

## AN INTERPERSONAL COMPETENCY SCALE

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THE need for psychological devices to assess various aspects of a person's "positive mental health," "personal effectiveness," or "personal competency" is now axiomatic (Wishner, 1955; Jahoda, 1958; Seeman, 1959). The need to identify and measure a broad range of student talents (Holland and Nichols, 1964; Richards, Holland and Lutz, 1966) is also gaining significance. The present Interpersonal Competency Scale is our attempt to answer these needs by means of a simple, inoffensive scale that might be used for research and that, hopefully, might have some useful application. The construction and validation of the Interpersonal Competency Scale are described below.

*Rationale and construction.* In their book, *Identity and Interpersonal Competence*, Foote and Cottrell (1955) outline a program of research for these concepts and suggest the major personal and environmental influences on interpersonal competency, which they define as "acquired ability for effective interaction." They assume that "interpersonal competency" consists of "(1) health, (2) intelligence, (3) empathy, (4) autonomy, (5) judgment, and (6) creativity." Although we used many of their ideas to write the following true-false scale, some of the items are not clearly tied to their rationale. All items are scored "true," an act we considered an oversight at the time of construction, but wisdom now (Rorer, 1965).

The Interpersonal Competency Scale was administered along with other scales and devices to two large, diverse samples of college freshmen (Abe, Holland, Lutz, and Richards, 1965). The means and standard deviations for 6,289 male college freshmen

TABLE 1  
*Interpersonal Competency Scale Items*

Item
1. I have a reputation for being able to cope with difficult people.
2. I find it easy to talk with all kinds of people.
3. I find it easy to play many roles—student, leader, follower, church goer, athlete, traveler, etc.
4. I am good at playing charades.
5. People seek me out to tell me about their troubles.
6. My physical endurance is greater than that of the average person my age.
7. I think I have unusual skill for assessing the motivation of other students.
8. My physical energy is greater than that of the average person my age.
9. I have unusual skills for making groups, clubs, or organizations function effectively.
10. If I want to, I can be a very persuasive person.
11. I have a clear picture of what I am like as a person.
12. I know what I want to do with my life.
13. My physical health is excellent.
14. My friends think that I am shrewd and insightful about other people.
15. I have good coordination.
16. I would enjoy being an actor (actress).
17. Most of the time, I have an optimistic outlook.
18. My friends regard me as a person with good practical judgment.
19. I am seldom ill.
20. I believe I have good practical judgment.

were 11.16 and 3.42, respectively; for 6,143 women, 11.56 and 3.28, respectively. The estimated reliability (K-R 20) for 6,289 male and 6,143 female college students was .69 and .67, respectively.

In a recent, unpublished study, the Interpersonal Competency (IC) Scale was administered at the beginning and end of the freshman year along with other scales and a questionnaire. The test-retest reliability for 138 males and 127 females attending three colleges was .63 and .67, respectively.

*Validity.* The evidence for the concurrent and predictive validity of the IC Scale was obtained as a smaller portion of several comprehensive assessments of college students. These studies contain more complete descriptions of the items and scales used to validate the IC Scale (See Abe *et al.*, 1965; Abe and Holland, 1965a; Abe and Holland, 1965b; Richards, Holland and Lutz, 1966).

The highest concurrent relationships between the IC Scale and student self-ratings, life goals, vocational interests, achievements, competencies, and home background are given in Table 2 for a large sample of college freshmen. Because of the large sample,

all relationships are statistically significant ( $P < .001$ ). For a given category, variables are shown in descending order of relationship with the IC Scale.

TABLE 2

*Concurrent Correlations of Interpersonal Competency with American  
College Survey Data  
(6,290 Male and 6,143 Female College Freshmen Attending 31 Colleges)*

	Correlation with Interpersonal Competency	
	Men	Women
<i>Self-ratings</i>		
Social Self Confidence	41	40
Leadership	40	39
Popularity with Opposite Sex	38	32
Physical Energy	37	35
Popularity	37	32
Aggressiveness	35	29
Physical Health	35	28
Speaking Ability	32	33
Understanding of Others	31	33
Cheerfulness	30	34
Sense of Humor	29	31
Athletic Ability	29	29
Expressiveness	27	27
Acting Ability	25	28
Sensitivity to the Needs of Others	26	26
<i>Life Goals</i>		
Become Community Leader	24	24
Become Influential in Public Affairs	22	20
Have Executive Responsibility for Work of Others	22	18
Become Outstanding Athlete	20	15
Keep in Good Physical Condition	20	13
<i>Interests</i>		
VPI-Social	23	24
VPI-Enterprising	23	20
Indecision	34	20
<i>Home Background</i>		
Range of Experiences	21	24
Intellectual Resources in the Home	18	20
<i>High School Achievements</i>		
Leadership Achievement	33	33
Dramatic Arts Achievement	21	27
<i>Competencies</i>		
Social Competency	54	53
Leadership & Sales Competency	44	44
Arts Competency	34	42
Athletic Competency	32	29
Homemaking Competency	31	25
Business Competency	27	23
Science Competency	24	20
Technical Competency	21	23
Governmental Competency	23	17
TOTAL SCORE: Competencies	48	51

Table 2 suggests that a high scorer on the IC Scale sees himself as a sociable, popular, persuasive, energetic person who hopes to become influential in community affairs. He also reports that he has many social, persuasive, and artistic competencies, and that he comes from a family which provided many intellectual resources and a wide range of experience.

For these self-ratings, students rated themselves on a simple four-step scale. They indicated their life goals on another four-step scale and their competencies on a checklist of 144 competencies. The student's record of high school achievements, range of experience, and intellectual resources in the home were obtained in similar fashion (see Abe *et al.*, 1965).

Table 3 shows the major fields and vocational choices that are

TABLE 3  
*Major Fields and Vocational Choices High and Low on Interpersonal Competency  
(6,290 Male and 6,143 Female College Freshmen)*

	Men	Women
Major Field		
Three Fields with Highest Mean Scores	Drama, Law, Public Relations	Law, Sociology, Drama
Three Fields with Lowest Mean Scores	Clerical Work, Industrial Education, Farming	Other Health Fields, Library Science, Physics
Vocational Choice		
Three Fields with Highest Mean Scores	Drama, General Psychology, Marketing	Law, General Psychology, Sociology
Three Fields with Lowest Mean Scores	Physics, Industrial Education, Astronomy	Bio-chemistry, Other Bio-science, Chemistry

characterized by the highest and lowest means on the IC Scale; that is, means were calculated for all students who aspired to each major field and each vocation. The results suggest that IC scores are positively associated with people-oriented fields and negatively related to science and thing-oriented fields.

Table 4 presents the relationships between faculty ratings and student IC scores obtained at three colleges. Although the relationships are low, they lend support to the construct validity of the scale.

Taken together, the evidence in Tables 2, 3, and 4 suggests that the IC scale has some construct validity. The high scorer sees

TABLE 4

*Correlations of Interpersonal Competency with Faculty-Ratings of Students  
(138 Male and 127 Female College Freshmen at Three Colleges)*

Rating	Correlations	
	Men	Women
Ideas are Clearly Presented in Speaking	24*	11
Asks Pertinent Questions	12	19*
Socially Self-Confident	18*	12
Initiates Useful or Constructive Discussions in Problem Solving Situations	11	19*
Seems Clear about his Educational Goals	18*	08
Has Keen Sense of Artistic Appreciation	-04	-27**

\* $p < .05$

\*\* $p < .01$

himself in expected ways and has predictable aspirations, competencies, and achievements. Equally important, the correlates of the IC Scale come from different assessments—interests, self-ratings, aspirations, etc.—as well as self-reports and faculty raters.

Follow-up data were collected in the sophomore year for 2,295 men and 2,834 women attending 29 colleges who had taken the IC Scale in their freshman year. The highest *predictive* relationships between the IC freshmen scores and student self-ratings, life goals, and achievement in college a year later are shown in Table 5. Again, the IC Scale predicts an expected set of criteria—popularity, physical energy, expressiveness, sensitivity to others,

TABLE 5

*Predictive Relations between Freshmen Interpersonal Competency Scores and  
Follow-up Variables in Sophomore Year  
(2295 Male and 2834 Female College Sophomores)*

	Men	Women
<i>Self-Ratings and Goals</i>		
Popularity	33	28
Physical Energy	32	29
Expressiveness	29	27
Sensitivity to the Needs of Others	25	25
Scientific Interest	24	21
Practical Mindedness	22	18
Goal—Be Influential in Public Affairs	20	19
<i>College Achievements</i>		
Demonstrated Interpersonal Competence	27	23
Social Participation	22	18
Social Service	20	19
Leadership	19	20

social participation, and leadership. The criterion, "demonstrated interpersonal competence," is a special criterion consisting of events assumed to be indicative of interpersonal competency. Typical items include: Started an informal discussion or study group at college, Visited a sick relative or friend, I have made some new good friends at college, I rarely miss school because of illness, I was sought out by one or more persons who wanted my advice, etc.

*Discussion.* The potential value of the IC Scale is, at this time, certainly unclear. Because the definitions of such terms as "interpersonal competency" and "personal effectiveness" are both varied and complex, the usefulness of the present scale remains to be determined. Perhaps it is, at best, one of several initial scales that researchers can use to explore the relation of "interpersonal competency" to similar variables as well as to other remote, but well-defined constructs.

The results thus far indicate that interpersonal competency is a talent unrelated to educational and intellectual abilities. In the Holland and Richards study (1965), the IC Scale had only low or negligible relationships to ACT scores or high school grades.

It should be possible to construct a record of past interpersonal effectiveness that is similar in principle to the nonacademic achievement scales developed for such areas as art, music, and literature. The present IC Scale might then be used largely as a method for tying a simple biographical scale to the relevant psychological literature.

More generally, the development of the IC Scale reflects a recent concern of psychologists with the idea of competency (White, 1959; M. B. Smith, 1966; Bower, 1966) which is similar to Barron's earlier studies of ego strength (1953) and personal soundness (1963). Barron's research indicated that people high in ego-strength were generally effective, socially ascendant, self-confident, and nonconforming. He also found that graduate students high in "personal soundness" were emotionally stable and socially responsive. Wright (1966) found similar correlates for the Duncan Personality Integration Scale (1963), which measures, by peer nomination, the ability to express one's feelings tactfully, to keep an open mind, to deal with tension, etc. There seems to be considerable similarity between the present scale and these earlier

measures of psychological strength. Although the IC Scale was designed to assess the ability to deal with others, not general personal effectiveness, the present results suggest that there may be a strong relation between interpersonal skills and general psychological health. It is eminently reasonable that psychological health is manifested in both intra-personal and inter-personal effectiveness.

The IC Scale does not attempt to measure all the complex and subtle interpersonal skills required in diverse social settings (Kahn *et al.*, 1964; Solem, 1966; H. C. Smith, 1966). It should probably be regarded as a rough measure of a general disposition or capacity for interpersonal competency. The items of the IC Scale are similar to the factors described as necessary for effective social relations in small groups (Guetzkow and Collins, 1964) and large organizations (Argyris, 1962). Although the present results indicate that the IC Scale is related to interpersonal achievement in college, new research is required to delineate its usefulness in other settings and for other purposes.

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