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A COMPARATIVE PERCEPTION OF COUNSELLOR CHARACTERISTICS
BY PRACTICUM STUDENTS IN A UNIVERSITY SETTING

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INTRODUCTION

Most counselling educators view the supervised practicum experience as one of the most important aspects of the professional training of Counsellors (APA 1952, Truax 1970). The practicum students need to be aware of those **characteristics that could make them effective in their counselling relationship with their respective clients.** The practicum experience, among other things, could provide a "try - out" of such Counsellor characteristics learnt during the counselling training programme.

The methods employed range from listing characteristics, to designing questionnaire to identify such traits and investigation of personality patterns of individuals.

A list of Counsellor Characteristics was issued by the National Vocational Guidance Association (1949) with the following traits suggested as being characteristic of a counsellor; interest in people, patience, sensitivity to other's attitudes and reactions, emotional stability and being trusted by others. The Council of Student Personnel Association in Higher Education (1964) provided

another list of traits, deemed appropriate in College Personnel work. The following traits were recommended, interest in students faith in students' capabilities, understanding of students' aspirations, interest in educational process, good physical and emotional health, willingness to serve others, ability to function at irregular hours, respect for others, patience and sense of humour.

Also, the Association for Counsellor Education and Supervision enumerated six other values required by a Counsellor. These include, belief in each individual human values, alternatess open - mindedness, understanding of self and professional commitment. Other approaches include the use of a Questionnaire Akinboye (1977) in an investigation, found among other things, that an internally consistent instrument for measuring Counsellor Characteristics is possible and that the construct, Counsellor Characteristics exists. Other investigators, in an attempt to identify Counsellor Characteristics, have focused on what Counsellors do, the career patterns they follow, while others have employed sociometric techniques, Arbuckle (1956) and Brown (1960) and the study of personality patterns Cottle and Lewis (1954).

Hypotheses:

In addition to the identification of those Counsellor Characteristics considered to be ideal by the subjects under study, the hypotheses listed below are also being tested.

There is no statistical significant difference in the Ideal Counsellor Characteristics of:

- (a) The undergraduate versus the graduate subject; and
- (b) The male versus the female subjects.

METHOD

Subjects: The Eighty-six subjects in the study were all students, enrolled in a practicum class at the University of Ibadan, in the second semester of 1979/80 session. All the subjects have at least been exposed to Counsellor Characteristics for a semester.

Design

Primarily, this study has been designed to identify those characteristics believed to be ideal to a Counsellor as this could affect the roles to be played by the subjects in their Counselling relationships in future. As a subsidiary, the study has also been designed to provide a base for the understanding and evaluation of acquired skills in the area of Counsellor Characteristics, the assessment of which could lead to further training during the practicum session.

Instrument:

The subjects simply responded to a two item "Open - ended" statements:

- (a) List at least 10 Characteristics of a Counsellor you have learnt during the Counselling programme.
- (b) List at least 10 other Counsellor Characteristics not learnt, but which you consider to be ideal to a Counsellor.

Procedure:

The subjects were instructed to respond to the two items in anonymity but to indicate their sex and academic classification in each instance.

Data Analysis:

From the list of Characteristics suggested in items (a) and (b) Fifteen Characteristics that were frequently mentioned were selected in each instance and the Characteristics were arranged in a descending order as frequently mentioned. The traits mentioned were sorted according to academic classification and sex. Those Counsellor Characteristics **believed** to be ideal in a Counsellor were further tested for statistical significance at .05 level of confidence.

RESULTS

The data from Table 1 reveal that the traits frequently mentioned as being learnt were those in the client - centered theory of Counselling such as empathy, understanding and accepting the client with unconditional positive regard. Other counselling Characteristics in other Counselling theories were mentioned with lesser frequency. The issue of confidentiality, Listening, objectivity and intelligent action on the part of the Counsellor were other traits frequently mentioned. Most of the responding undergraduates mentioned frequently these Characteristics in a descending order: empathy, understanding, listening and confidentiality. Most of the female subjects also mentioned empathy, understanding and tolerance as learnt Characteristics.

The data in Table 2 reveal that friendliness, neatness, tolerance and patience were among the most frequently mentioned characteristics believed to be ideal to a Counsellor. However, more of the responding female students, in comparison to the male students, mentioned friendliness, neatness, tolerance, patience, confidentiality and interest as being part of the ideal Counsellor Characteristics. The data in Table 3 reveal that there was statistical significant difference in the Ideal Counsellor characteristics of the undergraduate versus the graduate subjects. Similarly, statistical significant difference was also observed in the Ideal Counsellor characteristics of the male versus the female subjects.

Table 1

Frequency of Characteristics of Counsellors Learnt, According to Academic Classification and sex

Characteristics	Academic Classification								Response by All Subjects (N = 86)	
	Undergraduates (N = 77)		Graduates (N = 9)		Male (N = 50)		Female (N = 36)			
	Freq.	%	Freq.	%	Freq.	%	Freq.	%	Freq.	%
Empathy	57	74.03	6	66.67	32	64.00	31	86.11	63	73.26
Understanding	36	46.75	6	66.62	22	44.00	20	55.56	42	48.84
Listening	27	35.06	4	44.45	19	38.00	12	33.33	31	36.05
Confidentiality	20	25.97	7	77.78	16	32.00	11	30.66	27	31.40
Tolerance	19	24.68	3	33.33	9	18.00	13	36.11	22	25.58
Acceptance	16	20.78	5	55.56	10	20.00	11	30.56	21	24.42
Unconditional Postive regard	17	22.08	4	44.45	11	22.00	10	27.78	21	24.42
Attentive	16	20.78	3	33.33	12	24.00	7	19.44	19	22.09
Intelligence	15	19.48	2	22.23	11	22.00	6	16.67	13	19.77
Sincere	13	16.88	2	22.23	9	18.00	6	16.67	15	17.44
Sympathetic	12	15.58	3	33.33	10	20.00	5	13.88	15	17.44
Genuine	9	11.69	2	33.33	6	12.00	6	16.67	12	13.95
Non-judgemental	10	12.99	2	22.23	7	14.00	5	13.88	12	13.95
Objective	10	12.99	2	22.23	6	12.00	6	16.67	12	13.95
Friendly	11	14.20	1	11.12	7	14.00	5	13.88	12	13.95

Table II

Frequency of Characteristics Believe to be Ideal in a Counsellor
According to Academic Classification and Sex

Characteristic	Academic Classification				Sex				Response by all Subjects	
	Undergraduates		Graduates		Male		Female			
	Freq.	%	Freq.	%	Freq.	%	Freq.	%	Freq.	%
Friendly	30	38.96	3	33.33	13	26.00	20	55.56	33	38.37
Neatness	25	32.47	2	22.22	11	22.00	16	44.44	27	31.40
Tolerance	17	22.08	3	33.33	9	18.00	11	30.56	20	23.26
Patience	16	20.78	2	22.22	7	14.00	11	30.56	18	20.93
Good interpersonal relationship	14	18.18	1	11.11	9	18.00	6	16.57	15	17.44
Emotional Maturity	14	18.18	1	11.11	11	22.00	4	11.11	15	17.44
Confidentiality	10	12.99	4	44.44	6	12.00	8	22.22	14	16.28
Interest	12	15.58	2	22.22	5	10.00	9	25.00	14	16.28
Kind	12	15.58	1	11.11	5	10.00	8	22.22	13	15.12
Pleasant	11	14.29	2	22.22	6	12.00	7	19.44	13	15.12
Objectivity	10	12.99	2	22.22	7	14.00	5	13.89	12	13.95
Flexibility	10	12.99	1	11.11	3	6.00	8	22.22	11	12.79
Cheerful	10	12.99	-	-	2	4.00	8	22.22	10	11.63
Resouceful	8	10.39	2	22.22	6	12.00	4	11.11	10	11.63
Sincere	9	11.69	1	11.11	4	8.00	6	16.67	10	11.63

Table IIIAnalysis of the Ideal Counsellor Characteristics according to Academic Classification and Sex

Statistics	Academic Classification		Sex	
	Undergraduate	Graduate	Male	Female
M	13.9	1.8	6.9	8.7
SD	5.95	1.14	3.02	4.18
N	15	15	15	15
<u>Comparison</u>	<u>t</u>			
Undergraduate vs Graduate	2.971*			
Male vs Female	1.305*			

* Significant at .05 level of confidence.

DISCUSSION

Apparently, the issue of Counsellor Characteristics has been recognized by Counsellor educators, at the same time, research is showing that the value an individual holds or the conception of what is right or wrong or what is considered as "ideal" could sometimes have implications for the Counsellor in the Counsellor - Client relationship.

Listing the Characteristics learnt during counsellor preparation has its own short-comings for the fact that those Characteristics listed may depend on (1) the skills to which the subjects had been exposed during preparation and (2) the ability of the respondent to recollect those skills at any point in time. However, this approach has its own contribution in a practicum setting as the supervisor can evaluate the

practicum students in the area of Counsellor Characteristics, on the spot.

The data in Table 1 seem to suggest that the subjects under study, had a reasonable grasp of the Counsellor - Characteristics especially in the Client - centered theory of Counselling. Of greater importance is the Counsellor Characteristics thought to be ideal.

What a subject sometimes believes to be characteristics of a counsellor or the conception of the ideal Characteristic of a Counsellor could be a reflection of the individual's values. Rokeach (1968) has defined value as a type of belief system about how one ought, or ought not to behave, or about some end - state of existence worth or not worth attaining. It has also been observed that an individual's value, ideals and beliefs may sometimes suggest guidelines for behaviour in a given situation. Since there is some kind of influence exerted by the Counsellor on the Client in a Counselling situation, knowledge of the Characteristics possessed by the Counsellor, or held as ideal becomes important.

The data in Table 2 seem to reveal that the subjects listed traits usually Characteristics of an individual's behaviour. The ideal Characteristics identified by the subjects seem to contrast in frequency and order in comparison to those Counsellor Characteristics learnt.

Friendliness, neatness, tolerance and patience were frequently mentioned as the ideal Counsellor Characteristic. A possible explanation for the significant difference observed in the characteristics

assumed to be ideal, between the undergraduates and the graduate subjects could be the difference in academic level, if it is further assumed that the graduate subjects because of their training are more likely to evaluate critically any counsellor characteristic before listing it as being ideal, compared to the undergraduate subjects.

Another possible explanation for the significant difference observed in the male and female subjects in reference to the Counsellor - Characteristics assumed to be ideal could be that the female respondents were listing those traits that sometimes characterize women in our society, as more of females have listed attributes like friendliness, neatness, tolerance and kindness. This further suggests that femininity or masculinity may affect one's conception of the ideal characteristic of a counsellor.

Significance of the Study

There seems to be more emphasis, now, in the counsellor-client relationship rather than the technique employed or the skills of the counsellor, the proponents of this view seem to argue that no particular counselling technique has all the answers to a problem and the counsellor with relevant skills could turn a client away, if a poor counsellor - client relationship exists.

This study, has evaluated those counsellor characteristics that are likely to intervene in a counselling relationship, with the assumption that each helper sometimes establishes in his or her own counselling relationship, some notions as to how he or she can better help the client. A critical analysis of the counsellor characteristics, innate or learnt could lead to effective counselling when those

characteristics assumed to be necessary in a counselling relationship are brought to open and encouraged during the practicum experience.

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