Title of Abstract:

Higher levels of Agreeableness are associated with higher ratings of Therapeutic Alliance

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Abstract

The relationship between the therapeutic alliance and psychotherapy outcome has been well documented in the literature. The therapeutic alliance is considered a "main curative component[1]" in the interpersonal process of therapy, and is the foundation necessary for successful therapy outcomes across various orientations of psychotherapy. Still, far less research has examined the relationship between specific therapist personality characteristics and the quality of the therapeutic alliance. The current study was aimed at examining the relationship between several therapist personality traits and the therapeutic alliance. The study utilized the Working Alliance Inventory Short-Form (WAI-S) to measure client-reported therapeutic alliance, and the NEO-FFI to measure therapist personality. A one-way ANOVA was conducted to compare the relationship of agreeableness to the therapeutic alliance in groups of highly rated, average rated, and low rated working alliance. Therapists were grouped by the quality of their working alliance score and the scoring profile associated with each factor. On the NEO-FFI, agreeableness is divided into levels of low (*T= 35-44)*, average (*T= 45-55)*, high (*T= 56-65)*, and very high (*T > 65).* Those who scored in the high range *(T> 56)* of agreeableness demonstrate the highest levels of warmth, empathy, honesty, and trustworthiness. Results indicated that agreeableness was found to be a significantly related to the quality of the therapeutic alliance ($F[2, 39] = 7.09$, $p < .00$). Overall, higher levels of agreeableness were associated with higher ratings of therapeutic alliance, as well as the highest level of participation in the study. These findings suggest that therapist agreeableness is one important ingredient in strengthening the therapeutic alliance and reducing premature dropout. These findings also suggest the importance of therapists better understanding their degree of agreeableness and, if necessary, working to develop greater agreeableness for the purpose of strengthening their therapeutic alliances with patients.



Biography

Amanda Mendez is a fourth year PsyD student at Loma Linda University, School of Behavioral Health. She has a growing interest in the mechanisms producing therapeutic outcomes. Her experience includes 10 years working with persons in crisis and histories of traumatic experiences, assisting them make changes in their lives. With the most recent three years as a clinician providing outpatient therapy, this clinical experience has revealed the importance of a therapeutic alliance, and understanding what helps others who are in need of change. Recognizing various strengths of therapists and growing in the knowledge of the many aspects and processes of therapy, has provided her strong motivation to conduct this research. Her ultimate goal is to expand research on the therapeutic alliance and therapist personality, inform the training of therapists in order to improve patient outcomes, and serve as a consultant to educate and inform other training programs.

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Table 1

ANOVA Comparisons of Agreeableness by psychotherapist group

				Tukey's HSD Comparisons		
Group	*n*	Mean	*SD*	High	Low	Control
High Rated	10	61.9	3.5			
Low Rated	10	49.7	7.7	.002*		
Control	30	57.7	8.2	< .24	.014*	

* denotes $p < .05$

References:

1. Lambert, M., & Barley, D. (2001). Research summary on the therapeutic relationship and psychotherapy outcome. *Psychotherapy: Theory, Research and Practice, 38*(4), 357–361. https://doi.org/10.1037//0033-3204.38.4.357