The Application of Psychoanalytic Measures of Personality

to the Study of Social Behavior

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The research which I shall talk about today consists of three separate studies. Each one was conducted at a different session of the National Training Laboratory in Group Development, at Bethel, Maine, and each one involved about 100 subjects. The general procedure in each study was to administer a personality test, and then compare the personality scores with a variety of measures of social attitude and social behavior. The purpose of the research was to see whether it might be helpful to use psychoanalytic theory in the study of individual behavior in group situations.

It is a long step from psychoanalytic theory, with its emphasis upon psychosexual development and its concepts at the level of oral sadism or anal expulsiveness, to any judgment about overt adult behavior. Nevertheless, it seemed to us that if the psychoanalytic distinctions were helpful to the clinician working with individuals alone, then they should also be helpful to the social psychologist working with individuals in groups.

We used two different measures of personality. In 1950, for the first and most extensive study, we used the Blacky Pictures. This is a projective device, and is somewhat difficult to administer in a field situation. For subsequent work in 1952 and 1953, we used a paper and pencil inventory which had been

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1Paper presented at the 61st Annual Convention of the APA, 1953. This paper is based in part on a doctoral dissertation submitted to the Social Psychology Program, University of Michigan, 1953.
developed at the Chicago Psychological Institute by a man named Maurice Krout. The Krout inventory gives scores on six of the ten Blacky dimensions which were relevant for us, and we were able to add new scales to the Krout to match the remaining four dimensions. We were somewhat doubtful at first about using a paper and pencil test to measure depth factors in personality. However, preliminary results from this year and last year indicate that the inventory does an adequate job for our purposes. It does not differentiate as clearly as the Blacky between one type of problem and another, but it does seem to give an adequate indication of general personality orientation.

Each personality test gave us scores on ten separate dimensions for each individual. We could have concentrated on relating these separate scores to behavior. We did try this, and it failed, as we expected it to fail. In fact, this is the point where many studies have failed in the past. Single dimensions of personality do not relate well to behavior, because the person does not react to one dimension at a time. He behaves as a total unit, and his behavior reflects the simultaneous operation and interaction of many different personality factors. Somehow, this interaction between different elements of personality must be taken into account before behavior can be understood.

Our central task, then, was to find a way for combining the scores on separate personality dimensions to get a single summary score. In doing this, we were interested in arriving at qualitative distinctions, rather than quantitative judgments of more or less. We wanted to group people into homogeneous clusters, rather than spreading them out on some single continuum.

Our solution to this problem of personality classification required three second-order concepts, namely, hostility, anxiety, and narcissism. For each individual, a judgment was made of the kind and amount of hostility present, as indicated by five different scores. A second judgment involved the amount of
anxiety present, and was based upon three different scores. Finally, an estimate of narcissism was based upon a single score. These three intermediate judgments were then combined to define a single category. For example, there was anxiety alone; narcissism alone; the combination of anxiety with narcissism; the combination of both with hostility; and so on.

A further distinction was introduced among persons classified as hostile. This distinction was based upon a single score, namely, oral sadism. If oral sadism was present, together with other hostile scores, it was assumed that direct, verbal channels were available for the expression of hostility. If oral sadism was absent, so that the hostility was integrated around anal expulsiveness, it was assumed that there was no possibility for direct expression of hostility. In that case, the individual would handle hostility indirectly or by reaction formation.

This system gave us twelve categories. In addition, there were some special categories which I shall not try to describe today. The main thing to remember is that a method was developed for describing a total pattern of scores from the personality test, and that this method gave central emphasis to the concepts of direct hostility, indirect hostility, anxiety, and narcissism.

Let us turn now to the measures of social behavior. These included ratings from each staff leader describing the behavior of individuals in his training group, as well as ratings and sociometric choices from peers. Both the leader ratings and peer choices were obtained twice, once near the beginning and once at the end of the training period. From the individual himself we obtained ratings of satisfaction with the training group; a rating of the extent to which Laboratory training would change his behavior back home; and various perceptions of his own behavior as a group member. His attitude toward others was indicated by estimates from him of the extent of agreement between himself and others, and also by an ideology test covering various aspects of leader and member behavior in a face-to-face group.
There is no time this morning to give you a complete picture of findings from the three studies. In general, our analysis was designed to locate the behavioral measures on which persons with the same type of personality were uniformly high or uniformly low. Our findings consist of descriptive statements about the behavior of people in each personality category. I shall try to illustrate by summarizing the findings for each of the four key categories.

Let us look first at the two types of hostility. The hypothesis was that people with direct, oral sadistic hostility would be critical and aggressive, while those with indirect anal hostility would carefully avoid direct aggression. What do we find?

We find, first, that on ratings of satisfaction with the Laboratory, the two categories are at opposite extremes. The directly hostile people are critical of the Lab, and deny that they have learned anything; the others say that the Laboratory was a wonderful experience, and assert that they have learned a great deal. In one case there is criticism; in the other, extreme enthusiasm and approval.

Ratings from peers and staff members also associate the two kinds of hostility with opposite patterns of behavior. People with direct hostility are given high ratings on all measures involving aggression. They are critical, aggressive, and argumentative. They are also high participants in group discussion, showing energy and initiative, but keeping their comments relevant and group-centered.

Indirect hostility is associated with quite opposite ratings. These people are described as frightened by aggression, and as reacting to others with praise and approval. They protect themselves from disagreement by placing themselves firmly on the side of the staff, endorsing staff ideology and behaving in whatever way will gain staff approval.

I think these findings are enough to give you the contrast between direct and indirect hostility. On the one hand, we have a picture of aggressive independence;
on the other, a picture of rigid compliance, and indiscriminate offerings of praise and approval. Let us move on now to anxiety and narcissism.

The clear findings on anxiety may be summed up in one sentence: the anxious person is uncomfortable in a group situation, and particularly in an unstructured group situation. This is reflected in his ideology, which stresses the desirability of strong leadership; in his chronic dissatisfaction with meetings of the training group; and in his behavior toward others. Ratings indicate that he is dependent upon the leader for sanction; anxious to keep things moving; and intolerant of lack of procedural structure. He is rigidly attached to his own ideas, and inclined to reject or misunderstand the ideas of others. He is so anxious about getting things done that he can’t relax and interact freely with others. Not surprisingly, he leaves the Lab with very few friends.

The narcissist presents a very different picture. Where the anxious person is worried and afraid, the narcissist is indifferent. He is quite happy to let each go his own way. When he has something to say, he says it; when he has nothing to say, he keeps to himself. In general, his contributions are well received, and he is judged to be a constructive and helpful group member. His casual attitude toward others may be a little disturbing at first, but any negative effects disappear when it becomes apparent that he bears no ill will.

I think this is as far as we can go with the presentation of specific findings. Now let us turn briefly to conclusions. First, it seems clear that the research was successful in identifying groups of people who had common personality characteristics, and who expressed these in certain typical patterns of behavior. Our original question can be answered in the affirmative. Psychoanalytic measures and concepts can be of help in explaining social behavior.

On the other hand, it must be recognized that our success depends upon two levels of inference. The first step was to convert the original personality
scores to judgments of hostility, anxiety, and narcissism. The second step was to move from these judgments to predictions about actual behavior. It is quite conceivable that the first step could be streamlined. Thus, we could measure hostility, anxiety, and narcissism directly, rather than deriving estimates from some combination of psychosexual scores.

There is a certain satisfaction in finding that psychoanalytic theory works. However, this should not close our eyes to the fact that, in the classical phrase, there is still need for further research.