Countertransference inside and outside sessions: the impact of Countertransference on the therapist’s post-session elaboration

Francesco De Bei¹, Attà Negri², Gaia Dell’Arciprete³, and Diego Rocco³

¹Università degli Studi di Roma La Sapienza Dipartimento di Psicologia Dinamica Clinica e Salute
²Università degli Studi di Bergamo Dipartimento di Scienze Umane e Sociali
³Università degli Studi di Padova

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Abstract

Objective: Countertransference (CT) research has demonstrated the importance of CT management for successful therapy outcomes. Over time, CT research began to take this aspect more and more seriously and expanded the concept of CT management to include aspects, such as stable characteristics of the therapist and his or her theoretical model, that do not necessarily pertain the single session (e.g., therapist’s self-integration, theoretical framework). In this study we further expand the boundaries of CT management by investigating the relationship between CT experienced within sessions and the elaborative activity taking place between sessions. Method: Twenty-three in-training psychotherapists were asked to rate their emotional reactions through the Therapist Response Questionnaire at the end of 69 counselling sessions and to fill the Post Session Therapist Questionnaire, an instrument assessing three relevant reflexivity activities in the post-session time. The 69 sessions were also recorded, transcribed and evaluated by three external raters, who applied the Countertransference Behavior Measure. Results: Results showed significant correlations between some dimensions of CT experienced in the session and some dimensions of the therapist’ post-session working through. Conclusion: Results highlighted the centrality of the reflexivity processes that therapists put in place between sessions and not only within the session to increase awareness of their countertransference, a prerequisite for its handling during the session for therapeutic purposes.

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