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Perplexed and Circumplexed: The Structure of Social behavior in a Political World

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Abstract. This article posits some Issues needing to be clarified to increase the explanatory and predictive value of circumplex models of social behavior.

Timothy Leary's Interpersonal Diagnosis of Personality (1957) initiated a significant psychological research tradition: developing and validating the personality construct as interpersonal and circumplex models of such personality traits. Briefly, he proposed that the eight personality traits with the most significant social value are related to each other as distances of 45 degrees around two orthogonal axes--of Dominance and Nurturance. As described by Gaines et al (1997), one could start with managerial-autocratic at the 12-o'clock position and move counterclockwise in 45-degree increments from competitive-narcissistic, aggressive-sadistic, rebellious-distrustful, self-effacing-masochistic, docile-dependent, cooperative-overconventional, and responsible-hypernormal.

Since Leary, there have been numerous attempts to validate the circumplex structure (viz., Wiggins, 1979) and a smaller number of attempts to better define the traits within the circumplex or circumplex-like form (cf. McCrae & Costa, 1989). However, with the effort by psychologists to achieve greater and greater sophistication via statistical analysis, Leary's very conceptual conceit in positing the circumplex model seems to have been given short thrift. (And the same can be said for the interpersonal psychiatric approach of that "Psychiatrist of America" Harry Stack Sullivan (cf. Perry, 1982) that was the theoretical font of Leary's efforts.

For Sullivan and Leary, the crucial aspect of interpersonal personality theory was to capture the richness of human life and to apply the knowledge of personality obtained in both cases through what personologist Henry Murray called "deep diving" (cf. Robinson, 1992) to alleviate suffering and contribute to the quality of life experience.

The "hyperstatistical approaches" to interpersonal personality and circumplex models might as easily be describing the relational attributes of subatomic particles in the days of pre-Newtonian mechanics for all the human vibrancy explicated by such work. Moreover, the lesser attention paid to the telos sought by Sullivan and Leary in their work presents problems of interpretation for statistical results as well. Do results supporting a quasi-circumplex--as opposed to a circumplex or a square for that matter--suggest that previous researchers got it wrong or that people have changed through time? The same applies for the relative distances between interpersonal traits.

Even more problematic are differences in what specific interpersonal personality traits seem to mean based on correlations with other psychological entities. Are methodological wrongs being made right? Or have people changed?

Finally, where is the work of social and political psychologists attempting to develop and apply the validity of interpersonal and circumplex models of personality to policy, programs, plans, operations, and so on for the Commonwealth? The time has come for added emphasis on this area of psychology in the Public Interest. (See Gaines, S.O., Jr., Panter, A.T., Lyde, M.D., Steers, W.N., Rusbult, C.E., Cox, C.L., &

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Wexler, M.O. (1997.) Evaluating the circumplexity of interpersonal traits and the manifestation of interpersonal traits in interpersonal trust. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 73, 610-623; McCrae, R.R., & Costa, P.T., Jr. (1989.) The structure of interpersonal traits: Wiggins's circumplex and the five-factor model. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 56, 586-595; Perry, H.S. (1982.) *Psychiatrist of America: The life of Harry Stack Sullivan*. Cambridge, MA: Belknap; Robinson, F.G. (1992.) *Love's story told: A life of Henry A. Murray*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press; Sullivan, H. S. (1953.) *The interpersonal theory of psychiatry*. NY: Norton; Wiggins, J.S. (1979.) A psychological taxonomy of trait-descriptive terms: The interpersonal domain. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 37, 395-412.) (Keywords: Personnel Security; Psychological Assessment; Typology.)