

## BRIEF REPORTS

### DOES COUNSELOR ATTIRE MATTER?

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This study investigated the relationship between counselor attire and: (a) client disclosure and (b) client perception of counselor attractiveness in an initial interview analogue. Each of 50 subjects took part in a 20-minute interview with either a professionally or casually attired counselor and then responded to the Disclosure scale and the Counselor Attractiveness Rating Scale. Analyses of variance revealed no significant differences ( $p > .05$ ) between mean scores on these instruments. Counselor attire has little effect on client disclosure and client perception of counselor attractiveness in an initial interview.

Counseling psychologists have shown little research interest in contextual variables relating to counseling activity. One such variable is counselor attire. Practicum supervisors often suggest a tie and jacket as the most appropriate attire for a counselor. More casual attire tends to be interpreted by interview observers as a sign of inexperience (Schmidt & Strong, 1970).

The purpose of the present research was to investigate the effects of counselor attire on counselees' perceptions of counselor attractiveness and on the counselees' willingness to disclose information to the counselor in an initial interview. It was hypothesized that subjects meeting with a professionally attired counselor would be more disclosing and have more positive opinions of the counselor than subjects meeting with casually attired counselors.

#### METHOD

##### *Sample*

The subjects in the experiment were 50 male undergraduate volunteers enrolled in an introductory psychology course at the Ohio State University in winter quarter of 1970.

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##### *Confederates*

Five male first-year graduate students in counseling psychology at the Ohio State University served as counselor confederates in the experiment. They were given specific instructions on how to dress and were told to act as they naturally would in an initial interview. The professionally attired counselor was instructed to wear a sport jacket, tie, and dark, pressed slacks. The casually attired counselor was told to wear more casual, but neat, clothing including a sport shirt and casual slacks. Each counselor confederate interviewed 10 subjects, 5 under each of the two attire conditions. They were told that their only major task was to establish rapport and enable the subjects to be at ease and converse easily.

##### *Measures*

The Counselor Attractiveness Rating Scale<sup>3</sup> is a list of 10 statements used to determine the degree to which each subject perceived the counselor confederate who interviewed him to be attractive. Attractiveness was defined in terms of liking the counselor confederate, similarity of the subject and counselor confederate beliefs and interests, and the perception of the counselor confederate as an expert who could help the subject and others if they were seeking help. The subjects responded to each statement on a scale ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree.

<sup>3</sup>Copies of the Counselor Attractiveness Rating Scale are available from the first author.

The Disclosure Scale (Shapiro, Krauss, & Truax, 1969) measures four areas of disclosure: verbal, nonverbal, positive, and negative. Six items from each area are included in the scale. A total disclosure score as well as four subscores were obtained. The subjects were instructed to respond to each item by indicating the degree to which they would engage in each behavior described in the presence of the counselor confederate.

### Procedure

Each subject had volunteered to participate in research on "communication in counseling." When they appeared for the experiment, descriptions of the types of problems clients might talk about were presented to them. The subjects then were taken to the consultation room and introduced to the counselor. Immediately after a 20-minute interview, each subject responded to a questionnaire consisting of the attractiveness and the Disclosure scales.

### RESULTS

Two analyses of variance indicated no significant effect ( $p > .05$ ) on the total Disclosure scores and the Attractiveness scores, respectively, for modes of counselor attire ( $F = 2.69$ ;  $F = .10$ ), counselors ( $F = 2.13$ ;  $F = 1.31$ ), and the interactions between these variables ( $F = .51$ ;  $F = .60$ ). No significant differences were revealed by  $t$  tests ( $p > .05$ ) between the two subject groups (those exposed to casually attired counselors and those exposed to professionally attired counselors) for each of the four areas of disclosure.

### DISCUSSION

The results failed to support the hypothesis that counselors dressed in a tie and sport jacket tend to elicit higher disclosure and attractiveness scores than do counselors dressed in a sport shirt and casual slacks.

If counselor attire is one of the factors in perceived expertness (Schmidt & Strong, 1970),

then the results might be in accord with Sprafkin's (1970) finding that perceived expertness did not enhance counselor influence. If, on the other hand, the expertness of the counselor is an important variable as Strong and Schmidt (1970) have suggested, then the way a counselor is dressed may contribute less to his perceived expertness than has been believed. The absence of a relationship between dress and perceived expertness in the present study is suggested by the responses to one of the scales on the attractiveness measure which stated, "As far as I can tell, the counselor seemed to be quite expert in his field." There was no significant difference on this item between the mean ratings of subjects exposed to professionally attired counselors and subjects exposed to casually attired counselors ( $t = -1.54$ ,  $p > .05$ ).

Future investigations of counselor appearance should consider a possible interaction between counselor appearance and client variables such as attire, subculture, or values. The importance of attire may differ among various subcultures; these differences were not investigated in the present study. In addition, the apparent absence of a relationship between counselor attire and the criteria of subject disclosure and perceived counselor attractiveness may be unique to university environments where casual dress modes are both common and acceptable to many students and faculty members.

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