



METHODOLOGY FOR THE EVALUATION OF THE INTERPRETATIVE
QUESTIONNAIRE USED DURING THE SESSIONS OF THE
SEMINARY OF SOCIOPSYCHOANALYSIS.

Dr. Salvador Millán.

The seminary has continually maintained one meeting per week from 2 to 5 o'clock for the last eight years. In them have taken place the discussions of theoretical aspects and the processes of sensibilization and new understandings have been developed, including those as a group. And a six hour field practice has been carried on once a month for six years, which has become study object and practice.

A: Design and Application

This implies the elaboration of the questionnaires after determining the study project, which includes grosso modo the approach to existing knowledge about the group through the dominant ideology, as well as, in a general way, its basic history, cultural influences, means of expression as reflected in the use of language and how their traditions are expressed in festivities. This previous knowledge will facilitate the choice of questions, the reagents, which are based on the theoretical aspects of



humanistic psychoanalysis which may be useful and demonstrable in practice.

We have used two types of questionnaires. First, the interview questionnaire, where the questions, which are of the open type, are able to determine the course of the interview, through the stimulus question, in catharsis sessions or give an opportunity for the expression of resistance –with ideological replies in most cases– or elicit leading and original answers. In the second questionnaire, called biophilia–necrophilia, the precoded questions accompanied by their own specific multiple-choice answers are closed question-answers. Both questionnaires include stories and questions about dreams.

In the mining community project, the interview questionnaire was used. Additionally included were the stories used by Piaget to exemplify and define his concept concerning the moral development of the child.

The application of the interview questionnaire causes the work carried on to tend more toward the analytically oriented psychological interview than a simple collection of data, which in reality converts the application into an analytical clinical interview, so it is not surprising that the person interviewed should, after the interview, see a light or acquire a new awareness of himself.

One tries to make the application in a single period,



since, in this way, it is possible to evaluate, as a group, both the existing historical circumstances –cultural events of the moment– and the dominant politics–ideology. These circumstances may occasion, in an accidental manner non-determining for evaluating character, answers indicative of such events. The questionnaires reflect that ideology. For example, in the study of the children, we found that they talk about the critical situations their parents are going through as a result of being involved in a strike or being dismissed from their jobs or we find answers concerning their mothers, indicating the social protest marches against the authorities, in which they were participating.

In the mining community project, the application was done on three successive days. It was a group of 20 investigators who carried it out. Previously, they were sensibilized to the same questionnaire –they had applied it to third parties as practice– and, furthermore, they could count on an understanding of psychoanalytic theory and experience in personal analysis, so their intervention cannot be looked at solely as a poll. Three years later, we made a second application to the group being studied. This was given in the same way. We have published the results.

In our case, as members of the seminary, we have been able to count on one experience which has turned out to be particularly sensibilizing, a poll, in which the nuclear



type questionnaire –the one used for the study of the peasant– has been applied in a systematic and personal way by us, so that, at the same time, the evaluation, occasionally self-evaluation, of the questions themselves has been useful to us. We feel that this has facilitated the later application. Also, what we call refunding has been established. This consists of commenting directly and personally about the questionnaire. Here the administrator of the questionnaire tells the person to whom it is given the character traits encountered in the interview. For this praxis, we maintain the frame of the analytical theory of character.

B. The Interpretation. Qualitative Grading and its Quantitative Representation.

The questionnaires are worked through as many times as necessary. This requires several readings. The first assessment is made by those directly responsible for the project. The project may be an individual project presented to the group or a group project. A second assessment, which implies a critique and reassessment of the findings of the investigator is made by the group.

1. After the first general reading, the investigator has become acquainted with his material, giving him a chance to



absorb and find, according to his own sensibility, whatever attracts his notice, appears to be of some importance and has to do with the objective of the investigation. His findings may be the character traits or character dynamic, which permit him an overall understanding and a different way of seeing the social phenomenon being investigated. The investigator individually may make his own assessment.

When the work is done as a group, the questionnaire under study inreas, preferable by the person who applied it. The question may be read by a second member of the group, thus facilitating comprehension. The reading may be done in a continuous manner form beginning to end, that is, it may be read and listened to as a whole. Also, the reading may not be continuous, that is to say, it may be done question by question, which provides more opportunity to clarify the type of communication established and the conditions prevailing, catharsis, resistance or dialogue, also to point out the type of thought employed by the person interviewed, whether his ideas are original, whether he gave ideological answers or whether he gave an emotional answer. In the case of the meaning of character, we attempt to evaluate the answers in the following terms: Whether they speak of receiving or expecting from others, that others should give to them, or whether the answers indicate actions of getting something away from another, taking from



another, catching him unaware; or those answers which have to do with having, with order and finally answers which indicate how they value themselves, how they generate and culminate their actions and projects, appreciations which we consider within the processes of assimilation. Or, on the other hand, we take into account the answers which speak of suffering and sadism, or the responses which show individualism, arrogant answers, or answers very hard to separate from the subservient attitudes they take in relation to others or difficult to separate concept, subjective value from material things and, finally, whether they are answers of a productive activity, considerations that we make in the processes of socialization.

After finishing the reading of the questionnaire, which may take one or two two-hour sessions each, the group has a discussion looking to a new understanding and an approximation in character dynamics. In this way, we also obtain a sensibilization of the professional group.

Another procedure which we have practiced is to follow a series of key questions previously chosen which indicate, for example, the relationship of parents and children. In this way, we get to understand and clarify the relationship with authority. These questions facilitate the understanding of socialization processes. We also have questions which tell stories. This allows us to explore



projection mechanisms, imagination and comprehension of the person interviewed, and from the point or view of psychoanalytic clinical experience, these are mechanisms we shall see more clearly when we study their dreams, which are related spontaneously and with free associations and which together with fantasies and magical thinking, which they also express, provide us with an overall view quite close to their state of mind and psychological situation and permit us to form a picture of the interviewee from the questionnaire under study.

In this way, we evaluate whether the questions used hit their mark, whether they have proved useful and whether they were able to provoke something unexpected but relevant. Yet, although we know that any answer may trigger a typical character response and be a key to understanding the dominant character trait, we also know that a single question is not going to define the whole questionnaire, although it may be a typical answer and has to be evaluated in relation to the complete questionnaire.

2. Working as a group, several questionnaires can be studied at a time and also the answers of all the questionnaires to a single question.

This implies that we are interested in seeing the answers to one or several questions in an overall manner.



So the question is read and all the answers from the questionnaires are heard. This gives us a chance to appreciate the common ideology in conventional responses or see whether different, original answers exist, representing character. We also see the concept that the group has of authority, of its immobility or its expressions of violence and exploitation, in relation to the degree of freedom.

3. Two or three investigators address a specific theme.

These investigators may direct their attention to analyzing answers which follow a vector of the theory or a certain line of research. In this way, work has been done which indicates to us: The influence of TV, religiousness, types of dreams, clinical symptoms, descriptions of love, people most admired, plus investigations which determine degrees of development and growth or regression and paralysis of the group under study. We have also published these studies.

4. The Social Character.

For the evaluation of group character, we take into account the character types found in the study, which correspond, for the understanding of their dynamic, to those described by Fromm, but new and transitional types are not excluded, since social influences and changes are



more rapid than the adaptation process itself. This quantitative evaluation is based on the experience of the psychoanalytical clinic and is sustained by:

- The type of behavior being related,
- The relationship established with authority, parents and teachers,
- The degree of passivity or the degree of exploitation, taking from others, expressed in terms of snatching or taking away from another or else, through the expression of violence and destructiveness,
- The relation to their freedom or to the degree of fixation on family or duties,
- The actions they carry out in doing their work,
- Those which produce satisfaction and well-being and at the same time awake the interest of others,
- Narrations of relationships of suffering, grief and dependency,
- The degree of paralysis, dissatisfaction and lack of interest,
- The degree of compulsion to have things and to repeat,
- The degree of control exercised over their feelings and a solitary, isolating tendency, their interest in things,
- The defense of family, typical customs and national ones.

The understanding of the stories included in the questionnaire, as well as their own elaboration of fantasy narrations, stories about themselves and dreams help us to corroborate our psychoanalytic interpretation.

Once the character trait is determined, a comprehension is attempted based on knowledge of the socio-political influences and, if possible, the socio-economic ones. Understanding poverty from the point of view of character means demonstrating the dynamics which are being



experienced.

In our study of the mining community, we have corroborated that character formation in children is a process, contrary to the theoretical concept which is postulated that character once formed is unchangeable. The presence of children between the ages of six and eleven or more facilitated this conclusion for us. We saw that even very small children exhibited traits to be expected only later, traits that go beyond passivity. They showed themselves to be persistent, enterprising, persevering by themselves and satisfied, although we also saw how much older children persisted in or had regressed to passive dependent traits. This same appreciation, the flexibility of character, we had obtained from another previous study, and, although it was not done in the seminary, it serves as a direct antecedent: We compared the group of orphan children of NPH with a group of children of a government correctional institution. Both institutions maintain an ideology of assistance and the intention of facilitating the children's integration into society. However, NPH sustains principles based on aspects of development postulated by the theory of humanistic psychoanalysis. Fromm himself collaborated directly with Wasson, the director at that time. On the other hand, the government institution sustains the principle that it must, in order



to help, impose its values and criteria, based on order and discipline, on the children. That is to say, it does not offer a true alternative for change, but only a prolongation of the system

5. Analysis of Content.

Although, in our final report, the analysis implied numbers and percentages, these are a product of the observation of all the answers to the questionnaires. To this end, we worked up special sheets which allowed the answers to be read as a whole. If we read them in a horizontal line, we got information about an individual questionnaire, or if we did the reading vertically, we found all the answers which the group gave to the same question.

The reading of these answers is done in terms of the psychoanalytic theory itself, so it is a filtered and purposeful reading, which proves to be qualitative in itself.

The categories established were based on that overall study of the answers and they were also established under the psychoanalytical lens and are the product of interpretation.

The numbers and percentages used, which correspond to the quantitative expression, represent the numbers of



qualitative phenomena encountered. The percentage used corresponds to the quantitative phenomena present.

The quantitative expression becomes the result of the filter through the overall interpretation and psychoanalytical reading given to the answers.

The analysis of content, looking at all the answers and giving them a meaningful evaluation, is a practice used by the seminary. It is this experience which facilitated the numerical qualitative derivation.

6. Other studies.

The seminary has developed strategies for the interpretation of social character, with studies applying the questionnaire of precoded questions, known as the biophilia-necrophilia scale.

This questionnaire offers certain advantages, for example, in application, since the group to be studied can be gathered in one place and it can be applied to them all at the same time in a single session. This type of application takes the place of individual interviews. This questionnaire studies a population at the same historical moment, a phenomenon which may prove meaningful because of the relationship which may be established with the dominant ideology, especially if this is known beforehand.

Groups of university students from the school of



medicine have been the object of study, as have groups of pedopsychiatrists in their last years of specialization and groups of student psychiatrists, as well as a group of nurses. Here the ideology indicates to us to do good, watch over and save the patient, to help. Sustained by government public health programs that announce benefit under protective conditions and equality for all, the ideology reflects a protectionist structure. Nevertheless, we are not ignorant of the degrees of inhumanity existing in medical practice in the treatment of patients, converted into number and reference in the year-end attention report. These acts concern not only our country. The traits of character found, which function more in accordance with these practices, have to do now with economic power structures and hierarchies which characterize medical status. The traits have indicated exploitation, utilitarianism and authoritarianism and are comprised in narcissistic answers. It has not been surprising to encounter most serious degrees of perversion and necrophilia wrapped in professional glamour. The following dream of a physician characterizes these structures and their mimicry: She dreamed "that people, as if it were a demonstration, were pursuing me asking me to attend and heal them, but I felt very tired from attending so many and I asked them to wait for me to rest, telling them I



wouldn't fail them thereafter". A second dream of the same physician gives a wider understanding of her inner experience: "I dreamed that I had sexual intercourse with the professor of my husband, but when I was on him, he had an enormous computer and he asked me to push the button to get aroused and make the sexual function I liked best", an activity that is reduced to a mechanical act that depends on the exactness of technology and after all totally alienated from life.

In the case of the nurses, it has been found that, in the first years, the conscious desire to help, serve, and attend is very manifest. They are still influenced by conventional values and these coexist with character traits of dependence and obedience. In the last years of their preparation, we find that the professional group transforms itself and subordinates itself officially to the physicians, although it sets up a parallel struggle with this group to be the best health professionals. Their own structure is defined by themselves in terms of hierarchical levels and command. The character traits speak also of control, domination, coldness, and some of extreme or compulsive cleanliness, all of which they exercise over the patients.

The questionnaire was also applied to a group of young volunteers for an adult literacy campaign, in a



private school which originally took pride in its political refugee origin and its open, liberal and socialist ideology. There, too, we studied a group of young people alien to any participative social conscience, who instead aspire to be good pupils, good sons and daughters and behave as they are supposed to. The questionnaire clearly reflects the polarity of ideological tendencies and also tendencies to opposite character traits. For the group of volunteers, these inclined toward the pleasure of living, interest in meeting others and taking chances, and, for the group of good pupils, toward order, even ostentation of force, plus an attitude opposed to disorder. The following dream is an example from a youth of the first group: "Several times, I have dreamed I am in the country, with the other pupils. These are pleasant dreams".

Lately, the questionnaire has been applied to a small group of so-called street children, a contrastive phenomenon which indicates the grave condition of society, profound differences between classes, where the poor tend to become poorer. Although there exist institutional programs of neighborly help, which receive ample publicity and are sustained from above by the government apparatus and which provoke a reaction of well-being for some groups of society, who hear over and over with satisfaction the achievements announced by an ideology of aid, who, moreover



receive intense publicity in messages which attain an impact and fill their function in society. Yet, those street children do exist; they are present. We find in them an interesting trait which indicates the strength of their will not to be subjected, their attempts to change and a desperate struggle for better opportunities, although they are a sample of how ephemeral freedom is, since their struggle is joined under conditions of extreme risk.

All these groups are being studied circumstancially. The questionnaires contain closed questions which offer multiplechoice answers and also open questions, which are those taken in a projective way and are the object of interpretation, as well as the dreams and stories. This makes it easier to appreciate contrast, because many adequately answered ideological responses, considered good ones by the conscience, are expressed thus: Help, serve, do good, do no harm to another, but in their projective answers, the physicians indicated, in the people whom they most admire, a mixture of Christ with Hitler and Napoleon, and they mentioned that they admire them because of how they influenced others, how they ordered others around and the way they exercised control over them. These and other answers which indicate their character allow us to see their need to control patient, put them in order, or express that one must punish anyone who does harm, etc.,



that is to say, we read in them an authoritarian characterological structure.

The analysis of the answers and the interpretation which are carried out receive the same treatment as with interview questionnaires and, although this questionnaire offers many numbers as answers, they are and should be looked at with the interpretative filter of psychoanalytic theory.

The reading which can be made of society should not be limited to what is indicated to us by the conditions of ascendancy of the ideological superstructures or what refers to evident material conditions in walth or in poverty and the undeniable connection between the two. A reading can also be made which will point out a space which is dynamic and which will widen comprehension. That is the space of social character.