

On Being a University Student in Therapy: Exploring the Process of Therapy and its Impact on the Process of Learning

Historically, the client's experience of therapy has not featured centrally in psychological research. Research into student mental health shares this past bias towards the practitioner's viewpoint. While some research has been carried out into the process and outcome of therapy within some university counselling services, more is needed. This study aims to explore further the experience of undergoing therapy, as well as the experience of undergoing therapy and a university degree at the same time. Specifically, this study will seek to discover students' views on what impact, if any, undergoing therapy while studying has on their efforts to adequately complete their degree. In order to fully and accurately capture the student's experiences, a qualitative, phenomenological research design has been employed. Following a pilot that tested the interview schedule and method, six co-researchers with experience of undergoing therapy while studying for a university degree are being recruited by letter for semi-structured interviews. The interview material will be analysed using Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis, in order to ensure that the distilled themes remain true to the participants' material. Broad themes that have already arisen from the pilot are around driving factors and obstacles to seeking therapy, how clients feel therapy works, their experience of therapy, its outcomes, and how therapy assists students with their studies. This presentation will describe the results from the main study, including their relationship to these initial themes, as well as describe further the design and analysis. Possible implications from this exploratory study for practice within university counselling services and for our understanding of how therapy works generally will be discussed.