

THE HEALING POWER OF SELF NARRATIVES: *THE DIARY OF A YOUNG GIRL AND DEXTER*

Şeyda SİVRİOĞLU*, Bhekumusa Pascal ZWANE**

Abstract

This paper investigates self-narratives and their characteristics by demonstrating how they are a viable tool for engaging in psychotherapy. This is achieved by examining the narratives of *The Diary of a Young Girl* (Frank, 1947) and *Dexter* (Showtime Networks, 2006-2013) in light of Carl Jung's *Four Stages of Psychotherapy* (Jung, 1966) to show that the aforementioned narratives generally conform to these four stages. By aligning Jung's four stages of psychotherapy with the respective self-narratives, and discussing other therapeutic characteristics of self-narratives, it can be concluded that the exploration of self-awareness within self-narratives results in this narrative form being an effective means of therapy.

Keywords: *Self narratives, Psychotherapy, Identity, Psychoanalysis, The Diary of a Young Girl, Dexter.*

ÖZ ANLATILARIN İYİLEŞTİRİCİ GÜCÜ: *THE DIARY OF A YOUNG GIRL AND DEXTER*

Özet

Bu çalışma, öz anlatı ve onun özelliklerinin psikoterapide nasıl uygulanabilir bir araç olarak kullanıldığını inceler. Carl Jung'un "Psikoterapinin Dört Evresi" (Jung, 1966) kuramsal çerçevesinde, *The Diary of a Young Girl* (Frank, 1947) ve *Dexter*'in (Showtime Networks, 2006-2013) nasıl bu dört evreye uygun olduğu ortaya konulmuştur. Bu çalışmada, adı geçen öz anlatılarla Jung'ın psikanalizde anlattığı dört evreyi eşleştirerek, öz anlatılardaki kişisel farkındalık arayışının etkili bir terapi yöntemi olarak kullanıldığı sonucuna varılmıştır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: *Öz anlatı, Psikoterapi, Kimlik, Psikanaliz, The Diary of a Young Girl, Dexter.*

* Asst. Prof. Pamukkale University, Department of English Language and Literature. Denizli.
e-posta:sinceoglu@pau.edu.tr

** MA English Studies Student at the University of Kwa-Zulu Natal, Durban, South Africa.
e-posta: zbheki@rocketmail.com

A narrative is a representation of related events over time with an established addresser and addressee (Rimmon-Kenan, 1983: 2). Narratives take numerous forms, such as written or oral; and can be based on fictional or actual events. They have been used as means for transmitting myths, historical records and tales of various forms throughout the years. Thus, narratives have established themselves as a practical means for communicating thoughts and ideas. These and other qualities of narratives have made it possible for them to be used as a tool in psychotherapy more recently; namely, narrative therapy. In narrative therapy, patients' experiences are put into narrative structures that are easy to reference or analyze (Etchison and Kleist, 2000: 61) and this, hence, leads to the process of therapy through narratives being plausible.

Closely connected to narrative therapy are self-narratives. Self-narratives can be defined as, "the individual's account of the relationship among self-relevant events across time" (Gergen and Gergen, 1983: 255). Self-narratives, then, can be seen as being more useful in the process of narrative therapy as they highlight the individual: arguably one of the more important factors in psychotherapy.

This paper seeks to prove that the highly contrasting protagonists in the form of Anne Frank, *The Diary of a Young Girl* (1947), and Dexter Morgan, *Dexter* (Showtime Networks, 2006-2013) both engage in what

can be coined as self-therapy through their respective self-narratives. This will be done mainly in conjunction with Carl Jung's "Four Stages of Psychotherapy" as listed in his collection of essays, *Problems of Psychotherapy* (Jung, 1966). The aim is to show that both Anne Frank and Dexter Morgan generally adhere to these stages, and as a result, go through a healing process in their narratives. The reasoning behind selecting Dexter and Anne for this particular investigation is to illustrate the long reach and effectiveness of self-narratives as a means for self-therapy; particularly, the fact that the protagonists in question are from diverse backgrounds, and, Anne's narrative is mostly based on actual events, whereas Dexter's is fictional.

Another factor that connects Anne and Dexter through their self-narratives is the apparent neurosis they suffer from. For there to be a need of therapy, whoever is in question must have undergone some sort of traumatic experience, which has the likelihood of negatively impacting their lives. Dexter is unfortunate enough to witness the brutal murder of his mother as a toddler. The images of him crying for his mother in a pool of blood haunt him throughout his life and also seemingly give birth to his urges of killing: "Blood. Sometimes it sets my teeth on edge. Other times it helps me control the chaos" (Dexter:Dexter,S1.E1).

The Healing Power Of Self Narratives: The Diary Of A Young Girl And Dexter

Although, not as traumatic as Dexter's experience (one may argue), Anne Frank finds herself confined in a secret annex with seven other people, hiding with her family from Nazi persecution, "It's impossible to escape their clutches unless you go into hiding" (Frank, 1947: 55). Her unfavourable living conditions, ongoing puberty and the constant fear of being apprehended by the Nazis cause Anne considerable emotional distress, which in many circumstances could be dealt with through therapy.

These and other aspects of Anne's and Dexter's identities are brought to light by their self-narratives. Before proceeding to how Anne and Dexter heal themselves, it is necessary to indicate that their stories are, indeed, self-narratives as stated earlier. Self-narratives are centered on the individual, and relate everything occurring in the narrative to the self. This, naturally, means self-narratives are in the first person narrative and are characterized by an auto-diegetic narrator, in other words, a narrator that takes part in the narrative and tells his/her own story (Rimmon-Kenan, 1983: 96), as is the case with Dexter and Anne.

Another aspect of self-narratives is the tendency for the protagonist in them to gradually create their own identity through their narration, and ultimately end up with a better understanding of themselves (Gergen and Gergen, 1983: 254). Dexter is aware of "the dark passenger" and how it contributes to

his being. He presents himself as a functional psychopath and gradually shows the evolution of his identity as he narrates. Likewise, Anne (despite her age) puts forth a solid identity of herself, "Even though I'm only fourteen, I know what I want, I know who's right and who's wrong, I have my own opinions, ideas and principles, and though it may sound odd coming from a teenager, I feel I'm more of a person than a child -- I feel I'm completely independent of others" (Frank, 1947: 165). Her narration, all in all, shows an often optimistic and God-fearing girl who is, at times, rebellious.

Carl Jung states that psychotherapy is a dialectic process, wherein there is a discussion between two people (Jung, 1966: 53-75). Despite having a one-sided conversation, the self-narratives of Anne and Dexter showcase this dialectic process between the narrator (both protagonists) and narratee (the diary or implied reader in *The Diary of a Young Girl* and the viewer in *Dexter*, respectively). Both characters directly address a 'person' referred to as "you" (Dexter) and "Kitty" (The Diary of a Young Girl) throughout their narratives, thereby acknowledging the presence of an entity (whether real or imaginary) that takes part in the conversation despite their passive roles. This, therefore, establishes the apparent process of therapy in both self-narratives. Henceforth, Carl Jung's four stages of psychotherapy will be explored.

The four stages of psychotherapy according to Jung include: confession, elucidation (explanation), education and transformation. In the first stage, Jung states that, “the secrets or inhibited emotions, analogous to repressed sins that lead to neuroses, must be confessed to enable the patient to regain his wholeness” (Jung, 1966: 53-75). This can be further explained as the stage wherein the patient confides in someone they trust and, as a result, acquire some sort of relief. Further, the things which the patients confesses should be directly linked to what has or continues to cause them distress. The elucidation stage goes deeper and analyses the transference that has been done by the patient. This means exploring the consequences of these revelations as well.

Both Dexter and Anne find reliable and non-judgmental confidants in their narratees. Dexter details how his mother was murdered before him, and how this image remains with him all his life, “I was there. I saw my mother's death. A buried memory, forgotten all these years. They climbed inside me that day. And it's been with me ever since. My dark passenger” (Dexter: Truth Be Told, S1.E11). Dexter, additionally, implies that this horrific incident shapes his identity, and consequently leads to his neurotic behavior, which involves murdering people. The details and intricacies of his murders show a fixation which may be attributed to the cradle his current psyche was ‘born’ in: one of blood.

Working as a blood spatter analyst feeds his cravings for blood, the same way collecting and storing the blood of his victims in glass slides as trophies keeps him sane. One may argue that the trauma caused by the murder of his mother (which involved a lot of blood) leaves him with a need to be constantly around blood. Blood, then, can represent the last imprint of his mother in his mind. However, his fixation with blood does have a threshold, as illustrated in the *Seeing Red* episode (S1.E10). Dexter experiences a breakdown after an encounter with a crime scene that has a room full of blood (much like his mother’s crime scene). His ‘buried memories’ come to the surface and overwhelm him when he experiences a similar reality.

Dexter further shares how he has mastered to fake all social contact and how this affects him, “People fake a lot of human interactions, but I feel like I fake them all, and I fake them very well. That’s my burden, I guess” (Dexter: Dexter, S1.E1). The consequences of his deceptive character means he mostly appears to lead a normal life and is not suspected by colleagues and family; with the exception of Sergeant Doakes, who sees something dark in him. Despite his successful façade, Dexter struggles to be completely intimate in his relationships, and is put to the test in his relationship with Rita Bennet, “I can’t have sex with Rita. Every time I sleep with a woman, she sees me for what I really am. Empty. Then she’s gone.”

But I don't want Rita to go, which means I have to deal with this" (Dexter: Shrink Wrap, S1.E8). This confidential information, closely connected to his neurosis, is explained through Dexter's narration, and is at the disposal of the viewer (narratee).

Anne, on the other hand, affectionately refers to her diary as "Kitty", and it seems to be the only 'person' whom she confides in, "Up to now I've only confided my thoughts to my diary" (Frank, 1947: 24). She goes into detail regarding her puberty as she explains how it affects her emotionally; and she also admits how the war has brought her life to a standstill. Her transition to adulthood seems to take centre stage, however. This is shown by how her adolescence causes her to be more emotional and isolated from those around her, "Daddy's always so nice. He understands me perfectly, and I wish we could have a heart-to-heart talk sometime without my bursting instantly into tears. But apparently that has to do with my age" (Frank, 1947: 24). Anne acknowledges that she is going through changes because of her age, and she confesses this to her diary.

While most people in the annex are aware of her 'growing pains', it is only through her discourse with her diary that she reveals her growing grievances for her sister and mother, "I love them, but only because they're Mother and Margot. I don't give a darn about them as people. As far as I'm concerned, they can go jump in a lake" (Frank, 1947: 48). Her

attitude bears traits of the Electra complex (Jung, 1915: 69), as she seems to be closer to her father, and in turn shows a level of hostility towards her mother (and sister). Despite the extremity of her feelings towards her mother and sister, her thoughts can still be regarded as being understandable for her age (the Electra complex supposedly reaches its height during puberty). Anne also makes mention of the various boys whom she claims are in love with her and the ones she loves. In fact, a large part of her narration is dedicated to the explanation of her feelings for Peter, who at first is regarded as a repulsive figure by Anne, but then later becomes an intimate friend. Anne narrates these intimacies between her and Peter, such as her first kiss - secrets only her diary knows. Anne's emphasis on her emotions for those around her and her apparent mood swings, again, are reasonable in light of her coming of age.

Lastly, Anne addresses the issue which forms the backdrop of her narration: the ongoing war. The war invariably affects her psyche, as her repressed fears of being found continuously manifest in her dreams, "Why do I always think and dream the most awful things and want to scream in terror" (Frank, 1947: 117). Jung, in his *Theory of Psychoanalysis*, mentions that "dream material" may arise from a collection of unconscious imprints on the mind, most of which are a result of repressed thoughts/fears - that can be interpreted through various associations (Jung, 1915: 60-66).

It is her fears and resulting nightmares, it seems, that contribute to her neurotic behavior. Anne also explains how the war has stifled her dreams and aspirations, forcing her to live with and accept her current situation, “I have plenty of dreams, but the reality is that we'll have to stay here until the war is over. We can't ever go outside, and the only visitors we can have are Miep, her husband Jan...” (Frank, 1947: 24). All these secrets are relayed and explained by Anne in her diary, thereby completing her first and second stage of her therapy.

The third stage, education, involves a “process of drawing the patient out of himself in order to attain normal adaptation”, Jung states (Jung, 1966: 53-75). In other words, this stage focuses on the mechanisms and strategies that are put into place so as to “...make the ill-formed tree grow straight”, as Jung puts it. Dexter's education occurs on more than one occasion, the first through “Harry's code”. Dexter's foster father, Harry Morgan, seemingly constructs a code for his son after noticing his violent and deadly urges. When hunting animals becomes inadequate for Dexter, Harry teaches him how to only kill those who “deserve” death, hence, molding him into some sort of vigilante. Harry's experience in the same police force that Dexter works for ensures that his code keeps Dexter out of jail, “Harry was a great cop here in Miami. He taught me how to think like one; he taught me how to cover my tracks. I'm a very neat monster” (Dexter: Dexter, S1.E1). This

initial education process places emphasis on the root of Dexter's problems, and puts in place tools that Dexter can use so he can have an attempt at a functional life. He achieves this in his adolescence and for the most part of his adult life. Even though the code is crafted by his foster father, it is still Dexter's choice to implement it, a vital step in the education process.

The second part of his education occurs when Dexter discovers that his code might be a small part in a larger scale of unsolicited social experiments by Dr. Evelyn Vogel, who works with Harry Morgan to create the initial code. Before Dexter even discovers this, he embarks on a new path of self-education wherein Dexter only has the narratee, and not the ghost of Harry, to confide in, “my father might not approve, but I'm no longer his disciple. I'm a master now, an idea transcended into life” (Dexter: The British Invasion, S2.E12). Dexter's knowledge that Harry's code may have not been created out of sincerity causes him to doubt its validity. This results in somewhat of a new code being created by him, wherein he is the architect and not a mere ‘subject’ in an experiment.

A steadfast belief in God and sustained self-conditioning constitute part of Anne's education. Anne's belief and solace in God is unquestionable, but what is even more striking is how her belief helps her to overcome her problems.

The Healing Power Of Self Narratives: The Diary Of A Young Girl And Dexter

God, through her religion, offers her a code (like Dexter) that equips her with the tools she may use, even in the most hopeless situations, to remain positive, “Be brave! Let’s remember our duty and perform it without complaint. There will be a way out. God has never deserted our people” (Frank, 1947: 194). Her beliefs allow her to transcend her problems and see them as a transient feat or test which her people (Jews) will be rewarded for. In other words, her code requires total faith in God, and shows, with references to past events, how her faith will be rewarded. Trust in God is also seen as a mitigating factor for her fears - the source of most of her problems, “My fear vanished. I looked up at the sky and trusted in God” (Frank, 1947: 133). Her belief system, as a result, becomes an immovable pillar of her education, granted she remains faithful to God.

Anne’s self-conditioning goes hand-in-hand with her religious beliefs. She develops a resistance against all that is happening around her by coaching herself, in a way, and convincing herself that her current state will eventually pass, “We’ll need to be brave to endure the many fears and hardships and the suffering yet to come. It’s now a matter of remaining calm and steadfast, of gritting our teeth and keeping a stiff upper lip!” (Frank, 1947: 230). Over time, like an athlete that has exercised their body to prime condition, Anne’s psyche adapts and is tough enough to deal with whatever ordeal life serves her; whether she is in the annex or outside. In spite of the naivety in some of her pronouncements

and convictions, her optimistic attitude becomes a formidable tool for warding off her fears and insecurities.

The final stage of transformation marks the change of the patient in which the ‘cure’ of the patient is dependent on him/her and the therapist. Jung describes this process as the intermingling of two personalities (patient and therapist) in order to heal the patient (Jung, 1966: 53-75). There is also emphasis on how the therapist and patient influence each other, “you can exert no influence if you are not susceptible to influence”, Jung, referring to therapists. Ultimately, Anne and Dexter can be regarded as undergoing self-therapy in their narratives as the act of telling their respective stories does not include a therapist. This would then imply that the patient-therapist relationship they are expected to have, instead, is largely characterised by a level self-awareness and honesty that both patients show through their narratives. Self-awareness and honesty are highlighted as they form some of the characteristics required for the healing and individuation of a patient (Jung, 1966: 3-20). In fact, therapists are known to practice self-therapy whereby self-awareness is achieved through the exercise of self-therapy (Maria Malikiosi-Loizos, 2013: 33–50); thus, making it possible for the process therapy to occur with only one person present. It has already been established that Anne and Dexter showcase self-awareness and honesty as it is a feature of self-narratives.

As Anne narrates about her teenage angst and the war, an introspective tone and an overall awareness of herself and the situation she is in can be noted, “Am I really only fourteen? Am I really just a silly schoolgirl? Am I really so inexperienced in everything? I have more experience than most; I’ve experienced something almost no one my age ever has” (Frank, 1947: 204). Hence, the patient-therapist relationship in Anne’s case is replaced by an introspective and self-aware individual that relieves her stress and fears through her journal writing. Dexter, too, forms a rapport with his inner voice and looks within through his narration so as to eradicate his neurosis, “I’ve learned that periods of darkness can overcome us at any time. But I also learned that I can endure, overcome. And in the process, grow stronger. Smarter, better” (Dexter: *Those Kinds of Things*, S6.E1).

The final transformations of the patients are marked by the construction and deconstruction of Anne and Dexter’s identities respectively. Anne’s narrative ultimately consists of the construction of a young girl’s character shaped by her harsh environment. The narratee also witnesses the strengthening and expansion of Anne’s value system through her faith in God, “We must be brave and strong, bear discomfort without complaint, do whatever is in our power and trust in God.” (Frank, 1947: 193). She constructs her identity in a time when everything around her is falling apart. Anne also constructs what is regarded as

part of history today. Self-narratives are said to “function much as histories do within the society more generally” (Gergen and Gergen, 1983: 256). Anne fulfills both by writing an account of history in her diary and, at the same time, building her character through her narrative.

Once he is aware of the true nature of Harry’s code, Dexter embarks on a mission of knowing his true self, the self beyond the construct by Harry. Hence, Dexter breaks down his own character and explores the freedom of choice which is rather limited when he follows Harry’s code. This process sees Dexter going from being a ‘functional monster’ to being exposed, “We all make rules for ourselves. It’s these rules that help define who we are. So when we break those rules, we risk losing ourselves and becoming something unknown” (Dexter: *Surprise, Motherfucker!* S7.E12). Dexter, likewise, deconstructs the nature of his relationships, especially that with Debbie Morgan, his foster sister. Their relationship transforms from that of brother and sister into a romantic one. His deconstruction of everything related to him, then, can either end with his demise or reconstruction of himself, as the last scene of the final episode of the series (Dexter: *Remember the Monsters?* S8.E12) suggests. Dexter’s deconstruction, then, can be linked to ‘regressive narratives’ as explained in “Narratives of the Self” (Gergen and Gergen, 1983:266).

The Healing Power Of Self Narratives: The Diary Of A Young Girl And Dexter

“In effect, regressive narratives are logically tied to the creation of progressive narratives”, meaning regressive narratives (like Dexter’s) may lead to progressive (constructive, like Anne’s) narratives.

Of course, the success of psychotherapy is not entirely dependent on Jung’s *Four Stages of Psychotherapy* (1966). There are obviously other factors which go beyond the scope of literary criticism that determine the effectiveness of a method as a means of therapy. However, there is little doubt in the overall adequacy of self-narratives as a tool for therapy. The ability of self-narratives to synthesize fragments of everyday life into concise and structured plots makes it easier to examine the self, with or without a therapist. Both Anne and Dexter accomplish this. Self-narratives also comprehensively

illustrate the development of an individual’s identity, which may prove vital when analyzing the individual for the purpose of therapy. Anne and Dexter’s narratives allow one to see the protagonists’ problems as being separate from their identities, as is required in narrative therapy (Etchison and Kleist, 2000: 61). This then leads to the problem being easily distinguishable, and consequently, better dealt with. What is more important, though, is self-narratives offer those afflicted by mental distress the opportunity to unburden themselves of their problems, “When I write I can shake off all my cares. My sorrow disappears, my spirits are revived!” (Frank, 1947: 185-186). This means self-narratives initiate the first stage (confession) of psychotherapy as explained by Jung (1966), hence, opening the door to a process of healing for those narrating.

WORKS CITED

- Cerone, D., Colleton, S., Eglee, C., Goldwyn, J., Hall, M., Johannessen, C., Phillips, C. (2006). **Dexter**. Showtime Networks, Los Angeles.
- Frank, A. (1995). **The Diary of a Young Girl: The Definitive Edition**, S. Massotty (Trans.). O. H. Frank and M. Pressler (Eds.). Bantam Books, New York.
- Gergen, K. J. and Gergen, M. M. (1983). "Narratives of the Self" in T. R. Sarbin & K. E. Scheibe (Eds.). **Studies in Social Identity**, pp: 254-273. Praeger, New York.
- Jung, C. (1915). **The Theory of Psychoanalysis**, S. E. Jelliffe and W. A. White (Eds.). The Journal of Nervous and Mental Disease Publishing Company, New York.
- _____. (1966). "General Problems of Psychotherapy", G. Adler and R. F. C. Hull (Eds.). Vol. 16: **Collected Works of C.G. Jung: The Practice of Psychotherapy**, pp. 53-75. Princeton University Press.
- Kleist, D. M. and Etchison, M. (2000). "Review of Narrative Therapy: Research and Utility", Vol. 8: **The Family Journal: Counselling and Therapy for Couples and Families**. Sage Publications, Inc., Idaho State University.
- Malikiosi-Loizos, M. (2013). "Personal Therapy for Future Therapists: Reflections on a Still Debated Issue", **The European Journal of Counselling Psychology**, Vol. 2(1), pp. 33–50.
- Rimmon-Kenan, S. (1983). **Narrative Fiction: Contemporary Poetics**, T. Hawkes (Ed.). Routledge, New York.