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What love has got to do with it; recognition, reparation and reciprocity in (therapeutic) relationships

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Introduction: This paper, based on an ethnographic qualitative research project, discusses a subjective relational view of the interpersonal work by occupational therapists in an acute care hospital environment. The importance of the dynamic and emotional exchange between client and therapist is discussed using intersubjective theory (Benjamin, 1999) and its current relevance to occupational therapy is related to the early work of Fidler and Fidler's (1963) 'Occupational therapy as a communication process'.

Objectives: The research study, which was inspired by the seminal work of Menzies-Lyth (1988) on the nursing profession, aimed to look at the social defences that occupational therapists employed to do their work. These unconscious mechanisms may protect therapists from the overwhelming anxiety of working with vulnerable clients but can also, at times, thwart the therapists' desire for an emotional involvement with the clients and the fulfilment of reparative needs.

Methods: A psychoanalytically informed ethnographic study was undertaken of two clinical departments using three linked data gathering methods; participant observation, free association narrative interviews (Hollway and Jefferson 2000) and inquiry groups.

Results: Occupational therapists, although busy 'doing' tasks with clients, described being emotionally fulfilled by the relational work. This was through an appreciation of the reciprocal exchange that occurred when working in intimate care situations with clients and provided therapists with an opportunity to express their (less conscious) reparative desires. It was described by therapists as a foundation for deep learning about the client and themselves, i.e. contributing to clinical reasoning.

Conclusion: Fidler and Fidler's (1963) work on communication as an essential process in occupational therapy is reviewed within the current psychoanalytic thinking and practice of 'relational work'(Clarke et al, 2008). The triangular intersubjective area incorporating the client, therapist and the shared realm of occupation, is essentially one of compassion, creativity and transformation. It's what love **has** got to do with it.

Contribution to Practice: This paper aims to support a psychoanalytic 'relational' view of occupational therapy which emphasises the importance of the emotional work undertaken with clients is co-created, reciprocal and transformative.