The Effect of Early Labor Market Experience 
Upon Internal-External Locus of Control 
Among Young Male Workers

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This study examined the influence of some personal and labor market factors on changes in internal-external control among young male workers. Utilizing 960 respondents from the National Longitudinal Surveys of Labor Market Experience's national sample for young men, multiple regression analysis, and an abbreviated version of the Rotter Internal-External Control Scale, this study found that labor market success, race, and employment in the private sector enhance feelings of internal control during the transition between school and work.

INTRODUCTION

Ages 16-24 often mark the transition from school to work for many young workers. Participation in the labor market during this period is all too often characterized by high unemployment and turnover rates and low wages at jobs conferring little responsibility or mobility. 2 This combination of low-paying jobs providing few opportunities for career development is often critical in preventing young workers from developing an appreciation of labor market work and experiencing long-term upward mobility (Stevenson, 1978).

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2 For 1978 the national unemployment rate was 6%. For those 16-19 years of age, the unemployment rate was 16.3%; for those 20-24 years of age, the rate was 9.5%. For Black teenagers, the unemployment rate was 36.3%.

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Within the framework of social learning theory, internal-external locus of control refers to the degree to which an individual feels that the outcome of events are contingent upon his own actions or relatively permanent characteristics (internal control) or upon fate, luck, or chance (external control). A large literature on internal-external locus of control, summarized in the papers of Rotter (1966), Lefcourt (1966, 1972) and Joe (1971), has shown that internal control, or personal efficacy, is positively related with academic aspirations and performance, efficient utilization of information, concern for skill development and upward mobility, and willingness to delay gratification. At the same time, Lefcourt (1972) cautiously suggests a "theoretically probable relationship between increased effectiveness and increased perception of personal control. As persons successfully cope with immediate difficulties, they do seem to experience an increase in perceived control" (p. 31). The desirability of internal control is thus seen as having practical and policy-oriented implications.

It seems relevant, therefore, to investigate the factors which affect an individual's internal-external locus of control during his early working years. Specifically, this paper investigates the hypothesis that an individual's internal-external locus of control is affected by certain labor market and personal characteristics during the transition from school to work.

METHOD

Subjects and Data

The sample consists of 960 young men between the ages of 14-24 in 1966 who were drawn from the young men's sample of the National Longitudinal Surveys (NLS) of labor market experience. These respondents include only young men for whom a complete Rotter Internal-External Control Scale was available in both 1968 and 1971, who had completed their formal schooling by 1968, and who worked at least 35 hours per week in both 1968 and 1971. In 1968 the average age for the entire sample was 21 years. Begun in 1966, NLS data sets contain detailed personal and work histories of approximately 5000 young men (3500 Whites and 1500 Blacks). National Longitudinal Survey data, and longitudinal data in general, have two valuable properties: (1) the data measure or describe characteristics of individuals or groups of individuals at two or more points in time, and (2) the data permit an analysis of how these characteristics are related over time (Parnes et al., 1969, p. 5). With respect to young men, NLS data are particularly useful for understanding the transition from

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