

LRI REPORT NO. 8

Essays in  
Descriptive Psychology

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# MEANINGLESSNESS, VALUES, AND PSYCHOTHERAPY

*1967*



This paper serves a two-fold purpose: it presents a first attempt to formulate a theory *about* the "meaninglessness" syndrome frequently encountered by contemporary clinicians, and an exploration of the "optimal" techniques to be used by a clinician in dealing with this problem. As is demanded by a theory *about* something, the subject matter was "known" before any attempt at conceptualization and theorizing began; accordingly, the first task required of the author is that of describing this subject matter. This will be done first in "literary" terms, and then in terms of the intentional action paradigm.

Many sensitive observers of the current era have called it an "age of crisis:" an age of transition, in which the old explanations and reasons for existence are being rejected. Central to this age has been a concern for the sterility, the "meaninglessness" of the modern way of life, and a sometimes wistful, sometimes angry rejection of the systems, goals, and dreams which provided "meaning" in the past. The twentieth century has seen theologians who maintain that "God" is no longer relevant to man; philosophers whose major concerns are nothingness and suicide (Sartre and Camus); writers such as J.D. Salinger, Allan Ginsberg, and Edward Albee (to name a few) who angrily reject modern society as "phony," "absurd," "meaningless," and more recently the upsurge of "camp" culture and a cult whose slogan is "Turn on, tune in, drop out."

This is not the place for a sociological analysis of the origin and meaning of this phenomenon. For the purposes of this paper it will suffice to describe briefly the way in which it has manifested itself in contemporary literature. The modern novel recurrently features the "anti-hero," an existential person whose only heroism, indeed whose primary virtue, is sheer endurance of the hate, stupidity, emptiness, and "absurdity" he sees surrounding him. Typically (see any of the above-mentioned authors) the anti-hero finds himself in a situation not of his own making; in which he is assailed by forces which he neither understands, predicts, or controls; in which his every effort to better the situation results in failure and self-contempt; and from which there is "no exit." A favorite image of modern authors is Franz Kafka's "Castle," a gray land in which all communication has broken down; there is no causality, no logic, no meaning to existence.

This lack of meaning, in the above sense, is seen to be quite relevant, to the clinician when considered in the context of the intentional action paradigm. A primary requisite for intentional action is a "meaningful and orderly universe," in which predictions or expectations regarding behavior can be formulated with a reasonable degree of confidence. Without this "meaning" a basic component of intentional action is lost—the "reason enough" component. If one cannot be reasonably sure that there are actions which will achieve desired goals, or if one is uncertain concerning the existence of desirable goals, it is difficult to see that one has "reason enough" to achieve them.

This, then, is the "meaninglessness" syndrome: an individual whose functioning as a Person is impaired by a perceived lack of meaning in his universe. He typically states that nothing is *really* worthwhile, that he can see no reason for the things he must do, that "there should be more to life than this." In short, he is a person who chronically does not have "reason enough" to act.

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Granting this description, a theory *about* meaninglessness becomes possible. The key heuristic concept in this "theory" (a presumptuous designation, perhaps) is that of "values," or "value systems." Because of the central place occupied by this concept, and in view of the fact that it is in current psychological usage, a small digression must be made, in order to clarify the present usage of the term.

Following Kluckhohn, a value is defined as "a conception explicit or implicit, distinctive of an individual or characteristic of a group, of the desirable which influences the selection from available modes, means, and ends of action." (Kluckhohn, 1956). This definition is consistent with the usages of the term by several representative psychological theorists (Jessor, 1956; May, 1953; Rogers, 1951; Scott, 1965; Singer, 1965); in a survey of the sociological literature it is identified as representative of usages in which it is assumed that values are "located" in man: "values are what men hold." (Adler, 1956). This is obviously consistent with the contemporary psychological usages.

The above definition, while properly detailing what is meant by the term "value," requires considerable amplification before it yields insight into the problem at hand. Specifically, the first task is to determine the criteria for saying that *X* is a value of Smith.

We first observe that the concept of values is meaningful only in the context of action; i.e., without knowledge of Smith's actions we could not say that *X* is a value to him. We can make this statement only



when we know that, when presented with a choice, Smith chose *X* rather than some other *Y*." This re-statement also emphasizes the fact that values have meaning only in the context of a value *system*, i.e., relative to other possible values. It is meaningless to say that *X* is a value of Smith unless we know that Smith has chosen *X* rather than *Y* when given a choice; he values *X* *more than Y*. This element of choice implies a value system, in which values may be roughly ranked hierarchically.

The concept of "values," then, implies an individual's value system: A system which is roughly hierarchical, and which is known inductively by considering a Person's history of choice among alternative actions. It is evident that we are once again dealing with the "reason enough" aspect of the intentional action paradigm; we are stating that a Person has had reason enough to do *X* rather than *Y*.

Assuming that every Person has a history of action, and that most of these actions involve choice among possible alternatives, it immediately follows that for every Person a system of values is describable. How, then, can one characterize the "meaninglessness syndrome" in terms of the individual's value system? To do this, one must consider more closely some of the implicit aspects of the above formulation.

As described previously, the "meaninglessness syndrome" is characterized by a chronic lack of "reason enough" to act. In terms of values the individual has a "weak" value system in the sense described below.

One can roughly estimate the "strength" of a value *X* in a Person's value system by simply counting the number of times *X* is chosen and by observing the amount of effort that a person will expend to achieve *X*. For example, if I choose to read *Time* magazine faithfully every week, it is reasonable to say that this activity is relatively strongly valued by me. On the other hand, the fact that I read Doestoevski only once per year does not imply that I value reading *Time* more than Doestoevski; I will expend far more effort (and money) to be able to read the latter than the former.

It is obvious, however, that among the available "actions" in practically all choice situations is the option of doing nothing. A history of many such choices would result in a relatively "weak" value system in the above sense; nothing is "really worth-while." And indeed, the recent history of a Person fitting the "meaninglessness syndrome" is frequently of this sort. This situation however, does not completely account for one important aspect of the syndrome: the belief that "there should be more to life than this." That is a statement of dissatisfaction with the Person's life as is, and certainly constitutes reason enough to do something to improve it. This implies that we need more information than the mere fact that the value system is "weak," we need to know *why* it is weak, i.e., why the Person does not change his life situation for the better.

It is instructive to observe that a "weak" value structure is not the sort of thing that is normal, i.e., intelligible without further information, in a Person. A Person, presented with a choice situation, will generally choose some *X* instead of the other possible *Y*'s. This choice is "reason enough" to choose *X* again in the same situation, and the Person will do so *if* there is no reason why he should not. In this manner, a relatively consistent, self-perpetuating series of choice patterns emerge; indeed, most such choices for a Person are habitual, practically automatic processes, requiring little or no reflection about the alternatives. Obviously, this state of affairs results in a description of relatively "strong" value structure for the Person. Equally obviously, this is not the case in the "meaninglessness syndrome." This sort of person, then, has some reason *not* to choose as he has chosen in the past. It is this reason that we must ascertain.

Many theorists (e.g., Rogers [1951], White [1966]) stress the difference between "received" ("introjection", "imposed") values, and "real" ("personally wrought") values, the former being values which are "taken over" from the parents or culture by the process of identification and introjection, while the latter are values which are derived from the individual's own experiences with reality. This dichotomy is suggestive, but clearly untenable under analysis. The implication is that the well-adjusted person has a system of "personally wrought" values, and that a conflict between "personal" and "received" values can cause severe mental anguish. This is a suggestive insight, but a problem arises in distinguishing between the two. An individual's "personal" experience certainly includes his interactions with others; specifically it includes his experience of their expressions of approval or disapproval of his actions. Thus, a "received" value is certainly based on "personal" experiences; equally clearly, many values that would be labeled "personal" are exactly in accord with parental or cultural values.

But this distinction, as is often the case with "suggestive" distinctions, is unnecessary; its important core is the incontrovertible fact that every Person's behavior, particularly as a child, is subject to



judgments of "good" or "bad" by his parents or culture (significant others"). As a result, he can be made to feel guilt for engaging in (or even contemplating) disapproved actions which he finds personally desirable, or for failing to engage in approved actions which he finds personally onerous. This is the classic "approach-avoidance" conflict; a strong reason to act opposed by a strong reason *not* to act.

With the above as a foundation, then, the "theory" about the "meaninglessness syndrome" immediately follows. It is characterized by an individual whose functioning as a person is impaired by a chronic lack of "reason enough" to act, i.e., whose value system is "weak" and inconsistent. This lack is the result of an approach-avoidance conflict in choice situations; "approved" choices are personally onerous, while "disapproved" choices are personally desirable (if, indeed, *any* perceived choice is personally desirable). Choosing "approved" actions results in frustration; choosing "disapproved" actions results in guilt. Thus, such choices are made only when absolutely necessary, resulting in frequent refusal to choose, and inactions. The above situation leads to a feeling of inability to find and obtain desirable goals ("nothing is *really* worthwhile," "everything is meaningless, absurd") and an intense dissatisfaction with the present life situation ("there should be more to life than this").

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We are presented, then, with a person with a difficult life problem, and required to find an optimal therapeutic orientation to help resolve it. Out of the wealth of clinical techniques, which should be selected?

A first approximation is suggested by noting the similarity between the above formulation and the sort of analysis presented by Rogers (1951) and the existentialist clinicians (May, 1953). A great deal has been written concerning "client centered" *versus* "directive" approaches to therapy; unfortunately, the underlying conflict between the two is seldom made clear. It is egregious to suggest, as indeed May does (1953), that "client-centered" therapy means that the therapist provides *no* direction. The therapist's job is helping a "client" who has a life problem. As such, he has a responsibility to ascertain, to the best of his ability, *what* the problem is and *how* he can *best* assist his client in resolving or overcoming it. If, in his best judgment, he feels that the client will do himself or other serious harm, it is incumbent upon him to attempt to direct his client away from this action. Nor is it particularly meaningful to contrast "client-centered" with "directive" approaches on the grounds that the latter have standardized "techniques"; the Rogerian approach is fully as standardized as behavioristic "desensitizing" for phobics, in the sense that a Rogerian *will* do certain things and will *not* do others.

A more meaningful distinction between "client-centered" and "directive" therapies is the degree to which the therapist has a predetermined "target" of adjustment toward which he directs his client. In this sense, the "directive" therapist is, for example, one who feels that a "well-adjusted" person does not behave in ways that strongly conflict with societal demands. (A well-adjusted person is not sexually promiscuous; is a productive member of his society; etc.). An example of this approach is found in an article by Jessor (1956), in which it is suggested that a criterion for "mental health" is "social usefulness." The directive therapist, then, is one who feels that "healthy" persons all conform to a relatively specific "model" of adjustment, while the "client-centered" approach defines "healthy" by reference to the individual's satisfaction with his own unique "life style." (This is not to imply that the "client-centered" approach would make a hero of De Sade, who is perfectly satisfied by taking what he wants at any cost to others, as "healthy." It is a recognition of the fact, that, within the range of actions that are not directly harmful to others, there is a very diverse set of often conflicting actions that are appropriate to functioning as a Person).

In this sense, then, the optimal technique for dealing with the "meaninglessness" syndrome would be totally client-centered. At first glance it would seem that a directive approach would supply a strong set of values to an individual whose values are weak. However, it must be remembered that this individual has, from birth, been provided with a strong clear-cut model value system by parents and society; his displaying the "meaninglessness syndrome" is *bona fide* evidence that he has found it unacceptable. Indeed, there is no lack of such models in our society; the church, business or professional groups, his contemporaries, all provide an individual with possible value systems for emulations. The lack of a good model to "guide" one's behavior toward such an ideal seems to be anything but a solution.

The therapist's task, therefore, included ascertaining what actions are enjoyable or satisfying to the client. This implies that the therapist should strive for the Rogerian ideal of a warm, action-free



relationship; expression of disapproval by a "significant other" cannot serve to alleviate guilt feelings. There are two possible results of this attempt: either there *are* choices of action which the individual finds satisfying, but which are accompanied by feelings of guilt because they are disapproved (alternately, which result in guilt feelings because of failure to choose alternative actions which are strongly approved: "I want to be a social worker, but my parents have their hearts set on my becoming a lawyer") or else the individual perceives *no* choices as satisfying. In the former case, therapy should consist of encouraging the client to choose satisfying actions consistently, and attempting to resolve guilt feelings surrounding these actions. (This is an extremely general "program," but the specific details depend tremendously on the unique individual case). The self-reaffirming nature of satisfying choices seems likely to play a large role in reducing the approach-avoidance conflict.

The second case, in which *no* perceived choices are satisfying, seems a much less likely candidate for individual psychotherapy. The essence of choice is commitment to the chosen alternative; this commitment forms the healthy basis upon which individual psychotherapy works. In this case, other forms of therapy might be of greater benefit. For example, counseling might suggest satisfying alternatives of which the individual was previously unaware. More realistically, however, something like milieu therapy, in which the client is virtually *forced* to commit himself, seems to be the only form of therapy with a good probability of "success." This is a situation in which there is little of benefit that a therapist knows how to do; but the therapist's primary value demands that he try.



# THE ART CRITIC PROBLEM

*A Non-Empirical Investigation of Objectivity*

1969



The notion of "objectivity" occupies a central place in the vocabulary of philosophers of science. Indeed, a careful consideration of the current usages of the words "objective" and "scientific" would lead one to conclude that, like Mary and her lamb, where one goes the other is sure to follow. It is therefore disconcerting, to say the least, to realize that the use of the word "objective" is subject to few (if any) publicly-stated rules—i.e., whether a statement can be characterized as "objective" is, according to current usage, largely a matter of (subjective) opinion.

It is not the purpose of this paper to critically examine the currently dominant philosophy of science, nor even to delineate the current notion (I would be loathe to use the term "concept" here) of objectivity; that ground has been covered elsewhere (Ossorio 1966, 1968, 1969). It is sufficient here to state that "objectivity," as currently used, is fundamentally a polemic rather than descriptive term, a catch-phrase rather than a concept, and that a careful reexamination of the concept is called for. To this end, this paper will attempt to clarify some of the issues of objectivity which can be exemplified by what has been termed the "Art Critic Problem."

The Art Critic Problem, simply stated, is as follows: Two art critics, *A* and *B*, make judgments regarding the same painting. *A* says that the painting is a masterpiece, *B* says that it is a sloppy piece of junk. Both *A* and *B* take themselves to be making objective statements, but they appear unable to negotiate to a judgment which they both endorse. Further, "negotiation," in the usual sense of appeal to shared standards, hardly occurs at all; what counts for *A* as a reason for questioning the correctness of *B*'s judgment seems to *B* as simply avoiding the question at hand—and, of course, vice versa.

How then can *C* (meaning us) characterize this paradoxical situation of two people making objective statements about the same thing, but which contradict each other? Unfortunately, there is no technical procedure here which would conclusively decide between the two judgments, nor are there accepted premises from which it would demonstrably follow that the painting was good or bad art. And to offer our own evaluation of the painting would simply compound the problem.

Upon reflection, we can rather mechanically generate three ways in which statements about the same thing can contradict one another, namely: 1) Neither *A* nor *B* is making an objective statement, but is *merely* expressing an opinion or stating his personal preference; in short, the choice between *A*'s position and *B*'s is simply a matter of taste (and therefore it is logically impossible to make a false judgment.) 2) Both *A* and *B* are making objective statements, but one (or both) of them is wrong in his judgment. (This includes the special case of *A* making an objective statement, while *B* is merely expressing an opinion.) 3) Both *A* and *B* are making objective statements and neither is wrong. Since the third option is simply a restatement of the original dilemma, let us consider what would be required to get away with characterizing the situation as being of either the first two varieties.

The first characterization is popular among persons who, whether for ethical or purely prudential reasons, place a high value on the virtue of tolerance. This group includes artists, jazz musicians, existentialists, and most types of radicals—in short, those who are in no position to overwhelm, by sheer weight of numbers or power, the opposing viewpoint, as well as those who simply think that the issues



involved are not worth coming to blows about. Laudable though this sort of self-restraint may be, this "solution" is quickly seen as having ignored the original problem in favor of solving another problem: namely, that disagreement can lead to repression, persecution, and occasionally extermination of the less politically potent viewpoint. While describing the two judgments as being merely subjective tends to serve this humanitarian end, claiming this as a solution to the objectivity problem is methodologically akin to solving the murder by hiding the body.

To see that the "personal preference" characterization does not do justice to the reality of the problem, one need only consider what would happen if *Z*, an auto mechanic, were to venture a third opinion of the painting. Neither *A* nor *B* will be inclined to pay much attention to *Z*'s judgment; if *Z* forces the issue, he will be told by both *A* and *B* that he is not qualified to make that judgment (alternately, he might be told that his taste is not particularly advanced.) In short, the serious advocate of the "personal preference" characterization finds himself in the untenable position of saying, as George Orwell so nicely put it, "All animals are equal, but some are more equal than others."

The second characterization exemplifies the usual notion of objectivity in scientific circles, namely, that objectivity consists in observing and reporting what there is to observe, and that there is (objectively) one and only one set of things that can be observed. With this view of "objectivity," it is obvious that, if two objective reports contradict one another, one (or both) is in error. (The hard-nosed positivist, of course, will dismiss the possibility that the art critic's judgment *could* be objective, since such words as masterpiece" and "junk" are not part of an observation language. This, of course, is methodologically the same Procrustean error which the first characterization exemplified, and serves as one more reason for questioning the adequacy of the "show and tell" account of objectivity.) Lacking a technical procedure, however, one is hard put at first glance to say which critic, *A* or *B*, is wrong, and why. Indeed, to even make sense of the claim that either *A* or *B* could be shown to be in error requires a somewhat more sophisticated conception of objectivity than has been heretofore stipulated.

Ossorio (1969) demonstrated that the question of objectivity can be correctly raised in situations in which no technical procedure for ascertaining "the truth of the matter" exists, and suggests the following more plausible account of objectivity: "The contrast between objective and biased or subjective depends on there being the possibility of going wrong and on there being ways of judging whether one had gone wrong or not." Further, objectivity (or the lack of it) is not assured by the presence (or absence) of some type of procedure or methodology; rather, we take it that a judgment is objective (in those situations in which objectivity is meaningfully an issue) unless it has gone wrong in one of the ways that the judgment can go wrong.<sup>1</sup>

Thus, *A* can attempt to show *B* where *B* went wrong in his judgment, and vice versa, by means of the well-developed social practice of negotiation. Ossorio characterizes negotiation in this case as "appeals to shared standards," and broadly characterizes "the three ways in which *A* may have gone wrong: 1) *A* may have ignored or failed to observe some relevant state of affairs. 2) *A* may have made use of some consideration which was irrelevant and therefore ought not to have been a consideration. 3) *A* might be overemphasizing or underemphasizing one or more of the relevant circumstances he did consider. The end result of this process is either a single agreed-upon judgment, or else a failure to agree. In the latter case, both *A* and *B* "will resolve the disagreement unilaterally with an individual difference description" which codifies the way in which *A*'s judgment went wrong (according to *B*), and vice versa.

But this does not help us, *C*, in deciding the question of how to characterize the judgment. The ID descriptions are designed to make it plausible that, being *that* kind of person, *A* *would* make just the kind

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<sup>1</sup>This formulation exemplifies a frequently useful strategy, that of identifying concepts which are essentially negative in their use, but which are "defined" (inadequately) as positive. The contrast is between two "definitional" forms, the negative, "A state of affairs is *X* unless it is *non-X* in one of the ways it can be *non-X*," and the positive "A state of affairs is *X* if and only if it is *Y, Z* and *Q*." Concepts such as objectivity, which are properly used negatively, prove to be undefinable in the positive form. Either it is *X* when the attribution of *Y, Z* and *Q* is superfluous or, worse yet, demonstrably false; or else it is *Y, Z* and *Q* when it is rather clearly not *X*. Switching to the negative form is a means of putting to good use our knowledge of (or competence to judge) the circumstances under which it is not correct to call it "*X*". In addition, the negative form straightforwardly codified our otherwise informal knowledge that concept *X* is applicable only to certain states of affairs; if there are no plausible ways of treating this state of affairs differently if it is *X* rather than *non-X*, then *X* is not a concept which applies to this state of affairs. It is submitted that, since the positive form implies an infinite regress of definitions, it is the negative form which is the more basic, being the indispensable form for "defining" the basic, observational concepts.



of error in judgment that he did make. But then, *A*'s description of *B* is similarly intended. To make matters worse yet, usually the best evidence we have that *A* is the sort of person *B* says he is, comes from the fact that *A* made the judgment he in fact made—i.e. the ID description is generally an *ad hoc* explanation of how it was that *A* made this mistake in this situation, and *C* has no “independent” check on the description (at least, not at the time that it is given). Finally, even if *C* were able to ascertain that the description of *A* was correct, he can not therefore conclude that *A* was wrong in his judgment of the painting; it is quite possible to be the sort of person who understandably might make a certain sort of error without, in fact, making that error on a given occasion.

Thus, if *C* wishes to characterize the situation as being of the second sort described above, he finds himself in the uncomfortable situation of saying that either *A* or *B* is wrong—but he can't say which with certainty. At this point, the hard-nosed scientist gives up in disgust and joins the subjective account camp—and, indeed, that is his prerogative. Since either of these two accounts proceeds from an untenable position, the choice between them can only be a matter of personal preference or taste.

Lest the above argument be taken as saying more than is intended, we should hasten at this point to observe that *C*'s inability to say whether *A* or *B* is right is not the usual state of affairs (since we have presupposed that *C* is himself competent to make the judgment). Indeed, Ossorio categorically states that “our ability to criticize a judgment as ‘not objective’ reflects our competence to decide what conclusion *was* the correct conclusion to draw.” In the Art Critic Problem, however, we have stipulated that both critics are competent to decide “what conclusion *was* the correct conclusion to draw.” Adding *C*'s judgment will vary considerably among competent observers in *C*'s position. As we shall see, Ossorio's view applies directly to the Art Critic Problem, but the *way* in which it applies is not at all clear from the statement quoted above, and is quite different from the more typical state of affairs.

The way out of this dilemma is by means of a third characterization, which seemed the least promising route at first glance. Indeed, the resolution of the problem requires a further step away from the “show and tell” notion of objectivity than is evident in Ossorio's formulation, in order to resolve the seeming contradiction inherent in characterizing the judgments as both objective, and neither wrong.

The key to the reformulation lies in noticing that the discussion between *A* and *B* seems to lack certain familiar features of negotiation. Rather than disputing the facticity of a reason proffered by *A*, *B* seems more inclined to dispute *that* fact's status as a reason, i.e., the force of *A*'s argument seems to be lost on *B*, and vice versa. Indeed, if *A* were a known expert and *B* an unknown quantity, we would be inclined at this point to conclude that *B* simply was not competent to make the judgment in question; since both are experts we have no such easy out here. But our attention is drawn to the fact that negotiation is an appeal to *shared* standards, which suggests that we should add a fourth way in which *A*'s judgment could have “gone wrong” to Ossorio's three, namely: 4) *A*'s “frame of reference,” that is, his view of what constitutes a relevant consideration and to what extent it is to be considered (his set of “standards”) is different from *B*'s. This fourth category is phrased in as conservative a fashion as possible, in order to avoid legislating out of existence any of the possibilities discussed below.

Before discussing the implication of this for our view of objectivity, however, let us consider an analogy by way of orientation. The motion of an object must be characterized by reference to some other object or set of objects, and the characterization of the motion will differ depending upon what set of objects is used as a frame of reference. Thus, when the physicists report different (objective) motions for the same object, there are two categorically different ways in which this could be. The first is that one of the physicists made a mistake. In general, this means that he went wrong in one of the three ways Ossorio lists; the standards of relevance of considerations here are well-established and codified. The second way is by using different frames of reference for characterizing the motion. In the second case, the difference between the judgments is not seen as due to subjectivity, nor does it reflect an error somewhere; it is completely explained by observing that different frames of reference were used.

Returning to the art critics, we can now see that the initial difficulty arises from the “show and tell,” positive notion of objectivity, which ignores any consideration of frames of reference. The term “objective” in the positive formulation is confused with “absolute”—a different concept which means that frames of reference are irrelevant in making the judgment. Ossorio's formulation implicitly avoids this conceptual confounding; to make it explicit we need only note that, in order to “decide what conclusion *was* the correct conclusion to draw,” we must proceed from the frame of reference from which the conclusion is being drawn. (We cannot say what was the *correct* characterization of the motion of an object *O* relative to a frame of reference *X* unless we ourselves observe *O* from *X*—or unless we have



sufficiently precise translation rules such that we can translate our *Y* frame of reference characterization into an *X* characterization.)

As mentioned above, this fourth way in which objective judgments can differ has been formulated in as non-stipulative a fashion as possible. This is intended to specifically allow for two facts: 1) In the paradigm case of objective judgment, the standards for attributing the status of "reason" to a factual statement are established and shared; thus, holding different standards is an error (usually attributed to lack of competence) in the paradigm case, rather than reflecting a genuinely different frame of reference. 2) The admissibility of a "frame of reference" argument regarding a given judgment is itself subject to change (from admissible to non-admissible or vice versa); the dramatic shift in the status of measurements of the mass of a physical object from pre-Einsteinian absolute to post-Einsteinian relative is the classic example of this.

Thus, in most situations in which "objectivity" is an issue, conflicting judgments *do* straightforwardly imply that an error has been made. As a general strategy, then, the "everybody has his own way of looking at things" approach cannot be considered as legitimate unless shown to be otherwise, but rather vice versa. And typically, the admissibility of such an argument for a particular type of judgment is codified in social practices regarding "schools" and "exemplars."

Finally, since the notion of objectivity has herein been clearly loosed from its comfortable "show and tell" moorings, it is necessary to explicitly delineate the distinction between objective and non-objective (personal, subjective). The key here lies in emphasizing again that, in order for objectivity to be an issue, there must be the possibility of going wrong in the judgment, and ways of judging whether one has gone wrong or not. Because of this, it is clear that an objective judgment cannot be made from a *purely* personal frame of reference; i.e., the frame of reference (set of standards, etc.) must be shared by others. To see this, one need only consider the assertion that I am making an objective statement from a purely personal frame of reference, i.e., nobody else can be assumed to share it. You can only take my word for it when I say that I have (or have not) gone wrong in my judgment, because there is no way whatsoever for you to distinguish between my really having judged incorrectly, and my merely claiming to have done so. Thus, we can perhaps view the subjective or personal as a limiting case of the objective: namely, as a judgment made from a frame of reference which only one person can be presumed competent to use.



# SEX, EDUCATION, AND HUMAN RELATIONSHIPS

*A Proposal for Social Action Research*

1969



## I. GENERAL REMARKS ON SOCIAL ENGINEERING

Social Scientists are increasingly being confronted with the disparity between what they know how to do and the social problems which demand attention and solution. It is a commonplace observation that our social knowledge and technology lag seriously behind their physical counterparts ("We can send men to the moon, but we can't solve the problems of a single ghetto"), but it is not so obvious *why* this is the case, nor that it need continue to be the case.

It is customary to explain this disparity by observing that human (particularly social) phenomena are extremely complex compared to physical phenomena, that the scientific study of human beings is relatively young, and to conclude that, barring the appearance of another Newton in our midst, what is needed is simply more time for further research. If this analysis is accepted at face value, the conclusion is inescapable: social "science," as it currently exists, is necessarily useless in coping with social problems now, and can only hope at some indeterminate (probably distant) future time to be of extensive, pragmatic use.

In advancing such arguments, social scientists seem to be mistakenly viewing "science" and "technology" as essentially interchangeable. While it makes some sense to say that the phenomena with which physical *science* concerns itself are less "complex" than their social counterparts (although it is interesting to conjecture how much of this difference is real, and how much is due to the greater simplifying power of the concepts which physical scientists have developed), it hardly seems credible that the *technological* problems of the urban ghetto are more numerous and intricately related than those of manned lunar orbit. Further, it is not historically true (as is implied by the "relative youth" argument) that physical technology was the necessary offspring of "pure" physical science—indeed, the majority of pragmatically useful scientific knowledge was the result of attempts to solve previously insoluble technological problems. Finally, the confidence that more time for "further research" will produce useful results is ill-founded, because it is based on analogy solely with that branch of physical science which is minimally concerned with pragmatic application.

The above is not intended to belittle the role of pure science in advancing knowledge—there is no question of the importance of conceptualizing, theorizing, and controlled experimentation. What is intended is to question whether such an approach alone will develop and significantly advance knowledge which is useful in coping with real social problems. It is suggested that, if a model from the physical disciplines is needed, a more fruitful approach would be that of the creative engineer.

To say that a solution is theoretically possible is a far cry from being able to implement an actual solution—indeed, significant advances in scientific knowledge are frequently "theoretically possible" only after they have actually been made (e.g., the scholarly proofs in the nineteenth century that heavier-than-air flight was "theoretically impossible"). A major driving force in the expansion of knowledge has been the pragmatic attitude of the engineer, which places primary emphasis on the solution of specific real problems. It is an attitude which refuses to turn away from a problem simply because the existing knowledge is insufficient; thus, it leads to the forced development and expansion of relevant knowledge. It is the indispensable complement of the theoretically-oriented, "pure" science researcher. And it is an approach which has been almost totally absent in the social disciplines, until recently.

"Social engineering," then, refers to an approach that applies, tests, develops and expands whatever knowledge is currently available, using an experimental, scientific approach, in the context of finding solutions to genuine social problems. The remainder of this section will be devoted to expanding upon the implications of this approach and formulating a few of the broad methodological problems with which the social engineer will be confronted.

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Social engineering, at the present time, refers to little more than an approach. It is a commitment to searching for solutions to social problems, a judgment that this is best accomplished by use of the scientific tools of systematic conceptualization and experimental manipulation together with the pragmatic view that, lacking the perfect solution, we can still try for the current optimum. In marked contrast to physical engineering, social engineering does not refer to a large corpus of theoretical knowledge; even



less to a set of techniques and methods. Thus the social engineer is confronted with basic issues of the sort which his physical counterpart can essentially treat as settled.

Much physical engineering is routine, and can be successfully accomplished with very little understanding of the systematic conceptualization underlying the technology; unfortunately, there are currently no routine social engineering tasks. The social engineer is faced with the job of conceptualizing the problem in all its ramifications, a task to which he must bring at least all the power that the academic disciplines have to offer. Thus, he must be familiar with the concepts and approaches of all the social disciplines, at least to the extent of recognizing when their use is required and being able to understand the use of them, if not to the extent of being competent to use them himself.

One of the most difficult issues with which every social engineer is faced involves determining what constitutes a "social problem," i.e., when is social change called for? Fairweather (1967) concentrates on the "marginal" status of certain groups in our society as his central consideration. While this approach certainly characterizes a large number of the more pressing social problems today, it is equally clear that to characterize all social problems by the attribution of "marginal status" is merely exchanging one set of conceptual difficulties for another; i.e., determining what criteria are to be used for the attribution of this expanded concept of "marginality."

A more general formulation might be the following: "Social problem" means that a value or ideal, held by a group or institution in a society, is blocked in its attainment or expression by conflict with the social practices of another group (a special case being when the two groups are identical). It is clearly the case that any social problem can be characterized by the above; it is questionable, however, whether one can say that whenever the above condition obtains, a social problem exists. (Further, in what way would he know what the above condition obtains *other* than by recognizing the existence of a social problem?) The above is a necessary condition, but a general characterization would need be sufficient as well.

The problem here seems to be akin to asking a mechanic for a "general characterization" (as opposed to, say, a list) of the things which indicate that an automobile needs repairing. The best he could say would be "When it isn't working right." This is not to imply that he can necessarily give a general characterization of "working right," but rather that there are instances, which he has the knowledge and ability to recognize, which constitute cases of *not* working right.

Since we have no general characterization of how a society might "work right" (and no reason other than optimism to believe that we can ever give such a characterization), the best we can do in general is to say that there are instances of "social problems," which we have the knowledge and ability to identify as such.

This general statement, however, should not be taken as equivalent to saying, "A social problem is whatever a social engineer says is a social problem." There are constraints which apply in each *particular* instance (just as a mechanic is constrained to give reasons for each *particular* judgment of "It isn't working right"). Specifically, an initial list of some relevant constraints on saying that a "social problem" exists (equivalent herein to saying that social change is called for, as opposed to lamenting the state of the world) might be the following:

- 1) It must be established that the above-stated condition in fact obtains: that some actual group or institution does hold a value or ideal, which is demonstrably being blocked in attainment or expression by the social practices of an existing group or institution. The procedure here is not that of logical proof or empirical deduction, but rather presentation of reasonable evidence.

- 2) There must be good reason to believe that some change in the current social practices could alleviate the problem. This constraint could be interpreted as weakly as, "It must not be clear that a solution is impossible"; it is stipulated in order to exclude from the category of "social problem" those things, however lamentable, which are apparently without solution (e.g., some variant on "It's a shame that some people have more power than other people in our society").

In addition to these procedural constraints on categorizing something as a social problem, there are certain methodological concerns to be dealt with before a program of social innovative research can be undertaken with any degree of confidence. In particular, there are sticky problems concerned with such issues as: what sorts of alternative practices (Fairweather's "subsystems") are likely to produce results, what sort of unintended effects might accompany the desired change, and, perhaps most difficult, how are the results of the changes to be assessed and evaluated?

In order to deal with these considerations, let us first examine the role of conceptualization in social engineering a bit more carefully. A hoary truism of scientific investigation states that the results of an



experiment are no better than the concepts the experimenter used in designing it. In a setting as intricate as social innovation, this truism merits constant repetition, because the conceptualization of a problem in a very real sense determines, before the experiment is run, what would qualify as a solution to the problem. Further, the only "results" of the innovation which can be adequately assessed are those which can be identified as potentially (conceptually) relevant beforehand. While it is hardly plausible that all of the relevant changes due to a social experiment can be anticipated, there are frequently important "side-effects" which become apparent only after considerable conceptual analysis (the proposal in this paper is a good case in point).

There are, however, serious constraints on what sort of conceptualization is adequate. There is a strong temptation, in dealing with social systems, to conceptualize *ex cathedra*, constructing whole societies with little or no regard for the reality of the existing society. The procedure is somewhat as follows: I can conceive of a society which is clearly better, more harmonious, than the one we now have. In my society, social practice *X* would not exist. Being a realist, rather than a Utopian, I realize that my society can never become reality; however, if I can eliminate *X* from our society, it will be closer to Utopia, and therefore better.

The lack here is one of functional analysis. Perhaps in Utopia there is no use for social practice *X*, but it is clearly an error to conclude therefore that all societies (specifically, in the real society with which we are dealing), there is no socially useful or necessary function served by *X*. Indeed, it is difficult to envision any social practice, other than the purely ceremonial, enduring for long in a society in which it serves no useful function. To argue that the social problem *per se* is evidence that the practice in question serves no useful purpose is simply begging the question; it is incumbent upon a social engineer to discover *what* function the practice serves or, less dogmatically, what function it is supposed to serve. Only in this way can he anticipate and assess any potential adverse "side-effects" of his innovation—which is certainly part of any responsible social engineer's job.

If the above seems unduly conservative, it is not the result of a personal bias on the author's part, but rather a procedural necessity of taking seriously the task of making responsible experimental change in an existing society, in the absence of an extensive body of tested theory. The social practices and organization of our society are the end results of centuries of testing and selection, haphazard though it may be; what theories can we appeal to that have been tested at all in comparison? Thus, it is folly to *assume* that current social practices or ideals are absurd, or that a simple change will have a specific, beneficial result. In fact, the "cure" may be far worse than the illness (e.g., the dismal failure of many Utopian communities), and it is suggested that the most fruitful way of discovering the function of a practice and anticipating "unexpected side-effects" is to become skillful in the role of the intelligent conservative defender of the *status quo*. If the critic's purpose is to advance his own viewpoint and win converts, he can frequently afford to neglect doing justice to alternative points of view; if his purpose is to experimentally determine what is the best viewpoint, he can not afford this luxury.

With the above in mind, what can we say about various types of solutions to social problems? If nothing else, we should be wary of "solutions" which proceed directly from the conceptual statement of the problem. One such type could be called a "some's good, more's better" solution, which attempts to increase the extent or degree to which a socially-valued quality (e.g., creativity, openness to new experience, self-respect) is possessed by the society or some specific group. In this case it clearly makes sense to ask, "If more is *really* better, what has kept us from getting it?" and to inquire what useful function might be served by having *less* than a maximum amount of this quality (e.g., too much self-respect may lead to inflexibility). It may in fact be the case that more is better, but it is much less likely than it appears at first glance, and is certainly something that must be carefully demonstrated by the experimental results. (Precisely the same considerations are relevant to a possibly more common variant on the above—the "little is good, less is better" solution, e.g., less anxiety, less aggression, etc.)

The "some's good, more's better" approach is itself an instance of a more general category of what might be called "technical" solutions, which are appealing because of their relatively straightforward approach, but which inherently have serious potential pitfalls. A technical solution is characterized by the following general procedure: Having conceptualized the problem, a set *S* of social practices is identified, *S* as being the set of practices which lead to or "cause" the problem. Having identified *S*, the next move is to conceive of a set *T* of innovative practices, designed such that, if the experiment is successful, *T* will nullify the effect of *S*, or replace *S*. Thus, since the practices which contribute to the problem have been nullified or replaced, the problem is solved.



It should be apparent by now that there is a serious weakness in any technical solution. In selecting *T*, the primary criteria of selection focus on replacing or nullifying *S*. With a little judicious selection *T* can also be designed to have minimal side-effects *per se*; what is not taken into account, however, is whatever genuinely useful social function *S* may serve. If *S* has continued in existence because the society mistakenly believes it to serve a useful function, then no harm is done by adopting a technical solution; however, there is no good reason to believe that such anachronisms are common, nor can a responsible investigator count heavily on such good fortune. Having nullified the effect of *S*, the useful as well as the problematic functions are eliminated by *T*. Considering the criteria for selecting *T*, it is not likely that *T* would also happen to serve the same useful function that *S* did: thus, it seems probable that unforeseen and undesirable "side-effects" would accompany a technical solution.

A more likely candidate for success would be a "functional" solution, in which a set *S'* is designed to replace or nullify *S*, with the dual stipulation that *S'* serves the same useful function as *S*, while not leading to the same problems that indicted *S* in the first place. A functional solution would require considerably more analysis and conceptualization than a technical solution, and would probably be more complex to implement, but it seems to leave considerably less to chance by avoiding the major pitfall of the technical solution. Further, there is no guarantee that the functional solution can actually be found in any given case, but the analysis involved in searching for one would undoubtedly suggest possible adverse effects of a technical solution, which can then be included in the overall assessment of the experimental outcome.

Finally, let us consider some problems associated with evaluating the results of experimental social change (the considerations in Campbell and Stanley (1963) are essential to these problems, and are assumed in the discussion below). The physical engineer rarely has difficulty assessing experimental outcomes, partially because the criteria for success are relatively clearly stateable, but more importantly because the standards of assessment (length, force, acceleration, production) are practically always established in a context which is completely unaffected by the experimental change. This is not the case in social experimentation; frequently, the only standards we possess for evaluating the results of a social change are themselves altered by the experiment. Indeed, we can never be sure *a priori* that this has not happened, because in a non-trivial sense the social context in which the standards are stated is lost in the experimental condition. And because we are experimenting with changes in an ongoing society, we cannot consider the judgements of those who have undergone the experimental change as sufficient, since, assuming the experiment was non-trivial and successful, the subjects are very likely to be using standards of evaluation which are significantly different from those of the society which is to be changed.

Perhaps a rather drastic example will help clarify this point. Suppose that a social engineer had decided that anxiety and intrapsychic conflict are social problems and, having observed that pre-frontal lobotomy tends to reduce both, had set up an experimental program of performing lobotomy on a randomly-selected group of "normals." It is certainly conceivable that this group would show less anxiety and intra-psychic conflict, but being a good functionalist, the engineer realizes that he must check for adverse effects of such parameters as creativity, spontaneity, and self-satisfaction. If he were simply to ask the subjects for self-reports on these items, it is probably (based on actual clinical experience with lobotomy) that he would find that the subjects feel quite satisfied with their situations, feeling adequately creative, spontaneous, and generally quite happy. Here it is clear that the subject is appealing to standards which are quite different from those of the non-subject; a non-lobotomized judge would report serious deficiencies in creativity, spontaneity, and range of affect, side-effects that, to the non-lobotomized society, would greatly outweigh the benefits of the change.

Again, it seems useful to point out that the only relevant standards (or theory) we have which have had extensive validation are those standards which our society in fact does hold. This is not to deny that other standards may, in some sense, prove to be "better," but simply to point out the methodological error of attempting to demonstrate the superiority of an untested set of standards by judging them by reference to themselves. That is akin to judging the calibration of a yardstick by measuring an object of indeterminate length on two occasions, and concluding from the perfect consistency of measurement that here indeed is a better yardstick. The problem is that there exist prior standards for something being one yard long, and we are not at liberty to use just any standard, no matter how consistent. If we are to speak of "one yard long," we must do so by reference to the accepted standard practices for doing so; otherwise, while we may be talking about something, it cannot be a "yardstick." And the same thing is true when we substitute the judgment of "socially desirable" in our society, we can nevertheless enlist the aid of a group



of individuals who demonstrably know how to make such judgments, in order to evaluate the results of a social experiment. Such a group has been referred to as a "blue-ribbon panel" (Peter G. Ossorio, personal conversation), emphasizing the role of current societal standards and practices. The members of such a panel should be chosen for objectivity as well as representativeness (to exclude those whose judgment would be mainly based on "That's not the way we do things here" rather than "The reason we don't do things that way is because of this bad result or that expense"). Since the panel members may be called upon to make judgments of such things as personal satisfaction, moral responsibility, depth of experience, etc. based solely on the observation of another person's behavior (including, of course, verbal behavior), it is suggested that they be given some familiarity with the use of person-descriptive concepts (Ossorio, 1966). Finally, such a panel might be quite useful in making the final step of weighing observed gains versus observed costs in determining the overall worth of the experimental program—a job which again requires reference to the current societal standards.

There are, of course, other approaches to evaluation which might prove more practical or powerful than the blue-ribbon panel. For example, one might make use of the fact that the "society" as a whole is composed of many subgroups, with a widely diverse range of standards. This approach would involve identifying a subgroup by whose standards the effects of the social change are clearly desirable; then data concerning the size and status of this subgroup, as well as the general society-wide opinion of their total life-style, would be relevant in judging the desirability of the change of the society as a whole. Barring this, one could conceptually construct the life-style of a society or subgroup to whom the results would be desirable, and judge this total life-style by the current standards. In both techniques, it is necessary to admit the validity of less favorable counter-examples which are also consistent with the experimental results, but the possibility of such counter-examples must be demonstrated rather than merely asserted. None of these techniques have the elegant finality of meter-reading, but they are better than nothing—and to any engineer, that is enough to make it worth trying.

## II. SEX, EDUCATION, AND HUMAN RELATIONSHIPS

One of the most deeply-rooted values in American society is a commitment to the formation and maintenance of "meaningful" interpersonal relationships, particularly of the man-woman sort frequently institutionalized in marriage. Some of our most cherished folklore, from Anthony and Cleopatra to the abdication of the present Duke of Windsor from the throne of England, focuses on the sacrifices persons make for the sake of love for another.

From a brief perusal of the mass-media women's magazines (*Ladies' Home Journal*, *McCalls*, *Redbook*, etc.), it is clear that our culture attributes an important role to sex in the growth and expression of such relationships. Ideally, as expressed in these magazines and such popular books as Erich Fromm's *The Art of Loving*, sexual expression is a meaningful and integral part of a whole relationship.

That this is frequently not the case is equally clear. A constant theme of such magazines and books is the conflict and dissolution of marriages caused by failure to achieve a "mutually satisfactory sexual adjustment." (The statistics in Kinsey's two volumes indicate that this is not restricted to the pages of popular magazines, but is wide-spread through all segments of our society.) In given instances the failure is attributed to such diverse factors as anxiety, guilt, lack of consideration or communication, etc., which all point to a failure to satisfactorily integrate sex into a total relationship. It is this failure which constitutes the social problem for which this paper will attempt to formulate a solution.

It is suggested that the social practices which most directly contribute to the problem (and which seem most accessible to change) are those concerned with the transmission of sex information and attitudes—roughly, "sex education." Until recently, sex education has been at best informal and haphazard in our society, at worst misleading, or non-existent. Empirical documentation of this assertion is readily available (Kinsey and his followers, among seemingly countless others), but hardly seems necessary: the stork, "the birds and the bees," and the bride who was told the "facts of life" the night before her wedding are all well-known aspects of our recent history.

In recognition of the harmful consequences of such non-education in this important area, programs of formal "sex education," particularly in the public schools, have been implemented in recent years (beginning circa 1950). Since these programs constitute the practices which are to be replaced, it is



necessary to outline briefly their major aims and methods. The program in the Jefferson County, Colorado, public schools was chosen as exemplary of the best of the current approaches.

The Jeffco program is carried on in all twelve grades of the public school system. The instruction is done, in grades 1-7, by the student's regular teacher during school hours, the teachers having previously attended orientation meetings in which an attempt was made to break down their inhibitions about discussing sexual topics. The focus in these first seven years is on straightforwardly answering student questions about sex, and imparting basic knowledge of the anatomy and physiology of human reproduction in language which can be understood by the children. Starting in grade eight and continuing through the last year of high school, books such as *Love and Sex in Plain Language* by Eric Johnson are introduced, which deal with such "problem" areas as masturbation, menstruation, premarital sex and sex-play, the ovulation cycle, etc. In addition, occasional films on such topics as the prenatal development and birth of a baby are shown. Throughout the program, the emphasis is upon imparting *information* to the students about sex.

It is not the purpose of this paper to evaluate the "success" of the current sex education programs; indeed, what "evaluations" exist have concentrated on showing that students who go through such a program generally have more accurate knowledge about sex than those who do not go through the program—hardly a surprising result. The purpose is rather to show that the best current programs seemingly have serious deficiencies which contribute to the problem of concern in this paper, and to formulate alternative practices aimed at alleviating the problem.

The major objections to current practices all have a certain McLuhanesque flavor—the problem lies not in what is said, as much as in *how* it is said, and what is therefore left unsaid. Specifically, current programs do in fact deal with the question of sex as part of a whole relationship, by simply stating that sex *is* part of a whole relationship. What is lacking is any consideration of *ways* in which real persons actually integrate sex with the rest of their lives (indeed, the implicit message of the current approach is that there is one best way for all persons), and preparation of the students for actually doing it themselves.

Even more McLuhanesque is the far-reaching effect of the media used to convey the "information" (as well as the information-imparting orientation itself). The subject of sex is set apart from other subjects by the oblique way in which its subject matter is depicted. Every other course uses textbooks which are liberally laced with illustrative photographs; sex education textbooks are laced with charts and occasionally painfully stylized line drawings. Every other course makes good use of visual aids, from films to living specimens to field trips; the idea of actually observing genitalia or human reproduction, even on film, is clearly unthinkable (with the exception of birth, which, insidiously, is accorded a special status). The implicit message is strongly and repeatedly communicated: There is something different, wrong, or socially unacceptable about curiosity in sexual matters, even though it is not made clear what is different.

Let us leave the implications of this message *per se* for later discussion; of greater interest at this point are the restrictions which this approach places on what can be dealt with in sex education as currently conceived. The emotions accompanying sexual arousal and the sex act are frequently powerful ones, producing confusion and strong threat to persons who are unprepared to experience them. Aggression in sex seems, from clinical reports, to be particularly difficult to cope with—"how can I love someone and want to hurt them at the same time?" Unless the person is prepared for this possibility, or has good reason to believe that such feelings are "normal" or acceptable, it is difficult to support any conclusion other than, "There is something wrong with me." The current approach, with its restrictiveness and information orientation, is almost powerless in dealing with this very real problem. As a result, the picture of sex which is imparted is unrealistically insipid, but nonetheless serves as the "official doctrine" by which the student should judge his later experience.

This problem is indicative of a more general lack: the failure to provide a realistic basis by which a person can judge his adequacy as a sexual partner. In an area that is intimately involved with personal feelings of adequacy, it is not surprising that the actual performance is initially approached with considerable anxiety and self-doubt, and that feelings of guilt and inadequacy follow perceived failure. In most other areas, however, there are realistic standards which are publicly known on which one can base his perception of failure or success, a feature which is notably lacking in the area of sex. Further, feelings of anxiety and self-doubt implicitly involve some degree of expectation or prediction of failure; lacking standards to support a perception of success, a person would understandably be inclined to perceive his performance as inadequate. This can lead to a type of "unrealistic anxiety," in which a person is doubtful of his sexual adequacy but has no means of invalidating his prediction of failure. (There are, of course,



other considerations which mitigate or nullify the effects of this lack of realistic standards for some individuals. That this problem is by no means uncommon, however, is attested to in practically all sources, from *McCall's* to Fromm to Kinsey.)

Briefly then, the above are some of the factors which, it is submitted, contribute to the failure of a number of persons in our society to make sex a meaningful, integral part of a total relationship. The implicit message that sex is, in some socially unacceptable way, "different" is a road-block to integrating it with the rest of life; the failure to prepare a person for making his own, unique sexual adjustment is coupled with an implicit message that there is one "best" way to do so; and the lack of realistic, public standards of adequacy tend to undermine attempts to validate whatever adjustment is being made. Let us now consider an alternative program which is aimed at alleviating the problem.

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Although the conceptual pitfalls and false starts involved in arriving at the following program have (hopefully) been omitted from this paper, the program itself is taken by the author to be a functional solution. For the sake of coherence, the details of formulation and re-formulation which would support this claim were sacrificed in favor of the final formulation. However, it is clear that the social practices which are to be replaced (those of sex education) are only inferentially related to the outcome criteria (improving the ability to make sex a meaningful part of a total relationship). This is a direct result of taking the requirements of a functional solution seriously.

What could be the socially useful functions of our traditional methods of sex education? A discussion of *possible* functions is given later in this paper; however, one such function was judged plausible enough, important (by our society's standards) enough, and sufficiently uncompensated for in other non-effected social practices to be included in the design (as opposed to assessment) criteria of the program. It takes the following form: the mystery, the "differentness" surrounding sex forces a couple to discover and work out together the place of sex in their lives. This adds an element of "spice" and mutual discovery to marriage; it tends to bring the couple closer together and builds mutual trust and respect, resulting in more stable, fulfilling, happy marriages.

The socially-desired goals here are stable, fulfilling marriages, marked by mutual trust and respect with a sense of "spice" in the relationship. To suggest that traditional sex education practices have been extraordinarily ineffective in reaching the goals is tempting, but irrelevant; there demonstrably are marriages which fit the description in which the individuals had the traditional form of sex education. What is required is a program which has as its goal (and as a demonstrable result) the facilitation of such relationships *without* the use of the traditional practices and their attendant problems. Thus, rather than focusing on the "attendant problems," the preceding formulation focused on this goal as "the problem" and stipulated elimination of the "attendant problems" as part of the solution.

The experimental program will be aimed at the securely post-pubescent adolescents (ages 14-17). For pragmatic reasons which will become obvious, it will not be implemented through the public school systems but rather through the auspices of some less politically-responsive institution, such as the Unitarian church or the YMCA. The design corresponds to Campbell and Stanley's design number six, with both experimental and control groups randomly assigned from a pool of volunteers.

The program will center around a set of films, which will be developed before the program is begun. Their aim is to provide actual illustrations of how real couples make sex a part of their relationship. In this context, "information" will be imparted primarily by means of illustration and instantiation, to be discussed after the film in groups led by trained leaders, preferably married couples. The emphasis in the group discussion will be in relating what was to be learned from one film to the others, and discussing the possible relevance of this knowledge to the students themselves, now or in the future.

A basic maxim of behavior description says that "Things go right unless they go wrong in any of the ways they can go wrong" (Ossorio, 1969). Therefore, most of the detail in describing these films consists of detailing ways in which they could "go wrong." Briefly, a single film would depict a couple engaged in sexual relations or some single aspect thereof (foreplay, intercourse, preliminary overtures, etc.). The orientation would not be one of "Here is an example of the woman astride position," but rather, "Here is an example of a man and woman expressing something by means of sex." The emphasis would be placed on *what* feelings are involved, and how they are being expressed; technically, a "voice-over" description



by the couple, with appropriate cinematographic techniques, would make it possible to convey something of the direct experience to the students. (The author categorically refuses to call the above a "blow-by-blow" account." In addition to the illustrative material, the film would consist of interviews with and interactions between the couple, designed to illustrate in more detail what part sex plays for them, and the course of development and growth of their relationship, sexual and non-sexual.

It would be a mistake to devote a large amount of time on the film to non-sexual interactions or discussions, however relevant; particularly among this age group there might be a tendency to tune out anything but the "juicy" parts. Instead, biographical sketches of the couple and their relationship will be employed to supplement the films in the discussions afterward. An attempt will be made to avoid using only couples which fall into a pattern (very attractive, Caucasian, well-matched physically or in temperament) that could carry the implicit message, "You have to be like *this* to be sexually adequate." More generally, the discussion groups will emphasize the differences as well as the similarities in the relationships, in order to emphasize the role of the couples as merely examples rather than models.

It is submitted that these films and discussions can be designed to directly fill the gaps in current sex education. The method of "instruction" utilizes essentially the same techniques as used in other fields of study—straightforward illustration when it is necessary to supplement discussion and description. Further, the student's views on the non-sexual aspects of a relationship are being formed and examined in the same setting as the sexual; thus, the disruptive "difference" is no longer present. The student is prepared for strong emotions, such as aggression, which accompany sex because he has seen and discussed persons who were experiencing them, and will be better prepared to interpret them when he feels them himself. Finally, and perhaps most importantly, he has a firm basis for realistic standards of adequacy as a sexual partner because he has observed the performance and results of persons who were presented as examples of adequacy. He now has good support for his perception of himself as adequate, both technically and emotionally. At the least, he has the knowledge that some persons who became successes sexually went through the same problems or failures he is experiencing.

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*The problems of evaluating the results of this program are enormously complicated by two considerations: there are several potential side-effects of the new practices per se, and the judgments of the subjects will be clearly insufficient for assessment. As a result, the rationale for assessing particular variables will be omitted in favor of an indication of which ones will be evaluated in what manner.*

Both experimental and control groups will be observed annually for a ten-year period. During these observations, an attempt will be made to assess the degree to which a subject has integrated sex into meaningful relationships. This will be done by means of self-report, report from partners in relationships and from knowledgeable peers, and observation by trained observers rating on such variables as depth of experience. Obviously, when possible all observers should be unaware of the experimental-control status of the subject.

Other variables relevant to assessing the main effect might be: divorce rate; age at first sexual relationship (in or out of marriage? resulted in marriage? duration?); number, frequency, and duration of sexual relationships; incidence and duration of cotemporal sexual relationships; incidence of infidelity in marriage; age at first marriage; number of children, legitimate and illegitimate; number and frequency of casual sexual relationships; incidence of seeking help from therapists or marriage counselors (primarily due to sexual problems; primarily due to other sorts of problems). All of the above can be reliably obtained by direct self-report, with the reservation that the standards for "casual" sexual relationship must be demonstrably equivalent for the two groups, or else codified by the experimenter. (A good deal of technology for gathering such information was reported in White [1966]). In addition, an autobiographical account of the role sex has played in the subject's life would be required during the last year of observation.

Some possible side-effects of the program *per se* are: alienation from societal values, lack of personal responsibility, promiscuity, lack of moral judgment, an exploitative attitude toward others. In addition to the above sources, the following information would be required to assess these side-effects: scores on standard alienation tests such as Srole's anomia scale and the normlessness scale (Neal and Rettig, 1968), educational and work histories, history of involvement in community affairs.



It is impossible at this time to give a complete list of relevant types of sources of information, because the "blue-ribbon panel" approach to evaluation will be employed. The experimenters and panel will jointly determine what additional information is required to enable the panel to assess the program. Again, the judges will be unaware of the group status of the individual subjects under evaluation.

After all subjects have been thus evaluated, the evaluative data will be statistically analyzed for the control and experimental groups. If no difference is found in the socially undesirable effects, the job of the panel is finished. (Obviously, this is also the case if no differences are found in the socially desirable—i.e., criterial—effects.) If, however, the program has indeed accomplished its goal of facilitating the integration of sex into meaningful relationships, but has done this at the cost of producing undesirable other effects, the panel must be employed in the final assessment of the overall worth of the program—weighing gains *versus* losses. Regardless of the outcome of this deliberation, it is clear that our socially useful knowledge and technology will have been significantly expanded and clarified in the process of doing this experiment.



# CHARACTER, SOCIALIZATION AND DEVIANCE

*A Study of some antecedents and  
consequents of character*

1970



The emerging role of "social engineer" (Caplan, 1964; Fairweather, 1967; Putnam, 1969), which requires psychologists to make judgments regarding the effects of intentional social innovations, lends new force to psychology's traditional concern with bridging the conceptual and empirical gaps between early (antecedent) experience and subsequent adult or adolescent behavior. The boom in socialization research in the past decade can be partially understood as focusing on areas where, at least potentially, planned change can result in the attainment of subsequent socially-desirable goals—the reduction of certain types of deviance, for example. No matter how well-elaborated our knowledge of socialization practices becomes, however, it will avail us little until we have developed adequate "linking" concepts that enable us to make judgments about subsequent behavior from knowledge of such antecedents. It is the contention of this paper that "character" is one such concept, which is particularly useful in the study of deviance. This paper will explore the conceptual role of character, present a newly-developed instrument for the assessment of character defect in males, and report substantive research which demonstrates the validity and utility of character as a psychological concept.

The apposition of socialization and character in the preceding paragraph is more than more happenstance. Indeed, a concern with character is a logical extension of the study of socialization, which refers to "the process by which individuals acquire the knowledge, skills, and dispositions that enable them to participate as more or less effective members of groups and the society" (Brim, 1966). An important subset of "knowledge, skills, and dispositions" is formed by those which are required for effective participation as an *ethical* or *moral* member of groups and the society—the subset which is referred to by the traditional conception of character. This subset is of particular concern to a society when evaluating the desirability of an actual or proposed change in its social practices (especially in its child-rearing practices) because a major indispensable purpose of socialization is to produce adults of good character, as that concept is understood by the culture at large. Any change which results in increasing character defect will be met with alarm and resistance (Putnam 1969). Thus, it seems that methods of assessing character defect are indispensable in responsibly assessing the outcomes of differing modes of socialization.

A number of investigators in the past decade have concerned themselves with issues of moral behavior, notably Lawrence Kohlberg's work on the developmental sequence of moral reasoning (Kohlberg 1963a; 1963b; 1964; 1969a; 1969), and Justin Aronfreed's work on internalization and conscience (Aronfreed 1961; 1963; 1966; 1968). Neither of these approaches lends itself readily to the assessment of the full range of character defect, being oriented toward considerations of developmental process rather than outcomes. Indeed, it is surprising, to say the least, to observe that "character" is a concept which has been effectively absent from psychological discourse since the classic *Studies in the Nature of Character* of Hartshorne and May (1928) and their colleagues (Hartshorne, May and Maller, 1929; Hartshorne, May, and Shuttlesworth, 1930).

Burton (1963) suggests two reasons for this long hiatus: 1) "the very thorough, excellent job done by Harshorne and May," and 2) their conclusion regarding the situation-specific nature of honesty which Burton proceeds to reconsider. This author would like to add to the list at least two "tactical errors" of procedure which, taken together, make the approach exemplified by Harshorne and May an unlikely candidate for effective measure of character.

The first error lies in straying too far from the essential features of the concept. Character refers to a set of knowledge, skills, and dispositions. That is, in any actual situation in which moral behavior is an issue, a person of "good character" will: 1) recognize that he is in a situation in which he has an opportunity to act morally (or not), 2) have the skills necessary to successfully engage in moral behavior in this situation, 3) be *disposed* to choose the moral alternative *because* it is morally correct (rather than, for example, because he will be punished for choosing otherwise). In general then, a person without character defect will act morally in such a situation *unless* he has a stronger reason to act otherwise (and the strength of the "otherwise" reason required to make him forego moral action is a good indication of the "strength" of his character).

Hartshorne and May, however, did not directly assess *any* of the above, but rather observed *performance* in situations structured to contain "moral" alternatives ("moral," that is, to the investigators; Kohlberg's work might plausibly suggest that the children in Hartshorne and May's studies would not consistently recognize the opportunity for "moral" action [see Kohlberg, 1969b]). This procedure leaves untouched the questions: Which of the above three requirements was deficient? Were *any* deficient, or did the subject simply have stronger reasons (e.g., prudential self-interest, hedonic



gratification) for rejecting moral action? How strong were these other reasons (if any)? etc. In short, such an approach can be *at best* a short-cut indication of character; and, as is argued elsewhere (Putnam, 1970), the relative absence of well-articulated psychological theory argues against such short-cuts in favor of carefully derived measures which do justice to all essential features of a concept.

The second "tactical error" of the traditional approach is the attempt to construct a list of the "components" of character. Hartshorne and May (1930) specified four components: honesty, cooperation, inhibition, and persistence, to which Burton (1963) would add guilt, achievement motivation, rigidity, conformity-compliance, and social desirability. While one might doubt the utility of such an *ad hoc* listing, a basic difficulty is inherent in any attempt to offer a *positive* specification of character, akin to specifying positively the requirements for "mental health." Such a "definition" is not only bound to be controversial; it cannot do justice to the fact that many "configurations" of any such component-list are perfectly consistent with "good character." To say that a person is of good character is to make a judgment, and, as someone succinctly put it, "I may not be able to define an elephant, but I know one when I see one."

The same is not true, however, of a judgment that a person has *deficient* character. To make sense of such a statement, we *must* observe that the person's character is deficient in one of the ways that we know of that a person's character *can* be deficient. In addition, while we may not be able to completely specify meaningful criteria for judging a person to be of "good character," we *can* say that such a judgment must logically imply that he has none of the possible character deficiencies with which we are familiar as judges of character. (The absence of a fixed, positive definition of character does not imply that such judgments are "subjective" or non-falsifiable; see Ossorio [1968, 1970] for a delineation of the logic of this position.)

Thus, the approach to character measurement exemplified by the following instrument entails listing person characteristics which are, straightforwardly, instances of deficient character. The appeal here is to both necessity and sufficiency: it is submitted that 1) any person with character deficiency will be deficient in precisely one (or more) of the ways listed, 2) any person who is deficient in any of the ways listed would be judged to have deficient character, and 3) no person who would be judged to be of "good character" would be deficient in any of the ways listed. In addition, the instrument is intended to gauge quantitatively the degree of deficiency.

## DESCRIPTION OF INSTRUMENT

A heuristic example of extreme character defect is contained in the concept of psychopathy. McCord and McCord provide an excellent paradigm of the psychopath, who they maintain to be "an asocial, aggressive, highly impulsive person, who feels little or no guilt and is unable to form lasting bonds of affection with other human beings" (McCord and McCord, 1964, p. 3). Clearly, few people with merely deficient character are as extreme as the psychopath; however, the above definition outlines the major characteristics which would limit "effective participation as a moral member of groups and the society," and was taken as a good starting place for our analysis of character defect.

Nine major types of character deficiency were finally identified. They are: 1) lack of consideration for others, 2) inappropriate impulsiveness, 3) psychopathic aggressiveness, 4) no real concept of right and wrong, 5) shallow interpersonal relations, 6) interpersonal exploitativeness, 7) lack of interpersonal loyalty, 8) lack of trustworthiness and dependability, and 9) lack of "endurance" under stress or temptation.

Clearly our prior comments on the shortcomings of Hartshorne and May's "behavioral" measures are to the point here; no reasonable set of behavior observations could provide us sufficient information for assessing the nine variables listed above. Since our nine defect-types involve primarily defects in interpersonal participation, it was decided that the best source of information regarding them are persons who have had interpersonal relationships with the subject. Thus, the instrument was designed as an easily understood respondent questionnaire, filled out by knowledgeable associates of the subject.

The 48 items on the above questionnaire took the form of statements describing a "type of person." The respondent was requested to rate, on an 8-point Likert-type scale, "To what extent (to what degree, how much) he (the subject) is the *type* of person described in the sentence?" The items were designed to instantiate the nine variables, sampling the range from mild to severe, and provide sufficient information to make judgments regarding the presence and severity of each defect.



TABLE 1:

## Items on Character Questionnaire

*"To what extent (to what degree, how much) is the type of person described in the sentence?"*

1 = Not at all	2 = Very little	3 = Little	4 = Some, not much
5 = Fairly Much	6 = Much	7 = Very much	8 = Exactly

1. He pushes people around if he has the chance.
2. He would use any trick in the book to get a woman into bed, no matter how bad it made things for her afterward.
3. He really stands up for his friends, even under pressure.
4. He's a "love them and leave them" type with women.
5. He likes to win, but if he loses he can shrug it off.
6. You can't depend on him for anything.
7. He would do anything for a friend.
8. Almost all of his real friends are men.
9. He doesn't believe in the things that most people believe in.
10. He means well, but he can't resist a really strong temptation.
11. If you know what's good for you, you stay out of his way.
12. If he gives somebody his word, he will keep it even if it means that other people think he's a sucker for doing it.
13. Nobody gets close to him, and he likes it that way.
14. He tries his best to do what's right, but he just can't stay out of trouble.
15. He hates to hurt other people's feelings.
16. He has his own ideas about what is right or wrong, but they are very different from most people's ideas.
17. He would lie to anyone if he thought it would get him something he wanted.
18. If he says something is so, I can believe him.
19. He figures that sex is fun, and there's no need to complicate it by getting involved.
20. He's hard to get to know, but he's a good friend once you get to know him.
21. He is calm and relaxes.
22. He doesn't care what anybody thinks of what he does, as long as it doesn't get him into trouble.
23. I would lend him ten dollars in a pinch, because I know he would pay me back.
24. When the going gets tough, he quits.
25. He likes women, out of bed as well as in bed.
26. He understands why people feel the way they do about things, even if he doesn't feel that way himself.
27. He acts without thinking, and gets in over his head because of it.
28. He would sell his own mother for a quarter.
29. He doesn't really care what happens to anybody else.
30. He treats women like dirt.
31. He knows what he wants, with no second thoughts about it.
32. I don't think he's ever really cared for a woman.
33. He would sleep with his best friend's wife if he could get away with it.
34. He would take advantage of a woman if he could.
35. The idea of being really close to a woman scares him.
36. He will try to get what he wants, no matter who gets hurt in the process.
37. He would feel ashamed of himself if he copped out of a tough situation.
38. He does what he feels like doing at the moment, and to hell with the consequences.
39. He's always starting in on things and then doesn't complete them.
40. He thinks that "right and wrong" are OK for Sunday School teachers, but not for him.
41. Most people don't trust him, and for good reason.
42. I would be willing to tell him things about me that I wouldn't want most people to know.
43. He would feel very bad if he let a friend down.
44. He would do practically anything to get what he wants.
45. He thinks the only thing women are good for is screwing.
46. If he got a girl pregnant, he would figure it's her tough luck.
47. His friends would do almost anything for him.
48. The only thing he cares about in people is what they can do for him.



Some items contribute to the judgment on more than one scale. Items were also included which allow discrimination between patterns showing actual defect and patterns which are consistent with a no-defect explanation (e.g., a person who is psychopathically aggressive vs. a person who is strongly competitive but consieres other people; a person who feels no moral restraints vs. an alienated person with an adequate person code of ethics, etc.) Where possible, the statements describe specific behaviors in which this "type of person" engages.

A brief inspection of the questionnaire items will show that the usual simple summation procedure is inadequate to deal with the judgments required. Clearly, however, it would be unfeasible to utilize human judges to judge each profile. A "decision-table" procedure, utilizing a computer program to make scale judgments from the raw data, was therefore devised. The details of the decision-table required to produce scores on each of the nine scales are found in Table 2. "Item" refers to the item number in Table 1; "Rating" refers to the rating on each item provided by the respondents (where 1 = Not at all, 8 = Exactly); the "Score" is the contribution to the scale of that item when given that rating. On the face of it, this procedure does a reasonably good job of utilizing the information in the same way a human judge would.

TABLE 2

Scale	Item	Rating	Score
1. Lack of consideration for others	15	6, 7, 8	-2
	17	6, 7, 8	+1
	29	5, 6	+2
		7, 8	+3
	36	5, 6	+2
		7, 8	+3
2. Inappropriate impulsiveness	27	7, 8	+1
	38	6	+2
		7, 8	+3
3. Psychopathic aggressiveness	1	5, 6	+1
		7, 8	+2
	5	7, 8	-2
	11	6	+1
		7, 8	+2
4. No real concept of right and wrong	28	6, 7, 8	+1
	37	6, 7, 8	-1
	40	5, 6	+2
		7, 8	+3
	43	1, 2, 3	+2
		6	-1
		7, 8	-3
	44	5, 6	+1
		7, 8	+3
5. Shallow interpersonal relations	4	6, 7, 8	+1
	13	5, 6	+1
		7, 8	+3
	19	7, 8	+1
	20	6, 7, 8	-3
	30	6, 7, 8	+2
	32	5, 6	+1
		7, 8	+3
	35	6, 7, 8	+2



Scale	Item	Rating	Score
6. Interpersonal exploitativeness	2	5	+1
		6	+2
		7, 8	+3
	4	7, 8	+1
	25	6, 7, 8	-1
	30	6, 7, 8	+1
	33	6, 7, 8	+
	34	6	+1
		7, 8	+2
	45	6	+2
		7, 8	+3
	46	6	+2
		7, 8	+3
	48	5	+1
		6	+3
		7, 8	+4
7. Lack of interpersonal loyalty	3	3	+2
		1, 2	+3
	7	4, 5	+1
	12	4, 5	+1
		3	+2
		1, 2	+3
	28	6, 7, 8	+1
	43	1, 2, 3	+1
	47	1, 2, 3	+2
8. Lack of trustworthiness and dependability	6	6	+2
		7, 8	+3
	17	6	+2
		7, 8	+3
	18	3, 4	+2
		1, 2	+3
	23	3, 4	+1
		1, 2	+2
	41	5, 6	+1
		7, 8	+3
9. Lack of "endurance" under stress or temptation	42	6	-2
		7, 8	-4
	3	7, 8	-1
		1, 2, 3	+3
	10	6	+1
		7, 8	+3
	14	6, 7, 8	+1
	24	6	+2
		7, 8	+3
	37	1, 2, 3, 4	+1
	39	6	+1
		7, 8	+2



To test this last assumption, thirty actual profiles were selected from the sample described later in this paper. The profiles were selected to parallel the range of scores in the whole sample. Three judges were instructed in the meaning of the nine scales, but were not told the decision-table procedure for utilizing the raw data. Each of the three judges rated the thirty profiles on all nine scales; then they compared their ratings and negotiated to a single agreed-upon set. The profiles were scored using the computer procedure; agreement with the judges' rating is indicated by a correlation of...

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## RESEARCH

The character questionnaire was utilized in a large-scale retrospective study of exposure to pornography, character, and deviance among males, the details of which are reported elsewhere (Davis and Braucht, 1970). The data from this study provide a number of substantive findings which demonstrate the validity and utility of the above instrument as a method of measuring character defect.

Three hundred sixty-five male subjects, from eleven different natural groups that represented seven different types of subject, were participants in the study. The groups were selected to putatively represent extremes on the character and deviance criteria, and to assure substantial representation of the three major ethnic groups in the Denver-Boulder area—white, Hispano, and Negro. The seven kinds of populations sampled were: Inmates of the Denver City and County Jail (both felons and misdemeanants), Mexican-American college students (from three different local campuses), Black college students (from two campuses), white fraternity members from a liberal fraternity on one campus, conservative Protestant students (members of the Campus Crusade for Christ) from two campuses, liberal Protestant students from one campus, and Roman Catholic seminarians studying for the priesthood.

Age ranged from 18 to 30 with a mean of 22.2, median of 21.6. There were 73 Negro, 172 Anglo, and 120 Mexican-American subjects. 25% percent had not completed high school, and only 58% had some college. 17% were married. 55% had been arrested one or more times, and 25% had been arrested several times. All subjects were paid volunteers, who were informed beforehand that they would be asked personal questions about family background, illegal activities, and sexual behavior. Subjects were also informed that they would be required to "Provide the names of a man and a woman who know me well enough to rate my personality characteristics" (Davis and Braucht, 1970).

Each subject filled out a self-report questionnaire dealing with family and peer background, history of exposure to pornography, sex history, history of deviance and other personal information. In addition, they completed two of Kohlberg's moral dilemmas designed for group administration. Each subject was asked to give a Character Questionnaire labeled with his subject number to a male in the testing group who knew the subject. In addition, each subject was requested to address a stamped envelope to a woman who knew him well, enclosing in the envelope a packet containing: a standard letter (signed by the subject) requesting the respondent's cooperation, a Character Questionnaire labeled with his subject number, and a stamped self-addressed envelope for return of the questionnaire. Subjects were invited to seal the envelope themselves, to promote their conviction in the anonymity of the procedure. Out of 365 subjects, there were 243 for whom we had both male and female Character Questionnaires—a return rate of 68%.

To facilitate analysis, the nine scales listed above were summed to produce a single total character score, with each scale contributing equally to the total, scaled from 0 to 30.



TABLE 3

Summary of Frequency Distribution of  
Obtained Overall Interpersonal Character Scores

Character Score	Number	Percent	Cumulative Percent
0	123	34.7	34.7
1	65	18.3	53.0
2	38	10.7	63.7
3	32	9.0	72.7
4	28	7.9	80.6
5	16	4.5	85.1
6	18	5.1	90.2
7	8	2.3	92.5
8	10	2.8	95.3
9	5	1.4	96.7
10 & over 12	3.3	100.0	

NOTE: The higher the score, the more serious the character defects reported by the respondents.

Table 3 summarizes the obtained frequency distribution of total character scores, where zero signifies no defect, higher scores indicate increasing defect. As is to be expected, a substantial portion (34.7%) of our sample was reported to have no character defect, with 27.3% in the "serious" (four or greater) range. (Utilizing four as the boundary for "serious" defect is admittedly an arbitrary choice, but a close inspection of the scoring procedure in Table 2 will reveal that to receive a score as high as four, one must be almost totally and severely deficient on at least one scale, or else mildly deficient on several scales. Either case indicates that the person is in a poor position to straightforwardly participate as a moral member of society.)

TABLE 4

Character Scales—Intercorrelations

	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
1. Consideration	48	47	58	30	57	32	48	47
2. Impulsiveness		34	40	32	47	20	31	42
3. Aggression			38	32	39	31	41	42
4. Right vs. Wrong				40	61	55	60	52
5. Shallow Relationships					47	30	45	35
6. Exploitative						36	47	54
7. Loyalty							56	60
8. Trustworthy								51
9. Endures Temptation								

NOTE: All correlations are significant at  $p=0.001$

The obtained intercorrelations among the nine scales are shown in Table 4. Since the nine types of defect are conceptually distinct, there is little reason to expect that they would correlate highly with each other; however, the relatively large number of subjects reported to have no character defect raised the intercorrelations to a relatively high level.



Due to the "anonymous" procedures required by the nature of our study, it was impossible to utilize the original sample to get an estimate of the test-retest reliability of the instrument. A separate preliminary test-retest study utilizing fourteen respondents was therefore undertaken. Each respondent filled out the Character Questionnaire about a person known to him; ten days later, each was retested regarding the same person. With such a small sample, the variances of the nine scales were insufficient to promote much confidence in the obtained reliabilities (which were, with one exception, very high), but the variance of the total character score (which is the score utilized in the research reported below) was quite sufficient to accept the test-retest Spearman correlation of 0.92, yielding a reliability index of 0.96. In post-retest interviews, respondents reported that they found it 'impossible' to remember during retest how they had rated the person ten days earlier.

This remarkable stability of a given respondent's ratings contrasts markedly with the low level of agreement between two respondents reporting on the same subject in our deviance-study sample. With a sample of 243 such pairs, the correlation between respondents was only 0.18. This is not unreasonable, however, when one considers the different contexts in which the two respondents knew the subject. One respondent of each pair was male, from an ongoing natural group (including a substantial jail population); the other was female, and *not* a member of the group (wife, mother, girlfriend, etc.). Thus, the type of interaction with the subject that the respondents were likely to have had is almost maximally different; further, the correlation is limited by respondent-specific factors such as ability to understand another person's point of view (crudely, empathy). Work is currently in progress on a computer-simulation paradigm utilizing respondent specific factors to increase agreement between respondents; such an approach has proved successful in other areas of perception such as perception of hostility (Ossorio, 1970).

TABLE 5

Correlations with Antecedents, Consequents

Scale Name	Chronbach's Alpha	Homogeneity Ratio	Correlations	
			Character	Moral Level
1. FAMGDM	.619	.214	.248	-.202
2. FAMSXM	.366	.114	.239	-.230
3. FAMASN	.633	.154	.340	-.306
4. PARSEX	.521	.352	-.214	.125
5. DADHOT	.688	.428	-.155	.130
6. MOMHOT	.693	.433	-.179	.081
7. NEIDDEV	.875	.549	.300	-.209
8. PALDEV	.901	.499	.250	-.203
9. PALSEX	.786	.325	.290	-.269
10. PALHOM	.740	.347	.163	-.068
11. NYEDEV	.900	.385	.440	-.302
12. PRESEX	.497	.248	.349	-.224
13. EMSEX	.315	.209	.330	-.126
14. SEXPET	.848	.582	.231	-.167
15. SEXMST	.447	.290	-.159	.104
16. SEXDEV	.337	.067	.217	-.136
17. ALKUSE	.538	.190	.225	-.162
18. DRUGS	.828	.534	.250	-.159

Table 5 summarizes the characteristics of eighteen composite scales derived from the deviance study, as well as their correlations with the Character Questionnaire, and with the "moral stage" exemplified by the subjects' responses to two of Kohlberg's moral dilemmas. The details of these scales are reported in David and Braucht (1970); briefly, they are indices of 1) generally deviant models in the family, 2) sexually deviant family models, 3) absence of sanction networks in the family, 4) quality of



parent's sexual relationship, 5) warm relationship with father, 6) warm relationship with mother, 7) general deviance in the neighborhood while a child, 8) general deviance in the peer group, 9) sexual deviance in the peer group, 10) homosexual deviance in the peer group, 11) general deviant behavior by the subject, 12) premarital sexual behavior, 13) extramarital sexual behavior, 14) engaging in heterosexual "petting," 15) engaging in masturbation, 16) sexual deviance, 17) alcohol use, 18) drug use. Higher scores on the character scale indicate increasing character defect; higher scores on the moral scale indicate increasing sophistication of moral reasoning. Variables 1-10 are indices of conditions which precede (and presumably contribute to the formation of character (antecedents); 11-18 are indices of behaviors which are influenced by character (consequents).

It should be clear from the above brief descriptions that while these antecedents may *reflect* differences in socialization practices, they are not direct measures of such practices. Thus, the relatively modest (albeit significant, both statistically and pragmatically) correlations of antecedents to character can be seen as reflecting the imperfect relationship between the antecedent we could measure in this study and the actual socialization antecedents of character. It is worthwhile noting, however, that our closest approximation to a measure of the conditions of socialization, namely the absence of familial sanction networks, produced the highest antecedent correlation with our measure of character.

The correlations of character with consequent deviant behaviors are considerably stronger (the apparent discrepancy of the sexual deviance scale being more than adequately accounted for by its lack of homogeneity). Again our previous discussion of the behavior of a person of "good character" should warn us against expecting (or, for that matter, accepting) very high correlations between character and behavior; the interaction of character with circumstance to produce behavior is too strong for that. This interaction is shown by the correlation with the masturbation index, which indicates a small but significant tendency for persons of better character to masturbate *more* frequently. This result seems nonsensical until one recalls that the overwhelming majority of our subjects were single men who were either in college or in jail. Thus, their alternatives to masturbation (other than total abstinence) were premarital heterosexual intercourse or homosexual relations—both of which are culturally considered as less moral than masturbation.

Kohlberg's "moral dilemmas" test was chosen for comparison with the Character Questionnaire because it is the best known and best developed for use in the area of moral or ethical behavior. It should be noted beforehand that Kohlberg's work has been primarily concentrated on the sequence of moral development, and his instrument (used with adults, at least) is intended primarily to delineate the bases of an individual's moral perspective rather than to measure his disposition to behave morally (see Kohlberg, 1969b). Thus it would be egregious to take the following results, which use the dilemmas as the best available standard of comparison, as reflecting in any way on the quality or accuracy of Kohlberg's work; indeed, as will be indicated later, the moral dilemmas are an indispensable complement to the present Character Questionnaire.

Referring to Table 5, one can see that, in general, the Character Score relates more strongly to the antecedents and consequents than does the moral level. Using a sign test (where  $r_1$  is taken to be greater than  $r_2$  if  $r_1 - r_2 > 0.02$ ), we find that with a probability of 0.99 or greater, the mean correlation with character is greater than the mean correlation with moral level.

TABLE 6

Multiple Regressions

Predictors	Criterion	R	F
Antecedents	Character	.39	(10,315) = 5.65
Antecedents	Moral	.36	(10,315) = 4.62
Consequents	Character	.46	(7,318) = 12.12
Consequents	Moral	.32	(7,318) = 4.25



Table 6 represents an attempt to refine the quantification of the above difference, reporting the results of multiple regression of 1) antecedents on character, 2) antecedents on moral level, 3) consequents on character, 4) consequents on moral level. (In both 3] and 4], the extra-marital behavior index was excluded due to the small percentage of married men.) Again, it is clear that the character measure relates more strongly to both antecedents and consequents than does the moral level measure.

The correlation between character score and moral level was  $-0.295$ , indicating that, while they share some communality, a person's character and his sophistication in moral reasoning are empirically as well as conceptually distinct. It will be recalled, however, that one of the requirements for a person of "good character" is that he be inclined to choose the moral alternative *because* it is morally correct, rather than, e.g., for fear of punishment. In this one aspect, the interpersonal respondent for...

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is inadequate to provide sufficient information to decide the question; but it is precisely this aspect to which Kohlberg's test addresses itself. Thus, a procedure such as the moral dilemmas serves as an indispensable adjunct to a respondent character questionnaire, enabling us to adjust our view of a person's character as a result of the information it provides.

It seems appropriate to conclude this paper with the concluding remarks offered by Maller in his 1934 paper re-analyzing Hartshorne and May's honesty data. Maller wrote:

*It is likely that in the light of the results of these tests other attempts will be made toward the construction of character tests of greater reliability and of more definitive validity. Such carefully prepared tests will undoubtedly show higher correlations and will probably be as good measures of general character as mental tests are measures of general intelligence" (Maller, 1932).*

To which the present author, over thirty-five years later, wishes to add his second.



# GROUP ENCOUNTER

1970



## I. INTRODUCTION

Any honest attempt to give an adequate account of group encounter must begin by confronting the sheer scope of the phenomenon itself. The word "phenomenon" is used deliberately here, not with its cool, neutral, language-of-science-connotation, but rather in a journalistic sense, in order to convey a sense of the astonishing rapidity with which group encounter, in a bewildering variety of forms, has been embraced (or rejected) by so many people with such intense fervor and dedication. Whatever else may be said about it, the rise of "the encounter movement" in America has been truly phenomenal, and this fact alone is enough to make it a subject of interest to behavioral scientists. Add to this the claims of its advocates (one is tempted to say prophets), as exemplified by Carl Rogers' famous statement that "Basic encounter may be the most important social innovation of the twentieth century" (Rogers, 1969), and a topic of apparently great importance emerges. It is the intention of this paper to attempt to clarify (and suggest ways to further clarify) what this phenomenal phenomenon is all about.

The first step toward clarification, of course, is to define or delimit the topic. As has been the case with many interesting or important concepts in behavioral science (e.g., mental health, pathology, etc.), this proves to be quite difficult. One immediate problem is the variety of distinct (both merely semantically and actually) types of experience which must be accounted for as part of the "group encounter movement." Thus, one must discern the common element among: Esalen-type body awareness, managerial sensitivity training at the National Training Laboratory, marathon encounter groups, psychodrama, Synanon games, nude encounter, transactional analysis, etc., etc.—even the operant conditioners are getting in on the action. A search of the literature reveals that the vast bulk of articles in the field solve this problem of definition by one of three approaches:

1) Specificity. This is the most common move, in which an author limits his comments to a manageable subsection of the whole. Thus, we see articles on "time-extended marathon groups" (Stoller, 1968; Mintz, 1967), the role of facilitator in *marathons* (Bach, 1967a), the "adversary system" in *married couples' groups* (Everett, 1968), etc. This approach is generally used in "technique" articles, which report a special exercise, game, or strategy for use in appropriate contexts.

2) Vagueness. This approach (fortunately used by a small minority) consists of making a half-hearted attempt at definition. Were it not for the sense of obligation to "define" apparently felt by these authors, they would probably be in category 3). An excellent prototype of the "vague" definition is provided by Enright (1967) in an article on "Awareness Training in the Mental Health Professions." Enright defines "awareness" as follows:

*Awareness is immediate experience developing with and part of an ongoing organism-environment transaction. It is always of some organism-environment contact in the present and though it includes thinking and feeling it is always based on current perception of the current situation. Awareness always includes some intention and directionality of the self toward the world; in pure form, there is a momentary weakening of the self-other barrier and the "object" of awareness seems momentarily to be included in the self. (Enright, 1967, p.1).*

"In pure form," man the hungry amoeba.

3) Appeal to competent judgment. In most of these cases, the appeal is made implicitly. Explicitly, the move is, "I know what I mean by encounter, and you know what I mean." Carl Rogers in particular, and most other authors who write about the *general* topic, seem to favor this approach.

There is something to be said for the third approach, considering the infinite regress problem inherent in a propositional (definitional) system. (Ossorio, 1970). As someone once put it, "I can't define an elephant, but I know one when I see one." Indeed, it is the present author's view that "encounter" is not amenable to meaningful definition; one either has the competence to recognize a case of encounter or one does not. If this is the case, then the best one can do is try to get someone who lacks the ability to judge encounters to see what you are getting at (Ossorio, 1967), and this is the realm of metaphor, not definition. Not surprisingly, then, the best "exposition" of encounter with which this author is familiar was written by a Jewish mystic theologian—in verse form. (Buber, 1958).

Granted that the final "definition" of group encounter may perhaps of necessity contain undefined concepts, there is still considerable room for explicit delineation of the common elements which distinguish what we call group encounters from e.g., subway crowds, cocktail parties, and individual psychotherapy. (It should be noted in passing here that the fact that a concept is "undefined" does *not*



imply that it cannot accurately and *objectively* measured. [see Ossorio, 1970].) The term "group encounter" is not used here as a non-controversial term (whereas "encounter group" is not acceptable to N.T.L., psychodrama, Synanon, etc. ad nauseum) which connotes a group in which some sort of encounter occurs (at least in the paradigm case). The "definitional" strategy of this paper will be an attempt to outline a paradigm of group encounter which; 1) serves as an adequate paradigm for each of the various subsections of "the encounter movement," 2) allows group encounter to be distinguished from its first- and second-cousins, and 3) incidentally suggests a number of issues for research and/or debate.

At the risk of belaboring the obvious, the starting point for such a paradigm is the fact that group encounter takes place in a group. Only a few authors with which the present author is familiar (Bradford, et al., 1964; Lakin and Corson, 1966), however, have made a small but necessary step of viewing these groups as instances of Groups in general. (The capitalization is used here to avoid confusion of the specific instance with the general category.) The study of Groups and Group dynamics is a traditional branch of all behavioral sciences; as a result, a fair amount of conceptual articulation has taken place, and can be used to shed some light on group encounter. To be sure, there is no single agreed-upon *definition* of a Group, but there is sufficient agreement to offer the following *paradigm* statement: To say that a collection (two or more) of persons is a Group is to say that each person participates, with other persons in the collection, in a set of social practices which are common to the members of the collection, and characteristic of the Group. The key words here are "person," "participate," and "social practices," which are fully explicated by Ossorio (1966, 1967, 1970). (Indeed, the above "paradigm" is intrinsically embedded in the Ossorian system; a cleaner and more detailed articulation of the paradigm is necessary, but currently beyond the scope of the present author.)

Thus, a Group is characterized by its social practices. Another way of putting this is: There are standards by which actions can be judged as appropriate or inappropriate at any given time ("norms" in the group literature). There are appropriate actions, available to some and perhaps not to others, to engage in in response to another person's actions ("roles"). Each person feels the force of the shared standards ("group power" or "group influence"). And each person is capable of appreciating the point of engaging in these social practices ("sense of belonging"; collectively, "cohesiveness"). (One must recall at this point that the above is a paradigm, and that some deviation from the paradigm is the rule rather than the exception.) With this as background, we are in a position to offer a first-order general paradigm of group encounter:

Group encounter refers to a Group in which the social practices are designed to facilitate a course of action. That course of action is encounter, either of the self or of others.

This certainly serves to distinguish group encounter from cocktail parties and meetings of the board, but does not as yet meaningfully eliminate individual psychotherapy and some forms of friendship. This could be accomplished by fiat (Group + 3 or more), but it is an interesting and perhaps enlightening issue which deserves more careful consideration later in this paper. For the present, let us admit more telling criticism, namely, 1) that the paradigm as stated is too general to be of much pragmatic use, and 2) that it hinges on the global, undefinable concept of encounter. Fortunately, tending to the first criticism is a good way of tending to the second; our strategy will be to characterize in sufficient detail the social practices of group encounter that, for many practical purposes, the notion of encounter can safely be ignored. The next section of this paper will attempt this by focusing on a consideration of groups that go right.

## II. NORMS, ROLES AND SOCIAL PRACTICES

What characterizes the social practices of a group encounter that goes right? A quick overview of the literature is in order here. From a sampling of articles (Bach 1966, 1967; Bendrim, 1968; Berzon and Solomon, 1966; Enright, 1967; Everett, 1968; Fiebert, 1968; Lieberman, et al., 1968; Livergood, 1968; Mintz, 1967; Rogers, 1967; 1969; Simkin, 1966; Stoller, 1968a, 1968b; Zweben and Miller, 1968), the following emerge as important to group encounter: experiencing in the "here and now"; authenticity or "realness"; being "open" or "transparent" to others; awareness of one's own "feelings" (physical sensations and emotions); frank disclosure, both of one's self and one's feelings toward others; "trust" of the group by each member; and "congruence" or "integration" of feelings, thoughts, and actions. Most



of the referenced articles suggest ways in which these conditions can be "facilitated," or brought about; Bach (1966) even goes so far as to offer "Ten Commandments" for Marathon Groups. Much emphasis is placed on the role of the leader ("Facilitator," "trainer," "director," etc.) in bringing about these conditions. In addition, some authors add "ground rules" such as "sub-groupings" is not permitted, all eating arrangements are made by group consensus, etc. All, however, agree that physical aggression is taboo except in rigidly formalized rituals (e.g., arm wrestling), and that information disclosed in a group encounter is confidential. If these conditions are fulfilled, encounter reputedly emerges.

The above serves as a jumping-off point, in that it gives a sense of a particular sort of group, but it unfortunately is a jumble of norms, goals, roles, and tactics which needs clarification (the author submits that the jumble is not of his own making, but rather a too-frequent characteristic of discourse on group encounter). Let us attempt, with the above as guidelines, to discern the characteristics of such a group's social practices. (Recall, at this point, that we are, by definition, discussing a group encounter that goes right. This means that all members of the group are assumed to engage in these practices in the way and for the reasons that they are intended. The ways in which groups can go *wrong* are almost innumerable, and will be considered later.)

These practices require a norm of "frank and open" actions. It is always appropriate to say or do exactly what you want to say or do (subject to the physical violence constraint); it is never appropriate to refrain from doing or saying what you want to do. Specifically, a number of "reasons not to" that are usually considered are normatively inappropriate in a group encounter, namely expectations of: hurting someone else's feelings; appearing silly, childish, pompous, stupid, or immoral; being attacked, verbally or physically (here the purpose of the prohibition of physical violence is seen as making the norm workable among sane adults); exposing vulnerable areas or disclosing potentially dangerous or shameful information; rejection or lack of understanding; etc. The explicit assumption of this norm is that most of the people in group encounter are so accustomed to acting on these "reasons not to" that they have become unaware of what they want to do in the first place (a tricky issue discussed later). An implication of this norm is that a member is expected to provide "feedback" (say or do exactly what one wants disregarding the "reasons not to") when another person's remarks or actions affect him in any way.

The above is, I submit, one of two *primary* norms of group encounter, and in theory they are the only ones necessary. In practice, however, it seems to be not at all easy to simply adhere to the "frank and open" norm and so a host of secondary norms are explicitly established to facilitate putting this primary norm into practice. To tip my hand for a moment, it should be noted here that most of the ways in which group encounter can go wrong involve acting in accordance with a secondary norm for reasons *other* than a desire to adhere to or promote the primary norms.

Thus, an important secondary norm is acting (speaking) candidly and directly. It is inappropriate to say "John makes me more than a little annoyed"; it is appropriate to say "John, you make me really angry." Metaphor, qualifications, literary or technical references are all frowned upon *unless* they clearly are the most direct way of saying exactly what is intended.

Another important norm emphasizes talking about the "here and now," with emphasis on current feelings. That is, it is normatively appropriate to talk about what is currently happening in the group, what one thinks and, especially, feels right now; it is not appropriate to talk about an opinion, a global issue, or something that one *has* felt or that happened earlier or elsewhere (any of these being appropriate if it is personally significant to the group member *in the present moment*.) The assumption here seems to be that feelings that one currently feels are accurate indications of what one really wants to do, or at least are important reasons for acting. (To digress briefly—it has been the author's personal observation that the word "feeling" as used in group encounter is seen as directly linked to "feel like doing," or "want to do" by way of the social practices of the society at large. That is, to say "I'm feeling angry at you" is to say that the situation is such that a specific set of normatively understandable actions is appropriate now, and that I "feel like" engaging in one of them. It should be noted that one of the appropriate actions at this point is the one that I just engaged in, namely, telling you I'm angry.)

One final secondary norm is that of self-disclosure. It is appropriate to disclose any of one's feeling, experiences, opinions, goals, etc. whenever such disclosure is congruent with the "here and now" norm; it is inappropriate to refrain from such disclosure. This norm serves the purpose of explicitly banning a number of the above-mentioned "reasons not to" speak or act frankly and openly; it also provides a starting place for the social practices characterized by the second primary norm, which is attempting to understand as completely as possible the other members of the group.



There are a number of aspects of understanding another person which are subsumed under this norm. Explicitly, it is the type of understanding usually referred to as "empathy" that counts most. This involves an intellectual grasp of *his* reasons for doing what he does (wanting what he wants, etc.), as well as an appreciation of how it is that those particular reasons have the force they do for him. One is called upon to appreciate the meaning or significance that another person's actions have *for him*.

Fortunately, many of another person's actions are straightforwardly understandable by means of common reasons derived from shared social practices. If there is a lull at 4 p.m. and none of the group members have had lunch, it does not surprise us if John suggests having lunch now. If, however, George responds with an angry tone, "Can't you ever get your mind off your stomach?" we now have the task of understanding why George said that, what his reasons were, what social practice he is engaging in. We, of course, can ask ourselves what *we* would mean if we had said that and, if our experience with other persons is sufficient, it enables us to come up with several plausible explanations; under non-group circumstances we might simply ignore it, or pick the most plausible explanation and let it go at that. The group norms, however, demand that we try to understand *George's* reasons; thus, we might ask him about it, or suggest the most plausible explanation to him, and the "frank and open" norm requires that he respond appropriately. Obviously, there can be no guarantee of success here; the norms only demand that a genuine attempt to understand, and a frank and open attempt to disclose enough to be understood, be made. And, of course, if George genuinely does not understand why we have to ask about his reasons for such an obvious action, the norms demand that we try to get him to understand our reason for surprise. (Obviously, there is the theoretical possibility of an infinite regress here; pragmatically, considering the broad background of shared social practices, such a situation is virtual proof that one of the participants is either 1) the man from Mars, or 2) invoking the norms for the wrong reasons.)

Generalizing from the above example: The task is to individuate our normative understanding of another person's actions by appreciating the force of his reasons. It is not merely seeing a general category of which this action is an instance, but rather, appreciating the way in which this instance *is* the category. In this sense the understanding is symbolic; one cannot be said to understand a symbol unless he understand what it symbolizes. I may understand a particular plus sign as a horizontal line crossed by a vertical line; I cannot understand it *as* a plus sign unless I understand addition.

The above, I submit, are the norms, or standards by means of which a given action is judged to be appropriate at a given time, which characterize the social practices of group encounter. The characteristic roles are fortunately much easier to deal with. While there are a seeming infinity of roles, in the popular sense of the term, which one can play in group encounter, the only roles which are *necessary* to characterize group encounter are those of Member and Leader ("facilitator," etc.). Furthermore, with a few exceptions, such parts of most psychodramas, the role of Leader is available to any Member at any time, and vice versa (and in the exceptions such as psychodrama there is usually time set aside when roles can be changed). For our purposes, a Member can be defined as a person who participates in the social practices of the Group; a Leader is a Member whose action consists of promoting the norms of the Group. Since one of the ways of promoting the norms is by oneself adhering to them, it becomes apparent that, when all Members of a group encounter are acting in accordance with the norms, there is no distinction to be made between Leader and Member. The conclusion to be drawn from this is that this distinction is important only *before* this collection of people has fulfilled the conditions for being a Group or group encounter.

This conclusion is in accord with the existing literature on the leader's role in group encounter (see Fiebert, 1968; Bach, 1967a). The role of Leader must be taken, obviously, by someone who is familiar with the norms and knows how to adhere to them; this is generally a trained or experienced professional. He draws attention to instances when group norms are violated, and mobilizes group influence if necessary to bring pressure to bear on the Member to adhere to the norms. In doing so, however, the Leader must not himself violate the norms; if he is irritated with, say, a particular defensive Member, he must say so openly and frankly, rather than merely bringing to bear his influence "for the good of the group." (And, lest there be any implication that the Leader has license to dump hostility on miscreants, he must also adhere to the second primary norm, by genuinely attempting to understand the Member's reasons for acting in ways which strike the Leader as being defensive.)

The "group influence" mentioned above is a tricky business, for reasons which will be discussed later in the section on how groups can go wrong. At this point, let us merely point out that a Leader is in for a difficult time of it if he cannot mobilize group influence when necessary. However, a Group's



influence on a member depends on his desire to be part of the Group. Paradigmatically, this desire stems from his appreciation of the point of participating in the social practices of the Group, but *that* is something his is not in a position to have at the start of his first Group encounter. (One can play chess because one appreciates the point of playing chess; one cannot have this appreciation until one *has* played chess. One's first game of chess cannot be played straightforwardly for its own sake. [Ossorio, 1970]). Thus, the Leader initially must depend on the fledgling Member's wanting to be a member for some extrinsic reason (curiosity, a belief that it will make him a better person or save his marriage, etc.). This, too, is in accord with the experience of professional group leaders (Bach, 1966); a novice who has no such reason can make the Leader's task very difficult or impossible.

The social practices of group encounter, then, are characterized by the above norms and roles. Along the way, some of the most common practices of such groups have been briefly outlined as examples; for our general purposes, it is sufficient merely to say that any social practice which is characterizable by means of these norms and roles (or which promotes these norms) is an appropriate part of group encounter. One class of practices, commonly referred to as "games" or "exercises," is nonetheless of sufficient interest to warrant special consideration.

The group literature is replete with special-purpose "games" and Leader techniques. Generally, these techniques are properly used to promote the encounter norms, in situations where Members are having difficulty straightforwardly acting in accordance with them. For example, new group members commonly find it quite difficult to ignore their "reasons not to" in order to frankly and openly disclose their experiences or feelings toward another group member; others find the type of "symbolic" understanding of another person's actions to be difficult or an unfamiliar process. A thick and fascinating book could be compiled merely listing the techniques which have been reported in the literature; for our purposes, it is sufficient to offer the following general description which applies to the proper use of all of them: A "game" is utilized when a Member is having sufficient difficulty acting in accordance with the norms because 1) his constraint ("reasons not to") against such action is too strong, or 2) he lacks the ability to act that way. In the first case, the game is designed with an emphasis on setting up special circumstances in which the constraint is lessened or removed, i.e., the "reasons not to" are not particularly germane, either because of a guarantee of special circumstances ("In this exercise, I want you to tell everyone in the room exactly what you think of them. The rule is, nobody is allowed to say anything in response."), or else, because everyone is in the same boat ("Everybody in the group will tell us the thing that they're most ashamed of."). In the second case, a game is devised such that the performance involved constitutes an exercise or practice of the insufficient ability ("body-awareness" exercises are primarily of this sort). Obviously, such techniques require a skillful Leader to judge when they can be used effectively; they are properly utilized only to promote the norms.

We are now in a position to summarize a second-order paradigm of group encounter:

Group encounter refers to a Group whose social practices are characterized by two primary norms: frank and open action, and attempting to fully understand the other Group members; and by two major roles: Member and Leader. There are, in addition, a number of secondary norms which exist solely for the purpose of promoting adherence to the primary norms. Each member of the Group participates in its social practices, feels the force of the shared norms, and appreciates the point of engaging in these practices.

As promised, the notion of encounter has dropped out of the "definitional" end of this paradigm. (The last section of this paper suggests an approach to bring it back in a more manageable form.) Even granting the correctness of this paradigm, however, a number of issues of group encounter remain. The next section of this paper considers some of them.

### III. WHY, WHAT, WHO, AND HOW NOT TO

The phenomenal rise of the group encounter movement, one can safely assume, was not a historical accident nor a prank of the gods. In searching for reasons that account for it, however, one is quickly faced with a situation which seems to characterize almost all of the socially-important issues of group encounter: there are two quite plausible, mutually contradictory stories. For the sake of organization, this section will present and examine the merits of the alternative positions without reference to their empirical validity or methodological problems. The final section deals with those issues.



Futher (and here the reader's "willing suspension of disbelief" may be stretched to the utmost) the entire issue of what specific changes in an individual a group encounter brings about is left for the final section. In this section the author explicitly accepts at face value the claims of *specific* changes made by advocates of group encounter (backed by years of embarrassingly shoddy research, e.g., Bach 1967a, 1967b, 1967c), and assumes that negative effects of group encounters stem from 1) groups that went wrong, or 2) people who should not have been in group encounter in the first place. The reader is hastily assured that these are merely convenient assumptions for this section only, and will be critically examined in the final section.

There is general agreement among encounter advocates as to what these specific changes are. Leaving aside the Lydia Pinkham's-style testimonies as the *results* of change, most commonly reported changes are: increased openness to new experience and appropriate risk-taking; increased awareness of own feelings and wants; increased ability to express and receive emotions, particularly anger and love; increased ability to understand and accept other people; increased sense of self-worth and acceptance. The first four changes are straightforwardly cases of treating the world as being more like the Group than one did before entering the Group; the last can be seen as precisely what one *would* feel if one had significantly changed in the other ways listed.

Agreement ends, however, when one leaves this level of specificity. The pivotal issue, which in the author's view subsumes most of the others, is, simply stated: What do these specific changes add up to? Are they changes which make it possible for the individual to participate more happily and fully in the social practices of his previous, traditional way of life, or are they the first step toward a new way of life? Is it "Bring It Back Home," or "You Can't Go Home Again?"

The new way of life position seems to be the more popular one among professionals in the field; its exemplars are Esalen, Carl Rogers, and Abraham Maslow. In this view, the social practices of traditional American ways of life are inherently rigid, alienating, stultifying; they do not allow for growth, spontaneity, authenticity, genuine encounter, etc. Thus, the person pursuing these ends must forge a new way of life, in which group encounter plays a seminal role.

The minority view (among professionals, at least) is perhaps best exemplified by N. T. L. and, surprisingly, George Bach: it holds that all of these goals are possible in traditional ways of life, pointing to social practices involving marriage, friendship, family, psychotherapy, etc. In this view the individual learns from group encounters some important lessons which he then applies to *properly* engage in these traditional social practices in which he was unable to satisfyingly engage before.

The importance of this issue to a society concerned with preserving its traditional ways of life should not be underestimated. It is this author's view that, as is often the case with dichotomous alternatives, both sides have a point. There appear to be a number of persons who undergo group encounter who are unable to participate authentically, etc. in current social practices; for these people, pursuing these goals requires a new way of life (or, possibly, significant alterations of an existent way of life). Others, perhaps the majority, find these goals attainable in current social practices with the help of their group-acquire changes. At this point, professional Leaders should be sensitive to the existence of both possibilities, and strive to have group encounters from which either sort of person can benefit; researchers should address themselves to this issue, as suggested in the final section.

Approximately the same camps take opposing stances on the issue of why groups are necessary in the first place; that is, what are the enormous number of persons who have had reason enough to seek out group encounters looking for? Even after taking into account the effects of faddishness and normal curiosity, one is left with a large number unexplained. There is general agreement on the major symptoms: alienation, dissatisfaction with one lot, general angst; but explanations for how group encounter relieves these symptoms take two general forms: self-actualization, and remedial education.

Again, the Rogers, Maslow, et al. camp has the larger professional following. They hold that an individual, in group encounter, is going beyond the concerns with which traditional social practices were evolved to address. In this view, modern man is seen as having successfully filled the needs which concerned his ancestors; locked into the ancestral ways of life, his need for "self-actualization," growth, and new worlds to conquer is frustration, with resultant dissatisfaction, alienation, etc. The postulated need for self-actualization is all that is required to have reason enough to seek out group encounter.

The remedial education camp, as the name implies, views group encounter as a way of making up deficits in socialization which prevent a Member from participating in and appreciating his way of life. He seeks out encounter because he is frustrated, alienated, etc. from lack of ability to play the game as it is



properly played. He does not know how to get the satisfaction that there is to be had.

This latter position has a harder time making its view stick, since it postulates (in order to account for the sheer size of the group encounter movement) a massive breakdown in previously adequate socialization practices in the past few generations. This may in fact be true; it seems, however, to be a question that is incapable of resolution other than by historical speculation. On the face of it, then, a dash of something like actualization seems necessary to account for the encounter boom.

Granted this, however, this "remedial education" view can be seen as focusing on revision and extension of current socialization practices, rather than accepting the actualizers' revolution. This would be a prototypical case of social engineering (Putnam, 1969; Fairweather, 1968). A good starting place, it is submitted, would be to consider the effects of the American style of public education, which seems to train students to ignore their emotions in favor of "the truth of the matter" (Leonard, 1968).

An instructive sub-issue of "Why are groups necessary?" is the relation of group encounter to one-to-one relationship, particularly friendship and individual psychotherapy. The "remedial educators," on the whole, maintain that the changes or growth which occur through group encounter can, and more typically do, occur in intimate, one-to-one relationships (while nonetheless granting the power and efficiency of group encounter). The actualizers assert that the group encounter experience, with its attendant growth, only rarely and for a very few persons is duplicated in one-to-one relationships (nonetheless granting the importance of such relationships, while searching for new practices which make such one-to-one relationships possible.). It is not worth our while to detail here the arguments and supporting evidence available to the opposing camps; suffice it to say that in this author's judgment, both stories are interesting, solid, and inconclusive. One is left to conclude that either the actualizers do not know what a good friendship is, or the remedial educators have never had a real group encounter—or both.

This apparent dilemma is resolved (or at least made into an actual, familiar dilemma) when we assume that we are in fact dealing with two genuinely different ways of life. (This must, however, remain an assumption for the present, since the prime difference between a viable, different way of life and an aberration of an old way of life is that the former is liveable and transmittable, while the latter is not. The "actualizing" way has not been around long enough to have passed this test.) It is, of course, possible to have blue-ribbon panels from each camp check on and judge the quality of the opposition's relationships (see Putman, 1969), but the dialogue to date make it a safe bet that such panels would, in good faith, turn in conflicting reports.

Regardless of orientation on the above issues, responsible group encounter Leaders should find ground for agreement on the question of what sort of person is likely to benefit from (or be damaged by) group encounter that goes right. Some extremists in the movement seem to believe that shaking people out of their ruts is always good; most, fortunately, agree with Shostrom (1969) that "groups are not for everybody." Research on the subject, however, is practically non-existent, and the question at this point must be approached primarily by empirical means. Future developments suggested in the final section of this paper may put us in a better position to offer *a priori* suggestions for empirical validation; currently the best we can do *a priori* is on the order of: A worker whose job depends on his being able to ignore his anger at a rigid boss is a poor candidate for group encounter, where he may become sensitized to his anger and not then be able to do anything about it. (Shostrom, 1969).

We can, due to the above paradigm of group encounter, be more specific about the ways in which groups can go wrong. Any simple listing of ways in which groups go wrong would be necessarily incomplete; the human propensity for finding new ways to foul things up seems unconquerable (viz. Murphy's Law). Generally speaking, groups go wrong when the norms are not adhered to, or perhaps more difficult to encounter, when the norms are adhered to for the wrong reasons (e.g., a secondary norm invoked for reasons other than promoting a primary norm). Thus, we see groups in which "frank and open" is used as an excuse for dumping hostility on everyone present; "attempting to understand" takes the form of needless prying into personal (particularly sexual) matters, or a ploy for not taking another person's feeling seriously; "open self-disclosure" is engaged in as an exercise of "can you top this?" etc. ad infinauseum. In theory, an effective Leader (here we invoke the definition) can bring attention to these violations of the norms; in practice, a human being in the role of Leader is not always able to do so. This is a difficulty with which professional Leaders must live; but it is comforting to note that one does not make things go right by systematically eliminating everything that can go wrong (Ossorio, 1967). (It should be pointed out, however, that if a Member is clever enough to violate the norms without the other Members



and Leaders recognizing it, then, as far as everyone but the miscreant is concerned, things *have* gone right. In behavior descriptive terms, he engages in the same activities as if he adhered to the norms, but in different actions. Unless his different reasons for acting are reflected in the public, observable aspect of his performance (e.g., "You said you were angry, but your face looks as if you're enjoying yourself greatly"), then the other members can still engage successfully in social practices with him. The only person who misses out on the point of these practices is the alienated clever one.)

One particularly subtle way in which groups can go wrong involves improper use of group influence, turning the group into a vehicle for propagandizing or "brain-washing." As a group encounter develops into a Group, that is, as Members come to appreciate the point of engaging in the group's social practices, it is typically reported that tremendous group cohesiveness develops (e.g., Mintz, 1967); Members report a strong desire to remain a part of the group. At this point, as previously noted, the potential for group influence to make individual Members adhere to the norms is quite strong. It is also at this point that a group encounter can go wrong by introducing norms of agreement on some issue (e.g., "Actualization is a good way of life," "We should all try to be more tolerant of other people's flaws," "One shouldn't knock something until he's tried it").

In the most difficult instances both primary norms are invoked for the wrong reasons: "frank and open" ("That's what I really believe and it makes me angry that you don't agree, John") and "trying to understand" ("John, I really don't understand how you can believe that.") The above statements could quite legitimately be made in accordance with the norms *if* it is clear to everyone involved that John is merely being told that this opinion is important enough to the particular members that he wants everyone to agree, and that John is being asked to explain, rather than defend or justify, his reasons for disagreement. It is a violation of the norms if it is an attempt to bring group influence to bear on John to change his mind.

This can be seen by careful consideration of the paradigm; the group social practices are properly participated in because the Member appreciates the point of participation. That is, they are properly engaged in for their own sake; it is improper to engage in them for other reasons, such as trying to get someone else to agree with your opinion. That is like playing chess to impress people with your intellectuality; under an activity description it is the same as playing chess because you like chess, but they are different social practices. This "same activity description" problem leads to the following prudent rule-of-thumb regarding group influence: A Leader should take it that moves such as the ones described above are attempts to mobilize group influence unless he has good reason to believe otherwise. If he is wrong in so judging, then at least John has been given explicit notice that there is no pressure on him to agree; if he is right, he may have prevented an ill-advised yielding to pressure (see Shostrom, 1969, for examples).

#### IV. SOME NOTES FOR FUTURE DEVELOPMENT

Let us take stock of what the previous sections have (hopefully) accomplished by means of an analogy. We began with group encounter as a "black box," with people going in one end and coming out the other. At that point, the best research feasible would take a random assortment of persons, describe them before input and after output, and try to discern statistical regularities, from which we might guess at the structure of the black box.

The paradigm of group encounter describes the structure of the box without reference to any given person. We know now (or can find out) what the box is for, and how it is put together; we can distinguish this box from close cousins, and build another box if we want to. But we still can only guess at what the black box does when we put in a given person, and how it does it.

A future line of development, then, would detail how the box processes a given person, and what changes are brought about by the processing. We should be able to show various different processing-branches within the box, and demonstrate how the pre-input description (and previous branches taken) effect the choice. (The reader is requested to take with several grains of salt the apparent determinism of this analogy; the non-deterministic, frustratingly complex nature of group encounter makes such a mechanistic fantasy temporarily soothing, even though somewhat misleading.) A promising line of approach to this problem is provided by the "relationship formula" of Peter G. Ossorio, which is a



general paradigm of the functioning of interpersonal relationships. (Peter G. Ossorio, *Personal Communication*, 1970). With such a paradigm, the possibility of significant research would emerge.

At the present time the methodological problems of doing research on group encounter (only some of which would vanish with completion of the development proposed above) are as formidable as the issues are important. I am *not* referring to the problems common to all psychological research, with which we are all quite familiar: lack of good measures of person characteristics, comparability of "other things" which are supposed to remain equal, attributing causality to correlates, etc.; I take it that these are technical problems, which are troublesome but to which clever researchers will find adequate solutions. I refer rather to more fundamental problems which are inherent in the subject (as, indeed, they are in all problems of social innovation), the foremost of which has been termed elsewhere the problem of "lobotomized society." Putnam, 1969).

In group encounter, this problem most clearly shows up in the "Now I see that I was blind before" phenomenon. The paradigm is the religious convert who sees the error of his previous sinful ways. In group encounter the problem is apparent in the following interchange (thanks to Peter G. Ossorio for this example):

- P: "O, you really come off as a cold person."  
O: (*heatedly*) "You would too if you had been through what I've been through."  
P: "Wow, you're really angry at me, aren't you?"  
O: "No, not at all; I'm just bitter about the way my wife treats me all the time."  
P: "O, come off it. I'm sure my saying you are cold make you mad. It sure would make *me* mad. What do you think, A?"  
A: "I think you're right, P. O sure looked angry to me."  
O: "I guess you're right, I really am angry with you. I just didn't realize it at the time."

Now, we objective observers are attempting to rate this exchange for such things as "frankness," "trying to understand," "awareness of own feelings," etc. How do we rate it? Was *O* really angry at *P* to start with, or did he simply yield to group pressure in admitting it? We could take *O* aside and ask him, of course, but what do we conclude if he says, "Yes, I realize now that I really was angry at *P* to start with." After all, by the end of the exchange *O* has plenty of reason to be angry at *P*; the anger he finally "became aware of" might easily have been absent to start with.

By now this should be a familiar problem: the same performance description fitting two different actions. But in this case, choosing between the two action descriptions makes a considerable difference. On the one hand, we would say that *O* has become more aware of his true feelings, and might hope that this practice would increase this ability outside of groups. On the other hand, we would say that *O* has learned that the thing to do is assume that any strong, sudden emotion that is not clearly love is anger. Thus, he would be *less* in touch with his "true feelings" or, more precisely, the range of emotions which he is prepared to recognize in himself has been diminished. the first we count as a gain; the second as a loss.

Thus, we see that it was only for the sake of simplifying discussion that we could possibly take at face value, as we did in the previous section, the claims for beneficial change made by group encounter advocates. No amount of testimony by group participants will be sufficient to decide the issue (same problem, second verse), nor will any number of "I've seen it happen" case histories by professional leaders (ditto). We are faced with a fundamental ambiguity here, because *any* given interchange or set of interchanges of the above sort is subject to the same two equally plausible interpretations.

This is *not* to say, fortunately, that there is *no* way of finding the answer; it serves mainly to point out that observation of group encounter interaction is the wrong place to look for it, as is self-report and the testimony of group members. What is required is the full apparatus of the social engineer (Putnam, 1969). We need blue-ribbon panels who are competent to judge actions; who are familiar, for example, with the circumstances under which persons understandably might become angry, and what they understandably might do—in short, who are familiar with the range of social practices of our traditional ways of life. They must judge whether a group encounter graduate does in fact act in a way describable as "more aware of one's own feelings and wants" or "increased ability to express and receive emotions"; or whether his behavior (assuming it changes at all) shows a diminished or "group stereotype" range of feelings and wants, and he goes through the encounter motions of expressing and receiving emotions that the judges, in good faith, cannot believe he genuinely feels. Of course, the judges must have pre-group knowledge of the person; and, of course, the effects of such observations must be controlled for, etc. (Campbell and



Stanley [1966] have adequately worked out the design problems of such research.) This type of research is granted to be much more difficult than the standard self-report or "rate a few hours of type" variety, but it *is* do-able, and is capable of yielding valid and significant results of a sort which the standard-variety methodologically is not.

One final cautionary note is in order here. If the blue-ribbon panel's report on a person is positive, the situation is clear: he has benefitted from group encounter. If, however, the report is of the second sort, the situation is not so clear: the same report could stem from observing a viable new way of life that the judges were not in a position to appreciate as would stem from observing a non-viable perversion of a familiar way of life. Thus, the final judgment in this case can only be made by future generations. Considering the most common practices in our society for dealing with perceived aberration, one can only hope that the "actualizers" are allowed time to pass or fail that test.



# THE CRITERION PROBLEM IN OUTCOME OF PSYCHOTHERAPY RESEARCH

*1971*



## PREFACE

The formulation of psychopathology contained in this paper represents a minor extension and revision of a view originally formulated by Peter G. Ossorio (1966, 1970). As such, it is inextricably imbedded in the conceptual scheme articulated by Ossorio, the full explication of which has required hundreds of conceptually-dense pages. In lieu of reiterating those hundreds of pages, I shall attempt to sketch in enough of this conceptual framework to make the major implications of the formulation clear, with the explicit forewarning that a full understanding of it depends on a grasp of Ossorio's conceptual scheme *in toto*.

Research on psychotherapy has traditionally been divided into "process" and "outcome." Clearly, both types of studies are necessary; equally clearly, neither type is of much pragmatic use without the other. In particular, it takes no great degree of insight to recognize that the eventual purpose of "process" studies is to enable therapists to do better therapy, and that "better therapy" is ultimately shown to be such by outcome research. It is disconcerting, then, to recognize that recent years have seen an abundance of process and a dearth of outcome research.

One need not look far to find an explanation for this trend: outcome research is virtually impossible to do well. Indeed, a recent method article by a panel of experts states flatly: "There have been few convincing research studies on the effectiveness of the various psychotherapies." (Fiske, et al., 1970). The recommendations of this panel delineate some of the formidable methodological and practical problems facing the outcome researcher. It seems, however, that the most basic, pervasive problem is neither methodological nor practical, but rather conceptual: what Cartwright (1968) refers to as "the persistent, unresolved criterion problem" (p. 407). It is the intention of this paper to offer a formulation which makes possible a solution to this problem.

The criterion problem can be briefly stated as: What constitutes improvement in psychotherapy? At the risk of belaboring the obvious, let us stress some aspects of this problem. Therapy, if successful, must be seen as having brought about a state of affairs that is more desirable than that which obtained at the beginning of therapy. Leaving aside the methodological problem of attributing the improvement to therapy, we see that we are faced with the conceptual task of giving an account of how we are to decide that one state of affairs is more desirable (or less undesirable) than another. In short, the conceptual task posed by the "criterion problem" is no less than account of what is meant by mental health vs. mental illness, adjustment vs. maladjustment, normality vs. pathology, etc. For the sake of simplicity, let us refer to these various distinctions under the general heading of "mental health vs. pathology."

It is a commonplace observation that there have been as many definitions of mental health as there have been psychological theorists. William A. Scott, in a brilliant and scholarly paper on conceptions of normality (Scott, 1968) gives a fair sample of the range of "definitions," and proceeds to list a number of issues pertaining to them, along the way offering some excellent evaluations of the various alternative stances open on these issues (e.g., subjective vs. behavioral criteria, the unit of reference, performances vs. psychological means). Scott's analysis makes explicit some very real differences, and can serve as a standard of adequacy for any comprehensive conceptualization of psychopathology: such an account must make sense of the fact that intelligent theorists, acting in good faith, have come to apparently contradictory positions. What is required is a true synthesis which subsumes both thesis and antithesis.

In the absence of such a synthesis, outcome researchers have attempted to "make do" by adopting one of three strategies: 1) "indications" of improvement, 2) theory-specific measures, 3) "multiple measures." The first strategy has been perhaps most common, and can be seen as a less rigorous variant of the other two. Research of this type does not attempt to comprehensively assess degree of health or pathology, but rather uses "indicators" that vary empirically and/or commonsensically, in roughly the right directions. Examples of indicators are certain MMPI scales, recidivism rate among institutionalized patients, job performance, global therapist ratings, etc. Many such indicators have straightforward appeal; they differ from the other two strategies in that they are not taken to be *equivalent* to mental health. The fundamental problem here, of course, is one of validation; unless one is able to specify independently what mental health consists of, it is anybody's guess as to how well an indicator indicates it.

The second strategy, for obvious reasons, is useful only for studies within a single, well-defined school of therapy, since the criteria for health are dictated by the theory. (And the results of such studies



are summarily rejected by adherents of significantly different different schools, since they see the outcome criteria as simply irrelevant.

The "multiple measures" approach, which stems from the notion of convergent and discriminant validation (Campbell & Fiske, 1959), uses measures drawn from the concepts of several different theories, as well as whatever "indicators" seem appropriate. (It should be noted that the only formal difference between doing one outcome study with multiple measures, and doing several studies with each measure used individually, is that in the former case one can be sure that the populations and treatments are comparable, i.e. the same.) but what to do with the multiple measures one has obtained? If the intercorrelations were high, the situation would be clear enough (and one would need only one measure), but they are routinely low (Fiske et al., 1970). From the "theory specific" studies, one can safely predict that patients in client-centered therapy will score "better" on measures derived from client-centered theory than will patients in behavior therapy and *vice versa*. Which, then, has improved more? And what can one hope to gain by blindly pooling mutually contradictory results? If we take it (as seems the only plausible explanation) that the different theories focus, with less-than-perfect overlap, on different aspects of the same phenomena, the "multiple measures" approach is seen as akin to putting together a jigsaw puzzle by stacking the pieces one on top of the other. What is lacking, again, is a view of the picture which guides us in putting together the pieces.

It seems clear, then, that the current research strategies offer no promise of an acceptable resolution of the criterion problem. It is submitted that attempts to solve this problem (that is, to give an account of what is meant by mental health *vs.* pathology) have fallen short because their authors, quite properly attempting to specify their views in detail, lost track of the overall concept that they were trying to specify. Following Putman's Law ("Reification follows reduction"), the specifics which were meaningful in the context of the subsuming concept come to be taken as desirable (or undesirable in and of themselves. It is this loss of context which makes lists of desirable qualities so easily open to embarrassing counter-examples, or else to charges of vapid generality. Taking such lists and compiling them together, one is forced to agree with Scott, who concludes that "Almost any evaluation trait constitutes, from someone's perspective, a criterion of normality." (1968, p. 998).

Let us, then, offer the following formulation, stated in its most general form, which serves as a context in which any given state of affairs can be seen as "healthy" or "pathological": Psychopathology is a significant restriction of a person's ability to participate in his way of life. The "significance" of a given restriction is judged by reference to the social practices of his way of life.

It should be noted that, in the above formulation, the terms "person," "ability," "participate," "way of life," and "social practice" are used intentionally as concepts in the conceptual system articulated by Peter G. Ossorio (1966, 1970). That is, while all of these terms have common currency in both the vernacular and in psychological discourse (and, indeed, they are used here in such a way as to be consistent with such usages), it would be grossly misleading to assume that they are significantly equivalent to their common usages. (It is exactly the same error as taking "force," as used by a physicist, as equivalent to its common usage.) These terms have a precisely articulated place in Ossorio's conceptual system, and are interrelated in a well-defined manner. Thus, it is necessary to outline some of the structure in which this formula is imbedded.

Briefly (and therefore quite incompletely, Ossorio's system represents a thorough and successful attempt to accomplish what thoughtful psychologists have long requested: "a sound, consistent reformulation of the entire language referring to human behavior" (Scott, 1968, p. 998). The basic conceptual units of his system are two paradigms, one of Intentional Action (IA) and one of Person, paradigms which are inextricably interdependent. Each paradigm consists of a number of parameters, specific values of which yield specific Person or Action descriptions. It is by means of these two paradigms that a given person, and his actions, can be characterized.

The IA paradigm consists of five principal parameters, namely: Want, Know, Know How, Performance, and Achievement (W, K, KH, P, A). Among the possible values of the A parameter is an important type, in which the achievement consists of making it possible for another specific action (or one of a specific set of actions) to be engaged in. In such cases, one of the reasons for engaging in the action (W parameter) is to make it possible for this next action to be engaged in. Thus, the conceptual apparatus is established for describing interaction between persons (as well as meaningful sequences by the same person) by means of "social practices."

A social practice can be viewed as a chain of actions, in which the A parameter of action X includes making possible action X + 1 (and the W parameter of X consists of the same as A). Typically, X + 1 is one



of a specifiable set of options, and there are typically options regarding what person engages in  $X + 1$ . As is apparent, social practices of staggering complexity are readily describable in this framework.

On reflection, it is clear that it is logically necessary that some social practices, described as "intrinsic," are understandably engaged in for their own sake, with no further reasons required. While it is often reasonable to inquire as to a person's reasons for engaging in a social practice, to take it that such a move is always legitimate is to introduce an infinite regress; any proffered explanation can be greeted with, "Yes, but why does he want to do *that*?"

One further question arises: how does one choose among various optional actions at any given point? Explanations of these choices require utilization of one (or more) of four broad perspectives: Ethical, Aesthetic, Hedonic and Prudential. We can now state what is meant by a "Way of Life": a Way of Life is characterized by its social practices, and in particular by the patterning of the utilization of the aforementioned four standards.

At this point, it is hopefully clear that the above formulation of psychopathology has no *content* whatsoever, in the sense that no particular state, belief, behavior, what have you, is promoted nor proscribed. Rather, it is an attempt to state, succinctly but completely, the general rule of which any specific judgment regarding pathology is an instance. In the most general sense, it is what we *mean* by psychopathology.

An outstanding virtue of this approach is that, being contentless, it is therefore culture-free and useful in any context. This neatly resolves the seeming paradox of the repeated observation that what was adaptive yesterday is pathological today, that America's neurosis is Samoa's virtue. The meaning of a given behavior can only be properly assessed in the larger context of the person's way of life, but the rule for deciding that *this* behavior is pathological in *this* context is the same regardless of context. A parallel can be drawn here with the familiar physics concept of "relationships which are constant across transformations."

As previously stated, this formulation is taken to be a synthesis which subsumes both thesis and antithesis. Let us consider (drawing heavily from Scott, 1968) some of the issues on which theorists have taken opposing or contradictory stances, and demonstrate how they make sense in light of this formulation. A side-benefit of this exercise will hopefully be to make the formulation increasingly clear, since one acquires mastery of a rule primarily by seeing how it is used.

Perhaps the most intriguing aspect of the paradigm of psychopathology is its conceptual bridging of the person-environment (person-culture) dichotomy. This artificial split is most clearly troublesome in trying to define the "locus" of pathology: is the person "pathological," or is the pathology inherent in his circumstances? Are the mentally-ill "predisposed," or must all pathology be "precipitated?" As will be seen to be the case with many of the issues to be discussed, the present formulation does not show one view to be correct and the other erroneous, but rather explicitly provides a framework for showing that the "opposing" views are straightforwardly compatible (or else, both slightly off the mark). In this instance, it should be clear that, in any given case, either view or both may be correct. A person's ability to participate in his way of life may be restricted because of some personal shortcoming (e.g., alienation—he doesn't appreciate the point of intrinsic practices; mental deficiency; conflicting reasons for acting, etc.), or because opportunities for participation are insufficient (e.g., loss of a loved one, devaluation of important social practices, etc.). In this light, we can see that an observation such as "Mental illness increases in times of rapid social transition" is not a statement of discovered fact, but rather a tautology, akin to saying "Green objects reflect light of so-and-so wavelength." That is, if rapid social transition does *not* entail significant restriction of person's ability to engage in their familiar ways of life, we would be hard put to explain why we were calling it "rapid social transition."

A second issue centers around commonness vs. desirability as proper criteria for normality. Scott correctly states that desirability is the more apt criterion, but goes on to point out the "parochial" nature of such judgments. The confusion stems from a lack of recognition of the paradigm-case methodology inherent in judgments of pathology; in the paradigm case, the most common (trait, value, action, what have you) is the most desirable, and both are what it takes to straightforwardly participate in a way of life. However, neither is adequate *per se* as a criterion of "mental health *vs.* pathology"; one can easily construct plausible examples where both the common and the desirable (both, of course, in terms of a given way of life) represent restrictions in a person's ability to participate.

A factor contributing to most of the differences of opinion regarding psychopathology is a properly scientific desire to establish absolute criteria for mental health (or therapeutic improvement). Many therapists, however, including the behavior modifiers, argue that since each person has a different history



and set of problems, the proper course is to establish and evaluate individual goals for treatment. In the present paradigm, it seems clear that specific absolute criteria are unworkable as measures (rather than mere indicators) of pathology, since that judgment requires the context of specific ways of life. However, this does not mean that our criteria are subjective or arbitrary; in the context of a given way of life the criteria *are* absolute and shared (therefore objective). Some remarks on the methodology required by this formulation will be found in the final portion of this paper.

Scott (1968) states that physicians typically see illness as "transitory and confined to a smaller locus than the whole organism," whereas "psychiatrists are likely to conceive of the illnesses they treat as both chronic and pervasive" (p. 983). Like physicians, a growing number of therapists (e.g., Caplan 1964; Wolpe 1969) prefer to conceive of pathology in terms of specific disorders, limited in scope, which frequently do not require evidence of chronicity or a long etiology. Again, neither side is ruled out by the present formulation; the significance of a given set of restrictions does not conceptually depend on such factors as chronicity or pervasiveness, but rather on the significance it has in the actual way of life.

One could go on at some length raising and discussing such issues as the above, but it would seem that enough has been said to indicate the nature of the proffered paradigm. Let us instead conclude by examining some of the implications of this discussion for resolution of the criterion problem in outcome research.

Considering the complexity of the task of rigorously specifying the significant ways in which a person's ability to participate in his way of life can be restricted, and the number of possible ways of life that one must take into account, it seems clear that a methodology that radically differs from the current variety is required. One such methodology, which would allow rigorous outcome research to be done without explicitly specifying ways of life in their full complexity, has been extensively discussed elsewhere as the "blue-ribbon panel" approach (Putman 1969, 1970; Ossorio, 1970).

This approach, briefly, depends on recognition of the conceptual difference between "ability" and "knowledge"; that is, persons are demonstrably able to reliably, successfully engage in actions without being able to completely specify how they do it. (Good psychotherapy is a cogent example.) There is nothing mysterious or mystical about this notion; it is a straightforward recognition of the difference between the two concepts. We propose, then, that the best procedure at this point would be to utilize a panel of judges who, on the basis of a wide variety of information ("multiple measures") would decide the degree to which a patient's ability to participate is restricted. It is submitted that this procedure circumvents the objections raised earlier to the "multiple methods" strategy, by utilizing persons who are straightforwardly familiar with the ways in which the pieces fit together.

It should be noted that the prime requirement for membership on the panel is a thorough familiarity with the social practices of the relevant ways of life (analogous to the anthropological notion of "cultural exemplars"). Thus, behavioral specialists, who tend to share a set of the same values and practices that differ somewhat from the society at large, would properly comprise only a portion of the membership. Further, the "measures" used to provide information to the panel should be worked out in conference with the panel beforehand, to maximize the probability that the information provided will be adequate for the purposes of making the required judgments.

Obviously, a number of objections can be raised to this procedure; different panels would come up with somewhat different judgments about the same person, one strongly argumentative member might have a disproportionate influence on negotiations over differing judgments, etc. Further, the panel would be ineffective in judging a way of life that they were not in a position to appreciate; this, however, is true of *all* evaluative procedures, and is more properly seen as a fundamental ambiguity than a methodological problem (see Putman, 1970, for an extended discussion of this problem.) It is submitted that careful attention to procedure would minimize the effects of differing panel compositions; perhaps the most cogent answer to such objections, however, is to point out once again that the alternatives to this procedure, whatever other virtues they may possess, have one common drawback that the blue-ribbon panel approach does not: their results cannot be taken as straightforward measures of psychopathology.

Let us conclude this paper by suggesting a practical line of research that might result in having our cake and eating it too. There is good reason to believe (e.g., Mitchell, 1968; Putman, 1969b) that computers can be programmed to accurately simulate the judgments of persons, even on complex tasks. One could observe the operation of a blue-ribbon panel (paying particular attention to the standards to which members appeal in negotiating differing judgments of the same person), with the intention of discovering crudely the ways in which the panel utilizes the information it has in arriving at a decision. A computer program could then be written which simulates this procedure. Relevant research indicates



that one can expect "substantial agreement" in the judgments of differently composed panels (Scott, 1968); the above-cited research indicates that it is not unreasonable to expect a carefully-designed computer program to generate judgments which correlate at least as well with any given panel as the panel correlate among themselves. This would open the possibility of outcome studies in which the judgments of improvement were as reliable and comparable as the scales used to provide information; coupled with standard measures, the results would be directly comparable. With such a standard procedure, one is finally in a position to approach the question "Does therapy *X* do a better job than therapy *Y* with such-and-such a population?" with some confidence that it can be, at least partially, answered.