

SELF-ACCEPTANCE AND ADJUSTMENT REVISITED:  
A REPLICATION

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*Summary.*—Taylor and Combs (1952) found that adjusted children are more capable of accepting threatening statements than poorly adjusted children. The present study was an attempt to repeat their research with college students. Their list of damaging statements was modified for an older population and the California Test of Personality (CTP) was used as a measure of adjustment. Data were collected for 79 Ss who were asked to identify themselves. Critical ratios were not significant and a correlation of .01 between indices was obtained. When the measures were later administered to 109 Ss without requiring names,  $r = .04$ . Inspection showed that results for Ss in the CTP mid-distribution were in predicted directions but that scores for Ss at the extremes were reversed. Results were discussed in terms of neurotic symptoms and stable adult behavior.

Taylor and Combs (1952) investigated a theoretical statement of self theory that "a phenomenal self is adequate to the degree to which it is capable of accepting into its organization any and all aspects of reality" (Snygg & Combs, 1949, p. 136). They reasoned that the adjusted individual should be more capable of accepting derogatory and therefore threatening facts about himself than might be expected for a poorly adjusted individual. Their experimental hypothesis was: "given two groups of children, one better adjusted than the other by some external criterion; we predict that the better adjusted children will be able to accept more damaging statements about themselves than the poorer adjusted individuals" (Taylor & Combs, 1952, p. 89). Ss were 205 randomly selected children of similar age, education and socio-economic level from six grades of rural, consolidated, northeastern Pennsylvania schools. The California Test of Personality (CTP), Elementary Form A, was used as an external measure to distinguish between adjusted and maladjusted children who were divided into upper and lower 50 per cent groups according to adjustment score. Two weeks after the administration of the CTP, the children were presented a list of items to determine the extent to which they could accept damaging statements about themselves. Complete protocols were obtained for 105 boys and 75 girls. Data were analyzed separately for boys and girls by means of a critical ratio which yielded significant results. Taylor and Combs (1952) felt that their predictions were supported and they experimentally demonstrated a relationship between adjustment and ability to accept damaging statements about the self.

The present study was an attempt to repeat their study using college students rather than children to determine whether or not the same relationship



between self acceptance and adjustment obtains with older Ss whose adjustment patterns are presumably more stable.

#### METHOD

The California Test of Personality (CTP), Adult Form A, was administered to 102 undergraduate students enrolled in psychology adjustment courses at the University of Georgia. This group was more heterogeneous than that employed by Taylor and Combs (1952). While socio-economic backgrounds were not compared, educational levels included all four college classifications and ages ranged from 18 to 25 yr.

The list of damaging statements was revised for use with a college population. Seven statements were left in the original form, one or two words were changed in eight

TABLE 1  
ORIGINAL (a) AND MODIFIED (b) DAMAGING STATEMENTS

- |     |  |  |
|-----|--|--|
| 1.  | a. I sometimes disobey my parents.                             | b. I sometimes disregard parental instructions.                      |
| 2.  | a. I sometimes say bad words or swear.                         | b. I sometimes use profanity.  |
| 3.  | a. I sometimes copy or cheat on schoolwork.                    | b. I sometimes copy or cheat on schoolwork.                          |
| 4.  | a. I sometimes am rude to older people.                        | b. I sometimes am rude to older people.                              |
| 5.  | a. I sometimes tell lies.                                      | b. I sometimes am untruthful.  |
| 6.  | a. I sometimes make fun of other schoolmates.                  | b. I sometimes make fun of other people.                             |
| 7.  | a. I sometimes pretend to forget things I am supposed to do.   | b. I sometimes purposefully fail to do things that I should.         |
| 8.  | a. I sometimes steal things when I know I will not get caught. | b. I sometimes steal things when I know I will not get caught.       |
| 9.  | a. I sometimes fib to my classmates.                           | b. I sometimes fib to my friends, roommates, or family.              |
| 10. | a. I sometimes pretend to be sick to get out of things.        | b. I sometimes use sickness as a way out.                            |
| 11. | a. I sometimes am unkind to younger children.                  | b. I sometimes am unkind to younger persons.                         |
| 12. | a. I sometimes am lazy and won't do my work.                   | b. I sometimes am lazy and won't do my work.                         |
| 13. | a. I sometimes tell dirty stories.                             | b. I sometimes tell dirty jokes.                                     |
| 14. | a. I sometimes cheat in games.                                 | b. I sometimes cheat in games.                                       |
| 15. | a. I sometimes am unruly at school.                            | b. I sometimes am temperamental in the dorm, house, or where I live. |
| 16. | a. I sometimes do not brush my teeth on purpose.               | b. I sometimes behave inappropriately on purpose.                    |
| 17. | a. I sometimes talk back to my mother.                         | b. I sometimes talk back to my parents.                              |
| 18. | a. I sometimes am mean to animals.                             | b. I sometimes abuse the belongings of others.                       |
| 19. | a. I sometimes waste time when I should be working.            | b. I sometimes waste time when I should be working.                  |
| 20. | a. I sometimes show off in front of other children.            | b. I sometimes show off in front of others.                          |

statements, and six were modified more extensively with attempts to retain a similar meaning except for two statements. The original and the modified statements are shown in Table 1. Statements were mimeographed and the list was administered one week after the personality measure. Ss were instructed to mark statements true for them and to write their names on the papers. Both CTP and damaging statement lists were obtained for 79 Ss, 31 women and 48 men.

#### RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The data were treated by the procedure described by Taylor and Combs (1952). The CTP was used to divide Ss by sex into the upper and lower 50% in terms of adjustment scores. Mean number of damaging items endorsed were computed for each group and the critical ratio applied. Data in Table 2 show there were no significant differences between group means and the hypothesis was not supported. For pooled Ss a Pearson product-moment correlation of .014 was obtained.

TABLE 2  
MEAN ADJUSTMENT SCORES, MEAN NUMBER OF DAMAGING ITEMS CHECKED  
AND CRITICAL RATIOS OF DIFFERENCES FOR MEN AND WOMEN

Group		$M_{CTP}$	$M$ Damaging Items Checked	$M_{SD}$	$SE_M$	$CR$
Men	Lower 50%	99.75	14.92	3.55	.69	2.95
	Upper 50%	137.30	12.42	4.73	.98	
Women	Lower 50%	108.80	12.73	3.99	1.06	2.84
	Upper 50%	135.0	13.13	5.26	1.33	

This study differed from that by Taylor and Combs (1952) in that Ss were asked to write their names on the CTP and the damaging statements list. To investigate this difference both measures were administered by the same procedure to 109 additional Ss *without* requiring names. Critical ratios were not computed but the correlation was .0406.

Taylor and Combs (1952) hypothesized that much effort is given to the construction and conservation of an acceptable self image. The well-adjusted self can accept threats while the poorly adjusted individual experiences feelings of unworthiness, guilt, and inadequacy when threatened which results in defensive efforts to maintain his existing self concept. Their research was interpreted as supporting these contentions. The present study yielded no relationship between adjustment and ability to accept threat in two separate groups of college students. The insignificant results might be due to a lack of motivation, changes in administration, or test materials that do not effectively tap behavior of a college population. However, these alternatives do not explain certain specific findings. Taylor and Combs indicated that not only were predicted tendencies observable in individual cases, but that their statistical results would have been magnified by using the upper and lower 25% groups rather



than the upper and lower 50% groups. Visual inspection of present data showed that while individuals at the middle of the CTP distribution scored in the predicted direction, those at the extremes obtained *reverse* scores on damaging statements list. For example, of the first group, the individual who obtained the lowest CTP score accepted 19 of the 20 damaging statements as true while the individual with the highest CTP score accepted only two damaging statements. 42% of Ss in the upper 25% of the men and women accepted 10 or fewer damaging statements. Of the men, 83%, and 50% of the women in the lower 25% accepted 10 or more damaging statements. In the second study, 70% of Ss in the upper 25% accepted nine or fewer damaging statements while 51% of Ss in the lower 25% accepted 11 or more damaging statements. In general, for the first group, men in the lower 50% accepted more statements than men in the upper 50% group.

The first results were initially surprising but were supported by the second administration. They seem at least partially explained by clinical experience. Poorly adjusted adults have crystallized personality structures which include negative perceptions about self. They are frequently self-deprecating and derogatory and openly state the unworthiness they feel. Thus, they might well obtain low scores on the CTP and accept most statements. This is a common defensive ploy of individuals with depressive reactions who are attempting to obtain "narcissistic supplies" and reassurance. An obsessive compulsive neurotic might obtain low CTP scores and yet with rationalization, intellectualization, and critical perceptions about self, check most statements as true. On the other hand, many individuals who obtained high CTP scores endorsed few of the statements. It may well be that adjusted adults with mature personality development and stable behavior patterns do not actually engage in the specific behaviors supplied on the damaging statement list.

#### REFERENCES

- SNYGG, D., & COMBS, A. W. *Individual behavior: a new frame of reference for psychology*. New York: Harper, 1949.
- TAYLOR, C., & COMBS, A. W. Self-acceptance and adjustment. *Journal of Consulting Psychology*, 1952, 16, 89-91.

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