CORRELATES OF THE GUDJONSSON SUGGESTIBILITY SCALE IN DELINQUENT ADOLESCENTS

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Summary.—Correlations between scores on the Gudjonsson Suggestibility Scale and a number of relevant personality characteristics, i.e., intelligence, memory, social inadequacy, social desirability, and fantasy proneness, were examined in a sample of 71 delinquent boys. Analysis showed that intelligence and memory were negatively related to suggestibility scores. That is, lower memory and intelligence were associated with higher suggestibility. No significant correlations were found between suggestibility and other personality characteristics.

The Gudjonsson Suggestibility Scale was designed to assess individual differences in interrogative suggestibility (2, 4). More specifically, this scale taps two different aspects of interrogative suggestibility, namely, the tendency to give in to leading questions (Yield) and the tendency to shift responses under conditions of interpersonal pressure (Shift). In short, the Gudjonsson Suggestibility Scale consists of a narrative paragraph read out to the subject, who then reports all he recalls about the story. Following this, the subject is asked a number of questions about the story, some of which are (mis)leading. Next, the subject is told in an authoritative manner that he has made a number of errors and must answer the questions for a second time. Yield refers to susceptibility to suggestive questioning, whereas Shift pertains to pressured suggestibility, that is, the tendency to change answers as a result of social pressure (3).

Previous research has indicated that adolescents display stronger suggestibility tendencies than adults (10). More specifically, adolescents are especially vulnerable to interrogative pressure as measured by the tendency to change their previous answers following negative feedback, i.e., Shift. This finding may be particularly relevant to forensic settings in which young delinquents are repeatedly questioned about allegedly committed crimes (5, 9). Furthermore, various personality characteristics seem to influence suggestibility. For example, studies consistently showed that memory and intelligence are negatively linked to scores on the Gudjonsson Suggestibility Scale. That is, lower memory and intelligence are accompanied by higher Yield and Shift suggestibility scores (1, 10). It is plausible to assume that other personality

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features also affect suggestibility. For example, social inadequacy and social desirability may be positively linked to the tendency to shift responses following critical negative feedback. Furthermore, fantasy proneness, which is associated with the inclination to confabulate and to give affirmative responses to difficult-to-answer questions (7), may be associated with the tendency to be yielding to suggestive questions.

The current study examined relationships between scores on the Gudjonsson Suggestibility Scale and a number of personality characteristics in a sample of 71 adolescent boys who resided in an assessment and short-term treatment center for delinquent youths in Maastricht, The Netherlands. The mean age of the boys was 15.8 yr. (SD=1.2, range 14 to 19). Their mean Full Scale IQ as measured with the Revised version of the Wechsler Intelligence Scale for Children (12) was 93.9 (SD=11.3). These data were obtained during the standard assessment procedure of the center. All boys were referred to the center for antisocial behaviors, varying from minor delinquencies to serious criminal offenses against persons and property.

Adolescents were tested individually in a separate room in the center. The Gudjonsson Suggestibility Scale was administered to obtain Memory (as indexed by immediate recall of story elements), Yield, Shift, and Total Suggestibility scores. To get an impression of the test-retest stability of scores for this sample, the narrative paragraph of the scale was read out to the boys for a second time, some three weeks later, and they then completed the Yield scale again. On this second occasion, no Shift data were collected, because presenting the Shift instructions for a second time would have been unconvincing. Adolescents also completed the Social Inadequacy scale of the Junior Nederlands Persoonlijkheidsvragenlijst (6), the Social Desirability scale of the Amsterdamse Biografische Vragenlijst voor Kinderen (11), and the Creative Experiences Questionnaire as a measure of Fantasy Proneness (7).

Scores on the Gudjonsson Suggestibility Scale were comparable to those of previous studies with delinquent adolescents (9). That is, mean Memory, Yield, Shift, and Total Suggestibility scores were, respectively, 12.9 (SD=5.5), 4.8 (SD=2.7), 3.5 (SD=2.6), and 8.3 (SD=3.8). Further, the scale appeared reliable in terms of internal consistency, with Cronbach alpha being .80 for Yield, .85 for Shift, and .81 for Total Suggestibility. As to the stability of the Yield scale, mean scores on Administrations 1 and 2 were 4.8 (SD=2.7) and 3.5 (SD=2.8), respectively. The test-retest correlation was .62 (p<.001). Correlations between scores on the Gudjonsson Suggestibility Scale and personality characteristics are displayed in Table 1. As can be seen, suggestibility scores were negatively associated with Memory and Intelligence (rs between -.26 and -.48, ps<.05). No significant links were found between suggestibility indices and Social Inadequacy, Social Desirability, or
Fantasy Proneness, indicating that these personality characteristics had little relationship with suggestibility in these delinquent adolescents.

Taken together, the reliabilities of the Gudjonsson Suggestibility Scale were satisfactory in this sample of adolescent delinquents, a result in keeping with previous psychometric studies (2, 8). Further, data suggest that in particular adolescents with lower intellectual and memory capacity may be vulnerable to suggestibility effects during interrogation procedures.

REFERENCES


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