CONTENTS

Introduction

SYMPOSIUM

TOW ARD THE FUTURE OF PSYCHOLOGICAL COUNSELLING IN EUROPEAN HIGHER EDUCATION

Convenors: Declan Aherne, University of Limerick, Ireland

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The 1990's have witnessed a significant increase in the development of counseling services within third level institutions in Europe. Sadly, these developments are negligible in comparison to the U.S. situation, where service development and research in Student affairs continue to prosper.

From within Europe there is slowly emerging a body of research and a group of researchers dedicated to examining the issues faced by today's students.

Significantly the researchers involved in this task are primarily people who are working in the field of Student Affairs. These people are strategically close enough to students to gain a genuine understanding of student needs.

This symposium is a further step towards establishing the significance to research with students in its own right than treating students as simply a convenient and captive audience to research.

STUDENTS IN TRANSITION: A LONUDINAL INVESTIGATION OF THE IMPACT OF PERCEIVED SUPPORT AND COPING RESOURCES ON THE WELL BEING OF UNDERGRADUATES IN THE PROCESS OF ADJUSTMENT TO HIGHER EDUCATION.

Susan Lindsay, Dublin Institute of Technology, Ireland.

The link between psychosocial factors and psychological well being has received considerable attention in the literature to date. In the past decade, research efforts have specially focused on detennining the mechanisms by which support and coping resources may affect psychological functioning and consequently an individual's ability to cope with stressful encounters. The transition to higher education provides a prime opportunity to study these salient processes as well as preventive interventions based on the development of strong support networks and effective coping skills. This study focused longitudinally on investigating patterns of support appraisal and coping among a sample of undergraduates over a two year period. Findings from the study were oriented towards developing interventions designed to enhance support resources and promote coping strategies that can operate as psychological buffers in stressful situations.

A longitudinal study of the impact of appraisal, coping and support on the well being of undergraduates in the process of transition to Higher Education

5th European Psychological Congress July 1997

By Dr Susan Lindsay

My intention in this paper is to provide a flavour of specific aspects of my research study focusing specifically on patterns of appraisal and coping and how these factors may influence the well-being of students over a two year period. The paper will commence with a short background to the study, followed by a detailing of the main aims and a brief review of the theoretical background of two of the main variables, which were under investigation. This will be followed by a short description of the methodology of the study and concluding with a review of some the findings and recommendations for future studies.

The study was a two-wave longitudinal study designed to investigate the impact of stressors, stressor appraisal, coping and support processes on the well being of undergraduates in the process of transition to the Dublin Institute of Technology. College students were selected, firstly because, as Tanck and Robbins (1979) undergraduates are a stressed population. Secondly, as Pennebaker et al. (1990) noted, the transition to college provides a prime opportunity to study salient processes, such as coping and support as well as to implement preventive interventions based on their development of strong social networks and effective coping skills. The literature in this area supports the view that entering college can mark the beginning of a period of significant educational, vocational, personal and social changes. Many new students are faced with what Ryle (1966) called an "abrupt alteration in status from a

position of relative independence on parents and control by teachers, to a position where they enter into a community with new freedom and responsibilities and where the peer pressure can be quite extreme" (p.141 }. Some examples of the complex challenges/demands which undergraduates experience at this time include separation from home and parents, new more challenging academic demands, forming new relationships, uncertainty about personal and sexual identity, career uncertainties etc. Many of these demands affect both traditional and non-traditional students.

The transition to higher education is, however, not only characterised by the need to adapt to new and unfamiliar changes within a new environment but is also characterised by changes within the individual which Drum (1980} described as "developmental expansiveness". Ideally, many new students experience the stress of adjusting to college as a challenge and are left with a sense of competency, hope and an increased capacity to learn but some students experience considerable distress which can impact upon their academic and psychological functioning. There are potentially multiple factors which may engender psychological well being among undergraduates at this time, but gaining a perspective on the principles governing development of appraisal, coping and support processes may help to increase our understanding of what Morril termed " the forces swirling within the individual which affect his/her behaviour and judgement " (p.14}. An insight into these processes may also help in the early identification of vulnerable students who may be at risk of becoming distressed and/or withdrawing from higher education.

Aims of study

The study had three main aims. Firstly, it sought to identify the types of stress experienced by undergraduates in year 1 and year 2, how these stressors were appraised by students and the impact of stressor appraisal, support and coping resources upon their psychological well-being. Secondly, It examined differences in patterns of change in stressor, stressor appraisal, support and coping from year 1 to year 2, with a view to ascertaining the impact of these processes on the well being of the subjects as they progressed through their first year and into their second year. Thirdly, the study aimed to identify individuals or subsets of the total sample who may have become distressed in their second year and to examine the degree to which stressor appraisal, coping and support processes occurring in the first year might determine or predict the distress and/or withdrawal from higher education.

2. Theoretical approaches to appraisal and coping

A review of the literature revealed that there were three main theoretical approaches to the conceptualisation of coping. These are as follows:

1. Person centred approach or the personality approach
This approach posits that particular personal qualities and characteristics dispose the person to cope in certain ways that either impair or facilitate the person's ability to cope with stressful encounters. The personality theorists also argued that coping remains relatively fixed across time and circumstances. Critics of this approach argued that it underestimates the complexity and variability of actual coping efforts
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2. Situational-based approach
The situational approach posited that the type of strategies individuals use to cope with problems depend heavily on environmental demands or the type of problem or situation faced. In other words, how individuals cope will depend

upon the nature of the stressful experience. This approach has produced many classical works, for example, Lifton's (1968) study of survivors of Hiroshima, Critics have argued that that this approach is too simplistic and that frequently people who believe they may do one thing in a situation actually do another.

3. Cognitive Approach

The cognitive approach dramatically changed the way coping was conceptualised. This theory, which forms the foundation of the study, places emphasis primarily on conscious processes and led to the development of the cognitive theory of stress and coping. The cognitive theory of stress and coping was set forth by Magda Arnald (1960) and elaborated by Lazarus and Folkman (1984). Coping was defined as the "constantly changing cognitive and behavioural efforts to manage specific external and/or internal demands that are appraised as taxing or exceeding the resources of the person" (p.141). Essentially, the theory was process-oriented rather than trait-oriented and is concerned with what the person actually thinks or does in a specific context.

Lazarus and Folkman (1984) also distinguished three types of cognitive appraisal, which are as follows:

(a) Primary appraisal

In primary appraisal, the person evaluates whether he/she has anything at stake in this encounter. Events can be appraised as threatening when they involve harm/loss and challenging when they may involve positive outcomes. Both have implications for well being.

(b) Secondary appraisal, which is defined as the person's evaluation of his/her resources and options to deal with a loss, threat or challenge.

(c) Reappraisal was described by Lazarus and Folkman (1984) as a changed appraisal based on new information from the environment and/or person. Sometimes they are the result of coping efforts.

Coping strategies

The conceptualisation of coping as a dynamic process also led to delineation of coping strategies that have the potential to change in response to demands by the person or environment. Lazarus and Folkman (1984) emphasised that no one strategy is inherently better than another but the efficacy or

appropriateness of a strategy is "determined only by its effects in a given encounter and its effects in the long term" (p.134). They distinguished two types of problem-focused and emotion-focused coping. They referred to problem solving functions as actions designed to improve stressful situations by changing the environment while emotional -focused coping was described as regulating emotional states that may accompany the stressor. Coping strategies have also been categorised as approach oriented (towards threat) versus avoidance oriented (away from threat (Billings and Moos, 1981).

Coping and Outcomes

A great deal of research effort has also been directed at investigating the relationship between types of coping strategies and various mental health outcomes. For example, some studies have found that problem -focused coping decreases emotional distress, and emotion -focused coping increases it (Felton & Revenson, 1984; Mitchell, Cronkite, & Moos, 1983, Mitchell & Hodson, 1983) Mullen and Suls (1982) found, however, that avoidance strategies were more effective in reducing emotional distress in the short term, while approach strategies were more effective over the long term.

Later theorists argued the importance of being able to use a wide range of strategies. These theorists stressed that over utilization of particular strategies could increase distress.

Selection of thesis model for present study

A review of the literature revealed that the relationships between stressor appraisal, support, coping and well being are extremely complex. The complexity is also increased by the awareness that there are potentially multiple factors, which may engender psychological distress among undergraduates, some, of which may be the result of prior vulnerabilities. Given this complexity, it was necessary to select and use a psychological model to help guide the study of the factors that may determine well being among this population. The conceptualization of stress, support, appraisal and coping, which forms the framework of this research study, is based on the

model shown in figure 1 below. This model is adapted, with some
modifications form the transactional model of stress and coping developed by
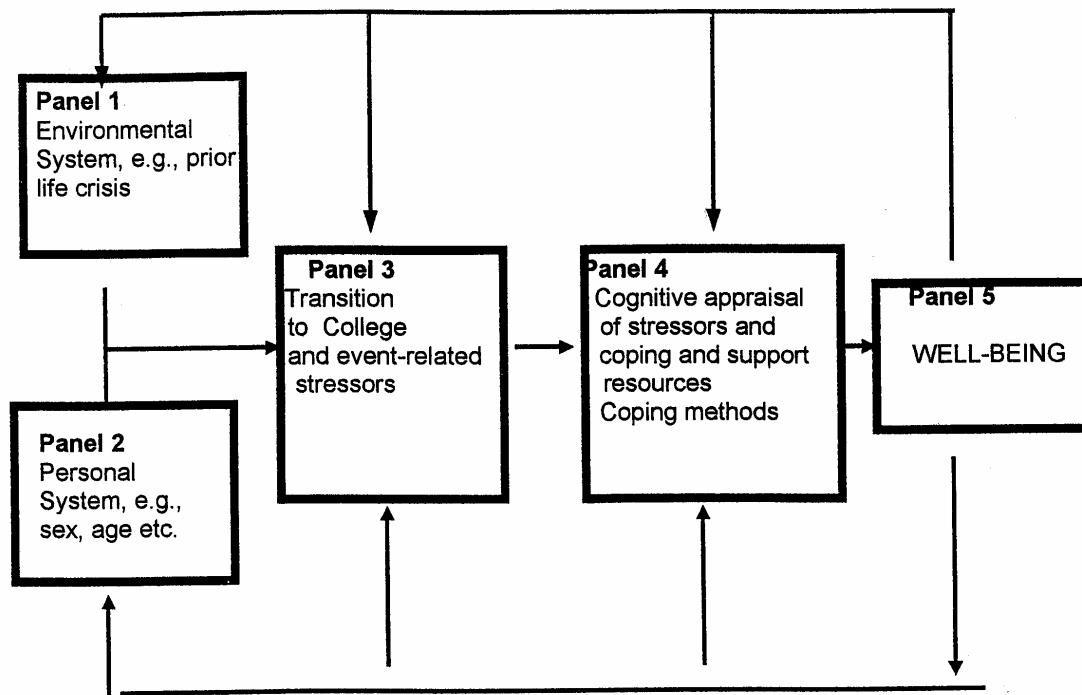Moos and Schaefer (1993)

Figure 1.1 : Schematic diagram of conceptual framework for study

The environmental system (panel 1) is composed of ongoing life stressors,
e.g., separation of parents, which the individual may have experienced before
entering third level. Panel 2 is composed of the personal system which
includes an individual socio-demographic characteristics, personal
characteristics, e.g.,social and problem solving skills. These are the
characteristics that an individual brings to the stress interaction.
This model is set within the context of transition to third level (Panel 3) which
can give rise to event related stressors which can be unique to a third level
environment. Some of these stressors have the source in their new environment, e.g, new
academic pressures, while others may be triggered or aggravated by the demands of the
transition to college, e.g. family conflicts.
Panel 4 is composed of cognitive appraisal. For the purposes of this study, the
three appraisal variables which are considered to be of importance are

appraisal of severity of stressor, threat, challenge, control and evaluation of coping resources. Panel 4 also includes cognitive appraisal of support or perceived support which, for the purposes of this study, is defined as the perception or appraisal that assistance is or could become available from significant others (Thoits, 1986).

 The support functions, which are measured in this study, refer to the emotional and practical assistance that significant

others mayor may not provide at this time which in turn may aid coping (Thoits, 1986).

Essentially, the model posits that there are a wide range of environmental and personal antecedents, which can shape appraisal and coping responses and their influence on well being. The personal and environmental antecedents may increase a student's vulnerability to stress and may impact upon their well-being. When students enter higher education, they are faced with a new environment, with new demands and challenges. Their response to these stressors and how they cope with them may determine their well being and subsequent adjustment to college life.

It is to be noted that the bi-directional paths indicate that these processes are transactional and show that reciprocal feedback can occur at any stage. The framework also encompasses the major sets of factors, which can be targeted for intervention. For example. interventions can be directed at improving stressful life circumstances and preparing students for the transition (panel 1 to 3) or by strengthening individual's social resources (panel 1) or by strengthening coping processes.. (Panel 5)

Methodology

Design

A two wave longitudinal study was selected in which the subjects were assessed at two points in time, i.e., in the spring term of their first and second year. Both correlational and group comparsions designs were used in order to

explore patterns of stress, stressor appraisal, coping and support processes, to examine both simple and complex relationships between the variables and to investigate what factors at time 1 predicted distress and withdrawal at time 2.

Sample

The study was set within the Dublin Institute of Technology which has an overall full and part-time population of 24, 00. A wide variety of Degree, Diploma and Certificate courses are offered. An initial sample of 272 first year undergraduates was surveyed from a number of different four-year degree courses. The total sample was 262, as 10 subjects did not provide complete data.

>- Total number in Year 1 = 262

>-Females =123

>-Males =139.

>-Mean age = 18.5.

Follow-up assessment

N =231 (88.1 % were recontacted)

Females =123

Males =108.

Mean age =19.1.

31 students = missing

30 had left college and one student was deceased

Procedure

Four questionnaires were distributed to the subjects early in their first year and a follow up study was conducted early in the first term of the subjects second year. For identification purposes student id numbers were asked for follow-up reasons.

Measures

There were three independent measures used in this study and one

dependent measure. Theses measures are as follows:

.Demographic survey. A number of demographic variables were sampled to assess indices of socio-demographic status and living status which included age, residential location before college, living arrangements, etc.

.Coping Response Inventory (Moos, 19903)

In this instrument, subjects are asked to describe a stressor, how they appraised this stressor and how they coped with it. The inventory distinguishes two coping orientations -approach/avoidance. There are 8 subscales, which reflect these orientations. The first two scales measures approach coping; the second set of four scales measures avoidance coping. The first two scales in each set measure cognitive coping strategies; the third and fourth scales in each set measure behavioural coping strategies.

.Significant Others Scale (Power et al., 1988). This instrument obtained a measure of perceived emotional and practical support for different role relationships.

Dependent measure

The instrument chosen to measure the dependent variable was the General Well-Being Inventory developed by Dupuy et al. (1973). This instrument provides a measure of the presence, severity and frequency of symptoms and also gives a measure of clinical history .

Main findings

A brief summary of some of the key findings, specifically in relation to stressor appraisal and coping, are summarised below.

Stressors and Stressor Appraisal

(1) Third level students experienced a diverse range of stressors, ranging from family, and peer relationships stressors to emotional, academic, financial and practical stressors. Nine broad categories of stressors were identified but for the purposes of analysis these were recoded into five

main categories. The most reported source of stress at time 1 were academic issues and emotional issues, e.g., anxiety, loss of self confidence etc. I followed by relationship issues which were typically associated with transitional difficulties, e.g., separation from home and family, meeting new people etc. At time 2, academic and family issues were the most prevalent sources of stress, followed by financial issues.

(2) Appraisal of the stressor as not severe, challenging, controllable and within coping resources was associated with an increase in well-being in first year while appraisal of the stressor as severe, threatening uncontrollable and not within coping resources was associated significantly with a decrease in well-being both in first and second year. It was noteworthy that, of the five appraisal factors tested in this study, only appraisal of challenge and control served as predictors of change in well being from time 1 to time 2. In other words, subjects who appraised the stressor as less challenging and not under their control at time 1 became more distressed at time 2 than subjects who perceived the stressor as challenging and under their control. It is likely that when a stressor is appraised by an individual as challenging and controllable, the subjects will have a positive perception of his/her capacity to overcome the stressor .

Coping

(3) Subjects consistently favoured cognitive coping efforts both in first and second year but subjects in first year expended much more coping efforts.

(3) The use of approach coping was found to be associated with an increase in well-being in first year but not in second year while the use of avoidance coping contributed to a decease in well-being in both first and second year though this did not prove to be the case where in their first year students had high emotional support from friends.

(4) It was found that subjects who improved in well-being engaged in far less cognitive avoidance and more support seeking at time 1 while subjects whose well-being declined engaged in more cognitive avoidance and less

support seeking. This finding does suggest that, in vulnerable individuals, failure to seek support in their first year accompanied by cognitively avoiding the problem may have adverse implications for their well-being. Low support seeking and high cognitive avoidance coping was also found to predict withdrawal of students before their second year.

Conclusion

While there has been a diversity of studies, which have examined the influence of appraisal, coping and support upon psychological outcomes, this study examined the influence of these factors upon the well being of an Irish student population. The findings provide insight into the type of stressors experienced by Irish students, how these stressors were appraised and coped with, and how the students perceived their support network as they progressed through their first and second year in college. Thus, the present research is seen as contributing to a greater understanding of the factors that affect students during their early years in college. It also helps to bring into focus the importance of, and the need for ongoing research on, the processes of ~ressor appraisal, coping and support and their influence on the well being :!)f third-Ievel students. The use of a longitudinal design also allowed for increased causal rigour and helped to identify what factors might predict distress over time.

In addition, the study put forward a framework or coherent model to encapsulate the complexity and intricacy of factors which may influence the well being of students in the process of transition to higher education. The findings from this investigation have the potential to be translated into pragmatic programmes of intervention and prevention which may counteract negative effects of support and coping deficits before distress becomes chronic or widespread.

Overall, the study findings demonstrated that third level education can be a very stressful experience for many Irish students. They highlighted that students experience a diverse range of stressors linked to the transition to

third level education and that family and social stressors were as prevalent as academic stressors. The diversity of stressors was matched by the diversity of students' needs and has implications for the design of programmes and interventions that may help to address the different needs of students at different stages in their college life. It is to be noted that the well-being of 40.2% of the subjects in this study declined to some degree in their second year, emphasising the need for early identification of students at risk and for programmes that eases their adjustment to third level education.

First and foremost, the findings have important implications for the third level institution itself. Interventions need to be targeted not just at students but also al1 the institutional environment. We need to be careful not to focus solely on the cognitions of the students as the only determining factors of well being and adjustment to third level education. It is important that third level institutions identify specific elements of institutional climate that may enhance or militate against the well being and adjustment of their students. Issues that need to be addressed are how well does the institution promote student-student interaction and faculty-student contact? Does it have appropriate policies and practices that promote student welfare and development (both academic and personal development) and do it demonstrate a clear commitment to providing a broad range of support services/facilities which meet the different needs of their students? Above all, the third level institution needs to identify any major mismatches that may exist between their students and the college environment.

A number of future studies are warranted. A study of the influence of antecedent factors such as person and background variables of the students would be of particular importance as some of these factors may increase a
student's vulnerability to becoming distressed. In addition, further information derived from a more detailed investigation of the complex causal relationships between stressor; stressor appraisal, coping, support and well being could prove fruitful. Using both qualitative and quantitative measures, as well as the inclusion of well-planned individual studies over a number of phases during

the students' first and second year may also prove valuable. Attention also must be given to the role that the institution may play in promoting or hindering personal development of students.

In conclusion, while acknowledging that support and coping resources are not a cure for all ills, the concept is still worthy of further investigation. Ultimately it is best seen as a rung on the ladder to a greater understanding of the complexities of the factors affecting students at this time so studying these areas are an important first step but not a place to rest.

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IMPLICA TIONS OF THE RESEARCH ON SOCIO-ECONOMIC DIFFERENCES IN DEVELOPMENT FOR COUNSELLING OF UNIVERSITY STUDENTS

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Research on socio-economic differences regarding young adults' developmental tasks is very limited. The Psychological Separation Inventory (PSI; Hoffman, 1984), the Rosenber Self-Esteem Scale (1965) and two scales (constructed and validated by the authors in a previous study) measuring the Capacity of Projection into the Future and the Self-Esteem of Sexual Image were applied to a sample of 153 Portuguese male university students. Although the differences found between socio-economic status were non-existent or small, for most of the variables, very significant differences emerged in the pattern of relationships between variable, when a path analysis was performed. The implications of these findings for counselling in higher education are discussed. It is suggested that counsellors who work with university students would benefit greatly from information on young adults' development.

Implications of the Research on Socio- Economic Differences m Development for Counselling of University Students

Graca Figueiredo Dias* Fifth European Congress
of Psychology
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(Transparency 1)

From the developmental psychological point of view, young people face several normative tasks at the end of adolescence and beginning of adulthood, some of the most important being autonomy construction and the capacity to establish love relationships. These tasks can be conceptualized in the scope of several psycodynamic theories. For instance, Erikson considers that. psychosocial identity consolidation and the beginning of intimacy crises, with its counterpart, isolation, are the fundamental tasks of young people. According to this author, the resolution of the fIrst task is a necessary condition to the resolution of the second one. With an incomplete or fragile identity , the youngster may feel a profound involvement with another person as an interpersonal fusion leading to an identity loss, and this may bring him to isolate himself. That is to say, a true involvement with others is at the same time the result and the proof that personality structure is clearly delineated at this age. Although Erikson doesn't mention explicitly autonomy development as an adolescence task, this development is implicit because without it, the experience of several roles and decisions and responsabilities taking, which are necessary to identity construction, would not be possible.

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In the frame of reference of self psychology , Kohut considers that consolidation
of self cohesion and of self-esteem is the most important task of young adulthood,
because at this age new social pressures and expectancies may lead to the emergence of
vulnerabilities in self development till then unnoticed due to a more secure life context.
According to Bios, along adolescence a second separation-individuation process
occurs, the first one being the young child separation from his mother, described by
Mahler. During adolescence, separation-individuation means that the adolescent separates
psychologically from his parents, becoming more independent from his real parents and
internalizing a value system that can guide his life. For Bios, sexual identity
consolidation and the capacity to establish love relationships is dependent of the quality
of resolution of this process of psychological separation. This aspect is also implicit in
Erikson's approach, since the integration of several identity components is as well a
negation as an affirmation process. That is to say, to consolidate his identity the
youngster must abdicate seeing his parents as all powerful and protecting.

It may be expected that psychological well-being may be associated with the
resolution of all these developmental tasks. Although literature foresee some
relationships between developmental tasks and their relationship with psycological well-
-being, it is neglectful as to possible differences between socio-economic levels in the
structure of these relations.

Due to this gap, the aim of this study is to analyse socio-economic differences in
the structure of relationships among the following variables: psychological separation,
autonomy, capacity for love interaction, and self -esteem. These differences will be
analysed using structural equation modeling which allows the testing of causal
hypotheses and the examination of psychometric adequacy of those models to empirical
data.

I Method (Transparency 2.)

In the course of a preliminary study, several dimensions had been identified,
which either theoreticalliterahlre or empirical research regarded as being outstanding for
autonomy construction and for the capacity to establish love relationships. These
dimensions were also supported by the clinical experience in counselling with university

students of one of us.

These dimensions had been evaluated by a questionnaire, especially elaborated for that purpose, which had been applied to a sample of 530 university students from several university Colleges in Lisbon. The factor analysis of collected data enabled the appearance of several factors which allowed the construction of scales with a good internal consistency.

The present study uses two of these scales. One is the Projecting the Self into the Future scale, which seems to be a good indicator of autonomy at this age, as at the beginning of adulthood it becomes prominent that young people have a plan for their future. The other is the Self-Esteem of Sexual Image scale, which seems to be a good indicator of the capacity for love interaction at the end of adolescence.

(Transparency 3)

The Projecting the Self into the Future scale comprises 10 questions, examples of wich are:

-Gennerally, what I want to be seems unattainable;

-Frequently I feel like giving up on everything I do;

-I feel confused when I think about my future;

-I'm postponing decisions all the time.

(Transparency 4)

The Self-Esteem of Sexual Image scale comprises 11 questions such as:

-Sometimes I think no woman will be interested in me;

-I feel I am desired by some women;

-Women only look at me as a friend;

-I feel as attractif as the majority of my colleagues,

The preliminary study has also allowed the validation of these two scales. For instance, young people who have had bad academic results have significantly lower levels on the Projecting the Self into the Future scale than those who have had good academic results. In the same way, young people who never dated or had no love experience have significantly lower levels on the Self-Esteem of Sexual Image scale than those who have already had that kind of experience.

To react to these two scales, subjects must choose one from six types of answers:

"1 totally agree", "I agree", "1 agree more than disagree", "1 disagree more than I agree", "1 disagree", "1 totally disagree",

(Transparency 5)

Self-esteem has been evaluated by the Rosenberg Global Self-Esteem scale. This scale appreciates the phenomenological experience of general self-worth. The scale is simple, composed of only 10 questions, and has a good construction validity confIrmed in several cultures. Examples of questions are;

-I feel that I have a number of good qualities;

-I am able to do things as well as most other people;

-I feel I do not have much to be proud of;

-I certainly feel useless at times.

Questions are answered on a scale of4levels: "totally agree", "agree", "disagree", "totally disagree".

(Transparency 6)

Psychological separation from parents has been evaluated using the ConfliL1Ual Independence scale of the Psychological Separation Inventory developed by Hoffman. This inventory has been adapted to the portuguese population in another previous study of ours. That scale measures the extent to which the relationship of the adolescent with his parents is free from enduring conflict, anger, guilt and mistrust. So it captures very well how much the young person is in peace with his parents, which is an indication of a good resolution of the separation from parents process.

The scale has 11 questions related to the mother and 11 equally related to thefather. Examples of questions are:

-I feel like I am constantly at war with my mother;

-Sometimes my mother is a burder to me;

-I blame my mother for many of the problems I have;

-I whish my mother wasn't so overprotective.

Questions are answered on a scale of 4 levels: "totally agree", "agree", "disagree", "totally disagree".

This scale has had its construction validity supported by several empirical researches which confirmed its association with several adaptation measures in samples of university students.

(Transparency 7)

The internal consistencies of all instruments were evaluated for the present study and were found satisfactory .

(Transparency 8)

The relationships between variables has been tested on another sample of 153 male university students from the Faculty of Sciences and Technology of New University of Lisbon with mean age of 22 years. Although the instruments were also applied to a larger sample including also female students, the model of relations couldn't be tested by socio-economic level for the female gender , because most of the correlations were not significant, probably due to that the number of subjects was smaller. The instruments were applied collectively in a single session. The order of the instruments was alleatory to cancel out in the global sample the systematic influence that the answers to an instrument might have on the next one.

Results (Transparency 9)

The model of relationships between variables foreseen, based simultaneously on theoretical and empirical research, as well as on our clinical experience, is presented in the next transparency. Indeed we consider that:

1) The resolution of psychological separation from parents is a necessary condition to the development of autonomy and to the capacity for establishing love relationships;

2) autonomy development is also a necessary condition for establishing love relationships;

3) the resolution of these psychological tasks, psychological separation, autonomy construction and capacity for love relationships is fundamental to the psychological well-

-being of the youngster, which manifests itself by self -esteem consolidation.

In this model the independence in relation to the mother and father are considered as independent variables, although they are not independent between them. It is assumed that they result from external influences to the model. The capacity to project the self into the future, the self-esteem of sexual image and the global self-esteem are considered as dependent variables. The relation between variables is represented by the direction of the arrows.

The model has been analysed using a structural equation modeling approach. For the analysis we used the program LISREL 7 (Linear Structural Relations), which provides several indexes allowing to evaluate the adequacy of the model to empirical data,as well as the percentage of data variance not explained by the model. The Chi-Square is an indicator of the distance between the theoretical model and the empirical data. The Adjusted Goodness of Fit Index indicates the adequacy of the model. The Chi-Square must be non-significant; the Adjusted. Goodness of Fit Index must have a value near unity.

In the analysis, the weak relationships between variables are suppressed from the model on the condition that the adjustment to the model remains suitable, so that the final model is at the same time the best and the simplest one possible.

The adjustment of the model to empirical data manifested itself suitable for the two groups, although significant differences were observed between socio-economic levels.

(Transparency 10)

In the two samples, conflictual independence in relation to mother has a direct influence on self-esteem of sexual image. On the other hand, the capacity to project the self into the future influences directly both self-esteem of sexual image and global self--esteem. Besides that, no significant direct influence was observed either between conflictual independence in relation to the father and self-esteem of sexual image, or between conflictual independence in relation to the mother and global self -esteem.

The first result is in agreement with psychodynamic theories, which emphasise the need for psychological separation from the mother for men's sexual identity consolidation and for his ability to establish love relationships.

Neverthless, the comparison of the results of the two socio-economic levels show significant differences between them. For the high status, the direct relation between conflictual independence in relation to the father and the projecting of the self into the future is insignificant; while for the low status this relation is very important. Besides, in this status a direct relation between conflictual independence in relation to the father and global self-esteem comes out. On the contrary, for the high status, conflictual independence in relation to the mother has a direct influence on the capacity to proj ect the self into the future, while this influence is insignificant for the lower status. In addition to this, for the low status, the sexual image esteem doesn't influence global esteem any more.

That is to say, concerning the capacity to project the self into the future, the resolution of the separation-individuation process in relation to the father is essential for lower status men, while it is the resolution of the separation-individuation process in relation to the mother that comes out as fundamental for young men from higher economic backgrounds. In addition to this, as the internal conflict regarding separation in relation to father lessens, the global self -esteem of young men from a lower status increases, while for the high status men the existence of this internal conflict doesn't seem to influence their global self-esteem. Finally, self-esteem of sexual image seems important for global self-esteem of high economic status men, but this doesn't seem to be the case for menfrom lower economic levels.

We can advance certain interpretations, which our results suggest, regarding the father's role in different socio-economic levels. It is natural that a young man, attending university and arising from a less favoured milieu, feels a greater distance between himself and his father , both from the cultural point of view and from the future economic level, and life sty le and achievement opportunities one, than a young man issued from a higher status background. This situation can even render the youngster more vulnerable to internal conflicts of loyalty, to culpability, to shame inherent to the separation process, and these conflicts can be experienced as more threatening for the maintenance of quality of the relationship with his father .We can also submit that even the theme of these conflicts can be associated, for the adolescents from lower economic level, to their future projects. As the matter of fact, at this level the father had to sacrifice himself to make possible for his son to follow university studies. He has invested more in this kind of

project and has possibly pressed more for his son's accomplishment. These facts can stimulate on the youngster's side, on the one hand a feeling of debt towards his father which he must payoff through loyalty; and on the other hand more ressentement towards the father for his pressures and expectations concerning his son's future, which limit the adolescent's freedom of choice and increase his anxiety.

The difficulty in the resolution of the separation process can yet be increased by the father's own ambivalence, as he couldn't himself rise to a social level which he desires and demands for his son. Mother's role seems to be important in the ability to project the future for the young male from middle and high backgrounds, whereas its influence comes out to be negligeable for low backgrounds. Perhaps, since the separation from the father is more "peaceful" for adolescents from high economic status, the role of the mother becomes more noteworthy. Besides, in these millieus mothers are in general more engaged in the daily life organization of their sons, which can favour above all the maintenance of their infantile dependancies.

The fact that self-esteem of sexual image doesn't seem to significantly influence global self esteem of men from lower socio-economic levels contrasts with the influence it has for men of higher status. We can suppose that that influence may be negligeable in comparison with the importance it takes, for the global esteem of the first group, the relationship without conflict with the father and the capacity to project the future. We can also advance that perhaps the priorities ascribed to different developmental tasks may be distinct for the young people from the two groups. Those from low economic levels may be more concerned with their academic success as their future professional projects may be a priori less secure for them than for those youngsters coming from more privileged backgrounds, for whom such projects may correspond to a more natural route, with better known stages and strategies. For these youngsters then, it is the self-esteem of sexual image that assumes a greater importance for their global esteem.

The results obtained have important implications for counselling with university students. In the first place, it is important to emphasize that young people who ask for counselling due to poor academic results may require not only academic counselling concerning, for instance, study strategies, but may need also personal/emotional counselling. It is vital the counsellor finds out if there are personal developmental

difficulties, namely in the domain of realistically planning a future with attainable goals. The same applies for young people asking for career planning. Career indecisiveness may also be underlined by problems in the ability to project the future. And the possible difficulties in this domain may in turn be the result of difficulties in psychological separation from parents. It is desirable that the counsellor identifies these problems and explores them with the student.

In the second place, our results suggest that the interrelationship between developmental tasks is different according to socio-economic level. That is to say, belonging to high or low socio-economic status means dealing with developmental tasks differently and having distinct peculiar vulnerabilities. In particular, counsellors should pay particular attention, while helping students from low socio-economic status, to dealing with their conflicts of guilt and loyalty towards the father.

Transparency 1

PRELII\IIINARY STUDY

Questionnaire: (autonomy + love interaction)

Sample: 530 university students
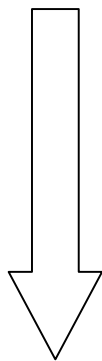
.Projecting the Self into the Future

.Self-Esteem of Sexual Image

Transparency 2

SOME YOUNG ADULTS' DEVELOPMENT AL TASKS

.Autonomy construction

.Capacity to establish love relationships

.Self -esteem consolidation

.Psychological separation from parents

Transparency 3

SELF -ESTEEM O F SEXUAL IMAGE

(Male version)

(Examples)

.Sometimes I think no woman will be interested on me

.I feel I am desired by some women

.Women only look at me as a friend

.I feel as attractif as the majority of my colleagues

PROJECTING THE SELF INTO THE FUTURE

(Examples)

.Generally, what I want to be seems unattainable

.Frequently I feel like giving up on everything I do

.I feel confused when I think about my future

.I'm postponing decisions all the time

PSYCHOLOGICAL SEPARATION INVENTORY

-Conflictual Independence Scale -

(HOFFMAN, 1984)

(Examples)

.I feel like I am constantly at war with my mother (father)

.Sometimes my mother (father) is a burden to me

.I blame my mother (father) for many of the problems I have

.I wish my mother (father) wasn't so overprotective (overprotective)

ROSENBERG GLOBAL SELF-ESTEEM SCALE

(Examples)

.

.I feel that I have a number of good qualities

.I am able to do things as well as most other people

.I feel I do not have much to be proud of

.I certainly feel useless at times

SAMPLE

Socio-Economic Level			
Age (years)	Low	High	Total
18-20	20	28	48
21-22	26	34	60
23-25	25	20	45
Total	71	82	153

.

Transparency 8

INTERNAL CONSISTENCIES (CRONBACH ALPHA)

Conflictual Independence (father) .865

Conflictual Independence (mother) .876
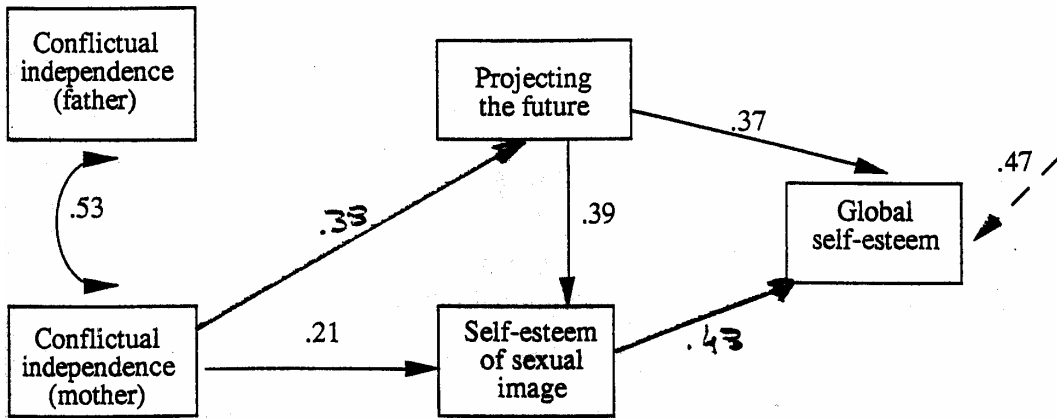
Projecting the Self into the Future .860

Self-Esteem of Sexual Image .884

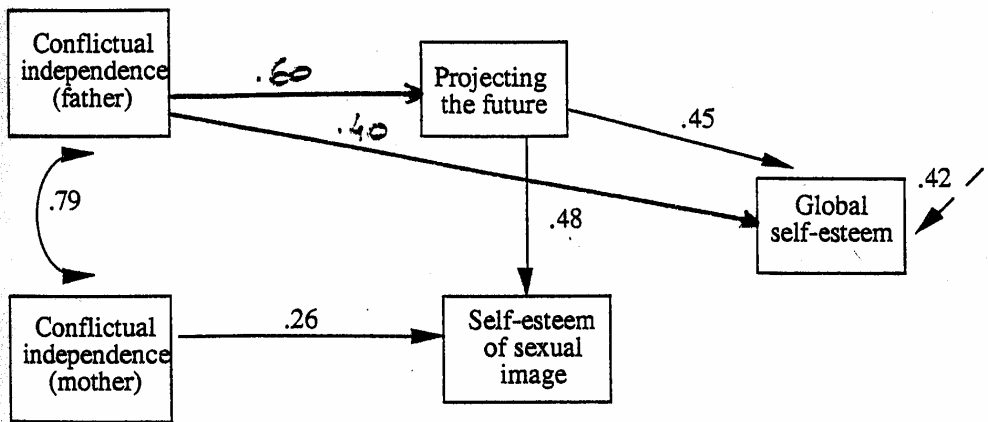Global Self-Esteem .862

PATH DIAGRAMS

High Status

$$\chi^2 (4) = 3.07 \ (p = .650)$$
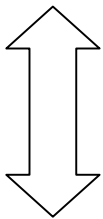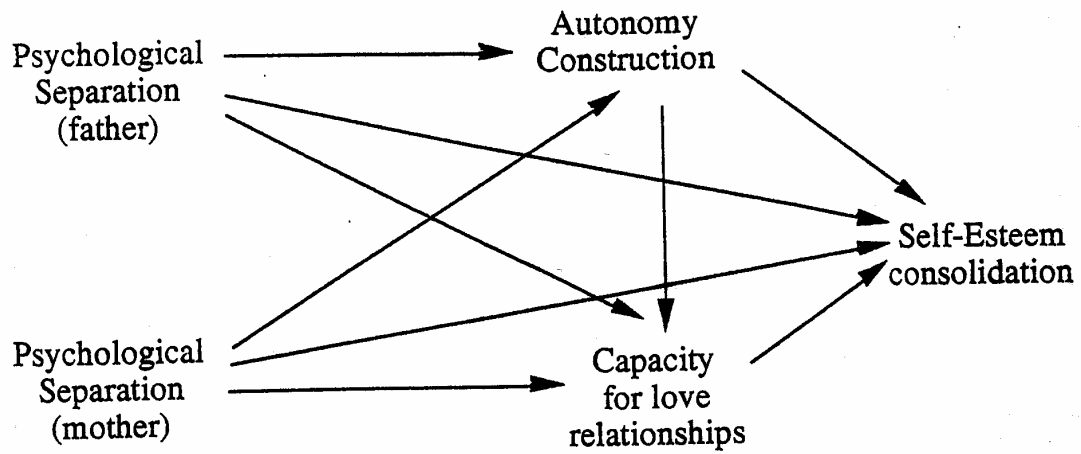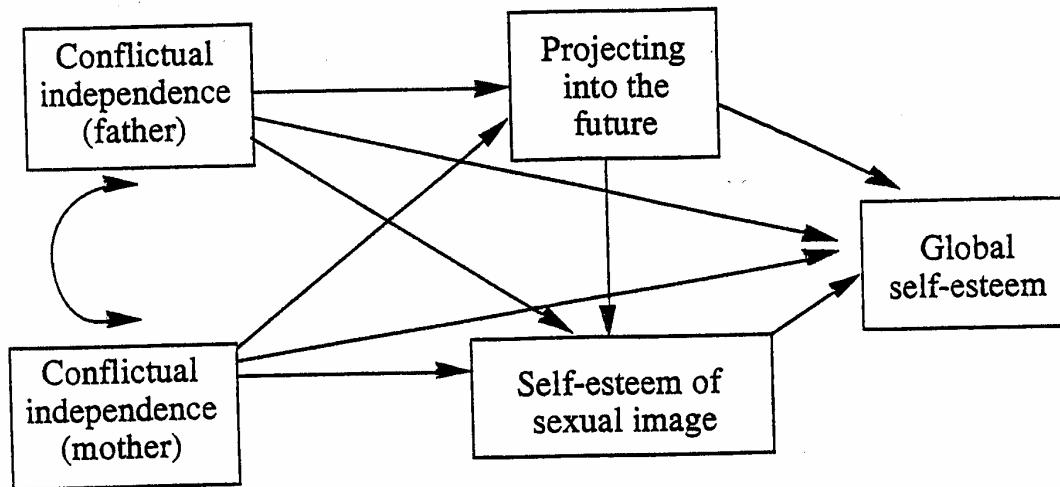$$AGFI = .941$$

Low Status

$$\chi^2 (4) = 3.59 \ (p = .465)$$
$$AGFI = .920$$

CAUSAL NIODEL OF THE RELATIONSHIPS

BETWEEN DEVELOPMENTAL TASKS

FEAR OF FAILURE, PRIV A TE SELF -CONSCIOUSNESS, AND PREDICTIVE MET ACOMPREHENSION.

Jean Paul Broonen, University of Liege.

Calibration of comprehension of expository texts among North-American undergraduate student is poor (e.g. Glenber & Epstein, 1985) and overestimation seems to be more frequent than underestimation.

In this study, 641 French-speaking Belgian undergraduate students rated their confidence in ability to answer questions about previously read expository passages and respond to a multifactorial self-assessment questionnaire (Will, Hope of success Challenge, Fear of failure, Public self-consciousness and Private self-consciousness). First, contrary to expectation, underestimation of future performance was more frequent than overestimation. Second, subjects expressing a high degree of Fear of failure provided a larger underestimation. Third, high values ofprivate self-consciousness were correlated with a better calibration and low values with a poorer one. No effect of the other independent variables was observed. Practical implications are discussed especially about academic measures that could

aim at promoting processes of reflecti veness and reducing the level of students ,

anxiety

Predictive metacomprehension and intrapsychic factors

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In counselling practice many students wanting to enter the university doubt that they have the capacities to achieve. In particular the student's self-assessment of comprehension (namely metacomprehension) has important consequences for the cursus. If the student believes that his/her comprehension has been achieved, he/ she is encouraged to terminate further processing of the text, which leads the reader to think that he/ she is ready for example for testing.

In fact the expression of a student's degree of confidence in comprehension of a text he is reading depends on many factors, some affecting the predictive estimation - personal ability to estimate oneself, human average capacity of self-estimating, personal variations according to content... -and some others affecting the predictive expression -the qualitative aspect of instructions, the consequences of self-estimation, personal attitude toward risks, need for points aso.

Research aims

An intriguing problem is the over- or underestimation in metacomprehension which is not well documented in this field, contrary to calibration of predictive probabilities in other domains (see Fischhoff et al., 1977). Some studies well-documented on various aspects of metacomprehension say nothing clear about the direction of miscalibration (e.g. Glenberg and Epstein, 1985). Other scholars claim

that overestimation is observed, but without precise specific measures (Ehrlich et al., 1988, 1991). The present study aims first to examine predictive metacomprehension following Glenberg and Epstein (1985) paradigm and to explore how it is linked to some intrapsychic variables.

Five latent factors as independant variables were considered:

1. Challenge (C) and motive to avoid failure (AF)

Following Atkinson (see e.g. Atkinson & Feather, 1966), most of the research on achievement has included measures on the motives to approach success and to avoid failure. In the original theory of achievement motivation, risk-taking played a central role. Since predicting a performance is a risk-taking, Atkinson's model - rather simplified -seemed to be relevant. Following a previous research (Broonen, 1995) where underestimation was unexpectedly the major tendancy , the exploratory hypotheses were that:

1. a high level of challenge would be linked to a lower underestimation;
2. a high level of motive to avoid failure to a higher underestimation.

2. Will (W)

Digman & Takemoto-Chock (1981) so labelled will to achieve, task interest, work, and thinking introversion, corresponding to dimension III in the five-factor personality model (Digman, 1990).

The exploratory hypothesis was that high W scores would be linked to a better calibration.

3. Private Self-consciousness (PrSc) and Public self-consciousness (PuSc)

Self-consciousness has been defined as the consistant tendency of a person to direct attention inward or outward'. The most widely used taxonomy of dispositional self-consciousness (Buss, 1980) is operationalized by the Private Self-consciousness scale and the Public self-consciousness scale (Fenigstein et al., 1975).

The correlation hypothesis between the PrSc scale and calibration was that high PrSc values would be associated with a better calibration.

Publicly self-conscious people are more attuned to others' evaluations and more concerned with managing their impressions than people whore score low on the scale (Buss, 1980). As a consequence, a correlation with calibration would be observed, because of the presence on the experimenter who was the students'teacher, but the sign of the correlation was difficult to predict, depending on the perception by the students of the evaluation -negative vs. positive -from the audience in the experimental setting.

Method

Subjects

230 undergraduate students were recruited from a Business School (Liege). Students received course credit for participating.

Materials and measures

Metacomprension

Ten expository tests: five from Glenberg and Epstein (1985), translated in French, and five new ones. The paragraphs ranged in lengh from 177 to 265 words, and following Glenberg and Epstein (1985) paradigm, each text was constructed to satisfy two constraints. Firstly, the text were self-contained. Secondly, each text was written about a single topic.

Four inferences statements per text were constructed, following Weaver (1990), who demonstrated that studies which assess comprehension with a single inference seriously underestimate the level of calibration. For the five texts from Glenberg and Epstein (1985), I used the inference statement (true or false) from the authors, and I generated three new ones inferences per text. New inferences were generated for the other texts. Overall texts, twenty items were true and twenty were false.

Prediction scales

Calibration of comprehension is classically defined as the correlation between

ratings of confidence in comprehension and actual performance on an objective test of comprehension. Basically the principle of calibration measurement is the comparison between the rate of objective success (correcte performance) and the average confidence degree. But calibration judgments are an area of suspicion. As far as instructions are concerned, all experimenters request students to express their (predictive or postdictive) confidence by choosing among the degrees on (generally) 1-6 points scales, where 1 is defined "Very low" and 6 "Very high" (e.g. Glenberg et al.1985). Leclercq (1983) claimed that this kind of instruction is irrelevant: "What is strongly sure for one student might be fairly sure for another and weakly sure for a third one... Since the experimenter does not know which exact interpretation of "fairly" sure has been given for various sudents, two answers with the same confident degree may not be compared if the are given by two different students. Moreover, nothing prevents the student from changing his interpretation of <e.g.> "strongly" sure during the course of a test. Contrasts between successive questions could lead him to modify his interpretation as he goes from item to item" (p. 186). Another difficulty lies in the fact that if such scales are merely ordinal, metric measures (mean and S.D.) are irrelevant!

Following Leclercq (1983) , an interval scale with confidence degrees on irregular and dissymetric zones was used (0-25%,25-50%,50-70%,70-85% 85-95%,95-100%). As subjects tend to use the extremes rather than the middle of a probability scale, irregular zones are justified. Moreover "(in) educational measurement, the areas on the right hand side of the scale are far more used than the areas on the left " (Leclercq, 1983, p. 189), which justifies dissymetric zones.

These two scales are appropriate to measuring calibration in association with multiple true/ false questions. In researches on metacomprehension, the first degree of the ordinal scale is considered by the experimenter as 50% of probabilities, which seems relevant for a single true/false item. But if several true/false inferences are proposed for only one confidence judgment, degrees below 50 have sense.

Two calibration indices were calculated:

a. The **"Centration"** indice [-.875; +.975] = ΨC =

nc

L RUCi (CVi-RSCi)

i=l

Where nc = number of confidence degrees

     RUCi = rate of use of confidence degree i

     RSCi = rate of success with confidence degree i

     CVi = central value of confidence degree i

This indice evaluates the tendency of the rates of correct answers to fit the diagonal. Positive result means tendency to overconfidence, negative result to underconfidence. Zero is perfection.

b. Realism [0; +.975] = ΨR =

nc

$\sum$ RUCi/MEEi/

i=l

Where **MEEi** = mean error of estimation with confidence degree i

The null value is perfect realism.

However, a value close to zero might result from a compensation of negative values by positive ones. Therefore,' the realism indice must be completed by the indice of centration.

<u>Intrapsychic factors measure</u>

C, AF, w, and W

Thirty-four items were adapted from the Lacerbeau's Motivation Questionnaire (revised by Aubret, 1988). A confirmatory factor analysis was included in order to assess the three latent structures.

PrS c and PuSc

The Private Self-consciousness scale and the Public self-consciousness scale (Fenigstein et al.,1975) were administered. The unidimensionality of the Private scale has been controversed. Some researches support a unitary structure (Berstein, Teng, & Garbin, 1986; Britt, 1992); others a bifactorial structure with a so-called self-reflectiveness factor and an internal state awareness factor (Burkrant & Page, 1984; Lennox et al., 1987; Mittal & Balsubramanian, 1987; Piliavin & Chamg, 1988). In the French-speaking version (Rime & Lebon,1984), the unidimensionality was not questionned. Therefore we submitted our data to a confirmatory factor analysis on the basic sample and on a second wave (N = 312).

Procedure

Instructions concerning texts were presented on the first page of the booklet, followed by the first experimental text. The order of the text was random for each subject. The paragraph was presented and read at each subjects pace; under the text, on the same page, the subjects were asked to provide the predictive probability rating in the hability to correctly draw inferences from the text. The order of the texts was determined randomly for each experimental subject. Each text was accompanied by a title. Rereading of a text was explicitly allowed but reexamination of the text during the inferences verification was not allowed. After this first task, subjects were invited to complete the questionnaire. They were tested in a large group.

Results

Centration metacognitive measures provided three results.
Firstly, ΨR means are significantly different from 0 for men {t = -4.966, p<.0001) and for women {t = -9.318, p<.0001) {Table 1). Secondly, underestimation is more frequent than overestimation for men {t = -4.866, p<.0001) and for women {t = -9.318, p<.0001) {Table 2). Thirdly, underestimation among women is more frequent than among men {t = -2.655, p = .0085) {Table 3). This last observation is consistent with researches on gender differences in the accuracy of self-evaluations {Beyer, 1990;

Beyer & Bowden, 1997; Daubman et al., 1992)

Table 1

Metacognitives Measures

Realism	Men (N=113)	Women (N=117)
M	0.211	0.233
SD	0.095	0.093
Min	0.032	0.063
Max	0.606	0.447
T: Mean = 0	23.53 (p<.0001)	27.135 (p<.0001)
Normal W.	p=.0302	p=.0212

Table 2

Centration Indice

M	-0.065	-0.112
SD	0.139	0.131
Min	-0.517	-0.435
Max	0.225	0.285
T: Mean = 0	-4.866 (p<.0001)	-9.318 (p<.0001)
Normal W	p=.6268	p=.7281

Table 3

Centration (% of Subjects)

	Men	Women
Perfect centration	-	.09
Underestimate	69.90	79.50
Overestimate	30.10	19.60

Several hypotheses have to be examined in order to explain the main underestimation effect. It may be that some subjects could have understood the instruction such as: "What is the probability for me to respond to all the questions correctly?". Of course this probability is subjectively less that the probability to predict how many questions on four the subject will correctly respond. However, this hypothesis is hard to sustain because random subjects said they considered the number of correct responses they could achieve. An underestimation effect could also be induced by easier questions as expected (hard-easy effect). However, texts with the higher percentage of correct responses did not produce more underestimation (and texts with the lower percentage of correct responses did not

produce more overestimation). Theref(}re intrapsychic factors had to be considered.

The impact of intra-psychic factors

A validity analysis of the questionnaire was performed in an attempt to develop validity support for the factor structure of each hypothetical latent factor . Cronbach's alpha is a faillible indicator of unidimensionality of a scale (Green, Lissitz, & Muliak, 1977). Confirmatory factor analysis (CF A) tests wether actual data fit an identified model. CFA (LISREL 6, SAS-CALIS procedure) test the hypothesis that a specified subset of observed variables (i.e. specific items of a measure) define a prespecified latent factor .

1. *AF factor*

A two-factor model produced better results among men chi2 (8) = 8.06, p = .43, GFI = .97, RMR. = .05 (first wave); chi2 (8) = 11.89, p = .15, GFI = .98, R:tvrn. = .05 (second wave, n = 188); and among women: chi2 (8) = 5.10, p= .75, GFI = .98, RMR = .035 (first wave); chi2 (8) = 12.09, p = .15, GFI = .97, RMR. = .06 (second wave, n = 123) than the one-factor model: men chi2 (9) = 12.64, p = .18, GFI = .96, RMR = .08; women chi2 (9)= 8.85, p = .45, GFI = .97, RMR = .05 (first wave). The first factor (3it.) was called Expectancy of failor and the second factor (3 it.) Discouragement (after a failure).

2. C factor

Nothing will be said about this factor, because no correlation was found with metacognitive measures.

3. W factor

The best model emerging from a confirmatory factor analysis performed on the two waves was a three-factor model. The first factor was labelled Procrastination (3 items), the second one Concentration (3 items), and the third one Activity (4 items).

4. PrSc factor

The unitary model was not completely satisfying (Broonen, 1997a) .The coefficients for some items were problematic especially for the item 8 (" I am alvare of the way my mind works when I lvork through a problem ") that many reseachers dropped because considered as trivial. This item was also dropped out of the scale, but according with the target of the research analysed separately in the stepwise regression (see below). Data better fitted to a two-factor model where Internal affective states awareness (2 items) and Self-reflectiveness (5 items) factors were derived.

5. PuSc factor

The data provided as expected an acceptable fit to the unitary model (Broonen, 1997a).

Regression analyses

In order to ascertain the extent to which selected traits exhibited associations with lpC and 'PR that were independent of their links with other traits, the scores of 'PC and 'PR were regressed on selected traits which met the 0.15 significance level for entry into the model (Table 4)

Table 4

Regression stepwise

Women (N = 113)

Realism

Step	Predictor	Partial R^2	R^2	F	p > F
1	Procrastination	0,0960	0,0960	11,1503	0,0012
2	Focus on mental work (item 8)	0,0483	0,1443	5,8701	0,0171
3	Internal affective states awareness	0,0260	0,1703	3,2338	0,0751

Centration

Step	Predictor	Partial R^2	R^2	F	p > F
1	Focus on mental work (item 8)	0,0800	0,0800	9,1284	0,0032
2	PuSc	0,0466	0,1266	5,5480	0,0204
3	Discouragement	0,0255	0,1521	3,0945	0,0815
4	Internal affective states awareness	0,0268	0,1788	3,3264	0,0711

Men (N = 109)

Realism

Step	Predictor	Partial R^2	R^2	F	p > F
1	Focus on mental work	0,1281	0,1281	15,1336	0,0002
2	Expectancy of failure	0,0525	0,1806	6,5369	0,0120
3	Self-reflectiveness	0,0193	0,1999	2,4388	0,1215

Centration

Step	Predictor	Partial R^2	R^2	F	p > F
1	Expectancy of failure	0,1138	0,1138	13,2316	0,0004
2	Focus on mental work (item 8)	0,0427	0,1566	5,1669	0,0251

The regression analyses accounted for 17% (women) and 20% (men) of the variance of the realism scores and for 18% (women) and 16% (men) of the variance of the centration scores.

Women and men with a more intensive awareness of cognitive activity during a problem solving task (item 8) presented a better level of realism (beta weights = -0.022 and -0.025).

Women with a low level of procrastination and a more intensive affective internal states awareness presented a higher level of realism.

Men with a high level of expectancy of failure provided a lower level of realism, in the direction of underestimation. A high level of self-reflectiveness among men was also predictive of a lower realism; this result is congruent with Campbell et al. (1996)

demonstrating that self-reflectiveness is negatively corrrelated with the self-concept clarity.

Some intrapsychic variables affected only centration in the model. Among women a high level of PuSc was correlated with a low level of underestimation. This result was unexpected as PuSc people are considered as sensitive to negative evaluation from an audience. Also a higher level of discouragement was correlated with a higher level of underestimation. Among men a high level of expectancy of failure predicted more underestimation

Discussion

1. Our findings suggest that intrapsychic factors do have an impact on calibration of comprehension. Realism and/ or centration have been showed to be sensitive to motive to avoid failure, se1f-reflectiveness, procrastination, focus on mental work, affective internal states awareness, discouragement, and public self-consciousness. Other studies ought to investigate wether other intrapsychic factors could have an impact as well, such as se1f-esteem or locus of control.

2. Gender differences seem to modulate the impact of some of the investigated factors.

3. The intrapsychic level of this analysis does not turn down other explicative levels. Some data (Broonen, 1997b) suggest that the psychosocial context has an impact on metacomprehension processes. A multilevel causal model as the fertile Doise's (1982) one could be applied in this area in untangleling variables and contribute to help students to improve the self-assessment of their comprehension.

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DECONSTRUCTIONOFSTUDENTHOOD

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One of the most striking features of Irish Society in the 1990's is the very high numbers of the population participating in third level education. The high value placed on education and educational credentials in Irish society has resulted in increased participation. (Drudy and Lynch, 1993 p.3). Educational credentials have become the major determinants of wealth, status and power. A second theme in third level education in Ireland is the role of education in "developing people" for the enterprise culture. This paper will explore how these cultural prescriptions influence the development of student identity.

My interest in this topic arises from my position as a student counsellor in a third level institution. From my clinical work with students who present with a dilemma regarding leaving or staying, I have come to view the narrative of student-hood as being useful. To borrow an idea of Derrida (1989 p.7), the meaning of student-hood has become clear in the moment of its deconstruction. It is in the moment of considering leaving or dropping out i.e. of becoming non-student that student begins to have a new meaning. As self -narratives are candidates for meaning within one or more cultural dance this study will elaborate on the cultural dance of studenthood. It will explore how in the episode of dropping out, the meaning of studenthood is experienced in a web of social relationships.

A Systemic Analysis of Student Dropout

Introduction

Student completion in third level has become a prominent topic in Ireland in the last few years. Student non-completion has implications for students, institutions and society. For the student in Ireland today, where education is the best indicator of life chances, there are career and social implications. There are also psychological implications of low self esteem and sense of failure. For academic institutions the consequences are important too. Non - completion represents a loss of revenue, inefficient use of resources and can lead to low staff morale. For society there are skill shortage and manpower repercussions. Thus it is not surprising that issues around student completion in third level have become a subject of inquiry in the media, the Dail and educational institutions. Questions have arisen about the numbers of students leaving third level without graduating, the causes of non completion and the solutions. The concern in the public domain has highlighted the need for research, discussion and debate to provide answers to the questions being asked.

This paper will discuss three themes in order to explore and expand the debate on non - completion. Firstly, the wider context of international research on the extent and many descriptions of non -completion will be considered. Secondly, issues from the current research literature will be discussed. Finally, a study will be presented of a research project in a higher education institute in Ireland to exemplify the themes of the earlier discussion.

The Extent of Non Completion

The first question that constantly arises is, what are the rates of non -completion? The international estimated rates of non completion vary widely.

United Kingdom 6- 13%	Italy 64%
Denmark 23%	Belgium 25 -30%
Germany 29 -3 1%	Belgium 25 -30%

ill Ireland the rate has been estimated at 26%.(Clancy,1995). ill Britain rates of withdrawal have also been linked to institutions trom 3% (Cambridge) to 24% (Aberdeen) (Johnes & Taylor 1989).

One of the difficulties in establishing the extent of non -completion is associated with the lack of consistency in collecting data. While some institutions have no computerised system of collecting data, in other institutions what constitutes withdrawal is open to different interpretations. (H.E.C.F. 1997; Martinez, 1995) .The variation in reported non –completion is influenced also by the differences in the studies and the methodologies used. Some studies differentiate between students who withdraw from courses and those who fail. Others measure throughput from registration to award level while many studies are concerned with first to second year only.

Non -completion; terminology, definitions and interpretations

The confusion that arises with establishing the extent of non -completion is allied to the distictinctions we make about the phenomenon itself. Leaving college before graduation is often considered a unitary act when in reality it includes a range of behaviors. There are a variety of ways in which students do not complete a course. Some accept an offer, attend but never register. Others defer prior to studies or during study. Some go through a formal withdrawal procedure. Others cease to attend or to do the necessary assignments without formally withdrawing. Some complete the required assignments but fail to reach the required standards and leave. Some move to do another course at another institution. Others fail their exams.

The existing evidence suggests that the terms used for non-completion need to distinguish between different forms of student behaviour such as non-starting, transfers, interrupted learning, withdrawal, failure, deferral. If Institutions fail to distinguish between the range of potential withdrawal routes when presenting data, figures will have limited meaning.

Positive Withdrawals

Several different terms are used to describe students who leave third level colleges before graduating: attrition, dropouts, student causalities, non -presisters, withdrawals, failures, student wastage, non -completers, early leavers. Many of these terms have negative

connations while more positive interpretations and terminologies are absent. Indeed, students often leave courses of study for positive reasons; they have derived all the benefit they want; they have realized that a course is not appropriate for them or they have gained employment.

In such cases non completion is not necessarily a negative experience and maybe a positive career move.

There is substantial evidence that many who leave a course or institution nonetheless remain in the education system or have every intention of returning to learning at a future date.

(Moorgat, 1997, Ozga et al., 1997). The idea of non-completion belongs to a concept of education as a continuum, necessarily linear, from compulsory (primary and secondary) education passing through higher education to the world of work. As the OECD Report (1997) suggests for some students non -completion can reflect

> ➤ .an intent to "stopout" rather than "dropout"
> ➤ .a decision to change orientation

Therefore student non -completion should not be invariably viewed as failure either on the part of the individual or the institution.

Current Literature on Student Non -Completion

The most striking feature of a review of the literature is the dearth of research work in Ireland on student non -completion in higher education until recently.

Similarly in Britain a search of the British Education Index reveals little on the topic.(Jhones et al., 1989, 1990; Rickinson et al., 1996). Recently two studies have been commissioned by the Higher Education Funding Council. (1997). Only in the last two years has non - completion in higher education been identified by the Council of Europe as a phenomenon requiring investigation in Europe. (Moortgat, 1997]

In the USA the subject of student non completion has been researched for many years (Pantages and Creedon, 1978; Bean and Metzner, 1985; Tinto 1975, 1987; PascareLla and Terenzini,1991; Myton et al, 1992: Fralick,1993). This research was initially prompted by institutional concerns about enroLlment during a period of demographic

decline. More recently these issues have emerged as part ofa wider public discussion on the effectiveness of the educational system.

In summary, the literature on student non -completion is varied and often disparate. Differences in the student populations surveyed, the diverse methodologies used and types of institutions investigated, lead to caution in extrapolating from studies in other countries to an Irish context.

What the literature says about non -completion

In an attempt to understand the reasons for non -completion researchers have explored the characteristics of students themselves, looking at demographic data, age, gender, socio - economic status, prior educational attainments, motivation, personality factors, reasons for withdrawal, academic performance, and finance. Most of these studies have been in USA and more recently in Britain.(Astin et al. 1987; H.E.F .C.E., 1987; Myton et al, 1992; McGivney,1996; Noel, 1987; Rickinson,1995, 1996; Tinto 1975,1987;)

The diversity of research findings on the possible links between student characteristics and non -completion suggests that it would be unreliable to use the former as predictors of high risk categories. Kember emphasizes the error of exploring predictive factors.

It is comforting that entry characteristics are such poor predictors of success. Students with the wrong initial data set are not pre-destined to fail however hard they try. The faculty and the college do have a role to play in determining the success or otherwise of their students.(Kember, 1995p.32)

Other studies have explored the student -college interaction; adjustment to third level, social integration, staff / student ratios and relationships. A number have focused on the institutions themselves, examining the college environment, its size and location, campus climate and ambiance. (Astin, 1993; Bean and Metzner, 1985; Cope & Hannah, 1975; Johnes et al 1989)

A variety of factors associated with student non -completion have been identified and I list the most consistent findings: .inappropriate course choice

.lack of preparedness for level of work workload and time commitment greater than anticipated lack of academic skills e.g. note taking frustrated expectations of course / institution difficulties in settling and integrating into life of an institution

.lack of support from significant others lack of financial support.

Most of the research reviewed focused on identifying particular student characteristics with withdrawal but did not provide a theoretical framework to understand the process of non - completion. Tinto's (1975,1987) work has been seminal in providing a model of student departure that explains the longitudinal process of interactions that results in students leaving third level colleges Tinto (1987) placed particular importance on the interaction of the student with the college environment and on the relationship between academic and social integration and drop-out.

Tinto's interactionalist model proposes that persistence in college may be affected by a person's integration into both the academic and social system of the college with social integration occurring primarily through infonnal peer group associations, semi fonnal extra curricular activities and interaction with academic and administrative staff(1987). Tinto's model attempts to understand the actions of students in tenns of the meaning leaving had for them. He proposed that departure is a "highly idiosyncratic event, one that can only be fully understood by referring to the understandings and experiences of each and every person who departs" (1987,p.39).

The major limitation ofTinto's model is that he does not include the influences of the wider social, cultural and family context on student experiences. It also does not take account of the socio -political and cultural contexts within which higher education occurs.

Pilot Study of 1st year Students

This pilot study focuses on the experiences of students in first year in a Irish higher education institution. The particular experiences of students who leave / fail first year are examined to ascertain the differences, if any, between the experiences of students who left and those who stayed. Furthermore data was obtained on their reasons for leaving and the meaning of this event in their lives. The influences of social and family contexts on student non- completion are also explored.

Methodology

A postal survey of all students who registered for the first time at the institution in 1993 was undertaken. The questionnaire was designed to elaborate Tinto's (1991) model by investigating not only the students' pre entry characteristics and the students' experiences after entry but also the students' social and family context. The questionnaire sought information on a number of areas including: demographic data, socio- economic factors, prior educational experiences, issues relating to course choice, experiences while at college both academic and social, financial arrangements, reasons for leaving the college and perceived impact of departure. In addition to the above, the questionnaire also sought; the students' views on the impact of withdrawal on themselves, their overall impression of the college and their recommendations on changes to improve the quality of life for students. In line with a qualitative approach the questionnaire contained space for the students' open- ended comments.

Population of the Study

The population of the study consisted of all students who registered in the institute in 1993 for the first time were invited to participate in the study. In 1993 the number of students who registered was 946. Of this population 336 dropped out -244 involuntary (failed exams) and 92 voluntary (withdrew). The findings presented here are based on the completed questionnaires received, which came from over one quarter of all students who registered in the college for the first time in that year.

<div align="center">

Key Research Findings

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Findings from the students who passed

The majority of respondents (70%) were aged 18 yr. or 19 yr. at the time of registration. They were single and came from a relatively large family, consisting of over four children and two parents. They mainly (60%) lived away from home during their first year in college. At the time the student came to the college the majority of fathers (71%) and a minority of mothers (41%) were in full employment

One of the principal findings or the study was that the majority of parents (90% of fathers

and 92% of mothers) did not receive third level education. However the students brothers (41%) and sisters (45%) were more likely than their parents to have attended a third level college. Yet most respondents (55%) reported that their families were the greatest influence on them in choosing a course while as few as 14% reported school staff were the major influence.

For most, 68% the decision to come to college was entirely their own and parents on the whole (97%) were in agreement with that decision. 49% reported they had not received career guidance before coming to the college.
71% gained within their first three choices of course and most respondents (87%) were pleased at being accepted for college.

Finance at college came primarily from grant and working (63%). Finance as such constituted a serious problem for 24% of respondents. 55% of students carried out paid employment during term time.

Those who left the college without continuing into second year
Respondents who left the college without continuing into second year differed significantly in a number of ways from those who stayed.
- They were likely to be younger aged 17 to 18.
- The decision to come to college was less likely to have been a personal one and less likely to have parental support.
- They reported receiving less career guidance with 67% receiving none.
- Of the students who left (41 %) viewed themselves not as committed as other students in their class, 30% of them felt less well prepared for college and 21% experienced some di fficulties in the transition to third level.

One of the most significant finding was that the study group respondents were more likely to work in a job during term time, to work longer hours and to be dependent on income from work to finance their studies. A higher percentage of those who left reported that work interfered with their studies, than those who continued on into second year.

Fig. 1 number of hours worked in paid employment		
	Students who continues	students who left/failed
6-10 Hr.	31%	30%
15-20 Hr.	10%	35%

A space was created within the questionnaire for students to voice their reasons for non-completion and to identify the aspects of college life for which they were unprepared. The following tables outline their responses.

~ Wrong choice of course

~ Unsatisfactory experience of course

~ Lack of preparation for third level

~ Inability to cope with demands of college

~ Financial reasons

~ Family / personal difficulties

Fig 3. Aspects of college life unprepared for

~ Living away from home

~ Getting to know people

~ Self management / responsibility for self

~ Managing finances / budgeting

~ New academic format

~ Workload demands of course

 Study and time management

Discussion

The findings of this study suggest there are a combination of social, personal and institutional factors associated with students not completing first year in higher education. The study is subject to several limitations. It is a single -institution study and comprised one undergraduate intake only, so the findings may not be generalised other than to institutes of similiar type and entry requirements. The limits of *post hoc* questionnaires in examining

students reasons for leaving have already been highlighted by Braxton et al. (1988). Notwithstanding the above, the findings of this study have increased our understanding of the factors which contribute to student non -completion in higher education. The study supports Tinto's hypothesis that students' social and academic integration into the institution is a contributing factor in non -completion. Students who left tended to perceive themselves as less committed and less prepared than others. They also experienced difficulty in adjusting to the academic and social demands of the college.

The study also highlighted the influence of the wider social and family context on student non -completion. Many students are making uninformed choices about courses and are unprepared for the demands of third level. The majority of respondents reported receiving no career guidance and relied on the informal system of family for guidance. As the majority of the students who do not complete are first generation in higher education; their families have not the experience of an ever increasing complex third level system. Accurate knowledge about career options, course demands and the exploration of a student's goals are a prerequisite for effective decision making. Ouidance counsellors are in a unique position to enable students become proactive choosers making informed and responsible choices .

However, many schools do not have the resources necessary to provide an adequate guidance couselling service.

The effect of financial hardship and part time work on non -completion emerged from this
study. The students who did not complete were more lightly to experience financial
l
difficulties than those who passed and more lightly to work. In addition they worked longer
hours and reported working interfered more with there studies than those who passed.
In conclusion this study indicates that not only do personal and institutional factors impact on
student non completion but that the wider family and social context also contribute. The

interactive patterns of these systems and the ways in which personal, family and cultural factors interact in students lives leading them to define themselves as student and to abandon the definition needs furthur research.

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