

Abstract

This research, on how male relational psychotherapists experience expressing love for their clients, emerged from the author's personal experience of expressing love for a client, and subsequent doubts about discussing that in supervision.

The study sought to understand what love means to male therapists, how they express it, and how they feel in doing so. Six male psychotherapists took part in unstructured, conversational interviews. The data were analysed using Sultan's (2019) approach to Heuristic Inquiry, including the researcher's subjective experience alongside participants' voices. The findings were synthesised into a set of nine, interrelated, resonant dimensions and a piece of creative writing – "Two men".

Findings included that early experiences with fathers and others shaped how therapists felt about love and loving, as well as that being male in a female dominated profession also played a part in their expression of love. Participants described feeling cautious using the word 'love', often preferring non-verbal or transpersonal forms of expression that felt safer and more authentic.

The study concludes that, for these male therapists, expressing love for clients is more often felt than spoken and that more professional support is needed for men to reflect on and express love towards clients in their practice.