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AFFECT, PERSON-PERCEPTION, AND BEHAVIOR

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Affect, Person-Perception, and Behavior

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Fundamentally affect is a construct referring to the neuro-physiological process underlying what we commonly term feelings and emotions. Probably our best bet for measuring first-order behavioral manifestations of affect is to record activities regulated by the autonomic nervous system. Perhaps because of this, the current surge of interest in affect (Arnold, 1960; Fiske & Maddi, 1961; Tomkins, 1960) centers in large measure around its physiological aspects. Even in the very recent Theories of the Mind (1962), there are chapters on "mind as emotion" that reflect strong physiological preoccupation. Yet, the real challenge to psychologists is to understand and be able to predict the role of affect in higher order behavior-- interpersonal perception, intellectual activity, effective functioning. The present paper is an effort to execute one rise to this challenge.

There are two classes of affect--positive and negative or pleasant and unpleasant. Within each class there are many subtle gradations of tone and intensity--feelings and emotions.

Although affect is a neuro-physical process, it is dynamically related to all ego-relevant behavior; it is always present and always inhibiting or facilitating to some degree. Much of the time it is an ideo-affective-physical process; that is, much of the time affectivity has a cognitive element.

There may be times when there are almost purely affective states or processes (esthetic, religious, sexual) and these may serve extremely useful and constructive purposes in the life of the individual. However, the affective processes underlying most of our day to day behavior have a cognitive element; but, paradoxically, the moment we cognize or label the affect we tend to change it (Dollard & Miller, 1950; Rogers, 1951). Such change influences the ongoing behavior to some degree.

Some of the most important affects or affective processes are quite subtle in nature. They are the tensions (or moods) that sustain positive perceptions and constructive behavior, not the dramatic disruptive affects that are seen in excess in pathological states. Whether these subtle affects can be reliably measured and differentiated by ordinary autonomic recording devices is problematic (Mack and Izard, 1963). Nevertheless, there are any number of stimuli that can be used to evoke behavior that can be reasonably expected to derive from affect and hence furnish an index of affective processes. A uniquely important class of such stimuli is people, which explains our predilection for person perception.

Central to any psychological theory is the problem of personality or behavior change. I should like to consider two interlocking notions relating to affect and person perception that bear on the problem of behavior change: 1) change a person's feelings toward you and you change the person's perceptions of you, 2) change a person's perceptions of you and you change his feelings towards you.

It is entirely possible that notions 1 and 2 are the same. The question of which comes first, change in feeling toward a person or change in perception of a person, may be a chicken-or-egg type question. These two principles concerning feelings and perceptions are actually concerned with a single though highly complex process. The basic element in this process is the perceptual-affective response, evoked by all stimuli that are meaningful to the responding organism. We shall maintain that the perceptual-affective response is, in terms of psychodynamics, essentially a unitary process. In relating to another person, percept and affect go hand in hand. Thus, it is reasonable to speak of interpersonal affect, meaning by this, affect for which another person or person-perception is the stimulus, or perhaps more accurately, the cue producing response.

One could certainly make a strong argument that perception precedes affect. How can there be arousal, affect, or feeling without the data furnished by perception. True, before an affective response to a given person (or object) can be generated there must be sensory input. But the raw data of the sensory-perceptual act immediately influences and is influenced by affective dispositional tendencies. These tendencies, like all personality characteristics, are products of the interaction between genetically given neuro-physical systems and experience. "Interpretation" of, or reaction to, the raw data of perception always contains an affective element. Person perception without affect, if such a thing occurs at all, is of little consequence. Stated differently, affect or affective

predispositions furnish the frame of reference within which perception is interpreted and responded to. Our feelings tell us how important a perception is, not vice versa. With regard to significant, self-relevant stimuli, it is not our perception that tells us how to feel; rather, it is our affect or feeling that tells us how to perceive. I recognize the danger of losing my case by over-stating it. So, let's look for a moment at a special case of the general principle implied in this statement of relationship between affect and perception. Perhaps we could more readily agree to the proposition that affect or an affective process is a critical determinant of selective perception (Izard & Jennings, 1963). In selective perception, affect might be considered the servomechanism or regulator that puts the personal bias or the idiosyncratic stamp on the perceptual process. But in view of our belief in the uniqueness of personality and the ubiquity of individual differences we might say: all perception has a personal bias, is to some degree idiosyncratic, and thus selective. Then, to some extent, all perception is regulated by affect.

Affect as a Resource

I believe one way of furthering our understanding of the role of affect in perception and behavior is to consider it as a resource much as we consider intelligence as a resource. Affect and intelligence have much the same relationship as affect and perception. Intellect without affect is of no avail. As with perception, affect serves as a regulator in intellectual functioning (Wehmer & Izard, 1962). Affect serves a selective function in

intellectual processes. It gives direction and purpose to intellectual activity, keeps us from being "scatter-brained."

Just as there are individual differences in intelligence, so are there individual differences in affect. We have come to think of intelligence as made up of a general ("g") factor and a number of specific (s) factors. I believe the same to be true for affect and feelings. Thus, as there are people who are intellectually dull there are people who have dull affect. Just as there are individuals with intellectual deficits, there are individuals with affective deficits. Just as individuals differ in the number and quality of specific intellectual factors they possess, so do people differ in their capacity to differentiate affect into more specific feelings and emotions. As with intelligence, we inherit affective capacity and learning and experience greatly influence how it is developed and utilized.

Affect and Adjustment

Psychopathology is basically a disorder of affect. The traditional classification of thinking disorders and affective disorders constitute a false dichotomy. Thinking disorders such as schizophrenia and affective disorders such as manic-depressive psychoses are phenotypical classifications based more on symptom description than system dynamics. A psychotic is a person who has been shaken loose from his affective moorings. His interpersonal affective ties have been broken or disarranged and his self-related positive affect or self-esteem is under dire threat (Izard, 1959; Havener & Izard, 1961). When a person's affect is

functioning inappropriately, affect, perception, and behavior cease to operate as a harmonious combination of personality subsystems. Feeling does not match perception or cognition. Perceptual report or verbalization does not ring true to the underlying feelings. The resultant of the now conflicting or disparate affective and perceptual functions is maladaptive behavior. The individual begins to behave inappropriately or maladaptively. This changes the reaction of others to him. These reactions tend to confirm his awesome feeling that his interpersonal affective ties are weak or entirely broken.

Affect, Person-Perception, and Psychotherapy

Psychotherapy is basically a process of changing the role of affect in a person's life experience. It involves changing perception, changing behavior, and changing feelings. Perception, or more broadly cognitive process, is the principal vehicle whereby therapeutic change is effected; overt behavior, to a less degree, may become a vehicle for changing the role of affect in a person's life.

When we focus on the process of psychotherapy we come again to the question as to which is primal in personality or behavior change--perception or affect. I believe it is the patient's affective orientation toward therapy (receiving help) and the therapist (helper); and the therapist's feelings about the client (person in need of psychological help) that are primary in bringing about therapeutic progress and personality change. Person perception, or the client's perception of the therapist and the therapist's perception of the client, may be the vehicle but

affect is the dynamism.

When the client enters the office of the psychotherapist for the first time, he brings with him disordered affects that are influencing his perception and behavior. They influence his perception of the therapist. At the same time, the therapist perceives the client and begins to form impressions of him as a person. While it is inevitable that the interpersonal perceptions in this initial interaction will have considerable influence on the therapy process that follows, underlying affective factors are more crucial determinants. The client's disordered affects continue to influence his perception of the therapist. While the therapist's immediate perceptions of the client have some influence, they cannot, if he is to be a good therapist for this client, override his basic affective orientation toward human beings. Underlying, and indeed regulating, his perceptions of the client is what we have termed interpersonal positive affect. This interpersonal positive affect will be expressed by the effective therapist despite possible immediate impressions of the client that might, in a non-therapeutic interaction, lead to the expression of negative affect. Thus, the therapist responding more in terms of his basic affective orientation than to his immediate perceptions would show interpersonal positive affect--positive regard, esteem, acceptance of responsibility, self-involving interest (Izard, 1960).

While we feel that psychotherapy furnishes an excellent opportunity to study the interrelationships of affect, person perception, and behavior, we believe that much the same situation

obtains in any significant interpersonal interaction. When a person enters a given situation, he brings affect with him-- affect as a resource, affect as a dynamic subsystem of personality. On the perceptual side, he brings only the neuro-physical equipment for perception. Perception does not exist as a dynamic subsystem of personality. The nearest thing to the affective dynamism in the cognitive realm is what Leeper (Leeper & Madison,) has called perceptual habit. We believe that perceptual habits exist but that ego-relevant perceptual habits are rooted in needs, feelings, and emotions. Again, the substratum, the dynamic basis of perception is affect.

By way of summary, let me state three maxims that seem mutually exclusive or self-contradictory; but let's list them as though this were not true.

Affect controls perception.

Perception controls behavior.

Behavior controls affect.

If these statements taken as a trilogy appear circular, and paradoxical, so be it. Their circularity does not preclude scientific evaluation of the interrelationships that exist among them. We can observe the three things--affect, perception, behavior--in interaction in processes like psychotherapy. In experimentation, we can manipulate a segment of the circle and see what happens to another segment (Mack & Izard, 1963).

Let me state these three maxims less sententiously: we all recognize that affect (for example, the affect underlying a strong and pervasive mood) can greatly influence our perception

and behavior. We also know that no man-determined change in human affairs occurs without perception of some sort. Particularly when we perceive the unexpected, our perception influences our feelings dramatically. We know, too, that when we can manage to behave in a way seemingly contrary to our feelings that the behavior effects changes in our feelings and perceptions. Thus, the aphorism: "It is easier to act your way into a new way of thinking than to think your way into a new way of acting." In one sense, then, affect or feelings control perception and behavior; and in a sense, behavior controls perception and feeling.

As stated earlier, in relating to another person, perception and affect constitute a psychodynamically unitary process of which the basic unit is the cue-producing affective-perceptual response. The complex interplay of perception, affective dispositional tendencies, situationally aroused affect, and behavior in interpersonal interaction is inevitable. Consequently, whenever we attempt to manipulate or measure perception or other cognitive processes we should remember to take into account the concomitant affective processes.

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