

Publication

Interpersonal pragmatics and the therapeutic alliance : the collaborative work in email counseling

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Online communication has become ever more present in our lives and has encompassed the personal as well as the professional sphere. This expansion has continued into the professional workspace of mental healthcare workers who conduct counseling online. Special emphasis needs to be given on how mental healthcare workers utilize online communication to work collaboratively with clients. Previous research has shown that the quality of the therapeutic alliance significantly impacts the outcome of counseling. In this book, the therapeutic alliance is examined from an interpersonal pragmatic perspective. Using a mixed methods approach, five naturally occurring email counseling threads are scrutinized to shed light on how the counselor and her clients work collaboratively to improve the clients' well-being. The content analysis reveals the specific topics that are dealt with in the counseling exchanges. The subsequent discursive moves analysis uncovers systematic discursive patterns that occur within the exchanges. Zooming in on specific aspects through a discourse-analytic approach finally allows for an in-depth description of three captivating phenomena: the use of a metaphor to combat unhelpful thoughts, the use of narratives to construct varying identities, and the intricate process of exiting the actual counseling process once clients have improved. By employing two notions from interpersonal pragmatics - relational work and identity construction - empirical evidence is provided to show how they are linked. Thereby, the book adds to research on interpersonal pragmatics, but also on online and mental health communication. Importantly, it serves as a guide to mental health practitioners by demonstrating how language in online counseling can be analyzed and utilized to negotiate the therapeutic alliance and support clients in their endeavor to improve their well-being. Franziska Thurnherr is a researcher in the public health sector in Switzerland. She has published on interpersonal pragmatics, (online) mental health and computer-mediated communication.

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