Inconsistent People

Based on our previous discussion of the sources of measurement error and true change we reasoned that the level of consistency should vary according to various attributes of respondents. First, we hypothesized that consistency would increase with socio-economic standing since those with high status would be better able to 1) understand vocabulary, 2) follow involved questions, 3) comprehend substantive issues, and 4) avoid distractions and other contaminants. SES was measured with three education variables (years of schooling, word comprehension from a vocabulary test, and interviewer's evaluation of respondent understanding of questions), occupational prestige (the Hodge-Siegal - Rossi scale), and family income. Second, we reasoned that consistency would vary with certain psychological states and orientations.

It was predicted that consistency would fall as anomia, (Srole's scale) and misanthrophy (Rosenberg's scale) increased and rise as general life satisfaction and cooperativeness increased. It was assumed that those with greater anomia and misanthrophy would be less socially and politically integrated and therefore more likely to be uninformed and less trusting and therefore less truthful. Those who were satisfied with life in general and were specifically more cooperative were seen as being better integrated and more willing to fulfill the role model of respondent. Third, we reasoned that those with a firm ideological world views might be more rigid in their opinions and more likely to give consistent responses. To measure this we compared those with liberal or conservative self-evaluations to those with centralist and middle-of-the-road rankings. Finally, we included the three basic biological attributes age, sex, and race to see if they exercised any impact on consistency.

To measure consistency we made additive scales that counted the total number of consistent responses a respondent gave between the test and retest on 1) attitude items, 2) personal evaluations, 3) behaviors, and 4) demographics.

TABLE 1

CONSISTENCY SCALES, 1972-1978

(Number of Items/Cases)

	YEAR					
	1972A	1972B	1972C	1973	1974	1978
Attitudes	4/120*	15/110*	6/115*	27/212	6/205	13/259
Behaviors	-	-	2/124	-	-	5/262
Demographics	15/62	13/56	6/107	13/175	9/176	2/251
Personal Evaluation	4/85	2/64	4/118	4/204	3/154	-

*Attitude consistency scales in 1972 excluded race relation items that were not asked of blacks.

By using scales that compared consistency across a number of items we hoped to get an indication of how respondent attributes influenced consistency in general rather than the particular impact on individual questions. Table 1 shows the number of consistency scales used, the number of items making up each scale, and the case bases

In looking at associations between the independent variables and consistency scales there is unfortunately a lot of noise due to the small sample sizes and other variation.(1) Despite this distortion it is possible to discern the major associational patterns. On the SES dimension the educational variables did quite well. (Table 2). Years of education, word comprehension, and respondent understanding all showed a positive association with consistency. Occupational prestige also tended with consistency but income showed little relationship. On the psychological variables consistency tended with low misanthropic and anomic scores and high satisfaction but cooperation was not related. Likewise our one measure of attitude stability, ideological extremism vs. centralism, failed to show an association. On the fixed demographics we found that sex had no association and that consistency was lower for the old and blacks.

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(1) The changes in correlations between the independent variables and consistency scales may result from several reasons 1) true changes between years, 2) changes in the item content of the consistency scales, 3) changes in intervals and other test/retest conditions, and 4) sample variation. We suspect that most of the variation comes from the sample variation. In order to see if item content might be the major contributor, we examined the association between six individual items that appeared on two or three surveys and three independent variables (years of schooling, comprehension, and satisfaction).

If these repeated items showed more stability than the scales across years we would suspect that the changing content of the scales might explain the variations. We found, however, that quite a lot of variation occurred across surveys in the association between consistency and the independent variables on these repeated items. Thus, variable content was probably not the major cause for the variation in associations.

Table 2

Bivariate Correlates of Consistency Scales

(Pearson's R)

Items *	1972A				1972B				1972C			
	AH**	BEH	DEM.	PE.	AH	BEH	DEM	PE	AH	BEH	DEM	PE
Sex	(-095)	-	(-014)	(.139)	(.043)	-	(.069)	(.050)	(-.063)	(057)	(.014)	(-.063)
Age	(-.048)	-	-.291	(-.030)	-.237	-	(.142)	(.034)	-.185	(.112)	-.161	-.264
Race	(-.053)	-	-.412	-.322	-.262	-	-.266	(.003)	-.298	(-.061)	-.178	(-.061)
Education	(.124)	-	(.200)	(.139)	.471	-	.413	(.034)	.331	(.032)	.213	.245
Wordsum	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Comprend	(-.082)	-	-.283	(.124)	-.416	-	(-.089)	(-.120)	-.215	(-.066)	(.045)	(-.147)
Income	-.222	-	(.069)	(.108)	(.072)	-	(.075)	(-.193)	(-.022)	(.096)	.181	(.008)
Prestige	(.123)	-	(.105)	(.116)	.413	-	.354	(.077)	.286	(.075)	(.098)	(.017)
Coop	(.087)	-	(.011)	(-.091)	(-.113)	-	-.350	(.094)	(-.140)	(.047)	(0.22)	(.063)
Satisfaction	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Anomia	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Polviews	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Misanthropy	-.340	-	-.228	(-.107)	(-.057)	-	-.505	(.107)	(-.044)	(-.134)	(-.025)	(0.46)

* GSS Mnemonics

** R's in parentheses are not statistically significant at .05

Table 2

Bivariate Correlates of Consistency Scales

(Pearson's R)

Items *	1973				1974				1978			
	AH	BEH	DEM	PE	AH	BEH	DEM	PE	AH	BEH	DEM	PE
Sex	(.020)	-	(.026)	.218	(.114)	-	-.152	(-.109)	(.025)	(.093)	(.101)	-
Age	-.254	-	-.132	-.182	-.307	-	-.120	(-.102)	(-.081)	(.102)	(.100)	-
Race	-.165	-	-.212	(-.056)	-.145	-	(-.321)	(-.111)	-.103	-.174	(.011)	-
Education	.347	-	.242	.190	.300	-	.167	.166	.188	.145	(.009)	-
Wordsum	-	-	-	-	.254	-	(.108)	(.125)	.197	.224	(-.002)	-
Comprend	-.374	-	-.191	(-.028)	-.286	-	-.155	(-.114)	(-.004)	-.185	(-.043)	
Income	.223	-	.220	(.034)	.173	-	.213	(.108)	(.069)	(-.049)	(.015)	-
Prestige	.295	-	.276	.169	(.065)	-	.156	.223	(.104)	.237	(.094)	-
Coop	-.122	-	(-.033)	(-.048)	(-.102)	-	(-.005)	(.030)	(-.010)	-.108	(-.044)	-
Satisfaction	-.224	-	-.233	(-.028)	(-.058)	-	(-.037)	-.156	(-.081)	-.124	-.110	-
Anomia	-.206	-	-.288	(-.062)	-.250	-	-.194	-.180	-	-	-	-
Polviews	-	-	-	-	(.017)	-	(.120)	(.008)	(-.087)	(.018)	-.217	-
Misanthropy	-.198	-	-.299	-.140	-	-	-	-	(.041)	(-.078)	(-.048)	-

To see if these bivariate associations were all independent effects or the product of spurious interrelationships we used step-wise multiple regression analysis. We dropped sex, ideology, and income from the analysis since they had showed little bivariate association and after preliminary analysis chose years of schooling as the best single measure of education and dropped misanthropy as the weakest of the remaining psychological variables. That left two demographics, race and age, two SES mesaures, years of schooling and occupational prestige, and two psychological variables, anomia and satisfaction.

As with the bivariate analysis the multivariate analysis showed much variation in the significance and magnitude of correlations (Table 3). Despite this certain pattern were observable. SES was the strongest factor. Clearly education was the single best predictor among these variables. It showed up as significant in five comparisons and prestige in another two. Satisfaction did well with three association with anomic, however, only showing as significant once. Age and race also showed up. In brief, each variable showed some sign of influencing consistency with education having the most frequent association followed by satisfaction, prestige, age, race,

TABLE 3

Multivariate Analysis of Consistency Scales
(variables in equations)*

YEARS

	1973			1974			1978	
	Item	Beta	F	Item	Beta	F	Item	Beta	F
Attitudes	Educ.	- .289	15.4	Age	- .289	16.0	Educ.	.193	9.1
	Satisf.	- .256	12.1	Anomia	- .263	13.3			
Behaviors							Prestige	.236	14.1
Demographics	Satisf.	- .272	11.5	Race	- .300	14.1			
							Satisf.	-.141	4.6
	Educ.	.242	9.1	Educ.	.164	4.2			
Personal Evaluation	Educ.	.227	8.6	Presgige	.250	8.5			
				Age	- .175	4.2			

*Variables used were age, race, education (years of schooling), prestige, satisfaction, and anomia (1973 and 1974).

and anomia. While the limited sample sizes and variations in correlation preclude any simple and definitive conclusion it appears that consistency will be highest for better educated and upper status employees, those psychologically integrated and adjusted, and perhaps, the young and non-blacks.

It is, of course, perfectly possible that the inconsistent groups are simply more prone to true change rather than being less reliable. We feel that measurement error differentials rather than stability differentials are the main reason for the inter group variation. Some evidence for this comes from the demographics. Most demographics were unchangeables that could not have undergone any true change over the approximately one month intervals between test and retest (e.g., state respondent was raised in or sex and race of respondent) and the rest were changeable but highly stable attributes (number of children over born, years of education, religion). With true change being impossible or very restricted for these variables, the inconsistencies between test and retest were overwhelmingly due to measurement error and the differentials observed must have been due to differing levels of reliability rather than different levels of true change. In sum, we find that test/retest consistency varies by attributes of the respondent and argue that this variation is largely a function of reliability differentials between the groups.