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# A PERSONALITY QUESTIONNAIRE GIVEN TO INMATES OF A STATE PRISON

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An attempt was made during the period of September, 1936 to July, 1937, to devise a brief oral disguised questionnaire to be given to one hundred inmates entering prison that could be given during a psychometric testing program and that would yield results which would have significant relationships with several past social adjustment factors. All effort was made to keep the questionnaire disguised. Because of the known inadequacies of subjective paper and pencil questionnaires, it seemed necessary to attempt to keep the questionnaire disguised. Because of clear evidence that the disguise was not entirely successful in at least nine of the first fifty cases, the questionnaire was revised and this second form then was given to the remaining fifty cases of whom four appeared to penetrate the disguise.

To see if a slight difference in population would yield widely dissimilar results the following plan was followed in selecting the population for the questionnaire: of the fifty cases given the first questionnaire, forty-three were inmates selected at random from the men sent to the prison from the courts, seven were parole violators; of the fifty cases given the second questionnaire, forty-three were similar to the forty-three on the first, and seven were long termers with minimum sentences of fifteen years or more.

Eight questions were chosen and woven into the general conversation that accompanied the testing.

The wording of the questions follows:

## (QUESTIONNAIRE No. I)

1. It's a fine day, isn't it? or,  
It's a dull day, isn't it? or,  
It looks like rain (or snow), doesn't it?
2. What do you do in your spare time, have you any hobbies?
3. Are you interested in sports?
4. What do you like to do in the line of work, is there any work you like best?

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5. Have you any ambitions in any line of work?
6. Do you think the country is being run right?
7. Did you go to church often?
8. Did you get on O.K. with your family?

Assuming a successful disguise objective responses by the subjects can be more nearly approached than would be possible without it. These objective responses thus would more nearly approach the expressions of the subjects' true emotional states at the time of their testing programs.

(QUESTIONNAIRE No. II)

1. It's a fine day, isn't it? or—one of the other alternatives.
2. If you had all possible chances from the start and all opportunities, what course in life would you have taken, what work would you have chosen?
3. What do you do in your spare time, have you any hobbies?
4. Are you interested in sports?
5. Do you think the country is being run right?
6. Are you a church-going man?
7. All of us have different feelings on the subject of sex. Do you think you have stronger sex desires than other men?
8. Did you get on O.K. with your family?

From these questions the following measurements were obtained:

- 1) The quantity or degree of response (responsiveness).
- 2) The emotional tone (either euphoria, despondency or neutrality).

It had been anticipated that cynicism would appear as a fourth emotional tone from this group. However, after ten questionnaires had been given, it was found that only one cynical response had been given out of the eighty replies received. This single reply easily could be analyzed as being despondent, and for this reason at this point it was decided to eliminate the emotional tone of cynicism.

For the quantity of response, a strict rating scale was set up which confined the reply to its proper rating depending upon the number of words; i. e.:

- Rating I: No response, or one or two syllables.  
Rating II: One or two short sentences (three to twelve words).

- Rating III: Two long, or one very long, sentences (thirteen to thirty words).  
Rating IV: More than thirty words.

For every inmate each of the eight questions was given one of the above ratings, and the sum of the eight ratings was taken as his index of responsiveness. Also, each one of the eight replies was classified to ascertain its tone (either euphoric, despondent or neutral). The tone was then scored as it appeared in the rating scale of responsiveness. For example, a lengthy euphoric reply would contribute more to the inmate's euphoric score than a brief reply. The index of euphoria for any inmate then was the sum of the euphoric ratings from all eight questions. His indices of despondency and neutrality were obtained in the same way. Another and more simple score was recorded, that of the *number of questions* to which the inmate responded euphorically, despondently or neutrally.

Whereas, for the total responsiveness, there was little difficulty in allocating replies to their proper ratings, in the case of the emotional tones some confusion resulted from the fact that the content was not always in agreement with the tone. It was decided to disregard content and rely solely on the apparent emotional state during the response.

The following past social adjustment factors were set up on rating scales:

- 1) The criminal record (in terms or number of past incarcerations) (five steps).
- 2) The employment record (in terms of jobs held in the past) (five steps).
- 3) The family relationship (in terms of degree of adjustability with family) (four steps).
- 4) The psychiatric classification (in terms of degree of deviation from normal) (three steps).

In each of the above rating scales the lowest index represented the best adjustment. The measurement of mental age also was recorded for each inmate and utilized with the four past social adjustment factors as correlative material against the measurements of the questionnaires. The data for the above was obtained from:

- 1) The inmate.
- 2) The social case record.
- 3) The psychiatric examination.

## RESULTS

The averages of the measurements of the two questionnaires yielded the following interesting results:

- 1) A consistent trend of the amount of tones. Neutralness was the greatest (average index equalled 8.5). Euphoria was slightly less (average index equalled 6.62). Despondency was the least (average index equalled 3.29). This consistency also held with the average number of replies (neutralness equalled 3.78; euphoria equalled 2.72; and, despondency equalled 1.50).
- 2) The seven parole violators in Questionnaire I showed considerably more despondency than any of the other groups; average index of 5.85, as compared with average index of 3.26 for the total population of fifty. Here the D (actual difference)/PE (difference) equalled 2.35.
- 3) The seven long termers in Questionnaire II showed a superabundance of dead tone (neutralness) at the expense of despondency and euphoria; average index of neutralness was 13.00, as compared to the average index of 8.54 for the total population of fifty. Here the D/PE equalled 5.40.

The mental ages were correlated with the results of the questionnaires; with responsiveness correlating plus .355; euphoria plus .315; despondency minus .135; and, neutralness minus .035.

From these correlations we only can say that mental age appears to have a slight positive relationship with responsiveness and euphoria. As a possible explanation for this appears the fact that inmates with the higher mental ages generally seem better able to master emotions and to appear interested and cheerful although they may feel otherwise.

The criminal records and the employment records were correlated with the measured factors of the questionnaires. In general the correlations were low. Responsiveness, euphoria and despondency yielded a slight negative relationship with criminal record; the correlations being minus .14, minus .19, and minus .06, respectively. Neutralness on the other hand correlated plus .22. These results interpreted show that of the group tested those inmates with the poorer criminal records (higher index) had a very slight negative relationship with responsiveness, euphoria and despondency, and a slight positive relationship with neutralness.

The employment record showed the same positive relationship with neutralness of plus .22 as did criminal record with neutralness. Responsiveness on the other hand showed a slight positive relation-

ship with the employment record, correlating plus .12; while euphoria and despondency showed the slight negative relationships of minus .03 and minus .19, respectively.

For the family relationship and the psychiatric classification, the averages of the measured factors of the questionnaires in each of the ratings were computed with the following results:

- 1) Very little relationship was shown between the different grades of family relationship and measured factors of the questionnaires. However, there appeared a slightly lesser amount of average despondency in the best rating of family relationship. (2.6 in Rating I as compared to 4.8 in II, 4.0 in III, and 3.5 in IV.)
- 2) The eminently normal (Rating I of psychiatric classification) showed more average responsiveness and euphoria than the defectiveness or psychopaths (Ratings II and III); i. e.: average index of responsiveness was 19.8 in Rating I, 18.2 in Rating II, and 18.5 in Rating III; also, average index of euphoria was 8.6 in Rating I, 5.9 in Rating II, and 7.0 in Rating III. The defectives showed more despondency than either the normal or the psychopaths, i. e.: average index of despondency was 3.3 in Rating I, 4.0 in Rating II, and 3.6 in Rating III.

#### RELIABILITY

To estimate the constructional reliability of the questionnaires, correlations were run between the results from the odd and even questions on each questionnaire. The average of the four correlations (between odd and even questions for responsiveness, euphoria, despondency and neutralness) on the first questionnaire was plus .45, and on the second was plus .51. This indicates a fairly good reliability.

Then, to see if the results of the two questionnaires would remain relatively the same, when given under different circumstances and by a different examiner, the two questionnaires were regiven by a different examiner after about six months to twelve cases (six for each questionnaire) that were selected at random from the populations. The averages of the results showed the following differences: A great reduction of the tone of despondency when the questionnaires were given a second time, with an accompanying increase in the tones of euphoria and neutralness. The average index of despondency for the first giving of questionnaire #1 was 3.50, and for the second giving on the same questionnaire it was 1.50. The D/P.E. equalled 2.09. The actual difference of the

average indexes of despondency in questionnaire #2 was 3.34, and in this case the D/P.E. equalled 3.07.

This reduction of emotional tone of despondency can be explained by the change of condition which the inmate has undergone from the time he has entered to six months later. He has been in prison for several months and has become acclimated to the prison routine, and in varying degrees reconciled to his condition.

#### VALIDITY

As a primary consideration we were not interested in rating personality traits as such. However, as a minor point of interest fifty-six subjects of the experiment were rated, after being in prison for about a year, by two raters who had jurisdiction over their work and recreation. The object was to see if the questionnaires tended to measure true emotional states. Rater M. was able to rate twenty-seven subjects during their recreational periods. Rater F. was able to rate twenty-nine subjects during their working hours. The ratings were obtained in the following manner:

For responsiveness .....	Much (3) .....	Some (2) .....	Little (1)
For euphoria .....	" " .....	" " .....	" "
For despondency .....	" " .....	" " .....	" "
For neutralness .....	" " .....	" " .....	" "

The resulting correlations were very low with the exception of euphoria. In this trait a consistently high correlation persisted. The ratings in euphoria of rater M. correlated plus .86 with the measurements of euphoria as obtained by the questionnaires. Also, the ratings in euphoria of rater F. correlated plus .85 with the measurements of euphoria.

The implication was that a questionnaire of this sort, when given to incoming inmates of a prison, appeared to measure euphoria as a true emotional state.

#### SUMMARY

Two forms of a brief, disguised oral questionnaire were given to fifty (two different groups) inmates entering a State prison. The results, scored in terms of total responsiveness and emotional tone (euphoria, despondency and neutralness), were compared with four past social adjustment factors, namely: 1) criminal record, 2) employment record, 3) family relationship, and 4) psychiatric

classification. The mental age was also utilized as correlative material.

The averages of the measured factors of the questionnaires showed the emotional tones to run consistent in quantity, i. e.: neutralness appeared in greatest quantity, euphoria slightly less, and despondency the least. Of the two special groups the parole violators showed considerably more despondency than any of the other groups, and the long termers showed a superabundance of neutralness.

The correlations in general were low, but there appeared a consistent and significant positive relationship between indifference of tone (neutralness) and the poorer indices of the criminal record and of the employment record. Mental age correlated with responsiveness and euphoria yielded a fairly significant positive relationship, while a very slight negative relationship appeared with despondency and neutralness.

The averages of results in the ratings of family relationships showed that inmates with the best family relationships had slightly less despondency than the inmates in the poorer ratings. In the ratings of psychiatric classification the eminently normal inmates showed more responsiveness and euphoria than the defectives and psychopaths, and the defectives showed the most despondency.

When at a later date some of the inmates were regiven the questionnaires by another examiner, there appeared a great reduction of despondency. From this result it would appear that any attempt at standardizing a questionnaire of this type depends upon taking a large enough cross-section of society that would include all possible conditions under which cases could be undergoing.

In spite of the generally small relationship shown between the results of the questionnaires and the past social adjustment factors, and in spite of results not valid enough to utilize as prediction factors, the writer believes that the oral disguised questionnaire approach has great value in aiding in the diagnosis of subjects' emotional and temperamental patterns. Used as a guide during a protracted psychometric testing program, the questionnaires of this experiment have been invaluable to the writer as a medium for obtaining optimum test results from the examinees as well as suggesting the examinees' true emotional levels.