

Abstract

The emergence of the 'true self' (Winnicott, 1965) is a significant part of becoming a psychotherapist in a developmental-relational training, yet the experience of this is largely unacknowledged. This study aimed to explore this experience, and specifically the struggle related to the movement between the 'true' and 'false' self whilst training as a psychotherapist. Qualitative, semi-structured interviews were conducted with a sample of five trainee developmental-relational psychotherapists who identified with this struggle. Interpretative phenomenological analysis illuminated two super-ordinate themes: 'the tensions of psychotherapy training' and "'dropping the shackles": the journey to self-acceptance'. These illustrated the painful challenge of trying to be at the end point of a journey to a 'true', 'authentic' practitioner, whilst being stuck with historical defences and adaptations. Findings also highlighted the liberating processes of letting go of old constraints, through a journey of self-acceptance and awareness. Findings are discussed in light of current literature and theories, and recommendations are made in relation to training and future research.