The Self-Determination Scale (SDS)

Scale Description

The Self-Determination Scale (SDS) was designed to assess individual differences in the extent to which people tend to function in a self-determined way. It is thus considered a relatively enduring aspect of people’s personalities which reflects (1) being more aware of their feelings and their sense of self, and (2) feeling a sense of choice with respect to their behavior. The SDS is a short, 10-item scale, with two 5-item subscales. The first subscale is awareness of oneself, and the second is perceived choice in one’s actions. The subscales can either be used separately or they can be combined into an overall SDS score.

Articles in which the SDS has been used.


The Scale

Instructions: Please read the pairs of statements, one pair at a time, and think about which statement within the pair seems more true to you at this point in your life. Indicate the degree to which statement A feels true, relative to the degree that Statement B feels true, on the 5-point scale shown after each pair of statements. If statement A feels completely true and statement B feels completely untrue, the appropriate response would be 1. If the two statements are equally true, the appropriate response would be a 3. If only statement B feels true And so on.

1. A. I always feel like I choose the things I do.
   B. I sometimes feel that it’s not really me choosing the things I do.

   Only A feels true  1  2  3  4  5  Only B feels true

2. A. My emotions sometimes seem alien to me.
   B. My emotions always seem to belong to me.
Only A feels true  1  2  3  4  5  Only B feels true

3.   A.  I choose to do what I have to do.
B.  I do what I have to, but I don’t feel like it is really my choice.

Only A feels true  1  2  3  4  5  Only B feels true

4.   A.  I feel that I am rarely myself.
B.  I feel like I am always completely myself.

Only A feels true  1  2  3  4  5  Only B feels true

5.   A.  I do what I do because it interests me.
B.  I do what I do because I have to.

Only A feels true  1  2  3  4  5  Only B feels true

6.   A.  When I accomplish something, I often feel it wasn't really me who did it.
B.  When I accomplish something, I always feel it's me who did it.

Only A feels true  1  2  3  4  5  Only B feels true

7.   A.  I am free to do whatever I decide to do.
B.  What I do is often not what I'd choose to do.

Only A feels true  1  2  3  4  5  Only B feels true

8.   A.  My body sometimes feels like a stranger to me.
B.  My body always feels like me.

Only A feels true  1  2  3  4  5  Only B feels true

9.   A.  I feel pretty free to do whatever I choose to.
B. I often do things that I don't choose to do.

**Only A feels true**  1  2  3  4  5  **Only B feels true**

10. A. Sometimes I look into the mirror and see a stranger.

B. When I look into the mirror I see myself.

**Only A feels true**  1  2  3  4  5  **Only B feels true**

**Scoring Information for the SDS.** First, items 1, 3, 5, 7, 9 need to be reverse scored so that higher scores on every item will indicate a higher level of self-determination. To reverse score an item, subtract the item response from 6 and use that as the item score. Then, calculate the scores for the Awareness of Self subscale and the Perceived Choice subscale by averaging the item scores for the 5 items within each subscale. The subscales are:

Awareness of Self:  2, 4, 6, 8, 10

Perceived Choice:  1, 3, 5, 7, 9