

Chronic Self-Destructiveness and Locus of Control in Cross-Cultural Perspective

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ABSTRACT. Chronic self-destructiveness and external locus of control were significantly correlated in student samples in Hong Kong, India, and the United States. Responses to the Chronic Self-Destructiveness Scale (Kelly et al., 1985) evinced high levels of internal reliability in these samples. The data from Venezuela were the only exception to this pattern of results. The results demonstrate some generalizability of the Chronic Self-Destructiveness Scale across three diverse cultural boundaries.

KELLEY ET AL. (1985) defined chronic self-destructiveness as the tendency to perform behaviors that later reduce positive consequences and increase the probability of experiencing negative ones. A personality measure was designed to tap this construct, resulting in two 52-item scales, one for men and one for women.

Requests for the items, instructions, and scoring key for the Chronic Self-Destructiveness Scale and for reprints should be sent to Kathryn Kelley, Department of Psychology, State University of New York at Albany, Albany, NY 12222.

Four categories of statements constituted the scale: (a) neglecting duties (e.g., "I usually eat breakfast"); (b) succumbing to temptations (e.g., "I do not stay late at social functions when I must get up early"); (c) seeking risky arousal (e.g., "I have done dangerous things just for the thrill of it"); and (d) negative consequences (e.g., "I have frequently fallen in love with the wrong person"). The items were scored in the chronically self-destructive direction depending on the degree of the respondent's agreement or disagreement with each statement.

Among North Americans, the scale has been shown to possess high reliability and validity and to be related to a wide variety of behaviors. For example, those scoring high on the scale reported more cheating on tests, had more traffic violations, rebelled more in adolescence, and postponed a test for cancer later than did those with low scores. In samples of hospitalized patients, high scorers were more frequently found in accident-related and alcoholic wards than in other wards, such as surgical ones.

A stringent test of the applicability of the scale is its generalizability across cultural boundaries, the problem of concern in the present study. The prospect of cross-cultural application suggested the need for variation not only in sample location, but also with respect to three other factors: The internal reliability properties of the Chronic Self-Destructiveness Scale should also persist in the face of sample variability, differences in linguistic translation, and concurrent relationships with another widely used personality scale. Locus of control (Rotter, 1966) was selected as the dimension to fulfill the last requirement because externality and chronic self-destructiveness have covaried reliably in college samples. Thus, it was hypothesized that chronic self-destructives in culturally diverse samples would display a tendency to blame their environment rather than themselves for their experiences.

Method

Subjects

Subjects were from four countries. Sample availability and diversity determined the locations from which participants were drawn. India represented the west Asian segment: Graduate students attending the Indian Institute of Management in Ahmedabad, India, volunteered to respond to the scales during their course on interpersonal dynamics. This sample consisted of 185 men with a mean age of 22.28 years ($SD = 2.51$); only 12 women participated because of the paucity of women receiving management training, with a mean age of 20.80 years ($SD = 1.55$). From an east Asian culture, introductory psychology students attending the Chinese University of Hong Kong participated, including 53 men with a mean age of 20.49 ($SD = 3.19$) and 37 women with a mean age of 19.74 ($SD = 1.09$).

In South America, participants were 36 male (M age = 23.28, SD = 6.40) and 34 female (M age = 19.21, SD = 6.32) undergraduates who were enrolled in introductory psychology at the Central University of Venezuela in Caracas. A North American sample consisted of 33 male (M age = 20.80, SD = 1.84) and 64 female (M age = 21.33, SD = 1.75) students enrolled in an advanced psychology course at the State University of New York at Albany.

Scales

Both the North American and Indian samples responded to the Chronic Self-Destructiveness and the Locus of Control scales in English. South American participants responded to both scales in Spanish. The Hong Kong sample was administered the Locus of Control scale in English and the Chronic Self-Destructiveness Scale in Chinese. Back-translation checked the accuracy of the translation.

Results

The possible range of scores for Locus of Control was 0 to 23, with higher scores representing externality. For chronic self-destructiveness, the potential range of scores was 52 at the low end to 260 at the high, or self-destructive, end. Table 1 presents descriptive data for the four samples. Analyses of variance showed that the four samples did not significantly differ with respect to chronic self-destructiveness ($p > .05$). Locus of control among Venezuelan men and women exceeded that of the other three samples, $F = 4.52$, $p < .01$, according to the Newman-Keuls procedure ($p < .05$). Table 1 also lists correlations between chronic self-destructiveness and external locus of control, which reached accepted significance levels in three out of four sample locations: Indian men, Hong Kong men and women, and men and women in the United States. The Indian female sample was too small to yield a significant correlation, although there was one in the predicted direction. Only the Venezuelan sample did not confirm the prediction. Moreover, slightly lower alpha coefficients also occurred in this sample (.67) compared to the generally higher alphas in the other samples' responses to the chronic self-destructiveness scale ($M = .83$).

Discussion

Associations have been established between chronic self-destructiveness and external locus of control in three out of the four cultures represented in this study. The hypothesized relationship occurred with respect to students attending institutions of higher education in Hong Kong, India, and the United

TABLE 1
Descriptive and Correlational Statistics for Chronic
Self-Destructiveness and Locus of Control

Sample location	Sex	N	Locus of control M	Chronic self-destructiveness		Correlation
				M	Alpha	
India	M	185	8.98 (4.56)	118.50 (19.89)	.84	+ .33**
India	F	12	9.08 (4.12)	123.75 (17.89)	.72	+ .25
Hong Kong	M	53	12.11 (4.39)	132.79 (17.66)	.81	+ .38**
Hong Kong	F	37	12.43 (3.83)	134.84 (18.27)	.86	+ .56**
Venezuela	M	36	17.06 (5.88)	118.33 (17.93)	.67	+ .15
Venezuela	F	34	19.21 (6.32)	116.32 (19.80)	.67	+ .13
USA	M	33	10.34 (5.85)	120.27 (18.08)	.89	+ .37*
USA	F	64	10.37 (4.84)	123.73 (19.74)	.91	+ .33*

Note. Standard deviations are indicated in parentheses.

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$.

States. The diversity in the sources of samples lends added support to the generality of the construct of chronic self-destructiveness. The data also indicate cross-cultural applicability of the construct because alpha coefficients attained acceptable levels of internal reliability.

A puzzling aspect of the results is the lack of the hypothesized correlation in the Venezuelan data. Apparently, no other information about externality in Venezuela is available, according to Hui's (1982) review of cross-cultural work on the control orientation. These respondents expressed the greatest degree of externality compared to the other groups and comparatively lower internal reliability of the Chronic-Self-Destructiveness Scale. Because similarity in externality and reliability of chronic self-destructiveness was observed among the other cultural groups, variables special to the Venezuelan case may have been operating, such as the accelerated economic development of segments of a culture and the beliefs in externality sometimes observed in Central and possibly South America (Reitz & Groff, 1974).

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