

THE EFFECTIVENESS OF THE GESTALT TWO CHAIR
COUNSELING TECHNIQUE IN REDUCING PAPER PRESENTATION
ANXIETY

A Thesis
Presented to
the Division of Psychology and Special Education
EMPORIA STATE UNIVERSITY

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

by
Lou Talbot
October, 1989

AN ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS OF

Lou Talbot for the Master of Science in

Psychology presented on October 9, 1989

Title: THE EFFECTIVENESS OF THE GESTALT TWO CHAIR
COUNSELING TECHNIQUE IN REDUCING PAPER
PRESENTATION ANXIETY

Abstract approved:

Kenneth A. Weaver

Conflict is defined as simultaneous arousal of two or more incompatible motives (Houston, 1985). The Gestalt two chair technique resolves conflict by using "dramatization" to allow the individual to view their cognitions from different perspectives. Conflict resolution is characterized by reduced anxiety and elevated performance and mood. Decision making also causes anxiety, especially when decision choices are unknown as they are in a novel task.

The present study attempted to determine the effectiveness of the Gestalt two chair technique in reducing the conflict produced by performing a novel task, presenting a paper at a conference. Given the documented effectiveness of the technique in resolving other types of conflict, the present study hypothesized that exposure to

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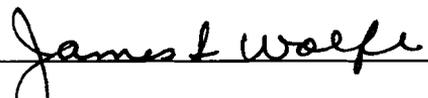
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the intervention would reduce the conflict caused by deciding to present the paper.

Two groups of subjects were randomly assigned to the control or treatment groups. Control subjects completed the pretests, presented their paper and completed the posttests. Experimental subjects followed the same sequence except exposure to the two chair technique was introduced between the pretest and presentation phase. Results indicated a reduction in anxiety and elevation of performance and mood. However, a methodological flaw confounded the effect of the treatment with the presentations. Suggestions for correcting the flaw are discussed.



Approved for the Major Division



Approved for the Graduate Council

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES. iv

CHAPTER

1. INTRODUCTION. 1

2. METHOD. 6

 Subjects 6

 Design 6

 Materials. 6

 Procedure. 7

3. RESULTS 12

4. DISCUSSION. 20

REFERENCES. 23

APPENDICES:

A. Human Research Approvals. 25

B. State Anxiety Scale 26

C. Likert Performance Scale. 27

D. Wessman And Ricks Mood Scale. 28

E. Certification Letter. 29

LIST OF TABLES

Table	Page
1. The Technique X Test Analysis of Variance For Anxiety. . .	13
2. Means and Standard Deviations: Anxiety	14
3. The Technique X Test Analysis of Variance For Performance	15
4. Means and Standard Deviation: Performance	16
5. The Technique X Test Analysis of Variance For Mood . . .	17
6. Means and Standard Deviation: Mood.	18
7. The Pearson Correlation Coefficients.	19

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank Dr. Kenneth A. Weaver for the time and effort spent to fulfill my need of producing quality research. Without his guidance and knowledge in experimental psychology I would not have been able to obtain this level of achievement. The instruction, mentoring, and patience of this individual were of the highest level.

In addition, I would also like to thank my other two committee members who endured the prolonged effort of this thesis. Without the support of Dr. David Dungan and Dr. Philip Wurtz I would not have been able to endure the frustrations of accomplishing this task.

Dr. Stephen F. Davis cannot go without his due expression of gratitude for his subtle assistance throughout my program of study. No finer friend, mentor, advisor, professor, and experimenter was found during my arduous task as a graduate student. I cannot thank Dr. Davis, Dr. Holmes, Dr. Joseph, Jim Shepard, Dr. Karr, and Dr. Karst, and so many others enough for shaping my professional future and molding me into the individual that will humbly continue the traditions learned within the psychology division.

I would like to thank Peg Martin and Frank Naylor for their judgement in placing me with their fine organization. Their support during my completion of this thesis was appreciated enormously. The Farm, Incorporated, has allowed my personal expression as a new professional.

Finally, I would like to thank the one person in my life that contributed the most to my capabilities as an individual both academically and personally. Sharon Ames has been so very patient, understanding, and supportive of my endeavors in both areas. The financial and moral support from her will forever be remembered.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Conflict is defined as simultaneous arousal of two or more incompatible motives (Houston, 1985). As a means of resolving personal problems resulting from conflict, the Gestalt two chair technique requires individuals to resolve their personal problems by performing, with the guidance of the therapist, a "dramatization" of their problems. The word "dramatization" is used because the clients change roles several times during the clarification of the problem. The therapist acts much like the director of a drama, guiding the client through role transitions while clarifying statements and providing feedback. Anxiety reduction, improved client performance, and more positive mood are important indicators of this therapy's effectiveness (Greenberg & Webster, 1982).

The originator of the two chair technique, Moreno (1946), believed that conflict arises from inaccurate interpretations of social interactions. As a result of this conflict, an individual's anxiety level increases and mood state becomes more negative. Therapy is necessary to relieve the anxiety that results from some conflict that needs to be resolved within the individual. Restructuring of old cognitive patterns

with the aid of individual dramatic interaction, group feedback, and role playing allow the individual to reduce anxiety and, thus alleviate conflict (Greenberg & Webster, 1982; Moreno, 1946).

Moreno's (1946) auxiliary chair method features clients sitting in one of two facing chairs on a minimally furnished stage, describing their conflict in detail. The therapist uses clients' recollections to facilitate memory (Tulving & Thomson, 1973) and to physically alter the initial setting in a manner congruent with their recollections. The stage lighting is also varied by the therapist to facilitate the re-enactment. In order to experience a different perspective on their past, clients are instructed to play a role other than their own when they occupy the empty or auxiliary chair opposite themselves. By understanding the stressful social interaction from a new prospective, the clients attempt to better understand how and why they initially interpreted the social interaction inaccurately.

Fritz Perls' (1965) hot seat technique modifies Moreno's auxiliary chair technique by emphasizing the self-exploration in a group rather than the client-only setting. Distressed clients take turns sitting next to the therapist while facing an empty chair.

Different parts of their conflict can be confronted while moving between the two chairs and receiving encouragement or criticism from group members. Perls (1965) believed that mental wholeness (i.e., mental health) required the identification and subsequent integration of a person's ideas, emotion, and actions. The stress caused by an absence of integration is the primary indicator of psychological distress. This lack of integration, also referred to as polarity, can be conceptualized as a distance separating two opposing ideas, emotions, or actions. Since this polarity retards integration, attaining wholeness is impaired, thus producing psychological distress or anxiety. The distress caused by polarity is equivalent to the repulsion of similarly charged magnets. Changing the polarity of one magnet causes attraction; similarly, changing one of the opposing ideas, emotions, or actions produces conflict resolution, and wholeness.

Perls (1969) proposed that listening to oneself discuss or externalize the polarity fosters reconciliation of the differences and enables the client to become psychologically whole. He called his hot seat technique "Gestalt psychotherapy" because good psychological health requires the wholeness (or Gestalt) of different parts of the personality.

Another approach similar to Moreno's auxiliary chair technique evolved from Greenberg's (1979) research on conflict resolution. Like Moreno, Greenberg uses a multiple chair technique in a client/therapist relationship. According to Greenberg (1979), the two chairs represent the two sides of a personality split, each side characterized by a different, conflicting verbal performance pattern. Switching from one chair to another forces clients to confront or externalize these conflicting patterns. For example, clients might exhibit a whining and excusing pattern of speech in one chair, but exhibit an objective and identifying pattern when sitting in the opposite chair. While resolving personal conflict (i.e., working on the differences between the chairs) was the original goal of Greenberg's (1980) two chair technique, this therapy has also been recommended for resolving decision conflict (Greenberg & Webster, 1982), but no empirical test has yet been done.

Decision conflict has been defined as psychological distress caused by a decision which produces perceived risk and therefore leaves the individual dissatisfied (Greenberg & Webster, 1982). The person regrets the decision and therefore is not committed to it. Decision conflict can be so aversive

that people avoid making decisions.

The psychological components of decision making are conflict, choice, and commitment (Janis & Mann, 1977). As all options during decision making appear to have some degree of risk, the alternative which minimizes risk tends to be selected, produce greater commitment, and lessen conflict on the part of the decision maker (Janis & Mann, 1977). On the other hand, if the decision involves doing something novel, the individual lacks an awareness of the risks and is more likely to experience conflict. It then appears reasonable that the effectiveness of the Gestalt two chair technique for resolving decision conflict can best be assessed using persons deciding to do something novel, specially if the decision clearly involves risk. In the present study, students who have decided to do a novel task (present a paper at a psychology convention for the first time) are exposed to the Gestalt two chair technique in order to determine empirically its effectiveness for resolving decision conflict. Based on Greenberg and Webster's (1982) study, it was hypothesized that subjects exposed to the Gestalt two chair technique, in contrast to those not exposed, would demonstrate reduced anxiety, increased performance, and heightened mood.

CHAPTER 2

METHOD

Subjects

This study used 12 volunteer undergraduates participating for the first time in the paper presentation competition at the Kansas Great Plains Student's Conference at Wesleyan University, Lincoln, Nebraska, on April 7 and 8, 1989. There were nine female subjects and three male subjects.

Design

Subjects were randomly assigned to either of two groups resulting in a 2 (Intervention: present or absent) X 2 (Test: pretest and posttest) mixed factorial design with Intervention as a between and Test a within subjects independent variable. The dependent variables were state anxiety, performance, and mood.

Materials

The consent form (see Appendix A), approved by the Human Research Boards of Emporia State University, Emporia, Kansas, and Nebraska Wesleyan University, Lincoln, Nebraska, was typed on a 8" X 11 1/2" sheet of white typing paper. The Spielberger Anxiety Inventory Form Y (see Appendix B) is a self evaluation questionnaire which measures state anxiety. The test Y-1 consists of 20 items, such as "I feel calm"

followed by a four point scale with 1 being "not at all", 2 "somewhat", 3 "moderately so", and 4 "very much so". The test takes approximately ten minutes to complete. Instructions are printed on the test form (see Appendix B), and the questions place emphasis on the person's current emotional state. The score is determined by adding the 20 values corresponding to the subjects' responses. The minimum score is 20 with a maximum score of 80. The norm for college students is 37.12 (Spielberger, Gorsuch, & Lushene, 1970).

Performance was measured with a 9 point Likert scale rating from extremely poor to excellent performance (see Appendix C). The performance score for each subject was the numerical value corresponding to the point marked by the subject on the scale with the minimum of 1 and a maximum of 9. Mood was assessed using the Wessman and Ricks (1966) Elation-Depression scale (see Appendix D) which contains eleven statements ranging from extremely sad to extremely happy. The subjects' score was the number of the marked statement. The minimum score was 1 (very depressed) and the maximum was 11 (very elated).

Procedure

The subjects were individually administered the pretests by a 38 year old white, female research

assistant in a classroom which had a long conference table with two chairs for the subjects. The assistant was trained prior to the experiment on how to give the tests. After welcoming the subjects, The assistant instructed them to read and sign the consent form. The assistant then read each test's instructions and told the subjects to answer the questions based on anticipating their paper presentations later in the day. After completing the anxiety, performance, and mood pretests, the control subjects were told to return for the posttests after their presentations, which followed within thirty minutes of the pretest session. The experimental subjects, on the other hand, were individually sent across the hall where they were greeted by the experimenter, a 38 year old white male, who asked the subject to be seated in one of the three chairs in the room. The chairs were arranged so that the subject would be able to move to another empty chair.

After being seated, the experimenter then explained to the subjects that the two chair technique permitted them to confront their feelings and behaviors associated with their upcoming presentations. The subjects were told that they would be switching chairs as discussion changed from feelings to behaviors. The

treatment began with the subjects responding to the question, "Could you tell me how you perceive risk with you paper presentation?" A typical response was, "There seems to be a lot of risk involved with doing the presentation, not only with the time spent preparing presentation, not only with the time spent preparing the presentation, but with the expectations of support staff wanting me to do my best."

After the first question was answered, the experimenter asked the subject to move to the other chair and then asked, "How do you feel about presenting a paper at this conference?" A typical response was "I feel very tense, anxious, and uncomfortable." After exploring the subjects' feelings, the experimenter requested each subject to move back to the other chair. Each subject was asked, "Now that we know and understand your feelings behind presenting your paper, will you tell me the behaviors associated with presenting?" The subjects typically started their behavior discussion with, "My throat will be dry and I will probably be shaking, somewhat."

When the discussion of behaviors was complete, the experimenter asked, "Will you tell me how you think feelings affect your behaviors?" Usually, the discussion was brief with the subjects concluding, "I

realize feelings and behaviors are sometimes difficult to separate." Following this statement, the individual subjects were asked, "Do you feel you can do your presentation right now, or do you need some time to adjust from this treatment?" Upon the response of the subject, the experimenter either released the subject for the transition from treatment to the presentation. Each subject was asked if they were ready for their presentation before the experimenter released them.

Approximately five minutes were used for the introduction and fifteen minutes for the treatment. The remaining ten minutes were used to help students prepare for the transition from the treatment to the presentation. This total of 25 minutes were consistent across all experimental subjects. The experimenter was experienced with the two chair technique and had been certified by Dr. Philip Wurtz, a professor, for effectiveness using this technique (see Appendix E for certifying letter).

After each subject gave the individual presentation, the subjects from both groups returned to the testing room for the posttests. Each was given the posttest by the assistant who instructed the subjects to base their answers from the perspective of having given the presentation instead of when they took the

tests before the presentation. When each subject finished, they were given the name and address of the experimenter should they feel the need to discuss any part of the treatment or experiment. Those subjects interested in the outcome of the experiment were also told they would be notified if they provided their addresses.

CHAPTER 3

RESULTS

All three independent variables were analyzed with a 2 (Technique: present or absent) X 2 (Test: pretest and posttest) mixed factor analysis of variance with Technique as a between subjects variable and Test as a within subjects variables. The results of the analysis of variance for each measure are included in Tables 1, 3, and 5. Tables 2, 4, and 6 contain means and standard deviations for each of the dependent measures. Table 7 contains the Pearson correlation matrix for pretest and posttest scores for all three dependent measures.

For anxiety (see Table 1), only the Test main effect was significant, $F(1,10) = 24.85$, $p < .001$. Subjects at pretest ($M = 48.33$, $SD = 9.25$) were feeling more anxious that they did at posttest ($M = 35.00$, $SD = 7.36$). No significant results were obtained for performance (see Table 3). For mood (see Table 5), the Test main effect was significant, $F(1,10) = 11.56$, $p < .01$. Subjects at posttest ($M = 8.33$, $SD = 1.26$) were more elated than they were at pretest ($M = 6.92$, $SD = .68$). The only significant correlation was between posttest mood and posttest performance ($r = .69$, $p < .05$).

Table 1

The Technique X Test Analysis of Variance for Anxiety

	SS	DF	MS	F	P
between subjects					
Technique	48.17	1	48.17	.45	
Error	1063.17	10	106.32		
within subjects					
Test	1066.67	1	1066.67	24.85	.01
Technique X Test	.17	1	.17		
Error	429.18	10	42.92		
Total	2607.33	23			

Table 2

Means And Standard Deviations: Anxiety

	TEST			
	Pretest	Posttest	Total	
TECHNIQUE	Presence	49.83	36.33	43.08
		(7.36)	(4.89)	(6.13)
	Absence	46.83	33.76	40.25
		(11.13)	(9.83)	(10.48)
	Total	48.33	35.00	41.67
		(9.25)	(7.36)	(8.31)

Table 3

The Technique X Test Analysis of Variance for Performance

	SS	DF	MS	F	P
between subjects					
Technique	2.67	1	2.67	2.55	.14
Error	10.67	10	1.07		
within subjects					
Test	4.17	1	4.17	1.62	.23
Technique X Test	.17	1	.17		
Error	25.67	10	2.57		
Total	43.33	23			

Table 4

Means And Standard Deviations: Performance

	TEST			
	Pretest	Posttest	Total	
TECHNIQUE	Presence	5.50	6.17	5.83
		(1.05)	(2.04)	(1.55)
	Absence	6.00	7.00	6.50
		(1.10)	(.89)	(1.00)
	Total	5.75	6.58	6.17
		(1.08)	(1.47)	(1.28)

Table 5

The Technique X Test Analysis of Variance for Mood

	SS	DF	MS	F	P
between subjects					
Technique	.38	1	.38	.35	
Error	10.75	10	1.08		
within subjects					
Test	12.04	1	12.04	11.56	.01
Technique X Test	2.04	1	2.04	1.96	.19
Error	10.42	10	1.04		
Total	35.63	23			

Table 6

Means And Standard Deviations: Mood

	TEST			
	Pretest	Posttest	Total	
TECHNIQUE	Presence	7.33 (.52)	8.17 (1.47)	7.75 (1.00)
	Absence	6.50 (.84)	8.50 (1.05)	7.50 (.94)
	Total	6.92 (.68)	8.33 (1.26)	7.63 (.97)

Table 7

The Pearson Correlation Coefficients

	Pre-A	Post-A	Pre-P	Post-P	Pre-M	Post-M
Pre-A	1.00					
Post-A	0.45	1.00				
Pre-P	-0.28	-0.39	1.00			
Post-P	0.01	-0.05	-0.34	1.00		
Pre-M	-0.10	0.15	-0.03	-0.40	1.00	
Post-M	0.12	-0.12	-0.28	0.69*	-0.06	1.00

Legend:

* = significance at the $p < .05$ level.

Pre-A = Pretest Anxiety

Post-A = Posttest Anxiety

Pre-P = Pretest Performance

Post-P = Posttest Performance

Pre-M = Pretest Mood

Post-M = Posttest Mood

CHAPTER 4

DISCUSSION

The present study attempted to assess the effectiveness of the Gestalt two chair technique for reducing decision conflict by measuring subjects' anxiety, performance, and mood. The overall pretest anxiety mean (see Table 2) of 48.33 was substantially higher than the norm for college student populations of 37.12 (Spielberger, Gorsuch, & Lushene, 1970), indicating that a higher degree of anxiety existed prior to the paper presentations. The overall pretest performance mean of 5.75 indicated an above average expectation to perform (5 represents average performance) and the mean pretest mood score of 6.92 indicated subjects tended to be feeling positive (6 represents neutral mood). Across all subjects, the posttest anxiety mean (see Table 2) of 35.00 was lower than the norm for student populations of 37.12, indicating that a low degree of anxiety existed following the paper presentations. The overall posttest performance mean of 6.58 indicated there was an expectation that performance was good. The mean posttest mood score of 8.33 indicated subjects tended to be feeling very good and cheerful. Conflict tends to be characterized by increased anxiety, an

expectation of decreased performance, and more negative mood state (Greenberg & Webster, 1982). Although the pretest results do not consistently match Greenberg and Webster's (1982) pattern, the movement in scores from pretest to posttest for all three dependent variables are in the direction predicted by conflict resolution, i.e., lowered anxiety, heightened performance (although not significant), and a more positive mood. The only significant correlation also indicates that, at posttest, more positive mood was matched by greater assessment of performance.

As both experimental and control groups produced these changes, the paper presentation itself appears to be effective in changing the scores in the desired direction. However, the focus of the present study was to ascertain the effectiveness of the Gestalt two chair technique. Unfortunately, the methodology used in the present study did not permit the independent assessment of the effectiveness of the experimental treatment because the posttests were only administered after the paper presentation. The large change in anxiety and mood scores from pretest to posttest indicates that an intermediate change might have been statistically detectable. To correct this flaw, the author suggests a design modification such that the pretest follows the

treatment. This should effectively separate the treatment from the task and allow independent measurement of the treatment's effect.

As a naturally occurring event, paper presentations are ecologically valid opportunities to assess the effect of various treatments on performance. The author recommends that the present study with the modified design would appropriately determine whether exposure to the Gestalt two chair technique might reduce anxiety, increase performance, and elevate mood prior to paper presentation.

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Appendix A
Human Research Approvals
Consent Forms
Emporia State and Wesleyan Universities



EMPORIA STATE UNIVERSITY

1200 COMMERCIAL EMPORIA, KANSAS 66801-5087 316/343-1200
RESEARCH AND GRANTS CENTER

April 5, 1989

u Bodart-Talbot
Division of Psychology
and Special Education
x 31
MPUS

Dear Mr. Bodart-Talbot:

The Institutional Review Board for Treatment of Human Subjects
s evaluated your application for approval of human subject
search entitled, "Is the Gestalt Two Chair Technique Effective
Reducing Anxiety Outside the Therapeutic Setting?" The review
board agreed unanimously to approve your application which will
allow you to begin your research with subjects as outlined in your
application materials.

Best of luck in your proposed research project. If the review
board can help you in any other way, don't hesitate to contact us.

Sincerely,

James L. Wolfe
Dean of Graduate Studies
and Research

:pf

: Ken Weaver

SUBJECT CONSENT FORM

Please read the following statements and, if you agree with them,
sign your name at the bottom.

I agree to participate in a study conducted by Lou Talbot and his
graduate assistants. The purpose of this study is to investigate
student paper presentations at a convention in Lincoln, Nebraska.
I am aware that I can discontinue participation in this study at
any time.

I realize that approximately forty-five minutes of my time will
be required for participation in this study. I understand that
confidentiality will be respected and neither my name nor any
identifying data will be used in any report of this research.

Having considered the above factors, I hereby consent and agree
to participate in the study.

Signature of participant _____

Appendix B
State Anxiety Scale

SELF-EVALUATION QUESTIONNAIRE

Developed by Charles D. Spielberger
in collaboration with
R. L. Gorsuch, R. Lushene, P. R. Vagg, and G. A. Jacobs

STAI Form Y-1

Name _____ Date _____ S _____
Sex: M _____ F _____ T _____

DIRECTIONS: A number of statements which people have used to describe themselves are given below. Read each statement and then indicate in the appropriate circle to the right of the statement to indicate how you feel *right now*, that is, *at this moment*. There are no right or wrong answers. Do not spend too much time on any one statement and give the answer which seems to describe your present feelings best.

VERY MUCH SO
MODERATELY SO
SOMEWHAT
NOT AT ALL

- | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| I feel calm | ① | ② | ③ | ④ |
| I feel secure | ① | ② | ③ | ④ |
| I am tense | ① | ② | ③ | ④ |
| I feel strained | ① | ② | ③ | ④ |
| I feel at ease | ① | ② | ③ | ④ |
| I feel upset | ① | ② | ③ | ④ |
| I am presently worrying over possible misfortunes | ① | ② | ③ | ④ |
| I feel satisfied | ① | ② | ③ | ④ |
| I feel frightened | ① | ② | ③ | ④ |
| I feel comfortable | ① | ② | ③ | ④ |
| I feel self-confident | ① | ② | ③ | ④ |
| I feel nervous | ① | ② | ③ | ④ |
| I am jittery | ① | ② | ③ | ④ |
| I feel indecisive | ① | ② | ③ | ④ |
| I am relaxed | ① | ② | ③ | ④ |
| I feel content | ① | ② | ③ | ④ |
| I am worried | ① | ② | ③ | ④ |
| I feel confused | ① | ② | ③ | ④ |
| I feel steady | ① | ② | ③ | ④ |
| I feel pleasant | ① | ② | ③ | ④ |



Appendix C

Likert Performance Scale

To report the rating of your performance, circle the appropriate level that applies to you at this time.

- 1-represents extremely poor performance
- 2-represents very poor performance
- 3-represents poor performance
- 4-represents below average performance
- 5-represents average performance
- 6-represents above average performance
- 7-represents extremely good performance
- 8-represents marginally excellent performance
- 9-represents excellent performance

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9

Appendix D

Wessman and Ricks Mood Scale

Please read all the following statements, then circle the number that corresponds to how you feel now.

1. Utterly depressed and gloomy. Completely down.
All is black and leaden.
2. Tremendously depressed. Feeling terrible, miserable, "just awful".
3. Depressed and feeling very low. Definitely "blue".
4. Spirits low and somewhat "blue".
5. Feeling a bit low. Just so-so.
6. Feeling neutral.
7. Feeling pretty good, "O.K.".
8. Feeling very good and cheerful.
9. Elated and in high spirits.
10. Very elated and in very high spirits. Tremendous delight and buoyancy.
11. Complete elation. Rapturous joy and soaring ecstasy.

Appendix E
Certification Letter
Dr. Wurtz



EMPORIA STATE UNIVERSITY

1200 COMMERCIAL EMPORIA, KANSAS 66801-5087 316/343-1200

February 7, 1988

Emporia State University Human Subjects Committee
Research using Gestalt two-chair technique

I have reviewed video tapes of Lou Talbat, and I think he has mastered the Gestalt technique he is using in his research. He is a good counselor in using Gestalt techniques, and I know he will be professional in his application of these techniques in his research.

Sincerely,

Philip J. Wartz, Ph.D., Professor
Division of Counselor Education and Rehabilitation Programs