

Assessing Subjective and Objective Interests with Stories and Inventories

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Early in the history of interest assessment, researchers seemed to be equally concerned with both objective and subjective interests. They measured objective interests with inventories that designate an interest using the names of the stimulating objects and activities that engage attention; for example mechanical interests. From this objective perspective, "interests are the objects and activities that stimulate pleasant feeling in the individual." (Fryer, 1931, p. 15). Fryer (1930) observed, based on his own experience, that interest inventories do not always reveal the pattern of an individual's vocational interests; thus the need to assess subjective interests. The assessment of subjective interests concentrated on the person's experience of or motivation for attending to certain objects. Fryer warned counselors that assessment from only the vantage point of objective interests directs counselors' concentration away from the human drama and philosophy of life that prompt a person to be interested in certain stimulating objects and activities. Fryer implored counselors to examine interest as a subject of experience as well as an object of attention.

Fryer pioneered the clinical approach to the study of subjective interests. In providing vocational guidance, he would help clients construct an *Interest Autobiography* by taking a history of different developmental eras: (1) earliest recollections, (2) entering school, (3) last years of elementary school, (4) last years of high school, (5) entering college (6) graduation from college (7) time of going to work (8) after several years of occupational activity (Fryer, 1931, p. 370). He wished that the history did not have to be retrospective and urged teachers and parents to keep records of their children's interests.

According to Fryer, analysis of interest histories secured by the autobiographical method reveal a continuity: "when the pattern is completed it is not so difficult to follow the design" (p. 412). He concluded that interest histories suggest a few general causes of the development of interests: economic opportunities, change or luck stimulation by the environment, role models, motivation to be recognized as an individual, and interest in some activity such as writing early on in life, which he calls intrinsic interests. Nevertheless, he concluded that adult interests may not be easy to forecast from early interests alone. He linked interests to adjustment by saying extreme lack of interest or extremely variable and disconnected interests occur in the badly adjusted. Continuity of vocational interest trends characterize the adjusted individual.

Bingham, an early advocate of interest inventory construction, also urged the use of interest autobiographies: (1937, p. 67) He believed that an individual's "narrative of the growth of his interests" had great value in securing a true picture of the client's interests. He emphasized the need for identifying the activities that reveal the person's interests. He used the word *Behaviorgrams* to denote these "notes of doings clearly indicative of interests."

Of course, Fryer and Bingham were not the first to emphasize the need to assess subjective interests with autobiographical questions. From the inception of modern vocational guidance, counselors used questionnaires to ask people about their interests. For example, Parsons (1909, pp. 29-31) used a questionnaire to ask "What are your favorite books, sports,

magazines? What do you do with your leisure time?" etc. In the present paper, I wish to demonstrate one contemporary approach to assessing subjective interests (Savickas, 1989, 1995, 1997a & b) by discussing the interest autobiography of one client, Ellenore Flood. Following this discussion, I will demonstrate how this assessment of subjective interests compliments an objective assessment of Ms. Flood's interests.

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