
Is There a Relationship Between Client Feeling Level and Categories of "Good Moments" in Counselling Sessions?

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Abstract

This study provides a preliminary look at the relationships between strength of client feeling and categories of good moments of client movement, progress, or change. Judges rated the strength of feeling and the good moments in 105 statements of a client seen in a single session of client-centred counselling. The findings indicated significant relationships between intensity of feeling and categories of good moments. Implications are drawn for further research and for counsellor training practice.

Résumé

La présente étude constitue une exploration préliminaire de la relation entre l'intensité émotionnelle du client et les catégories de bons moments thérapeutiques qui dénotent les mouvements, l'amélioration, la progression ou le processus d'évolution du client ou encore un changement chez le client. Deux groupes de juges ont mesuré chacun de leur côté l'intensité émotionnelle et les bons moments exprimés par 105 énoncés d'un client au cours d'une séance de counseling axée sur le client. Les résultats démontrent qu'il existe une relation significative entre l'intensité émotionnelle et les catégories de bons moments. Les implications de cette étude serviront à de futures recherches sur cette relation, à la formation des conseillers et à l'exercice de la profession.

In-session events that counsellors value as "good moments" of client movement, process, or change have increasingly attracted the attention of researchers (Elliott, 1983, 1984; Fiske, 1977; Greenberg, 1981, 1983, 1984; Horowitz, 1979; Kiesler, 1973; Mahrer, 1985, 1986, 1988, 1989; Rice & Greenberg, 1984). However, major reviews of the role of feeling level, emotion, and affect in counselling have pointed to the absence of studies on the relationships between client feeling level and good moments in counselling sessions (Greenberg & Safran, 1987; Nichols & Zax, 1977; Pierce, Nichols & DuBrin, 1983; Scheff, 1981). There are no studies on whether particular categories of good moments are associated with higher or lower levels of client feeling. If counsellors value particular categories of good moments, are these likely to occur at a higher feeling level, at a lower feeling level, or at all levels of client feeling?

This question is relevant for both counsellor practice and theory. For practitioners, the findings carry implications for how they can use feeling level in obtaining given categories of in-session good moments. In addition, the categories of good moments apply to virtually all counselling approaches. Essentially every client statement is assessable in terms of feeling level, and the relationships between feeling level and good moments bear directly on the theory of in-session client change.

This study was designed to provide preliminary findings on the relationships between client feeling level and good moments. It was also designed to explore the use of appropriate methodology and measures. Accordingly, the research strategy consisted of an in-depth exploration of good moments and of client feeling in a single session conducted by a distinguished, exemplary counsellor.

METHOD

Counsellor and Client

Data consisted of an audiorecording and verbatim transcript of a session conducted by Carl Rogers with a young, hospitalized, married woman (American Academy of Psychotherapists Tape Library, Volume 8, Mrs. P. S.). Her concerns centred on the recent loss of a baby daughter and ensuing resentments toward her family. There were 105 client statements and 106 counsellor statements in the session. Client statement was defined as all the words spoken by the client, preceded and followed by words spoken by the counsellor.

Categories of Good Moments

The categories were taken from a list of good moments of client movement, progress, and change generated from a survey-review of research (Mahrer, 1985). The categories were then refined (Mahrer & Nadler, 1986), and updated on the basis of further research (Mahrer, 1988). Each of the 12 "good moments" is defined briefly as follows:

1. *Providing meaningful material about self and/or interpersonal relations.* The client is describing material which is useful, revealing or significant, and which pertains to the self and/or interpersonal relations.
2. *Describing/exploring the nature and meaning of feelings.* The client is engaging in bodily felt, inner-focused description and exploration of immediate and ongoing feelings.
3. *Emerging of previously warded-off material.* The client is expressing significant material which had been previously defended against and which is now accompanied with strong positive or negative feelings.
4. *Expressing insight-understanding.* The client is expressing understanding, accompanied by feelings of emotional arousal, which indicate a substantial change in the way of seeing oneself and the world. The insight bears significant implications for the client's well-being and interpersonal behaviour.
5. *Communicating expressively.* The client's communication is characterized by voice quality that is active and energetic, and/or by vividness and richness in spoken words.
6. *Manifesting good working relationship with therapist.* The client's relationship with the therapist is characterized by high trust level and confidence in the

helping intent of the therapist. There is active cooperation in the search for meaningful material and acceptance of substantive responsibility for effecting personal change.

7. *Expressing strong feelings toward therapist.* The client is expressing strong positive or negative feelings toward the therapist, indicative of emotional bonding, confrontation, or transference.
8. *Expressing strong feelings in extratherapy contexts.* The client is expressing strong feelings and situations outside of the counselling session which may be recent or remote, real or fantasized, personal or impersonal, internal or external.
9. *Manifesting a qualitatively altered personality state.* The client is expressing a new personality state, indicative of a radical shift or transformation.
10. *Expressing new behaviours in imminent extratherapy world.* The client is trying out new ways of behaving in the imagined imminent world outside of the therapy context.
11. *Manifesting or reporting changes in target behaviours.* The client is manifesting or reporting the increased or decreased occurrence of behaviours which have been targeted for change.
12. *Expressing a general state of well-being.* The client is expressing a state of well-being characterized by relief, resolution of problems, self-satisfaction, and happiness.

Strength of Feeling Scale

Although there are no measures of client strength of feeling, there are measures of related variables. These include client problem expression (Van der Veen & Tomlinson, 1967), voice quality (Rice, Koke, Greenberg & Wagstaff, 1979; Trager, 1958), novelty experiencing (Kohn & Annis, 1975; Pearson, 1971), actualization (Shostrom, 1966), self-reported affect (Zuckerman & Lubin, 1965), expressiveness (Wexler, 1975), sensitivity to emotions (Kagan & Schneider, 1980), depth of self-exploration (Kiesler, 1973; Truax & Carkhuff, 1967), emotional style (Allen & Hamsher, 1974), and the commonly used experiencing scale (Klein, Mathieu, Gendlin & Kiesler, 1969).

An analysis of these measures yielded four dimensions for assessing strength of feeling: (a) degree of charge, force, energy, loudness, and volume; (b) degree of spontaneity, freedom from control; (c) degree of fullness and saturation of feeling; and (d) degree of strength and breadth of bodily sensations. Using these dimensions, a team of researchers scaled the strength of feeling in 225 client statements from 15 tape-recorded sessions. The sessions involved 15 clients seen in a variety of approaches. The research generated four levels feeling intensity, with definitions and examples of each level.

At the *neutral* level, there is essentially no feeling. Strength of feeling is flat or absent. At the *low* level, there is some feeling, but it is barely present. Strength of feeling is light, but there is some energy, some

volume, spontaneity, and mild bodily sensations. At the *moderate* level, feeling is clearly present, quite substantial, and of moderate intensity. There is moderate force and elevated loudness. There is also moderate freedom from control, and moderately strong bodily sensations. At the *strong* level, the strength of feeling is intense and powerful. There is unrestrained spontaneity and bodily sensations are conspicuous and strong.

Judges

Two sets of judges were used. The categories of good moments were rated by the first set of judges, which included three psychologists, five doctoral students and two honours students in psychology. Each judge had a minimum of 100 hours of experience using the categories of good moments. Client feeling level was rated by a second team of eight judges consisting of one psychologist, four doctoral students and three honours students in psychology. Each judge had a minimum of 20 hours rating client feeling level.

Procedure

To rate client statements for categories of good moments, each member of the first set of judges preselected 4 of the 12 categories. Each category was covered by at least three judges. In the first sweep through the session, each judge listened independently to the audio-recording of the session, together with a verbatim transcript. Any client statement thought to qualify in one or more of the judge's preselected categories was provisionally flagged. The 105 client statements and 106 counsellor statements were divided into four sets of sequential client and counsellor statements to reduce the effects of set. Each judge's provisional ratings were collated at the end of each set.

In the second sweep through the session, each judge confirmed or denied the provisional ratings of the initial sweep. The client and counsellor statements were again divided into sequential statements, and each judge individually listened to the audio-recording accompanied by the verbatim transcript. The criterion for final confirmation was agreement on the provisional rating by at least 70% of the first set of judges. All provisional ratings which failed to reach that criterion were deleted from further study.

The second set of judges independently rated each client statement in terms of the four levels of client feeling: neutral, low, moderate, or strong. Each judge was given a verbatim transcript of the session and a training manual which included descriptions of each of the four levels of client feeling and some verbatim examples of each. Each judge listened to the audiorecording and independently rated each of the 105 client statements as falling at the neutral, low, moderate, or strong levels of

client feeling. Four meetings were required to complete the 105 client statements. Criterion for confirmation was set at 75% agreement among the second set of judges. The slight difference in criterion agreement was due to the unequal number of judges in the two teams.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In terms of the levels of client feeling, 93 of the 105 client statements were at the neutral level, 12 were at the low level, and none were at the moderate or strong levels. Agreement on client feeling level among the judges was 89.5%. With regard to the categories of good moments, 33 of the 105 client statements were judged as containing one or more good moment categories. As indicated in Table 1, the session included 32 instances of category 1, 2 instances of category 4, 9 instances of category 5, 2 instances of category 8, and 1 instance of category 9. Agreement on the categories of good moments among the judges was 84.2%.

The results indicate that of the 93 client statements at the neutral level, 71 (76.3%) contained one or more categories of good moments. Of the 12 client statements at the low level of feeling strength, 11 (91.7%) contained one or more categories of good moments. These findings allow examination of the relationship between client feeling level and categories of good moments.

Category 1 (providing meaningful material about self and/or interpersonal relations) was exceptional in at least two ways. It was the category of good moments that occurred most frequently. It was also the only category of good moments that bore strong relationships to both the neutral and the low levels of client feeling strength. Of the 32 instances of category 1, 21 (65.6%) occurred at the neutral level. This is supportive of the relationship between category 1 and the neutral level. However, only 21 (22.5%) of the 93 client statements at the neutral level of client feeling contained instances of category 1, while 11 of the 12 client statements at the low feeling level (91.7%) contained instances of this category. These findings suggest that in this session the level of client feeling has little relationship to the occurrence of category 1 good moments.

Exclusive of category 1, there were 14 instances of good moment categories 4, 5, 8, and 9. Of these 14 instances, 10 occurred in 6 client statements at the low feeling level, and 4 occurred in 4 client statements at the neutral feeling level. With a total of 105 client statements consisting of 93 statements at the neutral feeling level and 12 statements at the low feeling level, the Chi-square analysis of 8.17 ($df = 1$, $p > .01$) indicates a significant association between categories 4, 5, 8, and 9 and the low level of client feeling in this session.

This preliminary study suggests that the intensity of client feeling makes little difference in the occurrence of good moments in category 1

(providing meaningful material about personal self and/or interpersonal relations). However, a low level of feeling strength was significantly associated with the expression of insight-understanding (category 4), communicating in an expressive manner (category 5), expression of strong feelings in extratherapy situations (category 8), and the manifesting of a qualitatively altered personality state (category 9).

These findings invited further investigation into the relationships between the low level of client feeling strength and good moment categories 4, 5, 8, and 9. As indicated in Table 1, 8 of the 12 instances of

TABLE 1

Level of Client Feeling (LCF) and Category of Good Moments (CGM) in a Single Client-Centred Session

<i>Statement</i>	<i>LCF</i>	<i>CGM</i>	<i>Statement</i>	<i>LCF</i>	<i>CGM</i>
1	N		48	N	1, 5
2	N	1	49-50	N	
3	N	1	51	N	1, 4
4-5	N		52-56	N	
6	N	1	57	L	1
7	N	1	58-61	N	
8	N	1	62	N	1
9-15	N		63-68	N	
16	N	1	69	N	1
17-19	N		70	N	1
20	L		71-73	N	
21	N	1	74	N	1
22	N		75-80	N	
23	N	1, 5	81	L	1, 5, 8, 9
24-25	N		82	L	1
26	N	1	83	L	1, 5
27-31	N		84	L	1, 5, 8
32	N	1	85	N	1
33-35	N		86	N	
36	N	1	87	L	1
37-39	N		88	N	
40	N	1	89	N	1
41	L	1	90	N	
42	L	1, 5	91	L	1, 4, 5
43	L	1	92	N	
44	L	1, 5	93-99	N	
45-46	N		100	N	5
47	N	1	101-105	N	

client statements at the low feeling level occurred in two bursts of consecutive client statements 41-44 and 81-84. This suggests that the occurrence of good moment categories 4, 5, 8, and 9 may be facilitated when the client moves from a neutral to a low level of strength of feeling that is sustained and enduring. A clinical analysis was done of the burst of client statements at the low level of feeling that the judges agreed contained the richest yield of good moments, and constituted the highlight of the session (client statements 81-84, Table 1). The purpose was to determine counsellor methods and procedures that were effective in raising the level of client strength of feeling from neutral to low, and in sustaining the low level of feeling.

Prior to statement 81, the client had been talking generally about her family. Throughout client statements 81-84, the changes included heightened annoyance, irritation, and a sense of righteous independence as she described one of their recent visits to her in the hospital.

Each member of the first set of judges was asked to listen to the transcribed recording, and to ascertain what the counsellor may have done to facilitate and sustain the increase from the neutral to the low feeling level. Each judge was free to examine any portion of the transcribed recording. On the basis of the collated inferences, two things were apparent. First, Rogers relied mainly on client-centred restatements, reflections, and simple acknowledgements from the beginning of the session and throughout client statements 81-84. Second, when the client's own fluctuating readiness was sufficient, these three client-centred methods were adequate in enabling the client to move from a neutral to a low level of feeling, accompanied with a rich yield of good moments. The clinical analysis may be seen as a confirmation of this aspect of client-centred theory and practice.

Although this preliminary study was of a single session with a single approach, the provisional findings bear implications both for further research and also for counsellor training and practice. With examination of a larger number of client-centred sessions, will the present findings be confirmed, and what other relationships may be uncovered? What are the relationships between client strength of feeling and categories of good moments in other counselling approaches, with other kinds of clients? What counsellor methods and procedures are effective in obtaining the good moments at each level of client feeling? How do these relationships vary with client input on both feeling level and good moments?

With regard to counsellor training and practice, there are both direct and indirect implications. There are three direct implications for a client-centred approach. First, category 1 good moments may be obtained independent of the level of client strength of feeling. Second, good moment categories 4, 5, 8, and 9 may be more easily obtained at a low rather than neutral level of client feeling. Third, given a state of client

readiness, client-centred reflections, restatements, and simple acknowledgements may be effective in facilitating a rich yield of good moments in a burst or series of client statements at the low level of strength of feeling. For other approaches, the implication is that given categories of good moments may be associated with given levels of client strength of feeling, and that the immediate level of client feeling strength may be useful. Furthermore, given counsellor methods and procedures may be useful in raising and lowering the level of client feeling and also in bringing about particular good moments at that level of client feeling.

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