

AN EXPLORATORY STUDY OF COUNTERTRANSFERENCE RELATED TO PSYCHOTHERAPISTS' RELIGIOUS BACKGROUNDS

by Nancy Neufeld Silva, 2007

A therapist's faith can be a resource for providing potential space in psychotherapy. This qualitative study was conducted using a grounded theory approach and interviews with eight licensed psychotherapists in California's San Joaquin Valley. Findings affirmed that these therapists who had a strong Jewish or Christian upbringing carry an integrated faith and a sense of a relationship with god or the transpersonal into their adult lives and professional practices. This faith is rich and deep having evolved from a religious foundation. This faith affects countertransference attitudes and reactions that include empathic and visceral responses as well as use of religious language, judicious self-disclosure, values conflicts, and spiritual struggles. The findings suggest that a consciously sustained faith strengthens the therapeutic container to gently and firmly hold all that enters the therapeutic process and relationships by giving the therapist the capacity for a gracious attitude conceptualized as "generous spaciousness."