

**A CORRELATIONAL STUDY OF NEED
FOR ACHIEVEMENT AND EMPATHY**

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A CORRELATIONAL STUDY OF NEED
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An Abstract
Presented To
the Graduate Council of
Austin Peay State University

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts

by
Stanley Elden Kant
July 1973

ABSTRACT

This study investigated the correlation between need for achievement and empathy. A sample of 68 undergraduate and graduate students in psychology at a small Southern university were given French's Test of Insight and Carkhuff's Index of Discrimination. The findings indicate that there was very little correlation between need for achievement and empathy as measured by these two tests. Findings would seem to suggest that variables previously ascribed to both high empathizers and low achievers are possibly not important variables in each since the correlation between need for achievement and empathy was negligible in this study.

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To the Graduate Council:

I am submitting herewith a Thesis written by Stanley Elden Kant entitled "A Correlational Study of Need for Achievement and Empathy." I recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts, with a major in Psychology.

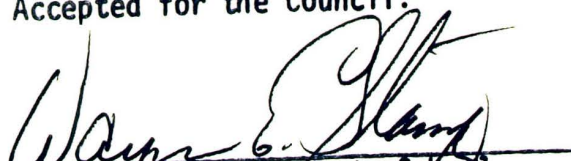

Major Professor

We have read this thesis and
recommend its acceptance:


Minor Professor


Third Committee Member

Accepted for the Council:


Dean of the Graduate School

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Recent studies (Carkhuff, Kratochvil, and Friel, 1968; Carkhuff, 1969) have shown that the more training counselors receive the less empathic they become. During this investigator's involvement in his graduate program it was his subjective impression that as people became more achievement-oriented they became less empathic. Since Carkhuff's study had found that empathy level does decrease with more training, this investigator decided to test his own subjective hypothesis that need for achievement (nAch) and empathy are inversely related.

Previous research (Clark, 1948; McClelland, Atkinson, Clark, Lowell, 1953; French, 1958) has investigated the variation of the level of nAch in different situations; however, there appear to be few studies which investigate the relationship of nAch and empathy.

Definitions

As used in this study, need for achievement is defined as the need for the attainment of a standard of excellence (French, 1958). French's Test of Insight (1958) was used to determine the different levels of nAch. This test is based on the assumption that those individuals who have high needs will tend to interpret the behavior of others in the same terms of needs (French, 1958). It was chosen because it was designed to measure the nAch as this investigator chose to define it.

However, an operational definition of empathy was more difficult to find. Empathy implies an "as-if" relationship, understanding someone else's feelings as if they were your own. This concept is expressed in

the Bible where man is implored to "love thy neighbor as thyself" (Leviticus 19:18). The same "as-if" principle is expressed in the rabbinic maxim found in Mishnah Avoth 2:5, "Do not judge your fellow until you have come into his place," (Katz, 1963). The Indians have a similar belief which involves not passing judgment on someone until you have walked a mile in his moccasins. A present day songwriter has altered this to "Walk A Mile In My Shoes," and most people probably define empathy as simply "putting yourself in someone else's shoes."

The investigator chose the following definition as representative of what empathy refers to in this study: Empathy is "... the tendency of a person to perceive another's feelings, thoughts, and behavior as similar to his own. When another has empathy toward you he understands exactly how you feel and what you mean. At a low level of empathy the person indicates he is not interested or is interested but unable to be aware of your feelings. At a high level of empathy the message 'I am with you' is clear. The person's remarks fit just right with what you are feeling at the moment" (Payne & Gralinski, 1968, p. 518).

Many individuals (Freud, 1957; Chance & Meaders, 1960; Katz, 1963) have been concerned with the causes of the fluctuation of empathy. The explanation of this fluctuation varies depending, in part, on whether one feels that empathic ability is innate or learned or a combination of the two. Freud (1957) saw empathy and identification as being synonymous and empathy could be explained as a feeling of similarity with someone. He further explained that our similarity (empathy) exists only when our ego identifies with or sees a similarity in someone else. Therefore our empathy would decrease when our ego ceased to note

similarities with the other individual. According to Katz (1963) this cognitive approach often causes difficulties because stereotyped images often produce superficial empathic responses.

Several individuals (Mead, 1934; Moreno, 1953; Carkhuff, 1969) state that empathic skill is more than just cognitive, that it is also emotional. This combination is referred to as empathic understanding.

George Mead (1934) described empathy as a communication skill, explaining that it was more than just a cognitive skill and implying that empathy is learned. He stated the following about one's empathic understanding of another individual, "We feel with him and we are able so to feel ourselves into the other because we have, by our own attitude, aroused in ourselves the attitude of the person we are assisting (1934, p. 299)."

According to Katz (1963), the anthropologist Redfield made a statement similar to Mead's. Redfield felt that the key to understanding others was experiencing similar emotions, or as Katz interprets Redfield, "In order to know what a Zuni Indian is ashamed of, one must first know what it means to be ashamed (p. 56)."

This investigator was interested in measuring empathy as Redfield (Katz, 1963), Mead (1934), and Payne and Gralinski (1968) describe it. Carkhuff's Index of Discrimination (1969) with accompanying scales focuses on this type of empathy measure.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Some studies (Carkhuff, Kratochvil, and Friel, 1968; Carkhuff, 1969) have found that an individual's empathy level decreases as he receives more counselor training. This decrease may be influenced by certain personality characteristics the individual possesses (Truax, 1970; Carkhuff, 1969; Bergin and Soloman, 1963; Vesprani, 1968), by the training he receives (Kleiner, 1970; Hungerman, 1970), or possibly by the attitude with which he enters the program (Miles, 1960; Chance and Meaders, 1960). Carkhuff explains that professional training programs often do not consider some of the following characteristics when choosing their candidates: demonstration of concern for others, their tolerance of people whose values are different from their own, a healthy regard for self, a show of warmth and sensitivity for others, and/or their capacity for empathy. Most programs select candidates on the basis of grade-point average (GPA) and performance on the Graduate Record Examination. However, as Carkhuff notes, some studies (Allen, 1967; Carkhuff, Piaget, and Prince, 1968) have shown that one's level of functioning as a counselor bears little relation to one's GPA. Carkhuff feels certain personality characteristics have a bearing on one's counseling ability.

Truax (1970) seems to agree with Carkhuff, believing that certain personality characteristics should be present before a candidate enters into a training program. He states that past research suggests

that individuals who are low in anxiety, depression, and introversion, as well as being strong, striving, dominant, active and autonomous are more likely to have natural therapeutic or interpersonal skill.

Some research (Bergin & Solomon, 1963; Vesprani, 1968) has found certain personality characteristics significantly related to accurate empathy (AE) as measured by the Truax (1963) empathy scale. Bergin & Solomon (1963) investigated personality characteristics as measured by the Minnesota Multiphasic Personality Inventory (MMPI) and the Edwards Personal Preference Schedule (EPPS) of candidates in a post-internship counseling program. They found the Depression (D) and Psychasthenia (Pt) scales on the MMPI to be negatively and significantly correlated with AE. On the EPPS, the Consistency, Order, and Intraception scales were found to be negatively and significantly related to empathy, while the Dominance and Change scales were positively and significantly related to AE. This study seems to be part of the research on which Truax has based his conclusion. However, a later study by Vesprani (1968), which attempted to cross-validate Bergen and Solomon's study using a different population, found Change to be negatively and significantly related to AE though it did support the previous findings concerning the D and Pt scales.

Some studies (Kleiner, 1970; Hungerman, 1970) support an opposing viewpoint suggesting that training plays a more important part in acquiring an empathic ability than any set of personality characteristics. Kleiner (1970) has found that, at the lower empathy levels, training was a more important variable in learning empathic communication

than any personality characteristic. However, he points out that this may not be true at higher levels of empathy. Hungerman (1970) also concludes that empathy may be a skill that has to be learned rather than an ability related to any set of personality dynamics.

However, there are also some studies (Miles, 1960; Chance & Meaders, 1960) which found that the attitude which the trainee has when he enters the training program affects his ability to become more empathic. Miles (1960) found that the people in human relations training who were most interested in learning more about people actually learned the least. A study by Chance & Meaders (1960) showed that those individuals who were most psychologically-minded were actually the least sensitive towards people, psychological-mindedness referring to "the degree to which an individual is interested in, and responsive to, the inner needs, motives, and experiences of others." Smith (1966) offers two hypotheses as to why this might happen: First, these individuals quite likely overlook significant facts, looking rather for some hidden impulse, and leading to feelings based on projection rather than reality. Second, people who are psychologically-minded possibly do not wish deep involvement with others but prefer, rather, to protect their own self-esteem.

As stated earlier, the variations in empathic ability in counselor training could be related to certain training techniques or they may be related to, and possibly affected by, certain personality characteristics. In reviewing the literature concerning empathy, this author found certain similarities in the characteristics of individuals who were high in empathic ability and those who were low in need for

achievement. This led to the hypothesis that there might be a relationship between empathy and nAch. Sidman (1968) and Kleiner (1970) both reported a positive relationship between an individual's willingness to help and his empathic ability, while a study by Schwartz, et al, (1969) found that subjects who were more likely to help in group decision-making were low in nAch though high in need for affiliation. Sidman (1968) found that more empathic subjects were likely to help others more frequently and more appropriately. In searching for possible reasons for this, Sidman discovered that the more empathic subjects had a more varied background in stress experiences, had more success in dealing with stress, and were significantly less defensive than low empathizers. Kleiner (1970) found that the frequency that a person reported others came to him for help significantly correlated with that individual's empathic ability. It would appear, based on the studies stated above, that the helping person is high in empathic ability and low in nAch.

Friedman (1950) examined the backgrounds of college men with varying needs for achievement. This study suggests that college men who had high nAch scores saw their parents as unfriendly, unhelpful, and unsuccessful. The college men who had low nAch scores saw their parents as helpful, nurturant, friendly, and successful. Although their parents were not tested for a corresponding level of empathy, it would seem that the parents described by the college males with low nAch scores were more empathic than the parents described by the college males with the high nAch scores. In evaluating Friedman's study, McClelland (1953) concluded that nAch develops out of independence in early life. Winter-

bottom (1953) found a similar relationship between independence and nAch, noting that teacher ratings of elementary boys' independence and pleasure in success were significantly related to the boys' nAch.

A study by Chance & Meaders in 1960 (Smith, 1966) stated that independence was one character trait of low empathizers. They found the following differences in character traits between low and high empathizers: Low empathizers were expressive, dominating, independent, aloof, cool, and aggressive, while high empathizers were inhibited, submissive, dependent, gregarious, warm, and unaggressive. Such traits as submissiveness, dependence, and unaggressiveness suggest a rather low orientation toward any need for achievement while independence, which Winterbottom (1963), McClelland (1953) and Friedman (1950) found was a trait of those high in nAch, is associated with those low in empathy. However, it is noted that Truax's study (1970) found that individuals who were dominant, striving, active, and autonomous were more likely to develop into empathic counselors in a training program.

Other research (Simons, 1966; Fidelman, 1960; Kemp, 1962; Melchiskey and Wittmer, 1970) found that individuals who are close-minded, or highly dogmatic, find it difficult to be understanding or empathic. Melchiskey and Wittmer (1970) also found that individuals who rejected T-group experience were close-minded and significantly higher in nAch than those who accepted this type of experience. They conclude that the close-minded individual appears to be defensive towards new experiences, and that therefore individuals high in nAch are likely to react unfavorably to a T-group experience and will also find it difficult to be empathic.

There also seems to be a difference in both empathy and nAch levels depending on the sex of the individual. Veroff (1950) found that adolescent boys show significantly increased nAch in ego-involvement situations while adolescent girls do not. Conversely, Bellante (1970) found that girls are significantly more empathic than boys.

An individual's self-concept is another variable that has been found to be related to nAch (Wasser, 1971, Hawken, 1970) and to empathy (Bellante, 1970). Studies investigating the relationship between nAch and self-concept (Wasser, 1971; Hawken, 1970) are conflicting in nature. Wasser was unable to find any relationship between achievement and self-concept while Hawken found that boys who were high in nAch had higher self-concepts than boys low in nAch. Considering that Bellante (1970) found a significant positive relationship at the .001 level between empathy and self-concept in 15-18 year-olds, it would appear that through the comparison to a third variable, self-concept, that those high in nAch would also be high in empathy.

Another study (Berlew, 1961) directly investigated the relationship between empathy and nAch as measured by TAT data (McClelland, et al, 1953). Berlew found that subjects who were moderately motivated would be more empathic than those who were either high or low in nAch.

CHAPTER III

METHOD

The Sample

The sample used in this study consisted of 71 undergraduate and graduate students enrolled in three psychology courses during the Summer Quarter, 1972, at Austin Peay State University, Clarksville, Tennessee. The students were asked by the classroom professor to cooperate with the investigator, a graduate student working on his Master's thesis. In each of the three classes there was total participation, although students who were in more than one of the classes participated only once.

Hypothesis

For the purpose of this study the hypothesis was stated in the null form and the .05 level of significance was used for rejection. The hypothesis as stated in the null form is that there is no relationship between a person's need for achievement and his empathic ability.

Description of the Instruments

The investigator chose Carkhuff's Index of Discrimination (1969) to measure empathy since it combined both affective and cognitive information in its measurement of empathy. This test contains 16 short vignettes, each having four possible responses. Carkhuff has evaluated and rated each of the responses based on their facilitative qualities. This rating scale has five levels with level one representing the lowest level of empathy and level five the highest, with level three representing the minimal level of facilitative interpersonal functioning (Carkhuff, 1969). This index was originally designed to select

prospective helpers by assessing their ability to discriminate effective helping responses. The ratings assigned were found to be consistent with those assigned by two expert raters who demonstrated good predictive validity in previous studies.

French's Test of Insight (1958) is a projective test which measures an individual's nAch. The stimuli in this test are verbal statements rather than pictures. This test assumes that individuals who are success-oriented will interpret material with goal-oriented responses while those who merely fear failure will reply in defensive terms (French, 1958, p. 243). This assumption is supported by the results of McClelland and his co-worker's (1953) research. An earlier study (McClelland & Liberman, 1949) had shown that persons with low nAch scores are more concerned with avoiding feelings of failure. For the purpose of this study the investigator has chosen McClelland's (1953) and French's (1958) definition of need for achievement (competition against a standard of excellence) for scoring the test items for AI. Since French's Test of Insight seems to yield productive responses which may be scored in a relatively objective manner, the investigator chose it for obtaining the subjects' nAch score.

Administration and Scoring

French's Test of Insight and Carkhuff's Index of Discrimination were given to 71 undergraduate and graduate students enrolled in psychology courses for the Summer Session, 1972, at Austin Peay State University, Clarksville, Tennessee.

Instructions for the Index of Discrimination were printed in the test booklet and were also read in class. Because his directions are oriented to counselor trainees, and this test was being given to a much broader population, the following instructions were used instead of those printed in Carkhuff's book (1969), pp. 114-115. The instructions given were: "Following are 15 short expressions of problems. They were made by people who sought the help of another person in a time of need. Included with each problem is a list of four possible responses. From this list choose the response which you feel you would most likely make if someone were telling this problem to you." Because of the more general population, the term "counselor" in excerpt 13 was changed to "person" and excerpt 16 was omitted completely.

The following instructions were not written but were given verbally before the testing began. "On French's Test of Insight you may write your answer in the test booklet. On the other test please note that there are actually only 15 problems and not 16 as written in the instructions. On this test there are no correct responses. Each of the responses given might be used as a response to this problem. The emphasis then is on your choosing the response which best fits what you might reply. Please use the answer sheet provided to mark your answers for this test, and please do not mark in the test booklet."

When the tests were scored three tests had to be discarded due to omitted items. Therefore only 68 subjects were included in the final analysis.

Since Carkhuff has already provided a rating scale for each of the four possible answers for all of the 15 excerpts, these tests were scored by assigning the rating that corresponded to the subject's response. The total of these 15 scores was the raw score for empathy.

Each of the ten items in French's Test of Insight were scored for having achievement imagery (one point given) or not having achievement imagery (zero points given). The maximum raw score on this test could be 10 and the minimum zero. Achievement-oriented responses were judged to be those matching McClelland's definition of competition with a standard of excellence (1953, pp. 115-119). This would include any reference to how well a task was done (good, better, best), reference to a unique accomplishment, or reference to long-term involvement (such as a profession). French's scoring outline (1958, p. 246) was used also in that reference to the desire for a goal, listing of personal qualifications for goal attainment (Example - "leadership ability"), and reference to goal attainment (similar to McClelland's unique accomplishment category) were scored as AI. Statements were scored for AI only if they contained responses which explicitly fit in the aforementioned categories taken from McClelland and French. Negative statements were not scored as AI since McClelland (1955) has stated that fear of failure is a characteristic of low nAch. Since French's test lends to statements high in need for affiliation, the investigator was also careful in the scoring to differentiate between need for affiliation and need for achievement. Need for affiliation statements express an individual's need for warm and supporting interpersonal relationships (French, 1958).

CHAPTER IV

ANALYSIS OF DATA

Results

The Pearson Product-Moment technique was used to compute the correlation coefficients. The raw scores on French's Test of Insight were used for need for achievement, and the raw scores on Carkhuff's Index of Discrimination were used for empathy.

The mean score for the test on empathy was 40.3, with a standard deviation of 6.7. The mean score for nAch on French's Test of Insight was 3.66, with a standard deviation of 1.72. The correlation coefficient was found to be $-.001$. Approximately 87 percent of the sample scored within a range of 2-6 on the nAch test with the full range being 0-8 and the possible range 0-10.

Discussion

The correlation coefficient between nAch as measured by French's Test of Insight, and empathy as measured by the Index of Discrimination was $-.001$. This failed to reject the null hypothesis which stated there is no relationship between nAch and empathy at the .05 level of significance.

The results of this study seem to raise some questions. McClelland (1953) and Winterbottom (1953) found that independence was an important variable in nAch. Chance & Meaders (1960) stated that independence was an important characteristic of individuals who were low empathizers. If this is the case, one would expect a larger negative correlation between nAch and empathy than $-.001$. A more sensitive instrument and a wider

sample might increase this relationship but it would probably not make it significant.

The conclusion that the helping person appears to be high in empathic ability but low in nAch, based on the studies by Sidman (1968), Kleiner (1970), and Schwartz, et al (1969), was not supported by this study. Of course it is possible that the helping person is higher in empathic ability than the non-helping person but still not as empathic as the counselor trainee. The levels of "high" empathic ability in these studies are probably related to the sample from which they are taken.

This study did not find that subjects significantly higher in nAch were necessarily lower in empathy, as Melchiskey and Wittmer (1970) had found. The fact that the present study found that those high in nAch are not necessarily low in empathic ability possibly lends credence to the results of the studies done by Miles (1960) and Chance & Meaders (1960) who found that the subject's attitude when he entered training programs affected his chances of becoming more empathic. Then one could explain the results obtained by Melchiskey and Wittmer on the basis that the subject's attitudes affected their empathy level. This study supports Berlew's findings (1961) which found that an individual who has a rather high or rather low nAch does not necessarily have a predictable corresponding level of empathic ability. However, it does not concur with his results which showed that subjects who were moderately motivated were more empathic than those who were either high or low in nAch.

An individual's self-concept has been found to be positively and significantly related to his empathy level (Bellante, 1970) and also

higher in those individuals with higher nAch levels (Hawkin, 1970). The apparent positive relationship between nAch and empathy was not supported by this study. However, there was already some question about the relationship between nAch and self-concept (Wasser, 1971), and the samples on which the studies were conducted were also quite different in many respects, including the population from which they were taken.

Katz (1963) pointed out that the danger in empathizing with someone is that one might find himself identifying with them, and therefore losing his independence. If someone has a rather low self-concept, they might be hesitant to identify (empathize) with someone for fear of losing this independence. This might be a point worthy of future investigation.

Bellante (1970) also found that adolescent girls are significantly more empathic than adolescent boys. Are women more empathic than men? Research investigating this could have a major effect on the selection of potential counselor candidates, should it be found that this is true. One would also need to investigate the effect of training programs on the empathy levels of men and women. Possibly those individuals who are low in empathy can, with proper training, develop levels of empathic ability consistent with the level needed for effective counseling. Possibly the latter point itself should be investigated, though both Truax and Carkhuff have investigated the level of empathy needed to effect change.

This study was conducted on a sample of college psychology students and therefore the results can only be generalized to this group of students. The test scores measured only the present levels of nAch and

empathy of these college students. The relationship between the two variables, empathy and nAch, could have been more appropriately assessed by obtaining pre- and posttest measures of counselor candidates in a graduate counseling program.

Also, the scoring technique used for obtaining the nAch scores might have been more sensitive if an adaptation of McClelland's achievement imagery scoring (1953) with the ten sub-categories had been used. As it was, statements which were short and contained only one reference to a standard of achievement were scored the same as statements which were long and contained many different references to achievement since a statement was scored as either achievement-oriented or not achievement-oriented. The investigator found that the administration of these two tests took some of the students only twenty minutes to finish while two people who wrote long responses required fifty-five minutes to finish the tests. It is not known whether the amount of time taken correlated with scores on either of the tests. Future research might investigate the relationship between the length of one's response and that individual's need for achievement and empathic ability.

Since the original question was precipitated by the effect graduate school had on an individual's empathy, it would have been better to conduct a longitudinal study, measuring the sample's nAch score and empathy score before entrance into a graduate program and after completion of the program.

CHAPTER V

SUMMARY

The purpose of this study was to determine the relationship between empathy and need for achievement (nAch). The sample consisted of 68 undergraduate and graduate college students enrolled in psychology courses who volunteered for this study. The correlation coefficient was $-.001$, which was not significant.

The results of this study agreed with the findings of Berlew (1961) in that apparently an individual's nAch level, if it is high or low, is not related to his empathic ability. This study did not agree with his results which showed that individuals who had moderate nAch had higher empathic ability than those individuals with high or low achievement needs.

The near zero correlation between nAch and empathy would not support the previous studies (McClelland, 1953; Winterbottom, 1953; Chance & Meaders, 1960) which found independence to be an important variable of individuals high in nAch and those low in empathy. This research also did not support conclusions drawn from previous research done on the helping individual (Sidman, 1968; Kleiner, 1970; Schwartz, et al, 1969) which showed that people high in empathy were low in nAch, nor does it support the conclusion that subjects significantly higher in nAch were necessarily lower in empathy (Melchiskey and Wittmer, 1970). Based on this study it would appear that there is virtually no linear relationship between nAch and empathy.

Since previous research (Bergen & Solomon, 1963; Vesprani, 1968; Chance & Meaders, 1960; Truax, 1970) presented some differences in

opinion as to what personality characteristics correlate to empathic ability, further study is suggested to help determine the personality characteristics of high and low empathizers. Present studies (Truax, 1970; Chance & Meaders, 1960) particularly differ on the relationship of independence and submissiveness to empathic ability.

Bellante (1970) found a significant positive relationship between empathy and self-concept in 15 - 18 year olds. From these results one would conclude that one's self-concept must also decrease in counseling programs if, as Carkhuff (1969) has found, one's empathy level decreases. Future research measuring one's self-concept level before and after a graduate counseling program should be conducted to test this hypothesis.

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