

CONSTRUCT VALIDITY OF THE EBNER-SHAW TEST OF RECONCILIATION¹

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Growth through the reconciliation of manageable dilemmas was the major theme of Frank Shaw's writings (4). Shaw's untimely death put an end to his own efforts to operationalize (in the best sense) his own brand of humanistic psychology. However, his ideas have inspired many psychologists who have been exposed to them. The present article reports a study by a group of young psychologists² of the Ebner-Shaw Sentence Completion Test (2).

THE TEST

The sentence completion test based on reconciliation theory differs from many other tests in three ways.

First, the test is scored on the basis of explicit norms of interpersonal competence developed from a theory of personality. Details of Shaw's still-growing theory are available in his posthumous works (4, 5). An example of what *reconciliation* means is provided by Shaw's discussion of conformity and rebellion: "Man . . . can become something other than a simple creature of conformity or rebellion through reconciling the opposition between conformity and non-conformity by means of a concept of responsibility, one which allows for both possibilities" (6, p. 69).

Second, the person taking the test must arrive at a solution to a real social problem, rather than merely stating his attitude. Helson (3) has suggested that personality tests requiring completion of a task may be more powerful than those asking for an opinion. This test is one of the few examples of such. The subject is not merely asked whether or not he would be a nice guy. He is allowed an opportunity to come up with his own solution to an interpersonal problem.

Third, the test comes perhaps closer than any other to an operational definition of social interest or *Gemeinschaftsgefühl*, a concept

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²Kenneth Coffield, in an unpublished study, revised the Ebner-Shaw scoring instructions, and a slight revision of his work is presented in Table 2. Carlton Paine and Wallace Mealiea were judges in the reliability study. Mealiea rated the tests in the present study. Interviews were conducted by Harry T. Johnston. All of these operations were conducted separately. The authors are grateful for the help of these psychologists and for the advice of Alvin W. Landfield.

which dominates the later writings of Alfred Adler. Both in therapy and in his pioneering efforts in community mental health, Adler concerned himself with the reconciliation of individual and society. He also predicted the operationalization of his concepts, as when he wrote: "We are concerned with the relationship of the unique individual to the problems of life, which can *almost* be measured" (1, p. 244, italics ours). The test provides for more rigorous investigation of both Shaw's and Adler's theories.

The test consists of a number of sentence stems posing interpersonal dilemmas, e.g. "When a friend keeps one from work that has to be finished, one might . . ." The original form (2) contained 25 items. Kenneth Coffield (unpublished study) developed a 16-item form which was used in the present study. The first author devised the short form presented in Table 1, which consists of the ten items most related to total score on both of the earlier forms.

TABLE 1. EBNER-SHAW SENTENCE COMPLETION TEST (SHORT FORM)

INSTRUCTIONS: Complete the unfinished sentences below. Be sure to do every one of the items.

1. If a person disagrees with his boss, the person might
 2. When one finds that he is not properly dressed for the occasion, he might
 3. When a friend keeps one from work that has to be finished, one might
 4. When a person's girlfriend (boyfriend) breaks a date at the last moment, the person might
 5. When a person's friend with a contagious disease asks him to visit, he might
 6. If a person finds himself alone at a party, he might
 7. When someone who doesn't know anything about it tells one how to do his job, one might
 8. When a person finds himself in a group with strangers, he might
 9. If a person's parents don't like his friends, he might
 10. If a person's close friend passes him on the street without saying hello, the person might
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Each completion is scored on the basis of how well the solution offered by the respondent reconciles his own needs with the needs of others. The highest rating among three is "Active-soft" (2 points), meaning that the responses satisfy the subject's own desires while he remains flexible and aware of the rights and wishes of others. Next come "Coping" (1 point) and "Inappropriate" (0 points). Scoring instructions, adapted by the present authors from Coffield's simplification of Ebner and Shaw's original manual (unpublished) are given in Table 2.

TABLE 2. SCORING INSTRUCTIONS

2 points, active-soft responses. The responses here are an efficient appropriate solution to the dilemma. The course of action indicated in them is one that will allow the individual to *satisfy his own desires and needs without creating any conflicts*. Here there is an ability to evaluate all aspects of the dilemma and react to them in an appropriate manner. The individual is *actively dealing* with and *attempting to reconcile* the situation and is *also aware of others'* rights and does not disregard them in satisfying his own needs. He is flexible and soft in his approach.

1 point, coping responses. This is a composite category which does not reflect an efficient social reconciliation to the desired degree of above to the dilemma. Here the person may be acting so that his own tensions may be reduced. Or his behavior may be *compliant* and generally *passive* in nature. He may not have appraised the situation realistically and, thus, reflects little control over the course of events. He may *yield to the desires of others* rather than attempting to satisfy his own needs and desires. These responses are generally more *vague* and *hesitant* and often *filled with emotion*. In general there is little if any active striving toward reconciliation and often a suitable course of action is not indicated or at least does not form the major part of the response.

0 points, inappropriate responses. All responses that cannot be satisfactorily placed in one of the above classes and which are inappropriate, in that they are merely comments about the dilemma, rather than responses which take note of the "pressures" imposed by the dilemma, should be put here. Also found here will be odd thinking, shift of reference, distortions, and bizarre reasoning.

Question	Examples		
	Inappropriate responses (0 points)	Coping responses (1 point)	Active-soft responses (2 points)
When a person is waiting at a sales counter and someone pushes in ahead of him, the person might:	"be in a hurry"; "think that he missed a bargain."	"do a little shoving back"; "tell him off"; "count to ten and then smile"; "get mad"; "feel bitter"; "leave."	"inform the person politely that he was first"; "say 'pardon me, but I was waiting before you.'"
When a person is dared to do something dangerous, he might:	"worry"; "lose a leg"; "adjust."	"just do it"; "do it and regret it later"; "take a chance to avoid criticism"; "get mad."	"think seriously before doing it and probably reject the idea as a result"; "explain that he does not take risks foolishly."

Interjudge reliability on the 16-item form was .83, on the 10-item form, .86.

THE STUDY

The present study tested the prediction that scores on the Ebner-Shaw Sentence Completion Test would be related to an independent evaluation of interpersonal competence by a skilled interviewer.

Nine male and five female undergraduate students at a large state university were selected at random from a larger group who had taken the Ebner-Shaw test (16-sentence form). They were invited (all accepted the invitation) to the university mental hygiene clinic to take part in a research project. Each subject was interviewed for two hours by a skilled diagnostician who was unaware of the subject's responses on the test. At the conclusion of each interview, the interviewer rated the subject on a semantic differential containing dimensions pertinent to interpersonal competence, e.g., open-closed, warm-cold, rigid-flexible, free-constrained, unaware-aware. Each subject received a total score determined by the degree to which he was rated toward the more "favorable" pole of each dimension.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The Spearman rank-difference correlation between scores on the Ebner-Shaw Sentence Completion Test and scores from interviewer's ratings was $+ .53$ ($p < .05$). Thus, the results support the construct validity of the test as a measure of interpersonal competence.

Should further studies continue to support its validity, the test may be useful in research, diagnosis, and therapy. Its use would of course be consistent with the current trend toward defining personality disturbances as problems in interpersonal living rather than as diseases.

The test may be used as a reasonably direct measure of social interest. If, as Adler affirmed, therapy may be considered a process of guiding the client toward social interest, such a test, perhaps in alternate forms, may be used to gauge his progress.

Responses of husband and wife may be used to learn about the sources of their conflicts. In both individual and group therapy, items similar to those presented here might be useful exercises. Clients can be encouraged not only to invent their own solutions to dilemmas presented to them, but also to invent original dilemmas! Practice with the test has enabled some of our clients to conceptualize what makes them unhappy as a dilemma rather than as a symptom (in themselves or in their partners), and then to invent a solution to that dilemma, with zest and with *Gemeinschaftsgefühl*.

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