

INTERNAL-EXTERNAL CONTROL AND ATTITUDES
TOWARD ENERGY CONSERVATION AND
WARREN COMMISSION REPORT*¹

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SUMMARY

The present investigation examined the relationship between college students' locus of control and attitudes toward energy conservation. It was predicted that the more external orientation would relate to the person's belief that energy resources were controlled by powerful others whose manipulation created energy shortage, and personal conservation would not help the situation. The present study also compared 1977 students' reactions to the Warren Commission Report to those of the sixties, to study changing attitudes among college students. Three hundred forty-seven male and female college students were administered the Rotter I-E scale and a questionnaire that included items dealing with energy and the Warren Commission Report. Analysis of variance supported the hypothesis: males were found to be more internal than females, and those who believed in energy shortage and conservation were more internal than those who believed otherwise. A similar analysis of the responses to the Warren Report showed no significant effects. Comparison of 1977 students to those of the sixties noted significantly more external orientation and increased attitudes of disbelief.

Controversial situations, ambiguous by nature, bring about subjective perceptions and interpretations in individuals in accordance with their preconceived expectations. The energy crisis of the early seventies triggered divided opinions on reasons for the shortage, the roles of petroleum

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companies, and whether related conservation strategies would be effective. The present study investigated the relationship between students' internal-external (I-E) locus of control and their attitudes toward controversial energy issues. It was expected that more external orientation would relate to the belief that energy resources were controlled by powerful others, whose manipulations created shortages, and conservation would not help the situation.

The present study also compared 1977 students' reactions to the Warren Commission Report to those reported by Hamsher *et al.*¹ in the sixties, who found that students with consistent disbelief of the Report were significantly less trusting and more external. Generally speaking, the issues related to Kennedy's assassination are vaguely understood by contemporary college students, and those who kept current with the controversy of the Warren Report may also react differently than reported by Hamsher *et al.*

Students attending lower level psychology classes in Lake Superior State College, Michigan ($N = 133$) and New Mexico State University ($N = 214$) responded to both Rotter's I-E Scale and a questionnaire that included items dealing with energy and the Warren Commission Report (items 3, 4, 5 from Hamsher *et al.*'s questionnaire).

The mean I-E score of all students was 14.04; no difference was found between male and female, Michigan and New Mexico students. Using only consistent responders to energy items [i.e., those who believed that the energy shortage was artificially created by oil companies' manipulation, that conservation would not help the situation ($N = 37$), and those who consistently believed the opposite ($N = 130$)], a 2×2 (2 levels of belief and sex) analysis of variance was performed on I-E scores. Results showed significant sex ($F = 4.74$, $df = 1/163$, $p < .05$) and belief ($F = 4.17$, $df = 1/163$, $p < .05$) effects: males were more internal ($N = 75$, $\bar{X} = 13.15$) than females ($N = 92$, $\bar{X} = 14.86$); those who believed in energy shortages and conservation were more internal ($N = 130$, $\bar{X} = 13.92$) than those who believed otherwise ($N = 37$, $\bar{X} = 14.70$). No interaction was found between sex and belief.

Using those who consistently showed belief or disbelief in the Warren Report, a similar 2×2 analysis of variance was performed which showed no significant effects. Compared to the students in the sixties, as reported by Hamsher *et al.*, twice as many students of 1977 admitted the lack of knowledge concerning issues relating to the Warren Report (36.57% vs 18.63%). Among those 1977 students who acknowledged the Report, a significant decrease from the sixties in belief (13.65% vs 44.69%) and

increase in disbelief (86.35% vs 55.31%) in light of the new evidence showing the Report to be accurate, along with an overall more external orientation (14.04 vs 10.70), supported Wolfe's contention (2) that there might be an increasing alienation and distrust among the college population during the last 10 years.

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