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ABSTRACT

In a study of whether more student control and responsibility in the classroom would cause them to feel more positive about a task and to like their co-workers better, 57 undergraduates were asked to complete an 8 statement questionnaire on how much control they would be willing to allow others working with them. They were placed in pairs with half of the participants expecting their partners to give them high control on the task and half expecting low control. The results indicate the students offering high control were liked more, though there was no main effect for responsibility. Also, when students had low responsibility, they preferred the other person more with high control than low control conditions. They had higher expectations of themselves when given high control. Students with more classroom control are concluded to become more involved, expect more of themselves, and like the instructor and other students better. Classes with no student control or responsibility may have very little student involvement, lower expectations from students, and less liking for one another and the instructor. (SM)

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Control, Responsibility, Expected Liking and Performance on a Classroom Task

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Running Head: Control and Responsibility in the Classroom

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Control, Responsibility, Expected Liking and Performance on a Classroom Task

Abstract

Subjects expected to work in pairs. Half expected their partners to give them high control on a classroom task, half expected to be given low control. Half of the high and low control groups expected to have high responsibility, the other halfs low responsibility, for the task. Results showed that high control subjects expected to like their partner more, and to do better on the task, than low control subjects. An interaction effect showed that low responsibility subjects expected to like their partners better under high control conditions than under low. The implications of these findings are discussed.

Control, Responsibility, Expected Liking and Performance on a Classroom Task.

Objectives

At the college level instructors are continually evaluated on a series of characteristics (enthusiasm, breadth, organization, interaction, learning, examinations, assignments, difficulty, Marsh, 1977), and it is assumed that these are the characteristics most important for student learning. However, two aspects of the instructor's classroom behavior that are not included are the issues of control and responsibility. Typically, college courses are so taught that the instructor has almost total control and the student none. With regard to the content of the course the instructor controls the material to be taught and the scheduling of this material; similarly with the examinations the instructor controls their content and their scheduling. On the responsibility issue instructors are again the ones who set the goals and objectives of the course and who are accountable for achieving them. Research has shown that control in a situation makes people more effective and gives them a feeling of well being. Deci (1975) states that intrinsic motivation is based on a feeling of personal control and on a feeling of being competent. Fisher (1978) has shown that control is the critical factor in intrinsic motivation and mediates the competence factor. Control essentially means freedom to choose the means and/or the ends in a given task. This freedom entails the absence of constraint or control on one's behavior by others. When people are allowed to assume control over their environment they are able to deal more effectively with stress (Gatchel & Proctor, 1976), and show a decrease in physical symptoms (Pennebaker et al, 1977). Phares (1976) has shown that people who believe that they have this control are more dynamic, more alert and active, better at utilizing information, at picking up cues even subtle ones, and less distracted by irrelevant information - all very desirable characteristics in students. Phares' findings were based on research using Rotter's (1966) scale which measured internal/external locus of control. Internal control referred to the belief that rewards are contingent on a person's behavior not on external factors - as in external locus of control. In a classroom situation if students were told that they were in control on a task then they should commence the task believing that they have the freedom to choose the means and the ends in performing the task. Fisher's (1978) research would indicate that if students are

given this control on a classroom task they will feel more competent and expect to be more effective in doing the task. It was hypothesized that on a classroom task students should expect to be more effective when told they are in control than when they are told they are not in control.

White (1959) argued that behaviors which make us competent in dealing with our environment are motivating in their own right. Such behaviors are stimulation through play, exploration, intellectual curiosity, manipulation of the environment all of which imply a control and a freedom in relation to the environment. White maintained that individuals who had this freedom in relation to the environment were rewarded with "a feeling of efficacy" (p.329). Behaviors where one is in control are seen as positive and so provide their own intrinsic reward. Since these in-control behaviors are rewarding then, according to the Byrne-Clore model of attraction (Byrne, 1971), individuals who feel in control of their environment should feel positive toward elements of that environment. It was hypothesized that on a classroom task students would like their fellow students better when in control of the task than when not in control

In much of the attribution literature causality and responsibility are often used interchangably (Brewer, 1977; Feather, 1969; Harvey, 1976; Jones et al, 1971;Weiner, 1974) the assumption being that they are similar if not identical constructs. Buss (1978) in his critique of the actor-observer differences in attribution makes the distinction between reasons and causes in making attributions. Buss maintains that actors when asked to make attributions of causality for their actions actually give reasons for their actions rather causes though these reasons may be framed in attribution of causality replies. Observers, on the other hand, either attribute the actions to causes they see in the actor or can try to estimate the reasons the actor had for producing these actions. This analysis of causes and reasons harks back to the format used by Aristotle (1952) to explain what is. Aristotle maintained that things were composed of a form (formal cause) imposed on a substratum or material (material cause) by some agent (efficient cause) for a reason (final cause). Buss's interest is in the efficient and final causes of Aristotle which he re-labels as "causes" (efficient causes) and "reasons" (final causes). Rothenbaum (1981) following Buss (1978) found that people tend to associate causality with efficient causes and responsibility with final causes. Rothbaum changes Buss' (1978) terminology using "sufficiency" to refer to the actor's ability to effect something (efficient cause, Aristotle; causes, Buss) and "necessity" to refer to a situation where there are no others to do something and so the actor feels necessitated

to do it, this necessity being the reason for doing it (final cause, Aristotle; reasons, Buss). Rothbaum's (1981) research shows that the less able others are in a situation the more the actor is necessitated to act. However, in the diffusion of responsibility research if people are made to feel competent (Partin and Carver, 1982) people will take on responsibility even when others are present. One way to provide a feeling of competence is to give people control since being in control brings intrinsic motivation and a feeling of competence. People, then would be more inclined to feel responsible if they had control than if they did not have control. Further, if given responsibility on a task individuals would feel better if at the same time they were given control over the task rather than not given control. It was hypothesized that if given responsibility with control on a task subjects would feel more positive about the task and so like co-workers better than if given responsibility without control. Since responsibility refers to ends rather than means, to final causes rather than to efficient causes (Rothbaum, 1981), responsibility would not be expected to impact on the effectiveness measure.

Method

Subjects. Fifty seven undergraduates volunteered to take part in the experiment.

Procedure. All the subjects were asked to complete an eight statement questionnaire which contained four statements on how much control the person would be willing give to others working with them. A week later, subjects, in groups of 15 to 20, were given a typed sheet telling them that another individual had been randomly assigned to work with them on a classroom task, and that the attached questionnaire had been completed by this individual a week previously. It was actually completed by the experimenter. For half of the subjects the questionnaire made it appear to each subject that the person they were to work with would give the subject high control on the task: for the other half of the subjects the questionnaire made it appear that the person assigned to the subject would give the subject very little control on the task. Half the subjects in the "high control" group were told they would be in charge on the task and would be responsible for the outcome; the other half were told they were not in charge and would not be responsible for the outcome. A similar division of responsibility was made for the subjects in the "low control" group. All subjects were instructed to check carefully the answers in the questionnaire so that they could make a judgment about the person they would be working with. When they felt satisfied that they knew what sort of

person they were to work with they were asked, before they began the task, to complete two 8-point scales: on the first scale they were to indicate their probable liking for the other; on the second scale they were to indicate how good a job they would expect to do on the assigned task. No task was actually performed. A manipulation check indicated that all subjects expected to work on a classroom task and believed that the questionnaire they received was a questionnaire filled out a week previously by the person assigned to work with them.

Results

The data were analysed via a 2x2 analysis of variance with responsibility (high-low) and control (high-low) as the factors involved.

Liking. As expected students were liked more when they gave high control to the subjects than when they gave low control, $F(1,53) = 41.4$, $p < .001$. There was no main effect for responsibility. There was an interaction effect but not as expected: when subjects had low responsibility they liked the other person more under high control than under low control conditions, $F(1,53) = 3.62$, $p < .05$.

Effectiveness. As predicted subjects expected to do better on the task when given high control than when given low control, $F(1,53)=8.62$, $p < .005$. There was no main effect for responsibility and no interaction effect.

Means and standard deviations for all conditions for each of the dependent measures are given in Table 1.

Insert Table 1 about here

Discussion

As hypothesized the results clearly indicate that when subjects are given control on a classroom task they expect to be more effective on the task and expect to like their fellow workers better also. Again, as hypothesized, subjects did not expect to have their effectiveness on the

task affected by the presence or absence of responsibility. However, subjects in the high control-high responsibility condition did not, as hypothesized, like their fellow workers better than subjects in the high control-low responsibility condition. Instead, an interactional effect showed that coworkers were liked least of all in the low control-low responsibility condition. This is difficult to explain since intuitively it would appear that the high responsibility-low control condition would be the condition producing the most problems. Not having control yet having to be accountable would be expected to produce a lot of dissonance whereas not being in control would seem go naturally with not being responsible and so make sense and be expected to produce little or no dissonance. A possible explanation for this apparent contradiction may be that not being a cause, either final or efficient, to use Aristotle's terminology, may be more negative for subjects than being in the contradictory situation of not having control yet having to be responsible. Put another way, it may be that people want to feel involved in what they are doing; that in the performing of a task they personally want to make some sort of impact on the task. If this is true then the present experiment provides four levels of impact on the task: being the efficient and final cause (high control-high responsibility), being the efficient but not the final cause (high control-low responsibility), not being the efficient but being the final cause (low control-high responsibility), being neither the efficient nor the final cause (low control-low responsibility). Having control with or without responsibility was most positive and would give most involvement: the next most positive condition and giving somewhat less involvement, was not having control but having responsibility: the least positive condition and the one giving the least involvement was the low control, low responsibility condition. This might also explain why the hypothesized interaction effect of high responsibility-high control producing greater liking than low responsibility-high control did not materialize. The control factor, the efficient cause, made such an impact and gave such involvement that it overshadowed the responsibility factor. Only when high control was absent did the presence and absence of responsibility make themselves felt.

Educational Importance

The study indicates that if students are given more control in a classroom they should become more involved, should expect to do better in class, and should like their instructor and their fellow students better. On the other hand courses which do not give some control to students and do not make students responsible are very likely to have minimal student involvement, to lower student expectation of

success and to lower student liking for their instructor and their fellow students.

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Table 1

Means and Standard Deviations of the Four Conditions for each Dependent Measure

	Responsibility		No Responsibility	
	High Control	Low Control	High Control	Low Control
Liking				
M	6.00	4.07	6.33	2.79
SD	1.11	1.82	1.23	2.08
Effectiveness				
M	6.79	5.43	6.27	5.21
SD	1.05	1.87	1.62	1.53