

DESIRABILITY RESPONSE SET IN CHILDREN

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SUMMARY. The junior form of the Eysenck Personality Inventory, measuring extraversion, neuroticism and tendency to lie, was administered to two groups of children totalling 575, both boys and girls, ranging in age from 11–15. Children in the control group were tested and retested under identical instructions; children in the experimental group were tested under standard instructions but retested under instructions to 'fake good.' As predicted there were highly significant changes in the experimental group towards greater lying and less neuroticism; there were no changes in extraversion as compared to the control group. Test/retest reliability in the experimental, as compared with the control group, were slightly lower for extraversion, considerably lower for neuroticism and very much lower for the lie scale. The results were interpreted as giving evidence that social desirability response set was unlikely to have accounted for more than a small portion of the variance in the original test scores.

I.—INTRODUCTION.

THERE has been much argument in recent years about the possibility of response sets or response styles affecting results obtained by use of questionnaires. Rorer (1965) has discussed this evidence at great length and has come to the conclusion that "the data accumulated to date must be interpreted as indicating that response styles are of no more than trivial importance in determining responses to personality, interest and attitude inventories." This conclusion is very similar to that arrived at independently with respect to the M.P.I. and E.P.I. by Eysenck and Eysenck (1963a, 1963b, 1964), and by Eysenck (1962). The recent publication of a junior form of the E.P.I. (Eysenck, 1965) suggested the desirability of investigating the possibility that response sets might be more powerful in the case of children whose responses do not seem to have been studied in detail in this connection. The present study is, therefore, concerned with a test of the hypothesis that the so-called 'desirability' response set is of little importance in connection with the answers given by children on the Junior E.P.I.

This questionnaire contains twenty-four questions relating to extraversion, twenty-four questions relating to neuroticism and twelve questions which form a lie scale, the purpose of which is to detect faking on the part of the subjects. The scales are reliable and norms are available for quite large age and sex groups. Full information on the test is given in the manual (Eysenck, 1965).

For the purpose of this test ten groups of children altogether were tested, divided into age groups (11–15 years, inclusive), as well as into sex groups. Two-hundred-and-eighty-nine children were given the test and were then retested within one month, instructions on both occasions being identical and as suggested by the manual. Two-hundred-and-eighty-six children were given the first test in the same way but were then retested after one month with instructions to 'fake good'; the specific words used were that they "should try to put themselves in the best light." In essence, therefore, this experiment was a repetition of the one carried out by Eysenck and Eysenck (1963a) on adults, and the underlying idea was that if the original test data had been strongly influenced by social desirability response set, then the deliberate adoption of

such a response set should not lead to any great change in scores. If, on the other hand, the original responses had been made without much regard to social desirability, then we would expect considerable changes in the scores of the experimental group, as compared with the control group, particularly in relation to the neuroticism and lie scales. It was not expected that the extraversion scale would be much affected as neither extraversion nor introversion is as obviously more socially desirable as is a low score on neuroticism or a high score on the lie scale.

The detailed results of the experiment are given in Tables 1 and 2. Table 1 shows the actual scores and the changes of the various groups on the three scales, as well as the test/retest correlations under straightforward test/retest conditions. Table 2 gives the same information under experimental conditions. Some of the groups are too small to make their results very convincing but the overall results are quite clear cut. With respect to extraversion, the changes in the experimental group are almost exactly as large as those in the control group, demonstrating that, as in the case of the adult sample, extraversion is not to any reasonable degree subject to conscious faking. When we turn to neuroticism the position is quite different. Changes in the control group average around .5, whereas in the experimental group they are some six or eight times as high. This difference is very highly significant statistically. It is interesting to note that the changes in the experimental group increase with age from 11 through 12 to 13; there is no further increase after 13. This is not an unexpected result, of course, as one might expect increasing age to bring greater sophistication with respect to knowledge of what is and is not socially desirable.

TABLE 1
CONTROL GROUP.

	Age	n	M									Test Retest Correlations		
			M			M			M			E	N	L
			E ₁	E ₂	E ₂ -E ₁	N ₁	N ₂	N ₁ -N ₂	L ₁	L ₂	L ₂ -L ₁			
GIRLS	11	38	17.474	17.789	.315	12.658	11.974	-.684	3.921	3.921	0	.690	.628	.575
	12	32	18.656	18.906	.250	10.500	9.281	1.219	3.312	3.000	-.312	.786	.804	.636
	13	36	17.389	18.028	.639	11.778	10.889	.889	3.778	3.444	-.334	.715	.748	.780
	14	27	17.296	17.926	.630	12.148	11.926	.222	3.444	3.444	0	.828	.827	.827
	15	7	16.143	17.143	1.000	13.000	12.143	.857	3.571	3.000	-.571	.902	.891	.811
BOYS	11	42	17.643	17.429	-.214	12.286	10.952	1.334	4.357	4.238	-.119	.694	.670	.654
	12	34	17.824	18.176	.352	11.500	10.559	.941	3.529	3.176	-.353	.603	.755	.782
	13	30	18.100	17.933	-.167	11.100	10.667	.433	3.067	3.467	.400	.502	.740	.810
	14	25	17.760	18.840	1.080	9.560	10.760	-1.200	2.120	1.440	-.680	.617	.727	.613
	15	18	18.111	18.556	.445	8.500	7.444	1.056	2.444	2.000	-.444	.821	.861	.786
BOYS AND GIRLS	11	80	17.563	17.600	.037	12.463	11.437	1.026	4.150	4.087	-.063	.688	.655	.627
	12	66	18.227	18.530	.303	11.015	9.939	1.076	3.424	3.091	-.333	.680	.774	.711
	13	66	17.712	17.985	.273	11.470	10.788	.682	3.455	3.454	-.001	.595	.743	.781
	14	52	17.519	18.365	.846	10.904	11.365	-.461	2.433	2.481	-.048	.737	.787	.797
	15	25	17.560	18.160	.600	9.760	8.760	1.000	2.760	2.280	-.480	.841	.872	.799

TABLE 2
EXPERIMENTAL GROUP.

	Age	n	M									Test Retest Correlations		
			E ₁	E ₂	E ₂ -E ₁	N ₁	N ₂	N ₁ -N ₂	L ₁	L ₂	L ₂ -L ₁	E	N	L
GIRLS	11	18	17.111	18.111	1.000	11.500	8.278	3.222	5.222	6.944	1.722	.742	.529	.681
	12	44	18.727	18.864	.137	12.364	9.955	2.409	2.818	5.318	2.500	.573	.692	.210
	13	43	18.070	19.023	.953	12.349	7.047	5.302	2.837	7.372	4.535	.875	.562	.049
	14	54	17.630	19.037	1.407	14.278	8.926	5.352	2.407	7.241	4.834	.415	.597	.093
	15	30	17.167	17.600	.433	14.733	10.200	4.533	2.200	5.767	3.567	.751	.524	-.008
BOYS	11	17	18.176	18.765	.589	10.000	10.000	0	3.471	3.647	.176	.362	.804	.552
	12	28	18.893	18.893	0	11.250	8.071	3.179	3.071	6.536	3.465	.598	.486	-.332
	13	34	18.235	19.529	1.294	10.647	6.324	4.323	2.618	6.941	4.323	.698	.675	.282
	14	9	17.556	18.556	1.000	9.667	5.000	4.667	2.111	8.444	6.333	-.560	.829	.010
	15	9	18.889	17.889	-1.000	11.333	6.444	4.889	1.111	7.667	6.556	.225	.690	.134
BOYS AND GIRLS	11	35	17.628	18.429	.801	10.771	9.114	1.657	4.372	5.343	0.971	.559	.644	.691
	12	72	18.792	18.875	.083	11.931	9.222	2.709	2.916	5.792	2.876	.563	.621	-.020
	13	77	18.143	19.246	1.103	11.597	6.728	4.869	2.740	7.182	4.442	.782	.604	.150
	14	63	17.619	18.968	1.349	13.619	8.365	5.254	2.365	7.413	5.048	.348	.643	.075
	15	39	17.564	17.667	.103	13.948	9.333	4.615	1.949	6.205	4.256	.697	.596	-.037

TABLE 3

Control Group				Experimental Group					
	E	N	L	n		E	N	L	n
Boys (11-15) years	.640	.726	.743	149	Boys (11-15) years	.509	.632	-.021	97
Girls (11-15) years	.754	.759	.709	140	Girls (11-15) years	.635	.516	.151	189
Total Age and Sex . .	.691	.741	.728	289	Total Age and Sex	.596	.608	.093	286

Results on the lie scale are even more impressive than those on the neuroticism scale. For the control group there is a slight tendency for the children to lie less on repetition, but for the experimental group there is a tremendous increase in lying, which again is very highly significant statistically. This increase is almost identical with that shown on the neuroticism scale but is, of course, achieved with a scale having only half as many items and must thus be regarded as being something like twice as large. Again, there is an increase in degree of change from 11 through 12 to 13, and a failure for this increase to continue beyond the age of 13.

The test/retest reliability for both conditions are given in Tables 1 and 2; they have also been calculated for the total group, boys and girls separately, and also boys and girls together; these figures are given in Table 3. It will be seen that reliabilities for the extraversion scale are somewhat lower under experimental as compared to control conditions; those for neuroticism show a further lowering, while those for the lie scale become completely insignificant

under experimental conditions. These results are in good accord with the changes in means reported above; although it is, of course, possible for a considerable shift in mean to occur without any change in test/retest correlation, this is unlikely to happen in practice because the added factor of 'faking good' instructions is likely to affect different children differently, and therefore, to lower test/retest correlations.

Our results will be seen to be very similar to those of the adults reported by Eysenck and Eysenck (1963a) in that much greater changes were found for the neuroticism and lie scales than for the extraversion scale. These changes were in the predicted direction, i.e., towards greater lying and less neuroticism and their size indicates that desirability response set is unlikely to have played a large part in the causation of the original scores.

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