



# ONLINE COUNSELING & EXCEPTIONAL EXPERIENCES

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# OVERVIEW

- Intro
- Research into online counseling of exceptional experiences (ExE)
- Research into online counseling in general
- My professional experience with online counseling
- Areas to explore

# A BIT ABOUT ME

- I'm a master's level psychotherapist and counselor from the U.S.
- Mostly have worked with people diagnosed with SMI (psychotic disorders, bipolar D/O, etc.).
- Trained in many different modalities (Existential, transpersonal, CBT, medical model, etc.) and have worked with psychiatrists, lawyers, police, and in hospital.
- I created, own, edit, and publish the *Journal of Exceptional Experiences and Psychology*
- ExE Responder for the Parapsychological Association
- PGR student/GTA at the University of Northampton
- Soon-to-be volunteer for the Spiritual Crisis Network




# ONLINE COUNSELING & EXE

- No research into ExE (religious, spiritual, transpersonal) counseling via online services
- Counselors not specifically trained in ExE come across clients with ExE, however
- Lack of education incorporating spirituality and meaning-making therapies (at least in the U.S.) in the counseling process
- Little research into online counseling in general, with most coming out of the U.S., Canada, and U.K.



# TYPES OF ONLINE COUNSELING

- Video Conferencing (telemental health, telepsychiatry, etc.)
- Email (asynchronous online environment)
- Chat rooms (synchronous online environment)



# THINGS TO CONSIDER

- Laws and ethics
- Screening clients
- Referrals
  - Contact information to local mental health emergency centers
- Researcher vs. counselor
- Is online counseling therapeutic? Is it ethical?



# IN DEMAND

- The Internet is the go-to for people who have ExEs
- People contact organizations via online regarding their ExEs for consultation, basic therapeutic support and mental health counseling
- Example: Spiritual Crisis Network - <http://www.spiritualemergence.co.uk/>

# PITFALLS

- A therapist needs to develop greater computer skills (particularly to protect client privacy and confidentiality)/technology can stop working
- Good verbal communication skills does not automatically equate good written communication skills
- Technology is an added expense (video, audio, firewalls, virus protection, encryptors, etc).
- Lack of visual cues
- Hard to gauge change within the client
- Hard to gauge investment of the client
- Hard to diagnose a clt's mental status (Is there a higher chance of being contacted by people with psychotic disorders?) (Is it even possible to diagnose online?)
- Poor writing (Second language clients, client's without much education, etc)
- Balancing between providing consultation and counseling



# BENEFITS OF ONLINE COUNSELING

- Increases access to traditionally underserved populations (e.g., people in remote locations)
- Writing emails may be preferable to clients who want time to figure out what they want to say
- Gives the client more autonomy/usually has a specific reason for contact
- Permanent record for the client
- Lack of visual cues: Disinhibition effect – Where people say or do things more openly and with less restraint online than in face-to-face environments (Suler, 2004; Cook & Doyle, 2002).
- Potential anonymity of online therapy can be attractive to people who are afraid of being stigmatized
- Multi-dynamic approach to therapeutic support (1-1 therapy, online groups, online information, etc. A supportive network).

# REFERENCES

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