

RELATIONSHIP OF BODY IMAGE TO SOCIAL DESIRABILITY

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RECENT research has suggested that the social desirability factor may be considered both as a response set, which exerts a contaminating influence on personality tests (Edwards, 1957), and as a measure of pathology. With respect to the latter, Tolor and Boitano (1960) found that increased severity of psychopathology tends to be associated with a decreased ability to make socially acceptable choices on a check list consisting of an equal number of socially approved and socially disapproved items. Moreover, Fordyce (1956) pointed out that the "psychotic factor" resembles a definition of social undesirability. The present study represented an attempt to focus attention on the possible meaning of differences in social desirability in terms of differences in degree of ego-strengths of subjects. The purpose, therefore, was to determine the relationship between one aspect of ego strength, namely, the body image as reflected in the figure drawings, and the social desirability variable, as measured by a check list.

These considerations resulted in the following hypotheses which guided this research: (a) patients with higher social desirability scores will exhibit less body image disturbance than patients who have lower social desirability scores; (b) when two groups of subjects, equated for initial social desirability level, are compared on ability to change in the direction of increased social desirability, given appropriate instructions, the subjects with the greatest ability to assume a socially acceptable role will also evidence the least degree of body image disturbance; and (c) the proportion of negative items assigned to the concept *Mother* as compared to the concept *Father* will be greater for subjects having a more severe body image disturbance than those with a lesser degree of such disturbance. The third hypothesis was derived from Winder (1960) who summarized recent studies suggesting that patients whose pre-morbid adjustment is poorer differ from patients whose pre-morbid adjustment is better in number of negative adjectives assigned to each parent, with poor pre-morbid adjustment being associated with the tendency to ascribe more negative terms to the mother and better pre-morbid adjustment being associated with a more negative characterization of the father. The question that was raised was whether any consistent differences in response to each parent existed that could be related to the degree of body concept disturbance.

The subjects were 70 psychiatric patients who completed the Social Desirability Test devised by Tolor and Boitano (1960) and who produced two figure drawings. The human figure drawings were independently scored by two psychologists both globally, using a five-point rating scale, and in terms of individual body image disturbance indicators, following Fisher (1959). Interrater reliability was satisfactory, using both the global method and the sign

approach. The two measures of figure drawing disturbance correlated .61 but were used separately to test the hypotheses.

The results show no significant group differences in the pre- or post-experimental social desirability scores nor in the amount of social desirability change for the subjects dichotomized according to their figure drawing pathology. Moreover, there was no support for the third hypothesis which predicted a relationship between body image disturbance and differences in socially undesirable characteristics attributed to each parent.

The possible effects on results of the relatively restricted range of pathology represented in this sample, and the possibility that ego strength may not be a unitary concept, measurable by a single technique, are important conditions. Assuming that the figure drawing technique represents a valid measure of body image disturbance, and that the Social Desirability Check List is an adequate measure of tendency toward social conformity, it would appear that the two are unrelated for hospitalized psychiatric patients.

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