TOWARD A FOUR-QUADRANT MODEL OF SELF-CONTROL:
POSITIVE AND NEGATIVE ASPECTS OF ASSERTIVENESS AND YIELDING

Deane H. SHAPIRO, Jr., Ph. D.
Department of Psychiatry and Human Behavior
California College of Medicine
University of California Irvine Medical Center

Eric PEPER, Ph. D.
Center for Interdisciplinary Science
San Francisco State University

Matthew HARR, M. A.
Pacific Graduate School of Psychology

Sybil CARRERE, M. A.
Department of Psychiatry and Human Behavior
University of California Irvine Medical Center
ABSTRACT

Research has proliferated on the clinical and health care applications of self-control strategies such as biofeedback, meditation, behavioral self-management, cognitive therapy, autogenic training. Relatively less attention, however, has been paid descriptively or conceptually to the construct of self-control within which these strategies might be contexted. Based on a previous pilot effort, this study attempted to develop and refine a four-quadrant model of self-control involving both positive and negative aspects of assertiveness and yielding. Words reflecting each of these four dimensions were grouped, and a profile of each quadrant posited. The implications of these dimensions for studying self-control cross-culturally, as well as for developing more precision about the nature of the construct are examined. Finally, implications for future research, as well as for developing a control model of balanced psychological health, are offered.
INTRODUCTION

The past decade has evidenced a new, renewed, and deepening interest in the application of Eastern and Western self-control strategies to a variety of clinical and health care problems (e.g., Pomerleau & Brady, 1979). These techniques, broadly subsumed under the label self-control strategies, include but are not limited to biofeedback (Shapiro, et al, 1981), self-hypnosis (Fromm, 1975), behavioral self-management (Thoreson & Mahoney, 1974; Mahoney & Arnkoff, 1979), meditation (Shapiro, 1980; Hirai, 1975), cognitive therapy (Meichenbaum, 1976), autogenic training (Onda, 1967), guided daydreams (Singer, 1975).

Although most of these techniques have been studied individually, sometimes the techniques are combined with each other, as in the case of biofeedback and autogenic training, as well as recent efforts to combine Eastern meditative strategies with Western behavioral self-control strategies (e.g., Shapiro, 1976, 1978; Shapiro & Zifferblatt, 1976). Unfortunately, however, it appears that efforts to discriminate among competing self-control strategies with clinical problems such as chronic anxiety, hypertension, stress are reaching a plateau (Raskin, 1980; Zuroff et al, 1981; Shapiro, 1982).

Given this plateau, it may be an auspicious time to step back and reassess the very nature of the construct--self-control--which we are studying. Even a brief and cursory review suggests the importance of this construct in disciplines ranging from religion to psychology and in quite disparate cultures (Hadas, 1965; Heath, 1982). And yet, when we look for a definition of the construct, we are struck with a paucity of information (Bandura, 1977; Mischel, 1970; Mahoney & Arnkoff, 1979).
In a previous effort (Shapiro, Note 1), a content analysis of individuals' views of self-control was performed, and six dimensions noted: choice, responsibility, skill, goal, discipline, and awareness. Interestingly, sometimes the goal was cited as an assertive active goal; i.e., stick to and accomplish a task. Other times, however, the goal was more of a yielding, passive, accommodating one; i.e., the ability to adapt and accept whatever comes.

Although historically and culturally, Eastern and Western psychologies have given relatively different emphases to these two goals, both might be considered representative of "self-control". Eastern views of self-control generally involve yielding, acceptance, and letting go (Lao-tze, 1936; Rajneesh, 1982; Suzuki, S., 1976; Suzuki, D. T., 1956), whereas Western views of self-control have historically involved assertiveness and goal-oriented achievement (Gilgen & Cho, 1979; Shapiro, 1978b).

The above two positively valued aspects of self-control are in keeping with the view of Mahoney and Arnkoff (1979) that self-control is socially desirable and occurs from noble ideals, regardless of culture. However, this study wanted to look at whether self-control might also have a negative valence. There were two reasons for looking at negatively valenced findings. The first was that in previous efforts to define self-control, it was found that those individuals who stated that self-control involved a dimension of discipline, also noted negative aspects of self-control such as cold, unemotional, and rigid, suggesting that self-control was not always seen as entirely positively valenced (Shapiro, Note 1). Second, if we look at claims and counter-claims between Eastern and Western psychology, we
often see that because of paradigm conflict, different cultural and philosophical assumptions, each may (correctly or incorrectly) criticize the other (e.g., Walsh, 1980; Shapiro, 1980; Rajneesh, 1982). Eastern self-control is often accused of being synonymous with over passivity, whereas Western self-control is often accused of being too action oriented and excessively goal oriented.

Thus, this study, which was exploratory in nature, sought to ferret out more accurate representations of the positively valenced assertive and yielding dimensions of self-control, as well as the potentially negatively valenced dimensions of self-control in order to see if more precision couldn't be evolved in the development of a four-quadrant model of self-control.

**METHODOLOGY**

**Subjects and Setting.**

Subjects were 43 individuals attending a specialized workshop on Biofeedback and Meditation: An East/West Approach given by the first two authors at a conference on Human Loving and Sexuality in Palo Alto, California. The general conference profile for the attendees was as follows: the mean age for males and females was 38.8 years, 65% were female, 35% male; 46% were married, 18% divorced, 32% single, and the rest in other living arrangements; 43.8% were health care professionals (physicians, psychiatrists, family physicians, psychologists, nurses, social workers); 12% educators; 12% students in the health and healing sciences; and the rest in "other" professions (e.g., law, business, etc.).
Instrument.

An open-ended prompt questionnaire containing a four-quadrant grid requested subjects to list words and phrases that they associated with their own strengths (positive qualities) and weaknesses (negative qualities) along two self-control dimensions: assertiveness (e.g., instrumental, goal setting, ends-oriented, yang, purposeful) and yielding (e.g., letting go, yin, defenseless, open).

INSERT FIGURE ONE ABOUT HERE

Data Analysis.

A total of 329 words were generated for the four quadrants, ranging from a low of 69 words or word groups (Quadrant 4) to a high of 96 words or word groups (Quadrant 2). These 329 words and phrases were collapsed into 105 categories. Since the goal of the study was to generate as many word groupings as possible, words and phrases were collapsed only when there were exact replication, obvious overlap, or when words were so proximal that it was difficult to differentiate between meanings. Rater reliability for this word grouping was 86.4%.

The frequency of each word grouping was then looked at descriptively in two ways: 1) Within quadrant percent. Within quadrant percent refers to the number of times a given word appeared in a specific quadrant, and is expressed as a percent of the total number of people listing words in that quadrant. 2) Across quadrant percent. Across quadrant percent refers to the number of times a word appeared in a given quadrant, expressed as a percentage of the number of times it appeared in all quadrants combined. To be included in our table in a given quadrant, a word had to appear in a specific quadrant more than 50% of the time.
FIGURE 1: The Four-Quadrant Grid

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ASSERTIVENESS</th>
<th>YIELDING</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>POSITIVE QUALITIES</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>QUADRANT 1</td>
<td>QUADRANT 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NEGATIVE QUALITIES</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>QUADRANT 3</td>
<td>QUADRANT 4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Quadrant 1 = Positive Assertiveness
Quadrant 2 = Positive Yielding
Quadrant 3 = Negative Assertiveness
Quadrant 4 = Negative Yielding
RESULTS

For Quadrant 1, assertive positive, 40 individuals generated 94 word groups. Figure 2 lists those word groups which were reported over 50% of the time as being in Quadrant 1. The constellation of adjectives in this quadrant described an individual who is goal oriented, purposeful, self-starting, well organized, decisive, who is able to communicate needs, socially capable, leading, and confident.

In Quadrant 2, yielding positive, 41 individuals generated 96 word groups. The highest frequency groupings for Quadrant 2 reveal the profile of an individual who is adaptable, accepting, flowing, often with reference to others' needs, as well as trusting, letting go, relaxed, patient, and who is compassionate, empathic, listening, sharing, cooperative, and gentle.

For Quadrant 3, negative assertive, 39 individuals generated 70 word groupings. The strongest profile emerging was one of an individual who was manipulating, pushy, and aggressive; an overcontrolling, temperamental, selfish, impatient individual who interrupts, jumps to conclusions, and is too independent, too logical, and too verbal. Another profile emerged, of lesser frequency, and was seemingly unrelated to the first profile: an individual who is nondirected, scatterbrained, indecisive, awed by experts, and afraid to control.

For Quadrant 4, negative yielding, 49 individuals generated 69 word groups. As can be seen from Figure 2, two distinct profiles again emerged. One reveals a profile of a person who yields too much, is manipulated, timid, shy, unwilling to risk, vulnerable, nervous, passive, and ambivalent. The second profile, and one seemingly at variance to the first, is of an individual who is reluctant to change, withholding, closed, and defensive.
Finally, there were some words which appeared interesting, but which didn't have higher than 50% in any quadrant. These words include instrumental (50% positive assertive and 50% negative assertive); intimate, sharing, giving (50% positive assertive and 50% positive yielding); critical (50% negative assertive and 50% negative yielding); and dependent/following (46% positive yielding, 31% negative yielding, and 23% negative assertive).

DISCUSSION

Relatively clear and homogeneous profiles seemed to emerge for the positive yielding and positive assertive quadrants. These profiles appear socially desirable, and seem to have a certain overlap with the literature on male and female sex role psychology (Spence et al, 1975, 1979; Bem, 1981, 1974; Lubinski et al, 1981; Holahan, Spence, 1980). As Bakan (1966) earlier noted, living organisms appear to have both a sense of agency (instrumental, male principle) and a sense of communion (expressiveness, selflessness, female principle). The former appears to overlap considerably with our Quadrant 1, and the latter with our Quadrant 2. Also, many of the qualities are similar to the classical dimensions and discussions between Eastern and Western psychology (Goleman and Epstein, 1982; Walsh, 1980; Suzuki, 1956, Rajneesh, 1982; Shapiro, 1978; Gilgen & Cho, 1979).

The negative profiles appear to provide us with a less homogeneous group. One possible reason to account for this is that the instructions may have been ambiguous. Some individuals may have written down negative qualities of assertiveness or yielding, whereas others might have put weaknesses (or barriers) which would keep them from being assertive or yielding. For example,
if we look at Quadrant 3, negative assertive, we can see that one homogeneous grouping involved words such as manipulating, pushy, aggressive, over-controlling, temperamental, impatient, interrupting, and selfish. This profile may have an interesting overlap with the Type A profile (Friedman and Roseman, 1974; Brunson, et al, 1981; Vickers et al, 1981). The second profile which emerged for negative assertive, and which may be weaknesses or barriers which keep people from becoming assertive, include the following: nondirected, scatterbrained, indecisive, awed by experts, and afraid to control. Although a plausible explanation, further research would need to document and differentiate the two clusters which appear to emerge in this Quadrant 3, negative assertive. Similarly, for Quadrant 4, negative yielding, one homogeneous grouping involved words such as yielding too much, manipulated, timid, shy, unwilling to risk, vulnerable, nervous, passive, ambivalent. The second grouping, which may be weaknesses or barriers which keep people from yielding in a positive sense, included words such as reluctant to change, withholding, closed, defensive, unwilling to risk.

It is interesting to note that if the above post hoc explanation is accurate, qualities which are barriers to positive yielding (Quadrant 2) may be negative assertive qualities (Quadrant 3), and qualities which are barriers to positive assertiveness (Quadrant 1) may be negative yielding qualities (Quadrant 4). Future research, however, will need to determine the exact relationship between these four quadrants. For example, how do these four quadrants relate to our six dimensions of self-control, involving choice, responsibility, awareness, skill, discipline, and goal (Shapiro, Note 1). What is the process by which an individual makes a decision about which quadrant a given word or phrase falls in, or in terms of labeling their own, or other's behavior (cf. Mahoney & Arnkoff, 1979).
Are Quadrants 3 and 4 merely extremes of 1 and 2? Do Quadrants 3 and 4 occur because of exclusive reliance on a single mode of trying to "be in control" in the world? What in fact is the relationship of Quadrants 1 and 2? Are they merely opposites of each other? Do they involve similar skills or quite different skills? If we push the issue one step further, is it possible that Quadrants 1 and 2 may eventually need to be integrated and combined in a balance (Shapiro, 1982a) such as suggested by the classic Hsinhsinming, "When activity is stopped and there is passivity, this passivity is a state of activity," (Blyth, 1976; cf. also the Taoist yin/yang; or the relationship of action in inaction in the Bhagavad Gita, 1964).

Can Quadrants 1 and 2 represent cognitive and behavioral options of self-control as goal and end state, or can they represent self-control as means for achieving other goals? What is the meaning and relationship of these two quadrants to each other, and in and of themselves in terms of means and ends?

Additional refinement is also necessary to insure discreteness between quadrants and greater homogeneity within quadrants. To insure greater discreteness and reliability of quadrants, we may wish to ask experts in Type A health psychology, sex role psychology, and East/West psychology, to rate these words. Finally, research should also look at the multifacetedness of constructs of control which were suggested by this study. This includes not only the four quadrants that we have discussed (active control, yielding control, overcontrol, and too little control), but also phrases generated by the subjects such as: letting go of control and becoming vulnerable; fear of losing control; fear of controlling; fear of being controlled; afraid to control; ability to give over control to another;
too high a need for control. It would be especially important to determine the utility of these profiles and quadrants in understanding differential diagnoses, as described in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual III (APA, 1980).
REFERENCES


*Bhagavad Gita*, Tr. F. Edgerton, Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1964, Chapter 4, Verse 18, Pg. 25.


**NOTE**

Shapiro, D. E. A content analysis of views of self-control: Relations to positive and negative valence in implications for a working definition. Under editorial review.