

1966

## The effect of training in counseling psychology on interpersonal perception.

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Magoon, Joyce Ann, "The effect of training in counseling psychology on interpersonal perception." (1966).  
*Masters Theses 1911 - February 2014*. 1757.  
<https://doi.org/10.7275/6871303>

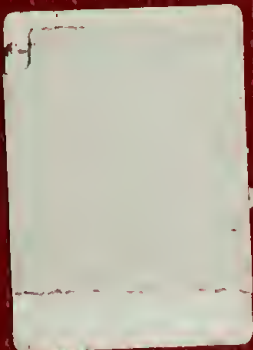
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THE EFFECT OF TRAINING IN COUNSELING  
PSYCHOLOGY ON  
INTERPERSONAL PERCEPTION

by

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Problem submitted to the Psychology Department  
In partial fulfillment of the requirements  
For the Degree of Master of Science  
University of Massachusetts  
Amherst, Mass.

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## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I wish to extend my sincere thanks to the following persons for their valuable assistance in the preparation of this study:

To Dr. Sarah A. Alleman for her support and her helpful comments on this study.

To Dr. J. Alfred Southworth and Dr. Richard Johnson for their helping comments on this study and for serving as members of my examining committee.

To Dr. Mary Suddyam for her help with the statistical aspects of this study.

In order to become a professional counselor or psychotherapist it is necessary for a student to complete a minimum of three years of graduate training in counseling psychology, followed by one year of internship. Whereas the first year of graduate training deals mostly with courses concerned with all areas of psychology, the last two years deal much more specifically with the theoretical foundations of counseling psychology and their applications. It is at this time (during the second and third year of graduate training), that the student is confronted by clients who expect to be helped. The clients will have assumed and rightly so that during this three year period, the counselor learns how to deal effectively with clients and knows how to guide them along the road to mental health and self actualization.

With the criteria set up recently by the American Psychological Association (1966), this assumption seems justified. The APA state that the psychotherapy training programs in clinical psychology (it is assumed that these standards apply to counseling psychology also) should meet the following requirements:

1. They should develop therapeutic competence in the student.
2. They should help the student develop greater ability to enter into a meaningful relationship with others.
3. They should increase the self-awareness, sensitivity and understanding of themselves and others.
4. They should develop the ability to conceptualize human problems.



However, there is one rather large problem: how a program leading to growth in these directions for the students should be implemented. The only specific ways mentioned in this article to attain these goals were three rather general criteria: a one-to-one relationship in psychotherapy and in other therapies which lead to change in clients, exposures to relationships which result in indirect influences on the clients and the supervision of the trainee by a practicing psychotherapist. The assumptions made by these implementing steps are:

1) That exposure to clients in a one-to-one relationship with 2) supervision by a practicing psychotherapist will produce desirable results in the student. The utopian goal of training, then, as it now exists, is to educate the students by theoretical coursework, by exposure to clients and to a supervisor's criticism. However, there appears to be no proof in the literature of any training program having demonstrated its efficacy in helping the student to grow in the above-mentioned directions. On the contrary, the literature supports the opposite position; that graduate students trained in counseling psychology deteriorate in their interpersonal functioning and in sensitivity to human feelings. And even worse, it appears that the more trained and experienced the counseling psychologist, the less sensitivity and understanding he has of his client's feelings.

Crow (1957) tested the assumption that exposure to clients makes a person more sensitive and more accurately empathic. He trained a group of medical students for a year and compared their "accurate empathy" three times during that year with untrained medical students. After discovering the untrained medical students to be more accurate and sensitive to their patient's feelings, he wrote: "Since very little is known about how to train people to make more accurate predictions about others, training programs frequently utilize a program of 'exposure' and little else. The belief that placing the trainee in a position to observe and to make judgments will produce desirable results is challenged by these findings." (Crow, 1957, p. 358)

Not only has the exposure assumption been challenged, but the supervision assumption has been challenged, also. Kelly and Fiske (1951) had supervisors rate their trainees and predict which one would be the most successful in the field of clinical psychology. They also had the trainees take the Strong Vocational Interest Blank and the ACE to determine how successful the two were in the prediction of successes in the training program. Not only were the SVIB and the ACE more accurate than the supervisor's predictions, but even more damaging to the psychologist's image was the finding that the more the supervisor knew his trainee, the less accurate were his predictions.



In this same area, Bergim and Soloman (1963) also discovered that the clients of those trainees who received the highest academic and practicum grades tended to deteriorate in functioning while the clients of those trainees who received lower academic and practicum grades improved in functioning.]

Luft (1950) carried out a study, the purpose of which was to compare the sensitivity of physical scientists, graduate students in clinical psychology, and clinical psychologists, or those ranging from no exposure and no supervision to much exposure and supervision. He discovered that the physical scientists, those with no exposure and no supervision, were "tuned in" better to the needs and feelings of the clients. The graduate students, however, were more tuned in than the professional clinical psychologists.

In another study done by Kelly and Fiske (1950), it was also found that clinical graduate students who had more exposure and supervision than similar subjects with less training were not any more accurate in predicting personality inventory responses of patients whom they had diagnosed through normal psychological techniques.

Not only has the accuracy among trained subjects decreased but their variability has increased also. The trained students show more extreme negative scores than the untrained. Cronbach (1955) (also Crow, 1957) claims the reason for this is to be found in the training programs, for they "increase the trainees' ability to differentiate between people without

increasing the trainee's accuracy." To quote him:

"There is an optimal degree of differentiation in making judgments. If a judge can make accurate judgments as to the relative location of others on a continuum, then he is wise to make the variability in his estimations as large as the variability in others' scores--never larger. But if he is forced to base his judgments on inadequate cues..., then he should treat people as if they were very nearly alike. The person who attempts to differentiate individuals on inadequate data introduces error even when the inferences have validity greater than chance." (Cronbach, 1955, p. 181). According to Cronbach, then training programs decrease accuracy when they increase the trainee's responsiveness to differences between clients. He goes on to claim that "differentiation is harmful".

Combining and interpreting all of the research presented, it would appear that neither exposure nor supervision has been shown to lead to effective training for the trainees. How then can these APA goals be implemented? And what should be done about present day training programs which emphasize supervision and exposure as implementing steps?

First of all, a closer look should be taken at each training program in counseling psychology to determine its efficacy. Objective as well as subjective measures of growth should be obtained, since the latter have already proven inefficient. However, there are some problems using objective measures also.

It is with the hope of obtaining objective measures of the effects of training of students in training at the University of Massachusetts, and also of correcting some problems dealing with the use of objective measures, that the present study is being conducted.



### STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

The fact that most training programs can lead to a decrease in accurate empathic understanding and an increase in variability has already been established (Crow, 1957). However, there are two methodological problems. The first is that the comparison was made between the trained and untrained counselors. The trained were not compared with themselves following a prolonged period of training, but rather with other untrained counselors. It appears that it would be difficult to make generalizations concerning the effects of training without comparing each trainee with himself before and after training. The second problem is that most studies required the judges to rate a client's personality on the basis of second-hand information, such as taped interview or case conference presentations. They rarely met their clients.

In addition to these methodological problems, there are some interpretative problems. It may very well be that some graduate training programs are meeting the needs of their trainees while others are not. Or it may be that trainees are affected by their graduate training in ways which have not properly been evaluated. Contrary to Cronbach's hypothesis, it may be valuable for the trainee to have increased variability even at the expense of accuracy, for it may indicate that the student is adhering less to stereotype. Even another possibility is that some trainees are helped by training and others are not; this may not show up in the results because they would

negate each other. Allport (1924) discovered that some judges of behavior were more accurate by using their intuition while others were more accurate following training in analytic therapy.

Just what is happening in our training programs? The exact reasons why the graduate training programs are not helping the students need to be determined. The present study is an attempt to work out some of these problems and therefore has a twofold purpose:

1. It is concerned with determining whether graduate students at the University of Massachusetts differ among themselves in the amount or the variability of empathic understanding they have of clients with whom they personally have related.

2. It can serve as a pilot study to be replicated at the end of the three-year training period. The untrained graduate students in this follow-up study will be compared with themselves following the completion of their training. They will also be compared to a control group which have been measured at the beginning and the end of the three years. This will then show the effects of training on the individual students.

Specifically, it is assumed that empathic understanding is a general trait existing in each counselor trained or untrained and that it is not entirely dependent on the specific interactional situation. Given this assumption, it is hypothesized that:

1. The trained counselors at the University of Massachusetts will not differ significantly from the untrained in the

amount of empathic understanding they show.

2. That no counselor trained or untrained will significantly differ from any other.

3. That each trained counselor will show more individual variability than the untrained. This hypothesis follows Cronbach's line of reasoning that the trained counselors have learned to differentiate between their clients more and are therefore more likely to make greater errors than the untrained. However, it is also postulated that the variability will be greater due to greater successes. Since the trainees have learned to differentiate between clients more, they will also be more accurate when they are correct. These two effects will negate each other; therefore there will be no difference in the mean functioning of the two groups.



### METHOD

Subjects: The subjects in this experiment are students in an introductory psychology course at the University of Massachusetts. The counselors in this experiment include four first year graduate students in counseling psychology, none of whom has had any counseling experience, and four second and third year graduate students in counseling psychology with one to two years of training and experience. A description of the experienced counselors follow:

Counselor 1: Two years of counseling experience with exposure and supervision at this university.

Counselor 2: Two years of counseling experience with exposure to clients and supervision at this university.

Counselor 3: Two years of counseling experience; one-half of a year at this university and one and one-half at a mental hospital. Both exposure and supervision were offered at both places.

Counselor 4: One year of counseling experience with supervision and course-work.

The four inexperienced counselors were all graduate students beginning in counseling psychology. They had had no practical experience either at this university or elsewhere. Each had had only one course dealing with the theoretical aspects of counseling. The subjects who served as clients were chosen at random from all students in undergraduate psychology courses. Two of the experienced and two of the inexperienced

counselors saw one male and four females, while the rest saw all females.

The students who served as counselors were chosen at random from the body of counseling psychology graduate students who were willing and eager to participate in this study.

Instrument: The California Psychological Inventory (CPI)

Procedure: The forty subjects were randomly assigned to one of the eight counselors. Before they were introduced to this counselor, they were given the following directions by the experimenter:

"You are participating as a subject in an experiment on interpersonal perception. For forty-five minutes, a counseling psychology graduate student will interview you and discuss some personal issues with you. Following the interview, you will be given a personality inventory to fill out. Your interviewer will be given the same inventory but he will be required to answer it as he thinks you will. Therefore, it is essential that you are honest both with the interviewer and on the questionnaire."

The counselors, before their first interview, were given the following instructions:

"The purpose of this interview is to obtain as much information as possible as to how the client perceives himself without asking him specific questions. The most important personality variables to look at are dominance, self-acceptance, responsibility, tolerance, intellectual efficiency and flexibility. At the end of the interview, you will take the CPI and you will be required to answer the inventory as you think your client would."

The counselor and client were then introduced by the experimenter and shown to a quiet office. After forty-five minutes, the experimenter interrupted the interview and had both the subject and the experimenter go to different rooms to

fill out the questionnaire. Each counselor interviewed five clients in the same manner.



## RESULTS

Six scales on the CPI (dominance, self-acceptance, responsibility, tolerance, flexibility and intellectual efficiency) were scored and rank ordered for each subject. The counselor's CPI for the same individual was similarly scored and rank ordered. A Spearman Rho correlation was obtained between each client's and his counselor's rankings.

The correlated results can be seen in Table 1 and the means and standard deviations for each counselor in Table 2.

From these tables it can be seen that:

1. There is an overall slight difference between the trained and untrained counselors. The trained counselors were slightly higher with a mean correlation of .41 while the mean correlation for the untrained group was .35.
2. There was more variability among the experienced counselors than among the inexperienced. The average standard deviation for the inexperienced was .178 while the average standard deviation for the experienced group was .165. Generally speaking then, the inexperienced counselor's correlations were lower than the experienced, but their variability was greater.

In order to determine the significance of these findings, an analysis of variance, a one variable nested design, was computed. This design was chosen because it gave information comparing not only the experienced and the inexperienced, but also gave information comparing the individual counselors within each group. The results are shown in Table 3. There is no

significance between the two groups nor is there any difference between the individual counselors within the groups. It was not felt that an  $r$ - $z$  transformation was necessary since a scatter diagram indicated that the correlation was low. However, the transformation was carried out on the group comparisons and the individual variability comparisons and the results were still not significant. In order to determine the significance of the variability results, a  $t$  test was computed. There was no significant difference between the two groups in the amount of variability.

TABLE 1

Correlation Co-efficient Between Client-  
Counselor Rankings of Client  
Personality Traits

Counselor	Client				
	1	2	3	4	5
Experienced					
1	.66	.39	.60	.83	.43
2	-.31	.30	-.44	.37	1.00
3	.37	.03	.19	.59	.56
4	.72	.99	0.00	.77	.26
Inexperienced					
5	.17	.40	.25	-.20	-.40
6	.07	.72	.59	.87	.46
7	-.83	.18	.89	.72	.19
8	.83	0.00	.53	.16	.66



TABLE 2

Counselor's Mean Correlation And  
Standard Deviation Over Clients.

		Mean	Standard Deviation
Counselor			
Experienced			
1		.58	.066
2		.18	.308
3		.35	.164
4		.55	.175
Inexperienced			
5		.20	.079
6		.54	.100
7		.23	.383
8		.44	.099

TABLE 3.

Analysis of Variance of Experienced-  
Inexperienced Counselors

Sources of Variance	SS	df	MS	F
Total	4180.6	39		
Between Groups				
A	390.6	1	390.6	.26
G/A.	9167.4	6	1528.	1.5.
S/G/A.	32238.4	32	976	

## DISCUSSION

The results of this study substantiate two of the three main hypotheses: that there is no significant difference between the trained and the untrained counselors in the amount of accurate empathy they show, and that there is no significant difference between the individual counselors in empathy. It appears, as Crow and Cronbach have hypothesized, that training does not affect a counselor's empathic level when this level is averaged over clients. However, it also appears that the variability between the two groups is insignificant. Contrary to Crow and Cronbach's hypotheses, training does not lead to an increase in negative correlations nor to an increase in variability. Does this mean that the training program at the University has no effect? Or is it a result of the experimental situation?

These questions can be answered by interpreting the data in various ways:

1. The first possible interpretation is that the variability which each counselor shows from client to client is a result of different client characteristics which have affected the counselor's perception, but which cannot be controlled by the counselor. Such characteristics as client-counselor similarity, client consistency and client transparency are more important variables affecting the degree of empathy shown by the counselor than any counselor characteristics.



2. Another interpretation, equally as plausible, is that training may affect the counselor's empathic ability but that it has not been measured in this study. The reliability and validity of the CPI is not so great that it can be assumed that these results are adequate measures of the client's traits.

3. There are a number of artifacts in this experimental design which could affect the results and the subsequent interpretation. The remainder of this section will be devoted to looking more closely at these three possible interpretations. The first interpretation is supported by the finding that each counselor does not significantly differ from every other counselor more than he differs from himself in different. This implies that empathy, as measured in this study, may be only part of the specific environmental situation.

Authors who support this position have researched the important client variables which lead to greater counselor empathy. Such variables as client transparency, client consistency, and client-counselor similarity have been found to be the most relevant (Foa, 1958, Pyron, 1965, Bender and Hastorf, 1953). That means that the more open the client, the more consistent his emotional reactions and the more his emotional reactions resemble the counselor's, the better will be the empathic understanding between the client and counselor.

If empathy is only a specific trait, depending on the particular client situation, then it should not be used to evaluate either individual counselors nor training programs because it would not be an adequate measure of a counselor's ability. And indeed, some writers advocate the complete abolishment of tests such as this (Bender and Hastorf, 1953).

However, other investigators have discovered that empathy is both a general and a specific trait; the counselor's as well as the client's personality are important variables. The more the counselor shows sensitivity to the generalized other and the greater his interpersonal sensitivity, the greater will be his empathic accuracy (Cline, 1960). In addition to this finding, it has been shown that the greater the counselor's empathy and sensitivity, the smaller the influence of the client's characteristics (Allport, 1939). Allport sums this issue up: "It would be unreasonable to expect a judge of people to be uniformly successful in estimating every quality of every person...it seems more of an error, however, to consider the ability entirely specific rather than entirely general." (Allport, 1937, p. 512). According to this formulation, then, specific characteristics influence the counselor's ability only when he has not developed empathic, sensitive understanding. It appears that the counselors at the University of Massachusetts are greatly influenced by the specific client-counselor relationship and

it can be concluded that training has not been effective in developing empathic understanding in these students.

Another plausible explanation of these results is that there is a significant difference between the two groups of counselors but that this difference has not been measured by this study. The reason for this could lie in the construction and interpretation of the CPI scales. A brief description of these scales follow.

The dominance scale assesses factors of leadership ability, dominance, persistence and social initiative. The self acceptance scale measures factors such as the client's sense of personal worth, self acceptance and the capacity for independent thinking and action. The responsibility scale identifies persons of conscientious, responsible and dependable disposition and temperaments. The scale for tolerance identifies students with permissive, accepting and non judgmental social beliefs. The intellectual efficiency scale indicates the degree of personal and intellectual efficiency which the client has achieved. The flexibility scale indicates the adaptability of a person's thinking and social behavior.

The questions which need to be raised about these scales is whether or not the scales actually measure what they are supposed to be measuring and whether they measure this reliably? In response to the first question, studies have been done to determine the concurrent validity of the



scales. This was done to determine if what the scale measures are what others think the scale measures. For example, the scale for dominance correlates only .40 with a supervisor's rating of dominance among military personnel (Gough, 1956). The validity for the other six scales ranges from .32 - .58 (Gough, 1956). Since this correlation is low, the two measures may be measuring something different. Since in this study the counselors were not told specifically what the scales purported to measure, the counselors may be using their own definitions of the traits.

Other studies also indicate that the test-retest reliability falls between .62 and .71.

Combining day to day changes with low validity, the results of this study may be a function of the test instrument used. If this is the case, then there may be a significant difference between counselors using a different measure.

There are four possible sources of error inherent in this experimental design which could account for the obtained results. The first is that the sampling of graduate students has been biased. The graduate students chosen to participate in this study included only those who were willing and eager to do so. The reason for this discrimination was to eliminate those students who would have participated but who might not have been motivated to try to understand their clients. It is possible that students who were the "best" (or at least the most confident) were the ones who were willing and eager to

participate in this study. If this is what has occurred, then the "best" of the first year students were tested so that any true difference between the two samples may have been camouflaged. However, following the same line of reasoning, it would also be hypothesized that the "best" of the second and third year students were also the ones who were willing and eager to participate. This would then minimize the possibility of this source of error operating here.

A second possible artifact of this experiment is contained in the instructions given to the students by the examiner. The specific instructions asked the student to be as honest as possible on both the questionnaire and with the counselor since the counselor would be required to fill out the questionnaire as he thinks the client will fill it out. The client, if he wants to help his counselor, may deny his true feelings and thereby change his responses. Then, not only is the counselor's perception of the client being measured, but also the client's perception of the counselor; the result may lead to a lower correlation than should be obtained. A concrete example of this effect follows. During the hour long interview, the client may have told the counselor that he enjoyed attending social parties (even though he may not be outgoing and sociable). Then he reads inventory questions 52 and 83 which read respectively: "I usually take an active part in the entertainment at parties." "I usually feel ill at ease at a

formal dance or party." His real feeling would require a "no" response to the first question and a "yes" response to the second. However, since he has already told his counselor that he frequently attended parties, he perceives that the counselor will not understand his real feeling and therefore changes his two responses. This is even more relevant if the counselor has perceptively sensed the client's feelings.

Another possible artifact of the experiment is contained in the measuring instrument. The CPI assumes considerable self-acceptance and self-honesty. If this assumption is violated by a naive subject, then the results are not true measures of counselor perceptiveness, for the counselor is probably more perceptive than the client is.

The last possible source of error in the experimental design is one that could not be avoided. That is the possibility that the client may deliberately answer the questionnaire as he wants to, not as he feels. In other words, he may deliberately respond differently than he did in the interview.

All of these possible artifacts produce irrelevant variables which could affect both the results and the implications found in this paper. However, ignoring these experimental errors, the results of this study seem to indicate that training at the University of Massachusetts has either no effect on the empathic ability of its trainees or has not been adequately measured.



These results suggest possibilities for future research. There is a need to replicate this study in three years to compare the untrained graduate student with himself following the completion of training. This will indicate both the reliability of this study and the rate of growth or deterioration of each trainee individually. Other studies should be done to determine the growth of the student in other ways.

### SUMMARY

This study was conducted to determine the effect of the counseling training program on interpersonal perception. Specifically, four trained and four untrained counselors were compared as to their accuracy and their variability of empathic understanding. This was carried out by allowing each counselor to interview five clients each for forty-five minutes. Following the interview, both the client and the counselors filled out the California Psychological Inventory; the counselor filled it out as he thought the client would. Six scales of the CPI were then rank ordered and a correlation co-efficient was obtained between the counselor and his client's rankings. An analysis of variance and a t test were then carried out on these correlations. The findings indicate that there was no significant difference between the two groups in the amount of accuracy. There was also no significant difference between the amount of variability shown by each counselor. Three possible interpretations of the results were given. The first was that the different characteristics which the client showed were more important than the counselor's empathic ability. The second was that the training may affect the counselor's empathic ability but that it has not been adequately measured by this study. The third was that the results are just by-products of the experimental situation.

Suggestions for follow-up research were made. It was suggested that this study be replicated in three years in order to compare the untrained graduate students with themselves following training. This will also determine the growth or deterioration of each graduate student. Other studies should be done to determine the growth of the student in other ways, also.



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APPENDIX

TABLE 5

Client-Counselor Rank Orderings of  
Six Scales on CPI

Exp.		<u>Counselor-Client</u>									
Counselor		1	2	3	4	5					
1	Do	5	3	4	4	3	2.5	3	2	6	6
	Sa	1	1	2	1	1	2.5	1	1	1	5
	Re	4	6	4	6	6	6	6	5	2	1
	To	6	5	4	2.5	4	4	5	6	4	1
	Ie	2	2	6	2.5	5	5	2	4	5	1
	Fx	3	4	1	5	2	1	4	3	3	3
2	Do	2	5	3.5	2	3	3	4	5	3	3
	Sa	1	4	1	5	5	1	6	6	2	2
	Re	4	6	2	1	6	2	2	4	6	6
	To	6	2	6	4	1	5	1	2	5	5
	Ie	5	3	3.5	3	2	4	3	3	4	4
	Fx	3	1	5	6	4	6	5	1	1	1
3	Do	3	2.5	6	1.5	4	4	1	3	3	3.5
	Sa	4	6	4	4	5	5	3.5	1	1.5	2
	Re	5	5	3	6	1	2	5	6	6	4
	To	1	1	2	2	2	3	2	4.5	5	3.5
	Ie	3	4	5	3	6	6	6	4.5	4	3
	Fx	6	2.5	1	1.5	3	1	3.5	2	1.5	1
4	Do	6	3.5	6	5	1	5	6	5	5	5
	Sa	5	6	2	6	3	1	3	6	6	6
	Re	3	2	5	3	2	2	5	4	2	2
	To	3	3.5	3	2	4	6	2	2.5	3.5	3
	Ie	3	1	4	4	5	4	4	2.5	3.5	1
	Fx	1	5	1	1	6	3	1	1	1	4



31

Inexp.

1

2

3

24

5

		6	6	6	4	1	6	2	2	3	4
5	Do	6	6	6	4	1	6	2	2	3	4
	Sa	5	5	3	3	2	5	1	2	3	4
	Re	1	3	1.5	1	4	1	5.5	2	1.5	1.5
	To	3	4	1.5	6	3	4	5.5	4.5	5	6
	Ie	4	2	5	5	5	3	5.5	6	6	5
	Fx	2	1	4	2	6	2	4	3	1.5	1.5
6	Do	5	4	6	5.5	4	4	6	6	6	4
	Sa	4	2	5	4	3	1.5	2.5	4	1.5	1
	Re	6	6	4	1	6	5	4	2	4	6
	To	3	5	2	5.5	2	3	1	3	3	6
	Ie	2	3	3	3	5	6	2.5	5	5	5
	Fx	1	1	1	2	1	1.5	5	1	1.5	2
7	Do	4	1	2	2	5	4	4	3	3	3.5
	Sa	3	4.5	1	1	1.5	5	2	5.5	1	3.5
	Re	2	2	3	4	4	2	3	4	6	5
	To	6	3	6	6	6	6	6	2	5	6
	Ie	5	6	5	3	3	3	5	5.5	4	2
	Fx	1	4.5	4	5	1.5	1	1	1	2	1
8	Do	4	6	5	3	2	4.5	6	6	6	5
	Sa	2	3	1	1	1	2	3	4	2	2
	Re	5	4	2.5	6	6	6	5	5	1	4
	To	6	2	2.5	5	4	3	3	1	4	6
	Ie	3	1	6	4	3	4.5	1	3	5	3
	Fx	1	5	4	2	5	1	3	2	3	1

Approved Alfred Southworth

Richard W Johnson

Date: May 25, 1966





