Caring for your Distant Researcher: Establishing Connection and Trust in the Digital Age

Olga Umansky, MLIS, Librarian/Archivist
Boston Psychoanalytic Society and Institute
library@bpsi.org
Who We Are

- **The Boston Psychoanalytic Society and Institute (BPSI)** is a non-profit member organization with specialized library and archives.

- **Our Archival Holdings:** personal papers, historic & administrative records, photographs, audiovisual materials, digital-born materials.

- **Our History:**
  - 1914 informal discussion meetings by psychiatrists and philosophers start
  - 1928 the first Boston Psychoanalytic Society is formed
  - 1933 BPSI is official incorporated as a Training Institute
  - 1934-1943 Viennese émigré psychoanalysts arrive in Boston
  - 1979 an Advanced Training Program in Psychoanalytic Psychotherapy starts
  - 1999 a one-year Fellowship program starts
  - 2014 BPSI moves from Back Bay in Boston to Newton Center, MA
Who Do We Serve?

- **Members** (psychoanalysts, psychotherapists, clinical psychologists, social workers), candidates & students, fellows
- **Partners** (Community, Academic, Student), Affiliate Scholars, Guests
- **Archival Researchers** from all over the world (historians, biographers, authors, scholars, university professors, etc.)
“Empathy is the capacity to think and feel oneself into the inner life of another person.”

~Heinz Kohut

**Radical empathy**: a learned process of direct and deep connection between the self and another. (Michelle Caswell and Marika Cifor (2016). *From Human Rights to Feminist Ethics: Radical Empathy in the Archives*. Archivaria 81: p. 30.)
From Archival Service to Archival Care

• Right to information vs. ethics of care and radical empathy

• Archivists as caregivers should empathize with:
  • records creators
  • subject matter
  • researchers
  • larger community

• Caretaking in BPSI Archives
Oral History: Our Chance to Engage

- Our Oral History project goes back to 1970’s
- Audiovisual materials and transcripts popular worldwide
- Initiated by Sanford Gifford, MD
  later contributions from other members and researchers
- Current video series:
  - The Voice of Experience: Interviews with Senior Members
  - Meet the Author
  - Kravitz Award Interviews about Community Action and Humanitarian Contribution
Sanford Gifford, MD  
(1918-2013)

Director of BPSI Archives  
Psychoanalyst and Historian  
The U.S. Army Psychiatrist in WWII  
One of the first members of Physicians for Social Responsibility in the 1960’s

Photograph by Allen Palmer, 2005
The Problem of Distant Research

• Lack of emotional response
• Limited information about context
• No interpersonal feedback
• Practical problems:
  • Language and cultural barriers
  • Time difference
  • Technological ineptitude
Distant Research: Our Best Practices

• A Letter of Intent
• A Follow-up Phone Call
• Restrictions and Copyrights
• Fees and Payments
• In-house Services vs. Outsourcing and Collaboration with Other Archives
• Staying in Touch
A Letter of Intent

• Is really an email these days
• Simple and straight language
• Do some detective work!
• What is the real question?
A Follow-Up Call

• Rare but important for complicated inquiries
• A great chance to explain and clarify
• A couple of my recent follow-up calls
Restrictions and Copyrights

- Consult legal experts when necessary
- Add access guidelines to donor deeds
- Explain copyrights and restrictions to researchers upfront
- Share user forms in a clear and concise way
- Take CopyrightX, a free course from Harvard Law School
Fees and Payments

- Inform about your fees upfront and ask for a confirmation
- List archival services and fees online
- Give estimates for large scanning jobs
- Use a hassle-free payment system that works outside of the US
- Have a consistent policy on fee reduction and waivers
Archival Fees

- Archival Reference Search - $25 (searches that require at least 30 minutes of staff time)
- Emailed Archival Documents - $10
- High-Resolution Images - $25
- Images with Permission to Publish – $75 ($150 for a book cover)
- Audio recording ($10.00 for streaming audio)
- Video recording ($15.00 for streaming video)
In-house Services vs Outsourcing

- Invest in a high-end networked scanner
- Set up an in-house audio conversion
- Outsource when in-house solution is not feasible
- Collaborate with other archives. Share resources.
Staying in Touch

• Treat researchers as colleagues
• Advocate for open access
• Follow up on publications
  • “Books We Helped Publish” shelf
• Researchers give back!
Karl Martin, PhD
Kent State University, OH

Sophie Freud, PhD
Lincoln, MA
Vienna
1931

Boston
1963

The daughter of Freud’s sculptor – 2019

Telling Stories
Questions? Comments? Your Practices?