

aging. For example, except for the transposition of one pair of cases they are able to match perfectly the rank ordering by the faculty of an entire class of ten teacher-trainees and using a paper and pencil test developed on previous classes they are able to predict the performance of college freshmen on comprehensive examinations at the end of the school year with a correlation of .63 (the correlation of this examination with the standard ACE scholastic aptitude test for the original sample was .17).

On the whole, this is a good and provocative book. None of the specific studies is beyond criticism from the point of view of design and analysis but since their purpose is illustrative this may be left as a minor fault. The major limitation lies in the inadequate conception of the situational "press." Lip-service is given to the notion that the evaluation process is a social system but no systematic account is provided analogous to the framework of variables for describing personality. The comparison of one situation with another and the consequent cumulation of knowledge about, for example, invariant aspects of the evaluation situation becomes virtually impossible without a more generalized and detailed statement of this side of the equation.

Finally, there is a more general social limitation which follows from the full and explicit acceptance of the criterion in each situation as an unchangeable "given." This book may open a "new chapter" in the history of assessment as is claimed by Professor Henry A. Murray in his Foreword. It is to be hoped that we may look forward to the first chapter of a new history when assessors come to take as their criterion each individual's "best" performance and turn from the assessment of men for situations to the assessment of situations for men.

ELLIOT G. MISHLER

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## THE FOCUSED INTERVIEW<sup>1</sup>

**D**URING the last ten years the techniques and procedures in interviewing have developed tremendously. Much basic

<sup>1</sup> Merton, Robert K.; Fiske, Marjorie; and Kendall, Patricia L.: *THE FOCUSED INTERVIEW*. Glencoe, Illinois, The Free Press, 1956, 186 pages, \$3.00.

research, tested by field application, in this area has been contributed by the Bureau of Applied Social Research at Columbia University. *THE FOCUSED INTERVIEW*, by Merton, Fiske, and Kendall, is a report of the Bureau. The 1956 revised edition is in reality the third printing of the book.

As stated by the authors, there are four characteristics of the "focused interview":

"1. Interviewees are known to have been involved in a particular situation (have taken part in an experiment, have seen a film, heard a radio program, etc.). 2. Investigator has provisionally analyzed situation and developed hypotheses regarding probable responses to it. 3. This content or situational analysis provides basis for interview guide, setting forth major areas of inquiry and providing criteria of relevance for interview data. 4. Interview focuses on subjective experiences to ascertain interviewees' definitions of situation in which they were involved." (Page ix.)

As its subtitle indicates, the book is "A Manual of Problems and Procedures." However, it is by no means simply a technician's handbook. It is rather a professional person's statement of principles and high level procedures. An underlying point of view of the authors is epitomized in their statement, "A manual for interviewing is not a substitute for the exercise of individual skill and judgment; rather, it provides some tools with which skill and judgment can operate." (p. 18.)

The substance of the book begins with a chapter on "retrospection" by which is meant the client's recollection of his responses to a given situation at the time it was experienced. "Retrospection in the focused interview, then, encourages stimulus-linked and detailed responses by helping the interviewee to *recall* his immediate reactions to the material rather than to *re-consider* the stimulus situation and report his *present* reactions to it." (p. 24)

Next come four core chapters devoted respectively to what the authors regard as the four criteria of productive, as distinguished from unproductive, interview materials. These are summarized as follows:

1. *Range*. Enable interviewees to maximize reported range

of evocative elements and patterns in stimulus situation as well as range of responses.

2. *Specificity*. Elicit specific reports of aspects of stimulus situation to which interviewees have responded.

3. *Depth*. Help interviewees describe affective, cognitive, and evaluative meanings of situation and the degree of their involvement in it.

4. *Personal Context*. Ascertain attributes and prior experience of interviewees which endow situation with these distinctive meanings. (Page x.)

The next chapter is devoted to the advantages and disadvantages of the group interview and to suggested procedures for getting participation from the entire group. There is discussion of means for controlling the loquacious and activating the reticent, for "coping with the interruptions" and for "counteracting the leader effect." The final chapter is concerned with selected problems in conducting interviews. These include opening the interview, controlling the expression of interviewers' sentiments, and the treatment of interviewees' questions.

Since there has been a great proliferation of efforts to secure information through interviews during the past decade, attempts to improve the techniques and to avoid pitfalls are of manifest value. The present reviewer was especially interested in, and also a little skeptical about, some of the discussion in the chapter on retrospection. Having learned from some survey experience how easily cause and effect can be confounded by the rationalization of respondents in *ex post facto* reports he gives three cheers to any effort at getting the individual "to recall his immediate reactions to the material rather than to re-consider the stimulus situation and report his *present* reactions to it." He is perhaps less optimistic than the authors of this book about any outstanding success in this area.

Since this book is devoted to the improvement of interview techniques, it is of interest to note that some of the larger research organizations attempt to meet the problem of human frailties in interviewing by giving meticulous care to the construction of questionnaire forms. Thus, whereas a previous maxim was to keep the questionnaire brief and to train the interviewers well there seems to be some trend toward great elab-

oration of the schedule and the use of interviewers who can be trained fairly rapidly. To some extent the trend is analogous to the breakdown of the craftsman's job into simple component parts that can be done by the semi-skilled workers on the assembly line.

Whatever may be the trend in interview procedure, there will remain the need for periodic re-examination of principles and methods. In a broad sense that is the contribution that has been made by the present volume.

CLYDE V. KISER

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### A FOLLOW-UP STUDY OF WAR NEUROSES<sup>1</sup>

THE stimulus provided by warfare to certain forms of medical and scientific research is strikingly illustrated by this volume. During the second World War approximately 703,000 patients from the United States army and the United States navy and marine corps entered hospital with a diagnosis of psycho-neurosis; 27 per cent of all army discharges for disability and 16 per cent of the navy discharges were on account of neurotic illness; 377,000 of these discharged people were still receiving compensation at the end of 1952, 40 per cent of them with 10 per cent disability-ratings. A problem of this magnitude raises important military and administrative questions and it fitted well into the post-war programme of medical follow-up studies developed by the Committee on Veterans' Medical Problems of the National Research Council. The results of the investigation directed by Drs. Brill and Beebe are now presented as one of the Veterans' Administration Medical Monographs.

The core of the investigation consisted in the five-year follow-up, by clinical interview when possible, of a randomly selected group of 1,475 men admitted to hospital during military service because of a neurotic disability; officers, females, and coloured men were excluded. As one control group the authors included a sample of 397 enlisted men in World War II for a comparison during the period of military service; they were

<sup>1</sup> Brill, Norman Q., M.D. and Beebe, Gilbert W.: *A FOLLOW-UP STUDY OF WAR NEUROSES*. Washington, Government Printing Office, 1955.