

Excerpt from *Measuring Personality Adjustment in Children Nine to Thirteen Years of Age*. Rogers, C. R. Ph.D. New York City: Teachers College, Columbia University. 1931, 1-2 and 93-94.

Chapter 1

“The Task”

Introduction

A hungry boy presents what might be called a classic example of a maladjusted personality. Between his present emptiness, and his vision of the contentment arising from a large meal, there is a gap, a contrast, a void, which is the essential factor of all maladjustment. In order to be a true case of maladjustment, the gap must be realized. The boy may not be hungry (and therefore not maladjusted) until he passes the baker’s window. Then he becomes actually conscious of the contrast between his present state and the desired one. The realization of the contrast may be the motive for many types of conduct. He may start for the pantry at home. He may dig into his pocket for a nickel. He may watch his chance to slip into the bakery and “snitch” some jelly rolls.

This trivial illustration is used because it brings precisely into focus those essential elements of adjustment and of maladjustment which are so easily lost sight of in more complex and emotional situations. Too often we think of “maladjustment” as a term applicable only to abnormal people placed in unusual situations. In speaking of children, maladjustment is thought of as synonymous with bad behavior. In thus using the word we are apt to forget the various failures in adjustment which act as motivating factors in normal as well as in abnormal lives. In the hungry boy as well as in the seriously maladjusted personalities which fill our courts and clinics we see both angles of maladjustment: first a consciousness of the gap between reality and desire, and then behavior which is designed to bridge or to cover up that gap.

The major element in maladjustment is that of a felt contrast between the real situation and the desired one. It is not enough that the contrast exists. It must be felt. It may be recognized only in the subconscious mind. Or it may be consciously realized, but it must to some degree be felt. A man may be perfectly at ease at a social function until his wife points out that he is the only one who is not in formal attire. Then he becomes self-conscious, discontented, eager to leave – in short, maladjusted. Similarly, a dull child in a class of bright pupils may not be unhappy if the situation is wisely handled by the teacher. If he is praised for doing his best, if comparisons between pupils are not made, if marks are given on a basis of effort and capacity, the child works quite contentedly on his own level, with scarcely any knowledge of the gap between his own mentality and that of the others. But if the teacher places him publicly at the foot of the class, if his marks are continually lower than those of his classmates, if he is jeered as a “dumb-bell,” then a contrast becomes keenly felt and dire behavior-consequences may follow.

The problem of the adjustment of a personality to its environment is a difficult field to enter with tools or measurement, since so much depends on subtle attitudes, and so little on easily measurable quantities.

Chapter 10

“In Conclusion”

Having scrutinized the Personality Adjustment Test from the point of view of its formation and standardization, we turn to the question of its practical use. In dealing with children, the real children of school and home and

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clinic, where does such a test fit in? There are already a multitude of psychological tests. Why should there be another? And if the need of another test be admitted, who shall use it? What is its specific purpose?

In order to give satisfactory answers to such questions, a general survey of the situation is perhaps necessary. Psychology is becoming increasingly a science as it adds to and improves its tools of measurement. Every year new tests of intelligence are introduced and old ones are improved, while psychologists at the same time grow more modest in their assertions and more accurate in their descriptions of what such tests measure. There are available tests of achievement in all school subjects, and these are being constantly added to. Of tests of special abilities and aptitudes there is no end. Yet with all these measures, there is much that is left to estimate and guesswork, when one is dealing with individual children. All of these tests are tests of capacity, but they can tell us nothing of the use which the child may make of these capacities, not of emotional factors which may motivate or hinder their expression. For example, two intelligence tests agree in rating Francis, a boy of thirteen, as a boy of superior intelligence. A test of mechanical aptitude indicates that his mechanical skill is exceeded by approximately fifteen per cent of the boys of his age. Tests of educational achievement show that in general he is up to the level of his grade in school subjects, although he is working a full year below his mental level. All these facts are valuable and helpful. Yet they throw no light on the facts that suddenly, three months ago, Francis began stealing large amounts from his mother, playing truant from school, lying about his behavior, and refusing to respond at all to the pleas of those who knew him. All these actions were totally at variance with his whole previous respectable history. In such a situation questions of capacity become of secondary importance. *In order to begin to find the cause of his difficulty, it is his attitudes and feelings toward school and home, toward teacher and mother and brother and friends, that must be investigated* [italics added]. If we had tests of attitudes, which were as exhaustive and accurate as our present tests of intelligence, we should be able to diagnose Francis' case much more quickly, and in a much more scientific manner.

This is not an isolated example. It is safe to say that everyone dealing with children who are in trouble recognizes the limitations of mere tests of capacity. The child is an organism, solving in one way or in another the problem of adjusting to its environment. It is not enough to measure the child, nor is it enough to attempt to measure the complicated environment which he faces, though both of those measurements may be enlightening. The most important elements in the process of his adjustment are revealed by a study of the child's attitude toward his surroundings, an attitude built primarily out of previous experiences. We can then learn whether he is finding a happy or an unhappy adjustment to it. The sore spots in his relationships can be discovered.

It is this field of children's attitudes that the Test of Personality Adjustment enters. The test is by no means adequate. It serves only to suggest the possibilities for dynamic psychology of tests which measure the adjustment and the maladjustment of personalities.