

Interaction of Certain Personality Variables and Feedback in a Computerized ESP Test

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Immediate trial-by-trial feedback has recently been proposed as a technique favoring the development of ESP ability. "Lab lore," however, indicates that some subjects find such feedback distracting or

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disturbing. On the assumption that differences among subjects' reactions to feedback may be measurable through personality variables, two personality factors were selected for examination under two feedback conditions. The two personality factors were anxiety and surgency (the tendency to be happy-go-lucky vs. the tendency to be serious-minded). The two feedback conditions were immediate trial-by-trial feedback and run-score-only feedback.

Subjects were chosen from a subject pool of high-school students on the basis of their scores on the anxiety and surgency (*F* factor) scales of Cattell's High School Personality Questionnaire (HSPQ). A total of 40 subjects were tested, with 10 in each of the four possible personality combinations (high-anxious-high-*F*, low-anxious-high-*F*, high-anxious-low-*F*, and low-anxious-low-*F*). The ESP task was a computerized clairvoyance test using as targets the numbers 1 through 5. Each subject did one 100-trial run under each of the two feedback conditions; the order of presentation of these conditions was counterbalanced.

The data were analyzed by a three-way ANOVA with the main variables being anxiety, *F* factor, and feedback condition. Only anxiety showed a marginally significant effect ($F_{1,36} = 4.95, p \approx .03$), with high-anxious subjects scoring slightly above chance and low-anxious subjects scoring below chance. The interaction between the anxiety factor and the feedback condition was marginally significant ($F_{1,36} = 5.12, p < .03$). This effect was primarily due to a difference in the run-score-only feedback condition ($t = 3.3, 38 \text{ df}; p < .002$, two-tailed). Here, the high-anxious group scored slightly above chance while the low-anxious group scored significantly below chance ($t = -3.99, 19 \text{ df}; p < .001$, two-tailed). The interaction between the *F* factor and the feedback conditions was suggestive at $p < .07$. The low-*F* (serious-minded) group scored lower on the immediate feedback condition than on the run feedback condition while the high-*F* (happy-go-lucky) group did the reverse.

These results suggest that the indiscriminate giving of immediate trial-by-trial feedback may be detrimental to ESP scoring and that the role of such feedback should be further clarified.