

67298

1. Relationships between desired freedom and actual threat to freedom in a correctional institution.
2. Stefan Hormuth, Robert A. Wicklund, Mercedes Dallas, University of Texas at Austin, & Jerome Mabli, Federal Correctional Institution, Fort Worth.
3. --
4. Notions of control and freedom were tested in a correctional institution. The desire for freedoms related to the institutional life and threats to freedom by actions of the parole board were related to behavior requiring initiative from inmates. Results are discussed in terms of reactance theory and learned helplessness.
5. Social Psychology
Loss of control
Reactance
6. Slides will be used.
7. Stefan Hormuth
Department of Psychology
University of Texas at Austin
330 Mezes Hall
Austin, Texas 78712
8. --

67298

1. Relationships between desired freedom and actual threat to freedom in a correctional institution.

2. An individual's desire to have control over aspects of his/her life, the reaction to such a loss of control, and the factors affecting differential reactions in uncontrollable situations have become increasingly important variables in psychological research. A number of concepts and theories address such issues: reactance theory (Brehm, 1966; Wicklund, 1974), learned helplessness (Seligman, 1972), loss of control (Glass & Singer, 1972), personal causation (deCharms, 1968). Recently, Wortman & Brehm (1975) have presented a model that takes both learned helplessness and reactance into account. Following this model, persons initially high in their attempts for control tend to give up when they experience an impactful loss of control, whereas persons initially low in their attempts for control try to reestablish their freedom.

To test notions related to the loss of control or freedom, a field study was undertaken in a prison environment. Issues of control and freedom are highly salient in this setting. Earlier, Hormuth et al. (1977) reported on the relationships between personal variables, expectations of freedoms which should be granted in the institution, and actual behavioral freedoms. Then the actual behavioral freedoms referred to behavior that occurred before the inmates indicated their desired freedoms. This study is concerned with behavior that occurred only after the inmates answered the questionnaire.

3. Subjects were 59 female and 75 male inmates of a Federal Correctional Institution who volunteered to participate in the study.

4. Expectations about life in the institution were assessed by a questionnaire consisting of twelve items. Each item was worded "Should you have a choice about...?" and could be answered on a five-point scale, ranging from "I should have complete choice" to "I should have no choice". The items were added to-

gether to obtain one score, indicating the desire for freedom as related to the institutional life. The correlation of the individual items with the overall score was satisfactory. For some of the further analyses, a median split was obtained.

An additional variable consisted of changes in the release date (which usually was the result of an action taken by the parole board after a punishable incident committed by the inmate). This variable was seen as an impactful actual threat to freedom.

Dependent variables were the trips taken outside the institution. These trips are initiated by a request from the inmate, and can thus be considered active attempts to increase the range of behavioral freedoms. The three dependent variables were trips with a member of the institutional staff, trips taken alone during the day, and trips taken alone involving an overnight stay outside the institution.

The questionnaire was given in the summer of 1976. All other variables are reported for the time from July 1976 to March 1977 (i.e. only after the questionnaire was given). Analyses of variance with Release date change (no/yes) and Freedom (high/low) as independent variables, and the respective number of trips as dependent variables were performed on these data.

5. The interaction between release date change and desired freedom proved significant for the number of trips with a staff member ($F(1,130)=6.8;p=.010$), day trips ($F(1,130)=9.18;p=.003$), and overnight trips ($F(1,130)=4.5;p=.034$). (See Table 1.) The highest number of trips of each kind was found for the subjects who had a change in release date and were initially low in their desire for freedom. A significant main effect was found for changes in release date on the variable day trips ($F(1,130)=6.3;p=.014$). No other main effects were significant.

6. As Table 1 indicates, the pattern of results is the same for all three

variables. The interactions can completely be accounted for by subjects who indicated a low desire for freedoms related to life in the institution and who subsequently experienced a change in their release date.

If concern for freedom can be divided into freedoms related to the institutional life and those related to the outside life, then a change in release date constitutes a threat to a greater proportion of freedom for those who do not desire many institution related freedoms but more outside-related freedoms. A reactance effect, based on the proportion of freedom interpretation (Wicklund, 1974) would then predict reactance resulting from the action of the parole board for those having a low desire for institutional freedoms, whereas the threat to freedom is not sufficient for those more concerned about life in the institution. For them, a smaller proportion of freedom is threatened. This interpretation is at this point speculative because no sufficient information about the proportion of inside- and outside-related freedoms is available.

An alternative explanation relates these data to Wortman & Brehm's (1975) model. For the subjects initially more concerned about their freedoms, an action of the parole board constitutes an impactful loss of control. No further attempts to regain control are then made. Subjects initially low in their attempts to control, however, would now try harder to establish a broader range of activities by applying for more trips of all kinds. The data support this interpretation.

Table 1: Mean values for the dependent variables.

DV: Trips with a staff member

	Freedom	
	High	Low
No	2.8	1.2
Release date change		
Yes	1.0	6.1

DV: Day trips

	Freedom	
	High	Low
No	2.6	1.0
Release date change		
Yes	2.2	7.1

DV: Overnight trips

	Freedom	
	High	Low
No	2.1	.5
Release date change		
Yes	1.5	5.1

Reference Note

Hormuth, S.; Wicklund, R.A.; Dallas, M.; Mabli, J.; Pribble, M. & Hood, R. Freedom in a correctional institution: Relationships between personal variables, expectations, and behavioral freedoms. Southwestern Psychological Association, Fort Worth, Texas, 1977.

References

- Brehm, J.W. A theory of psychological reactance. New York: Academic Press, 1966.
- deCharms, R. Personal causation: The internal affective determinants of behavior. New York: Academic Press, 1968.
- Glass, D.C. & Singer, J.E. Urban stress: Experiments on noise and social stressors. New York: Academic Press, 1972.
- Seligman, M.E.P. Helplessness. San Francisco: Freeman, 1975
- Wicklund, R.A. Freedom and reactance. Potomac, Maryland: Lawrence Erlbaum, 1974.
- Wortman, C.B. & Brehm, J.W. Responses to uncontrollable outcomes: An integration of reactance theory and the learned helplessness model. In L. Berkowitz (ed.) Advances in experimental social psychology, Vol. 8, 277-336. New York: Academic Press, 1975.