

## Abstract

The purpose of this poster project is to demonstrate the profound influences and numerous applications the concept of mentalization has within the field of counseling. The skill of mentalizing extends beyond theoretical orientations within existing counseling frameworks and has been suggested to be a core factor within the counseling process (Allen, Fonagy, & Bateman, 2008). Mentalizing capacities have been linked to positive therapeutic alliances (Markowitz & Milrod, 2011), and positive client outcomes (Bernbach, 2002; Bouchard et al., 2008; Fonagy & Target, 1996; Karlsson & Kermott, 2006; Levy et. al., 2006; Meehan, Levy, Reynoso, Hill, & Clarkin, 2009); and as such are an essential skill for counselors and clients to develop. The concept of mentalization also has broader implications for counseling, specifically counselor education and developing competencies within counselors-in-training.

Reflective functioning, is the operationalized term for the capacity to mentalize and is assessed using the reflective functioning scale (RFS) developed by Fonagy, Target, Steele, and Steele (1998), within the application of the Adult Attachment Interview (AAI). Traditionally used to assess attachment styles and maternal attachment relationships, current research has demonstrated reflective functioning's connection to positive psychological health. According to Wallin (2007), much of psychopathology can be viewed as a reflection of either an inhibition of mentalization or a failure to develop it in the first place. There is also evidence to suggest that low reflective functioning, is a risk factor for psychopathologies, and related to the quality of interpersonal relationships and adaptive functioning (Choi-Kain & Gunderson, 2008; Fonagy & Target 2002; Karlsson & Kermott, 2006). Wallin suggests that counseling should be understood as an effort to kindle the client's mentalizing capacities, and as such should aim to ultimately promote a reflective mentalizing stance within the client that will allow the client to have flexible

attention, openness to new information, and the ability to consider multiple perspectives on the same experience (Wallin, 2007).

With the emphasis on reflective functioning's connection to positive counseling outcomes and psychological health, it is an essential skill for counselors to possess and develop. Our ability to assess an individual's reflective functioning using the Reflective Functioning Scale, may provide valuable insights into counselor education and increased competencies in counselors-in-training. It is my proposal to demonstrate the usefulness of the Reflective Functioning Scale within counselors-in-training populations to promote effective counseling clinicians and improve counseling competencies.

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