

AN ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS OF

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Title: An Examination of the Relationship Between Locus of  
Control and Violent, Non-violent, and Sexual Offenders

Abstract approved: Casper B. Holmes

External locus of control has been identified as a personality variable that is problematic to successful completion of parole by parolees. To examine the relationship between locus of control and parolees, three groups of volunteer parolees were used in this study. The groups were divided according to type of offense as defined by the Kansas Department of Corrections: violent (crimes against persons), non-violent (crimes against properties and included in this category possession of controlled substances and or paraphernalia), and sexual (any crime involving sexual assault or misconduct). The participants were currently on parole in the Northern Parole Region of Kansas. Seventy-five male participants (25 violent, 25 non-violent, and 25 sexual) whose mean ages were 33.7 were given the Rotter Locus of Control Scale. No groups significantly differed from each other with regard to locus of control using a one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA). All groups scored toward the internal end of the locus of control continuum.

AN EXAMINATION OF THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN LOCUS OF CONTROL  
AND VIOLENT, NON-VIOLENT, AND SEXUAL OFFENDERS

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## CHAPTER 1

## INTRODUCTION

Parole represents a philosophy in penology that is focused on the individualized supervision of a person who committed a crime, served time for that crime in a correctional institution, and is released back into the community (Kansas Board of Probation and Parole, 1970; Kansas Department of Corrections, 1995). Becknall (1978) contended that persons placed on parole are expected to maintain an exemplary lifestyle which requires employment, good family ties, and emotional stability. However, parolees are really not prepared to make these changes, even if they want to.

Several factors influence reintegration of the offender. Although situational variables are important, personality variables also contribute to the offenders' capability to effectively complete parole and successfully reintegrate into their community (Bayse, Allgood, & Van Wyk, 1992; Conrad, 1981; Czunder, 1985; Graham, 1993; McMurray, 1993).

As an indication of an offender's inability to complete parole, Bayse, Allgood, and Van Wyk (1992) found approximately 32% of the offenders released in 1989 were expected to recidivate within three years. McMurray (1993) found in his review of data on offenders on parole between 1978 and 1982 that 69% of the offenders were rearrested with

49% being returned to prison. The Kansas Department of Corrections reported 44% of the prison population in Kansas as of June 30, 1996, were inmates who had returned to prison as parole violators (Kansas Department of Corrections, 1996).

#### Purpose of Study

This study was conducted to identify the locus of control of offenders currently on parole. It was also conducted to examine any differences in locus of control existing between the parolees when the parolees were divided according to the three categories of offenses used by the Kansas Department of Corrections.

#### Locus of Control

Locus of control is a personality variable identified by Rotter (1954) that refers to the feelings of control that individuals perceive they have over certain life events. When an event is perceived by people to be contingent upon luck, chance, fate, or powerful others, they are identified as having an external locus of control. When an event is perceived by people to be contingent upon their own behavior, then they are identified as having an internal locus of control. Rotter (1975) contended that a person with an internal locus of control generally experienced greater personal satisfaction with life.

The internal versus external locus of control personality variable has been found to be related to

numerous behaviors (Bayse, Allgood, & Van Wyk, 1992). Individuals identified as having an internal locus of control have been assumed to have superior performance in their environments (Rotter, 1966). Seeman (1963) discovered that offenders with an internal locus of control had a greater capacity for acquiring and retaining knowledge, which enforced Rotter's contention in 1966 that the ability to acquire knowledge was strongly influenced by perceived reinforcements with internal locus of control being superior to external locus of control.

Graybill and Sergeant (1983) investigated the effect of locus of control on acquiring, retaining, and effectively utilizing information. The researchers hypothesized that locus of control was based on perceived competence rather than perceived contingency. The results of their study were consistent with previous studies in that participants with internal locus of control performed superior to participants with external locus of control. Items on the Rotter Internal-External Locus of Control Scale that correlated with perceived competence ( $r = .23$ ) as opposed to perceived contingency ( $r = .05$ ) significantly related to the task variance in this study (Graybill & Sergeant, 1983).

Palenzuela (1985) conducted a study to further investigate Graybill and Sergeant's research concerning the relationship of locus of control to perceived competency or perceived contingency. Palenzuela concluded there was no

support for the assumption that locus of control was related to perceived competency.

Gutpa and Mueller (1984) investigated the effect locus of control has on the criminal mind and identified two types of deterrents which might keep a person from re-offending. External deterrents are composed of external forces such as the law, correctional officers or police officers; internal deterrents are composed of personality traits of the offender, the individual's value system, or conscience. Those offenders who responded to external deterrents manifested an external locus of control; whereas, those offenders who responded to internal deterrents manifested an internal locus of control.

Graham (1993) investigated the difference between sex offenders, offenders who committed violent and non-violent crimes of non-sexual content, and a community control group with regard to locus of control, dissociation, and alienation. He found that sex offenders were significantly more externally controlled than the other two groups in his study.

Gutpa and Mueller (1984) believed offenders will not change unless they acquire an internal locus of control through cognitively oriented programs which will empower the offender to assume responsibility for their own actions instead of blaming others. When this change in personality

is accomplished, there will be a decrease in persons' re-offending.

Griffith (1984) found most incarcerated offenders believed that powerful others (staff members, jailers) controlled their destiny, indicating an external locus of control. The offenders indicated that completion of the rehabilitation program was not contingent upon their performance, but was contingent on the rewards or punishments given by the staff members. Griffith acknowledged that before rehabilitation could occur, offenders need to be taught they are responsible for their own destiny. Therefore, the prerequisite for successful completion of rehabilitation was the offender's ability to assume responsibility for the consequences of personal behavior.

Prerost and Reich (1982) evaluated an 11-week self-help program taught by inmates to inmates. The study was designed to address the attitudes of the inmates concerning responsibility for the consequences they faced. Results found an increased feeling of internal locus of control and less personal manipulation of the staff by the inmates. The attitudinal modifications related directly to this study described variables which affect the successful completion of parole by the offenders.

Czunder (1985) advocated a cognitive moral approach in rehabilitating the offender based on understanding the

offender and acknowledging the offender's ability to change. He contends the failure to change the offender in the past has been due to the failure to understand the offender. Czunder's approach combines Reality Therapy to instill responsible behavior, cognitive restructuring to alter errors in thinking, and spiritual teaching to promote feelings of guilt or remorse.

Bayse, Allgood, and Van Wyk (1992) evaluated 63 inmates in a minimum security correctional facility to assess the relationship between locus of control and narcissism. Results revealed that 41% of the inmates scored in the lowest 25% of the internal locus of control test norms for men. This finding confirmed research indicating the majority of inmates believed that external forces controlled their lives, leaving them with a feeling of powerlessness.

Withrow (1994) observed offenders returning to the prison often made excuses or blamed others for their reincarceration. She further observed many offenders do not "understand the concept of victimization- except as it applies to them" (p. 112). Cognitive restructuring was chosen to help break the cycle of crime and to empower the offenders to learn to take responsibility for their own actions.

Foremost in effectively dealing with the growing problem of offenders recidivism rate is understanding the offender's belief system as to attribution of control for

the consequences that ensue from their personal behavior. Costs of room and board are great, and prison room is decreasing as the prison population continues to grow (Turner & Petersilla, 1992).

Rotter's publication on locus of control generated a plethora of research and articles. The research on criminals consistently revealed the need to identify and modify the locus of control belief system in the offender to facilitate successful completion of parole.

Research has shown locus of control can be modified (Hunter, 1994; Prerost & Reich, 1982). The most successful way to modify locus of control is for offenders to participate in programs that are cognitively based.

#### Hypotheses

1. Participants in this study will score on the external end of the Rotter Locus of Control Scale continuum.
2. Offenders convicted of sexual crimes will score higher toward the external end of the locus of control continuum than offenders convicted of violent and non-violent crimes.

#### Significance of Present Study

The present study was designed to identify the locus of control of offenders on parole which deviates from past and recent literature on offenders and locus of control in that those participants were incarcerated at the time of the studies.

## CHAPTER 2

## METHOD

Participants

Participants were 75 male offenders currently on parole in Kansas. Their mean age was 33.7 years with a range of 18 years to 54 years. The ethnic breakdown of this sample was 73% Caucasian, 19% Black, 4% Hispanic, and 4% Native American. Participation was contingent upon which offender had a scheduled appointment with his parole officer during the data collection period and had agreed to volunteer. Approximately 20 parolees refused to participate in this research. Because women were not included as participants in any of the studies reviewed, women were not included in this study.

Participants were divided into three groups of 25 each: violent or those who have been convicted of crimes against persons; non-violent or those who have never been convicted of crimes against persons but have been convicted of crimes against property; and sexual offenders or those who have committed crimes against persons of a sexual nature. These groupings are consistent with the Kansas Department of Corrections' classification of offenders. The information concerning category of crimes was ascertained from the offenders' criminal record at the Kansas Department of Corrections. Because the participants were largely homogeneous, data concerning education, socioeconomic

status, marital status, race and occupation were not obtained.

### Instrument

The participants were administered the Rotter Internal-External Locus of Control Scale (Rotter, 1966; Rotter, 1975). The scale contains 23 pairs of statements using a forced-choice format with 6 pairs as fillers to make the intent of the scale ambiguous (Marsh & Richards, 1987; Palenzuela, 1985; Rotter, 1966; Valiant, Simpson-Housley, & Cooper, 1982). The pairs are dichotomous in nature with one internal statement and one external statement. The participants make a choice between the two statements. The Rotter Internal-External Locus of Control Scale is based on the assumptions that the Internal-External construct is unidimensional, internality and externality represent endpoints of a bipolar dimension, and the use of a dichotomous forced-choice format is the most effective way to measure the construct (Marsch & Richards, 1986; Valliant, Simpson-Housley, & Cooper, 1982).

The Rotter Internal-External Locus of Control Scale has demonstrated good reliability at  $r = .80$  (Graybill & Sergeant, 1983; Rotter, 1966, 1975), good internal consistency (Collins, 1974; Rotter, 1966, 1975), and good discriminate validity (Rotter, 1966, 1975; Zuckerman, 1977).

The Rotter Internal-External Locus of Control Scale is a paper and pencil test with no time limits imposed on the participants. The scoring of this scale is additive. The participant receives 1 point when an external statement is chosen and 0 points when an internal statement is chosen. A score of 23 indicates all the external statements were chosen by the participant and a score of 0 indicates all internal statements were chosen by the participant. No exact cut-off score is provided by Rotter to determine locus of control. However, scores above 11 indicate a tendency toward an external locus of control. Scores below 11 indicate a tendency toward an internal locus of control.

#### Procedure

All participants met with their parole officers at the Topeka Parole Office for their regular meetings. After meeting with his parole officer, the participant was asked by the parole officer to meet individually with the researcher. The participant was seated at a table in a separate room with the researcher. The researcher explained the research and asked the participant to sign an informed consent form (see Appendix A). Criminal history and number of convictions were recorded by the researcher from the Department of Corrections records at a later date.

The participant was given a number 2 pencil and the Rotter Internal-External Locus of Control Scale (see Appendix B). Instructions were read and the scale was

administered. In the event that the participant was not able to read, the researcher read the consent form and the scale to the participant, and the participant marked his choice of statements. This applied to only three participants. At the completion of the Rotter Scale, the participant was thanked, and questions were answered.

The researcher met with the participants until a minimum of 25 participants were enlisted for each of three groups. Participants who were classified as sexual offenders meet regularly as a group on Friday for a Sexual Offender Program. Participants for this group were easily identified and the researcher collected the data on the first 25 sexual offenders who volunteered to participate. The other participants in the remaining two groups were not as easily identified and the researcher collected the data, daily, accessed the records for placement into the appropriate group and continued to collect data until both remaining groups had a minimum of 25 participants.

## CHAPTER 3

## RESULTS

The Rotter Internal-External Locus of Control Scale protocols were divided according to category of offense. Performance on the Rotter Internal-External Locus of Control Scale was assessed by the additive score of the items on the instrument and computing a group mean for the scores. Statistical analysis for scores on the Rotter Internal-External Locus of Control Scale were computed using one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) of the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) computer program. The score on the Rotter Internal-External Locus of Control Scale was the dependent variable and the category of offense was the independent variable.

Results of the ANOVA using the SPSS statistical package yielded no significant differences between any two groups at the .05 level. Violent offending parolees were designated as Group 1 with a mean score of 7.33 and standard deviation of 3.40. Non-violent offending parolees were designated as Group 2 with a mean score of 5.84 and a standard deviation of 3.21. Sexual offending parolees were designated as Group 3 with a mean score of 6.96 and a standard deviation of 3.50. The total mean score for all participants was 6.71 with a standard deviation of 3.39.

It was hypothesized in this study that the three groups of offenders should have yielded scores on the Rotter

Internal-External Locus of Control Scale that were on the external end of the continuum and that the scores for the sexual offenders group would be significantly different than the other two groups. For the purpose of this study a score greater than 11 was considered to be on the external end of the continuum.

The results of this research indicated this sample of parolees manifested a locus of control that was on the internal end of the continuum, and there were no significant differences between the scores of the sexual offender group and the other two groups.

## CHAPTER 4

## DISCUSSION

Previous research on offenders revealed the majority of offenders exhibit an external locus of control (Bayse et al. 1992; Graham, 1993; Griffith, 1992; Hunter, 1994). The results of this research are inconsistent with the research on incarcerated offenders and do not support the research hypotheses. The present data indicated that this sample of offenders exhibited an internal locus of control. The mean score for the participants in this study of 6.71 was below the cut-off of 11 which was established by this researcher to indicate the beginning of the internal end of the locus of control continuum.

These results could be due in part to the fact that this is one of the few studies done with parolees. The data on offenders and locus of control have been collected in previous research using offenders who were incarcerated at the time of the data collection period. The participants in this research were volunteers on parole which might have biased the sample. These volunteers appear to have developed an internal locus of control while they were incarcerated due to certain programs available to inmates in the prison system which might have accounted for their willingness to participate in the research.

Further research appears warranted. The findings of this study indicate that the locus of control of these

parolees might have changed, since findings of previous studies have concluded that incarcerated people are externally controlled (Bayse et al. 1992; Griffith, 1984; Gutpa & Mueller, 1984). This difference may be due to the fact that incarcerated individuals may exhibit an external locus of control because they are, in fact, externally controlled and perhaps locus of control is at least partly determined by the situation.

Future studies should explore the relationship between locus of control and recidivism on a longitudinal basis. This should involve measuring the locus of control of the offender upon entering the correctional system, monitoring the rehabilitative programs the offenders attended while incarcerated, measuring the locus of control of the offender upon release to parole status, and monitoring the recidivism rates of this group of parolees. Gathering this type of data would allow for a more accurate picture of the personality trait being investigated.

The need to understand and identify locus of control has been demonstrated worthy. The ability for locus of control to be modified (Gutpa & Mueller, 1984; Hunter, 1994; Murphy, 1990) has further been identified with internal locus of control being demonstrated as superior to external locus of control in regard to improved interpersonal adjustment (Prerost & Reich, 1982), superior performance (Rotter, 1966), greater acquisition and retention of

knowledge (Graybill & Sergeant, 1983; Seeman, 1963), and greater personal satisfaction with life (Rotter, 1975).

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A  
INFORMED CONSENT FORM

## Informed Consent Form

Read this consent form. If you have any questions ask the researcher and she will answer the question(s).

You are invited to participate in a study investigating the relationship between locus of control and category of offense. You will be given a locus of control inventory to complete and you will be asked to give permission to the researcher to get the following information from your DOC file: type of offense convicted of.

Information obtained in this study will be identified only by a code number. Your name will not be associated with the information gathered by the researcher from your file or the scale you will fill out today.

Your participation will be completely voluntary. Should you wish to end your participation, you are welcome to do so at any point in this study. There is no risk or discomfort involved in completing this study.

If you have any questions or comments about this study, feel free to ask the researcher. If you have any additional questions, please contact Kathie Harris (913) 296-3195.

Thank you for your participation.

---

I, \_\_\_\_\_, have read the above  
(please print name)  
information and have decided to participate. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I may withdraw at any time without prejudice after signing this form should I choose to discontinue participation in this study.

---

(signature of participant)

---

(date)

**THIS PROJECT HAS BEEN REVIEWED BY THE EMPORIA STATE  
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SUBJECTS FOR THE PROTECTION OF HUMAN SUBJECTS**

APPENDIX B

ROTTER INTERNAL-EXTERNAL LOCUS OF CONTROL SCALE

1.
  - a. Children get into trouble because their parents punish them too much.
  - b. The trouble with most children nowadays is that their parents are too easy with them.
2.
  - a. Many of the unhappy things in people's lives are partly due to bad luck.
  - b. People's misfortunes result from the mistakes they make.
3.
  - a. One of the major reasons why we have wars is because people don't take enough interest in politics.
  - b. There will always be wars, no matter how hard people try to prevent them.
4.
  - a. In the long run people get the respect they deserve in this world.
  - b. Unfortunately, an individual's worth often passes unrecognized no matter how hard he tries.
5.
  - a. The idea that teachers are unfair to student is nonsense.
  - b. Most students don't realize the extent to which their grades are influenced by accidental happenings.
6.
  - a. Without the right breaks one cannot be an effective leader.
  - b. Capable people who fail to become leaders have not taken advantage of their opportunities.
7.
  - a. No matter how hard you try some people just don't like you.
  - b. People who can't get others to like them don't understand how to get along with others.
8.
  - a. Heredity plays the major role in determining one's personality.
  - b. It is one's experiences in life which determine what they're like.
9.
  - a. I have often found that what is going to happen will happen.
  - b. Trusting to fate has never turned out as well for me as making a decision to take a definite course of action.
10.
  - a. In the case of the well prepared student there is rarely if ever such a thing as an unfair test.
  - b. Many times exam questions tend to be so unrelated to course work that studying is really useless.
11.
  - a. Becoming a success is a matter of hard work, luck has little or nothing to do with it.
  - b. Getting a good job depends mainly on being in the right place at the right time.
12.
  - a. The average citizen can have an influence in government decisions.
  - b. This world is run by the few people in power, and there is not much the little guy can do about it.
13.
  - a. When I make plans, I am almost certain that I can make them work.
  - b. It is not always wise to plan too far ahead because many things turn out to be a matter of good or bad fortune anyhow.
14.
  - a. There are certain people who are just no good.
  - b. There is some good in everybody.
15.
  - a. In my case getting what I want has little or nothing to do with luck.
  - b. Many times we might just as well decide what to do by flipping a coin.
16.
  - a. Who gets to be the boss often depends on who was lucky enough to be in the right place first.
  - b. Getting people to do the right thing depends upon ability, luck has little or nothing to do with it.
17.
  - a. As far as world affairs are concerned, most of us are the victims of forces we can neither understand, nor control.
  - b. By taking an active part in political and social affairs the people can control world events.
18.
  - a. Most people don't realize the extent to which their lives are controlled by accidental happenings.

- b. There really is no such thing as “luck.”
19. a. One should always be willing to admit mistakes.  
b. It is usually best to cover up one’s mistakes.
20. a. It is hard to know whether or not a person really likes you.  
b. How many friends you have depends upon how nice a person you are.
21. a. In the long run the bad things that happen to us are balanced by the good ones.  
b. Most misfortunes are the result of lack of ability, ignorance, laziness, or all three.
22. a. With enough effort we can wipe out political corruption.  
b. It is difficult for people to have much control over the things politicians do in office.
23. a. Sometimes I can’t understand how teachers arrive at the grades they give.  
b. There is a direct connection between how hard I study and the grades I get.
24. a. A good leader expects people to decide for themselves what they should do.  
b. A good leader makes it clear to everybody what their jobs are.
25. a. Many times I feel that I have little influence over the things that happen to me.  
b. It is impossible for me to believe that chance or luck plays an important role in my life.
26. a. People are lonely because they don’t try to be friendly.  
b. There’s not much use in trying too hard to please people, if they like you, they like you.
27. a. There is too much emphasis on athletics in high school.  
b. Team sports are an excellent way to build character.
28. a. What happens to me is my own doing.  
b. Sometimes I feel that I don’t have enough control over the direction my life is taking.
29. a. Most of the time I can’t understand why politicians behave the way they do.  
b. In the long run the people are responsible for bad government on a national as well as on a local level.

Note: Score is number of underlined items.

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Kathie Lynn Harris  
Signature of Author

July 17, 1997  
Date

An Examination of the Relationship  
Between Locus of Control and Violent,  
Non-violent, and Sexual Offenders  
Title of Thesis

Coey Coey  
Signature of Graduate Office Staff Member

July 17, 1997  
Date Received