

# CONSTRUCT VALIDITY OF THE CORE CONDITIONS AND FACTOR STRUCTURE OF THE CLIENT EVALUATION OF COUNSELOR SCALE

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**ABSTRACT.** *The Client Evaluation of Counselor Scale (CECS) was developed by the author and used to obtain 135 client's evaluations of their counselor's in-session attitudes and behaviors, along with client's reported satisfaction with their counseling experience. Practicum/internship counselors (n = 35) participating in the study represented themselves as preferring a variety of theoretical orientations. For purposes of the present report, clients' evaluations of the core conditions (as defined by specific CECS items) were appraised with regard to the variables with which they were most highly correlated. Global profiles of an understanding/empathic, an accepting/unconditionally positively regarding, and a genuine counselor were derived from statistical data on face valid and content valid items as revealed by clients' reports. These core condition profiles compare well with traditional conceptualizations of the core conditions. Twelve empirically-factored counselor styles/dimensions were identified; most included both theory specific and non-specific variables (survey items); and all correlated significantly with counseling outcome. Results are compared and contrasted with current research on counseling process and outcome, with person-centered concepts in particular addressed. The present research provides support for the views that multifarious therapist approaches are correlated with positive client outcomes; that person-centered characteristics appear to be especially strong correlates of client positive outcome; and that perhaps the most significant component of both counselor embodiment of the core conditions and client positive outcome is the client's perception of the therapist as a well-adjusted person.*

## **Introduction**

The core therapeutic conditions of psychotherapy and personality change postulated by Carl Rogers (1957; 1959)-- to include empathy, unconditional positive regard, and genuineness-- have earned the reputation of being necessary ingredients in virtually all psychotherapeutic systems (c.f., Patterson & Welfel, 1999). Lambert and Cattani-Thompson

(1996), along with Miller, Duncan, and Hubble (1997), have presented outcome study reviews that recognize the core conditions as the most consistently identified characteristics of therapeutic success in general.

In addition to his postulates concerning the necessary and sufficient conditions, Rogers advocated a “revolutionary,” non-directive therapeutic stance that emerged from both empirical analysis of forward movement of recorded therapy cases, along with his growing conviction in the self-actualization and fundamental-actualization tendencies (Rogers & Dymond, 1954). Meta-analytic outcome study results are harmonious with Rogers’ non-directive position in their support for extra-therapeutic factors-- that is-- elements of clients’ lives not directly attributable to counseling that promote therapeutic gains (Lambert & Cattani-Thompson, 1996; Miller, Duncan, & Hubble, 1997). Comparative theory and research too, have supported trustworthiness of a fundamental principle of individual self-directedness and subjective, relativistic experiencing of reality (e.g., Goldstein, 1940).

Caveats to evaluating therapeutic effectiveness across numerous studies include the variability of types of research questions asked, measurements used, and methods of data collection. Sexton (1996) has reported that in 258 different studies using specific instruments to measure outcome, 297 different instruments were used, that outcome measures pertained to a) presenting problem change, b) general behavior change/adjustment, or c) satisfaction with counseling; and that assessments used a) client self-report, b) counselor rating, c) outside rating, or d) multiple methods.

A tendency appears for therapists to evaluate their clients’ therapeutic progress more highly than do their clients themselves (Horenstein, Houston, & Holmes, 1973; Patterson & Welfel, 1999) suggesting that therapy success is perhaps not best measured using a unidimensional, therapist rating. Indeed, client evaluations of the therapy relationship tend to be more highly correlated with outcome than are their therapist’s relationship ratings (Hovarth & Luborsky, 1993; Orlinsky, Grawe, & Parks, 1994). The problem of therapist inflation of effectiveness ratings has repeatedly been cited as a limitation of research evaluations conducted by therapists with a stake in the outcome. Furthermore, with regard to research on the core conditions specifically, clients and independent raters tend to evaluate therapy relationship factors of empathy, unconditional positive regard and genuineness differently (Bozarth & Grace, 1970; Hansen, Moore, & Carkhuff, 1968).

The present study sought to evaluate the existence of various types, or factors, or dimensions of counselor’s attitudes and behaviors *as perceived by the client*, and to identify whether those specific factors were correlated with client’s self-reported satisfactory counseling experiences. In addition, correlations between the three Client Evaluation of Counselor Scale (CECS) items paralleling Rogers’ core therapeutic conditions (i.e., understanding, acceptance, and genuineness) and all other items permitted an empirical understanding of core condition dimensionality as perceived by clients. Finally, relationships between the degree to which client’s perceive their therapist to possess or exhibit various characteristics and client global outcome were examined.

## Methods

### Participants.

Participants for the study can be divided into two groups, 1) the counselors; and 2) the clients. Counselor participants in the study were 35 master's candidates working in their practicum/internship placements at various sites, including community mental health agencies, college counseling centers, family mental health clinics, and criminal justice facilities. Counselors all received permission to survey their clients from their respective agencies. Each counselor completed a counselor consent form, and also used a client consent form for their clients that was derived for the study (or supplemented the latter with an agency approved consent form). Client consent forms were filed in client charts, while counselor consent forms were retained by the researcher. A short counselor data form completed by each counselor revealed information about counselor age, gender, theoretical preference, and number of years experience in counseling (See Table 1). For calculating years experience, one (1) was assigned for counselors with no prior counseling experience who were training in their internship year.

In addition to completing their counselor evaluations using the Client Evaluation of Counselor Scale (CECS) instrument (see Materials below), clients reported their age, gender, and the approximate number of sessions that they had with their counselor (See Table 1). They were presented with the CECS at or near their final session, either in-person or through the mail.

**Table 1. Counselor and Client Characteristics**

	Summary statistics		
	<u>M</u>	<u>SD</u>	<u>n</u>
Counselor			
Age	33.87	8.21	83
No. Years Experience	2.89	2.92	135
Client			
Age	23.16	9.05	132
Number of Sessions	9.23	7.71	120

Preferred theoretical orientations of counselors participating in the study appear in Table 2. That the sample of counselors identifies largely with humanistic/existential/person-centered theories can largely be explained by the person-centered orientation of the researcher who supervised the majority of counselor interns participating in the study.

**Table 2. Theoretical Orientation Preferences of Counselors.**

	Females	Males	Total Sample
Humanistic	56	1	57
Psychoanalytic	9	0	9
Cognitive Behavioral	28	14	42
Eclectic	18	7	25

Counselor preferred theoretical orientation was significantly different for the sexes, with males being “over represented” in the cognitive behavioral and eclectic domains ( $\chi^2(3, 133) = 21.77, p > .001$ ).

### Materials.

The CECS consists of three response categories relevant to: 1) environment and structures of the setting (e.g., “the referral to my counselor took too long”) (six items); 2) counselor knowledge, skill and attitude (i.e., including non-specific and theory-specific counselor behaviors and characteristics) (49 items); and 3) value of client’s experience in counseling (e.g., “I considered counseling to be helpful to me,” and “I felt satisfied with how the relationship ended”) (nine items). Items on the CECS were rationally generated by surveying related measures, by eliciting characteristics of an effective and ineffective counselor from a focus group of counselors, and by drawing on the counseling text book literature. Researchers and clinicians may freely use the CECS appearing in Appendix 1 with the proviso that the scale author be provided with reports on its findings. The factor structure on all three sections of the CECS can be considered statistically sound, as shown in the results section below.

### Procedures.

Counselors recruited for the study consisted primarily of masters-in-training candidates supervised by the researcher or an associate during the students supervised counseling experience, or internship. Several trainees had various years of counseling experience prior to the internship year, although most were novice counselors. As seen in the CECS directions, clients were recruited in the context of a request for evaluative feedback to benefit counselor future helpfulness, to evaluate effectiveness, and to evaluate performance. Both counselor and client participation was voluntary, and all data has been kept confidential.

## Results And Discussion.

### The CECS Factor Structure.

Preliminary statistical analyses yielded a solid factor structure on each the three CECS sections (i.e., setting, counselor characteristics, and value of the counseling experience) (see

results below), providing some reassurance as to the value of examining interrelationships between and among the CECS items and factors.

The first set of results pertains to the factor structure of the CECS (see Table 3). Of particular importance for this discussion is evidence for multifarious therapy styles/dimensions as seen within Factor II, Counselor Characteristics as Perceived by the Client. It is important that readers interpret correlations between the nine reverse-score items (3, 6, 7, 10, 11, 14, 27, 42, 49) in their inverted meaning, so that a negative correlation with one of these items is viewed as a positive relationship between the comparison variable and the originally worded item. (Refer to Appendix A for item list.)

**Table 3. Factor Structure of the Client Evaluation of Counselor Scale**

Factor Description and Labels	Factor > E = 1.00	<u>E</u>
<b>I. <u>Environment And Structures Of The Setting</u></b>		
Facilitativeness of Setting	Factor 1 = All Items	E = 6.92
Accessibility	Factor 2 = (-)1,6(+),4,5	E = 1.54
<b>II. <u>Counselor Characteristics As Perceived By Client</u></b>		
Total Counselor Characteristics (.48)*	Factor 1 = <u>Not</u> 6,23,26,29,48	E = 16.16
Core Conditions + Expert Directive (.41)	Factor 2 = (-) 1,6,7,9,10, 13,48 (+) 17,28,34,46,47,49	E = 3.28
Core Conditions + Confront & Advise (.54)	Factor 3 = (-) 2,5,23,26,28,44 (+)17,28,34,46,47,49	E = 1.99
Apathy and Superficiality (.47)	Factor 4 = (-) 11, 23,33,34,40,41 (+) 43	E = 1.88
“Tough Love” (.75)	Factor 5 = (-) 39(+), 3,4,16	E = 1.66
Realness with Boundaries (.67)	Factor 6 = (-) 2,37(+), 22,30	E = 1.61
Expert Confrontational (.56)	Factor 7 = (-) 26,48(+), 35,45	E = 1.56
Structuring (.69)	Factor 8 = (+) 20,21,45	E = 1.32
Competent, Caring, and Involved (.40)	Factor 9 = (-) 23(+), 9,10	E = 1.30
Laissez Faire v. Invested/Present (.33)	Factor 10 = (-) 14(+), 23	E = 1.23
Discomforting and Interpretive (.54)	Factor 11 = (-) 3 (+) 19	E = 1.10
Interested and Respectful (.39)	Factor 12 = (-) 11 (+) 6	E = 1.06
<b>III. <u>Client-Rated Outcome Experiences</u></b>		
Global Outcome Rating	Factor 1 = All 9 Items	E = 18.23
Helpful, Valuable, and Pleasant	Factor 2 = (-) 1,3,6(+), 2,5,8	E = 1.46

\*correlations in parentheses next to factor labels represent correlations between the factor and the global outcome score.

Apparent when examining the Counselor Characteristics As Perceived By Client Factor (II) are one (1) total scale factor, and eleven (11) counseling style/dimension factors. A review of specific items contained in the 11 factors (see Table 3 and Appendix A) reveals that most client-perceived therapist styles/dimensions contain both theory-specific and non-specific elements (items).

### Client-Perceived Therapist Style/Dimension Relationship with Global Outcome.

Table 3 shows that Factor III: Global Outcome, can be expressed as the sum total of all nine items representing various therapy evaluation elements (e.g., helpful, would pay for, would recommend, would enter again, felt comfortable, satisfied with ending) (See Appendix A). All nine loaded on the Global Outcome Factor (Factor III), at  $p \geq .001$ . In other words, client's global outcome scores are significantly and positively correlated with all 11 counselor characteristic factors. Table three shows that there is a range of correlations between counsel or characteristics (Factor II) and global outcome (Factor III), from .33 on Factor II-10, to .75 on Factor II-5. Although this finding may be surprising and perhaps even distressing to therapists who would prefer to see their specific therapy style come out on top, the data here as well as in the below section are consistent with reports on therapy effectiveness irrespective of theoretical orientation. This is not to say that it is never wise nor relevant to consider which therapy, which therapist, which client, and under which conditions (Paul, 1967). Indeed, considerations of this nature are likely to explain at least some of the variation in the correlations between style and outcome identified in the above Table 3.

### Counselor Theory Preference Relationship with Global Outcome.

As seen in Table 4's ANOVA report, counselor theory preference did not significantly correlate with client-reported global outcome ( $F(3, 115) = .118; p = .95$ ) Taken together with the above results, inferential evidence exists in favor of the proposition that significant portions of the variance in psychotherapy outcome can be accounted for by client-therapist relationship and by extra-therapeutic factors, rather than by specific therapist behaviors or theoretical affiliation.

**Table 4. Theoretical Orientation and Clients' Global Positive Experience Ratings (N = 84)**

Theory Orientation	Mean	SD	n
Humanistic/Existential/Person-Centered	371	84	36
Cognitive/Behavioral/Reality	372	62	24
Psychoanalytic/Object Relations	345	108	4
Eclectic	369	81	20

Note. Extracted from ANOVA Counselor Sex X Theoretical Orientation on Client Global Outcome Scores ( $SS = 2764; df = 3,79; MS = 921; F = .15; p = .93$ ).

The present sample of relatively novice counselors revealed no significant ANOVA effects with regard to any of the 11 counselor characteristic styles/dimensions and their relationship to stated theoretical preference ( $p$ 's ranged from .11 to .89;  $M = .56$ ). Lest it be concluded that no practical differences emerged, it should be mentioned that some evidence for theory-based practice differences are evident in the data, for instance, the psychoanalytic group tended to be least structured ( $p = .11$ ). A larger and more diverse sample would be useful for understanding theoretical practice differences and their relationships with client outcomes. Follow-up research in this area may be a prudent response to Fiedler's (1950) classic but now half-century old report on veteran and novice counselor therapy practice

differences. Future research could replicate the current study on client-perceived styles/dimensions with samples of veteran therapists practicing from specific theoretical orientations.

Further evidence that therapy produces positive outcomes regardless of therapist style was seen by examining simple correlations between all Factor II items and the sum of Factor III items. All but six Factor II items correlated significantly with global outcome ( $p \geq .001$ ). Moreover, all 11 Counselor Characteristic Style/Dimension Factors correlated significantly with Global Outcome ( $p$  values range from .006 to .000;  $Mp = .0008$ ).

### Construct Validity of the Core Conditions.

After evaluating the factor structure of the CECS, correlates of the core conditions were reviewed. A .50 cut-off was used for inclusion of correlates. More traditional cutoff scores (e.g., .01, or  $r = .30$ ) would have produced longer lists of interrelationships, but parsimony seemed necessary given the pilot status of the CECS instrument, along with the error probable in identifying such a large number of correlates. Thus, the selection of a .50 cutoff was artificially, though rationally based. Table 5 presents the core conditions correlates.

**Table 5. Correlates of Understanding, Acceptance, and Genuineness.**

Empathy (Item 12)			Acceptance (Item 7)			Genuineness (Item 22)		
#	Item	<i>r</i>	#	Item	<i>r</i>	#	Item	<i>r</i>
38	Well Adjusted	.66	1	Available	.62	42	Well Educated	.52
42	Highly Educated	.61	38	Well Adjusted	.61	38	Well Adjusted	.52
27	Helped w/Goals	.61	13	Patient	.56	25	Listened Intently	.52
13	Patient	.60						
21	Explained Process	.60						
25	Listened Intently	.59						
14	Enjoyed Me	.58						
15	Assisted Progress	.56						
24	New Ways	.56						
8	Knowledgeable	.54						
5	Shared Personal	.53						
20	Provided Direction	.52						
39	Supported Me	.50						

Table 5 results suggest that a principle element defining client's perceptions of the therapist as understanding, accepting, and genuine is the perceived well-adjustment of the counselor. This finding supports Sanford's (Cohen & Sanford, 1998) notion that the core conditions are an inseparable construct defined by the total way of being of the therapist in relationship with the client. These correlational results might be taken to mean that well-adjusted counselors demonstrate the core conditions, or perhaps, that in the presence of the core conditions, counselors are seen as well-adjusted. Either interpretation converges on Bozarth's (1998) conclusion that "the core condition is us." The relevance of a perceived well-adjustment of the counselor can be thought to intersect with the previously reported findings that specific therapist styles/dimensions and particular theory preference is not statistically related to global outcome.

In addition to appearing as a significant correlate with all three core conditions, “Appeared to be a Well Adjusted Person” emerged as the highest single item correlation with client global outcome ( $r = .78$ ,  $R^2 = .61$ ). Further exploratory interest led the researcher to discover that in the sample surveyed, the highest correlates with “well adjusted” (exceeding  $r = .60$ ) included items that focus largely on qualities consistent with person-centered attitudes: 25-listened intently (.74); 39-supported my attempts to change (.71); 14-enjoyed being with me (.64); 42-seemed highly educated/trained (.64); 15-assisted my progress toward achieving goals (.60); and 32-was open and honest (.60). Setting the cut-off at  $r = .50$ , a greater mix of attitudinal and behavioral correlates of perceived well-adjustment appear: 13-was patient (.57); 24-suggested new ways to view situations (.55); 31-kept a professional demeanor (.57); 27-helped me to achieve my goals (.53); 37-praised my accomplishments (.53); 1-available to meet regularly (.52); and 8-knowledgeable (.52). Future research may benefit from conducting stepwise regressions to help explain the chief sources of variance on the adjustment factor.

### Single Highest Item Correlates with Global Outcome Scores.

The top five correlates of client’s self-reported global outcome (which includes counselor’s perceived well-adjustment) appear in Table 6.

**Table 6. Highest Five Counselor Characteristic Correlates with Client Global Outcome.**

#	Item	r	Person-Centered Construct Comparison
38	Well Adjusted	.78	Combined Core Conditions (Sanford, 1998)
12	Understanding	.73	Empathy
13	Patient	.70	Acceptance
25	Listened Intently	.70	Empathic Acceptance (Braaten, 1999)
20	Provided Direction	.69	Structure (Patterson, 1996)

That the characteristic “well-adjustment” emerges as the strongest single item correlate with client’s global outcome scores (Table 6), and is significantly correlated with the three CECS items paralleling Rogers’ (1957) core conditions (Table 3) substantiates the counselor educator/supervisor requirement for trainee examination and relative resolution of personal conflicts. From a person-centered perspective, Sanford’s (1998) description of Rogers’ therapeutic framework, that is, an integrated interpersonal process sustained by inseparable and usually indistinct relationships between the core conditions (here, as perceived), might both explain and be explained by the “well adjustment” process. One might digress or regress from the process during times of distraction or conflict, etc., and thus be more deliberate and focused in a particular core principle.

The next three highest correlates with global outcome (see Table 6) specifically relate to Rogers’ core therapeutic conditions, while the fifth highest correlate, that of providing direction for the sessions can be thought to represent a) therapist boundaries as a dimension of congruence *as a therapist*, and b) the therapists respect for the safety of the client-- who is by



counseling process definition in a necessarily more vulnerable position (Timulak, 1999; Rogers, 1959), and perhaps c) the therapists respect for concrete communication of the client's experience/subjective field (Carkhuff, 1967; Patterson, 1996), so that the direction of a session is provided through the as-if reflective attitude.

### Boundaries, Structure, and Trust in the Self-Actualizing Tendency.

The present study supports the view that client outcome is positively influenced by client's perceptions of their counselor maintaining boundaries (Factor I-3 and I-6) and structuring the therapy (Factor I-8; Factor II-20). In person-centered therapy, therapist trust in self actualizing processes for both self and client will ordinarily be manifested in the therapist's genuine communications relating to "immediacy" experiencing of the client and the therapist-client relationship. Although a blurring of boundaries and a breakdown in structure is a risk inherent in the non-directive process, the essentiality of entering the client's phenomenal field will at times make the *non-directive process* breach the as-if condition, yielding to the *non-directive condition* (What is not lost, cannot be found). Indeed, a dutiful respect for the client's phenomenology continues to exist as the fundamental, distinctive, sometimes misunderstood paradigmatic feature of the revolutionary force that is (inherent in) the person-centered approach.

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## APPENDIX A

## The Client Evaluation of Counselor Scale

Completion of this form is voluntary, and responses are anonymous, so please do not put your name on it. This evaluation form is intended for the counselor to receive input from you regarding your experience in counseling. The answers you provide will be used by the counselor to consider his or her work as a counseling professional, and where appropriate, to make modifications in her/his work to benefit future clients. In some instances forms may be included by the counselor in evaluation materials. Your answers may also be used for the purposes of research on counseling process and effectiveness. Please take the time to respond to the questions below as honestly as you can. Read questions carefully because they are not all worded in the same direction (e.g., some refer to desirable behaviors, and some to undesirable ones). If an item seems to not be applicable to you, or you don't know the answer, mark it "N/A."

Sex: F \_\_\_ M \_\_\_ Age \_\_\_\_\_  
 Approximate # of sessions with counselor \_\_\_\_\_  
 Who referred you \_\_\_\_\_

## PART I. Evaluating your site and getting started:

## RATING SCALE

	Strongly Disagree		Neutral			Strongly Agree		
1. The space was easy enough to get to	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	N/A
2. The space where we met was comfortable	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	N/A
3. The receptionist was courteous	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	N/A
4. The referral to my counselor took too long	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	N/A
5. There was too much "red tape" involved in being seen at the agency/center	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	N/A
6. I was able to leave messages for my counselor when I needed to	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	N/A

## PART II. Evaluating your counselor:

1. Available to meet regularly	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	N/A
2. Accessible outside of sessions when needed	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	N/A
3. Uncomfortable to be with	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	N/A
4. Trusted to keep my confidentiality	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	N/A
5. Not trusted enough to share very personal aspects of myself	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	N/A
6. Disrespectful of me	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	N/A
7. Accepting of me as a person	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	N/A
8. Knowledgeable	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	N/A
9. Incompetent	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	N/A
10. Uncaring	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	N/A
11. Interested in what I had to say	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	N/A
12. Understanding of me	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	N/A
13. Impatient with me	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	N/A
14. Enjoyed being with me	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	N/A
15. Assisted my progress toward achieving goals	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	N/A
16. Pushed me to discover solutions	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	N/A
17. Encouraged me to set goals	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	N/A
18. Challenged my self contradictions	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	N/A
19. Looked for underlying reasons to explain my behavior	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	N/A
20. Provided direction for our sessions	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	N/A
21. Explained the process of counseling from the	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	N/A
22. Appeared to be genuine	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	N/A



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