

# Chapter 24

## Assessing Individual or Family Dynamics through the Collage Life-Story Elicitation Technique (CLET)

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**OVERVIEW:** *The Collage Life-Story Elicitation Technique (CLET) is an auto-ethnographic and representational technique that scaffolds the process of narrating significant relationships and attachments in everyday life of children, adolescent and adults. Based on the theoretical underpinnings of narrative psychology, social constructionism and symbolic interactionism, the CLET provides a way in which participants can express and perform narratives involving cognitive, motivational and affective aspects of autobiographical remembering as they engage in both collage-making and storytelling. The CLET brings to light rich and vivid stories about the self and relationships in a variety of settings such as the family and the school, and provides the counselor and researcher access to perceptions that lurk below the level of awareness or that are often suppressed because of fears of retribution. Thus, the CLET can serve as tool for intake interviewing and treatment planning, externalizing conflicting relationships and problems, and fits well within the School-based Family Counseling (SBFC) model for preventive and remedial purposes.*

### BACKGROUND

Telling stories—life stories, stories about key events, stories about one’s family or school, or stories about significant attachments—has become a key feature of ethnographic inquiry and narrative therapy for different population groups (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; McAdams, 2001, 2006). The basic premise is that story telling is a mechanism by which experiences are rendered meaningful within some form of structure, interweaving physical, cognitive and affective aspects of development across the lifespan (Anderson & Gehart, 2007; Taylor, 2006; White, 2007). Storytelling provides a framework for studying humans as relational beings and in the context and content of their self-defining memories (Bohn & Berntsen, 2008; Bruner, 2010; Gergen & Gergen, 2006; Habermas & Bluck, 2000; Kulkofsky & Klemfuss, 2008; McLean & Pasupathi, 2010). It is the integrative configuration of self-in-the-world and the psychosocial consequences of the co-constructed, relational self.

A challenge for many counselors, however, is finding ways to elicit reliable and detailed narratives that provide access to individual’s experiences and perceptions of relationships to others, as well as externalizing the underlying problem (Brannen, Mooney, & Statham, 2009; Chan, 2004; White, 2007). Some client populations also experience difficulty telling their stories due to a number of obstacles such as age, suppressing a past filled with trauma, discontent and emotional cut-off, cultural prohibitions, or lack of discursive modes for expressing themselves in language of the dominant group (or counselor) (Monk, Winslade, Crocket, & Epston, 1997; Van Schalkwyk, 2010). For example, children and adolescents are only starting the storytelling process and are often constrained by a fear of retribution should they disclose their vulnerabilities (Bohn & Berntsen, 2008; Kulkofsky & Klemfuss, 2008). Although adults might have developed greater interpretive capabilities and can tell an integrative life story, they are often constrained by cultural and societal cues that prevent or inhibit self-disclosure (Bauer, McAdams, & Pals, 2008).

In view of these (and other) obstacles, the Collage Life-story Elicitation Technique (CLET) was developed as a way to explore life-story remembering in a way that could overcome the reluctance of some—specifically those in distress or in cross-cultural settings—to tell the full story and disclose or externalize the underlying problematic (Van Schalkwyk, 2010). Within this technique, I accept that collage making is a valid social action, a narrative performance that provides a channel for making sense of the past and integrating experiences with the present and an anticipated future (Eisner, 2002; Fivush, 1991; Monk et al., 1997; Weber, 2008). Collage making combines with conversation or storytelling to generate rich descriptions and vivid memories. It is a kind of ‘performance’, in which the perceptions emerge in relation to the multiple voices of the social and the private self. In a collaborative process of narrating both non-verbal and verbal recollections of the past, the CLET engages the individual or family in co-constructing stories for interpretation and co-action.

Thus, the purpose of the CLET is to explore what lies beneath the level of awareness and gain access to experiences and perceptions of real-life relationships, events and attachments that could shed light on the dynamic conflict and cause for concern. Based on life story remembering (McAdams, 1993), narrative psychology (McLean & Pasupathi, 2010; Monk et al., 1997; Lieblich, McAdams, & Josselson, 2004) and the theoretical underpinnings of social constructionism (Gergen, 2000), the objective with the CLET is to gain a greater understanding of how the individual co-constructs his or her reality for everyday living. Children, adolescents and adults alike can be quite creative and resourceful when disclosing their distresses in a playful and engaging manner (Bauer, McAdams, & Pals, 2008; Brannen et al., 2009; Powell & Snow, 2007; White, 2007). Through life-story remembering using the CLET, individuals and groups represent their perceptions and interpretations of local customs and practices, attitudes, relationships and interactions that emerge in interactive systems and in different settings such as the home, at school and in recreational environments (Van Schalkwyk, 2010).

### **PROGRAM DESCRIPTION**

The CLET is a plausible and integrative method to study the experiences and perceptions of individuals and groups (e.g., the family). “It provides scope for collecting and analyzing self-defining memories and expressions or representations of self, involving autobiographical memories, as well as cognitive, motivational and affective aspects as the individual engages in collaborative process of (co)constructing life narratives” (Van Schalkwyk, 2010, p. 676). Through a process of scaffolding, the individual or group is provided with a mechanism supporting and aiding remembering and narrating significant events, relationships and attachments to people and objects using different modes of expression. Thus, following the sequential steps outlined below, the CLET can uncover memories from the past that have or could have significant meanings to the individual and a bearing on the underlying problematic causing distress in the present. Whether conducted as a face-to-face semi-structured interview with the individual or family or in a written format with small (focus) groups, the procedures unfold in the same manner following five steps outlined below. The counselor should familiarize him or herself with the steps as well as the subsequent analysis and interpretation before proceeding.

### **PROCEDURE**

The CLET unfolds in five non-negotiable sequential steps. Step 1 entails the making of a collage, followed by ‘storytelling’ (step 2), positioning of the dialogical self (step 3), juxtaposition (step 4), and self-reflection (step 5). The individual completes each step before commencing with the next one all the time collaborating with the counselor in constructing and interpreting their stories. Below I explain each step for collecting the narratives (data) in more detail. The tasks for each of the steps are explained to

the individual using simple and easy language to ensure understanding, and can easily be translated into the native language of the individual in counseling.

Following the explication of procedures for collecting stories, I explain the analytic strategy for making sense of the non-verbal and verbal narratives collected utilizing the CLET. This analytic strategy provides a broad overview of how the counselor can use the materials to gain insight in the client's everyday functioning in different settings. However, it should be noted that the CLET should not be interpreted rigidly as it is aimed at hypothesis generating rather than formal diagnosis. Additional strategies might be necessary should one suspect more severe forms of pathology. Nonetheless, the CLET is useful for generating provisional hypotheses that can be explored further during the counseling process.

## STEPS FOR CONDUCTING THE CLET

*Preparation.* Prior to conducting the CLET semi-structured interview, it is essential to determine the focus area or topic. In this regard, the counselor can focus on any particular area for the narrations that are relevant to the referral issue and/or the topic under investigation. Focus areas usually involve relationships and attachments, developmental issue, settings, events, and so forth. It is best to have a focus area at the outset that can be clearly communicated to the individual or group participating in this process. Furthermore, prepare all materials necessary for proceeding smoothly through each step. Apart from sound knowledge of the CLET steps and their sequence, the following preparations are important:

a) Collect a number of magazines, journals and newspapers to be used for collage making. There is no restriction on the kind of magazines and it is not necessary to have the same magazines for all individuals. However, it is advisable to collect those magazines with similar content for each individual to allow sufficient scope for selecting pictures and images for the collage making (see also discussion below in Step 1 of CLET procedures). Alternatively collect a range of images publicly available (e.g., on the Internet) and representing a range of categories. It is advisable to collect 20+ images of (i) people (individuals, dyads, triads, groups), (ii) human-like figures (cartoons), (iii) settings and events with people (e.g., celebration, eating), (iv) objects and artefacts with no human involvement, (v) any other relevant images to the focus area for the narration.

b) Materials for collage making: blank A3 (or A4) paper, scissors, glue, pen/pencil and crayons (for drawing if needed).

c) Voice recorder for audio recording the conversation (in the case of an individual or group face-to-face interview). Voice recording is helpful for later transcription creating the field texts for analysis and is strongly advised since writing down all narratives can interfere in the smooth flow of the procedures. Video recording is optional although advised for children with serious disabilities such as Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) and to obtain further material for behavioral observation. However, recording can only be done with consent from the individual or, in the case of children, the parent or guardian.

*Setting.* Prepare the right setting that is private, has sufficient space and furniture, and is not noisy. The interview can be conducted at the individual's home or in a public place where facilities are available. As far as possible, avoid interferences during the execution of the CLET, whether from parents or teachers when working with a child, children when working with adults, or any other outside noises and disturbances (e.g., phone calls).

## Step 1: Collage making

The first step in the CLET entails the making of a collage. The adjacent column reflects the basic instructions for collage making and encourages the individual's agency in selecting images and/or cuttings from the magazines and print media provided for making a collage.

### Instructions for collage making in the CLET project

Create your own life story (or focus area) collage. Use at least 8-10 pictures, images, cuttings (also text) and drawings. Try to answer the question:

*"How does this picture/image/drawing represent something important or memorable about \_\_\_\_\_ (focus area) in my life?"*

You are free to paste the images in any way you want on the paper provided. You can also make some drawings on your collage if you want to. Take your time but try to do this as quickly as possible so that we can proceed with the next part.

The collage is a non-verbal narrative in the form of a poster or visual representation of the focus area—i.e., the phenomenon identified as the topic for inquiry. For example, exploring children's perceptions of family life, the focus of collage-making will be *the family* and the child will select pictures, images or cuttings (also text) and drawings from the available magazines that represent her or his perceptions of family life. Collage-making takes approximately 20-30 minutes, depending on the situation, the individual's age and level of functioning, and the topic. Making a collage aims to stimulate remembering and sets the individual—even adult individuals—at ease for the next steps in the CLET process. Although 8-10 images should be sufficient to elicit rich and saturated narratives, more images are also possible and some contexts (focus areas) require 10-15 images for the collage-making. It is also possible to ask the older participants to make the collage at home and bring it to the next session when the further CLET steps unfold in a semi-structured interview setting. When asking the participant to make the collage at home, it is advisable not to present Steps 2 to 5 at the outset but execute these steps when the participant attends the next session.

The CLET makes use of locally relevant magazines and print media and assumes basic motor skills for cutting and pasting images on the collage. As described above, the use of local print media is important as these provide valuable socio-cultural cues that would not be available if images are pre-determined through prior selection from culturally irrelevant sources. Counselors who want to use the CLET are advised to collect magazines and other print media over a period of time and from whichever sources available in the local context. For example, ask the local newsstand owner for copies of magazines after the expiration date, or get friends to provide their old magazines instead of discarding them in the dustbin. Magazines are social products indigenous to the culture in which they are

published and thus contain cues that are reminiscent of social construction of everyday life for the individual (Threadgold, 2003). Therefore, it is advisable to use magazines that have relevance to the participant's daily life and with which he or she is familiar in the local context and, if possible, contains writing in the participant's native language. Locally familiar magazines provide the participant with the freedom to narrate her or his own non-verbal story using culturally relevant cues instead of predetermined categories—i.e., when the counselor selects and presents images from other sources such as the internet to the client.

As indicated above, there is no restriction on the kind of magazines used for the collage making although counselors should preferably not use magazines with sensitive information such as explicit sexually-related images. The nature of the self-selected images or pictures, the pasting of these images on the collage and their relationship to one another, as well as the construction of the collage as a whole represents the participant's autobiographical remembering of the phenomenon and will be interpreted through the sense-making process described below. The counselor can also ask the participant to bring her or his own photos, picture, images and cuttings (also text) from magazines to the interview session. This approach works well with older children, adolescents and adults, although some also prefer to rather use magazine clippings in order to maintain confidentiality and avoid self-disclosure. When working with young children, those who do not have the cognitive-motor skills for cutting images from a magazine or children previously diagnosed with cognitive impairment, the counselor can choose to pre-select and cut-out images of different type and nature (see Table 1) and provide these during the session to the child for pasting and/or further cutting. Some children might also need assistance with pasting the images. Nonetheless, the counselor should take care not to impose any prescriptions or advice about how to make the collage (i.e., pictures to choose, where to paste an image, and so on) and allow the participant sufficient freedom to do this in her or his own way.

## Step 2: Storytelling

<p>In Step 2 the individual engages actively in constructing micro-narratives stimulated by the images on the collage. In a semi-structured interview setting, the counselor asks the participant to describe each picture/image on the collage as best they can.</p>	<p><b>Ask the following questions:</b></p> <p><i>Tell a short story about the picture/drawing on the collage.</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Why did you choose this picture or drawing to represent ____ (focus area)?</i></li> <li>• <i>What makes this picture or drawing important to you as a representation of ____ (focus area)?</i></li> </ul>
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The individual narrates a story about each image on the collage, giving reasons for selecting them, describing thoughts, and feelings and the meanings each image brings out and explaining the significance of the image in her or his life and in relation to the focus area. Images on the collage are numbered consecutively as the narratives unfold, providing a point of reference for later steps in the CLET and for analytic purposes. The narrating takes place in the language with which the participant feels comfortable (e.g., native language or English), and should allow the participant to tell whatever comes to mind as the authentic author of her/his own story (McAdams, 1993). The co-constructor—that is, the counselor—supports the narrator demonstrating appropriate responses affirming the participant's knowledge about her or his own memories regarding the focus area or phenomenon.

### Step 3: Positioning the self and eliciting silent voices

<p>The third step continues the autobiographical remembering and reminiscing, asking the participant to comment on two issues:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• A place on the collage where she or he would like to position the self.</li><li>• An image he or she could not find but would have liked to add to the collage.</li></ul>	<p><b>Ask the following questions:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <i>Where would you put yourself (a picture of yourself if you had one) in this collage at this point in time?</i></li><li>• <i>What image would you like to add if you could find the right one?</i></li></ul>
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Mark the selected position clearly and ask the participant to give reasons, meanings and emotions related to this positioning of the self. As explained below in the analytic strategy, the individual's self-positioning provides some insight into her or his ownership of and involvement in the reported memories and perceptions of self-in-the-world of everyday living along two dimensions of the player-spectator orientation and the close-distanced self-other relationships. Discuss also the image the participant would have liked to add asking about the meanings and emotions such an image would have evoked. The silent voice often refers to a suppressed memory or relationship and alerts the counselor to further explore if not during the execution of the CLET, then later in counseling. For example, when remembering family relationships one could explore further why a particular family member is not mentioned or depicted in the collage.

### Step 4: Juxtaposition (comparing similarities and differences)

<p>In this step, the participant reflects upon the dynamic conflict portrayed in the similarities and differences of images on the collage. After selecting three images, ask the participant to describe the similarities and differences and to give reasons.</p>	<p><b>Ask the participant to:</b></p> <p><i>Select two pictures/images with similar meanings, and one picture/image with an opposing (different) meaning.</i></p> <p><i>What are the differences and similarities between these images?</i></p>
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The counselor should again mark and/or number the similar and different images on the collage for later reference. If the individual has difficulty selecting similar and different pictures/images for this step (e.g., younger children) the counselor can assist with the task. Select two similar images that the participant focused on most during the storytelling stage (Step 2) and an opposing image as one he or she skipped over very quickly. Alternatively, select two images of positive meanings and one with a negative meaning. Reflecting upon the differences and similarities explore the dialogue between narrative voices and inter-subjectivities (Markova, 2003)—that is, the dialogue between voices from the past with those of the present, voices that may be part of the outside or the inside world of the self (Hermans, 2001), or voices that tell of a conflict yet to be discovered. It is an important step to uncover or externalize the potential problem. Although comparing differences and similarities once only should be sufficient to uncover such dynamic conflict, repeating the step two or three times could elicit further meanings regarding the problem saturated narratives underlying the representations on the collage.

## Step 5: Reflection and Closure

For the final step in the CLET interview, the individual gets a chance to reflect upon the process of making the collage and telling her or his story, and to add further information she or he might think relevant to the topic. This step also provides some form of debriefing, and allows the individual to ask questions about things that created confusion during the collage making and storytelling.	<b>Ask the participant:</b>  <i>How did you feel when making this collage and telling your stories?</i>  <i>What do you feel now that we are almost done?</i>  <i>Can you think of anything you would like to add that you did not include previously?</i>
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During the execution of the CLET, emotions may emerge caused by disturbing or difficult events in the participant's life. The counselor should be sensitive and empathic in these emotional states, and preferably not prompt for further elaboration if it appears to be a difficult topic for the child. Debriefing is imperative and should be available at the participant's request, particularly if the CLET is conducted for research purposes rather than as an intake interview for potential clients. Throughout the process of conducting the CLET, the counselor can use appropriate prompts as a form of conversational scaffolding and encourage reflection and self-understanding. However, avoid expanding the parameters of the focus area as this can create confusion for the individual as well for later analysis. It is also advisable, in the case of a face-to-face interview, to record the conversations for later transcription—and translation if necessary. Furthermore, the individual can be invited to read the transcript of the interview as soon as it is completed. This will give the individual an opportunity to ensure that you have captured her or his stories correctly in writing, and provide her or him a chance to add or change something should they wish to do so.

Although narrative inquiry or storytelling is a plausible and integrative framework for exploring experiences and possible problems, the CLET adds a scaffolding process to life story remembering that helps to overcome perceived obstacles that some client populations have with autobiographical remembering. The collage (non-verbal) and the storytelling (verbal) thus provide multiple stories for each case, allowing for case study analytic procedures to follow (see *Interpretation of CLET* below). The CLET can also be combined with other diagnostic tools to gain a deeper understanding of the problem or as confirmation for interpretations. After completion of the CLET interview, the counselor is encouraged to compose field notes and analytic memos pertaining the experience and impressions gleaned from doing the CLET with the individual or family. This adds a further data source for interpretation, as each case solicits its own reflections and interpretations.

### INTERPRETATION OF CLET NARRATIVE TEXTS

The purpose of this section is to present an explication of the analytic strategy for analyzing and interpreting the CLET case. The objective of analysis and interpretation is to make sense of the data and to build a valid and compelling argument for further action and co-action (e.g., treatment planning). Each CLET interview follows a central question or focus area. For example, in a study exploring children's perceptions of family life, the central question could be "*How do children in middle childhood perceive the family in which they grow up?*" (Van Schalkwyk, 2011). Children in middle childhood aged 9-12 years and living with their families in different cultures could tell their stories following the steps in the CLET, and reveal both similar and different perceptions about family life in their culture. Their

perceptions not only reveal local customs of childcare and practices in the family, but also attitudes, relationships and interactions that emerged in the child-family interactive system in different settings such as the home, at school and in recreational environments (Mulvaney, 2011; Van Schalkwyk & Lijadi, 2013). Some of these stories also required further attention by a local counselor particularly when family relationships were distressful to the child.

## TRANSCRIPTION AND TRANSLATION

Moving from speech to text entails transcription of interview material. It is advisable, even in a counseling setting, to transcribe the spoken word into text as an important part of analyzing and interpreting the content of the CLET and provide evidence for further action. The functions of a transcript are as follows:

- Helping us to take note of a particular phenomena
- Providing accessible data archive material (i.e., empirical data of an interview)
- Providing quick access to a range of interactional episodes that can be inspected for comparative purposes
- Providing the reader with limited but useful access to phenomena discussed in analysis

Alternatively the counselor can refer back to the audio recording during analysis and interpretation, although this can be difficult for a longer interview. Translation will also be necessary if the CLET was not conducted in English or in the language of the counselor. The translation entails a verbatim translation where the entire transcript is translated to capture the inherent meanings and intent of the narrator. Different procedures exist for translation of narratives, and the counselor should use the one most suitable for the textual data obtained through the CLET.

## MAKING SENSE OF THE CLET NARRATIVE TEXTS

The CLET data, when appropriately completed in a sequential manner as described above, provides the counselor with a holistic single-case study containing three embedded units analysis for examination and interpretation (Figure 1) (Baxter & Jack, 2008; Yin, 2009). The first unit of analysis pertains to the collage as a non-verbal narrative and represents the nature and content of the participant's autobiographical memories. For example, as a non-verbal narrative, the collage contains information about significant people (individuals and groups), objects-in-the world, settings and events, the relationships of self with others, the cognitive functions relevant to organizing memories in coherent fashion, and the underlying meanings that the individual has difficulty verbalizing.

The second unit of analysis concerns to the stories the participant told for each image. These are micro-narratives stimulated by the images on the collage and representing the participant's authentic memories and interpretations of past events as they influence the present and anticipated future functioning of the participant. The story grid as a combination of all the steps of the CLET constitutes the third unit of analysis and represents the interweaving of a full but realistic range of memories with the cognitive, motivational and affective aspects of the self-in-the-world. Systematically analyzing and interpreting the case will give the counselor access to different layers of memories and stories—also problem-saturated stories—that affect functioning in different settings. Whereas the underlying dynamic conflict and problem saturated narratives might otherwise go unobserved, utilizing the CLET and making sense of the data bring to light that which the counselor needs to address through the therapeutic process. The case analysis and sense-making process of the CLET unfolds in different sequential phases as the counselor organizes the data for a holistic single-case analysis and explore the deeper meanings and connotations elicited through autobiographical remembering (Miles & Huberman,





Figure 1 Embedded single-case protocol with three units of analysis and permeable boundary with the context or setting

1994; Van Schalkwyk, 2010; Yin 2009). The analytic strategy developed for analyzing CLET data is described below. It is a coherent and systematic way to explore each unit of analysis (collage, stories and story grid) along 14 categories for coding the various units of analysis, and interpreting the participant's range of memories in a given context and about the specified phenomenon or focus area in response to context-specific question. It also allows the counselor to identify the underlying conflict or problem of which the participant is yet unaware but where the counselor wishes to target her or his intervention strategies.

*Phase 1: Analyzing the Collage.* The first phase involves analyzing and coding the collage as non-verbal narrative (unit of analysis 1) while temporarily ignoring or bracketing the verbal micro-narratives. Read the collage as a stand-alone non-verbal narrative while observing and coding Categories 1 to 7 as listed in Table 24.1. The analysis of the collage takes place independent from the stories

Table 24.1 *Categories for analyzing the collage as non-verbal narrative of the CLET*

Category	Description	Analytic action
Number of images	The number of images indicates the participant's adherence to prescriptions, where fewer images could indicate the level of cognitive functioning required for autobiographical remembering and/or distress resulting in repression of memories.	
Nature of images	<p>Categorise the nature of images representing one of the following categories:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- human characters (e.g., people, individuals, groups, cartoons),</li> <li>- settings and life events (e.g., travel, celebration involving humans)</li> <li>- non-human characters (e.g., animals, non-human cartoons)</li> <li>- objects/artifacts,</li> <li>- scenery (e.g., nature), and</li> <li>- other (e.g., not fitting any of the above)</li> </ul>	List the denotations for each image and assign them to one of the six groups and count images in terms of the six groups. Depending on the context and/or topic, further groups could be added for a more in-depth understanding of the denotations and connotations (see also the analysis of the story grid in phase 3 of the analytic strategy).
Proximity	The overall sense of self-other closeness where a numerical value of 1 represents closeness in relation to people, and 2 represents self-object/artifact/scenery closeness.	<p>Coding:</p> <p>1 = self-other closeness 2 = self-object closeness</p> <p><i>Note: &gt;50% images with humans could be interpreted as closeness to people and would be interpreted somewhat differently than closeness to objects, artifacts or scenery depending on the topic or focus of the CLET. However, this will only be done in the final phase of analysis and interpretation.</i></p>
Narrative tone	The overall emotional content of the non-verbal (collage) narrative where 0 reflects a neutral emotive tone, 1 reflects a positive tone, and 2 reflects a negative tone	<p>Coding:</p> <p>1 = positive narrative tone 2 = negative narrative tone</p>
Construction	The overall sense of structure in the collage depicting the underlying cognitive organization of memories related to the topic, and where 1 represents a sequential and 2 a random organization of the collage.	<p>Coding:</p> <p>1 = sequential (i.e., ordered clockwise or row-by-row) 2 = random (i.e., triggered by memories and not sequential)</p>
Coherence	The overall sense that the individual's descriptive efforts in performing a non-verbal (collage) narrative were related to the topic (1) or unrelated to the topic	<p>Coding:</p> <p>1 = related to the topic 2 = unrelated to the topic</p>

Self-positioning	<div>or focus area (2).</div> <div>The position on the collage where the individual positioned the self (step 3) and in relation to the centre of the collage or on the periphery of the collage.</div> <div>Coding: 1 = close to centre of collage 2 = on the periphery of the collage</div> <div><i>Note: See also the interpretation of self-positioning below.</i></div>
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(micro-narratives) to avoid being influenced by the story-telling and missing some of the deeper meanings communicated in the non-verbal narrating. Potential interpretations for each category are described below.

In the CLET, the collage is the first unit of analysis including symbolic meanings and representations that describe the dialogical self and involves cognitive, motivational and affective aspects of autobiographical memories. “Both social and personal voices, as well as dominant and conflicting positions emerge in the rich ‘text’ and metaphors represented in the pictures and images posted on the collage as a form of narrative performance” (Van Schalkwyk, 2010, p. 680). The collage emerges as a representation of self-in-the-world and is part of the doing of a certain kind of action, the performance of which would not normally be described by just ‘saying’ or ‘describing’ something. Thus, the collage represents not only the actual content of the images (denotations), but also the symbolic meanings (connotations) that emerge from the participant’s interactions with the context. Whether the context pertains to the family, the school, the society or other cultural cues, using images from locally relevant magazines for making a collage captures the underlying feelings, meanings, thoughts and actions implied by the connotations for the ‘speaker’ (the individual) and the other (the counselor) and as a representation of the context. Therefore, the interpretation of each category in Table 1 would depend heavily on the counselor’s knowledge of and expertise in the context.

Interpreting the collage aims at generating hypotheses for further exploration and cannot provide sufficient evidence for diagnostic purposes. In this regard, for example, a child’s collage about *the family* containing mostly objects and artifacts with very few (if any) people could generate hypotheses about poor attachment formation and relationships with significant others. The great distances between images pertains to how the child perceives and experiences her or his relationship to, for example, family members. In this regard, big spaces between images could hypothetically indicate poor relationships and a lack of warmth in the family as supported by the narrative tone of the memories. Moving to the construction and the coherence in Table 24.1, the collage represents more information about the cognitive aspects of remembering and the motivations in relation to others that lurks below the surface. Here one could hypothesize lower levels or even poor cognitive functioning when images are disjointed, irrational and unrelated to the focus of the collage making, while also understanding the deeper meanings emerging from a narrow or full range of memories about the focus area. Thus, several hypotheses emerge that could be explored when conducting Phase 2 (see below) of this analytic strategy and/or implementing further a variety of assessment strategies.

The previous paragraph describes the collage of a child that is most likely disturbed and in need of intervention for closing the gap between self and other. On the other hand, the child’s collage about the family containing images of people (also human-like images such as cartoons), positive emotions, connectivity (overlapping images) and coherent construction provides the counselor with areas of strength that can be supported through preventive interventions. For the most part, however, the collage represents the symbolic meanings of the autobiographical memories that are important to the individual. Interpretation should always be done with sensitivity to the focus of the inquiry (reason for using the CLET), the context within which the CLET was executed, and further analysis of the micro-narratives discussed below. The counselor who is familiar with the context and culture and has

experience interpreting narrative performances will add as many notes and comments to the collage analysis as possible, all of which will help when interpreting the case in more depth.

*Phase 2: Analyzing the verbal micro-narratives.* The aim of analyzing the stories (micro-narratives) that the individual told about each image/picture on the collage is to find the voice of the client in a particular time, setting or context (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). The next phase in the sense-making process therefore involves reading and re-reading the narratives as the second unit of analysis and to gain a deeper understanding of the participant's autobiographical memories (Van Schalkwyk, 2010). Here the counselor or researcher asks about the substance of the individual's stories, the meanings these stories have for the client, and the symbolic meanings and metaphors embedded in the micro-narratives. Meanings, in this regard, emerge from the positive or negative associations, high or low points, qualities adopted as self-defining attributes, and so on. The analysis of micro-narratives takes place independent from the collage to avoid being influenced by the non-verbal narrative and missing some of the deeper meanings communicated in the story-telling.

Table 24.2 lists Categories 8 to 11 for the purpose of analyzing the micro-narratives and serve as possible interpretive codes likely to emerge from reading the stories. However, as with other analytic procedures in narrative inquiry, the counselor should be sensitive to any other possible categories that could emerge from an in-depth analysis of the stories we live by. For example, in the CLET about family life, who are the characters (people) in each micro-narrative and how does the individual relate to these characters? What role does the individual ascribe to the self in relation to the world he/she lives in (e.g., central character, spectator, hero, villain, perpetrator, victim and so on)? How does the plot in each micro-narrative and the CLET narrative as a whole unfold? What solutions have been found for difficult situations in the past and how are these transferred into the present and prospective future? It is not possible for me to explicate all potential questions for analyzing the micro-narratives within the scope of this chapter. Nonetheless, I believe that the experienced counselor will have developed her or his own expertise analyzing verbal narratives as these stand at the center of all clinical interviews and intervention strategies.

Apart from coding the micro-narratives according to the categories listed in Table 2, the counselor also adds further comments and summarizes the narrative content for inclusion in the final phase of the CLET analytic strategy, the story grid.

*Phase 3: The story grid as a summary of the case.* The final phase of the sense-making process entails creating a story grid for the case (Du Preez & Roos, 2008; Van Schalkwyk & Lijadi, 2013). The story grid is a unique protocol for each case consisting of:

- The background information about the case (e.g., demographics);
- The collage;
- A table consisting of 4 columns containing the (i) image number, (ii) denotation inventory for each picture/image on the collage, (iii) the metaphor, symbolic meanings and/or cultural connotations associated with each picture/image, and (iv) the micro-narratives for each picture/image; and
- A transcription of Steps 3 to 5 of the CLET.

In order to create a story grid, the counselor (or researcher) reads the field texts (collage and micro-narratives) several times for the actual and symbolic meanings adding words, phrases, adjectives, or descriptive terms in the margins or in analytic memos. On the story grid and in the table format suggest in point 3 above, compile an inventory of denotations (actual meanings) for the images on the collage using descriptive terms. These will most likely correspond with the nature of the image (see Table 1, Category 2). The metaphor for each image is catalogued in the next column. Here one adds

symbolic meanings or cultural connotations implied by the denotation of the image or picture. Compile a list of adjectives that reflect the metaphors the image holds in the local culture and any other significant meanings relevant to the context. The key question to ask oneself is “*What are the contextual meanings manifested in the symbolic aspects of each image on the collage?*” The metaphors are culturally specific and could reveal a depth of meanings otherwise ignored when merely looking at the literal (denotation) meanings of the images on the collage. For example, food can carry both

Table 24.2 *Categories for analyzing the verbal micro-narratives of the CLET*

Category	Description	Analytic action
Proximity	The overall sense of the relationship between self and others expressed in micro-narratives (stories) and depicting memories of distance and closeness.	Coding: 1 = self-other closeness 2 = self-object closeness
Narrative tone	The overall emotional content of the verbal narrative (stories, unit of analysis 2) in terms of positive or negative memories.	Coding: List micro-narratives with positive tone List micro-narratives with negative tone in parentheses
Construction	The overall sense of storylines as chronological or as a random sequence of events but not chronological.	Coding: 1 = storylines are mostly chronological 2 = storylines are mostly a sequence of events but not chronological
Coherence	The overall sense of the micro-narratives and the participant’s descriptive efforts as representing a full but realistic range of memories about the topic or focus area.	Coding: 1 = related to the topic 2 = unrelated to the topic

positive and negative meanings depending on how it is presented—a single, lonely bowl of soup devoid of other contextual clues represents loneliness and isolation, whereas a plate filled with various delicacies and with other contextual clues could represent community and togetherness for the child telling stories about the family. The core content and meanings of each micro-narrative are added in column 4 of the table in the story grid together with extracts in the individual’s own voice. Complete the story grid by adding the narratives that ensued from Steps 3 to 5 on the CLET story grid together with analytic memos or notes about underlying meanings.

Each protocol, consisting of the collage, the table summarizing the denotations, connotations, micro-narratives and analytic memos, as well as the Steps 3 to 5 provides the third unit of analysis for the final thematic analysis and interpretation. This final analysis of the story grid of a CLET protocol is done in terms of Categories 12 to 14 as listed in Table 24.3, and provides further access to the substance, content and meanings related to the focus area.

The third unit of analysis in the CLET analytic strategy aims at exploring the positioning of self (Category 12), the silent voice(s) (Category 13) and the dynamic conflict (Category 14). Interpretation of these categories gives the counselor insight into the how the individual’s perceptions of self-in-the-

Table 24.3 *Categories for analyzing the story grid of the CLET*

Category	Description	Analytic action
Positioning of self	The representation of self on two dimensions: A – player-spectator B – distance-closeness to others (people)	
Silent voice	The recognition and nature of the silent voice—the voice that is absent from the narratives.	List representations of significant memories that were silent and concerning: - people (e.g., individuals and groups), - settings or life events (e.g., travel) - objects/artefacts, and - scenery (e.g., nature)
Dynamic conflict	The conflict or problem relevant to the topic.	Note the possible underlying conflict as expressed by the participant and other hypotheses ensuing from the full exposition of the CLET and worthy of further exploration in the therapeutic context

world, ownership of her/his memories, and absence of significant others could affect the individual's memories and everyday functioning. It also explicates the dynamic conflict and potential problematic that would inform the treatment planning. For example, the individual's positioning of him or herself (Category 12) on the edge or periphery of the collage indicates a spectator orientation (dimension A), while the proximity of self to inanimate objects or non-human characters rather than human figures could reflect a distance in self-other relationships (dimension B) and tell a story about how he or she perceives and experiences the self-in-the world of everyday living. Alternatively, positioning the self in the center of the collage (player-orientation) and in close proximity to others could reflect a secure attachment formation and an available emotional support system.

Analyzing the silent voice, dynamic conflict and possible congruence or incongruence between non-verbal (unit of analysis 1) and verbal (unit of analysis 2) narratives serves to develop further hypotheses or arguments for the nature of an intervention that might follow. Whereas the non-verbal narrative (collage) often reveals what lies below the surface of awareness, it is possible that the participant tells her or his stories (micro-narratives) quite selectively based on what they think the audience wants to hear or how the culture informs self-disclosure. Here the CLET provides the most

significant contribution to eliciting that which lurks below the surface or is often suppressed for fear of retribution. For example, the child posting mostly objects in the collage but telling stories of warmth and affection in parent-child relations represents an incongruent tale that should be further explored. Another child, pasting only one picture (despite much encouragement to do more) and then telling of his mother's love and affection and the siblings' care for him, is most likely unaware of his distrust, isolation and withdrawal from the world (see Figure 2). For this child and his family, the incongruence between non-verbal and verbal narratives reveals a deep-seated distress that urgently needs remedial attention if he is to function optimally within the school environment. On the other hand, comparing the units of analysis in the CLET also reveals, through the collage and micro-narratives, the strengths of family relations upon which a child experiencing distress in the school environment can draw to develop his or her agency and optimal functioning in different settings.

### **BUILDING A COMPELLING CASE**

The interpretations of CLET case materials evolves from rigorously reading each unit of analysis (i.e., the collage, the micro-narratives and the story grid), taking cognizance of the existing literature and theoretical frameworks, and reflexivity to build a compelling case for further co-action (e.g., Watt, 2007). Thus, the counselor should adopt a critical reflective position when analyzing the case, and check and re-check interpretations with the original collage, micro-narratives, and literature. Collaborating with the others (e.g., other counselors or a multi-disciplinary team) improves the credibility of the case. Collaborators can independently analyze the case following the analytic strategy outlined above, provide further background information about the context, and assist in identifying the problems relevant to the intervention processes.

Furthermore and as indicated above, the CLET is not a diagnostic tool, but a screening tool for intake interviewing that provides a rich source of hypotheses for further exploration either through clinical interviewing or additional assessment strategies. Performances on the CLET are not true or false, that is, they are not truth-evaluable. Instead, they are subjective meaning-making actions or part of the doing of a certain kind of co-action, the performance of which would not normally be described by just 'saying' or 'describing' something. When something is wrong with them then they are 'happy' or 'unhappy', not right or wrong.

The CLET is a powerful expressive channel for conveying non-verbal messages about the self and for modulating emotional impact on everyday functioning (Page, 2001; Raggatt, 2007). It is not only an individual movement but also a process that is context-shaped and context renewing. Both counselor and client gain insights from collaborating in the sense-making process, which helps with developing a less problem-saturated life story and optimal functioning in different everyday life settings.

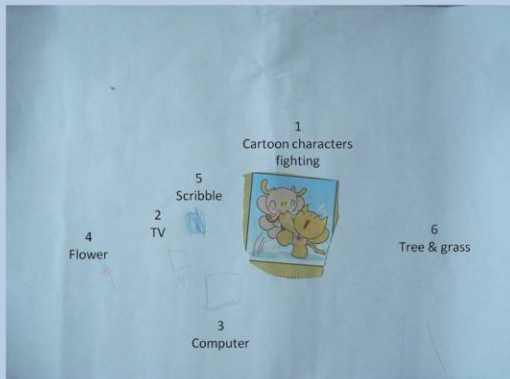
### **RELATIONSHIP TO THE SBFC MODEL**

The CLET fits well within the SBFC model described in in this book. As indicated above, the CLET provides a viable means to conceptualize a case through a theoretical lens appropriate to SBFC and for hypothesizing the client's problems and strengths. Although not a diagnostic tool in itself, the CLET affords the SBFC counselor with multiple hypotheses to follow up in further diagnosis of the case. The CLET also offers general guidance for goal-setting and developing a meaningful and attainable goal for counseling. It can also be used effectively the determine whether these goals have been met by executing the CLET again at the end of the intervention to see if problem-saturated narratives have been transformed to strength-based narratives guiding the improved functioning of the individual in her/his



## CONTEXT: FAMILY LIFE

### Case of Mark



### Collage

### Stories

### Story grid

*Extract for image 1: [Can you tell me the story of the collage, each picture? How about this one?]*

*Ate his things [Pardon?] He has eaten his thing ... Ice-cream [Why did you choose this?] ... [Hhm?] ... [What does this represent in your home?]. ... [Hhm?] You don't know?] (Shakes his head)*

No	Denotation	Metaphor	Participant's self-defining memory
4.	Flower (small faint drawing)	Nature Separate from others	<p><i>[Okay, let's talk about other things first. How about this flower?]</i></p> <p><i>... [This flower?] ... [What does the flower represent? Can you tell me?] ...</i></p> <p><i>... (shakes his head) [Why did you draw this flower?] I like to draw [You like to draw. Then do you like the flower?]</i></p> <p><i>(Nods) [What kind of flower do you like?] ... [Hhm?] ... Lotus [Lotus. Have you seen a lotus flower?] I have seen it on TV [So, have you seen it on the river?]</i></p> <p><i>No [Why do you like lotus?] It is pretty [I see. What color do you like?] ... [Hhm?] ... [What color have you seen?] I have only seen one color [What is that?] I don't remember [You don't remember. Don't you know what color you have seen?] Maybe pink</i></p>



world. Thus, the CLET can be used in any quadrant of the SBFC model based on whether the counselor is exploring school-focused or family-focused, remedial or preventive case conceptualization. For example, the CLET can be utilized in each of the quadrants in the following ways:

*School-Prevention:* Utilise the CLET in teacher consultation to explore underlying areas of stress and teacher practices/customs, as well as plan interventions that can prevent problems for the individual and/or students.

*School-Intervention:* Utilise the CLET to identify problem situations and where intervention is clearly required given the consequences of such problems within the school setting. Most School Psychology programs do not include sufficient training for how to work with all stakeholders independently and collaboratively. The CLET provides an opportunity to explore the underlying dynamics as well as the strengths and weaknesses that are available to the various stakeholders (i.e., teacher, child, family and school).

*Family-Prevention:* The family members can individually or collectively participate in the CLET, and identify strengths for developing skills to prevent future problems.

*Family-Intervention:* The CLET can, for example, enable parents and children to explore their perceptions of family life, parenting style and customs of care giving, and to promote family change when problem-saturated perceptions are having a negative effect on a student.

Since the CLET is still a fairly newly developed technique in narrative inquiry, many possibilities are open to how the counselor can utilize it for establishing a plausible and compelling case for further action, whether as intervention, psycho-education or consultation. In the Child-remedial Focus area, the counselor utilizes the CLET to explore the underlying dynamic conflict or problem that brought the child to the intervention setting. Whatever the referral problem might be, the CLET can provide access to the problematic that has not yet surfaced or has not been observed by other observation strategies. However, as indicated above, the CLET is not a diagnostic tool and in the case of more severe or diverse problems should be used in conjunction with other assessment strategies to verify hypotheses generated through the analytic strategy. When used in conjunction with other assessments, the SBFC counselor can obtain more rigorous and in-depth understanding of the case and focus her or his treatment planning for either remedial or preventive purposes. Thus, the counselor can act on a more sophisticated level of intervention in the SBFC Model quadrants.

## EVIDENCE-BASED SUPPORT

Apart from its utility within the counseling context, the CLET has great potential as research method in different contexts and for various populations. As a collaborative inquiry tool, the CLET was developed to explore life story remembering in cross-cultural settings where various obstacles prevented verbal narrating. Combining non-verbal and verbal strategies to elicit life stories thus provided a way to access populations otherwise excluded from participating in ethnographic research projects. Van Schalkwyk (2010) explicated the utility of the CLET with a group of emerging adults in late adolescence. In this study, the CLET was executed in the written format with a group of students studying in English as a non-native language. Participating in the project enabled these young people to reflect on their past and integrate this with the present in view of an anticipated future (Habermas & Bluck, 2000). Through the collage-making, their remembering was stimulated so as to elicit rich narratives that would otherwise have been difficult to perform given the cultural inhibition towards self-disclosure.

Lijadi and Van Schalkwyk (2013) explored the relationship experiences of Third Culture Kids growing up in a high-mobility lifestyle and as so-called global nomads, and found the CLET a useful tool to elicit rich narratives from participants who were initially reluctant to tell their stories. Exploring the family life of three families living with autism, Lao and Van Schalkwyk (2012) utilized the CLET to gather multiple voices—that is, the voice of the mother and the voice of an older sibling. The three units of

analysis provided a rich source of data to gain a deeper understanding of the challenges and distress these families experience in their local context. The CLET has also been implemented with adults to explore connectedness and alienation within the family life, social networking, and the work context (Bauer et al., 2008; Ow & Katz, 1999; Van Schalkwyk, 2013).

Until recently, the CLET has only been executed with non-clinical populations although the analytic strategy revealed underlying problematic that might otherwise not have been noticeable with these groups. Thus, although evidence with clinical samples is not yet available, the technique has shown potential to uncover conflicts that the client and/or the referral agency have not yet uncovered. Counselors using the technique with clinical population should therefore execute the analysis alongside further diagnostic measurements to confirm interpretations.

### **MULTICULTURAL COUNSELING CONSIDERATIONS**

The original rationale for developing the CLET was to conduct narrative research in cross-cultural settings. It was therefore designed to fit well within different cultures and is sensitive to socio-cultural cues through the use of locally relevant magazines for the collage-making (Ho, Peng, Lai, & Chan, 2001). Conducting a study of children's perceptions across four different cultures, Van Schalkwyk and Lijadi (2013) explored the utility of the CLET to elicit rich narratives despite other potential differences there may exist between the children. The authors found that the CLET works equally well with children in China and Africa, and despite the variation in cognitive functioning of the different groups. Their study also revealed that implementation of the CLET can be done by multiple fieldworkers who were adequately trained to execute the procedures as outlined above in the native language of the participants. Although some of the finer nuances of narratives are lost in translation of the verbal text, the collage offers a rich source of non-verbal narration that can overcome the limitations of translation. Furthermore, as with any assessment in psychological counseling and intervention, ethical considerations should be taken into account prior to conducting the CLET. When working with children, parents should be appropriately informed of procedures and give consent for recording the semi-structured interview. Confidentiality should be evident on all fronts to protect the rights of the participant. This could imply changing names and personal details about the child or the family prior to soliciting collaboration from others to also analyze the CLET or when discussing a case in a multi-disciplinary setting.

### **CHALLENGES AND SOLUTIONS**

One of the challenges is to appropriately execute the sequential steps of the CLET when asking for written narratives instead of conducting a semi-structured interview. Some client populations find it difficult to verbalize their stories in written format. For example, young children and those who have to write in their non-native language might not have sufficient command of the language or an adequate vocabulary to express themselves fully in writing (Van Schalkwyk & Lijadi, 2013). Other clinical populations such as substance abusers, those with minimal education, and those who are developmentally challenged (e.g., ASD) could also be hindered in expressing themselves in written form. Nonetheless, the written format works well with adolescents and adults in non-clinical populations and those with adequate language proficiency. In the written format, the CLET can also be assigned as a self-reflective (homework) activity forming part of an ongoing intervention strategy. When conducted in the written format, steps 2 to 5 of the CLET are carefully structured in a booklet where the participant can add her or his stories as they proceed through the different steps.

Another challenge to the execution of the CLET is the reluctance of adults to engage in playful behavior such as collage-making. Cultural prohibitions, task-orientation and reluctance to self-disclose or

emotional expressiveness disenable the adult striving for control over her or his environment to engage in actions considered to be 'childish'. Nonetheless, with sufficient encouragement adults will collaborate. Even if collaborating with initial reluctance, the adult participant soon discovers the power of the CLET to scaffold memories and produce insight regarding issues otherwise suppressed (Van Schalkwyk, 2013).

## SUMMARY

This chapter describes the procedures and analytical strategy for implementing the Collage Life story Elicitation Technique within the SBFC Model. I developed the CLET to prompt autobiographical remembering in different settings and with varying client populations. It combines collage-making with storytelling to support the narrating process and to elicit rich and vivid stories and metaphors about the past in the present and with a prospective future in mind (Van Schalkwyk, 2010). Participants become co-actors as they reflect upon their life stories and co-construct a sense of meaning about the phenomenon that focuses the inquiry. Collage making is a way of dialoguing that overcomes the inhibitions of verbal communication by utilizing an alternative mode of expression. In a cross-cultural setting, where language could pose problems, or when conducting narrative inquiry with clinical populations who have difficulty with self-disclosure it has great value for uncovering underlying local processes and social interactions and relationships.

Finally, the interpretations will be context-specific and no generalizations are possible to non-local populations. Rather, the purpose is not to find universal trends or patterns but to build a reasonable and compelling case for treatment planning and intervention that could follow the implementation of the CLET. By presenting a significant case for intervention purposes, the counselor makes pragmatic use of the available resources to plan and execute interventions. The CLET adds a range of very useful representations and communication regarding positive and negative experiences, attachments to significant people, settings and actions, successes or failures, future aspirations and many more that contribute to an understanding of the client's daily functioning. It is a collaborative process of inquiry, actively and fully involving the client in the process of co-constructing stories, and provides the counselor access to the individual's authentic autobiography—the significant events, beliefs, internal and external views of the self, and core constructs regarding the nature of the world and reality (Berg, 2009; McAdams, 1993, 2001; Pasupathi, 2006).

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