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AUTHOR Yager, Geoffrey G.; And Others
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ABSTRACT

Thirty-one prepracticum counselors were assigned randomly to two methods of confrontation skill training: (a) a cognitive self-instructional modeling group and (b) a discrimination/communication training group. The self-instructional group practiced aloud and, later silently, a set of questions designed to identify and to verbalize a discrepancy in a client's thoughts, feelings or behaviors (i.e., to identify and verbalize a confrontation). They also were taught a method to evaluate the confrontation responses they were practicing. The discrimination/communication training group discriminated levels of effective confrontation using Carkhuff's confrontation scale and, subsequently, practiced communication of confrontation responses. Both groups received 3 hours of group practice and feedback. Assessment of the effects of treatment was carried out through analysis of 15-minute audiotapes made by each subject with a coached client. Dependent measures included total number of responses, number of confrontations, ratings on Carkhuff's confrontation scale, scores on the Multidimensional Confrontation Response Scale, and the Response Relevance Scale ratings. The results indicated that the cognitive self-instruction group subjects made fewer total responses and higher Response Relevance Scale scores, but they did not differ in the measures directly related to confrontation. (Author)

Developing Counselor Confrontation Skills by a Self-Instructional or Discrimination/Communication Process

Geoffrey G. Yager
Dianne Lobes
Mary V. Witham
University of Cincinnati

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Abstract

Thirty-one prepracticum counselors were assigned randomly to two methods of confrontation skill training: (a) a cognitive self-instructional modeling group and (b) a discrimination/communication training group. The self-instructional group practiced aloud and, later, silently a set of questions designed to identify and to verbalize a discrepancy in a client's thoughts, feelings or behaviors (i.e., to identify and verbalize a confrontation). They also were taught a method to evaluate the confrontation responses they were practicing. The discrimination/communication training group discriminated levels of effective confrontation using Carkhuff's confrontation scale and, subsequently, practiced communication of confrontation responses. Both groups received three hours of group practice and feedback. Assessment of the effects of treatment was carried out through analysis of 15-minute audiotapes made by each subject with a coached client. Dependent measures included total number of responses, number of confrontations, ratings on Carkhuff's confrontation scale, scores on the Multidimensional Confrontation Response Scale, and the Response Relevance Scale ratings. The results indicated that the cognitive self-instruction group subjects made fewer total responses and higher Response Relevance Scale scores, but they did not differ in the measures directly related to confrontation.

Developing Counselor Confrontation Skills by a Self-Instructional or Discrimination/Communication Process

The present research examined the development of one of the more active counseling skills, confrontation. For this study, Cormier and Cormier's (1979) definition of confrontation was used: "a verbal response in which the counselor describes some discrepancy or distortion apparent in the client's message and behavior" (p. 82). Confrontation is an active response initiated by the counselor to stimulate awareness and to encourage self-exploration. The counselor attempts to provide an external, objective, and undistorted statement of the discrepancies in the client's thoughts, feelings, or behaviors. Because a confrontation requires an established relationship of trust between counselor and client, a counselor would generally be ill-advised to employ many confrontations in early sessions with clients.

One of the few investigations addressing confrontation training was the recent study by Beck and Yager (1982) on the effects of three training methods: (a) a control group that discussed types of confrontation and role-played confrontation situations; (b) a discrimination/communication group that practiced rating a variety of responses on the Carkhuff confrontation scale and, later, role-played; and (c) a cognitive self-instructional modeling group that learned a set of questions leading to an appropriate confrontation response, practiced these questions aloud and silently while role-playing, and then,

learned to evaluate confrontations on a 1 - 12 point scale. In both a written and a role-played test of confrontation skills, the subjects in the two training groups outscored those who received the control treatment. In the role-play with a coached client, the two training groups delivered more confrontations than the control group with higher ratings on the Carkhuff confrontation scale and on a scale designed for the study, the Multidimensional Confrontation Response Scale. There were, however, no differences between the self-instructional and the discrimination/communication groups on any of the confrontational measures related to the role-played interview.

In an effort to reassess the possible differential effects of the cognitive self-instructional and discrimination/communication groups, the present investigation repeated the comparison of these two training methods. Since the effectiveness of the treatments compared to a control group receiving no method of evaluation had been established (Beck & Yager, 1982), this study did not include a control group.

Method

Subjects

The subjects were 31 volunteer students enrolled in a master's program prepracticum class. The course was skills-oriented, and students had experienced 16 hours of class (12 hours focused on empathy training) prior to the confrontation treatment. Students were randomly assigned to two groups. Within each

treatment group, students were randomly assigned to a smaller group of four to five students led by an advanced doctoral student supervisor (n=7 supervisors). The doctoral students had also been randomly assigned to help with one of the two treatments.

Procedures

All subjects received 4 hours of training in confrontation over a two-day period. Treatment for both groups began with a general lecture on confrontation and its purposes in a counseling interview. The lecture lasted 45 minutes, and the two groups separated for the first time following the lecture. For the remainder of the two training sessions, the groups met separately, and students were asked not to discuss their activities with members of the other group.

Discrimination/Communication Training Approach. This treatment was an adaptation of Carkhuff's (1969) method for developing the facilitative conditions of counseling. On the first day of training, following the general lecture, students were divided into small groups to discriminate "subtracting" from "adding" confrontations while becoming familiar with Carkhuff's confrontation rating scale (Confrontation in Interpersonal Response Scale; Carkhuff, 1969). By the second training day, the students were expected to communicate the skill of confrontation in role-played interactions. Feedback on these role-plays was provided by a doctoral supervisor and other students. The role-plays employed in both treatment groups were provided for the students in brief, one-page descriptions of a client's concerns with a list

of six possible discrepancies that could be presented. The students did not share this client description before the role-played counseling interaction.

Cognitive Self-Instructional Modeling Training Approach.

This self-instructional approach was initially described by Meichenbaum (1977) and has been successfully applied to the training of empathy (Ochiltree, Yager, & Brekke, 1975; Yager & Beck, 1981). In a manner similar to previous studies, the present cognitive self-instructional modeling incorporated a set of questions designed to structure the student's thinking so that relevant content and feelings of both the client and counselor would be considered prior to stating a confrontation response. The eight questions included the following: (a) What can I pat myself on the back for with regard to this counseling session? (b) What has the client said verbally about feelings? (c) What has the client indicated nonverbally about feelings? (d) How am I (i.e., the counselor) feeling right now? [To this point, the questions are identical to a set of six questions used to develop an empathy response. The next question provides a possible branching to the three specific confrontation response questions or to the remaining two empathy-related cognitions.] (e) Have I identified any client discrepancies through the questions I have just asked myself or through my understanding of the client's discussion? [A "no" response, here, branches back to the last two empathy questions: If I were this client, with this client's background and experience, how might I feel in the situation the

client has described? How can I tie together the feelings I have identified with the content I have heard to make an empathic statement?] (f) Will the client benefit from a confrontation at the present time? [Is there a trusting, caring relationship, and is the timing right?] (g) What will be the content (feelings, thoughts, behaviors), direction (inside or outside counseling), and time focus (present, past, future) elements that I will employ in my confrontation? (h) What will I actually say in my confrontation, using a format of "you say . . . but?"

After listening to the confrontation lecture on the first day of training, the cognitive self-instructional group received an additional lecture on the content of the set of questions and observed a live demonstration in which the counselor "thought aloud" his responses to each of the self-instructional questions. Feedback on the demonstration was provided in terms of identifying the content, direction, and time focus of the counselor's responses. On the second day, students practiced the set of questions in small groups with role-played concerns identical to those employed in the discrimination/communication group. The questions were practiced both out loud and in silence. Since the cognitive process involves silence for several seconds after a client has stopped talking, the doctoral student trainers were insistent that trainees took time to pause during the practice sessions.

Instrumentation

Criterion variables were obtained through ratings of a 15-minute audiotape made by each student in a coached "client"

role-play on the day following completion of the treatment. Five trained, female role-players presented the same concern to each of six randomly assigned counselor trainees. (One trainee counseled a sixth role-player after all other subjects had completed their sessions.) The trainees were told to assume this was their fourth session with the client, and the content of their "earlier discussions" was outlined in a one-page handout. As the client discussed her concerns, she mentioned at least six discrepancies (e.g., "I was just given a raise by my boss, but he really thinks my work is awful."). This was not a typical interview: the client was unusually discrepant in her statements and her views of her problem were rather distorted. Although confrontation is not a skill of value in every counseling situation, it was clearly an appropriate counseling response in the fourth session with this particular client.

The dependent measures included: (a) the frequency of responses offered by the counselor; (b) the frequency of confrontations; (c) mean ratings across all responses on Carkhuff's five-point Confrontation in Interpersonal Process Scale (Carkhuff, 1969) -- this measure rates irrelevant statements as "1," reflections and appropriate empathy as "2," direct statements of the discrepancy as "3," statements of discrepancies with encouragement to explore as "4," and statements of the discrepancy with possible action steps as "5"; (d) mean scores for all confrontation responses on the 12-point Multidimensional Confrontation Response Scale (Beck & Yager, 1982) -- these scores represent both the difficulty of the confrontation and the possible impact that the confrontation may

have upon the client. The multidimensional scale involves three separate ratings that are combined multiplicatively to produce one overall score: "content" of the confrontation (cognition = "1," behavior = "2," affect = "3"), the "direction" (inside the counseling relationship = "1," outside = "2"), and the "time focus" (present = "2," past or future = "1"); and (e) average ratings on the Response Relevance Scale for all responses (Yager & Beck, 1981). This scale also involves three separate ratings that are combined additively to yield one score representing the relevancy of the counselor response: relevance ("5," relevant; "0," irrelevant), feeling content ("3," direct feelings; "1," implied feelings; "0," no feelings), and format ("1," statement; "0," question). Scores on the Response Relevance Scale range from 0 to 9.

Two judges were involved in rating the five dependent measures. One-third of the total sample of audiotapes was rated independently by both raters. Inter-judge reliabilities were acceptably high for all measures (total frequency of response = 1.0; frequency of confrontation = .90; Confrontation in Interpersonal Response Scale = .84; Multidimensional Confrontation Response Scale = .86; and Response Relevance Scale = .84). Given these high interrater reliabilities, it was decided that only one rater was needed. The remainder of the tape ratings were, therefore, split between the two raters. Both raters were blind as to the treatment conditions experienced by the subjects they were rating.

Results

Table 1 contains the means and standard deviations for each

measure in both treatment groups. Since five of the six coached clients role-played for all but one subject, it was decided to analyze the data incorporating the individual coached client as a factor in the design. This necessitated the exclusion of the one subject from the primary analysis. Thus, a 2 X 5 (2 levels of treatment by 5 levels of coached client) multivariate analysis of variance was run on these data.

Insert Table 1 about here

The results of the multivariate analysis are summarized in Table 2. The sole multivariate significance was found in the differences between the two treatments [Multivariate $F(5,16) = 2.99$, $p < .04$]. In order to understand the possible source of this significance, inspection of the univariate analyses of variance become appropriate. The univariate analyses of the treatment comparison are summarized in Table 3. The variables "total response frequency" and "Response Relevance Scale (RRS)" appear to be the greatest contributors to the significant difference obtained between the two treatment groups. In the univariate analyses, the cognitive instructional group scored significantly lower than the discrimination/communication group in the number of responses and significantly higher in RRS ratings.

Insert Tables 2 and 3 about here

Table 4 contains the correlation matrix indicating the interrelationships among the dependent measures in this study. There are very strong positive relationships between Response Relevance, the Carkhuff confrontation scale, and the frequency of

confrontaion. There are also significant inverse relationships between total response frequency and both the Carkhuff confrontation scores and the Response Relevance Scale scores. Finally, there was a significant relationship between total responses and the frequency of confrontation.

Insert Table 4 about here

Discussion

This study has provided additional evidence that one of the more active counseling skills, confrontation, can be developed over a relatively short period of time. The fact that both training groups averaged more than three confrontations during a 15 minute interview is, surely, an indication that subjects had attempted to implement their new learning. Additional evidence for the assertion that confrontation skills had been developed is found in the Beck and Yager (1982) study which included a placebo control group: in a twenty-five minute role-play with a coached client (nearly twice the time allowed in the present investigation), the control subjects averaged below three confrontations.

It was expected that the cognitive self-instructional modeling group would outperform the discrimination/communication group. Although Beck and Yager (1982) had compared these two methods of confrontation training, the present study involved more than twice the number of subjects in each treatment. Given the increased precision of the statistical test with a larger sample, the potential benefits of a systematic thinking process were expected to be demonstrated.

Although the multivariate analysis of variance indicated

a significant difference between the two treatment groups, the differences appeared to come primarily from the two measures that were not directly related to confrontation: the Response Relevance Scale and the total response frequency. The significant measures can be directly related to the differences in the two treatments. Since each group had received empathy training involving a cognitive self-instructional approach, the group of subjects who were taught a branching set of cognitive questions leading to confrontation might well be expected to make counseling statements that are empathy-related. If the branching decision to a confrontation is not made, the cognitive questions should lead the counselor back to developing an empathy response. Since the Response Relevance Scale has been demonstrated to be highly correlated with Carkhuff's empathy ratings (r = .86, Yager & Beck, 1981), the significantly higher RRS scores in the cognitive self-instructional group are consistent with the empathy-branching treatment. The second statistically significant difference on the total response frequency variable is equally logical. Because the cognitive process involves pausing for ten to twenty seconds following a client's statement, the training of the self-instructional group emphasized the importance of silence during the counseling interview. The significantly lower number of counselor responses in the cognitive self-instructional group may well be a direct byproduct of longer periods of silence.

Since the coached client role-play involved a situation where

nearly every client statement presented another possible discrepancy in the client's thoughts, feelings, and behaviors, the lack of significant differences between treatments in the number of confrontations may not be surprising. Subjects were certainly aware that the skill of confrontaion had been emphasized in their training during the two days immediately preceding the role-play, and their instructions to "be as helpful as possible with this client" might likely have been heard as "be confrontive."

The lack of differences in the confrontation rating scales, however, is not easily explained. Essentially, the discrimination/communication group was trained to evaluate their confrontations on the Carkhuff Confrontation in Interpersonal Response Scale (CIRS, Carkhuff, 1969) while the cognitive self-instructional group learned to evaluate themselves on the Multidimensional Confrontation Response Scale (MCRS, Beck & Yager, 1982). Were both groups to confront their clients consistent with the rating scales they had learned, the discrimination/communication group would have tended to encourage the client more directly to explore and change the discrepant issues in their lives (i.e., higher rating levels on the CIPS), and the self-instructional subjects would have offered confrontations that focused more immediately on feelings about the counseling relationship in the "here-and-now" (i.e., higher MCRS ratings). In retrospect, it is the opinion of the authors that the lack of differences on these two scales may well be an indication of appropriate training for both groups: the level of confrontations appeared to fit the

issues presented by the client during the 15-minute role-play. Perhaps a more immediate confrontation would not have tended to be as helpful as the confrontation with an outside emphasis on past events? Maybe a more direct push to explore a discrepancy is not well-timed in the first 15 minutes of an interview? These questions need to be addressed with future research involving larger samples, longer sessions, and, if possible, confrontations with real clients and correlations between confrontation ratings and actual outcome measures. The call for such research, however, is incredibly more easy to make than to produce!

In summary, this study represents an initial step in an attempt to integrate the variety of counseling skills that are often learned and practiced as distinct entities. To this end, the cognitive self-instructional modeling approach employed a branching set of questions in the training of both empathy and confrontation. Although the self-instruction group was not shown to be significantly better on the isolated skill of confrontation, it did demonstrate a stronger carryover of skills from the earlier training in empathy that both groups had received. The cognitive group scored higher in response relevance and lower in total number of responses.

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Table 1

Means ans Standard Deviations for the Two Treatment Groups on all Dependent Measures

Variables	Discrimination/ Communication Group (n = 16)		Cognitive Self-Instruction Group (n = 15)	
	M	SD	M	SD
Total Response Frequency	11.31	2.89	8.47	3.25
Frequency of Confrontation	3.28	2.31	3.53	1.63
Confrontation in Interpersonal Response Scale	2.03	.53	2.34	.42
Multidimensional Confrontation Response Scale	3.12	2.00	2.94	1.13
Response Relevance Scale	5.08	1.67	6.05	1.01

Table 2

Summary of the Multivariate Analysis for Treatment and Individual Coached Client Effects across the Five Dependent Variables*

Source of Variance	d.f.	Multivariate F	p<
Treatment (Cognitive Self-Instruction vs. Discrimination/Communication Training)	5, 16	2.99	.04
Individual Coached Client Variability	20,54.02	1.29	.23
Interaction: Treatment X Individual Client	20,54.02	1.05	.42

* Dependent Variables included (a) total frequency of counselor response, (b) frequency of confrontation, (c) Carkhuff Confrontation in Interpersonal Response Scale, (d) Multidimensional Confrontation Response Scale, and (e) Response Relevance Scale.

Table 3

Summary of Univariate Analyses of Variance for the Treatment Group Comparison

Variable	Hypothesis Mean Square	Error Mean Square	Univariate F	Probability Less Than
Total Response Frequency	53.33	7.60	7.02	.02
Frequency of Confrontation	1.63	3.84	.42	.52
Confrontation in Interpersonal Response Scale	.82	.23	3.50	.08
Multidimensional Confrontation Response Scale	.11	1.80	.06	.81
Response Relevance Scale	9.75	1.84	5.31	.03

Degrees of freedom for hypothesis = 1

Degrees of Freedom for error = 20

Table 4

Correlation Matrix of Dependent Variables

$\underline{n}$ = 31

	Total Response Frequency	Frequency Confront.	CIPS	MCRS	RRS
Total Response Frequency	1.00				
Frequency of Confrontation	-.35*	1.00			
Confrontation in Interpersonal Response Scale (CIPS)	-.43**	.62**	1.00		
Multidimensional Confrontation Response Scale (MCRS)	.13	.22	.05	1.00	
Response Relevance Scale (RRS)	-.32*	.48**	.81**	.16	1.00

* $\underline{p} < .05$

** $\underline{p} < .01$