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A TEST STUDY OF CYNICISM AND IDEALISM*

MARTIN F. FRITZ

A test of cynicism is being constructed and standardized in order to make available a measurement of another phase of personality. Certain interesting relationships have been studied, part of which will be reported in a separate paper by Mr. Charles O. Neidt, who has been assisting with the statistical work (see Proceedings of the Iowa Academy for 1946).

PROCEDURE

Two hundred items expressing either a cynical or an idealistic attitude were assembled. In order to avoid indicating the exact nature of the test, the label "Practical Policy Test" was used. As a further precaution against making the nature of the test too obvious, certain printed directions were supplied as follows: "In this test there are a number of statements dealing with practical situations. In each case you are to decide what is the best practical viewpoint to hold. What would you say was the best thing to do in practical, everyday life? What attitude would be most workable? Do you agree or disagree with the statement? This test is *not* a matter of right or wrong answers. It is *not* an examination of how much you know. It is *not* an intelligence test. IT IS AN INVENTORY OF ATTITUDES. Since you are entitled to hold any attitude which you wish, indicate exactly how you feel. CAUTION: Don't give the answer that you think you *should*. Do not try to make a good impression. Answer as though no one would ever see your paper." A signature was not required on the paper.

In order to get an expression of strength of feeling toward a particular item or situation a "scale for answers" was provided with directions, "by means of the scale below, *try to show how strongly you feel about a statement.*"

- A--*Definitely Acceptable*. I agree most wholeheartedly with the statement.
- a--*Fairly Acceptable*. In general, I agree with the statement, but not too strongly.
- d--*Mild Disagreement*. I am inclined not to agree with the statement. In general, I think I would reject it.
- D--*Definitely Rejected*. I absolutely do not agree with the statement.

The "cynical items" were stated with the general idea in mind that

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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 "poohs-poohs" certain beliefs and attitudes, does not consider the holding of such beliefs and attitudes as worthwhile, and is likely to consider anyone who does as naive or perhaps gullible.

It is extremely difficult to give a satisfactory statement of the opposite of cynicism. We shall call it idealism and assume that the idealist believes, in general, in "goodness" and the ultimate worthwhileness of human striving. The idealist, to use a slang expression, would be considered a "sucker" by the cynic.

A total weighted score was obtained for each individual taking the test by assigning a value of two points to each "strong" answer (A or D) and a value of one point for each "mild" answer (a or d).

Three hundred sixty-four college students, 92 men and 272 women, took the test at Iowa State College.

RESULTS

The total weighted scores ranged from 25 to 233 with a mean of 79.5 and a median of 75. This ratio of more than nine to one between the highest and lowest scores is in line with the usual finding of wide variability on psychological tests. Scores for the highest quarter ranged from 97 to 233, while for the lowest quarter the range was from 25 to 57.

There is some reason to think that the so-called "scale of answers" does constitute a recognizable differentiation. For example, the statement "if you show kindness toward your fellowmen, you're just a 'sap'" was strongly rejected by 90 persons, mildly rejected or disagreed with by one, and accepted by none in the lowest quarter or the 91 least cynical. On the other hand, the least cynical quarter divided fairly evenly in their rejection of the statement "the average big industrial corporation certainly does 'fleece' the public—just a bunch of 'crooks'" with 50 strong and 41 mild rejections. Although none accepted the statement, a considerable proportion must have rather felt that there is an element of truth in the statement and apparently were unwilling to indicate a strong, definite rejection. It is interesting to note that among the 91 most cynical, 29 accepted this statement, and 9 of the 29 did so strongly.

Another type of distribution was found in the case of the statement "how I want to spend my time on Sunday is nobody's business" with 17 strong and 29 mild acceptances, and 17 strong and 26 mild rejections or disagreements (2 failed to answer this item.) The most cynical group showed 55 strong and 22 mild acceptances, and 6 strong and 7 mild rejections.

If our interpretation here is correct that subjects can differentiate between mild and strong attitudes, then we might suggest that this technique could be made use of more frequently in testing than has been the case. It is possible that the somewhat greater com-

plexity of scoring would be offset by certain gains. At least, the much used all-or-none, this-way-or-that method of scoring could be argued.

TABLE I

The highest quarter (91 subjects) compared with the lowest quarter (91 subjects) on the total and mean number of responses which were strongly cynical (C), mildly cynical (c), highly idealistic (I), and mildly idealistic (i).

Group	C		c		I		i	
	No.	Mn.	No.	Mn.	No.	Mn.	No.	Mn.
High Q.	3725	18.6	4152	20.8	5576	27.9	4719	23.6
Low Q.	836	4.2	2696	13.5	8183	40.9	6341	31.7

From Table I it will be seen that the greatest difference between the highest and lowest quarter occurs on the highly cynical answers. The most cynical group is somewhat less reluctant to give strongly cynical answers. We may also infer from the number of responses given that even the most cynical group has a strong tendency toward idealism mingled with cynicism. An examination of individual papers shows that all subjects will mark some items idealistically no matter how many cynical responses have been given.

There seems to be considerable overlapping between the extreme quarters with respect to the items that are marked cynically. Eighty-two of the 100 most cynical items for the top or cynical quarter are also among the 100 most cynical items for the bottom or least cynical quarter.

The ten most cynical items for the top cynical quarter are:

1. Human beings are fundamentally selfish.
2. I would say that nearly all missionaries are sincere about their work.
3. If you don't look out for yourself, nobody else will.
4. I think it would be quite all right for Negroes and White people to inter-marry.
5. The average politician is more honest than the average citizen.
6. Self-preservation is the old jungle law, and it still holds good in spite of all our civilization.
7. It is my opinion that there is very little chance of permanently eliminating war from this world.
8. I believe in trusting people, but I want to pick out the people I am going to trust.
9. Complete prohibition (of liquor) cannot possibly be enforced.
10. For public protection, it is a mighty good thing that the government controls big business as much as it does.

It is interesting to note that seven of these items, numbers 3, 4, 5, 6, 8, 9, and 10, are also among the ten most cynical items for the quarter having the lowest cynical scores.

These data would seem to indicate that when the least cynical students did make cynical responses, they tended to mark the same items as the most cynical students.

SUMMARY

1. A 200 item test involving the variables cynicism and idealism is being statistically analyzed for the purpose of developing a satisfactory standardized test.
2. Total weighted scores ranged from 25 to 233 with a mean of 79.5 and a median of 75. The inter-quartile range extended from 57 to 97.
3. The nature of the distribution of the responses seems to indicate that the subjects did differentiate between mild and strong attitudes.
4. The greatest difference between the most cynical subjects (highest quarter) and the least cynical subjects (lowest quarter) is in the relative number of highly cynical responses.
5. Subjects in both extreme quarters showed a marked mingling of cynicism and idealism.
6. There was considerable overlapping between the extreme quarters with respect to the items that were marked cynically. The least cynical group tended to mark the same items as the most cynical group but not so often.

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