

This Week's Citation Classic

Lefcourt H M. Internal-external control of reinforcement. A review. *Psychol. Bull.* 65:206-20, 1966.

When causes for performance outcomes are attributed to external forces, people generally become less alert and resourceful. Persons who habitually attribute outcomes to fate, chance, or others often appear apathetic and more vulnerable to stressors than 'internals' who cognitively prepare themselves for challenges. [The *Science Citation Index*[®] (*SCI*[®]) and the *Social Sciences Citation Index*[™] (*SSCI*[™]) indicate that this paper has been cited over 310 times since 1966.]

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"My interest in the locus of control construct derived from a convergence of experience and academic instruction. At Ohio State University when I was a graduate student, research was focused on perceptions of causality. During my clinical internship at a hospital for narcotic addicts, I became privy to the pervasive helplessness among urban blacks which seemed to predetermine continued failure and despair. My early research dealt with despair via perceptions of causality with the hypothesis that disbelief in personal efficacy resulted in failure to recognize available opportunities and presaged a dearth of positive experiences. Over the years many data have been reported which support these contentions. The *Psychological Bulletin* article was among the first reviews of this research and filled a void at the right moment. The

popularity of the article probably derives from its timeliness.

"Many others have witnessed something akin to the apathy I found among black drug addicts. The inability to manage one's day as one wishes gives everyone at least a taste of helplessness, when causes for outcomes are beyond one's personal means. To obtain a seat on a subway or to avoid a mugging through selection of one's route may be residual efforts at maintaining a semblance of control. For some, such successes may comprise their day's highlight and have helped to make them aware of their efforts to maintain control. This 'awareness' has been heightened greatly by the social movements of the last decade in which the terms 'powerlessness' and 'alienation' became almost trite explanations for much of today's malaise.

"Given the popularity of terms akin to locus of control, it has become difficult to save the construct from conceptual fuzzi-ness that can result with popularization. Consequently, I have written a book, *Locus of Control*,¹ in which I have tried to preserve the meaning of the construct while exploring its relevance to given social problems.

"Due perhaps to my lengthy involvement with the construct, I have come to believe that locus of control is a major determinant of what I refer to as vitality. When people believe that outcomes flow from their actions, then behavior becomes more purposive and, to others, they seem to be that much more alive. Support for this contention, which comprises the conclusion of my book has been found in research and, of equal importance, in the writings of great authors. It is comforting to find support from the likes of James Fenimore Cooper, who records the momentary shifts in vitality reflected in Deerslayer's face and body as he shifts in his beliefs regarding his efficacy."

REFERENCE

1. Lefcourt H M. Locus of control: current trends in theory and research. Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Assoc, 1976. 211 p.