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Abstract

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"The Effects of Sex, Socio-Economic Status, and
Parental Control on Children's Resistance to
Temptation"

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Resistance to temptation has been submitted to a number of studies, some of which dealt with the effects of sex, socio-economic status (SES) and parental control on resistance to temptation. The results of those studies were unsettled and contradictory. As for sex, for example, some studies showed that girls surpassed boys in resistance to temptation (Ward and Furrhach, 1968), (Whiteman and Kosier, 1964), (Walsh, 1967), (Meddinner, 1966), while other studies didn't show any difference between boys and girls (Eisne, 1972), (Grinder, 1964), (Greenglass, 1972). On the other hand, many studies indicated that the moral judgement of low SES children tends to develop slower than that of higher SES children (Boehm and Nass, 1962), (Hoffman, 1970). The results of studies dealing with parental control were also contradictory. Some of them showed the superiority of restrictive and punitive methods of control (Symonds, 1939), (Burton, Maccoby and Allinsmith, 1961), (Walsh, 1968). (Greenglass, 1972); While others indicated the superiority of permissive methods (Gutkin, 1975), (Grinder, 1962), (Lavoie and Looft, 1972).

Hence, this study has tried to assess the effects of these variables (Sex, SES, and parental control) on the children's resistance to temptation, defined here as " the capacity to

refrain from morally reprehensible behavior when motivated to engage in it, either in the presence of others or alone".

(Wright, 1971, p. 19). The two measures used for measuring resistance to temptation in this study were frequency and latency.

A parental - control- questionnaire and an SES information sheet were given to 8-10 years- old children in eight randomly chosen elementary schools in Amman. After the questionnaire and the sheet had been filled by the parents and brought back, 120 Ss were randomly chosen to represent high and low SES on the one hand, and restrictive and permissive control on the other. Determination of children's SES was based on information about the family's total income, parent's jobs and education, and place of residence.

This study has been designed to test the following hypotheses:

1. Children of high socio-economic status resist temptation significantly more than children of low socio-economic status.
2. Children who were brought up under punitive methods of control will resist temptation significantly more than those brought up under permissive methods.
3. There will be no significant differences in resistance to temptation between girls and boys.

In order to assess the effects of the independent variables on resistance to temptation as a dependent variable, each S was submitted to an individual test situation where he was asked to play a game with some specific rules. The game

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was designed in such a way that the S could not get a reward unless he transgressed the rules of the game. A one-way-mirror separated the experimental room from another one used by the experimenter to observe and record down the S's transgressive behavior.

Three-way analysis of variance has been used in analysing the results of this study. The results that indicated high SES subjects showed higher resistance to temptation than low SES subjects. The difference was, however, significant on the frequency measure only. This finding supports the first hypothesis of this study. The superiority of high SES in resistance to temptation was explained on the basis of the value given by each group to the reward. It is generally assumed that children of low SES value the reward more so than those of high SES, since it is believed that in their homes, low SES children rarely receive material rewards for their behavior.

No significant differences have been found out between boys and girls on either of the two measures used in this study.

As for parental control, children whose parents used punitive methods in bringing them up resisted temptation significantly more than those whose parents used more permissive methods. The difference was significant on both measures of resistance to temptation. This finding supports the second hypothesis. It was explained on the basis that children at this age (8-10 years) are in need of some restrictiveness and punishment so as to adhere to moral values, and that permissive methods alone don't suffice for this purpose except at a later stage of their lives.