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AUTHOR Gustafson, John A.; Pennscott, William W.
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ABSTRACT

For the purpose of discerning short term terminated clients' attitudes toward the counseling process and outcome, 98 such clients from two Northern Illinois University Counseling Centers were examined by means of the Counseling Evaluation Inventory and a client "reason for termination" statement. Results indicated that client satisfaction with counseling process and outcome was not affected by counselor, number of interviews, or sex of client. The analysis of data related to the client problem indicated no significant difference in client satisfaction with the process, but did indicate a significant difference in satisfaction with the outcome. Implications of the findings were discussed in terms of short term client satisfaction, the lack of consistency between findings of similar studies, and differential effect of the counselor when other factors are considered. Directions for additional research were indicated. (Author/TL)

EVALUATION OF THE COUNSELING EXPERIENCE BY TERMINATED CLIENTS

John A. Gustafson and William W. Pennscott

Northern Illinois University Clemson University

The study was concerned with short-term, terminated client attitudes toward counseling process and outcome. The attitudes of 98 terminated college clients were examined by means of the Counseling Evaluation Inventory and a client reason for termination statement. Results indicated that client satisfaction with counseling process and outcome were not affected by counselor, number of interviews, or sex of client. The analysis of data related to problem category indicated no significant difference in client satisfaction with process, but did indicate a significant difference ($p < .05$) in satisfaction with counseling outcome. The implications of these findings were discussed in terms of short-term client satisfaction, the lack of consistency between findings of similar studies, and differential effect of the counselor when other factors are considered.

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Termination is an aspect of counseling which can be initiated by either the counselor or the client. It may occur as a mutual decision or be as abrupt as a client not returning for a subsequent interview. Often the client's reason for termination remains a mystery, especially for those who maintained very few contacts with the counselor. Previous studies dealing with causes for termination (Heilbrun, 1961; Heilbrun and Sullivan, 1962) found that clients who terminated early in counseling conformed most closely to the appropriate cultural personality stereotype appropriate to his or her sex and displayed insufficient psychological problems and/or defensiveness. The present study is also concerned with terminating clients, but with an assessment of their perceptions and opinions of the counseling process and the outcome of counseling.

The evaluation of counseling has been actively pursued in the past. Tyler (1960) states that the unanimity of the results in past studies suggests that no more evidence of an overall sort is needed to demonstrate that clients like counseling. She suggested that it would seem more profitable to design research that would permit comparisons of subgroups and identify factors related to degrees of favorableness of reaction. The purpose of this study was to examine terminated client's perception and evaluation of what occurred during counseling. It reports an

effort to investigate the reasons for short-term client termination and explore terminated clients' attitudes toward the counseling process and outcome.

Methods and Procedures

The population consisted of all (137) terminated clients of two Northern Illinois University Counseling Center counselors from September 1, 1968 through February 28, 1969. For the purpose of this study, a terminated client was defined as a client having no counseling contacts with the counselor for at least a six-week period, ending April 14, 1969. Because of the criterion used in selecting the population, almost all long-term clients were eliminated. The number of interviews per client ranged from one to twenty with a mean of 2.24. Fifty-three per cent of the clients had only one interview.

Data were gathered for the terminated clients on their satisfaction with the counseling process and attitude toward counseling outcome using the Counseling Evaluation Inventory (CEI) (Linden, Shertzer and Stone, 1965) and a request for a statement of the reason for termination. Ninety-eight of the 137 clients responded with usable returns. This produced a return rate of 71.5%.

The terminated clients were asked to complete the instruments as they pertained to their counseling experience. Responses from the CEI were scored according to final scoring weights derived by its authors. The client reason for termination was categorized into four groups (favorable, neutral, unfavorable and no reply)

by three experienced counselors holding doctoral degrees. This categorization was considered to be a measure of client satisfaction with counseling outcome.

The basic aim of the investigation was to discover how short-term terminated clients evaluated their counseling experience in terms of satisfaction with process and satisfaction with outcome. Previous investigators (Gabbert, 1967; Ivey, Miller and Gabbert, 1967) have analyzed the effect of counselor, sex differences, diagnostic category, and length of counseling as factors in client attitude toward the counseling experience. It was felt that these same factors would affect client evaluation of short-term counseling in the current study.

Data relevant to client satisfaction with outcome was analyzed using chi square and data related to client satisfaction with process was analyzed with a least squares analysis of variance using a BMDX 64 program. The least squares analysis was necessitated by unequal subclass numbers in the data.

For the purpose of analysis, the four factors were divided into the following levels: counselor A and B; diagnostic categories 1-vocational, 2-emotional, 3-educational; one interview, 2-3 interviews, and 4 or more interviews; male and female clients.

Results

Table 1 presents the results of the least square analysis of variance for client satisfaction with counseling process, based on CEI scores. The F ratios for all main effects and

interaction effects were not significant. Thus there seemed to be no one factor which stood out as significantly contributing to client satisfaction with the counseling process.

Insert Table 1 about here

The results of the study of client satisfaction with counseling outcome are found on Table 2. There were no significant differences of client satisfaction with counseling outcome when compared by counselor, number of interviews, and sex of client. When client satisfaction was analyzed by diagnostic problem, the resulting chi square of 15.09 was significant at the .05 level.

Insert Table 2 about here

The results presented on Table 3 display selected mean comparisons of client satisfaction with process. The interactions represent comparisons of counselor by problem category and counselor by interview category. There was no significant differences between the interaction means.

Discussion

The results indicate that client satisfaction with counseling process and outcome was not significantly affected by counselor, number of interviews, or sex of client. The analysis of data related to problem category indicated no significant difference in client satisfaction with process, but did indicate a significant

difference in client satisfaction with counseling outcome.

Table 2 shows the only significant chi square to be client satisfaction with counseling outcome by problem category. A review of the analysis indicated most of the significance was attributed to two cells: emotional-unfavorable and educational-no reply. Since a disproportionate number of clients who viewed their counseling outcome unfavorable were in the emotional problem category, their termination statements (five in all) were reviewed. One general theme appeared to run through the unfavorable reasons for termination: the feeling that the problem was beyond the scope of the counselor. A preconceived expectation of the client apparently was not met. Some clients felt that no one could help them with their problem, and others stated a specific need for a psychiatrist.

The other cell contributing most to the significance was educational-no reply. A review of the interview write-ups indicated that most of these clients had problems which were referred to the Registrar's Office or academic departments.

A review of the emotional outcome statements presents an apparent contradiction. The CEI mean scores indicate that the emotional group was in the middle in terms of satisfaction with counseling process. Since most emotional problems do not lend themselves to clear-cut solutions, the data suggests the possibility that emotional clients might be dissatisfied with the resolution of the problem, while at the same time experiencing some degree of satisfaction resulting from the counseling

relationship itself.

The results indicate that client satisfaction with the counseling process was not significantly affected by any of the four factors investigated. These findings are at variance with those of Gabbert (1967) who found that personal- psychological clients' attitudes were affected by counselor assignment, sex differences, and duration of counseling, while these factors were not important in distinguishing attitudes of educational- vocational clients. Ivey's (1967) replication of Gabbert's study found attitude differences only among clients seen for three or more interviews. Thus, counselor assignment and sex of clients, and problem category, as in the present study, produced no significant results.

The lack of significant findings related to satisfaction with counseling process in the present study may be due to the nature of the subjects included in the study. With short-term "terminated" clients as a population, it is possible that the more satisfied client would still be involved in a counseling relationship at the time the survey was conducted. Ivey's findings of attitude differences among clients seen for three or more interviews may indicate that the lack of significance in the present study could be attributed to the narrow range of number of client interviews.

Insert Table 3 about here

Ivey concluded that clients react to counselors in varying patterns, even though clear counselor differences did not appear in his study. Inspection of the mean satisfaction with process (CEI) scores in Table 3 would give added support to the notion of the differential effect of the counselor, particularly when other factors are considered. For example, the data indicated that clients of counselor B who presented educational problems were much more (but not significantly more) satisfied than counselor A's educational clients. On the other hand, counselor A produced higher satisfaction scores in clients with emotional problems than did counselor B. Counselor A seemed to produce more client satisfaction in those clients who had either one or four or more interviews, while counselor B produced his most satisfied clients among those who experienced 2 or 3 interviews.

At the present time there seems to be no clear-cut pattern of counselor effect on client satisfaction with the counseling process. While the above trends are not significant, they do provide some indication of directions for further research.

The directions of the data indicate that counselors may have a differential effect on clients, with the effect being related to factors such as diagnostic problem and number of interviews.

An over-riding question was the satisfaction of the short-term client. Of the clients responding, 52% made a definitely favorable statement about termination. However, the neutral statements contained a certain degree of positiveness, but did not include a compliment for the counselor or the fact that the

client would return to counseling if needed. If neutral are combined with favorable, the positive responses increase to 79%. Generally, it appears that the short-term clients were obtaining some degree of satisfaction with counseling outcome.

It was again found that factors contributing to client satisfaction are varied and difficult to pinpoint. It appears difficult to establish any definite effects which will be constant in replication. This lack of definite effect may be a finding in itself. The variables of counselor, problem, number of interviews, and sex of client do have an effect on counseling satisfaction, but their effect seems to be complex and to differ from situation to situation.

The study also indicated that client satisfaction with counseling process can differ from satisfaction with counseling outcome. A client may find the outcome more rewarding than the counseling process, or be very satisfied with the counseling relationship, but find the outcome lacking. The two are not necessarily dependent upon each other.

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TABLE 1

Analysis of Variance of Client Satisfaction
with Counseling Process

| Source | df | MS | F | P |
|----------------|----|---------|-------|------|
| Counselor (A) | 1 | 19.670 | 0.184 | N.S. |
| Problem (B) | 2 | 182.456 | 1.705 | N.S. |
| Interviews (C) | 2 | 23.569 | 0.220 | N.S. |
| Sex (D) | 1 | 1.208 | 0.011 | N.S. |
| A X B | 2 | 205.892 | 1.924 | N.S. |
| A X C | 2 | 214.864 | 2.008 | N.S. |
| A X D | 1 | 4.695 | 0.043 | N.S. |
| B X C | 4 | 87.045 | 0.813 | N.S. |
| B X D | 2 | 24.595 | 0.229 | N.S. |
| C X D | 2 | 50.400 | 0.471 | N.S. |
| Error | 78 | 106.986 | | |

TABLE 2

Client Satisfaction with Counseling Outcome

| Variables | χ^2 | P |
|-------------------|----------|------|
| Counselor | 4.38 | N.S. |
| Problem | 15.09 | .05 |
| No. of Interviews | 4.82 | N.S. |
| Sex of Client | 1.40 | N.S. |

TABLE 3**Selected Mean Comparisons of Client****Satisfaction with Process****Interaction Means****Counselor X Problem**

| | |
|---------------------------|--------|
| Counselor A X Vocational | 24.619 |
| Counselor A X Emotional | 30.368 |
| Counselor A X Educational | 27.819 |
| Counselor B X Vocational | 25.741 |
| Counselor B X Emotional | 24.943 |
| Counselor B X Educational | 35.616 |

Counselor X Interviews

| | |
|-------------------------|--------|
| Counselor A X 1 | 29.190 |
| Counselor A X 2-3 | 23.100 |
| Counselor A X 4 or more | 30.516 |
| Counselor B X 1 | 27.321 |
| Counselor B X 2-3 | 30.748 |
| Counselor B X 4 or more | 28.231 |

Note.-There was no significant difference between the means compared.