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The Tomkins Polarity Scale: Recent Developments

Abstract

Tomkins (1957) described normative and humanistic ideologies that integrate world views, beliefs about human nature, and values through underlying emotional scripts. *The Polarity Scale* (Tomkins, 1964) is an innovative instrument devised to measure these ideologies. It suffered neglect for some years, but it has recently become more popular for two reasons. First, the Scale has drawn interest because of greater focus on emotion in politics. Second, for some years the test was difficult to find, but its republication in our 1988 book, *The Psychology of Politics* has allowed wider dissemination.

This paper gives a brief overview of Polarity Theory, and presents some recent evidence for its validity. We argue that the original format of the scale, which asks for choices between humanistic and normative alternatives, is essential. We present a revised and shortened 43-item form of the Polarity Scale (PS43) that allows responses in machine-scorable forms, that preserves the original presentation of polarities, and that removes the ambiguity of the "Neither" response in the original. We include copies of the Scale and scoring instructions in our paper.

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The Polarity Scale (Tomkins, 1964) measures two life orientations that are at once both broadly ideological and highly personal. *Humanism* and *Normativism* engage a person's world views, beliefs about human nature, and personal values. These are integrated through underlying emotion patterns that, according to Tomkins's (1987) theory of ideoaffective scripts, develop from infancy and fundamentally order one's orientations to the world.

Tomkins first presented his theory of the structure of ideology in Western thought in a talk given in 1957[1]. He traced a "recurrent polarity" in thinking about human affairs, a polarity that he found in philosophy, science, and other areas of discourse from the classical era to the present. Humanism involves as the source of all meaning and value a

positive idealization of human experience. Normativism involves a negative but equally idealized image of human experience as valueless and meaningless in and of itself. To the normative, meaning is found in the realm of the essence, that is, in standards that exist independent of space or time or human action. Tomkins found this polarity in Protagoras' argument that man is the measure of all things, as contrasted with Plato's argument for the priority of the realm of essence. He reported finding reflections of the polarity in classical metaphysics, theology, mathematics, and epistemology, and in modern theories of aesthetics, perception, value, child rearing, politics, psychotherapy, and personality.

Three focal contrasts distinguish these ideologies. First, humanism accepts human nature as good in and of itself, whereas normativism rejects human nature as flawed, weak, and evil. Second, humanism advocates an open, accepting stance toward most aspects of human experience, whereas normativism takes a critical stance that evaluates any experience in terms of external standards. Third, humanism emphasizes direct, uninhibited affective responses to life experiences. Normativism emphasizes indirect, restrained responses to life experience. Together, these three contrasts describe a humanistic orientation in which the "good life" is a psychologically rich, unrestrained, and unevaluative. For the normative, good living involves self-restraint and the evaluation of all experience according to extrinsic standards. Normatives reject experiences that fall short of such standards.

The Polarity Scale.

Tomkins (1964) supported his conception of the two ideologies with a self-report instrument designed to measure respondents' endorsement of items reflecting each ideology. It consisted of 59 paired items such as:

(A) Human beings are basically evil. (B) Human beings are basically good.
The respondent was asked to check the alternative with which she agreed best. One was allowed to check the normative or the humanistic alternative, both, or neither. Research to date using this instrument has supported Polarity Theory (Tomkins, 1965; Williams, 1983; Stone, 1986; Stone & Garzon, 1992; Schaffner & Stone, 1992; de St. Aubin, 1996; Schultz, Stone & Christie, 1997). However, despite the potential value of this broadly encompassing, psychologically rich theory, it has received relatively little research attention. Both the unusual format of the test and certain practical limitations may have inhibited its use. We have, with Tomkins's advice, made some improvements on the scale (Stone & Schaffner, 1988), and in this paper present further suggestions.

The Polarity Scale contrasted normative and humanistic views through successive pairs of statements that range across all domains of human experience. The format of the scale allows one to choose the humanistic alternative, the normative alternative, both, or neither. Despite that he presented humanism and normativism as polar contrasts throughout Western philosophy, Tomkins offered an important alternative perspective on these ideologies. In effect, he asserted that humanism and normativism are not experienced in zero-sum relation to each other. Rather, for whatever reasons, people may experience "ideoaffective resonance" to **both** normative and humanistic perspectives on any given topic. Asked for his choice regarding the polarity "Human beings are basically good--basically evil," he replied: "...they're both...and neither."

One departure from Tomkins's intent involves changes in the layout of the scale's items as well as the aggregation of responses. De St. Aubin (1996) presented the scale as a list of 80 discrete normative and humanistic items using a 5-point Likert-type response format. Presentation of each statement in isolation rather than as one element of a bipolar contrast changes in two important ways the psychological task involved in forming a response. Firstly, such decoupling changes the context of each item, and it is well known that the meaning of survey items is context-dependent. Secondly, de St. Aubin's format allows respondents greater opportunity to endorse contradictory statements with less self-scrutiny than Tomkins intended.

Psychometric characteristics of the Scale. We now have Polarity Scale data from three distinct populations (total N=548). The US *student sample* includes 290 North American undergraduate students, divided evenly by gender, and averaging about 21 years in age. Respondents in this sample used a slightly revised version of the 59-item Polarity Scale (Stone & Schaffner, 1988). A Spanish translation of the same scale was used with the *Spanish student* sample that includes 108 Spanish undergraduates (average age, 22.5 years; they were predominantly (75%) female). A modified scale devised by Schaffner was used with the *voter* sample which included 153 registered voters from one small city in New England. These respondents were selected by stratified random sampling so as to include equal numbers of women and men, and of Republicans, Democrats, and unenrolled voters. This sample also was roughly evenly distributed across age deciles (20's through 70's); thus, it is an appreciably older sample than the other two, which consist largely of traditional (young) college students.

In the US voter sample both the 59 humanistic items and the 59 normative items achieved satisfactory levels of internal consistency (coefficients a = .80 and .83, respectively). These compare favorably with the Spanish translation (H,a = .84; N,a = .85) and the USA student sample (H,a = .81; N,a = .78). The U.S. student sample heavily favored humanistic statements (mean = 43 of 59 items) over normative statements (M = 17). In the Spanish sample, once again humanism (M = 42.4 items) was favored heavily over normativism (M = 13 items)[2]; neither mean differed significantly from that of the American student sample. A significant sex difference did emerge: women favored humanism slightly more than did men. Finally, the US voter sample also favored humanism (M = 38) over normativism (mean = 24); the humanistic preference was weaker among these older respondents. Humanism and normativism scores were unrelated - the theoretical independence of Humanist and Normative scores was upheld in all three samples; none of the correlations between H and N differed significantly from zero.

Personal Ideology Polarity

Ed de St. Aubin's (1996) study utilized a 40-item version of the Polarity Scale[3]. However, the humanist and normative pairs were not presented as polar choices, but were randomly distributed within an 80-item questionnaire that utilized a 5-point agree-disagree response scale. This procedure resulted in mean Humanist and Normative scores of 141 and 102, respectively. The correlation of the two scores was again insignificant; the reliabilities were low: a = .66 for Humanism and a = .63 for Normativism.

Although de St. Aubin did find meaningful relations among the Polarity scales and values, religiosity, political orientation, and beliefs about human nature, the low

reliabilities support our questions about the validity of his measurement technique. We feel that he would have obtained a much clearer picture of the fundamental relationships had he preserved the "polarity" that seems to us an essential element of Tomkins's method of study.

An Abbreviated Polarity Scale
To complete the original Polarity scale, respondents must read and respond to 118 statements. The length of the scale makes it less easily used in research; it also risks respondents' loss of attention to the items, and attenuation of their motivation to complete the instrument conscientiously. For these reasons, a brief version of the scale would be useful, provided that it meets basic psychometric requirements.

Presented here is a copy of the 43-item (pair) version (PS43) that we have developed. It originated from item analyses of the 59-item scale, based on several student samples. The reliabilities of the Humanism (.82) and Normativism (.78) scores compare favorably with those for the 59-item version[4]. The theoretically significant **Both** score has an alpha of .84. Shorter scales would not give very satisfactory reliabilities **or** validities, since in theory one must sample across domains of experience because people have varying interests and experience.

We have found it very simple to have college students answer on IBM sheets using the code 1 = left, 2 = right, 3 = both, and 4 = neither. This allows us to read the sheets directly into the computer, avoiding data input errors, etc. The instructions are shown on the sample test booklet appended.

Humanism, Normativism, and Personality
Our most recent data are from a study by Walter & Stone (1997). In this study, 183 college men (n = 53) and women (n = 130) completed the PS43 together with a number of personality measures[5]. The means and alpha reliabilities for the Polarity Scores for this sample were: Humanism (M = 21.75; SD = 6.71; a = .82); Normativism (M = 3.48; SD = 3.36; a = .78); and Both (M = 11.22; SD = 5.89; a = .84). The following is a brief resume of the relations between the PS43 variables and the personality variables:

Humanism. Humanists expressed more positive affect (POS, r = .15), were less authoritarian (RWA, r = -.35), less socially dominant (SDO, r = -.39), more open (OPEN, r = .31), more agreeable (AGREE, r = .23), and more empathic (QMEE, r = .34).

Normativism. Normatives expressed less positive affect (POS, r = -.18), more negative affect (NEG, r = .17), were more authoritarian (RWA, r = .28), more socially dominant (SDO, r = .37), less open (OPEN, r = -.34), more introverted (EXT, r = -.20), and less agreeable (AGREE, r= -. 32). In this sample, there was a significant negative correlation between H and N (r = -.37).

Both. Both correlated strongly with H (r = -.56). High scorers on Both were more authoritarian (RWA, r = .31); these were the only significant relationships.

These findings support the theoretical basis of Left and Right Wing ideologies. Humanists report more positive emotion, are less concerned with controlling others, and

are more agreeable, open, and empathic. Normatives show less positive and more negative affect, are more authoritarian, and in general are less socially oriented. These observations lend support to the idea that emotional scripts underlie the manifest ideologies. No predictions were made for the Both Score, but perusal of Tomkins's preliminary discussion of this variable[6] suggests that it has different meanings for each individual.

Humanism, normativism, and alternative ideologies
Future research with the Scale will illuminate further the relations between normativism and humanism, and their relation to socially consequential attitudes and behavior. Until that time, Tomkins's writings[7] as well as existing data give reason to anticipate a variety of relations with other conceptions of general sociopolitical ideology that have been proposed and supported by measuring instruments.

Notes:

1. See Tomkins (1963) for a revision of this talk. The most complete statement of Polarity Theory is Tomkins (1965). Tomkins's (1992) final observations are contained in Volume III of *Affect Imagery Consciousness*.
2. These means each include the total for Both, a procedure that we do not now recommend.
3. A short scale recommended by Stone & Schaffner (1988).
4. For the 59-item scale, Stone & Schaffner (1988) reported alpha reliabilities of .78 (humanist) and .79 (normative).
5. Including our 20-item version of Altemeyer's authoritarianism scale (RWA); Sidanius' Social Dominance Scale (SDO); the five factor personality scale including openness (OPEN), conscientiousness (CONSC), extraversion (EXT), agreeableness (AGREE), and neuroticism (NEUROT); the Self-report Altruism Scale (SRAS); the Questionnaire Measure of Emotional Empathy (QMEE); and the positive (POS) and negative (NEG) affect scales from the PANAS.
6. See Tomkins's interpretations in the instruction sheet appended.
7. See especially Virginia Demos' (1995) collection.

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Polarity Scale
SCORES, KEY, INTERPRETATION (Form PS43)

Major Scores
The major scores in the Polarity Scale are:

1. **The number of L** (Left Wing or Humanistic) responses.
   This is the sum of all responses keyed as Left Wing (either A or B).
2. **The number of Both responses.**
   This is the sum of all "C" responses. Each such double response is given a score of one on the Both score. Thus if a subject answered "C" to every item-pair in the entire test her Both response score would be 43.
3. **The number of R** (Right Wing or Normative) responses.
   This is the sum of all responses keyed as Right Wing (A or B). (It is possible for a subject to have a zero Left Wing score and a zero Right Wing score if he has a Both score of 43 obtained by answering "C" on every item-pair).
4. **The number of Neither responses.**
   This is the sum of all the subject's "D" responses. (In the original Polarity Scale, "Neither" was scored when the subject made no response to either item of the pair, thus it was uncertain whether she meant "neither" or simply had skipped that item-pair).

How to Score
The Scoring Key appears on the following page. Humanistic, Normative, Both and Neither scores sum to 43.

Note: These instructions for the 43-item version (PS43) are adapted from Silvan S. Tomkins's 1966 instructions. His comments are reproduced here with little modification, as they reflect his original thinking. (W.F. Stone, July, 1997).

PS43 Scoring Key

Starting with the item-pair #1, the following gives the key for an "A" response. Thus, for item- pair 1, an "A" is a Right Wing (Normative) response (R). for item-pair 2, an "A" is a Left Wing (Humanistic) response (L), etc.

1. R	12. R	23. L	34. L
2. L	13. L	24. L	35. R
3. L	14. L	25. R	36. R
4. R	15. R	26. R	37. L
5. R	16. R	27. L	38. L
6. L	17. L	28. L	39. R
7. L	18. R	29. L	40. L
8. L	19. L	30. L	41. R
9. L	20. R	31. L	42. R
10. R	21. L	32. R	43. L
11. R	22. R	33. L	

Interpretation of Major Scores

The rationale of the Polarity Scale has been described in Tomkins, S. S., and Izard, C., (Eds.) (1965), *Affect, Cognition, and Personality* (Springer) in the chapter "The Psychology of Knowledge," and in White, R. W., (Ed.) (1963), *The Study of Lives* (Atherton) in the chapter "Left and Right: A basic Dimension of Ideology and Personality." Pages 399 to 411 of the latter book contain an analysis not found in "The Psychology of Knowledge" chapter. Additional material on the differences in types of socialization (rewarding and punitive) which are postulated to determine left and right wing ideas -- affective postures [now scripts] -- will be found in Volume II, Tomkins, S. S. (1963), *Affect, Imagery and Consciousness* (Springer). [Further discussion, with additional research, may be found in Tomkins (1991) Volume III].

The score Number of L responses and the score Number of R responses indicate in general how humanistic and how normative in orientation the individual is. In general, there is a negative relationship between the scores. But in individual cases scores may be equally high: in some areas, e.g., child rearing, attitudes toward play, attitudes toward friendship, they may be humanistic in orientation, whereas in such areas as government, science, and aesthetics they may be normative in orientation. In such a case there might have been a golden age in childhood which was sharply reversed in late adolescence so that the severity of later experience influenced attitudes toward adult concerns. Another possibility would be an identification with the mother which determined attitudes about childhood and an identification with the father who held articulate normative views on government, science and aesthetics.

Although the scale was designed to represent several specific ideological domains, or dimensions, it is not always the case that the individual person, or even groups of subjects, will always categorize their experience in these categories. Items 22 and 23 deal with tolerance for distress and fear respectively. They were designed to test for tolerance toward negative affect in general. Indeed, many subjects will respond to these two items in the same way, but for specific individuals or groups (such as adolescents) there may be tolerance for one negative affect (either fear or distress) but not for the other. Furthermore, some items are responded to in the same way by almost all subjects of one age or class; e.g., almost all college graduates have one answer to Item 4 - Play is important for all human beings - whereas older subjects are divided equally. In general then, the factor structure of the test varies for different groups of subjects, and one must examine carefully the groups of items on which the individual (or group) is normative and humanistic. These variations will reveal important differences in the structure of ideology and personality.

The number of **Both** responses may be interpreted in a number of different ways. In contrast to an even distribution of **L** and **R** responses, it indicates more conscious conflict between **L** and **R** positions, and an unwillingness to commit oneself to one or the other position. As such it is a more temperate, graded posture. It may also indicate heightened empathy with all human beings. It may arise from identification with both mother and father, but in a different way from where L and R are equal in frequency. In the case of the high **Both** score, it is more probable that the mother and father did not hold opposing ideological positions about non-overlapping issues (such as child-rearing and politics) but

rather had different views on **all** issues and were in open conflict with each other. In this case the child **may** identify with both positions and his high **Both** score arises from his wish to reduce the conflict between his conflicted parents and between his divided selves, and to increase communication and agreement between the parents which becomes equivalent to integration within his own personality. Such individuals are commonly drawn to the mediating professions the law, government, etc. and to domains of knowledge that are concerned with conflict, e.g., communication theory, the drama. A high **Both** score may also arise from a failure of commitment or excessive indecision, or an obsessive neurosis. Or, again, it may arise from a very high intelligence which is sensitive to the complexities of the issues involved and therefore reluctant to affirm either extreme position. In most studies thus far (but not all) the high **Both** score has occurred when the rest of the score was predominantly Left Wing, indicating in all probability heightened empathy as a concomitant of conflicted identification.

In the high **Neither** score we may be dealing either with high negativity or with an ideological position orthogonal to the theory on which the Polarity scale is based. The significance of the rationale of the Polarity Scale is suggested by the small number of records in which very high **Neither** scores appear. This, however, may also indicate the strength of yea-saying over nay- saying trends within the American culture....

POLARITY SCALE[*]
by Silvan S. Tomkins

Instructions
Consider each of the following pairs of ideas, A and B, and decide which of them you agree with. If you agree with both ideas, you can answer "C" on your answer sheet. If you agree with neither, answer "D". Blacken A if you agree with the idea on the left. Blacken B if you agree with the idea on the right. If you agree with the idea on the left, and also the idea on the right, blacken C. If you disagree with both ideas, blacken circle D for that item.

Remember:

- A = you choose the left idea
- B = you choose the right idea
- C = you like both ideas
- D = you care for neither idea

A = Left	B = Right	C = Both	D = Neither

1. (A) Children should be taught to obey what is right even though they may not always feel like it.

1. (B) Children should be encouraged to express themselves even though parents may not always like it.

2. (A) If I break the law, it is not always to my advantage or to the advantage of society that I be punished.

2. (B) If I break the law I should be punished for the good of society.

3. (A) The most important aspect of science is that it enables you to realize yourself by gaining understanding and control of the world around you.

3. (B) The most important aspect of science is that it enables you to separate the true from the false, the right from the wrong, reality from fantasy.

4. (A) Play is childish. Although it is proper for children to play, adults should concern themselves with more serious matters.

4. (B) Play is important for all human beings. No one is too old to enjoy the excitement of play.

5. (A) The maintenance of law and order is the most important duty of any government.

5. (B) Promotion of the welfare of the people is the most important function of a government.

6. (A) To assume that most people are well-meaning brings out the best in others.

6. (B) To assume that most people are well-meaning is asking for trouble.

7. (A) Parents should first of all be gentle with children.

7. (B) Parents should first of all be firm with children.

8. (A) Children must be loved so that they can grow up to be fine adults.

8. (B) Children must be taught how to act so that they can grow up to be fine adults.

9. (A) A government should allow freedom of expression even though there is some risk in permitting it.

9. (B) A government should allow only such freedom of expression as is consistent with law and order.

10. (A) What children demand should be of little consequence to their parents.

10. (B) What children demand, parents should take seriously and try to satisfy.

11. (A) When people are in trouble, they should help themselves and not depend on others.

11. (B) When people are in trouble, they need help and should be helped.

12. (A) Competition brings out the best in human beings.

12. (B) Cooperation brings out the best in human beings.

13. (A) The most important thing in the world is to know yourself and be yourself.

13. (B) The most important thing in the world is to try to live up to the highest standards.

14. (A) The main purpose of education should be to enable the young to discover and create novelty.

14. (B) The main purpose of education should be to teach the young the wisdom of the remote and recent past.

15. (A) Juvenile delinquency is simply a reflection of the basic evil in human beings. It has always existed in the past and it always will.

15. (B) Juvenile delinquency is due to factors we do not understand. When we do understand these we will be able to prevent it in the future.

16. (A) When you face death you learn how basically insignificant you are.

16. (B) When you face death, you learn who you really are and how much you loved life.

17. (A) Great achievements require first of all great imagination.

17. (B) Great achievements require first of all severe self-discipline.

18. (A) If human beings were really honest with each other, there would be a lot more antipathy and enmity in the world.

18. (B) If human beings were really honest with each other, there would be a lot more sympathy and friendship in the world.

19. (A) The beauty of theorizing is that it has made it possible to invent things that otherwise never would have existed.

19. (B) The trouble with theorizing is that it leads people away from the facts and substitutes opinion for truth.

20. (A) Imagination leads people into self-deception and delusions.

20. (B) Imagination frees people from the dull routines of life.

21. (A) Thinking is responsible for all discovery and invention.

21. (B) Thinking keeps people on the straight and narrow.

22. (A) It is disgusting to see an adult cry.

22. (B) It is distressing to see an adult cry.

23. (A) Fear can make the bravest person tremble. We should not condemn a failure of nerve.

23. (B) Cowardice is despicable and in a soldier should be punished.

24. (A) When a person feels sorry for himself, he really needs more sympathy from others.

24. (B) When a person feels sorry for himself, he really should feel ashamed of himself.

25. (A) Some people can only be changed by humiliating them.

25. (B) No one has the right to humiliate another person.

26. (A) Human beings are basically evil.

26. (B) Human beings are basically good.

27. (A) Those who err should be forgiven.

27. (B) Those who err should be corrected.

28. (A) Anger should be directed against the oppressors of mankind.

28. (B) Anger should be directed against those revolutionaries who undermine law and order.

29. (A) Familiarity like absence makes the heart grow fonder.

29. Familiarity breeds contempt.

30. (A)   Numbers were invented.

30. (B)   Numbers were discovered.

31. (A)   Reason is the chief means by which human beings make great discoveries.

31. (B)   Reason has to be continually disciplined and corrected by reality and hard facts.

32. (A)   The changeableness of human feelings is a weakness in human beings.

32. (B)   The changeableness of human feelings makes life more interesting.

33. (A)   Human beings should be loved at all times, because they want and need to be loved.

33. (B) Human beings should be loved only if they have acted so that they deserve to be loved.

34. (A)   There are a great many things in the world which are good for human beings and which satisfy them in different ways. This makes the world an exciting place and enriches the lives of human beings.

34. (B)   There are a great many things which attract human beings. Some of them are proper, but many are bad for human beings, and some are very degrading.

35. (A)   Children should be seen and not heard.

35. (B) Children are entirely delightful.

36. (A)   In order to live a good life you must act like a good person, i.e. observe the rules of morality.

36. (B)   In order to live a good life you must satisfy both yourself and others.

37. (A)   Mystical experiences may be sources of insight into the nature of reality.

37. (B)   So-called mystical experiences have most often been a source of delusion.

38. (A)   You must always leave yourself open to your own feelings--alien as they may sometimes seem.

38. (B)   If sanity is to be preserved, you must guard yourself against the intrusion of feelings which are alien to your nature.

39. (A)   To act on impulse is to act childishly.

39. (B)   To act on impulse occasionally makes life more interesting.

40. (A) Human beings should be treated with respect at all times.

40. (B) Human beings should be treated with respect only when they deserve respect.

41. (A) There is no surer road to insanity than surrender to the feelings, particularly those which are alien to the self.

41. (B) There is an unique avenue to reality through the feelings, even when they seem alien.

42. (A) Life sometimes smells bad.

42. (B) Life sometimes leaves a bad taste in the mouth.

43. (A) The mind is like a lamp which illuminates whatever it shines on.

44. (B) The mind is like a mirror which reflects whatever strikes it.