

How collaboration in psychotherapy becomes therapeutic: A study of interactive and psychophysiological processes in good and poor outcome cases

ABSTRACT:

Background

The collaborative relationship between patient and therapist offers an opportunity to create a safe and insightful intersubjective space that increases patient's openness to share their current experiences and revise them. Early studies on physiological responses in psychotherapy have shown that both patient and therapist are reactive to each other producing physiological responses that can be in concordance or in discordance between them.

Aims

Overall, this project aimed to understand patient's and therapist's contributions to Therapeutic collaboration (TC), studying the physiological processes involved in the dyad TC throughout the therapy processes. Also we aimed to study the physiological synchrony between the dyad in specific TC episodes and significant events of therapy.

Method

Therapeutic Collaboration was coded using Therapeutic Collaboration Coding System (TCCS). Therapist and client had their physiological responses (Heart Rate and Electrodermal Activity - EDA/ Skin conductance - SC) recorded simultaneously. BIOPAC system was used to record dyad's physiological responses and Acqknowledge Software was used to analyze the physiological data.

Main Results and Conclusions

Descriptive results showed that the patients presented lower values of heart rate variability than the therapist throughout the therapy process, although both values were stable. These results suggest that patients presented less autonomic flexibility, which is coherent with the difficulty to regulate their physiological activity in emotionally challenging contexts. The analysis of dyad physiological synchrony showed variability across TC episodes. The results allowed us to reformulate the concept of synchrony in therapeutic dyads and are the starting point of a work in progress.

Keywords

Therapeutic collaboration, Psychophysiological synchrony, Therapeutic dyad, Depression, Cognitive-Behaviour Therapy

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