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Main Themes

The training of young therapists

Keywords

young psychotherapists, age bias, therapeutic identity, existential analysis, maturity, credibility

Title

Would You Go to a 25 Year Old Therapist? Nurturing Identity and Addressing Biases While Training Young Psychotherapists

Abstract for

Short Presentation (15-20 mins)

Abstract

There are few professions more freighted by expectations than psychotherapy. Since Sigmund Freud entered the popular imagination as the image of our work, psychotherapists have been, at various times, expected to be male, severe, wise, unreadable, and, perhaps most enduringly, older. This expectation around age can significantly affect and discourage young therapists. It is an unspoken assumption and bias, which is as detrimental to therapeutic training as to the therapeutic process. Thus, addressing the age bias in therapy should be an integral part of any training program for young therapists. In answer to the operative question—Is a twenty-five year old capable of working with someone twice their age?—I can confidently say, yes. Given that, what can be done to educate young, skilled therapists so that they are not limited by biases and a perceived obligation to work within their age bracket?

Following the phenomenological approach of Existential Analysis and an attempt to face issues directly, this presentation explores the bias against young therapists and lays out a simple plan to address the question of age, experience, and legitimacy in the education of young therapists. Collectively, this can be called a process of “nurturing the therapeutic identity.” While therapeutic identity is essential to all practitioners, it is particularly difficult to cultivate, and therefore of special importance, to psychotherapists who are held back by assumptions about the way age impacts a psychotherapist’s abilities.

The presentation aims to:

- ? ?Identify and understand the common biases young psychotherapists must confront (e.g. lack of life experience, clinical inexperience, perceived immaturity and lack of credibility, resistance to authority).
- ? ?Explore the importance of self-development and the role of self-experience/personal therapy in young psychotherapist training.
- ? ??Discuss how the unique qualities young therapists bring enrich the profession (e.g. openness, curiosity, adaptability, and enthusiasm).
- ? ??Present strategies for creating supportive training environments that address biases directly and promote self-awareness.

By drawing on phenomenological experiences and the roles of self-image and self-value, this interactive presentation strives to foster a dialogue on how to meet young trainees where they are as they embark on their professional journey. Ultimately, it emphasizes the importance of nurturing the unique strengths and values each therapist brings to the table while cultivating a psychological maturity that cannot be reduced to a practitioner’s age. Practically, this process starts with our own existential openness and a question: can I learn something from a young therapist?

Katya Kiiaeva is a psychotherapist-in-training and counselor who holds degrees in Philosophy and Psychological Counseling. Currently, she studies Existential Analysis under Dr. Alfried Längle.

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