

Strickland B R. The prediction of social action from a dimension of internal-external control. *J. Soc. Psychol.* 66:353-8, 1965.
[Department of Psychology, Emory University, Atlanta, GA]

In the spring of 1963, the Rotter IE Scale was administered to 53 black social activists and a control group of 105 black students. A significant relationship was found between internal expectancies and behavioral commitment to civil rights activism. [The *Social Sciences Citation Index*® (SSCI)® indicates that this paper has been cited in over 120 publications since 1966.]

Bonnie R. Strickland
Department of Psychology
University of Massachusetts
Amherst, MA 01003

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"As a displaced Southerner in the clinical program at Ohio State University in the early 1960s, I followed the events of the civil rights movement with great interest. A number of us worked with Julian Rotter*, Doug Crown, and Shep Liverant to revise and improve the early assessment instruments of internal versus external control of reinforcement expectancies (IE). This was particularly exciting in that IE beliefs were predictive of behavior not only in experimental laboratories but in real life as well. In learning laboratories, internals gave different extinction curves following acquisition than did externals. In prisons and hospitals, internals were more knowledgeable about situational events, such as opportunities for parole or health care. The willingness of internals to involve themselves in social action was an obvious question of interest.

"Pearl Gore-Dansby and Rotter completed the first study on IE and attempts to change racial practices in the South.¹ Internal black college students were significantly more likely than externals to commit themselves to social action such as signing petitions, participating in mass rallies, or taking 'freedom rides' across the South. A limitation of the findings was that while written

responses were available, no actual behavioral indexes were gathered.

"In 1962, I returned to Atlanta, the center of organized civil rights activities at that time. In the spring of 1963, the Southern Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) held a conference there. Fifty-three SNCC members and selected civil rights activists agreed to complete the Rotter IE Scale plus several other questionnaires. We ran into one minor difficulty. We asked respondents to note their race since we planned to use data only from black activists. Some participants responded 'human' and could not be placed according to ethnic background.

"SNCC activists were predominantly involved in voter registration in rural areas of the Southeast. They lived in conditions of poverty with physical harassment and threats of violence. The mean number of arrests was five with one respondent having been jailed 62 times. One hundred and five black college students who had not been so involved in dramatic social action served as a control group. Black students were difficult to identify who had not, at the least, participated in street demonstrations, but generally the control students had not made a full-time commitment to civil rights. As expected, SNCC activists were significantly more internal than matched college students. No sex differences were evident.

"Events surrounding civil rights activities, of course, changed rapidly during the 1960s, especially in regard to debates about civil disobedience and confrontational techniques. As some activists began to espouse violence, Sank and I found militants to be more external than moderate activists.² Surely some of our early findings are now as dated as the language we used (Negroes, White Citizen Councils, etc.). Still and all, I suspect that the importance of this article had to do with the fact that this was one of the first studies in which an individual difference variable predicted an important social action."

1. Gore P M & Rotter J B. A personality correlate of social action. *J. Personality* 31:58-64, 1963. (Cited 195 times.)
2. Sank Z B & Strickland B R. Some attitudinal and behavioral correlates of a belief in militant or moderate social action. *J. Soc. Psychol.* 90:337-8, 1973.

*Rotter J B. See Citation Classic. Commentary on "Generalized expectancies for internal versus external control of reinforcement." *Psychol. Monogr.* 80:1-28, 1966.
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