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This Months Experiment

One of the most noticeable things about Humanistic Psychology is the way in which it pays attention to the body - how the body feels, what the body wants, what the body is expressing, and so on.

And of course it is a common experience in an encounter group to find that a person is saying one thing with his voice, while his body is saying something else entirely.

But even within the voice itself, the words can be saying one thing, and the *tone* of voice can be saying something different, even opposed. For example, one piece of research found that the degree of anger in doctors' voices had a lot to do with how successful they were in treating alcoholics (those with the lowest degree of anger had the most success, and vice versa); and another found a similar relationship between the anxiety, anger, warmth and pleasantness in the speech of mothers, and their children's behaviour over a 23 month period.

In the present study, people read a series of instructions twice, once just as practice, and once for a person whose description was given, who could either be a black garage attendant, a black law student, a white garage attendant or a white law student. The voice was rated each time on a scale for being loud or soft, warm or cold, admiring or condescending, pleasant or unpleasant, and personal or businesslike, by people who did not know who was being addressed.

After reading the instructions, the subjects were asked to fill in various attitude scales about the person they had been involved with, indicating how friendly they felt towards this person, how much they liked him, and so on.

When these results were put together (by Shirley Weitz, of the Department of Social Relations at Harvard University) they showed a *negative* correlation between the attitudes expressed and the tone of voice used, for the black interactions.

In other words, those who expressed the most friendly sentiments towards the black men also had the most cold and condescending voices when they spoke to them.

And similar relationships were found with other indicators of actual behaviour. In this experiment, liberal statements did *not* mean any greater readiness to mix with or to like black men, in actual practice. As the author says: '*Extremely favourable verbal attitudes were coupled with subtle signs of rejection of blacks across the experimental conditions.*'

It seems that it might be better all round if people dropped their 'oughts' about how they *should* react to black people, and become aware of what their bodies were telling them. This might not be so comfortable, but it would at least mean that some clear message came across, rather than a conflicted confusion. It might be possible then for some real work to be done on the prejudices which would be revealed.

Shirley Weitz, *Attitude, voice and behaviour: A repressed affect model of interracial interaction*, *J. Pers. Soc. Psychol.* 24, 1973.

Other experiments mentioned:

Milmoe et al, *The mother's voice: Postdictor of aspects of her baby's behaviour*, Proceedings of the 76th Annual Convention of the APA, 1968.

Milmoe et al, *The doctor's voice: Postdictor of successful referral of alcoholic patients* *J. Abnorm. Psychol.* 72, 1967.