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CULTURAL PROBLEMS

DIFFERENTIAL RESPONSES TO PROJECTIVE TESTING IN A NEGRO PEASANT COMMUNITY: MONTSERRAT, B.W.I.*

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THE psychologist who investigates a given cultural group is likely to look for the regularities in attitudes and behaviour as reflected in test performance of either a group as a whole or of subgroups within the group; e.g. men and women, children and adults, those more or less acculturated. These behavioural and attitudinal patterns as indicated by best results tell us something of the uniqueness of a group or subgroup, or of its similarities to other groups or subgroups. But the regularities as exposed may mask some of the specific characteristics of individuals in a group, and may fail to reveal some of the idiosyncratic aspects of personality of particular individuals.

That deviants have been overlooked in cultural studies is not entirely true, as witnessed by such studies of the chief among the Alorese Islanders,⁽⁹⁾ or the witch doctors among the Pokoma Indians.⁽⁵⁾ Métraux and the author⁽⁷⁾ studied some aspects of the normal and deviant behaviour among the Negro peasants of Montserrat, an investigation in which we compared estimates of deviance from three points of view: those of the anthropologist, the psychologist, and the members of the community themselves.

What we plan to do in the present paper is to highlight a few of the individual differences in the test material of some of the subjects in our Montserrat study. Here, we shall not limit ourselves to the markedly deviant, as we did in the earlier work, but shall describe individuals who show the regularities of the group in test performances, but who also mirror their own individuality and personal style.

The material on which this report is based was obtained in 1953-54, during the course of a research study on the peasant culture of Montserrat, one of the Leeward Islands in the British West Indies. Dr. Rhoda Métraux made an eleven-month field study of Danio Village,† a rural community of some 500 persons living in 103 scattered homesteads on a mountainside of the island. The author spent a month doing projective testing. The purpose of the testing was to supplement and complement the work of the anthropologist in seeking an understanding of the personality structure and psychodynamics of the individuals under investigation.

Montserrat is part of the Leeward Islands Colony, and has a history of over 300 years of British government. The island is small and exceedingly rugged and has a crowded population of some 14,000 persons—most of them peasants—sharecroppers, renters, hired labourers, small landowners, artisans, part-time fishermen, who are coloured descendants of Negro slaves imported to work the

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† This name is a pseudonym. The field work for this study was supported by grants to the anthropologist by the Social Science Research Council, and to both field workers by the Institute for Intercultural Studies.

plantations. Many men and women have been abroad—to other islands, to the Canal Zone, to the United States—and directly and indirectly Montserratians are affected not only by British but also by American culture. They speak a dialect locally known as “bad English”, which is merging with the speech of educated British West Indians.^(6, 8)

During her stay the psychologist administered a battery of four tests (Pfister Pyramid, Szondi, Rorschach, Lowenfeld Mosaic) to 65 persons between the ages of 13 and 70, comprising 31 females and 34 males.⁽¹⁾ Most people responded to the test situation as they did to other fads—here was something new and possibly amusing to try out—or they came smilingly to oblige us in return to favours past or yet to come.⁽²⁾

The regularities in test performance for the group as a whole for the sexes and for the adolescents with greater or less education, have been discussed in previous publications.^(1, 3, 4) Briefly, we may say that the predominant total group pattern indicates that these people seem to have a non-sublimated ego picture with lack of self-awareness and ability to conceptualize their basic wants. They have strong narcissistic and infantile needs for sensual contact, which is somewhat stronger in women than in men. Both men and women are orally frustrated, but the women have a compensation in being able to express their need for security and by clinging to objects (home, kitchen utensils, clothes) that give some focus to their lives. Both males and females show rather good emotional control, but they have no strong repressions or violent outbursts of aggression (Abel, 1959). They are sexually aggressive; the men more than the women. The less educated adolescents are more accepting of their culture than are the more educated, the latter being particularly resigned and lacking in initiative. Adolescent boys show signs of greater anxiety than does any other subgroup, being more uncertain of where they belong in the total picture. All adolescents reveal a richer phantasy-life on the projective tests, especially the Rorschach, than do the more mature men and women.

In pointing up individual differences we shall first give an example of some of the differences in one family; and, secondly, we shall focus on a few members of the tested community. Household 20 consists of a married couple, TM 26 and TF 23; the man is 46, his wife about 45 years old. They have had ten children, all living, ranging in age from 5 to 21, four boys and six girls. TM 26 is an overseer on a cotton plantation. This man's Rorschach is quite typical for Danio Village: namely, he gives a small number of responses, has good use of colour, is open and free in expressing feeling, but he shows also the typical oral deprivations and oral aggressiveness of the group (e.g. in Card VII he perceives “teeth to hold something here”, and on Card VII he sees “rat picking something like cheese; stealing”). What is atypical with TM 26 is that he gives a good human movement response (Card III). Males in Danio Village rarely do this. This suggests that he is able to make constructive use of his phantasy-life. The response he gives is also one where a man and woman are speaking to each other, indicating his acceptance of friendly interpersonal relationships. What is idiosyncratic with TM 26 is that he is the only person in the group tested who makes a reference to a sex relationship between a man and a woman. He calls the man and woman he sees in Card III “Darby and Joan”, and as he speaks he roars with laughter. He tells us “they talk”, but he implies that they are

also doing something else. No other person tested enjoyed himself so fully in the presence of the examiner. Furthermore, this man gave varied human movement responses to the three Baron ink-blot cards shown (cards used to elicit human movement responses; Baron, 1951). In Card 2, he saw "Peter and John pulling away from other each" (biblical reference); in Card 2, TM 26 perceived "Hansel and Gretel talking", and Card 8 was depicted as "servants humbling themselves to one another". This man must be intelligent, interested in a wider world than that of his own village, and well adjusted (he can afford to speak freely).

His wife, TF 23, is very different. She seems to be aloof, afraid, and on her guard. She gives no human movement responses nor colour ones (atypical for the group and for women). Even on the Baron cards, she denies seeing people (this is rare in the tested group). Two of her little children, looking over her shoulder as she was being tested, saw people in these cards. Her youngest girl (almost 5 years old) also saw a "monkey eating a potato" in Card III of the Rorschach. TF 23 must feel inadequate, for in two of her responses she perceives only part of a person or animal (part of man, Card I; part of frog, Card II). She seems to have strong, hostile feelings buried down deep, for she speaks of "scissors cutting trees and big limbs and bread and cheese, and a pig cut up and divided" (note the reference to food, which is typical of the group). TF 23 has had little education, her children having had and are receiving much more. She depends on them to write letters for her. Probably, she is particularly fearful and on the defensive with the examiner, since she knew her whole family was being tested. However, it is suggested from the Mosaic test that TF 23 has succeeded in making a place for herself in the family unit and is to a degree accepting of herself. She constructed her first name (Catherine) out of the stones—using all the colours except white. She employed mainly the diamond-shaped stones, using three small triangles in addition. The shapes of the letters only roughly represented the true shape. TF 23 apologizes, saying "My brain leaves me", but she appears satisfied. She has named herself and has established herself after feeling pretty helpless and frustrated on the Rorschach.

The oldest daughter, TF 27, is 16.9 years old. Her father had been disappointed in his oldest son, who had decided to leave school at the end of the seventh standard, and had decided to give his daughter a high-school education. He treated her preferentially in the family, paying for her high school and taking her around with him and her mother (something he did not do for his other children). On the Rorschach, this girl reflects her education and particularly her need to reveal it, for she speaks of such things as "amoebas", "thigh bone". She is probably struggling to succeed, for she twice refers to animals trying to climb or run. She also seems to be developing an interest in having sex experiences, but has either been kept or kept herself aloof from them; e.g. she perceives a "flower about to open up in two" on Card IV, and a "baby about to be born" in Card IX. That TF 27 is being pushed somewhat beyond her capacity and not given sufficient emotional support is indicated by her seeing "baby rats nursing from the mother" (Card V) and the baby concept mentioned above. Although these responses are rather typical of the oral needs responses of the group as a whole, the nursing and new-born concepts of this girl are more directly related to infancy than are the more usual food responses given by others.

The oldest son, TM 29, was 19.8 when tested. He produces more than the usual number of responses for Danio Village (he gives 23, whereas the average is 13). His concepts are varied and colourful. He reveals, however, the usual oral needs of the group, for he describes a bird going to pick fruit, a parrot eating peas, etc. Also, TM 29, like some of the other males tested, gives responses indicating a status ambition, such as "crown over head of magistrate", "statue high up; people go up to see". But, as do other males, particularly some of the adolescent boys, this boy has given up his ambition and feels defeated. For example, he sees a "burned-out candle fallen to the bottom" (Card VIII) and "put salt on parrot and it wears down to nothing" (Card V). Perhaps, since he is particularly articulate as well as intelligent, TM 29 is able to describe his feelings more vividly than do others in his village. Also, he has a sexual problem, as do many adolescent boys (Abel and Métraux, 1959), and he somehow is not able successfully to identify with a male figure. There are several references to a phallic symbol in his Rorschach, such as a "cattle horn", a "saw", "elephant trunk", "candle burning", but there is also a strong undercurrent of sadism which is not usually found in the protocols of other adolescent boys in the group. TM 29 mentions a "rat-trap that folds up and catches rat" (Card II), a "saw with sharp edge", "soldiers who lost legs", and "man praying who has lost his head".

TM 29's younger brother, TM 27, was also tested. He is 18.6 years old. He had much less schooling than his older brother, and has a closer association with his father. He has worked on projects with the father, and he helps more than does his brother in the family (baking bread). His Rorschach differs from his brother's in that all the concepts he gives relate to his life in the village. He sees various local plants growing and sprouting, the local animals ("goat", "rat", "rat-bat"), and he perceives an island surrounded by water (Montserrat). TM 27 perceives in Card VI a water-pump placed in concrete in a house. Besides the usual sexual connotation of this concept, it suggests one of the activities he has done with his father, as has his response to Card V ("tree cutting and sawdust"). TM 27 also reveals the anxiety characteristic of the adolescent boys in Danio Village (e.g. shading responses, cut-off limbs, falling pieces), and in addition he reflects some of the maso-sadistic trends pointed up more strongly by his brother. TM 27 sees a snake head "crushed in bloody water" in Card IX.

What TM 27 does rather uniquely is to give detailed and careful descriptions to most of his concepts. For example, Card II he perceives as "a pear [avocado] having roots, stretching down to the earth, roots, this is the plant coming out on surface. The flesh that feeding the plant needs a line down here; when seed grows it makes hold in here". This is very different from the curt responses of his brother and sister. His brother sees in this same card a "rat-trap; food in here, and it folds and catches rat". To the same card, the sister responds: "Two headless pigs, and, maybe, two elephants with no heads, but with trunks". We surmise that TM 27 is much more positively oriented to his life on the island, less discouraged and hostile, than are his brother and sister.

Among the various records we obtained we could select any number of examples of idiosyncratic responses that reflect the individuality of each person tested. In our brief presentation we can select only a few instances, which could easily be duplicated many times. First, we want to present a few examples from the Lowenfeld Mosaic Test; and, secondly, from the Rorschach.

On the Mosaic, about half of the subjects made the representation of a house, thus apparently reflecting what is one of the important objects in their lives, as well as indicating their need to be nurtured. Others made what we call "enclosed hollows" (irregular circular or angular figures with a white space centre), or what Lowenfeld has called a "slab" (pieces put together irregularly in a somewhat haphazard and loosely organized design. Some designs show more individuality). As we said above, the mother in Household 20 spelled out her first name in stones. One other person made a letter with stones. This was TF 28, a 17-year-old adolescent girl who was learning the dressmaking trade. She was the only child of a woman who had had a keeper relationship that was dissolved. The mother subsequently married. Her husband had a steady job in town, as did she herself. She was a competent and friendly woman. On the Mosaic, TF 28 first made a figure that looked like an enclosed hollow, somewhat oval and with a red square stone at the top. She called this a perfume bottle. Next, she made the letter "P" (her first name was Pris). The letter was made upside down, but reversing positions of figures and designs has no particular meaning for the group tested. Apparently, TF 28 had aspirations to be someone special and to attain success as a woman (perfume bottle), and she sealed her wish by signing her initial. Later, this girl married the minister of the Church of God, after converting to his religion and influencing her mother to do likewise. In the eyes of the neighbourhood she presumably attained a favoured position.

Another idiosyncratic Mosaic was that of TM 35, a 20-year-old boy, the fourth child of a single mother. His first production in the middle of the Mosaic board was that of a house done sideways (this was typical). His second was a well-constructed black, yellow and white figure which he called a "farm bee". To the observer, it was the clear representation of an insect. His third design was what the boy called a "cassava mill", including a representation of a trestle and wheel. These concepts suggest his identification with the life around him: house, mill for grinding cassava nuts (at the time of the testing, nuts were being ground for flour for the Christmas festival), and a bee. The bee, however, must have some further dynamic meaning for TM 35, for on the Rorschach he also sees a bee on the whole of Card II (an unusual response). TM 35 reflects the adolescent boy's anxiety in many of his Rorschach responses, such as seeing parts and bits of animals rather than the whole animal, and some shading responses as water running between cliffs. His answers to Card V, "skin almost ripped off" and "alligator mouth open", suggest his fear of or desire for aggression (shown also by the two boys in Household 20). However, his uniqueness seems to be in his special ability to express himself well through non-verbal means—that is, through the visual and manipulative activity required of the Mosaic.

TF 7 is a married woman with eight living children (the only family besides Household 20 where there were no deaths among the children). Her husband has a small tannery and one of the two local stores in the village. She runs this store and does some dressmaking as well. Her Mosaic consisted of four simple geometrical figures, each one done in one colour—yellow, blue, white and red. She could not name the figures. She seemed timid and fearful of revealing her intellectual limitations to the examiner. TF 7 worked slowly and cautiously in making the forms with the stones.

On the Rorschach an individual may reveal his unique qualities by such characteristics as the number of responses, the perseverative nature of his concepts, or by an idiosyncratic single response. For instance, TM 32, a 15-year-old boy, was the first child of married parents. This boy gives 30 responses to the ink-blot, this being the largest number reported by anyone tested in the village, the average number being slightly over 13. Also, TM 32's initial reaction time to each of the ten Rorschach cards ranged from 12 seconds to 1 minute 40 seconds (all very long and unusual). He spent seven minutes alone on Card X. He saw a great many details and minute ones in particular (such as small claw of crab), and was concerned about the correctness of his answers. He is a strong obsessive-compulsive in personality structure (much more so than his father, who shows compulsiveness but is still able to be spontaneous and to talk and let out his feelings). This boy also shies entirely away from colour (atypical for Montserrat). Thus, he seems not to have sufficient outlets for his emotional life, and has been forced into situations where he has to exert a great amount of control. He also reveals passivity and lack of spontaneity in his test record. His anxiety is buried and is not reflected in Rorschach responses, as is done by other boys in the village.

A few persons tested repeated a concept several times. For example, TM 22, a 16-year-old boy, repeatedly saw the mountainside (Montserrat consists of three mountain peaks and hardly any flat land). On Card III, TM 22 speaks of "a mountain with fire in the middle and grass around" (there are on the mountains a couple of vents through which smoke and steam from the underlying volcanic action emerge). On Card VII he sees the "stony part of the mountain and dry shoal around". Card VIII, he says, "favoured a mountain nearly like that out there, and grass". On the Mosaic he constructed a mountain, sideways, indicating the top, the shoal (stony dry part), trees, and path to walk on. Apparently, mountains have some strong dynamic significance for TM 22—most likely fear of danger (e.g. the fire and burned grass, and the shoal where he said "you slip"). It is conjectured the boy was trying in some way to reach his father (who was married and lived higher up on the mountain), and was reflecting the uncertainty of his life with his mother. She had had three children prior to marrying her present husband (this boy and a brother and sister). The mother had more children in her marriage—one, a small and very ill child about whom she was ambivalent about trying to save. Life was very difficult for the children in this home.

An example of a single, unique concept on a Rorschach is the response given by TF 40. She sees on Card VI "something in the radio called sock covered like this" (she demonstrates by placing one tin can inside another). TF 40 is between 30 and 40 years old. She has a keeper relationship with a retired policeman. This man had worked on another island, St. Kitts, and had returned to his village, bringing a radio with him. It was the only radio in the village. Since Card VI is considered a likely sex symbol card, TF 40 seemed to be telling us about her pride in her relationship to a man who had a status position (policeman, able to buy a radio, and a travelled man). She also gave a response to Card VII that indicated acceptance of herself as a woman (a card suggestive of female sex both in the women figures and the vagina connotation in the bottom centre). TF 40 saw in this card a "collar or edging around a dress; a glamour neck".

Another instance of idiosyncratic, single response was given by TM 23, a 29-year-old single man. He saw the only outright, sexual organ response in a blot. He said that the grey top (reversed) of Card X was what he called "pentacles", pointing to testes and penis. We feel that the sex-organ response must have meant he had some problem in this area; especially, since he blocked entirely on both Cards IX and X (colour cards), and only after urging in the inquiry did he volunteer his sex response. In a black card (Card VI) he was able to sublimate his sex responses by calling the blot "a spire". But, since he could give no concept to Card II, as well as Cards IX and X, we suspect that he was thrown by the colour and hence must be blocked or disturbed in some way. He was known in the community as someone different—who did not go around with women. He was, however, liked and respected; for he was able to organize various community functions, such as a lottery.

In presenting this paper, we have attempted to highlight individual differences in projective test responses, in the Rorschach and the Lowenfeld Mosaic. In our earlier publications we concentrated largely on group and subgroup regularities, including, however, a discussion of a few markedly deviant people (e.g. psychotic, on the Rorschach; or deviant, as observed by the anthropologist or as evaluated by the community). Here, we have pointed out individual differences within one family unit, as well as a variety of test responses differences among several individuals in the village—differences both in form and content of response. We have made some speculations about the significance of these differences in terms of psychodynamics of the individual. We could only speculate, however, since we do not have detailed life histories nor means of procuring these from the significant people in the lives of the individuals under discussion. Nevertheless, a good deal is known about the predominant trends in the cultural patternings in Danio Village and on the Island of Montserrat. Dr. Métraux, whose paper follows this one, will tell us about her observations and interpretations of the problems attendant upon cultural changes in Danio community, that may be responsible not only for some of the regularities in projective test performance, but for some of the irregularities as well.

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