

焦點解決網路即時諮商當事人知覺之工作同盟、諮商員效能與諮商滿意度的相關研究

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摘要

本研究旨在探討：焦點解決網路即時諮商當事人，於初次晤談後以及晤談結束後所知覺的工作同盟、諮商員效能與諮商滿意度之間的相關與差異情形。本研究由研究團隊設計一網路即時諮商平台，並邀請 3 位諮商員參與本研究及接受相關訓練。另有 8 位女大學生參與本研究，分別接受 2 至 6 次的焦點解決網路即時諮商。本研究的研究結果發現：(1) 於初次晤談後，工作同盟中的任務與連結與諮商員效能有顯著相關。(2) 於晤談結束後，當事人所知覺之整體工作同盟及其目標、諮商滿意度，乃分別與諮商員效能之間有顯著相關。在初次晤談後與晤談結束後的差異比較上，所有的變項皆無顯示出顯著組內差異。本研究並根據研究結果，為焦點解決網路即時諮商及未來研究提出相關建議。

關鍵詞：工作同盟、網路諮商、網路即時諮商、諮商滿意度、諮商員效能、電子郵件諮商

Article Title: A Study of Working Alliance, Counselor's Effectiveness, and Client's Satisfaction of Solution-Focused Real-Time Webcounseling on Taiwanese College Students : An Exploratory Study

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to explore the clients' perception of the "working alliance", "counselor's effectiveness", and "client's satisfaction" in the process of Internet counseling via Solution-focused real-time

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1. This study described was founded by the National Science Council of Taiwan.
2. An earlier version of this article was presented at the first international conference of Solution-focused brief therapy, Aruba, April 10th-12th, 2008



webcounseling (SFTRW). Three female counselors applying Solution-focused approach were trained to operate the real-time webcounseling platform designed by the research team before this experiment. Eight female college students participated and received fifty-minute SFRTW sessions once a week, which proceeded two to six sessions based on their own decision. The findings of this study were as follows: (1) after the first session, the clients' perception of tasks and bonds of working alliance had significantly positive correlation with the clients' perception of counselor's effectiveness; (2) after the last session, the clients' perception of goals of working alliance, whole working alliance, and client's satisfaction had significantly positive correlation with the clients' perception of "counselor's effectiveness"; and (3) no significant difference was found in the clients' perception of tasks, bonds, goals, working alliance, counselor's effectiveness and client's satisfaction between the first session and the last one. Based on the results of this study, some important suggestions were proposed for SFRTW and future studies in relative fields.

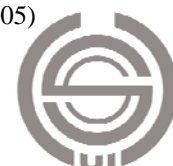
Key words: client's satisfaction, counselor's effectiveness, real-time webcounseling, Solution-focused real-time webcounseling, Solution-focused brief therapy, working alliance.

I. INTRODUCTION

Nearly 580 million people across the globe access the Internet (Leibert, Archer Jr., Munson & York, 2006). The growth, evolution, and increasing use of computer technology and the Internet have already had a major impact on the professional field of counseling; for example, a growing number of practitioners are providing counseling or therapy services via the Internet (Chester & Glass, 2006). As Derring-Palumbo and Zeine (2005) mentioned, webcounseling may not be considered as a new approach or theory; rather, it is such a well known and highly influential trend for professional counseling that its development must be taken very seriously. Nowadays, webcounseling, relative to face-to-face counseling, is more private, comfortable and flexible for clients. Webcounseling can reduce the repulsiveness of clients. Clients who participated webcounseling commonly gave feedback about their positive feelings, such as feeling safer (Haberstroh, Duffey, Evans, Gee & Trepal, 2007) and "saving face" (Schultze, 2006). Moreover, it is especially more convenient and efficient for those suffering from communication challenges or physical disabilities, and for those not able or willing to vocalize to experience the counseling process (Bambling, King, Reid & Wegner, 2008; Kraus, Zack & Stricker, 2004; Rochlen, Land & Wong, 2004). Recent research has proved that webcounseling is helpful to women struggling against eating disorders and dysfunctional body images, to patients of chronic headaches and anxiety disorders, to persons suffering from insomnia, and to suicide prevention (Barak, 2007; Haberstroh, Duffey, Evans & Trepal, 2007; Leibert et al., 2006). Meanwhile, according to the investigation of Chang and Huang (2001), 72% of clients using webcounseling were university/college students in Taiwan; the hotline service of Taipei Lifeline Association in Taiwan (2006) also indicated they were 49% in 2005. Therefore, it is indeed a trend of the development and popularity of webcounseling in the world and also in Taiwan (Wang, Lin, Liu, Yang & Hsiao, 2008).

1. Theoretical Framework

More and more webcounseling or websites of psychotherapy have been emerging. Although there are several ways to access webcounseling, including e-mail, real-time chat, secure web-based messaging, video conferencing and voice-over-IP, and Internet phone, etc. (Ainsworth, 2002), Derring-Palumbo and Zeine (2005)



found that the majority of clients on the Internet opted for contact without vision and voice. Real-Time Webcounseling (RTW) is one of the most popular styles of webcounseling service. It is a synchronous model of communication between clients and counselors through exchanging messages on both-side screens without vision and voice (National Board for Certified Counselors, 2001), and it has the similarities to traditional face-to-face counseling (Ainsworth, 2002). Undoubtedly, the development of RTW stands on a vantage point.

With the advent of webcounseling services as a creative and innovative therapeutic medium, counselors are now considering how therapeutic conditions can be fostered in an online environment (Leibert et al., 2006). Cost-efficiency considerations, along with social and technological changes, may make therapy via the Internet the preferred approach in the future (Macdonald, 2003). Chester and Glass (2006) also found online clients mainly receive relatively short-term interventions. Hence, Macdonald (2003) believed Solution-Focused Brief Therapy (SFBT) well suited to such developments. Having engaged in e-mail counseling since 1995, Murphy and Mitchell (1998) introduced the concept of “therapy-e-mail” in 1998, which successfully combined SFBT and narrative therapy to help clients find suitable ways to rewrite their living stories positively. Thus, in parallel with not only the diversity and short-term nature of different counseling approaches but also the dramatic developments in post-modern approaches, contemporary short-term and post-modern models of applying the SFBT model in webcounseling, as Derring-Palumbo and Zeine (2005) strongly recommended, have established their importance and, indeed, their necessity

SFBT was developed by the clinical practice of Steve de Shazer, Insoo Kim Berg and their colleagues at the Brief Family Therapy Center in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, in the early 1980s (Berg & Dolan, 2001). SFBT is often referred to as a therapy of constructivism, social constructivism, or postmodernism which actively cultivated antirealism philosophy that pervaded the late twentieth-century humanities (Osborn & Johnson, 2001). By adopting this new philosophical trend, the solution-focused approach made a major philosophical shift or paradigm shift in psychotherapy (Kim, 2006). Instead of assuming a single, tangible, or external reality, solution-focused therapists believe that realities are socially constructed and that multiple realities and solutions exist (de Jong & Berg, 2007). Likewise, this model regards clients as competent and capable experts who are able to solve their own problems with minimal assistance (Kim, 2006; Trepper, Dolan, McCollum & Nelson, 2006) and also views the therapy as a process whereby the client and the therapist co-construct desirable realities. By means of the therapeutic skills of SFBT, such as miracle questions, exceptional questions, scaling questions, relationship questions, coping questions, and compliments, clients' solutions are elicited (Kim, 2006). In the process of solution-building, SFBT also assists clients to master their own lives, get support on autonomy and subjective experiences, gain positive power and resources, envision the future with hope, reinforce their solution-focused thinking and responsible actions, and enhance the sense of control in life (Greene, Lee, Mentze, Pinnell & Niles, 1998). SFBT has been expanded into an important and practical therapy approach (Berg & Dolan, 2001), and Trepper et al. (2006) further analyzed quasi-experimental and clinically-based studies of SFBT. They concluded that SFBT: (a) was more effective than no treatment and was nearly as effective as current psycho-social treatments and (b) might be more effective than problem-focused treatment and more likely to achieve similar outcomes with fewer sessions in some cases and for some problems. In less than three decades, the application and research of SFBT have increasingly and dramatically grown and supported that SFBT has its own unique therapeutic effects.



In research on the counseling process, working alliance and counselor's effectiveness are usually examined in relation to their connection with client's satisfaction. These are also important relationships to investigate in webcounseling. Bordin (1979) argued that clients would have successful consequences if they had experienced a positive working alliance with counselors. Leibert et al. (2006) also emphasized working alliance was one of the most significant and most consistent factors to predict a successful outcome of counseling; and Sauer, Lopez and Gormley (2003) also found the number of sessions might be an influential factor. Bordin (1979) defined "working alliance" as a relationship which was composed of three elements, including one or several assigned tasks based on mutual agreement by client and counselor, affective bonds derived from the counseling process, and counseling goals agreed with by both sides. Horvath (1981) developed "Working Alliance Inventory" from Bordin's (1979) theory, which was widely applied as an instrument (Fitzpatrick, Iwakabe & Stalikas, 2005; Hatcher & Gillaspay, 2006). Meanwhile, "counselor's effectiveness" means the influence which counselors have on clients' alteration of attitudes and behaviors (Shu, 1996). Research has also established that there is indeed a positive relationship between counselor's effectiveness and client's satisfaction through clients' perception (Kokovotic & Tracey, 1987). According to theories of social influence, Strong (1968) believed counselors would increase their influence on clients as the process proceeded if they could strongly impress clients with the images of expertness, attractiveness and trustworthiness in the early stages of counseling. Bank and LaCrosse (1975) further derived "Counselor Rating Form (CRF)" from Strong's theory (cited from Corrigan & Schmidt, 1983). Corrigan and Schmidt (1983) revised it as "Counselor Rating Form—Simplicity (CRF-S)."

However, though the evidence which supports the proposition that webcounseling is helpful is increasing, the studies of working alliance, counselor's effectiveness, and client's satisfaction in webcounseling, RTW or SFRTW are few or remain inconsistent. According to the research of Leibert et al. (2006), the clients were really satisfied with webcounseling to a certain degree. One of the possible disadvantages of webcounseling concerns the difficulties with establishing strong working alliances in the absence of nonverbal information available in traditional face-to-face counseling (Leibert et al., 2006; Rochlen et al., 2004). In contrast, a recent review of studies which evaluated participants' post-session affective outcome of webcounseling provided preliminary evidence of working alliance that online modes of therapy do establish working alliance (Leibert et al., 2006; Reynolds, Stiles & Grofol, 2006). Comparing with the face to face counseling, Reynolds et al. (2006) also found the relationship between clients' satisfaction and working alliance in webcounseling was similar with and even higher than traditional face-to-face counseling. Cook and Doyle (2002) also directly evaluated working alliance in webcounseling, and the outcome revealed that the total score for working alliance was as strong for online as for face-to-face clients, and even significantly higher for online therapist-client dyads than for face-to-face therapist-client dyads. Thus, many researches support the connection between working alliance, counselor's effectiveness, and clients' satisfaction in RTW, but rarely discuss the relationship among them. Hence, to conduct the research on working alliance, client's satisfaction, and counselor's effectiveness in RTW are of great value and importance.

2. The Purpose of the Study

The requirement of webcounseling reflects the development of Internet. Counseling equipped with scientific techniques will be the key for the future development of this profession. The counseling professional



field should actively explore how to apply the multiple functions of webcounseling to professional counseling and how to make it as a new healthy psychotherapy. However, many researches on webcounseling mainly discuss the difficulties of system operations, ethical concerns, practical challenges, and technical problems (Wang, et al., 2008; Wen, Wang & Chen, 2009), but rarely explore the effects of RTW, or the suitability of applying a certain counseling approach. It is well established that solution-focused real-time webcounseling (SFRTW), combining the Solution-Focused approach with RTW, is especially suitable for webcounseling. It is also well established that working alliance and counselor’s effectiveness play critical roles in client’s satisfaction in the counseling process. The question which is not settled is whether they have a positive connection with each other and with client’s satisfaction in SFRTW.

So the purposes of this study were: (1) to explore the relationship among working alliance, counselor’s effectiveness and client’s satisfaction perceived by clients, after the first and the last sessions of SFRTW; and (2) to compare the perceptions of the clients after the first session with those of the last on working alliance, counselor’s effectiveness and client’s satisfaction.

II. METHOD

1. The design of this study

The study applied the quasi-experimental method, “pre & post-test for single group” (shown as Table 1). The purpose of this study was to explore the clients’ perception of the “working alliance”, “counselor’s effectiveness”, and “client’s satisfaction” in the process of Internet counseling via SFTRW. Three female counselors applying Solution-focused approach were trained to operate the real-time webcounseling platform designed by the research team before this experiment. Eight female college students participated and received fifty-minute SFRTW sessions once a week, which proceeded two to six sessions based on their own decision. After the first and the last sessions, these clients filled out “Working Alliance Inventory”, “Counselor Rating Form—Simplicity” and “Counseling Response Scale”. These scales were administered personally by the researchers.

TABLE 1 *The Design of This Study*

Experiment	Three Scales Filled	Experiment	Three Scales Filled
First session of SFBT	After the first session of SFBT	The second to the last sessions of SFBT	After the last session of SFBT

2. Counselors

Three 26 to 46-year-old female counselors with master degrees participated in this study. They had been applying solution-focused approach at least for three years. These counselors received an 80-minute training session in the purposes and procedures of this study and a 120-minute training session in how to operate the RTW platform before the formal experimental treatment.

3. Samples



Eight female college students with ages ranging from 20 to 23 were publicly recruited. They participated in this study voluntarily. All of these clients were publicly recruited in a university, then gathering interested students and explaining the rules, such as the purposes and the procedure of this study, counseling privacy and other related affairs. After being confirmed the willingness to participate this study, these clients received a one-hour orientation of the RTW system before participating in SFRTW. Two to three participants were randomly assigned to one counselor anonymously based on both sides' schedules and willingness to participate. One of these clients experienced 6 webcounseling sessions, two did 5 times, two did 4, another two did 3, and one did twice. Each session took 50 minutes once a week. To make it similar to a real life situation, both clients and counselors could choose their suitable and convenient places to carry out the webcounseling process.

4. The Instruments

Real-time webcounseling platform: A team composed of one professor and two graduate students majoring in Information Management designed the RTW platform. Before the formal experiment started, 18 graduate students majoring in counseling role-played as counselors and clients to test the RTW platform and gave feedback to the designing team for modifying this system.

After logging in by entering the account ID and password, the users could watch the main screen of RTW shown as Figure 1. The screen was divided into three sections: "Logon message", "Dialogue display area", and "Message area". The Message area provided a message box and various functions. Both the counselor and the client could edit their messages in the Message box, and choose different emoticons, facial expression, emotional phrases, and text effects and colors to dress up the messages. All these options were designed to facilitate both sides' communications. The message finally appearing on the screen would look like Figure 2.

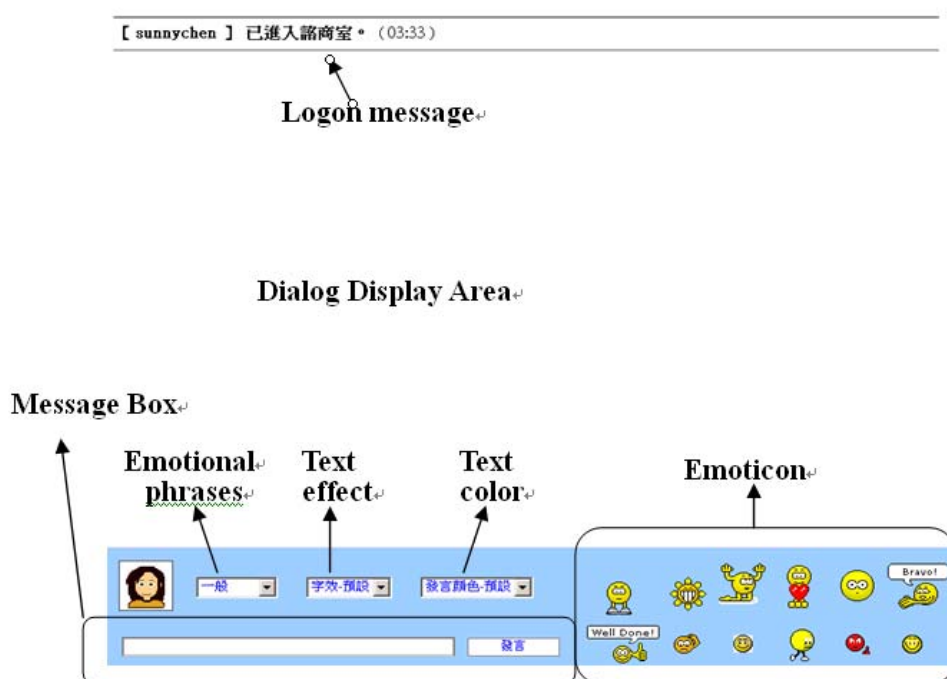


Figure 1. The main screen of real-time webcounseling system



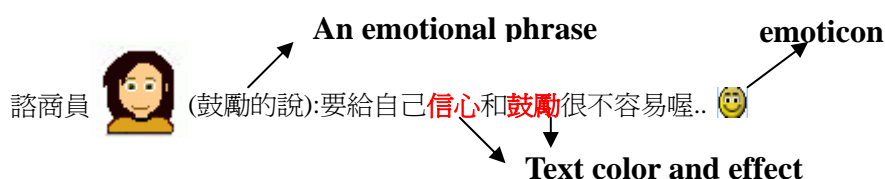


Figure 2. An example of the message

After the users pressed the SEND button, the messages from both sides would appear in the Dialogue display area. When new contents appeared, the old ones would be moved upward. Logon message was used to notify the other side that her/his partner had entered the system already.

The RTW system also incorporated the back-end management functions to maintain clients' data, manage counselors' response hints, make reservations, and keep clients' history. The reservation function would automatically remind counselors to make the next appointment just after their session was closed. Counselors or their assistant could also use this function to make reservations manually. The history function helped counselors to trace all the past sessions' records of his clients. The session transcripts of each client were kept according to their dates. The RTW system also provided response hints function, by which counselors could pre-store their frequently used messages and easily retrieve and edit them during the real sessions.

Working Alliance Inventory: Chen (1995) modified the Chinese version of "Working Alliance Inventory" derived by Horvath (1981) and based on Bordin's (1979) opinions. Thirty-six questions measuring clients' responses on a 7-item Likert scale were applied to evaluate working alliance in tasks, affection bonds, and counseling goals, which included minus scores. The higher scores reported by clients meant the higher working alliance the client perceived during the counseling process, and vice versa. The measurement showed its reliability by the inner consistency of .93 and the consistency was recognized by experts as .88 (Chen, 1995).

Counselor Rating Form—Simplicity: This was based on "Counselor Rating Form—Short Version" (CRF-S) devised by Corrigan and Schmidt (1983), and Lin (1991) modified it into a Chinese version. The original measurement consisted of 12 opposite pairs of adjectives to evaluate counselors' expertness, attractiveness, and trustworthiness according to clients' perception. There were four questions for each dimension measured on the 7-item Likert Scale, which were all scored positively. The higher scores reported by clients meant the higher "counselor's effectiveness" the client perceived during the counseling process and vice versa.

In reliability, factor analysis identified two factors which accounted for most of the total variability. Factor 1, named characteristics, included "attractiveness" and "trustworthiness"; Factor 2, expert traits, consisted of "expertness" and "attractiveness". Factor 1 explained 52.5% of total variability, and Factor 2, 11.6% (Lin, 1991).

Counseling Response Scale: Wang (1990) modified this Chinese-version measurement, which was applied to evaluate clients' inner feelings and reflections after the counseling session. The higher scores indicated higher client's satisfaction. There were 17 questions measuring clients' responses on a 6-item Likert scale and were all scored positively. The measurement showed its reliability by the inner consistency of .93. Factor analysis identified three factors in reliability: "exploring the present", "developing the future" and "acting to fulfill the future vision". Factor 1 explained 5.1% of variety; Factor 2, 3.3%; Factor 3, 45.2% (Wang, 1990).



5. Data Analysis

Since the sample of participants was limited and the characteristics of the sample were unknown, “nonparametric tests” were employed. Researchers adopted SPSS10.0 and counted the means and the standard deviation of the scores of three scales. Then researchers also applied Kendall’s tau-b to examine the correlation among working alliance, counselor’s effectiveness and client’s satisfaction after the first and the last session of SFRTW from clients’ perception. Wilcoxon signed ranks was applied to compare the first and the last session on the clients’ perception of working alliance, counselor’s effectiveness, and client’s satisfaction.

III. RESULTS

From Table 2, middle high degree of task ($M = 14.38$, $SD = 7.07$), bond ($M = 33.63$, $SD = 2.66$), goal ($M = 3.50$, $SD = 9.71$), total of working alliance ($M = 51.5$, $SD = 7.34$), counselor’s effectiveness ($M = 58.88$, $SD = 2.68$), and client’s satisfaction ($M = 74.88$, $SD = 10.30$) showed from clients’ perception after the first session in SFRTW. After the last session, the clients’ perceived task ($M = 10.88$, $SD = 10.61$), bond ($M = 30.75$, $SD = 4.66$), goal ($M = 4.37$, $SD = 12.50$), total of working alliance ($M = 50.38$, $SD = 35.19$), counselor’s effectiveness ($M = 55.50$, $SD = 13.77$), and client’s satisfaction ($M = 68.50$, $SD = 18.08$) remained in middle high, though there was a great variety among these clients’ perceptions.

Shown as Table 3, after the first session, the clients’ perceptions of task on working alliance and counselor’s effectiveness revealed a significantly positive correlation of .59 ($p < .01$); bond of working alliance and counselor’s effectiveness, .96 ($p < .01$). However, goal of working alliance and counselor’s effectiveness produced a non-significant correlation of .45 ($p > .05$); working alliance and counselor’s effectiveness showed a correlation of .57 ($p > .05$). Task of working alliance and client’s satisfaction revealed a non-significant correlation of .29 ($p > .05$); bond of work alliance and client’s satisfaction, .29 ($p > .05$); goal of working alliance and client’s satisfaction, .14 ($p > .05$); working alliance and client’s satisfaction, .55 ($p > .05$).

TABLE 2

The Means and Standard deviations of Counselor’s effectiveness, Work alliance, and Client’s Satisfaction after the first and the last sessions

Scale		<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Counselor’s Effectiveness	After the First Session	58.88	7.58
	After the Last Session	55.50	13.77
Task of Working Alliance	After the First Session	14.38	7.07
	After the Last Session	10.88	10.61
Bond of Working Alliance	After the First Session	33.63	2.66
	After the Last Session	30.75	4.66
Goal of Working Alliance	After the First Session	3.50	9.71
	After the Last Session	4.37	12.50
Total of Working Alliance	After the First Session	51.50	7.34
	After the Last Session	50.38	35.19
Client’s Satisfaction	After the First Session	74.88	10.30
	After the Last Session	68.50	18.08



TABLE 3

The Correlations Among Counselor's effectiveness, Work alliance, and Client's Satisfaction After the First and the Last Session in SFRTW

Scale	Counselor's Effectiveness		Client's Satisfaction	
	After the First Session	After the Last Session	After the First Session	After the Last Session
Client's Satisfaction	.30	.64*		
Working Alliance				
Task	.59*	.40	.29	.04
Bond	.96**	.43	.29	.07
Goal	.45	.64*	.14	.29
Total	.57	.71*	.55	.50

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$

From Table 4, comparing the first with the last session of clients' perception, there was no significant difference on working alliance (task of work alliance, $Z = -.772$, $p > .05$; bond of working alliance, $Z = -.421$, $p > .05$; goal of working alliance, $Z = -.421$, $p > .05$; total of working alliance, $Z = -.140$, $p > .05$), counselor's effectiveness ($Z = -.841$, $p > .05$) and client's satisfaction ($Z = -.840$, $p > .05$).

TABLE 4

Comparison of the First and the Last Sessions of SFRTW on Work alliance, Counselor's Effectiveness, and Client's Satisfaction by Wilcoxon Signed Ranks Test

Comparison of the First and the Last Sessions		Number	Mean of Rank	Sum of Rank	Z
Counselor's Effectiveness	R-	5	4.80	24.00	-.84
	R+	3	4.00	12.00	
	Ties	0			
	sum	8			
Client's Satisfaction	R-	5	4.80	24.00	-.84
	R+	3	4.00	12.00	
	Ties	0			
	Sum	8			
Task of Working Alliance	R-	4	5.88	23.50	-.77
	R+	4	3.13	12.50	
	Ties	0			
	sum	8			
Bond of Working Alliance	R-	4	5.25	21.00	-.42
	R+	4	3.75	15.00	
	Ties	0			
	sum	8			
Goal of Working Alliance	R-	3	5.00	15.00	-.42
	R+	5	4.20	21.00	
	Ties	0			
	Sum	8			
Total of Working Alliance	R-	3	6.33	19.00	-.14
	R+	5	3.40	17.00	
	Ties	0			
	Sum	8			



IV. DISCUSSION, IMPLICATIONS, AND SUGGESTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

In summary, this study explored the relationship among working alliance, client's satisfaction and counselor's effectiveness in SFRTW. According to the results, the clients participating in this study agreed SFRTW could produce middle high degree of working alliance, counselor's effectiveness, and client's satisfaction. The research results also give preliminary support for the use of the solution-focused approach in RTW. Therefore, as Macdonald (2003) argued, keeping promoting and incorporating SFBT in RTW (or even other webcounseling services) are important undertakings for SFBT practitioners for the development of SFRTW and the application of SFBT.

Meanwhile, the clients' perception of tasks and bonds of working alliance had significantly positive correlation with their perception of counselor's effectiveness after the first session. After the last session, the clients' perception of goals of working alliance, and whole working alliance, had significantly positive correlation with counselor's effectiveness. It was obvious that working alliance was developed in SFRTW in this study, and working alliance positively correlated with counselor's effectiveness. This finding confirms what Bordin (1979), Gelso and Carter (1985) emphasized on the importance of working alliance, and proves the establishment of working alliance in SFRTW to be essential as well as in traditional face-to-face counseling (Leibert et al., 2006; Reynolds et al., 2006; Rochlen et al., 2004). However, the dimensions of working alliance correlated with counselor's effectiveness were different after the first and the last session. It seems that the correlation between working alliance and counselor's effectiveness will be changed during the SFRTW process or after a different number of sessions. This difference also reflects that counselors of Solution-focused approach still endeavored building relationship with clients and formed the task of counseling at the very beginning in SFRTW. Since mainly focusing on solution-building, the counselors of Solution-focused approach would make every effort on reaching clients' counseling goals especially at the later stage of counseling, which might also affect this difference. The possibility and the details of this alteration were not explored in this study, though it would be worthwhile to study in the future.

Moreover, there was no correlation between client's satisfaction and counselor's effectiveness in SFRTW after the first session, yet there was a positive one after the last session, and the client's satisfaction of SFRTW was not correlated with working alliance, neither after the first nor the last session. Thus, it seemed that counselor's effectiveness, which was correlated with working alliance and client's satisfaction at the same time in SFRTW, is a more powerful variable than working alliance in influencing client's satisfaction in SFRTW. Meanwhile, this result is opposite to the findings of Leibek et al (2006), which stated working alliance was crucial for clients' satisfaction in RTW. Of course, this difference deserves further study.

The comparison of the first and the last session had no significant difference. The indication is that in SFRTW, counselor's effectiveness, working alliance, and client's satisfaction kept stable in 2-6 sessions in this study. Of course, the various numbers of sessions for different clients, as Sauer et al. (2003) claimed, might be a contributing factor. The different counseling topics could also influence the results, especially the post-test. In addition, according to the scores of three scales after the first and the last sessions, the clients' perception after the last session had higher variations compared to the responses after the first session, and this might reveal that clients' motivation for SFRTW and interaction with their counselors were quite different, which also became an influential factor. Another reason why the scores of the three scales, between the pre and post-tests, showed no



significant differences is that the scores of three scales evaluated after the first session were higher than the means. It represented that the clients already perceived high working alliance with counselors, counselors' effectiveness and satisfaction after the first session. In other words, it might be the "ceiling effect" so that the ratings afterwards showed resemblance. Particularly, owing to the limited samples, the result show no significant difference between pre and post-tests. Of course, the number of clients and counselors was too few in this study to draw a definitive conclusion. Therefore, the further study should recruit more clients and counselors in order to distinguish the variation and keep exploring the changing process of counselor's effectiveness, working alliance, client's satisfaction and more other variables in SFRTW in the future. Furthermore, future research can also add more in-depth interviews after the counseling sessions to deeply explore clients' subjective perceptions and experiences in the webcounseling process.

Another topic emerging from this study was about the scales. The scales of "Working Alliance Inventory", "Counselor Rating Form—Simplicity" and "Counseling Response Scale", having been used in traditional face-to-face counseling, were not designed for the purpose of RTW or SFRTW, nor were they completed by clients on the Internet in this study. In order to improve the study designs, the precision and suitability of the scales, which can properly investigate the process and outcome of RTW and SFRTW, should be devised in the future.

It also implies one important factor that counselors of SFRTW not only need to be acquainted with the solution-focused approach, but also they need to be able to apply SFBT fluently while operating the RTW system. It also raises another important issue: What is the proper content of training programs for counselors in SFRTW? Researchers and practitioners can work on developing these training programs in the future.

One expected factor concerning the technical issues of webcounseling was still found during this experiment. Although clients and counselors could decide their counseling time and place flexibly in this study, the unreliability and low responding speeds (e.g. typing) of webcounseling systems sometimes interrupted their concentration and involvement in the counseling process due to the different configurations of their hardware and software and their familiarity with this webcounseling platform. The barriers of the webcounseling system regarding stability and speed of response should be overcome. Also, future researchers and SFBT practitioners can develop a webcounseling system particularly designed for SFRTW and explore further into its effectiveness.

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