Using Technology to Enhance Clinical Supervision

edited by

Tony Rousmaniere and **Edina Renfro-Michel**

AMERICAN COUNSELING ASSOCIATION
6101 Stevenson Avenue, Suite 600 • Alexandria, VA 22304 • www.counseling.org

Appendix C

Recommendations for Video Recording Counseling Sessions

Videotapes of counseling sessions are widely regarded as valuable for increasing the accuracy and quality of supervision (Alpert, 1996; Bernard & Goodyear, 2014; Ellis, 2010; Haggerty & Hilsenroth, 2011). There are many ways videos can be used in supervision, including reviewing entire counseling sessions, picking highlights of challenging situations within sessions, or engaging in structured microanalysis of counselor and client interactions (e.g., McCullough, 2003). For a description of the evolution and impact of video on psychotherapy, see Costello (n.d.). For detailed case examples of how video can be used in supervision, see Chapters 13 and 14.

Video Cameras

The simplest method to create videos is to use a recording device built specifically for that purpose (i.e., a video camera). Playback can be done from the device itself or by connecting it to a television. Older video recorders use tapes; most modern devices record to digital files. Modern economy-model digital video cameras can be bought for less than $200 and are generally suitable for recording counseling sessions. If high-quality audio is required, video cameras with ports for external microphones can be purchased at higher cost. When picking a camera, it is recommended that supervisors avoid new cameras that have been on the market for less than 1 year, because these cameras often record in the newest digital formats that may not be compatible with your computer. If there are problems viewing digital recordings, VLC Media Player software is recommended. To enhance security, it is recommended that supervisors dedicate a specific device exclusively for videotaping counseling sessions, use it only for that single purpose, and keep the device locked with the psychotherapy notes.

Webcams

Another method for recording video is to use a webcam connected to a desktop computer. High-definition webcams can be purchased for less than $100. If the computer is placed far away from the client, a USB extension cable can be used to extend the reach of the webcam. Alternatively, if a laptop computer is available, supervisors can use the webcam that comes preinstalled at the top of the screens of most new laptop computers. A wide range of software is available for recording video from webcams directly onto the computer's hard drive (e.g., IMovie or Screenflow for Apple computers, Wirecast for PCs, or Quicktime for both platforms). Supervisors should carefully check the software settings to ensure that videos are not automatically uploaded to the Internet cloud (e.g., YouTube) or shared on social media (e.g., Facebook; Rousmaniere, 2014).

Storing Digital Videos

Videos can be transferred to a computer hard drive from video cameras or saved directly there from webcams. If videos are stored on a computer, supervisors should use a strong password for the computer and set the computer to auto-encrypt when not in use (see Chapter 7). The easiest option may be to save videos to a portable hard drive that has auto-encryption (e.g., the Apricorn Aegis Padlock). These drives automatically encrypt themselves when they are not plugged into a computer with the correct password, meaning that the data on the drives are secure even if the portable drive is lost or stolen.

Picture-in-Picture Video

Some supervisors prefer to see both the client and counselor in videos. The simplest and cheapest method of doing this is to place a large mirror behind the client, in view of the camera, so the counselor's face appears in the mirror. Another method is to use Wirecast, which records via two webcams connected to one desktop computer. The videos are automatically combined into one video of the counseling session, with the client and counselor shown side by side. The digital video is saved directly to the computer's hard drive and can be burned onto DVD. Recording from two webcams requires a desktop computer with fast graphic processors and extra memory. Computers designed specifically for gaming or video editing work well for this purpose and can be purchased for about $2,500. Wirecast costs about $450 and is available for both PCs and Apple computers. Wirecast also lets supervisors specify the quality and format of the video that is recorded. Wirecast requires a moderate level of computer proficiency to set up but is easy to use after installation.

Audio

The sound quality from most video cameras and webcams is sufficient for supervision of counseling sessions. If higher quality sound is desired, supervisors can use an external microphone. This is possible with both video camera and webcam-to-computer setups. If you plan on using an external microphone with a video camera, make sure to buy a video camera that has an input port for an external audio device.

Mobile Devices

Mobile devices (e.g., smartphones, tablets) can also be used for creating videos. However, mobile devices often pose greater threats to security and confidentiality than other recording methods. For example, mobile devices often include preinstalled software that makes automatic backups of the content on the device to the Internet cloud. This software runs in the background and can be complicated to turn off. Furthermore, mobile devices periodically update their own software, which can reset the settings back to automatically uploading all content to the cloud. If supervisors use a mobile device for taping, they should disable any Internet connectivity on that device. It is also recommended that supervisors dedicate a specific mobile device just for videotaping, use it only for that single purpose, and keep the device locked with the psychotherapy notes. It is not recommended to use a smartphone or tablet that is also used for personal use, because mobile devices used in everyday life are common targets of theft.

Consent

Client consent should be obtained in writing before using video. For a thorough discussion of legal and ethical issues related to online supervision, see Chapters 2 and 3. Consent form templates are available at www.zurinstitute.com.

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