

THE EXPERIENCE OF BEING UNDERSTOOD: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL-STRUCTURAL ANALYSIS

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This article is based on a masters thesis conducted by the first author under the direction of the second author at the Department of Psychology, Tel Aviv University, Ramat Aviv, Isreal.

ABSTRACT

The research on Interpersonal Understanding, until now, was done mainly through the concept of Empathy. In spite of the many theoretical and empirical research studies done on empathy, a content and structural definition of this term has not been reached until now. Interpersonal Understanding is composed of two feelings: 1 - understanding the other, 2 - being understood by the other. Two studies were designed to explore the reactions to "being understood." The first study described the feelings of this experience by a phenomenological method and thirteen categories of content were discovered to be indispensable and obligatory composers of the experience "being understood." A "Cilindrex" three dimensional structure of the investigated phenomenon was obtained by the INDSICAL method in study II. This structure is composed of three facets that were interpreted in terms of: 1 - A state of power that is enhanced by the understood person's feelings (weakness or strength); 2 - Quality of feeling (basic or elevated); 3 - Focus of feeling (intrapersonal or interpersonal). It was also found that these facets characterize each one, respectively, the feelings of being understood by: 1 - parents, 2 - friends and 3 - couple. Tentative answers have been given to these differences. The discussion points out to the firstness of the experience of being understood and its importance as an agent of essential psychological human need.

INTRODUCTION

The importance of feeling understood by a significant other concerns various fields of study. Different Interpersonal domains such as Interpersonal Communications (DeVito, 1983), Interpersonal Perceptions (Laing, 1966), Friendship (Kon & Losenkov, 1978; Gamer, 1977), and Child Parent relationships

(Goldstein, 1957; Paul, 1970) treat implicitly the inner growth of the personal feeling "being understood." Developmental psychology, psychotherapy and counseling perceive this sensation as a basic mean towards the achievement of "Mental Health." (Winnicot, 1965; Olden, 1953; Goldstein, 1981; Carkhuff, 1969).

Despite the unquestionable repercussions of the subject, the "feeling understood" experience has not become an autonomous topic of research. This lack of independence is mainly a result of the monopoly that the term empathy has over the interpersonal understanding field.

The study of empathy absorbed the feeling of "being understood." Theodor Lipps introduced in the early nineteenth century, the term *Einfuhlung* to the psychological lexicon (Harre & Lamb, 1983). Since then, an Empathy-Interpersonal Understanding parallelism has been nurtured. "A" empathizes with "B," "B" feels understood by "A." This sentence became, actually, a psychological axiom. Numerous references verify the latest assertion, e.g., Rogers (1962, 1965), Sullivan (1953), and Shantz (1975). Naturally such processes limited the study of interpersonal understanding to the single word: Empathy. Having this axiom, the research dedicated itself to building many measurement methods, the purpose of which was to correlate multiple variables with empathy (Hoffman, 1977; Scotland et al, 1978). Despite empirical flourishing, including the latest articles treating empathy conceptually (e.g., Barret - Lenard, 1981) no attempt to discover the phenomenological and structural content of empathy is known to the authors of the current research. It should be noted that such methodological fault is not inherent to the research of empathy but occurs in many other psychological concepts such as emotion (Schoenfeld, 1971). Scientific procedure obligates comprehending the specific content of the concept investigated, prior to the creation of scales and measurement techniques (Chein, 1972). This constraint is not in vain, today we are witnessing an embarrassing discordancy among the vast interpretations of empathy. Ianotti (1975) expresses this confusion in his article about empathy in children . . . "these research reports are becoming increasingly difficult to integrate due to different, and in some cases conflicting, definitions of assessment techniques, . . . various assessment techniques are then examined, and it is found that in some instances there are inconsistencies between the conceptual and operational definitions" (p. 21). Bacharach (1976) describes this situation in his article illustratively named: "Empathy: We know what we mean, but what do we measure?"

The literature reveals a single and partial attempt to know the components of the experience of "being understood" (Van Kaam, 1969). Interpersonal understanding is composed by two primordial experiences: 1 - understanding the other; 2 - feeling understood by the other. Exploring the contents and the internal organization of both experiences will provide a basic definition of Interpersonal Understanding and, therefore, of Empathy.

The purpose of the present investigation was to examine the basic feelings or reactions of being understood by discovering the internal structure and manifestations in different relationships. Guided by this goal two studies were conducted. The first one dealt with phenomenological description of the reactions to being understood (b.u.) while the second one was a structural analysis of this concept.

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STUDY I — A Phenomenological Description

The purpose of Study I was to discover the phenomenological categories which compose the reaction of being understood (b.u.) as a layman manifests it. The "Intra-subjective validity" method of investigation suggested by Van Kaam (1969) allows us to achieve the different categories that establish the being understood moment.

This method consists of obtaining naive descriptions of spontaneous perceptions of the phenomenon from a sample of untrained subjects. Those subjects may produce a great number and variety of descriptions for the phenomenon studied. Therefore, the researcher should try to identify the fundamental components of the phenomenon which appear in those meaningful descriptions. This method categorizes the different manifestations of the verbal reports of the feeling "being understood" with a minimum of distortion of the original date.

This method does not invalidate a scientific approach. Van Kaam (1969) has affirmed that phenomenological research must be considered the first step of scientific investigation. Phenomenology can never replace other scientific methods. However, it can be important for psychological research because it does not appeal to theories or preconceptions besides the behavior itself. The phenomenology only "... makes explicit what is already implicitly present in behavior itself" (Van Kaam, 1969, p. 267). Following such phenomenological research, theoretical models can be advanced based on the manifold manifestations of the studied phenomenon.

In short, the first task is to describe the different categories of the feeling "being understood by a significant other." The analysis of the phenomenological data should be performed in six chronological phases: 1 - Listing and preliminary grouping, 2 - Reduction, 3 - Elimination, 4 - Initial categorization, 5 - Application, 6 - Final identification of the studied feeling. (For more details see Van Kaam, 1969, p. 325).

According to Van Kaam (1969), these six phases must be executed according to the following axiom: "to describe the necessary and sufficient constituents of a certain experience is a moment of the experience which, while explicitly or implicitly expressed in the significant majority of explications by a random sample of subjects, is also compatible with those descriptions which do not express it (Van Kaam, 1969, p. 334-6). A phenomenological method must test every formulation on two dimensions: 1 - Does the concrete formulation by the subject contain an item of experience that might be a necessary and sufficient constituent of the "being understood" experience? 2 - If so, is it possible to make an abstract of this item and to label the abstraction without violating the original experiences that are reflected in the proposed categories. Each category must represent the common denominator of overlapping experiences. Experiences which do not overlap should be classified in different categories. The sum of the resulting categories must cover the different and non-overlapping manifestations of the studied phenomenon.

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METHOD

SUBJECTS: The subjects were 94 undergraduate students at Tel Aviv University, whose ages ranged between 20 to 37 years. Forty-seven females and 47 males participated in the study. The subjects volunteered to complete the questionnaire without compensation. Two restrictions were imposed for the sample composition: 1) A basic ability to express themselves with relative ease in the Hebrew language, 2) The subjects ought not to be specialists in psychology and not be related in any way to the researched topic.

INSTRUMENT: Van Kaam's questionnaire (1969, p. 331) for investigating the "feeling understood" experience was used. The subjects were asked to describe an experience of really feeling understood. Subjects were given the following instructions: 1) Describe how you feel when you feel that you are really being understood by somebody. Before you answer, please pay attention to the following points:

- a. Recall a situation or some situations when you felt that you were being understood by somebody you know. For example: mother, father, wife, husband, boyfriend, girlfriend, friend, teacher, etc.
- b. Try to describe how you felt in that situation (not the situation itself).
- c. Try to describe your feelings just as they were.
- d. Please do not stop until you feel that you have described your feelings as completely as possible.

The subjects completed the questionnaire anonymously, specifying just their age and sex. They were free to spend as much time as they wished on this task.

ANALYSIS OF THE QUESTIONNAIRE: A random sample of 35 questionnaires was taken from the total. The statements expressed by this sample were listed exactly as they were written by the subjects. This technique resulted in a wide range of listed expressions. Following this listing, three naive judges received independently the list of statements. Each just began to group the different statements into categories. Each category contained overlapping statements, that is, statements which refer to the same category of content. After the judges ended the categorization task, interreliabilities between judges were computed. Each proposed category was tested by evaluating whether it was mentioned by the three judges. Only categories mentioned by the three judges were retained for the final analysis. Interreliabilities between judges were computed using the conservative method of evaluating percentage agreement between judges for each category separately. The mean interjudge agreement for all the categories was 90% with a range between 82% to 97%.

Following this initial grouping, the judges applied the proposed categories to the questionnaires completed by all of the subjects. Every original expression was placed in a corresponding category. It was not necessary to add new categories.

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RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Thirteen categories of content were indicated by the analysis as the principal components as the feeling of b.u. Table no. 1 presents the 13 categories and the percentage of subjects in each category.

The main contents that were included in each category were as follows:

SATISFACTION: This category was characterized by reports of Satisfaction, a good feeling and gladness and other reports such as a beautiful state, a wonderful moment, etc.

SECURITY: This category included a feeling of security or restfulness in the situation itself. There were reports of security in the relationship, and exactness of communication with the other. In other words, when a person feels understood by another person one achieves: 1) a feeling of general security, 2) a feeling of security about the relationship with this person and about the exactness of perception of message.

TENSION-RELIEF: The subjects related a feeling of release and relief of tension, muscle relaxation, calm, and a lowering of anxiety.

SUCCESS IN CONVINCING AND/OR TRANSFERRING THE MESSAGE: The subjects related to the fact that their approach and their attitude were correct. They were pleased that they succeeded in explaining themselves and convincing others of their rightness.

SELF-FULFILLMENT: This category carried a spiritual character. The subjects reported feelings of pride and self-actualization, supreme satisfaction, spiritual peace and inner felicity. The subjects relate to the experience of understanding as a decisively important event for personal development and self-fulfillment.

OPTIMISM ABOUT THE FUTURE: Here, the subjects expressed hope and felt encouraged. Moments like this enforce the belief in the world and the human race. Ambition and expectation that it will happen again. All these were accompanied by a general feeling of optimism about the future.

PARTNERSHIP AND THE ABILITY TO SHARE EXPERIENCES: This category implies the participation of another person in one's experiences, sensations and feelings. The feeling of collaboration and the possibility of sharing personal events.

IDENTIFICATION WITH THE OTHER: Here the word "identification" is used to express the meaning of the word itself and by metaphores such as: The incoming of another soul into oneself, part of myself goes into another person and settles there.

CLOSENESS TO THE OTHER: Here we can see the manifestation of closeness and the willingness to approach the understanding person.

BELONGING AND NOT ALONE: As the name indicates, it is reported here about belonging and not alone, i.e., a situation of understanding brings about a feeling of belonging and release from loneliness. In this category the commonest report was: "I'm not alone."

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ACCEPTANCE: Here we consider a person who feels he is accepted, wanted and loved.

THE WILL TO CONTINUE IN THE SAME SITUATION: As simple as it is conveyed, the subject's will to go on with the same state of events, i.e., express themselves, explain, tell and continue with the communication with the same person who understands them.

FEAR OF SELF-DISCLOSURE: In terms of values, this is the only category which turns to a negative attitude. There has been a great ambivalence among the subjects. On the one side a certain gladness is expressed about the fact of b.u., but on the other hand a felt reticence outstanced among the subjects because of self-disclosure.

TABLE 1
Category Name and Percentage of Subjects
for "Being Understood" Feelings

Category Name	Subject's Percentage
Satisfaction	67
Security	39
Tension Relief	34
Success in convincing and/or transferring the message	29
Self-fulfillment	23
Optimism about the future	23
Partnership and the ability to share your experiences	22
Identification with the other	20
Closeness to the other	16
Belong and not alone	14
Acceptance	8
The will to continue in the same situation	8
Fear of Self-Disclosure	8

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Therefore, according to the analysis, the synthetic description of the researched experience is: The feeling of really being understood is characterized by most people by satisfaction, and in minor degree, in descending order, by the following emotions: Security, Tension Relief, Success in convincing and/or transferring the message, Self-fulfillment, Optimism about the future, Partnership and the ability to share your experiences, Identification with the other, Closeness to the other, Belonging and not alone, Acceptance, The will to continue in the same situation and Fear or self-disclosure.

Eight out of these 13 categories appear, in one way or another, in Van Kaam's (1969) research, and the 5 phenomenological categories of: success in convincing and/or transferring the message, self-fulfillment, optimism about the future, the will to continue in the same situation and feel of self-disclosure, do not take part in it. Since we took as a minimal percentage, the 8% of reports creating a category, we found more than Van Kaam who took as his lowest line a percentage of 64%. This was done to reach the maximal differentiation of the experience even if it was reported only by a small number of people.

The new feelings discovered here help to indicate more accurately the sensations, emotions and feelings of the understood person. There is, however, in Van Kaam's work a ninth category which has not been included among ours. This category was "Perceiving signs of understanding" and is, in our view, more perceptive than emotional and therefore it does not appear in our work.

STUDY II — A Structural Analysis

A phenomenological approach is the first stage for the definition of a psychological concept. It seems to be a descriptive method which must be followed by an explanation of the relationships between the different components. Our second task will provide the structure of the feeling understood experience. This structuralist task is based on the following axiom: A phenomenon can only be defined by studying the organization and relationship between its components. We will try to discover in which ways the individual organizes and interrelates the different components of the subjective experience "feeling understood." This structuralist attitude has been adopted by several psychological theories. Two of the most important are the Gestalt and the Lewinian topological schools. Both schools have proposed that human beings organize their cognitions, feelings, perceptions and every aspect of the individual life in a structured way. Inner and psychological experiences are organized by certain groupings (similarity, proximity, etc.) and topological (frontiers, distance, etc.) laws. The geometrical structure of the researched experience should be defined by studying the order and relationships between the phenomenal components. According to the multidimensional scaling system, the structure of the feeling understood experience is composed of different regions while each region is defined by the proximity of relation among its components. This proximity is stated by the probability that two or more components (in this case: feelings) should appear at the same time. According to the degree of proximity among all pairs of components, this system arranged all of the feelings in the multidimensional

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space. In order to acquire the general structure of the understood person's experience and its particular character in several relationships (friends, couples and child-parents), the following study was conducted.

METHOD

SUBJECTS: Thirty students (14 males and 16 female) whose ages ranged between 19-28 years old answered the questionnaire "feeling understood." The subjects had to be children of living parents or whose parents died in a maximal range of 2 years. In addition each subject reported to have a couple in present or near past (up to 2 years) and to have a close friend.

INSTRUMENTS: In order to examine the general structure of the experience of being understood and the particular one in certain relationships (friends - couples - child-parent) a questionnaire was constructed based on the essential and indispensable elements that were mentioned in Study I. It was aimed to clarify the weight of each component of the experience in the relationship between child-parents, couples and friends. Three different questionnaires were constructed (to be understood by 1 - parents, 2 - his/her mate, 3 - friend). Each of the questionnaires consisted of 13 feelings according to the categories described in Study I. Each feeling had a seven point scale with "1" representing "I did not experience this feeling at all" and at the other extreme "7" representing "I did experience this feeling to a high extent." The subjects completed the three questionnaires individually in a random order without a time limit.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In the present research the INDSCAL method (Carroll & Chang, 1970) was used. For the present analysis, the 2 most relevant characteristics of this technique are: 1) That it provides a common solution, i.e., a graphic representation, based upon more than 1 set of input data. In our case, the results of the three questionnaires together will give us a picture of the experience as a whole, beyond the three specific situations. 2) That the degree of correspondence between each of the axes in the solution and each set of input data can be directly examined separately. In other words, the special quality of this method is that it considers the differences between the results of the 3 questionnaires inside the space representation. This method will show what is the weight of each of the three different situations (child-parent, couples, friends), in the space representation of the general experience as a whole. The axe with a bigger weight in a given situation means that this axe is the most adequate representative of the experience of being understood in the same situation. Three different matrices of Pearson correlations 13 x 13 for each separate situation were computed. These matrixes were the input for the INDSCAL analysis. The output is expressed by Cartesian — coordinates. As the number of dimensions grows, a graphic representation expresses the original connections among the components.

The parameter that is chosen to decide the number of dimensions according to which the results will be presented is called coefficient of stress. This measure expresses the incongruence between the input data and graphic solution. The

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congruence lowers as the coefficient of stress grows. One criterion in deciding on the optimal dimensionality for a set of components is by inspection of the rate at which stress decreases with increasing dimensionality. The dimensionality after which there is little improvement in fit is chosen as the optimal dimensionality. The coordinates of the 13 categories are presented in Table 2.

One and two-dimensional INDSCAL Analysis were made for the 13 categories, however, their coefficient of stress was higher than .20. The coefficient of stress of the three — dimensional analysis was .19. Stress which is lower than .20 represents best the results and therefore it was decided to use this last analysis.

As can be seen in Table 2 and in its space representations in Figures 1 and 2, a three dimensional structure of the feeling understood experience was achieved. These results are beyond the 3 specific situations. In these structures we can see 3 main axes. The special arrangement to each axe will be called a facet.

Canter (1981) quotes Shye who defines a facet as: "a classification of the item domains of a given content universe according to some rule" or as Canter declares himself: "More technically a facet is a component set of any Cartesian set" (Canter, 1981, p. 215).

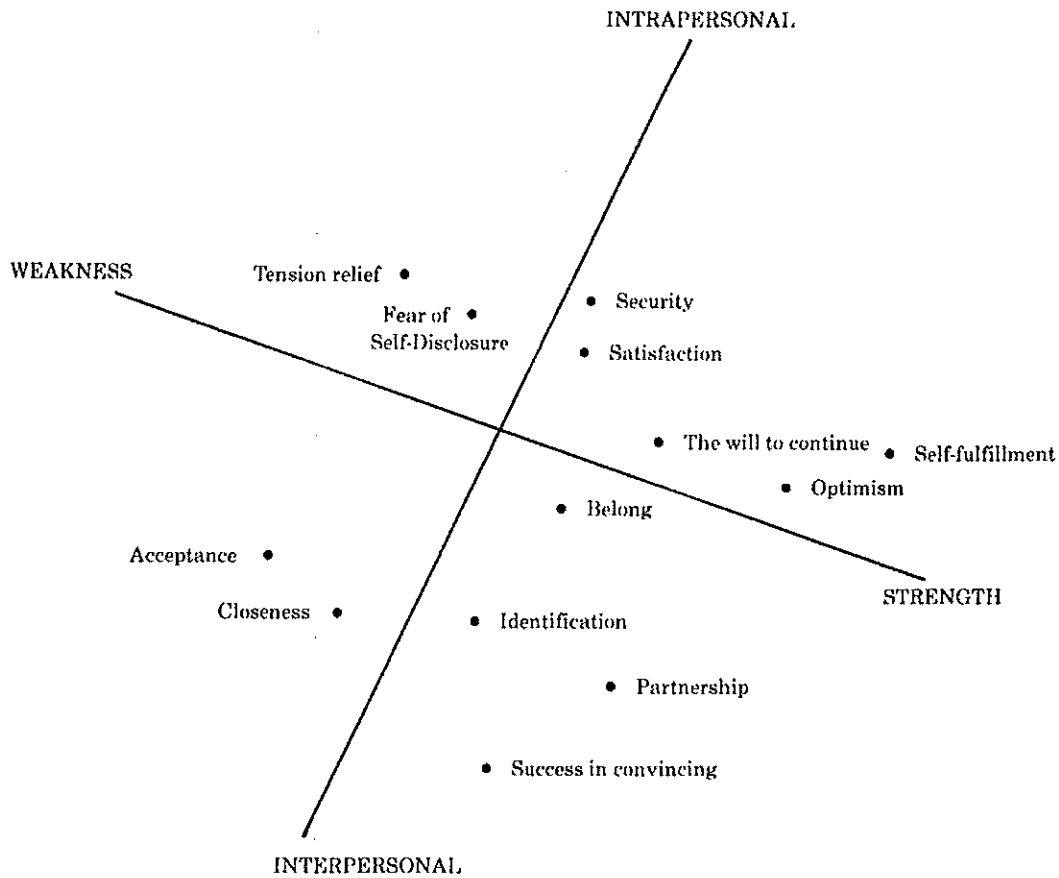
Each facet is divided into 2 groups of components, thus in each facet, two regions are to be found.

TABLE 2
The Three Dimensional Space Representing
"Feeling Understood" Categories

Category	Dimension		
	I	II	III
Satisfaction	0.20	0.97	-1.01
Security	0.32	1.25	-.037
Tension Relief	-0.87	1.58	-0.51
Success in conviction and/or transferring the message	-0.42	-1.62	-1.19
Self-fulfillment	1.88	0.16	0.10
Optimism about the future	1.57	0.03	0.70
Partnership and the ability to share your experiences	0.21	-1.33	-0.33
Identification with the other	-0.53	-0.94	-1.10
Closeness to the other	-1.26	-0.89	-0.90
Belong and not alone	0.30	-0.07	-0.72
Acceptance	-1.74	-0.64	-.60
The will to continue in the same situation	0.83	0.31	-0.62
Fear of Self-Disclosure	-0.49	1.19	2.31

FIGURE 1

Dimension 1 vs Dimension 2 of the three-dimensional space represented "feeling understood" categories.



According to the vertical axis of Figure 1, it is possible to divide the categories in two different parts. The common denominator of the categories, left of the diagram, is that these are feelings that come from a certain state of weakness. Fear of self-disclosure, tension relief, closeness to the others and acceptance are categories in which there is a sort of addressing the other that comes from a state of weakness. The individual needs the other's help, for acceptance and relief. The position of weakness is expressed in the need of others and fear of self-disclosure.

Generally speaking, this region will be called "state of weakness." In the right side of the diagram, the categories are built by feelings that derive from a position of strength.

The situation of understanding provides the subjects with a sensation of security, satisfaction, and a will to continue in the same situation, etc. (see Figure 1). It can be seen that these are feelings of content that come from a strong

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position of the individual. The region that contains these feelings will be called "state of strength." The facet achieved by these two positions will be called "state of power."

Relating to the horizontal axis of Figure 1, it can be seen that the common aspect of the categories on the upper half of the figure are personal feelings experienced by the subject himself. This region will be called "Intrapersonal feelings."

The lower part of the picture shows feelings that the individual experiences with or for others. This region will be called "Focus of feeling."

In Figure 1, a CIRCUMPLEX picture is acquired, built by the facets: 1) State of power, 2) Focus of feeling. Every feeling is a composition of both facets.

The feelings of closeness to the others and acceptance that are on the lower-left part of Figure 1 are a combination of interpersonal feelings in a state of weakness. In a Circumplex model, every group of points in space is differed from another one just by one region (e.g., in the lower part of the picture, the left group of categories are different from the right-side ones only because of the state of power. Likewise they have the focus of feeling in common.)

Figure 2 shows the arrangement of the 13 categories according to dimensions 1 and 3. The horizontal axis has already been shown in Figure 1 and has been called "state of power." The vertical axis in Figure 2 divides the categories as follows: In the upper part, the feelings described are of an elevated quality; i.e., feelings related to spiritual moments. These are very special feelings both in frequency and strength; and therefore it was chosen to call them "elevated," such as Self-fulfillment.

The basic and earthly feelings are located in the lower part of the figure. Comparing these categories to the previous ones, the latter express such basic feelings as satisfaction, tension-relief, belonging and not alone. This region is called "basic."

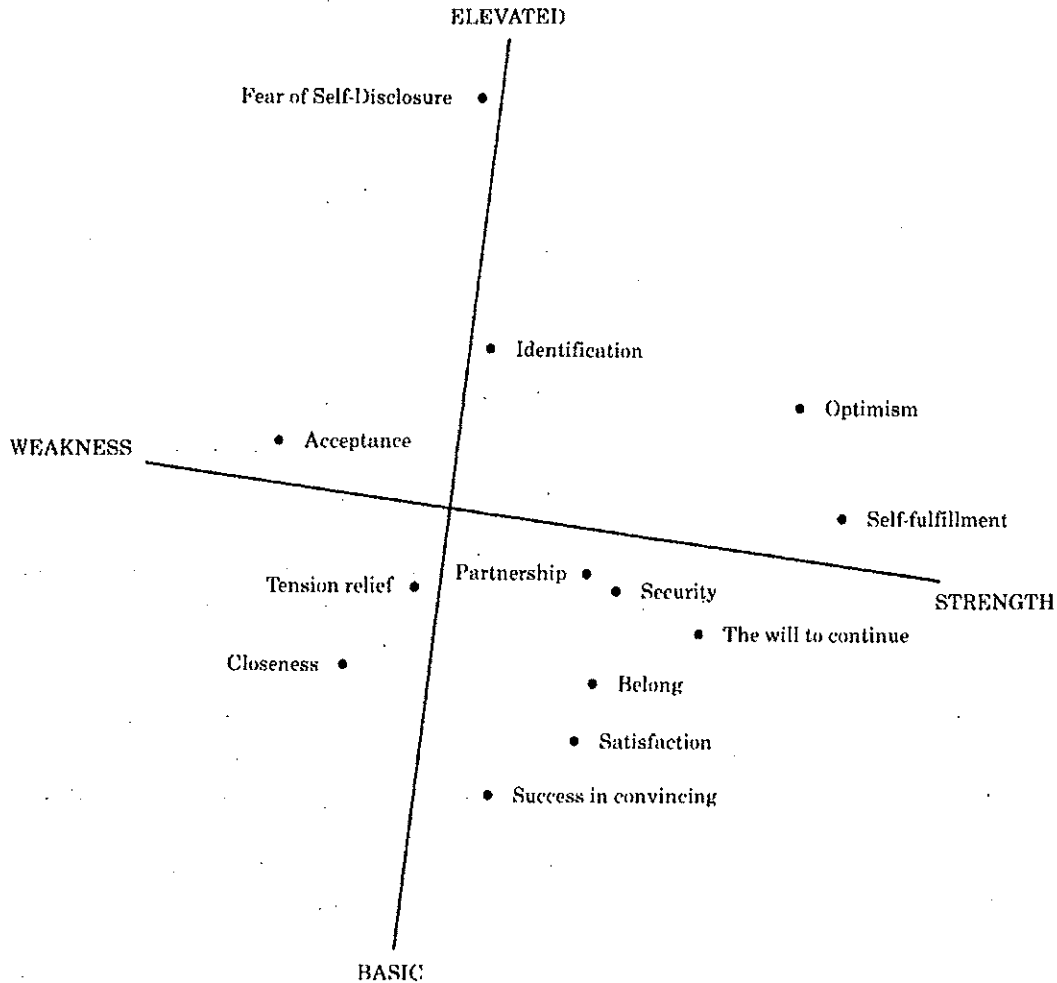
The two regions compose the facet: "quality of feeling." Up to now we were able to show the three dimensional findings in two bidimensional figures. Our attempt will be now to show one three-dimensional figure.

Guttman suggested to present three-dimensional results as ours in the form of a cylinder. This form is composed at least by two circumplex that are one above the other while each circumplex is a combination of two facets. (In this case: "state of power" and "focus of feeling"). The third facet divides between the two circumplexes (here, "quality of feeling"). There have been a number of attempts to present different results according to CYLINDREX model (i.e., Canter, 1981).

In geometrical terms, the facets: "State of power" and "Focus of feeling," give the width and depth of the cylinder while the facet "Quality of feeling" represents the height. In this structure, each item in the figure represents a combination of these three facets. Thus, each category is classified by one of the points that compose the different regions.

FIGURE 2

Dimension 1 vs Dimension 3 of the three-dimensional space represented "feeling understood" categories.



In Figure 3, a cylinder appears which is composed of all the points that appear in Figures 1 and 2.

Table 3 describes the different regions that bring about all the points in the cylinder presentation.

In a cylindrical three-dimensional representation, a group of four points compose one region; i.e.: the points 1, 2, 7, 8 set up the region "State of weakness." The points 1, 7, 4, 6 establish the region "interpersonal." In this figure, each CIRCUMPLEX is a combination of two facets; in this case: "Focus of feeling and "state of power." The facet "quality of feelings" remains stable in each of the circumplexes. The upper CIRCUMPLEX is characterized by elevated feelings and the lower one is determined by basic feelings.

According to the mapping sentence, we may present the composers of feelings reports of 'being understood by the other' as follows:

FIGURE 3

A Cylindrical Representation of the Feeling Understood Experience.

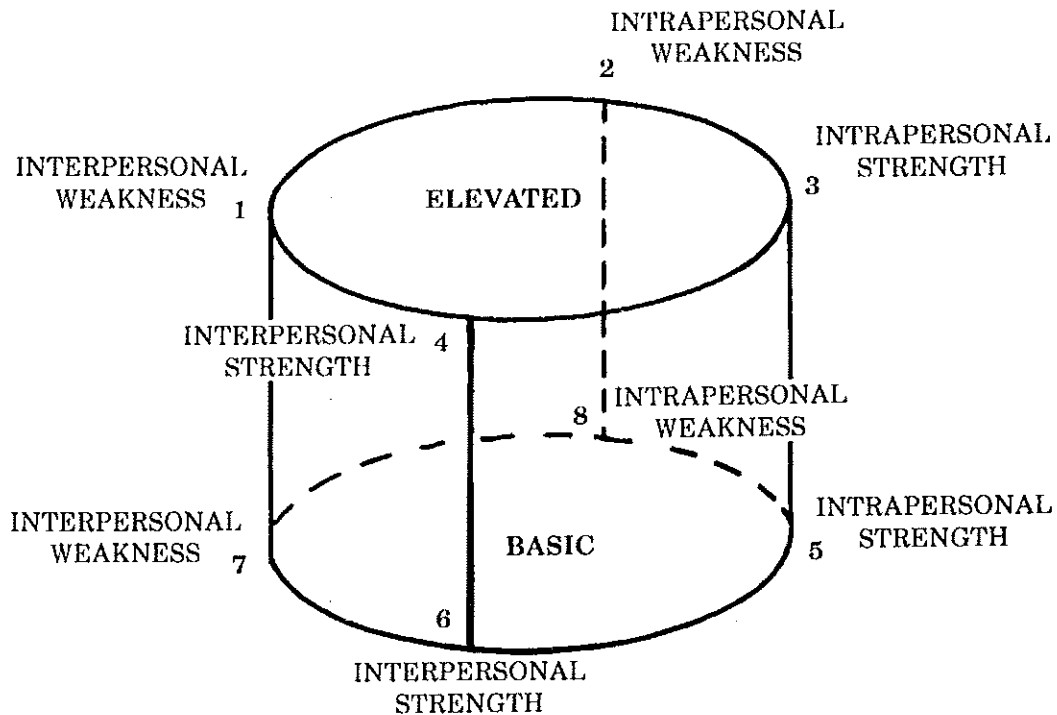


TABLE 3

Categories and Regions Compounding the Cylindrical Space

Point in Space	Categories	Regions
1	Acceptance	Interpersonal, Weakness, Elevated
2	Fear of Self-Disclosure	Intrapersonal, Weakness, Elevated
3	Self-fulfillment Optimism	Intrapersonal, Strength, Elevated
4	Identification	Interpersonal, Strength, Elevated
5	Security Satisfaction The will to continue	Intrapersonal, Strength, Basic
6	Belong and not alone Partnership Success	Interpersonal, Strength, Basic
7	Closeness	Interpersonal, Weakness, Basic
8	Tension Relief	Intrapersonal, Weakness, Basic

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While the person (child; friend; couple) feels understood by the other (parent; friend; couple) his/her feelings are focused as interpersonal or intrapersonal, are qualified as basic or elevated, and derive from a state of weakness or strength.

Hence, we learned the structure of the f. of b.u. in general terms. Now, since we are interested to check the unique contribution of any situations of b.u. (by parent, friend, couple) to the general picture, our attention will be aimed at Table 4. According to INDSCAL analysis, the strongest weight of the situation of b.u. by couple, is the second dimension (focus of feeling). The meaning of this is that the individual when b.u. by couple tends more to feel either intrapersonal or interpersonal feelings. In the relationship child-parent the strongest weight falls upon the first axe: state of power. This finding explains that at the time of a subject b.u. by parent, his feelings will be mostly defined as weakness or strength. When a person feels u. by a friend his feelings will be basic or elevated.

This is because the weight focus on the dimension of quality of feeling.¹

TABLE 4
Weight of each Understood Statement
in the Three-Dimensional Representation

Understood Situation	Dimension		
	1	2	3
Couple	0.27	0.60	0.38
Child-Parent	0.79	0.30	0.21
Friends	0.40	0.45	0.62

¹Footnote

As an objective to validate the results of Table 4, the ALSCAL procedure of the SAS library was applied. ALSCAL analysis were made in each situation of understanding in a separate way. The results of the ALSCAL supported in general the results of the INDSCAL analysis confirming that the facet "focus of feeling" was the most salient for understanding a couple; facet "quality of feeling" was the most salient facet of understanding a friend and the facet "state of power" was the most relevant for the situation being understood by a parent.

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GENERAL DISCUSSION

The objective of Study I was to extract the components of the reaction to being understood. Thirteen phenomenological categories were found to represent the basic feelings of such phenomenon.

Study II organized the different categories in a three-dimensional structure which divided the categories into eight regions. The content of the experience, except the components of the intrapersonal elevated regions (that will be discussed later), lead to the conclusion that it is spoken about a most primary experience. When looking at the interpersonal and basic regions, it is difficult to avoid a connection with the emotional life of early childhood. Winnicott (1965), Goldstein (1957), Bowlby (1969) and others described satisfaction, security, relief, belonging, enjoyment of intimate relationship, ability to transfer a message and the rest of categories as the elementary soul nourishment without which the baby is not able to advance in appropriate psychological development.

The congruence between the feelings awakened at the time of being understood and those that characterize the infantile life, speaks in favor of two reasonable assumptions: 1) the importance of the experience as a component and predictor of mental health, 2) the meaningful sensations in early childhood that continue to form a considerable part in the emotional life of the adult. The baby needs to be understood by his caretaker, in the same way the adult needs to be understood by the people near him in order to achieve a feeling of well-being (Goldstein, 1957).

In a general way, the 'understood' experience is a perfect catalyst for the satisfaction of psychological needs. According to Maslow (1970), most of the feelings that are involved in the discussed experience — except the fear of self-disclosure — are meant to satisfy a determined human need.

Basic needs are satisfied, by feelings such as: security, satisfaction, relief of tension, etc. The feelings of belonging, closeness, partnership, sharing, acceptance, optimism and self-fulfillment can provide with human need of a more elevate nature that appear in Maslow's scale. (Maslow, 1970).

Similarly, Sullivan (1953) described satisfaction and security as the most basic of human needs. These two feelings were the most frequently reported in the "being understood" experience. The treasure of psychological needs provided by this experience of being understood, enhances its importance as one of the central moments of the interpersonal life.

In spite of the positive aspects of the 'understood' experience, one feeling points out if not the negative value of the experience, at least a very ambivalent regard towards it; the fear of self-disclosure. It must be mentioned that this category was not reported frequently, but through it is possible to learn about a different aspect of the understood person. In this fear, the will of self-disclosure to another, and being understood on one side and the threat of losing his selfness on the other side, are included.

The ability of self-disclosure is an important component of healthy, interpersonal relationships (Jourard, 1971; Cunningham & Strassber, 1981). Thus, this social ability signifies one of the efficient elements to fight loneliness (Solano, Batten & Parish, 1982). However, despite these advantages self-disclosure encompasses several dangers. Cozby (1972) argued that self-disclosure

is positive up to a certain point beyond which it can be threatening. The authors of this article assume that the more an individual discloses negative aspects of himself, he will fear disclosure. He is likely to regret that he disclosed aspects of himself that on second thought would have kept to himself. This type of disclosure might damage more than it can help. Thus, disclosure which is a positive element of mental health can be — beyond a certain limit — threatening. It should be remembered that it is every person's right to keep and defend one's psychological privacy. A person motivated by the will to be understood might betray himself and over-disclose himself. This individual feels that he has exceeded his limits in an arduous race towards being understood, thus, uncovering his privacy, secrets and needs that he would rather keep within the realm of his own. Regarding the same, Medini says "While loneliness in the extreme may be psychosis, the inability to put up walls when we wish to, can lead to feelings of hopeless vulnerability . . . I am convinced that we need interpersonal barriers, secrets — for survival, if you will . . ." (Medini, 1981, p. 149). Hence, the logical fear of over-exposure an individual feels as a threat to break his own personal psychological barriers.

Another aspect of the INDSICAL analysis is the one that points out the different character of the experience in each situation. According to the analysis, the experience of child-parent understanding has the character of a struggle for power. A child who feels understood by a parent will tend to feel stronger or weaker than the parent. It is almost certain that the difference of status between parent and child and the generational distance are responsible for the power quality of the experience (DeVito, 1982). There are few adults searching for understanding from parents (Wright & Keple, 1981). The results show that the facet 'quality of feeling' characterizes the experience of being understood by a friend. The individual feels basic, earthy emotions on one side or spiritual, elevated ones on the other side. All this differs from the previous situation, where 'power' is the determining element. The process to be understood by a friend is one of the basic steps to "friendship." (Gamer, 1977) The bonds of friendship are sustained by two persons whose position in each other's eyes are equal.

In Cicero's words: "True friendship, meaning Aristotle's third type, could occur only among those of equal and symmetrical status, with neither holding a claim of authority upon the other (in Selman, 1982, p. 243). The last two statements explain, to a great extent, the difference that exists between the two situations (child-parent — friend-friend). Two studies that were conducted on an adolescent population showed that adolescents feel understood much more by friends than by parents (Millen & Roll, 1977; Kon & Losenkov, 1978). There is no any similar research in an older population but Wright and Keple (1981) hint that the situation does not tend to change with age. The experience of being understood by a couple is characterized by the facet "focus of feeling" (inter or intrapersonal feelings). It can be assumed that since this is the most intimate of all three situations, it will be mainly interpersonal.

It seems that interpersonal understanding or empathy is important not only in the therapeutic or counseling process (Szalita, 1976; Rogers, 1968) but also in some of the closest interpersonal relationships of everyday life.

THE EXPERIENCE OF BEING UNDERSTOOD

The main assumption that initiated this study was that "empathy" research has not yet produced clear-cut definitions of two of the main feelings: 1) understanding the other and 2) being understood. The present research dealt with being understood. It has shown that being understood by another is a complicated and multidimensional feeling. Since interpersonal understanding is composed of both understanding and being understood, future research should also analyze the feeling of understanding, trying to find the common elements of the two moments of understanding, thus enriching in a most significant way the understanding of interpersonal understanding.

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