

A SCALE FOR MEASURING COUNSELLOR GROWTH FOCUS*

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Abstract

The interjudge reliability of a scale for counsellor growth focus was investigated, along with its relationships with scales for the facilitative conditions. Tape recordings of counselling sessions were collected from 15 graduate student therapists and were rated on process scales for empathy, warmth, genuineness, immediacy, self-disclosure and growth focus. Counsellor scores on growth focus correlated highly with scores on all of the other variables. Six counsellors also provided tapes of a number of successive sessions with one of their clients. Correlations of session scores on growth focus with the other variables suggest it might be a useful instrument when counsellors' performances over time are to be studied.

Résumé

La crédibilité de juges d'une échelle mesurant la capacité du conseiller à se concentrer sur le développement d'une personne fut examinée. On étudia également le rapport entre cette échelle et celles servant à mesurer les conditions favorables. Des bandes enregistrées pendant des séances de consultation tenues par quinze étudiants diplômés thérapeutes furent rassemblées et classées d'après des échelles de processus en ce qui concerne la sympathie, la cordialité, la sincérité, la relation directe intime, la mise à découvert de soi-même et la concentration sur le développement. Les résultats que les conseillers obtinrent pour la concentration sur le développement furent en très grande corrélation avec les résultats pour toutes les autres variables. Six conseillers fournirent aussi les enregistrements d'un certain nombre de séances successives avec un de leurs clients. La corrélation des résultats obtenus pendant les séances de concentration sur le développement avec les autres variables suggère que cela pourrait être un instrument utile lorsqu'on doit étudier les performances du conseiller pendant une certaine période de temps.

An increasing number of research efforts suggest that certain counsellor-offered conditions are related to therapy outcome. These facilitative dimensions include the core therapeutic conditions of accurate empathy, non-possessive warmth, and genuineness and more recently studied variables such as immediacy and self disclosure (Bergin, 1966; Carkhuff, 1969; Carkhuff & Berenson, 1967; Truax, 1963, 1970; Truax & Carkhuff, 1967; Truax & Mitchell, 1971). While the evidence is strong that these variables are important to the counselling process, some studies

have not obtained positive relationships with outcome measures (Bergin & Jasper, 1969; Beutler, Johnson, Neville & Workman, 1972). Such contradictory findings seem to necessitate the search for additional counsellor behaviors which contribute to successful outcome. The present study examines the utility of a scale devised to measure one such variable, the counsellor's "growth focus".

Counsellor growth focus is defined as the extent to which the counsellor responds to the growth potential of the client rather than to a static concept of the client as "sick" or "weak". Truax and Carkhuff (1967) contend that high levels of the core conditions lead to client improvement; however, it is conceivable that "facilitative" behaviors such as empathic responding can be offered in a way that encourage

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a client to dwell on his inadequacies at the expense of devising and implementing strategies to improve his situation. If a client's expressions of helplessness or pessimism are consistently followed by warm, empathic counsellor responses, he might come to feel that acceptance from the counsellor is contingent upon verbalizations of inadequacies. Krasner (1967) has discussed the reinforcing influence a therapist can have over a client's verbal behavior. Categories of client verbalizations have been successfully reinforced by interviewer responses such as "uh-hmm", "yeah" and "I see" (Salzinger & Pisoni, 1958) and by counsellor reflections (Waskow, 1962). In order to assure that the client's confidence and capacity to deal effectively with his environment are increased, the counsellor should reinforce appropriate actions and verbalizations that go beyond the client's baseline of functioning. This is not to suggest that problems or weaknesses should be ignored. However, it is the counsellor's responsibility to structure these in a developmental frame of reference so that possibilities for a healthier future status are recognized and defined. Blocker (1966) has outlined a similar perspective in his concept of developmental counselling. Recent behavior therapy approaches, emphasizing self management techniques, are consistent with the growth focus concept in that the client is aided in developing specific strategies by which he can improve deficiencies (Goldfried, 1971; Goldiamond, 1965).

The growth focus variable is supported by evidence that successful counsellors attend more to a client's competence and potential for development than his weaknesses or pathology. Truax's (1966) analysis of one of Roger's successful cases indicated that empathic responses were to some degree offered contingent upon client statements reflecting a positive, problem-solving outlook. Studies by Berenson, Mitchell and Laney (1968), Berenson, Mitchell & Morovec (1968), and Mitchell (1968) add further support to the growth focus concept. Counsellors scoring high on the facilitative scales made more encouragements to action, confrontations of strength and experiential confrontations than did low facilitative counsellors, who in turn made more confrontations of weakness than the high facilitators.

If the growth focus variable can be reliably measured, its role in therapy outcome can be evaluated. If it is found to contribute to therapy

success, it could be used in counsellor/helper training programs such as those conducted by Carkhuff (1969).

The purpose of this study is to explore the utility of the counsellor growth focus scale by assessing its interjudge reliability and determining its independence from some of the facilitative scales (empathy, warmth, genuineness, immediacy and self-disclosure). There are two parts of the study. In the first, a counsellor's performance is represented by an average score on each scale. The results of this part have implications for the usefulness of the growth focus scale when an overall index of a counsellor's performance is desired. In the second part, a counsellor's performance across a number of sessions with the same client is examined. Part II has implications for the usefulness of the scale in activities such as counsellor training and supervision, where counsellor performance over time is the main focus.

PART I

Method

Counsellors and Clients

The counsellors in the study were 15 post-internship doctoral students in clinical and counselling psychology at Columbia University (at Columbia the internship is ordinarily taken in the third year of the four year program). All were participating in supervised fourth year practica in individual counselling. Each provided two audiotape recordings of individual counselling sessions.

Eight of the counsellors were male; seven, female. Their ages ranged from 24-39. Prior counselling experience ranged from 72 to 250 hours.

The clients were late adolescent and adult outpatients (minimum age 15 years) encountering such difficulties as vocational indecision, marital conflicts, social isolation and other interpersonal problems.

Instruments

The facilitative conditions. The Bergin and Solomon (1963) revision of the Truax Empathy Scale was used to measure counsellor empathy. This revision includes an additional point between levels two and three of the original nine-point scale, making it possible to discriminate more effectively among low-empathy counsellors. The Truax and Carkhuff (1967)

scales for nonpossessive warmth and facilitative genuineness and the Carkhuff (1969) scales for immediacy of relationship and facilitative self-disclosure were used. These were expanded from 5- to 9-point scales to allow for finer rater discrimination.

Counsellor growth focus. The following scale was developed in order to assess counsellor growth focus:

Level 1

The counsellor is to a great degree encouraging a negative, *static* concept of the client. His picture of the client seems to emphasize weakness or pathology. The client's strengths are ignored. Any effort on the part of the client to focus upon growth aspects is ignored or discouraged.

Example: The counsellor may dwell extensively on the pathology of the client, reinforce negative statements, ignore positive statements by the client, confront the client with weaknesses without treating them as aspects that can improve.

In summary, the counsellor seems to see the client as a sick "case" rather than as a developing person.

Level 2

The counsellor allows the client to dwell upon negative aspects of himself *without* structuring these as weaknesses the client can begin to overcome. The counsellor responds mainly to the negative and static aspects of the client; however, he does not project a totally negative image of the client, as does the counsellor responding at level 1.

Example: The counsellor may continually reinforce negative statements by the client, ignore most positive statements by the client, etc. The counsellor's behavior at level 2 is more tentative than at level 1.

In summary, the counsellor responds more to the negative and static aspects of the client than to the positive, growth aspects.

Level 3

The counsellor is open to a focus upon growth but is not actively pursuing it. Neither is he encouraging the client to dwell upon negative aspects. He is allowing the client to maintain the client's present evaluation of himself and his present level of functioning.

Example: The counsellor's statements reflect the same attitude toward the client's ability to grow that is reflected in the client's own statements. The counsellor is not likely to confront the client with a perception of the client's capacity different from that which the client holds.

In summary, there is evidence that the counsellor is open to a focus upon growth if this is initiated by the client; however, he is not actively encouraging the client to reach beyond his present concept of himself.

Level 4

The counsellor encourages the client to see himself as capable of growth and in a process of development. In a tentative way he helps the client move toward a concept of himself that is more positive and growth-oriented than his present one.

Example: The counsellor may *actively* reinforce positive client expressions, encourage the client to take certain actions he is uncertain about, and tentatively confront the client with positive aspects of himself and his growth potential.

In summary, the counsellor attempts to take the client beyond his present concept of what he can do and what he can become.

Level 5

The counsellor strongly projects a concept of the client as a capable, potentially productive person. The counsellor fully recognizes the client's negative and conflicted feelings about himself but is able to strongly present the possibility of the client's developing in ways the counsellor can make relatively specific.

Example: In a stronger, less tentative way the counsellor exhibits the same kind of behavior as does the counsellor functioning at level 4. He actively reinforces positive client expressions, encourages the client to take appropriate actions that frighten him, and confronts the client with positive aspects of himself and his growth potential.

In summary, the counsellor is able to project a vision of what the client can become in such a way that it seems attainable to the client.

Rating Procedures

Three advanced doctoral students in counselling psychology were trained in the use of

the process scales. One student was assigned to each scale as the primary judge. A second was assigned to a scale so that interjudge reliability data could be obtained. Each rating team worked with a scale until satisfactory interjudge reliability ($r = .60$; $p < .05$) was demonstrated on a block of ten practice excerpts.

Each counsellor was asked to provide audio-tape recordings of counselling sessions with two different clients (minimum age, 15 years). Two tapes were collected from each of 15 counsellors, making a total of 30. Two segments of four minutes in length (minutes 10-14 and 30-34) were selected from each. Thus, a total of four segments were chosen for each counsellor. These were presented in random order and rated on each scale by the judge teams. Two judges assigned to the same scale worked independently in determining their ratings.

Results

A counsellor's score on a variable was determined by averaging the four ratings of the primary judge assigned to that scale. The means and standard deviations of scores for the group of 15 counsellors on the process scales are presented in Table 1.

In order to assess the interjudge reliability of the scales, counsellor scores were obtained

for a second judge on each variable. These were compared to the scores obtained by the first judge by a Pearson product moment correlation procedure. The following coefficients were obtained: .97 for empathy, .94 for warmth, .94 for genuineness, .97 for immediacy, .97 for self-disclosure and .93 for growth focus.

In order to determine the independence of growth focus from the other process scales, counsellor scores on the process variables were intercorrelated using a Pearson product moment procedure. The coefficients for growth focus with the facilitative scales are presented in Table 2. In all cases, the coefficients were high, indicating that when overall counsellor scores were used, ratings of growth focus were closely related to the ratings of the facilitative dimensions. Intercorrelations among the other facilitative scales were also high, ranging from .70 for warmth and self-disclosure to .93 for warmth and empathy.

PART II

Method

Counsellors and Clients

The segments used in Part I were rated on the Carkhuff (1969) scale for gross interpersonal facilitation, which allows a counsellor's performance to be given one rating that incorporates

Table 1
Means and Standard Deviations
for Process Scales in Part I
(n=15)

	Empathy	Warmth	Genuine-ness	Immediacy	Self-disclosure	Growth focus
\bar{X}	4.03	4.68	4.75	4.53	3.75	4.63
SD	1.71	1.19	1.33	1.31	1.11	1.23

Table 2
Correlation Coefficients of Counsellor Scores on
Growth Focus with Scores on Facilitative Conditions
(n=15)

Empathy	Facilitative conditions			
	Warmth	Genuineness	Immediacy	Self-disclosure
.91	.91	.91	.91	.78

$p < .01$ in all cases.

Table 3
Means and Standard Deviations of Session Averages
on Process Scales for Counsellors in Part II

Scale		High facilitative			Low facilitative		
		A: 12 sessions	B: 5 sessions	C: 8 sessions	D: 11 sessions	E: 5 sessions	F: 10 sessions
Empathy	\bar{X}	6.51	6.48	4.79	2.67	2.64	1.69
	SD	.56	.48	.71	.57	.41	.44
Warmth	\bar{X}	6.31	5.96	5.41	3.69	3.64	2.79
	SD	.59	.48	.42	.49	.58	1.12
Genuineness	\bar{X}	6.25	6.08	5.29	3.45	4.08	2.89
	SD	.56	.33	.72	.40	.64	.31
Immediacy	\bar{X}	5.96	6.64	4.97	3.35	3.72	2.83
	SD	.59	.26	.66	.51	1.04	.61
Self-disclosure	\bar{X}	4.33	4.48	4.03	3.13	3.32	2.95
	SD	.72	.39	.52	.38	.54	.36
Growth focus	\bar{X}	5.99	5.64	4.91	3.62	3.56	3.32
	SD	.51	.36	.48	.46	.74	.32

all of the facilitative dimensions. According to ratings on this 9-point scale, three high facilitative (average gross ratings of 4.5, 5 and 6) and three low facilitative counsellors (average gross ratings of 2.5, 3 and 3) were selected. Four were male; two, female. Their ages ranged from 25 to 30.

Each counsellor's relationship with one of his clients was followed for a number of consecutive sessions. Five of the clients were female; one, male. The sessions sampled were toward the end of the counselling relationships, since the counsellors were in their last semester of practica.

Instruments

The same process rating scales used in Part I for empathy, warmth, genuineness, immediacy, self-disclosure and growth focus were employed.

Rating Procedure

Each of the six counsellors was asked to provide audio tapes of the remaining sessions with one of his clients. Counsellor A provided tapes for 12 sessions, B for 5 sessions, C for 8 sessions, D for 11 sessions, E for 5 sessions, and F for 10 sessions. Five four-minute excerpts were taken from each tape (minutes 0-4,

10-14, 20-24, 30-34, and 40-44). These were presented in random order and rated for empathy, warmth, genuineness, immediacy, self-disclosure and growth focus by the primary judge assigned to each scale.

Results

In order to assess interjudge reliabilities, 30 of the tape segments were selected randomly and rated by the second judge assigned to each scale. The two sets of ratings for a scale were then compared. The coefficient for growth focus was .87, as compared with .95 for empathy, .93 for warmth, .80 for genuineness, .86 for immediacy and .85 for self-disclosure.

Scores on the variables were obtained for each session by averaging the five ratings on a scale. The means and standard deviations of session scores on the process scales are presented for each counsellor in Table 3.

The session scores were used in computing intercorrelations of the variables. Separate computations were made for the high facilitative group of three counsellors, the low facilitative group of three, and the combined group of six. Unlike in Part I, the sample in the computations

Table 4
Correlation Coefficients of Session Scores on Growth
Focus with Scores on the Facilitative Conditions
for High^a, Low^b and Combined^c groups of Counsellors

Group	Facilitative Conditions				
	Empathy	Warmth	Genuineness	Immediacy	Self-disclosure
High	.11	.28	.19	.12	.34
Low	.41*	.78**	.83**	.25	.21
Combined	.25	.54**	.46**	.22	.28*

^a Total n of 25 sessions for high group (12 for Counsellor A; 5 for B; 8 for C)

^b Total n of 26 sessions for low group (11 for Counsellor D; 5 for E; 10 for F)

^c Total n of 51 sessions for combined group

* $p < .05$

** $p < .01$

did not consist of the number of counsellors but of the number of sessions. The sessions were subgrouped for the different counsellors. Due to the subgroups, a correlational procedure for use with a sample containing subgroups with unequal means was applied to the data (Walker & Lev, 1969).

The coefficients obtained with growth focus and the facilitative scales are presented in Table 4 for the high facilitative, low facilitative and combined groups. The coefficients are noticeably lower when consecutive session scores are used than those found in Part I using overall counsellor scores on the process scales. The growth focus scale was significantly related to warmth and genuineness for the low and combined groups but not for the high group. It was significantly related to empathy for the low group but not for the high and combined groups. It thus appears to have been used with more independence from the other scales at high levels than at low levels. The intercorrelations among the facilitative scales were more modest than those obtained in Part I. They ranged from .16 between warmth and immediacy for the high group to .78 between warmth and genuineness for the low group.

DISCUSSION

The purposes of this study were to test the interjudge reliability of the growth focus scale and to evaluate its independence from scales for some of the facilitative dimensions.

The interjudge reliability of the new scale was satisfactory in both parts of the study. These results give an encouraging indication that in-

dependent judges can agree upon the degree of growth focus emitted by a counsellor.

The question of the independence of the growth focus scale from the previously constructed facilitative scales seems to depend upon whether an overall score for a counsellor is used or whether counsellor performances over time are examined. The high intercorrelations in Part I suggest that when an overall assessment of a counsellor is to be made the new scale may not add substantially to information provided by the facilitative scales. However, such a conclusion is premature, in light of two considerations. First of all, it must be remembered that not only was growth focus highly correlated with the facilitative scales but the latter were highly intercorrelated with one another. A possible interpretation is that the facilitative scales measure a constellation of positive behaviors toward the client, which are also reflected in the growth focus scale. Muelhberg, Pierce and Drasgow (1969) also found high intercorrelations among facilitative conditions and postulated a "good guy" factor inherent in the dimensions. The facilitative and growth focus scales may reflect an underlying core of skills and attitudes which are highly interrelated. The second consideration that makes difficult an interpretation of the high correlations in Part I is that different patterns of intercorrelations among facilitative scales have been reported in other studies. A number have reported moderate intercorrelations (Truax & Carkhuff, 1967; Rogers, Gendlin, Kiesler & Truax, 1967). At the other end of the continuum, Garfield and Bergin (1971) found genuineness to correlate negatively with empathy and warmth.

A number of factors may account for the discrepancies among reported intercorrelations, including counsellor and client communication styles, the use of different revisions of the scales, tape segment selection and rating procedures. Other crucial factors could include procedures for selection and training of judges and the consequent interpretations they apply to the scales. Unfortunately, this kind of process scale requires the rater to make judgments from time to time that are not explicitly defined. There is opportunity for the judge's mental set to influence ratings. For these and other reasons, Chinsky and Rappaport (1970) and Rappaport and Chinsky (1972) have challenged the discriminant validity of the accurate empathy scale. Until further research illuminates the reasons for the discrepant intercorrelations in different studies, the relationships of counsellor averages on growth focus with the other facilitative scales will remain unclear.

The low and moderate correlations of growth focus with the other facilitative scales in Part II suggest that the new scale might be productively used in counsellor training and supervisory activities, where a counsellor's performance for a number of consecutive sessions is of primary interest. It would appear that the growth focus scale is more independent from the active conditions of immediacy and self-disclosure than from the core conditions, at least for low facilitative counsellors. This finding makes sense conceptually, in that most of the growth focus behaviors would seem to be less confrontative than those defined by the immediacy and self-disclosure scales. For the high facilitative group, none of the correlations between growth focus and the facilitative scales reached significance. If this different trend for high versus low facilitators is replicated, it might mean that specific behaviors can be more easily defined and rated with these scales at higher levels. This possibility is in keeping with the Bergin and Solomon (1963) study, in which it was necessary to revise the Truax empathy scale so that it could discriminate more effectively among low empathy therapists.

In summary, the growth focus scale would appear to have promise as an instrument for counsellor training and research. In this study, it was more independent from the facilitative scales when performances over time were studied than when average scores were compared for a group of counsellors. It seemed to be more

independent from the other scales for high facilitative than for low facilitative counsellors. For the low facilitative group, it was significantly related to the core conditions but not to immediacy and self-disclosure. Satisfactory levels of interjudge reliability were obtained for the growth focus scale in both parts of the study.

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