



Variations in locus of control due to changing social roles

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ABSTRACT

The study examined the nature and characteristics of locus of control across three critical phases of the life span such as young adulthood (20-25 yrs.), middle age (40-45 yrs.), and old age (65-70 yrs.) among both males and females. The sample consisted of 90 subjects, 30 from each of the age categories. Equal number of males and females from each of the categories were randomly selected. All the subjects were individually administered Rotter's 'Internal-External Locus of Control Scale'. The results were analyzed for observing age-related and sex-related effects and changes in locus of control. Major findings of the study are summarized below. Both males and females are highly internals during the middle age, while they are externals at young and old age. Females show relatively more of external locus of control than males. However, the male-female difference was not found to be statistically significant across any of the three age groups. The interaction effect between age and sex was also not found to be significant suggesting that these two are independent factors with respect to locus of control.

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Introduction

Locus of control is one important and specific personality attribute that strongly influences the individual's behavior. Rotter (1966) initially identified the concept. He defined locus of control, "as how people see themselves in control of and responsible for the course of occurrences, which they experience". Lefton (1994) defined locus of control, "as how people view the world and how they identify the causes of success or failure in their lives". Zimbardo (1985) described that locus of control is a belief about whether the outcomes of our actions are contingent on what we do or on events outside our control. In essence, the above definitions, point to some people who understand that things happen due to chance, luck, fate, or God and they have nothing much to do about it. Rotter called them as 'Externals'. On the other hand, some people believe that events are consequences of their own action and they take the responsibility for it. Rotter called them as 'Internals'.

Nunn (1991) found that internals are more positive in self-concept, more goal oriented, less impulsive, less inclined to move around, preferred more formal learning methods, less anxious about learning, and perceive themselves and abstract thinkers. Whereas externals are less positive in self-concept, anxious, less goal and achievement oriented, preferred movement in learning environments, preferred informal learning settings, felt more inclined towards one particular style of learning, and were concrete thinkers. Hock (2001) differentiated the 'Internals' and the 'Externals' with the following characteristics.

Internals

1. They attribute both their success (to ability and effort) and failure (to lack of ability or effort) to personal factors.
2. They feel guilt and shame when they fail and expect others to feel the same and take responsibility of their action.
3. They are motivated, persistent, high performing, and problem solving. They work harder to achieve long-range goals and are serious about work and career.

4. They are socially skilled and take interest in others. They are less vulnerable and pliable.

5. They are physically and mentally healthy and seek more knowledge about people, events and objects that influence them.

6. They have better coping skills, and like to be engaged in problem-focused coping.

Externals

1. They attribute both their success and failure to external factors (to luck, God etc.) and feel less guilt and shame when they fail.

2. They understand that others' behaviour is also controlled by outside forces.

3. They are less motivated, less persistent, and low performing. They do not work hard to achieve goals, and are less serious about their work and career.

4. They take least interest in others and seek less knowledge about people, objects, and events that influence them.

5. They are romantic and are idealistic about romantic love.

6. They are physically and mentally less healthy. They are vulnerable, and easily pliable. They take less control, and seek less knowledge about people, objects, and events that influence them.

7. They are poor in coping.

A person is not just either 'Internal' or 'External'. He belongs to a position in the continuum of the scale. He is called an internal or external depending on which side he is more inclined to. Weitan (1998) observed that locus of control in a person changes across the lifespan depending on the reinforcement model of the society. He observed that locus of control is partly a socio-cultural event, which develops through the interaction of the individual with his environment. Hock (2001) studied people from a number of socio-cultural settings and observed that there are cultural stereotypes about locus of control. He also reported that related to life-specific demands, locus of control changes across the aging of a person. People around the middle age are found to be more internal. Hook explained that having more social responsibility, requiring more

of controlling behavior, and having high in achievement needs, people in the middle age tend to be internals.

Several studies also reported gender-differences in locus of control. Cushner, McClelland, and Safford (1992) reported from a cross-cultural study that females are more likely to blame themselves for failure, and attribute failure to internal factors such as lack of intelligence or ability. But the males more often attribute their success to a personal trait whereas failure to external factors. Hence, they indicated that females in general are more internals than males. On the other hand, Mamlin, Harris, and Case (2001) reported from a larger cross-cultural sample that males tend to be more internal than females. The same study also made attempts to relate the development of locus of control with age. It was found that as age increases, people tend to become more internal but at a later age, they again tend to be externals. Mamlin et al., (2001) also found that people higher up in organizational structures tend to be more internals.

Anderson (1977) reported that internals are better able to cope because of their sense of control over the course of events. Weiner, (1979) in his achievement motivation theory reported that those who attribute their success to internal causes have a greater degree of achievement motivation than those who attribute their success to external causes. Those who attribute their failure to external causes, rather than internal causes, have stronger self-esteem and achievement motivation than those who attribute failure to internal causes (Weiner, 1979; Teglasi, 1978).

In addition, there are other characteristics that emerge as a result of individuals' perception of their environments as personally or externally controlled. For example, research investigations have suggested that people classified as internal in locus of control display more information seeking behavior and make better use of this information than people classified as external in locus of control (Weiner, 1979).

Several studies focused on how locus of control develops and how it changes. It has been found that parental approval and attention to positive behavior are associated with a child's developing internal control. Whereas parental reinforcement based on social comparisons of the child's behavior and devaluing the child without attention to the child's specific behavior are associated with developing external control (Rotter, 1975). It has also been found that social class and educational level are positively associated with the internal locus of control. Attempts have also been made to relate locus of control to various personality variables. Externality has been correlated with low-ego strength, (Erikson & Roberts, 1971) and poor personal adjustment (Warehime & Foulds, 1971).

In view of the above research findings, the present study seeks to examine the change and development of locus of control across the lifespan of a group of educated middle class males and females.

The Rationale

The locus of control is said to be a significant determiner of the individual's adjustment and coping. Studies have reported that locus of control in a person changes over his lifespan. While young adults and aged persons are mostly externals, middle-aged persons are usually internals. Similarly, several studies have also reported sex differences in the coping style of both externals and internals. In view of the above findings, the present study seeks examine the nature of locus of control among people in three significant phases of life the young age, the middle age and the old age.

Objectives

The objectives of the present study were :

1. To examine the nature of change in the locus of control for both males and females across the three age groups.
2. To examine whether middle aged are more internals than both the young and the old people.

Hypotheses

In the light of the discussion of relevant literature in the introduction chapter, the following hypothesis are formulated for the present study.

Hypothesis 1 : People are more external during youth and old age, but are more internal during middle age.

Hypothesis 2 : In general, there would be no difference in the locus of control between males and females except during the middle age, when males would be more internal than females.

Method of study

A brief outline of the social settings from which the subjects were selected. The tests used in the present study along with the data collection procedure etc. are as follows:-

Sample

The sample consisted of 90 subjects with 30 subjects belonging to each of the three age groups 20-55, 40-50, and 65-70 years. In each of the age groups, three were equal number of males and females. All the subjects were selected randomly from the middle class families in different localities around 10 kilometers radius in Bhubaneswar, Orissa. The subjects were all educated. All of them have reasonable understanding of the English language. They were all socially sensitive, and matured persons. They cooperated the investigator with enthusiasm during the process of data collection.

Tests

Responses were obtained from all the subjects on the locus of control questionnaire developed by Rotter (1975). The nature of the questionnaire, its administration, and scoping procedures are narrated below.

'What is Your Locus of Control ?' Questionnaire. The Rotter internal-external locus of control scale is used the present study. The scale consists of 29-items of which 23 are relevant to locus of control and 6 are filler items. Each item includes two statements, one showing the approval for external locus of control, and the other for internal locus of control. The subject's task is to choose between the two alternatives (forced choice), that he personally believes to be 'truer'. The scale scored in the external direction i.e. the higher the score the more external the individual. The maximum score for the scale is 23. The midpoint of the scale is twelve. A subject scoring 13 or above is an external and scoring less than 13 is an internal.

Instructions : "This is a questionnaire to find out the way in which certain events in the society affect you. Each item consists of a pair of alternatives lettered a or b. Please select the one statement of each pair (and only one) which you more strongly believe to be the case as far as you are concerned. Be sure to select the one you actually believe to be truer rather the one you think you should choose or the one you like to be true. This is a measure of personal belief; obviously there are no right or wrong answers. Your answer either a or b to each question on this inventory, is to be reported beside the question. Please answer these items carefully but do not spend too much time on any one item. Be sure to find out an answer for every choice. In some instances you may discover that you believe either statements or neither one. In such cases be sure to select the one you more strongly believe to be the case as far as you are concerned. Also try to respond to each item independently when making your choice; do not be influenced by your previous choices. Please do not begin until you are told to do so."

Scoring Procedure

The maximum score on the scale is 23, which reflects the subject's score on external locus of control. The Item Nos. 1, 8, 14, 19, 24 and 27 are filler items for which the subject does not get any score. He earns a score of 1 each for his responses to the items as 2-a, 3-b, 4-b, 5-b, 6-a, 7-a, 9-a, 10-b, 11-b, 12-b, 13-b, 15-b, 16-a, 17-a, 18-a, 20-a, 21-a, 22-b, 23-a, 25-a, 26-b, 28-b and 2-a. A score 13 and above tells about a subject as external and less than 13 as internal.

Procedure

The questionnaire was individually administered to each subject by the investigator. The investigator visited the home of each subject and appraised each about the purpose of the investigator's visit. The investigator requested them to go through the questionnaire carefully and seek clarifications in case of doubt. Once the subjects properly understood the instructions, the investigator left the questionnaire with them. They had all agreed to return the duly filled in questionnaire in about two days. The investigator collected the questionnaire from them in time, and thanked them for their cooperation. All the subjects were educated, and belonged to middle class families.

Results and discussion

In this chapter, results are arranged in terms of the type of skills investigated in the present study. The task used in the present study was to find out the locus of control of the subjects. The data were organized in a 2 (Sex: male/female) x 3 (Age group: 20-25/40-45/65-70) factorial design. The results are described by means and standard deviations, graphs, and analysis of variance.

Descriptive Analysis

Table 1 presents the means and standard deviations for locus of control (external) in respect of each of the six subgroups. The means are also graphically plotted in the Figure 1. Observation of the result table are the figure revealed that both young adults and aged persons are more external in respect of their locus of control. During this age, there are not much of gender differences among them. In the age group of 20-25, both male and females are externals having means of 16.30 and 15.80 respectively. While during the middle age, the means are as low as 7.30 and 10.00. On the other hand, during the old age, means for males and females are respectively 18.60 and 20.40.

Table 1

Gender-wise Means and Standard Deviations for Locus of Control across Three Age Groups							
Dimension		Age Group 20-25		Age Group 40-45		Age Group 65-70	
		Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
External Locus of Control	Mean	16.30	15.80	7.30	10.00	18.60	20.40
	SD	2.33	2.86	3.74	2.93	2.42	1.96

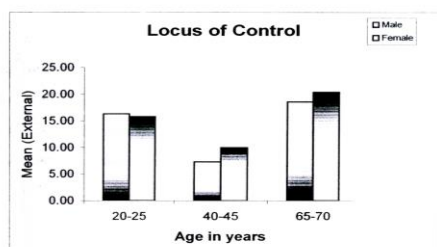


Figure 1. Gender-wise means score for locus of control (external) across the three age groups.

Group Comparison Using ANOVA

Table 2. Summary of Analysis of Variance Showing the Effects of Age (A) and Gender (B) on Locus of Control

Sources	SS	df	MS	F
Age (A)	177.23	2	88.62	10.44*
Gender (B)	12.37	1	6.66	1.86
AXB	31.24	2	15.62	1.84
Within	713.16	84	8.49	

* $p < 0.5$

** $p < .01$

Table 2 presents the summary of analysis of variance for the effects of age and sex on locus of control.

Conclusion

From the results it is indicated that during the middle age, both male and females are more internal with males being substantially more internal than the females. Similarly, the results indicated the nature of change and development of locus of control for both males and females across their lifespan. The findings of the present study are in many respect similar to those of Cashner, Mc Clelland, and Safford (1992); Hock (2001); and Mamlin, Harris, and Case (2001). Further the results also point to the fact that the locus of control changes significantly across age. But no significant gender effect is observed on the nature and development of locus of control. The interaction effect between age and sex is also not significant pointing to the fact that age and sex are independent factors with respect to the nature and development of locus of control. The findings comply with prior studies of Mamlin, Harris, and Case (2001).

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