EFFECTS OF COUNSELOR ATTIRE ON SUBJECT PERCEPTIONS
OF COUNSELOR EXPERTNESS, EMPATHY, AND
COUNSELOR PREFERENCE

by

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Statement of the Problem

Therapeutic intervention encompasses a wide range of variables that affect treatment outcome. Through efforts to ascertain the most influential factors in therapy, it is postulated that the therapist-client relationship is a key factor in treatment success (Frank, 1961; Goldstein, 1980; Minuchin, 1974; Rogers, 1951). A number of studies have sought to delineate the specific components of an effective therapist-client relationship.

Specifically, research has investigated the influence of therapist characteristics upon the therapist-client relationship. Therapist qualities of empathy, warmth, genuineness, and understanding have been emphasized by several authors including Carkhuff and Berenson (1967), Johnson (1980), Lazarus (1971), and Truax and Carkhuff (1967).

Another dimension that has been researched with regard to the therapist-client relationship is client perception of therapist expertness. For instance, a number of investigators have suggested that therapists' expertness as perceived by the client significantly influences the potential for client change, which in turn affects the success of

A third dimension of research involving the therapist-client relationship has sought to determine the specific influence of therapist attire on that relationship (e.g., Amira & Abramowitz, 1979; Hubble & Gelso, 1978; Kerr & Dell, 1976; Stillman & Resnick, 1972). Mixed findings have resulted from these studies, partially due to the investigation of several variables within one study (i.e., therapist attire, office furnishings, therapist behavior).

A substantial amount of data has been collected concerning the therapist-client relationship, but results have been inconsistent. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to isolate the role of therapist attire in client perceptions of therapist expertness. Previous investigations have not clearly defined the specific role of therapist attire in client perception of therapist expertise. However, it is predicted that a significant positive relationship will be found between therapist attire and client perception of counselor level of expertness. The possible contribution of this study will be to further the knowledge of the mode of attire most conducive to clients' perceptions of the therapist as expert.

Review of the Literature

The purpose of therapeutic intervention has been
summarized by numerous authors as an attempt to produce a change in client problems (Haley, 1976; Jacobson & Margolin, 1979; Kanfer & Goldstein, 1980; Minuchin, 1974). In an effort to identify the types of intervention most useful in producing client change, two methods seem most apparent.

The first method has to do with actual treatment strategies and techniques. Use of various interventions is dependent upon one's theoretical orientation and definition of successful therapy. For example, analytic counselors stress resolution of transference as a means to personal insight and individual competence (Nadelson, 1978). Conversely, behaviorists advocate a technology which includes principles of shaping, learning, and reinforcement (Skinner, 1953). Finally, systems therapists emphasize the interactions between individuals, rather than individual characteristics of the clients, as the focus of treatment (Sluzki, 1978).

The second method involves the influence of the therapist-client relationship upon treatment success. The role of counselor variables in this relationship has received abundant attention in the literature. Numerous studies have dealt with the identification of counselor characteristics such as empathy (Carkhuff, 1969), warmth (Truax & Carkhuff, 1967), attractiveness (Goldstein, 1971), trustworthiness (Walster, Aronson, & Abrahams, 1966), and open-mindedness (Milliken & Paterson, 1967). Considering the extensive research conducted in this area, "the results may be viewed
as generally disappointing, often contradictory, and only tentative" (Rowe, Murphy, & DeCsipkes, 1975, p. 241).

Rowe et al. (1975) propose that the lack of success associated with identification of preferred counselor characteristics may be partially due to the criteria chosen to measure therapy effectiveness. For example, numerous studies have exclusively utilized global ratings by clients concerning counselor effectiveness (e.g., good counselor, bad counselor) (Gruberg, 1969; Kazienko & Neidt, 1962; Wicas & Mahan, 1966). This lack of specificity in determining the basis of counselor effectiveness renders replication of these studies fruitless (Whitely, 1969). Furthermore, the specific value of therapist characteristics to treatment goals is questionable (Parloff, Waskow, & Wolfe, 1978). Barak and LaCrosse (1977) suggest that it is not enough for therapists to possess certain skills; clients must perceive the therapists as successfully integrating these skills into their therapeutic repertoire to maximize positive treatment outcome. Consequently, it has been stated that fruitful research results would occur if "the focus of research would shift from the personality of the counselor to particular behaviors, skills, or interactions and their relationship to counseling outcome" (Rowe et al., 1975, p. 242).

As previously noted, the effect of therapist variables on the therapist-client relationship has generated a plethora of research studies. Also, numerous attempts have been made
to identify the specific components of counseling which induce a change in client problems. One such component would be the cognitive approach which ascribes to two principles of cognitive organization when discussing client attitude change, the principle of simplicity, and the principle of evaluative consistency (Johnson, 1980). The cognitive approach asserts that it is desirable for attitudes to be simplified which allows for greater personal consistency.

Another component to induce client change is modeling. Bandura (1977), a major proponent of modeling, emphasizes the process of therapist modeling and its effect upon clients' social behavior. A more recent emphasis has been on communication interaction. Communication training is another attempt to induce client change through open expression of client thoughts and emotions (Jacobson & Margolin, 1979). In summary, it is apparent that there are numerous counseling components which influence the therapist-client relationship, thereby affecting treatment outcome.

Through utilization of these change inducing procedures, therapists seek to modify inappropriate attitudes and opinions of clients because as Johnson (1980) suggests, "no psychological problem can be solved, no helping process can be conducted without attempts to change attitudes" (p. 59). Changing inappropriate client attitudes and opinions is desirable as a means of developing constructive thought and
behavior patterns in the client. Although there are other factors that influence behavior other than attitudes and opinion, current evidence indicates that attitudes and opinions are a primary determinant of behavior (Eagly & Himmelfarb, 1978).

The importance of opinion to behavior change has been thoroughly investigated by social psychologists. Many of these studies have been based on an extension of Festinger's (1957) theory of cognitive dissonance. "Applied to opinion-change research, the theory suggests that an individual will experience dissonance when he knows another person—a communicator—holds an opinion contrary to his own" (Strong, 1968, p. 215). The greater the discrepancy between personal opinion and a credible communicator's opinion, the greater the dissonance; the greater the dissonance, the greater the opinion change in clients will be. Furthermore, Aronson et al. (1963) found that highly credible communicators were more successful in inducing opinion change in subjects than mildly credible communicators at all levels of discrepancy.

In support of this theory, Strong (1968) cites several studies which demonstrate the impact of communicator's perceived expertness on opinion change. Strong (1968) summarizes these findings by concluding that "the greater the communicator's perceived expertness, the more discrepant his communications can be without generating derogation" (p. 218).
A body of research exists that illustrates the various effects of a communicator's perceived expertness on clients. For example, it appears that perceived counselor expertness can influence subjects to engage in self-help activities outside of the interview (Heppner & Dixon, 1978). It has also been shown that subjects of expert, as compared to inexpert, interviewers recalled more of the problem-solving process taught by the interviewer (Merluzzi et al., 1977). In addition, Stretzler and Koch (1968) found that subjects participating in a role play with experimenters of high status show significantly greater attitude change than participants role playing with low status experimenters. In conclusion, research has demonstrated that perceived communicator expertness can be an influential factor in a therapeutic relationship.

Specifically, client perception of counselor expertness has been repeatedly shown to affect the quality of the therapist-client relationship, thus affecting the successful outcome of therapy (Barak & LaCrosse, 1975; Schmidt & Strong, 1970). Gurman and Kniskern (1978) cite several findings which suggest that the therapist's level of experience is one of the therapist factors that has a "noteworthy" relationship to therapy outcome. Similarly, Strong (1968) discusses the importance of professional titles, certificates, and diplomas as evidence of the counselor's specialized training
and expertise. Moreover, Schmidt and Strong (1970) delineate specific interpersonal qualities (e.g., friendliness, attentiveness, relaxation) that are characteristic of expert counselors. Counselor expertness may also be evidenced through the counselor skill of structuring therapy sessions (Strong, 1968), as well as one's confidence in his/her therapeutic theory and procedure (Frank, 1963).

Another counselor variable that appears to influence one's perceived expertness is counselor attire. Research involving counselor attire is of recent origin with the first direct experimental test of the effect of counselor attire conducted by Stillman and Resnick in 1972. The purpose of their research was to determine the effect of counselor attire on subjects' perceptions of counselor attractiveness and on subjects' willingness to self disclose in an initial interview. It was hypothesized that subjects assigned to a professionally attired counselor would disclose a greater amount of personal information and positive opinions toward the counselor than subjects assigned to casually attired counselors. Subjects for the experiment consisted of 50 male undergraduates. Each subject participated in a 20-minute interview with either a professionally or casually attired male counselor. Immediately following the interview, each subject responded to a questionnaire consisting of the Counselor Attractiveness Rating Scale and
the Disclosure Scale (Shapiro et al., 1969). Results indicated no significant effect of counselor attire on subject perception of counselor attractiveness and subject disclosure in an initial interview.

Research by Kerr and Dell (1976) investigated the manner in which interview setting, counselor attire and counselor behavior interact to produce client perceptions of counselor characteristics. It was predicted that subjects would perceive interviewers in the expert role as more expert than attractive, while the opposite would occur for interviewers in the attractive role. Two female undergraduates conducted 10-minute interviews with 80 undergraduate students. Subjects were randomly assigned to one of eight experimental conditions defined by two styles of attire (i.e., professors' office, student lounge) and two interviewer roles (i.e., structured, spontaneous). Immediately following the interview, subjects completed the Counselor Rating Form (Barak & LaCrosse, 1975) to assess client perceptions of counselor expertness and attractiveness. Results indicated that subject perceptions of counselor expertness were affected by counselor role and attire; yet, attractiveness ratings were affected only by counselor role behavior.

Hubble and Gelso (1978) were the first experimenters to test three levels of counselor attire, that is, traditional, casual, and highly casual. They attempted to
determine if the effects of counselor attire were dependent upon the client's preferred style of attire and the client's level of dogmatism. Fifty-four female undergraduates were interviewed in a 45-minute counseling session by one of three male doctoral students. Each of the three counselors interviewed six clients under each of the three attire styles (i.e., suit and tie, slacks and sport shirt, blue jeans and sweat shirt). Instrumentation consisted of the A-State Anxiety Scale (Speilberger, Gorsuch, & Lushene, 1970), the Disclosure Scale (Shapiro, Krauss, & Truax, 1969), Form E of the Dogmatism Scale (Rokeach, 1960), and two questions concerning a counselor preference and subjects' typical attire. An interesting finding in this study noted that female clients' anxiety level appeared to elevate when interviewed by a male counselor dressed in a highly casual manner. Results found a crucial moderator in counselor ratings to be the client report of her own typical attire; clients responded most favorably to counselors dressed one level more formal than their own usual clothing style.

Amira and Abramowitz (1979) attempted to clarify some of the unresolved issues from previous research involving the effects of counselor attire and office furnishings upon client perceptions of the therapist. In this study, 82 undergraduate students viewed one of four 5-minute videotaped segments of an initial simulated therapy session.
Except for the style of attire (i.e., coat and tie, sport shirt) and office furnishings (i.e., diplomas, sensitivity posters), the films were identical. Subjects assessed therapist performance along six 6-point bipolar scales. Ratings of attraction were found to be independent of counselor attire; subjects' impressions were also insignificantly affected by the office furnishings.

Thus, it can be stated that results from the aforementioned studies are inconclusive and often contradictory. The specific effect of counselor attire upon subject perceptions of the counselor remains undetermined. Past research cites the role of counselor attire as ranging from no significant effect (Amira & Abramowitz, 1979; Kerr & Dell, 1976; Stillman & Resnick, 1972) to a distinctive effect (Hubble & Gelso, 1978), on the counseling process. These mixed findings may be due to two serious methodological problems. First, the variable of counselor attire has not been tested independently. For example, each of the previously mentioned studies had subjects rate counselors on various scales after a personal interview with the counselor (Hubble & Gelso, 1978; Kerr & Dell, 1976; Stillman & Resnick, 1972) or after viewing a simulated therapy session (Amira & Abramowitz, 1979). However, direct interaction or observation of therapist behavior prevents accurate ratings of the effects therapist attire alone has on client
perceptions of therapist expertness. Therefore, the practice of researching several variables in a single study (e.g., office furnishings, counselor role behavior, counselor attire) seems questionable if the purpose of the study is to test the actual influence of therapist attire alone on clients' perceptions of therapist expertness.

A second methodological problem has been the exclusive utilization of undergraduate student samples as subjects. Obviously, the generalizability of these findings is extremely limited. Sole observations of therapists by college students are not necessarily representative of the general population.

In summary, then, it can be said that the amount of opinion change in clients seems to be affected by perception of the counselor's expertness. Of the variables discussed involving counselor expertness, the subject of attire has been addressed in previous research. However, the results have been inconclusive largely due to the inclusion of contaminating variables and exclusive usage of student populations.

**Hypotheses**

Based upon research documented in the previous section and a preliminary pilot study (Crane & Bailey, Note 1), the following hypotheses were formulated:
(1) Traditionally attired counselors will be perceived as more expert than informally and casually attired counselors.

(2) Informally attired counselors will be perceived as more expert than casually attired counselors.

(3) Informally attired counselors will be perceived as more empathic than traditionally or casually attired counselors.

(4) Traditionally attired counselors will be selected as the counselor preference more than informally and casually attired counselors.

(5) Informally attired counselors will be selected as the counselor preference more than casually attired counselors.

It is appropriate to include at this point a set of operational definitions for this study.

(1) **expert** - perception of a counselor as a source of valid assertions (Strong, 1968)

(2) **empathic** - perception of a counselor as accurately understanding the feelings of other people (Goldstein, 1980)

(3) **counselor preference** - selection of a particular counselor for possible future counseling needs
METHODS

Subjects

The data used in the present study were compiled from interviews with 125 people living in Lubbock, Texas, and surrounding communities. Subjects for this study consisted of 64 females and 61 males who volunteered to participate in the project. Respondents ranged in age from 19 to 78, with a mean age of 40.7 years. According to marital status, 23 respondents were single (18.4%), 90 were married (72%), 6 were divorced (4.8%), and 6 were widowed (4.8%). Marital length ranged from 0 to 55 years with a mean of 15.4 years.

Educational achievement ranged from attending high school to possession of a doctorate degree, with 92.8% of subjects attending college for various amounts of time. The educational mean was 5.816 on a scale ranging from one (some grade school) to eight (doctoral degree) with the rating of five representative of subjects who attended some college and the rating of six representative of subjects who finished college. Subjects were given freedom of choice in designating their profession which led to 29 different professions. The majority of professions (63.2%) can be summarized by the following: 1) Business owner (16.8%), 2) Homemaker (10.4%), 3) Manager (8.8%), 4) Student (8%),
5) Teacher (6.4%), 6) Salesperson (6.4%), and 7) Office clerk (6.4%). Total family income for the preceding year (1981) ranged from less than $5,000 to over $80,000. Forty percent of respondents averaged an income between $30,000 and $49,999. Income ranging from $10,000 to $49,999 comprised 76.8% of subjects. The mean family income was 4.784 on a scale ranging from one (less than $5,000) to ten (over $80,000), with the rating of four representative of an income between $20,000 and $29,999, and the rating of five representative of an income between $30,000 and $39,999 (see Tables 1-5).

**TABLE 1**

PERCENTAGE OF MALE/FEMALE SUBJECTS CATEGORIZED BY AGE

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>19 - 29</td>
<td>13.6% (17)</td>
<td>12.0% (15)</td>
<td>25.6% (32)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30 - 39</td>
<td>12.8% (16)</td>
<td>7.2% (9)</td>
<td>20.0% (25)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40 - 49</td>
<td>10.4% (13)</td>
<td>16.8% (21)</td>
<td>27.2% (34)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50 - 59</td>
<td>9.6% (12)</td>
<td>10.4% (13)</td>
<td>20.0% (25)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>60 - 69</td>
<td>0.8% (1)</td>
<td>1.6% (2)</td>
<td>2.4% (3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>70 - 79</td>
<td>1.6% (2)</td>
<td>3.2% (4)</td>
<td>4.8% (6)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>48.8% 61</strong></td>
<td><strong>51.2% 64</strong></td>
<td><strong>100.0% 125</strong></td>
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### TABLE 2
PERCENTAGE OF SUBJECTS ACCORDING TO MARITAL STATUS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Marital Status</th>
<th>Percentage of Subjects</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Single</td>
<td>18.4% (23)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Married</td>
<td>72.0% (90)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Divorced</td>
<td>4.8% (6)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Widowed</td>
<td>4.8% (6)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100.0% 125</td>
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### TABLE 3
PERCENTAGE OF YEARS MARRIED TO PRESENT SPOUSE

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number of Years</th>
<th>Percentage of Subjects</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Never Married</td>
<td>24.0% (30)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0 - 9</td>
<td>20.8% (26)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10 - 19</td>
<td>12.8% (16)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20 - 29</td>
<td>26.4% (33)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30 - 39</td>
<td>12.0% (15)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40 - 49</td>
<td>1.6% (2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50 - 59</td>
<td>2.4% (3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100.0% 125</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Educational Attainment</td>
<td>Less Than $5,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------------------</td>
<td>-----------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some High School</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Finished High School</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some College</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Finished College</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Graduate Work</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Doctorate Degree</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage</td>
<td>4.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Profession</td>
<td>Number of Subjects</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------------------------------------</td>
<td>--------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Business owner</td>
<td>16.8% (21)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Homemaker</td>
<td>10.4% (13)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manager</td>
<td>8.8% (11)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student</td>
<td>8.0% (10)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Salesperson</td>
<td>6.4% (8)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Office clerk</td>
<td>6.4% (8)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher</td>
<td>6.4% (8)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minister</td>
<td>4.0% (5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Certified Public Accountant</td>
<td>3.2% (4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Engineer</td>
<td>3.2% (4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Computer programmer</td>
<td>3.2% (4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professor</td>
<td>2.4% (3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contractor</td>
<td>2.4% (3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Restauranteer</td>
<td>2.4% (3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nurse</td>
<td>2.4% (3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Retired</td>
<td>1.6% (2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Librarian</td>
<td>1.6% (2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fire fighter</td>
<td>1.6% (2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physician</td>
<td>1.6% (2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Insurance</td>
<td>0.8% (1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pharmacist</td>
<td>0.8% (1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dentist</td>
<td>0.8% (1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Purchasing agent</td>
<td>0.8% (1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Farmer</td>
<td>0.8% (1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social worker</td>
<td>0.8% (1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Artist</td>
<td>0.8% (1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Journalist</td>
<td>0.8% (1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Banker</td>
<td>0.8% (1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100.0% (125)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Measures

Counselor models were six Caucasian females and six Caucasian males. Two males and two females were in their mid-40s (\( \bar{x} = 45 \)), two each in their mid-30s (\( \bar{x} = 35 \)), and two each in their mid-20s (\( \bar{x} = 25 \)). Each model was photographed in each of three different attire conditions, i.e., formal, informal, and casual. For the formal condition, male models wore a dark suit, white shirt, and tie while the female models wore a blazer, skirt, blouse, and tie. The informal condition consisted of a shirt, sweater, and slacks for both male and female models. Similarly, both male and female models wore blue jeans and a tee-shirt in the casual condition.

Apparatus consisted of 12 sets of three photographs each which were compiled and neatly matted. Six sets consisted of all female counselor models. Each photograph set was composed of one photo from each of the three attire styles, that is, traditional, informal, and casual. Each photo set contained three different models of the same sex who represented each of the three different age groups, i.e., 25, 35, 45. The order of placement of the three photos on the mat was randomly assigned.

Instrumentation consisted of a one-page demographic data sheet and a four-page questionnaire. Requested demographic information included: sex, age, marital status,
length of marriage, profession, family income, and education. The questionnaire was divided into three major sections, each of which rated one of the three counselor models. Four identical questions were asked about the three counselors, resulting in a total of 12 questions. Responses to each question were rated on a bipolar scale ranging from (1) (least) to (7) (highly) characteristic of the model. Questions rated each counselor's level of knowledge, education, understanding, and experience, respectively.

Two additional questions were posed at the end of the questionnaire to aid in verification of counselor selection. Question 13 asked subjects to choose which counselor they would select for help with a current problem. Question 14 was used as an additional check by asking subjects what factors influenced their decision in counselor selection (see Appendix A).

Procedure

Subjects were personally contacted (i.e., telephone, in person) by the researcher and asked to participate in a study of counselor selection. Those who volunteered to participate in the project were interviewed at a place and time of convenience for the subjects. Subjects were interviewed either by the researcher (n = 87) or one of two employees of a local retail bookstore (n = 38). The primary researcher and two assistants collaborated on the method
of interviewing so that each questionnaire was handled in the same manner.

Subjects were asked to read and sign a consent form conforming to American Psychological Association and Texas Tech University ethical standards. Subjects were then presented with one of 12 sets of photographs. Each set contained three photographs of three different female models or three different male models. After viewing the set, subjects completed the questionnaire, including demographic data information.

Ten subjects viewed each photograph set with the following exceptions: Set #1 (n = 11), Set #3 (n = 12), Set #4 (n = 11), and Set #8 (n = 11). Stratification was used to insure equal viewing of all sets by participants. This technique categorized each of the three photo sets separately and allowed systematic sampling to follow. Simple random sampling then directed the order of set presentation to subjects through use of a random numbers table.

**Design**

The technique of purposive sampling was chosen to obtain a population of people most likely to participate in marriage or family therapy. Purposive sampling is "characterized by the use of judgment and a deliberate effort to obtain representative samples by including presumably typical areas or
groups in the sample" (Kerlinger, 1973, p. 129). A possible detriment to this method of subject selection is the non-randomness of the sample. However, the benefits of a large, accessible sample and diverse subject demographic variables seemed to outweigh any possible limitations incurred as a result of the nonrandom sample. Therefore, the aim of subject recruitment was not a totally random stratified population, but a population of middle class nonstudents.

Standardized interviews with self-administered questions were used to eliminate respondent bias resulting from experimenter verbalization cues. Fixed-alternative questions were used throughout the questionnaire with the exception of the closing open-ended question used as a clarification check.

A randomized block design was employed to insure a high degree of control for secondary variables. As Robinson (1976) states, "it is possible to add a second control technique, constancy, by employing blocking" (p. 277). First, three ages of counselor models were used to control for the secondary variable of age preference. Secondly, the background area for each picture was held constant by utilizing the same arrangement which consisted of a panelled wall, solid carpet, and a black leather chair. Thirdly, the variables of physical attractiveness was controlled for through equal viewing of each counselor model by subjects. Finally, and most importantly, three counselor attire styles were
chosen and standardized. For example, each of the male models wore a dark suit, white shirt, and long necktie for the traditional attire condition. Similarly, each of the female models wore a blazer, skirt, blouse, and bow tie for the formal attire condition. Constancy in the attire conditions was necessary to control for individual differences in dress and appearance.

Randomization was also applied as a control procedure. First, the selection and placement of each picture on the mat was randomly chosen. Secondly, presentation of sets to respondents was handled through a random numbers table irrespective of counselor or respondent gender.
CHAPTER III
GLOBALS

Each subject scored one set of three counselor models on four specific areas including knowledge, education, understanding, and experience. A randomized blocked one-way analysis of variance design was employed to conduct statistical analysis among the four major questions. A Duncan Multiple Range Test was then utilized to determine the specific nature of the significance between the three attire conditions.

Each of the four questions (see Appendix B) showed a significant overall effect of counselor attire upon respondent answers. Questions 1-4 rated counselor knowledge, education, understanding, and experience, respectively. A significant $F$ Value was found for each question as shown in Table 6.

Because the analysis of variance tests resulted in a significant $F$ value in each of the four questions, Duncan's Multiple Range Test was utilized on each question. All four questions showed the formal attire condition (A) to have the highest mean score, the informal attire condition (B) to have the second highest mean score, and the casual attire condition (C) to have the lowest mean score. The means of the four questions are also presented in Table 6.
TABLE 6

ANALYSIS OF VARIANCE AND DUNCAN'S MULTIPLE RANGE TEST COMPUTATION
FOR EACH OF FOUR QUESTIONS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>SS</th>
<th>MS</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>P</th>
<th>R-Square</th>
<th>Multiple Range Test</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2. Education</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>252.112</td>
<td>126.056</td>
<td>101.15</td>
<td>.0001</td>
<td>.352261</td>
<td>A=5.5040 B=4.5360 C=3.4960</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Understanding</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>103.8773</td>
<td>51.9386</td>
<td>29.86</td>
<td>.0001</td>
<td>.138328</td>
<td>A=4.8320 B=4.4880 C=3.5840</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Experience</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>248.128</td>
<td>124.064</td>
<td>76.81</td>
<td>.0001</td>
<td>.292267</td>
<td>A=4.8240 B=4.2640 C=2.8880</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

KEY:  A = Traditional Attire
      B = Informal Attire
      C = Casual Attire
After rating each of the three counselor models on four questions, each subject selected one of the counselors for possible help with a current problem. Because this question involved a single choice in response to the variable of counselor selection, a Chi-Square Test of Significance was conducted to measure response differences. Results presented in Table 7 showed a significant difference of counselor selection according to attire condition ($X^2 (2) = 43.2592, p < .01$). Frequency counts showed that 57.6% of subjects selected counselors in formal attire ($n = 72$), 32.8% selected counselors in informal attire ($n = 41$), and 9.6% selected counselors in casual attire ($n = 12$).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Attire Condition</th>
<th>Selection Frequency</th>
<th>Selection Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Formal</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>57.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Informal</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>32.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Casual</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>9.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>125</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The last question asked respondents to explain what factors influenced their decision for the previous question concerning counselor selection. After reviewing the 125
comments, four categories were created which best expressed the sentiments of the subjects. The four categories included positive references to counselor age and appearance and negative references to counselor age and appearance. One subject chose not to comment while 20% of subjects made positive references to counselor age, 2.5% made negative references to counselor age, 75.83% made positive references to counselor appearance, and 1.66% made negative references to counselor appearance.

Hypotheses

The first hypothesis stated that traditionally attired counselors would be perceived as more expert than informally and casually attired counselors. Counselor attire was controlled by constancy of dress. Three questions were composed to rate perception of counselor expertness: Question 1 ("Rate the counselor as to his/her level of knowledge."); Question 2 ("Rate the counselor as to his/her level of education."); and Question 4 ("Rate the counselor as to his/her level of experience."). Duncan's Multiple Range Test showed a significant difference between all three attire conditions on each of the three questions. In addition to supporting the first hypothesis, this analysis also supports the second hypothesis which states that informally attired counselors would be perceived as more expert than casually attired counselors. Table 6 summarizes these findings.
The third hypothesis which stated that informally attired counselors would be perceived as more empathic than traditionally attired counselors was not found to be true. Question 3 analyzed counselor empathy by asking subjects to "Rate the counselor as to his/her understanding of you and your problem." The scores from Duncan's Multiple Range Test show that traditionally attired counselors are perceived as more empathic than informally or casually attired counselors.

Hypotheses four and five were interrelated as hypothesis four stated that traditionally attired counselors would be selected as the counselor preference more than informally and casually attired counselors. Hypothesis five stated that informally attired counselors would be selected as the counselor preference more than casually attired counselors. Question 13 on the questionnaire asked, "Assuming a current problem, which counselor would you select to obtain help from?" Frequency counts showed that traditionally attired counselors were selected 72 times out of 125 (57.6%), informally attired counselors were selected 41 times out of 125 (32.8%), and casually attired counselors were selected 12 times out of 125 (9.6%). Similarly, results of the Chi-Square Test of Significance showed that traditionally attired counselors were significantly more likely to be selected as the counselor preference than informally or casually attired counselors ($\chi^2 (2) = 43.2592, p < .01$).
CHAPTER IV
DISCUSSION

In this investigation, subjects' perceptions of counselor models seem to have been significantly affected by counselor attire. Four of the five previously stated hypotheses for this study were confirmed: (1) Traditionally attired counselors will be perceived as more expert than informally and casually attired counselors; (2) Informally attired counselors will be perceived as more expert than casually attired counselors; (4) Traditionally attired counselors will be selected as the counselor preference more than informally and casually attired counselors; (5) Informally attired counselors will be selected as the counselor preference more than casually attired counselors. Hypothesis three which stated that "Informally attired counselors will be perceived as more empathic than traditionally or casually attired counselors" was not found to be true. Conversely, traditionally attired counselors were perceived as more empathic than informally or casually attired counselors. A possible explanation for the inability to confirm this hypothesis is that traditional dress does not necessarily imply unresponsiveness. It appears that informal attire is not automatically associated with greater listening and communication skills. Another interpretation for this phenomenon may
center around the total presentation of one's appearance. In other words, if counselors generally appear to be well-qualified in the area of counseling, their perceived level of understanding is one component of an overall view instead of a well-defined separate area. In summary, traditionally attired counselors were perceived as more expert as well as more empathic than informally or casually attired counselors, in addition to being selected more frequently as the counselor preference.

Formality of attire produced several main effects, contrasting the null findings of several previously mentioned studies. Three major studies reported no significant effect of counselor attire on subject perception of the counselor (Amira & Abramowitz, 1979; Kerr & Dell, 1976; Stillman & Resnick, 1972). However, several variables in those studies were altered in the present research; thus, viewing the variable of counselor attire from a new and different perspective. For example, all three studies employed undergraduate students as subjects. This particular body of subjects is not comparable to the majority of private marriage and family therapy clients, thereby limiting generalizability of results. Additionally, all three studies exclusively used either male interviewers (Amira & Abramowitz, 1979; Stillman & Resnick, 1972) or female interviewers (Kerr & Dell, 1976). The current study incorporated both genders into counselor
models, presenting them randomly to both genders of subjects. This was done to eliminate possible sexual bias that may have existed in previous research. Most importantly, by the use of photographs this study isolated the variable of counselor attire through elimination of any personal interaction with a counselor model or interview setting. Kerr and Dell (1976) and Stillman and Resnick (1972) utilized actual interview sessions with subjects while Amira and Abramowitz (1979) utilized a simulated video segment of a therapy session. Consequences of personality interaction interfere with a precise view of the specific effects of counselor attire. Therefore, this study has controlled several possibly contaminating variables found in previous research in order to solely examine the role of counselor attire.

In an effort to isolate the role of counselor attire on subject perceptions, uncontrolled variables inevitably contaminated the study to an extent. One hindrance to the procedure followed in this research concerns the standardizing of counselor photographs. Because each of the three photos viewed by subjects were identical in background, the possibility exists that subjects realized the aim of the questionnaire was to examine attire. Therefore, some subjects may have responded with their personal preference to a particular clothing style instead of the overall picture of a potential counselor.
Another potential limitation incurred in this study involves the factor of counselor attractiveness. Counselor models were chosen on the basis of sex and age; however, the individual variable of personal attractiveness could not be standardized. Consequently, the possibility exists that subjects were influenced by counselor physical attractiveness in addition to counselor attire. However, the blocking and randomization control procedures should have controlled for this possibility.

Although this study's results show the significant effect of counselor attire on subject perceptions, it is still unclear as to the importance this perception plays in the counseling process. For example, personal interaction between counselor and client may overpower any positive or negative effects of attire in actual counseling sessions. As Kerr and Dell (1976) stated,

\begin{quote}
It may be that in an interpersonal situation the behavior of the parties involved is more important in determining perceptions of the other than are such variables as attire or setting. (p. 556)
\end{quote}

However, as the "Review of Literature" section of this thesis demonstrated, client perception of the counselor as an expert is a major factor in client change which, after all, is a central goal of counseling. Nonetheless, the reader should keep in mind that the results are based on a one-time viewing of the photographs.
Another possible limitation of the study was that the majority of subjects had some degree of familiarity with the primary researcher. This was done to provide access to a large body of subjects believed to be representative of marriage and family clients. Future investigations of counselor attire should consider a possible interaction between subject and researcher familiarity, possibly with the ability to eliminate that relationship and still obtain a large, representative population. However, the standardization of testing procedures should have controlled for any familiarity with researcher effects.

Due to the personal interview conducted with each respondent, the geographic location of subjects was limited. The community of Lubbock, Texas, and its surrounding areas are relatively conservative in comparison with other regions of the nation. As reflected in the demographic data, subjects were generally married, well-educated, white-collar workers, and of middle- to upper-middle income status. These characteristics are thought to constitute a potential typical marriage and family client. However, many counseling clients are from very different backgrounds. The apparent relationship that exists between counselor attire and subject perception of counselor expertness and understanding may be unique to conservative environments where traditional dress standards are both common and acceptable.
In conclusion, the mode of therapist attire may be a more important factor in the effectiveness of therapy treatment than previous research has surmised. The results of this study demonstrate that counselors dressed in traditional attire appear more expert, as well as more understanding, than informally or casually attired counselors. Moreover, informally attired counselors are perceived as more expert and understanding than casually attired counselors. As earlier reported, a client's perception of a counselor as an expert has positive effects on therapy outcome. This study has shown that traditional attire is the level of dress most conducive to being perceived as an expert counselor. Based upon empirical evidence cited in the "Review of Literature" section, counselors who are perceived as expert elicit greater behavior and opinion change in clients. Consequently, clients of traditionally attired counselors may be more likely to engage in self-help activities outside of the counseling session (Heppner & Dixon, 1978), recall more of the problem-solving process taught by the counselor (Merluzzi et al., 1977), and show a significantly greater attitude change (Stretzler & Koch, 1968). Similarly, according to the theory of cognitive dissonance (Festinger, 1957), traditional attire may induce greater opinion change in clients (Aronson et al., 1963; Strong, 1968) inasmuch as the counselor's interpersonal behavior confirms his/her expert
status. Consequently, it can be deduced from this study that traditional attire aids the perception of expertness which may lead to promotion of client change, which is the primary purpose of therapeutic intervention.
REFERENCE NOTE

REFERENCES


APPENDICES

A. DEMOGRAPHIC DATA

B. DATA COLLECTION SHEET
APPENDIX A: DEMOGRAPHIC DATA

1. Sex: (1) Male ____ (2) Female ____

2. Age: _________

3. Marital Status: (1) Single ____
   (2) Married ____
   (3) Divorced ____

4. Number of years married to present spouse: ____

5. Profession: ________________________________

Circle the appropriate number for the following questions:

6. What is the best estimate of your total family income last year:
   1. Less than $5,000
   2. $5,000 - $9,999
   3. $10,000 - $19,999
   4. $20,000 - $29,999
   5. $30,000 - $39,999
   6. $40,000 - $49,999
   7. $50,000 - $59,999
   8. $60,000 - $69,999
   9. $70,000 - $79,999
   10. Over $80,000

7. Below is a list of categories of educational attainment. Circle the highest level you attained in school:
   1. Some grade school
   2. Finished grade school
3. Some high school
4. Finished high school
5. Some college
6. Finished college
7. Graduate work
8. Doctoral degree
APPENDIX B: DATA COLLECTION SHEET

SET NUMBER __________

Circle the appropriate number for the following questions:

COUNSELOR A:

1. Rate the counselor as to his/her level of knowledge.
   1. Least knowledgeable
   2. Poorly knowledgeable
   3. Fairly knowledgeable
   4. Knowledgeable
   5. Somewhat knowledgeable
   6. Very knowledgeable
   7. Highly knowledgeable

2. Rate the counselor as to his/her level of education.
   1. Least educated
   2. Poorly educated
   3. Fairly educated
   4. Educated
   5. Somewhat educated
   6. Very educated
   7. Highly educated

3. Rate the counselor as to his/her understanding of you and your problems.
   1. Least understanding
   2. Poor understanding
3. Fair understanding
4. Understanding
5. Somewhat understanding
6. Very understanding
7. Highly understanding

4. Rate the counselor as to his/her level of experience.
   1. Least experienced
   2. Poorly experienced
   3. Fairly experienced
   4. Experienced
   5. Somewhat experienced
   6. Very experienced
   7. Highly experienced

COUNSELOR B:

5. Rate the counselor as to his/her level of knowledge.
   1. Least knowledgeable
   2. Poorly knowledgeable
   3. Fairly knowledgeable
   4. Knowledgeable
   5. Somewhat knowledgeable
   6. Very knowledgeable
   7. Highly knowledgeable

6. Rate the counselor as to his/her level of education.
   1. Least educated
   2. Poorly educated
   3. Fairly educated
4. Educated
5. Somewhat educated
6. Very educated
7. Highly educated

7. Rate the counselor as to his/her understanding of you and your problems.
   1. Least understanding
   2. Poor understanding
   3. Fair understanding
   4. Understanding
   5. Somewhat understanding
   6. Very understanding
   7. Highly understanding

8. Rate the counselor as to his/her level of experience.
   1. Least experienced
   2. Poorly experienced
   3. Fairly experienced
   4. Experienced
   5. Somewhat experienced
   6. Very experienced
   7. Highly experienced

COUNSELOR C:

9. Rate the counselor as to his/her level of knowledge
   1. Least knowledgeable
   2. Poorly knowledgeable
3. Fairly knowledgeable
4. Knowledgeable
5. Somewhat knowledgeable
6. Very knowledgeable
7. Highly knowledgeable

10. Rate the counselor as to his/her level of education.
   1. Least educated
   2. Poorly educated
   3. Fairly educated
   4. Educated
   5. Somewhat educated
   6. Very educated
   7. Highly educated

11. Rate the counselor as to his/her understanding of you and your problems.
   1. Least understanding
   2. Poor understanding
   3. Fair understanding
   4. Understanding
   5. Somewhat understanding
   6. Very understanding
   7. Highly understanding

12. Rate the counselor as to his/her level of experience.
   1. Least experienced
   2. Poorly experienced
3. Fairly experienced
4. Experienced
5. Somewhat experienced
6. Very experienced
7. Highly experienced

13. Assuming a current problem, which counselor would you select to obtain help from?
    ____ Counselor A
    ____ Counselor B
    ____ Counselor C

14. What influenced your decision for question #13?