

Sheehan P W. A shortened form of Betts' Questionnaire upon Mental Imagery.
J. Clin. Psychol. 23:386-9, 1967.
[Institute of Pennsylvania Hospital and University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, PA]

The cause of imagery within the *Zeitgeist* has continued to advance significantly since the 1960s, and measurement of imagery function is an essential part of the research endeavour. This paper reports on the measurement of imagery across different sensory modalities and offers a brief instrument which has good psychometric support. [The *Science Citation Index*® (SCI®) and the *Social Sciences Citation Index*® (SSCI®) indicate that this paper has been cited in over 165 publications, making it one of the most-cited papers for this journal.]

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"The research for this paper was part of work completed for my doctoral dissertation. It was supported by the National Institute of Mental Health (US) for study in Australia of the relationship between imagery, fantasy, and hypnosis. The project was a team effort, and this member of the team (under the direction of J.P. Sutcliffe) became very much interested in the function and nature of imagery. It was only later that I turned to research, just as energetically, on hypnosis. There were no real obstacles to the research, and cooperative effort obviously facilitated the work.

"The research can be placed relatively firmly within the *Zeitgeist* of the time. The cause of imagery was advancing. Francis Galton¹ began the emphasis in psychology on quantitative assessment of imagery and produced the first generally acknowledged method of measuring voluntary imagery ability. Galton's questionnaire was adapted by Betts,² but Betts' Questionnaire upon Mental Imagery was too long and so not particularly useful. The work reported in the above article aimed to provide a useful test that was brief, maintained measurement

across sensory modalities (i.e., wasn't exclusively visual), and had good psychometric support.

"From a content analysis of citations that I have conducted, the major reason to emerge for the work being cited across time is clearly the perceived usefulness of the instrument for assessing individual differences in imagery ability. The most common fields of inquiry in which the work is cited for the purpose of measurement are imagery, hypnosis, experimental psychopathology, and clinical psychology (therapy). Not surprisingly, the earliest field where the work was cited was imagery. This extended into the fields of hypnosis and clinical abnormality in the early 1970s. The test began to be used heavily in the fields of special education and child psychology in the late 1970s, and interest broadened as far afield as art psychotherapy and parapsychology in the late 1970s. Currently, the scale is being used heavily in psychophysiological studies of conditioning and work investigating the effectiveness of cognitive therapy.

"With time, however, reasons for citation other than measurement emerged. The scale, for instance, has been studied extensively in its own right (e.g., what response sets affect performance on it?) and authors cite it because they are attempting to substantiate or refute original claims made about what the scale measures. The work is also cited frequently as relevant background material for the development of new scales and is used to train both subjects and practitioners in the employment of imagery skills. An update on the literature associated with measurement appears in a chapter by Ashton, White, and me.³

"While as a researcher I would not have chosen the work reported here as the most satisfying I have conducted, it is clearly the piece of research that has generated the most personal correspondence over the years. From postgraduate students to clinicians to established researchers, queries about the test have been steady over the 17 years since its construction. Psychology apparently needed a brief and easily administered test to tap individual differences in imagery ability, and perhaps it still does."

1. Galton F. *Inquiries into human faculty and its development*. London: Macmillan, 1883. 387 p.

2. Betts G H. *The distribution and functions of mental imagery*. New York: Teacher's College, Columbia University, 1909. 99 p.

3. Sheehan P W, Ashton R S & White K D. The assessment of mental imagery. (Sheikh A A, ed.) *Imagery: current theory, research and application*. New York: Wiley, 1983. p. 189-221.