CHAPTER III

THE CONCEPT OF INTEREST

I. VARIOUS VIEW POINTS

With the advent of measurement of interests some of the mysteries around motivational factors have been unfolded and much light has been thrown on the nature of interest. Popular concepts of interest prevailed for a long time until modern definitions crystallized as a result of intensive researches. In the words of Monroe\(^1\) "Interest is essential as the starting point of the educative process, effort is essential as its outcome". The interest of a child may explain the entire mechanism of human behaviour in relation to the environment. Arnold\(^2\) summarized the work of early writers and concluded that interest was a dynamic force in determining human behaviour. The German psychologist Stumpf in 1883 defined interest as a desire to observe. Although this definition was not scientific, he has laid down the foundation of the future work. With Stout, the English psychologist, interest and "Condition" are the same things. Interest is motivation or mental striving towards an end-state. Woodworth\(^3\) presented a more convincing concept of interest as a motivating force. To him interest

\(^1\) Monroe, P.: op. cit., p. 566.


was a motive or drive towards activity. Thorndike\(^4\) considered interest to be a pleasurable feeling which aids learning. In his opinion, interest is the result of past experience. James\(^5\) described interest as a selective force in our experience.

Drever\(^6\) emphasized the element of satisfyingness in interest. "To him, interest is a feeling of Worthwhileness passing into satisfyingness. Dewey\(^7\) points out, "Interest is first active, projective or propulsive ... Interest projects itself towards an object, which has conceptual existence outside the limits of the sphere of the interest itself".

Mangion\(^8\) has attempted a comprehensive definition of interest in relation to the structural and functional aspects of personality. In the words of Mangion, "Interest is a feeling of worthwhileness, dynamic, positive, selective and specific, which has the nature of a relationship, functioning here and now towards a psychological object in

\(^4\) Thorndike, E.L.: op. cit.
\(^5\) William James: op. cit.
\(^7\) Dewey, John: op. cit., p. 16
view of an end, which on being attained gives satisfaction to the individual's needs*. It is seen that interest has a reference to needs, desires, and motivation. It is a set of disposition towards a particular object or idea. Interest is thus a word with different shades of meanings.

The earlier concepts of interest emphasized the role of experience in interest formation. As expressed by Bingham⁹, interest, is a tendency to become absorbed in an experience and to continue it. The psychological nature of interest remained shrouded in mystery until the concept was used in terms of measurements. In the measurement sense according to Fryer¹⁰, "Subjective interests are likes or dislikes which are estimated experiences, characterized by feeling of pleasantness or unpleasantness".

The feeling aspect is thus dominant in the psychological analysis of interest attempted earlier. The introspective study of interest experience has been made from various angles. One approach analyses this experience into the elemental psychological factors which compose it. It has been regarded as a complex experience dominated by feelings. This is a structural approach to the study of interest while the second point of view is that of functional psychology. According to the functional point of view, the motivation

---

of the interest experience is very important. Thus, the dynamic aspect of interest has received greater attention of this school. In the opinion of Gestalt psychology, however, interest is to be considered an experience as a whole.

Historical survey indicates the complexity of interest and points out the need for objective definitions, while the earlier conceptions of interest brought out the feeling aspects involved in interest. More clearly, McDougall\(^\text{11}\) emphasized the conative aspects. According to him, interest, being essentially conative, is a matter of enduring the setting of our conative tendencies or impulses. Interest is, therefore, determined by our instincts and sentiments.

The operational concept of interest has been provided by Fryer who points out a clear cut demarcation between subjective and objective interest.

**The Subjective and Objective Interest**

The subjective interest in the opinion of Fryer, can be regarded as a cognitive experience influenced by the apperceptive mass in question and the intensity of stimulus arousing it. On the other hand, objective interests have been interpreted in a measurement sense as positive or negative reactions to stimulating objects and activities in the environment.

---

The Horntic School of Psychology has emphasized the conative aspect and described interest to be active and projective. Thus, both the cognitive and conative factors appear to comprise interest as a complex whole.

Baldwin\textsuperscript{12} has asserted that emotion or a feeling tone is no less important in the field of interest. He has defined the term as the intellectual feeling which is the result of consciousness, which accompanies the direction of mental tendencies. Thus, an advance has been made in the elaboration of the concept of interest by including a new dimension viz., the affective one.

It appears that interest has a number of aspects and as such it is a complex concept as that of attitude. According to Barlyne\textsuperscript{13} "Interests are very much the same as attitude though the definition is a matter of controversy". Inspite of the various investigations in the field of interest, these are certain pertinent questions deserving special mention.

1. What are the psychological elements involved in interest?
2. Is interest dynamic?

These questions are fundamental and the advance so far made in this field of research is not sufficient to offer

\textsuperscript{12} Baldwin, J.W. : Dictionary of Philosophy and Psychology.

any conclusive evidence. As regards the stability of interest or permanence of interest Strong\textsuperscript{14} says, "The evidence is fairly conclusive that occupational interest patterns are well established in many children by fifteen years of age". He has also said that feeling, interest, want and attitude, all involved a psychological mechanism. Interest is an aspect of behaviour, not an entity in itself. He has presented three conceptions of interest viz., interest as a single expression, interest as a general tendency toward a consultation of items and interest as a total score on an interest inventory. While discussing the criteria of interest, Strong\textsuperscript{14a} said that three of the criteria—attention, being stirred, and objects—are mentioned in the definition of interest from Webster's dictionary, which reads: "a propensity to attend to and be stirred by a certain class of object".

Although it is true that one attends to something that interests one, the statement really adds very little to an understanding of interest. A more meaningful term than attention is "persistent attention". Normally attention fluctuates from one thing to another. To activities which are interesting one can continue to pay attention seemingly without effort and for considerable periods of time. The more interesting one's work is, the less is the effort to continue it.


\textsuperscript{14a.} Strong Edward K., Jr. Vocational Interest 18 years After College, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, 1955.
'Feeling' is the most commonly emphasized criterion of interest. Technically feeling refers to pleasantness or unpleasantness.

The third criterion of interest is variously designated in current definition. In most cases it can be reduced to either of the two words: object or activity. The term 'object' focuses attention upon the stimulus, the term 'activity' upon the response. One is interested in certain objects and when so interested one does something to or with them, at the same time liking or disliking the activity.

These criteria pertain to interest which is an aspect of consciousness similar to feeling. But in interest measurement we are concerned with specific interests, that is, specific activities with which interest is associated. Such interest must be viewed as positive or negative - the activity being liked or disliked.

Interests are then activities for which we have a liking or disliking and which we go toward or away from. Or an interest may be defined as a liking or disliking state of mind accompanying the doing of an activity, or the thought of performing the activity.

For practical purposes this concept has been accepted for the present investigation. These concepts of interest have been explained in different terms viz., expressed interest, manifest interests, tested interests, inventoried interests, etc. The question remains whether there is something like potential interests and if so, what is its
relation to manifest interest? It has been pointed out that interest has a reference to needs, wants or desires. The basic pattern of interests emerges out of the interactions of these in relation to total personality. Evidence is accumulating that there is a definite relationship between interests, attitudes and personality factors pertaining to the adjustments of everyday life. Thus, there is an indirect admission of the fact that interests are mostly learned.

As regards the relationship between interest and personality, Barley and Hegenah point out that measured interests and actual occupational involvement reflect personality and provide opportunities for the fulfilment of the personal needs and drives.

Interest as a psychological concept has thus been recognised increasingly in recent years. It is a unit of behaviour, according to many. It is associated with the values which a person develops in course of his experience. On an analysis of the various concepts so far presented, it appears that interest is not only potential, but it may also develop gradually with reference to a number of determinants. Basically, it appears to be a conative experience leading to the formation of some interest patterns which may be reinforced by affective sets of dispositions and expressed through behaviour. It is also possible that there is a

---

heirarchy in the process of development of interests and much research is awaited in this area. Similarly, interests may have a number of dimensions still to be explored. Thus, as a concept, it requires further exploration and consolidation. This is however, a formidable task and is not within the purview of the present research.

II CLASSIFICATION OF INTERESTS

Interests are activities which are either liked or disliked by individuals. Since this is so, it is difficult to see how there can be general interests in the sense of psychological entities. Thus, the problem lies in the classification of interest because of its complex nature. This is why, there are various classifications besides the fundamental ones. It would be observed that Thurston\textsuperscript{16} has classified interest under four categories viz., Science, people, Language and Business, while Allport and Vernon\textsuperscript{17} have emphasized six areas of interest viz., Theoretical, Social, Economic, Political, Aesthetic and Religious. It is also interesting to see a difference in the classification by Strong\textsuperscript{18}

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{16}Thurston, L.L.: A Multiple-Factor Study of Vocational Interests; Personnel Journal, 10, 1931, pp. 198-205.
  \item \textsuperscript{18}Strong, E.K.: op. cit.
\end{itemize}
and Kuder\textsuperscript{19} The Kuder Preference Records are among the most carefully constructed instruments for the appraisal of interests according to Traxler\textsuperscript{19a}.

The difference between the two widely used inventories for interest measurements, Bordin\textsuperscript{19b} stated, "The two inventories tackle the same vocational interest problem from two directions. Logically the tests should reach the same goal, but empirically the tests have not shown adequately that they can be used interchangeably".

Strong uses interest measurement to develop scales which represent a configuration or constellation of preferences which differentiate one occupational group from another. Kuder extracts a few broad independent areas of vocational interest.

Thus Kuder has classified, interest under ten broad areas viz., Outdoor, Scientific, Literary, Mechanical, Clerical, Computational, Artistic, Musical, Persuasive and Social Service. There are various other classifications which might confuse a researcher to a considerable extent. Kuder's classification has, however, prompted the investigator to take a common core of interests and the following areas of interests have been covered in the pilot form of the present inventory:

\begin{itemize}
\item \textbf{Outdoor}
\item \textbf{Scientific}
\item \textbf{Literary}
\item \textbf{Mechanical}
\item \textbf{Clerical}
\item \textbf{Computational}
\item \textbf{Artistic}
\item \textbf{Musical}
\item \textbf{Persuasive}
\item \textbf{Social Service}
\end{itemize}


A critical study of literature available in the area of interest and motivation indicates an ambiguity in the concept of interest. It is quite natural to get confusion emerging from the diverse tendencies of the research workers to overlook certain aspects of this important variable. There are those who have failed to consider the unitary concept of personality by ignoring the global aspect of personality development in their theoretical frameworks. There are others who prefer molecular approach which is reflected through the categorization of their interest theories. In other words, there is a controversy on the basic theory of interest. Either aptitudes are considered as the fundamental factors in the origin of interest with reinforcement coming from other personal variables, or personality is variously defined as identification, values, needs etc. This basic difference in the approaches has contributed very little
towards a consistent interest theory. It appears that the position in the development of a clear-cut theory of interest is still shaky as the key problem is the failure to consider the integrative aspect of personality variables. In the opinion of Carter\(^{20}\) identification and a self-concept are contributory to interest formation and the importance of the interplay of personality characteristics is undeniable. According to him, the degree of interest and aptitude interaction will be reflected in the adjustment process of the individual. He goes further by saying that the relationship of the personality variables, interests and aptitude plays a crucial role in one's development or adjustment.

Another theory is put forward by Super\(^{21}\) in his later writings where he has indicated the importance of interaction and integration of personality variables. He clearly indicated in another source that adjustment is influenced by the interaction of interest and aptitudes. Super's contribution lies in his attempt to synthesize knowledge in this field through his constant emphasis upon interaction of personality characteristics and in turn the effect of environmental variables upon this interaction. Both Carter and Super agree that the extent of congruency between what a person is motivated to do and what he is capable of doing is reflected in


his adjustment process. Thus, the entire process of adjustment depends upon the degree of harmony of interest and aptitudes within the individual.

Fryer\textsuperscript{22} indicates the role of ability as well in personality adjustment and pointed out that abilities when coupled with interest spell success.

Strong\textsuperscript{23}, another pioneer has shown some reluctance to take a position on interest development. He has no doubt, expressed his convictions that interaction and aptitudes play an important role. A crucial contribution to interest theory has been made by Darley\textsuperscript{24} when he emphasized the relationship of interest development to personality development. It was explicitly stated that integrative aspect of interest and aptitudes are very much present in occupational selection. The complexity of interest and aptitude relationship and the effect of interaction has received attention from Berdie\textsuperscript{25}.

Tyler\textsuperscript{26} perceived an interest pattern as standing for a role, that a person has accepted. His theory would seem to

\begin{thebibliography}{99}
\item Fryer, D.: \textit{op. cit.}, p. 89.
\item Darley, J.G. and Theda Hegenah; \textit{op. cit.}, p. 65.
\item Berdie, R.F.: \textit{A Femminility Adjective check list}; \textit{Appl. Psychol.}, 1959, 43, pp. 327-333.
\end{thebibliography}
include interaction between interest and personality variable including aptitudes.

Patterson\textsuperscript{27} observes that overemphasis upon unconscious drives has caused other factors such as aptitudes to be ignored. He states that the emotional factors are not to be considered to the exclusion of all others but instead there is a different dimension which interweaves with and colours all others. Thus, it would appear that in the exploration for unifying trends the importance of the interaction of interests and aptitudes is basic to all theories.

The field of motivation and interest involves a number of complex interrelationships between a number of variables belonging to personality area. It is, therefore, quite likely that a number of theories have been developed in various directions. The most striking contribution is that by Super\textsuperscript{28} who relates interest and motivation to the process of personality adjustment. In short, the concept of interest and motivation has been brought forward in a more meaningful manner by Super and Carter.

In the words of Carter\textsuperscript{29}, "The Individual in the process of adjustment to a complex culture, finds experiences which

\textbf{References}


afford a basis for personality integration". In this sense, the relationship of the personality variables, interest and aptitude plays a crucial role in development and adjustment.

On the other hand, there are few like Strong who preferred to view interest as less amenable to environmental pressures, although acknowledging the interaction of interest and aptitude in the entire adjustment process. In other words, he emphasizes the inherent forces like drives and needs contributing to the formation of interest. Thus, interest as looked upon by him is an independent factor which can be accounted for or measured separately. In the sphere of personality testing there is always a conflict between the two approaches viz., clinical or global and analytic or actuarial. The same has been reflected on the area of interest measurement as well and the concept has partly been influenced by these approaches to measurement.

In view of the controversies on the concept of interest, it has been considered necessary to accept the definition of interest as stated before as enunciated by Strong.

**RESUME**

The term "interest" is not so simple as it appears to be. In spite of the popular notion of interest, the complexity of its nature has been gradually recognized. The earlier concepts of interest emphasize the role of experience in interest formation, while the recent trend is towards the emphasis on treating interest as a dynamic concept. Even the idea that interest is amenable to environmental pressure and
can be changed or diverted has become tenable in modern times. There are still a few controversies on the development of interest. There is a tendency to regard interest in relation to total personality while a few psychologists advocate interest as an independent variable to a certain extent. The global concept of interest is not very encouraging for the purposes of measurement and thus, an operational concept has been evolved by Strong and others who believe interest as a behaviour pattern identifiable and measurable on subjective or objective basis. The present investigation has, however, accepted the definition enunciated by Strong for practical purposes.
References


