

Empathy and Counseling

Gerald A. Gladstein and Associates

Empathy and Counseling

Explorations in Theory and Research

With Contributions by John Brennan,
JoAnn Feldstein, Gerald A. Gladstein,
Mary Anna Ham, Jeanette Kreiser,
Susan MacKrell

With 17 Figures



Springer-Verlag
New York Berlin Heidelberg
London Paris Tokyo

GERALD A. GLADSTEIN AND ASSOCIATES
Center for Counseling, Family, and Worklife Studies
Graduate School of Education and Human Development
University of Rochester
Rochester, New York 14627, U.S.A.

Library of Congress Cataloging in Publication Data
Gladstein, Gerald A., 1927-

Empathy and counseling.

Bibliography: p.

Includes index.

1. Counseling. 2. Empathy. I. Title.

BF637.C6G54 1986 158'.3 86-10168

© 1987 by Springer-Verlag New York Inc.

Softcover reprint of the hardcover 1st edition 1987

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be translated or reproduced in any form without written permission from Springer-Verlag, 175 Fifth Avenue, New York, New York 10010, U.S.A.

The use of general descriptive names, trade names, trademarks, etc. in this publication, even if the former are not especially identified, is not to be taken as a sign that such names, as understood by the Trade Marks and Merchandise Marks Act, may accordingly be used freely by anyone.

Typeset by Ampersand Publisher Services, Inc., Rutland, Vermont.

9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

ISBN 978-1-4615-9660-8

ISBN 978-1-4615-9658-5 (eBook)

DOI 10.1007/978-1-4615-9658-5

*This book is lovingly dedicated to my wife Barbara,
my children Richard, Deborah, Rose, and Laura,
my mother Bella,
and in memory of my father Samuel.*

Preface

Contemporary society is in constant change. Transitions and crises occur in every life, regardless of status, ethnicity, sex, race, education, or religion. Yet, the traditional societal forms for helping with these transitions and crises are changing as well. The typical nuclear family has given way to single-parent, blended, or dual-career structures. Religious, health, educational, social service, philanthropic, and other organizational support systems have also changed from their pre-1950 counterparts.

As these sometimes evolutionary, sometimes revolutionary, changes have occurred, considerable scholarship and empirical research has attempted to identify and develop methods of helping people encounter these transitions and crises. These efforts have come from various fields: psychology, sociology, anthropology, linguistics, law, social work, nursing, medicine, education, labor relations, and others. Each has brought its own theories, research methods, and practical experiences to bear on the problems.

One of the methods that these fields have universally been intrigued with is the use of empathy. Empathy, that crucial but elusive phenomenon (so the literature has reported), has been identified as important in human interactions. Labor mediators, legal arbitrators, psychiatric psychoanalysts, encounter group facilitators, classroom instructors, and kindred helpers have been told that “understanding how the other person or group is thinking and feeling” will help that person or group. The anxious parent and troubled spouse have been urged to “understand the other’s point of view.” Some writers have even argued that empathy is crucial to resolving international tensions and terrorist group violent actions.

Maybe they are correct. Maybe our times, especially, call out for more people understanding other people. Certainly, our hi-tech-electronic-age, our hydrogen-bomb-age, our space-travel-age has put human interactions into new perspectives. Old “man-environment” concerns have given way to new “person-person-environment” issues. Perhaps being empathic is a crucial means of helping others.

It was within this context that I first became interested in making a serious study of empathy. As a graduate student at the University of Chicago, beginning in 1950, I studied with Carl Rogers and his colleagues John Schlein and Jules Seeman. At that time they began to write about “empathic understanding” as an important part of the psychotherapeutic process. From that time to this, I have sought—through research, counseling practice, teaching, and writing—to discover what empathy is and how it may or may not be useful in the helping process. These efforts led me into diverse literature, including psychology, sociology, psycholinguistics, anthropology, aesthetics, nonverbal communication, and film. The search continues.

It continues because what I discovered is that we really know very little about empathy, and its role in counseling! Oh yes, plenty has been written, just look at the list of references at the end of this book. But, in my opinion, we lack well-founded empirical evidence. However, we know a lot more than in 1950 when empathy began to have a continuous place in the professional counseling/psychotherapy literature. Numerous theories have been developed, many empathy measures have been created, and hundreds of process and outcome studies have been carried out. I believe we are beginning to tease out empathy’s multiple elements and processes as it is used in counseling people.

Therefore, the major purpose of this book is to offer to the reader what appears to be known today about empathy and its role in counseling. Three general questions guided all of the writing: (1) What is empathy? (2) How does it develop? and (3) What is its role in counseling and similar helping processes? Answers to these questions were sought by synthesizing the major theoretical writings, beginning with the late 1800s, and presenting eight recent empirical studies to illustrate efforts to test out some of these theoretical beliefs. As the title indicates, these are explorations in theory and research. Given the state of our knowledge, it would be premature to say that we have reached the “promised land.”

The book begins with an analysis of the counseling/psychotherapy, social, and developmental psychology literature. Then, in Chapters 2–7, six empirical studies are presented that describe counselors’ empathy and its role in counseling process and outcome. Each chapter looks at empathy as a complex, rather than as a unidimensional variable. Chapters 8–10 focus on counselor empathy training. After a theoretical presentation, two studies (Chapters 9 and 10) systematically explore multiple training procedures. The book concludes with a synthesis of the empirical studies’ findings and a description of a new categorization of the various types of empathy documented in this book. Finally, suggestions for research and practice are offered.

In view of the above, I believe this book will be primarily of benefit to serious “students” of empathy. Scholars, researchers, theoreticians, graduate students, and thoughtful practitioners should find many new

and challenging perspectives about empathy. For example, at the end of the book, 18 different kinds of empathy are identified and defined. Although the book is not designed to present "how to" methods of using empathy in counseling/psychotherapy and similar helping processes, the reader will find many examples of techniques that have been developed and tried out in research projects. The reader may want to try these methods in his or her own work.

Many individuals have been very helpful to me and my colleagues as we have developed and completed this volume.

First and foremost has been my wife Barbara. As a professional (family therapist) and intimate companion she has always provided the intellectual and emotional support so crucial during the lonely scholarship process. My four children, Richard, Deborah, Rose, and Laura, have also shown the type of interest and curiosity that helped me relate theoretical concepts to the real world of human relationships.

Many professional colleagues have been helpful over the years. One in particular Miron Zuckerman, has been especially important for this book. Through our co-teaching a course entitled "Empathy and Helping" he has provided valuable insights to the social psychology literature. Further, his critique of an earlier version of this book led to significant improvements. Three graduate students also need to be pointed out. Garson Herzfeld provided valuable comments on the entire manuscript. Christina Frederick tirelessly searched for references and checked their accuracy. Nancy Kizielewicz helped create the author index.

The absolutely crucial task of typing the many drafts was wonderfully achieved by Margaret Davidson, Betty Drysdale, Florence Geglia, Judy Gueli, and Margaret Zaccone. Their separate and combined efforts are greatly appreciated.

At Springer-Verlag, I am particularly pleased to thank the editorial staff, who responded so quickly and enthusiastically to the manuscript.

Finally, I am grateful to my former graduate students, some of whom are chapter authors in this book, who provided encouragement and intellectual challenge throughout the years.

GERALD A. GLADSTEIN
Rochester, New York
October, 1986

Contents

1	The Role of Empathy in Counseling: Theoretical Considerations	1
	GERALD A. GLADSTEIN	
	Concepts from Social and Developmental Psychology ...	6
	Significance for Counseling/Psychotherapy Literature ...	13
	Conclusion	20
2	Counselor Empathy	21
	MARY ANNA HAM	
	Summary of Literature	21
	Research Question	22
	Methodology	23
	Findings	24
	Discussion	26
	Conclusion	29
3	Client Behavior and Counselor Empathic Performance ...	31
	MARY ANNA HAM	
	Summary of Literature	31
	Research Question	33
	Methodology	33
	Results	39
	Discussion	43
4	State-Trait Anxiety Level and Counselor Empathic Behaviors in the Interview	51
	JEANETTE KREISER	
	Summary of Literature	52
	Research Questions	53
	Methodology	54
	Results and Discussion	56

5	The Effect of Counselor Empathy and Communication Modality on Client Outcomes	63
	GERALD A. GLADSTEIN	
	Statement of Problem	63
	Review of Literature	64
	Methodology	67
	Results	75
	Discussion	86
	Conclusions and Limitations	93
6	Counselor Empathy and Client Outcomes	95
	GERALD A. GLADSTEIN	
	Background and Hypotheses	95
	Methodology	96
	Findings and Discussion	101
	Conclusion and Implications	107
7	Relationship of Counselor and Client Sex and Sex Role to Counselor Empathy and Client Self-Disclosure	109
	JoAnn Feldstein	
	Purpose and Hypothesis	111
	Methodology	111
	Results	115
	Discussion	117
8	Issues and Methods of Counselor Empathy Training	121
	GERALD A. GLADSTEIN	
	Issues Concerning Counselor Empathy Training	121
	Learning to Be Empathic	122
	Successful Empathy Training Program	126
	Counselor Training Manual	126
	Increasing Affective Empathy: A Proposal	131
	Summary	134
9	Effects of Four Training Programs on Three Kinds of Empathy	135
	John Brennan	
	Review of Literature	135
	Research Questions and Hypotheses	142
	Methodology	143
	Results	146
	Discussion	149

10	Supervision Method and Supervisee Empathy	155
	SUSAN MACKRELL	
	Summary of Literature	156
	Research Questions and Hypotheses	158
	Methodology	159
	Results	164
	Discussion	167
11	What It All Means	173
	GERALD A. GLADSTEIN	
	Summary	173
	Discussion	179
	Conclusions	187
	Appendix: Gladstein Nonverbal Empathy Scale	190
	References	191
	Author Index	209
	Subject Index	215

Contributors

JOHN BRENNAN, President, Interact Associates, Rochester, New York 14607, U.S.A.

JOANN FELDSTEIN, Consulting Psychologist, Harvard Community Health Plan, Cambridge, Massachusetts 02238, U.S.A.

GERALD A. GLADSTEIN, Professor of Education and Psychology, Graduate School of Education and Human Development, University of Rochester, New York 14627, U.S.A.

MARY ANNA HAM, Assistant Professor, Counseling Psychology, Institute for Learning and Teaching, University of Massachusetts-Boston, Harbor Campus, Boston, Massachusetts 02125, U.S.A.

JEANETTE KREISER, Coordinator, Student Development Programs, University of Maryland University College, College Park, Maryland 20742, U.S.A.

SUSAN MACKRELL, Assistant Professor, Graduate School of Education and Human Development, University of Rochester, Rochester, New York 14627, U.S.A.