

of their clients are "Why are you seeking counseling from me?" "What is it that you would like to explore?" and "What is it about yourself or your life situation that you most want to change?" By staying focused on what their clients want, therapists can greatly reduce the danger of imposing their own goals on clients.

Having considered the basic assumptions, views of assessment, and goals of therapy, we now consider a specific case. It is possible to learn a great deal about Ruth's interpersonal style by the manner in which we interact during the assessment process. As you study Ruth's case, look for ways to apply what you have just read to gain a fuller understanding of her.

The Case of Ruth

The themes in Ruth's life are characteristic of those of many clients with whom I have worked. As mentioned earlier, I took typical struggles from a number of clients and compiled a clinical picture of a client I call "Ruth." Ruth's intake form and autobiography, reproduced here, will provide you with much of the information you need to understand and work with her. Each of the theory chapters will provide additional information. As you read the next 13 chapters, refer to this information about Ruth to refresh your memory on some of the details and themes in her life.

In addition to what is presented here, Ruth is also the subject of an interactive self-study program titled *DVD for Integrative Counseling: The Case of Ruth and Lectures*. See Session 1 ("Beginning of Counseling") in particular for more information about Ruth.

Ruth's Autobiography

As a part of the intake process, the counselor asked Ruth to bring the autobiography she had written for her counseling class. Although most therapists do not make it a practice to ask their clients to write an autobiography, doing so can be beneficial. It provides clients with a way of reviewing significant life experiences and gives therapists insight into their clients' self-perception. Here is what Ruth wrote:

Something I've become aware of recently is that I've pretty much lived for others. I've been the one who gives and gives until there is little left to give. I give to my husband, John. I've been the "good wife" and the "good mother" that he expects me to be. I realize that I need John, and I'm afraid he might leave me if I change too much. I've given my all to see that my kids grow up decently, but even though I'm trying my best, I often worry that I haven't done enough. When I look at my life now, I don't like what I see. I don't like who I am, and I certainly don't feel very proud of my body. I'm very overweight, and despite my good intentions to lose weight I just can't seem to succeed. I enjoy eating and often eat too much. My family ragged me as a child, but the more they wanted me to stop, the more I seemed to eat, sometimes to the point of making myself sick. I make resolutions to start an exercise program and stick to a diet, but I've yet to find a way to be successful.

One of the things I do look forward to is becoming a teacher in an elementary school. I think this would make my life more meaningful. I worry a lot

about what will become of me when my kids leave and there is just John and me in that house. I know I should at least get out and get the job as a substitute teacher in a private school that I've wanted (and have an offer for), yet I drag my feet on that one too.

One thing that troubles me is my increasingly frequent feelings of panic. I never remember feeling that bad. Often during the day, when I'm at school, I feel dizzy, almost like fainting, and have difficulty breathing. Sometimes in class I get hot flashes, and then sweat profusely. At times my hands tremble, and I'm afraid that others will notice this. There are times when I wake up at night with my heart beating very fast, in a cold sweat. I feel a sense of doom, but I don't know what over. I get scared over these feelings, which just seem to creep up on me. It makes me think that I might be going crazy.

I worry about death—about my dying—a lot. As a kid I was motivated by fear. Nine years ago I finally broke away from my strong fundamentalist church because I could see that it was not me. A philosophy class in the community college years ago got me to thinking about the values I was taught. When I was 30, I made the break from the fundamentalist religion that I had so closely lived by. I'm now attending a less dogmatic church, yet I still feel pangs of guilt that I am not living by the religion my parents brought me up with. My parents haven't formally disowned me, but in many ways I think they have. I'll never win their approval as long as I stay away from the religion that's so dear to them. But I find it more and more difficult to live by something I don't believe in. The big problem for me is that I so often feel lost and confused, wanting some kind of anchor in my life. I know what I don't believe, but I still have little to replace those values with that I once lived by. I sometimes wonder if I really did discard those values.

As part of my college program I took a course that was an introduction to counseling, and that opened my eyes to a lot of things. One of our guest speakers was a licensed clinical psychologist who talked about the value of counseling for people even though they are not seriously disturbed. I began to consider that maybe I could benefit from getting some counseling. Up until that time I had always thought you had to be mentally ill before going to a psychotherapist. I see that I could work on a lot of things that I've really tucked away in my life. Yet even though I think I've almost made the decision to seek therapy, there is still this nagging fear within me. What if I find out things about myself that I don't like? What will I do if I discover an emptiness inside of me? What if I lose John while I'm getting myself together? I so much want magical answers. All my life I've had clear answers to every question. Then nine years ago, when I became a questioner to some extent, I lost those answers.

What I most want from therapy is that the therapist will help me discover the things I need to do in order to change. My fear is that I could settle for a comfortable life that I have now, even though a great part of it drives me nuts. Sure, it's boring and stale, but it's predictable. Then again it's uncomfortable to be where I am. I'm scared to make the wrong decisions and that in doing so I'll ruin not only my life but John's life and the future of my kids. I feel I owe it to them to stay in this marriage. I guess I'm trapped and don't see a way out. Sometimes I wonder if I should turn my life over to God and let Him take over. I so much wish He would take over! I don't know what lies ahead. I'm afraid and excited at the same time.

TABLE 1.1

CLIENT'S INTAKE FORM

AGE	SEX	RACE	MARITAL STATUS	SOCIOECONOMIC STATUS
39	Female	Caucasian	Married	Middle Class

APPEARANCE

Dresses meticulously, is overweight, fidgets constantly with her clothes, avoids eye contact, and speaks rapidly.

LIVING SITUATION

Recently graduated from college as an elementary education major, lives with husband (John, 45) and her children (Rob, 19; Jennifer, 18; Susan, 17; and Adam, 16).

PRESENTING PROBLEM

Client reports pervasive dissatisfaction. She says her life is rather uneventful and predictable, and she feels some panic over reaching the age of 39, wondering where the years have gone. For 2 years she has been troubled with a range of psychosomatic complaints, including sleep disturbances, anxiety, dizziness, heart palpitations, and headaches. At times she has to push herself to leave the house. Client complains that she cries easily over simple matters, often feels depressed, and has a weight problem.

HISTORY OF PRESENTING PROBLEM

Client made her major career as a housewife and mother until her children became adolescents. She then entered college part time and obtained a bachelor's degree. She has recently begun work toward a credential in elementary education. Through her contacts with others at the university, she became aware of how she has limited herself, how she has fostered her family's dependence on her, and how frightened she is of branching out from her roles as mother and wife.

Ruth completed a course in Introduction to counseling that encouraged her to look at the direction of her own life. As part of the course, Ruth participated in self-awareness groups, had a few individual counseling sessions, and wrote several papers dealing with the turning points in her own life. One of the requirements was to write an extensive autobiography that was based on an application of the principles of the counseling course to her own personal development. This course and her experiences with fellow students in it acted as a catalyst in getting her to take an honest look at her life. Ruth is not clear at this point who she is, apart from being a mother, wife, and student. She realizes that she does not have a good sense of what she wants for herself and that she typically lived up to what others in her life wanted for her. She has decided to seek individual therapy for the following reasons:

- A physician whom she consulted could find no organic or medical basis for her physical symptoms and recommended personal therapy. In her words, her major symptoms are these: "I sometimes feel very panicky, especially at night when I'm trying to sleep. Sometimes I'll wake up and find it difficult to breathe and my heart will be pounding. I lose and turn trying to relax, and

instead I feel tense and worry a lot. It's hard for me to turn off my thoughts. Then during the day I'm so tired I can hardly function, and I find that lately I cry very easily when minor things go wrong."

- She is aware that she has lived a very structured and disciplined life, that she has functioned largely by taking care of the home and the needs of her four children and her husband, and that to some degree she is no longer content with this. Yet she reports that she doesn't know what "more than this" is. Although she would like to get more involved professionally, the thought of doing so frightens her. She worries about her right to think and act in her own best interests, she fears not succeeding in the professional world, and she most of all worries about how all this might threaten her family.

- Her children range in age from 16 to 19, and all are now finding more of their satisfactions outside of the family and the home and spending increasing time with their friends. Ruth sees these changes and is concerned about "losing" them. She is having particular problems with her daughter Jennifer, and is at a loss about how to deal with her. In general, Ruth feels very much unappreciated by her children.

- In thinking about her future, Ruth is not sure who or what she wants to become. She would like to develop a sense of herself apart from the expectations of others. She finds herself wondering what she "should" want and what she "should" be doing. Ruth does not find her relationship with her husband, John, satisfactory. He appears to resist her attempts to make changes and prefers that she remain as she was. She is anxious over the prospects of challenging this relationship, fearing that if she does, she might end up alone.
- Lately, Ruth is experiencing more concern over aging.

All of these factors combined have provided the motivation for her to take the necessary steps to initiate individual therapy. The greatest catalyst for her to come for therapy was the increase of her physical symptoms and her anxiety.

PSYCHOSOCIAL HISTORY

Ruth is the oldest of four children. Her father is a fundamentalist minister, and her mother is a housewife. She describes her father as distant, authoritarian, and rigid; her relationship with him was one of unquestioning, fearful adherence to his rules and standards. She remembers her mother as being critical, and she thought she could never do enough to please her. At other times her mother was supportive. The family demonstrated little affection. In many ways Ruth took on the role of caring for her younger brother and sisters, largely in the hope of winning the approval of her parents. When she attempted to have any kind of fun, she encountered her father's disapproval and outright scorn. To a large extent this pattern of taking care of others has extended throughout her entire life.

One critical incident took place when Ruth was 6 years old. She reported: "My father caught me 'playing doctor' with an 8-year-old boy. He lectured me and refused to speak to me for weeks. I felt extremely guilty and ashamed." It appears Ruth carried feelings of guilt into her adolescence and thus repressed her own emerging sexuality.

In her social relationships Ruth had difficulty making and keeping friends. She felt socially isolated from her peers because they viewed her as "weird." Although she wanted the approval of others, she was not willing to compromise her morals for fear of the consequences.

Ruth was not allowed to date until she completed high school, at the age of 19 she married the first person that she dated. She used her mother as a role model by becoming a homemaker.