

IS COGNITION SUFFICIENT?

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(On May 14-17, 1967 a conference on Counseling Theories and Counselor Education was held at Onamia, Minnesota. George A. Kelly was scheduled to present his position on psychotherapy. He had requested that I respond to his paper. However, shortly before the conference he died. Leon H. Levy replaced him. This paper is a response to Dr. Levy's paper titled "Fact and Choice in Counseling and Counselor Education: A Cognitive Viewpoint". Levy's paper is published in the book reporting the conference edited by Clyde Parker -- see references. It is felt that my paper can stand alone, so it is included here.)

The paper by Dr. Levy presenting a cognitive viewpoint in counseling created in me a state of cognitive dissonance. The viewpoint is inconsistent with my theory and approach to counseling. And since I abhor inconsistency (which I do not believe must be pathognomic or pathogenic), I must do something about it. There must be some way of reconciling (apparent) differences between honest and intelligent individuals; after all, neither can be wrong.

But was it cognitive dissonance that I experienced, or was it affect arousal? Is cognitive dissonance entirely cognitive, or is it always associated with, or followed by, affect?

Is man a rational being, or is he essentially a rationalizing being, using reason in the service of affect and emotion? Are choices and decisions essentially rational, based upon logical analysis of the problem and alternative solutions, or are choices and decisions influenced by feelings and emotions? Are psychological problems the same as scientific problems, to be solved through logical analysis?

The answers to these questions should be obvious. At least they are to me although I do not claim to be a completely rational being and admit to rationalizing. It would seem to me obvious that counseling is not a rational or logical process, or the application of rational, logical procedures with a client and his problems. Nevertheless, this is a widely held concept, at any rate among a certain segment of counselors. Perhaps--and this may be a new insight to me--it is this concept of counseling which leads to the insistence on differentiating between counseling and psychotherapy. But if counseling is differentiated from psychotherapy on the basis of being a process of rational problem solving and decision making--or, as Weitz (1964) proposes, developing problem-solving skill--then it becomes difficult if not impossible to differentiate counseling from teaching, or individual tutoring. If counseling is not psychotherapy, is counseling then not teaching? It appears that the concept of counseling as a cognitive or rational process is prevalent among academically oriented counselors and counselor educators, including the University counseling center staff, and counselor educators whose background is in education, with little or no psychology. Levy seems

to accept this concept of counseling when he says that counseling becomes "another exercise in problem solving and creativity. It becomes educational rather than remedial or clinical...." What about the client who requires no education, or even reeducation, but needs to find out who he is, what the meaning of life is or could be for him, how to reduce the discrepancy between what he is and what he wants to be or can be, how to get rid of crippling feelings and attitudes?

It is, of course true that cognition is receiving increasing attention. Perhaps it has, in the recent past, been underemphasized in the study of behavior and in education. But, in the characteristic manner of human beings, the pendulum may be swinging too far in this direction. Some counselors may be so sensitive to trends and so fearful of being left behind that, to mix a metaphor, they are jumping on the pendulum and being swung into outer space.

Now, of course, psychologists, as scientists, claim to be rational and objective. But it is interesting to note the affective strength with which this claim is defended. I have been impressed, incidentally and parenthetically, with the feeling with which editorial reviewers of psychological journals condemn an author for showing his feelings and values.

The neocognitivists, to coin a word, have the new look. That is, they recognize the influence of perception (which has affective elements) on cognition, and Levy makes it clear that "the facts" are not the objective facts sought by Sergeant Friday. His is not a "naïve realism" but actually a phenomenological viewpoint: "to either understand, predict, or modify the behavior of an individual in a situation it is necessary to know the meaning of that situation to him. To know the facts of a person's existence, that is, we must first know the ways in which he codes his experience." Facts do not, then, exist in some external world or constitute an external reality; they are constructed, or created, by the individual. Facts are the perceptions, concepts, meanings, attitudes, constructs, beliefs, etc, held by the individual. This is a phenomenological position. If one understands that "fact," as used by Levy in his description of the counseling process, is the meaning of the situation to the client, one can accept, at least in part, his statement that "The counselor is expected to help the client consider all the facts, distinguishing: between relevant and irrelevant facts, accept them, and make the most of life in the face of these facts." One might substitute "meanings" or "perceptions," then, for "facts." But when one does that, it becomes apparent that the statement does not describe all of counseling, since it is possible, and perhaps desirable, that meanings and perceptions should change as a result of counseling. Thus, counseling does not accept facts as immutable, to be accepted and adjusted to by the client.

COGNITIONS AND 'FACTS'

The question which arises when one uses the term "facts" in this way is whether counseling is, or can be, a purely cognitive process. To apply the term "fact" may give it the appearance of a cognitive process, but the definition of fact given by Levy suggests that it is only an appearance, based upon the use of a word associated with cognition but not, as defined, necessarily a purely cognitive term, as witness the cognates which are suggested: "meanings," "concepts," "perceptions," etc. Are such "facts," or perceptions or meanings, affect free, or rationally determined? The new "look" in perception, dating back to the study of Postman, Bruner, and McGinnies (1948) on personal values as selective factors in perception, makes it clear that perception is not a purely cognitive process but involves affect as well. Facts are not entirely

objectively determined and thus cannot be treated as objective and impersonal, or apart from the emotions of the individual. Levy, of course, recognizes this.

Man is not a rational being, living in a "real" world of "facts." He is an affective, rationalizing being living in a phenomenological world which he in a sense created and to which he gives meanings--and the meanings are influenced by his feelings and emotions. The fact of man's nonrationality is clearly demonstrated in his persistent claim to being rational in the face of overwhelming evidence that he is not rational.*

The individual is a unitary organism, with cognitive, conative, and affective aspects, none of which can be divorced from each other and dealt with separately. Therefore, any approach to counseling or psychotherapy must recognize the affective nature of man.

This view, long accepted in education, is epitomized in the statements that the whole child comes to school and that teachers teach pupils, not subject matter. If the affective factors are important in subject matter learning, are they not more important in the learning that occurs in counseling or psychotherapy, with its infinitely greater ego involvement? The difference is belittled by those who attempt to emphasize the similarity of teaching and counseling. Representative of their attitude is the slogan that teaching and counseling are alike except that the subject matter of teaching consists of academic disciplines while the subject matter of counseling is the client himself, the implication being that this difference is not significant. I have sometimes suggested, perhaps minimizing similarities for the sake of emphasizing the differences, that the greatest similarity of counseling and teaching is that both make use of a fifty-minute hour.

There are, of course, similarities, since both deal with a total human being. Education recognizes the importance of the affective aspect of the person. Perhaps it may be contended that many approaches to counseling or psychotherapy do not adequately recognize the cognitive aspects. The difference between teaching and psychotherapy may be essentially one of emphasis, with teaching emphasizing cognitive learning while recognizing the influence of affective factors, and psychotherapy emphasizing affective change while recognizing cognitive factors. In the client with deep personal problems, however, affective factors overshadow cognitive factors, and the counselor must recognize and deal with these. Rational thinking and behavior may be a goal of counseling, but it may be that once the affective factors are dealt with the client will need little if any help in working through the cognitive aspects of his problems. Yet peculiarly Levy seems not to accept greater rationality as a goal of counseling: ". . . it is not rationality that the counselor is after in helping his client, but a better conceptual scheme." A rational approach to counseling or psychotherapy must be one which recognizes and deals with the affective and nonrational nature of man. Counselors must *feel* with their clients rather than *think* with them.

* Nicholas Hobbs (Sources of gain in psychotherapy, *American Psychologist*, 1962, 17, 18-34), in discussing the strength of the belief in the efficiency of insight, relates it to "our strong general commitment to rationality in problem solving. As F. S. C. Northrop has pointed out, western culture (in spite of its immense irrationalities) has a deeply ingrained rational component. For us reason is a faith. From earliest childhood we are taught to apply rational principles to the solution of many kinds of problems"

The importance of the atmosphere in counseling is its relationship to the affective aspects of the client's problem. The therapeutic atmosphere is anxiety reducing, desensitizing the client's emotional reactions to his experiences. It is nonthreatening, leading to self-exploration, or dealing with affect-laden ego-involving ideas. Absence of threat, and the accompanying reduction of anxiety, has been demonstrated to lead to greater exploration and improved problem solving in noncounseling situations and to client self-exploration and therapeutic personality change in counseling (Truax 1963). Thus, Levy's statement that the client will be more receptive to the facts of his life and be guided by them in an unthreatening, accepting, and warm atmosphere, though intuitively plausible, but apparently not demonstrated, is simply not true.

The virtues of inconsistency seem to be overrated by Levy. If, as the aphorism says, consistency is the virtue of simple minds, then our greatest scientists have been simpletons. Inconsistencies certainly exist, and we must accept some, but the acceptance of all can lead to passivity. Refusal to accept inconsistencies is the source of discovery and scientific advancement. Levy misreads history if he feels that it is inconsistency which reflects growth. It is the refusal to accept inconsistency itself, and certainly not its acceptance, that results in growth. There is a need for consistency in human beings, perhaps constituting or including the need for self-consistency or the need for integration. The striving for consistency, the reduction of apparent contradictions, leads to the development of theories and systems which in turn spur investigations and experiments designed to test hypotheses of consistencies. In addition, while a moderate amount of inconsistency may constitute a challenge and lead to growth, great inconsistency may constitute a threat and lead to disturbance.

Interestingly, Levy presents a dualism in his approach to counseling. On the one hand, he points out that the client needs help because he has run out of alternatives, which the counselor must supply. Yet, at the same time, he states that "Most importantly, (the client) needs to learn a new stance in relation to his experience, a different perspective so that he can find his way out of the box he is in." Thus, it seems, it is not so much new knowledge as new perceptions which are necessary; counseling is not the suggestion of new alternatives by the counselor but the emerging of new alternatives in the client as a result of his new perceptions. Again, "it is not additional information that is required as often as it is additional ways of interpreting information." While Levy apparently considers this a highly cognitive process, it appears to be one involving feelings and emotions.

COUNSELOR AND CLIENT

The problem of counseling or psychotherapy, then, is not getting the client to think differently but getting him to feel differently. In fact, it may be suggested that the way to get people to think differently is to get them to feel differently, and thus to perceive differently. One need only consider the different thinking of the depressed and the manic individual to recognize the influence of affect on perception and thinking. One does not try to change thinking in counseling, therefore, but to change feelings and perceptions. The achievement of this change is not by means of information giving, analysis of alternatives, teaching problem solving, or applying logic, but through providing a safe, secure, nonthreatening relationship in which self-exploration and changes in perception can occur. The counselor does not--indeed, cannot--change the facts or

perceptions of the client. Only the client can do so. The counselor can facilitate--or hinder--the process, however. Intervention of the cognitive kind, I suggest, hinders rather than facilitates perceptual change. It may facilitate the solution of essentially cognitive problems, or assist in the making of choices in which affective factors are minimal. But this, it is proposed, is not counseling, but teaching, and probably not what most clients who need and want counseling require.

The cognitive approach apparently has little confidence in the client. The client cannot be depended on to solve his own problems or effect his own change. The providing of an atmosphere or conditions for client self-exploration and changes in perception is not considered sufficient. Levy states that "If the counselor sees the world as his client does, he has little to offer him." He must "provide the new and different inputs necessary to help his client move forward." Yet the counselor must see the "client's problem as the result of how he has coded or construed events," which Levy feels is a cognitive process. But this is empathic understanding, achieved by adopting the internal frame of reference of the client, and hardly a purely cognitive process. The solution to a client's problem is, as Levy notes, helping him find different ways of construing (or perceiving) events. But this is not achieved, except possibly on an intellectual or verbal level, by a cognitive approach. It is not verbalizations about the events which must change, but the perceptions of the events.

Again and again in counseling I have found that the client can and does change his perceptions--or his personal constructs--when the counselor enters his frame of reference and sees things as the client does. When a client says, "Things are completely black," the counselor may simply respond, "Everything is completely black." Then the client is enabled to say, "Well, perhaps not everything," or, "Well, perhaps not completely." But if the counselor responds by saying, "Things can't be completely black," or "Everything can't be completely black," the client will probably reiterate his statement or defend it, thus leading to resistance to changing his perception. I recently supervised a student who was working with a child. For several interviews the child reported incident after incident of being picked on, discriminated against, misunderstood, etc. The student counselor felt that no progress was being made, so we looked closely at what he was doing. It became apparent that he was not in the client's frame of reference but was seeing the child as being somewhat paranoid or showing ideas of reference. The client did not feel he was being understood or accepted and persisted in trying to get the counselor to see things as he did.

Now, seeing things as the client sees them does not mean, as Levy seems to say, that the counselor agrees with the client and accepts the client's perceptions as being unchangeable or not in need of change. On the other hand, it is not necessary for the counselor to keep reminding himself and the client that there is a difference between the client's perception and the counselor's, or that understanding of the client's perceptions does not mean acceptance of them as fixed. And it does appear to be sufficient that the counselor see how the client perceives things for the client to begin to change his perceptions. This is what empathic understanding is. The new perceptions are those of the client; he must change his perceptions. The counselor cannot offer or provide new perceptions, which are his own, and which cannot become those of anyone else. Kelly apparently recognizes this when he notes that the counselor does not attempt to pass his own constructs on to the client; if he should do so the client would translate and change them to fit his own construct system (Kelly, 1955, pp. 593-594). Thus does Levy fuse concepts and percepts, reason and affect,

logic and psychologic, and the behavior of the scientist with the process of developing personal constructs.

The scientist qua scientist is not functioning as an ordinary human being in relationship to his environment. Although he is not entirely able to shed his humanity to become an objective observer and analyzer, in the pursuit of science he strives to do so. That it is not a natural, ordinary, or easy thing is attested to by the difficulty, and incompleteness, with which it can be achieved. Therefore, the analogy of the development of the individual's personal construct system with the practice of the scientist is misleading. True objectivity would make of man an (almost) affectless human being. It would, or should, lead to more homogeneity and less conflict between the personal construct systems of individuals. Scientists also, if they were successful in achieving rationality, would evidence less disagreement (often accompanied by considerable feeling) than they do.

The difficulty seems to lie in not assigning affect the place it should have in the development of personal construct systems and in their change. Affect seems to be implicit in Kelly's system, certainly as an underlying factor in the rigidity and resistance to change of personal constructs.

But peculiarly it is not recognized and dealt with, at least overtly and explicitly, in counseling. In the same way emotion seems to permeate personal constructs, which determine one's facts or one's perceptions, yet no overt recognition is given to the emotional component pervading the personal construct system. Personal constructs are said to be responsive to validating and invalidating evidence, but the resistance to such evidence indicates their emotional component. And it is, of course, known that one's hypotheses can be confirmed by manipulation of events and data in response to strong emotions or belief or desire to see certain results.

If there is one thing that experience and experiment in psychology has demonstrated, it is that attitudes, beliefs, perceptions (and personal constructs) are not altered easily if at all by logic, reason, and argument--that is, by rational approaches. Yet cognitive counseling proposes to do exactly this. To quote Levy, "the activity he [the counselor] and his client are engaged in is no different from that of the scientist and theorist." This activity, he says, leads to "changes in the nature of the client's construct repertoire and . . . belief system. Feelings, needs, and motives are not ignored, but they are viewed as part of the context in which solutions are to be sought and as subject to reconstruction themselves," presumably by the same cognitive approach. The resulting changes--indeed, all changes--are apparently regarded as cognitive changes. Yet they are not "insights," which are "equated with the discovery of Truth," but are simply alternative ways of construing or perceiving events.

It is interesting how strongly theorists resist the acceptance of the relationship as the effective element in counseling. They view it instead as the substratum, the nonspecific context, or, as Levy terms it, the medium. There is probably no doubt that what is added to the basic relationship has some influence on the outcome, but questions may be raised as to the necessity or desirability of this influence. However, if one defines counseling as teaching, as many, including Levy, apparently do, perhaps something more than the relationship must be provided, something of the kind Levy describes.

The statement that "it would be grossly inefficient if we failed to make use of man's symbolic processes and relied solely upon the experiential component of the counseling relationship in trying to communicate with clients and modify their cognitive structures" needs some experimental support, particularly when it has been pretty clearly demonstrated that the relationship alone does lead to change, and to change from more emotional to more rational behavior.

THE COGNITIVE COUNSELOR IN ACTION

The difficulty with the cognitive approach as outlined by Levy is not necessarily its goals, nor its description (at least in broad outline) of the process of change in counseling. The goal of counseling is change in perceptions or the personal construct system, leading to changes in behavior. The counseling process involves exploration by the client of new ways of perceiving or construing events, choices, decisions, etc. The difficulty is the methods by which change is induced, the techniques of counseling. Can change be achieved by the methods proposed by the cognitivists, even when applied in a warm, nonthreatening relationship, if the latter can actually be provided using these methods? The reason for doubt and questioning is that perceptions and personal constructs are not purely, or even mainly, cognitive. It appears that Levy equates cognitions with perceptions or personal constructs. This equating is deceptive and lends plausibility to his argument which it does not merit. The research he cites provides evidence for the importance of perceptions, with their affective components, rather than for cognition, which is, or has always been, contrasted with affect.

If there is cause to believe that cognitive counseling is not effective with emotional problems, how does one account for the (apparent) success of the approach? The answer is relatively simple. Cognitive counselors do not do what they say they do--or, perhaps better, they do not limit themselves to cognitive counseling. They can and do offer a relationship. Like the behavior therapists, they state that this is not the effective element, but they have not demonstrated their claim. Their effectiveness may be, and probably is (as with behavior therapy) more the result of the relationship than added specific techniques. It is high time, especially in view of the evidence we have for the effectiveness of the relationship alone, that those who claim added effects from specific methods or techniques demonstrate the effects rather than assuming them. We cannot accept success as evidence for the effectiveness of the approach unless it is shown that the success is not or cannot be achieved by the relationship alone.

The implications for counselor education suggested by Levy do not appear to be closely related to the cognitive approach to counseling which he outlines. His methods are not highly cognitively oriented. There are no courses in logic, reasoning, pitfalls in thinking, argument and persuasion, or in social, cultural, educational, occupational, and other information, which should be very much part of the background of a cognitive counselor. There may be an overemphasis on learning and cognition as compared to personality and emotion. Few, if any, would disagree with the comments on the milieu of counselor education, however. The practicum, on the other hand, may seem to reflect the cognitive approach, with much time spent in "discussing the client's cognitive structure and how it may account for his present behavior." But if one reads "perceptual structure" or "personal construct system" for "cognitive structure," there would probably be little objection. It is interesting that Levy places little emphasis upon technique and specific interventions, whether in terms of analysis of the student's past interviews or with reference to what he should do in future

interviews. "Technique is surely discussed, but it is secondary to understanding." There can be scant disagreement with the general discussion of supervision.

The foregoing discussion may be obscured by terminology. Levy uses the term "cognitive" in its generally accepted meaning as covering all aspects and means of knowing, including perceiving as well as recognizing, judging, reasoning, and conceiving. Difficulty and confusion arise, however, in that the view of the nature of perception has changed. Perception is no longer seen as being determined by, or isomorphic with, external stimuli or the excitation of sensory receptions. In other words, perception is not purely cognitive but has affective aspects or components, as well as cognitive elements. Thus the old classification of mental processes into cognitive, affective, or conative is no longer possible. All mental or psychological events or processes, and all behavior, as indicated earlier, partake of all three aspects. Levy includes affective elements in his cognitive approach through recognizing their influence on perception. His approach is accordingly not purely cognitive in the old sense of being separate from or excluding affect. His cognitive viewpoint is clearly not a solely intellectual or rational approach to counseling.

My criticism, therefore, is directed to the relative emphasis on a rational, logical, intellectual approach as compared to an emphasis on an affective, experiential, relationship approach to counseling. To me the former is an overemphasis on the nonaffective aspects of psychological problems, or a lack of recognition of the affective influences on behavior. The question is not one of either-or, but of more or less. The difference, however, is not to be minimized. The emphasis in dealing with psychology and problems in counseling or psychotherapy should, in my opinion, be heavily on the affective, experiential side. The development of skill or effectiveness in this area should be the focus in counselor education. The stress on the rational and the logical in all other areas of education should be sufficient to assure that the cognitive (nonaffective) aspects of counseling will not be neglected. In fact, the greatest problem in counselor education, I believe, is getting counseling students to reduce the cognitive factor and attend to the affective aspects of the client, his problems, and the relationship.

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