Review on the Self-Disclosure of Visitors

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Abstract

Self-disclosure is a significant factor in psychological consulting and psychological therapy. There have already been studies dividing the self-disclosure according to the content features and emotional dimensionality. Visitors display higher self-disclosure in psychological consulting situation, and men disclose more than women. The self-disclosure of visitors is a process of gradual exploration with specific emotion, which is influenced by the psychological state, emotional experience, counselors and social culture. The self-disclosure of visitors is related to the psychological consulting process, strategy selection and effects. The features of self-disclosure, as well as its function in psychological consultation, shall be further explored.

Keywords: psychological consulting, self-disclosure, visitor

1. Introduction

Self-disclosure is "a window for an individual to express his emotion, ideas and opinions towards others" (Suo, Hong & Qian, 2008), and it is closely related to the psychological health of human, which is especially reflected in the individual adaptation and psychological therapy (Li, Huichang & Yonghua, 2006). Self-disclosure is an effective factor in psychological consultation and psychological treatment, which has already been an extensive common sense among the therapists. The study on the self-disclosure of visitors starts from Weiner and Schuman (1984), but there are few studies involving the self-disclosure of visitors in China, and the exploration is not deep enough. Moreover, its active role in the psychological consulting and treatment has not been concerned yet. Consequently, the combing of related studies concerning the self-disclosure of visitors will be of important theoretical and realistic significance.

2. Concepts and Types of Self-Disclosure of Visitors

2.1 Concepts of the Self-Disclosure of Visitors

Generally, researchers held three types of opinions towards the concept of self-disclosure:

(1) Self-disclosure is a kind of personality feature. Jourard (1971) insisted that self-disclosure is the premise and expression of healthy personality. Dindia and Duck (2000) pointed out that self-disclosure may be the willing or capability of an individual, or a kind of relational feature (which is significant for interpersonal relation).

(2) Self-disclosure is a behavior event. Scholars holding such opinions mainly strengthen stress the privacy of disclosure (Licheng, Hua, & Jiawen, 2006), quantity and adaptability, etc. by starting from the features of the information disclosed. Wei et al. (2005) defined self-disclosure as the verbal communication in private information, individual concept and emotion conducted by individuals for making the other party understood. Antaki et al. (2005) pointed out that the information of self-disclosure shall be personal and spoken spontaneously, and it may sound important.

(3) The self-disclosure is a process of interaction. Scholars holding such opinion insisted that self-disclosure is a process of revealing significant information that cannot be achieved through other channels by others

(Dongping et al., 2006). Some even considered that self-disclosure is a process of revealing the feelings and information truly in front of others during the process of communication between individuals and others (Linying & Huichang, 2003). Moreover, Dindia and Duck (2000) pointed out that self-disclosure in interactive process has the following features: self-disclosure is a bilateral and consistent cyclic process; it is impacted by situation, with situationality; all components of self-disclosure may rely on each other and influence each other.

2.2 Types of Self-Disclosure of Visitors

There are no essential differences between the type division of the self-disclosure and the self-disclosure in general situation. The common division mainly consists of two types (Suo et al., 2008): (1) It is divided into descriptive self-disclosure and evaluative self-disclosure according to the nature of the contents disclosed. The former refers to the disclosure of factual information (such as individual thought, experience, etc.), while the latter refers to the disclosure of feelings, evaluation or judgment, etc. (2) It is divided into positive self-disclosure and negative self-disclosure according to the orientation of self-disclosure. The former refers to positive contents that have no adverse effects on individuals, and the latter refers to negative contents that have adverse effects on individuals and individuals even try to hide or do not want to disclose, for instance, Kahn et al. called the information disclosed or concealed as "distress disclosure", which is a kind of negative self-disclosure (Kahn, Achtcr, & Shambangh, 2001).

3. Measurement of Self-Disclosure of Visitors

Self-disclosure of visitors is mainly measured in the following two methods, and subjective report method is frequently applied.

3.1 Subjective Report Method

Kahn et al. (2002) pointed out that self-disclosure or hidden subjective report tendency can predict the practical disclosure behavior well. Besides, such orientation adopts questionnaire method (or scaling method) in most cases. The common self-disclosure questionnaires mainly include the self-disclosure questionnaire (JSDQ) of Jourard (1971) and self-disclosure situation survey (SDSS) of Cllelune (1976). There also self-concealment scale and disclosure expectation scale.

Self-concealment scale was compiled by Larson (1990), and there are a total of ten questions. The total score stands for the trend of self-disclosure. The higher the score is, the more evident the trend of self-disclosure will be (Larson & Chastain, 1990). The expected result scale of self-disclosure was compiled by Vogel and Wester (2003). There is a total of eight items, and it mainly adopted the Likert 5-point rating. Scores are calculated according to the two dimensionalities "expected risk" and "expected effect" (four items), and the higher the score is, the higher the expectation will be. Some researchers also evaluate the self-disclosure of visitors by consulting the conditions of applying scales (Walfish, Barnett, Marlyere, & Zielke, 2010).

3.2 Observational Method

The study on the self-disclosure of researchers with observational method may be restrained by some conditions, for instance, equipment, etc. The experimental observation mainly records the conversation process with texts, recording, videos, etc. and then, transcription and evaluation shall be conducted according to certain coding rules (Kahn, Vogel, Schneider, Barr, & Herrell, 2008), so that characteristics of self-disclosure can be analyzed. Non-systematic observation is relatively optional, and the measurement index is also relatively simple, for instance, the time of self-disclosure (Cunningham & Strassberg, 1981), etc.

4. Characteristics of Self-Disclosure of Visitors

4.1 Wills of Self-Disclosure of Visitors

The self-disclosure wills of visitors may be impacted by the consulting targets. Generally speaking, visitors may display higher self-disclosure wills to the counselors. It has been discovered in researches, the undergraduates seeking for help from counselors may display higher self-disclosure wills than anyone else (Linying, 2003). Farber et al. (2001) discovered from studies that if calculated according to hundred-mark system, the average score of visitors' disclosure to counselors reaches 80.7, and the disclosure of private topics is above the average level, which may be related to the fact that visitors regard the psychological consulting as the "secure place for discussing the important topics in life" (Farber & Hall, 2002), as well as the positive attitude towards the self-disclosure in treatment (Farber, Berano, & Capobianco, 2004).

4.2 Contents in Self-Disclosure of Visitors

Topics of self-disclosure mainly involve such themes as the self-value, anxiety and interpersonal relationship. But most are about the negative events, for instance, strengthening the difficulty of some things, discussing disappointments or frustration brought by the ignorance of others, etc. and few are about the private events. Hall has discovered through studies that scores of such items, "what visitor dislike or worry about", "some personal characteristics that are considered as barriers", "some characteristics of parents disliked", "hopeless, depressive or disappointing feeling", "angry with spouse or partners", etc. However, Farber (2003) discovered in researches that most visitors can disclose their personal experience deeply in the consultation, but they seldom disclose information about personal privacy, especially sex, frustration, as well as the failures.

Shall we allow visitors to conceal in the psychological treatment, or encourage them to open the heart? It is a dilemma in psychological consulting and psychological treatment, and there are also inconsistent opinions among scholars. According to Kelly (2000), visitors often conceal the negative response and some personal information, hoping to leave a good impression on the therapist, or avoid embarrassment or shame, and the concealing of visitors may be favorable for the psychological consultation. But Hill et al. (2000) encouraged visitors not to conceal too much information from therapists.

4.3 Gender Difference of Self-Disclosure of Visitors

The gender difference of self-disclosure may be different in distinct situation. Generally, the self-disclosure level of females is higher than males (Linying & Huichang, 2004), and the disclosure of males seem to be restrained by many social characters (Suqin, Liya, & Hongzhuang, 2010). However, there may be distinctions in the consulting situation, for instance, males disclose more than women, women often avoid topics about sex, while men talk more about violence (Weiner & Schuman, 1984). It has been discovered by Farber et al. (2002) that females take about "hopeless, disappointing and frustrating emotions" fully, while males talk about personalities. But men and women disclose the same or similar themes, and they may be depressed in disclosing negative emotions (Linying et al., 2008).

4.4 Depth of self-disclosure of visitors

The depth of self-disclosure is related to many factors. Kahn et al. (2001) pointed out that the self-disclosure of visitors is related to the pressure and symptom during the entire consulting process. Individuals may adjust the disclosure depth according to time and situation. Visitors wish to maintain the autonomous control of consulting, and probe with some small problems disclosed. If counselors can understand and accept well, they may tend to disclose larger and more important problems, and it is a gradual probing process. Farber (2003) discovered that visitors may have negative emotional experience before and during the disclosure, but they may have positive experience after the disclosure (release or pride, safety, true sense, etc.) In addition, self-disclosure is also related to attachment. Saypol et al. (2010) discovered that self-disclosure depth of visitors with secure attachment may be in significant positive correlation with the happy emotional experience after disclosure and in insignificant negative correlation with the unhappy emotional experience after disclosure, while visitors with non-secure attachment would have unhappy emotional experience before and after the disclosure.

5. Influence Factors of Self-Disclosure of Visitors

According to Faber (2003), sense of shame obstructs the disclosure of negative response, while effective consulting alliance and reasonable treatment time may be favorable for alleviating the anxiety disclosed. Therefore, self-disclosure may influence the consulting effect, but there are quite a lot factors impacting the self-disclosure, which mainly gathers in the following aspects.

5.1 Psychological States of Visitors

Halpem et al. (1977) discovered that the ordinary theory of self-disclosure may not be applicable in psychological consulting, and the past self-disclosure trend may impact the degree of current self-disclosure. But Faber (2003) pointed out that the difference between self-disclosure trend and significance evaluation of self-disclosure may impact the treatment effect. In addition, researchers also find out that individual depressive symptom may reduce the self-disclosure degree (Kahn & Garrison, 2009), while patients with neurosis may not be able to make appropriate self-disclosure in front of different alliances(Cunningham & Strassberg, 1981).

5.2 Emotional Experience of Self-Disclosure of Visitors

Problems disclosed by visitors may be of certain privacy, which may bring sense of shame, tension, etc. in which sense of shame usually becomes an important barrier of self-disclosure (Sorsoli, kia-keating & Grossoman, 2008). Kahn et al. (2001) discovered that the self-disclosure of visitors may be in close relation with the emotional characteristics when involving in conversation and it may decrease with the pressure and symptom of visitors. Consequently, counselors shall send positive feedbacks to the emotional response during the conversation and promote the settlement of problems. However, some researchers also deny the correlation between the shame trend and self-disclosure of visitors (Farber & Hall, 2002).

5.3 Consulting Time and Alliance

The length of consulting time m may impact the self-disclosure of visitors (Hall & Farber, 2001), and the longer it is, the easier self-disclosure will be (Linyin, et al., 2008). Besides, solid consulting alliance may promote the complete disclosure of visitors, and a positive consulting alliance may promote the self-disclosure and self-exploration of visitors (Linyin, et al., 2008). Moreover, connections between self-disclosure and consulting alliance is maintained by the emotional disclosure and related work (Shechtman & Tsegahun, 2004).

5.4 Counselor

It has been discovered from researches that undergraduates are more willing to disclose to heterosexual counselor, while female counselor may obtain more self-disclosure than male counselors (Brooks, 1974). Feldstein (1979) discovered that male visitors disclose the most to womanish female counselors and the least to masculine female counselors; female visitors disclose the most to womanish male counselors and the least to masculine male counselors. Visitors are more comfortable in front of attractive female counselors (Harris & Busby, 1998).

In addition, personality characteristics of counselors and the self-disclosure may also impact the self-disclosure of visitors. Halpern et al. (1977) discovered that the self-disclosure of visitors may be related to the cognition, such as their self-disclosure to counselors, capabilities, etc. Visitors may disclose more to sincere counselors when compared to enthusiastic and compassionate counselors. Mccarthy et al. (1978) discovered that counselors applying self-involvement may seem to be more trustable and professional than those with self-disclosure narration (for instance, the past life events of counselor), which may enable visitors to revel more discussions about the feelings and themselves. However, there are also researches (Lundeen & Shuldt, 1992) considering that the self-disclosure of counselor is not related to the disclosure willingness of visitors.

5.5 Other factors

Some researchers pointed out that the cognitive factors, avoiding trend, fear of being isolated, negative impact of self-disclosure, as well as social culture, and self-accusation of victim experience will impact the disclosure of related information of visitors (Sorsoli, Kia-keating & Grossoman, 2008; Shechtman & Tsegahun, 2004; Brooks, 1974; Feldstein, 1979; Orchowski et al., 2009). In addition, modern network information may impact people's self-disclosure. Generally, people may disclose more with the help of network, and it may involve more problems.

6. Influence of Self-Disclosure on Psychological Consulting Effect

Since the self-disclosure may promote the physiological and psychological health, people may develop some effective self-disclosure skills in practice, such as written disclosure skill (Daiki & Shintaro, 2009), emotion focused therapy (namely play a role through supporting the emotional disclosure of visitors) (Anderson, Guajardo, Luthra & Edwards, 2010), etc. which reveals the important significance of self-disclosure towards the psychological consulting.

6.1 Psychological Consulting Process

The degree of self-disclosure may impact the consulting process and satisfaction. When visitors reserve personal behavior and cognitive secrets, they think that the consulting process is shallow, and they may be unsatisfied with the consultation (Regan & Hill, 1992). When visitors use more positive vocabularies in disclosure, they may show deeper consulting degree (Kahn et al., 2008). In group consultation, the more members in the group conceal from other members, the more unsatisfied they will be about the treatment process. Vogel et al. (2005) pointed out that there is a positive correlation between the self-disclosure and appealing intention and the expected effect in DES, and a negative correlation with the expected risk scale. But researchers also pointed out that the self-disclosure is not related to the smooth proceeding of consultation

(Kahn et al., 2008). On that basis, in order to promote the self-disclosure of visitors, Joanna et al. (2008) pointed out that psychological counselor can intervene the self-disclosure through verbal or non-verbal means, so as to regulate the consulting process.

6.2 Preference in Psychological Consulting Method

Different visitors of self-disclosure are distinct in the selection of consulting methods. Kowittand et al. (1978) discovered that visitors with high self-disclosure prefer the center for visitors, while those with low self-disclosure prefer systematic desensitization therapy. The former may be more effective for the self-exploration of visitors, while the latter may be more effective for changing the individual behaviors. Females prefer the latter, while males prefer the former.

6.3 Psychological Consulting Effect

There is no consistent conclusion about the relationship between the self-disclosure and treatment effect. It has been discovered by Farber et al. (2002) that there is no significant correlation between the self-disclosure and progress realized. However, some researchers also think that the agonizing disclosure may be regarded as a predictive index for promoting the improvement of visitors(Kahn, Achtcr & Shambangh, 2001), for instance, there is a medium correlation between the agonizing disclosure of children ranging from 7 to 14 years old and the consulting effect(Kendall & Angelosante, 2005). Some researchers also showed that there is no relationship between the unspoken things and the therapeutic outcome, satisfaction of visitors, changes of visitors, etc. Panagopoulou et al. (2009) also found out that the emotional expression of pregnant females plays an insignificant role in alleviating the depressive symptoms, and there are insufficient evidences proving that high-level self-disclosure is related to good consulting effect. Some researchers also pointed out that there is certain correlation between the privacy retained and decreasing symptoms in consultation (Kelly, 2000).

7. Conclusion

The self-disclosure of visitors is regarded as significant factors in the psychological counseling and treatment. It is quite significant for counselors to focus on the self-disclosure and emotional state, and to take appropriate coping measures. However, some problems in the self-disclosure shall be further discussed, for instance the role of self-disclosure in psychological consultation, if there are certain intervening variables in the relationship with psychological consultation? What kind of level shall the self-disclosure of visitors be? What kind of strategies shall be taken for promoting the growth of visitors with different disclosure inclination? Confronted by the self-disclosure that may bring challenges, for instance, the disclosure of violent crimes (Walfish et al., 2010), these problems shall be further explored. In today's considerable development of psychological consulting, it is quite necessary for us to figure out the characteristics of seeking for help, so as to satisfy the practical demands.

The self-disclosure of visitors shall be a behavior event, and meanwhile, it is the information interactive process. However, previous studies involve more about the behavior events of visitors, but neglect the study on information interactive process. It must be related to the different definitions of self-disclosure, as well as the measurement tools. Consequently, in the future studies, it shall pay more attention to the exploration of process factors of the self-disclosure, and develop corresponding measurement tools. In addition, it shall take comprehensive research orientation in research methods, consider about the qualitative research methods, and reduce the reliance on self-reports of visitors, which may make the research results more effective.

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