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## FOLLOW-UP: A STUDY OF COUNSELLING OUTCOME

Too often counsellors and counselling services ignore the common textbook emphasis upon following up their clients. The tendency is to trust to subjective criteria in determining the efficacy of counselling. Unfortunately, such criteria may have little relationship to the clients' measure of assistance. Within any counselling setting an ultimate criterion of success is client satisfaction. Clients obviously judge the assistance they receive, and their judgement should warrant counsellor interest. Goodstein and Grigg (1959) concluded, after a thorough review of follow-up research on client satisfaction, that the client's evaluation of counselling is an important factor in any overall evaluation of the counselling process.

Given that the client had registered his judgement, then a very important question is raised which the counsellor cannot ignore. Regardless of the judgement, whether positive or negative, what was it about the client's counselling experience which led him to judge the way he did? As a research topic this question has drawn substantial attention as evidenced by the work of Truax (1963) and Carkhuff and Bersonson (1967). They, and others, have postulated a number of counsellor, client and process variables important to a successful counselling outcome.

The follow-up provides a method of determining client satisfaction with the experience. It also has utility in delineating variables which may be crucial to successful counselling. The purpose of the present study was two-fold. First, to determine student satisfaction with their experiences at a university counselling centre. Second, to define differences in the counselling experiences between students who claimed to have benefited from counselling and those who claimed little or no benefit.

### METHOD

A random sample of 400 clients who had used the University of Calgary Student Counselling Services during the 1967-1968 academic year were sent a follow-up questionnaire in September of 1968. It

### LA RELANCE: UNE ETUDE DES EFFETS DU COUNSELLING

La relance des clients est nécessaire: est-ce-que le service leur a été profitable?

Pourquoi a-t-il décidé que le service lui a été ou non profitable?

Le but de l'étude: le degré de satisfaction de l'étudiant, la relation avec l'expérience vécue en counselling.

On a utilisé des questionnaires pour connaître les réactions des étudiants.

was accompanied by a covering letter and a stamped, addressed, return envelope. Two weeks later a reminder letter was sent to each of the sample. Forty of the questionnaires were undelivered and 230 were returned for a 64% return rate, acceptable by most standards (Selltiz et al., 1966). Twenty-two of the returned questionnaires were incomplete. The final sample comprised 208 students, 116 males and 92 females. Their mean age was 22 years.

#### *The Questionnaire*

The questionnaire used was a modified version of one developed by Strupp, Wallach and Wogan (1964) for use in following up psychotherapy patients. The version used was edited to make it more relevant to a counselling experience. The questionnaire had two parts. The first part was composed of questions which sampled student evaluation of the counselling they received and subsequent change as a result of it. The respondents rated benefit from counselling, satisfaction with it, impression of the counsellor's experience, change as a result of counselling, present adjustment and degree to which they would recommend counselling to a friend. They also reported the number of sessions of counseling they had had. Each of 12 questions of this type was of a rating scale format as shown below.

11. How much do you feel your marks and/or study habits have improved?

\_\_\_\_\_A great deal                      \_\_\_\_\_Very little  
 \_\_\_\_\_A fair amount                    \_\_\_\_\_Somewhat  
    \_\_\_\_\_Not at all

For purposes of analysis some of the questions were grouped to provide a general rating. In evaluating change the students were asked to rate change apparent to themselves, family and friends each in separate questions. A general measure of change was obtained by grouping these items into a composite score of change.

The second part of the questionnaire required the students to rate 40 statements about their counselling experience on a five-point scale ranging from Strongly Agree to Strongly Disagree. Typical statements were:

16. Counselling was an intensely emotional experience.
22. I feel that the counsellor was rather active most of the time.
25. I often felt I was "just another counsellee."
34. I often had the feeling that he (she) talked too much.

Recommanderaient-ils à un ami de faire l'expérience du counselling?

Le changement tel que perçu par le client, sa famille et ses amis.

Student ratings of the 40 statements were subjected to factor analysis. Rotation to the varimax criterion produced four factors which accounted for 55% of the total variance. They were designated Positive Regard, Counsellor's Manner, Intensity of Emotional Experience and Concreteness. The factors comprised twenty, six, nine and five items respectively. Although using a somewhat different analysis, Strupp et al. (1964) obtained essentially the same structure from their subjects' ratings.

The final analysis was conducted on scores obtained for the four factors (sum of items) and ratings on seven items evaluating the counselling experience. Question 3, shown below, was used as the criterion question.

3. How much have you benefited from counselling?
- A great deal       To some extent  
 A fair amount     Very little  
 Not at all

The sample was split on the basis of their response to this question. Persons responding A great deal, A fair amount, and To some extent, were grouped in opposition to those who responded Very little and Not at all. Respondents who claimed benefit were then compared with those who claimed little or no benefit.

### RESULTS

Ninety-six students, or 46% of the sample, claimed to have benefited from counselling, whereas 112 students claimed little or no benefit. Chi-square analysis indicated that these percentages are not significantly different than 50% ( $\chi^2 = 0.64, df = 1$ ). A breakdown of the responses to question three is shown in Table 1. The mean rating for all subjects is 3.56 or between Very little and Not at all.

Les facteurs importants: l'acceptation inconditionnelle du conseiller, son tact, son attitude concrète et l'intensité de l'expérience émotive.

46% en ont profité,  
54% n'ont rien retiré de l'expérience.

TABLE 1  
The Frequency and Percentage of Responses to Each of the Question Three Alternates  
Fréquence et Pourcentage des Réponses à Chacune des Questions

	N	%
A great deal	9	4.3
A fair amount	25	12.0
To some extent	62	29.8
Very little	64	30.8
Not at all	48	23.1

TABLE 2  
Between Group Differences On Process  
and Outcome Variables  
Différences entre Groups sur les Variables  
Processus et Résultat

	Benefit	No Benefit	t
Number of counselling sessions	1.98 <sup>1</sup>	3.03	-5.50**
Satisfaction with counselling	4.06	5.13	-6.07**
Counsellor's experience	4.28	4.63	-2.46*
Improvement in grades and studies	3.26	2.10	6.58**
Present adjustment	9.94	9.14	1.49ns
Change apparent to self and others	12.49	8.05	8.01**
Recommend counselling	4.67	3.98	4.79**
Positive regard	55.88	49.64	3.22**
Counsellor's manner	17.07	15.39	3.47**
Emotionality of the experience	17.52	20.70	-4.19**
Concreteness	9.85	9.52	0.68ns

\*p<.01

\*\*p<.001

Le client qui se dit  
satisfait de son  
expérience estime  
qu'il en a moins  
profité!

The scores of the two groups on each of the eleven process variables were compared through the use of t-tests of difference. Table 2 summarizes the results of the analyses. Nine of the eleven variables discriminated between the two groups. Persons who claimed little or no benefit had significantly more sessions, were more satisfied with counselling, rated the counsellor as more experienced and rated counselling a more emotional experience. Those who claimed benefit reported greater improvement in grades and studies, more change apparent to self and others, rated their counsellor higher on positive regard and as more active and informal. The groups did not differ in their ratings of current adjustment or concreteness of the counsellor.

## DISCUSSION

Le client qui con-  
sidère son conseiller  
comme ayant été  
très réceptif, actif et  
simple considère que  
l'expérience lui a  
été profitable!

Clearly the follow-up was informative. It provided an estimate of the clients' evaluation of their counselling experience and delineated what appear to be important components of successful counselling. Most counsellors would be disappointed to learn that only about one-half of their clients felt they had benefited from the contact. The importance of this finding to the centre involved is obvious. What may be of equal importance is the possibility that the finding is not atypical of what is occurring at most counselling centres.

The analyses conducted on the process variables cannot be interpreted as reflecting a casual relationship between the variables and counselling outcome. The results shown in Table 2 merely summarize some of the concomitants of outcome. Within the results are some apparent anomalies. It is surprising that persons who claim little or no benefit also claim significantly more satisfaction with counselling or that their counsellor was deemed to be more experienced. Without more information it can only be hypothesized that a large number of those who claim little or no benefit were simply overwhelmed by the experience. An experienced counsellor may be perceived as intimidating to some clients. The naive worry that he will "read me like an open book" may be enough to inhibit successful counselling.

The concomitants of rated benefit, although suggestive of a halo effect, are reassuring. One of the difficulties in counselling is obtaining a measure of the extent to which improvement generalizes to other aspects of the client's life. That persons who claim benefit also recognize improved study habits and grades and change apparent to themselves and others provides just such a measure. In as much as counsellors need clients to stay in business, it will pay to be successful for clients who benefit also advertise.

Counsellors who have clients who feel they have benefited apparently have more positive regard for their clients, are more active and informal during interview and keep the emotionality of the experience at a low key. These findings serve to reiterate earlier findings such as those of Truax and Carkhuff (1967). It is noteworthy that the follow-up technique has utility for the counsellor in monitoring the operation of these variables.

The follow-up reported above produced results which were both encouraging and disappointing to the counselling service involved. However, reaction to these findings should have more purpose than congratulation or recrimination. The data should stimulate further investigation and more rigorous attention to the counselling being offered. In short, a follow-up should lead to another follow-up and the honest appraisal of the efficacy of counselling available to our students.

En ont-ils moins profité parce qu'ils étaient trop impressionnés?

Il est important que le conseiller soit efficace.

On a besoin d'évaluations franches de l'efficacité du counselling.

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### FOOTNOTES

<sup>1</sup>It should be noted that the values reported for the number of sessions are relative. The question sampling this variable was worded: Please indicate the number of counselling sessions you had by circling one of the following:

- |                            |                             |
|----------------------------|-----------------------------|
| 1 One session              | 3 Between 5 and 10 sessions |
| 2 Between 2 and 5 sessions | 4 10 or more sessions       |
|                            | 5 15 or more sessions       |