Locus of Control and Behavioral Versus Self-Response Measures of Social Interest

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Messiah University is a Christian university of the liberal and applied arts and sciences. Our mission is to educate men and women toward maturity of intellect, character and Christian faith in preparation for lives of service, leadership and reconciliation in church and society.
The social learning theory of Julian B. Rotter has generated a great deal of interest and research since his book, Social Learning and Clinical Psychology, was published in 1954. His book provided the theoretical framework for the development of the internal-external locus of control construct as outlined in his 1966 monograph. When an individual perceives that an event or behavior is contingent upon his or her own behavior or characteristics, this belief is termed internal control. If, on the other hand, the individual interprets a reinforcement as not being entirely contingent on his own actions, but as being in some way attributable to chance, fate, luck, or under the control of others, this belief is called external locus of control (Rotter, 1966). Since the appearance of Rotter's monograph, more than 2,000 studies and several books have been published on locus of control.

Rotter (1954) credited Alfred Adler as being a major influence in the development of his social learning theory. Although he suggested that efforts be made to empirically verify the concepts of Adler's Individual Psychology (Rotter, 1962), to date, the number of attempts to do so have been fewer than one might expect, given the continued interest in Adler. Some reasons for this, according to Rotter (1962), are that the general nature of Adler's concepts, the absence of clear-cut operational definitions, and the overlapping of ideas cause methodological difficulties. Despite these problems, however, he sees overcoming these difficulties as being a challenge for researchers.

One of Adler's major concepts is that of social interest, or Gemeinschaftsgefühl. This compound noun in German eludes simple English translation; in fact, Rotter (1962) declared it unlikely that any single operational definition would satisfy most individual psychologists. Gemeinschaftsgefühl carries the idea of cooperation, empathy, a feeling of belonging, contribution to the common wel-
fare, understanding others, and use of common reasoning or common sense (Adler, 1956, 1970). (Throughout the remainder of this article the term "social interest" will be used in place of the German term.)

Although relatively few studies have attempted to focus on social interest by name, a number of researchers have explored areas which relate to self-sacrificial, other-directed behavior, implying social interest (e.g., Krebs, 1970; Midlarsky, 1968).

Several studies specifically attempt to relate locus of control to some facet of prosocial attitudes or behavior, with conflicting results. Tseng (1970) reported that internals were significantly more cooperative than were externals; likewise, Tiller (1970) and Bobbit (1967) found internals to respond more cooperatively in the Prisoner's Dilemma Game. McClay (1972) found that internals have a greater social conscience than do externals. Peters (1974) reported that internals were more altruistic than were externals. Majumder, MacDonald, and Greever (1977) found that internally oriented rehabilitation counselors had more positive attitudes toward the poor than did externally oriented counselors. Hjelle (1975) reported that internals showed more social interest than did externals on the Social Interest Index (Greever, Tseng, Friedland, 1973).

In contrast, a number of studies report no relationship between locus of control and prosocial attitudes or behavior, or else report that externals exhibit greater concern for others. On the basis of two studies (Phares & Lamiell, 1975; Phares & Wilson, 1972), Phares concluded that internals were less helping or altruistic than were externals; and Lerner and Reavy (1975) came to the same conclusion. Bierhoff and Osselmann (1976), Singer (1975), and Farra, Ziner, and Bailey (1978) reported no difference in help given by internals versus externals. Schwartz and Clausen (1970) and Schwartz (1974) found locus of control to be unrelated to volunteering for a charitable cause. Neither Petrimoulx (1977) nor Boyton (1977) found any relationship between internality and cooperation.

Thus, the literature is mixed regarding the prosocial tendencies of internals versus externals. Again, one probable reason is that these several aspects of prosocial behavior represent or approximate only part of Adler's concept of social interest. Another possibility, as pointed out by Schwartz (1974), is that, for internals, helping may relate to opportunities for the person to show his/her competence or
reach his/her goals through control of the environment. Opportunities for helping which lack these possibilities may result in less helpful behavior by internals. Finally, another reason for the mixed findings may be that many studies attempt to predict prosocial behavior on the basis of paper-and-pencil tests alone. Krebs (1970) reports that such measures have generally failed to yield strong correlations with behavioral measures of helping behavior.

Therefore, the present study was designed in part to examine the relationship between social interest and locus of control by employing both self-report and behavioral measures. One purpose was to replicate Hjelle's study (1975) to determine if social interest, as measured by the Social Interest Index, was higher for internals than for externals.

Another goal was to examine the effect of peer influence on volunteering behavior, more specifically as it related to the subject's locus of control. A number of studies indicate that, in general, a person is more likely to engage in charitable behavior or altruistic acts if he/she observes others engaging in such activity (Bryan & Test, 1967; Gross, 1975; Hornstein, Fisch, & Holmes, 1968; Pomazal, 1977; Rosenhan & White, 1967). Moreover, a number of researchers have found that externals are more susceptible to influence attempts than are internals (Biondo & MacDonald, 1971; Crowne & Liverant, 1963; Doctor, 1971; Hjelle & Clouser, 1970; McColloy & Thelen, 1975; Odell, 1959; Tolor, 1971). However, the authors failed to find any studies which specifically examined locus of control and persuasibility as it related to prosocial or altruistic behavior. Thus, one question to be asked was whether a person's locus of control affects the degree to which he/she will volunteer for a worthy project.

The final purpose of this study was to see if internals would behaviorally demonstrate more social interest by volunteering aid to a worthy cause or organization than would externals. Early studies which focused on social or political activism reported that internals were more involved in the civil rights movement (Gore & Rotter, 1963; Strickland, 1965). However, because of the possible confounding effects of variables such as self-interest, hostility, or peer influence, this activism cannot be unequivocally equated with social interest. In addition, in his 1974 review of the literature on locus of control and activism, Abramowitz concluded that internals were not any more socially or politically active than were externals; he cited a number of studies showing either no relationship between locus of
control and activism or a relationship in which externals were actually more involved than internals.

Actually the idea of examining social interest from a behavioral perspective fits in with Adler's belief that the true test of a person's social interest is activity (Adler, 1929). Research in this area is extremely rare. In one study Arkell (1976) attempted to determine if a difference existed between internals and externals in making a verbal versus a behavioral commitment to a worthy cause. He found no relationship between personal perception of locus of control and an actual behavioral commitment. However, the nature of the "worthy cause"—staying after class to do some group work on student involvement in school affairs—may not have been regarded as sufficiently important to motivate students to actually volunteer. Thus, the results of Arkell's study showing no difference between internals and externals are open to question.

In light of the previous studies and unresolved questions, the following hypotheses were stated:

H1 Internals will report significantly greater social interest on the Social Interest Index than will externals.

H2 In the modeling influence condition, actions of the externals will more closely mirror the model’s behavior than will the actions of internals.

Ha Because fewer internals than externals are likely to volunteer primarily because of the influence of the model, internals will support the perfunctory card-taking commitment with a behavioral commitment significantly more often than will externals.

METHOD

Subjects

Subjects were 100 female and 25 male students from undergraduate teacher preparation educational psychology classes at Texas Tech University. All subjects were debriefed following complete data collection.

Instruments and Procedures

The Rotter Locus of Control Scale (Rotter, 1966) and the Social Interest Index (Greever et al., 1973) were administered to each subject. The Rotter scale is a 23-item instrument with six filler items. Using a forced choice format, it measures externality with items that...
deal with fate, chance, and powerful others, whereas internality is measured in terms of mastery or control over one's own life situation. The Social Interest Index (Greever et al., 1973) is a 32-item Likert format scale designed to measure the concept of social interest as developed by Adler (Dreikurs, 1950). It attempts to measure a respondent's attitude toward work, friendship, love and self-significance. The authors indicated that since it was a relatively new scale, further refinement and validation were required. Both of these scales were administered prior to the experimental part of the study.

The procedure for the experimental portion of the study involved pairing a subject and a confederate who reported together for the memory drum experiment. The students were to perform a serial anticipation intentional-incidental learning task employing a memory drum. A complete description of this task may be found in an article by Dixon and Cameron (1976). Before the learning task was conducted, and while the subject and female confederate were waiting outside the experimentation room, they were told by the experimenter that there was an opportunity to volunteer to help a (bogus) organization for aiding the visually impaired. The experimenter explained that "the organization had heard we were doing research on visual perception and asked if we would let you know that they needed volunteers to do some mail or telephone work or to guide a blind person through the college museum."

The experimenter then pointed to some self-addressed postcards that the subject (and confederate) might take, fill out (name and phone number), and return to the organization if they wished to volunteer. The experimenter then returned to the experimentation room, ostensibly to prepare equipment. At this point, the confederate (female undergraduate) would either say, "I'd like to help if I can. I think I'll get one of these cards" or in the negative condition, "I think I've volunteered for enough of these things for now."

These randomly assigned statements and the behavior of walking over and picking up a card under the positive influence condition were the only elements of persuasion. For this study, the act of taking a card was considered to be a tacit verbal expression of volunteering. Following the influence attempt, the experimenter returned and called the subject for his/her turn in the experimentation, at the same time asking the confederate to wait.
Statistical Technique

Chi square was employed to determine whether there was an overall modeling effect on volunteering behavior. Subjects were then divided into internal and external locus of control groups on the basis of a median split on the Rotter scale. Analysis of variance was then used to test differences in social interest by level of locus of control. In addition, two 2 x 2 Chi squares were performed to determine if the influence of the modeling conditions on volunteering differed for the external versus the internal group.

Results and Discussion

Using a simple analysis of variance technique, the authors found confirmation for the first hypothesis that internals would report significantly more social interest than would externals on the Social Interest Inventory ($F=3.056; df=1,120; p<.05$). This finding corresponds to Hjelle’s (1975) results. For the second hypothesis that externals would more closely mirror the confederate’s modeling condition with regard to taking a volunteer card, the authors first performed a 2 x 2 Chi square (whether or not a subject picked up a volunteering card by positive or negative confederate influence) and determined that confederate influence did have an overall effect on the subject’s volunteering behavior ($X^2=4.587; df=1; p<.05$). Next, a Chi square analysis was done using the same procedure but this time controlling for locus of control. Results confirmed the second hypothesis in that there was no significance among internals for confederate influence on volunteering behavior, whereas for externals, the confederate influence was significant ($X^2=5.77; df=1; p<.05$). Thus, externals followed the model’s lead in either accepting or declining to volunteer much more closely than did internals. Finally, the authors were unable to test the third hypothesis that internals would behaviorally commit themselves to volunteering by mailing in the volunteer card significantly more than would externals. Of the 125 subjects, 36 took cards, and of this number, only two returned the cards, leaving the N too low for statistical testing. Certainly this study and Kazdin and Bryan’s (1971) suggest the need for an extremely large number of subjects if one is to have adequate data to test such a hypothesis since the percentage of responding subjects is generally very low.

The findings suggest the need for further exploration of behavioral commitment as a component of social interest and locus of control. The broad definition of social interest may permit other approaches to the study of social interest and locus of control, e.g., Machiavellianism. Certainly, any approach to explicate the nature of this Adle rian construct should involve behavioral measurements.
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