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Co-Variation of Cynicism and Idealism*

MARTIN F. FRITZ

Last year (1946) two papers were presented before the psychology section of the Iowa Academy of Science by Mr. Charles O. Neidt and the author of this paper, dealing with the construction and statistical analysis of a test designed to measure the variables of cynicism and idealism. The test, consisting of 200 items, is called a "Practical Policy Test" in order to avoid indicating its exact nature to the subject. The details of administering the test will not be repeated here (1), except to say that a four-point scale was used in order to secure graded responses as follows: A—very strong or wholehearted acceptance; a—mild agreement but not too strong; d—mild disagreement or a tendency to reject a statement; D—strong disagreement or definite rejection.

The items composing the test were validated against the definition that a cynic is a person who is contemptuously distrustful of human nature and who, following suggestions from Webster's dictionary, "believes that human conduct is motivated wholly by self-interest." He does not consider the holding of certain beliefs and attitudes as worthwhile and is inclined to look with pity, if not scorn, upon anyone who does.

We shall consider idealism as the opposite of cynicism, although some might want to name it "gullibility" or "traditionalism." The idealist, we shall assume, believes in certain situations often referred to as "goodness" and "progress." He accepts the ultimate worthwhileness of human striving.

While making various analyses of the test it became apparent that there was a marked mingling of cynicism and idealism. The question then arose as to whether or not there is a high inverse relationship between cynicism and idealism. In other words, the problem to be considered is this: do those who show the most cynicism also show the least idealism, or is it possible that a subject may be highly cynical and yet, at the same time, show high idealism?

The responses of 400 students (130 men and 270 women) at Iowa State College were available for the study.

Procedure

The test material was mimeographed (8 pp.) and the subject marked his answer right on the scale (A a d D) at the end of each statement. These responses were then transferred to International Business Machines scoring sheets and all counting done electrically. The scores for each subject, along with certain personal data, were placed on 3 by 5 cards showing the number of items marked C (strongly cynical), c (mildly cynical), i (mildly idealistic), and I

*This report is part of a study for which a grant-in-aid was received from the Iowa Academy of Science.

1. See the Proceedings of the Iowa Academy of Science for 1946.

(strongly idealistic). Then weighted cynical and weighted idealistic scores were secured by counting one point for mild answers and two points for strong answers. These results were placed on tabulation sheets starting with the highest weighted cynical score, descending in order to the lowest cynical score. Since another study showed that men and women differ significantly, two tabulations according to sex were made.

Results

In Table I we can see a decided tendency to give a greater number of strongly idealistic responses than strongly cynical responses. Even in the groups of one-fourth most cynical men and women, the mean number of strongly idealistic responses exceeds the mean of the strongly cynical responses. The same generalization holds true when mildly idealistic responses are compared with mildly cynical. Whether this is a function of the test, depending upon the wording of the items, or whether it is a true reflection of relative cynicism and idealism in our sample, it is not possible to say without further investigation.

Table I.

Mean weighted cynical, weighted idealistic, strongly cynical (C) mildly cynical (c), mildly idealistic (i), and strongly idealistic (I) responses for each of the various groups as indicated.

Group	N	Mean No. Responses					
		weighted cynical	weighted idealistic	C	c	i	I
$\frac{1}{4}$ most cynical men	32	145.3	158.3	49.9	45.5	49.2	54.5
$\frac{1}{4}$ least cynical men	32	53.9	235.7	10.8	32.1	74.5	80.5
$\frac{1}{4}$ most cynical women	67	115.7	189.0	35.9	43.8	50.2	69.4
$\frac{1}{4}$ least cynical women	67	45.2	256.4	8.9	27.4	66.9	94.7
All men	130	94.1	200.6	26.3	41.3	61.5	69.4
All women	270	76.2	219.7	19.1	38.0	64.1	77.8

When the weighted cynical and weighted idealistic responses were correlated a value of $-.608$ was obtained for the women and a value of $-.642$ for the men. Correlations such as these indicate that we are not dealing with a highly fixed inverse relationship. In other words, it cannot be said that as cynicism rises point by point idealism drops correspondingly. The inverse relationship holds true only in a general way and a number of even quite marked deviations will be found. This means that for any particular weighted cynical score

it will be possible to find quite different distributions of the relative number of mildly idealistic and strongly idealistic responses, varying from one person to another. A complication that needs to be considered is the fact that a wide variety of patterns are possible involving mild and strong responses for both the cynical and idealistic sections of the scale.

As further possible evidence that cynicism and idealism tend to co-exist in the same individual, it may be pointed out that every one of the 400 subjects made at least some strongly cynical responses, regardless of the number of highly idealistic responses. And conversely, every subject gave some highly idealistic responses, no matter how strongly cynical the total score may have been. However, it might be argued that this situation is again a function of the test and so it is merely presented here as a possibility.

In the group comprising the 67 or one-fourth most cynical women, it was found that 65 had a greater I score than C score, that is to say, a greater number of highly idealistic responses than highly cynical. Likewise, 19 of the 32 or one-fourth most cynical men also showed the same thing. While not beyond argument, it would seem to be stretching a point to say that the test is wholly responsible for making the most cynical individuals at the same time so idealistic.

In conclusion, certain evidence has been presented which may possibly support the theory that cynicism and idealism are merely names for certain types of specific responses. This would be opposed to the trait theory holding that there is a generalized response showing itself as cynicism and another showing itself as idealism or perhaps even a single continuum or trait the opposite ends of which are named cynicism and idealism. In short, if the theory of specific situations is correct, it would be quite possible for an individual to be strongly cynical and yet at the same time strongly idealistic with respect to a variety of individual situations.

Summary

1. A test of 200 items involving what has been called cynicism and idealism was given to 400 students at Iowa State College.
2. There was a marked tendency to give a greater number of idealistic responses than cynical.
3. The correlation between weighted cynical scores and weighted idealistic was $-.608$ for the women and $-.642$ for the men.
4. Every subject made some highly cynical responses as well as highly idealistic.
5. Sixty-five of the 67 or one-fourth most cynical women gave a greater number of highly idealistic responses than they did highly cynical. The proportions for the men were 19 out of 32.
6. The suggestion is made that cynicism and idealism are a function of specific situations. Therefore, it would be possible for

an individual to be strongly cynical and at the same time
strongly idealistic with respect to a variety of situations.

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