

# Overrating Empathy: Self-Assessment Bias in Roleplay with Standardized Patients

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Standardized patients (SP) have been used for 3 years of using in Uni Tartu's medical communication courses. The teaching is Motivational Interviewing (MI) based, using roleplay, recordings and measurement practices.



Students consider the simulations challenging and at the same time rewarding. Working with SPs is quite different from peer roleplay. While this kind of learning can foster enthusiasm, caution is suggested to mitigate self-assessment bias.

In the course "ARPO.01.042 Patient-centred communication" 2023 for the first time we tested out an experiential examination (OSCE). The SPs played the role of a chain smoking teacher with students conducting an interview to facilitate an adoption of healthier behavior and tobacco cessation. The recordings are assessed in multiple stages:

- 1) students' self-assessment
- 2) SPs give their assessment
- 3) the teachers' assessment based on the MITI coding system.

In a research study we reviewed the correlations between the various ratings.

It turns out that student-SP correlations remain low, generally not passing the threshold of significance  $p < .01$ . As an exception, a low ( $r = 0.264$ ) correlation was found in empathy ratings.

With all the caveats that it could be an artifact of research design, the results are in accord with research from the fields of psychotherapy and counselling research going back to Carl Rogers (1967). As in most fields involving complex skills (from chess to cooking), people are consistently bad in self-assessment (Ericsson & Pool 2016). At the same time, it is not confidence but benevolent humility that predicts better outcomes in psychotherapy and counselling (Nissen-Lie et al 2015).

Ericsson, Anders; Pool, Robert (2016). Peak: Secrets from the New Science of Expertise. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt.  
Rogers, C. R. (ed.). (1967). The therapeutic relationship and its impact: A study of psychotherapy with schizophrenics. U. Wisconsin Press.  
Nissen-Lie, H. A., Ronnestad, M. H., Högland, P. A., Havik, O. E., Solbakken, O. A., Stiles, T. C., & Monsen, J. T. (2017). Love Yourself as a Person, Doubt Yourself as a Therapist?. *Clinical psychology & psychotherapy*, 24(1), 48-60. <https://doi.org/10.1002/cpp.1977>