

IMPLICATIONS OF PERSON PERCEPTION RESEARCH FOR COUNSELING

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Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

Underlying much of the training given to counselors is the assumption that the more knowledge a counselor has about the intentions, motivations, and beliefs of the client -- the more accurate the counselor is in perceiving what the client is "really" like -- the more effective the counselor can be in his or her role as helper (Steiner, 1955). Therefore, in training counselors, emphasis is placed on gaining accuracy in perception of others and on developing a theoretical framework or orientation which aids the counselor in organizing his or her thinking about the client. But accuracy is only one component in perception and judgement of others. Less attention is typically given to understanding the process through which counselors arrive at their perceptions of others. How do people form impressions of others? How do people order the impressions and information received from or given about another?

There is little doubt that the counselor attempting to understand the individual client is faced, fundamentally, with a task of person perception. It is the purpose of this paper to show that research in person perception, specifically research pertaining to implicit personality theory, has much relevance for the field of counseling.

There have been two major directions in person perception research. One trend of inquiry has been concerned primarily with

accuracy or veridicality of perception and with the determination of the characteristics of a "good" or accurate judge of others. The second area of investigation has focused on questions about the process of perception, i.e. how does one form and synthesize impressions of others. In practice, accuracy and process are highly interrelated, but for the purposes of this paper, accuracy and process will be considered separately. The discussion will initially and primarily focus on processes of perception.

It seems axiomatic that people begin to form impressions of others based on limited information. As an individual accumulates information about another and tries to find out what another person is like, he or she tends to check out certain hypotheses based on assumptions about that person, which in turn are based on the individual perceiver's implicit personality theory. In the first comprehensive review of the research literature in psychology that pertains to the process of person perception, Bruner and Tagiuri (1954) introduced this term "naive, implicit personality theory" to describe the tendency for people to infer from the presence of one bit of information about an individual a host of other traits or characteristics of that individual. For example, knowing that someone is intelligent may influence many people to expect that person to also be reasonable, imaginative, and creative. Bruner and Tagiuri emphasize that these inferences or assumptions about others are not necessarily logically derived from the given bit of information but are based instead on the perceiver's assumptions about personality. Implicit personality theory guides one's interactions with others and especially the formation of an impression of what another is like.

The concept of implicit personality provides a general framework for organizing our thinking about the process of perception. Some of the research relevant to the formulation of this concept will be reviewed in Chapter 2. The literature on response sets in perception, on the general nature of impression formation, and on stereotyping as an example of a specific type of implicit personality theory will be considered.

Chapter 3 will review the research on one specific form of stereotyping: sex-role stereotyping. The ramifications of sex-role stereotyping for counseling and clinical endeavors will be considered. Finally, the implications of person perception research, especially the research on process of perception, will be related to the counseling endeavor in Chapter 4. Some implications for counselor training will be discussed.

Chapter 2

THE PROCESS OF PERCEPTION

Early research in person perception tended to concentrate on accuracy and the correlates of accuracy, e.g., determining the characteristics of an accurate judge of others. In the course of this research, a number of general "response sets" of the judge or perceiver were identified which seemed to be more a function of the judges' general ways of perceiving others than a function of veridicality itself. The first section of this chapter reviews the nature of the general response sets. Difficulties encountered in the accuracy studies led to increased interest in the processes by which we come to make judgements of others. The work on impression formation, which greatly affected later theory and methodology in the area of implicit personality theory, is covered in the second section of the chapter. In the last section, some of the other research documenting the importance of implicit personality theory in perception is examined. Stereotyping as an example of an implicit personality theory is briefly reviewed.

Response Sets

People tend to approach the task of judging others in certain general ways. One of the best known of these global response tendencies or sets is the "halo effect" (a term first coined by Thorndike in 1920, although it had been observed much earlier). Halo effect describes a tendency to perceive another primarily in terms of "good" or "bad"

and to infer other qualities of the person from this evaluation. A general impression of "good" tends to skew all impressions of an individual in a positive direction; conversely, a general impression of "bad" lends a negative aura to other impressions. The halo reflects a tendency on the part of the perceiver to "package" the myriad impressions received from another person in evaluative (good-bad) clusters (Jones & Gerard, 1967).

This evaluative dimension has consistently been observed in research about judgements of others and is considered to be the most important single determinant of the organization of first and later impressions of others (Tagiuri, 1958; Jones & Gerard, 1967; Schneider, 1973). Osgood, Suci, and Tannenbaum (1957), although they were concerned with the basic dimensions of verbal meaning, obtained results which relate directly to the halo effect. Subjects were asked to indicate where they felt a wide variety of concepts (such as boulder, mother, and Catholic) fell on certain bipolar dimensions such as happy-sad and hot-cold. The response ratings were intercorrelated and several independent factors or clusters of adjectives emerged which could be considered basic dimensions on which all things had been described. The first factor, which accounted for the greatest amount of variability in meaning, was the evaluation (good-bad) factor. A second factor of potency (strong-weak) and a third labeled activity (active-passive) were also important dimensions, but less so than the evaluative dimension. Since the Osgood, et al (1957) study, numerous investigations have confirmed the stability, pervasiveness, and pre-eminence of the evaluative dimension in judgements of traits, social issues, and other people (Freedman, Carlsmith, & Sears, 1970; Jones & Gerard, 1967).

Tagiuri (1965) has used the term "leniency effect" to describe the halo that occurs when others are characteristically perceived as having more favorable traits than unfavorable ones. He considers this "an instance of the central tendency of judgement, with ratings regressing to an idealized middle point; for example, lacking full information one operates on the assumption that people are moderately good" (1965, p. 411). Another well recognized response set is the tendency for the perceiver to assume that others are similar to him or her and to attribute characteristics of themselves to others. When the perceiver is actually similar to another in attitudes and traits, this tendency results in a fortuitous accurate judgement of another (Brown, 1965; Taft, 1955). Assuming similarity when the perceiver and perceived differ, however, typically leads to inaccurate perceptions of another.

These characteristic tendencies to package impressions of others have been explained in terms of an effort to reduce cognitive dissonance (Festinger, 1957). Studies in cognition have shown that in complex cognitive processes, such as the perception of others, people attempt to order their cognitions such that dissonance among elements is minimized and a balance of elements is maximized. In other words, we often attempt to make sense of another's behavior by overlooking inconsistencies (reducing dissonance) and by categorizing or packaging impressions with respect to salient dimensions (e.g. good-bad) from our own implicit personality theory.

Impression Formation

Studies in impression formation are pertinent to the understanding of the perceptual process. The most significant work in this area was initiated by Asch (1952) who argued that impressions of others form

an integrated whole, a gestalt, and that certain traits assigned to person or presented by a person are central to the process of impression formation. In a classic series of experiments, Asch (1952) demonstrated that key traits or central traits color or affect the meaning of other traits -- they transform the meaning of other traits with which they interact. In one much cited study, he presented the following list of terms to one group of college students and asked them to write a sketch of that person: "intelligent, skillful, industrious, warm, determined, practical, cautious." A second group of students was given similar instructions for the same list of adjectives with the word "cold" substituted for "warm". After writing the sketches, the students were asked to read through a checklist of paired antonyms and select from each pair the term that best fitted the impression they had formed. The two groups of students differed significantly both in written sketches of the hypothetical person and in the terms they used to describe that person. Specifically, the impressions of the warm group were generally more positive: the warm students inferred the person to also be generous (90%), humorous (77%), good-natured (94%), and happy (90%). The cold students perceived their stimulus person to be ungenerous (92%), humorless (87%), ruthless (69%), irritable (83%), and unhappy (66%). Clearly, very different impressions of persons were created when the words "warm" and "cold" were exchanged in Asch's list of traits. A change in one trait produced a fundamental change in the resulting impression. When the words "polite" and "blunt" were substituted for warm and cold (1952), only slight differences in impression were found. Some traits, then, are considered more central to impression formation than others.

In another experiment, Asch (1952) demonstrated that when

warm and cold are exchanged in a different list of traits ("obedient, weak, shallow, warm, unambitious, vain"), they lose their comparative importance as central traits. What this suggests is that while a certain trait may act as a central organizing trait or key factor in determining an impression in one instance, in another instance that same trait may be of peripheral importance in forming an impression of another. Asch's studies refuted the additive model of impression formation which states that a perceiver arrives at an overall impression by simply adding together bits of information (Fishbein & Hunter, 1964).

Kelley (1950) replicated Asch's findings in a more realistic setting. Two groups of psychology students were given biographical descriptions of a guest lecturer prior to his appearance that differed only with respect to the inclusion of the statement "he is known as a rather warm (cold) person, industrious, critical, practical, and determined." After the lecturer led a twenty minute discussion, the students were asked to give their impressions of him. Not only did the impressions of the lecturer differ significantly for the two groups of students, but the students who received the warm description tended to initiate more interactions with the lecturer than did those who had received the cold description. These findings substantiate the central traits theory as well as suggesting that one's social behavior may be a function of how others are perceived.

Of relevance to the study of first impressions is the question of how first impressions influence later ones. In other words, is the order in which we receive impressions important in an overall evaluation? Asch (1952), in investigating this issue of primacy, showed how the first bit of information received produces a set which influences how later information is interpreted. Specifically, Asch hypothesized that

the first bit of information shifts the meanings of information encountered afterwards. Anderson's (1965) studies suggest that, rather than shifting meanings, the impact of the first information is to reduce the weight assigned to later information (the "weighted averaging model") and that information is averaged in obtaining an overall impression with saliency given to highly positive or highly negative traits. Regardless of which explanation is preferred, the important point is that the primacy of information received is an important determinant of the overall evaluation of another.

Some subsequent research has shown that the centrality of a trait depends on what traits the experimenter chooses to include in his response checklist (Wishner, 1960) and that the meaning of isolated traits can also be predictive of their meaning in a combination of traits (Bruner, Shapiro, & Tagiuri, 1955). Jackson (1962) found that certain persistent central traits correlate highly with a factor of traits that is evaluative (good-bad) in nature, thus tying Asch's work to the operation of an evaluative response set in perception. In any case, Asch's basic contentions -- that certain dimensions may be central in impression formation, that some dimensions of perception are more important than others and may shape the meanings of others, that bits of information are not necessarily additive -- have been supported by considerable empirical evidence and are considered to be valid (Freedman, Carlsmith, & Sears, 1970; Sampson, 1971; Jones & Gerard, 1967).

Studies of impression formation thus show that people tend to infer from the presence of one trait or cue a number of other traits or dispositions of the stimulus person. Even given a little data about another, people typically arrive at a number of assumptions and they do so with some consensus. Further, the organization of these first

impressions is affected by general response sets such as the tendency¹⁰ to assume similarity and to evaluate in global good or bad terms.

Implicit Personality Theory and Stereotyping

Although Bruner and Tagiuri (1958) first introduced the term "naive, implicit personality theory", the basic idea had at least been hinted at for some time. Guilford (1936), for example, used the term "logical error" to refer to the tendency for people, given one trait, to exhibit a strong set to expect certain other traits to correlate. Cronbach (1958) referred to the implicit, inferential process in perceiving others as the "personal map of the world of other people" that every individual carries with him. Since its initial christening, the term implicit personality theory has come to imply all the sets of assumptions and expectations about human behavior and personality that the perceiver entertains at an implicit level.

Some of the most significant contributions to the concept of implicit personality theory came from the studies of Tupes and Christal (1961), Norman (1963), and Passini and Norman (1966). They showed that the same five factors are consistently used in describing others regardless of how much contact the perceivers have with the persons described. Passini and Norman asked subjects who had been in contact with one another for less than fifteen minutes to rate each other on scales of pairs of opposite descriptive adjectives. When the results were factor analyzed and compared to similar ratings of subjects who has been in longer term contact with stimulus persons (from three days to three years), five factors emerged for all groups. These factors were: extroversion (e.g., talkative-open, adventurous-cautious), agreeableness (e.g., cooperative-negativistic, good-natured-irritable), conscientiousness (e.g., responsible-undependable, persevering-quitting), emotional

stability (e.g., calm-anxious, poised-tense), and culture (e.g. simple-imaginative, intellectual-unreflective). Sampson (1971) in summarizing these findings, concludes that:

It is the individual's implicit personality theory that produces the same five-factor structure whether strangers or friends are rated... interrater agreement stems from sharing within a given group and perhaps with a given culture a relatively common framework of such implicit theories. Each allows us to work from a small base of data about another to an impression of that other person. Each, so to speak, sets the limits within which our interpersonal inference process works (p.7).

Dornbusch, Hastorf, Richardson, Muzzy, and Vreeland (1965), using a free response method, arrived at a similar conclusion that emphasizes the importance of the perceiver, more than the perceived, in determining perceptions of others. They tape recorded interviews with children and asked them to give free description of all other children at a summer camp. They reasoned that children would be less motivated than adults to conceal material or alter their impressions for the sake of the interviewer. Based on a content analysis of the description and taking into account the amount of descriptive overlap, Dornbusch, et al, comment that "the most powerful influence on interpersonal description is the manner in which the perceiver structures his interpersonal world"(p. 440).

Taken together, these findings lend credence to the idea that we go about perceiving others by using "built-in maps of inference" (Cronbach, 1958), our implicit personality theory. Each individual's implicit personality theory probably develops from a combination of personal and cultural experiences, but it is difficult to disentangle what aspects of one's implicit assumptions about others have grown out of past personal learning and which have been adopted from the culture. Some implicit personality theory, then, may be specific to

an individual -- a tendency unique to an individual to associate certain characteristics with others -- while others may be shared by many, such as cultural stereotypes.

Individual differences in person perception have been related primarily to the cognitive style of the perceiver. There appears to be consistency in the way an individual cognitively integrates perceptions independent of the stimulus person. Cognitive complexity indicates the degree of conceptual differentiation (the number of independent dimensions) that are utilized in characterizing and classifying others (Bieri, Briar, Leaman, Miller, Atkins, & Tripodi, 1966). Cognitive complexity has been related to accuracy in perception, but it has not yet been linked to other personality variables aside from intelligence (Bieri, et al, 1966). In general, no studies have satisfactorily demonstrated the personality variables that are consistently related to the way one perceives others (Tagiuri, 1965).

Some persons characteristically use certain traits in defining others. Women, for example, tend to use psychological terms more often than men who focus on physical traits in their description (Dornbusch, et al, 1965; Bieri, 1961; Sarbin, 1954). Shapiro and Tagiuri (1959) found that women were more sensitive to qualities of efficiency, responsibility, and practicality in describing others; and they tended to make positive or negative inferences of an extreme type more often than men. The men in their study more readily inferred qualities of intelligence, humor, and enthusiasm in others.

Stereotyping can be considered a specific instance of the operation of implicit personality theory. The term is best defined as "the general inclination to place a person in categories according to some easily and quickly identifiable characteristic such as age, sex,

ethnic membership, nationality, or occupation, and then to attribute to him qualities believed to be typical of members of that category" (Tagiuri, 1965, p. 422). Most of us employ certain subjective or implicit categories in thinking about others, what Sampson (1971) refers to as the shorthand of stereotypes. "Most of us tend to build conceptual models of the world that hold a great deal of shared meaning; we use the shorthand of stereotypes at least until we get to know another person in a more highly differentiated way" (p. 3).

Katz and Braly (1933) and Gilbert (1951) have shown that not only are stereotypes persistent over a long period, but people are typically unwilling to admit they use them as a way of categorizing others. The term "stereotyping" has come to imply a rather simplistic and unsophisticated way of viewing others, but, as Sampson (1971) has emphasized, it is an almost universal and perhaps unavoidable human activity. The phenomenon of sex-role stereotyping, which may have special relevance to counseling and the counselor-client relationship, is discussed in the next chapter.

Chapter 3

SEX-ROLE STEREOTYPING AND IMPLICATIONS FOR COUNSELING

One well recognized example of an implicit personality theory that is shared by the members of our culture is the set of assumptions and consensual beliefs about the differing characteristics and roles of men and women, usually referred to as sex-role stereotypes. Such stereotypes prescribe occupational and personality expectations for each sex.

Women in our society are typically viewed as being emotionally unstable, passive, nurturant, dependent, irrational, and inconsistent (Komarovsky, 1950; Sherriffs & McKee, 1957). Women's roles are primarily that of wife and mother, whereas men are considered to be providers and protectors. The stereotype for men embraces such qualities as bold, aggressive, intellectually competent, independent, logical (Brown, 1958). These attitudes have defined separate spheres of behaviors and competence for men and women. Investigators have found these stereotypic attitudes to be not only widespread, but ascribed to by both men and women (Kitay, 1940; Sherriffs & Jarrett, 1953; McKee & Sherriffs, 1957; Lynneborg, 1970; Sappenfield, Kaplan, & Balogh, 1966). Consistently, those behaviors and characteristics considered to be masculine are viewed as having higher social value than those behaviors considered to be feminine (McKee & Sherriffs, 1957).

In the psychiatric literature it has been assumed that the adoption of appropriate sex-roles and behaviors are crucial to adequate

personal and psychological adjustment (Kayton & Biller, 1972; Erickson, 1964). The positive value, or conversely, the detrimental aspects of sex-role standards on the full development of capabilities of men and women have only recently been questioned (Broverman, Vogel, Broverman, Clarkson, & Rosenkrantz, 1972; Horner, 1969). Undoubtedly this questioning has been spurred, in part, by the challenges of the feminist movement to the value of sex-role stereotyping.

Rosenkrantz, Vogel, Bee, Broverman, & Broverman (1968), suspecting that sex-role stereotypes were in a state of flux, attempted to define current perceptions of the typical male and female. They asked men and women psychology undergraduates to list all the characteristics, attitudes, and behaviors which they thought differentiated men and women. All items which occurred at least twice were included in a questionnaire which was then administered to 74 college men and 80 college women. Unlike previous investigators, Rosenkrantz, et al, defined sex roles as the degree to which men and women were perceived to possess a particular trait. A final 122 items, covering such areas as interpersonal sensitivity, emotionality, aggressiveness, dependence-independence, maturity, intelligence, activity level and gregariousness were presented in bi-polar form on the questionnaire. Stereotypic items were defined as those items on which 75% of subjects of each sex considered more descriptive of the average male than the average female or vice versa. Forty one items were thus defined as stereotypic items (with t-tests, $p < .001$); forty eight of the remaining items differentiated between average masculinity response and average femininity response and were termed differentiating items ($p < .05$). The remaining thirty three items were non differentiating (non-significant).

Since the 1968 study, Rosenkrantz and his colleagues have administered

the questionnaire to nearly 1000 subjects (Broverman, et al, 1972). The findings on this larger sample corroborate the findings of the 1968 study: (1) a strong consensus as to differing characteristics of men and women was found independent of age, sex, religion, education or marital status, (2) the characteristics ascribed to men were more positively valued (more socially desirable) than characteristics ascribed to women. When factor analyses were performed on the items (separately for masculine and feminine responses for both men and women respondents), two factors emerged which divided the stereotypic items into those in which the male pole was more socially desirable (male-valued items) and those in which the female pole (female-valued items) were more desirable. The male-valued factor, which accounted for 61% of the total extractable variability among items, seemed to reflect a "competency" cluster (independent, objective, active, competitive, logical, skilled in business, worldly, adventurous, able to make decisions easily, self-confident, always acting as leader, ambitious), while women were stereotypically seen as lacking these characteristics relative to men (i.e., dependent, illogical, passive, etc.). The second factor of female-valued items, termed the "warmth and expressiveness" cluster, included traits such as gentle, sensitive to the feelings of others, religious, neat, quiet, interested in art and literature, able to express tender feelings, tactful. Men, relative to women, were perceived as lacking these traits.

Further, when subjects were asked to define themselves on the questionnaire (following their description of the typical male and female), women were found to incorporate not only the positive feminine aspects but the negative aspects of femininity as well in their descriptions of themselves. However, at least for the college men and women in

their study, women's self-concepts were significantly less feminine than the stereotypic perception of women in general, and men's self-concepts were significantly less masculine than stereotypic perceptions of men in general.

This finding for college students was replicated by Elman (1970), indicating that the college population views itself as somewhat less stereotypically masculine or feminine. Using a shortened version of the Rosenkrantz (1968) questionnaire, Elman asked men and women college students to indicate not only typical masculine and feminine characteristics, and their self concepts, but also what constituted the ideal masculine and feminine traits. They found that both men and women saw the ideal man and woman as being more similar to each other than to the stereotypic expectations, that is, the ideal man and woman were conceived of as possessing many similar socially desirable adult traits.

In summary, then, the most current studies attest to the pervasiveness of sex-role stereotypes, and even though some evidence indicates that self-concepts may be shifting for the college population, the existing stereotypic differences between men and women are endorsed by large segments of our society.

Do counselors and therapists share stereotypic views toward men and women? Broverman and her associates (1970) noted that the scientific literature has consistently verified a positive correlation between the social desirability of behaviors and clinical ratings of those behaviors in terms of normalcy, adjustment, and health. In an attempt to determine whether clinicians also maintain distinctions in their concepts of healthy or adjusted men and women, Broverman et al asked 79 practicing mental health professionals (46 men, 31 of whom held Ph.D. or M.D. degrees; and 33 women, 18 with Ph.D.s) to describe

on the Rosenkrantz (1968) questionnaire the "mature, socially competent" male, female, and adult (sex unspecified). While clinicians' ratings of a healthy adult and a healthy male were highly similar, a significant difference was found in ratings of the healthy adult and healthy female. Broverman, et al, conclude that a "double standard" of mental health exists for men and women. "The general standard of health (adult, sex unspecified) is actually applied to men only, while healthy women are perceived as significantly less healthy by adult standards" (1972, p.71)..

Nowacki and Poe (1973) and Neulinger (1968) obtained results very similar to those of Broverman, et al. Neulinger asked psychiatrists, psychologists, and social workers to describe the optimally integrated personality. His subjects ranked dominance, achievement, autonomy, and aggression as more indicative of mental health in men than in women; whereas sentience, nurturance, succorance, abasement were ranked higher for the optimally integrated female. He states that the female is seen as "an affiliative, nurturant, sensuous, playmate who clings to the strong, supporting male...The sex orientation of this society is not only shared but also promoted by its clinical personnel" (p. 554).

How do these stereotypic views affect the perception of the client and his or her difficulties? While the Broverman, et al (1972) and the Neulinger (1968) studies indirectly dealt with the issue of how sex of clinicians influences clinical judgement, only one study has been reported that directly assesses this relationship. Haan and Livson (1972), in the course of a larger follow-up study in age-related personality changes, found that 10 men and 13 women psychologists (all clinically experienced, Ph.D. level) differed in assessment of the same clients. Individual California Q-sorts (consisting of 100 personality descriptive items), one by a male psychologist and one by a female psychologist, were obtained for 48 male and 50 female clients.

Women judges saw subjects of their own sex in a more favorable way (e.g., more intellectually competent and self-accepting) and gave greater saliency to extremes of a control dimension in evaluation of females (e.g., self-dramatization and conservatism) than did the men psychologists. Men judges, on the other hand, were generally more unfavorable in their judgements of both men and women clients. Men viewed the women clients in a more conventional, stereotypic manner (e.g., protective, socially perceptive) and were especially alert to "excesses" of that stereotype (e.g., moodiness, bitchiness). In viewing their own sex more harshly, male psychologists focused upon characteristics of passivity and self-doubt. Women psychologists assigned greater salience to over-control, condescension, power-orientation, in male clients. Despite these findings, Haan and Livson's overall impression was that the psychologists in their study were somewhat freer from sex-role biasing than the other studies suggest, but, their sample restrictions (N=26) and their own cautions regarding the very tentative nature of their findings must be considered.

The influence of sex-role stereotyping and how it affects male/female interaction and outcome in a therapeutic setting has received considerable theoretical, if negligible research attention recently (Weisstein, 1971; Chesler, 1971; Schlossberg, 1972; Gardner, 1971). Although empirical evidence is lacking, these writers have argued that in the first place, a counselor's stereotype of what men and women are like may influence the kinds of information the counselor seeks in making an assessment of the client. This line of reasoning finds support in the body of research reviewed in Chapter 2, namely, that a perceiver forms impressions and tests out these impressions, based on his or her implicit personality theory, in ways that clearly

influence the kinds of information subsequently received.

Secondly, sex-role stereotypes on the part of the counselor may determine expectancies of what "healthy" behavior for a male or female should be -- basicly an issue of outcome. For a woman to be "healthy" however, she must adjust to the behavioral norms for her sex, even though these norms are not highly valued by her society or her counselor and are considered undesirable for a "healthy" adult (Broverman, et al, 1972). Meltzoff and Kornreich (1970) have concluded, after an exhaustive survey of the literature in psychotherapy, that "...as it now stands, there is some evidence that the personality, values, and meaning systems of the patient shift with therapy in the direction of those of the therapist" (p. 472). They caution that change is not necessarily synonymous with improvement. Thus the counselor may communicate his expectations to the client in a variety of verbal or nonverbal ways and may model or shape the client's behavior, intentionally or unintentionally, in the direction of these expectations. In short, the therapist or counselor must decide to what extent his or her expectancies, as determined by his or her explicit and implicit personality theory, should enter into the therapeutic process and how. Again, the empirical data to support the operation of expectancy effects in producing "self-fulfilling prophecies" (Rosenthal, 1966) in counseling, with regard specifically to sex role issues, is lacking. It seems safe to conclude however, that sex differences in assessing men and women, based on sex-role stereotypes, do exist, although it is not yet clear exactly how these differences affect the outcome of counseling or psychotherapy.

Chapter 4

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The most general conclusion to be gained from the preceding literature review is that the perception of persons is a highly complex activity. Person perception research has proliferated, especially in the past two decades, and much more is now understood about the factors involved in both process and accuracy. However, the details about how those factors operate, and the links between process and accuracy studies, are less well understood (Schneider, 1973; Adinolfi, 1971). One of the difficulties in the field is the lack of a sound theoretical basis which would anchor research in person perception within the more well established theoretical traditions in psychology e.g., personality theory, cognition, learning (Tagiuri, 1965). Schneider (1973) has pointed out that the sophistication of methodology in the field has far surpassed sophistication of theory. Even less well defined are the links between clinical inference and person perception research, although recent research seems to be moving in this direction (Bieri, et al, 1966; Sarbin, Taft, & Bailey, 1960; Adinolfi, 1971). In general, however, there are more questions to be raised than answers available.

The present discussion will deal with several issues relating to the material discussed in previous chapters. What are the broad implications of the research in person perception, specifically research concerning perceptual processes, for counseling? Does better understanding of the process of assessing other have relevance for accuracy of perception

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which is still an essential focus for individual counseling? Are there ways to incorporate what we do know about person perception into counselor training?

The study of formal (explicit) theories of personality is one way the beginning counselor is encouraged to examine his or her assumptions about others' behavior. But the research has demonstrated that most people, including counselors, are often unaware of the subjective implicit assumptions employed in thinking about others. As counselors, it would certainly behoove us to try to bring to awareness these subjective assumptions. The idea that counselors utilize many implicit assumptions in perceiving others may initially meet with some resistance. For, as Sarbin, et al (1960) have stated "...the professional aims toward higher degrees of validity and greater definiteness preparatory to making decisions about the person object. Further, [he or she] is engaged in making inferences about others at a supposedly more active and more explicit level" (p.17). But once we are able to recognize that we all make inferential assumptions about others based at times on scant information, that we all stereotype, then it may prove profitable to investigate the nature of our implicit personality theory.

For some investigators, the study of implicit personality theory has taken on the nature of the study of judgemental biasing. It has been assumed that the operation of implicit personality theory results in distortion of reality. The operation of one such inferential process - sex-role stereotyping -- and the possible detrimental aspects of that process illustrates the negative implications of implicit personality theory. But, this by no means indicates that stereotyped thinking or implicit personality theory is per se odious. To view this inferential process as simply a method of biasing and distortion would be

a gross misunderstanding of the concept. Implicit theory may often operate in a facilitative manner in perception of others. For example, research has shown that stereotyping at times leads to more accurate inferences about others than does detailed information about an individual (Crow, 1957; Gage, 1952). In clinical psychology, the "Barnum" or "Aunt Fanny" statement has long been recognized: inferences about a particular clinical case may be true a large percentage of the time simply because of the base rates of occurrence of certain behaviors or traits. So at times knowledge of the generalized other and assumptions made about others on the basis of stereotypes may provide quite accurate evaluations.

The issue clearly is not that we should become aware of our implicit personality theory because it causes distortion of the client but, rather, that we should recognize when our implicit personality theory no longer serves to facilitate our understanding of others. When inferential processes do lead to distortion in perceiving, the counselor's true understanding and potential helpfulness is severely limited.

Bringing to awareness the counselor's implicit assumptions about people might be one focus of counselor training programs. Just as many typical counseling courses focus on the perceived person (theories of learning, theories of counseling and psychotherapy), a course which focuses specifically on aspects of the perceiver may be helpful in accomplishing this end. Such a course might cover some of the issues reviewed in this paper: e.g., how do we form impressions of others? What is the nature of stereotyping we employ? What are general response sets in judging others? Such a course might also utilize the work by Sarbin, Taft, and Bailey (1960) as an introduction to gaining a perspective on how the inferential process of implicit personality theory

operates in counseling. They have attempted to forge a link between person perception literature and clinical inference and diagnosis. Their paradigm accounts not only for the process of clinical inference but person cognition in general. Five major phases are included in their "syllogistic inference model" (ref. by Tagiuri, 1965):

1. The postulate system of the judge or diagnostician, his tacit or explicit premises (e.g., team sports require cooperation; cooperative people tend to have many friends).
2. A syllogistic major premise, derived from the postulate system (e.g., people who enjoy team sports tend to be cooperative).
3. Search for and observation of occurrences relevant to the major premise (e.g., Jack plays football).
4. Instantiation or conversion of an occurrence into an instance of a general class (e.g., football is a team sport).
5. Inferential product or conclusion (e.g., Jack is probably cooperative).
6. Prediction (e.g., Jack probably has many friends).

Sarbin, et al, discuss in detail the various forms of individual variation in inferences that can occur at each step in their model. Distortions of reality or biasing occurs when inaccurate or misguided premises are entertained implicitly or explicitly and maintained through the process.

But simply offering or requiring coursework is not enough. Theoretical knowledge per se does not necessarily lead to effectiveness in counseling. Moreover, the messianic tradition in education (the idea that if you create a course you will eliminate the problem) has generally failed; there is no reason to suspect it will work any better in counselor training. And, as was mentioned previously, it is simply not enough to be aware of our implicit personality theory: the ultimate usefulness of such awareness must be a recognition of how such theory operates for the individual counselor in practice, which is basically a question of accurate perception. "While it is undoubtedly essential that clinical psychologists be aware of the nature of their inferential processes, it would seem that the ultimate utility of this

awareness would be in its application to a more accurate impression of the object of study, rather than an objectless dissection of the elements of consciousness" (Adinolfi, 1971, p. 168). Perhaps we can look to other aspects of person perception research for suggestions on how to improve accuracy and how to incorporate these aspects into counselor training.

Most reviews of the literature on person perception conclude that there is very little evidence relating personality characteristics of the perceiver or judge with accuracy in perception or even that accuracy is consistent over people. Although research has failed to identify any general ability in accuracy of perception of others, there is some suggestion that there are separate abilities involved in accurate judgment. One such ability -- stereotyped accuracy -- has already been discussed. The other -- differential accuracy -- refers to sensitivity to individual differences and exists independently of stereotyped accuracy (Bronfenbremer, 1956).

Differential accuracy, in turn, appears to be related to cognitive complexity. "Cognitive complexity may be defined as the "capacity to construe social behavior in a multidimensional way" (Bieri, et al, 1966). The implications of research by Bieri, et al, are that judges high in cognitive complexity are "set" to seek diversity in terms of judgments of others while low cognitively complex judges are "set" to perceive regularity in their judgments, to emphasize consistencies and uniformity in others. Low cognitive complexity, then, is related to stereotyped accuracy ability mentioned above. As one becomes more cognitively complex, there is a tendency to become more accurate in impressions of the individual (Crockett, 1965). Certainly the case can be made that stereotyped accuracy is a useful ability, however, as long as individual counseling

is a primary focus in training programs, differential accuracy on the part of the counselor is required.

One further line of research may indicate the benefits of some sort of laboratory training for helping counselors develop differential accuracy. Dunnette (1969) found that members of interactive T-groups (interactive as defined by a variant of the Hill Interaction Matrix) increased in their skills of accurate social differentiation, and, further, that increased accuracy was not the result of strategies involving stereotyping or assumed similarity. Little (1967) has suggested that there may well be a positive relationship between ability to accurately perceive behavior and the ability to profit from feedback. One possible implication of these studies may be that, in the least, programs could be structured to increase opportunities for feedback in counselor training as a way of encouraging the sorts of skills that result in more accurate differential perception of others. The practicum experience would seem to be a logical point for inclusion of these opportunities.

Although the search for the specific personality correlates of accurate person perception has been, for the most part, futile, there is one factor that does seem to correlate highly with accuracy. Usually, in order to gain accuracy, the perceiver must be similar to another in some important way or he must be familiar with the other (Brown, 1965; Taft, 1955). Several theoretical explanations of this relationship between similarity and accuracy have been given in the person perception literature -- assimilative projection, increasing cognitive complexity with familiarity. --Regardless of the explanation preferred, this has been a consistent finding. Furthermore, Crockett (1965) has shown that as one becomes more familiar with an object of perception, one becomes simultaneously more cognitively complex in relation to it and more

accurate in perception of it.

Adinolfi (1971), in commenting on the persistent attempts of clinicians to categorize and characterize unfamiliar others, has suggested that the higher rate of psychotic diagnosis for the poor is due to the inability of the typically white middle-class clinicians to accurately perceive those who are poor. Chesler (1971) has used this same line of reasoning in her arguments that male clinicians are sometimes unable to understand or accurately perceive women. Counselors may need to recognize that their ability to empathize and understand others may be greater for some persons than for others. Perhaps training programs can prepare the counselor for the realization that, at least in some situations, he or she cannot be all things to all people.

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IMPLICATIONS OF PERSON PERCEPTION RESEARCH FOR COUNSELING

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ABSTRACT

The counselor attempting to understand the individual client is faced, fundamentally, with a task of person perception. It is the purpose of this paper to show that research in person perception, specifically research pertaining to implicit personality theory, has relevance for the field of counseling. The topics of impression formation, response sets, and stereotyping are discussed. Particular attention is focused on sex-role stereotyping and its implications for counseling. The need for awareness and recognition of our implicit inferential processes is noted. Suggestions for counselor training are included.