

AN ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS OF

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Title: An Examination of the Relationship Between Locus of Control  
and the Amount of Time on Parole

Abstract approved: Cooper B. Holmes

External locus of control has been identified as a personality variable that is problematic to successful completion of parole. To examine the relationship between locus of control and length of time on parole, two groups of volunteer parolees were used in this study. The participants were currently on parole in the Northern Parole Region of Kansas. Participants were divided according to how long they had been on parole determined according to whether the offender had been recently released, one to two months on parole, or had been on parole for five months or more. Fifty men (25 one to two months and 25 five months or more) whose mean age was 32.7 were given the Rotter Internal-External Locus of Control Scale. Analysis of variance results showed neither group significantly differed from the other with regard to locus of control. Both groups scored toward the internal end of the locus of control continuum.

**AN EXAMINATION OF THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN LOCUS OF CONTROL  
AND THE AMOUNT OF TIME ON PAROLE**

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**A Thesis**

**Presented to**

**the Division of Psychology and Special Education**

**EMPORIA STATE UNIVERSITY**

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**In Partial Fulfillment**

**of the Requirements of the Degree**

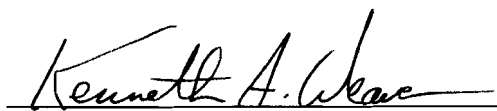
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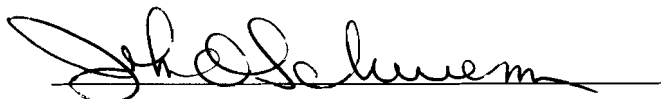
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**May 1998**

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Approved for the Division of  
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Approved for the Graduate Council

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

Parole represents a philosophy of crime control that is oriented toward individualized handling of law-breakers considering the offender and not just the offense (Kansas Board of Probation and Parole, 1970). It is a belief 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 Department of Corrections, 1995). Becknall (1978) believed that individuals placed on parole were expected to maintain an exemplary lifestyle which required employment, good family ties, and emotional stability. However, parolees usually are not prepared to make these changes.

There are many factors which influence reintegration of the offender. Even though situational variables are important, personality variables are also contributing factors to the offenders' capability of effectively completing parole and successfully reintegrating into their community (Bayse, Allgood, & Van Wyk, 1992; McMurray, 1993).

As an indication of an offender's inability to complete parole, Bayse et al. (1992) found that 32% of the 368,228 offenders released nationwide in 1989 were expected to recidivate within three years. McMurray (1993) found that 69% of offenders were rearrested with 49% being returned to prison. The Kansas Department of Corrections (1996) noted 44% of the prison population in Kansas were inmates who had returned to prison because of a parole violation.

## Literature Review

Rotter (1954) identified locus of control as a personality variable which refers to the feelings of control that individuals perceive they have over certain life events. When people perceive an event to be contingent upon their own behavior, they are identified as possessing an internal locus of control. When people perceive an event to be contingent upon luck, chance, fate, or powerful others, they are identified as possessing an external locus of control. Rotter (1975) claimed that a person who had an internal locus of control generally experienced greater personal satisfaction with life. Goodstein (1979) stated that upon release prisoners who had been categorized as internally oriented would make significantly better transitions back into the community and would be less likely to be reincarcerated.

Personality variables dealing with external and internal locus of control have been linked to numerous behaviors (Bayse et al., 1992). Rotter (1966) contended that individuals who were identified as possessing an internal locus of control had superior performance within their environments. Offenders with an internal locus of control have been shown to have a greater capacity for acquiring and retaining knowledge (Seeman, 1963). Seeman's (1963) study supported Rotter's (1966) belief that the ability to acquire knowledge was strongly influenced by perceived reinforcements, with internal locus of control being superior to external locus of control.

Internally oriented prisoners have reported being less anxious and less depressed with lower levels of anger (Zamble & Porporino, 1988). They are more likely to take advantage of occupational and educational programs which would facilitate transition back into the community (Groh & Guldenberg, 1976). Upon release, they are less

likely to be reincarcerated (Sweet, Little, Wood, & Harrison, 1977). Stronger internal control, therefore, leads to greater potential for effectiveness in the social environment. Ultimately, the result is increased success and personal satisfaction (Turner-Gering, 1997).

While some offenders may be internally controlled, most incarcerated offenders believe that powerful others (e.g., jailors, staff members) control their destiny, indicating an external locus of control (Griffith, 1984). MacKenzie and Goodstein (1986) contended that inmates with a high external locus of control were found to report significantly more anxiety, depression, and conflicts with both guards and inmates when compared to the group with an internal locus of control. Offenders indicated completion of rehabilitation programs was not contingent upon their performance but was contingent upon the rewards of punishments given to them by staff members. Griffith (1984) stated that offenders must be taught they are responsible for their own destiny before rehabilitation can occur. Because of this, the prerequisite for successful completion of rehabilitation would be the offender's ability to assume responsibility for the consequences of personal behavior (Harris, 1997).

Gutpa and Mueller (1984) looked at the effect locus of control had on criminals. They identified two types of deterrents which could keep a person from re-offending. Internal deterrents were composed of personality traits of the offender, the individual's value system, or conscience; external deterrents were composed of external forces such as the law, correctional officers or police officers. The offenders who responded to internal deterrents manifested an internal locus of control. Gutpa and Mueller (1984) went on further to state that offenders would not change unless



they acquired an internal locus of control through cognitively oriented programs. These programs would require the offender to take responsibility for their own actions instead of blaming others. The change in personality would ultimately decrease the person's chances of re-offending. However, the fact that prisons rely heavily upon exerting external control toward the end of punishment and confinement probably is a factor contributing to the high recidivism rates (Pugh, 1994). Because of this, a personality change may not be possible.

Prerost and Reich (1982) reviewed an 11 week self-help program taught by inmates for inmates. The study was designed to address inmates' attitudes concerning responsibility for the consequences they faced. They found an increased feeling of internal locus of control and less personal manipulation of the staff by the inmates.

Czunder (1985) constructed a cognitive moral approach in rehabilitating the offender based on understanding the offender and acknowledging the offender's ability to change. He believed the failure to change the offender in the past was due to the failure to understand the offender. Czunder's approach combined Reality Therapy which instills responsible behavior, cognitive restructuring to alter errors in thinking, and spiritual teaching which promotes feelings of guilt or remorse. Czunder found that the combination of Reality Therapy and spiritual teaching was effective.

Bayse et al. (1992) observed 63 inmates in a medium security correctional facility to determine the relationship between locus of control and narcissism. They reported 41% of the inmates scored in the lowest 25% of the internal locus of control test norms for men. This finding supported the research that indicated the majority of inmates believed external forces controlled their lives, leaving them with a feeling of

powerlessness.

Withrow (1994) contended offenders who returned to prison often made excuses or blamed others for their reincarceration. She also found many offenders did not understand the concept of victimization. Withrow chose cognitive restructuring to help break the cycle of crime and to empower the offenders to learn how to take responsibility for their own actions. Gupta and Mueller (1984) contended a criminal would not change unless he obtained an internal locus of control and begin to realize that being caught, and receiving the resulting punishment, was simply an extension of his own criminal behavior.

Wright, Holman, Steele, and Silverston (1980) hypothesized internally controlled individuals participate in increased amounts of cognitive work to prepare for mastery, exerting more control than externally controlled individuals. They believed internally oriented individuals may attribute failures internally, and externally oriented individuals may attribute failures externally; however, both groups attribute success internally. They found internally controlled individuals were better than those externally controlled in manipulating their environment to obtain quicker improvements in their living conditions. Internally controlled individuals were found to attribute success to ability rather than luck, fate, and others than those who were externally controlled (Turner-Gering, 1997).

Livingston (1986; cited in Turner-Gering, 1997) found externally oriented individuals attributed antisocial behavior to luck more than they attributed prosocial behavior to luck. Therefore, he concluded that external beliefs served as a defense mechanism for some offenders. He speculated that programs designed to increase

beliefs in internal control resulted in increased acceptance of responsibility for antisocial and prosocial acts.

Hunter (1994) acknowledged that research has shown locus of control can be modified. The most proficient way to achieve this modification of locus of control is for offenders to participate in cognitively based programs (Harris, 1997).

Harris (1997) examined the relationship between locus of control and parolees. She used three groups of volunteer parolees divided according to type of offense as defined by the Kansas Department of Corrections: violent (crimes against persons), non-violent (crimes against properties including possession of controlled substances and/or paraphernalia), and sexual (any crime involving sexual assault or misconduct). The participants were given the Rotter Locus of Control Scale. Harris found no groups significantly differed from each other with regard to locus of control. All groups scored toward the internal end of the locus of control continuum.

Turner-Gering's (1997) study sought to determine any relationship that might exist between parolees' degree of hopelessness and their subsequent success on parole. Secondly, the relationship between locus of control orientation and success on parole was examined. These variables were assessed by the Beck Hopelessness Scale and the Adult Nowicki-Strickland Internal External Scale. Results revealed no significant differences between groups of high vs. low degrees of hopelessness or between groups of external vs. internal control with regard to success on parole.

Research on offenders consistently revealed the need to identify and modify the locus of control belief system in the offender to facilitate successful completion of parole (Harris, 1997). Rehabilitation needs to occur if the offender is to form healthy

relationships in the future. Once criminal activity had ceased, Sommers, Baskin, and Gagan (1994; cited in Turner-Gering, 1997) believed that new relationships would be important in sustaining a new lifestyle. An extensive research review revealed that the variable of time an individual is on parole has not yet been investigated.

### Hypothesis

Offenders who have been on parole two months or less will score higher toward the external end of the locus of control scale than those who have been on parole five months or more.

### Significance of Present Study

The present study was designed to examine possible differences in locus of control of offenders over time. Differences in locus of control might indicate the need for varying parole strategies for recent parolees compared to longer-term parolees.

## CHAPTER 2

### METHOD

#### Participants

Participants were 50 male offenders currently on parole in Kansas. The mean age for Group 1 was 30.44 years ( $SD = 6.18$ ) while Group 2 was 34.84 years ( $SD = 10.44$ ). Ages ranged from 19 to 56 years. Participation was contingent upon the offender's scheduled appointment with his parole officer during the data collection period and his willingness to volunteer. Five parolees refused to participate in this study. Insufficient numbers of women parolees were available to include them in this study.

Participants were divided into two groups of 25 each according to the amount of time they had been on parole: Group 1, those who had been recently released, meaning that they were in their first or second month of parole, and Group 2, those who were in their fifth month or more of parole. These intervals of time were arbitrarily chosen because no research has yet been conducted on the length of time a person is on parole in association with internal and external locus of control. The participants were largely homogeneous in terms of marital status, socioeconomic status, education, and occupation.

#### Instrument

The participants were given the Rotter Internal-External (I-E) Locus of Control Scale (Rotter, 1966). 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, 1986; Rotter, 1966; Valliant, Simpson-Housley, & Cooper, 1982). The

pairs were dichotomous in nature with one internal statement and one external statement and the participants made a choice between the two statements.

The Rotter I-E Locus of Control Scale is based on the assumption that the Internal-External construct is bidimensional with externality and internality representing endpoints of a bipolar dimension. The scale also uses a dichotomous forced-choice format which is thought to be the most effective way to measure the construct (Marsh & Richards, 1986; Valliant et al. 1982). The Rotter I-E Locus of Control Scale has demonstrated test-retest reliability at  $r = .80$  (Graybill & Sergeant, 1983; Rotter, 1966, 1975), good discriminant validity (Rotter, 1966, 1975), and good internal consistency (Rotter, 1966, 1975).

The Rotter I-E Locus of Control Scale is a paper and pencil test with no time limits imposed on the participants. 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. If the participant receives a score of 23 it indicates that all the external statements have been chosen by that participant. A score of 0 indicates all internal statements have been chosen by that participant. Exact cutoff scores are not provided by Rotter to determine internal or external 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 (Harris, 1997).

### Procedure

All of the participants met with their parole officer at the Topeka Parole Office for their regular appointments. After meeting with his parole officer, the participant was asked by the parole officer to meet individually with the researcher in a separate room.

The research project was explained, the participant signed an informed consent form (see Appendix A) and provided his date of release from prison and age. The release date and age were confirmed through the Department of Corrections records at a later date. The release date was used to calculate how long the participant had been on parole.

The participant was then given the Rotter I-E Locus of Control Scale (see Appendix B) after being verbally instructed to please read each of the following statements and then circle the statement that you agree with most. In the event that the participant was not able to read, the researcher read the consent form and the Rotter I-E Locus of Control Scale, and the participant marked his choice of statements. Upon completing the Rotter I-E Locus of Control Scale, the participant was thanked, and questions were answered.

## CHAPTER 3

### RESULTS

The Rotter I-E Locus of Control Scale protocols were divided according to the length of time an individual had been on parole. Performance on the Rotter I-E Locus of Control Scale was determined by the additive score of the items on the instrument and computing a group mean for the scores. Statistical analysis for these scores was conducted using a one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA). The score on the Rotter I-E Locus of Control Scale was the dependent variable and the amount of time (one to two months or five months or more) an individual was on parole was the independent variable.

Results of the ANOVA yielded no significant difference,  $F(1, 48) = 1.17, p > .05$  between the two groups. Group 1, offenders who had been recently released; one-two months on parole, had a mean score of 8.28 and a standard deviation of 3.28. Group 2, offenders who had been on parole five or more months, had a mean score of 9.28 and a standard deviation of 3.26. The total mean score for all participants was 8.78 with a standard deviation of 3.28.

It was hypothesized that Group 1 would yield scores that were higher toward the external end of the Rotter I-E Locus of Control Scale than those who were in Group 2. 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 that all parolees manifested a locus of control that was on the internal end of the continuum from the time they were released until five or more months post-release. These results were incongruent with



previous research which stated that incarcerated offenders would be more on the external end of the continuum.

## 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 the present research are inconsistent with the research on incarcerated offenders and do not support the research hypothesis. Data from this study indicated that offenders currently on parole at least two months exhibited an internal locus of control. The overall mean score for the participants in this study was 8.78 indicating a tendency to be more toward the internal end of the continuum. The mean score was below the cut-off of 11 established by Harris's (1997) study which stated that a score below 11 was considered to be towards the internal end while a score above 11 was considered to be toward the external end of the continuum.

These results could be due in part to two reasons. While previous data on locus of control had been collected using offenders who were incarcerated at the time of data collection, this was the first study to focus on the relationship between the amount of time an individual was on parole and locus of control. Second, the participants in the present study were volunteers on parole within the state of Kansas. Four out of 19 prior studies indicated where the participants were geographically located. Therefore, insufficient data was available to compare offenders from the state of Kansas with offenders from other states.

Results from this study and Harris (1997) yielded all participants as being more towards the internal end of the Rotter I-E Locus of Control Scale continuum. These results raise the questions that locus of control might not be as much a personality

trait as previous research suggests but may be attributed to the environment of the individual. In order to assume that an individual's environment might play a role in determining locus of control, future studies should include measuring the locus of control of the offender upon entering the correctional system, monitoring the rehabilitative programs the offender attends while incarcerated, measuring the locus of control of the offender upon release to parole status, and incorporating a larger sample to ensure a more accurate study. Gathering this type of data would allow for a more accurate picture of the phenomenon being investigated.

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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 the amount of time an individual is on parole. 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: release date and age.

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 Jacci McDermott (913) 296-3195.

Thank you for your participation.

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I, \_\_\_\_\_, have read the above information and have  
(please print name)  
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  
UNIVERSITY INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD FOR TREATMENT OF  
HUMAN 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 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.

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May 4, 1998

Date

An Examination of the Relationship  
Between Locus of Control and the  
Amount of Time on Parole

Title of Thesis

Gary Cooper

Signature of Graduate Office Staff Member

May 4, 1998

Date Received

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