

Barber Suggestibility Scale

The Barber Suggestibility Scale was designed to be administered individually, but to be flexible in its use. It can be administered with or without a hypnotic induction, and can be scored objectively or subjectively.

Instructions

The Barber Suggestibility Scale can be administered either:

1. Without any special preliminaries – participants can simply be told that they will receive a test of imaginative ability
2. After a traditional trance induction procedure – a standard hypnotic induction
3. After special preliminary instructions such as Task Motivational Instructions (Barber, 1969), Human Potential Instructions (Barber, Spanos, Chaves, 1974), or Think With Instructions (Barber & Wilson, 1977)

Participants should be asked to close their eyes and to keep them closed during the administration of the scale. The experimenter should read the scale items verbatim in the order they are presented. Alternatively the scale can be tape recorded.

Materials needed

1. Stopwatch
2. Ruler
3. Pen

Reference:

Barber, T. X., Wilson, S. C. (1978/1979). The Barber Suggestibility Scale and the Creative Imagination Scale: Experimental and Clinical Applications. *American Journal of Clinical Hypnosis*, 21: 84-108

Suggestions

1. Arm Lowering

“Hold your right arm straight out in front of you like this.”

(Guide the subject to extend the right arm directly in front of the body at shoulder height and parallel to the floor.)

“Concentrate on your arm and listen to me.”

(Begin timing)

“Imagine that your right arm is feeling heavier and heavier, and that it’s moving down and down. It’s becoming heavier and heavier and moving down and down. It weighs a ton! I’s getting heavier and heavier. It’s moving down and down, more and more, coming down and down, more and more; it’s heavier and heavier, coming down and down, more and more, more and more.”

(End 30 seconds)

“You can relax your arm now.” (If necessary, ask the subject to lower the right arm.)

Objective score criterion: 1 point for response of 4 inches or more. (Response is measured by placing ruler near the subject’s hand at the beginning of the suggestions and noting the degree of displacement at the end of the 30-second suggestion period.)

2. Arm Levitation

“Keep your eyes closed and put your left arm straight out in front of you in the same way. Concentrate on your arm and listen to me.”

(Begin timing)

“Imagine that the arm is becoming lighter and lighter, that it’s moving up and up. It feels as if it doesn’t have any weight at all, and it’s moving up and up, more and more. It’s as light as a feather, it’s weightless and rising in the air. It’s lighter and lighter, rising and lifting more and more. It’s lighter and lighter and moving up and up. It doesn’t have any weight at all and it’s moving up and up, more and more. It’s lighter and lighter, moving up and up, more and more, higher and higher.”

(End 30 seconds)

“You can relax your arm now.” (If necessary, ask the subject to lower the arm.)

Objective score criterion: 1 point for response of 4 inches or more during 30-second suggestion period.

3. Hand Lock

“Keep your eyes closed. Clasp your hands together tightly, and interlace the fingers.” (If necessary, the experimenter states, “Press your hands together, with palms touching” and assists the subject to interlock the fingers and bring the palms together). “Put them in your lap. Concentrate on your hands and hold them together as tightly as you can.”

(Begin timing)

“Imagine that your hands are two pieces of steel that are welded together so that it’s impossible to get them apart. They’re stuck, they’re welded, they’re clamped. When I ask you to pull your hands apart, they’ll be stuck and they won’t come apart no matter how hard you try. They’re stuck together; they’re two pieces of steel welded together. You feel as if your fingers were clamped in a vise. Your hands are hard, solid, rigid! The harder you try to pull them apart the more they will stick together! It’s impossible to pull your hands apart! The more you try the more difficult it will become. Try, you can’t”

(End 45 seconds)

(5-second pause) “Try harder, you can’t”

(10-second pause)

“You can unclasp your hands now”

Objective score criterion: ½ point for incomplete separation of the hands after 5-second effort; 1 point for incomplete separation after 15-second effort.

4. Thirst “Hallucination”

“Keep your eyes closed.” (Begin timing) “Imagine that you’ve just finished a long, long walk in the hot sun. You’ve been in the hot sun for hours, and for all that time you haven’t had a drink of water. You’ve never been so thirsty in your life. You feel thirstier and thirstier. Your mouth is parched, your lips are dry, your throat is dry. You have to keep swallowing and swallowing. You need to moisten your lips. (3-second pause) You feel thirstier and thirstier, drier and drier. Thirstier and thirstier, dry and thirsty. You’re very very thirsty! Dry and thirsty! Dry and thirsty!” (End 45 seconds) “Now, imagine drinking a cool refreshing glass of water.” (5-second pause)

Objective score criterion: ½ point if the subject shows swallowing, moistening of lips, or marked mouth movements; additional ½ point if the subject indicates during the “postexperimental” questioning that he or she became thirsty during this test (e.g. “I felt dry”, “I was parched”, “I felt somewhat thirsty”). (See “postexperimental” questions for final scoring criteria on this test.)

5. Verbal Inhibition

“Keep your eyes closed.” (Begin timing) “Imagine that the muscles in your throat and jaw are solid and rigid, as if they’re made of steel. They’re so solid and rigid, that you can’t speak. Every muscle in your throat and mouth is so solid and so rigid that you can’t say your name. The harder you try to say your name the harder it becomes. You can’t talk! Your larynx has tightened, up; your throat and jaw feel as if they’re in a vise. Your throat is clamped so tightly that you can’t talk; you can’t say your name. The harder you try, the harder it will be. It’s useless, the words won’t come out; you can’t speak your name; it’s impossible to talk! The harder you try to say your name the harder it will become. Try, you can’t!” (End 45 seconds)

(5-second pause) “Try harder; you can’t.” (10-second pause)

“You can say your name now.”

Objective score criterion: ½ point if the subject does not say name after 5-second effort; 1 point if subject does not say name after 15-second effort.

6. Body Immobility

“Keep your eyes closed.” (Begin timing) “Imagine that for years and years you’ve been sitting in that chair just as you are now. Imagine that you’ve been sitting in that chair so long that you’re stuck to it! It’s as if you’re part of the chair. You’re whole body is heavy, rigid, solid and you weigh a ton. You’re so heavy that you can’t budge yourself. It’s impossible for you to stand up, you’re stuck right there! Your body has become part of the chair. When I ask you to stand up you won’t be able to do it! You’re stuck tight. The harder you try the tighter you’ll be stuck and you won’t be able to get up. You’re heavy in the chair! Stuck in the chair; you can’t stand up. You’re so heavy and stuck so tight. You can’t stand up; you’re stuck. Try, you can’t.” (End 45 seconds)

(5-second pause) “Try harder; you can’t.” (10-second pause) “You can relax [or sit down] now.”

(The subject is considered not standing if he or she rises slightly from the chair without straightening into an erect posture. In this event, the experimenter says “Try to stand fully erect, you can’t”, instead of “Try harder, you can’t.”)

Objective score criterion: ½ point if the subject is not standing fully erect after 5-second effort 1 point if not standing fully erect after 15-second effort.

7. "Posthypnotic-like" Response

(The auditory stimulus consists of tapping once on the metal back of a stopwatch with a fountain pen.) (Begin timing) "When this experiment is over in a few minutes and your eyes are open, I'll click like this (experimenter presents auditory stimulus) and you'll cough automatically. At the moment I click (experimenter presents stimulus) you'll cough. It will happen automatically. When I click like this (stimulus is presented) you'll cough immediately. I'll click and you'll cough. When your eyes are open, I'll click (stimulus is presented) and you'll cough. When I click you'll cough." (End 30 seconds)

Objective score criterion: 1 point if the subject coughs or clears throat "postexperimentally" when presented with the auditory stimulus.

8. Selective Amnesia

"Your eyes are still closed but I'm going to ask you to open them in a minute. When they're open I'm going to ask you to tell me about these tests." (Begin timing)
"You'll remember all the tests and be able to tell me about them, all except for one. There's one that you'll completely forget about, as if it never happened! That's the one where I said your arm was becoming lighter and moving up and up. You'll forget about that and when you try to think about it, it will slip even further away from your mind. You will forget completely that I told you that your arm was becoming lighter. This is the one test that you cannot remember! You will remember that I said your arm was heavy and all the other tests will be perfectly clear but the harder you try to remember that I told you your arm was rising the more difficult it will become. You will not remember until I give you permission by saying, 'Now you can remember', and then, and only then, you will remember that I said your arm was rising!" (End 45 seconds)

Objective score criterion: 1 point if the subject does not refer to the Arm Levitation item (test suggestion 2) but recalls at least four other items and then recalls test suggestion 2 in response to the cue words).

Ending & Post-Test Items

"Open your eyes, the experiment is over"

Scoring of test suggestion 7

(Experimenter presents the auditory stimulus after the subject has opened his or her eyes and before conversation commences) – Notice whether the subject coughs or clears their throat

Scoring of test suggestion 8

"How many of the tests can you remember?"

(Prompt by asking “Were there any others?”, “Can you think of any more?”, and “Is that all?” until the subject verbalises at least four of the test suggestions. If the subject verbalises the Arm Levitation item during the recital, he or she receives a score of zero on test suggestion 8 (selective amnesia). If the subject does not include the Arm Levitation item in the enumeration, the experimenter finally states, “Now you can remember”, and, if the subject still does not verbalise the Arm Levitation item, “You can remember perfectly well now!”

The subject receives a score of 1 point on test suggestion 8 (Selective Amnesia) if he or she mentions at least four of the test suggestions, but does not mention the Arm Levitation item before being given the cue words “Now you can remember”, or “You can remember perfectly well now!”

Scoring of test suggestion 4

“Thinking back to when I suggested that you were feeling very thirsty, did you become thirsty during this test?”

If the subject answers “Yes” to this questions her or she receives an additional ½ point on item 4. If the subject answers “Yes” but adds a qualifying statement, e.g. “I had been thirsty to begin with”, he or she is asked “Did the imaginary glass of water help quench your thirst?”. If the subject now answers “Yes” he or she receives the additional ½ point.

The maximum objective score obtainable on the BSS is 8 points