

## INFORMATION TO USERS

This material was produced from a microfilm copy of the original document. While the most advanced technological means to photograph and reproduce this document have been used, the quality is heavily dependent upon the quality of the original submitted.

The following explanation of techniques is provided to help you understand markings or patterns which may appear on this reproduction.

1. The sign or "target" for pages apparently lacking from the document photographed is "Missing Page(s)". If it was possible to obtain the missing page(s) or section, they are spliced into the film along with adjacent pages. This may have necessitated cutting thru an image and duplicating adjacent pages to insure you complete continuity.
2. When an image on the film is obliterated with a large round black mark, it is an indication that the photographer suspected that the copy may have moved during exposure and thus cause a blurred image. You will find a good image of the page in the adjacent frame.
3. When a map, drawing or chart, etc., was part of the material being photographed the photographer followed a definite method in "sectioning" the material. It is customary to begin photoing at the upper left hand corner of a large sheet and to continue photoing from left to right in equal sections with a small overlap. If necessary, sectioning is continued again — beginning below the first row and continuing on until complete.
4. The majority of users indicate that the textual content is of greatest value, however, a somewhat higher quality reproduction could be made from "photographs" if essential to the understanding of the dissertation. Silver prints of "photographs" may be ordered at additional charge by writing the Order Department, giving the catalog number, title, author and specific pages you wish reproduced.
5. PLEASE NOTE: Some pages may have indistinct print. Filmed as received.

### University Microfilms International

300 North Zeeb Road  
Ann Arbor, Michigan 48106 USA  
St. John's Road, Tyler's Green  
High Wycombe, Bucks, England HP10 8HR

78-3880

LITTMAN, Madeleine Iris, 1947-  
CONCEPTUAL LEVEL AND FACILITY IN THE  
ACQUISITION OF COUNSELING SKILLS:  
IMPLICATIONS FOR TRAINING AND SELECTION.

The University of Nebraska - Lincoln,  
Ph.D., 1977  
Psychology, clinical

**University Microfilms International**, Ann Arbor, Michigan 48106

PREVIEW

CONCEPTUAL LEVEL AND FACILITY IN THE ACQUISITION OF COUNSELING  
SKILLS: IMPLICATIONS FOR TRAINING AND SELECTION

by

Madeleine Littman

A DISSERTATION

Presented to the Faculty of

The Graduate College in the University of Nebraska

In Partial Fulfillment of Requirements

For the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Department of Educational Psychology and Measurements

Under the Supervision of Professor DeLoss Friesen

Lincoln, Nebraska

August, 1977

**TITLE**

Conceptual Level and Facility in the Acquisition of Counseling

Skills: Implications for Training and Selection

**BY**

Madeleine Littman

APPROVED	DATE
DeLoss D. Friesen	July 8, 1977
Robert D. Brown	July 8, 1977
Richard A. Dienstbier	July 8, 1977
Vernon Williams	July 8, 1977

**SUPERVISORY COMMITTEE**

**GRADUATE COLLEGE**

**UNIVERSITY OF NEBRASKA**

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank Dr. DeLoss D. Friesen, for without his patience, understanding, knowledge, help and friendship this dissertation would not have been conceived, carried out, or written.

My thanks also go to Dr. Robert D. Brown for his kindness and friendship and for his thoughtful suggestions in regard to the revisions of this dissertation.

I would also like to thank the other members of my committee, Dr. Vernon Williams for his suggestions in regard to the dissertation and my writing style, and Dr. Richard Dienstbier for his benevolent good will and suggestions regarding the proposal for this dissertation.

My sincere appreciation and thanks go to Margit Royal, Marley Watkins, Calvin Stoltenberg and Gerard Lavelle for their generosity and patience during the many, many, many hours of training and scoring of the interview transcripts and for their friendship and humor which made the long hours of work pass quickly and with fun.

I would also to thank Puncky Heppner for his help in running one of the control training groups during the summer of 1976 and Craig Johnson for his help with the data analysis.

My thanks go to Michelle Ballering, Michael Preston, Rose Rothmeier and Dianna Newman for without their friendship and support during my stay in Lincoln, Nebraska, this dissertation could not have been written.

And my thanks also go to my family, their love and support across the distance that separates us was much needed and appreciated.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER		PAGE
1	STATEMENT OF PROBLEM. . . . .	1
	Introduction. . . . .	1
	Counselor Training and Selection. . . . .	1
	Statement of the Problem. . . . .	3
	Background and Rationale for this Study . . . . .	4
	Description and Explanation of Conceptual Systems Theory. . . . .	4
	Development of Conceptual Systems . . . . .	5
	Training Environments and Conceptual Development. . . . .	9
	General Objectives of the Study . . . . .	12
	Specific Objectives of the Study. . . . .	13
2	REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE. . . . .	14
	Introduction. . . . .	14
	Counseling Effectiveness. . . . .	14
	Counselor Training. . . . .	20
	Counselor Selection . . . . .	23
	Conceptual Systems Theory . . . . .	28
	Summary . . . . .	38
3	METHODOLOGY, DEFINITIONS, HYPOTHESES. . . . .	41
	Introduction to the Study . . . . .	41
	Subjects. . . . .	41
	Procedures. . . . .	42
	Analogue Interview. . . . .	45
	Written Analogue. . . . .	45
	Measurement Instruments . . . . .	46
	Measurement of Conceptual Level . . . . .	46
	Paragraph Completion Test . . . . .	47
	The Amidon Interaction Analysis System. . . . .	49
	Research Hypotheses . . . . .	53
	General Null Hypotheses . . . . .	59
4	RESULTS . . . . .	61
5	DISCUSSION, IMPLICATIONS, LIMITATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS . . . .	83
	Discussion. . . . .	83
	Counselor Training and Counselor Effectiveness. . . . .	83
	Conceptual Level and Counseling Effectiveness . . . . .	85
	Scores on the Semantic Differential--Interaction Between Conceptual Level and Training . . . . .	88

CHAPTER		PAGE
5	Limitations . . . . .	93
	Implications. . . . .	95
	Conceptual Level and Counselor Effectiveness. . . .	95
	Conceptual Level and Counselor Training . . . . .	96
	Conceptual Level and Counselor Selection. . . . .	97
	Conclusions . . . . .	98
	Summary . . . . .	99
	REFERENCES. . . . .	102
	APPENDIX A - Counseling Skill Training Syllabus . . . . .	109
	APPENDIX B - Paragraph Completion Test. . . . .	127
	APPENDIX C - Written Analogue . . . . .	129
	APPENDIX D - Presenting Problem of the Confederate Client . . . . .	138
	APPENDIX E - Semantic Differential. . . . .	140
	APPENDIX F - Amidon Interaction Analysis System Scoring Procedures. . . . .	142

PREVIEW

# LIST OF TABLES

TABLE		PAGE
1	Distribution of Male and Female Counselor Trainees. . . . .	43
2	Means and Standard Deviations of Paragraph Completion Test Scores of High- and Low-Conceptual Level Groups. . . .	43
3	Means and Standard Deviations of the Indirect/Direct Counselor Talk Ratios Derived from the Amidon Interaction Analysis Ratings of the Analogue Interviews . . . . .	62
4	F Ratios of the Contrasts of the Indirect/Direct Counselor Talk Ratios Derived from the Amidon Interaction Analysis Ratings of the Analogue Interviews. . . . .	62
5	Means and Standard Deviations of the Counselor Talk/ Client Talk Ratios Derived from the Amidon Interaction Analysis Ratings of the Analogue Interviews . . . . .	64
6	F Ratios of the Contrasts of the Counselor Talk/Client Talk Ratios Derived from the Amidon Interaction Analysis Ratings of the Analogue Interviews. . . . .	64
7	Means and Standard Deviations of the Accepts Client's Feelings Percentages Derived from the Amidon Interaction Analysis Ratings of the Analogue Interviews . . . . .	67
8	F Ratios of the Contrasts of the Accepts Client's Feelings Percentages Derived from the Amidon Interaction Analysis Ratings of the Analogue Interviews. . . . .	67
9	Means and Standard Deviations of the Accepts and Uses Client's Ideas Percentages Derived from the Amidon Inter- action Analysis Ratings of the Analogue Interviews. . . . .	69
10	F Ratios of the Contrasts of the Accepts and Uses Client's Ideas Percentages Derived from the Amidon Interaction Analysis Ratings of the Analogue Interviews . . . . .	69
11	Means and Standard Deviations of the Question Percentages Derived from the Amidon Interaction Analysis Ratings of the Analogue Interviews. . . . .	71
12	F Ratios of the Contrasts of the Question Percentages Derived from the Amidon Interaction Analysis Ratings of the Analogue Interviews. . . . .	71



TABLE		PAGE
13	Means and Standard Deviations of Client Self-Initiated Response/ Total Response Ratios Derived from the Amidon Interaction Analysis Ratings of the Analogue Interviews. . . . .	73
14	F Ratios of the Contrasts of the Client Self-Initiated Response/Total Response Ratios Derived from the Amidon Interaction Analysis Ratings of the Analogue Interviews. . . . .	73
15	Means and Standard Deviations of the Scores on the Semantic Differential . . . . .	76
16	F Ratios of the Contrasts of the Scores on the Semantic Differential. . . . .	76
17	Correlations Between the Proportions Derived from the Amidon Interaction Analysis Ratings of the Analogue Interviews and the Written Analogues. . . . .	80
18	Correlations Between the Scores on the Semantic Differential and the Proportions Derived from the Amidon Interaction Analysis Ratings of the Analogue Interviews . . . . .	80

PRELIMINARY

## LIST OF FIGURES

FIGURE		PAGE
1	Description of Amidon Categories. . . . .	51
2	Example of Amidon Coding. . . . .	52
3	Interaction Between the Conceptual Level and Treatment in the Ratings on the Semantic Differential . . . . .	77

PREVIEW

## CHAPTER 1

### STATEMENT OF PROBLEM

#### Introduction

##### Counselor Training and Selection

In the past support in the face of crises, and informal counseling like activities were provided by the traditional systems of family, school and religion. Whatever the reasons for the decline of influence of these institutions, the fact is apparent; people are no longer relying on them for support. In the western world more and more people are turning instead to psychological counseling to help them deal with the issues of these complicated times.

There is a growing demand for more and more highly qualified counselors, and the field of counseling and clinical psychology must somehow meet these demands. Competent counselors need to be trained to meet these present and future needs. The problem is more complex than just training, as this assumes that everyone would be equally responsive to a counselor training program. Some potential counselors may respond more quickly and acquire more skills in a counselor training program than others.

It is therefore important to analyze the interrelated issues of counselor selection and training. Such an analysis involves, in part, determining the specific counseling skills needed and the most efficient methods for training those skills in order then, to be able to define more clearly the type of person who would be likely to respond more positively

to training and become a productive counselor.

Thus far, research in counseling has succeeded in isolating the therapeutic conditions of empathy, genuineness, positive regard and specificity as important interpersonal factors correlated with positive counseling outcomes (Truax & Mitchell, 1971). Some training techniques have been developed which have been fairly successful in teaching those skills to students (Matarazzo, 1971).

However, the field of counseling has been unable to delineate clearly the types of people most likely to provide, or be trained to provide, those important interpersonal factors. The APA Division 17 Report on Research Priorities in Counseling (Note, 1) also recognized this problem:

The lack of significant predictors exists despite the definition of counselor selection as an urgent problem and the large quantity of research which has been published in the area [p. 13].

#### Statement of the Problem

While research has shown that traditional academic and personality indicators are not good predictors of counseling competency, there have been some promising research results in the predictive validity of personality factors such as tolerance for ambiguity, psychological openness and cognitive flexibility (Gruberg, 1969; Jones, 1974; Allen, 1967; Allen & Whiteley, 1968). These characteristics seem to be similar to the abstract pole of the conceptual level continuum (Harvey, Hunt & Schroder, 1961). While some research in the past has investigated the relationship between conceptual level and counselor characteristics,

it seemed important to investigate the contribution of conceptual level to the acquisition of counseling skills. Of interest also, was any implications these results might have for the selection of counselor trainees.

### Background and Rationale for this Study

The variable of conceptual abstractness, also called conceptual level is derived from conceptual systems theory (Harvey, Hunt and Schroder, 1961). The theory postulates that empathy develops as the person develops along the continuum from conceptual concreteness to conceptual abstractness. It would follow, that if this theory is valid, people exhibiting greater conceptual abstractness would also exhibit greater empathy within their interpersonal relationships.

### Description and Explanation of Conceptual Systems Theory

The cognitive complexity of an individual is based upon the organization of his conceptual system. Harvey, Hunt and Schroder (1961) define a person's conceptual system as a network of interrelated concepts about the world that, "serve as an experiential filter through which impinging events are screened, gauged and evaluated" (pp. 2-3). Their formulation of conceptual systems is similar to Kelly's system of constructs:

Man looks at his world through transparent patterns or templates which he created and then attempts to fit over the realities of which the world is composed. The fit is not always very good. Yet without such patterns the world appears to be such an undifferentiated homogeneity that man is unable to make any sense out of it. Even a poor fit is more helpful to him than nothing at all [Kelly, 1963, pp. 8-9].

These conceptual systems are unique to each individual, thus people seeing the same stimulus will perceive it differently and then behave differently based upon their own unique perceptions. However, even though each person's conceptual system is unique, there are some systematic similarities and differences among them. Conceptual systems can vary in content, i.e., different people are Democrats, Republicans and Independents. Conceptual systems can also vary in regard to their structure regardless of whether their content is similar or not, i.e., some Republicans are rigid and others are flexible. Harvey et al. (1961) focus on the three structural dimensions of concreteness/abstractness, simplicity/complexity and undifferentiation/differentiation in order to distinguish among conceptual systems. Those conceptual systems characterized by more concreteness, simplicity and undifferentiation, employ fewer concepts and resultant perceptions tend to be rigid and more stimulus bound. A "more concretistically functioning person is more likely to make only a few differentiations of his environment and to leave these cognitive 'elements' in a greater state of isolation" (Harvey et al., 1961, p. 25). Conceptual systems characterized by more abstractness, complexity and differentiation, employ more concepts, and have more interrelations between them. Perceptions tend to be more flexible and less stimulus bound and the more abstractly functioning person is more capable of "abstracting relationships from objects of his experience and of organizing them in terms of their interrelatedness" (Harvey et al., 1961, p. 25).

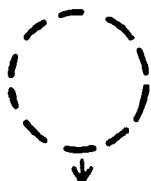
### Development of Conceptual Systems

Conceptual development proceeds from the concrete to the abstract; and occurs as children interact with and learn from the environment. They learn through a process of differentiation and integration, where they break up the environment into meaningful units and then integrate those units into the already existing cognitive network. This development is not strictly linear, rather:

in conceptual development, one seems first to form gross differentiations by cognitively cutting the ambiguous or undifferentiated into large chunks. This large chunk one might differentiate more before moving to break off another chunk, but generally one moves to the cutting of a second chunk before finely and clearly differentiating the first. In fact, it seems in most cases that it is with the aid of differentiations and reference points gained from the latter gross segment that one is able to differentiate more finely--and even veridically--the facets of the first chunk [Harvey et al., 1961, p. 18].

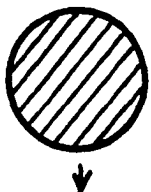
This development of conceptual systems, given ideal environmental conditions, proceeds from the concrete to the abstract and involves learning and forming concepts about the world, then forming concepts of the self as separate and distinct from the world, and then forming concepts in regard to the interrelationships between self and others. Hunt (1966, pp. 277-302) schematized the developmental process as follows:

Sub (I)



The individual has not yet formed many concepts about the world.

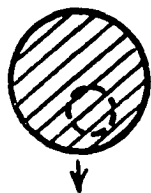
Stage (I)



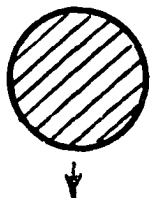
Slowly the individual forms more and more clear concepts about the world, and begins to understand external bounds and limits.

However, at this state "there is a lack of differentiation between a rule and its purpose and between authority and one's own experience" (Harvey et al., 1961, p. 94).

Transition to  
Stage II



Stage II Other

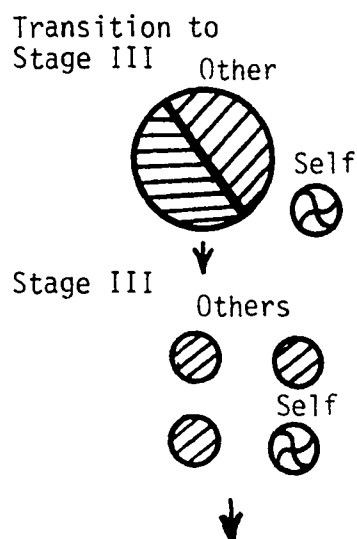


Self



The individual begins to differentiate himself as unique from the rest of the world. For example, in childhood this takes the form of the child's wish for autonomy. The child doesn't want to do everything his parents want him to do. The individual more fully differentiates himself from the world. At this stage, however, the person defines himself in opposition to the world. This resistance and opposition then "enables the organism to use and develop inner controls" (Harvey et al., 1961, p. 100). This development of inner control then allows the person to accept individual responsibility for outcomes and then the individual's own feelings become the basis for differential action. This self-delineation will later serve as the empathic basis for understanding the feelings and experiences of others (Hunt, 1966).

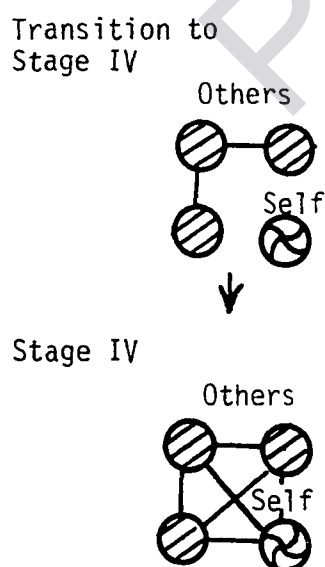




Once the person has clearly defined himself he then begins to differentiate people more clearly and begins to deal with them on a more equal and empathic basis.

The person continues to differentiate others, not according to their roles but according to their beliefs and feelings (Hunt, 1966).

The person begins to become aware of alternate points of view and more tolerant of ambiguity. Internal control continues to develop and "during this stage mutuality, obtaining satisfaction from pleasing others, and empathy replace unilateral functioning and concern with dominance and power. A new basis for relating to people is established" (Harvey et al., 1961, p. 103).



The mutuality and empathy developed in the previous stage provides the basis for the further development of autonomy, based not upon opposition to others, but rather upon mutuality with others.

The individual fully integrates mutuality, empathy, and autonomy into interdependence. The person is thus able to integrate the standards of himself and others by realizing that people occupy different positions

on the same transcendent dimension (Hunt, 1966).

### Training Environments and Conceptual Development

The progression of conceptual development just described is the ideal. Most people do not pass through all the stages. In fact, on the average, only 7.5 percent of the population progress to Stage IV (Schroder et al., 1967). In order for development to proceed the environment has to allow the individual to differentiate basic concepts clearly and then allow him/her freedom to explore and be open to events opposing the basic concepts in order for integration to occur.

Different environments vary in the degree to which they foster integration. Reliable unilateral training environments consist of parents who reward their children when they behave in accordance with external standards and punish behaviors that are unacceptable according to those external standards. An example would be punishing a child for exhibiting autonomous, self-willed behaviors such as not wanting to go see a movie (that he/she wouldn't like) with the family. In general such environments tend to inhibit most forms of self-expression and children tend to become docile and submissive (Harvey et al., 1961). Adults who have been reared in this type of environment tend to become arrested at Stage I. They tend to be the people who see things in a more categorical manner, tend to be more rigid and rule bound, have trouble being flexible in ambiguous situations, and tend to rather uncritically embrace the values of the dominant culture.

Unreliable unilateral training environments involve inconsistency of control on the part of the parents. This leads to inconsistent patterns of reward and punishments. Parents in such environments tend to have absolute and excessively high expectations of the child, therefore putting the child in a consistent situation of failure (Harvey et al., 1961). Some environments of this type are also rejecting and neglectful of the child. Because the world is so unreliable and demanding, children raised in this type of environment begin to differentiate themselves from the rest of the world before they have built a truly stable set of concepts about it. Adults raised in such environments tend to become arrested at Stage II. Instead of accepting and incorporating the dominant culture, they define themselves in opposition to it. They tend to be hostile and have a strong need for autonomy stemming from their distrust of authority and rules (Harvey, 1966).

Protective interdependent training environments involve defining the success and failure of a child's behavior in terms of the needs of the child himself rather than in reference to a set of external criteria (Harvey et al., 1961). In this case, the child not wanting to go to the movies would not be looked at as "bad" but as having needs different from the rest of the family at that point in time. Parents in this type of training environment tend to protect their children from experiencing failure by stepping in and offering support and help before the possible failure occurs. In the rare situation when the child does experience failure he then tends to see it as a form of rejection and lack of support. Adults who have been reared in this type of environment tend to become arrested at Stage III. They tend to have moderately

abstract conceptual systems. They neither categorically accept or reject rules or society. Rather they have developed a set of internalized standards that they apply flexibly in a variety of situations. They have a strong orientation towards people and tend to be conditionally dependent based upon some degree of mutuality; however their behavior is in part directed towards obtaining the type of protection and support they received in the past.

Informational Interdependent training environments consist of parents who control the environment so that the child's exploratory activity leads to the development of skills and to the discovery of multiple solutions to problems as opposed to rewarding the child for an externally defined "right" answer. In environments such as this the child learns from experiencing the consequences of his own actions and the parents' role tends to be that of clarifying to the child the natural consequences of the child's behavior in terms that are meaningful to the child (Harvey et al., 1961). Adults who were reared in environments such as this, tend to progress to Stage IV. They are the people with the most abstract conceptual systems. Like the people at Stage III, they have developed a flexible set of internalized standards and their relationships are based upon mutuality and empathy. However, in contrast to the conditional dependency characteristic of Stage III, these people tend to be more autonomous and their relationships thus tend to be more interdependent.

### General Objectives of the Study

Within conceptual systems theory, the basis for empathy lies in the growing realization of oneself as unique and separate from the generalized other. Once the conceptualization develops that oneself, as an individual, has thoughts, feelings and values which are unique, the person then becomes able to differentiate among people who comprise the generalized other. The individual then begins to understand and relate to others, not in terms of their role in society, but rather in terms of their unique thoughts, feelings and values which they as individuals have also developed.

This process of self-differentiation and subsequent differentiation of other begins in the transition to Stage II. If conceptual systems theory is valid, then research should be able to prove that people at progressively higher stages of development exhibit more and more empathy in their interactions with others. Heck and Davis (1973) and Goldberg (1974) have found that counselor trainees with higher conceptual level exhibit more empathy, are less directive, respond more to client feelings and exhibit more understanding than lower conceptual level counselor trainees. This study investigated whether the greater capacity for empathy associated with higher conceptual level would facilitate the acquisition of counseling skills in a counselor training program. Of interest also was the implication that such a relationship might have for counselor trainee selection. An additional goal was to expand upon the research done by Heck and Davis (1973) and Goldberg (1974). Their findings appear to be based upon data derived from the written responses

of counselor trainees to written client statements. Since a written analogue is somewhat removed from actual counseling, it might be invalid to make generalizations about overall counseling skill. Those same trainees might have responded differently in an actual counseling interview where their responses could have been based not only upon the client's words, but also upon the many non-verbal cues available. Therefore, this study obtained counseling effectiveness data relative to conceptual level, from an analogue situation which was more similar to an actual counseling interview.

#### Specific Objectives of the Study

This study investigated the construct of conceptual level and its relation to facility in acquiring counseling skills in a counselor training program. Of interest also were the implications that such a relationship might have for counselor trainee selection. The study obtained measures of counselor effectiveness after the low and high conceptual level counselor trainees had participated in either the treatment, a counselor training procedure, or the control learning condition. The judgments about their counseling effectiveness were based upon their performance in two analogue situations, (a) an analogue interview with a coached client and (b) a written analogue consisting of standardized client statements.

## CHAPTER 2

### REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

#### Introduction

This chapter first reviews the counseling effectiveness literature and examines the specific counseling behaviors which have been associated with positive counseling outcomes. Next is a review of the relevant issues involved in counselor training, followed by a presentation of research related to counselor-trainee selection. The last section contains an exploration of the implications that conceptual systems theory might have for counselor selection and training. A summary of significant findings concludes the chapter.

#### Counseling Effectiveness

Ever since Eysenck (1955) used "averaged" data and found that psychotherapy was no more effective than spontaneous remission, a great deal of effort has been devoted to delineating counseling outcomes. To prevent any masking of results due to the fact that people can vary both positively or negatively on single dimensions, the research has focused on delineating specific interventions, client characteristics and counselor characteristics. However, even in more recent studies which do utilize specific factors, the results have been disheartening. In his review of the counseling outcome literature, Bergin (1971) found that:

While there is little difference in the "average amount" of change occurring in experimental and control groups, a significant increase in variability of criterion scores appears at post-testing in the treatment groups [p. 246].

One possible explanation is that people receiving counseling are getting better and worse than people who are not treated. Therapy can therefore be helpful, it can effect improvement; or harmful, it can effect deterioration in the people seeking help.

These findings made it incumbent upon psychologists to find out the differences between successful and unsuccessful counselors. However, even before these alarming findings, there was a great deal of effort to determine what it is that successful counselors do within their counseling relationships. Fielder (1950a) compared experienced and inexperienced therapists from the Psychoanalytic, Adlerian and Client-centered orientations in their view of what the "ideal therapeutic relationship" would be like. He correlated the Q-sorts completed by the therapists which described their therapeutic ideal and found higher correlations between the Q-sorts of the experts across the three orientations than there were between those of the experts and non-experts of the same orientation. In a similar follow-up study (Fielder, 1950b), he had four expert therapists rate actual taped interviews of experts and non-experts across the three orientations. Using the same Q-sort technique, the experts sorted the cards according to the degree to which the statements on the cards were indicative of each taped interview. He again found higher correlations between the Q-sorts describing the interviews of the experts across the three orientations, than between the experts and non-experts within the same orientation.