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Somatic countertransference experiences of nurse therapeutic touch practitioners: A content analysis

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Statement of the Problem: Poorly articulated and minimally researched, somatic countertransference (SCT) is a spontaneous phenomenon sometimes experienced by therapists during their work with traumatized clients. A more positive perspective on countertransference, it is defined by Orbach and Carroll (2006) as “the therapist’s awareness of their own body, of sensations, images, impulses, and feelings that offer a link to the client’s healing process” (p. 64). The study is timely and aligned with current state of the science on use of Complementary and Alternative Medicine (CAM; Strauss, Coeytaux, McDuffie, Williams, Nagi, & Wing, 2011). Purpose of the Study is to qualitatively describe SCT experiences of nurse Therapeutic Touch (TT) practitioners.

Methodology & Theoretical Orientation: Use of purposeful sampling recruited eight experts. Audiotaped sixty-minute face-to-face in-depth interviews were conducted using a semi-structured interview guide with six open-ended questions. Sandelowski’s (1993, 2000, 2010) preferred method of latent content analysis produced codes and subcategories grounded exclusively in the saturated data (Patton, 2002).

Findings: Ten subcategories, three categories (Donabedian, 1988), and one major theme were inductively generated to reveal the underlying meaning in the communication (Chang, 2001). “SCT: A Language for Healing Trauma” was consistent with social science communication research (Krippendorff, 1989, 2004), SCT was found to be a factor in the healing of trauma, experienced during the verbal and nonverbal communication of one group of nurse TT practitioners in interaction with traumatized clients.

Conclusion & Significance: SCT mitigates vicarious traumatization and enhances compassion satisfaction in the therapist. Increased understanding of SCT can further promote the adjunctive role of TT and embodiment in trauma therapy. Study findings contribute to the academic and clinical debate about the self/other distinction in neuroscience, nursing, psychology, and philosophy.

Biography

Catherine Jirak Monetti has her expertise in Nursing Education and non-exposure trauma therapy. A Robert Wood Johnson Foundation (RWJF) Scholar, she earned her Doctor of Philosophy from Rutgers, College of Nursing in May, 2014. She is trained in Gestalt Psychotherapy, EMDR Trauma Therapy, and Therapeutic Touch (TT) Energy Healing. She has been teaching undergraduate, graduate, and doctoral nursing students for 27 years. Her qualitative doctoral dissertation research, “Somatic countertransference experiences of nurse Therapeutic Touch practitioners: A content analysis,” contributes to the academic and clinical debate about the self/other distinction in neuroscience, nursing, psychology, and philosophy. Her research was presented by poster at the 2014 CANS (Council for the Advancement of Nursing Science) State of the Science Congress on Nursing Research: Optimizing Health by Addressing Complexity, Washington, DC, September 17 - 20, 2014., and at the Sigma Theta Tau International 28th Nursing Research Congress, July 28, 2017, Dublin, Ireland.

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