SITUATION SPECIFIC VIGNETTES AND THE FOUR MODES OF CONTROL

Introduction and Overview

We collected several hundred different questionnaires from individuals attending mental health conferences in order to study explores differences in individuals' self-perception as assertive, and as yielding—both real and "ideal" and how those perceptions relate to perceived attitudinal and behavioral responses to a series of situationally specific and gradated vignettes. We also asked whether the respondents have practiced meditation (to what extent) and and/or have had assertiveness training to see whether that would effect responses.

The research literature is clear that "environment and context" interacts with the "person". Yet it is also clear we have self-conceptions that are less amenable to shifts across environment and situation. In previous research (see the file on the SSCI above) , in response to questions about their sense of control, people sometimes would say "it depends" (on situation, circumstances, and context). Therefore in this study we wanted to pinpoint more specifically the relationship among

> *personality variable of assertiveness and yielding (real and ideal)

> *gradient of situational vignette variable

> *and an individuals' expressed attitudinal and behavioral responses (both within

nuances of a vignette; and across different vignettes)

The two page self-assessment questionnaire on assertive and yielding, is shown below. You might also ask yourself how you would self-assess on the yielding/assertive questions.

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On the following pages, there will be some descriptions of personality charac-
teristics and some open-ended questions that we would like you to answer as a
way of describing yourself. Please take 10 to 20 minutes to answer all ques-
tions and be as honest as possible. There are no right and wrong answers.

A. Please rate yourself overall on the below personality dimensions using a
    7-point scale. Circle one.

    Are you <u>Yielding</u>?   1   2   3   4   5   6   7
                        (Not at all)   (Totally)

    Are you <u>Assertive</u>?   1   2   3   4   5   6   7
                        (Not at all)   (Totally)

    What do you mean by yielding?

    What do you mean by assertive?

B. If the above rating was what you are overall, how would you rate your ideal
    self, that person you would like to be?

    <u>Yielding</u>   1   2   3   4   5   6   7
              (Not at all)   (Totally)

    <u>Assertive</u>   1   2   3   4   5   6   7
              (Not at all)   (Totally)

C. Please rate yourself on the following personality characteristics using the following 7-point scale:

1 -- NEVER OR ALMOST NEVER
2 -- USUALLY NOT
3 -- SOMETIMES BUT INFREQUENTLY
4 -- OCCASIONALLY
5 -- OFTEN
6 -- USUALLY
7 -- ALMOST OR ALMOST ALWAYS

Circle One

Easily Manipulated	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Able to Set Realistic Goals	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Rigid and Inflexible	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Appropriately Assertive without being Tense	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Accepting of Others	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Overly Dependent	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Able to Maintain a Sense of Meaning and Purpose	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Able to be Receptive and Listen Well	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Overcontrolling	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Able to Share Weaknesses	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Wrapped up in Plans, Goals, Future	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Overly Passive	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Present-Centered (Living in Now)	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

D. Do you or have you practiced meditation?_____

If so: How long?_____

How often?_____

What type or school of meditation?_____

E. Have you ever taken a course in assertiveness training?_____

If so, please describe that training:_____

_____

_____

<div align="center">*   *   *</div>

We then offered gradated situations in several different domains and areas and asked individuals how they might normally respond to each situation. These ranged from interpersonal relations (e.g., communication with a significant other over a content issue regarding a task, watering plants); dealing with a boss who asks/demands different levels of tasks (from easy to aversive, to what you perceive as unethical". See below for Table One, a one page overview of the topics and gradations.

<div align="center">

ASSERTIVE YIELDING---SITUATION SPECIFIC

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Series One: Attractive Stranger   *if responses on A-y scale*

      **looking at you frequently (Y-7; B-1)

      **does not notice you (Y-4; BR-8)

      **sees gaze and looks away (Y-1)

      **meets gaze and smiles warmly (Y-10)

Series Two: Road Snarl/Business Appointment

      **15-30 minute delay but still on time (Y-2) (B-6) routine

      **15-30 minute delay and 15-30 min. late (Y-5; B-7) routine

      **indeterminate delay, each minute--=1 later (Y-8; BR-1; B-8)   routine

      **very important, no sense of dealy; each minute = 1 later (Y-11; B-9)

Series Three: Suffering Plants/spouse

      **1 suffering (Y-6; B-2)

      **5 suffering (Y-12)

      **Many suffering (Y-9; BR-7)

      **Not suffering, but not up to your standards (Y-3)

Series Four: Boss

   x asks not difficult task 0-1   x asks favor not difficult 0-4   xdemands not diff 0

   x asks aversive   0-2; B-3; BR-6   x favor--aversive 0-5   xdemands--aversiv

   x asks unethical 0-3   x favor--unethical 0-6   0

                                                                            xdemands--unethic 0

Series Five: Waiter/Waitress

   x medium rare comes well done--waiter BR-3

   x medium rare comes well done--waitress BR-4

MISC. Items

    x casual acquaintance--eager, naive, and mistaken   B-4

    x Making love with new partner--stroking unplesant B-5

    x Two year old child warned, but continues to play near oven BR-2

    x Practicing relaxing and person says you look tense, don't you   BR-5

*   *   *

We wanted to explore how sensitive individuals might be to situational specific shifts as reflected in their mode response flexibility (assertive/change and/or yielding/accepting) depending on the gradation of the situation. When we began to sort and analyze the data, we realized that that there was much promising qualitative data, which helped us in evolving and refining our work on the assessment aspect of Control Therapy (the SCI, and the SCCAS— Control Content Analysis Scales.) For example, 1) Real and Ideal self-perception of themselves on the dimensions of Assertive and Yielding, This is the precursor to the "four modes of control" on the SCI, as well as "satisfaction level (wanting to be more, less, same).2) The use of selective words as a way of testing their applicability to our four mode model, and to see how that related to their responses. 3) Clarifying, defining, and coding individuals' responses to the vignettes in terms of the four modes of control, which became helpful in evolving the Mode Aspects of the Control Content Analysis Scales.

Further, in exploring the answer, we helped evolve what we considered to be "wise" healthy responses to the different vignettes. For example, we used one of the questions from this study in the Control Therapy Training Manual, to explore the idea of different responses to a situation. Before reading the different responses, you might ask yourself how you would respond to this situation (and how that relates to how you described yourself above on the assertive and yielding dimensions.

You and another person (roommate, significant other, spouse) have agreed that he/she will water the plants in your home. You notice that the plants are beginning to wilt. What do you do? (from Control Therapy Training Manual, Module 3.2.4 pp. 175-191)

We might think of this example as an "external Rorschach vignette" in that each of us, based on our control profile and dynamics, may have different responses to the same situation. How would you be feeling? Angry, helpless, frustrated, sad? Are there any "root" issues that

would be accessed (e.g., not able to rely on someone else for help? Feelings of loss—mortality at seeing something "ill"?).

Before proceeding, take a few moments and being as honest as you can, try to imagine the situation, and notice what would be your "natural" (typical, reflexive) response to this situation.

Now, take a look at the responses you gave, and try to classify them in terms of the four quadrant model: positive assertive, positive yielding, negative assertive, negative yielding. In examining your responses, look for "feeling" words and their intensity: e.g., enraged (angry, upset, frustrated concerned); disappointed (sad, helpless). Also look at verbs used by both yourself and others and their "force" ("bully," pressure, demand, insist, state as non-negotiable, persuade, urge, request, suggest, ask, encourage, coax, cajole, invite, offer [e.g., "how can I support you?"] plead, beg).

As noted, in this study, we examined the relationship between people's control profiles and the nature of their responses to a series of gradated situations (e.g., your boss asks <demands> that you do something that is reasonable <of questionable ethics>. How do you respond?). Below are some subjects' answers generated in response to the situation about watering plants:

Take charge once again and do it myself.
Tongue lashing on behalf of the plants.
Call their attention to it, and make decisions about future of plants and "other."
Ask partner if he'd like more instructions on their care.
Say that I want nice plants around but don't want to maintain them myself.
   If he doesn't care, I'll get rid of them. And him?
Why are you acting so passive/aggressive? If you don't want the plants, say so.
   Don't just let them die.
I'd hire someone to water them.
Let the plants die, throw them away, and say nothing –no direct communication--
      he'll get the message.

How would you frame these responses in terms of the four quadrants? Note, there can be integration both of the positive assertive and positive yielding modes (dongjing), but there can also be an integration of the two negative modes: it's called passive aggressive (for example, see the last response above, which, while "doing nothing" (quadrant four) is actually a very conscious and destructive controlling action which causes the plant's death (quadrant three) as a way to send a message. Once you have generated a couple of your own responses, please proceed.

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This present work was an early study looking at ways to develop some aspect of the Control

Inventory, including definitions of assertiveness and yielding; (including positive and negative

aspects; "real and ideal" self-assessment, and different words reflecting the modes. The study

also assessed individuals' sensitivity and response flexibility to different gradated   situation. As

is clear from the discussion of Control Therapy, learning to recognize nuances in a situation,

and having the cognitive, behavioral, and emotional flexibility to match one's response

skillfully, is an important aspect of psychological learning. Exploring these vignettes was

helpful in refining and wrestling with what might be thought of as the "wisest" response to a

given situation. [1] As you peruse the different vignettes and responses, note what you feel is the

"wisest" way to proceed.

We also realized that some individual's assessment of their behavior, which they might label

as appropriately (positive) assertive) +A) , or appropriately (positive) yielding +Y, did not

always match our views. For example, would you say that "I would let the plants die" is positive

yielding? Or that "giving a tongue lashing" is positive assertive? This discrepancy became the

basis for the "rater disagreement" in the Control Content Analysis Scales."

In the attached material, we explore the results from each of the different vignette series, In

each series, we provide case examples of individual differences in responding to the same

prompt, and of a specific individual across gradations of the vignette. We also offer responses

categorized according to the four modes of control (Positive, assertive, positive yielding,

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[1] Although we didn't know the word at the time, we have subsequently introduced the Chinese concept of "dongjing"—a word that means the "best" strategy (combining "yin" and "yang" in a nuanced and appropriately balanced way for a given situation" and with no more "yang" than is needed for a given situation. In Taoism, "dongjing" (forms) comes after xujing (the quiet, centered place, of emptiness, before forms).

negative assertive, and negative yielding) and end each vignette series with questions and suggestions for future research.

Since these initial efforts, we have developed a more psychometrically sophisticated way to measure the four modes of control (see the SCI Manual), but the basic questions of self-identity on these modes, and a person's flexibility in skillfully and wisely becoming aware of and adapting to different situation specific gradients, we believe, is still quite important. Cleary these skills are essential for each of us in gaining a skillful positive sense of control as we navigate different domains of life. Future research could refine the responses by age of respondent (are their response shifts over time) and by gender.

We hope that this preliminary work "message in a bottle" might spark interest in some to refine and extend this work

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Please click on each of the vignette series as follows:

- Introduction and Overview
- Vignette Series:
    - Watering Plants
    - Attractive Stranger
    - Love Making
    - Expertise Stress
    - Child Near Stove
    - Waiter Waitress
    - Boss
    - Freeway: Being Stuck
- Responses across cases and vignettes