessment, as we choose to use the term, is a process by which therapists reach some conclusion as to the possibility or likelihood of effective working."* (Wilkins & Gill, 2003)

PCA view of Assessment

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"The whole question of client 'assessment' runs entirely counter to person-centred theory and fits those approaches to counselling which more closely align to the diagnostic 'medical model'." (Mearns, 1997, ch.6)

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PCA view of Assessment (ctd.)

What about assessment in a less formal sense - of the ongoing relationship and of the therapist's own feelings?

3 forms of 'assessment' consistent with the PCA....

Psychological *Contact*

As pointed out in Wilkins & Gill (2003), person-centred therapists need to assess whether 'psychological contact' is possible between client and therapist (see Rogers (1957))

Rogers' 7 stages of process

In 'On Becoming a Person', Rogers (2011[1961]) gives a detailed description of how he sees a person changing throughout the therapeutic process. It could be argued that consideration of these stages provides a way of 'assessing' where a client is in this process.

Mearns' 20 suggested questions for consideration during person-centred supervision.

(see Mearns (1997, ch.6))

Mearns' 20 suggested questions for consideration during person-centred supervision.

- How do I (the counsellor) behave in relation to this client?
- What do I feel in relation to this client?
- What do I think when I work with this client?
- What goes on 'underneath' for me?
- What parts of myself am I using with this client?
- Am I 'changing' (using different parts of me) in relation to this client?
- What parts of myself am I not using in relation to this client?
- What is the nature of my empathy with this client?
- Are there any blocks to my empathy with this client?
- How is my warmth with this client?
- Is my warmth different with this client than with others?
- Do I have any tendency towards 'conditionality' with this client?
- In what ways am I being incongruent with this client?
- Am I feeling any problems in relation to my contract with this client?
- Am I experiencing any 'boundary' problems with this client?
- What am I learning in relationship with this client?
- What are my assumptions about how the client is experiencing me?
- How am I checking on the client's experiencing?
- What is my judgement of this client's locus of evaluation?
- How is my judgement of the client's locus of evaluation affecting my communication with the client?

From Dave Mearns. Person-Centred Counselling Training (Kindle Locations 1275-1283). Kindle Edition.

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