

# Transformative encounters essay sample

[Psychology](#)



**ASSIGN  
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## 1) Introduction

I chose to conduct my interview with the non profit organisation “ Focus on the Family”. As an employee and also having conducted my first assignment at Focus on the Family, I had already developed a good working relationship with Elaine Venton, our professional counsellor. This time however, I invited Elaine Venton, to my recording studio to participate in our interview. It has always been my goal to make my studio conducive to counselling especially because many of the people I interview are survivors of trauma.

## 2) SECTION A

### 2. 1 Planning the Interview

The planning phase and preparation for this interview took more time than I initially allocated for it. I chose to conduct the interview with Elaine in my recording. My reason for this is twofold: a) Transcribing becomes easy once recorded and

b) I want my studio to have a warm, safe environment that’s conducive to counselling especially when I conduct interviews with trauma survivors.

### 2. 2 Interview Schedule

2. 2. 1 Checking in: I emailed Elaine Venton and make an appointment to interview her (see annexure A). Later, I phoned her about my idea of conducting the interview in the studio opposed to the counselling centre.

2. 2. 2 We discuss the time frame required for our interview and I gave her an idea of what my assignment requirements.

2. 2. 3 These are some of the questions I had in mind:

-what made you pursue a career in counselling?

-elaborate on the different fields of Psychology that one can specialize in? -

Tell me more about your field of specialization.

-Clients with problems that fall outside our scope of practice, must provide a challenge for us, how do you deal with that scenario. -How do you cope with the stress of counselling in your personal capacity?

## 2. 3 Transcript of Interview

Tuesday: 03 April 2012 Time: 09. 30 am

Counsellor: Elaine Venton

Interviewer: Geshana Nadesan

Elaine arrived punctually with a cup of coffee in her hand. I normally don't allow food and drinks in the studio but today, I was going to make an exception. I welcomed Elaine and introduced her to my studio engineer. While engaging in 'small talk' about the sudden change in the weather, I ushered her into the recording booth that now resembled a cosy counselling room. Elaine explained that she had a client booked at 10 a. m. and that her assistant will come through to call her when the client arrived. I assured Elaine that the interview would not take more than 10 minutes of her time.

I was just grateful to even get this appointment with Elaine as my previous ones were postponed due to Elaine's hectic schedule. We settled into the chairs and I began the interview:

Gesh: Elaine- thank you for accommodating me and fitting me into your tight schedule (tone of sincerity) Elaine:(begins to laugh)

Gesh:(a little surprised at her response, I laughed also, keeping the warm,

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friendly atmosphere) I've been trying to get this appointment for a long time .. Elaine: I know (still smiling and relaxed into the chair while sipping her coffee). Gesh: but I'm so grateful to you for blocking out some time for me. Elaine: aahh, you know I'm really sorry that I couldn't see you earlier. Things just get so busy. Anyway, we're here now and I really hope you get enough time to finish your assignment. Gesh: Oh yes – thanks, I'm sure I will ...

Elaine:(Sipping her coffee) so what's on your mind?

Gesh: Well there are few questions about the practice of psychology and counselling which I need clarity on, so I thought this, 2nd Assignment in Transformative Encounters is a perfect opportunity for me to ask these questions. Elaine: hmmm ok (nodding)

Gesh:(Making eye contact) what made you choose counselling and the practice of psychology as a career path? Elaine:(holding her cup in both hands, clearing her throat) I think for me, it really was a process. You know, I was working as a lay counsellor at a local church at the time. It's just the people that were coming across my path..... it made me realised that I needed more training – I needed to be more equipped. So I started attending more courses, Gesh:(Nodding) uh huh.

Elaine: I started off reading a lot, I did a lot of training, I did a counselling course but I realised that I needed more and more training. So I did a Bachelors degree and realised that that wasn't enough, you know my BPsych degree. But for me I just had a yearning in my heart to be properly equipped

and trained to make a difference in people's. Gesh: ah huh (minimal engager)

Elaine: And to me psychology is, er is such a dynamic field... Gesh: hmmm

Elaine:(passionately) There's so much you can do – so many things. And you can go in so many directions – it's so exciting. Gesh:(as Elaine spoke I

reflected on my reasons for studying – my reasons were exactly the same as Elaine's). (Paraphrasing) So what you're saying is that your experience in the church environment ultimately influenced your decision to study psychology.

Elaine: ah huh, that's right, that's where it began. (silence) Gesh: Elaine, you mentioned that one can go in so many directions; can you elaborate on that?

(Open ended) Elaine: You know there are so many fields of psychology. As I

say, the fields are massive. The opportunities are massive. Err hmmm you know, you can go into err (counting on her finger tips) Clinical psychology,

Counselling psychology, Research psychology, Educational psychology, you know, just to name a few er there's Forensic psychology, Neuro psychology

which is such a new area of psychology, you know, it's just evolving all the

time. Gesh: I didn't realise there were that many fields, so what area are you specializing in – I know that you're doing your masters in psychology at the

moment. Elaine: I would say that I am doing general psychology. Er yes – It's an academic masters in research psychology. Specialising in what's called

Gestalt psychology... Gesh: aaah Gestalt Psychology.... (smiling)

Elaine:(also a gentle laugh)

Gesh: That's familiar

Elaine: yes – you should know about that by now. Well, ours is a research masters but Gestalt is the practical application. We're going to be doing a lot

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with early child development and I want to really focus on dealing with children and the early foundational phases. Gesh: That's very interesting.

Elaine: yes it is (silence).

Gesh:(Lean forward) So different psychologists specialize in different fields but when clients walk through the doors at Focus on the Family, many of them expect that we are able to help them with every problem. How do we manage that process. Elaine: ok (speaking more deliberately) I think that at Focus on the Family, we do a lot of Family therapy, a lot of couple counselling, which is what we are predominately doing at the moment. The counsellors and the psychologists that we've got here at the moment are well trained in a variety of things. To give you an example, let's say it's a child who maybe needs assessments, then we will know that a particular psychologist is maybe more trained and equipped in that area – so we then refer. We have another psychologist who is trained in Marital Therapy and that's what she really prefers to do. So we try to send all the ' couple counselling' straight through to her. I like to deal with ummm children and with teenagers. So I will deal with those but at the same time we do a variety of things depending on the people who come through at the same time.

Gesh:(paraphrasing/clarity) So what you're saying is that our counselling department is adequately equipped to deal with the general counselling needs of this ministry.

Elaine: Yes but we don't have clinical psychologists here, you know, it's mainly counselling psychologists who deal with basic adjustment issues. If it were a clinical problem were you have to diagnose, then we would refer to a clinical psychologist, to a medical doctor or to a psychiatrist, that kind of

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thing. So we have a very strong referral base that we use. Gesh:

(Intersectoral collaboration) Do you have a list of people that you can refer to outside of the Focus on the Family team.... Elaine: You have to – and we have very strong people in the medical profession and I think that's very important that as a psychologist and counsellor, you have to not move outside of your scope of practice (ethics). So we all have a scope of practice and we need to know what that is.

For instance a counselling psychologist or a counsellor should not diagnose. So if there's a problem with, let's say a diagnosis, we need to refer to a clinical psychologist. So we have a data base at 'Focus' with a variety of people, psychiatrist, social workers, medical doctors – so we would refer.

Gesh: hmmm. Now I know that you do a lot of trauma counselling and I don't want to go into the details of trauma counselling but tell me, how do you cope with the stress from a personal perspective. Elaine:(focusing on the 2nd person) I think your training helps you to a large extent – but I think for me, I can only talk for me personally (focusing on herself) – I know my own level of functioning. I know when I have to take a rest. I have a very high level of self care. So I try and live a balanced life as far as possible. You know, I try and make time for friends and to do things I enjoy. For me, I mean, I enjoy taking a bath – it's just relaxing, its walking on the beach, its feeling the sand, it's also taking time to do something different. Gesh: ah huh (minimal engagers)

Elaine: yes – to spend time with family and people with significant relationships. And its not always that easy when you're dealing with people. But I have learnt that I cannot fix people's problems – I don't take responsibility. I can just be the best counsellor that I can be. I use my skills  
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to help them. But I know that I have to leave it down and that they must take ownership, they need to take responsibility. I can just help them and walk with them as far as possible. You know there are some times, especially dealing with children, traumatised children, that is an area that I personally find it difficult. But I have learnt to try and not take that home with me – I have to. Gesh: I see (Verbal Attending – Visually)

Elaine:(crossing her legs and sitting back) But I remember, and I think I shared this with you the last time we chatted, you know, some of our training teaches you to be detached but even then, you still need to be involved with people – and to show who you are and sometimes expose who you are.

Gesh:(Clarity) what you're saying is: be human yet have the ability to er – disengage when the counselling session is over. Elaine: hmmm (nodding in agreement).

Gesh:(Summarizing) Elaine, this discussion has been so helpful to me. Just to recap, we spoke about what the various fields of psychology are; the need to refer clients and not attempt to practice outside ones scope of expertise. We even touched on how to engage and convey humanness and also be in a position to disengage after the session is over. I know now what you do for a bit of respite as well. (Start to check out) You know in this short time, I learnt quite a lot and I really want to thank you for sharing your heart and passion of counselling with me. Elaine: I'm glad to hear our discussion was helpful to you but we end, I just want to encourage you regarding your studies. Always ask yourself: 'What is the end goal?' As a student, there's many 'ups' and many 'downs' – so many challenges. Always ask yourself: "Why am I actually doing this?" – Yes, you do want to have this qualification, this degree

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but always keep it in perspective. Don't let things consume you. You may want to do your honours and your masters some day but there are times when this totally consumes you. Don't give up because some day, when all this is over, you will be doing a job that you enjoy and feel fulfilled with and you will make a difference in people's lives. And you what, it will be worth it! Gesh:(Standing up and shaking Elaine's hand) Thank you Elaine, thank you so much for that encouragement. I really appreciate it.

## 2. 4Narrative Descriptive Account

I realised that my recordings studio is not the ideal counselling environment, however I am required to interview people who have experienced and survived traumatic situations in their lives. With a round table in the middle of the studio, headphones, microphones and glass windows many guest to my studio may feel threatened, anxious and uncomfortable.

Before Elaine arrived, I decided to make some adjustments to my studio. I pushed the round table to the side, re-arranged the chairs so we could sit squarely. I did a sound check on both microphones that were set up on the round table in the studio to ensure that our conversation would be audible enough despite us sitting squarely. Closing the curtains in the sound proofed room immediately changed the atmosphere making it warm and safe.

Although I was interviewing the counsellor, I realised that there are some steps that I need to become accustomed to doing before a 'real life' counselling consultation. Setting the room up correctly was a good start.

Hosting this conversation with Elaine took on an entirely new meaning for me. This was not exactly a therapy session but many micro skills were still

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necessary. Checking In: I greeted Elaine as she entered the studio and introduced her to my sound engineer. As we made our way into the sound booth we spoke casually about how cold the weather had suddenly become. Elaine mentioned that she had been away in Johannesburg the previous week for her lectures. She is currently pursuing her Masters in Psychology. As we settled into our seats and spoke briefly about my studies at Unisa, quickly glanced at our position. There was adequate space between us facilitating an open posture as the desk was no longer an obstacle. Contents of Engagement:

I advised Elaine that our discussion should be approximately 10 minutes and that the only reason I had to record it was for the purpose of transcribing. She agreed and also advised me that her secretary would come through to call her as soon as her next client arrived. Working Alliance: Getting to know Elaine from my previous interaction and visit to the counselling centre created a good working alliance. The 'small talk' before our interview also helped to keep a warm and friendly disposition. Attending Skills: Many of my questions were open-ended and this gave Elaine the opportunity to speak freely and share her experiences from the heart. Listening, nodding of my head as she spoke, and the minimal encouragers are clear indications that I was fully engaging physically, intellectually and emotionally. These non-verbal and verbal skills came naturally to me.

The skill I felt most challenging for me was paraphrasing. There were many times during our conversation that I was tempted to continue with the next question without paraphrasing, however, I was aware of my weakness and had to make a conscious effort to pause, think and then paraphrase.

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Reflecting: Elaine mentioned how her career in counselling began in a church environment and she realised how desperately she needed to equip herself. As she spoke, it seemed that I was looking into a mirror. I reflected on reasons that drove me to study psychology and amazingly it was due to my involvement in the Christian context. I observed that Elaine was very relaxed especially when she crossed her legs and sat back on her chair while talking about how her training also taught her how to detach from the counselling. If I had another opportunity to conduct this interview, I would also discuss how Elaine's faith and Christian worldview influences her counselling. This would have provided a very interesting discussion. Checking out:

I felt that I had adequately summarized our discussion and it was clear that I had begun checking out. Elaine's closing statements really encouraged me. I think a defining moment in my life will certainly be the ability to make a difference in someone's life. I will hold on to this piece of advice as I pursue my studies in Psychology. 3)SECTION B: RIVER MAP

#### My Idea of Counselling

- My past experience was truly a windy river doing lay counselling •It all began in the Church environment. Due to my marriage to a Medical Doctor, people assumed that I had all the answers to solve their problems. I also felt obligated to give a quick solutions.
- I had very little empathy as the social setting was different. Most people in my church live from 'hand to mouth' and I was unable to they could drink instead of providing for their families. •This was becoming exhausting and began consuming me. I didn't have the skill to handle marriages on the brink

of divorce or to handle teenagers with drug addictions. •I depended a lot on my husband for help and began feeling inadequate. •I just didn't have the right tools or skills to counsel people •My husband suggested that I register to do Psychology Registered at Unisa

- Excitement when Tutorials Arrived
- Watched DVD
- Very confused about the ' cracks in the landscape'
- Watched counselling role plays
- Initially Impression: This is frustrating as counselling sessions seemed slow moving.
- This is not how I solve problems!
- Why aren't these counsellors providing solutions?

Assign 01:

- >Fatigue trying to juggle family, work and studying
- >Engaged with Tutorial, Reader and DVD again
- >Engaged counselling centre " Focus on the Family"
- >Knowledge of the theory was easier than practical application.
- >Checking in Process was nerve wracking.
- >I was very fearful and anxious of moving out of my comfort zone
- >Fear that I would be judged about my lack of knowledge
- >Had no confidence in myself. Reality:

My visit to the counselling centre:

Warm/Welcoming/Caring

Non-judgemental/Confidential/Safe

## Assign 02: Interview with Professional Counsellor

oLearnt that I must be empathetic, be human but also know how to disengage. oCounsellors must take care of themselves well oStay focused and learnt to apply micro skills. AHA! – Micro skills oA sense of liberation

**PARADIGM SHIFT!!!!!!**

I changed from saying: “ You know what you should do?” to “ Let’s explore some of your options”. I began to ask Open ended questions, Paraphrase, Listen, Observe, Focus, and Summarize. My last counselling session included defining the problem, exploring of her options and considering the pros & cons of each option. Guiding her through her dilemma took the pressure off my shoulders A feeling of confidence and liberation. So grateful for this experience of studying Transformative Encounters.