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AN EMPIRICAL STUDY OF COMPENSATION

A. R. LAUER AND LUALIS UTHOFF

INTRODUCTION

Textbooks, which have tended to include psychoanalytic concepts, have used the term compensation more or less vaguely. Most authors refer to compensation only suggestively, while others, two in particular, Morgan (1) and Groves (2), have delved extensively into the problem. These writers, however, present rather elaborate expositions on the concept of compensation, but give practically no experimental data on the problems related to it. A review of the literature (3) shows no significant experimental data existing on the problem. It seems that most sources of information are to be traced directly to the Freudian exponents and are mostly of a clinical origin. Information has been derived observationally, rather than experimentally.

METHOD

The present study is an attempt to establish a criterion for an experimental approach to the problem of compensatory behavior and is based upon information gleaned from standard sources. It is a continuation of the study reported last year by Zugmeier (4).

Two independent scales have been developed for the purpose of establishing the reliability and validity of the measuring instruments designed to measure phases of compensation as above defined. From the pragmatic point of view we have attempted to include measures of elements assumed to be beneficial to the individual as well as to society. The negative items were found to give a very low and unreliable, $r = -.21 \pm .09$, correlation with positive items and have therefore been disregarded in this study.

Test I is a social response inventory, devised by several persons cooperating in the field, and was given to seventy-five subjects. This test, requiring about forty minutes working time, includes detailed multiple-choice questions regarding patterns of compensatory behavior or possible modes of response to a given situation, and makes provision for the subject to indicate:

- (1) The course of action which he would be most likely to take in the situation presented.
- (2) The course of action which he thinks ought to be taken as a matter of duty.

Test II is a gradation answer inventory covering response mechanisms of a specific nature and was given to the same subject twice, along with Test I. This inventory was assumed to be, in a broad sense, indicative of the subject's potential responses in specific situations of automobile driving since most of the items covered such situations. To score these tests the scales used were semi-weighted, in the sense that the most desirable compensatory responses gave the subject the most points on each question. A specially evaluated weighting system was tried and found to be extremely laborious to use. It yielded results which correlated $r = +.87 \pm .02$ with natural weighting of the items. The weighting system was therefore abandoned in favor of the latter. Less desirable behavior tendencies added positively toward the total score earned but in reverse order of magnitude. This avoided negative scores.

EXPERIMENTAL

The two tests used, as stated above, were developed by several people cooperating in this particular field over a period of three years and were revised three times after preliminary evaluation before being used in the present study.

Seventy-five subjects, ten women and sixty-five men were examined. These included fifty-six CCC enrollees, and the remainder were college students—in particular, members of psychology classes. None of the CCC men had more than completed a secondary education.

RESULTS

Correlation between course of action most likely to be followed and the course of action believed to be most desirable as indicated by Test I, the general response inventory, was $r = .53 \pm .041$.

Correlation between the two sets of answers on Test II, the *specific* gradation answer inventory given by each subject was, $r = +.723 \pm .043$.

Correlation between each subject's response to Test I and Test II was, $r = +.396 \pm .076$.

CONCLUSIONS

While the conclusions drawn must be considered tentative and applicable only to the particular sampling of the population studied, the following general statements may be made with some degree of assurance as to their validity:

1. Verbalized responses of a compensatory nature can be measured objectively and more or less reliably by the methods described. By using a test twice as long, the reliability could be raised from $+ .72$ to $+ .84$ as predicted by the Spearman-Brown prophesy formula.

2. Such responses as one may make by attempting to conform to the wishes of the examiner may be somewhat controlled by asking the subject to indicate both, (a) what he would do and (b) what he ought to do. The average amount of agreement between the two was 50 per cent and the correlation between the parallel scores was found to be $r = + .53 \pm .05$.

3. It is possible to measure certain elements which are common to the two tests, of widely differing items and procedures, by carefully devised tests. The validity of the tests, so far as they measure actual compensation, must be assumed until further validation work is done. If corrected for attenuation the correlation between the two different tests would be $r = + .54$.

4. Of the groups tested, men showed more of a tendency to compensate than did women, and college students showed less tendency towards compensatory action than did CCC enrollees. Since CCC enrollees had more at stake when answering the questions, it is conceivable that frankness or honesty in giving responses may account for some of the results obtained. This possibility must be further investigated.

5. Compensation in a specific field seems to be greater than that indicated in a general area, perhaps supporting the general conclusion made by Zugmeier (4) that compensation tends to be specific and not general.

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