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LETTER WRITING IN RELATIONAL THERAPIES

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Starting with Sigmund Freud, a literature Nobel Prize winner, therapists have had a long-standing relationship with the written word as a tool to document the client's account and the therapeutic process. In the last two decades, though, therapists have been found collaborating with clients in the sharing of their intimate wonderings as well as the nuances of the therapeutic process. While narrative therapy (White & Epston, 1990) highlighted or brought to the forefront the possibilities of employing writing as a transformative device, many others in the larger world of psychotherapy as well as the systemic therapy world have explored its uses (Bacigalupe, 1996). The authors in this special section extend this tradition with the use of letters written to clients: one article employs brief therapy tenets, a second paper is informed by a narrative focus, and a finally a paper based on interpretive research about the tone of the therapeutic relationship.

Brief therapy demands that therapists focus on creating a context for change in every interaction with their clients; George Graham writes letters to clients as a first step to orient them to a therapeutic context that gives a central role to talk of change. His letters are sent to clients before they attend their first session, providing clear instructions that orient clients toward change. Continuing the purposefulness of interactional therapies, Graham uses the letters to aid clients in defining the problem, clarifying expectations, developing a consensual understanding of the therapeutic goals, and normalizing the difficulties of finding solutions.

Mary Ann Majchrzak Rombach contributes a template for letter writing that uses narrative and solution-oriented ideas in detailing clients' strengths in the formulation of letters to clients. Besides narrative tenets that counteract the psychiatric assessment through problem externalization, Rombach celebrates cli-

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ents' inner wisdom and provides them with a resource that they can access in the future. The letters to clients are not only directed to them per se but also serve as a way of making the therapist accountable to the clients' needs through a structure that slows down the expert view. The letters also provide clients and therapists with a sense of continuity across sessions.

In the last article of this section, Nancy Moules analyzes the impact of letter writing in a nursing unit of a university hospital. She investigates an experienced therapist who employs letters to externalize problems and also to develop clients' strengths, similar to the work by Graham and Rombach. Her use of the idea of therapeutic relationship tone will seem familiar to systemic readers since it approximates to the concept of process. Moules suggests that staying in tune with and keeping a harmonic relationship with the client requires a transparent relationship between writer and its reader. This transparent postmodern posture to which Moules subscribes involves a close attention to the self-of-the-therapist. The paradox, though, is that for postmodern-oriented therapists who use writing, the meaning of the letter would ultimately be defined by the client-reader.

Clinicians and supervisors will find inspiration in these three articles to overcome the frustration of "paperwork" in our clinical work, a difficult task for beginning and experienced therapists. Writing needs to remain a part of therapeutic work rather than being one more constraining aspect of legal and economic institutional demands. Graham, Rombach, and Moules describe very specific ways to use the written word to prepare clients for therapy, intervene during therapy, and evaluate the therapeutic process that keeps the clients' needs out in front.

REFERENCES

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