

INFLUENCE OF SOCIAL DESIRABILITY UPON THE GROUP PERSONALITY PROJECTIVE TEST

DON OGSTON AND ANGUS THOMPSON

University of Calgary

Summary.—The probability of endorsing each multiple-choice item alternative of the Group Personality Projective Test was correlated with the probability of endorsing the alternative as the most socially desirable. The results indicate that about 53% of the measured variance of the test can be attributed to the influence of social desirability. A possible reason for the finding that social desirability has less influence on the test than has been demonstrated with True-False type inventories was discussed. The results suggest caution in evaluating the discriminative validity of the test.

Braun (1967) demonstrated that responses to the Group Personality Projective Test (GPPT) can be distorted to produce a favorable impression. Implicit in his "fake-good" procedure is the assumption that Ss evaluate the social desirability (SD) of each response alternative in compliance with the examiner's direction to distort their responses. Apparently the GPPT, which employs a multiple-choice response mode, is susceptible to the influence of SD in much the same way as demonstrated with tests which use a True-False response mode (Edwards, 1964). The present study investigated this implied influence of SD on the GPPT.

The procedure typically employed by Edwards (1957) involves administering a True-False inventory to a large sample of Ss to determine the frequency of endorsement of each item. A second sample is given the inventory but are directed to rate the SD of the content of each item. The frequency of probability of endorsement is then correlated with the mean SD rating of each item in the inventory to obtain an estimate of the relationship between inventory content and SD. Resultant coefficients have ranged from 0.80 to over 0.90 (Edwards & Walsh, 1963). Because the GPPT uses five response alternatives for each item, a single frequency of endorsement for each item is impossible. Consequently it was necessary to modify Edwards' procedure.

The responses of a group of Ss to a multiple-choice item yield a distribution of the frequency of responses to each item alternative. The GPPT has 90 items, each containing an ambiguous stick-figure drawing, a question about the drawing and five multiple-choice alternatives. If responses to an item's question were made arbitrarily, then each alternative would receive 20% of the responses by chance. Conversely, absolute agreement on an item alternative would produce a 100, 0, 0, 0, 0% distribution. The unit of analysis used in this investigation was the distribution of responses to the alternatives of an item.

Procedure.—The GPPT was given to two groups of university and nursing students. The 52 Ss in Group I were informed that the test was new and that it was being given anonymously to gather normative data. Their responses were tabulated, transformed into percentage of responses and the distribution of the percentage of response determined for each of the five alternatives for each of the 90 items. These distributions provided the probability of endorsement (PE) for each item.

The 26 Ss in Group II were directed to examine each question and then to choose the alternative which they believed most people would select as the nicest, most pleasant, or socially acceptable. Their choices were tabulated, transformed to percentages of choices, and the distribution of the percentages across the five item-alternatives determined. These 90 distributions represented the probability of selection as most socially desirable (PSD).

The PE distribution was correlated with the PSD distribution for each item. So that an index comparable to Edwards' could be obtained, the resultant correlations were summed and averaged over the 90 items. A useful facet of the correlation coefficient is that its square provides an estimate of the measured variance accounted for by the relationship. The r was squared to obtain an estimate of the measured variance accounted for by the relationship between PE and PSD.

Results.—A product-moment correlation of 0.805 ($df = 3$, one-tailed) was required to indicate a correlation significantly greater than chance ($p < .05$). Forty-two (46.67%) of the 90-item distributions produced correlations greater than required. The average correlation was 0.726 which, when squared, indicated that 52.76% of the measured variance could be accounted for by the influence of social desirability.

Considering that Edwards has routinely accounted for from 65 to 85% of the measured variance, these results must be viewed as indicating that SD has substantially less effect on the GPPT than it does on True-False inventories. An explanation for the difference comes from examination of the item content of the two types of test. True-False inventories are usually composed of self-descriptive, declarative items. The items in the GPPT require the testee to describe other, unspecified persons. In judging the desirability of self and others it is likely that most testees would find it easier to recognize socially undesirable behavior in others. Consequently, the GPPT would be influenced less by the SD effect described by Edwards and others (Fiske & Pearson, 1970).

In view of the fact that about 53% of the measured variance was accounted for by the influence of SD, it is suggested that claims about the discriminative validity of the GPPT's seven scales (Cassel & Kahn, 1961) should be weighed. Even if the scales do possess some discriminative power, it appears that they may account for less than one-half the variance purportedly sampled by the test.

REFERENCES

- BRAUN, J. R. Group Personality Projective Test fakability: a re-examination. *Journal of Clinical Psychology*, 1967, 23, 389-391.
- CASSEL, R. N., & KAHN, T. C. The Group Personality Projective Test (GPPT). *Psychological Reports*, 1961, 8, 23-41.
- EDWARDS, A. L. Social desirability and probability of endorsement of items in the Interpersonal Check List. *Journal of Abnormal and Social Psychology*, 1957, 55, 394-395.
- EDWARDS, A. L. Social desirability and performance on the MMPI. *Psychometrika*, 1964, 29, 295-308.
- EDWARDS, A. L., & WALSH, J. A. Relationships between various psychometric properties of personality items. *Educational and Psychological Measurement*, 1963, 23, 227-238.
- FISKE, D. W., & PEARSON, P. H. Theory and techniques of personality measurement. *Annual Review of Psychology*, 1970, 21, 49-77.

Accepted March 8, 1971