THEORETICAL ORIENTATION OF UNDERGRADUATE PSYCHOLOGY STUDENTS: A HYPOTHESIS AND REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

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Theoretical Orientation of Undergraduate Psychology Students: A Hypothesis and Review of the Literature

The study of the field of psychology began with Robert Watson. Since Watson began this introspection in 1917, many areas of the field have been investigated. One question that remains is why do therapists end up in different orientations? Is the difference based in education or personality? Authors have suggested both (Cummings & Lucchese, 1978, Ellis, 1978, Walton, 1984). If orientation is based in personality, when does differentiation begin; graduate school? at an undergraduate level?

Much of the research investigated suggests that theoretical orientation is indeed based in personality (Lidner, 1978, Keinan, Almagor & Ben-Porath, 1989, Strupp, 1984). This differentiation has also been investigated in graduate students and undergraduates (Mallinckrodt, Gelso & Royalty, 1990, Ross, 1984). In undergraduates, a preference for certain counseling styles can be determined. Since the education of undergraduates is not theory-based enough to support the preferences, the determining factor must lie in personality types, and research supports this hypothesis (Hart, 1982, Lydon, 1989). This hypothesis needs further investigation and with a questionnaire similar to the Theoretical Orientation Survey created by Coan (1979), the preliminary orientation of the undergraduate could be observed.
The question of the influence of a particular therapist's personality on his/her professional career is still under debate. How much weight does the personality have on theoretical orientation, technique or quality of the therapist? While the research on the subject is far from extensive, most of the results seem to favor the side of personality control. Not all authors agree.

Cummins and Lucchese (1978) disagree. They argue that theoretical orientation is a factor of where one ends up in graduate school. Factors that control graduate school placement have nothing to do with personality, but rather location and undergraduate grades. These accidental factors may result in a selection of a school whose main school of thought is inconsistent or in conflict with the personality of the student. "Sources of influence over one's orientation seem to lie with exposure to primary clinical experiences in practicum training and one's interface with clinical models and therapy supervision. (p. 327).

Krasner and Houts (1984) contend that the evidence is inconclusive at best. They conducted a survey concerning dissimilarities between behaviorists and non-behaviorists and determined that beyond the obvious discrepancies in theory, no distinctions in personal or sociocultural values existed.
Most of the evidence concerned with the subject supports the idea that personality is influential in determining theoretical orientation. The studies conducted are primarily correlation studies or self-reports of personality types, but they tend to agree with one another.

The Winter, 1984, issue of Psychotherapy: Theory, Research and Practice contains a large discussion among professionals concerning the issue at hand. One of the articles contained within this issue was written by Hans H. Strupp of Vanderbilt University. His contention was that personality played an important role in the technique and quality of the therapist. Native talent in such technical skills as empathic ability and the ability to identify neurotic patterns made one a better therapist.

In the same issue, Lidner discusses the importance of personality in choosing a field of specialty. He contends that the choice of orientation is important in releasing transference pressures.

Albert Ellis, in the same issue, agrees with Lidner that personality is important in determining orientation. Personality attracts a therapist to the theory. For example, he suggests that therapists who are risk-takers and are willing to be confrontational and philosophical would be effectiverational-emotive therapists.

Several researchers have used self-report measures to assess personality type. One such work was written by Sullivan-3
Keinan, Almagor and Ben-Porath (1989). These authors discuss the differences between psychoanalysts, behaviorists, and eclectics. They found support for their hypothesis with such results as behaviorists reporting themselves as being more assertive, practical, and more inclined to take the initiative. Psychotherapists reported themselves as being more insightful. Despite the differences between the groups, none of the scientists questioned considered themselves to be typical of a therapist in their field.

Psychoanalysts and behaviorists were also the focus of the study conducted by Walton in 1984. Rational-Emotive therapists and eclectics were also included. Walton's results stated that psychoanalytic therapists view themselves as complex and serious, RET's are simple and humorous, behaviorists do not place emphasis on intuition, and eclectics scored lower on rationality scales.

Again, behaviorists and psychoanalysts were the focus of a study conducted by Tremblay, Herron and Schultz. This time the study included humanists. The results agreed with the others discusses, with statements such as humanists are more optimistic about the nature of man.

In the study of psychologists personalities, not all research has been conducted on professionals practicing in the field-some has been done on graduate students. If the research on professionals seems sketchy, then the studies including graduate students are more so. The results obtained from studies are at best inconclusive. Of the two included in this report, one study supports the
idea of a difference between groups (Mallinckrodt, Gelso & Royalty, 1990), the other contends only that there may be a difference (Zook & Sipps, 1987).

Mallinckrodt, Gelso and Royalty conducted an experiment in which grad students were assessed of their preferences for research based on their styles of personality according to the Holland personality types. They found a significant correlation between Investigative and Investigative/Artistic personality types and interest in research. They state that personality is a better predictor of interest in research than training environment and person-environment interactions.

Zook and Sipps hypothesized that counselors in training would be more manipulative according to the Maciavellianism scale since counseling offered more opportunities for one-to-one interactions where others could be influenced. However, they results they obtained were just the opposite. Counseling psychology students were reported to be less manipulative than their behaviorists counterparts. As a result, these authors hesitate to suggest that the differences between therapists is inherent.

The question of whether or not these differences are apparent in undergraduates may be a factor of the education he/she has received. The education of the undergraduate psychology student is most often very general. The curriculum
includes basic courses and introductory courses. Theory, when included, is rarely taught but talked about.

Ross (1984) describes a curriculum wherein no theory is offered at all. A basic psychology major includes courses about tests and measurements, statistics, and experimental psychology and a variety of upper-level courses centered around certain themes. No theory course or even a course in history and systems is required.

Holloway (1983) describes a different curriculum, this one including a history and systems course as a requirement.

Williams and Kulpke (1986) describe a liberal arts curriculum in which psychology and literature are intertwined in one course. The literature is used to psychologically analyze human behavior and the psychology theory is used to critically analyze literary works.

Enns (1989) has some suggestions for improving theory courses including recommendations for the teaching of feminist theory and complementing Freudian theory with theory by Karen Horney and other women theorists.

Whether it is specifically taught or not, it is at the undergraduate level that most students begin to understand the differences between schools of thought and to formulate preferences for one or another.

Undergraduates are often used as subjects in psychological experiments and this instance is no different. According
to the two reports surveyed, preference for a particular counseling style or theoretical orientation has a basis in personality.

Lyddon (1989), in his study of undergraduates, found a relationship between the students' dominant way of knowing and a preference for one of three counseling approaches. The three approaches to knowing are rationalism, empiricism and metamorphism. For example, a student whose prominent way of knowing is rationalism would prefer a rationalist therapy because it is more similar to the coping skills he/she uses in everyday situations.

Hart (1982) used the Myers-Briggs as an indicator of what he called orienting attitudes based on Watson's prescriptions. He found a difference between Objectivists and Endogenists. Objectivists are characterized by a Myers-Briggs typology of introversion, intuition, feeling, and perceiving. Also using Richard Coan's Theoretical Orientation Survey, a preference for theoretical orientation can be predicted by using the Myers-Briggs typology.

The basis of much of the research conducted concerning theoretical orientation cites one or both of two major works written by Robert Watson and Richard Coan.

In 1967, a groundbreaking article was published by Robert Watson. Watson compiled a list of prescriptions he felt were the basis for the ideas and research in the field of psychology.
Based on these prescriptions are the ideas which make up the different schools of psychology, though each will have a different emphasis.

Many researchers have used these prescriptions to form diagnostic criteria to identify adherents to the separate schools of psychology.

Taking this idea one step further, Richard Coan developed the Theoretical Orientation Scale (TOS). Based on 34 variables, the scale acts as a reliable differentiator between therapists according to orientation.

A questionnaire based on Coan's 34 variables is included in this report. The questionnaire consists of simply rewording Coan's list into questions. The questions have not been tested for reliability and the questionnaire has not been tested for confounding variables. A questionnaire such as the one submitted could be administered to undergraduates with reasonable ease.

According to the information reviewed, certain presumptions can be made:

(1) There is a difference in theoretical orientation among professional psychologists. This difference is either a result of education or personality. Although the contention has been made that orientation is an accident of placement (Cummings & Lucchese 1978), most researchers feel that personality plays the more important role (Ellis, 1978; Walton, 1984).

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At an undergraduate level, students of psychology do not have the education to support a theoretical orientation (Ross, 1984; Holloway, 1983; Williams & Kolupke, 1986; Enns, 1989).

However, research has supported the notion that undergraduates do have a preference for particular theories. This discovery lends weight to the idea that personality factors are determinant of theoretical orientation; and to my hypothesis that this differentiation can be observed as early as at an undergraduate level.

A questionnaire such as the TOS or any derivative of it given in conjunction with personality scales should produce significant correlations.

Furthermore, I suggest that if the undergraduates were separated into groups of therapists-to-be according to orientation, the personality characteristics associated with the group would have counterparts in groups of professional therapists already subscribing to that orientation.

While no study like that which I have described has yet been performed, I predict results in line with the hypothesis proposed. Based on support found in the literature, I have confidence in the hypothesis. Evidence in articles support the idea that theoretical orientation in professionals is based in personality. A similar trend has been discovered among undergraduates with a correlation between personality...
types and a preference for counseling styles.

More research needs to be done in this area. Psychologists do not often make themselves the subject of their research, and as a result, the evidence in this area is surely lacking.

If perhaps the theoretical orientation of psychologists is based in personality, this discovery could have a profound effect on psychology curriculum in Universities. The student's orientation could be determined by means of personality measures and the education of that student could be focused on the orientation to which he/she is predisposed.

I am not suggesting that this would necessarily be a wise thing to do, but the implications should be considered.
SAMPLE QUESTIONNAIRE

1. Social Security #
2. Year in school FR SO JR SR
3. Are you a psychology major? Y N
4. Do you plan on continuing in the field of psychology? Y N
5. What is your primary area of interest? (circle one)
   - Clinical
   - Behavioral
   - Counseling
   - Personality
   - Developmental
   - Industrial
   - Educational
   - Social
   - Learning
   - Motivation
   - Physiological
   - Perception
   - Cognition
   - Animal
   - Experimental
   - Other

   To what extent are the following important or influential in the study of behavior? (1-not important, 4-neutral, 7-very)
6. Learning 1 2 3 4 5 6 7
7. Sensation and perception 1 2 3 4 5 6 7
8. Motivation 1 2 3 4 5 6 7
9. Conscious processes, conscious experience 1 2 3 4 5 6 7
10. Observable behavior, action, performance 1 2 3 4 5 6 7
11. Unconscious processes 1 2 3 4 5 6 7
12. Emotion 1 2 3 4 5 6 7
13. Self-concept, self-perception 1 2 3 4 5 6 7
14. Biological determinants of behavior 1 2 3 4 5 6 7
15. Social determinants of behavior 1 2 3 4 5 6 7
16. Heredity, constitution 1 2 3 4 5 6 7
17. Influence of past experience on behavior 1 2 3 4 5 6 7
18. Immediate external determinants of behavior 1 2 3 4 5 6 7
19. Total organization of behavior 1 2 3 4 5 6 7
20. Uniqueness of individual personality 1 2 3 4 5 6 7
21. Persistent traits of individuals 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

   How important are the following methods of data collection?
22. Introspective reports of experience 1 2 3 4 5 6 7
23. Rigidly controlled experimentation 1 2 3 4 5 6 7
24. Statistical analysis 1 2 3 4 5 6 7
25. "Armchair" speculation 1 2 3 4 5 6 7
26. Naturalistic observation 1 2 3 4 5 6 7
To what extent do you agree with the following? (1—strongly disagree, 4—neutral, 7—strongly agree)

27. Voluntarism, viewpoint that volition or will is a central feature in mental processes and constitutes an independent influence on behavior.

28. Determinism, viewpoint that behavior is completely explicable in terms of antecedent events.

29. Finalism, teleology, viewpoint that ends or purposes have a causal influence on behavior.

30. Mechanism, viewpoint that all activities and processes are completely explicable in terms of the laws of physical mechanics.

To what extent do you agree with the use of the following? (1—should never be used, 7—should be used exclusively)

31. Operational definition of concepts

32. Elementarism, atomism, description or analysis of events in terms of relatively small units.

33. Holism, totalism, treatment of phenomena in relatively global terms.

34. Nomothetic approach, formulation of general principles.

35. Normative generalization, statistical generalizations about groups of people.

36. Quantitative formulation of principles and relationships.

37. Quantitative description of individuals and behavior.

38. Conceptualization in terms of hypothetical entities.

39. Use of analogies based on physical systems.
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