

What psychotherapists ought to do: A critique of the ethical foundations of evidence based practice for psychology

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Abstract:

Evidenced Based Practice for Psychology (EBPP) is, arguably, a response to the implicit ethical question of what a psychotherapist ought to do when faced with a client exhibiting a certain mental disorder. The answer provided by EBPP to this ethical concern is one largely based on pragmatic reason (Habermas); by providing the empirical criteria for deciding whether a set of guidelines for therapeutic practice are empirically justified, EBPP acts as a decision making instrument for psychotherapists, facilitating services that allow practitioners to be held accountable to the larger culture of mental health consumers. However, when we broaden our considerations of the ethical, it becomes clear that the discourse of pragmatic reason is in no way exhaustive of the ethical reflection necessitated by the question of what psychotherapists ought to do. Indeed, the exclusive application of pragmatic reason can be argued as a disservice to the patient. In urging for a broader response to the question of what psychotherapists ought to do, this paper will offer a critique of the ethics tacit to EBPP, as guided by an understanding of a practitioner's responsibility to the Other. This critique, in part, entails a discussion of the problematic assumption held by EBPP as to the homogeneity (in experience and symptoms) of a diagnostic category, and its negative impact on the face-to-face psychotherapeutic encounter. Further, the danger of psychotherapy being used as a form of rhetoric under the EBPP initiative is addressed, a discussion that draws both from Levinas and Teo's notion of 'epistemological violence'.