

International Mental Health Research Newsletter Page Concerning Unrealized Factors in International Attitudes and their Bearing on International Health

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Research Suggestions

It seems to me that a study of this kind gives a few suggestions, as have other team studies on the cultural patterns and personality characteristics of any given group or subgroup, on how to study the mental health of one group, and to make a comparison of different groups. The following suggest what to look for and ask about:

1. The predominant personality characteristics: a) the conscious ones that the group values; and b) the more pronounced unconscious, motivational forces, conflictual or mutually reinforcing.

2. The relationship between a) and b); e.g. in Danio Village and Montserrat generally, the strong independence value was a defence against oral dependence.

3. Does another community on other Caribbean islands or on other isolated islands and villages anywhere in the world— (I am not suggesting that Danio Village be compared to New York or London) have similar or dissimilar predominant attitudes, defences, and unconscious motivations?

4. What are the external pressures on the community from the government, churches, other communities, outsiders, generally, or external communications media doing to a) and b) under 1., above? For example, in Danio Village the “government” was reinforcing dependence by thwarting means for independence not only economically but by attitudes such as apparently acting as scolding or rejecting parents, or at least being seen as such by members of the community.

Modern psychology finds itself in a curious position concerning our understanding of the different major races. The old conception of the inherent superiority of individuals of certain races, over those of others, has been disproved, both by massive test results and by the achievements of individuals of those races formerly regarded as having inherently less potential ability. At the same time social anthropology continually confronts us with the existence and diversity of cultural patterns.

5. What are the already present attitudinal trends both conscious and unconscious that are “psychotherapeutic” or potentially so? In the case of Danio Village, with an occasional exception, there was tolerance for and understanding of individual deviant behaviour and general encouragement of individuals toward

mental health as well as being able potentially but, yet, consciously, to marshal positive feeling toward others.

6. As we know, many communities are much less tolerant of deviant behaviour, and have developed a paranoid, suspicious defence against others (e.g., the island of Dobu). What factors make for these differences?

We do know that different cultures draw upon and emphasize differently the potential resources of the human organism including needs and feelings. What we want to study is that which one type of personality normal in one culture but deviant and abnormal in another and those elements in both these cultures that can be considered basic for the mental health of the given community, and which can be employed in helping the members of the community adapt to and cope with the problems of their changing world. I feel that any two social scientists, one looking at the cultural regularities, the other at the more latent conflictual motivations of a group can, without too much time or difficulty, get a fairly clear picture of the aspects of a group that make for mental health or pathology; and 'what is found out in one group can be a help in studying and understanding other groups.

From what elements in human personality, the question needs to be put, do these differences arise? and what is their importance? How can this be studied? What tools have we at hand with which such an enquiry can be conducted?

It is a commonplace of the intensive study of individuals in any given country, that the forces which make for integration or disintegration are often largely outside conscious awareness. Can the same be true for those groups of individuals sharing a common way of life, that we term Nations? If such be possible, if it might be that some of the forces bringing about a shared and common way of living, with its impingement on the individual, are unknown to the people themselves composing such a group, how can such a possibility be investigated?

A major difficulty arises here. It is through the known that the unknown is sought. As our work is at present organized enquiry into the psychological, psychiatric, economic, and social aspects of a country must be conducted through application of principles already established. From such enquiry emerge comparable relativities within the area in which those principles apply. Much that is the core of our understanding of each other has come from these enquiries. Yet something eludes us. With all of our massive knowledge of factors and of structure, the differences between individuals in any two countries or in a number of countries, remain obscure.

Can it be possible that what is true for the individual in regard to his consciousness of himself and his unaware- ness of much of what in fact goes to make him a living personality, can be true for nations also? Might it be that in all large collections of human beings who share a common way of life, powerful factors exist which, because they are all-pervasive and exert upon all individuals a formative effect, are invisible and unrealized?

Supposing for the moment that such a possibility exists, how could it be investigated? How could the nature of such forces, supposing they exist, be discovered? Here principles already agreed upon are inapplicable. For such an investigation to produce results, something is needed which can be used by all and which will appeal to all ages, from all types of temperament, and all degrees of intelligence.

Three Essential Conditions of Research

The first, in regard to the individual; that the tool he is to use should be new to him, not needing skill, and its use not regulated either by rule or by previous experience.

The second, about the tool itself; that it be of a fixed and 'absolute' nature, incapable of difference of assessment by itself; so that all responses obtained with it are strictly and directly comparable with one another.

The third, relating to the examiner; that there be no existing rules or comparable experiences to make a foundation for analysis, but that evaluation of the results proceed freshly from the best spontaneous judgement of which he is capable.

Two such tools have come out of my many years work in the study of individuals, some disturbed, many not, of different countries. These tools have now been in use for a sufficient period of time for it to be possible to see the general lines of knowledge about individuals that they are capable of bringing to us. They bear my name, much to my dislike. This is in order to describe them accurately and to assign to no one but myself the responsibility for their design and construction. These tools are The Lowenfeld Mosaic Test and the Lowenfeld Kaleidoblocs.

The Lowenfeld Mosaic Test is a collection of flat coloured pieces in geometrical shapes which interrelate with one another and of which there are six colours of each shape and sufficient numbers of each shape in each colour to make fundamental geometric patterns. The pieces are so disposed in the box as to give no suggestion to the person using it. This test has now been used for some thirty years in a number of countries, and sufficient evidence and experience has been gathered to suggest a possibility of bringing new insight into factors as yet unevaluated in human personality.

The second of these tools, Kaleidoblocs, was devised in order to make available three-dimensional qualities and mathematical interrelations which are sympathetic to the preoccupations of our time. This tool is still young in development but steadily opening up new avenues of thought and investigation. Each of these tools is presented to the subject with the same instructions: — 'here are ... then follow brief description of the materials, couched in terminology suitable to the subject ... What I want you to do is to use as many or as few of these as you like and to do with them whatever you wish. Tell me when you are finished'. With the L.M.T. there is added at 'on this board' (or tray). This is because an essential part of the use of the pieces in the L.M.T. is that the response be carried out with- in a restricted and uniform framework. This frame must have two unequal dimensions to allow the

subject to have a choice of position, and should be covered with an exactly fitting piece of paper to allow of rapid recording. Work with the L.M.T. in the U.S.A and Europe has shown the importance of this limitation of space.

The essential value of the L.M.T. is that it is independent of language. It is indefinitely repeatable by the same individual if desired, and the recorded designs remain as direct evidence of the response of the individual concerned and can be placed in any series or sequence of other designs and be contrasted, compared, analysed and examined, in any way desired and by any number of independent observers. If they can be obtained without leading questions, the comments of the maker on his design add to the richness of the result, but the design has solid value in itself.

Results with the Mosaic Test

Two main types of results have emerged from work with the L.M.T. in Europe and the U.S.A. The first is that while it is possible to make certain generalizations about designs, what emerges from each response is a kind of picture of the self-in-action, which, when analysed by an examiner of experience, is accepted by the subject as true of him- self. Recently, for instance, the L.M.T. has been used for work in marriage counselling with most encouraging results.

The second type exemplifies the possibility I spoke of earlier, the emergence of the totally unexpected. It is the experience of those who have studied the responses made by comparable groups on both sides of the Atlantic, and at the same time taken careful note of the spontaneous assessments made of similar and dissimilar designs by members of European and American psychological teams, that aspects occur in both designs and assessments that no previous experience would lead one to expect, and some occur to which we have as yet no clue. There are no a priori rules by which anything in the L.M.T. or Kaleidoblocs should be evaluated and nothing with which it can be compared. Criteria therefore, have to be evolved through study of what in fact happens. Those described in my book, and those that my colleagues and I had made in Britain, seemed to be sound and drawn from considerations that seemed obvious. When, however, I had the opportunity to study collections made in the USA. and to discuss them with eminent workers in that country, it became clear that quite different criteria were evolving. Besides such highly developed societies as those of Europe and the U.S.A., the L.M.T. has been used extensively by Dr. Margaret Mead and her team in New Guinea and by Dr. Abel and Dr. Metraux in the Caribbean. As has been pointed out in the final chapter of my book on the test * the description and analysis by the member of Dr. Mead's team who carried out this part of the work, of a design by a prominent Manus subject, notes characteristics which I would have missed, and looks for qualities that I would not have thought of. At the same time some of those qualities which seem central to me were not considered by her at all.

A recent publication by Ilg and Bates-Ames on Mosaics of American children, which describes the responses of 1500 children studied at the Gesell Institute, illustrates this point well. In a foreword to the book I have drawn attention to the types of response which appear frequently in this collection of American children, but

infrequently, if at all, in similar collection of English children. Unfortunately, there is no parallel European collection with which these can be matched so that valid conclusions can be drawn. Explanations of these differences in response and in methods of classification can therefore only be tentative. Sufficient definite differences, however, occur to raise queries of considerable interest.

Here then is a tool by means of which some of those qualities of a stable culture, which are invisible to the members of that culture because they are shared by all, can be brought to expression and made available for study. It is possible that organized research on these lines might bring into view, factors of real international importance, both in their impact upon individuals living in that culture and also in their ability to act as factors making for misunderstanding in international discussions.

Inter-National Research

If any such fresh insight is to be gained, experience suggests that this will only happen if the research is planned and carried out with the utmost rigor and with very careful attention to the definition of all terms used.

In a field as new as this, it is of major importance that all aspects of the enquiry be kept in mind. That is to say, that it should be planned to find answers to the three following queries:

a) Which types of design occur most frequently in the cultures being studied? Do comparable subjects living in these different cultures make similar responses, both qualitatively and quantitatively? Or are there characteristics discernable in the responses from one culture which do not occur in a comparable series from other (or one other) cultures? If so, in what way have these to be taken into account in assessing the responses of single individuals coming from that culture?

b) Do investigators coming from different cultures look for different qualities in the responses they are evaluating? If so, can we suggest how these differences arise and what may be their significance?

c) What part is played by the board upon which the designs are made, its presence, its shape, size and position? It is work in Africa which has put a spot light upon this question, since in a very large piece of work done in East Africa it appeared likely that the oblong upright position of the board immediately represented to the subjects the conventional framework of Western windows, books, papers, pictures etc., and appeared therefore to call for the type of response associated in their experience with their work in Western type schools and colleges; i.e. something learned from outside and not spontaneous to themselves at all.

Research which would be aimed at gaining information on all these points might, perhaps, be planned as follows:

1. An agreement to be reached between research workers with suitable training and experience, in two or more countries, such as U.S.A., Japan, and perhaps Brazil with ' parallel lines of industrial development, as to the type and numbers of sub- jects to be selected for study. These could come from any homogenous group of people, textile workers, business secretaries, housewives of comparable economic status, farm workers, etc.; any group whose general background can be taken as similar.
2. Two responses should be obtained from each subject, if possible, within a short space of time (to eliminate chance influences of mood or temporary preoccupation).
3. Each group of recorded responses should be analysed by the investigators of his country, without reference to the other investigators. This can be done with or without the help of my book on the L.M.T.; but if with, then the degree and nature of the cooperation with it should be clearly stated.
4. As soon as this analysis is complete the recorded responses (or carbon copies of them which can be obtained easily at the time of recording) should be sent without the analysis to the investigators of one of the other countries and this repeated until two analyses have been obtained on each set of responses (or three if three countries are cooperating).
5. When all analyses are complete the following should be undertaken:
 - i. The criteria used by each group of investigators should be compared, differences analysed and discusses and suitable inferences drawn.
 - ii. The analyses, factual and statistical, made by each, of each collection should be compared in detail and the following established:
 - a) Are there any types of response in any of those collections which do not occur, or occur very infrequently in the others?
 - b) Are there general characteristics traceable in the majority of responses in any one collection which do not obtain m' the other collections?
 - c) Do the differences in criteria (If any) between the investigation of different cultures materially affect the assessment of individual patterns in any of the groups?

For example, concerning this latter point, at a first glance certain commonly occurring designs in European collections (which, according to European criteria rate highly) were judged by American observers as 'limited, obsessional and neurotic', and vice versa, with American responses assessed by European standards.

A second piece of research could then, very profitably, be planned where the designs made by agreedly neurotic or psychotic subjects could be assessed against the background of the results obtained by the first enquiry. Such work would bring us

fresh insight into the interactions between personal and cultural factors in the production of neurosis and possibly of psychoses. It would also widen our understanding of the effect of cultural presuppositions upon the design of critical criteria in psycho- logical and psychiatric research and make for profounder international understanding.