

Therapy as Wild Handout

Summary:

- Good versus Bad therapist can be reframed as a struggle between our wild selves and domesticated selves.
- When working as a therapist, it would be helpful to be in Wild Mind - a state which means resting in our embodiment, open to the whole of our experience, balancing that intuition and openness with our intellectual thoughts and clinical knowledge.
- How humans have domesticated themselves threatens this. We've separated ourselves from our own embodiment by seeing ourselves as other from animals, plants, rocks, natural cycles and therefore we become separate from our wild senses. This has seen us develop a fear of the wild - the unpredictable, the spontaneous.
- The way we live in the Western world reflects this fear - we've designed a world of separation, isolated systems and hierarchy which plays out in how we approach religion, philosophy, politics, education, difference in race, ethnicity, culture, sexuality - and all in all, it affects how we approach humanity. Separation is the foundation of our hierarchical society, which causes great harm and oppression.
- Our fear of our own wildness can threaten effective therapy - in order to stay domesticated and keep the systems in place, we want to stay in control as humans - fearing our own spontaneity, the unpredictability of others, fear of the unknown.
- If we practise therapy from that space, how can we trust the process of our clients, trusting our clients to self regulate and move towards healing? How can we trust in the changes that are and will happen, and not force our own will and outcomes as a therapist onto the client?
- Learning to surrender and accept the unpredictability and spontaneity of our own embodiment means we can offer this surrender to clients too.
- It would be easy to think of Wild Therapy as an invitation to engage in Ecotherapy with our clients, and whilst connecting tangibly with the natural world can be one way to embody wildness, Wild Therapy is something that can be practised in the therapy room with two individuals sitting face to face. It's an attitude - a commitment to recognising interconnectedness, not only between two people, but also with the wider ecosystem.

Supporting Theories:

Person-centred Approach

- Traditional therapy approaches have not tended to explicitly recognise the relationships with the other-than-human world.
- However, there is some connection with Wild Mind in the person-centred approach. Rogers indicates that in order to be a fully-functioning person, negative emotions (e.g. the wild part of ourselves), need not be denied but worked through embodiment – trusting the feelings, instinct and gut reactions.
- Rogers uses the metaphor of growth as an organism which is propelled to grow given the right conditions.
- We all have the tendency towards growth that lay hidden under layers of psychological defences (hiding our true undesirable 'wild' selves).

Gestalt Approach:

- Totten and Priestman say it is impossible to grasp an individual's issues and problems without a sense of their wider relational field, because their problems are problems of that field.
- Gestalt therapy has a theory (Field Theory) which focuses on the interaction patterns between individual people and the "field" - their wider environment - developed by Gestalt psychologist Kurt Lewin in the 1940s.
- Field theory has been described as 'the theory of everything'. The assumption that an individual is limited to an independent, inherent existence is part of a linear and mechanistic perspective, and is true only within a limited frame of reference. This directly links to the concept of Wild Therapy which suggests working with clients within this limited frame of reference i.e. as a separate entity from the world around them, can inhibit healing because it does not acknowledge client's interconnectedness.
- Perls, Hefferline and Goodman (1973: 19) wrote: 'Only the interplay of organism and environment ... constitutes the psychological situation, not the organism and environment taken separately'.

Journal Prompts:

- "Psychotherapists are by and large indoor people" (Linden & Grut, 2002).
- "Therapy is by nature wild but a lot of it at the moment is rather tame" (Totton, 2010).
- "We are all wild. It's just that civilisation keeps getting in the way" (Barnes, 2007).
- What's your relationship with the natural world, and does this influence how you live?
- What are the challenges of the wild approach for clients?
- What are the challenges of the wild approach for therapists?
- What comes up for you when you look at the word 'wild'?
- Do you think your own therapy is wild? What stops it from being more wild?
- What challenges do you think you would have, personally, in practising a wild approach?

References

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