

PERSONALITY AND ATTITUDE TOWARD A POLITICAL EVENT¹

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During the week of October 21, 1962, following Soviet moves in the Caribbean, it became evident that, unlike many other political events, the Cuban crisis was experienced in a personal and intense way by large numbers of people. The present study was suggested by the authors' observations and speculations regarding different modes of response to the crisis; modes which appeared to bear some relationship to characteristic ways of relating to others.

Fundamentally, it was hypothesized that persons showing a relatively dominant style in interpersonal behavior would tend to react to the crisis consistently with this style.

Our speculations narrowed to the scheme of Karen Horney (2) as a parsimonious, albeit oversimplified, view of interpersonal response, appropriate for exploratory purposes. Horney has differentiated three basic interpersonal styles or types. The *compliant* personality fears disapproval and signs of rejection above all else. He tends to "wear his heart on his sleeve" and his dominant response to threat is "moving toward" the source, by compliancy and seeking reassurance. The *aggressive*, on the other hand, seeks to protect himself from feelings of helplessness. He fears being exploited by others and reacts by "moving against" them. Finally, the *detached* personality tends to "move away" from others, affectively at least. Like the aggressive he is sensitive to coercion, but his response is to withdraw from sources of threat. Granted that interpersonal behavior involves a complex of traits, motives and cognitions, as well as situation variables, we have used the relatively neutral term "style" to summarize some of these dispositional elements.

Viewing these as prototypes of interpersonal response and assuming some generalization to the kind of threat posed by the crisis, several hypotheses were advanced. (a) Compliant subjects were expected to express, or at least admit, greater involvement or concern over the crisis than the detached, since the compliant is sensitized to hostility or disapproval, and the detached withdraws.

¹The main content of this paper was presented under a different title (3) at the Amer. Psychol. Assoc., Philadelphia, August 1963.

(b) Aggressive subjects were expected to be less conciliatory, less favorable to negotiation with the Soviet Union than the compliants. Corresponding tendencies were also predicted in the responses of aggressives and compliants on a conventional scale of attitudes toward Russia.

(c) A final prediction concerned the amount of factual information the subject possesses about the crisis. If the compliant tends to be more affectively involved, more anxious, this might be further evidenced in disruption of cognitive activity and a rather diffuse awareness of crisis events. Witkin *et al.* (6) have argued that the type of subject labelled compliant in this study tends to be field-dependent and cognitively undifferentiated. On this basis it was predicted that compliants would score lower than the other groups on an information test dealing with the crisis.

METHOD

A questionnaire was devised and administered to 246 students in introductory psychology classes at West Virginia University. It consisted of:

6 opinion questions dealing with crisis reactions, of which 2 dealt with feelings of personal concern over the threat of nuclear war; 2 with reactions to current and future negotiations with the Soviet Union; and the last 2 with radio-TV listening and newspaper reading;

an information test on crisis events, consisting of 8 questions dealing with names or issues constantly before the public during the crisis;

a 20-item Thurstone-type scale of attitudes toward Russia, constructed by the usual procedure in connection with earlier research on another topic.

This questionnaire was prepared over the week-end of October 28 for administration Monday on the assumption that the crisis would not yet be resolved. Although a substantial part of the threat had been removed by Monday, Soviet-U. S. relations were still fluid, and at least some of the feeling evoked by the crisis had not subsided. Thus we proceeded as planned and gave the questionnaire to Monday morning classes.

Approximately 10 weeks later the same groups were given a personality scale built around the Horney categories. Previous work by Rosenberg (4) has shown some general relationships between the Horney types and the occupational choices of college students. Using Rosenberg's items and working from Horney's descriptions, an experimental scale was constructed yielding a score for each mode of interpersonal response. It consisted of 55 items, 48 of the true-false and 7 of the forced-choice variety.² Test-retest reliabilities were .85 for compliant, .80 for detached and .72 for aggressive ($N = 50$ with a 4-week interval). Since introductory classes were utilized for research throughout the semester and the personality scale was given in the context of studying choice of college major, it was assumed that subjects would not associate the two questionnaires. Classroom comments and questions during the administration supported this assumption.

In order to obtain subjects showing dominant tendencies toward one of the three styles, only those scoring in the upper quartile on a single scale and at or below the median on the other two were used in the analysis. This resulted in a final N of 68 males and 45 females, 113 in all.

²Copies of this scale can be obtained from the principal author.

RESULTS

Scores were derived from the weights assigned to response categories for the variables of degree of involvement or concern, and willingness to negotiate with the Soviet Union. Number of correct information items and the Thurstone scale values provided the other measures. Each of these variables was analyzed in a 3×2 factorial, the three levels consisting of the interpersonal styles, and the two levels being male and female. Thus, for example, scores for degree of crisis concern were analyzed for the two main effects of style and sex and for the interaction. None of the interactions between interpersonal style and sex was significant, thus only main effects will be discussed. Since cell frequencies were disproportionate, main effects and interaction sums of squares were adjusted by a method proposed by Steel and Torie (5).

On the first prediction regarding compliant-detached differences in concern over the crisis, concern was indeed greatest for compliants, least for detached, and intermediate for aggressives ($F = 8.94$, $df = 2/107$, $p < .001$). The compliant-detached t was also significant ($p < .001$ one-tailed). Sex differences were not significant on this variable.

On the second prediction regarding aggressive-compliant differences on reactions to negotiation, the aggressives were indeed least favorable, the compliants most conciliatory. The detached group was intermediate ($F = 4.34$, $df = 2/106$, $p < .025$). The t for the aggressive-compliant comparison was significant at the .01 level. Significant sex differences were also obtained ($F = 3.58$, $df = 1/106$, $p < .05$), with females more conciliatory. The additional prediction of aggressive-compliant differences on the attitude scale toward Russia was not supported (F s for both style and sex < 1).

With regard to the final prediction, the analysis of information test scores yielded significant F ratios for both main effects. Compliants had the lowest mean scores, aggressives highest and the detached intermediate; however the means for aggressive and detached differed only slightly ($F = 5.10$, $df = 2/107$, $p < .01$). Males had significantly higher scores than females ($F = 8.46$, $df = 1/107$, $p < .005$). In order to make the nonindependent comparisons required by the prediction, Duncan's Multiple Range Test was applied, with each sex analyzed separately. Aggressives and detached did not differ significantly for either sex, however for both sexes compliants had lower information

scores than the other two groups. All values from the Duncan Test were significant at the .05 level. The prediction was supported.

By obtaining American College Test (ACT) standard scores through matching personal data with student records, we had hoped to partial out intelligence from the information scores with a covariance analysis. This proved impossible due to a loss of nearly one-third of the cases in matching. Analysis of variance on the remaining cases showed no significant differences in ACT score by style, although the compliants were slightly below the other groups. In short, the contribution of intelligence to the information differences remains problematic.

DISCUSSION

Taken together the data are consistent in a general way with the findings of Christiansen (1) that the individual's characteristic direction of blame in everyday situations, whether outward, inward or passive, is related to his attribution of blame in the area of international relations.

However, the question of the use of extreme groups is raised by this study. There is no evidence that the less extreme would show these same tendencies to any marked degree. Even with the experimental groups, the differences are small when viewed against the total range of responses on the crisis questionnaire.

On the attitude toward Russia scale all groups were strikingly similar. The consistency of political attitude with personality was in the present study restricted to the more immediate threat posed by the crisis.

SUMMARY

During the Cuban crisis of 1962, college subjects were administered a questionnaire to assess their personal concern and information about the crisis, and their feelings about American policy toward Russia. Two months later they were given scales devised to measure the three personality categories of Horney, i.e., movement toward (compliant), against (aggressive), and away from people (detached). It was expected that these interpersonal styles would be related to reactions to the crisis.

The following predictions were confirmed: compliants expressed greater personal concern than detached; aggressives took a more uncompromising attitude toward negotiation than compliants; com-

pliants knew less about the crisis than either aggressives or detached. Further analysis showed that females were more conciliatory toward the Soviet Union than males, and males scored higher on information than females. These findings were discussed within the framework of personality consistency.

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(continued from page 128)

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