

# The Spontaneity Assessment Inventory: The Relationship Between Spontaneity and Nonspontaneity

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**ABSTRACT.** The authors explored the theory that spontaneity and nonspontaneity represent two separate continua rather than opposite states of mind by means of a newly designed Spontaneity Assessment Inventory (SAI) and Spontaneity Deficit Inventory (SDI). The authors administered the SAI, the SDI, the Friedman Well-Being Scale (FWBS), and the Marlowe-Crowne Social Desirability Scale (MCSDS) to a group of 103 male and female students. The results confirmed the overall notion that spontaneity and nonspontaneity cannot coexist at the same time. However, they can exist within the same person. The two-continua hypothesis was supported. The SAI and SDI showed a satisfactory split-half reliability, correlated in the expected direction with the FWBS scores, and correlated positively with the MCSDS. The authors also discuss the possible implications of the findings.

**Key words:** assessment of spontaneity, deficit of spontaneity, living in the moment

SPONTANEITY IS A KEY CONCEPT in the theory of classical psychodrama, representing a general philosophical outlook as well as a specific therapeutic agent (Del Nuovo, Spielber, & Gillis, 1978; Hollander, 1981; Horwitz, 1945; Moreno, 1923; Wyatt, 1988). As a philosophy, the idea of the spontaneous person reflected a way of living and a general outlook on life that valued taking advantage of living "in the moment." As a therapeutic agent, spontaneity was said to be a specific curative factor believed to increase openness, reduce inhibitions, and enhance one's psychological well-being (Moreno, 1946). This duality contributed to the considerable degree of confusion regarding the meaning of spontaneity and the way(s) it expressed itself (e.g., Kipper, 1967, 1986,

2000). Moreno (1923, 1941) initially proposed that theatrical role enactment was the most expeditious way for triggering spontaneity. In the ensuing years, this belief was misinterpreted by many to mean that spontaneity became evident *only when a person was in action*. Later, Moreno (1946, p. 112) clarified this issue and pointed out that “Spontaneity can be present in a person when he is thinking just as well as when he is feeling, when he is at rest just as well as when in action.” The realization that spontaneity may also operate covertly did not make the task of understanding the ways it manifests itself any easier.

Defining spontaneity was a challenge in the early days of psychodrama as it is now. Part of the difficulty was that spontaneity was described as energy that could not be conserved and could not be observed by the naked eye (Kipper, 1967; Moreno, 1953). The notion that spontaneity is a mental disposition was clearly articulated in Moreno’s writings. For example, citing Moreno, Fox (1987, p. 42) stated that “Spontaneity is a readiness of the subject to respond as required.” Moreno wrote, “Spontaneity propels a variable degree of satisfactory response which an individual manifests in a situation of variable degree of novelty.” (p. 42). In the light of such a characterization, it became quite clear, that to be seen, spontaneity required a tangible carrier. In other words, the presence of spontaneity had to be inferred from certain manifestations of one’s behavior, expression of feelings, and verbal utterances. It was not surprising, therefore, that subsequent attempts to define spontaneity shifted from focusing on its quality as a state of readiness (energy) to describing the characteristics of the way it is reflected in behavior that subsumed the presence of an underlying spontaneity (a response). This explains the commonly accepted definition of spontaneity as “an appropriate response to a situation or a new response to an old situation.” Whether such a definition captures the essence of spontaneity may be debatable, but it makes the task of devising a measure for spontaneity one step easier.

For a long time, the absence of a scientifically reliable measure of spontaneity made it impossible to investigate empirically the various theoretical hypotheses about its effects on well-being. It has been a glaring impediment to the prospect of demonstrating the validity of the theoretical underpinnings of psychodrama. It was not until recently that there has been a serious attempt to provide a statistically reliable and valid inventory that purports to measure spontaneity (Collins, Kumar, Treadwell, & Leach, 1997; Kellar, Treadwell, Kumar, & Leach, 2002).

Collins, et al. (1997) reported the first study of constructing a measure of spontaneity. They devised a 58-item inventory entitled the Personal Attitude Scale (PAS). The method of creating the items for this measure was as follows: The authors surveyed the published literature on spontaneity and collected the various characteristics and descriptions ascribed to them. They then phrased the descriptions into brief statements constituting the items on the inventory. The responses to the items were arranged on a 5-point Likert-type scale, ranging

from 1 = *strongly disagree* to 5 = *strongly agree*. Initially, the PAS contained a 70-item inventory that was administered to 168 introductory psychology students, half of them men and half women. The result of an item analysis reduced the number of items to 58. The authors reported a good reliability—a Cronbach's alpha of .86 for the PAS. Exploring the concurrent validity of the inventory, the researchers concluded from the results of the study that there was a statistically significant negative correlation with a measure of depression (for women only) and significant correlation coefficients, in the expected direction, with a self-monitoring scale and sensation seeking scale.

In a second study, Kellar et al. (2002) revised the original PAS, now titled the Personal Attitude Scale-II (PAS-II), by deleting weak items and replacing, adding, and modifying others. They arranged the responses to the new scale, now comprising 88 items, on a 5-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 = *strongly disagree* to 5 = *strongly agree*, similar to the format designed for the original PAS. They subjected the responses of 544 students to the inventory to an item analysis, leaving the inventory with 66 items. Internal consistency reliability for the new inventory yielded a Cronbach's alpha of .92 and a 4-weeks test/retest reliability of .86. They measured external validity by correlating the PAS-II with a number of inventories, for example, the Beck Depression Inventory-II, the Marlowe-Crowne Social Desirability Scale (MCSD), the Creative Styles Questionnaire-R, and Eysenck's Personality Inventory. For the most part, the obtained correlation coefficients showed statistically significant results in the expected direction. In this study, gender differences accounted for only 2% of the variance and were deemed unimportant.

At the same period that the study of the PAS-II was conducted, our own study concerning a different measure of spontaneity was in progress. For that study, we conducted an investigation with an original inventory, titled Spontaneity Assessment Inventory (SAI), and reported the outcome. The purpose of our study was two-fold: first, to offer a reliable measure of spontaneity and second, to investigate the relationship between one's ability to display spontaneity and one's being in a nonspontaneous state. The second purpose concerns a theoretical issue that we explain in greater detail later. To facilitate such an investigation, we constructed an additional inventory, namely, the Spontaneity Deficit Inventory (SDI). The methods for the SAI and the SDI were different from the one used in constructing the PAS-II.

## Method

### *Participants*

The participants were 106 psychology students from Roosevelt University and other schools in the Chicago area. These include 5 high school seniors, 55 college students, and 46 graduate students. Their ages ranged from 18 to 60

years. All participants consented to participate in the study and understood that the participation was voluntarily and that they were free to withdraw from the study at any time without penalty.

### *The Instruments*

The study employed the following four psychological measures: an original inventory for the assessment of spontaneity (SAI), an original inventory for the assessment of spontaneity deficit (SDI), Marlowe-Crowne Social Desirability Scale (MCSD; Marlowe & Crowne, 1960), and the Friedman Well-Being Scale (FWBS; Friedman, 1994).

*The SAI and the SDI.* The SAI was designed as a measure of spontaneity, and the SDI was designed as a measure for assessing the lack of spontaneity.

*The rationale for the inventories.* The rationale for developing separate measures for spontaneity and the lack of it grew out of confusion about the meaning of being nonspontaneous. For instance, the psychodrama literature treats the lack of spontaneity as undesirable and desirable states: It is undesirable because it is the opposite of spontaneity and desirable because many routine, nonspontaneous behaviors are vital for daily survival. They serve an indispensable role in maintaining consistency and stability in life. Furthermore, Moreno (1946) introduced the concept of pathological spontaneity to explain the development of psychological disorders. This leaves open the question whether pathological spontaneity is the opposite of spontaneity or an extreme case of nonspontaneity. He also said that the opposite of spontaneity is anxiety. In other words, it is not entirely clear whether spontaneity and the lack of it represent two ends of the same continuum, with one end representing a positive psychological state and the other end representing a negative one. Spontaneity and nonspontaneity alternatively could constitute independent psychological states representing separate continua. We determined that developing one measure for assessing spontaneity and one for the lack of it and treating them as separate inventories would offer an opportunity to shed further light on the issue.

*Constructing the SAI and SDI.* The process of constructing the inventories was as follows: We contacted 20 senior psychodramatists from the United States and Europe. They all were known for their professional expertise in psychodrama in their own countries and internationally and had a minimum of 25 years of experience. We asked them to write five adjectives (or two-three-word characteristics) that describe “the feeling of being in a spontaneous state” and five adjectives that describe “the feeling of being in a nonspontaneous state.” We

incorporated their descriptions into one list that, after deleting redundancies and long descriptions, consisted of 125 adjectives or items. At that point, there were 79 items in the spontaneous category and 46 in the nonspontaneous one.

For the next step, we made two sets of identical forms of the inventory. Each contained the list of 125 items, with the spontaneous and nonspontaneous items mixed randomly. In one of the two forms, we asked participants to write a sentence describing an activity or a situation when they felt spontaneous. Then they were to rate each of the 125 items to the extent that it reflected their feelings in that situation. In the second form, we asked the participants to write a sentence describing an activity or a situation in which they did not feel spontaneous. Then they were to rate each of the 125 items to the extent that it reflected their feelings in that situation. The instructions for responding to both forms were identical, except that one form pertained to a situation when the respondent felt spontaneous and the other for when the respondent felt not spontaneous.

The responses to the items were arranged on a 4-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 = *not at all* to 4 = *very much*. The two inventories were given to 78 participants ranging in age from 18 to 65. With the responses in hand, we separated each list of the 125 items into two categories, one composed of the items that describe a state of spontaneity and one addressing the state of being not spontaneous. After an item analysis of each category, we eliminated a number of items, leaving 35 items on the spontaneous list and 23 on the nonspontaneous list. A split-half reliability test for each condensed inventory yielded a Cronbach's alpha of .94 for the spontaneity list (SAI) and of .93 for the nonspontaneity (SDI) one.

*The present version of the inventories.* We then refined the SAI and SDI inventories in the following manner: Two items from the early SAI version were dropped because their descriptions were too long, leaving the inventory with 33 items. The SDI retained the 23 items that remained following the item analysis. We made two more minor but necessary changes. We phrased a few items in the negative to avoid response set and rephrased some items to maintain stylistic unanimity across all items. At the top of the latest SAI and SDI forms was the same question, "How strongly do you have these feelings or thoughts in the course of a typical day?" We arranged the responses to the items on the two inventories on a 6-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 = *none* to 6 = *very strong*. In the final refinement of the two inventories, we conducted an additional item analysis, based on the results of the responses of the 106 participants in the study. The results of the analysis left the SAI with 20 items and the SDI with 17 items.

*The MCSD.* The MCSD (Marlowe & Crowne, 1960) consists of 33 statements to which respondents answer either true or false. The scale has been

widely used to measure the extent that a person tends to seek approval in a culturally appropriate fashion. There is also evidence, however, that a high score on the scale indicates avoiding disapproval, rather than seeking approval, as indicated by the original label. In any event, the scale continues to sustain a dual existence as a measure of social desirability and a measure of an approval-dependent personality.

*The FWBS.* The FWBS (Friedman, 1994) consists of a series of 20 bipolar adjectives (e.g., angry–calm) designed to measure an adult’s level of well-being. Respondents rate themselves by indicating to what extent each adjective applied to them, using a 10-point semantic differential-type scale ranging from 1 = *very* (e.g., very angry) to 10 = *very* (e.g., calm). The scale includes five subscales: (ES) emotional stability (10 items), (SE) self-esteem/self-confidence (3 items), (JO) joviality (3 items), (SO) sociability (3 items), and (HA) happiness (1 item). The scale allows for a total score reflecting the Friedman Well-Being Composite (FWBC) and separate scores for each subscale. The internal consistency reliability estimates of the composite scores ranged from .92 to .98. The result of a split-half reliability with college students for the subscales, except for the happiness subscale, which contains only one item, ranged from .69 to .96. Test–retest reliability of the composite scores (with intervals of 3–13 weeks) ranged from .73 for the students to .85 for the patient sample.

The FWBS manual reports over 100 correlations with clinical, personality, attitudinal, stress, relational, marital, and interpersonal scale and subscales. It is highly correlated with measures of emotional stability, so much so that it appears to be measuring that construct.

## Results

The average score of the participants on the SAI was  $M = 76.93$  ( $SD = 14.54$ ). Given that the possible range of the scores on this inventory varied from 20 to 120, the obtained average reflects a slight skew toward the higher scores. For the SDI, the average score for the participants was  $M = 51.17$  ( $SD = 12.66$ ). The possible range of scores on the SDI varied from 17 to 102, so the obtained group average is close to the middle of the range.

Two previous studies concerning the Personal Attitudes Scale (PAS), the first conducted by Collins et al. (1997) and its later revision, the PAS-II, by Kellar et al. (2002), showed a gender difference in which men scored significantly higher than women. In our study, we observed the same phenomenon. The average SAI scores for the male participants ( $n = 37$ ) was  $M = 85.05$  ( $SD = 14.37$ ) and was  $M = 78.54$  ( $SD = 15.05$ ) for the 69 female participants. The difference between the scores of the men and the women was statistically significant,  $t(104) = 2.18$ ,  $p > .03$ , with the men scoring higher than the women.

However, there was no statistically significant difference between the scores of the men and the women on the SDI. On that inventory, the average score for the 37 male participants was  $M = 53.03$  ( $SD = 14.35$ ) and was  $M = 50.17$  ( $SD = 11.64$ ) for the 69 participating females with  $t(104) = 1.11, p = .27$ .

The overall results for the relationship between spontaneity and non-spontaneity appeared to be consistent with the theoretical hypothesis, namely, that being highly spontaneous is the opposite of being nonspontaneous. The Pearson's product-moment correlation coefficient between the SAI and the SDI was negative and statistically significant,  $r(105) = -.25, p = .005$ . Indeed, the content of the items comprising the SAI and the SDI represent concepts that, on the surface, look like two opposites. However, when the participants were separated into two groups on the basis of their SAI scores, above and below the median (a score of 77), a different picture emerged. The Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient between those who scored above the SAI median and their SDI scores was  $r(54) = -.26, p < .05$ , consistent with the previously mentioned negative relations between spontaneity and nonspontaneity. But there was no correlation between the scores of those whose SAI score was below the median and their SDI scores,  $r(51) = .02, ns$ . It appears that the theoretically assumed negative relationship between spontaneity score and nonspontaneity only holds true for high SAI scorers. It is not true for those who appear to be in the medium to low range of spontaneity scores.

To further investigate the difference in the relations between SAI and SDI scores for high and low SAI scorers, we divided the participants' responses on the SAI into three subgroups of top, middle, and bottom scores. The results of correlating those SAI scores with their SDI scores showed Pearson product-moment coefficients of  $r(52) = -.21, ns$  for the top 33% SAI scorers,  $r(52) = .11, ns$  for the middle third, and  $r(52) = .10, ns$  for the bottom 33%. It appears that none of the SAI results of those subgroups correlated significantly with their SDI scores, although there was a tendency for the high scorers on the SAI to score low on the nonspontaneity inventory. We discuss the possible meaning of that finding later in this article.

The results showed a statistically significant relationship between the scores obtained on each of the SAI and the SDI inventories and the MCDS;  $r(96) = .36, p < .01$  for the SAI and  $r(96) = -.38, p < .01$  for the SDI.

### *Reliability*

The results of a split-half reliability computation for the two inventories yielded Cronbach's alpha reliability coefficients of .88 for the SAI and .80 for the SDI. Those outcomes indicated a satisfactory level of reliability for both measures.

### Validity

We investigated the construct validity of the two new inventories by correlating the SAI and SDI scores with the scores obtained on the FWBS. The SAI was expected to correlate positively with the FWBS, whereas the SDI was expected to show a negative correlation. The results confirmed those expectations. The calculation revealed  $r(97) = .36, p < .01$  for the SAI and  $r(97) = -.45, p < .01$  for the SDI. The pattern of relationship for the correlation of the SAI and SDI with each of the five FWBS subscales was the same (see Table 1).

In Table 1, all the correlations between the SAI and the FWBS subscales measuring sociability, self-esteem, joviality, emotional stability, and happiness are positive, ranging from .30 to .60, and highly significant ( $p < .01$ ). All correlations between the SDI and the same subscales, however, are negative, ranging from  $-.24$  to  $-.47$ , and highly significant ( $p < .01$ ).

### Discussion

With the present study, we explored the relationship between the psychological characteristics referred to by psychodramatists as spontaneity and those described as nonspontaneity. There is a long tradition that psychodramatists regarding the one as being the opposite of the other (e.g., Blatner, 2000; Moreno, 1946) and considered spontaneity a desirable phenomenon and nonspontaneity an undesirable one. There are also findings (Kipper, 2000) that point to the likelihood that the two are not mutually exclusive, in

**TABLE 1. Product-Moment Correlations Between SAI Scores and FWBS Scores and Between SDI Scores and FWBS Scores**

FWBS	SAI	SDI
Subscales		
FSOC (sociability)	.38	-.37
FSES (self-esteem)	.52	-.34
FJOV (joviality)	.56	-.24
FES (emotional stability)	.52	-.47
FHPP (happiness)	.60	-.36
FWBSC (total scores)	.36	-.45

*Note.*  $N = 106$ ; SAI = Spontaneity Assessment Inventory; SDI = Spontaneity Deficit Inventory; FWBS = Friedman Well-Being Scale.

\* $p < .01$  for all correlations

the sense that both fulfill vital functions in life and, therefore, coexist within the healthy person. The present outcomes appear to clarify that apparent conflict. We propose that spontaneity and nonspontaneity represent two separate continua, rather than the traditionally held notion that the two represent the two extreme ends of one continuum. Our position is that the spontaneity continuum addresses various degrees of a state of mind associated with the readiness to act in a novel way, whereas the nonspontaneity continuum addresses a separate issue and represents various degrees of characteristics associated with routine behavior.

According to our proposition, one would still expect an overall negative relationship between spontaneity and nonspontaneity because, by definition, the two cannot coexist simultaneously in a given moment. However, considering the two separate continua hypotheses, we make a different prediction. We believe that the ability of a person to be spontaneous in one situation does not necessarily predict his or her being nonspontaneous in another situation and vice versa. The present findings lend credence to this view. Thus, the phrase the spontaneous man or woman does not describe a personality dimension of an individual who is always spontaneous. Rather, it characterizes a person who is able to become spontaneous often, whenever appropriate, but who, in many situations, may act nonspontaneously.

The ability to test these predictions depended on the availability of appropriate measures to carry such an investigation. At the time the present investigation was conceived, such measures were unavailable (Moreno, 1968). Our first task was, therefore, to construct such measures in the form of the SAI and the SDI. The former provided scores for assessing various degrees of spontaneity, whereas the latter provided scores for portraying various degrees of nonspontaneity.

The results showed that when the participants were divided into three equal subgroups—the high, medium, and low SAI scorers, it was impossible to predict their SDI scores from their SAI scores. It is possible that the small sample ( $n = 3+5$ ) in each of the three categories affected the size of the correlation coefficient. The sample size, however, also allows one to entertain the notion that the result might lend credence to the two separate continua proposition. The consequence of this is twofold. First, as implied in Moreno's definition, spontaneity is a state of mind attached to the situation. In other words, being spontaneous in some situations does not preclude being nonspontaneous in others. Second, it challenges the commonly held view that, by definition, nonspontaneity is an undesirable state of mind. A caveat to the last point in the hypothesis in keeping with the separate continua proposition is that pathology may depend on one's degree of nonspontaneity, not always as a function of the lack of spontaneity. Future studies might explore this issue in greater detail.

Throughout the discussion, we have been referring to spontaneity and non-spontaneity as states of mind. That followed from Moreno's early writing describing spontaneity as unseen energy (Kipper, 1967), the "readiness to respond" (Fox, 1987, p. 42), and a force that "propels" a variable degree [of response] (Moreno, 1953, p. 42). Such a concept is akin to the concept of flow (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990). The flow experience refers to the ability to be immersed totally in an enjoyable and satisfying activity. One may speculate that perhaps spontaneity can appear together with nonspontaneity, creating the favorable conditions to enter into a flow experience. If true, it may be more fitting to refer to spontaneity as the spontaneity experience.

In the present study, we also report initial psychometric data regarding the two original inventories, the SAI and SDI. The SAI and the PAC-II (Collins et al., 1997; Kellar et al., 2002) are available now and offer researchers tools to test some of the hitherto untested theoretical postulations of classical psychodrama. The SAI and the SDI correlated in the expected direction with the FWBS and all its subscales, thus demonstrating initial satisfactory validity. Further research will provide more information about the psychometric characteristics of these two inventories.

The SAI and SDI described in the present study are new and require further validation from subsequent studies. It should be noted that the two inventories yielded statistically significant correlation with social desirability. This aspect makes both inventories susceptible to manipulation by some respondents, a feature that needs to be taken in consideration in interpreting the scores.

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