‘Fragile Worlds’

*A Literature-based Heuristic Exploration of the Experiencing of Presence Within the Person-centred Therapeutic Encounter.*

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Abstract

The quality of presence has been widely researched within the realms of both nursing and psychotherapy during the last two decades and yet would appear to continue to challenge our contemporaneous predilection for the more measurable and contained. Through heuristically informed literature-based research, the author examines facets of the personal, professional and spiritual dimensions of presence, offering an investigation of its experience and influence within the psychotherapeutic encounter. The study identifies five key aspects of presence and offers a discrete analysis of these, whilst simultaneously acknowledging the essential fluidity of the phenomenon. Co-creative elements of presence are emphasised incorporating recognition of the mutuality of encounter, alongside a consideration of presence as offering. The significance of the self is identified and the study concludes with a reflection on existential and spiritual dimensions.

Within much of the literature presence is perceived as deeply therapeutic. Conversely, this research suggests that, whilst presence may clearly retain the capacity to support emotional and psychological growth, it may also possess the potential for harm. It is argued that, as therapists, we might offer our presence with care, guarding against a somewhat indiscriminate ‘holding’ and accompaniment of clients. The main implication is to training wherein the author argues that further attention might be paid to understanding the impact of the ‘self’ within the moment of meeting. Written from an existential-humanistic stance, this study concludes that however elusive presence may initially appear, it offers itself for a considerable degree of analysis and thus proves itself worthy of more focused attention during initial training and beyond.
Declaration

This work is original and has not been submitted previously in support of any qualification or course.

Signed: ................................................................. (Ruth M Bridges)
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………

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‘Tiffany reasoned that everyone had something inside them that told the world they were there. That was why you could often sense when someone was behind you, even if they were making no sound at all. You were receiving their ‘I am here’ signal.

Some people had a very strong one. They were the people who got served first in shops. Granny Weatherwax had an ‘I am here’ signal that bounced off the mountains when she wanted it to...

She could turn it off too.

She was doing that now. Tiffany was having to concentrate to see her. Most of her mind was telling her there was no-one there at all.’

(Pratchett, 2007: 30/31)