Contemporary Media Forum

Exploring Psychoanalysis on the Web

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I'm glad I used the term "exploring" in the title of this piece. On my last visit to the Alta Vista search engine (www.altavista.com) I entered the keyword "psychoanalysis" and was rewarded with 86,000 hits. Even the best search engines only cover about 40% of cyberspace, so that's most likely a modest estimate of psychoanalysis on the Internet. There is a great deal of information about psychoanalysis to explore in cyberspace, so how does one undertake such a Herculean task?

First, it's important to remember that receiving 86,000 hits does not mean that there are that many web sites devoted to psychoanalysis. It means that the word "psychoanalysis" appears on (at least) 86,000 pages—which includes pages devoted exclusively to psychoanalytic topics as well as pages where "psychoanalysis" was mentioned in passing. Powerful search engines that produce many hits will attempt to rank those hits, placing at the top those pages that deal primarily with psychoanalysis. But that ranking system does not always work to your advantage. The page you want may appear far down the list. If you are looking for web sites devoted exclusively to psychoanalysis, one method is to use a LESS powerful search engine, like WebCrawler (webcrawler.com). These engines will produce a much shorter list of pages, but usually only pages where psychoanalysis is the major theme.

Another strategy involves using more specific keywords and Boolean parameters to find specific pages. Embedding your keywords inside quotation marks—such as "American Psychoanalytic Association"—will tell many search engines to look for pages containing that specific order of words. If you use Boolean parameters such as AND, AND NOT, OR, and NEAR you can make your search even more precise. At Alta Vista, if you enter psychoanalysis AND Kohut AND NOT Lacan the search engine will find pages that contain both the words "psychoanalysis" and "Kohut" but

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not the word "Lacan." If you enter Kohut OR self psychology the engine will find pages containing either the words "Kohut" or "self psychology." If you enter Kohut NEAR Freud it will return pages in which the words "Kohut" and "Freud" occurred within ten words of each other.

Not all search engines work exactly the same. A good strategy is to find one search engine you like, read the instructions on how to search for keywords, and stick to that engine for most of your online work. Some of the better search engines include Dogpile, Excite, HotBot, Infoseek, Lycos, and Yahoo. If you can't find what you want using one engine, try switching to another. In your bookmarks file of your web browser (Netscape, Explorer, etc.) create a separate folder of search engine addresses. That will make it easy to switch from one to another.

Once you have located a web page that seems promising, connect to it and look around. Many web sites contain links to other similar web sites. You will be able to explore most of the online "community" of psychoanalytic web sites by weaving your way through these interconnecting links. As you move around, keep an eye on links that have changed to the "visited" color, which indicates that you have already been on that page. It is always interesting to see who links to whom, and what web sites are cited most and least often. You may even stumble across someone who has done a lot of the homework for you---someone who has compiled a list of psychoanalytic web sites. I found good collections of links at Kurume University in Japan (www.mii.kurume-u.ac.jp/~leuers/Freud.htm), at the "Links2Go" site (www.links2go.com/topic/Psychoanalysis), and on a site by Parfen Laszig (www.rzuser.uniheidelberg.de/~iy0/laszige.htm). A search at Psych.com (www.thepsych.com) for "psychoanalysis" also produces a decent sized list. Of course, web site lists always reflect the personal preferences of the people who create them, as well as their motivation in maintaining those lists. Web pages addresses are always changing and some pages disappear completely, so some of the links in anyone's list will go "dead" until they fix them.

A majority of the large psychoanalytic web sites are devoted to well-known psychoanalytic organizations and institutes, such the International Psychoanalytic Association (www.ipa.org.uk) and the American Psychoanalytic Association (apsa.org). The site for the American is especially comprehensive, including the full text of a brochure "About Psychoanalysis," a searchable bibliography of almost 30,000 references using the Jourlit and Bookrev databases, a quotation quiz in which participants must identify a quotation from the Standard Edition, abstracts of articles from the association's journal, as well as information about the association's membership and meetings. The web is the perfect place to compare psychoanalytic organizations from around the world. Want to know the status of psycho-

analysis in Australia? Visit the site of the Australian Psychoanalytic Society (www.psychoanalysis.asn.au/default.html). Other psychoanalytic sites are devoted to specific theories or theorists, such as the Abraham Brill Library (plaza.interport.net/nypsan/index.html), Freud Web (landow.stg. brown.edu/HTatBrown/freud/Freud_OV.html), Modern Psychoanalysis (www.bgsp.edu/modern_psych2.html), and the International Council for Self Psychology (www.selfpsychology.org).

Online journals devoted to psychoanalytic topics include Free Associations (www.human-nature.com/free-associations) and Psychoanalytic Studies from the Centre for Psychoanalytic Studies at the University of Sheffield (www.shef.ac.uk/~psysc/psastud/index.html). Hardcopy journals also may have a web site, such as The International Journal of Psychoanalysis (ijpa.org/index.hts). Books about psychoanalysis can be found at the ICP Virtual Bookstore (www.icpla.edu/vb/onpsycho.html).

In your exploration of cyberspace, you may come across some hidden psychoanalytic gems—information or resources that you may not have even realized existed. During my explorations, for example, I came across an interesting page by John Lye entitled "What Psychoanalysis Can Contribute to Literature" and an article by Alan Stone in Harvard Magazine entitled "Will Psychoanalysis Survive" (see if you can find these using search engines!).

What makes for a good psychoanalytic web site? Here are some questions to consider. Is it easy to navigate through the site and find what you want? If you get lost or disoriented, it probably is not your fault. The site is poorly designed. Sensible, pleasing-to-the-eye page layout and a logical system of links between pages can make or break a site. Is the page easy to download? Excessively lengthy pages or ones with too many graphics will result in a long, finger-tapping wait. Some browsers allow you to turn off graphics, which will eliminate the visuals from the page and thereby shorten the download time. Once you are on a hefty page and want to navigate through the rest of the site, try holding down the mouse on a link and use the pop-up option that allows you to open the link in a new browser window. That will save you time when you want to return to the window containing the hefty page, which will still be open. Does the site contain links to other sites? It is common courtesy on the web to link to other similar sites, and it helps visitors who are having trouble finding what they want. Is there an easy way to contact the owner of the site, such as an e-mail link? If so, you have the opportunity to give the owner some feedback about his or her site as well as to ask for any other information that you might need.

Web sites can be more than just places to gather information. They also can offer the opportunity to meet people and participate in a commu-

nity. For example, the American and International psychoanalytic associations provide e-mail addresses of their members and an e-mail newsletter to bring you up to date about events in their community. The International Council for Self Psychology has a message board where you can post information and announcements to other visitors, as well as carry on discussions about psychoanalytic topics. The Psychoanalytic Connection (www.psychoanalysis.net) is devoted specifically to the goal of creating an online community of psychoanalytic researchers and clinicians who want to share information, ideas, and resources about psychoanalysis.

There may be more than 86,000 web pages containing the word "psychoanalysis," but with some search engine skills and a dash of patience, you can master the exploration of psychoanalysis on the web.