

Social Paradigm Belief Inventory (SPBI)

3-Choice Forced Choice Version

Instructions

For information about the validation of this instrument, see Deirdre A. Kramer, Patricia E. Kahlbaugh, and Ruth B. Goldston, "A measure of paradigm beliefs about the social world," *Journal of Gerontology: Psychological Sciences*, 1992, 47, P180-P189.

Subjects are asked to choose which of three statements--an absolute (formistic or mechanistic), a relativistic, or a dialectical statement--is closest to their own beliefs. Subjects are given one point for an absolute statement, two points for a relativistic statement, and three points for a dialectical statement. Scores are then summed for a total score. Subjects can also receive separate scores for the number of absolute statements chosen, the number of relativistic statements chosen, and the number of dialectical statements chosen.

When a single "stage score" is required, a method which typically produces a definitive and discriminating classification is to convert subjects' frequencies (for each statement) into z-scores, and assign them to a level based on their highest attained z-score. This provides a classification which is relative to the sample. In other words, convert the absolute scores to z-scores, the relativistic scores to z-scores, and the dialectical scores to z-scores, and choose the highest of these three z-scores: that statement type becomes the person's classification. Alternative methods, neither of which we have found to be effective, involve a) assigning a subject to a level based on the greatest number of statements chosen, or b) using median splits to determine one's classification. The former (a) results in a preponderance of people at the dialectical (or, in the case of adolescents, relativistic) level and very few, if any, at the absolute level; as such, it is not very useful for research (or, in all likelihood, applied) purposes. The latter method (b) often fails to produce unambiguous classifications, as several people typically will have identical percentiles for two of the statement types. In this way, the z-score method has produced more definitive classification.

The statement corresponding to each of the three world views for the 27 items is as follows:

	Absolute	Relativistic	Dialectical
1.	c	b	a
2.	a	c	b
3.	a	b	c
4.	b	a	c
5.	c	a	b
6.	a	b	c
7.	b	c	a
8.	b	a	c
9.	b	a	c
10.	a	b	c
11.	a	b	c
12.	b	c	a
13.	b	a	c
14.	b	c	a
15.	b	c	a
16.	a	c	b
17.	a	b	c
18.	a	c	b
19.	b	c	a
20.	c	a	b
21.	c	a	b
22.	b	a	c
23.	a	b	c
34.	c	b	a
25.	b	a	c
26.	c	b	a
27.	c	b	a

Note: Changes, mostly minor, have been made in the wording of some of the original statements, in order to improve them. The instructions have also been changed, so that subjects are told to attend to the second part of the item if they do not agree with both parts. The wording changes involve the absolute statements from questions #3, 15, 21, 22, and 27, the relativistic statement from question 8, and the dialectical statements from questions 3, 8, 15, 21, 26, and 27. These changes were incorporated into the likert version of the scale as well.

BELIEF INVENTORY

This questionnaire is about how people think about people, relationships, and social institutions. There are no right or wrong answers--we are just interested in the ideas you have about human nature.

Read each item and choose the statement (that is, 'a', 'b', or 'c') that best represents your view on the topic. Then circle the letter corresponding to that statement on the answer sheet provided. If none of the statements is exactly like your own thoughts, choose the one that comes closest--**only circle one answer**. If you agree with one part of the statement, but not the other part, base your answer on the second part (the part that states "*this is because...*").

- 1 a. You cannot know a person completely. This is because getting to know a person in a particular way means not getting to know him or her in some other way.
b. You cannot know a person completely. This is because a person seems different all the time depending on what part of him or her you look at.
c. You can know a person completely. This is because after a long enough time a person's real self emerges, allowing you to see what makes him or her tick.
- 2 a. There are absolute moral principles. This is because some behaviors are universally wrong (i.e., wrong everywhere) and there is no justification for going against them.
b. There are non-absolute moral principles. This is because we each form a set of consistent rules to guide our lives, which make the most sense in terms of our overall life goals.
c. There are no absolute moral principles. This is because morality is personal, and people have different ideas about what morality is.
- 3 a. Our country generally does what's right. This is because we have moral imperative on our side when we make political and economic decisions.
b. Our country sometimes does not do what's right. This is because questionable actions are sometimes necessary to bring about needed results.
c. Our country can try to do what's right. This is because when principles and reality conflict, we can redefine them in exploring solutions which take both into account, but are not perfect.

- 4 a. Dissension is not necessarily dangerous. This is because you can never say for sure that giving in to dissenters will cause problems later because life is unpredictable.
 - b. Dissension is a dangerous thing. This is because surrendering to dissenters places you at the mercy of anyone who wants to impose his or her ideas on society.
 - c. Dissension is a healthy sign. This is because if you oppress others unnecessarily you might destroy yourself in the process and become inhuman.
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- 5 a. Frame of mind sets the stage for whether you can work with someone. This is because if you like someone and expect to work well with him or her you probably will, but if you have a bad attitude you may not.
 - b. It's difficult to tell what influences whether you can work with someone. This is because feeling uncomfortable with a new person can generate a vicious cycle of feelings between you, with neither knowing how these came about.
 - c. Personality determines whether you can work with someone. This is because there are certain types of personalities which are innately compatible and you know immediately whether you can work with such a person.
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- 6 a. Change is unnatural. This is because people need traditional values in order to correct society's problems and deviating from such values would be destructive.
 - b. Change is natural. This is because nothing lasts forever and each new generation brings its own changes.
 - c. Change is natural. This is because there will always be problems, whose solutions may dramatically change old ways of thinking.
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- 7 a. You can't know immediately whether you'll end up liking someone. This is because feelings constantly change, evolve, and take different forms as you get to know the person.
 - b. You can know immediately whether you'll end up liking someone. This is because there are certain types of people you don't like, who are not compatible with you, and you can sense this upon first meeting.
 - c. You can't know immediately whether you'll end up liking someone. This is because you may like or not like a person depending on characteristics of the person you see at any given moment, which influences your view of him or her.

- 8 a. In a war, both sides have valid points of view. This is because each side sees different aspects of the problem and thus reaches different conclusions.
- b. In a war, there is usually a right side and a wrong side. This is because if both sides disagree, logically they couldn't both be right.
- c. In a war, both sides contribute to the problem. This because they belong to the same world and are part of the problems that exist in that world.
- 9 a. There can never be a perfect society. This is because everyone has a different conception of what such a society would be like, and there can never be enough consensus on what to work toward.
- b. There may someday be a perfect society. This is because with the development of technology and the social sciences we should be able to rid the world of its medical, psychological and economic problems.
- c. There can never be a perfect society. This is because every feature of a society carries with it advantages and disadvantages, so that no society has only good points.
- 10 a. There is a right person for everyone. This is because some people just belong together since they have the same type of personality and as a result are perfectly compatible.
- b. There is no one right person for anyone. This is because relationships form on the basis of who's there at the time, whether these people want a relationship, and can make it work.
- c. There is no one right person for anyone. This is because characteristics you find attractive will also seem unattractive in some ways.
- 11 a. Beauty is something objective. This is because some features of a person's looks are considered aesthetically pleasing, with people agreeing on what these features are and who possesses them.
- b. Beauty is something subjective. This is because how you look at someone, such as through the eyes of love, influences whether you find him or her beautiful.
- c. Beauty is not something objective. It is not a thing, but a process which grows, evolves and becomes deeper as a relationship unfolds.

- 12 a. Men and women periodically change. This is because people seek change and growth and express more parts of themselves as they get older.
- b. Men and women are not likely to change. This is because it is in the nature of things that people are content with the way things are, so men will continue to perform some roles, and women others.
- c. Men and women constantly change. This is because people are always changing and trying out whatever new roles happen to be facing them at the time, and there is no real order to this process.
- 13 a. People are essentially contradictory. This is because people are simply full of contradictions in how they act, and we cannot hope to understand these contradictions, no matter how hard we try.
- b. People are not essentially contradictory. This is because you see contradictions in another's actions only if you are thinking in a faulty manner, or in other words, if you are making an error.
- c. People are essentially contradictory. This is because people are always changing and becoming someone new, which contradicts the old self.
- 14 a. Personality may or may not be molded in childhood. This is because it is continually influenced by the environment, but also influences it, so we can't say for sure where personality comes from.
- b. Personality is molded in childhood. This is because it's influenced by one's parents, peers, teachers, etc., and once it's formed in this way, it's set.
- c. Personality is not molded in childhood. This is because it continually changes to fit the immediate environment, in order to adapt and obtain what's needed to get along in life.
- 15 a. It is difficult to predict whether a marriage will last. This is because marriage depends on the active commitment of the partners, and if the commitment is there, existing differences can be appreciated and worked out.
- b. It is possible to predict whether a marriage will last. This is because marriage involves finding the right person, and when two people who are right for each other get married, it should be a success.
- c. It is not possible to predict whether a marriage will last. This is because the selection of a spouse and the success of a marriage has a lot to do with factors beyond your control.

- 16 a. A problem in the family or an organization can usually be traced to one person. This is because that person, for whatever reason, has problems which lead to problems with the other people, causing contention in the group.
- b. A problem in the family or an organization cannot usually be traced to one person. This is because when problems arise in the functioning of the group, this changes how persons act and interact.
- c. A problem in the family or an organization is usually a question of point of view. This is because looking at the same group, some people will see a problem and others will not, depending on how they look at the situation.
- 17 a. There should be tough, mandatory sentences for certain crimes. This is because society is obligated to discourage such actions in order to make life safe for its citizens.
- b. There should be no mandatory sentences for any crimes. This is because every case is different and each has to be evaluated on its own.
- c. There can be mandatory sentences for crimes but this will create still new problems. This is because in order to have a crime-free society, something else, such as personal liberty, is sacrificed.
- 18 a. People should never be allowed to act deviantly. This is because norms of behavior are good for society and must be respected if we are to have order.
- b. People should be allowed to act deviantly under some circumstances. This is because rules are useful guides, but only when used flexibly; you have to consider the specifics of the situation and try to fit the rule to it.
- c. People should be allowed to act deviantly under some circumstances. This is because you can't judge another's actions unless you know about his or her home life, education, philosophy, etc., and how he or she saw the situation at the time.
- 19 a. You cannot predict how a child will turn out. This is because each person copes differently with many life experiences, and how he or she molds his or her personality and life will reflect this creative process.
- b. You can predict how a child will turn out. This is because parents who follow a certain set of rules in raising their children can be certain that they will grow up to be well-adjusted adults.
- c. You cannot predict how a child will turn out. This is because life is unpredictable and thus there is no way for a parent to be sure of the consequences of his or her decisions.

- 20 a. When somebody is not doing a good job, he or she can change. This is because all that's needed to do a good job is to put your heart into it and then you can do just about anything.
- b. When someone is not doing a good job, this can be changed. This is because he or she probably has a related strength which is not being utilized.
- c. When someone is not doing a good job it's unlikely that he or she will change. This is because people stay essentially the same and either have the ability to do the job or lack it.
- 21 a. Solving problems requires realizing that there is no right solution. This is because there are many different sides of a problem and depending on what side you look at, a good decision maker needs to recognize that there are different solutions.
- b. Problem solving is a question of developing new perspectives. This is because a good decision maker is able to see many sides of a problem and encourage a dialogue in which everyone will be heard and contribute to each other's thinking.
- c. Solving problems requires quickly coming up with the best solution. This is because there is a correct way of doing things, and a good decision maker, recognizing this, decisively wastes no time putting it into action.
- 22 a. The most powerful countries do not have the right to use their power. This is because what one country views as right and just, another may see as unfair and unjust.
- b. The most powerful countries have the right to use their power. This is because the world operates by survival of the fittest and if the strong do not maintain their power their existence is threatened.
- c. The most powerful countries do not have the right to use their power. This is because we're all interrelated and will sink or swim together, so countries have got to be understanding and cooperative.
- 23 a. Criminals fit into one category. This is because certain kinds of people are born with the personality for criminal behavior and are not likely to change.
- b. Criminals don't fit into a particular category. This is because no two people are exactly alike or act in the same way for exactly the same reason.
- c. Criminals are essentially like other people. This is because they, like others, go through different phases in their lives, taking on new roles and developing new priorities.

- 24 a. Change comes neither from the inside nor the outside. It comes from an interaction of natural changes the person goes through with changes in the environment, and how these changes are seen by the person.
- b. Change comes from the inside. It comes from a change of outlook on things; no matter what happens on the outside you can always alter your view of things and you will be different.
- c. Change comes from the outside. It is for the most part forced on us by job changes, financial circumstances, a spouse, and the like.
- 25 a. There is no right or wrong in a disagreement. This is because everybody will have a different opinion on the matter and there is no way to say that one is right and the other wrong.
- b. There is usually a right side to a disagreement. This is because it is impossible for two sides to be right if people disagree--this would be illogical.
- c. There is no one side to a disagreement. This is because imposing your opinion on another affects everyone involved, including yourself.
- 26 a. Some countries are very much alike. This is because a shared ideology transcends the existing differences among countries, even though the differences are important too.
- b. No two countries are alike. This is because every country operates under differing circumstances, even those sharing the same political system.
- c. Some countries are indistinguishable. This is because the essence of a given political system is the same no matter where it is.
- 27 a. A person's behavior is generally consistent. This is because each person works to make sense of him or herself and act in a manner consistent with this image; inconsistencies that arise are used to develop this sense of self further.
- b. A person's behavior is basically inconsistent. This because each person is a unique, random mix of behaviors, so that he or she can be generous one moment and stingy the next.
- c. A person's behavior is basically consistent. This is because certain types of behaviors are always together, so that a person wouldn't be generous one moment and stingy the next.

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