

EDWARDS PERSONAL PREFERENCE SCHEDULE (EPPS)

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1. Core Definition

The Edwards Personal Preference Schedule (EPPS) is a widely recognized standardized objective personality inventory designed to measure the relative strength of an individual's psychological needs or motivations. Developed by Allen L. Edwards, the EPPS is fundamentally rooted in the elaborate theory of needs articulated by **Henry A. Murray**. Unlike many traditional personality inventories of its era, the EPPS was specifically constructed to assess 15 specific "manifest needs" deemed important in understanding human behavior, utilizing a unique response format intended to minimize the pervasive influence of social desirability bias in self-report measures.

This inventory is characterized by its **forced-choice structure**. Respondents are presented with pairs of statements, where each statement describes a behavior related to one of the 15 measured needs. The individual must select the statement that is more personally characteristic of them, even if both statements seem applicable or neither seems entirely relevant. This structure forces a choice between two equally desirable (or undesirable) items, thereby yielding an ipsative score--meaning the score indicates the relative strength of one need compared to the others within that individual, rather than an absolute comparison to a normative population.

Originally tailored primarily for use with **college students** and adults in counseling and vocational guidance settings, the EPPS provides profiles indicating the dominance of certain needs, such as **Need for Achievement**, Need for Order, Need for Affiliation, and Need for Endurance. The interpretation of the results focuses on the pattern of these needs, offering insights into personal motivation, interpersonal relationships, and occupational fit based on the established framework of Murray's psychogenic needs.

2. Etymology and Historical Development

The development of the EPPS began in the early 1950s and was published in 1954 by Allen L. Edwards. Its creation was a direct response to two major psychological issues prevalent in personality testing at the time: the need for a standardized measure of Murray's influential theory of needs, and the necessity of controlling for response sets, particularly the tendency of subjects to respond in a socially acceptable manner (social desirability bias). Edwards systematically paired statements that had been empirically shown to be similar in terms of their social desirability rating, ensuring that the choice between them was based on the underlying psychological need rather than the perceived goodness or badness of the trait.

The theoretical foundation of the EPPS rests entirely on the work published by **Henry A. Murray** in

his 1938 classic, *Explorations in Personality*. Murray identified a comprehensive list of psychogenic needs--unconscious drives that motivate behavior. Edwards translated 15 of these needs into operational definitions suitable for questionnaire format, ensuring that the instrument provided a practical application of Murray's abstract theoretical concepts. This adoption formalized Murray's qualitative, clinical observations into a quantitative, psychometric tool, making the EPPS a crucial link between theoretical psychoanalytic psychology and empirical personality assessment.

Initial standardization efforts focused heavily on university populations, reflecting the test's intended use in educational counseling and vocational placement. Through subsequent decades, the EPPS became a prominent fixture in research examining motivational differences, particularly in relation to academic success, career path selection, and leadership styles. While its use peaked in the mid-to-late 20th century, its methodological innovation--the systematic control of social desirability bias--remains a highly influential contribution to the field of psychological measurement.

3. Key Characteristics and Measured Needs

The defining operational feature of the EPPS is its construction using 225 pairs of statements. Each of the 15 needs is paired twice with every other need, creating a dense network of comparison points. This results in 210 pairs used to generate the 15 need scores, plus 15 additional repeated pairs used to create a **Consistency score**, which serves as a measure of the respondent's care and veracity in completing the inventory.

The 15 manifest needs measured by the EPPS are derived directly from Murray's framework and include:

Achievement (Ach): The need to succeed, accomplish tasks, and overcome obstacles.

Deference (Def): The need to comply with authority, praise others, and follow tradition.

Order (Ord): The need to organize, be precise, and maintain cleanliness and structure.

Exhibition (Exh): The need to be the center of attention, excite, and amuse others.

Autonomy (Aut): The need to be independent, resist coercion, and defy convention.

Affiliation (Aff): The need to form close friendships, be loyal, and cooperate with others.

Intrception (Int): The need to analyze feelings and motives, both one's own and others'.

Succorance (Suc): The need to seek aid, emotional support, or protection from others.

Dominance (Dom): The need to influence, lead, or persuade others.

Abasement (Aba): The need to feel guilty, accept blame, and seek punishment.

Change (Chg): The need to seek new experiences, variety, and travel.

Endurance (End): The need to persist in tasks, finish projects, and work long hours.

Heterosexuality (Het): The need to engage in relationships and activities involving members of the opposite sex.

Aggression (Agg): The need to attack, criticize, or retaliate against others.

Nurturance (Nur): The need to help, care for, and encourage the welfare of others.

The resulting profile is **ipsative**; scores reflect a zero-sum game, meaning that a high score on one need necessitates lower scores on others. For instance, a high score in Autonomy implies less reported reliance on Succorance or Deference. This ipsative nature is a critical element, differentiating the EPPS from normative tests that compare an individual's score directly against a population average.

4. Applications and Interpretive Framework

Historically, the EPPS has been applied most extensively in non-clinical settings, particularly within high school and university counseling centers. Its primary applications fall into three major categories: vocational guidance, academic counseling, and motivational research.

In **vocational guidance**, the EPPS helps individuals understand how their motivational structure aligns with the demands and rewards of various occupations. For example, a high score on **Achievement** and **Endurance** might suggest suitability for demanding, long-term professional fields, while high scores on Affiliation and Nurturance might point toward careers requiring interpersonal care and teamwork. Counselors use the profile to initiate discussions about internal drivers and potential job satisfaction, rather than simply predicting job performance.

Within **academic counseling**, the EPPS provides insights into student behavior. A student with high **Order** and low Change may thrive in highly structured curricula, whereas a student with high Autonomy and high Aggression might struggle with overly restrictive academic environments or large lecture formats. This information aids educators and counselors in optimizing the learning environment or addressing potential sources of conflict or dissatisfaction for the student.

Furthermore, the EPPS has been valuable in **motivational research**, allowing psychologists to study how different needs correlate with various outcomes, such as leadership effectiveness, consumer behavior, and cross-cultural differences in priority setting. Despite the test's ipsative scoring limitations for external comparison, researchers have successfully utilized the internal profile patterns to explore the dynamics of personal motivation across diverse groups.

5. Debates and Criticisms

While the EPPS was groundbreaking in its attempt to control social desirability, it has faced significant scholarly criticism, primarily concerning the psychometric properties derived from its unique scoring methodology.

The most substantial criticism revolves around the **ipsative scoring system**. Because the scores are interdependent (a gain in one need necessitates a reduction in others), they do not provide

information on the absolute strength of any given need, nor can they be straightforwardly compared across different individuals or groups using standard statistical techniques that assume independence. This ipsative nature limits the EPPS's utility for pure normative comparison and certain types of research, leading critics to argue that the scores reveal only the *rank order* of needs within the person, rather than a true measure of need intensity.

Secondly, critics have questioned the effectiveness of the forced-choice format in truly eliminating **social desirability bias**. While Edwards attempted to equate the desirability of the paired statements, subsequent research suggested that individuals could still perceive subtle differences in desirability, or that the forced-choice mechanism simply shifted the response bias rather than removing it entirely. Furthermore, the format can sometimes frustrate test-takers who feel compelled to choose between two uncharacteristic or two highly characteristic statements, potentially reducing response validity.

Finally, concerns have been raised regarding the **construct validity** of the 15 scales and their relationship to the original theoretical needs defined by Murray. Some researchers have suggested that the scales exhibit high intercorrelation, indicating that they may not be measuring 15 distinct, orthogonal constructs as intended. Despite its historic importance, the EPPS has largely been superseded by newer personality inventories that utilize normative scoring and incorporate modern factor-analytic approaches to ensure cleaner separation of personality dimensions.

Further Reading

[Edwards Personal Preference Schedule \(Wikipedia\)](#)

[Henry Murray \(Wikipedia\)](#)

[Edwards, A. L. \(1954\). Manual for the Edwards Personal Preference Schedule. Psychological Corporation.](#)