

THE A-B VARIABLE AND  
INTERPERSONAL PERCEPTION

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GENE OCZKOWSKI

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## ABSTRACT

This study investigated the role of the Whitehorn-Betz A-B variable in interpersonal perception between interviewers and interviewees. Previous clinical research suggested that pairing "A" therapists with schizophrenics and "B" therapists with neurotics leads to greater "effectiveness" than the opposite pairings. The A-B variable analogue studies of psychotherapy generally lent support to these findings.

In this study, male undergraduates, who scored as A's or B's on the A-B scale, were randomly paired to form interviewer-interviewee dyads (A-A, A-B, B-A, B-B). The subjects serving as interviewers and interviewees, were given instructions as to their roles. The interviewer conducted an interview for 25 minutes. The subjects then answered the Interpersonal Perception Method questionnaire, which taps direct and higher order perspectives of the person responding on issues of interexperience and interaction. The comparison of the responses of interviewer and interviewee provided a measure of the accuracy of each person's perceptions of the other and of the relationship.

The results indicated that interviewers were more aware that they agreed or disagreed with the other when both were of similar A-B status. B type interviewees were more aware that they agreed or disagreed with the other than A types. Regardless of A-B status, interviewers and interviewees were more aware of whether or not they were understood by the other about their self-pictures than they were aware of being understood or not by the other about the relationship between them. Generally, the similar (B-B, A-A) pairings of

interviewer and interviewee resulted in greater accuracy of perception by both participants than the dissimilar pairings. These results were interpreted in terms of field independence-dependence.

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# CHAPTER I

## INTRODUCTION

Therapist variables in the psychotherapy process have generated considerable interest and research activity in recent years. The so-called A-B variable has been particularly promising, and has already received two reviews (Razin, 1971; Chartier, 1971). Still the role of the A-B variable in the psychotherapeutic process remains an elusive phenomenon.

Clinical studies (Razin, 1971) suggest that the pairing of A type therapists with schizophrenics and B type therapists with introjective neurotics are more "effective" than the opposite pairings. These results are based on a small number of studies and are far from conclusive.

Psychotherapy analogue studies (Chartier, 1971) suggest that A type quasi-therapists paired with "patients" exhibiting an avoidant mode of adjustment, and B type quasi-therapists paired with "patients" exhibiting a self-destructive mode of adjustment are more "effective" than the opposite pairings. There is also some evidence that under stress, A's and B's exhibit self-destructive and avoidant modes of adjustment, respectively. Some of the research suggests that therapist-patient complementarity rather than similarity on the A-B variable may mediate "effectiveness".

The analogue studies can generally be criticized for their artificiality. A therapy session involves two real people in encounter. The therapy analogue, with audio or video taped stimulus material, results in the "therapist" reacting rather than interacting with the stimuli. The process is essentially one-way,

since no feedback of any kind is provided by the "patient".

### A-B Variable Research

In a number of clinical studies, Whitehorn and Betz (reviewed by Betz, 1967) found that certain therapists had more successful outcomes with schizophrenic patients than other therapists. These therapists were labelled A's , while the others were labelled B therapists. Later work enabled them to differentiate A and B therapists on the basis of a small number of items taken from the Strong Vocational Interest Blank. These items formed the A-B scale, and involved activities and occupations of a mechanical, technical or manual nature that B's like and A's dislike.

Attempting to cross validate the A-B scale, McNair, Callahan and Lorr (1962) found that the neurotic patients of B therapists showed greater improvement on a number of outcome measures than neurotic patients treated by A therapists. In these studies, the less successful therapists appeared to evidence less psychological understanding of their patients' problems than did the more successful therapists.

The findings of these two studies suggested that more successful therapy outcome depends upon both patient "type" and therapists "type". Pairing or matching A type therapists with schizophrenic patients, and B type therapists with neurotic patients resulted in greater "effectiveness" than the opposite pairings.

Since the content of the A-B scale cannot be described in terms related to psychotherapy, a conceptualization of the dimension or dimensions



that the scale may be measuring has proved difficult. Lorr and McNair (1966) suggested differences between A and B therapists on a masculinity-femininity dimension. A and B type males tend to express relatively feminine and masculine interest patterns, respectively. Attempting to find psychological correlates of the A-B scale, Pollack and Kiev (1963) studied the relationship between field independence and the A-B variable using the rod and frame technique. B types tended to be strongly field independent, whereas A types were more influenced by the surrounding frame. The results were interpreted as B types being more differentiated cognitively than A types.

In order to gain a better understanding of the A-B variable in the psychotherapeutic process, one approach has been to use the psychotherapy analogue study with its characteristic experimental controls. Carson, Harden, and Shows (1964) had A and B type quasi-therapists interview clients with induced distrust and trust characteristics. The induced client sets were considered prototypic of schizoid and neurotic behavior, respectively. The pairings of A interviewers with distrusting clients and B interviewers with trusting clients resulted in more information being obtained by the interviewers, deeper and more direct interpretations, and greater interviewer sensitivity and alertness to their clients. The interviewers in these pairings perceived their clients as relatively flexible and tended to be perceived as dominating interviewers.

Kemp (1966) studied differential reactions to certain patient attributes. He examined the responses of A and B quasi-therapists to taped material simulating turning-against-self (TAS) or self-destructive, and avoidance-of-

others (AVOS) or avoidant symptom clusters (Phillips & Rabinovich, 1958). This diagnostic system had the advantage of being defined by more specific behaviors than the standard diagnostic categories. The AVOS syndrome reflects schizoid states, while the TAS syndrome reflects introjective neurotic states. The results indicated that, in the supposedly effective pairings of A with avoidant material and B with self-destructive material, the quasi-therapists were less comfortable and found it more difficult to make responses. This finding was inconsistent with general thinking about the role of warmth and acceptance in psychotherapeutic effectiveness.

A common dimension linking A and B type therapists with patients with whom they are supposedly more effective has been investigated. Sandler (1966) reported self-descriptions made by A and B type quasi-therapists. A type quasi-therapists described themselves as being self-destructive, while B type quasi-therapists described themselves as being avoidant of others.

Berzins and Seidman (1968) in a replication and extension of Kemp's (1966) study did not find therapists discomfort when A therapists were paired with avoidant patient material or when B therapists were paired with self-destructive patient material. The authors suggested that therapist-patient dissimilarity or complementarity with respect to avoidant-self-destructive adjustment modes might yield better results than similarity.

Berzins, Freidman and Seidman (1969) extended Sandler's (1966) results by examining the relationship of patients' A-B status to symptomology and therapy expectancies. The A type patients exhibited self-destructive

symptoms, whereas B type patients tended to externalize anger. The A type patients expected to unburden themselves in an active, productive manner and B type patients appeared to seek rational guidance. Proposing that patient-therapists complementarity or dissimilarity in A-B status may mediate "effectiveness" in therapy, Berzins, Friedman and Seidman suggested that the reason A therapists perform less well with introjective neurotic patients might be due to the therapists' "blind spots" which interfere with therapeutic communication. These "blind spots" might result from the tendency of A type patients and therapists to exhibit self-destructive modes of adjustment under stress.

Seidman (1969), using a psychotherapy analogue, investigated variables that might mediate the greater success of A-schizoid and B-neurotic dyads. Responding to taped material, A quasi-therapists showed high levels of respect and empathy for the schizoid "subject". The B type quasi-therapists showed high levels of respect and empathy for the introjective neurotic "subject".

Other characteristics of the "effective" therapist-patient pairings were studied. Berzins, Ross and Cohen (1970) examined the relation between the A-B distinction and trust-distrust sets of patients' self-disclosure in brief in brief interviews. The findings indicated that A therapists paired with distrustful patients and B therapists with trusting patients obtained more patient self-disclosure in personal areas than the opposite pairings. The patients' A-B status was found to be negligibly related to performance differences. This suggested limitations to the hypothesis that therapist-patient dissimilarity or complementarity in A-B status is more "effective" than similarity.

Berzins, Seidman and Welch (1970) studied the responses of A and B quasi-therapists to taped stimulus material representing patients with extra-punitive and intro-punitive modes of anger expression. The results were largely inconclusive. The quasi-therapists were more satisfied with their performance when they perceived the "patients" as being less rather than more similar to themselves. The A and B quasi-therapists reported themselves to be intro-punitive and extrapunitive, respectively. The authors felt that the complementarity hypothesis had some merit since these modes of anger expression are opposite to those of the patients with whom the therapists expressed satisfaction.

Scott and Kemp (1971) studied the initial interviews of neurotic patients conducted by medical students. No significant relationship was found between the therapists' A-B score and empathy, warmth and genuineness. B therapists did elicit greater depth of self-exploration.

#### Interpersonal Perception Method

The work of R. D. Laing provides a different approach for studying the role of the A-B variable in the psychotherapeutic process by focusing equally on both people in a relationship. Laing, working primarily with schizophrenics, has been developing the basis for an interpersonal psychology (Laing, 1960, 1961). One of the results of this work has been the development of the Interpersonal Perception Method (Laing, Phillipson & Lee, 1966), a method which permits examination of the patterns of perception and communication of two people in a relationship. Laing, Phillipson and Lee (1966) have been able to differentiate for example, non-disturbed and disturbed marriages, by examining

the relationship of the marital partners. The Interpersonal Perception Method has also been reported a useful adjunct to marital therapy (Kotkas, 1969).

What follows is a brief description of the Interpersonal Perception Method.

Laing and his colleagues (1966) state that behavior is a function of experience, and that both experience and behavior are always in relation to someone or something other than the self. For two people in relationship, the behavior of each person toward the other is mediated by the experience of each by the other, just as the experience of each is mediated by the behavior of the other. In addition, the behavior of each does not lead directly to experience. The individual perceives and interprets the behavior of the other in a manner at least partly consistent with the way in which he generally "sees" his world. The interpretation of the percept will involve past experiences, expectations, needs and fantasies. Thus the experience is compounded from perception, interpretation and fantasy.

Suppose, that for two people in relationship, experience of an event differs. Person A behaves toward person B in a certain manner. Person A experiences his behavior in a certain way. Person B's experience of this behavior may or may not be the same as person A's. Additionally, person A's experience of person B's experience, mediated by person B's behavior, can also involve misinterpretation. This process can continue in an unending spiral of successive misinterpretations, and the result can be a complete breakdown of meaningful communication between the two people. The Interpersonal Perception Method, then, is used to examine the state of interperception at any given time.

Consider two people in a relationship. Let one person be called the interviewer, and the other the interviewee. There are two points of view about anything that occurs in this relationship: the point of view of the interviewer and the point of view of the interviewee.

The relationship, involving interviewer and interviewee, can be considered for the purposes of analysis as consisting of four self-other phases. These are: the interviewer's relationship with the interviewee, the interviewee's relationship with the interviewer, the interviewer's relationship with himself, the interviewee's relationship with himself. These are actually interrelated in a complex way not yet understood.

Using Laing's method, the relationship is described in terms of phrases that express interaction and interexperience. The issues range from expressions of interrelatedness balanced with separateness to expressions which are destructive of such healthy processes. Examples of these issues are love, respect, torment, hate. The Interpersonal Perception Method permits examination of 60 such issues.

Consider the issue "respect" in the relationship. The four self-other phases of the relationship on this issue would be: interviewer respects interviewee, interviewee respects interviewer, interviewer respects himself, interviewee respects himself.

There are also the points of view of the interviewer and interviewee. The interviewer's view of "interviewer respects interviewee" is the interviewer's direct perspective in that phase of the relationship. The interviewee's view of

"interviewer respects interviewee" is the interviewee's direct perspective. Both interviewer and interviewee have direct perspectives on the other self-other phases of the relationship involving the issue "respect".

The interviewer's behavior with respect to the relationship "interviewer respects interviewee" involves not only his direct perspective, but also higher order perspectives. These are called meta-perspectives and meta-meta-perspectives. The interviewer's view of the interviewee's view of "interviewer respects interviewee" is the interviewer's meta-perspective. The interviewer's meta-meta-perspective is the interviewer's view of the interviewee's view of the interviewer's view of "interviewer respects interviewee". A similar scheme holds for the interviewee's meta and meta-meta-perspectives. Perspectives of higher order than meta-meta are not being considered here.

#### Interpersonal Perception Method Questionnaire

The questionnaire associated with the Interpersonal Perception Method investigates the direct, meta and meta-meta-perspectives of each person in the dyad in the four self-other phases of the relationship, for 60 issues of inter-experience and interaction.

A single individual's view is not considered in isolation. A number of reciprocally matched comparisons of perspectives are made. By comparing the perspectives of one person with those of the other, the relationship can be viewed, as well as each person involved.

The following comparisons are made: The interviewer's direct perspective is compared with the interviewee's direct perspective. Conjunction of

the two perspectives shows Agreement on the part of interviewer and interviewee. Both see the phrases describing their perspectives on some aspect of inter-experience in the same way, as either true or false. Disjunction shows Disagreement. The interviewee sees the phrase describing his perspective as true of himself, and the interviewer sees his phrase as false or vice versa.

A comparison between the interviewer's meta-perspective and the interviewee's direct perspective is made. Conjunction of the perspectives shows Understanding by the interviewer. He is aware of the fact that they Agree or Disagree. Disjunction shows Misunderstanding. The interviewer thinks they Agree when they do not, or thinks they Disagree when they Agree. A similar comparison is made between the interviewee's meta-perspective and the interviewer's direct perspective.

A comparison between the interviewer's meta-meta-perspective and the interviewee's meta-perspective is made. Conjunction of the perspectives shows Realization by the interviewer of Understanding or Misunderstanding on the part of the interviewee. The interviewer is aware that the interviewee thinks they Agree or Disagree when they do, or that the interviewee thinks they Agree or Disagree when they do not. Disjunction of the perspectives show Failure of Realization by the interviewer of Understanding or Misunderstanding on the part of the interviewee. A similar scheme holds for the interviewee.

The comparisons are made for the four self-other phases of the relationship (interviewer-interviewee, interviewee-interviewer, interviewer-interviewer, interviewee-interviewee) on each of the 60 issues expressing interaction.



### Rationale of the Study

Berzins, Freidman and Seidman (1969) suggested that the rapist-patient complementarity or dissimilarity rather than similarity on the A-B variable may mediate psychotherapy "effectiveness". It was also suggested that this phenomenon might be due to therapists "blind spots" in communication when the therapist was paired with a patient of similar A-B status. The assumption was made that "blind spots" interfere with therapeutic communication and persist over time.

These "blind spots" could be persistent therapist misinterpretation and misperceptions of himself, of the patient, and of the therapeutic relationship. Involved in this would be patient misinterpretations and misperceptions of himself, of the therapist, and of the relationship. The therapists might misinterpret some behavior of the patient. The therapist's response could be misinterpreted by the patient, etc. An unending spiral of misperceptions and misinterpretations could develop.

The Interpersonal Perception Method provides a means for determining whether such failures of communication exist in a relationship between two people.

A pilot study of interpersonal perceptions of interviewers and interviewees suggests that A-A rather than A-B pairings may result in more accurate perceptions of interexperience by both interviewer and interviewee (Oczkowski, 1971). This trend in the data, reached with a very small sample, is in opposition to previous studies suggesting that complementary therapist-patient

dyads are more "effective".

The research literature generally suggests that the A-B variable is a measure of some, as yet unknown, personality dimension which plays a role in psychotherapy outcome, independent of therapist training and experience. In view of this, and the trend in the data found in a pilot study (Oczkowski, 1971), it was felt that a similar study, incorporating more experimental controls and larger sample size, could throw some additional light on the role of the A-B variable in the psychotherapy process.

The use of untrained students as interviewers and interviewees in an interview situation limits the generalizability of any results. However, the results from this type of analogue could provide some indication of the usefulness of considering the A-B variable both a therapist and patient variable in the psychotherapy process.

## CHAPTER II

### METHOD

#### Subjects

The UK19 (Appendix C), a 19 item version of Kemp's 31 item modification of the Whitehorn-Betz A-B scale (Betz, 1967) was administered to 649 male students enrolled in an introductory psychology course at the University of Manitoba. Male students were chosen in order to control for sex in the dyadic interaction. A sufficient number of female students who would score as B's on the UK19 would also have been difficult to obtain. The mean of the distribution of scores on the UK19 was 9.78 and the standard deviation was 3.22.

Cutting scores of 7 and 13, corresponding to the 23rd and 80th percentiles of the distribution, were chosen to define the pools of B and A type subjects, respectively. Forty A's and thirty-six B's volunteered to take part in the study and randomly signed up for the study, forming thirty-eight interviewer-interviewee dyads: 9 A-B, 9 B-A, 11 A-A, 9 B-B.

#### Procedure

The participants were assigned the roles of interviewer and interviewee on the flip of a coin. The participants in each dyad listened to taped instructions. The subject identified as interviewer conducted a 25 minute interview with the interviewee. The interview was recorded. Both interviewer and interviewee answered the IPM questionnaires following the interview.

The following procedure was followed for each interviewer-interviewee dyad: The experimenter introduced himself to the two students and thanked them

for volunteering. The student selected as interviewee was directed to a room and asked to wait for a few minutes.

The experimenter accompanied the student selected as interviewer to the interview room, where a playback of recorded interviewer instructions was started. The experimenter then proceeded to the room where the interviewee was waiting and started the playback of recorded interviewee instructions.

Transcripts of the interviewer and interviewee instructions are found in appendices A and B, respectively. These instructions informed both interviewer and interviewee about the nature of the study, and their respective roles.

Some additional structure to the interview was provided by suggesting that the interviewer study a list of possible topics for discussion. The list of topics, based on Jourard's (1964) Self Disclosure Questionnaire, provided the interviewer with some general areas for inquiring into the personal life of the interviewee.

#### Suggested Topics

University studies - most enjoyable aspects, most boring aspects, goals and ambitions.

Attitudes and Opinions regarding religion, politics, morality.

Body-feelings about his appearance, does he have health problems.

Personality - aspects that he most likes about himself, facts about his present sex life, things that make him feel ashamed or anxious, things that make him feel proud of himself.

The rationale for the instructions and suggested topics was to enable the interviewer and interviewee to interact, as much as possible, according to

their personal styles, while at the same time setting some definition as to their roles.

Two minutes after each set of instructions were presented, the experimenter escorted the interviewee to the interview room and introduced the interviewer. The two were seated opposite each other, approximately four feet apart. The experimenter remarked, "I'll be back in about 25 minutes", started the tape recorder, and left the room taking the list of topics with him.

After the interview, the experimenter gave an abbreviated version of the Interpersonal Perception Method questionnaire (Appendix D) to both participants. The time taken to answer the questionnaire ranged from 35 to 55 minutes. The interviewer and interviewee were seated back to back approximately four feet apart while answering the questionnaire. This seating arrangement enabled each to feel the presence of the other and thus aid in answering the questionnaire items. It was felt that face to face seating arrangement might have had an inhibiting effect on answering the items. The experimenter was not present in the room while the questionnaires were being answered, and the behavior of the participants was not monitored in any way.

The number of issues examined by the questionnaire was reduced, since issues like "loves", "mocks", "hates", etc. would not have represented relevant aspects of interexperience after one brief interview. The issues examined by the abbreviated Interpersonal Perception Method questionnaire were:

understands  
takes seriously  
takes responsibility for  
couldn't care less about  
blames  
can't come to terms with  
tries to outdo  
makes up mind for  
lets be self  
thinks a lot of  
has a warped view of  
is kind to  
is detached from  
doubts  
expects too much of  
bewilders

depends on  
respects  
worries about  
finds fault with  
humiliates  
would like to get away from  
deceives  
treats like a machine  
is honest with  
believes in  
likes  
analyzes  
is disappointed in  
lets down  
gets on nerves  
won't let be

### Data Analysis

Three independent raters, blind to the experimental conditions, were used to eliminate invalid data from the analysis.

A computer program was written to make reciprocal comparisons between interviewer and interviewee questionnaire responses for each dyad and to produce IPM profiles. In each of the four self-other phases of the relationship, the following data were obtained for each interviewer and each interviewee: the number of Agreements, Disagreements, Understandings, Misunderstandings, Realizations of Understanding or Misunderstanding, Failures of Realization of Understanding or Misunderstanding.

Since the number of Agreements + Disagreements, Understandings + Misunderstandings, Realizations + Failures of Realization is equal to the number of issues involved in the questionnaire, the analysis of the data only required consideration of Agreements, Understandings and Realizations of

Understanding or Misunderstanding. That is, a significant difference in Agreements implies a significant difference in Disagreements, etc.

The purpose of this study was to determine if there were differences in interviewers' and interviewees' perceptions of their experience with each other as a function of the A-B type of persons they were, and as a function of whether the person was considering perception of self, other, etc.

Each of the interviewer and interviewee dependent measures (Agreements, Understandings, Realizations) was analyzed by means of a three way analysis of variance. The three fixed factors were: Interviewer A-B status with two levels, Interviewee A-B status with two levels, Phase of the relationship with four levels (Interviewer-Interviewer, Interviewer-Interviewee, Interviewee-Interviewer, Interviewee-Interviewee) and repeated measures taken on the levels.