Effect of Student Therapists’ Interpersonal Competence on an Initial Interview

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THERAPISTS’ PSYCHOLOGICAL WELL-BEING positively influences the treatment process and outcome, according to some studies (e.g., Beutler, Crago, & Arizmendi, 1986). Their level of social adjustment affects their handling of the therapeutic relationship (Bergin & Soloman, 1970) and clients’ emotion and behavior (Donner & Schonfield, 1975). Barron (1963) also indicated that people with a high level of interpersonal competence were emotionally stable and socially responsive. Thus, it is hypothesized that therapists’ interpersonal competence exerts a direct influence on the therapeutic process and outcome and that those therapists with high interpersonal competence are more effective therapists. The purpose of the present study was to evaluate the effect of student therapists’ interpersonal competence on an initial interview, while at the same time controlling for possible confounding effects of their ages and actual experience, which, as suggested by Beutler et al. (1986), are salient factors in most psychological treatment procedures.

The clients consisted of 40 male and 40 female American college students with a mean age of 22.19 years. They were recruited to participate in interviews in which they discussed one to three problems that they felt they were facing. The student therapists were 25 male and 15 female third-year American doctoral students (mean age, 31.25 years) in clinical, counseling, or behavioral medicine programs in the psychology department of the same university. All the therapists had completed two years of practicum training, with a mean of 2.35 years of actual experience in interviewing or counseling.

Student therapists first completed the Interpersonal Competency Scale (Holland & Baird, 1968) and some demographic items. The second and third

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