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The Formation of a Professional Identity

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A book or a course has too often been presented as an isolated act of science or profession, a product with apparently no history in the person. However, the psychohistory of any intellectual product is always more than the sum of its content and methodological ingredients. The product is an expression of the author, a statement of where he/she is in the rites of intellectual passage and an outgrowth of a history of personal involvement and commitment to an area of endeavor. This particular product has personal origins and these roots will be explicitly incorporated as a legitimate inquiry into the assumptions and substance of the ideas themselves. This is especially pertinent here since the thrust of this exposition is toward a human science model for studying personality and as such warrants a personal as well as intellectual history.

The author as an undergraduate majored first in French and English largely due to a preoccupation with poetry, especially the writing of poetry and the study of the linguistic formats for conveying a meaning representation with conciseness, clarity, and beauty. Poetry, in this context, is method, an exercise in precise renditions of meaning fused with feeling and conveyed by applications of a learned rule system that differs from prose communication. Training in psychology was primarily Social Psychology in which content of relevance was combined with sharply focused and highly prized methodology.

Graduate school in an early Boulder model program (Illinois) was an immersion in learning theory, especially that of Clark Hull under the tutelage of Robert Grice and Charles Osgood. Hull's theory was Big Theory, formal and elegant, conceived with the notion that deductions from this theory when tested by systematic
research would provide the basis for understanding human beings. Coupled with theory was a continuous practice of methodology as the royal route to research sophistication. The writing of sonnets in lieu of undergraduate lecture notes was replaced by the creation of research designs, grandiose and limited by knowledge of statistics and practicalities. These exercises in methodology—fabrication and play with variables and statistical consequences—were analogous to exercises with the forms of language that constitute traditional poetry idiom. These endeavors had immediate progeny in theory construction (Dana, 1954a) and research (Dana, 1954b), two papers which in retrospect appear as personal reactivity to graduate experience.

Clinical training (in a VA hospital setting remote from campus) included an injunction by the supervising psychiatrist to keep away from "pre-oedipal" material in psychotherapy and a license to conceptualize and describe persons with minimal supervision because reports were well written (not because they were useful or of demonstrated predictive validity). Psychotherapy practice in this hospital was a systematic rendition of Miller and Dollard sans supervision with patients who were considered "hopeless" and consequently beyond damage due to ineptness, ignorance, or too much risk-taking with their institutional lives. Psychological treatment was, therefore, to be discovered in practice using a self-taught application of learning principles. As such it was a practice of method ostensibly based upon conceptualization (assessment).

Such bifurcated professional identity was not rare in early Boulder model programs. It was not until the process of the Diplomate examinations (1958-1960) that I realized I had become—for that generation—a maverick who functioned largely beyond the constraints of consensus in clinical practice primarily because I was unaware of the ingredients for a more conventional practice. Nevertheless, what was probably a very early rendition of growth therapy for well
functioning young professionals was coupled with treatment of disturbed persons whom other professionals preferred not to see in their practices. The major professional outcome was a change in location to West Virginia University, a setting that not only provided more feedback from peers for clinical practice but less psychotherapy practice and more research opportunity. I became reacquainted with graduate statistics as well thanks to Art Thomas, a very coherent teacher of statistics.

In personality research, method variety was to prevail over content specialty. Studies encompassed the unlikely companion areas of person perception, repression-sensitization, verbal-numerical discrepancies and personality, ego strength, and the Brunswik Lens model for clinical judgment! However, assessment research provided the main theme with more than 40 empirical studies prior to 1969. While the early focus was on Rorschach and TAT stimulus characteristics, objective tests were increasingly represented. Repeated attempts to make sense out of empirical studies (e.g., Dana, 1955; Dana, 1962; Dana, 1963a; Dana, 1966a; Dana, 1968a; Dana 1968b; Dana, 1969a) were augmented and replaced by review articles in the 5th, 6th, 7th, and 8th Mental Measurements Yearbooks and elsewhere (Dana, 1977, Dana, 1980a). Finally, a process or model by which tests and other data were used to describe persons was presented (Dana, 1966c; Dana, 1970) and a variety of empirical studies were accomplished which discredited this inference model, a finding in keeping with Walter Mischel's concurrent research.

Obviously much of this research was accomplished with students for they have been responsible for my growth and identity no less than I have participated in some of their professionalization. I have always been deliberate in eschewing a systematic research area, partly because of my own interests, but primarily because I prefer to learn where students are going and share that discovery rather than enjoin them to follow my preplanned research program. The implicit
message from my published research is a people story of sharing enthusiasm, hard work, and a growth of relationships, respect, and understanding. For me, at least, this process then outweighed the value of the research contributions themselves.

Professional identity from the early 1950s to 1968 was an uneasy compartmentalization of method applications, an increasingly behavioral concern in therapy and research, and continuing practice of conceptualization in assessment. There was no unifying theme except for a persistent outcropping of seemingly unrelated papers, essentially humanistic-existential in tone, beginning about 1960 and finding some fulfillment in occasional publications in atypical outlets (Dana, 1961; Dana, 1965; Dana, 1966; Dana, 1967). In fact, a refrain among West Virginia graduate students of that era was, "If you cannot publish in an American journal, try Darshana!" A paper on causality and alienation (Dana, 1969b) presaged a transformation which was to coalesce the separate areas of research, training, and practice into a professional unity. Causality and alienation were more than themes for an intellectual discourse, they were the hallmarks of my experience and embodied a search for means-end relatedness in the face of a pervasive accumulation of diverse strands of experience.

The major event here was a diagnosed cancer of the pancreas and a subsequent preparation for death. The diagnosis was surgically proven inaccurate, but there was a transition away from the fragmented existence of an urban psychologist dealing with administration, consultation, teaching, and research with an assurance that was belied by the inconsistencies across these domains. Leaving the city for a rural teaching existence, the first endeavor was an unpublished statement, *A New Clinical Psychology* (Note 1), of how the components of professional existence were to be put back together once again. For the very first time a paper was written that was not intended for publication, but existed as
a credo and a reminder that values were the glue that put separate components together and made them consistent and related. And everything thereafter has been a reaffirmation of these values in research, teaching, and clinical practice.

It is no accident that a critical incident in research preceded this paper. The incident occurred following a deception study using replicated Latin Squares. College women were trained to present their standard Rorschach protocol under neutral, sexy and hostile conditions to male graduate assessment students who were persuaded to believe that all of these Rorschach were bona fide (Dana, Dana, and Comer, 1972). One day Rick Murphy and Paul Griswold - two of these examiners - upon seeing a "subject" in the Student Union called her by different names. She ran directly to my office with the two graduate students in pursuit. The research "game" was over for me at that point and publishability and design probity became clearly secondary to other issues.

I look back upon the stranger I have described in these preceding paragraphs and although I know him, I do not experience the fragments of professional identity as a person. In a clinical sense I have bestowed a professional identity that did not exist by compilation, categorization, and documentation. Such is our practice. We conceptualize persons and the product seems to be integumented, to cohere, to actually become that person. But it is not so: an intellectualized, after-the-fact representation may be elegant, comprehensive, lucid, but it is not the person. Thus, the second portion of this professional lifetime provides another way in which the strands of identity may be put together so that the result is not intellectual but experienced and behavioral.

A profession for a person is a way of life, a commitment to more than providing services for financial reward. Ideally, the professional acts should make an identity statement that describes the person's values and his or her
humanity. We have no doubt, for example, of who Erik Erikson is simply by reading his statements of what other persons - Martin Luther and Gandhi - are ostensibly like as seen through his eyes and his human condition. We do not need Robert Coles to tell us who Erikson is, although Robert Coles needs to tell us who he is by describing Erikson. While this may seem like playing with words, the point is compellingly behavioral: we are what we do.

Throughout the first portion of my professional life meaning was conveyed by format, method, style, or technique. A poet's poet with a special personal idiom, or a psychologist's psychologist attempting purvey the recondite exercise of meaning through the form of the research métier. I would submit that such "exercise" or "practice" by means of form is secondary to the values that undergird the performance and are responsible for it. This simple truism was not apparent to me until 1969. If I had stopped the frenetic professional pace to listen to what Maslow would describe as my "inner core", I would have experienced the clarity, certainty, and unity of realization at an earlier time.

Meaning is thus predicated on values and only subsequently exposed in method. The method is plastic and variable rather than immutable and a condition of our science of psychology. This statement does not excuse poor or inadequate method, but subordinates the choice of method to the values inherent in what one is doing professionally. A "better" method ("better" in terms of the present canons of our science) that dehumanizes persons called subjects is not to be preferred to a less rigorous mode of inquiry that preserves the human status of the person as coworker or partner in a research process. This is clearly a value judgment and a value issue that every psychologist must confront and engage in research and clinical practices.
The problems that we—as psychologists, persons, and citizens—face are simply too overwhelming for our professional behaviors to demonstrate dalliance, personal image building, egocentricity, dilettantism or conservatism-conformity. These problems are of persons in environmental contexts and speak directly to survival and to the quality of our own lives. What we can do (about the state of ourselves and our society) is related to our stage of personal ego development. Training or practice should (ideally) be related to growth process, a change idiom that is predicated on becoming more like what we can be, more sensitive, more open, more caring; in a word, more humanized (Dana, 1974; Dana, 1978b).

If values are the sine qua non of professional acts, personal responsibility is the catalyst for their implementation. The impact of such responsibility for me occurred in an exquisitely minor contribution on social responsibility to the Vail Conference (Dana & Meltzer, Note 2), and in awareness that psychologists had no corner on helping behaviors (Dana, Note 3). College students are effective helpers of other students (Dana, Heynen & Burdette, 1974) and persons from all walks-of-life are found to be potent self-helpers (Dana & Fitzgerald, 1976; Dana, Note 4; Dana & Gilliam, Note 5). Marital or living partners could help one another (Dana & Turner, Note 6). Persons can be readily trained to enhance paraprofessional skills (Dana, Brian & Tabor, Note 7) and trainers may also be trained to continue giving away psychological skills to the public (Dana, Turner & Fitzgerald, Note 8; Dana, Tabor & Brian, Note 9).

Accountability is not to be found in the Barnum literature where all subjects are deceived with bogus personality information (Dana & Graham, 1976). There is, however, demonstrably more to genuine psychological assessment reports than Barnum statements (Dana & Fouke, 1979). Accountability in psychological assessment
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is more likely to occur in face-to-face feedback with asessees and referral
source persons. Such feedback techniques can and should be communicated as
part of assessment training for graduate students (Dana & Lunday, Chapter 17
in Dana, 1981) and in continuing education for professional psychologists
(Dana, Erdberg & Walsh, Note 10). There is a basis for the belief that such
practices are mandatory for ethical clinical psychologists (Dana & Leech, 1974;
Dana, 1975).

Inevitably, there was a spread from these specific training efforts to
more general issues of training (Dana, 1966b; Dana, 1980b) and the competence
of clinical psychology graduate students (Dana, Gilliam & Dana, 1976). Case
studies of "good" training programs evidence the effects of student ownership
of their own training experience and of benevolent caring as program mandates
(Dana, 1978a). Research on internship evaluation speaks to the relatedness of
intern affects to their activities, practice settings and other persons. Explicit
separation of person and setting characteristic affect values provides feedback
that is relevant for individual interns and for program management (Dana & Mc-
Arthur, Note 11). That interns complete internships and move on to the larger
professional society is being documented by the specific, components effects
of internship experiences upon subsequent clinical psychology practice (May &
Dana, Note 12).

Of even greater generality are the issues of method involved in program
evaluation research. If one abjures psychic or physical violence to the person
as subject, one also believes that organizations profit from their own expertise,
initiative, and self-study. Enabling, monitoring and focus may result from
external aequis, but essentially involved is a confrontation with their own
agency strength and capacity for intact functioning (Dana, 1964; Dana, Note 13).
A university counseling center and two social service agencies explored their own viability and potential for growth within this research paradigm.

These separate strands pertain to the values involved in professional practices, the care and training of the person as nonprofessional or professional helper, and the revitalization of the agency or organization to approximate more closely their human service missions. Implicit in this panorama is an ideology of growth, an abiding concern with the person and with the environment as expressed in quality of life. For me this is psychology: a human science slowly creating its own methods and identity out of concern for human beings. Similarly, I construct my own identity out of my own history and try to place myself (rather than to discover myself) in what I do as a professional. I encourage my acts to be relevant to my beliefs and consistent over time such that whatever I do is a public exposition of what I am and a set of behaviors for which I can be responsible and accountable. Long ago (Dana, 1963b), I wrote about responsibility preceding human acts rather than following them. That intellectual awareness became the basis for the experience of inseparability between psychologist and person, between thought and word and deed, between credo and behavior. Thus, this prologomenon is considered to be a necessary groundbass for all that follows.
Reference Notes

   (Available from Psychology Department, University of Arkansas, Fayetteville, Arkansas, 72701).


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