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STUDENTS' PERCEPTION OF THERAPEUTIC CORE-CONDITIONS WITH CLIENT'S PROBLEM CONTROLLED¹

It is commonly agreed on in counseling literature that certain levels of therapeutic core-conditions (i.e., accurate empathy, nonpossessive warmth, congruency) are essential to promote positive behavioral change on the part of the client. A number of studies (e.g., Barrett-Lennard, 1962; Cartwright & Lerner, 1963; Truax, 1968; Truax & Carkhuff, 1965) have shown that those clients who receive a higher level of the therapeutic core-conditions demonstrate more positive behavioral change and/or self-explorations in terms of the outcome measures of counseling than those who receive a lower level of the therapeutic conditions.

In studies concerned with the client's own perception of these therapeutic core-conditions, however, the results have not yet been so convincing: Some studies (e.g., Rogers, 1957; Strupp, 1960; Truax, Wargo, Tunnell, & Glenn, 1966) report that positive change can result independent of the client's perceived level of these counselor-offered therapeutic conditions, while others (e.g., Van der Veen, 1961; 1967) report a failure to obtain such findings.

Unless the basic proposition—that the behavioral and affectual consequences of a stimulus input are a function of its perceived nature of the recipient—be obscured, failure to obtain a significant correlation between the counselor-offered therapeutic core-conditions and the client's perception of these conditions is disappointing. It seems unreasonable to expect positive behavioral change without accurate perception or awareness of the therapeutic conditions by the client.

Several methodological considerations have been proposed to account for those confounding results in investigating the client's perception of these counselor-offered core-conditions. It has been frequently pointed out that most of the studies were based upon restricted samples—hospitalized groups of patients who may not have been able to accurately perceive and report on their perception of the therapeutic conditions. It has also been suggested that nonhospitalized groups or 'normal' groups can perceive or be aware of the core-conditions more accurately than can hospitalized patient groups. Second, many studies in the past have regarded the core-conditions as a single global construct or have focused exclusively on the level of

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empathy while, relatively few studies have isolated the components of therapeutic core-conditions separately in evaluating the client's perception of these core-conditions. Since there is some evidence, in the studies concerned with the psychometric structure of the rating scales used to measure therapeutic conditions, that the components of the therapeutic conditions are somewhat independent factors (e.g., Mills & Zytowski, 1967; Walker & Little, 1969), it would be interesting to know whether or not similar independent perceptions of these components could be obtained from the client's perception of a simulated counseling interview.

Using an experimental analogue, the purpose of the present study, therefore, was to determine whether or not the student can accurately perceive the counselor-offered therapeutic core-conditions when the counselor systematically manipulates the therapeutic core-conditions in a counseling interview. In this study, the evaluations as to degree of therapeutic core-conditions present in a counseling interview were made by third party non-participant students who were asked to respond as though they had been actual client rather than as an observer. It was expected that evaluation by 'normal' subjects who were not actual participants in the counseling interview would result in more accurate perceptions of the therapeutic core-conditions than those by hospital groups and/or by those who have actually received the counseling interview. In this study, the content of the client's problem and his non-verbal behaviors were controlled over the different interview sessions, while the counselor offered differential levels of the core-conditions in a systematic way. This was done to eliminate criterion contamination by the observers or raters in evaluating the counseling interview through possible dependency between functioning level of the counselor and the client.

Method

Subjects

The subjects were 158 grade 10 and 11 students (males, females) drawn from a large secondary school located in Coquitlam, B.C. All subjects were volunteers.

Video-taped Interview

Stimulus materials used in this study were five video-taped counseling interviews, each of them 21 minutes in length. In these tapes a coached-counselor interviews a coached-client who role-plays a grade 12 male student with problems in vocational choice family relationship, and personality adjustment. Over the 5 video-tapes, the nature of the client's problem and his nonverbal behaviors were controlled, while the counselor's functioning level with regard to the overall core-conditions was varied from tape to tape and within each tape. Each tape was divided into three 7-minute blocks, with the counselor systematically offering a different level of the core-conditions within each block—either high, moderate, or low. Thus, in the Tape-HML, for example, the level of the core-conditions varied from a high level during block 1 (the first 7-minute) to a moderate level during block 2 (the second 7-minute) and to a low level during block 3 (the last 7-minute). In the Tape-LMH, on the other hand, the order of the core-conditions was reversed.

The following are the layouts of therapeutic core-conditions offered in each tape:

Tape-HHH: High level during block 1, high level during block 2, and high level during block 3.

Tape-MMM: Moderate level during block 1, moderate level during block 2, and moderate level during block 3.

Tape-LLL: Low level during block 1, low level during block 2, and low level during block 3.

Tape-HML: High level during block 1, moderate level during block 2, and low level during block 3.

Tape-LMH: Low level during block 1, moderate level during block 2, and high level during block 3.

The counselor in the video-taped interview was role-played by a male graduate student in counseling psychology. He was given 12 hours training and 'practice' over approximately four 3-hour sessions for the preparation of the tapes under the direction of the investigators.

Measure of Perception of the Interviews

To measure the student's perception of the counselor in the tapes, a rating scale was developed based on Barrett-Lennard Relationship Inventory (BRI, *Form O.S.*). A total of 32 items, 8 items for each component or factor of the therapeutic core-conditions, were selected from those which showed a high correlation coefficient with each factor based on the study of Walker and Little (1969). For the present study, the wordings of the items of BRI were modified so as to be applicable for the nonparticipating observers. The response format used was a 9-point rating scale with 1 being the most negative and 9 being the most positive rating continuum. Thus, the score for each component of the core-conditions for a subject in a single evaluation session could range from 8 to 72.

Data Collection

Each tape was shown to a single group of sampled subjects, each group of subjects seeing only one video-tape. The order of showing the tapes as well as the assignment of subject group for each tape was randomized. The experiment was conducted over 2 days during regular school hours and class periods with a segment of each class or classes making up a single sample group.

Immediately after general instructions were given, a tape was shown: at the end of each 7-minute segment the tape was stopped, the experimenter distributed the BRI to the subjects and asked them to rate the counselor's responses during 7-minute segment they had just seen. Thus, for each group of subjects, there were 3 repeated measures of each subject's perception of the counselor in the video-tape.

Results

The number of the subjects used in each of the 5 independent groups were: Group HHH=35, Group MMM=39, Group LLL=18, Group HML=40, Group LMH=26.

Prior to the analysis of the data in terms of each component of the core-conditions, the orthogonal comparisons were made by means of *t* ratios for the mean scores of the overall core-conditions, which are the summed score of empathy, regard, congruency, and unconditionality within each block. As can be seen in Table 1, the group HHH showed consistently higher

means of the overall core-conditions ($p's < .005$) in each block than those of the groups MMM or LLL. However, none of the block comparisons of the groups MMM and LLL were significant ($p's > .05$), and thus, the means of these two groups within each block were pooled in the subsequent analysis of the data.

For the comparison of each component of the core-conditions among the groups, the following procedures were used. For the means of block 1 only, the planned comparisons were made by means of t ratios among the groups HHH and HML versus groups LLL and LMH; the planned comparisons made for the remaining blocks 2 and 3 were the group HHH versus groups MMM and LLL. Table 1 shows the results of the component-wise comparisons made.

TABLE 1
The Block Mean of Each Component of the Core-conditions for the Five Groups

Group	Component of Core-conditions					
	Empathy—1		Empathy—2		Empathy—3	
HHH ^a	44.89	2.26**	47.09	3.03**	48.57	2.33**
MMM	40.12		41.64		43.58	
LLL	41.00		39.83		42.39	
HML ^b	42.30	1.90*	44.65	.03	40.53	-1.65*
LMH	37.50		44.73		45.04	
	Regard—1		Regard—2		Regard—3	
HHH ^a	43.78	3.96**	48.94	3.81**	50.63	2.74**
MMM	38.62		42.23		45.92	
LLL	39.94		36.94		41.11	
HML ^b	42.50	4.57**	44.30	.11	40.28	-1.97*
LMH	30.54		43.96		46.12	
	Congruency—1		Congruency—2		Congruency—3	
HHH ^a	36.94	1.83*	42.54	.98	46.74	.47
MMM	34.95		40.44		41.69	
LLL	35.56		49.06		49.56	
HML ^b	36.63	2.24**	43.00	.21	43.83	.55
LMH	30.89		43.54		45.27	
	Unconditionality—1		Unconditionality—2		Unconditionality—3	
HHH ^a	43.71	1.50	44.54	4.73**	44.23	4.98**
MMM	38.38		37.79		38.79	
LLL	41.44		35.06		34.39	
HML ^b	41.43	1.10	41.60	.99	35.20	-1.71*
LMH	39.31		39.65		38.19	
	Overall—1		Overall—2		Overall—3	
HHH ^a	169.31	3.18**	183.11	3.17**	189.89	2.80**
MMM	152.03		161.36		170.26	
LLL	157.94		160.89		167.44	
HML ^b	163.10	3.32**	173.55	.66	159.58	1.76*
LMH	138.23		171.88		174.62	

Note— $MSe's$ for each block: Empathy—1 = 100.27, Empathy—2 = 89.87, Empathy—3 = 117.45; Regard—1 = 107.70, Regard—2 = 136.88, Regard—3 = 138.19; Congruency—1 = 103.16, Congruency—2 = 104.00, Congruency—3 = 117.96; Unconditionality—1 = 57.75, Unconditionality—2 = 60.52, Unconditionality—3 = 48.26; Overall—1 = 881.80, Overall—2 = 982.99, Overall—3 = 1152.34.

* $p < .05$

** $p < .025$

^a Comparison with pooled mean of groups MMM and LLL

^b Comparison with group LMH

As can be seen in Table 1, there were significantly higher mean scores in most blocks ($p's < .05$) of the group HHH than those of the groups MMM and LLL in each component of empathy, regard, and unconditionality. In general, such components as empathy and regard were more discriminating between the group HHH and groups MMM and LLL than did unconditionality and congruency in each block. In fact, congruency did not reach significance ($p's > .05$) in block 2 and 3.

Other evidence of the subject's differential perception was obtained in the comparison of the groups HML and LMH. Since the subjects in these two groups had seen systematically differential levels of the core-conditions over the 3 block periods, either in a descending or ascending order, differential perception scores were predicted in the comparisons of each block mean between the groups HML and LMH. The data was consistent with the prediction. That is, in block 1, the means of the group HML in empathy with the regard, and congruency were significantly higher ($p's < .05$); no significant differences ($p's > .05$) in any of the means in block 2; and higher means of empathy, regard, and unconditionality ($p's < .05$) in the group LMH than those of the group LMH in block 3. However, it was puzzling to note that, within any particular group, the subjects generally failed to demonstrate awareness of the changes in the levels of the core-conditions during the 3 block periods ($p's > .05$).

A multivariate analysis of variance was performed to compare the trends among the 5 independent groups using the group HHH as a basal-line condition. The results are summarized in Table 2.

As can be seen in Table 2, significant differences ($p's < .001$) in the trends were obtained in the overall core-conditions only between the groups HHH and HML and between the groups HHH and LMH; the differences in the trends between the groups HHH and MMM and between the groups MMM and LLL were not statistically significant ($p, < .05$).

For the comparison of the trends among the groups in terms of each component of the core-conditions, pairwise comparisons were made using the group HHH as a basal-line condition. Results: Unconditionality showed significant differences ($p's < .01$) in all pairwise comparisons against the group HHH; in the component of regard, the differences in the trends were significant between the groups HHH and LLL ($p's < .008$), between the groups HHH and HML ($p < .0001$), between the groups HHH and HML ($p < .006$) and between the groups HHH and LMH ($p < .04$) were significant; in the component of congruency, none of the groups MMM, LLL, HML, and LMH showed significant differences ($p's > .05$) in the trends from the basal-line group HHH.

Discussion

In the overall core-conditions, the students generally have successfully differentiated the counseling interviews which offered consistently higher levels of the core-conditions from the one which offered consistently moderate or lower levels of the core-conditions, but they failed to differentiate between the interviews which offered a moderate and low level of the core-conditions.

However, it was interesting to note that there was considerable variations among the four components of the core-conditions in terms of their discriminating power in the video-taped interviews. Such components as

TABLE 2
F Ratios for the Multivariate Test of Equality of Mean
 Vectors in Each Component ($N = 158$)

Comparison	Component of Core-conditions				
	Empathy				
	Multivariate <i>F</i>	<i>p</i>		Univariate <i>F</i>	<i>p</i>
HHH vs MMM	1.38	.25	Constant	1.30	.26
			Linear	.30	.59
			Quadratic	1.85	.18
HHH vs LLL	2.27	.08	Constant	1.86	.17
			Linear	.16	.69
			Quadratic	4.67	.03
HHH vs HML	4.26	.01	Constant	2.12	.15
			Linear	9.96	.00
			Quadratic	1.03	.31
HHH vs LMH	2.78	.04	Constant	4.20	.04
			Linear	1.81	.18
			Quadratic	2.54	.11
Regard					
HHH vs MMM	1.64	.18	Constant	0.20	.66
			Linear	1.16	.28
			Quadratic	2.28	.13
HHH vs LLL	.411	.01	Constant	3.28	.07
			Linear	1.88	.17
			Quadratic	11.12	.00
HHH vs HML	9.06	.00	Constant	1.32	.25
			Linear	25.93	.00
			Quadratic	0.09	.76
HHH vs LMH	8.18	.00	Constant	9.72	.00
			Linear	7.43	.01
			Quadratic	3.57	.06
Congruency					
HHH vs MMM	1.86	.14	Constant	3.01	.09
			Linear	3.11	.08
			Quadratic	0.57	.45
HHH vs LLL	2.15	.10	Constant	2.78	.10
			Linear	1.87	.17
			Quadratic	3.03	.08
HHH vs HML	1.28	.28	Constant	0.00	.99
			Linear	3.73	.06
			Quadratic	.00	.98
HHH vs LMH	2.54	.06	Constant	1.01	.32
			Linear	2.33	.13
			Quadratic	4.77	.03
Unconditionality					
HHH vs MMM	3.84	.01	Constant	3.60	.06
			Linear	7.00	.01
			Quadratic	1.78	.18
HHH vs LLL	6.17	.00	Constant	7.24	.01
			Linear	5.45	.02
			Quadratic	5.81	.02
HHH vs HML	8.57	.00	Constant	4.74	.03
			Linear	15.67	.00
			Quadratic	2.89	.09
HHH vs LMH	4.27	.01	Constant	11.53	.01
			Linear	0.70	.40
			Quadratic	0.03	.86

empathy, regard, and unconditionality discriminated more between high and low level of the core-conditions offered than did congruency. While it is not clear whether such a result was due to artificial setting of a 'video-taped' interview or due to the real differences in the latent continuum of each component of the core-conditions offered, the finding suggests that the perception of each component of the therapeutic core-conditions are somewhat independent, and that such components as empathy, regard, and unconditionality account for large variances in the perception of the students in a video-taped interview setting as used in this study. It may therefore be suggested that, insofar as the study of the student's or the client's perception of the core-conditions is concerned, analyzing only the overall core-conditions in a counseling interview setting may not be meaningful.

When the video-taped interview which offered an ascending order of the core-conditions (i.e., group LMH) was compared to the one which offered a descending order of the core-conditions (i.e., group HML), the students' perceptions were more positive in empathy, regard, and unconditionality in the group HML than in the group LMH in the first block, nonsignificant differences in any one of the components in the second block, and more positive ratings in the group LMH than in the group HML in the last block. While these results clearly support the evidence that students perceive correctly the level of the core-conditions, it is puzzling to note that the subjects in these groups did not show any indication of significant changes in their ratings of the core-conditions commensurate to the level of the core-conditions offered over the 3 block periods. In order to search for a possible reason, it may be necessary to examine first the ratings of the groups which have seen the tapes in which no variations in the levels of the core-conditions offered (i.e., groups HHH, MMM, LLL). In these groups, the students have given lower ratings in block 1 than they did in blocks 2 and 3. Thus, it seems that, regardless of the layout of the core-conditions in the interviews, students were reluctant to give positive ratings during the first half, possibly due to their unfamiliarity to the video-taped setting; and then began to give more positive ratings in the subsequent blocks, possibly due to their built-in expectations that the counselor will do 'better' next time. This lowered rating by students in the first half period may have caused the failure to reflect any significant changes in the scores over the three block periods. Supportive evidence for this is reported by Snelbecker (1967) who found that his college subjects showed significantly higher ratings of the core-conditions for the second therapist presented than the first in the counterbalanced repeated measurements of sound-film recordings of psychotherapy sessions.

The comparisons of the trends have shown significant differences in changes in the perception of the overall core-conditions between the groups HHH and HML, and between the groups HHH and LMH. This is consistent with the theoretical expectations. However, the general patterns of the trends in terms of the component-wise comparisons using the group HHH as a basal-line conditions were at variance. For example, empathy, regard, and unconditionality have shown consistently significant differences in the trends in all pairwise comparisons against the group HHH with the remaining 4 groups; while in congruency, none of the pairwise comparisons against the group HHH were significant. This may support the earlier claim that empathy, regard, and unconditionality are more sensitively, if not necessarily

correctly, perceived by the nonparticipant observers. These components may be better discriminators between high and low level of the core-conditions than congruency.

Some qualitative aspects of the data warrant mentioning. An inspection of the students' ratings revealed considerable variations in the scores. Some students were consistently 'deviant' in their perception scores from those of the majority of the group. One factor responsible for this may be the life-long reinforcement histories an individual has had in the past. That is, those students who have been receiving lower level of the core-conditions in real life settings in the past (e.g., parental rejection or insufficient loving) may be unable to perceive these counselor-offered therapeutic core-conditions as the majority of students did in the video-taped interviews used in this study. A future study of these 'perception-deviant' groups in terms of the objectively rated or subjectively perceived levels of core-conditions (e.g., parental affection) may provide some clue for the individual variations in perceptions.

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LA PERCEPTION PAR LES ETUDIANTS DES CONDITIONS
THERAPEUTIQUES DE BASE
("THERAPEUTIC CORE-CONDITIONS")

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Cette étude visait à établir si les étudiants "normaux" peuvent percevoir correctement les conditions thérapeutiques de base durant une entrevue avec un conseiller.

On enregistra cinq entrevues de 21 minutes sur vidéotape. On divisa chaque enregistrement en trois sections de 7 minutes durant lesquelles le conseiller présentait systématiquement un niveau différent de conditions de base—supérieur, moyen, ou inférieur. On présenta les enregistrements à cinq groupes d'élèves des classes de 10e et de 11e de façon à ce que chaque groupe ne soit exposé qu'à un seul enregistrement. Les élèves évaluèrent les réponses du conseiller à la fin de chaque section, de sorte qu'on obtint trois mesures répétées pour chaque étudiant. Les résultats: (1) les étudiants ont réussi à différencier les niveau supérieurs des niveaux inférieurs des conditions de base dans les réponses du conseiller. Des composantes comme la chaleur, l'empathie et l'acceptation inconditionnelle permettaient une plus grande discrimination que la congruence des niveaux supérieurs et inférieurs des conditions de base dans les enregistrements.

