

## Developing a Reliable System for Coding Presenting Problems in Psychotherapy

Presenters: Azeemah Kola, Deniz Civril Ozturk, Deanna Colarusso, Hally Wolhandler, Grainne Daly, Courtney Townsend, David Gumpel, and Richelle Allen

The New School for Social Research

### INTRODUCTION

Understanding what brings the client to treatment is the first step in treatment planning. However, there is no validated coding and classification system for client self reported presenting problems. To address this need, we adapted a pilot manual (Cheng, 2000) to code transcripts from initial therapy sessions from a psychotherapy training clinic in New York City, then tested its reliability.

### METHODS

**Phase 0:** Adaptation of coding manual.

**Phase 1:** Intakes of first wave of patients were video recorded, transcribed, and coded by three researchers (raters A, B, and C) for 3 presenting problems. (N=12)

**Phase 2:** Intakes of second wave of patients were coded by corresponding therapists and three novice raters (raters X, Y, and Z). (N=20)

**Method:** Cohen's  $\kappa$  was run for each pair of raters for interrater reliability (IRR).

### RESULTS

Overall, we found substantial agreement between coders. The categories of self-management and emotional distress appear to contain overlapping constructs, as they accounted for the majority of disagreements. On several occasions, raters differed in coding order only.

### DISCUSSION

The presenting problem is the foundation of the psychotherapy treatment plan. The results reported above suggest a promising method for categorizing this key response and can inform future manual revisions.

The answer to the question “What brings you here?” is understood in clinical practice as the reason the client came to treatment. This “presenting problem” is foundational to treatment planning and relevant to outcome research. Yet, no widely used validated system exists to categorize the client self-reported presenting problem. Therefore, we are working to develop a reliable Presenting Problem Coding System.

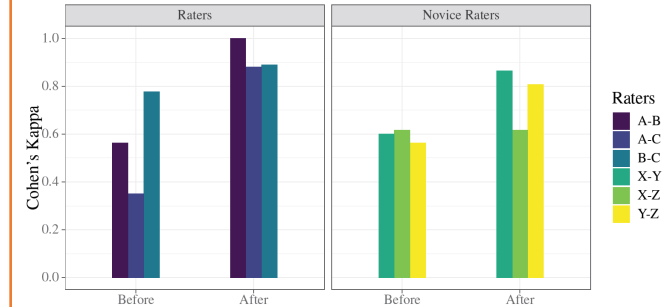


## NOTABLE VISUALS

Raters disagreed about the order of the presenting problems. In each phase, IRR was also assessed after accounting for the order of the first two presenting problems. Results significantly increased.

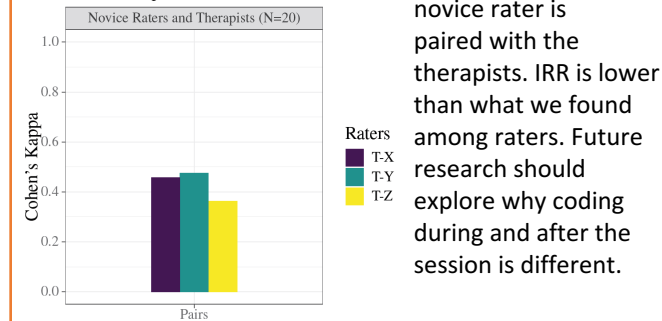
IRR: Raters vs Novice Raters

Controlling for the order of 1st presenting problem



IRR

Note: Therapists are considered as one rater



Each novice rater is paired with the therapists. IRR is lower than what we found among raters. Future research should explore why coding during and after the session is different.

**Presenting Problem Categories:** 1 - Emotional Distress, 2 - Self-Management, 3 - Self-Concept/Esteem, 4 - Relationships, 5 - Physical Complaints, 6 - Substance Abuse, 7 - Trauma, 8 - Environmental Stress, 9 - No Defining Problem

Descriptive Statistics				
Phase	Sex	N	Age Mean	Age SD
1	Female	10	27.6	2.143
1	Male	2	27.0	3.560
2	Female	14	28.9	6.209
2	Male	6	28.5	0.320