

Children's likableness ratings of 22 trait adjectives

CLYDE HENDRICK*, KENNETH L. HOVING, and CHRISTINE M. FRANZ
Kent State University, Kent, Ohio 44242

Twelve Ss in each of Grades K, 2, 4, and 6 rated the likability of 22 common trait adjectives. The mean ratings and standard deviations are given for each trait. Analysis of variance indicated that only 2 of the 22 traits showed significant differences across grade levels. The data indicated that the evaluative meaning for this set of traits was remarkably stable, and that the conventional meaning of common trait words is achieved at an early age.

Most research on impression formation has used college students as Ss, and with rare exceptions (e.g., Butzin & Anderson, 1973), little research has been done with children. The data reported in this paper were collected as part of a broader study of "averaging versus adding" (Anderson, 1965) as a stimulus combination rule for children. Children in Grades K, 2, 4, and 6 rated the likability of 22 preselected trait words. Although the sample size was relatively small for each age group, the data proved remarkably stable across groups. The results for individual trait ratings are presented for convenience of researchers interested in developmental research in impression formation.

METHOD

Ss were 48 students (23 males, 25 females) from the University laboratory school at Kent State University. Twelve students from each of Grade Levels K, 2, 4, and 6 rated how much they would like a stranger described by each of 22 trait adjectives. Ss had average ages of 69.1, 93.3, 120.7, and 132.0 months for Grades K, 2, 4, and 6, respectively.

Testing was done individually by a female adult. When each child arrived for a session, the E talked with him for several minutes before explaining the impression task in simple terms. The response scale consisted of seven faces, similar to those used by Butzin and Anderson (1973). The faces were identical except that three had upward curving smiles of increasing degree, three had downward curving frowns of increasing degree, and the mouth of the neutral face was a straight line. Ss selected their response by pointing to the face which indicated their preference for a given stranger. The responses were scored on a 1-7-point basis. The E worked with each S until she was sure that the S understood the meaning of the scale. All of the Ss understood the task quite readily.

The trait words were selected for this age range on an intuitive basis with the limitation that low-frequency words were excluded. Eleven words were chosen which seemed desirable; the remaining 11 were deemed undesirable. The trait words are given in Table 1 and Table 2. The traits were presented in a quasirandom order for each S with the restriction that desirable and undesirable traits alternate about equally for the entire presentation sequence.

*Requests for reprints should be addressed to Clyde Hendrick, Department of Psychology, Kent State University, Kent, Ohio 44242. We wish to thank the participating students, teachers, staff, and administration of the University School, Kent State University.

RESULTS

The means and standard deviations for each grade level are given for the desirable traits in Table 1, and for the undesirable traits in Table 2. The ratings for each trait were subjected to an analysis of variance with the four grade levels serving as levels of a variable. The F ratios are also given in the tables ($df = 3/44$ for each analysis).

The mean ratings were remarkably stable across grade levels. Only two traits showed a significant effect. The effect for *friendly* ($F = 5.13$) may well have been due to chance, but the progressive mean increase for *afraid* ($F = 5.48$) across grade levels may indicate a developmental trend. On balance, however, these data show that the evaluative meaning of this set of trait words is formed by age 5, and that once formed, the meaning remains constant through Grade 6.

Some of the traits used in the study also appeared in Anderson's (1968) list of trait words which was standardized on college students. For comparative purposes, the means for available words from Anderson's list are shown in the last column of the tables.¹ Inspection indicates that with one exception, ratings for college students were about the same as for children. The exception was *silly* which had uniformly high ratings, and, in fact, was judged by the Ss as a desirable trait. The ratings for *silly* probably reflect a true positive evaluation of this characteristic for children in this age group.

One caution is perhaps in order. The Ss on the average came from advantaged family backgrounds, and thus might be expected to exceed the average in intelligence. Such a restriction seems minor, however, in view of the stability of the data across grade levels. Any difficulties in generality would probably occur in Ss' understanding of how to use the response scale. As noted, there was no difficulty in this regard in the present study. In view of the stability of these results, there is no reason why the study of information integration should not be extended readily to children. Much may be gained from such developmental research.

Table 1
Means and Standard Deviations for Desirable Traits

Trait	Kindergarten		Second Grade		Fourth Grade		Sixth Grade		F	Anderson's (1968) List
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD		
Brave	5.08	1.16	6.00	1.04	5.25	.97	5.33	.98	1.79	—
Friendly	5.17	.83	5.83	.83	6.42	.67	5.92	.79	5.13*	6.19
Funny	5.58	1.24	6.25	1.06	6.33	.78	6.08	.79	1.39	—
Glad	5.83	1.11	6.33	.49	6.25	.75	5.92	.90	1.01	—
Good	5.92	.90	5.75	.75	6.42	.79	5.75	.75	1.86	5.80
Happy	6.50	.80	6.50	.90	6.50	.80	6.33	.78	.12	6.14
Kind	5.92	1.00	6.17	.58	6.33	.78	6.08	.79	.56	6.20
Nice	6.33	1.07	6.92	.29	6.17	1.03	6.42	.67	1.82	5.36
Right	5.67	1.15	5.50	.90	5.67	.78	5.25	.45	.63	—
Smart	5.92	1.38	6.25	.97	5.75	.97	5.17	.94	2.12	5.88
Wonderful	6.25	1.22	6.42	.79	6.67	.78	6.33	.65	.50	—

* $p < .05$

Table 2
Means and Standard Deviations for Undesirable Traits

Trait	Kindergarten		Second Grade		Fourth Grade		Sixth Grade		F	Anderson's (1968) List
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD		
Afraid	2.58	.90	3.00	.60	3.75	1.42	3.92	.51	5.48*	—
Angry	2.08	1.31	2.25	1.42	2.00	.85	2.50	1.00	.43	2.69
Bad	2.58	1.16	2.25	1.09	1.92	1.16	2.67	.98	1.14	—
Mad	2.50	1.51	2.83	1.19	2.50	1.00	2.75	.97	.25	—
Mean	2.50	1.31	2.42	1.08	1.83	.94	2.08	1.08	.92	1.37
Sad	2.33	.98	2.25	.87	2.75	1.86	3.08	.90	1.20	3.09
Silly	5.17	1.34	5.67	1.44	4.75	.87	5.67	1.15	1.59	3.19
Strange	3.75	1.29	3.42	1.00	4.33	.78	4.17	1.03	1.90	—
Terrible	1.92	1.08	1.50	.90	1.58	.90	1.83	.72	.57	—
Unhappy	2.58	1.24	3.00	1.21	2.75	1.76	2.92	1.00	.23	3.03
Wrong	3.08	1.00	2.67	1.07	3.83	1.19	2.75	1.22	2.69	—

* $p < .05$

REFERENCES

- Anderson, N. H. Averaging versus adding as a stimulus-combination rule in impression formation. *Journal of Experimental Psychology*, 1965, 70, 394-400.
- Anderson, N. H. Likableness ratings of 555 personality-trait words. *Journal of Personality & Social Psychology*, 1968, 9, 272-279.
- Butzin, C. A., & Anderson, N. H. Functional measurement of children's judgments. *Child Development*, 1973, 44, 529-537.

NOTE

1. One point has been added to the mean values shown in Anderson's (1968) list because the scoring in that study was on a basis of 0-6, but in the present study, the scoring was on a 1-7 point basis.

(Received for publication May 2, 1974.)