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Abstract

Research question: **The self and psychosis: A Personal Construct Psychology study locating aspects of the self in experience labelled as psychotic and exploring the implications of the meaning of the experience for engagement in therapy.** This question has the following three components:

1. what is the construction (meaning) of the experience labelled as psychotic, from the perspective of the person with the label, using life narrative and social roles as a focus ;
2. what is the impact of the construction (meaning) of these experiences on expectations of engagement with therapy (psychological and psychotropic medication); its process and outcome;
3. what is the construed experience of researching in a group with people who have experiences which are part of a florid and intrusive non-consensual reality when the researcher does not have such experiences?

The topic of this research was generated from work with people in a 'Hearing Voices' group within a local mental health rehabilitation setting. The aim of the research was to pick up on the emergent themes and explore them with participants from a local Early Intervention in Psychosis service. Two types of participants were recruited from this service: five client participants and one nursing staff researcher participant who became a co-researcher.

The first two components of the research question addressed the experiences of the client participants in two ways. The personal construction of their experiences was explored during individual interviews based on three self-characterisation sketches (Kelly, 1991, 1955) looking at the self before the onset of the symptoms, the self in the present and the self in the future. The social articulation of their experiences was explored through the co-operative inquiry (Heron, 1996, Heron and Reason, 2001) version of action research (Lewin, 1946). The aim of the inquiry was to share experiences in order to develop a booklet for other clients of the service to use to help them explain the meaning of their experiences to others. The co-operative inquiry research group lasted for six weeks and then each participant had an individual interview to reflect on the group. It was envisaged that the basic material for the booklet could be generated within the inquiry group and developed more fully after the research period.

The third component of the research question addressed the experience of the two researchers: nurse researcher participant and psychologist researcher participant. The aim was to elicit how they construed themselves as researchers and monitor changes that might happen to this construction during the inquiry group. A self-characterisation sketch was produced by each researcher participant followed by an individual repertory grid looking at the changes that took place in their construing at the beginning, middle and end of the co-operative inquiry group. A parallel heuristic inquiry (Moustakas, 1990) took place during the group as each researcher participant wrote a reflexive diary exploring their experiences of being with the client participants. At the end of the process the researcher participants engaged in peer debriefing.