Brit. J. Psychiat. (1971), **119**, 57–8

Predicting Participation Length in Group Therapy

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As part of a study of the predictive value of a picture-story test in relation to verbal behaviour in group therapy, a positive relationship was recently found between the number of participations patients made in the first session of a new therapy group and the number of times they described human figures on a projective story test as making active, observable 'approach' movements toward another person or place (Aston, 1970). It was hoped that this finding might prove helpful in selecting patients for group therapy.

The projective test used was Phillipson's (1955) ORT, consisting of one blank card and 12 pictures of one or more human figures, to each of which the subject told a story. Movement in the stories, indicated by active verbs and attributed to depicted figures, was termed 'Social Approach' if it described an approach toward people, either across space, or by the initiation of a closer relationship with them, e.g. 'He moved toward the group', or 'They begin talking'. Movement directed toward a place or impersonal object, was termed 'Positional Approach', e.g. 'She comes toward the light', or 'He will walk toward the house'.

There were 19 subjects, from three therapy groups, in which opportunities for verbal participation were sufficiently similar, for all subjects, to allow results from the different groups to be combined. Both types of Approach score showed a significant positive rank-order correlation with number of group participations ($p < \cdot002$ for a two-tailed test in each case). Neither Approach measure was related to ORT story length. Length of group participations was not taken into account.

In the study to be reported here, attention was focused upon the average word-length of the same participations, made by the same subjects in the same group sessions, in relation to their ORT Approach scores. Only 13 subjects provided sufficient evidence of group speech length for it to be compared with their ORT scores (the others making only 0–2 participations). Findings, therefore, refer here to these 13 subjects (6 men and 7 women), who were evenly distributed throughout the three groups. Average participation word-length was found for each subject by allocating one point for each word or proper name spoken in the group, then dividing his total number of points by his total number of participations. Points were also given for noises such as 'Mm, ah,' etc. if they occurred right at the beginning of a sentence, when they were thought to indicate intention to speak on, rather than anxiety or hesitation.

For these 13 subjects, the correlation with number of participations was ·60 for Social Approach ($p < \cdot05$ for a two-tailed test), but only ·27 for Positional Approach. This suggested that impersonal Approach, whilst distinguishing participators from virtual non-participators, was less reliably related to amount of participation than socially-oriented Approach; two intra-group correlations from the previous study also suggested this. Other work again indicated that scores with a social orientation might be expected to show a more definite relationship not only to frequency, but also to length of participations. For example, Bass *et al.* (1963) found that subjects who showed a marked orientation toward social interaction on a multiple-choice inventory test particularly preferred working at tasks in a group rather than alone. This suggested that socially-oriented individuals might perhaps find any group situation attractive, and be encouraged to prolong their participations for the sake of relating to others, especially since group members who speak most seem to be those who receive most attention from others (see Bales *et al.*, 1951; Talland, 1954; Munro, 1968). For these reasons, Social Approach was expected to be positively related to average length of group participations as well as to frequency. On the other hand, lack of concern for, or even avoidance of, social relations implied by a markedly impersonal orientation, suggested that a high Positional Approach score might indicate avoidance of over-involvement in the group, leading to the making of relatively brief speeches for impersonal ends. To what extent this might be so was not, however, clear.

Trends for the 13 subjects in fact showed a positive Spearman rank-order correlation of ·32 for Social Approach, and a negative one of $-\cdot41$ for Positional Approach, this latter result being more marked than expected. Since subjects scored on both Social and

https://doi.org/10.1192/bjp.119.548.57 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Positional Approach, the conflict between these orientations was expressed as a ratio of Social to Positional Approach scores. This ratio showed a positive correlation of ·51 with participation length ($p < \cdot 05$ for a one-tailed test).

ORT scoring reliability was assessed by asking another clinical psychologist to score the stories both for Approach, and for similar observable movement not implying approach, termed 'Activity'. The relationship of Activity to number of participations had previously also been positive, but less marked. Eighty-one per cent agreement with the author's scores was obtained for Social Approach, 80 per cent for Positional Approach, 81 per cent for Social Activity, and 70 per cent for Non-social Activity. There was a positive correlation of ·27 between the ratio of Social to Non-social Activity and participation length.

In summary, these findings suggest, albeit tentatively, that ORT Social Approach reflects the making of both frequent and lengthy participations in a new therapy group. Positional Approach, on the other hand, seems to reflect a tendency to participate rather than remain silent, but relatively briefly. The balance between these trends is probably most closely related to actual participation length in the group. The particular importance for group verbal behaviour of ORT Approach, as compared to other Activity in the stories, is discussed in the earlier paper on predicting participation frequency.

Acknowledgements

I wish to thank Miss E. Noonan for her valuable help in scoring the ORT stories.

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(*Received 21 April 1970*)

https://doi.org/10.1192/bjp.119.548.57 Published online by Cambridge University Press