

## **The DiSC Graphs**

Few concepts in the use of DiSC cause as much confusion and controversy as the three graphs that measure a respondent's scores. Ever since we introduced the first DiSC profile almost 30 years ago, practitioners have debated the merits and applications of the graphs. Today, claims of different interpretations of the graphs are almost as plentiful as imitations of our original Personal Profile System that started it all.

How did such strongly held beliefs develop? And who is right?

### ***The Controversy***

Illustrating the depths of the issue, many interpretations of the graphs exist. One school of thought holds that Graph I is the public self, Graph II is the private self, and Graph III is the real self. A competing interpretation agrees that Graph III displays the real self, but says that Graph I shows the ideal self while Graph II shows less-desirable characteristics.

Another theory states that Graph I measures other's expectations of the person, Graph II displays behavior under pressure, and Graph III measures self-perception. Yet a different interpretation states that Graph I is adapted style, Graph II is natural style, and Graph III is behavior in a selected environment.

In addition, there are those who believe that Graphs I and II are simply a means to an end (i.e., the creation of Graph III) and should just be ignored. And there are still other interpretations, which continue to surface.

This dizzying conflux of interpretations and theories demands clarification. To do so, it is necessary to discuss the history of the graphs and their relationship to the DiSC model.

### ***The Roots of the Issue***

The roots of the issue are sometimes traced to Walter Clarke, an industrial psychologist in the 1940s [still need to verify the time frame...], who was among the first to design a personality assessment influenced by Marston's work. His instrument, the Activity Vector Analysis, required respondents to answer a questionnaire twice. The first time, Clarke had respondents identify "words I have heard others use to describe me." The second time, he had them identify "words I honestly believe describe me." It is important to note that Clarke actually gave two separate instructions to respondents, so it was natural to presume that different concepts were being measured. Finally, we note that we have never been able to determine that Clarke did any further validation for this instrument.

In the 1950s, when researcher John Cleaver developed the first forced-choice instrument based on Marston's model, the concept of public and private selves may have remained a strong influence. Cleaver's version of the instrument, however, did not include the same instructions that Clarke

had used. Furthermore, with this instrument, people only responded to questions once, which was a fundamental difference.

Then, in the 1970s, a researcher at the University of Minnesota, John Geier, authored the first *Personal Profile System* (the earliest version of *DiSC Classic*) building on the work of Marston, Clarke and Cleaver. The PPS called for interpreting Graphs I and II as measurements of the public and private selves, respectively. Consequently, when we published this first PPS and trained the first trainers and consultants in the use of DiSC, we encouraged them to interpret Graph I as their public self and Graph II as their natural self (and the way they acted under pressure, a belief held by John Cleaver [do we know this for sure?]). This continued throughout the 1980s.

Also, during that time, because of the enormous success of our DiSC profile, others had begun imitating Inscape's DiSC instrument, including its use of Graph I and II. They carried with them with the corresponding interpretations. In some cases, the claims regarding the graphs grew to include an even wider range of uses.

Then in the 1990s, we began making significant strides towards increasing the accuracy of the Personal Profile System with the introduction of the PPS Series 2800, with new research by Pamela Cole. As part of the increased emphasis on research at the time, the company reevaluated its position on Graphs I and II. Our researchers documented that while both Graph I and II are reliable and valid measures of DiSC, there was neither a strong enough theoretical nor empirical connection to support their use as measures of any of the alternative interpretations. But by that time, the company had spawned such a great number of practitioners in its original use of the Graph I and II that a debate was inevitable.

### ***Where We Stand***

In the controversy over the interpretation of Graphs I and II, little, if any attention has been given to the role Marston's original theories have in this debate. So, in pursuit of this deeper connection to the issue, Inscape initiated a review of Marston's works relative to this question.

Indeed, it seems that this difference between the public and private self is among the richest of Marston's concepts. In fact, much of the power of Marston's theories may lie in this construct and a better understanding of it may allow us to gain insight into behavior, adaptability, and other vital aspects of communication so central to DiSC. But Marston never designed an instrument to measure private and public self-perceptions, nor did he design an instrument to measure the D, I, S, and C emotions.

Still, his emphasis on the distinction between the public and private self may have influenced the researchers who attempted to harness this concept over the next 40 years. It may also explain why some practitioners have found the discussion of public vs. private selves so compelling as a way to present deeper insights to users of DiSC.

Meanwhile, the fact remains that efforts to validate measurement of these separate parts of one's self in an instrument have not been successful from a research perspective. In essence, there has

never been well-documented support that any of the graphs are indicators of the private, public, natural, or pressured self or anything other than measurements of general self-concept.

But as a one of Marston's key concepts, the understanding of the public and private selves represents a worthy goal. To this end, Inscape recently initiated two studies to explore this topic. Study 1 examined the possibility that Graph I measures the public self and Study 2 examined the possibility that Graph II measures behavior under pressure. Based on the 367 people in Study 1 and the 376 people in Study 2, these preliminary research findings do not support either of these alternative interpretations for Graphs I or II. They suggest that in all probability, Graphs I and II simply reflect a set of emotions and behaviors that are congruent with the respondents' general self-concept. This is the full extent of the information that Graphs I and II provide, at least according to the available evidence.

Of course, we cannot say definitively that Graphs I and II do not measure the public or private selves, and we will continue to explore other avenues of research. We will also look for other ways in which they may be measured. Finally, if efforts to reduce public and private self to measurement remain elusive, we will direct our efforts to determining how best to apply Marston's theory to the use of DiSC.

### *In Summary*

For the foreseeable future, the most accurate measurement of an individual's DiSC style remains Graph III. Because our research confirms that Graph III consistently demonstrates superior reliability and validity compared with either of the other two graphs, we will continue to promote it as the best indicator of the respondent's DiSC style.

Inscape recognizes that the use of the public and private selves remains a valued element for some of our practitioners, and it is possible that the alternative interpretations of Graphs I and II are meaningful even if they cannot be proven empirically.

Until new research suggests otherwise, then, Graph III remains, in research terms, the most accurate barometer of human behavior in the DiSC model. Its importance has been demonstrated both through the rigors of science and in the real world. At the same time, we have renewed our attention to Marston's theory of a public and private self, and we are committed to investigation of its practical application to DiSC.