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AUTHOR Gill, Stephen Joel; Taylor, Simone Himbeault
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ABSTRACT Professional disclosure in counseling is the process of informing clients about the services being provided and the persons providing those services. It includes the issues of client expectation, accountability and consumerism and counselor credentialing. The effects of a professional disclosure statement on client expectations, behavior, and satisfaction were studied by assigning university counseling center clients to read a professional disclosure statement, general statement, or no statement before counseling. Clients who read the professional disclosure statement tended to: (1) be more likely to change their expectations of counseling; (2) have a better understanding of the counseling process; (3) have more realistic expectations; and (4) report greater satisfaction with the counseling outcome. The findings suggest that professional disclosure as an instrument of information and accountability appears to have face validity. (JAC)

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Professional Disclosure, Consumerism,
and Counselor Preparation

Stephen Joel Gill
School of Education

Simone Himbeault Taylor
Career Planning and Placement
The University of Michigan

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Background

Professional disclosure in counseling is the process of informing clients about the services being provided and about the person providing those services. Several issues are integral to the concept of professional disclosure. These issues include client expectations for counseling, the influence of consumerism on counseling and the controversy over counselor credentials. These are discussed briefly below.

Client Expectations

There exists strong support for the positive relationship between realistic expectations for counseling by the client and the client's satisfaction with counseling. These findings suggest the value of inducing realistic expectancies in a client prior to counseling. Levitt (1966), called this relationship the "expectations-reality" discrepancy where the closer the client's expectations were to the real situation, the more positive the counseling experience would be. This stimulated subsequent research on the nature of the relationship between counseling expectations and outcomes. Frank (1973) concluded that clients could benefit from information to prepare them for the counseling process. An explanation of counseling style or rationale could eliminate any misconceptions regarding the process. Other researchers determined that clients receiving information about counseling demonstrated greater improvement on process and outcome measures than those who did not receive information (Bednar and Parker 1969, Parrino 1971). More current studies by Scbel and O'Brien (1979), Berger (1978), and Davidshofer and Richardson (1981) also support the belief that pre-counseling information can promote accurate and positive client expectations which in turn influence client in-counseling behavior and ultimate client satisfaction with counseling. The means by which clients obtain pre-counseling information, such as rationale and the counselor's background, is called professional disclosure. Gill (1982), Gross (1977), and Witmer (1978) propose that the professional disclosure statement serve as the vehicle for providing this information.

Accountability and Consumerism

The consumer movement, coupled with the national interest in human rights in the 1960's and 1970's made the helping professions a natural target of consumer interest. There was a demand for counselor accountability by clients and the counseling profession alike (Forster 1977, 1978; Winborn, 1977). The counseling profession flourished in the 1960's and 1970's as the demand for counselors in educational and social settings grew. With the fast growth of this new profession came lax accountability standards, certainly resulting in an opportunity to try unique methods and techniques, but not always providing justification for their use (Penn 1977). Today, as accountability develops into a social concern, counselors must be able to justify their own strategies and demonstrate their value within the helping professions.

Counselors must also practice "truth in counseling" which speaks to the counselor's responsibility to inform clients about the nature of counseling in general and the qualifications of the counselor in particular. Gross (1977) believes that this information will empower the consumer who may then take the responsibility of choosing the type of counseling and counselor desired. Arbuckle (1977), however, is wary of giving full responsibility to either client or counselor

noting that promoting the dissemination of information without stressing the responsibility attached to that dissemination could be dangerous. The argument appears to be one of execution rather than concept as most are in favor of "honest labeling" in counseling, a term borrowed from the consumer movement by Winborn (1977). The issue of delivering this "truth" has a significant impact on the counseling profession and the concept of credentialing.

Credentialing

The issue of credentialing has come to the fore in the counseling profession within the past ten years as more counselors have sought social service positions traditionally held by social workers, psychologists and other licensed professions. Sweeney and Sturdevant (1974) identified the need for counselors to obtain credentials in order to compete with other mental health professionals. Forster (1977) and others rekindled and monitored counselor interest in credentialing and the American Personnel and Guidance Association supported credentialing for ethical, legal and practical purposes. Some people have cautioned that credentialing could backlash, serving to restrict minorities by stressing majority values (Forster 1977) and by the profession becoming more rigid (Goldman 1976). Gross strongly opposes credentialing and licensing in particular. He believes that rather than protecting the public, licensing serves to restrict the practice of professionals, limiting the amount of health and mental health care available and giving official sanction to individuals who may not be competent in their field (Gross 1977; 1978; 1981). Means of credentialing include accreditation, certification, licensure, and a national register. Alternatives to credentialing include creating a directory or guide (Swanson 1979, Kravitz & Brotherton 1978 a,b) and professional disclosure statements. Gross (1977), the major advocate for the professional disclosure statement, believes that such a statement can be a vehicle for consumer awareness and responsibility. With accurate information the consumer can judge for him or herself the value of the service. Gross believes that the statement can raise consumer awareness as well as serve as a legitimate credentialing alternative for counselors.

Witmer (1978) concurs with Gross on the merit of professional disclosure but does not see it as a realistic alternative to other methods of credentialing, such as licensing. Gill (1982) in agreement with Witmer and a strong supporter of counselor licensure, suggests that professional disclosure be utilized in association with licensure as a method of providing the consumer with the most relevant information.

Professional disclosure as an instrument of information and accountability appears to have face validity. The right of clients to know what kinds of counseling and counselors are available has an ethical, legal and philosophical base. Professional disclosure statements have gained recognition as a valuable asset to counseling. As it becomes more widely studied, the influence of professional disclosure on the client, the counseling process and the counseling profession may become even better understood.

Method and Procedures

We conducted a study of the effects of a professional disclosure statement on client expectations for counseling, behavior in counseling, and satisfaction with counseling. The research utilized a post-test, with equivalent placebo group and control group design.

First, a pilot study was conducted in the Counseling Center of the School of Education at The University of Michigan. This is an agency which provides vocational, academic, and personal counseling at the University and Ann Arbor communities. During a two month period, clients were given either a professional disclosure statement or general information statement on a random basis to read before meeting with randomly assigned counselors. Following counseling, clients were asked to fill out a questionnaire which asked about expectations and satisfaction. Counselors answered questions about client's expectations, openness, sense of responsibility, cooperation, and satisfaction. Also, supervisors who observed the sessions filled out a questionnaire that asked about these same attitudes and behaviors. The results from this pilot study indicated that, although there appeared to be some differences between the two client groups, the differences were not significant.

The next step was to test what we had learned from the pilot in another counseling setting with more clients. We selected the Career Planning and Placement office of The University of Michigan. This time we randomly assigned clients to three groups by giving them a professional disclosure statement, a general statement (lacking the philosophy of counseling), or no statement, to be read before meeting with their counselor for an initial session. Those clients who read one of the two statements were given a set of questions that asked about changes in their expectations to be filled out immediately after reading the statement. After their sessions, all clients were given a questionnaire that asked about expectations again, and about satisfaction with counseling. Counselors were asked about their clients' behavior. A follow-up questionnaire was sent to clients two weeks later. Numbers of completed questionnaires for each group are given below:

Questionnaire	Group		
	Professional Disclosure Statement	General Statement	No Statement
Pre-counseling Questionnaire (client)	51	54	--
Post-counseling Questionnaire (client)	40	46	48
Counselor Questionnaire (counselor)	44	48	49
Follow-up Questionnaire (client)	23	35	27

Results

1. If clients read a professional disclosure statement they were more likely to report a change in expectations prior to counseling and because of the statement.
2. Clients who read a professional disclosure statement in comparison to the two other groups, reported a better understanding of counseling, a greater understanding of how their counselor will be helpful, a greater awareness of what is appropriate to discuss, a greater understanding of the appropriate degree of openness, and a greater understanding of confidentiality.
3. After the counseling session, a client who had read a professional disclosure statement before the session was more likely to indicate that he/she knew what to expect from the session.
4. The clients whose counselors reported having more realistic expectations for counseling were those clients who read a general statement before their session.
5. After two weeks, clients who read a general statement or no statement before counseling reported greater satisfaction with counseling but less understanding of the issues of openness and confidentiality than the clients who read a professional disclosure statement.
6. Clients who read a general statement or no statement were more likely to report that their sessions turned out the way they expected immediately after the session.
7. Clients as a whole were satisfied with the counseling they received regardless of which pre-counseling condition they were assigned.

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