

Counseling and Psychotherapy Transcripts, Client Narratives, and Reference Works

A Resource for Mental Health Educators and Practitioners

This white paper describes the nature and potential uses of *Counseling and Psychotherapy Transcripts, Client Narratives, and Reference Works* for training in the helping professions. It provides information on problems in counselor training and offers rich, experience-based materials of actual sessions and clients so that future and current counselors might broaden and deepen their perspectives on the work of helping. This database shows the power of modeling for learning to become a counselor.

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I. Overview

The work of preparing counselors is both important and fluid. Its importance lies in the power that future counselors have over human lives. The fluidity lies in both the constantly evolving theories and methods as well as in the nature of counseling itself. Among the professions, counseling can seem like the most amorphous (Skovholt & Ronnestad, 2003). Counseling work is dynamic, with each client-counselor contact being both an intentional and an impromptu encounter. Counselors must remain both current and flexible to meet the evolving demands of such a dynamic field. Texts and theories can age rapidly in that environment. Resources must be rich, relevant, and current, if they are to be useful.

To respond to these demands for relevance and ongoing learning, SAGE Publications and Alexander Street Press partner to create the database *Counseling and Psychotherapy Transcripts, Client Narratives, and Reference Works (CPTCNRW)*. The database provides access to an evolving and expanding set of client narratives, transcripts, and reference works that will be useful in the preparation of clinical psychologists, clinical social workers, professional counselors, psychiatrists, and psychiatric nurses, to name a few mental health professions that require rich and up-to-date information. *CPTCNRW* combines conceptual material with rich anecdotal and verbatim data.

Any training resource must be judged by at least two criteria: (1) usefulness and (2) accessibility. *Counseling and Psychotherapy Transcripts, Client Narratives, and Reference Works* meets both. *CPTCNRW* gives counselors and students of counseling immediate entry to a storehouse of sessions, client stories, and theories that can be integral to training programs and continuing education curricula. Through accessing the materials in *CPTCNRW*, students and practicing counselors can discuss, analyze, and discover the evolving nature of helping as expressed in the actual practices of the past and present. The continuous updating of the materials ensures that diversity of ideas, clients, and cultural issues is represented. This paper describes the content and the potential of this new unique database product.

“Thank you so much for putting this together! I cannot tell you how frequently I have hoped to have such a resource available. I cannot commend your project enough, and I will be certain to subscribe once it is out.”

—Alejandra Suarez, Ph.D.
Faculty of the Doctorate in Clinical Psychology (Psy.D.)
program at Antioch University, Seattle

“I find this initiative a wonderful opportunity for research, training and exchange between academics and professionals, and I would like to congratulate SAGE Publications and Alexander Street Press for carrying it forward. I have subscribed to the Preview Request and I am looking forward to take part in the initiative.”

—Felix Diaz
Psychology Lecturer
Universidad de Castilla-La Mancha (Spain)

II. The Challenge of Providing Experience-Based Counselor Education

Counseling and psychotherapy are dynamic, interactive activities that allow for no formulas. The mental health professional must therefore be prepared, through her or his training, to make considered but immediate judgments in complex situations with important consequences. Counselor education, like the work of counseling itself, is an uncertain and complex enterprise. The work of counseling must be taught at once experientially and conceptually.

Mental health practitioners have to weigh at least four factors at once in doing this work: (1) a unique and evolving client conceptualization based on both individual and cultural factors, (2) deliberately chosen theoretical lenses, (3) considered moment-to-moment actions that are guided by a rationale, and (4) attention to social systems that affect clients' lives.

The major pedagogical challenges for the creation of effective professional counselors might be summarized thus:

Challenge	Learning Tasks Required
Making client conceptualizations	Experience client narratives, see experts conceptualize clients, know diagnostic concepts, understand culture and cultural alertness, try out conceptualizations, get feedback and re-conceptualize
Applying counseling theory in action	Know counseling theories, translate theories into actions in specific situations, with rationale and evaluation of effectiveness
Enacting helping interventions	Observe, understand, practice, reflect on, analyze, and modify helping skills
Engaging in systemic thinking and advocacy	Observe, analyze, critique, and re-create organizational and other systemic interventions to prevent and ameliorate social problems and to promote social equality

In sessions, a counselor must engage—do a mental dance in simultaneously considering clients' expressed and covert emotions, their mixed feelings and contradictions, changes in client behavior within and between sessions, and the counselor's own responses to the client and the counselor her- or himself. To do this work well requires "reflection-in-action" (Schon, 1987), that is, the ability to weigh choices in the midst of a decision-making event. To promote that level of professional sophistication, educators must have both (1) a guiding framework for teaching and learning and (2) instructional resources and accompanying technologies for stimulating learning. Each will be addressed in turn in this paper.

III. Guiding Frameworks for Teaching and Learning in Counselor Education

At least two conceptual frameworks might guide the counselor educator who wishes to produce complex professionals. One is experiential learning (Kolb, Boyatzis, & Mainemelis, 2002). That theory outlines four modes that must be present for powerful learning, namely (1) concrete experience, (2) reflective observation, (3) abstract conceptualization, and (4) active experimentation. Counselor training should be infused with all four. Another useful framework that can inform the training of counselors comes from the social cognitive work of Bandura (2001). Social cognitive research shows that individuals often acquire new behavior from observational learning, that is, from watching the actions of others, especially credible role models.

Two themes run through both of these theories, namely the power of *experience* and *observation*. Unfortunately, these two elements are difficult for educators to provide. Instead, instructors often default to lecturing, and students rely on reading mostly abstract conceptual material, in the form of counseling theories. Experience and observation are often secondary in traditional counselor education, often saved for the internship at the end of the program, leaving students poorly prepared to integrate abstractions into coherent practices. Rich experience and observation must also be provided early in training, and in an ongoing way, so that counselors can test abstract conceptualizations in the fire of actual sessions and client stories.

Counselors-in-training must have models of best practices as well as of client experiences. They must add conceptual understanding to active experimentation. *Counseling and Psychotherapy Transcripts, Client Narratives, and Reference Works* provides both anecdotal and conceptual material that is rich and current. These resources can be used as texts in courses in diagnosis and treatment; abnormal psychology; psychopathology; counseling and psychotherapy theories; social and cultural issues in counseling; and counseling skills, to name some examples.

IV. Providing Effective Experience-Based Counselor Education: Solutions

Technology as an Asset for Counselor Education

Technology revolutions have occurred in counselor training. Following the original technologies of film, audiotape, and videotape, digitized media have arrived as a powerful, interactive means of teaching and learning the work of counseling. The computer provides significant access to simulations, sessions, lectures, narratives, and conceptual material—access that print and analog materials cannot. Through the computer, client narratives and sessions can be captured and made available to trainees and practitioners. With the use of the computer, instructors can have students observe, reflect, and try concepts out in multiple locations and at many times. *CPTCNRW*, a digitized database of counseling sessions, client stories, and conceptual materials, provides this computerized resource. In *CPTCNRW*, extensive collections of counseling sessions and client narratives are stored, indexed, and made available to students in ways that previous media could not. And they are updated continually. Given the power of experiential and observational learning for the craft of counseling, sessions and client narratives must be made easily available to trainees for imitation and analysis.

Digitized Resources: *Counseling and Psychotherapy Transcripts, Client Narratives, and Reference Works*

The digitized databank, *CPTCNRW* is comprised of the three types of materials mentioned in its name. Each will be described here, with suggestions for use as well.

• **Session Transcripts**

These are explicit, word-by-word delineations of actual and training sessions. A number of the sessions are conducted by leading theorists and model-builders. Each session is preceded with titles that indicate counselor and client demographics, client issues, and the counseling approaches represented in that particular session. The sessions are generally offered in a straightforward manner, with no introduction, ongoing commentary, or conclusion. Exceptions to that model are the sessions that have been transcribed from DVDs and conference presentations, which generally provide complementary narratives by the counselors on the issues that the sessions provoke. Clients range in age, sexual orientation, and ethnicity. Also included are group counseling transcripts. In addition, there are sessions that explicitly demonstrate ethnic issues in counseling.

Client issues (in both sessions and client narratives) include both developmental (e.g., identity, autonomy, career purpose) and non-developmental perspectives (e.g., depression, eating disorders, self-injury) as well as the intersection between the two frames. Those issues include the following:

- eating disorders
- depression (much emphasized)
- schizophrenia (and its mysteries)
- allergies (retraining the immune system using NLP)
- conflict with family
- self-injury
- sexual dysfunction
- indecision
- substance abuse
- social phobia
- avoidant personality
- distress over sexual orientation
- histrionic personality
- obsessive-compulsive disorder
- panic, agoraphobia
- developmental adjustment in young adulthood
- anger
- suicidality
- insomnia
- couples conflict/relationship dynamics
- career purpose
- conflict with family values
- inauthenticity in interpersonal relationships
- low confidence, low self-esteem
- identity, autonomy

Suggestions for Instructors. Instructors can supplement student understanding by highlighting chosen elements in each selection. That would require instructors to preview the sessions to construct their own understanding of them. The sessions can be assigned to be read out of class, with suggestions that students note their questions and comments on the moment-by-moment interactions. In that way, students can both closely observe counselor-client interactions and be actively engaged in raising uncertainties, questions, and critical comments. In fact, instructors can prepare students for reading the sessions by providing a set of questions that target client issues, culture, and counseling approaches. Students might then read the transcript with the answers to these questions in mind, note their responses as well as their own questions and comments, submit them electronically to the instructor and/or the class, and then discuss them in a forum.

So that users might choose easily among the many selections, explanatory titles and the information about the type of therapy, the year of the session, client gender, client age range, client marital status, client sexual orientation, therapist gender, therapist experience, and therapist education are provided at the beginning of each session.

• Client Narratives

In this set of resources, clients tell their stories, usually in book-length form, about their experience of distress and treatment, or mistreatment. Most of these narratives are eloquently written by individuals who published their stories in book form. The Client Narratives dimension of *Counseling and Psychotherapy Transcripts*, *Client Narratives*, and *Reference Works* consists largely of digitizations of published books by individuals who experienced emotional distress. The narratives, as of this writing, range in time from about 1952 to the present, with an ongoing addition of new material. Many of them provide a glimpse into both the phenomenal world of distressed persons and into the systems that supposedly ameliorate such distress. Clients represented in the narratives are both female and male, American and British, African American and European American, heterosexual and gay, the famous and the not-famous. The narratives include vivid accounts of the experience of the following:

- alcoholism
- eating disorders
- depression
- schizophrenia
- bipolar disorder
- incest
- family violence
- struggle over sexual orientation
- racism
- hospitalization, both voluntary and involuntary

Client stories were written with two main purposes: to serve as models of recovery for others who are in distress and to make a plea for more effective, human mental health treatment. The stories are varied descriptions of triumph and hopelessness, professional cynicism and positive engagement. There are inspiring tales of the recovery and reclaiming of lives. Many of these writings are especially pointed in their condemnation of inadequate and self-serving mental health institutions, especially hospitals. Misdiagnosis and mistreatment are rife in the older narratives. The narratives therefore demonstrate to future counselors both how to act and how not to act as professionals.

The books from the earlier period are often calls for reform of what seems like authoritarian and primitive mental health treatment. The evocations are sometimes

of historical value (i.e., antiquated terms, conceptualizations, and intervention methods are described). Electroshock therapy is described in a number of narratives, as is the use and misuse of medications. However, the descriptions of the anguish of the disorder itself are relevant to today.

A number of the client narratives are powerful polemical narratives (in book form) about the primitive state of in-patient psychiatric practice from the 1940s through the early 1970s. For example, one narrative declares

“ *This book has been written for the express purpose of bringing to the American people the facts about the parlous state of psychiatric research and training in a country fat with prosperity, two-toned automobiles, and refrigerators which open from either side.* ”

from “Every Other Bed”, by Mike Gorman, 1956, in *Counseling and Psychotherapy Transcripts, Client Narratives, and Reference Works*

Clients tell their stories from the U.S. and from Britain in order to plea for a more humane and effective practice. There are stories of both authoritarian, controlling practice and stories of empathic, effective therapy. These narratives are testaments to the overpowering presence and influence of psychiatry in mental health treatment during most of the 20th century. They contrast to the late-20th century emergence of the non-medical, and more egalitarian and inclusive, mental health professions of counseling, social work, and psychology.

Many of the client narratives in *Counseling and Psychotherapy Transcripts, Client Narratives, and Reference Works* are more contemporary and therefore even more relevant to practice for trainees.

Suggestions for Instructors. The narratives that represent client experiences from the 1940s through the 1970s can be assigned to groups of students as a means of reminding them about misuse of power in the mental health fields and of the limitations of mental health practice during that era when insight-oriented therapies held sway and electroshock and medication were minimally effective and when clients were often treated as powerless wards. The reader of the historical narratives is reminded of the power of the humanistic and cognitive-behavioral revolutions, of the patients’ rights movement, and of the advances in psychotropic medication. This reading can serve the purpose of alerting future practitioners to never minimize a client’s rights or treat clients in a dismissive fashion.

Reading any of the narratives, especially the contemporary accounts, can sensitize future counselors to experiences that they may have little experience with. No training program can introduce trainees to the whole range of human difficulties; therefore, these glimpses into such issues as self-injury, family violence, and racism may be the only vivid contact students get before entering practice. Such exposure can make students more empathic and can increase their conceptual complexity in dealing with the multiple issues of people in distress.

• Reference Works

These types of materials consist largely of whole-book handbooks of clinical gerontology, parenting, narrative therapy, group counseling, family life education, emotional and behavioral difficulties, parent-child relations, counseling women, counseling men, Asian American psychology, and close relationships. Each is a

complete, published work, usually an edited volume that has been reviewed for publication. They are well-written by scholars. Some of them are the standard reference works for those topics in the field.

Suggestions for Instructors. Students can read the material in the handbooks prior to reading related sessions that might illustrate particular principles. While the counseling sessions, client narratives, and handbooks are not cross-referenced, instructors can construct a sequence by referring to the key terms that are listed at the beginning of each entry and matching them with other materials.

V. Conclusion

Among professional fields, none depends more on a rich experiential foundation and opportunities to reflect on clinical decisions and assessments of clients. This paper has described a new and unique resource for the teaching of counseling. *Counseling and Psychotherapy Transcripts, Client Narratives, and Reference Works* allows students to analyze moment-to-moment interactions, scrutinize client dynamics, and deepen their understanding of theoretical foundations. No longer will counselor educators be dependent on scattered video materials and abstract print readings to prepare future counselors to do this complex work. Students can now access, in one digitized location, session transcripts, client narratives, and resource materials. Counselor trainers can mine the rich store of actual counselor and client experience that is represented in this collection. From these materials, they can generate clinical decision-making questions, evoke discussion topics, and make student at-home assignments. *Counseling and Psychotherapy Transcripts, Client Narratives, and Reference Works* will provide, in one place the foundational material for many courses and training venues. It will be an ongoing conversation-starter that will produce deeper, more insightful counselors.

For more information about *Counseling and Psychotherapy Transcripts, Client Narratives, and Reference Works*, please visit www.alexanderstreet.com/products/psyc.htm.

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