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NOTES ON PSYCHOLOGY AT THE UNIVERSITY
COLLEGE OF SOUTH WALES AND MONMOUTHSHIRE

BY

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NOTES ON PSYCHOLOGY AT THE UNIVERSITY
COLLEGE OF SOUTH WALES AND MONMOUTHSHIRE

The last few years has seen a large-scale growth of psychology as a separate discipline in British universities and the establishment of many new departments. One of these is at the University College, Cardiff, a constituent college of the University of Wales.

Cardiff, a city of some 260,000 population, is the capital of Wales and a principal seaport for the Welsh coal fields. The University College, founded in 1883, was the first Welsh college to admit women students. Its enrollment at present numbers roughly 2500 students. For the first few years of its existence students were prepared for final examinations and the awarding of degrees from London University. The University of Wales was founded in 1893, and the University College at Cardiff became one of three Welsh colleges brought together in the new degree-granting University. Subsequently, the University has grown and several new colleges have been added.

A chair in psychology was established at Cardiff in 1962, and a small but stimulating Department has been developed over the past three years. Professor George Westby is the founder as well as present chairman of the Department. Westby came to Cardiff from Hull University, where he is reputed to have developed an excellent psychology department even though he never held the Chair. His reputation as an administrator is being reinforced at Cardiff. Westby has devoted his attention to teaching and building his new department rather than to research. Apparently the "neglect" of research has not impaired his stature as a psychologist, as he is the current President of the British Psychological Society.

In addition to Westby there is the following full-time faculty: one Senior Lecturer, Mr. John Liggett, formerly of the University of Durham; two Lecturers, Dr. J.O. Robinson, formerly of the MRC Social Psychiatry Research Unit, and Mr. Leonard Bloom, who lectures in social psychology. There also are two research demonstrators, who are doctoral candidates in the Department. Dr. J.G. Ingham and Mr. J.M. Gibbs are affiliated with the Department on a part time basis.

The Department of Psychology is housed in two buildings at the present time. The larger consists of a pair of Victorian row houses which have been joined by connecting

doors. Here one finds a rather interesting although complex maze of rooms, individually heated by fireplaces or electric fires, which serve as laboratories, offices, and classrooms. Part of the staff and the remainder of the laboratories and classrooms are in a new, modern, centrally-heated building which is quite nearby. University College is engaged in a major building program at present, so the Psychology Department may anticipate adequate housing at a single location within the foreseeable future.

Courses are offered leading to Honors degrees in psychology, the basic qualification for graduate study, and there are two students doing research for the PhD. As the entire program is new, there have been no graduates from either of the above programs. The general orientation of the Department is toward a presentation of psychology as a discipline which combines both the biological and social sciences. Research interests of the Department, and the expanding laboratory facilities, tend to focus on the general experimental and clinical fields. Provision is also being made to support research in the social and industrial area through collaborative arrangements with the Department of Industrial Relations and the Faculty of economic and Social Studies.

It is quite obvious that the administrative as well as teaching demands placed upon the staff of a new four-man department will be great for some time to come. This problem is further complicated by the fact that the Department is in an already well-established University which has its full share of students. In spite of the time and effort which must be devoted to this early growth phase of the Department, however, an active research program is developing. To some degree this is facilitated by the fact that at least two of Robinson's former research collaborators are now located in the Cardiff area, and it has been possible to establish contacts with established research institutions such as the MRC Pneumoconiosis Research Unit in Cardiff. This latter group is of particular interest in large scale longitudinal and/or field studies of personality development, ageing, etc., because of their carefully defined samples of several Welsh communities.

Robinson presently is engaged in a longitudinal study of the relationship between neuroticism and blood pressure elevation. This work constitutes an extension of the research he conducted several years ago for his doctoral dissertation at the University of London (1),

an extremely well-designed and controlled effort which overcomes many of the methodological weaknesses of previous research on the relationship of hypertension and personality variables. Robinson capitalized on the Rhondda Valley population samples developed by the Pneumoconiosis Research Unit to select a random group of control subjects (N=167). These samples of "total" Welsh communities are ideal for behavioral science studies of "normal" populations. His neurotic group was selected from the out-patient population of a psychiatric clinic in the hospital serving the Rhondda Valley area (N=56). Blood pressure readings of the neurotic group were unknown at the time of their selection as subjects. An hypertensive group was selected from the medical clinic of the same hospital, selection being based solely on objective medical and residence considerations without consideration of neurotic illness.

Each subject was examined in his own home. Carefully standardized blood pressure readings were made and a group of eight psychological tests were administered. The tests used were selected from those described by Eysenck, Granger, and Brengelmann in their book Perceptual Processes and Mental Illness. In addition to the Maudsley Personality Inventory and several other paper and pencil personality type tests, two psychomotor tests were included in the battery.

Because only six of the hypertensive individuals were under 40 years of age, the data analysis was confined to the 40-50 age range. Here, the test battery distinguished between both the control-hypertensive groups and the control-neurotic groups at better than the 0.001 loc. However, there was no significant difference in the scores between the hypertensive and neurotic groups.

In a further examination of the data, using a covariance technique, Robinson found that correction of the neuroticism scores for blood pressure level did not eliminate differences between the control and hypertension group as might be anticipated. Obviously the differences between the two groups were not due solely to differences in blood pressure levels.

At present Robinson is engaged in both a more penetrating study of the relationship of blood pressure to neurosis and a longitudinal study of personality factors in essential hypertension. As a first step in his program he replicated that part of his dissertation concerned with differences between the control-hypertensive groups. With a

large sample of subjects (N=148) in the 41-50 year age group, the previous findings were not confirmed.

Several different avenues of investigation are being followed at present, although none of the work has progressed to the point of publication. The studies outlined above have suggested the possibility that the very act of referral to a hospital clinic may have a significant influence both on blood pressure readings and upon scores obtained on psychological test batteries. Moreover, this relationship may vary with different hypertensive syndromes and with individual attitudes towards symptoms. As part of the systematic longitudinal study, work has been initiated on the development of a measurement technique which will be valid at the beginning and remain valid with repeated testing over a long period of time.

A study also has been initiated on the relationship both between symptoms of hypertension and indices of neurosis to clinically established essential hypertension as a disease entity. One of the primary focal points in this area is on blood pressure liability. Studies to date have been somewhat rewarding in that distinct differences in physical symptoms have been found among groups studied.

A scale to measure individual attitudes towards symptoms and seeking professional advice has been developed, using a Thurstone technique. Results to date with this scale somewhat surprisingly have failed to disclose any significant or major difference between neurotic, control, and hypertensive groups with regard to their attitude towards symptoms.

While Robinson is collaborating in the above work with a number of medical and behavioral science colleagues, he also appears to be taking a much more active part than would be expected in view of his other responsibilities. Even though some questions might be raised regarding the psychological test battery which has been employed to date, one cannot help but be impressed with the careful and systematic approach which has been adopted in the research.

Liggett, the Senior Lecturer in the Department, is now engaged in further studies on a projective technique he has developed for evaluating the self-concept. Three papers have been published on this work, although none have come out in the past five years. A description of this technique, the "Self Valuation Test," and the stimulus materials employed, was published in the Journal of Psychology

in 1957. (2). Liggett presented detailed administration and scoring systems in a later publication (3), and has summarized the work in the Revue de Psychologie Appliquée (4).

Basically, the stimulus materials consist of a set of seven pictures, each containing a face which has been rendered quite indistinct through a process of photographic distortion. The pictures are systematically presented, using the paired-comparisons method, and the subject is required to make a choice according to one of several concepts which are being evaluated. Responses are obtained from a sequence of repeated presentations in terms of the person who is most "intelligent," "attractive," "dominant," "nervous," "best," most like "self", etc. Through a rather clever and rapid scoring system it is possible to obtain scores on a number of comparisons, such as the extent to which the subject identifies the same pictures in his selection of "best" as he does in selecting "self," or "dominant" and "self," etc.

Liggett's technique is rather intriguing, although his findings have been somewhat less positive than might be desired. In the published studies he was able to distinguish a control or "normal" group from a patient population at the 5% loc, but it was not possible to distinguish between the three quite specific sub-groups which made up the patient population. While not published, there has been considerable additional work on refinement of the technique, collecting norms, etc. Probably the most interesting aspect of this work is a shift in the set given to the patient when the test is administered, which results in an increase in the amount of data obtained. Recently, Liggett has been experimenting with an approach whereby the subject is required to "cast" the individuals pictured on the stimulus materials into "roles" they might play on the movies. Liggett's approach to the methodological problems of studying self-evaluation is both interesting and novel. However, on the basis of the research results to date, one is led to doubt whether the Self Valuation Test ultimately will find a significant place in the pool of techniques available for studying the "self" concept.

One might expect that doctoral research undertaken in the Department at Cardiff would coincide with the interests of at least one of the faculty members active in research. As in many British universities, this is not necessarily true. The work of Patrick Westley, a Research Demonstrator in the Department, provides an example in

point. Westley is an extremely well-read and capable individual who is taking his degree under Westby. His research is in the area of animal psychology, although at present there is no other work in this field at Cardiff. Thus, as a first step in his dissertation, it has been necessary for Westley to establish a rat colony in the Psychology Department, build experimental cages, and develop instrumentation.

Westley's primary interest lies in the area of curiosity behavior in animals and its relationship to exploratory activity patterns. The floors of the home cages used in his studies are divided into segments and so instrumented as to permit recording both of activity level and specific movement through space. The early stages of his work have been devoted to a study of individual differences among rats with regard to the manner in which space is utilized "normally" and changes in activity pattern brought about by the introduction of novel stimuli. His procedure in this phase of the work is quite straightforward. Base lines are established for the animals in their home cages both in terms of activity patterns and time cycles. Novel stimuli then are systematically introduced into the cage and changes from the base line behavior are recorded. While these studies are just getting underway, Westley has found rather clear-cut differences in the basic home-cage activity and space utilization patterns of animals otherwise determined to be maze "bright" and maze "dull."

In summary, while Cardiff is a small and relatively isolated Department, one cannot help being impressed with its future potential. A somewhat undefinable atmosphere of vigor, stimulation, ingenuity, and dedication seems to characterize this group. What they lack the money to buy, they build. What they lack in terms of specialized staff is compensated for by affiliating with appropriate, high quality institutions in the Cardiff area. On the basis of a rather brief visit, it would appear that this seemingly happy state of affairs may be traced to Westby and his skill as an administrator and organizer. In some respects the development of this Department constitutes an affirmation of what is understood to be a fairly recent trend in Great Britain of emphasizing administrative and teaching as opposed to research qualification in the appointment of new department chairmen.

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