




Measured Impact Webinar
 Psychological Issues and Techniques in
 Navigating the Asylum Process

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Presenter



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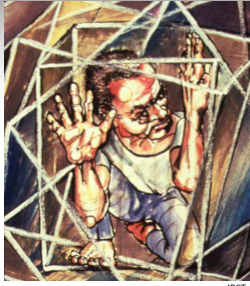
Objectives:

- Articulate the role that mental health professionals play in the asylum process
- Understand foundational concepts related to performing a psychological evaluation, including the goal of the evaluation and recommended techniques for how to effectively engage with clients throughout the process
- Understand foundational concepts related to providing expert testimony, including an understanding of its structural limitations and recommendations for conducting oneself in a courtroom setting

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Primary Asylum Questions

- Are you the person you say you are?
- Do you come from the country you say you come from?
- Have you gone through the experiences you claim to have survived?



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Approach to the Client in a Psychological Evaluation

Goal – To produce the most detailed, comprehensive, and insightful report possible.

Approach - Not just “touchy-feely,” “PC” stuff.

Focus on effective collaboration and communication

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Multiple Goals



PSOT PSOT PSOT

Legal and therapeutic benefits

“It doesn’t have to be therapy to be therapeutic.”

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Types of Psychological Documentation

- One-time psychological evaluation
- Ongoing treatment

Different forms of affidavit (legal style or psychological summary)

Presenting problem; Means of referral; Course in tx; Brief in history; Describe how symptoms fit in with dx; Clinical summation; DSM-V;

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Structural Limitations

- Consistency not Causation
 - Cannot report past facts as such (reported events)
 - No pre-morbid contact with client
 - Possible v. Probable – No 100% certainty
- Bounds of competency
 - Not country experts
 - Not political experts
 - Not cultural moralists

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Evaluation Priorities and Techniques: Safety




- Of crucial importance for people who have lost their sense of safety and/or their sense of trust;
- Potential for re-traumatization
 - Many people have been tortured in the context of interrogation

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Evaluation Priorities and Techniques
Safety (cont'd)

Create a **climate** where the client can open up, share, and trust;

Work against **negative institutional transference**



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Evaluation Priorities and Techniques
Safety (Cont'd)

- **“Anticipatory guidance”**
Explain process and potential benefits
Normalize fears and anxieties
- Reduce ambiguity
- Relate ambiguity to psychological torture techniques
- **“Accompanier” model** - stretching of traditional roles
- Emphasize **therapeutic value** of positive personal relationship

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Evaluation Priorities and Techniques:
Empowerment

Empowerment

- Of crucial importance for people who have been purposely and violently disempowered;
- Helps them to find their voice in an intimidating situation (it can mean life or death)
- May need reinforcement and elevation in the perceived power hierarchy

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Evaluation Priorities and Techniques:
Empowerment (Cont'd)

- Context of mutual respect – it's a cycle. Pt. is helping you to do the most thorough job possible on their behalf
- Collaborative v. expert stance
 Relationship between two human beings not "expert" and "victim"
 Give sense of control and ownership
 Do not add another cultural boundary (legal processes) in which they do not know the norms/behaviors



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Evaluation Priorities and Techniques:
Empowerment (Cont'd)

Allow client to teach/share

Model that their thoughts/ideas have value
Some country knowledge is valuable, but you don't have to be an "expert"

Language issues

Acknowledge multiple language skills; particularly for those who are struggling with English (most Americans struggle to speak just one language)



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Evaluation Priorities and Techniques:
Empowerment (Cont'd)

Rapport building – Beyond being a key therapeutic/healing tool, this can also give clues to current functioning

Consider process as well as content (Where does client begin narrative? What is the focus? How is the story told?)

Look for consistencies/examples (i.e. finding the office; navigating the transit system; time management)



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Session Nuts and Bolts

Free-Floating v. Specific Sequence of Questions

Some clients will need prompting and encouragement
 Normalize their resistance;
 Re-emphasize the need for detail; and
 Re-state the purpose and benefits

Some clients will be more forthcoming with the trauma history. Try to follow the flow of the story and back up later for details. Be prepared to re-direct if they digress too much or get caught up in too much detail

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Session Nuts and Bolts (Cont'd)

Collaborative context – not punitive like they are doing something wrong; do not want to discourage sharing

Ex. - "In order to present the most effective report to the judge, I'm going to ask that we focus some more on..."

Use for evidence regarding thought processes:
 Gaps in history? Inconsistencies? Affect? Fixations?
 Avoidance of certain areas?

Multicultural Considerations –
 Ostensibly objective reports based in large part on subjective data

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Credibility is Paramount

- Respect bounds of competence
- Context is key
- Consider process as well as content
- Feedback from fellow expatriates (group encounters, etc.)
- Historical/Cultural knowledge

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Comments about testifying

Focus on consistency, not causation
 Acknowledge limits of knowledge (no pre-morbid contact)
 Cannot expect to always eradicate ambiguity
 Limits of competence (possible v probable)

Be careful of being drawn into adversarial relationship
 More effective when seen as professional/expert, not advocate
 Be prepared to defend credentials

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Insights from Former Applicants




Wide range of presenting styles/reaction

“Getting to express myself”
 “My heart holds more than I can say”

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Insights from Former Applicants



Setting a humane context is the key

“Humanity is the only thing we have in common”
 “Treat me like I’m a human being who has no country, no home, and I’m asking if I can stay with you.”

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Questions?

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