

Ambivalence as Ethical Practice: Methodologies to Address Noise, Bias in Care, and Contact Evaluations

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Abstract : While complete objectivity is a desirable scientific position from which to conduct a care and contact evaluation (CCE), it is precisely the recognition that we are inherently incapable of operating objectively that is the foundation of ethical practice and skilled assessment. Drawing upon recent research from Daniel Kahneman (2021) on the differences between noise and bias, as well as different inherent biases collectively termed “The Elephant in the Brain” by Kevin Simler and Robin Hanson (2019) from Oxford University, this presentation addresses both the various ways in which our judgments, perceptions and even procedures can be distorted and contaminated while conducting a CCE, but also considers the value of second order cybernetics and the psychodynamic concept of ‘ambivalence’ as a conceptual basis to inform our assessment methodologies to limit such errors or at least better identify them. Both a conceptual framework for ambivalence, our higher-order capacity to allow for the convergence and consideration of multiple emotional experiences and cognitive perceptions to inform our reasoning, and a practical methodology for assessment relying on data triangulation, Bayesian inference and hypothesis testing is presented as a means of promoting ethical practice for health care professionals conducting CCEs. An emphasis on widening awareness and perspective, limiting ‘splitting’, is demonstrated both in how this form of emotional processing plays out in alienating dynamics in families as well as the assessment thereof. In addressing this concept, this presentation aims to illuminate the value of ambivalence as foundational to ethical practice for assessors.

Keywords : ambivalence, forensic, psychology, noise, bias, ethics

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