DISCRIMINATIVE CONTROL OF THERAPISTS' PERFORMANCE¹

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In order to examine therapists' discriminative responding to normal and idiosyncratic patient responses, naive subjects were presented with a simulated "patient" for treatment. The subjects were made to believe they were reinforcing normal verbalizations emitted by this patient. In fact, they were listening to a tape on which normal and idiosyncratic verbalizations had been recorded. Different probabilities of normal and idiosyncratic "patient" verbalizations could be presented to the subjects by means of a digital programming unit. In one of a number of conditions, the subjects' accurate reinforcing responses were followed by an increased probability of the patient's normal verbalizations. Accurate reinforcing responses emitted by the subjects were brought under the control of normal and idiosyncratic patient responses, by use of contingent feedback, change in patient responding, and monetary reinforcers. When the patient's normal verbalizations increased in probability, so did the subjects' accurate reinforcing responses following the patient's normal verbalizations, and to a lesser degree, the subjects' inaccurate reinforcing responses following the patient's idiosyncratic verbalizations. When the patient's idiosyncratic verbalizations increased in probability, the subjects' accurate and inaccurate reinforcing responses decreased in probability. The clinical implications of these tendencies are discussed.

DESCRIPTORS: discrimination training, therapist behavior, simulated patient, induced responding, analogue study, psychiatric patients, feedback

Received 5 October 1973.

(Final acceptance 1 April 1974.)

¹The full text of this manuscript is deposited with the National Auxiliary Publication Service (NAPS). For copies, order NAPS Document #02576. Order from ASIS/NAPS Co., c/o Microfiche Publications, 440 Park Avenue South, New York, New York 10016. Remit with order for each \$1.50 for microfiche or \$13.70 for photocopies. Make checks payable to Microfiche Publications. This study was based upon a thesis submitted by the first author to the Department of Psychology, Queen's University, Kingston, Ontario, Canada, in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy. The authors are indebted to Drs. A. P. Purohit, W. L. Gekoski, and P. C. Dodwell for their interest in the study and their thoughtful comments and suggestions. We also acknowledge the kind cooperation we received from the various members of the staff of the Kingston Psychiatric Hospital, particularly from Mr. J. S. Sutherland. The study was conducted with financial assistance from the Department of Psychology, Queen's University, Kingston, Ontario, Canada.

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