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## CULTURAL DEPRIVATION, IRRATIONAL BELIEFS AND THE SELF-CONCEPT

In recent years, parents, educators and behavioral scientists have become aware of the growing number of children being classified as behavior problems in the schools. The phenomenon of a large number of such behavior problems is especially evident within the urban school population. Many pupils enrolled in metropolitan, city center areas, have been classified as "disadvantaged" by educators because of the pupils' "lack of cultural experience" as defined by middle class norms. Many of these so-called culturally deprived or culturally disadvantaged youth come from homes in which the adults have a minimal level of education and social values that are different from those held by the majority of the population.

There is an obvious need for researchers to provide a better understanding of these culturally deprived pupils who have difficulty meeting behavior standards in school. These children see little value in the formal academic routines of our schools and, having been humiliated by failure, have developed hostility toward school authorities (Watson, 1962). Large numbers of pupils in this classification are a major concern of the schools because of the disciplinary and learning problems they cause.

Since problems in behavior have long been recognized as being related to *emotional difficulties*, the focus of this investigation is on emotional adjustment. That the relationship between the emotions and behavior is important in understanding adjustment is a well documented observation (Cobb, 1950; Ellis, 1962; Horney, 1950; Rogers, 1951; Schacter & Singer, 1962).

The question this investigation attempted to answer was: Are there differences between the emotional status of culturally deprived pupils who present "no behavior problems" in the school, and of those who find themselves labelled as "behavior problems?"

There is ample support from both theoretical and empirical literature that cognitions and emotions have a close relationship. Schacter and Singer (1962) demonstrated in their experiment that the individual labels an emotional state in terms of cognitions available to him. Similarly, Ellis' (1962) theory of Rational Emotive Psychotherapy offers a system of relating cognition and emotion. Ellis explains that thinking takes the form of self talk, or internalized sentences.

Ellis (1962) has outlined eleven major illogical and irrational beliefs which he suggests are presently ubiquitous in Western civilization. An example of one of these irrational beliefs is the idea that one should be thoroughly competent, adequate, and achieving in all possible respects if one

is to consider oneself worthwhile. The main goal and purpose of life is achievement, or success. One is worthless if one is incompetent. Ellis' rational replacement is that it is better to accept oneself as an imperfect creature, who has definite human limitations and fallibilities; to consider oneself worthwhile whether or not one is competent or achieving.

Ellis (1962) points out that his theory is closely related to phenomenological and existential approaches to human behavior such as that of Combs and Snygg (1959). Ellis, and Combs and Snygg hold that it is rarely the stimulus which gives rise to human emotional reaction, but instead, it is usually the individual's beliefs regarding, attitudes toward, or interpretation of the stimulus which actually lead to his reaction. Both Ellis, and Combs and Snygg are concerned with cognitions. Central in phenomenological theory is the self-concept. The self-concept is formed on the basis of each individual's unique perceptions or beliefs about himself. The self is an all important concept in determining behavior. In self-theory terms positive self-concepts lead to positive or adequate behavior adjustment while negative self-concepts lead to negative and less adequate behavior adjustment (Horney, 1950; Rogers, 1951).

In the present study, it was hypothesized that the stream-oriented ( $S_D$ ) group have significantly more irrational beliefs than the stream-disoriented ( $S_O$ ) group. It was also hypothesized that the stream-oriented ( $S_D$ ) group have significantly lower self-concept than the  $S_O$  group. The  $S_D$  group, for the purposes of the study, were defined as those who had a record of serious disciplinary behavior which included such patterns as truancy; overly aggressive acts such as fighting; hi-jacking lunches or money; stealing; and interfering with the teacher's discipline in such ways as uncontrolled comments, abusive or profane language in the school, open or defiant resistance to peers, teachers or administrators.

## METHOD

### *Subjects*

The sample consisted of two groups of fourteen year old boys selected from public school classes of the School District of Philadelphia. The boys in each group were selected from low socio-economic neighborhoods. No boy was included who had an I.Q. score lower than 80. The selection of boys in the stream-disoriented or  $S_O$  group was from three disciplinary schools. Every boy in this sample had at least three serious behavior incidents precipitating his placement in a disciplinary school. The selection of boys in the stream-oriented or  $S_D$  group was made from boys in attendance at three junior high schools, located in the same low socio-economic area in Philadelphia. The sample was not random, but was made on the basis of a school record containing no evidence in the boy's entire school history of a failing rating in cooperation or deportment. In addition, no students who had ever been referred for disciplinary purposes were selected. Academic standing was not considered.

The sample of subjects classified as  $S_D$  numbered 102. The sample of subjects classified as  $S_O$  numbered 67. The total sample numbered 169.

### *Instruments and Data Collection*

The following measures were administered to all the subjects in groups of thirty or less, within the school attended:

California Test of Personality (Intermediate)  
 Socio-Economic Index  
 Self-Concept Scale  
 I-I Inventory

The California Test of Personality was administered to the pupils in the two sample groups to lend supportive evidence to the selection and grouping of pupils in S<sub>D</sub> and S<sub>O</sub> categories. The California Test of Personality is organized around the concept of life adjustment. The test yields scores for personal adjustment, social adjustment and total adjustment. The results of the administration enabled a more precise comparison of the two groups. These results were then subjected to a *t* test of difference of means. By this procedure, the arbitrary designation of S<sub>D</sub> behavior and S<sub>O</sub> behavior was checked to determine if these dichotomies actually existed apart from behavior. The means and standard deviations were calculated for each group and are presented in Table 1 with *t* test results.

TABLE 1  
 Difference Between Means of the Two Groups  
 on the California Test of Personality.

Variable	S <sub>D</sub> Group		S <sub>O</sub> Group		<i>t</i> Ratio	Significance
	Mean	S.D.	Mean	S.D.		
Personal Adjustment	56.69	13.72	64.40	11.45	3.72	<i>p</i> < .001
Social Adjustment	54.89	14.89	66.51	12.81	5.304	<i>p</i> < .001
Total Adjustment	111.68	26.01	130.97	21.63	5.010	<i>p</i> < .001

Support was thus gained to suggest that the S<sub>D</sub> and S<sub>O</sub> subjects were not only clearly different in behavioral terms but that they were also distinctly different in personality adjustment.

As indicated earlier the two groups used in this study were selected from similar low income neighborhoods. The Socio-Economic Index was used as an objective check. After finding that the variances were homogeneous, the results of the Socio-Economic Index were subjected to a *t* test of difference of means for a comparison. The means and standard deviations were calculated for each group and are presented in Table 2 with *t* test results.

TABLE 2  
 Difference Between Means of the Two Groups  
 On Socio-Economic Index

S <sub>D</sub> Group		S <sub>O</sub> Group		<i>t</i> Ratio	Significance
Mean	S.D.	Mean	S.D.		
10.50	3.29	11.18	3.17	1.32	<i>n.s.</i>

The two groups thus can be considered as coming from similar socio-economic backgrounds.

To measure beliefs the Hoxter abridgement of Zingle's original Irrational Ideas Inventory (I-I Inventory) was used. The original instrument developed by Zingle (1965) contains 122 items which attempt to measure

Ellis' eleven Irrational Ideas. The total score is an indication of the degree to which the subject possesses irrational ideas. The Hoxter<sup>1</sup> version of the Irrational Ideas Inventory is shorter than the original test because Hoxter took only those items which measured the seven irrational ideas considered to be appropriate for children. Satisfactory reliability and validity for the unabridged version of the test have been reported by Sanche (1968), Fox (1969), Taft (1968), McPhail (1969), Davies (1970), and Allen (1970).

## RESULTS

An analysis of covariance, using socio-economic status and intelligence as covariates was performed to test the hypotheses. Means and adjusted means of the two groups are shown in Table 3.

TABLE 3  
Means and Adjusted Means of Irrational Ideas Scores for  
The Stream Disoriented and Stream Oriented Groups

Group	N	Means	Adjusted Means
S <sub>D</sub>	102	137.35	136.36
S <sub>O</sub>	67	115.99	117.50
Difference		21.36	18.86

<sup>1</sup>The rationale for the I-I Inventory (abridged form) and the test itself can be obtained by writing Hoxter. A copy of the original I-I Inventory can be obtained from Zingle.

A summary of the analysis of covariance is presented in Table 4.

TABLE 4  
Summary of Analysis of Covariance of Irrational Ideas Scores of the  
Stream Disoriented and Stream Oriented Groups, using  
Socio-Economic Status and Intelligence as covariates.

Source of Variation	df	MS	Adjusted F	Significance
Between Groups	1	8641.76	23.48	$p < 0.001$
Within Groups	165	368.07		

It is clearly evident from Table 4 that the first hypothesis is confirmed. The S<sub>D</sub> group possessed significantly more irrational ideas than did the S<sub>O</sub> group.

The second hypothesis predicted lower self-concept scores in the S<sub>D</sub> group. Means and adjusted means of the two groups are shown in Table 5.

TABLE 5  
Means and Adjusted Means of Self-Concept Scores for the  
Stream Disoriented and Stream Oriented Groups

Group	N	Means	Adjusted Means
S <sub>D</sub>	102	78.03	78.02
S <sub>O</sub>	67	81.09	81.10
Difference		3.06	3.08

A summary of the analysis of covariance is presented in Table 6.

**TABLE 6**  
 Summary of Analysis of Covariance of Self-Concept Scores of the Stream Disoriented and Stream Oriented Groups, using Socio-Economic Status and Intelligence as covariates.

Variation Source of	<i>df</i>	<b>MS</b>	<i>F</i> Adjusted	Significance
Between Groups	1	230.76	2.46	<b>n.s.</b>
Within Groups	165	93.66		

It is clearly evident from inspection of Table 6 that the difference between the adjusted means is not significant. The prediction that the S group would have significantly lower self-concept scores therefore was not substantiated.

**DISCUSSION**

The finding of this study, which supports Ellis' formulation of a relationship between negative emotion and irrational ideas should be of important interest to educators, counselors and psychologists who are concerned with pupils who have trouble with behavior in school.

Ellis (1962) has theorized that man's psychological disturbances are largely the result of his thinking illogically or irrationally. It seems reasonable to suggest that pupils in the S<sub>D</sub> group, therefore, can be helped in the way Ellis prescribes by showing them, in a therapeutic situation that:

- (a) Their difficulties largely result from distorted perception and illogical thinking; and
- (b) There is a relatively simple, though work requiring method of ordering their perception and reorganizing their thinking so as to remove the basic cause of their difficulties (Ellis, 1962, p. 36).

The failure to confirm the second hypothesis is not easy to explain: Whether or not one could conclude that this study provides conclusive evidence that S<sub>D</sub> fourteen-year old boys from low socio-economic districts have self-concepts which are no less negative than S<sub>O</sub> fourteen-year old boys from low socio-economic districts is not clear. However, it does lend at least partial support to the idea that a rational-emotive approach is likely to be a more appropriate approach to counseling these subjects than is a counseling approach based on self-theory.

A line of reasoning with regard to the second hypothesis that could be followed might go somewhat as follows: It is not unusual in a large urban setting to find completely homogeneous groupings of low socio-economic levels in schools and neighborhoods. Such schools often have enrollments of two or three thousand students. The neighborhoods they come from are more populous than many small cities. The reinforcement of prevailing values tends to establish a greater acceptance of group standards and ideals because these S<sub>D</sub> students are in constant association with S<sub>O</sub> students whose socio-economic backgrounds are no different from their own. They may not, under these conditions develop feelings of differences with respect to their self-concept as compared to the self-concept of their peers in the stream oriented group. Conversely, where S<sub>D</sub> pupils form a minority in a city, or town, perhaps their self-concepts might tend to be under a degree of self-scrutiny because they are more likely to associate with persons where socio-

economic background and values are different from their own. It seems reasonable to predict, therefore, that in these circumstances  $S_D$  individuals might report lower self-concepts. Whether or not self-concepts of  $S_D$  urban groups are different from similar  $S_D$  groups in smaller cities or townships, is a problem which might profitably be attacked in another research.

The findings that the  $S_D$  subjects were so clearly different from the  $S_O$  subjects in behavior, personality adjustment, and possession of irrational beliefs, but not in self-concept offers an exciting challenge. As the present writers see it, the challenge involves a more comprehensive exploration of the self-concepts of these youngsters.

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## L'APPAUVRISSEMENT CULTUREL, LES CROYANCES IRRATIONNELLES ET LE CONCEPT DU MOI

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L'étude avait pour but d'examiner les différences émotives entre deux groupes d'étudiants défavorisés au plan culturel: ceux qui avaient été catégorisés comme ayant des problèmes de comportement et ceux qui n'avaient pas manifesté de tels problèmes. En se basant sur la théorie d'Ellis, on a formulé l'hypothèse que les étudiants ayant des problèmes de comportement (i.e. ayant un dossier disciplinaire peu reluisant) exprimeraient significativement plus de croyances irrationnelles que les étudiants sans problème de discipline. On a aussi formulé cette deuxième hypothèse que les étudiants ayant des problèmes de comportement ou de discipline auraient une perception d'eux-mêmes plus défavorable que celle des étudiants de l'autre groupe.

L'échantillon était constitué de 169 garçons de 14 ans. Les résultats ont corroboré la première, mais non la deuxième hypothèse.

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