

DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 099 724

CG 009 317

AUTHOR Tinsley, Howard E. A.; Harris, Donna J.  
TITLE Client Expectations for Counseling.  
PUB DATE Aug 74  
NOTE 10p.; Paper presented at the American Psychological Association Convention (82nd, New Orleans, Louisiana, August 1974)

EDRS PRICE MF-\$0.75 HC-\$1.50 PLUS POSTAGE  
DESCRIPTORS \*College Students; \*Counseling Effectiveness; \*Counselor Acceptance; Counselor Characteristics; \*Expectation; Questionnaires; Speeches; \*Student Opinion; Surveys

ABSTRACT

Clients enter counseling with expectations regarding what counseling will be like. It is widely believed that effectiveness of counseling is closely linked with these expectancies. This study was designed to determine the degree to which college students actually possess such expectations and to investigate the relationship of their expectations to their sex and college class. A questionnaire regarding expectations for counseling was given to 287 students and included 24 questions dealing with the subject's expectancies regarding his own behavior in counseling, and 64 statements concerning the subject's expectations about how the counselor would behave during counseling. Results suggested that subjects indicated an expectation that counseling in general could be helpful, they expressed doubt that it could ever be helpful to them, personally. Results also indicated that the longer students remained in college, the less they anticipated contact with an expert, accepting counselor. Findings were consistent with those of Apfelbaum (1958) in that females expected the counselor to be accepting and nonjudgemental while males anticipated a more directive and critical counselor. (Author/PC)

ED 099724

U S DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH,  
EDUCATION & WELFARE  
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF  
EDUCATION  
THIS DOCUMENT HAS BEEN REPRO-  
DUCED EXACTLY AS RECEIVED FROM  
THE PERSON OR ORGANIZATION ORIGIN-  
ATING IT. POINTS OF VIEW OR OPINIONS  
STATED DO NOT NECESSARILY REPRESENT  
OFFICIAL NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF  
EDUCATION POSITION OR POLICY

**Client Expectations for Counseling**

**Howard E.A. Tinsley and Donna J. Harris  
Southern Illinois University at Carbondale**

**Presented at the American Psychological  
Association Convention  
New Orleans, Louisiana, 1974**

CG 009 317

## Client Expectations for Counseling

Clients enter counseling with expectations regarding "what counseling will be like." It is widely believed that the effectiveness of counseling is closely linked with these expectancies. Hoch (1955), for example, has stated that clients form an "ideal picture" of the method they want and to which they will respond and Rosenthal (1966) has repeatedly shown that expectancies can influence subsequent behavior. Moreover, Carkhuff (1969) has stated, "Helpes have different levels of sets and expectancies concerning helping which potentially influence motivation and thus the helping process and its outcome."

Despite recognition of the existence of client expectancies and the stress on their importance for the counseling process, surprisingly little is known about them. Knowledge of the nature of client expectancies and the manner in which they effect a client's behavior in counseling is clearly desirable. The purpose of this research was to identify some of the expectancies the college student client has for counseling and the relationship of those expectancies to other client characteristics.

Previous research has suggested several possible client expectancies regarding the college counselor's behavior. The counselor is expected to be warmly interested in each client, to be highly trained and expert, and to be confident of his ability to help the client. He is expected to be problem centered on a personal level. Clients expect their counselors to be

thoroughly prepared for each interview and to be at ease with the client and his individual problem. Moreover, clients expect counselors to maintain confidentiality (Friedenburg, 1950; Lewis and Warman, 1964; Price and Iverson, 1969; Schmidt and Strong, 1970).

King and Matteson (1959) have suggested that the client's expectancies may change during college. They report that college freshmen and sophomores see the counselor's function as being primarily informational while juniors and seniors see the counselor as more of a social-emotional problem solver. Moreover, Apfelbaum (1958) has suggested possible client sex differences in expectancies with males expecting a directive (critical, analytical, and non-indulgent) counselor, and females anticipating counselors who are non-judgemental, permissive listeners.

While a number of possible expectancies have been suggested, however, the extent to which college students actually have such expectations of counselors is unknown. This research was designed to determine the degree to which college students actually possess such expectations and to investigate the relationship of their expectations to their sex and college class.

## METHOD

### Subjects

The subjects were 287 students enrolled in introductory psychology classes. All were undergraduates, 22 years of age or younger, who had no prior counseling experience. A quota sampling procedure was followed to assure that each cell of the two-dimensional sex by college class data matrix contained a minimum of twenty-five subjects.

### Instrument

Each subject completed a questionnaire regarding their expectations for counseling. The instrument contained 88 statements, the first 24 of which dealt with the subject's expectancies regarding his own behavior in counseling. The last 64 statements concerned the subject's expectations about how the counselor would behave during counseling. The subject rated each statement on a seven point scale which ranged from "not true" (1), and "slightly true" (2), up to "definitely true" (7). Nine of the items concerned specific counseling procedures and are not reported upon herein. The remaining items were combined into eight expectancy scales (see Table 1).

### Analysis

Scale values were obtained for each subject by calculating his mean response to the items on the scale. A two-way (sex by college class) analysis of variance was performed on the scale values for each of the eight expectancy scales. The .05 level of confidence was specified as the critical value.

### RESULTS

Table 1 presents the mean scale values for each expectancy scale and summarizes the results of the analysis of variance. The expectancy scale values were highest for genuineness (5.3), expertise (5.3), trust (5.1), acceptance (5.0), and responsibility (5.0). Lower scale values were observed for understanding (4.2), outcome (3.7), and directiveness (3.6). The expectancies of males and females differed significantly for acceptance with females indicating a greater expectation of acceptance ( $\bar{X} = 5.1$  for

females, 4.9 for males). While not significant ( $p = .08$ ), males indicated a greater expectation of directiveness ( $\bar{X} = 3.7$  for males, 3.5 for females). The college classes differed in their expectation regarding the expertise and acceptance of the counselor. Freshmen indicated the greatest expectation of counselor expertise ( $\bar{X} = 5.6$ ) followed by sophomores ( $\bar{X} = 5.3$ ), juniors ( $\bar{X} = 5.2$ ), and seniors ( $\bar{X} = 5.1$ ). Sophomores ( $\bar{X} = 5.2$ ) indicated the greatest expectation of counselor acceptance, followed closely by freshmen ( $\bar{X} = 5.1$ ) and juniors ( $\bar{X} = 5.0$ ). Seniors ( $\bar{X} = 4.7$ ) indicated a somewhat lower expectation of counselor acceptance.

#### DISCUSSION

Both theoreticians and practicing counselors have long been in agreement that clients bring expectations and beliefs to counseling situations. These expectancies can influence both the counseling process and its outcome. Yet little has been done to investigate either the dimensions of these prior beliefs or the client variables to which they may be related. Without knowledge of what a client expects from counseling and how strongly he expects it, the counselor can neither effectively control for nor deal with these variables.

These results indicate rather strong client expectations that the counselor will be genuine and accepting of them, that they will trust the counselor and will assume responsibility for themselves and for the solution to their problems, and that the counselor will be skilled at his trade. The students indicated less of an expectation that the counselor would be able to help them. The mean of 4.2 corresponds closely to the "fairly true" level of the scale and connotes some uncertainty. Finally,

the results range between "fairly true" and "somewhat true" for outcome and directiveness, indicating greater pessimism or less of an expectancy than in the above areas.

When looked at closely these results suggest a sobering implication. The scales for which strong expectancies were observed deal with client attitudes and behaviors (trust and responsibility), counselor attitudes and behaviors (genuineness and acceptance) or the counselor's ability to help people in general (expertise). The scales dealing with the counselor's ability to understand (understanding) and help (outcome) the client himself indicate greater pessimism. In essence, the subjects seem to be indicating an expectation that counseling, in general, will be helpful but they are somewhat doubtful that counseling could ever be helpful to them. This suggests that many potential clients may never seek counseling because of their low expectancy that they will be helped. Moreover, this may in part account for some clients who come for one or two counseling interviews and then "drop-out." These data suggest the possibility that knowledge of the client's expectancy to benefit from counseling would be helpful to the counselor in planning his counseling strategy.

The results of the analysis of variance are consistent with the findings of Apfelbaum (1958) that females expect the counselor to be accepting and nonjudgmental while males anticipate a more directive, critical, analytical counselor. The counselor who intends to be somewhat directive with a female client or somewhat nondirective with a male client may not be fulfilling the client's expectations. This is not necessarily bad, of course,

and may be therapeutically beneficial in some instances. But the counselor should be aware of the situation so that he can more adequately deal with it.

Finally, the results suggest that the longer students remain in college, the less they anticipate an expert, accepting counselor. Although this finding may be related to the development of the students' critical faculties, a more definitive interpretation of this finding must await further research. Findings such as the above serve to underline the relative paucity of knowledge in the area.

In closing, the authors believe this research has illustrated the importance of this field of study and has pointed up the need for further investigation in this area.



## REFERENCES

- Apfelbaum, D. Dimensions of transference in psychotherapy. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1958.
- Carkhuff, R.R. Helping and human relations: Vol. I. New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, Inc., 1959.
- Friedenburg, E.Z. The measurement of student conceptions of the role of a college advisory system, Educational and Psychological Measurement, 1950, 10, 545-568.
- Hoch, P.H., Aims and limitations of psychotherapy, American Journal of Psychiatry, 1955, 112, 321-327.
- King, P.T., & Matteson, R.W., Student perception of counseling center services, Personnel and Guidance Journal, 1959, 37, 358-364.
- Lewis, E.C., & Warman, R.E., Confidentiality expectations of college students, Journal of College Student Personnel, 1964, 6, 7-11.
- Price, L.Z., & Iverson, M.A., Student's perceptions of counselors varying statuses and role behavior in initial interviews, Journal of Counseling Psychology, 1969, 16, 469-475.
- Rosenthal, R., Experimenter effects in behavioral research, New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1966.
- Schmidt, L.D., & Strong, S.R., Expert and inexpert counselors, Journal of Counseling Psychology, 1970, 17, 115-121.

**Table 1**  
**College Student's Expectations for Counseling**

Scale	Number of Items	Mean Scale Value	Significant Factors
Genuineness	10	5.3	
Expertise	8	5.3	Class
Trust	10	5.1	
Acceptance	14	5.0	Sex, Class
Responsibility	7	5.0	
Understanding	11	4.2	
Outcome	5	3.7	
Directiveness	10	3.6	