

RELIGIOSITY AND LIE SCORES: A QUESTION OF INTERPRETATION

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A total of 3,228 11- to 16-year olds completed the Francis Scale of Attitude towards Christianity and the Junior Eysenck Personality Questionnaire. The positive relationship between religiosity and lie scale scores was examined in light of the 3 theories that religious people are less mature, more socially conforming, or simply bigger liars.

Keywords: religiosity, lie scale scores, maturity, social conformity, interpretation.

Researchers of the relationship between religiosity and lie scale scores among children, adolescents, and adults generally report a significant positive correlation, for example by Nias (1973a) among 11 and 12 year olds, by Powell and Stewart (1978) among 11 to 15 year olds, by Francis, Pearson, and Stubbs (1985) among 9 to 16 year olds of low ability, by Crandall and Gozali (1969) among 8 to 17 year olds, by Francis, Pearson, and Kay (1983) among 15 and 16 year olds, by Nias (1973b) among 19 to 25 year olds, and by Wilson and Brazendale (1973) among 18 to 34 year olds. This indicates that those who score more highly on lie scales also tend to score more highly on indices of religiosity. The problem concerns the theoretical interpretation of this consistent empirical finding. The problem has its roots in the ambiguity surrounding the meaning of lie scale scores themselves. Originally lie scales were introduced into personality measures to detect the tendency of some respondents to lie or to 'fake good' (Dahlstrom & Welsh, 1960; O'Donovan, 1969), generally in the sense of placing themselves in a more socially desirable light (Eysenck & Eysenck, 1963). This is the interpretation of lie scale scores adopted in a number of empirical studies (Rigby, 1987; Rump & Court, 1971). On this account, the positive correlation between lie scale scores and religiosity might be interpreted to imply that religious people are bigger liars. This is the view taken by Crandall and Gozali (1969) who explain the relationship in terms of defensive denial behavior. They argue that religiosity may lead to the repression or denial of actual, but unacceptable, thoughts and behaviors. More recently, however, the lie scale has been interpreted as a personality measure in its own right (Furnham, 1986; McCrae & Costa, 1983). The

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argument is that, since the internal consistency of the lie scale is quite independent of the motivation to dissimulate, the scale must be measuring some underlying personality dimension or set of characteristics (Eysenck & Eysenck, 1976; Eysenck, Eysenck, & Shaw, 1974). The problem is further compounded by the fact that there are two main interpretations of the personality dimension measured by the lie scale. On the one hand, Finlayson (1972), Eysenck and Eysenck (1976), Powell (1977), Massey (1980), and O'Hagan (1981) suggest that the lie scale measures social acquiescence or conformity to social rules and pressures, involving such characteristics as greater honesty (Loo, 1980), truthfulness (O'Hagan and Edmunds, 1982) and conscientiousness (McCrae & Costa, 1985). On this account, the positive correlation between lie scores and religiosity might be interpreted to imply that religious people are more socially conforming. This is the view taken by Nias (1973a) who explains the relationship in terms of the internalization of parental values, arguing that the more socially acquiescent children will pick up the attitudes of the group upon which they are dependent.

On the other hand, Dicken (1959), Eysenck, Nias, and Eysenck (1971), Crookes and Buckley (1976), and Kirton (1977) suggest that the lie scale measures lack of self-insight. On this account, the positive correlation between lie scores and religiosity might be interpreted to imply that religious people lack self-insight. This is the view taken by Francis, Pearson, and Kay (1983) who explain the relationship in terms of immaturity. They argue that immaturity may be reflected both in lack of self-insight (Eysenck et al., 1971) and in religiosity (Pohier, 1965). The writings of Eysenck and colleagues suggest that a way of adjudicating between these three different interpretations of the lie scale scores in a given database is to be found in an inspection of the correlations between the lie scores and the other main personality variables. Michaelis and Eysenck (1971) argue that the size of the correlation between neuroticism and lie scores indicates the motivation of the group to 'fake good'. Eysenck et al. (1971) argue that the size of the correlation between extraversion and lie scores serves as an index of social acquiescence.

The aim in the present study was to examine the pattern of correlations between religiosity, lie scores, neuroticism, and extraversion in order to explore whether religious children are less mature, more socially conforming, or simply bigger liars.

METHOD

The Francis Scale of Attitude towards Christianity Form ASC4B (Francis, 1978) and the Junior Eysenck Personality Questionnaire (Eysenck & Eysenck, 1975) were completed by 1,555 boys and 1,673 girls aged between 11 and 16 years. The data were analyzed by means of the SPSS computer package (SPSS Inc., 1986).

TABLE I: CORRELATION MATRIX

	<i>Attitude to Christianity</i>	<i>Extraversion</i>	<i>Neuroticism</i>	<i>Lie Scale</i>
<i>Sex</i>	+0.2633 .001	-0.0035 NS	+0.2006 .001	-0.0034 NS
<i>Lie Scale</i>	+0.1759 .001	-0.1937 .001	-0.1133 .001	
<i>Neuroticism</i>	+0.0275 NS	-0.1551 .001		
<i>Extraversion</i>	-0.0569 .01			

RESULTS

Table 1 contains the correlation matrix between sex, attitude towards Christianity, extraversion, neuroticism, and the lie scale scores.

DISCUSSION

The significant positive correlation (0.1759) between lie scale scores and attitude towards Christianity supports the general conclusion of previous research that those who score more highly on lie scales also tend to score more highly on indices of religiosity.

According to Michaelis and Eysenck (1971) the theory that the lie scale is measuring actual lying can be examined against the size of the negative correlation between lie scale and neuroticism scores. They demonstrate that, while for groups where there was high motivation to 'fake good' the correlation between neuroticism and lie scores ranged from -0.5 to -0.6, for low motivation groups the correlation approached zero. Eysenck et al. (1971) interpret a correlation of -0.16 between neuroticism and lie scale scores as suggesting that there is little motivation in the group to 'fake good'. Since the correlation of the present data is only -0.1133, this statistic cannot be taken to support the notion that the lie scale is functioning to measure actual lying in the group. This detracts from the interpretation of the positive correlation between religiosity and lie scale scores that religious children are bigger liars. According to Eysenck et al. (1971), the theory that the lie scale is measuring social conformity or acquiescence can be examined against the size of the negative correlation between extraversion and lie scores. Since the correlation in the present data is only -0.1937, this statistic cannot be taken to support the notion that the lie scale is functioning to measure social conformity or acquiescence in the group. This detracts from the interpretation of the positive correlation between religiosity and lie scores that religious children are

more socially conforming. Eysenck et al.(1971) proceed with their argument that, if the correlation between lie scores and extraversion is small, it follows that "insight would be the most probable variable measured". On this account; the most likely interpretation of the positive correlation between religiosity and lie scale scores in the present sample is that religious children are less mature.

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