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## ABSTRACT

This investigation sought to determine whether faculty, peers, or community supervisors could provide the best type of positive reinforcement for college students engaged in community-based learning service. Students were placed in 5 equally weighted groups: (1) reinforcement by community supervisors only; (2) half of the reinforcement from community supervisors and half from college faculty; (3) all reinforcement from college faculty; (4) only peer group reinforcement; and (5) no reinforcement (control group). The most striking result was that the control group with no reinforcement completed 0% of their assignments on time for the first semester. The faculty group represented the lower parameter of 30%, and the peer group achieved the highest score, 70%. Overall, students performed as well with peer group reinforcement as with faculty reinforcement. To be substantiated this finding would require isolation of personality, convenience, and other unknown factors. Further research is recommended because of the cost-effective and learning enrichment potential represented by wider roles for students. (Author/HS)

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North Carolina Wesleyan College  
Rocky Mount, North Carolina

EXPERIMENT IN LEARNING/SERVICE

March 1972

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION, AND WELFARE

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National Center for Educational Research and Development  
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## ABSTRACT

### "Experiment in Learning/Service"

This investigation sought to determine whether faculty, peers, or community supervisors could provide the best type of positive reinforcement for college students engaged in community-based learning/service. Students were placed in five equally weighted groups: 1) reinforcement by community supervisors only, 2) half of the reinforcement from community supervisors and half from college faculty, 3) all reinforcement from college faculty, 4) only peer group reinforcement, and 5) no reinforcement other than universal reinforcers (control).

The most striking result was that the control group with no reinforcement completed 0% of their assignments on time for the first semester. The faculty group represented the lower parameter of 30%, and the peer group achieved the highest score, 70%. Generally, students performed as well with peer group reinforcement as with faculty reinforcement. To be substantiated this finding would require isolation of personality, convenience, and other unknown factors. But the point remains that within the limited N and with the restricted parameters of this research students reinforced community-based learning/service as well as faculty.

A second tentative conclusion is that reinforcement is a considerable factor in student learning/service performance. The strongest evidence for this conclusion is the fact that the control group scored lowest on both actual task performed and task completed on time.

Further research is recommended because of the cost-effective and learning enrichment potential represented by wider roles for students. Effective use of communities as living labs for the social sciences and humanities could help students seeking relevance and schools seeking more efficient resource management. This research should explore learning/service as a way of giving vocational guidance to students and reducing isolation of learning centers from constituent communities.

Final Report

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EXPERIMENT IN LEARNING/SERVICE

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North Carolina Wesleyan College  
Rocky Mount, North Carolina

March 14, 1972

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U.S. DEPARTMENT OF  
HEALTH, EDUCATION, AND WELFARE

Office of Education  
National Center for Educational Research and Development

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## Experiment in Learning/Service

### I. Introduction

This investigation sought to determine whether faculty, peers or community supervisors can provide the best type of positive reinforcement for college students engaged in community-based Learning/Service. Reports from a number of college and university campuses indicate successful applications of contingency management, operant conditioning or behavior modification to classroom teaching (Michaels, 1970, Keller, 1971, etc.). This research attempted to extend these principles, primarily the positive use of attention and verbal praise to community-based learning.

Students were placed in five groups: 1) reinforcement by community supervisor only, 2) half of the reinforcement from community supervisors and half from college faculty, 3) all reinforcement from college faculty, 4) only peer group reinforcement, and 5) no reinforcement other than universal reinforcers. All groups received three types of universal reinforcers: 1) a kick-off banquet sponsored by the local Chamber of Commerce, 2) Learning/Service cards on which achievement was certified by the receiving agency (Appendix A), and 3) four progress report meetings including announcements of due dates and general discussion.

Head Start, Fountain Training School, Neighborhood Youth Corps (O.I.C), Upward Bound and a Youth Services Center were receiving agencies for college students during the Fall and Winter semesters of the 1970-71 academic year. Students who completed twelve hours of Learning/Service each semester plus attendance at six of eight college convocations programs received one semester hour of credit for that semester. Completion of both semesters was not required in order to receive credit. General convocation programs were loosely coordinated with the Learning/Service "lab" in that programs on "Engineering the Human Environment" were held.

Students traveled to community receiving agencies in car pools. Transportation was generally held not to be a problem, but the data does suggest that good transportation helped performance in at least one instance. Students were paid minimal transportation costs out of project funds.

### II. Methods

Five groups with ten students per group were weighted equally according to first, second and third agency preferences. Students were not told the nature of the research or the research design and were assigned to a given agency, not knowing the research group involved. The research design was also unknown to community agency supervisors, but each supervisor was offered four dollars for each Reinforcement Visit Form (R.V.F.) filled out on selected students. Supervisors were given minimal instruction in how to reinforce the student whose name appeared on the R.V.F. (Appendix B)

The universal reinforcers function as follows: at the kick-off dinner students in attendance (about 50% elected to appear) received praise for their interest in community problems, selected students

received verbal praise for specific performance when R.V.F.'s were filled out, and all students were praised at the four progress report reinforcement meetings. Paired with verbal praise for specific achievements while at the community site, the R.V.F. and community agency supervisor and faculty attention were the primary reinforcers in Groups I, II, and III. Group IV received only random peer group reinforcers in the form of verbal and social encouragement from the group leader and members. Group V served as a control.

Each group was assigned six two-hour blocks of Learning/Service time. The time was to be recorded on a signed Learning/Service card and turned over to a campus instructor. The due date at the end of the semester was made clear to all students in the five groups. Finishing these six blocks of time and turning in the signed cards to a faculty office thus defined "finishing on time." Assignments were the same second semester, but students were not placed in reinforcement groups. As data show, this non-reinforcement provided a return to baseline in the "finished on time" category and was possible to measure because performance data were also kept during the second semester. Two agencies were changed second semester, but comparison data were made on the three remaining agencies. Comparisons by agency were also made between first and second semester "time donated beyond assigned time" for these three agencies.

Attitude shifts were measured on two scales during the first semester. "Attitude Toward the Negro" and "Attitude Toward Juvenile Delinquents" were administered at the beginning and end of the semester (approximately 15 weeks apart). (See Appendix C and D.) At the beginning and end of the second semester a "Liberal-Conservative" scale was administered. (See Appendix E.)

### III. Results

As Table I shows, the most striking result was that the control group with no reinforcement completed 0% of their assignments on time for the first semester. The Faculty group represented the lower parameter of 30% and the Peer group achieved the highest score, 70%. The control group also had the lowest performance score, 41. Since reinforcement was clearly a factor in both performance and on time completion, the fact that some students were not reinforced because of absence partly explains the low Faculty group "on time" score. When faculty members visited agencies to reinforce half of group II and all of group III, students were sometimes absent. This had the effect of withholding reinforcement; hence only 19 R.V.F.'s were completed for group III.

A second finding was that students performed as well with peer group reinforcement as with faculty reinforcement. To be substantiated, this finding would require isolation of personality, convenience and other unknown factors. But the point remains that within the limited N and with the restricted parameters of this research students reinforced community-based Learning/Service as well as faculty. Note also that students achieved high performance without the use of R.V.F.'s. These forms may have had an effect, however, because their use correlated with performance even though it does not correlate with "on time" achievement. The forms were mildly effective in performance but had no effect in "on time" achievement at the end of the semester. This seems to mean

Table I

<u>Reinforcer</u>	<u>Actual Task Performed</u>	<u>Possible Task Performed</u>	<u>Task Completed on time</u>	<u>Reinforcement Visit forms</u>	<u>Donated Hours</u>
1. Community supervision	49	60	60%	26	8
2. 1/2 Com 1/2 Fac	54	60	40%	30	8
3. Faculty supervision	51	60	30%	19	9
4. Peer supervision	50	60	70%	-	6
5. Control	41	60	0%	-	7



that reinforcement for "on task" behavior did not generalize to "on time" behavior. Student performance of extra donated time was down slightly, but this seems inconsequential since there is little variation from group to group and the control group was two hours higher than the student group. Again, this may mean that reinforcement of on task behavior did not generalize to donated time behavior. On the other hand, when semesters are compared, there is some evidence that donated time was affected by generalization. Students donated 22 hours first semester and 14 hours during the second semester after all reinforcement had been withdrawn from other behaviors.

Table II shows a return to baseline during the second semester for three agencies: Upward Bound, Fountain School, and Headstart. The high score for OIC reflects an unusual consistency in one student leader's transportation and organizational assistance. In the three agencies on which comparison data is available there was a 24.3% drop when reinforcement was withdrawn. The trend was not observed for the Upward Bound group. This probably reflects the fact that students were serving on campus and inevitably exposed to reinforcers during the second semester. When this is taken into account and comparison limited to off-campus Learning/Service, the drop is 35% below levels obtained during reinforcement. Although reinstitution of reinforcers would have been desirable during a third semester, indications are that reinforcers were a significant factor in student performance.

Our third finding is conditional upon whatever validity may be assigned to the three attitude tests employed: Attitude Toward the Negro, The Juvenile Delinquency Attitude Scale, Conservative-Radicalism Battery. Table III shows a tendency for students working directly with blacks (90% of the college students were white) to become more negative toward blacks (Headstart - 306, Neighborhood Youth Corps - 180. In all tables plus scores mean that the total points in a group exceeded 0 after minus scores were subtracted; minus scores mean total scores are below 0 after plus scores are subtracted.) while students working in agencies with larger white staffs became more positive toward blacks (Youth Services Center +439, Fountain School +237). The finding correlates with a -352 score for students who were supervised by community supervisors who were more often black than supervisors in other groups. The faculty supervisors were both white and their reinforcement group (II) scored -51. The peer reinforcement group, dominated by whites, improved racial attitudes by +334. Note that the control group was +92.

Table IV suggests students working directly with training school students became slightly more negative, -49, toward "juvenile delinquents" while students working with Neighborhood Youth Corps students became more positive, +51. As expected, no pattern of attitude toward "juvenile delinquents" change emerged with reinforcement groups since this was not part of the reinforcement contingency program.

The Liberal-Conservative attitude test was given second semester only and applies to agency, not reinforcement groups. As Table V shows, students tended to become slightly more conservative regardless of agency. Again it should be emphasized that this attitude was not intentionally reinforced, but it is interesting that community-based

Table II

COMPARISON BY GROUP 1st and 2nd SEMESTERS OF PERCENTAGE COMPLETING WORK ASSIGNMENT.

	<u>1st semester</u>	<u>2nd semester</u>
Upward Bound	54%	51%
OIC		100%
Youth Services Center	90%	
Fountain School	77%	50%
Headstart	100%	57%
Neighborhood Youth Corps	83%	

Table III

<u>Attitude Toward Negro - By Agency</u>	<u>Attitude Toward Negro - By Group</u>
<u>Youth Services Center</u>	Group I -352
+439	Group II +7
<u>Upward Bound</u>	Group III -51
-87	Group IV +334
<u>Headstart</u>	Group V +92
-306	
<u>Fountain School</u>	
+237	
<u>Neighborhood Youth Corps</u>	
-180	

Table IV

Attitude Toward J.D. - by Agency

Youth Services Center  
0

Upward Bound  
-4

Headstart  
2

Fountain School  
-49

Neighborhood Youth Corps  
51

Attitude Toward J.D. - by Group

Group I - 8 people only  
18

Group II - 6 people only  
-35

Group III - 8 people only  
-29

Group IV - 6 people only  
-1

Group V - first 10  
33

Table V

LIBERAL-CONSERVATIVE, By Agency (2nd semester)

Upward Bound  
-15

OIC  
-20

Fountain School  
-14

Headstart  
-24

learning in general may have been an influence toward the conservative end of the spectrum. This finding is suspect, however, because the other two attitude tests did not substantiate this shift.

#### IV. Conclusions

Because of the limited number of subjects, degree of control and duration of intervention, the conclusions of this study must remain tentative until it is verified by replication. With this in mind, two general conclusions appear to be justifiable from the data on a tentative basis.

First, from the basic question posed by the research design (Which group provides the most effective reinforcement of learning/service, community supervision, faculty or students?), we must conclude that students do as well if not better than faculty. Students also outperformed community supervisors by a small margin. This suggests that learning/service programs could be organized with student leadership, perhaps with general faculty supervision as in the present design. Our experience with student leaders in this program prior to research implementation suggests that one factor we did not study, namely, the particular abilities of student leaders, should be isolated in further research. The scope of this research does not touch this issue, but student leaders would probably benefit from some training for leadership roles. Given some training and a structured reinforcement program such as the R.V.F. system, students would probably enrich community-based learning/service instruction. An added benefit to institutions of higher learning would undoubtedly be a considerable costs saving since students performed well without cash reinforcement.

A second tentative conclusion is that reinforcement is a considerable factor in student learning/service performance. Our strongest evidence for this conclusion (note Table I) is the fact that the control group which did not receive the reinforcement system scored 8 points lower (actual task performed) and 30% lower (task completed on time) than any reinforced group. The research design clearly makes this finding defensible, particularly with a return to baseline drop of at least 24%.

Our attitude findings are, for the same reason, less defensible. The research design was based upon observable behavior counts. The extent to which attitude shifts had anything to do with learning/service behaviors remains largely unknown. As we pointed out above, attitude shifts between tests also do not appear to correlate with each other: black/white and juvenile scores remained generally constant when pluses and minuses are balanced out; liberal-conservative scores shift slightly toward conservative. We therefore list our finding that attitudes toward blacks improved more with white contacts than with black as an observation only. This approach seems even more justified in the light of the fact that no clear pattern at all emerged on the attitude toward juvenile delinquents scale.

Perhaps a more reliable measure of student attitudes is reflected in our survey, Student Evaluation Questionnaire. Students listed

scheduling lab time (361) and transportation as major difficulties. Learning enrichment (1st) and opportunity for service (2nd) were considered major strengths.

#### V. Recommendation

Based upon the effective performance of student or peer leadership in learning/service reinforcement, we recommend that a Phase Two research project be undertaken. This should include extensive use of student leaders with varying degrees of training in order to determine training needs. Such a project could well determine the cost effectiveness of student instruction in learning/service. Colleges and universities seeking ways to cut costs and enrich instruction might well benefit from the findings. Under the learning/service concept the community around the campus becomes living laboratory for study, particularly for the social sciences and humanities. Lab time can be scheduled just as it is now scheduled in the sciences. A master teacher (college faculty member) could work effectively with large numbers of students by using peer reinforcement procedures. Students seeking "relevance" would have an opportunity for both involvement in real problem solving and assessment of personal vocational objectives. An additional cost saving could be realized if this resulted in students deciding on vocational or learning objectives. Presumably institutions would benefit if students were less prone to change majors and objectives. A final benefit could be a reduction in the isolation of college and university learning from constituent communities. Communities would receive direct service; colleges would receive learning opportunities plus a tangible way to demonstrate their value in meeting human needs.

Appendix A

**Learning/Service Unit**  
N. C. Wesleyan College

This certifies that \_\_\_\_\_  
has served \_\_\_\_\_ hrs. (1 hr. - one Learning/Service Unit)  
for \_\_\_\_\_ (agency)  
on \_\_\_\_\_ (date).

\_\_\_\_\_  
CERTIFYING OFFICIAL



Appendix B  
REINFORCEMENT VISIT FORM

Student \_\_\_\_\_

Reinforcer \_\_\_\_\_

Activity \_\_\_\_\_

Place \_\_\_\_\_; Time \_\_\_\_\_

-----  
(After observing for 15 minutes)

I. "I like (your attitude, your interest, your activity, your ability to communicate with the clients, etc.)

II. What problems have you had?

a.

b.

c.

III. What solutions do you suggest?

a.

b.

c.

IV. (Selectively reinforce a. b. c. (III) if they are good.)  
Write your comment below.

## Appendix C

### ATTITUDE TOWARD THE NEGRO

This is a study of attitudes toward the Negro. Below you will find sixteen statements expressing different attitudes toward the Negro.

Put a check mark ( ) if you agree with the statement.

Put a cross ( ) if you disagree with the statement.

If you cannot decide about a statement, you may mark it with a question mark.

This is not an examination. People differ in their opinions about what is right and wrong in this issue.

Please indicate your own attitude by a check mark when you agree and by a cross when you disagree.

#### Form A

- \_\_\_ 1. The difference between the black and white races is not one of mere degree, but of kind.
- \_\_\_ 2. The educated Negro is less of a burden on the courts and is less likely to become a dependent or a defective than the educated white man.
- \_\_\_ 3. No Negro should hold an office of trust, honor, or profit.
- \_\_\_ 4. The Negro should not be simply the doormat of American civilization.
- \_\_\_ 5. I place the Negro on the same social basis as I would a mule.
- \_\_\_ 6. The Negro should be given the same educational advantages as the white man.
- \_\_\_ 7. I am not at all interested in how the Negro rates socially.
- \_\_\_ 8. Inherently, the Negro and the white man are equal.
- \_\_\_ 9. The inability of the Negroes to develop outstanding leaders dooms them to a low level in society.
- \_\_\_ 10. No Negro has the slightest right to resent, or even question the illegal killing of one of his race.
- \_\_\_ 11. After you have educated the Negro to the level of the white man, there will still be an impassable gulf between them.
- \_\_\_ 12. The Negro is fully capable of social equality with the white man, but he should not be so recognized until he is better trained.

- \_\_\_\_\_ 13. The Negro is by no means fit for social equality with the commonest white people.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 14. I would not patronize a hotel that accommodates Negroes.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 15. It is possible for the white and Negro races to be brothers in Christ without becoming brothers-in-law.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 16. The Negro should have the advantage of all social benefits of the white man but be limited to his own race in the practice thereof.

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## Appendix D

### THE JUVENILE DELINQUENCY ATTITUDE (JDA) SCALE

The following are statements with which some people agree and others disagree. Similarly, you will probably find yourself agreeing strongly with some statements, disagreeing just as strongly with others, and being perhaps more neutral about still others. There are no right or wrong answers. The best answer is your personal opinion. Please mark each one in the left margin according to the amount of your agreement or disagreement by using the following scale:

- |                        |                           |
|------------------------|---------------------------|
| +1: I slightly agree   | -1: I slightly disagree   |
| +2: I moderately agree | -2: I moderately disagree |
| +3: I strongly agree   | -3: I strongly disagree   |

- \_\_\_\_\_ 1. Each member of a gang that becomes involved in a gang war, commits robbery, sets fires, etc., is equally guilty and all should receive the same punishment.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 2. While psychology can contribute to our understanding of why children steal, become truant, run away from home, and are stubborn, there are some kinds of violent and wanton behavior that cannot be understood by the human mind.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 3. Youngsters who get into trouble have to suffer the consequences in order to learn that wrong living does not pay and can only lead to punishment and suffering.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 4. Young people who commit sex crimes, such as raping or molesting girls or forcing other young people into homosexual acts, deserve more than mere imprisonment; they ought to be dealt with severely.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 5. Living is too soft for kids today; less of them would get into trouble if they had a job to occupy their time and minds.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 6. While looks can be deceiving, physical appearance, such as tidiness or sloppiness, tells a lot about a young person; it would seem that even the delinquent child who is tidy and neat would be easier to help than the delinquent whose appearance is rough and untidy.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 7. If delinquents expect adults to like them, they have to show respect and obedience.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 8. Character, honesty, and obedience will tell in the long run; most boys and girls get what they deserve.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 9. The boy who commits a destructive or assaultive act should be locked up where he can do no more harm.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 10. A major cause of delinquency stems from magazines and movies that play up the sordid and seamy side of life, exposing the

minds of young people to all sorts of immoral ideas and criminal schemes.

- \_\_\_ 11. On the whole, juvenile delinquents are not as much the unfortunate and helpless victims of circumstances as some people think; they know right from wrong and can do better if they try.
- \_\_\_ 12. It would be difficult, if not impossible, to help the juvenile offender who refused to repent and confess his guilt.
- \_\_\_ 13. With regard to juvenile delinquency, we are putting too much faith in the psychological approach, when what we really need are stiffer laws and more vigilant law enforcement.
- \_\_\_ 14. We are coddling juvenile delinquents and their parents by shielding them from the newspapers; if the names of the delinquents and their parents were published, the disgrace might have the effect of keeping such youths out of further trouble.
- \_\_\_ 15. Young people should not be allowed to hang out on street corners for it is often there that delinquent gangs are formed and malicious acts planned.
- \_\_\_ 16. It would be easier to help a younger and smaller boy who became involved in delinquency than an older and bigger boy.
- \_\_\_ 17. Help to delinquents is better carried on in the church and synagogue than in the demoralizing setting of the home.
- \_\_\_ 18. It is almost too late for the church or synagogue to help the persistent delinquent after he has finally been sentenced to a correctional institution.
- \_\_\_ 19. Church- or synagogue-sponsored activities, such as scouting, arts and crafts, and basketball, while of value to delinquent youngsters in the forming of wholesome relationships with peers and adult leaders, do not offer as much corrective influence as religious instruction classes.
- \_\_\_ 20. Most juvenile delinquents are vicious and destructive and present a growing threat to life and property.
- \_\_\_ 21. Behavior is either right or wrong, good or bad, and young people should be rewarded or punished accordingly as the case may be.
- \_\_\_ 22. Psychologists who deal with delinquents in guidance centers and reformatories should be less concerned with the subconscious life of these youths and more concerned with their moral life.
- \_\_\_ 23. In the final analysis, the only way to stop some kids from getting into further trouble is to instill fear in them whether it

be the fear of God, or the fear of the police, or the fear of punishment.

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10. Life is too soft for kids today. A few years in the Army would be good for them.  
 Agree Disagree  
 Strongly \_\_\_\_\_ Partly \_\_\_\_\_ Strongly \_\_\_\_\_ Partly \_\_\_\_\_
11. Children should take as their models the men who started with nothing and through great determination rose to the top.  
 Agree Disagree  
 Strongly \_\_\_\_\_ Partly \_\_\_\_\_ Strongly \_\_\_\_\_ Partly \_\_\_\_\_
12. We can best help those who are less fortunate by supporting good charitable organizations.  
 Agree Disagree  
 Strongly \_\_\_\_\_ Partly \_\_\_\_\_ Strongly \_\_\_\_\_ Partly \_\_\_\_\_
13. In politics and government it is best to move only when we are absolutely sure where we are going.  
 Agree Disagree  
 Strongly \_\_\_\_\_ Partly \_\_\_\_\_ Strongly \_\_\_\_\_ Partly \_\_\_\_\_
14. It is up to the individual, not the government, to assure that his family is adequately clothed, housed, and fed.  
 Agree Disagree  
 Strongly \_\_\_\_\_ Partly \_\_\_\_\_ Strongly \_\_\_\_\_ Partly \_\_\_\_\_
15. When it comes to political leadership it almost always is best to go along with an older man who has had experience and is not going to do anything foolish.  
 Agree Disagree  
 Strongly \_\_\_\_\_ Partly \_\_\_\_\_ Strongly \_\_\_\_\_ Partly \_\_\_\_\_
16. Instead of admitting American draft dodgers and deserters, Canada should send them home to get what is coming to them.  
 Agree Disagree  
 Strongly \_\_\_\_\_ Partly \_\_\_\_\_ Strongly \_\_\_\_\_ Partly \_\_\_\_\_
17. The attempt to abolish the death penalty is just another example of pampering criminals.  
 Agree Disagree  
 Strongly \_\_\_\_\_ Partly \_\_\_\_\_ Strongly \_\_\_\_\_ Partly \_\_\_\_\_
18. In the family you should not spend more than you earn, and in government you should do the same by balancing the budget.  
 Agree Disagree  
 Strongly \_\_\_\_\_ Partly \_\_\_\_\_ Strongly \_\_\_\_\_ Partly \_\_\_\_\_
19. Immigrants who complain about this country should be told to go back where they came from.  
 Agree Disagree  
 Strongly \_\_\_\_\_ Partly \_\_\_\_\_ Strongly \_\_\_\_\_ Partly \_\_\_\_\_
20. When rebellious young people get older they will settle down.  
 Agree Disagree  
 Strongly \_\_\_\_\_ Partly \_\_\_\_\_ Strongly \_\_\_\_\_ Partly \_\_\_\_\_



## Conservative-Liberal Scale

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