



COGNITION, MOTIVATION AND EMOTION:  
DYNAMICS IN THE ACADEMIC ENVIRONMENT

Fedora Psyche Conference in Lisbon, 2002

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# COGNITION, MOTIVATION AND EMOTION: DYNAMICS IN THE ACADEMIC ENVIRONMENT

Fedora Psyche Conference in Lisbon, 2002

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## INTRODUCTION

The title of this second PSYCHE conference reveals the Programme Committee's intentions: to gather contributions and encourage participants to discuss topics that focus on the interplay between the cardinal functions of cognition, motivation, and the emotional difficulties that students have to face, in a world of change and uncertainty. Psychological counsellors have as one of their main functions to help students to envisage more clearly who they are, who they may want to become, what difficulties (either academic, personal or interpersonal) that may be hindering their full development as students and as persons, and how to overcome them and discern their future. This is why René Magritte's painting "Le Libérateur" was chosen for the poster of this Conference, with its magnificent symbols, the key, the cup, the pipe and the bird. Indeed, psychological counsellors aim at assisting students in the understanding of their internal psychological functioning (the key) and in the resolution of the leading psychological developmental task proper to young adults, the consolidation of their identity (the cup and the pipe). This will allow them more freedom (the bird) in their choices and more confidence in facing their academic and personal challenges. These challenges may be emotional, motivational or cognitive ones, but they may prevent students using their full potential.

Although the PSYCHE conferences are mainly addressed to FEDORA and PSYCHE members, it was decided to publicize this one among Portuguese specialists, either working in Psychological Counselling in Higher Education or carrying out research that throws light into students' need of it. This was done because this Conference was an invaluable opportunity for Portuguese specialists to exchange ideas and to learn from the experience and knowledge of counsellors from European countries, where counselling in Higher Education is by now a much more established experience. Indeed, a lot of Portuguese counselling services are now just starting.

It is not incidental that this conference in Portugal was organised by the team of the first Portuguese Higher Education counselling service, which dates from 1983. At that time, Graça Dias was teaching and researching at the Faculty of Sciences and Technology in Lisbon, but had also personal experience in person-centred and psychodynamic therapies, and knew the work of counselling services both in the United States and the United Kingdom. She decided to propose the creation of the first counselling service in Portugal because she was convinced of the usefulness of such a service for students, although she only gained the approval of the institution, thanks to the mentorship of Professors Leopoldo Guimarães and Marciano da Silva, respectively the Dean and the Scientific Council President. In its first year, the service had no more than a half dozen of students, as any student who entered the service felt the risk of being looked at askance by his or her peers. Moreover she had to face the reluctant acceptance of her work by some colleagues and the hostility and suspicion of others who saw the service as of no use to the institution. Today, however, around 2,5% of the total student population seek individual counselling every year, in addition to those who attend the preventive and developmental activities offered by the service.

Slowly counselling services in Portugal began to spread. At the time when Professor Manuel Viegas de Abreu organised an International Conference on guidance in Coimbra in 1996, which brought together FEDORA and Portuguese specialists, there were still only six guidance services in Portugal. However, now there are 24 counselling services, although some of them are only beginning and face difficult and insecure situations in terms of their human and financial resources. Nevertheless, Portuguese counsellors are committed to overcome obstacles and enhance the quality of their services. They are presently linked together into a common network, with a homepage on the Internet, and soon will be organised as a formal national association. Yet, they know that they are still far from having the usefulness of their

work valued and accepted at the institutional level in Higher Education.

In the opening session of the conference, Graça Figueiredo Dias, in her position of Chair, emphasized, in the presence of the Rector of the Universidade Nova de Lisboa, Professor Sousa Lobo, and Margaret Dane, the FEDORA President, that at a time when financial and human resources devoted to counselling services in Higher Education are becoming scarce, the question of the priority of two aspects of our work is critical. On the one hand, devices that aim to make students more efficacious (e.g., reducing exam anxiety, enhancing study skills), that is the visible side of our work, "the one the institution generally values most" or, on the other hand, the more silent help of the more vulnerable students, the invisible side.

Three keynote speakers introduced the working days. Gerhart Rott connected the topic of the conference with the change of the structures within Higher Education as stated in the Bologna declaration. These changes, the perspective of a self-managed progression in learning and work, and uncertainty about the future have an impact on students in terms of fear of failure and additional stress. Elsa Bell's lecture showed how brief therapy may be the treatment of choice for university students and how the context of the university setting can be used to enhance the therapeutic work. She suggested that, far from brief therapy being the 'poor relation' of longer and more traditional therapies, it has a usefulness in its own right. The third Contributor, Frederico Pereira, contended through a condensed epistemological analysis, that there is no valuable education without a Culture of Education, as a social construction of meaning, of knowledge and of the selves, on the basis of social interactions. A positive utopia is to think of education as promoting cooperation instead of "competitivism" - the deep approaches to learning and decentralization instead of the pragmatic ones and auto-centralization. From Wednesday to Friday, the 84 participants (50 being Portuguese) were offered 10 working groups and 1 workshop including 33 papers. Topics of these working groups were "New perspectives on students' support", "Study choice decision", "Helping students' development in the academic environment", "Academic achievement: Research and intervention studies", "Cognitive, motivational, and emotional factors in learning", "Some factors influencing academic well-being: research studies", "Cognition, motivation, and emotions in examinations and high demanding work", "Using symbols and imagination as a bridge between cognition and emotion in students' counselling and therapy (workshop)", "Career development", "Feelings and emotional problems", "Research and case studies" and "Psychological adjustment to the academic environment: Research and intervention studies". The profusion of the theoretical and methodological approaches of the contributors showed how the interplay between cognition, motivation and emotion was a critical topic in research and practices in students' counselling. Paradigms underlying reflections were numerous: cognitivo-behavioural, social learning, "hot" cognition, Freudian, cognitivo-psychoanalytic, philosophical, transcultural. This was evidence of the openness and richness of the discussion among participants. On the other hand it clearly appeared that the use of group work is growing, not only as a result of economic constraints, but also as a specific resource which needs to be developed.

This conference also showed the importance of doing research, as well as intervention, at the level of Psychological Counselling, for example, on the first day Jean-Paul Broonen spoke about his research which showed that well established models from United States don't fit the understanding of European students academic issues. Also in some of the working groups, the value of demonstrating objectively the results of our work to the institution was stressed.

The conference showed that the FEDORA-PSYCHE group is well-poised to strive towards a joint strengthening and deepening of a truly European dimension of higher education counselling. We must seek out the right channels, instruments and instances of the European political and educational forums, and muster our concerted efforts to obtain tangible responses from them. At the national level too, this event

allows the opportunity to promote increased local awareness and recognition. The Conference took place thanks to financial support from the European organisation FEDORA (Forum Européen de l'Orientation Académique) and from several Portuguese Higher Education and Research Agencies, namely "Faculdade de Ciências e Tecnologia" and its choir, "Reitoria" and "Serviços de Acção Social", all members of "Universidade Nova de Lisboa", and, furthermore, "Fundação Calouste Gulbenkian", "Fundação para a Ciência e Tecnologia", "Instituto de Inovação Educacional", "Unidade de Investigação Educação e Desenvolvimento", "Câmara Municipal de Lisboa". We would like to express our gratitude to all those organizations for their effort. We would also thank to Fernando Rato, Joana Lemos, Maria João Moutinho and Paula Albuquerque who helped to prepare the conference in Lisbon and Helga Knigge-Illner as well as Peter Figge who also were part of the Programme Committee. Finally, we would like to express our thanks to Christine Pradel-Pavési and to Karine Brutin for helping us out with parts of the French translations. The results of the conference are so encouraging that we thought it worthwhile to share them with a larger audience. So we are grateful to all the colleagues who spared no effort to turn their conference contribution into a more formalised manuscript for publication and let them be checked by native speakers. We would like to thank Ann Conlon who read all the texts for a second time. We would also like to thank Catharina Schultz for the editorial help. This publication continues the effort of FEDORA-PSYCHE, started in the early 90s, to contribute to a body of knowledge in student guidance and counselling. In this way it facilitates the communication of student counsellors on a European scale. In doing so it emphasizes the importance of student counselling for the well-being of students and the quality of the academic learning environment. Thus it gives the issue of student counselling a voice within the emerging European Area of Higher Education.

The editors

## FEDORA PRESIDENT'S OPENING SPEECH

Honourable guests, ladies and gentlemen, colleagues and friends in FEDORA

On behalf of the Executive Committee of FEDORA I would like to welcome you all to this important occasion. A significant group of professional experts in the field of psychological counselling of students in higher education throughout Europe are meeting here in Lisbon over the next few days to discuss and learn about matters of central importance to the well-being and success of our students.

FEDORA – Forum européen de l'orientation académique/European forum for student guidance – is a network of professional student advisers working in higher education institutions throughout Europe. It was founded in 1988 and includes psychological counsellors such as yourselves, but also study advisers, careers advisers and advisers to students with special needs.

FEDORA has held a considerable number of successful events during the 14 years of its existence. It holds a Congress every three years, with venues including Athens/Delphi, Berlin, Barcelona, l'Aquila and Edinburgh and the next one will be in Odense, Denmark, from 25–28 May 2003. There have been six summer universities which provide excellent opportunities for professional development and exchange of best practice as well as a chance to develop valuable contacts with colleagues involved in similar work across Europe.

FEDORA Psyche Working Group which has organised this important symposium, has been involved in a number of previous specialist events like this one as well as providing a range of workshops at the Congresses and Summer Universities. FEDORA's other Working Groups have been similarly involved in organising and ensuring the success of our special events and in producing the range of FEDORA publications.

On behalf of the Executive Committee and our national members whom we represent, I wish to thank our hosts here in Lisbon for your hospitality. I also want to thank the Psyche Working Group and in particular Graça Figueiredo-Dias and Gerhart Rott, along with their colleagues involved in the planning of this symposium for the huge amount of hard work they have done to get us all here. I wish them and you all as participants, a very successful and enjoyable symposium.

Margaret Dane, FEDORA President

## PAROLE D'OUVERTURE DU PRÉSIDENT DE FEDORA

Mesdames et Messieurs, collègues et chers amis de FEDORA, C'est au nom du comité de direction de FEDORA que je voudrais vous souhaiter la bienvenue dans le cadre d'une manifestation aussi importante .

Un groupe d'experts professionnels excellents et nombreux , dans le domaine de la consultation psychologique des étudiants de l'enseignement supérieur européen, se réunit ici à Lisbonne, ces jours ci, pour discuter et s'informer sur des sujets très importants qui impliquent le bien-être et le succès de nos étudiants.

FEDORA, Forum Européen de l'Orientation Académique \ Forum du Conseil pour l'étudiant, est un réseau des conseillers professionnels travaillant dans des établissements d'enseignement supérieur de l'ensemble de l'Europe. Il a été fondé en 1988 et inclut aussi bien les conseillers psychologiques que vous représentez, mais également les conseillers

de l'information, les conseillers de l'emploi mais aussi tous les autres types d'accompagnements de l'étudiant.

FEDORA a organisé un nombre considérable d'événements avec succès au cours de ces 14 années. FEDORA organise un congrès tous les trois ans, dans les grandes villes européennes que l'on peut citer, Athènes/Delphes, Berlin, Barcelone, l'Aquila et Edimbourg. Le prochain aura lieu à Odense au Danemark du 25 au 28 mai 2003.

Nous avons organisé six universités d'été. Cela représente d'excellents moyens pour le développement et les échanges de pratiques professionnelles ainsi que l'opportunité de développer des contacts de qualité avec des collègues à travers l'Europe.

Le groupe de travail de FEDORA Psyché qui organise ce colloque important s'est déjà impliqué dans de précédentes manifestations de psychologues mais a aussi fourni une gamme d'ateliers importants pendant les congrès et les universités d'été.

Les autres groupes de travail de FEDORA ont de façon identique organisé et assuré le succès de manifestations et ont produit de nombreuses publications sous l'égide de FEDORA.

Au nom du comité de direction et de nos membres nationaux que nous représentons, je souhaite remercier nos hôtes pour leur hospitalité.

Je tiens à remercier également le groupe de travail de Psyché et en particulier Graça Figueiredo-Dias et Gerhart Rott, ainsi que leurs collègues qui se sont investis dans l'organisation de ce colloque ce qui représente une quantité énorme de travail pour que nous puissions nous réunir aujourd'hui.

Je vous souhaite à tous organisateurs ou participants un colloque très réussi et agréable.

Margaret DANE, Présidente de FEDORA

## THE INTERPLAY BETWEEN COGNITION, EMOTION AND MOTIVATION: A QUALITATIVE PARAMETER FOR HIGHER EDUCATION IN EUROPE – A CONTRIBUTION BY THE FEDORA WORKING GROUP PSYCHE

## LES INTERACTIONS ENTRE COGNITION, ÉMOTION ET MOTIVATION : UN PARAMÈTRE QUALITATIF POUR L'ENSEIGNEMENT SUPÉRIEUR EN EUROPE – UNE CONTRIBUTION DU GROUPE DE TRAVAIL PSYCHE DE FEDORA

Gerhart Rott |

### ABSTRACT

The efforts of European countries to adapt to the British Bachelor (BA) and Master (MA) programme and to establish a European Area of Higher Education offer the opportunity to compare different higher education systems and thus make them more transparent. In addition, universities experience “[...] pressure towards efficiency and accountability” (Watts & Esbroeck, 1998, p. 89). This changing nature of the HE systems demands new qualifications from the students and has a deep impact on their learning culture. Students have to face a future in which self-managed progression in learning and work plays a major role. Undoubtedly, these tendencies influence the way students experience university. In this context, it seems to be helpful to have a closer look at the interaction of cognition, emotion and motivation.

Students react to the changing demands and requirements in various ways. A common dominator of such reactions is great uncertainty. It is obvious that new structures often imply additional stress and pressure put on the students. Higher education institutions as a whole must learn to cope with these changes, not only for their own benefit but in order to help students adapt to and profit from the renewal of the system. It is important not to assume that young people can manage themselves, but to realize that they may need help. Everyone within the higher education environment (i.e. professors as well as counsellors) has the responsibility to share and exchange their experiences in order to improve and balance the students’ position. Communication is a central means to reach this goal.

Guidance and Counselling services contribute to a better understanding of these central challenges. Furthermore FEDORA-PSYCHE has shown ways to communicating some of these new experiences in HE. In this connection a focus of this lecture is on the concept of self-esteem. This concept seems to be fruitful for a further extended exchange of views within HE in a European environment. It might also be useful for the more general debate on the changing needs of students.

Key words: European Area of Higher Education, guidance and counselling services, motivation, emotion, self-esteem

## RÉSUMÉ

Les efforts des pays européens pour s'adapter au programme du baccalauréat britannique (BB) et de la Maîtrise (MA) et pour établir un espace européen de l'enseignement supérieur offrent la possibilité de comparer différents systèmes d'enseignement supérieur et donc de les rendre plus transparents.

De plus, les universités font l'expérience "[...] de pressions vers l'efficacité et la responsabilité financière" (Watts & Van Esbroeck, 1998, p. 89). Cette modification de la nature des systèmes d'enseignement supérieur requiert de nouvelles compétences de la part des étudiants et a un impact profond sur leur culture d'apprentissage.

Les étudiants ont à faire face à un futur où la progression autogérée de l'apprentissage et du travail joue un rôle majeur. Ces tendances influencent sans aucun doute la façon dont les étudiants appréhendent l'université. Dans un tel contexte, il semble qu'il soit utile d'avoir un regard plus aigu sur l'interaction entre la cognition, l'émotion et la motivation.

Les étudiants réagissent à ces nouvelles demandes et exigences de diverses façons. Un dénominateur commun à de telles réactions est une grande incertitude. Il est évident que de nouvelles structures impliquent souvent chez les étudiants un stress et une pression accrus.

Les institutions d'enseignement supérieur doivent globalement apprendre à gérer ces changements, non seulement pour leur propre profit, mais aussi pour aider les étudiants à s'adapter à ce renouveau du système et à en tirer profit. Il est important de ne pas faire l'assomption que les jeunes sont capables de se gérer eux-mêmes, mais de réaliser qu'ils peuvent avoir besoin d'aide.

Chacun, dans l'environnement de l'enseignement supérieur (c'est-à-dire, les professeurs aussi bien que les conseillers), a la responsabilité de partager et d'échanger ses expériences en vue d'améliorer et d'équilibrer la situation des étudiants. La communication est l'outil principal permettant d'atteindre ce but.

Les services d'orientation et de counselling contribuent à une meilleure compréhension de certains de ces défis majeurs. De plus, FEDORA-PSYCHE a montré les voies par lesquelles on peut communiquer certaines de ces nouvelles expériences dans l'enseignement supérieur. En rapport avec ce point, l'un des foyers de cette communication est le concept d'estime de soi. Ce concept semble fécond dans la perspective d'échanges de vues plus larges au sein de l'enseignement supérieur dans le contexte européen. Il pourrait aussi se révéler utile à propos du débat plus général sur les besoins en évolution des étudiants.

Mots clés: espace européen de l'enseignement supérieur, services d'orientation et d'aide psychologique, motivation, émotion, estime de soi

## INTRODUCTION



Your Excellency Professor Luís Fernando Gomes de Sousa Lobo, Mrs. Margaret Dane, dear Colleagues, Ladies and Gentlemen – welcome to our symposium on "Cognition, Motivation and Emotion: the Dynamics of the Academic Environment".

I would like to thank all who have participated in the preparation of this conference. Especially I would like to thank Dr. Graca Figureido Dias who has done such a great job in making the conference possible, coping with all the obstacles which inevitably occurred in the preparation process. She has experienced, I think, a fairly general feature of the European Union: it is rewarding to co-operate on a European scale – but it is always also a challenge.

This is the second independent conference of the FEDORA–PSYCHE Working Group after the symposium in Copenhagen on Separation and Attachment in 1999.

In stating the topic of this second conference we have taken on the challenging task of examining the dynamics of higher education (HE) with a clear focus on cognition, emotion and motivation. By highlighting these complex constructs, we aim to elaborate some issues in the psychology of higher education, and at the same time draw attention to the student developmental process within the academic environment. But we have a further and particularly pressing reason for choosing our conference topic. For, on a European scale, tremendous structural changes are currently going on within the institutional setting of academia, and their success depends, in an ultimate sense, on their impact on students. To look at the interplay between student cognition, emotion and motivation on the one hand, and structural change within higher education on the other, may therefore provide us with a perspective for evaluating some of the features of change and estimating the chances and risks involved in the current processes.

It is the aim of my introductory lecture to develop a framework on the interplay between cognition, emotion and motivation as three distinct factors, as well as on the interaction of these three factors with structural change. In this way one can develop some meaningful and relevant links between the knowledge emerging within counselling rooms and the current debate on change in higher education. In their daily work with students, psychological counsellors learn a lot about the needs of students and their efforts to cope with the demands put on them. Counsellors are well aware that structural changes sometimes make things worse, not better – if those changes fail to adequately consider the developmental tasks of the student and the personal circumstances of academic learning. It is this kind of 'realistic knowledge' that is worth communicating to the wider academic community, as well as to society at large.

But to be successful here we have to listen to the arguments of others. Those who believe in the need for structural change see it as reciprocating the demands of society. It is a kind of mutually conditioning oscillation process. They nourish the hope that structural change will improve results and provide the education society wants. It would be myopic not to listen to what this is all about. Even if the different worlds of counselling and management seem too far apart to make meaningful communication possible, it would be a regressive attitude to just give up. According to Watzlawick et al., there is no way not to communicate (Watzlawick et al., 1969). So it is probably better to do it in a conscious way – and as counsellors we may indeed facilitate the communication process.

In the quest for 'realistic knowledge', one of the exciting events in our short FEDORA–PSYCHE history was our cooperation with the Association for Student Counselling in the UK, nowadays called the Association for University and College Counselling, to jointly prepare their conference on "Culture and Psyche in Transition: a European Perspective on Psychological Health" in Brighton in 1996. There we had a thorough look at important "Implications for Cross-Cultural Counselling" (Okorochoa, 1996, p. 82)

and Processes of “Alienation and Adaptation” (Van Deurzen-Smith, 1996, p. 1). In summarizing some of our results at the end of the conference I used the idea of conceptual networks (Rott, 1996b; 1997b) to describe some of the communication processes within the counselling setting as well as in cross-cultural encounters.

Respecting differences and accepting the unknown is an important feature of these conceptual networks. It is a way to relate to complex human environments in which it is neither possible nor perhaps desirable to understand everything. It might also be a way to better understand our own selves and our environments. People have to be aware of their personal experiences and interests but they also have to find out whether they can cooperate with others. Truly cooperative relationships respect differences in cultural background. They put personal experience into action without feeling the need to understand the ‘foreign’ context completely. Under these conditions, cooperation will bring new knowledge.

We as professionals in psychological counselling can be part of such a cooperative attempt to establish conceptual networks in order to understand the difficult and sometimes unknown dynamics of higher education and to make use of this understanding to improve the learning environment of the student.

Such an attitude is even more crucial if one considers the major institutional role now being played by Europe in transforming higher education. Nowadays within HE, local or even personal decisions may interact with very distant global and European structural directives. The attempt to understand and at the same time acknowledge the foreign in building up cooperative conceptual networks may provide a fresh perspective on this complexity of trends. As Haug and Tauch suggest in *Learning Structures in Higher Education* (Haug & Tauch, 2001), counsellors may find such networks useful for coping with change, and be able to apply them in a heuristic and supportive way in their daily work with students.

To take a step in this direction, I would like to develop a framework for a conceptual network on a European scale.

- First I shall summarize the Bologna process and highlight some of its key concepts for the topic of cognition, emotion and motivation in higher education.
- Secondly, drawing on Psyche events as well as additional experiences and theories, some elements of a framework of cognition, emotion and motivation in higher education will be introduced.
- Thirdly, the attempt will be made to link these elements and issues to the changing structures of higher education, and to develop some qualitative parameters provided specifically by a counsellor’s perspective on higher education and the student.

## THE BOLOGNA PROCESS

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Various surveys over the last few years have pointed out that the learning structures in HE in Europe are extremely complex and varied. Reasons are the variations in type, breadth and duration of secondary education such as the existence or absence of subsystems of HE, the possibilities to transfer from one to the other, access to HE, study fees, or the structure, duration, number and types of degree that can be achieved (Haug, 1999, p. 10).

HE in Europe is confronted with globalisation, new communication technologies, English as the de facto lingua franca, increased competition and growing commercialisation. This has not only led to the rapid emergence of a new educational sector but also to the need for comparable and transparent educational systems. According to the reports, the latter may be achieved along four lines:

1. Adoption of credit systems for transfer and accumulation of academic credits compatible with ECTS. Such a system aims to activate the potential in Europe for greater flexibility, diversity and efficiency as well as increasing mobility and making European HE more comprehensible for students.  
ECTS as a European credit accumulation and transfer system aims to cover all forms of HE and allow transfer across the whole of Europe, facilitating response to diverse student needs and changing employment profiles (Haug, 1999, p. 18).
2. The Sorbonne declaration of May 1998 recommended that studies should be organized in an undergraduate cycle (leading to a first qualification) and a graduate cycle (leading to a master or doctoral degree). Following on the Bologna declaration there has been a movement towards a two-tier structure, which is basically about the consolidation of Bachelor/Master structures.
3. An enhanced European dimension in quality assurance and evaluation, resulting from a need for the development of transnational education agendas, will prepare European universities and governments to compete in the new world market (Haug, 1999, pp. 20-22).
4. Empowering Europeans to use new and more flexible learning opportunities provided by the European labour market. The adoption of a credit system will structurally ease the mobility of students and enable them to fully use Europe-wide career-related opportunities.  
Existing mobility programmes are to be further developed – e.g. with regard to the portability of national study grants and study loans. New forms of mobility for teachers and administrative staff are to develop (Haug, 1999, pp. 22-23).

On the basis of these findings and assumptions the Joint Declaration of the European Ministers of Education was signed in Bologna in June 1999. Since then the implementation of this Declaration has gained momentum in an increasing number of countries.

My own country has seen a rapid development of courses within the BA/MA-structure, which is a considerable change, since Germany has a long tradition of degree or diploma courses lasting at least 4½ to 5 years. Although there is quite a bit of reluctance, adaptation is going on fast. In my own federal state the University of Bochum has changed its structure almost completely into BA/MA-courses and my home university is already taking the necessary steps. When I visited the conference of the directors of the university guidance services in Strasbourg this summer I learned from the government representative that France is firmly committed to fulfil the Bologna requirements by 2010.

The main objective of the Bologna declaration is the creation of a European space for HE, built around the principles of mobility (of undergraduates as well as graduates), employability, competitiveness and attractiveness. Key factors for achieving this goal are accessible and comparable degree structures, the distinction between first qualifications and postgraduate studies (BA/MA), ECTS and quality assurance.

The Bologna process is an answer to ongoing transitions in the economic world. It is the task of the universities to cope with the new demands arising from economic change. But they have to maintain an environment in which teaching and research are still possible. This results in structural reforms aiming to make learning more open to these demands. Structural reforms of this sort should promote transparency without producing uniformity.

One of the purposes of structural change in HE is increased mobility on an academic as well as professional level. This is of particular importance in smaller countries in which a strong need for study and employment abroad exists. In other countries new emphasis is placed on incoming mobility. The result is the creation of a European labour market for highly qualified personnel.

Mobility requires a certain degree of cross-cultural competence and the ability to link with other countries not only on the part of the students but also on the part of the counselling and teaching staff. Mobility demands greater flexibility all round.

The Bologna Declaration wants to encourage processes which have a positive effect on the relation between higher education and professional life, in particular on the preparation of graduates for employment. "From the three aims underpinning the Bologna declaration, enhanced employability seems to be the strongest source of change and reform in higher education" (Haug & Tauch, 2001, p. 26). In some countries this is seen as a way to respond to high graduate unemployment, while other countries have undertaken specific efforts to promote first degree graduates on the labour market. To make their graduates more employable on a European level they have taken steps to reduce the duration of studies, e.g. by bringing actual duration more in line with official duration. A second means to increase the employability of students is to create alternative part-time degrees which are accepted throughout Europe.

It is the task of the universities to develop curricula which support student employability. To do so they are increasingly interacting and collaborating with employers and professional bodies. However, the debate on how to integrate so-called career management skills and key qualifications into the curricula is still going on, and the question how to achieve employability during degree studies has yet to be answered.

The third aim of the Bologna declaration – the promotion of competitiveness and attractiveness – has received amazingly high support in various countries over the last few years. "For several countries, the main goal is to attract more foreign students, in particular non-European students" (Haug & Tauch, 2001, p. 30). The reason behind this is the countries' interest in attracting young researchers in order to maintain a world-class research environment as well as increased international acceptance of their own degrees.

Different types of measures have been taken to increase the attractiveness of degree courses. These include traditional ones – for instance information brochures, databases and student fairs and the provision of language courses for incoming students. However, there are also a whole range of new methods e.g. "setting up new [...] internationally oriented, mostly postgraduate programmes taught in English, either specifically for foreign students or for a mixed audience of local and international students" (Haug & Tauch, 2001, p. 31-32). Some countries have also recognised the need to improve non-educational provision for foreign students e.g. accommodation or social and academic tutoring services. Several countries have even announced their intention to award additional grants to incoming students.

It seems that "more and more European countries and universities [...] have become

aware that their degrees are not automatically recognised at their real level in the outside world and that co-ordinated action is needed in this area [...]” (Haug & Tauch, 2001, p. 33).

In a first report on the Bologna declaration, guidance and counselling was seen as an important issue to counterbalance the changes and uncertainties brought about by the implementation of the declaration's aims. The role of psychological encouragement from professional advisors was especially emphasized. But since the focus has now basically shifted towards structural reform, the questions arises anew how and to what extent counsellors can contribute to the central topics of this debate. To summarize, these topics are: the effectiveness of learning structures, mobility, flexibility, qualification profiles and personal competence within the context of employability, and the attractiveness of universities to the young generation.

## THE FRAMEWORK OF COGNITION, EMOTION AND MOTIVATION IN HIGHER EDUCATION

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Those learning structures relate most effectively to the process of studying in which the student's self plays an important role. Understanding some of the phenomena that relate to the interplay of a student's cognitions, emotions and motivation – understanding, that is to say, the emotional risks and opportunities of being a student – will, therefore, be a step towards developing a conceptual network for the Bologna Process.

Students react to new (and often conflicting) demands and requirements in various ways. A common denominator of such reactions is uncertainty and fear of failure. It is obvious that increasing flexibility in their past, present and future life will often put additional stress on students. Higher educational institutions as a whole must learn to cope with such stress, which is, after all, the direct result of the social and economic changes in which they are themselves acutely involved. They must do so for their own sake. And they must do so in order to help students adapt to and profit from the expectations newly imposed on them – both within the higher education environment and in view of their future personal and professional life.

Guidance and counselling services have the immediate responsibility to help students balance their position in life, through perception and identification of the limits of their development. As Craig McDevitt has observed, the younger generations nowadays show an increasing tendency to introspection, blaming themselves if things do not work out that well. They have “high expectations of themselves and a lot is expected of them” (McDevitt, 2000, p. 39). “Thus it is important for counsellors not to assume that young people can manage themselves, but to realize that they may need help – and counsellors should be able to give it to them in a differentiated way” (Rott, 2002, p. 14). In all these issues, FEDORA-PSYCHE is trying to find answers on a European scale. To clarify and compare our different European settings we published a report on Psychological Counselling in Higher Education – A European Overview (Bell, McDevitt, Rott, & Valerio, 1994). Furthermore, inside the FEDORA-PSYCHE context, we have dealt with some central aspects of emotion, cognition and motivation and a great number of selected processes in which students find or place themselves during their studies. Students anticipate future events (Rott, 1994, p. 49). Making a decision does not stop once one is enrolled in a course, but the selections of goals, the examination of alternatives and choices continually accompany the process of studying. In 1994, we pointed out that the range and kind of decisions students take about courses depend

on national differences in higher education systems (Bell et al., 1994). Even today, with various adaptations of the BA/MA-system in place or taking place, this statement remains valid. Choices stabilize existing beliefs and concepts, and evoke new cognitions. "Since decisions require limitation and are self-reflexive (Broonen, 1991), they reinforce structuring cognitive processes. They go along with specific feelings and behaviours" (Rott, 1996a, p. 277).

One central aspect of decision-making is the stress put on students. In this context, Aherne's analysis (1997) of the developmental tasks of young adults and late adolescents in their relation to stress and threat to the self is very valuable. A central concept here is that of self-adequacy. Aherne's analysis of the interdependence of academic concerns, of the significance of the family and of social relationships creates a model of student stress which has a "functional relevance for student counselling interventions, but which also enhances the psychological understanding of students in higher education" (Rott, 1997a, p. 42).

Further important aspects of cognition, emotion and motivation were presented during our conference in L'Aquila in 1997. One of the workshops acquainted us with new developments in the student counselling services in specific countries (Valerio and Casacchia, 1997, mentioned in Rott, 1997b, p. 74). However, this was not the only time that we discussed possible future perspectives for psychological counselling. Adapting to new structures and problems has always been one of the main themes of the FEDORA-PSYCHE working group. In Barcelona in 1995, Elsa Bell already raised the question "Inside, outside or on the edge? A place for therapeutic counselling in the university community" (Bell as cited in Rott, 1996b, p. 118).

In another PSYCHE workshop at L'Aquila we discussed the importance of projecting the self into the future. Within the issues of attachment to and separation from parents, Graça Figureido Dias presented a paper on the impact of socio-economic status on the development of self-esteem in terms of projecting the self into the future. This paper discussed to what extent differences between the sexes influence these processes (Rott, 1997b, p. 72). At the same conference Barbara Rickinson explored the effectiveness of short-term counselling interventions in reducing distress. In this context it became obvious that, especially at important transition points, students may experience a high level of psychological stress. The question arose how effective counselling interventions could be for students trying to cope with such transition processes (Rott, 1997b, p. 73).

Generally it is important to keep in mind that the use of psychological theories in student counselling must always be open to correction and improvement, with a view to a more subtle understanding of their practical implications. Empirical research, like that of Broonen and Ahmadi on "individualism as a function of cultural variation" (Broonen & Ahmadi, as cited in Rott, 1997a, p. 42), makes clear how important cultural influences can be. The differentials yielded by Broonen and Ahmadi's additional research show how over-generalization in psychological concepts must be avoided. Our knowledge and concepts cannot be seen as a product, but as a continuous process of clarification. Further FEDORA-PSYCHE conferences have stressed the interaction between cognition, emotion and motivation. In Copenhagen (1999) the concepts of "Separation and Attachment" were presented. In this context, the importance of understanding the current interaction of higher education and psychotherapy within the defined context of the student environment was discussed. We turned our attention to the attachment theory (Bowlby, 1969; 1973; 1980), originally developed for early childhood, and concluded that questions concerning attachment and separation are not only important for work with young children, but also for work with young adults interacting in the world of higher education – and therefore also for the improvement of guidance and counselling services in higher education (Rott, 2002).

To illustrate the coherence of these practical and theoretical efforts I developed a model for our contribution to the European Psychological Congress in Athens in 1995. In a meta-analysis of existing psychological theories, the model identified some

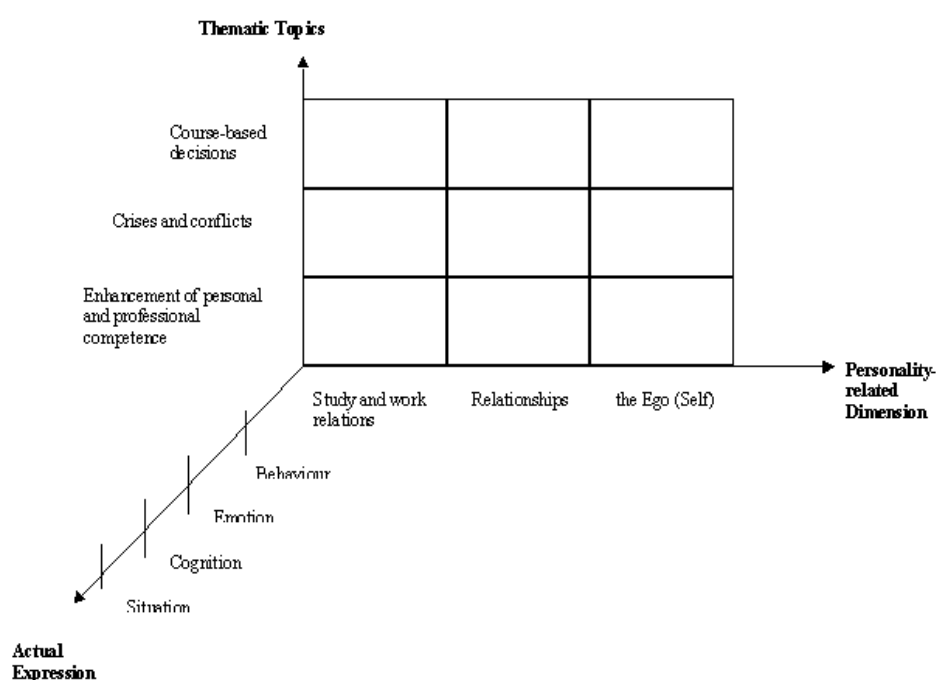
important features of a student's normal HE experience bearing on the interaction between emotion, cognition and behaviour, and related these to the support that can be provided by counsellors. The model used an earlier analysis of the motives which have to be coped with by a German Central Student Counselling Service (ZSB). As an integrated service, the ZSB incorporates psychological counselling as well as educational, orientational and some vocational guidance and counselling. In my analysis I introduced the following coordinates to highlight the interactive nature of student motives for contacting the counselling service – motives which had traditionally been thought of as disparate (Rott, 1991, pp. 57-78).

These motives are divided into thematic topics

- course-based decisions
- crises and conflicts
- enhancement of personal and professional competence

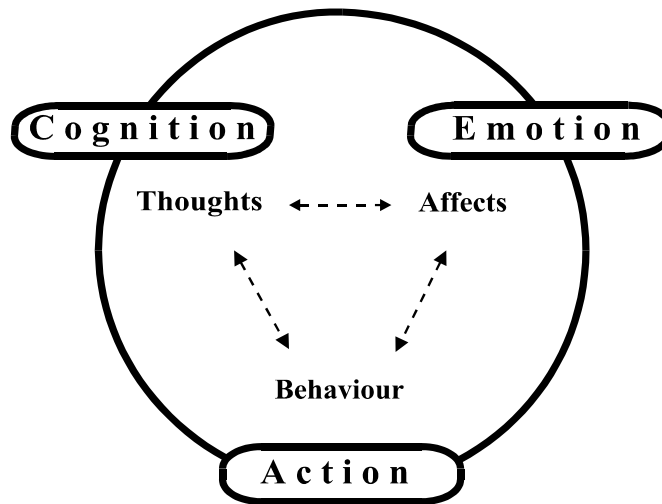
and personality-related dimensions

- study and work relations
- relationships
- the Ego (self).



The basic differentiation between emotion cognition and behaviour looks like this:

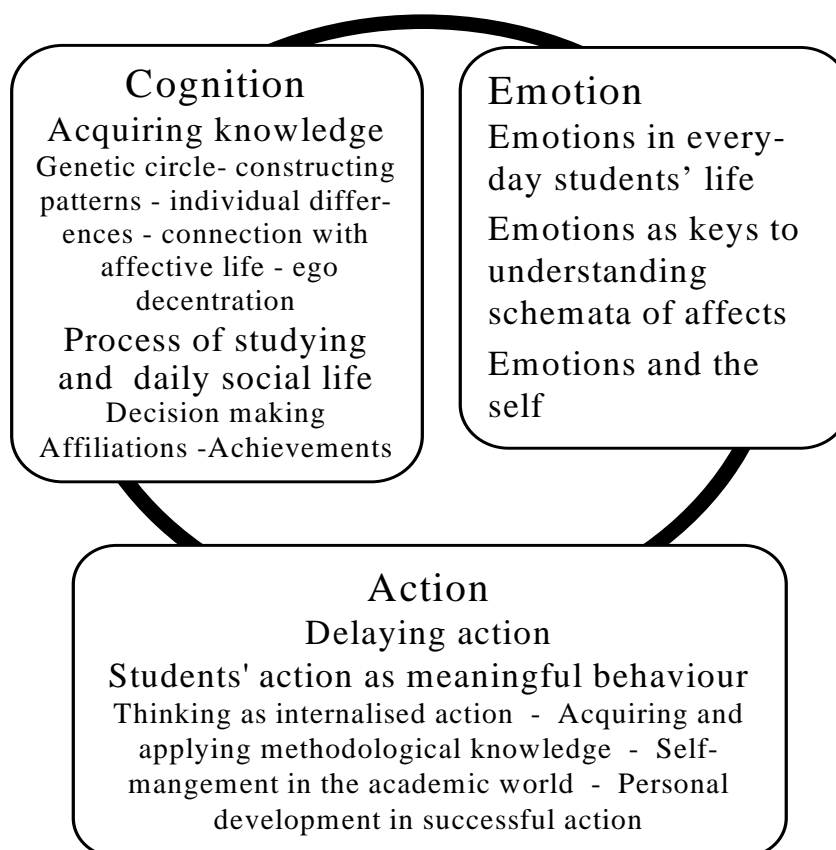
The Interaction between cognition, emotion and action



In the FEDORA-PSYCHE model I put these terms in the centre because I felt that to understand their interplay is an important key to understanding the student as a person, as well as his relation towards the university.



## Interaction between Emotion, Cognition and Action in Higher Education



To relate the process of acquiring academic knowledge as part of the perceived or constructed world of the student and his or her cognitive development I drew upon the epistemological approach of Piaget, because as far as I know he is still the one who provides us with the “most coherent psychological concept relating individual thinking and the structures of academic knowledge” (Rott, 1996a, p. 274). In his concept of the epistemological circle he gives us an idea of the student as someone who is participating in his or her studies as a subject acquiring knowledge. “The recognising subject knows the object only by his/her activities, but can know himself and one’s [his] activities only by relating to the object” (Rott, 1996a, pp. 274-275). Thus he/she constructs patterns, cognitive patterns connected with affective life, and in the process of ego-decentration becomes more flexible, more differentiated towards the object. Individual differences remain, of course, important.

Students’ relations to their subjects develop not only in direct contact with the ideas taught at university. Those relations advance as an integral part of their everyday personal and social life inside and outside the university. On the other hand, their everyday concerns connect with the task of becoming an academically trained person, and one can observe the cognitive development taking place within those processes. Theories like Weiner’s attributional theory of motivation and emotion (1986) may help us to understand what kind of significance specific cognitions might have for students in their daily life, and how these relate to emotions.

In everyday student life specific feelings like pride, hopelessness and hope, guilt and shame, anger, gratitude and pity relate to specific causal dimensions and

expectancies. Emotions are connected with past experiences. In their growth process as young adults during their time at university, students, in Piaget's terms, develop their emotional schemata. They are in a continuous balancing process: accommodation accompanies assimilation, balancing the inner and outer world. Present experience assimilates to past, and vice versa – the past to the present (Piaget, 1975, p. 238; Rott, 1996a, p. 279). We can say, therefore, that

To understand some phenomena which relate to the interplay of cognitions and emotions is to realise how closely the student's self is related to his/her process of studying. This comprehension provides insights into the emotional risks and opportunities of being a student (Rott, 1996a, p. 279).

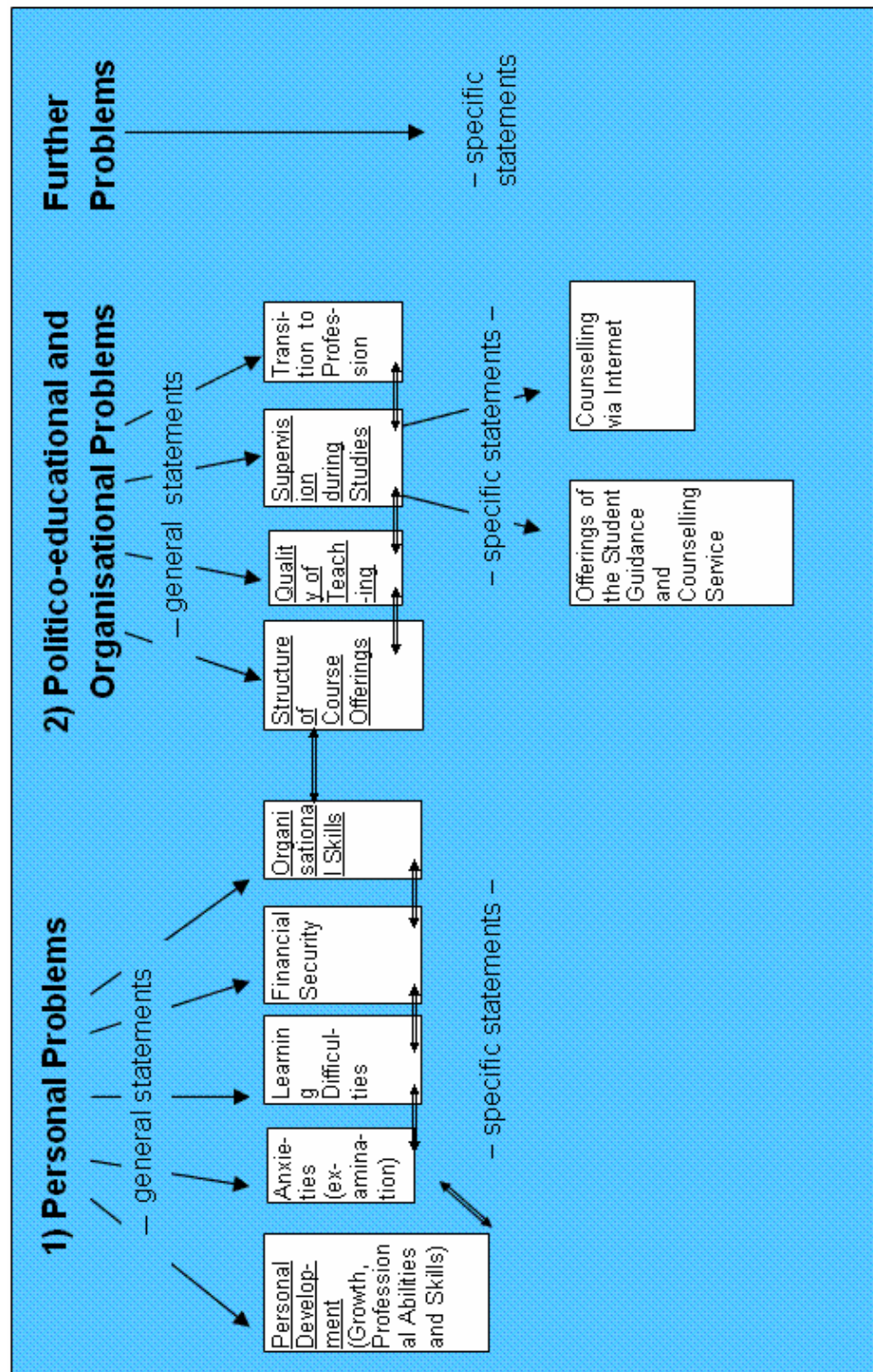
Thus, emotional security is important for students to enlarge their ability to take emotional risks and to check on their cognitive evaluations of situations in everyday life and in their academic learning process. Delaying action, on the other hand, can be understood as a structural element within higher education which is strongly connected with real life, yet also very distant to it. Allbert Ellis described this symptom when he said "99 percent of students procrastinate, know they procrastinate, and go on procrastinating" (Ellis, mentioned in Rückert, 1994, p. 130). Prolonged frustration may produce burn-out symptoms. To counterbalance these negative phenomena, emphasis has to be put on aspects relating to student action as meaningful behaviour. In the FEDORA-PSYCHE model I describe four such aspects:

- the potential of thinking as internalised action
- acquiring and applying methodological knowledge
- self-management in the academic world
- personal development in successful action

In these processes students cope with the expectations put on them by finding new balances: they "equilibrate – to use the Piagetian term – in a new way their cognitive and emotional life in concrete actions" (Rott, 1996a, p. 238).

In a qualitative study based on this model that looked into the ways in which student teachers identified difficulties and approached problem-solving within their studies, we found the following pattern:

Pattern of Categories (taken from Rott, Petersheim & Zimmermann, 2003, p. 45,  
slightly modified)



Note:  $\longleftrightarrow$  indicates categories with overlapping areas

In each category we discovered the impact of aspects relating to student action as meaningful behaviour for problem-solving. How the university stimulates the development of constructive study habits and self-management, and how on the other hand students are able to use what the university offers are essential issues here. In this respect a key concept of our study was that of moderate growth (Weiner, 1986, p. 234):

Weiner observes the cases of failure, which people have attributed to stable internal causes. In those cases a change of self-concept, self-esteem and expectation of success can only be changed as a gradual process, in terms of “moderate growth” (Rott, 1996a, p. 283).

With the emphasis we put on motivation and volition in our present conference, we might add new insights on how this moderate growth process is developing, especially as some modern motivation theories provide us with deeper insights into self-regulation processes.

Thus, in his functional-design approach to motivation and self-regulation, Julius Kuhl looks at Personality Systems Interactions (1999). In his attempt to describe the need for “a more differentiated model of dynamic aspects of motivation, a model that describes the flow of energy across various subsystems” (Kuhl, 1999, p. 11) he offers exciting perspectives on how motivation is connected with the dynamic functions of the four cognitive macrosystems:

*Functional characteristics of four cognitive macrosystems (taken from Kuhl, 1999, p. 15)*

	Behavioral Systems	Experiential Systems
High-inferential Systems	<u>Intention Memory (IM) / Thinking (left-hemispheric):</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• analytical (critical feature)</li> <li>• sequential</li> <li>• vulnerable</li> <li>• slow</li> <li>• accurate</li> <li>• decoupling from emotions</li> </ul>	<u>Extension Memory (EM) / Feeling (right hemispheric):</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• holistic (family resemblance)</li> <li>• parallel</li> <li>• robust</li> <li>• fast</li> <li>• impressionistic</li> <li>• close interaction with autonomic reactions</li> </ul>
Low-inferential Systems	<u>Intuitive Behavior Control (IBC):</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• contextual</li> <li>• cross-modal</li> </ul>	<u>Object Recognition (OR):</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• decontextualized</li> <li>• modality-specific</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• presence and future-oriented</li> <li>• anticipation</li> <li>• holistic</li> <li>• robust</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• past-oriented</li> <li>• recognition</li> <li>• analytical</li> <li>• vulnerable</li> </ul>
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Within the elaborated levels, what Kuhl calls the high inferential systems, namely "intention memory and analytical thinking" (ibid, p.17), the "[...] analytical thinking relates to the ability to form explicit representations of intended actions" (ibid, p.17) and to analytical problem solving. Extension memory and intuitive feeling connect with the implicit memory active in creating self-representations and intuitive problem solving (ibid, p. 18). In Kuhl's view

[This] high-level intuitive-holistic processing forms the basis of implicit self-representations, that is integrated representations of internal states such as need, emotions, somatic feelings (e.g., muscles tensions), and values. [...]. [It] postulates an implicit or 'intuitive' knowledge base integrating an extended network of representations of own states, including personal preferences, needs, emotional states, options for action in particular situations, and past experiences involving the self [...]. [...] This is to say that access to an implicit self-system enables self-determined action in the sense described by humanistic psychology (Rogers, 1961; Maslow, 1970) and more recently, in self-determination theory (Deci and Ryan, 1991) (ibid, pp. 18-19).

Kuhl goes on to say that the access in question, and the

intrinsically motivated self-determined action based on such representations [...] are positively related to emotional support of self-determined action in educational [...] settings, which in turn is positively related to indices of psychological and physical well-being (Brunstein, 1993; Ryan, Kuhl & Deci, 1997; Sheldon & Kasser, in Press) (ibid, p. 20).

What Kuhl calls "action oriented emotional coping" (ibid, p. 20) is part of seven affect-cognition modulations related to the four cognitive macrosystems. I do not want to go into the details of them here but would like to make more explicit what it is about by relating three essential issues of Kuhl's Personality Systems Interactions to a short therapy of 10 sessions with a student.

Carola, an economics student in her fifth semester, came to our Zentrale Studienberatung because she had twice made the attempt to attend courses in a certain area of her studies she needed for her intermediate exam. Though in all the other areas she was quite successful, she had a strong belief in failure here and there was especially one field which worried her. She had twice been to a seminar in this field but in both semesters had stopped after two weeks. Two professors who were teaching the field were behaving rigidly and at the same time both were short-tempered

and confusing. In the past two semesters she had always made very clear plans how to manage participation but it did not help. She had the impression all the other students were far ahead of her. She simply lacked competence.

She was not sure whether psychological counselling would help her, but thought there could be some techniques which might help. She lived with her mother and felt extremely insecure in contact with her father. During the therapy it was revealed that her parents' marriage had broken down when the father had become intimate with a girl friend of Carola's when she was seventeen. The girl friend was three years older. The father was over fifty.

We usually have a short therapy concept of fortnightly sessions and sometimes even longer intervals between sessions. During the counselling process, the student stayed in the seminar she had selected, though quite a number of other students left. She prepared each session intensively and even enjoyed participating. The professor even made positive remarks on her contributions. But in her first paper (there had to be two of them and a final test at the end) she failed. It was a difficult situation, she felt extremely stressed, but she talked to the professor. Though as required she had gone to a kind of assistant of the professor's in preparing the paper, she had been badly advised by him and he was the opposite of a support. It seemed he and the professor had some kind of confused conflict. The professor allowed her to revise the paper and gave her an average rating. She continued to participate actively in the seminar. She got an excellent rating in her second paper and in the final test as well as in the overall rating.

For organisational reasons she had to pass this field with the other professor in the intermediate exam and also received an excellent mark there. In all the other topics of the area she also passed with an excellent grade.

In the meantime, already quite early in the counselling process, she had left her mother's apartment and was now living with her boyfriend. And she visited her father, not too often, but in a relaxed frame of mind. She was happy that she felt much less dependent on her mother.

Concerning the seminars at the beginning of the therapy Carola might be described as having activated her intention memory by planning ('I should go there'), but just produced volitional inhibition, which reduced the positive affect. The explicit representations of her intended action usually worked quite well (e.g. good exams) but not in this case, in which there was unconscious decoupling from the emotions and no efficient cooperation with the antagonistic cognitive macrosystems of the extension memory. The traumatic experience of the break-up of her parents' marriage had fragmented and not integrated the self-experience she needed to cope with this situation, and led to an at least partially low self-esteem. As the therapy proceeded, the relation to the extension memory was activated by giving space for 'here and now' expression of feelings, what Perls calls "felt experience" (Perls, as cited in Kuhl, 1999, p. 20), which promoted self-relaxation. She found "deeper meaning" (Kuhl, 1999, p. 24) and extended her "semantic network" (ibid, p. 24), providing space to access the differentiated self-representations relating to her experiences as a student in contact with the professors. By activating free choices she could find better access to self-motivation, which helped her to enhance her self-determination. Her goal attainment became less local and more intrinsic by extending the network of "needs, values, and many other self-aspects" (ibid, p. 27), and she improved her ability to "downregulate negative affect or positive affect without external stimulation" (ibid, p. 26). With this gain in emotional autonomy she could ease the symbiotic relationship with her mother. The development of self-actualisation allowed her to be more flexible in the integration of painful experiences. She could develop mastery orientation to cope with the stress associated with experiences of failure and negative emotionality. She increased energy flow and "holistic processing" as well as broadening the basis for self-representation of internal states such as needs, emotions, somatic feelings and values, and she could then use positive intentionality and intention memory planning to develop competence

in achieving her difficult tasks (ibid, p. 40).

So far the attempt to reconstruct the process and outcome of the therapy in the language of the modulation assumptions of personality systems interaction theory.

## THE LINK BETWEEN COGNITION, EMOTION AND MOTIVATION AND CHANGING LEARNING STRUCTURES IN HIGHER EDUCATION

What can we – with this 'realistic knowledge' about motivation and learning and students' personal development in higher education – contribute to the educational policies derived from the Bologna process?

In a way it is all about offering "solidity" (McDevitt, 2000, p. 5) in the face of change. This is "what this generation needs" – in Craig McDevitt's words (ibid., p. 5). In a world in which careers are defined by planned serendipity or serendipitous planning one has to overcome anxiety by acknowledging the challenge of uncertainty.

In the first place, to be effective, learning structures have to overcome great uncertainty and fear of failure. It may help to reduce complexity and open up room for choice and decision with the generalization of the two-tier BA/MA structure, but this has to be accompanied by impartial professional support and guidance. Universities have to communicate their advantages and limitations, and this is a mutual process. Power and interest are part of the university as an institution (Großmaß, 2000) but the universities have to allow students as young adults to communicate with these structures in a mature way, to develop their own orientation. Sincerity and realistic orientation are important means of enhancing emotional security.

At the same time universities have to provide space for exploration – of the subject and of the Self. This can help reframe internal working models concerned with attachment and separation (Rott, 2002). A good institutionalised balance of emotionally secure support and clarified expectations is a prerequisite for developing a self-activating and self-regulating learning environment. This balance has to ease the "downregulation" of negative affects and to support teaching structures (Wildt, 2002) which facilitate intermediate stress response and "self-relaxation" – or, as Aherne puts it, stress-management based on growing self-adequacy and self-actualisation (Aherne, 1997). It is important that students "develop differentiated knowledge about task-relevant context information, including self-relevant knowledge [...]" (Kuhl, 1999, p. 24). To strengthen this ability, which is essential for successful higher education, teaching-learning structures should, in Kuhl's terms, "activate self-representations and other contents of extension memory" (Kuhl, 1999, p. 28) and foster "mastery orientation" (Dweck, 1986, as cited in Kuhl, 1999, p. 24). Higher education, therefore, Higher has to support learning structures in which "action as meaningful behaviour" (Rott, 1996a) supports the sense of personal identity. The development of flexibility requires a secure feeling of identity, strong support from the self-system and self-esteem (Baumeister, 1993). It needs the experience of skilfully using the energy flow between Kuhl's four "cognitive macrosystems". Interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary knowledge transfer may well be related to those four contexts, rather than just to analytical thinking in the "intention memory". Effective learning structures, therefore, have to be open to the reality facing individual students, their need to find their own personal way of coping with the demands put upon them. Higher education should take into consideration that whenever goals are perceived to be integrated in and supported by an

individual's self-representational system, people invest more time and effort, feel less exhausted, are more persistent and more successful in pursuing their goals (Sheldon & Elliot, 1998).

In this way "self-managed progression in learning and work" (Watts & Van Esbroeck, 1998, p. 89) provides an indispensable personal competence profile in terms of employability. The self-organization competencies developed in higher education, along with other self-related competencies, are the foundation on which an individual's ability to cope with difficulties and stress is built – and these are the typical features of modern management life).

Finally, effective mobility and the development of cross-cultural competencies are dependent on activated self-regulation and activated self-supportive and independent learning strategies.

And this, I would argue, is where we come in. To support learner autonomy and self-regulated learning in higher education (Wild & Wild, 2002) is a challenging task for higher education. But the improvement of teaching-learning settings, however necessary, is insufficient. To create a learning environment in which critical situations are seen as a chance to develop self-related competencies and to strengthen self-esteem, professional support and orientation is required. The educational enterprise is based on realistic knowledge and self-knowledge from both sides of the institution. And because this is not an automatic provision, guidance and counselling has to be acknowledged as a third constituent element in higher education alongside teaching and research.

The qualitative parameters I have mentioned are appropriate not only for questioning and evaluating the outcome of the Bologna process, whenever that becomes visible. They should be taken now, while that process is still in the making, as a starting point for further thinking and clarification. What higher education should be and how it should be realised in the twenty-first century demands clarification over and above current discussion on structural change. Finally, beyond any superficial commercial or political advertisement, our higher education institutions must become attractive to young people. If it can achieve a partnership with students as important representatives of future social and cultural development, the European space in higher education will bring fresh impulses to our continent at a time of immense risks and challenges.

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## COMMENTARY TO DR GERHART ROTT'S KEY LECTURE

Jean Paul Broonen |

Among the various aspects of Gerhart Rott's contribution I would like first to emphasize how interesting the case study was Gerhart Rott presented which linked key phases of a student's life episode in psychotherapeutic work to some central concepts of Kuhl's action theory. Indeed this was not by chance since we know how vivid the German school of Will Psychology is, which roots into Asch's studies. Kuhl's experimental and theoretical developments on volition that refer to both the strength of will needed to complete a task and the diligence of pursuit are a strong argument against many motivational theorists who ignored until recently volitional processes, assuming that motivation leads directly to outcomes. Kuhl argued instead that motivational processes only lead to the decision to act. Once the individual engages in action, volitional processes have to determine whether or not the intention will be fulfilled. In general a variety of distracters can waylay even the strongest intentions to act. Several specific volitional strategies have been proposed by Kuhl to explain persistence in the face of distracters: cognitive control, emotional control, motivational control and environmental control. The volitional constructs are also interesting because they can be linked to developmental guidance models.

This case study was also interesting by calling on the concept of intrinsic motivation. This is a big problem for students... and professors. Covington's findings at the university level – however in very selective American universities – claimed that academic system encourages performance goals whose purpose is to enhance one's reputation for ability by outperforming others to avoid failure. These specific achievement goals emerged largely because of the scarcity of rewards (i.e. good grades), since these top marks are distributed unequally. "When one student wins (i.e. makes points), other students must lose points". In French-speaking Belgian universities that system is generalized in Medicine faculties. In such a competitive game, the main obstacles to overcome are other students, not the challenge of mastering the subject. That situation is probably in part a reflection of a society viewed as a big market where one of the basic laws is competition. But how will students' goals evolve inside that world conception? And how will we manage with such a viewpoint? Will we be able to influence this overwhelming trend?

Finally I would briefly comment on the "qualitative" attribute in the title of Gerhart Rott's lecture. Learning structures that can overcome uncertainty and fear of failure, space for exploration of the subject and of the self provided by universities, secure feeling of identity, self-managed learning, and effective mobility through cross-cultural competencies are appropriate and central qualitative parameters from which a prospective view of Higher Education as a whole can be explored. On the psychological side it seems to me first that quantitative methods applied to psychological structures and processes, guided by insights gained in case studies, can portray large trends inside the EU. Second, a psychosocial view is required to understand these trends. Generalization of the Bologna process will affect students from various cultural backgrounds. At least two levels have to be considered here. First in a specific university of a specific country, different behaviours related to, let's say, achievement goals, may be found for instance between students in economics and students in literature studies. Second, across countries, it may be that achievement goals differ in intensity and/or in their structure. For example in my university on a large sample of students in psychological studies I found the dichotomy mastery-approach goals and mastery-

avoidance goals, but the approach orientation/avoidance orientation did not emerge in performance goals, perhaps because the theory that assumes and demonstrates that dichotomy in performance goals is an American one.

This example illustrates my idea about developing “further thinking and clarification” of HE as puts Gerhart. Qualitative parameters indicate what is to be studied. Quantitative methods (linked to qualitative approaches and interpretations) tell us how to portray tendencies. Thirdly the impact of socio-cultural background on changing HE and students reminds us to integrate in our models the psychosocial perspective which focuses in the same time on individuals and on social processes with the central hypothesis that many (most?) psychological phenomena are psychosocial in nature.

## TOUGH THOUGHTS AND DEEP FEELINGS BRIEF THERAPY WITH UNIVERSITY STUDENTS

## PENSÉES CORIACES ET SENTIMENTS PROFONDS THÉRAPIE BRÈVE POUR ÉTUDIANTS À L'UNIVERSITÉ

Elsa Bell |

### ABSTRACT

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This paper looks at the core issues of brief therapy and draws on the experience of working with one particular student to expand on the theoretical framework. It will show how brief therapy may be the treatment of choice for university students and how the context of the university setting can be used to enhance the therapeutic work.

The paper suggests that, far from being the “poor relation” of longer and more traditional therapies, it has a value and usefulness in its own right and can be the source of major therapeutic change.

Key words: brief therapy, time limited therapy, personal idiom

### RÉSUMÉ

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Cet exposé se penche sur les questions de fond posées par la thérapie brève et se fonde sur l'expérience d'un travail avec un étudiant particulier pour tracer un cadre de référence théorique. Il montre comment la thérapie brève peut constituer le traitement de choix pour des étudiants universitaires et comment le contexte de l'environnement universitaire peut être utilisé pour améliorer le travail thérapeutique.

L'exposé suggère que loin d'être la « parente pauvre » des thérapies plus longues et plus traditionnelles, elle a toute sa valeur et son utilité de plein droit et peut être la source d'un changement thérapeutique majeur.

Mots clés: thérapie brève, thérapie limitée dans le temps, idiome personnel

## INTRODUCTION

The detail of this paper is illustrated with extracts from work with a specific student. Identifying details have been changed wherever possible. The student has read the text and given permission for the work with him to be used in this way.

I thought we'd have a gentle introduction to the themes of my paper –

At this point the 1st section of Bach's Goldberg variations was played to the audience. Of course, most of you will recognise that as the first part of Bach's Goldberg variations. I thought it would be useful to hear it because this core theme, this motif, is the basis for 30 variations. Bach takes the theme and then introduces us to it in many different forms - sometimes fast and energetic; sometimes slow and languid; sometimes it is difficult to spot the theme because there is so much going on around it, but if we listen carefully it is there - maybe as an undertow to a bright and dazzling example of piano fireworks - but it is there. As we move through this paper, with its inevitable variations on a theme, and especially at the times when you think that maybe I, or you have lost sight of the main theme, I hope you can hold this experience, this knowledge of this music, in mind and that you will recognise that it encapsulates everything that I am trying to say.

Let me start by introducing you to a student. I'm beginning with a summary of our first two sessions and can only give you a glimpse of the work we did together, but you will get to know him a little better by the end of this paper.

Tom, an international student, arrived at the counselling service and asked to see someone straight away. The receptionist told him that there were no appointments immediately and that there is usually a wait of between five and ten days before an appointment can be given. Tom said that he really wanted to be seen today or tomorrow. Again the receptionist explained the system as sensitively as she could and suggested that while he was waiting for his first appointment with a counsellor, he might like to make an appointment with the doctor that was attached to his college.

The next day the Deputy Head of the Service said he needed to talk to me about a student who might need to be seen urgently. He'd taken a call from a College Doctor who had asked if we could possibly find a space to see a student (who turned out to be Tom) rather more urgently than we would normally. In his session with Tom, the doctor had very quickly realised that Tom was probably seriously depressed. He had spent about twenty minutes trying to get Tom to talk to him but without any success. In desperation he had said to Tom, "Well you went to the counselling service so that must mean that you want to talk to someone." Tom's answer was, "Yes, but not to you!"

The doctor asked if we could, please, see Tom urgently and see if we could get him to talk so that some kind of assessment could be made about treatment options. And that is how I came to be Tom's counsellor.

I saw Tom for the first time the next day. As is my usual practice, I went to meet him in the waiting room. He stood up as I entered, shook my hand as I introduced myself and, it seemed, followed meekly behind me as I indicated the way to my room. I'm always interested in these first few moments of contact and seeing how students negotiate the space from the waiting room to the counselling 'chair', - how they greet me in the waiting room; whether they attempt to say anything as we climb the stairs to my room; what they do with the large space from the door of my room to the chairs; whether they use the hook on the back of my door to hang up their coat or jacket or whether they

take it off and hold on to it or, sometimes, place it on the floor beside them. All of this is important initial information that will help me formulate an idea of what this person might be bringing to me and to therapy itself.

I'm also interested in what I am feeling. What are my thoughts about the pre-session information I have gathered? How do I feel as I walk into the room with him and as he sits down opposite me? What might these thoughts and feelings tell me about what he is thinking and feeling?

Tom sat down very gently in his chair. The word I would use to sum him up is 'tidy'. He sat very still and very 'properly', didn't slouch in the chair, and seemed to be determined not to make the place look untidy. He was tall, slim but with a muscular frame, very good looking and very neatly and 'tidily' dressed with polished shoes, not the inevitable students trainers. Here was a 'well presented' young man who had taken great care with how he dressed. I wondered if this was cultural - a young man from South East Asia making first contact with a woman in an 'authority role' but something told me this was not what was behind this care over appearance and his 'tidy' presence in the room. How did this fit with the desperate young man I had heard about who had needed to be seen 'now' and had raised so much anxiety in his doctor - a young man who had, in fact, made a very 'untidy' arrival at the Service. And almost simultaneously, as I was registering his neatness and tidiness, I was also registering in myself a feeling of needing to be very careful. I sensed I would have to take things very gently, that something about him was very vulnerable - and when, before even saying anything he looked up, and seemed to search my face and then looked me straight in the eye, I was astounded by the sense of longing and fear that was in his gaze.

I started the session in the usual way by telling him about the time we would have and the purpose of the session. I also told him what I knew of his contact with the Service already and with the College Doctor (who had told him that he would speak to us to try to arrange an early appointment). I then invited him to tell me why he had come to the Service and what he hoped we might be able to do to help him.

I won't go into all the details of the session, but the key points are these: He said he had been very depressed for some months and that he was not working. As this was his final year he was worried. He couldn't concentrate, had no motivation and every time he sat down to work other thoughts filled his head. This happened when he was trying to get to sleep as well - as if voices were interrupting his thoughts. This had happened to him in his first year at university but had not been as bad and had eventually gone away. Now it was back, worse than before. He told me, as well, a complicated story of having to intervene and mediate in a dispute in the house in which he was living. I found the details of the story difficult to take in, and in fact was not able to unravel the narrative until much later in our sessions, but the key feature that I did pick up was that this was centred on a couple and another housemate, and that Tom had found it very distressing to have to be the go-between. Tom said he needed me to help him control his thoughts.

When I invited him to tell me a little about his background he told me that his parents had separated when he was eight. His mother had left home suddenly and he did not see her again for a number of years. He'd lived with his father for a time and then was sent to live with another member of the family in another town - so that he could go to senior school. When he was sixteen he had come to England to boarding school so that he could take A-levels, the passport to University. He had not seen, nor spoken to his father for about four years and didn't want to. His mother now lived in another country, on a completely different continent, and in fact he was going to visit her during the next week.

The fluency and, indeed, the tidiness, with which I'm giving you these details, is deceptive - it was not like that in the session. Although his use of the English language was fluent, he spoke slowly, in short sentences and would often lose his train of thought. He had little energy and seemed to wait all the time for me to ask another question. Very little information was volunteered and I felt as if I had to work really hard



to keep any communication going.

Of course part of what was necessary in the session was to explore the nature of these thoughts/voices that were intruding - and to listen to how he described them - to see whether this was a symptom of a developing serious mental illness. In fact it did not seem so. Already I was beginning to see that this was Tom's way of describing, in a very concrete way, the confusion and chaos that he felt to be his internal world.

As we neared the end of the session we began to talk of what next. He was going away for a week, so any follow up session would be two weeks later. After that session the Service was closing for two weeks for the Christmas vacation. We had hardly started and here we were talking about external circumstances that would prevent consistency in the tentative communication we'd begun. We also talked about links with the doctor and whether, now that Tom had had his first counselling appointment he might be able to talk to the doctor a little more. I reminded him that the doctor might have a view on whether or not medication would help with his symptoms of depression. Tom gave me permission to liaise. And we needed to discuss what kind of help would be most appropriate for him within the Service. I described to him the range of options, particularly how our cognitive behavioural and psychodynamic practitioners worked in individual therapy and said that when we had our follow-up session in a fortnight he might like to say which version of individual counselling/therapy he'd prefer. I imagined (or did I hope?) that he would opt for CBT. His description of his thoughts, his lack of ease when emotional material was directly addressed in the session made me think that he would be more comfortable with a more structured approach. To my surprise he responded instantly. He was quite clear, he said, that he would like to work with a psychodynamic practitioner and, in fact, he would like to carry on seeing me.

And just before we leave Tom for a short while, let me give you the important information that emerged in our second session. He told me that whilst he had been visiting his mother he had been very depressed and had spent as much of the time he could in bed. His mother had fussed over him and tried to encourage him to do things, but this had only annoyed him and made him feel worse. 'In fact,' he said, looking at me straight in the eye, 'I think you should know that every day, and almost every hour that I was awake, I thought about killing myself'. Then he looked at me and smiled and said, 'But this week I've decided not to kill myself' - and here there was a long gap as he looked at me and then he added - 'for now. I've decided to do it after the exams.'

Of course I wanted to blurt out, 'And when are your exams?' but I didn't.

Later in the session he told me that he had not let his mother know about his suicidal feelings during the week he had been with her, but decided to tell her just as he was leaving for the airport. My response was one word - wow! And when we had both recovered from our sense of surprise at my unorthodox intervention he said, 'I'm not sure now whether that was the right time to tell her. But I was angry with her all the time I was in her house.' The unorthodox interpretation had worked! He had made the link. I simply said, 'And it seems as if you are doing it differently with this 'mother' here. You haven't just told me as you get on the flight. You've given some time for us to talk about it - you've given an early warning. But, perhaps it might be useful,' I said, hoping that I sounded calmer than I felt, 'perhaps it would be useful to know when the flight is leaving.' He told me the date of his exams. He had given me eight sessions to make him better! So - what to do with him? I think that from whatever theoretical orientation you have been listening and have formed your own views of what might be going on in this young man's mind and, indeed, between him and me in the session, I think we will all agree that Tom's is a complicated story. Complicated by the chronology, the many geographical locations of significant events and complicated by the various and important changes that Tom had experienced. His compounded sense of loss was huge - even if he was not yet ready to articulate that for himself. How do you begin to address such complicated thoughts and emotions in brief therapy?

In fact the eight sessions that he had given us were more than most students who come to the counselling service in Oxford have. Our average number of sessions per

student for the last academic year was five. We are committed to a brief therapy approach for a number of reasons - yes, because we have limited resources, but most importantly because we believe that a focussed approach is developmentally appropriate. Our student population is made up of young people who are mainly between the ages of 18 and 26. For these young people, whose psychological imperatives are those of autonomy and independence, it is rarely appropriate that they be seduced into long term therapeutic relationships with pseudo parents at a time when they need to be experimenting with life and what life might be like on their own. Of course some young people really do need longer term therapy and we try to offer that when appropriate, but we are becoming more and more convinced that the numbers who really do need this long term work are not as great as our trainings might have led us to think.

Because all of you know very well the nature and severity of the problems that are often presented to our services I do not need to remind you that short, brief therapy, however we like to describe it, does not mean that the work is simple or easily resolved. We are not talking here of a short time being spent with students because they have a very specific, external problem, about which they need to think and come to their own decision. Nor are we talking of a few sessions that prepare the way for longer term therapy. We are talking of the complex psychological and emotional problems that are a feature of some of our more troubled adolescents and the attempt to find a therapeutic mode that addresses the core of the problem, and produces as much change as possible in the briefest possible time. Ellen Noonan, whose work is familiar to many of you, once described brief therapy as being the opposite of the game Pick Sticks. You know - the game where there is a bundle of sticks on the table and you have to move one without disturbing the other sticks. In brief therapy we are looking for the one stick that will produce as much therapeutic movement as possible. So where do we look for the body of knowledge that will be a beacon for us, a guiding light as we venture out into these often dark, stormy and exciting waters of brief therapy?

Most of the books on brief therapy point out the irony that the founder of psychoanalysis and, one might say, the founder of psychotherapy Freud himself, frequently offered treatment that lasted only a few weeks or months. His four-session treatment of Gustav Mahler is the most celebrated account. And yet as psychoanalysis developed, so it became longer. Therapists became less active, challenging or supportive. Therapist neutrality was seen to be the main vehicle for the development of a transference relationship that would allow the patient to replay, and thus have analysed, the complicated and unconscious process that contributed to the patients current state of mind. Rigour and depth became the bywords, and rigour and depth became synonymous with length. And indeed those arguments prevail today.

My focus here is on the developments within the psychoanalytic framework, because that is what informs my current work. It would be rather foolish of me, in the time available, to attempt to give an account of the development of briefer therapies within other models, even if I were capable of doing so. We would probably spend all day on it, and it would be quite a different paper. But I'm hoping that you will be able to see the links within your own models for yourselves and that, when I have finished this will lead to a useful cross-theory discussion.

So it is interesting to me, as I look for a theoretical basis for current models of brief therapy that, alongside the development of what is now deemed to be 'classical Freudian' psychoanalysis there were those who were taking these ideas, examining them, and offering a change of perspective. Rank was producing a more developmental model and Firenczi wanted to develop a new cooperative therapeutic relationship with his patients and thereby empower them. Even Lacan, at times, found five-minute sessions more effective than the classical fifty-minute analytic hour.

It is this concept of the cooperative therapeutic relationship that gives us a foundation for the practice of brief therapy today. It is the recognition that in this therapeutic

relationship both sides constantly influence the quality of the relationship, and that the quality of this relationship becomes the focus for understanding the internal world of the client/patient and, indeed of the therapist.

From Alexander and French onwards there is a developing idea that interpretations, in the classical sense, might not always be the most effective way of bringing about change; that the past, and the intricacies of past relationships (both conscious and unconscious), are of relevance when they shed light on current behaviour and problems, rather than, as previously emphasised, being the prime focus and the *sine qua non* of the therapeutic work - and that it is possible to see that the transference phenomena in the session might be non-neurotic and able to be worked with in terms of the real and present therapeutic relationship within the room. And here it becomes interesting in terms of the links with other theoretical models, for example with the Rogerian belief that the core vehicle for change is the therapeutic relationship and the more recent developments within CBT where the quality of the relationship is now recognised as important for therapeutic outcomes.

One name that you probably would not expect to hear in a paper on brief therapy is Donald Winnicott. As a psychoanalyst working at the Tavistock in London his work is part of the canon of modern day psychoanalytic literature. Yet in his work with children he often employed brief interventions - what he called his 'consultations'. He engaged actively with his patients. He used drawings and other creative media to allow the patient to speak for and to themselves, but with the therapist as a guide. He understood the importance of transference, where patients re-enact their historical relationships with the therapist, and counter-transference - the personal history that the therapist brings to the relationship. He knew, as well, that there is another version of counter-transference where the feelings the therapist has might be a guide to what the patient is trying to communicate in an unspoken way. But, as in his use of creative materials, he believed that the most effective interpretations are the ones that patients come to for themselves - again with the therapist as a guide. And he was a great believer in the importance of therapeutic surprise. I'd like to think that my 'wow' comment in the second session with Tom was in the Winnicottian tradition of therapeutic surprise - well I'd like to think so! What I do know is that one word, in language that might have been Tom's own and not that of the 'proper therapist', a word that took us both by surprise, spoke at one and the same time of his relationship with me - I'm going to kill myself, but not yet, so let's see if you can do something about that' - as well as his relationship with his mother as he dumped the information on her as he boarded a plane. All I said was 'wow' and he made his own interpretation for himself 'hmmmm... perhaps I was angry.'

What marked out Winnicott's work, especially in the area of surprise, was those moments when he seemed to make a comment that seemed to come from nothing but intuition, but which was, in fact, based on many years experience and fully grounded in his knowledge of developmental theory. I don't put my 'wow' comment quite in that category, but maybe one day...

There is another specific area of Winnicott's work that has been a seminal influence, and that has particular relevance for brief therapy. He was one of the first to pay attention to what he called the 'pre-transference' - what he observed in early sessions to be evidence of the thoughts and beliefs his patients had about him before they even entered the therapeutic room. This concept, including the pre-therapy feelings, or counter-transference, of the therapist, is, to my mind, an essential tool of the short-term therapist. Time is of the essence and the communication through the therapeutic relationship may have begun before the two participants have even met. So having said that 'time is of the essence', let's spend a few moments looking at the work of one person whose theory of brief therapy is founded on the very concept of time itself and a theory that has particular relevance for work within a university.

There is a sense in which all work in educational institutions is about time and its limits. Students are aware that they have committed a specific amount of time to achieve a

particular task. and, however seductive the notion of long vacations and endless discussions about the meaning of life might be, there is always a sense, even at the back of the mind, that time is passing. In some this may induce feelings of panic, but for others it is a motivating factor and one that can be harnessed in the therapeutic process. Mann (1973) describes how the sense of timelessness, where everything is felt to be possible, originates in the earliest stages of infancy. When the infant feels totally at one with the mother and a parallel sense of omnipotence prevails then time is not an issue. Indeed time does not exist. It is only as the process of separation and individuation begins that time begins to have a reality. He suggests that it is this struggle between a primitive desire for timelessness and the burden of the reality of time and its finiteness that is the constant task of life and one that is always apparent in the consulting room, although often ignored. When sessions are organised so that clients/patients can re-experience that sense of timelessness with the counsellor/therapist and yet at the same time be allowed to mourn the loss of the sense of infinite time a more realistic knowledge of self emerges. Far from time limited work being the poor relation of 'real' therapy Mann sees it as creative and life enhancing.

Students' lives are an enactment of this paradox and conflict. Their external world is governed by terms, examinations and the daily timetable; whilst the internal imperative is towards separation and autonomy there is also a need to become totally absorbed, even fused, both with their subject and the experience of being a student, and they need to do this before differentiation can begin, and a capacity to be critical can be formed. If counsellors are brave enough to deal with their own wish for endless time then they may help students to use time and its limits to advantage. In terms of technique, this means that a clear date for ending the therapy is set at the beginning and this is held to no matter what. During the course of the therapy reminders are given of passing time and the constant theme, linked to the student's own particular narrative and themes, is that there is both a yearning for this relationship to be never ending and a sense of relief that it will come to an end and that separation and autonomy can lead to creativity and a fruitful life.

I think it is highly significant that Tom came for counselling at the end of term, in his final year and that he gave us eight sessions to do our therapeutic work. Remember, he was eight when time, in one sense, ran out for him when his mother left. I am persuaded by Mann's theory that Tom had unconsciously given us one week for each year of his life when he felt that he had a real experience of his mother. His wish, in his threat to end his life, was to find that he had not died at age eight, after all.

And this leads me now to a significant change in terminology. The conference organisers asked me to talk about brief therapy and that is exactly what I have done until now. But is this the correct, or most creative terminology that we can use?

What do we mean by brief? There seems to be no clear definition of what a brief amount of therapy might be. There are the one session proponents - that's very brief, and then we have the two session model- one plus one to change you for life. Others models range from four to thirty sessions. So if it is called brief, then we have to ask, briefer than what? Briefer than proper therapy? I hope I'm making a case that this might not be so. There is an alternative terminology that has a long history and yet is not so often used and that is 'time-limited therapy'. I wonder why that is? Could it be that Mann is right? That the very idea of time being limited is so difficult for all of us that we avoid it in our lives, in our consulting rooms and in the name we give this focussed, challenging, tough and deep work that we do in a limited amount of therapeutic time? So I'm going to take up the challenge and call my work time limited therapy for the rest of this paper, and I invite you to share in this challenge.

Now we move on to thinking more specifically about the nature of sessions themselves in time limited therapy and what might be the observable features that distinguish them. I have talked about the need to find a core focus for the work. This is the thread

that runs through all writing on time-limited therapy. By this I don't mean the main, articulated problem that the students present to us - I can't concentrate on my work; I'm feeling depressed, or anxious, or isolated - this we might describe as the content of the session. I mean what is the key formulation that we can make from the evidence, in the process, that we discern in the sessions that will give us an understanding of what might be the underlying factors that make the current situation unmanageable? This is the main feature of the work. Once this has been found, or formulated, it is used throughout the work, with modifications if these come to light, and material that the student brings is linked to it. If the student brings material that does not link to it, that material is acknowledged and left to one side - We have to be ruthless in not picking up the curiously, interestingly shaped stick in the Pick Stick game that perhaps is slightly to one side of the pile and not centrally situated. No, in time limited therapy we can't do that. We have to find the one in the middle that links to as many other sticks as possible. When we have such a formulation and keep to it then something very significant happens. Or to use another analogy, we are like the film director who says to him or herself, 'Where shall I direct my camera in this scene so that the essence, the core theme, of this film will be brought to the centre of attention and its significance underlined?'

Perhaps more specifically we are saying that the element that is common to all time limited therapies is an understanding that there is something about the client's specific and personal way of being in the world, and that the understanding and use of that, is crucial.

In his book on psychodynamic brief therapy, Alex Coren (who was a colleague in the counselling service at Oxford when we were developing our own version of time limited therapy) defines this way of being in the world, that is specific to each individual, as that person's personal idiom and I think that it is such a useful way of describing it, and ultimately giving us a direction for what we might actually do, what might be an essential technique, in time limited therapy, that I'm going to use it here.

However, I'm aware that in this multi-lingual group there is a danger that we might have different understandings of what the word idiom means, even where the word itself exists in other languages. So, to aid the development of a common language here, for at least the next few minutes, I'm going to give a practical demonstration of its meaning.

I'm going to use a second example from the world of music to help us develop a common understanding of the word idiom. Just listen for a moment and register, or write down the words that come into your head that convey to you what you think this music says. You are looking for mood, emotion. Those of you who are not familiar with it already may even be able to identify the beginnings of a story, a narrative. Those of you who do know the story to which this is an introduction - concentrate on spotting where the core theme is already set out in these first few minutes.

The overture to *La Traviata* was played here

Have a few minutes to talk to your neighbour and see what you each have identified as the core elements of this magnificent music.

For those of you who did not know, this is the overture to Verdi's *La Traviata*, where the haunting orchestral opener sets the scene for the emotional world of the opera. It is a miracle of Verdi's genius that he conjures up the tragedy of Violetta and Alfredo's love, haunted by illness and sacrifice, before anyone sets foot on stage.

The other piece of information that I think is germane to the theme we are pursuing today is that *La Traviata* was based on the novel *La Dame aux camelias* by Alexandre Dumas the younger and he based his novel on a real-life person who died age twenty-three. So Dumas took a theme, and made it his own and then Verdi took the same theme but interpreted it according to his own personal idiom - the same story but viewed and related by two individuals whose personal perspectives, their idioms, make their shared story unique to each of them.

And if you will allow me to take this one step further - tradition has it that when Bach

visited the Russian ambassador to the court of Saxony, Count von Keyserlingk, in 1741 he received a commission for a work of such length that it would occupy the insomniac Count during his hours of sleeplessness. This was to be played to him by his protégé, Bach's pupil Johann Gottlieb Goldberg - and thus we have the Goldberg variations. This legend fails to take into account the fact that Goldberg would have been fourteen at the time and that there was no trace of a dedication to the Count, as might have been expected, when the variations were published in 1742. Could it be that the essential core theme of these many variations spoke so powerfully to those who heard it that a story had to be constructed, an interpretation made, to personalise the universal theme?

So this concept of a personal idiom is useful to us as a therapeutic tool because it highlights the need for us to tune into those person specific ways of relating, in the room with us. This will give us clues as to how the student forms his or her concept of self and self in relation to the external world. We will see evidence of this in body language; in specific words used frequently or at significant moments; in the way students experience and interpret relationships with past and present important figures and how they expect these people to relate to them; how they pick up and interpret non-verbal communications from the therapist and even how they relate to the therapy itself; and, I would maintain - and this I believe to be a core element that we can use creatively in therapy with university students - the meaning they attach to the experience of being a student, the structure of university life with terms and timetables and, indeed, their personal relationship with the subject they have chosen to study. All of these give us access to the individual's recurring motifs and help us to decide where to focus our film director's camera. Alex Coren has a lovely sentence in his book. He says that a person's idiom is the one thing that they cannot not express. I hope that construction with its double negatives is understandable to the non-native English speakers - cannot not express. In a less succinct, and less poetic way, what it means is that a personal idiom can never be secret, even if it is private, because it will always be there and be a meaningful motif. It is up to the therapist to listen and tune in.

And now you know the other reason why I began with the Bach. It is this recurring motif that we are listening for in time-limited therapy, whatever the other enticing, dazzling, puzzling elements of the 'performance' the recurring motif is the core theme that we must come back to every time.

So how do we make use of this personal idiom in time limited therapy? We use it to give us as the therapist the clues to the language that will make most sense to the student. By experiencing the idiom in the way the student relates to us, speaks to us and uses the therapeutic experience itself, we have a means of accessing the specific view that the students has of him or herself in the world. How s/he formulates a view of past and present relationships and events; how they have built up their defences to shield themselves against anxieties, both real and imagined. In short - it gives us the speediest and most effective way of finding the core formulation that, once addressed, will produce the most therapeutic movement possible.

And finally we get back to Tom, to see how he can help us elucidate this tough, but deeply effective and emotionally challenging version of therapy. We go back to the opening encounter to see just how much there was there that gives us clues to how the therapy might proceed.

## HISTORY AND CONTENT

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We have a narrative account of Tom's history – his loss of both his parents at different times and the ambivalent relationship he now has with his mother and his stated aim to have no contact with his father; we have the loss of his culture and country and his entry into a new country and culture, alone at a relatively young age; we know he has had to, and still is, negotiating the specific culture that is Oxford University and particularly that he was about to face a very testing time – his final examinations where he knew, beyond any doubt, that his thoughts needed to be under control. He recalled being depressed when he first came to Oxford, and now that he was nearing the time to leave, his depression had returned but was worse than he had ever experienced before. We know also, that a complicated triangular relationship in the house where he lived had caused him recent distress.

## THERAPEUTIC PROCESS

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Tom took great care to appear neat and tidy and tried to carefully manage his thinking in the session. He made sure that he did not give any more information than he thought was absolutely necessary. He did not respond easily in the first session to any invitation to explore what events in his life might mean for him emotionally. And yet he failed in his attempt to keep everything ordered. In the first session he lacked fluency of thought and speech and left me feeling as if I had to work very hard to help him feel safe as he narrated his story – as if there was no consistency in his narrative at all. Within myself, I found that I had to work hard not to lose track of significant events. I felt worried that I would say the wrong thing, that I would make him worse if I came up with too complicated a thought and certainly if I tried to link thought with feeling. And yet I had also experienced the longing, the yearning, in his frightened gaze when he first sat down. This was so powerful that I think I really did hope that he would opt for CBT when given the choice. He had let me know that this would be tough work and that he wasn't at all sure that either of us would survive the experience.

## IDIOM

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Tom's idiom, like Verdi's overture, was present before he had even set foot on the 'stage' of my consulting room. He conveyed in very clear terms that there is a time and place for everything and that there are some people – in the right place - to whom it is possible to speak and that there are others, despite their role, title and the place that you meet them who will be no earthly good at all. His view of the world was that there was a place where you 'think' and another place where you 'feel' and that these, by their very nature, should be kept apart. He 'knew' that this was true because he had very successfully, in the past, separated his thinking and emotional world. He had been a successful student who had gained the necessary high grades in

examinations, where he was forced to think in a language that was not his own, that would give him entry in to Oxford University. What more evidence was required? To be in this University, where the capacity to think clearly and dispassionately about your academic study is prized, confirmed him in his view that he was someone who had always had control of his thoughts. So it is not surprising that, when invited to think about and comment on his emotional world in the first session, words failed him; his thoughts became fragmented. This was a foreign task – as if he had landed on yet another continent with yet another language. And within his idiom there was also his belief that emotion could be explosive – that if he didn't have counselling today, tomorrow, it would be too late; and I remind you of his inflammatory comment to the doctor that might have provoked a dismissal – yes I want to talk to someone – but not you; and the bomb that he dropped on his mother as he left her at the airport and the way he carefully timed his emotional challenge to me – 'I've decide not to kill myself – for now.'

These three elements, the history and content, the process in the room, and Tom's idiom provided the focus for the on-going work. They give a matrix for understanding how, from real and external circumstances, Tom has created a view of the world that has helped him to defend himself against the overwhelming anxieties that his real world has produced; how these recurrent motifs influence his current relationships and, most powerfully, how terrified he is that these explosive emotions will break through and destroy the carefully assembled edifice of his life. My task was to learn to speak his language, and engage with his personal idiom, in order to see whether the story that we were writing together might take a new and interesting turn – that the ending might not be what seemed to be predicted in the opening chapters.

How did I do this? Well, I will simply highlight one example of his motif and how it recurred and changed as our limited time together moved on.

I mentioned that in the first session Tom had a very concrete way of describing the voices within his head and that I had to learn, very quickly, to tune into this aspect of his language. This was apparent in an even more powerful way at the beginning of the second session. Towards the end of the first session when I had been arranging permission for me to liaise with the doctor, I said, 'So that this set of 'parents' can talk to each other'. He started the next session with, 'I've been thinking about what you said about my parents, and I think I do need a new set of parents.' He said it in such a concrete way that my anxiety went sky high. Had he taken me literally? What had I led us both into? But no, I stuck with listening to him rather than to my own anxiety, and to his 'take' on my passing interpretation - in fact to his accent or regional variation on the language we were beginning to use in the session.

This phenomenon reappeared frequently during our early sessions. During one session we would have ventured into an area of important emotional content and the next session he would begin with, 'I've been thinking about what we said and here is my theory.' With a word like theory you would imagine that he would be about to go into an over-intellectualised defensive manoeuvre but he wasn't. He would go on to give real evidence of how the emotional content was being worked through, but his language was that this was a theory, a way of giving credibility to his chaotic inner world. We may describe this as the beginning of a healthy commentary on his narrative.

An important part of his narrative that I was to discover in the middle section of our work was that, when his mother left home Tom and his father lived in a large, silent house where they would go for hours at a time without speaking to each other. When I suggested that perhaps his 'intrusive thoughts' were about filling a silence and keeping his mother with him he laughed with surprise and then grinned and then he looked sad and said, 'And she often talked too much so that we would want to turn her off'. No need this time to go off quietly and turn what he had felt into a theory. An insight gained and an immediate response that indicated that we might just manage to show that feeling and thought might co-exist. Later in that session he came up with



the most wonderful description of intrusive thoughts that I have ever heard. He said they were like mental hiccups. So wonderfully poetic and so powerfully descriptive of the violent disruption to the rhythm of his life with his mother, an explosive disruption that took his breath away.

And finally, to tie in with the subtitle of this talk, the significance within the core theme of the context of being a university student. Tom had pursued a subject that required him to work with symbols but, to his mind, in a concrete way - to use the symbols to prove the many theories that were waiting to be proved. But I discovered that he was also a violinist and a painter who, despite his love for these activities and his accomplishments in them, had abandoned them once he left his home country for the UK – another illustration of his idiom that there is a place for everything and everything should remain in its place. During the course of our sessions Tom was able to explore his great sense of loss of this artistic side of himself and his need to integrate this part of himself into his current study – to bring thinking and feeling together, to let his internal mother and father talk to each other, and to him. Once he had allowed himself room for these deep feelings, and the possibility of creative playing within his subject, then he would be able to cope with the tough thoughts, the very tough thoughts, needed to pass his examination and to pass them in a way that had deep meaning for him.

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(This is in a brief therapy series edited by Stephen Palmer and Gladeana McMahon where other theoretical models are covered)

About to be published (April or July): An edition of the journal *Psychodynamic Practice* that will be devoted to brief therapy. This is published by Taylor and Francis, a part of the Brunner-Routledge group. Contact at [orders@tandf.co.uk](mailto:orders@tandf.co.uk). The journal is available on-line as well as in hard copy.

## COMMENTARY TO ELSA BELL'S KEY LECTURE "TOUGH THOUGHTS AND DEEP FEELINGS – BRIEF THERAPY WITH UNIVERSITY STUDENTS"

Helga Knigge-Illner |

I suppose many of you would like to respond as immediately as possible to this fascinating and very stimulating presentation that Elsa Bell has given us. Therefore I promise to remain brief and give a brief commentary.

It's very tempting to start from the case study and to discuss it from different points of view. But I would like to propose that we first concentrate on clarifying the concept and the procedural method of Elsa's approach a little more. I have some questions about it, which may stimulate further discussion.

First of all I would like to say that Elsa Bell's argument is very convincing: Time-limited therapy can be regarded as an efficient instrument in its own right. It doesn't seem at all to be merely shortened and incomplete therapy. I can support this opinion with my own therapeutic experiences as a counsellor and therapist working with students. I agree with the argument that time and its limitation is an important theme in itself for students who are in their post-adolescent phase of development and should be coped with in therapy as well. In Germany, Leutzinger-Bohleber (1985) in particular has emphasized - based on her therapeutic work with students - that psychodynamic time-limited therapy is the first method of choice for this group. - I think that it is not the only one, but here we are dealing with the psychodynamic approach. - Its efficiency has been proved by empirical studies, too.

But this doesn't mean that time-limited therapy is suitable for all clients of this age, or for all kinds of problems. It's rather a question of indication, too: We need to ask ourselves, under which conditions is time-limited therapy indicated?

Representatives of focal therapy presuppose ego-strength and the ability to cope consciously with conflicts on the side of the patient, as does König (1999), a German psychoanalyst. Some of these therapists think focal therapy is not appropriate for special psychic structures - especially not for depressive patients. Most therapists agree that time-limited therapy is not indicated for severe personality and character disorders, psychosomatic disorders, psychoses and borderline patients (Weghaupt, 1999).

What is your opinion on this point? I am interested in your criteria in choosing Tom as a client and for this kind of therapy. Your description suggests that he chose you, and you agreed with his choice. But I think you had additional aspects in mind as well. How important for this choice was his positive transference to you as "the good mother, very deeply interested in him" and your positive counter transference? Or did you primarily rely on your immediate empathic understanding of his individual view of the world?

In focal therapy, the therapist generally defines a focus on which therapeutic work will concentrate. In Mann's time-limited therapy, the definition and formulation of the focus play a very important role. Following König, the focus can be a conflict, the client's symptoms or the client's mode of experiencing relationships. In my opinion, your presentation didn't clarify how you defined this. As I remember, you stated that there were three elements providing the focus: "the history and content, the process in the room, and Tom's idiom". Altogether this seems to be a very comprehensive focus. Is it a characteristic feature of your approach to state the focus so broadly and openly? What kind of hypotheses did you come to about the underlying psychodynamic conflicts? How did you tell your client which focus or core theme was going to stand in the centre of your therapeutic sessions?

A last question concerning the procedural method: Do you have a structural scheme for the sequence of your therapeutic work and if so, what's it like?

My following considerations and questions relate to the therapist-client relationship. In

my view, Elsa's case study describes an example of successful communication: understanding by empathy, unconditional regard (or acceptance) and personal authenticity realised by the therapist, and the client feeling accepted, and precisely and deeply understood. Here we recognize a strong similarity to Rogers's client-centred therapy. You mentioned a connection with it. But I could imagine that it is not so easy to combine these central variables with the very active role as a time-limited therapist: He or she has to direct the client, steering the client's thoughts on a central topic, stopping the client from talking about irrelevant material, and confronting the client with negative experiences. How do you manage this?

Perhaps you would agree to call your style of interaction an example of a dialogue relationship, too. Jobst Finke (1999) distinguishes between four dimensions of relationships which appear in different ways in different methods of therapy:

- the basic working relationship underlying all therapeutic relationships;
- the transference relationship, in which the therapist mainly interprets transference and counter transference reactions;
- the alter-ego relationship, in which the therapist primarily takes the helping function of a positive empathetic ego; and
- the dialogue relationship, in which the therapist also acts as a real and authentic person.

In this final form, the dialogue relationship, the therapist demonstrates his or her own feelings and views as a real person, too, so that the client can apprehend that the therapist is distinct from whatever existing transferred objects (or partial objects) there are, thus enabling the client to correct his or her relationships expectancies, with an accompanying improvement in relationship ability.

I guess you realized this dimension to a certain degree as well.

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# COPING WITH COLLEGIATE DYNAMICS – AN AMERICAN WAY A EUROPEAN’S VIEW ON STUDENT SERVICES AT US-UNIVERSITIES

Peter Figge |

## ABSTRACT

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While growing increasingly familiar with the complexity of student services at European universities, it proves quite revealing to make experiences and comparisons with the situation of student services at US universities.

A recent research visit to the universities of Indiana and Purdue has focused on concepts of counselling, on organizational structures of student services and on the cooperation and integration of different student service institutions within the universities. Additionally questions of status and standing within the university, the financial situation and the contribution of student services to their respective university regarding the competition between institutions of Higher Education have been evaluated, and are presented for discussion.

Key words: student services, US universities, concepts of counselling

## RÉSUMÉ

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Etant de plus en plus familiarisé avec la complexité des services universitaires pour les étudiants en Europe, il s'avère très instructif d'étudier et de comparer la situation en Europe à celle des Etats-Unis dans ce domaine.

Au cours d'une récente visite à l'Université d'Indiana et à l'Université de Purdue, les recherches se sont concentrées sur l'étude des concepts d'encadrement, de structures pour l'organisation des services universitaires pour les étudiants et sur la collaboration entre ces différents services et leur intégration au sein des universités. De plus, ont été examinées des questions concernant le statut de ces services, leur place dans l'université, leur situation financière, leur rôle dans leur université respective en ce qui concerne la concurrence entre les institutions d'enseignement supérieur, tous ces points sont l'objet d'un débat.

Mots clés: Services universitaires pour les étudiants, universités américaines, concepts du « counselling »

## INTRODUCTION

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Assuming that you are familiar with student services not only at your own university but also with the different standards of student services at universities in the European union – I would like to introduce some characteristic aspects of the US way of coping with the cognitive, emotional and motivational dynamics of students which are so very familiar to you in your everyday professional life.

I'll try to be as concrete as possible in order to make you familiar with some of the experiences of mine during a research stay at three US universities.

May I introduce – John.



He is 19 years old, in his second of four university years, a so called sophomore student, at a large Midwestern university with about 37.000 students.

It is 7:30 in the morning. John comes directly from his hall of residence on campus, where he shares a small room with his roommate.



He is waiting for us, on his way to his first class in the morning. Today he is walking, because the sun shines, otherwise he would use one of the university Campus buses.

On his way he passes the building of Academic Advising Services, his first contact when he came to college a year ago. Here and at his own hall of residence in all 42 advisors support the transition between high school and university. They act as interpreters of the university's academic programs and rules. In his first days at university here was a place for orientation. He had been individually tested for placement (math, foreign language, science), been meeting with individual advisors: defining his individual schedule, to register his schedule with the administration, here he had been assigned his personal advisor to contact whenever he felt it necessary. But what was best – as John is still undecided about what exactly he wants to study – he was able to leave his final choice open for two years – not applying to a special school (such as the School of Law, the College of Arts and Sciences or the School of Education), but being enrolled like one third of the students at the Advising Services, within an Undergraduate Studies Program.

Apart from already choosing courses accredited for his later choice, John participates in Exploratory Student Resources: an advisory program for undecided freshman students. supporting the exploration and decision-making process during the first year in college. Students start out as an exploratory major. The “exploratory student status” is possible until after the second year when a selection of a major is necessary.



John passes the Student Academic Center . He knows that this is the place to go if he needs support in his study career: free workshops as well as workshops based on fees. Supplemental instruction is offered, individualized academic assessment and assistance or peer tutoring.

But he has been informed that the university will also refer him to this institution if his grade point average is falling below average. He will even be placed on probation and eventually be dismissed if his study performance does not pick up.

This institution is even present in his hall of residence, every evening from Sunday to Thursday on a walk-in basis.

These satellite offices are called Academic Support Centers (ASC). They offer tutoring, advising, workshops, review sessions and other academic support right where the students live. But also introductory courses in math, business, science and Spanish; development of study skills, plus – most important: Writing Tutorial Services.

Just last night he had received individual assistance by a student tutor on a writing project. He had been assigned to this tutor whose interests and background provided the best match between the demands of the course and John's needs. He feels that he is being supported in discovering the craft of writing while working at a given task or assignment. Though it was made clear to him: "We do not write papers for you. We do not offer solutions. But we help you to find solutions."



A little later John reaches the huge building in which most of the lecture halls are situated – and we just leave him for his classes in the morning until the afternoon. After his classes he will have lunch in the cafeteria.



He participates in the university's meal plan program which operates on a flexible point system purchased in advance for the academic year. Afterwards John might prepare classes, check his e-mail or surf the net in one of the many computer pools on campus or in one of the residence halls which are open and in use 24 hours a day.



What we do, we just follow the little creek that runs through the lovely green campus in the shade of old trees, around small groups of students, resting, eating, conversing,

reading or studying and reach the building of the Student Health Service, where we find CAPS – the university's Counseling and Psychological Services.



This service is located in the university's Health Center alongside with the medical clinic, the pharmacy, and physical therapy.

On a walk-in basis between 8 – 16:30 nineteen staff members of CAPS offer Counselling and Psychotherapy, Psychiatric Consultation, Sexual Assault Crisis Service.

Apart from individual counselling and psychotherapy the students find seminars and workshops such as dissertation support group, graduate and returning students group, anger management group, body esteem, body-mind connection as well as depression groups; a group focusing on strategies for change, a group for women who have been sexually assaulted, a substance reduction group, a group helping to survive the "great transition" for undergraduate students, and a group for women seeking healthy relationships and self-esteem.

The 19 staff members consist of six psychologists (with PhD degrees), four social workers (incl. Director), three interns, two practicum students. Two (1 2/2) psychiatrists, 2 Sexual Assault Crisis Counselors (M.S.). Plus five secretarial staff including dictating service: 3 + 2/2.

So – not taking into account the envy setting in with a number of 19 staff members for this service, the setting of this counselling service sounds familiar. What is special?

1. CAPS does not have its own budget but is funded out of the health service fee (\$ 83/semester) of the students. Additional charges are made for each 3rd plus visit : \$14 for single counselling, \$ 7 for group counselling. Non-health fee: \$25/\$12.50 each visit.

2. A main feature of CAPS is its status as a nationally accredited institution and its qualification as an institution for the clinical training of psychotherapists. Thus CAPS offers a graduate, one-year Psychology Internship Program (a pre-doctorate program with one of the staff acting as responsible director of training). Further a clinical program exists for Psychology majors fulfilling practicum obligations. In all - a professional effort following the universities academic standards but also in making use of potentials and additional capacities of interns and practicum students serving as normal staff members.

The Psychology Internship Program is part of CAPS. It is an accredited graduate training program offering Pre-Doctoral, Practicum and Master's Internships.

It consists of and offers weekly internship seminars, clinical experience, emergency coverage, supervision, group psychotherapy, clinical case conference, treatments seminar, outreach and consultation, opportunities to provide supervision, research, facilities, personal growth opportunities. Time demands: 40-45 hours/week.

The CAPS-staff member in charge of this program acts as Director of Training. Interns and practicum students are assigned to one CAPS-psychologist functioning as mentor and supervisor. The one-to-one supervision of practicum students by the interns which in turn is supervised by a CAPS psychologist (a so called "super-sup"). There are weekly training meetings of supervisors.

For the internship candidates exists a formal, nationwide application procedure. A central agency, the APPIC (Association of Psychology Postdoctoral and Internship

Centers) coordinates applications and training institutions including a so called "Clearing House". This service is responsible for the matching of institutions and candidates after first choices have been made and choices may not have meet. The University pays about \$18.000/ year to interns.

3. The organizational structure of CAPS may be characterized by its highly formalized setting that reflects a specific situation within the US health system.

Appointments are centrally made for the therapists by the secretaries. Documentation on each session is dictated by the therapists to the secretaries through central electronic database. So every report on any patient is centrally available, as well as statistics on the activities on any therapist.

Furthermore: everybody is much aware of a special characteristic of their professional setting, quite unfamiliar to most Europeans. Upon request any documentation on a client has to be released by the therapist (on patient request, request by a court, or by public institutions prior to public employment in security areas). As a consequence – therapists are advised to keep: no personal files, no process notes (for example on transference or counter transference), just to keep factual progress notes. All with the intention: to insure yourself against law suits for malpractice, against possible submitting of records.

Another specialty: the institution observes a strict 8 – 17 hours day, with one hour lunch break. Doors are locked after 17:30 even for staff – so there are no evening activities, no weekend activities - on one hand. On the other – everybody walking in can be absolutely sure to reliably meet those they want to see during the official opening hours – except if this person is taken up by prior appointments.

4. Within CAPS or closely linked to it we find services reminding of substantial problem constellations on campus: alcohol, drugs, sexuality. These institutions are the Sexual Assault Crisis Service, the Drug and Alcohol Consultation, and KISSIS (Kinsey Institute Sexuality Information Service for Students), the sexual information hotline of the Sexual Health Clinic.

#### *DRUG AND ALCOHOL CONSULTATION (CAPS)*

Alcohol problems (binge drinking: > 5 drinks in one hour) may lead to violence and sexual assault on campus. Even incidents of deaths in connection with drinking are reported.

While drinking age is limited to 21, any students associated with underage drinking are automatically referred by the university's administration and police. Any drinking of this group would be considered an underage drinking offence ensuing disciplinary action by the university. E.g. no alcoholic beverages may openly be carried in the car, all offences are recorded by campus police, and are published with name and charge daily in the official campus newspaper. Concerning drug abuse: mostly no hard drugs, mainly marihuana offences are reported.

#### *SEXUAL ASSAULT CRISIS SERVICE*

Cases of sexual assault mostly happen in connection with alcohol abuse (binge drinking). Sexual assault would be defined as rape but also as not consented/not wanted sex. This might also include afterthoughts in cases when individuals concerned didn't have the "capacity" to consent because of intoxication.

The following facts constitute the background of the problem: the drinking age being 21 years; the encouragement of abstinence also in sexual relationships; no sex education in a conservative society: e.g. the Clinton administration already advocated abstinence-only programs in sex education, giving money only to corresponding programs.



Because of the predominance of the abstinence concept, the possibility of conducting seminars on “communication and sexuality” or focusing on sexuality in human growth groups appears politically delicate. And also: these kind of personal seminars and workshops tend to be not strongly frequented by students. Nevertheless the need for some kind of program is felt, but no appropriate approach seems realistic.

Instead: in cooperation different institutions on campus focus on e-mail services where personal issues seem to be presented more easily, and on the offer of sexual information (not counselling) through websites, e.g. through KISS (Kinsey Institute Sexuality Information For Students;), a website administered by the Kinsey Institute, Sexual Health Clinic.

Sexual Information may also be given on request through in-course presentations by the “Health and Wellness Service”, e.g. in biology, nursing, psychology, Physical Education, Education, or Applied Health).

5. And a last characteristic: making use of Virtual Services supplied by a nationwide cooperation of counselling services. For example:

- Concerned Charlie (administered by Ball State University), an anonymous answering service to students about school, relationships, personal issues, or just about life in general. The questions and their answers will be published at the CC web site and are therefore available for anyone to see.

-The Counseling Center Village, a virtual Web-platform made up of the many home pages –

and other web resources – created by college and university counselling centres mainly from the US. The Village web-project is coordinated by the counselling service of the University of Buffalo and has quickly become an important tool for counselling centre professionals and students. The emphasis is on gathering together resources, information, and services created by counselling centres professionals. The finalized version of the Village consists of 10 sections . Such as:

- Counseling Center Directory  
A listing of university and college counselling centres currently on-line,
- Virtual Pamphlet Collection (administered by the University of Chicago)  
Psycho-educational pamphlets produced by counselling centres organized by topic.
- Help.Your.Self  
Award-winning psycho-educational self-help web pages designed for college students.
- Technical Assistance  
Assistance on creating or improving a centre's web page. Also, the Student Counseling Center Web Resources listserve.
- Workshop Central  
Psycho-educational workshop outlines, manuals, handouts, and other materials.
- At The Office  
Sample forms and other paperwork, policies and procedures, Document Bank, assessment instruments, and more.
- Research Network  
A place to exchange ideas, meet and collaborate on counselling research.
- Practice Resources  
Clinical, assessment, and other practice-related resources.
- Staff Development  
Professional organizations, staff development program materials, presenters for various topics, jobs, licensure resources etc.
- Pre-doctoral Training  
Pre-doctoral internships, practica, material for seminar presentations, on-line readings.

Now we have to hurry: we have an appointment with John after his classes. Right across the street we pass the Career Development Center (CDC) in a well maintained building which looks like their corresponding budget of \$ 1 mill/year, even excluding the costs for buildings and salaries for 19 fulltime staff, incl. 5 solely for contact keeping purposes to employers.



The CDC stands for Placement Offices for different schools, Student Employment Office, Career Counseling Services, Career Resource Library, Graduate Career Advising Program.

In a way it is very special – because the importance of this institution to the university and to outside employers is undisputed. For one this is a service that maintains itself. And secondly:

employers are most interested in contacts to graduates using the services of the CDC– the job market at the present time being considered to be a students' market. Donations are acquired from employers (for example \$ 1.4 mill. for renovation of the premises; or: the technology network at the university has been sponsored by a single firm. Or: employers pay \$ 500 for participation at careers fairs).

The CDC maintains a strong position in the university's pecking order. Its services are vital regarding the ranking of the university's successful educational program in comparison with other universities and – of course - in acquiring more and successful student prospects.



We meet John and Bill, his roommate, in front of the huge recreational sports building – ready for a workout before tonight's studying. Not quite qualified to go out for the university's 24 varsity teams from basketball, football, soccer, to track and volleyball which compete on a professional level nationwide –



he has the choice of using the facilities of indoor and outdoor pools and tracks, of a fitness studio, of a overwhelming number of recreational courses and workshops on 362 days a year.

So we leave them now, where in the lobby of the building John again checks on his e-mail at one of the terminals. Surely something to do with a date at one of the parties on Friday or Saturday.

Watching John and Bill there is apparently no need for them to consult with the Student Advocates Office in order for example to mediate a conflict.



The Student Advocates Office functions like an University Ombudsman: take retired professors and administration officials (60 – 80 years old). They are volunteers without pay in service for 4 hours/week; mostly persons with an established standing in the university including an acknowledged record of positive and active involvement with students. Create an independent service acting as partners or advocates to students in problems with the university's administration and faculty. Organize a Peer Mediator Training (peer Mediators being undergraduate and graduate students who volunteer to resolve conflicts within the university's community).

Then you have something like the Student Advocates Office: if nothing works and no one seems to be the right person to address yourself to, the students advocates will explain university policies and procedures. They advise students about their options, direct students to the people on campus who will address their issues; make inquiries on a student's behalf; follow up to be sure that a problem has been resolved; accompany a student to meetings or hearings relating to the problem.

So even in cases of a conflict between roommates, unfair treatment by faculty and administration, preparation of an appeal, cases of personal and academic misconduct, examination problems (cheating, process of examination), these people can be contacted.

It's been a long day not only for John – but for us too. Time to gather our experiences – and there are many more that just didn't fit in this day.

As shown in the following illustration student services at Indiana University are integrated in different organizational divisions: you find them

- in a so called service-oriented "Campus Life Division"
- in an administrative "University Division"
- or even in "Academic Affairs" which include all academic faculties and departments.

You will recognize some of the institutions we have mentioned on our tour today.



**INDIANA UNIVERSITY**

<b>CAMPUS LIFE DIVISION</b>		<b>UNIVERSITY DIVISION</b>	
Alcohol-Drug Information Center		ADMISSIONS	

**Career Development Center**

**Academic Advising Services**  
**Exploratory Student Resources**

**Disabled Student Services**

**Student Academic Center**

**Health Center**

**Academic Support Center**

Medical Services

**Counseling and Psychological Services**

**Writing Tutorial Services**

**Sexual Assault Crisis Service**

**Division of Health and Wellness**

**Parents Association and Staff Development**

**Student Activities**

**Student Advocates**

**Student Ethics and Anti-**

*Harassment Programs*

**GLBT Student Support Services**

**ACADEMIC AFFAIRS**

**Centre for Human Growth,  
School of Education, Counselling and  
Educational Psychology  
Kinsey Institute, Sexual Health Clinic**

But what does it cost to John, the privilege of studying with an all-round support having such a bouquet of student services at his disposal?

And here is, how the fees add up in detail:

*Credit-Hour Fees (12-17 credit hours, undergraduate)*

State resident	\$ 2.286,55/semester
Non-resident	\$ 7.591,85/semester

**Mandatory fees**

Student Activity Fee	\$ 58,87/semester
Student Health Fee	\$ 82,91/semester
Technology Fee	\$ 200,00/semester
Transportation Fee	\$ 29,00/semester

*Special Fees*

Residence Hall rates	approx. \$ 3.000 /academic year
Meal Plan	approx. \$ 2.500/ academic year
Parking Permit	approx. \$ 118/ academic year

This amounts to:

For a non-state resident: approx. \$ 16.000/year  
 plus approx. \$ 5500 (lodging and meals)  
 For a state resident: approx. \$ 5.200/year  
 plus approx. \$ 5500 (lodging and meals)

Just a rough accounting, the example being taken from the University of Indiana (2002). And be sure that fees for additional services and courses and administrative matters further increase the bill.

The situation observed calls for an appraisal: in the end maybe confirming one's own familiar approaches. Or maybe stimulating initiatives to pursue or integrate different ideas and services. Or maybe leading to decisions to pursue different options.

Circumstances and settings of student services at US universities are – as you have seen – quite different when compared with most European service institutions.

The students too differ considerably – US students study under much dissimilar circumstances at least when compared to our German student population.

They are much younger, for the first time released from their family's care. Their families and the students expect an all-round educational program including a professional, supportive or even protective setting plus recreational options in return for the money they pay. US students are fulltime students, even if they earn money on the side, the work doesn't interfere with their studies.

So any appraisal has to take into account the difference between the US and European situation – but even within our own European backyard - we might observe as large differences between services as if we compare them with institutions on the outside.

But what I do – I just give you my very own, subjective appraisal, sharing with you some of the valuable incentives that filled my personal professional suitcase.

#### 1. Make use of the potential of an own mission statement for your service

It has become quite popular to develop mission statements even for service institutions. Not in terms of appearing service oriented and modernistic. But I feel there is a considerable value in seriously attempting to pursue the goals formulated and ostensibly promoting the attitude lying behind.

Let me give you an example of a mission statement which I personally value, taken from Student Services at Purdue University

##### Mission of Student Services:

- to assist students and faculty in achieving their educational objectives through attracting and selecting a high quality, culturally diverse undergraduate student body consistent with the missions of the university;
- assisting students in their search for rewarding educational and career goals and to retain them through graduation;
- providing a variety of formal and informal learning experiences; creating an environment in which students can grow intellectually, culturally, emotionally, and socially; enhancing the quality of life for the student body, faculty, staff, and community at large.

Let maybe such a self-determination of your own mission statement of student services be known: Make it explicit, comprehensive, and easy to communicate within the university. And evaluate your own service along these guidelines.

#### 2. Promote the professionalism of the service but avoid potential consequences of a

formal integration into administrative systems.  
(fulfil accreditation standards but beware of subsequent containment; e.g. losing your flexibility by having to follow procedures of a social service institution)

3. Let your service be known for interested support towards students but not for any part in administrative control.  
(be sure that everybody understands the counselling services are independent institutions from e.g. admissions or examination offices or from other administrative institutions exercising executive functions)
4. Understand that the services of psychological psychotherapy/psychotherapy include services much prior to any first appointment.  
(promote and participate in the student's education of soft skills, be part in developing organizational options to allow students to prolong the finality of their study decision, offensively support students to improve their study abilities, secure the personal approachability for students within your service)
5. Make use of virtual media in your service improving the setting of psychotherapy, but do not substitute virtual media for the potentials of a personal therapeutic relationship.  
(consider using virtual media a "plus-service", increasing the approachability for some students and supporting the staff in their everyday work. But don't consider it an "instead-service", in exchange for a face-to-face relationship)
6. Try to make up for lacking personal resources by making use of any potential cooperation within the university.  
(use your service as a training institution – interns, volunteers – e.g. in further education, look for cooperation with university institutions/clinics)
7. Improve the cooperation between independently operating services.  
(create integrating networks, but try to avoid competitive situations between services for funds or personal resources)
8. Secure external self-funding through sponsoring, marketing of services.  
(don't rely solely on central funds, but contribute to your own independence through finding extra funding)

## CONCLUSION

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In concluding it seems appropriate to give a special credit to those who had an important part in my being able to present to you these facts and impressions of student services at some US universities.

A special thank-you goes to the colleagues at the University of Indiana, at Purdue University and at the University of Buffalo:

- for making me welcome in a most friendly way
- for readily sharing with me their institutional and personal experiences

- and for their active interest in our European student service situation.

After more than 10 years of PSYCHE in Fedora, it seems to me that Europe appears much more familiar - as personal acquaintances produce new links and experiences. With this experience in mind it might be a good time to be aware of the corresponding values of potential ties, of challenges and of benefits that lie in transatlantic exchanges.

## LIST OF LINKS

University of Indiana	<a href="http://www.indiana.edu">www.indiana.edu</a>
Purdue University	<a href="http://www.purdue.edu">www.purdue.edu</a>
State University of New York at Buffalo	<a href="http://www.buffalo.edu">www.buffalo.edu</a>

Institutions and Services (e.g. University of Indiana)	
Counselling and Psychological Services (CAPS),	<a href="http://www.indiana.edu/~caps/">www.indiana.edu/~caps/</a> <a href="http://www.indiana.edu/~caps/internship.html">www.indiana.edu/~caps/internship.html</a>
Academic Advising Services	<a href="http://www.indiana.edu/~udivadv/udivweb/frontpage.htm">www.indiana.edu/~udivadv/udivweb/frontpage.htm</a>
Exploratory Student Resources	<a href="http://www.indiana.edu/~udiv/html/explore.html">www.indiana.edu/~udiv/html/explore.html</a>
Student Academic Centre	<a href="http://www.indiana.edu/~sac/">www.indiana.edu/~sac/</a>
Academic Support Centre	<a href="http://www.indiana.edu/~acadsupp/ASCinfo2.html">www.indiana.edu/~acadsupp/ASCinfo2.html</a>
Writing Tutorial Services	<a href="http://www.indiana.edu/~wts/wts/wtsinfo.html">www.indiana.edu/~wts/wts/wtsinfo.html</a>
Health & Wellness	<a href="http://www.indiana.edu/~health/hellwell.html">www.indiana.edu/~health/hellwell.html</a>
Sexual Assault Crisis Service	<a href="http://www.indiana.edu/~caps/flyers/sacsmain.html">www.indiana.edu/~caps/flyers/sacsmain.html</a>
Alcohol	<a href="http://campuslife.indiana.edu/ADIC/">http://campuslife.indiana.edu/ADIC/</a>

Drug Information Centre	
Kinsey Institute Sexuality Information Service For Students	<a href="http://www.indiana.edu/~kisiss">www.indiana.edu/~kisiss</a>
Concerned Charlie	<a href="http://www.bsu.edu/students/cpsc/ccharlie.htm">www.bsu.edu/students/cpsc/ccharlie.htm</a>
The Student Counselling Virtual Pamphlet Collection	<a href="http://counseling.uchicago.edu/vpc/">http://counseling.uchicago.edu/vpc/</a>
The Counselling Centre Village	<a href="http://ub-counseling.buffalo.edu/ccv.html">http://ub-counseling.buffalo.edu/ccv.html</a>
Career Development Centre	<a href="http://www.indiana.edu/~career/">www.indiana.edu/~career/</a>
Student Advocates Office	<a href="http://campuslife.indiana.edu/Advocates/index.html">http://campuslife.indiana.edu/Advocates/index.html</a>
Recreational Sports	<a href="http://www.indiana.edu/~recsport/">www.indiana.edu/~recsport/</a>



## A VIRTUAL STUDY BUDDY: THE CD-ROM MANI AS AN INFORMATIVE AND TRAINING INSTRUMENT FOR (FUTURE) STUDENTS, THEIR TEACHERS AND COUNSELLORS

## UN ACCOMPAGNEMENT VIRTUEL DANS LES ÉTUDES : L'INTRODUCTION D'UN CD-ROM COMME OUTIL D'INFORMATION ET D'ENTRAÎNEMENT POUR (FUTURS) ÉTUDIANTS, LEURS PROFESSEURS ET LEURS CONSEILLERS-PSYCHOLOGUES

Eric Depreeuw |

### ABSTRACT

After a few decennia of experience in the field of student psychological help, we sometimes forget how difficult it is for young people to bridge the gap between high school and higher education. This renewed insight brought the authors to the project of putting together their and other's ideas, strategies, informative and training material in a modern communication medium: the CD-ROM. With the maecenatism of a financial group one of us could work for one year on the project. The educational content was composed, and the concept developed. The creation of the interactive layout was realised in cooperation with teachers and bachelor students of the Arteveldehogeschool - Gent. A professional firm took care of the software.

The purpose of the CD-ROM is not only to provide an informative data base but mostly to give future students the opportunity to train themselves in skills we think are crucial for success in higher education. Eleven themes were chosen (study choice, attending courses, projects, motivation and time management, test anxiety, health, failure etc.) and worked out in relation to five phases of a semester (start, course time, preparation of exams, exams and thereafter). Users can start from the menu 'themes' or from the menu 'phases' and get a short self test, a short description of the topic, a more extended introduction, sometimes with interactive exercises and a synthetic filing card. Counsellors and teachers can find special material and sources. Five students, enrolled in the Flemish higher education, give testimony in video clips. Another step in to the CD-ROM is the FAQ-box.

Key words: communication medium, training of skills, transition high school to higher education

### RÉSUMÉ

Après décennies d'expérience dans le domaine d'aide psychologique aux étudiants, on oublie parfois les difficultés que les jeunes rencontrent lors de la transition entre l'école secondaire et l'enseignement supérieur. Cette compréhension renouvelée a encouragé quelques psychologues Flamands à mettre ensemble leurs idées et stratégies, matériaux informatifs et éducationnels dans un nouveau moyen de communication : le cd-rom. Avec l'aide d'un groupe financier, un des collègues a pu s'occuper du projet pendant un entier an. Nous avons composé le contenu éducatif et développé le concept. La forme interactive a été créée avec la coopération de professeurs et étudiants du baccalauréat de la Arteveldehogeschool à Gand. Une entreprise professionnelle s'est occupée du software.

Le but du cd-rom n'est pas seulement de prévoir une banque de données informatives, mais surtout d'offrir aux futurs étudiants la chance de s'entraîner aux compétences que nous croyons cruciales afin de porter les études supérieures à une bonne fin.

Onze thèmes ont été choisis (choix d'étude, présence aux cours, projets, motivation et organisation du temps, angoisse d'échec, santé, échec précédent, etc.) et développés en les mettant en rapport avec cinq phases dans chaque semestre (début, cours, préparation des examens, examens et la période après). Les utilisateurs du cd-rom ont le choix de commencer dans le menu « thèmes » ou dans le menu « phases » et ont accès à un petit teste, une description synthétique du sujet, une introduction plus élaborée -occasionnellement avec des exercices interactifs, et une carte sommaire.

Pour les thérapeutes et les professeurs, on a prévu des matériaux et des sources spécialisés.

Cinq étudiants, inscrits dans une institution d'enseignement supérieur Flamand, témoignent en trente fragments vidéo.

Une autre étape dans le cd-rom est la boîte question-réponse.

Mots clés: moyen de communication, entraînement des compétences, transition du secondaire au supérieur

## THE CHANGING LANDSCAPE OF EUROPEAN HIGHER EDUCATION

All over Europe, the educational landscape is changing drastically. More than thirty countries have deliberately made the commitment to restructure their higher education into the bachelor – master model (the so-called Bologna Convention). This radical and energy-consuming restructuring has several basic aims. Firstly, the countries involved want to increase the transparency of the educational course. This should facilitate and at the same time stimulate student mobility across the state boundaries and make the European higher education more attractive for non-European students. Together with the structural transformation, functional measures for the enhancement of flexibility in the learning career are being studied and implemented. The existing rigid curricula will have to be replaced by a full or partial credit system. This will enable students to interrupt their study at one institution and to continue at another, possibly in another

country. People already involved in a professional career will be encouraged to take up studying again, and will be able to convert already acquired competencies in curriculum credits.

One of the significant consequences is that academic staff and counsellors will be confronted, more so than in the past, with a heterogeneous student influx. The didactic formula of lectures attended by large groups of students, is steadily losing or has already lost its dominant position. Teaching approaches are diversifying and are implemented as a powerful learning environment (De Corte, 1996), enabling students to become active constructors of their own knowledge. Students' autonomy will be maximised, yet, when necessary, students will be individually coached (Boekaerts, 1999; McKeachie, 1994). Appropriate instruments for effective remedial interventions focused on the necessary study skills, competencies and attitudes must be developed. This article describes a new and original approach to these issues: the CD-ROM *Mani. Higher education within reach* (Depreeuw, Leniere & Wels, 2002).

## THE CONTEXT OF THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE CD-ROM: RESEARCH FINDINGS AND COUNSELLING EXPERIENCE

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The authors of the CD-ROM, all three Flemish psychologists, have been involved in study and student counselling for many years, and complement this practical approach with research. Both aspects of their work have proved a fertile soil and a rich source of inspiration for the CD-ROM. This is illustrated by the research of Depreeuw and Lens (2001): 782 students from Flemish universities were asked to fill out an extensive questionnaire, which explored study related (meta-)cognitions, emotions and behaviours. Cluster analysis revealed six different student types. 32% of the sample could be described as optimal students, thinking constructively, feeling well and behaving adequately (e.g. harmonious planning of their life and effective performance; psychologically and socially balanced). A second student type was labelled pragmatic (15%): their academic life does not have the highest priority, yet they fulfil the necessary conditions and combine a rather happy life with moderate but effective study accomplishment. Confirming earlier research findings (Covington and Omelich, 1991; Depreeuw and De Neve, 1992), this study differentiated two types of test anxious students. The active test anxious student (22%) is highly achievement motivated but loses efficacy due to perfectionism, often obsessive study efforts and negative feelings related to fear of failure. The passive test anxious student (3%) attempts to reduce the threat of evaluation related cognitions and emotions as long as possible by quantitative (study time) and qualitative (surface level learning) procrastination. This self-handicapping strategy (Covington and Omelich, 1991) leads to panic once the avoiding strategy can no longer be continued and exams are nearby. 2% of the sample has a rather demoralised and disorganised life and study style and was given the label apathic student. Finally, 27% of the students fell into the group of modal students, not clearly characterised by any strong or weak cognitive, emotional or behavioural style. It must be evident that the large majority of this sample of university students could improve their academic and psychosocial condition when given appropriate information and training opportunities, before as well as during their higher education.

Besides research findings as described above, the authors learned from their broad experience as student counsellors that pupils finishing high school are not seldom

unfamiliar with the general and specific requirements of higher education. Moreover, and more importantly, they have often not developed the necessary skills, habits and attitudes that facilitate academic success and psychosocial well-being as autonomous adolescents. Most first year students are not at all aware of this lacuna, and even if they are, they do not discern effective and/or attractive remedial tools.

## THE BASIC IDEA AND THE EARLY DEVELOPMENT

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Both dimensions of the authors' professional task led them step by step to the CD-ROM-project. As there is already a lot of good quality introductory material in Dutch, the authors were convinced that the umpteenth book on study competencies for higher education would not meet the needs. Their challenge was twofold. Firstly, they wanted to offer introductory material in a modern and attractive 'outfit', inviting young people to explore and to use the material effectively. Secondly, they were and are convinced that adequate information as such is useful and important, yet it is highly insufficient when it comes to skills, habits and attitudes. For the latter, preparatory and continuing practical training seems indispensable. The modalities of an interactive CD-ROM seemed to offer the potential to meet both these purposes.

However, there was one tremendous problem - financial resources. Attempts to attract public support from the Flemish educational department were not successful. On the other hand, considerable private support was obtained from the Cera Foundation. Their directory board studied the project and considered it highly relevant to their societal mission. These financial resources made it possible to engage one of the authors to spend a full year on the development of the content, to take care of the coordination of final-year Graphic Design students to work out an attractive lay-out and display, and to cooperate with the private company Better Use of Technology – BUT for the development of the software necessary for powerful interactive possibilities. About two years after the first embryonic ideas, the dream came true and the CD-ROM Mani could be demonstrated during a conference in the prestigious building of the Flemish Parliament in Brussels.

## DESCRIPTION OF THE CONTENT: STRUCTURE AND FUNCTIONS

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The global structure of the CD-ROM is based on eleven themes: study and career orientation, motivation, time management, attending courses and taking notes, learning strategies, project and team work, preparing exams, health and well-being, assertiveness, procrastination and fear of failure. We are aware of the partially arbitrary

choice of some of these themes and of the omission of others. However, practical limitations had to be taken into account (time and money!) and the target group had to include (future) university students as well as professional bachelor students.

Each theme is developed following a more or less fixed plan. First, the student can fill out a short screening questionnaire. Mani then offers a (rough) feedback score, indicating whether there probably is not at all a problem, a moderate or a considerable one. In the latter cases (moderate or serious problem) the student is invited to explore the theme and to take the next step: some further information. This information has been kept limited and uses a rather informal language, in order to motivate the young users to stick to the topic at hand. Moralizing statements are avoided and some humoristic comments and remarks to put things into perspective have been included. As we stressed earlier, the main purpose of the CD-ROM is to offer training opportunities related to the eleven themes. Depending on the specific theme, adequate tasks and assignments are given. With regard to time management, for example, the student is invited to work out a concrete planning for the coming week and to observe himself in its realisation. With regard to learning course material, ten texts on different topics are presented, out of which the student can select one of interest and print it out. After intentional study, multiple choice questions are available. Mani gives feedback to each answer, and in the case of a faulty choice the student is sent back to his study desk...

The fourth heading is a clearly structured, summarising card of the theme, also printable when desired. Next, the CD-ROM offers direct links to some useful theme-related websites. Here also, important restrictions have been made in order to refer only to trustful information and stable websites that are regularly updated.

The last heading in each theme contains more elaborated information for teachers and counsellors (and of course also for interested students). For example, for the themes of motivation, fear of failure and procrastination, the interested reader is referred to elsewhere published, relevant chapters (copyright has of course been respected).

The same eleven themes are also approached from another direction, namely the phases of an academic year. This is particularly of interest for the student already enrolled in higher education. Five phases are distinguished: the start of the academic year, courses and tasks, preparation of exams, exams and after (holiday or restart study...). For each phase, only the relevant themes are dealt with. During the phase of the courses and tasks, information on study and career orientation is of little importance, but themes such as attending courses, project and team work or learning texts can be extremely useful.

Particularly attractive to young users are the students' testimonies. Inspired by the already described research findings on student types, fragments out of the daily life of real Flemish students have been video-recorded. Each of the six student types is focused upon with a recording related to each of the five phases of the academic year (in total 30 clips of about 30 seconds). Although the scripts are flashy and sometimes humoristic, the different types are extremely recognisable and function as a mirror for future students with corresponding problems and lacunas.

Besides a data base with 60 frequently asked questions (FAQ), there is interactive material to train time management. The CD-ROM includes a week schedule (Monday 7 am till Sunday 12 pm). A week planning can be filled out in the CD-ROM-week schedule, according to five kinds of student activities (attending courses, autonomous study related activities, pauses, active leisure time and unspecified time spending). Each kind of activity has its own colour, clearly displayed; the CD-ROM computes the week totals and the week survey can be printed (in colour or in grey tones). Particular attention is paid to time management because of its extreme importance as a manifestation of the responsibility the student has to take for his own life, without or with little external control.

## ACTUAL AND FUTURE APPLICATIONS OF MANI

It is a problem but also a creative challenge that a new instrument has no history of application. Consequently, what follows is more a product of optimistic fantasy than a factual description of realised practice. MANI has been developed focusing in the first place on individual pupils and students. We think they will first explore the rich content of MANI and dwell on attractive and/or relevant topics (e.g. the video testimonies, the FAQ or fear of failure). When they really are convinced to have a lacuna, we hope they will work through a theme in-depth and try to realise the transfer from the CD-ROM exercises and tasks to their academic and personal life.

However, having plenty of experience with students, we are not naive. Putting the introductory material on a CD-ROM instead of a paper print only will not motivate the modal student to effectively resolve his problems. We are convinced that the directing and motivating role of teachers and counsellors is indispensable and irreplaceable. Teachers can help their pupils individually, but also integrate it into normal class teaching, especially with regard to study-related topics. For example, a teacher can imitate a university lecture and ask to take notes or to prepare an exam, preferably after the pupils have gone through the corresponding themes of MANI. We also see opportunities for dynamic group activities: starting from the testimonies of the student types, classroom discussions can help to identify and clear out individual problems and suggest possible solutions. Personally, we already use MANI frequently in our counselling for procrastinators. The time management information and practical schemes are of very significant value and support. We also integrate some parts of MANI in our talks for (future) students; and several schools for higher education offer MANI as a welcome present for newly enrolled students. However, we are convinced that this enumeration is far from complete. Creative teachers and counsellors will find other and maybe more effective applications. We hope and expect that MANI will find a supporting role in the changing university landscape.

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## CUORI: AN INTEGRATED INFORMATION, GUIDANCE AND COUNSELLING PROPOSAL AIMING TO ENHANCE THE TRANSITION FROM HIGH SCHOOL TO UNIVERSITY AND ADULT LIFE.

## CUORI: UNE PROPOSITION QUI INTÈGRE L'INFORMATION, L'ORIENTATION, ET L'AIDE PSYCHOLOGIQUE AFIN D'OPTIMISER LA TRANSITION DU LYCÉE À L'UNIVERSITÉ, ET UNE VIE ADULTE

Pierpaolo Luderin, Anna Tortorella, Alessandra Franceschini & Giovanna Bazzacco |

### ABSTRACT

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In the process of the construction of adult identity, success and failure in one of the phase-specific tasks are important signals for the counsellor or psychologist operating in an integrated dimension which is favourable in terms of the student's personality development, where the complex integration between cognitive, motivational and emotional levels is borne in mind. The reality that the C.U.O.R.I. operator deals with is in fact characterised by multiple requests which tend to require global assistance. The problematics of distress, identity, professional or study difficulties constitute an opportunity to meet and interact with an adult/expert, who occupies an alternative position if compared to university, family and friends. Dealing with such requests has led us to provide a service able to bring together a plurality of roles and competences, ranging from providing information to pre-, post- and intra-university guidance, educational and vocational guidance, psychological counselling, individual support as well as counselling for small groups with a view to reinforcing cognitive abilities. Our contribution therefore aims to develop a propositional contribution in order to investigate the characteristics of these integrated operations.

Key words: university guidance, psychological counselling, vocational guidance, educational guidance, personality development

### RÉSUMÉ

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Dans la construction de l'identité adulte la réussite plutôt que l'échec dans une des tâches spécifiques de cet âge deviennent des importants signals pour le psychologue ou pour le conseiller d'orientation qui travaille dans un contexte de services strictement interreliés, intégrés même dans un espace commun, un contexte capable de favoriser le développement de la personnalité de l'étudiant dans laquelle se compénètrent des



niveaux soit cognitifs, soit concernant la motivation ou l'émotion. Le conseiller d'orientation/psychologue du C.U.OR.I. rencontre chaque jour une réalité caractérisée par une demande très différenciée qui quelquefois paraît plus précise et directe, d'autres plus indéfinie, mais qui en tout cas requiert une prise en charge complexe, à l'intérieur de laquelle les problématiques du malaise, de l'identité, du choix universitaire ou professionnel comme des difficultés dans l'étude deviennent l'opportunité d'une rencontre avec un adulte/expert, en position de tiers en rapport à l'université, la famille, les amis, lequel est disponible à se mettre à l'écoute de l'être-au-monde du jeune. La nécessité de faire face à des demandes pareilles nous a poussé à organiser un service capable de réunir une pluralité de rôles et de compétence qui passent de l'information à l'orientation dans toutes les phases de la vie universitaire (du point de vue soit scolaire que professionnel), à la consultation psychologique, au soutien individuel ou au travail en petit group pour le renforcement des aptitudes cognitives. Notre contribution se propose donc de développer un apport pour approfondir les caractéristiques de ces interventions intégrées.

Mots clés: orientation universitaire, aide psychologique, orientation professionnelle, aide pédagogique, développement personnel

## INTRODUCTION

In the process of the construction of adult identity, success and failure in one of the phase-specific tasks are important signals for the counsellor or psychologist operating in an integrated dimension which is favourable in terms of the student's personality development, where the complex integration between cognitive, motivational and emotional levels is borne in mind. The reality that the C.U.O.R.I. operator deals with is in fact characterised by multiple requests which, whether they are indefinite and a-specific or direct and specific, tend to require global assistance. The problematics of distress, identity, study difficulties, the choice of profession constitute an opportunity to meet and interact with an adult/expert, who occupies an alternative position if compared to university, family and friends, and who is openly receptive to the young person. The need to deal with such requests has led us to provide a service able to bring together a plurality of roles and competences, ranging from providing information to pre-post and intra-university guidance, educational and vocational guidance, psychological counselling, individual support as well as counselling for small groups with a view to reinforcing cognitive abilities. C.U.OR.I. operators have a clinical training as well as a training in the field of communication and of educational and vocational guidance which help them both to answer a direct request and to approach the young person "with the aim to build together –through the relationship– an opportunity to differentiate the need" (Luderin, Maione, 2001). From these considerations the idea has developed of reformulating the traditional view, made up of services which were distinct even though intrinsically connected, within a centre, as a non-differentiated space, able to welcome the students' diversified, global requests (the centre has slowly developed into a holding environment in Winnicott's words). C.U.OR.I. has been conceived and organised as a centre for information, guidance and psychological counselling, as well as a facility for improving studying skills. It is the result of the attempt to improve the answer to students' needs while optimising human, technical,

financial and logistical resources.

## BUILDING AN ADULT IDENTITY

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Psychosocial research has lately defined a transitional figure between adolescence, late adolescence and adulthood, with its own connotations and characteristics: the young adult (Scabini, Rossi, 1997; Farina, Galimberti, 1993). Such a situation, referring to the age range between 20 and 30, is characterised in Italy by the phenomenon of the cohabitation of two generations of adults or almost adults, given that one third of 30-34 yrs. old people still live with their parents (IARD, 2002). There are various reasons for that: the first one seems to be related to the development of the social situation, particularly the difficulty in finding the first job. In Italy, still  $\frac{1}{4}$  of 30 yr. olds are not yet part of the labour market. A further factor seems to be related to a process of prolonged neoteny, a typical slowing down process of the human species, which apparently finds an optimal condition in the Italian context, allowing an extension of training and care time for the young. Finally, a third factor seems to be about a cultural change whereby parents and children ally less around issues of duty and responsibility than around the primary concern for self-fulfilment. The new ideal is represented by the duty/necessity of self-fulfilment, particularly with respect to professional life, rather than a choice of a social role, either in married life or living on one's own. Moreover, such an ideal/imperative is likely to allow the young adult to postpone the assumption of responsibility. In such a scenario, the transition to adulthood seems to be postponed farther and farther and also regarded not favourably, connected as it is with uncertain and precarious circumstances, or even with restraint. Living with a partner or having a child is considered as "a limitation of one's opportunity to choose and a retroactivity" (IARD, 2002): hence it is always preferable to pave more ways. The young Italians are supported by their families, without having any limitation to their freedom; such a fall in normative patterns is marked by little concern about the responsibility and the tasks traditionally associated to adulthood, such as "setting up house", "earning one's living". In particular, extending their stay in the family is a privilege of upper-middle cultural social classes. The building process of adulthood seems to blur and to have different connotations to the past: where the parents' social view of being adult tends to be associated to images of stability in the couple, i.e. permanent job, autonomous dwelling; the view of the 20-30 yr olds is more of a split between professional and personal success and the issues related to a settled life as a couple or to a permanent dwelling are considered important after the 30s (IARD, 2002). This cultural change seems to affect periods of micro-transition, such as the entrance to tertiary institutions, as well as the process of socialisation to work. In the process of building an adult identity, where success is the crucial issue, the question is how success or failure in passing from higher education to university, or in coping with the requests of the university environment, can act as useful perspective of the individual's life.

## LABORATORY PROFILE OF A STUDENT

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On the one hand, entering tertiary education involves factors such as the relevance given by both the family and the student, to cultural heritage and to studying, the social-economic and cultural background, as well as the resources required for support. On the other hand the typology of the choice made has its relevance, too. Students' aims in relation to higher educational levels, are related to their father's cultural levels (Luderin, Boni, Maione, 2001). The choice is often the "combined product of family plans and aims, of available economic resources and of expectations based on children's capabilities" (Checchi, 1999). Drawing the profile of the university student, despite the specific features of each individual's profile, we are faced with the three basic dimensions of role relationship: the cognitive, motivational and emotional components. Such areas interact simultaneously in such a way that very often it is not easy to consider them separately. The goals of learning appear to be the result of the interaction of those elements. They in fact imply expectations about one's future and evaluation of one's skills, as well as the emotions related to the experiences of success or failure (De Beni, Moè, 2000). These aims, which in literature are characterised as performance aims or mastery aims, are meant as an organised set of beliefs orienting learning. Self-perception is acknowledged as an important source of motivation and it affects the student's behaviour - the way he/she studies - and in turn such ways of studying affect self image. The student having a more consistent image of him/herself as a student, feels more effective in learning situations and he/she performs academically better as a result.

A well studied pattern regarding the connection with academic success is the pattern of self-efficacy (Bandura, 1995). For example, with regard to adolescents, a recent longitudinal research study of a sample of high school students (Cattellino et al, 2002) has shown that subjects highly motivated to become cultured, but who lack an adequate level of perception of their own self-efficacy, seem to have poor results. Self-esteem seems to be connected to an elevated capability to face tasks, by means of efficient learning strategies, active and motivated participation, subscription of aims and teaching methodologies. Dweck had indeed highlighted the relevance of the theories of the Self considered as significant that individuals give to the situations they face, to success and failure. Regarding learning for example, subjects' theories of intelligence should be examined: if it is regarded as a fixed entity it is less helpful to learning than if it is seen as increasing and as such capable of improvement through commitment. Hence, self-esteem in students with a theory of intelligence as a fixed entity increases when they manage to work fast with no mistakes. Failure is not expected and can quickly make self-esteem decrease; whereas in students with an increasing model, self-esteem depends on the feeling of engaging a tiresome task and being able to master it. This pattern appears interesting for its implications in the intervention: students with "entity" theories, though gratified by successful performances, can prove unsatisfied or poorly efficient in facing difficult experiences.

According to Di Nuovo's research (2000), the most mentioned reasons for a university choice are the goals of self-fulfilment and a specific interest in a field of studies; there follow the "functional" reasons (obtaining a good job with a good wage). Other reasons have less relevance, such as one's family's advice, or "accidental" reasons, such as the impossibility of finding a job, postponing military service, living apart from the family, behaving like one's friends. Such data confirm the prevailing tendency, within the Italian cultural context, of putting values oriented around the Self, personal development and usage of one's skills as main work values (Work Importance Study, Trentini, 1995; Bellotto, 1997). Hence, at the top of a recent map of young people's values, we find internal and restricted social values: family, friendship, self-fulfilment and work; whereas success, career or commitment come second (IARD, 2002). In

such a context, the reasons for university choice can be categorised along three modalities:

1. A choice with vocational predominance;
2. A choice with external/functional predominance;
3. A choice with standby predominance, in wait.

## THE CUORI STUDENT'S PROFILE. A FEW CONSIDERATIONS

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The young university adult finds him/herself facing several micro-steps: the beginning and the entry as a full-fledged student, the overcoming of difficult situations, the processing for closing a cycle, the opening up to a profession. Each stage requires a flexible arrangement and a progressive integration of the tasks of the previous stage. At the beginning the student is asked to manage the university environment, to acknowledge his/her rights and duties, then he/she must be able to face difficult experiences, while staying on course, with apt adjustments. Finally he/she must get ready to come to an end and leave the now congenial environment, giving up their student identity to open up to a profession. The building process of an adult identity in the context of university studies can develop along levels of phase-specific tasks, as regards both the personal and the social side. On a personal level, the phase-specific tasks a student must face are:

- On a self-organisational and cognitive level: success in managing their time and priorities, as professional success in studies, considering sitting exams as the student's work;
- On a relational-emotional level: identification of themselves as students, flexible adaptation to the tertiary institution;
- On the level of relationship with authority, with lecturers and professors, re-enacting attachment style belonging to the individual;
- On a social level: The building of a relationship with the peers and managing the relationship with the administration.

The aim of the differentiation process is the development of individual personality (Jung, 1921). The passage from the high school context to the university environment requires practical and self-organisational skills, the ability to perceive the signals and to seize the opportunities. A student who is not able to relate to the apparent ambivalence of university, focussing in turn either on negative or positive aspects, who cannot picture university as the integrated product of both aspects, cannot experience the institution as a whole. He/she will then make sweeping requests and attack the university, unable to keep that necessary distance which normally works as a filter for the swirl of emotions the student experiences. The failure this student will meet seems to go always together with a feeling of unfulfilled hope in the relationship with the university-object, and with a profound feeling of fatuity.

The so called "depressive" position is indeed characterised by a pleasant-unpleasant encounter with the actual possibilities of the university-mother, which seems to be a necessary phase to proceed along with regard to the process of individuation and the acquisition of a student identity. For some students, this will be a maybe not so pleasant encounter, though necessary to redefine goals, modalities, useful attitudes to proceed along the academic career they have chosen. For others, on the contrary, it

does not seem to be a question of awareness modulated by a sound Self and by a strong and definite enough sense of Self, instead it takes the shape of a downright collision, with the risk that an underlying problematic situation might surface. The daily adaptation to real life, not only to university life, entails the loss of some of the wishes constituting part of our personality. Adaptation, same as loss, implies acceptance of sorrow: the resulting narcissistic wound triggers responses which show both paranoid and depressive mechanisms. The process of individuation and construction of the identity of a person as a student will open up to a new discovery of oneself, and thus, to a new and more satisfying relationship with the university-object. Therefore, it seems necessary to move on abandoning satisfaction modalities and states of the self previously considered reassuring and satisfying. Some people, facing such crises, are only able to act out past solutions, since they are unable to loose the bond with their previous ideal selves. The process of abandonment which we are hinting at, refers clearly to the need of letting go of childhood ideals as they originally appeared, unreal and unattainable. We can think of the individuation process as a lifelong development, where the individual constantly has to face situations requiring new processes. The university claims at least two processes: the first one leads to the acquisition of the student identity; the second one to the attainment of the state of graduated-adult person entering the world of labour. We have very often pictured the coming up of previous attachment modalities in the university/students, lecturers/students relationships. We have wondered whether the categories used to describe the attachment bond with the mother in the first place, and then with the following significant figures (Ainsworth et al., 1978) could be used to describe the bond between each student and the university and what it may represent. At first, we can observe the young persons along a line, ranging from students well adapted to the university life, to its requests, its characteristics, able to adjust to its supply and demands; to the students who do not feel safe or satisfied in the institution which they clash against instead of meeting. We may describe as "sure" those students who are able to use the mother-university object as a convincing base enabling them to autonomously explore and interact with the surrounding environment. These students respond well to university stimuli, can successfully overcome difficult experiences, are able to ask for help when uncertain without being overwhelmed by a negative situation. On the other hand, we may define as "unsure-avoiding" those who, though capable to explore the new environment, do not express positive affection rather, they are characterised by an explorative behaviour which does not count on a secure basis. To these students, university can become intrusive, controlling, unable to approach them, distant and increasingly out of reach.

We may describe as "unsure-ambivalent" those students manifestly anxious, either agitated or passive, unable to start a safe exploration either of the environment or of themselves. They seem to have grown up with an inadequate attachment model, unable to answer their request for closeness. The relationship with the university teems with fits of enthusiasm: everything and everybody looks great, there follows a complete disillusion preventing them to regularly continue their academic career, which they may interrupt for short or long periods.

A common element between these two typologies of students seems to be the lack, or even the fall of a sense of confidence in themselves, in the others, in the environment around them. A sense of confidence seems to arise along with the solution of the conflict between the introjected elements, with the adoption of a series of clear roles and the definition of the boundaries of the Self that should be viewed as a developmental task, as much as the individualisation process. When the definition is still partial, and as such not yet secure, much of the investment on the Self is devoted to the strengthening of the boundaries themselves, in order to avoid a possible invasion from the outside. The perception of the others, on a interpersonal level and with respect to the object relationships, is distorted by the concern about the boundaries of the Self. The sense of confidence develops both through identification

processes with reliable figures, and through positive experiences with them. The difference between the persons able to feel confident and those who cannot is clear if we observe the way they perceive and experience the range of possibilities, since the range of freedom looks wider to a confident person than to one who is unsure. The mistrustful and diffident student-individual always feels in danger, threatened, lonely, frightened and isolated. The most common affective experience is fear since they perceive the university-world as a dangerous place. On the contrary, the confident person feels less anxious towards inner or outer dangers, and is more open to new experiences. We hypothesise that when the student experiences an academic failure, the different elements (type of choice, the phase of the young adult's life aiming to self-fulfilment, relational style and sense of self-efficacy) may come together to represent what is considered a failure and what is an experience liable to be taken up in the Self. In our practice of guidance on study skills, we often find these three dimensions intertwined. We believe it is necessary to have a "global" approach to the person, which does not exclude any dimension from the overall picture.

## GUIDANCE ON STUDY STRATEGIES

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The main object is the importance of a not less responsible than receptive education. The sessions focus on making the student protagonist of their own knowledge. The modalities of intervention have wider group sessions with freshers at the beginning of the academic year, smaller group sessions with those who have met problems in the course, and individual counselling. The latter starts with an inquiry session and develops in two ways: the first, consisting of three sessions, for those in need of a systematisation of an existing study competence; the second, with fixed sessions aiming to a shared goal (e.g. an exam), for those who need support throughout their studies. The first step is in fact the analysis of the request.

The requests of support-intervention on the study strategies are based on the polarity failure/success at exams. To a student, the simple observation of poor efficiency in studying, when no failure at exams has been experienced, seems not to be a sufficient reason for seeking guidance. The request of counselling for an exam - or for the series of failed exams - in order to fit in the professional level of success in studies seems to mean:

- a) a signal using academic linguistic code to reveal existential uneasiness, or
- b) an experience of failure being drawn within the Self as a whole (I am a failure).
- c) A partial fall, not affecting self-esteem (I've failed, nevertheless...).

The signal-failure should be seen as the top of the iceberg of a relational discomfort which can be expressed only by acting out. The complete failure seems to be a misgeneralisation due to an idealising over-investment of the university cultural context, accompanied by a strong devaluation of the self and poor levels of self-efficacy. When the fall is experienced as partial, it may be interpreted both as a defence of the wholeness of the Self and as a rationalisation of it as a setback. In the first two instances, it would be advisable to refer to psychological counselling, in order to explain and support the dynamics. In the third case, the work should concentrate on guidance related to study strategies. However, in our opinion, this does not mean

focusing only on cognitive issues or on advice on strategies for efficient study strategies. It instead involves considering the person in a comprehensive way, as a whole, and directing the means of “learning to study” towards its relevance for the sense of mastery of the self, on self-esteem and on facing phase-specific tasks. The capability to use the university-object, following Winnicott (1969) seems fundamental for the student’s growth and autonomy.

## FIELDS TO BE EXPLORED IN THE INTERVIEW

Whatever the case, the first session should inquire into the following fields:

1. The field connected with the life cycle: age, phase of university life; attainment of phase-specific “tasks”, organising style, level of the individuation process;
2. The social, cultural and economic field: parents’ title of study and occupation, typology of previous educational experiences;
3. Field of the choice: modality of choice with fulfilling, external or stand-by predominance;
4. Field of motivation and of the quality of the investment on university and on cultural values;
5. Field of the learning goals: how they link up to images of oneself, with respect to one’s theories of intelligence, either fixed or increasing; the self-efficiency level;
6. Field of the experiences of one’s and the reference context’s failure, with case history of previous family’s failure and success experiences
7. Field of previous experiences of success/failure and of possible tackling strategies performed.

We are presenting an uncommon case, though interesting in so much as it brings a behaviour to its utmost consequences and in such extreme conditions a field of inquiry emerges. Clara is 24, has not yet completed her course within the prescribed time. She was referred to Cuori by her psychotherapist who has been treating her for a manic-depressive condition, so that she may have a point of reference within the university context and a support in dealing with university “tasks”. She lost her mother from a severe disabling disease, accompanied by a profound depression, with an incomplete academic career. She lives with her father, a primary school teacher, and with a partner she is going to marry, with learning disabilities, and a below average IQ. She has been attending an Oriental languages course and she plans to be a professional translator. When she comes, she is very anxious, unsure about her preparation and she feels worthless and unable. Her first request is for an IQ test, which could confirm her ineptitude. The dissociation mechanism causes a separation between the university and the cultural context, the latter being over-appreciated and associated to a strong paternal idealisation by the rest of the world, well represented by the fiancé-husband “who cannot think, he’s like a baby”. The university world teems with lecturer-figures put on a pedestal, she won’t be able to reach, everybody is better than her, even the counsellor is invested with major idealising projections. The organising style is absent or chaotic, learning goals are too high, there are no definite time boundaries between sleeping-studying-eating. She is unable to be in the present, here and now: she is always escaping from the past into the future, and this affects her capacity of

concentration and of retaining what she has read. Her style of studying clearly mirrors her maniac-depressive predicaments: having to know everything to sit an exam, leaving out no detail, paragraph or noun, considering a writer's single word as sacred, or for the initiated, even widening the assignment by checking every quotation, alternating hard work to inaction and lack of concentration. Since studying is sacred, in her depressive phase she believes she will never be up to it. She says that studying is an act of love, and you need the flame of inspiration. In the first sessions the maniacal tendency appeared in her choice of a higher number of exams than required, mostly very difficult, but considered essential for an excellent qualification. If she passed an exam, she fell into depression, with external attribution of her success (a generous lecturer) and the impossibility to hold the role, in which she immediately felt trapped, of passing all exams with excellence. After two initial sessions, our guidance continues during the academic year, in tandem with the psychotherapist. The focus of our guidance is on her having workable goals, remaining close to the text, treating it as an object, an instrument and not as a shrine. The "study" code becomes an anchor to accept the sense of limit and of loss. Clara manages, with much difficulty, to keep her session, to pass a couple of exams, accepting the limit of not feeling completely ready, committing to take a reasonable number of exams, comprising two easy ones, and overcoming, for the time being, the success bloc.

We will try, now, to observe the case along the above mentioned categorisation:

- a) Quality of investment in university and in culture: it appears as over-appreciation and idealisation, with a split from the negative elements, defined as non-culture;
- b) Motivation and choice: studying at university as a unique and all-absorbing life choice; choice of a particularly difficult course of study;
- c) Expectations of self-efficacy level: excessively big/small expectations, low self-esteem, low self-efficacy;
- d) Attaining of phase-specific tasks:
  - 1. Self-organising success and organising style: unorganised and chaotic, lack of method, timing, note-taking and organising task not attained.
  - 2. Socialisation with peers: peers are experienced as superior, socialisation task not attained.
  - 3. Relationship with lecturer-authority and prevailing attachment style: generalised idealisation, no identification with realistic models; learning difficulties; unsure-ambivalent attachment style.
- e) Experience of failure: confusion regarding the ideal of being a student, feeling of incapacity and worthlessness. Experience of success: difficult to tolerate, since it implies increasing expectations for the self. Family experience: family united around culture as a defence from the external world, mother who could not complete her studies. Success experience also negative.
- f) From previous experiences of success/failure and from the enacted confrontation strategy: she feels it as a shortcoming to have attended scuola magistrale (primary teacher training high school) instead of liceo classico (school specialised for humanities), which she had been estimated as not up to, to have been accompanied and supported at school. At university, after failing an exam, she used to give up class attendance or study. After a success, she used to get stuck into blankness.

Our intervention consists in taking small steps, dwelling on the meaning of each achievement, particularly on small ones (e.g. maintaining a thread of what she says for longer than few minutes, summarising a text), to strengthen an image of herself as competent, and putting all attribution of intelligence onto the counsellor, whose relationship is alongside instead of opposite.



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## INHIBITION OF THE LEARNING DESIRE

Karine Brutin-Rouquet |

### ABSTRACT

I am working, as a university teacher, in a therapeutic institution (the BAPU: university students come to this place for psychoanalytic treatment), and in an open structure to help foreign students (RSI). In the BAPU, the students I see for individual sessions are sent to me by their psychoanalyst when these students have great difficulties with their academic work.

I observe frequently that these students (I,II,III university cycle) need to negotiate their projects with parental figures who give them internalised injunctions into their inner self. These internalised injunctions block their learning desire and their personal development. I will give illustrations of this problem.

Key words: psychoanalytical treatment in the university context, learning desire and personal development

Mots clés: approche psychanalytique dans un contexte universitaire, désir d'étudier et développement personnel

### LES OBSTACLES INTÉRIEURS AU DÉSIR D'ÉTUDIER

C'est à partir d'une pratique pédagogique se développant au sein de la structure thérapeutique du BAPU-Pascal (Bureau d'Aide Psychologique Universitaire) que j'aborde le champ clinique des obstacles intérieurs au désir d'étudier.

Il importe donc avant tout de préciser la fonction que j'occupe au sein de cette structure et de son antenne au sein du Relais Social International. Je donnerai ensuite quelques pistes de réflexions théoriques concernant l'ouverture de ce champ conceptuel et pratique.

Le BAPU est une structure de consultations thérapeutiques pour les étudiants qui ressentent le besoin d'une aide psychologique. Ils y sont reçus par des psychanalystes, pour des consultations qui sont prises en charge par la sécurité

sociale. Le BAPU-Pascal est rattaché à la Fondation Santé des Etudiants de France<sup>1</sup>. Les psychanalystes m'adressent les étudiants quand ces étudiants ont besoin d'avoir un dialogue avec un enseignant au sujet de leurs études. Je suis enseignante détachée de l'Université Paris 7 dans cette structure, et par ailleurs rattachée à l'équipe de recherche dirigée par Julia Kristeva : « Théorie de la littérature et sciences humaines ».

Le BAPU-Pascal a créé une antenne pour les étudiants principalement étrangers au sein du Relais Social International de la Cité Internationale Universitaire de Paris. Mais dans cette antenne, à la différence du BAPU-Pascal, je les reçois directement, soit individuellement, soit en petits groupes dans des ateliers « Pratiques d'écritures » qui ont pour but d'explorer les potentialités expressives de la langue française dans l'objectif de l'écriture de leur recherche en français.

Les réflexions qui vont suivre sont théoriques. Elles visent à expliciter comment dans mon expérience d'enseignante de la littérature à la clinique médico-universitaire Georges Heuyer, puis de pédagogue au sein du BAPU, j'ai été conduite à m'intéresser à ce qui empêchait des jeunes gens pourtant désireux de le faire d'étudier, et d'exercer librement leur curiosité intellectuelle sur les objets de savoir qu'ils rencontraient dans leur discipline.

En fait ces jeunes gens poursuivaient leurs études mais avec malaise et souffrance. A la fin de nos entretiens, on peut dire que le plus grand nombre d'entre eux se sont sentis dégagés d'éléments éducatifs très pesants et intériorisés qui venait contrarier leur libre accès au champ du savoir.

C'est en travaillant à la clinique G. Heuyer avec des étudiants en grandes difficultés psychiques, que j'ai été amené à dégager le travail d'une instance liée au fonctionnement intellectuel, et que j'ai appelée « l'interlocuteur imaginaire » ou « l'autre intérieur » (dans mon livre : *L'alchimie thérapeutique de la lecture ; Des larmes au lire*). C'est une instance que j'ai forgée par analogie avec la création par l'écrivain d'une figure intimement liée au processus de la création littéraire, selon les psychanalystes Octave Mannoni et Michel de M'Uzan, la figure du lecteur intérieur, ou lecteur imaginaire, ou public intérieur.

En effet, « penser c'est dialoguer avec soi-même », écrit Platon. Le travail intellectuel solitaire nécessite la mise en jeu d'une instance intérieure médiatrice, permettant le dialogue avec soi-même. Elle représente l'autre à l'intérieur du sujet. Lorsqu'un autre en soi fait défaut, il n'est pas possible d'objectiver sa pensée, de construire un objet intellectuel qui tienne compte des exigences d'autrui, car cet interlocuteur n'est pas un simple double, il représente l'Autre à l'intérieur du sujet.

Les obstacles au désir d'étudier sont liés, à mon avis, au jeu de cette instance, soit défaillante ou absente, soit persécutrice, qui agit à l'intérieur du sujet, contrariant ses aspirations naturelles à la connaissance et à l'épanouissement intellectuel.

En conclusion, une citation de la philosophe Hannah Arendth permettra d'ouvrir encore ce champ de réflexion : « Toute pensée est un dialogue entre moi- et moi-même, mais ce dialogue de deux en un ne perd pas le contact avec le monde de mes semblables : ceux-ci sont en effet représentés dans le *moi* avec lequel je mène le dialogue de la pensée ». Je n'ai pas employé le terme de « surmoi féroce et interditeur » pour désigner cette instance. Je lui préfère les termes autrement plus éloquents quand il s'agit du fonctionnement de la pensée « d'autre intérieur », de « semblables représentés dans le *moi* avec lequel je mène le dialogue de la pensée » pour évoquer ces situations intérieures limites que traversent certains jeunes gens, ou l'homme,

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De la Fondation Santé des Etudiants de France dépendent un certain nombre de cliniques médico-universitaires, accueillant en hospitalisation des jeunes gens souffrant de troubles graves mais néanmoins capables d'étudier. Une équipe d'enseignants de l'Education Nationale est mise à disposition pour aider ces jeunes gens dans la poursuite de leurs études

selon Jean Amery est menacé « de perdre la foi qu'il a en lui-même comme partenaire de ses pensées et cette élémentaire confiance dans le monde, nécessaire à tout expérience ».

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## BEING CLOSE AND PULLING AWAY:

### AN APPLICATION OF THE WORK OF MARGARET MAHLER TO WORK IN A UNIVERSITY COUNSELLING SERVICE

## SE RAPPROCHER ET S'ÉLOIGNER:

### UNE APPLICATION DE L'ŒUVRE DE MARGARET MAHLER AU TRAVAIL DANS UN SERVICE D'AIDE PSYCHOLOGIQUE UNIVERSITAIRE

Sue Steging |

## ABSTRACT

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The paper attempts to address some of the issues arising from an increase in the incidence of established mental health problems in a University population. The work of Margaret Mahler on infantile development is applied to borderline characteristics in those approaching a Counselling Service. Responses to the early care environment, especially during the rapprochement crisis are considered as patterns for transference and counter-transference reactions arising in sessions and to the setting itself. Mahler's schema provides a useful metaphor, helping to understand difficult behaviour and suggesting appropriate ways of responding.

Key words: mental health in university population, transference, countertransference

## RÉSUMÉ

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Cette communication comporte une étude de certains problèmes résultant de l'augmentation de symptômes de maladie mentale déjà existant au sein de la population universitaire. Les résultats des recherches de Margaret Mahler sur le développement infantile seront appliqués à des caractéristiques marginaux présentées par des clients d'un centre de conseils psychologiques. Des réactions à l'environnement de soins connu pendant les jeunes années surtout au moment de la crise de rapprochement serviront de modèle des réactions de transfert et de contre-transfert qui se présentent pendant les sessions de conseil et ailleurs. Le schème de

Mahler nous offre un cadre utile qui nous facilite la compréhension d'un comportement difficile et nous suggère des moyens de réponse appropriés.

Mots clés: santé mentale de la population universitaire, transfert, contre transfert

## CONTENTS

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In recent years a seismic shift has occurred in UK Universities as we have moved from elitism to a concept of mass Higher Education. In a parallel move, disability legislation has placed the onus on social systems to adapt in order to become more open to those whose physical or mental conditions previously would have been seen to disqualify them from access to educational, employment or recreational environments. In education, at least, the failure to match these changes with resources has meant that a system which is legally required to recognise individual needs is ill-equipped to respond except in the most functional terms. The stage is set for re-enactments involving needy infants and distracted parents.

The University as Alma Mater (foster mother) has always offered an opportunity to revisit past experiences of separation and to re-negotiate identity and affiliation. The term itself suggests the psychological underpinning of the social rite de passage. In the work of Margaret Mahler we find useful metaphors enabling a deeper understanding of an apparently increasing number of students (Smith, 1999) whose need for holding and containment seems to be as strong and as pathological as their resistance to it and whose ambivalence is perhaps reinforced by being mirrored in the social structures which now pertain. Tantalising fantasies of academic achievement which will offer compensation for earlier losses and disappointments, desires for independence and illusions of self-sufficiency alongside a fundamental distrust of self and others, can be seen to correspond to moments within Mahler's schema of development from normal autism to object constancy. Such conflicts refer particularly to the crisis in development which she describes as rapprochement.

While it is possible to apply these concepts to a very detailed examination of clinical material, I have chosen in this paper to consider a broad spectrum of clinical issues and particularly the transference to the counselling situation itself. Mahler's work helps us to understand why students most at risk often are the most reluctant to engage in a helping relationship and I consider this to be one of the greatest challenges the profession faces in responding to social change and its concomitant personal consequences. Interestingly, when I sought permission from two students to refer to our work in this paper, they both couched their permission in the same terms, that is that they would like to help others who had experienced similar difficulties.

Before going on to discuss the application of Mahler's work, it is worth considering her approach and its context in a little detail. Margaret Mahler was born in Hungary in 1897, the first and apparently unwelcome child in the unhappy marriage of a 20 year

old, German speaking mother and an older Hungarian father, a doctor. We might not be surprised, then, that she should become a doctor herself and focus on the significance of early, maternal relationships, also emphasising the compensatory effects of relationships with fathers. Of course in this stress on the maternal she was very much at one with the post-war focus on two body relations and her work is clearly related to Winnicott's thinking on deficiencies in maternal care. We also hear echoes of Bowlby's thinking on maternal deprivation and attachment. In terms of the structure of her theory, I think it is also relevant that before she was forced to leave Vienna, Sandor Ferenczi and Michael Balint were key figures in her early professional life. In Ferenczi, whom she often cites, we see the emphasis within Freudian discourse on early object relations and the provision of gratification, the focus on the actual relationship. From Balint we perhaps can infer that she draws the ability to propose a mixed model theory in which relational/structure constructs are developed in the context of earlier drive/structure premises. Mahler's most immediate influence though, was Heinz Hartmann, working within the tradition of ego psychology and focusing on 'reality' as well as pleasure seeking. Her own strongest emphasis is on the personal aspect of the individual's relationship to the external world. She construed this as an issue of adaptation and her work recognises the human infant's enormous capabilities in this area (Greenberg and Mitchell, 1983, p. 194).

Crucially Mahler differentiates between physical and psychological birth. This task of negotiating our own identity in relation to the world around us is one in which we all remain constantly engaged. New situations reverberate with the echoes of past experiences. Old, unresolved issues of self-identity can be reactivated but they can also remain peripherally or even centrally active. Mahler contends that the origins of psychosis are laid down between 18-24 months. Even when full psychosis does not occur many features of this period, termed the rapprochement crisis, are characteristic of borderline pathology. In order to understand this critical period it is necessary to bear in mind the whole developmental schema, placing the rapprochement crisis in a context which will offer us the opportunity to explore the potential patterns of regressive behaviour, cognition and affect to which overlapping stages of the developmental process give rise. Wherever possible I will try and relate these phenomena to experience with students.

Mahler proposes that the infant is born into a state she terms normal autism, relatively unconnected to external stimulus and focussed physiologically on the maintenance of homeostasis rather than on sources of satisfaction in the external world. Mahler argues that from 3-4 weeks a dim awareness begins to develop of the need satisfying object and the period of symbiosis is ushered in. It appears that the mother must choose symbiosis - that is she must voluntarily engage in a temporary delusion of complete identity with the child's needs in order that this period can be negotiated. We find parallels here in Winnicott's ideas of primary maternal preoccupation. If the mother cannot achieve either the coenaesthetic empathy necessary to meet the infant's needs or separate after meeting them, then the child's movement towards separation and individuation will be interrupted. The pull towards union is strong. Indeed, Mahler suggests, this delusion of a common boundary is the mechanism to which the ego regresses in the most severe cases of disturbance (Mahler, 1975, p. 45). The mother's ability to hold the infant, to be its auxiliary ego, helps the baby to develop psycho-physiological equilibrium. In Winnicott's terms this is the mutual cueing of the "good enough mother" and her infant (Winnicott, 1965.). As cognitive and physical functions develop the child begins to embark on the process of differentiation, moving from an epoch equivalent to that of Freud's primary narcissism and beginning the early process of achievement which will mark the child's assumption of his/her own individual



characteristics ushered in through the sub-phase of differentiation or “hatching”. These tentative movements towards separation, achieved through tactile exploration of the mother, visual scanning of her face and the identification of transitional objects, are accompanied by early internalisation and adoption of the mother’s preferred soothing pattern. Through a series of progressions and regressions, the child’s awareness of bodily separation/differentiation from the mother is paralleled by the development of independent autonomous functions in cognition and perception.

Having begun the process of differentiation the child enters the sub-phase of practising. During the early phase of practising, physically crawling, climbing, standing while holding on, Mahler describes a psychological process of increasing intrapsychic autonomy, memory, cognition and reality testing. For the mother this period also has significance and her response is still crucial to patterning the child’s development. For those who have had difficulty with what Mahler calls the “lap-baby”, distance is potentially a relief as the anxiety about dependence is relieved by the child’s decreasing vulnerability. Conversely, when mothers find it difficult to let go, reluctance to acknowledge and promote this development can ensue. For our purposes it is important that during this period a “distance contract” begins to be negotiated. Optimally, “emotional refuelling” or “distance refuelling” replaces the confident expectation of direct and immediate relief of instinctual tension. In these contacts the mother does not rush to the child but remains alert and responsive. Another way of expressing this, using Bowlby’s and Ainsworth’s term, is that the mother is established as a secure base from which exploration can take place (Bowlby, 1979). I think this is an important aspect of the development that will help to define help seeking behaviours in the students I will describe in more detail later.

In the practising sub-phase proper, the capacity for upright locomotion and growth in ego function enable the child to embark on what Phyllis Greenacre has termed a “love affaire with the world” (Greenacre, 1957). The phase is characterised by wider horizons. A growth in narcissism is experienced as a result of practising skills in an expanding world which in turn gives rise to a relative imperviousness to knocks, falls and frustrations. The increased self-love also provides solace for the parallel object loss. For some infants this period represents an elated escape from fusion with and engulfment by the mother – again an aspect of the process to which individuals might regress in situations of difficulty. However, as this stage develops it is also notable that the mother’s presence is still required to support the child’s enjoyment of new functions. The researchers noted that when mother was absent from the room gesture and motility slowed down and interest in surroundings was diminished. The child appeared preoccupied with “inwardly concentrated attention” which is attributed to the child’s engagement in a process of imaging. Mahler and her colleagues named this “low-keyedness” and attributed it to an effort to hold on to “the ideal state of self” which exists in mother’s presence and cannot be maintained in awareness of the loss of the other half of the symbiotic self (Mahler, 1975 pp. 74-75). Again it is worth noting one particular aspect of behaviour at this time. The child in this state is able to maintain an equilibrium of this low-key sort unless approached by another, whereupon tears and distress are expressed suddenly and often inconsolably: a model, perhaps for the retreat from others seen in very homesick or other students in whom the transition process is causing acute difficulty.

The next sub-phase of the separation/individuation process is known as rapprochement – the final stage of the hatching process and the first stage of identity. This period of rapprochement takes place between the ages of 15-17/18 months and

three years. The process begins with an increasing ambivalence toward separateness and a resurgence of separation anxiety. Behaviours such as excessive shadowing, risk taking behaviour to provoke rescue and precocious identification with the adult care giver begin to develop as recognisable patterns. So too does erotic behaviour emerge as a solution to crisis, whether in a retreat to the auto-erotic or in wooing and negotiation. These behaviours, once established can become established as dominant patterns of interaction during periods of difficulty and are clearly seen in the cliché images of adolescent life.

During rapprochement the infant becomes less resilient, more prone to frustration and more aware and anxious about the whereabouts of the mother. The separation anxiety which has been kept at bay during practising returns, hence the term rapprochement. However there is still a strong impulse to be apart and the mother who seems to be impinging on recently achieved autonomy will be pushed away herself. Mahler argues that the, "No!" of this period reflects need for distance as well as the tendency toward mastery of the anal period in which it takes place. A short digression here – Mahler uses the word ambivalence heavily while writing of this period. Rather than making reference to the achievement of a whole object relationship as suggested by Klein she seems instead to be emphasising unresolved, split emotions of love and hate.

The child's anxiety and doubt is further aroused when the incipient fear of loss, attended by increased cognitive capacity and reality testing, leads to an increased sensitivity to parental approval and disapproval and an understanding of the obstacles in the way of the expected "conquest of the world" (Mahler, 1975, p. 78) to which the practising phase gave rise. These developments are the harbingers of an intense struggle with the love object. Vulnerability, impotent rage and helplessness are accompanied by a self-conscious turning away from strangers. Mahler and her colleagues note that this differs from the earlier mixture of curiosity and anxiety and in its hostility toward those who were earlier welcomed, seems instead to represent an echo of inward attention, a refusal to accept anyone who might disturb the fragile, delusory equilibrium of an exclusive relationship with the mother. The infant also seems to experience a conflict of loyalties with others who might be important, often projecting negative feelings so that potential helpers are attributed with dangerous or aggressive characteristics. At the same time the child is developing the ability to ask for things, to appreciate praise and to recognise the real significance of others, principally the father. The extent to which these attributes and interests will be fostered or discouraged depends greatly on the mother's own feeling about the emerging individual and her ability to tolerate the erratic oscillation between clinging and rejecting behaviour. A young mother told me of her furious arguments with her two-year-old son. He was constantly escaping from the house in order to get into the car. She would race to get him back. Eventually (she is a psychotherapy student) she thinks that this might be related to his need to recover the womb, since she has recently become pregnant again. I agree but think that we are also witnessing his desire to move out into the broader world, the wish to be one and also separate, a conflict perfectly expressed by the car. Again I think that this period can serve a metaphor for the new student – to what extent do they feel able to engage with the world around them without fear of sacrificing an essential, by now internal, object or relationship? To what extent can they make a realistic appraisal of the help that is offered to them without exaggerated fear of being overwhelmed or disappointed?

The rapprochement crisis itself is characterised by Mahler with the words "grandeur and fear". On the one hand is the fantasy of omnipotence, the toddler's idea of

him/herself as a grand, all-powerful entity whose desire is for his/her wishes to be magically fulfilled. To ask for help would be to recognise that the help is actually coming from outside, not an automatic production of being. Here too, I think, is a model for some of the behaviour we see in students who find themselves unable to adapt to an appointment system – who want what they want – now! In some cases the adaptations required by an impersonal system might represent a painful threat, a reminder of separation but also opening up the prospect of a return to fusion and engulfment. In infancy, another characteristic phenomenon of this period is the fear that the mother has gone while she is still in the room. I hope it is not too fanciful to draw a parallel between the issue of this stage of development and the floundering student who cannot identify or use the help that is available - especially seen perhaps in the person who always has to check appointment times – and often misses them when they have been confirmed but also in the one who asserts that they were never told about the services that were available.

The contexts in which such enactments take place must also reflect our own transference relation to the institution as well as to the therapeutic setting. How do we, as therapists, respond to these failures to engage and do we, governed as we are by the authoritative and holding rules of professional behaviour, assert the need for consistency and regularity without recognising the students need to assert and re-assert autonomy? I have found it helpful in the early stages of working with some borderline and autistic students, to agree at times to shorter sessions, seeing this as an important way of symbolising the fact that they have an opportunity of regulating intake and avoiding feeling overwhelmed. Even when a pattern of longer sessions has been established, it has also been helpful to have short sessions in between times, perhaps only for 10 minutes. My experience of these is of re-fuelling, a reminder of the insight already achieved and a rehearsal of the coping mechanisms to be applied in anticipated difficulties. I am aware that this might be construed as acting in transference. However, I do believe that in consciously taking on this role, an important message can be conveyed to a person who has neither time nor motivation to search internally for the insight that not all toxic experiences need be endlessly repeated. Such short sessions should not be misunderstood as lack of need. We should be aware of the counter transference implications when we find ourselves relieved at their apparent independence, misinterpreting a premature ending or, in short-term work, ending with an apparent reinforcement of potent but precocious achievement. We might also wish to investigate feelings of rejection or disappointment when a client wishes to go on alone. A student told me that she had telephoned her mother (in the days before mobile phones) on being discharged from hospital after a motor accident. Her mother's reaction, offering no comfort, was to say, "well, I won't worry about you anymore", appearing somehow hurt and resentful that the student had managed to take care of herself. This does seem reminiscent of Mahler's example of the mother during rapprochement whose assistance can only be rejected once – "You think you can manage on your own? OK, let's see how you get on". How could a person in this kind of relationship optimistically turn to others for help or admit mistakes once a helping relationship has begun? How would such experience condition the perception of time limited contacts? A metaphorical re-enactment of stranger anxiety is a potential here.

Optimally, in infancy, exploration at this stage takes place within a setting where the mother is "quietly available", neither intruding nor abandoning. Play, imitation and identification lead to the internalisation of a relationship of optimal distance and availability so that verbal communication with its acknowledgement of separateness can develop safely. In such an environment manic defences and reaction formations masking sadness can be replaced by new ways of managing. Anger, disappointment

and the realisation of one's own helplessness can begin to be experienced. This is a process we often find ourselves attempting to recapitulate in our counselling rooms. Counter to this process is the emphasis on splitting as a defence. The "good" mother is longed for yet warded off to avoid further disappointment. The absent mother is "bad" and these splits are projected onto neutral figures who therefore become unhelpful. The counter-transference to these splits can be difficult to bear and we need to remind ourselves of Winnicott's injunction against retaliation.

Interestingly for our work, with clients whose main activity is to read, Mahler emphasises the preference for storybooks and being read to as a displacement activity during rapprochement. She sees this as a transitional activity, occupying the space between closeness – sitting on the reader's lap – and distancing and exploration through symbolisation and fantasy. Given these mediating factors, relationships with others, perhaps principally the father, can give relief from the conflictual relationship with mother. How does the student perceive the support service within the University? Are stereotypes at work where support is seen as maternal and academic work a masculine sphere? Refusal of support in such cases might be seen to mirror fearful recoil from engulfment by a narcissistically invested yet disappointing mother and recourse to the safety of the father's neutrality. How can we frame our work to assist the student to test the reality of the help that we offer?

Mahler proposes that the rapprochement crisis may become and remain an unresolved intra-psychic conflict, an uncomfortable fixation point, (Mahler, 1975, p. 107) adding to the difficulties of the Oedipus Complex and obviously to intimate and non-intimate relationships beyond that. It has an effect on super ego development. The fear of object loss and abandonment, partly relieved by narcissistic pleasure in achievement, is complicated by the internalisation of parental demands and fear of losing their love. In Freud and Klein's schemas of course, this process is an artefact of loss itself. The early internalisation of such conflicts is acted out in coercive behaviours which are directed toward forcing the mother to continue to act as an extension of the child. Such behaviour is also notable as a feature of adult borderline disturbances and in those cases too they can be seen to alternate with intense clinging behaviour. A borderline woman I have seen over a period of 5 years once passed me in the street. In the next session she reported wondering how I would have reacted if she had said, "Hello, I'm just going home to kill myself". The anxiety about suicide in the student population perhaps represents a reservoir of this kind of unresolved ambivalence about relationships.

The extent to which the rapprochement crisis remains pivotal is determined by a number of factors. Adolescence offers an opportunity to revisit earlier developmental obstacles and the extent to which it is possible to achieve object constancy in part depends on the effects of stress and trauma at that later stage. Whatever the difficulties the child has had to negotiate, the impulse to develop as an individual remains strong and in most cases the child will have taken enough of what is needed from parental objects in order to move forward. In good enough environments the gradual withdrawal of the mother will mirror the gradual development of modulating ego functions so that the object is internalised rather than existing as "an unassimilated foreign body" (Mahler, 1975, p. 117). On achievement of object constancy, the recognition of real disappointment in the real mother will go along with the internalisation of a maternal function patterned on the earlier real interventions of an empathic as well as non-empathic mother or her substitutes. In such environments the child will develop the ability to retain or restore self-esteem in the context of a primary

object whose “good” and “bad” parts are unified into the ambivalence of Klein’s depressive position. The object will not be rejected or exchanged when it cannot provide satisfaction and will still be longed for when absent. Of course the very fact of being able to yearn for a paradise lost establishes this young human forever as a separate being. The inherent conflict between our longing for this coenaesthetically fantasised, absolutely protected state of fused identification and the equally strong and innate movement towards individuation is something that belongs existentially to the human condition. No child will proceed without crisis and no adult without at least momentary trepidation and conflict. Such anxieties and contradictions are often re-told in our rooms and will also make it difficult to reach them.

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## THE EFFECTS OF FOCAL GROUP THERAPY ON STUDY BEHAVIOUR, STUDY MOTIVATION AND INTEGRATION IN THE ACADEMIC ENVIRONMENT

### LES EFFETS DE LA THÉRAPIE DE GROUPE À OBJECTIFS LIMITÉS SUR LE COMPORTEMENT, LA MOTIVATION DANS LES ÉTUDES ET L'INTÉGRATION DES ÉTUDIANTS DANS UN ENVIRONNEMENT UNIVERSITAIRE.

Ton Boekhorst, Prijna van Duuren & Peter Deuss |

#### ABSTRACT

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This article covers the contextual embedding of Focal Group therapy on the studentpsychological services of the University, a definition of this form of group therapy including some characteristic features and two case studies as an example of what Focal Group Therapy can mean for individual members in the group. Finally it includes a presentation of the results of the effects of these groups. All students of 5 focal groups have filled in some questionnaires before the start of the therapy and at the end. The main conclusions were that after group therapy many stress-related problems have been reduced significantly while there was more approach to other people; at the same time there were indications of an increase of autonomy. Test competence was another field in which a significant increase was to be notified. These results are interpreted as a strong indication that short-term group therapy can have an impact not only on personal and social functioning but also on problems in the field of study behaviour and test anxiety.

Key words: focal group therapy, short-term group therapy, study behaviour, test anxiety, stress management

## RÉSUMÉ

Cet article traite de l'intégration de la thérapie de groupe focale au sein des bureaux de Psychologues pour étudiants de l'université, et présente une définition de cette forme de thérapie de groupe à l'aide de quelques-unes de ses caractéristiques principales et de l'étude de deux cas qui illustrent l'importance que peut revêtir la thérapie de groupe focale pour les membres individuels du groupe. Tous les étudiants appartenant à 5 groupes focaux ont rempli un certain nombre de questionnaires au début et à la fin de la thérapie. Les conclusions les plus importantes ont été que beaucoup de problèmes liés au stress ont été réduits de façon significative après la thérapie de groupe et une augmentation du rapprochement à l'égard des autres personnes ; on a noté en même temps des indications d'une augmentation de l'autonomie. La compétence au niveau des examens est un autre domaine où une augmentation significative a pu être établie. Ces résultats sont interprétés comme une forte indication que la thérapie de groupe de courte durée exerce une influence non seulement sur le fonctionnement personnel et social mais aussi sur des problèmes liés au comportement pendant les études et à la hantise de l'échec.

Mots clés : thérapie de groupe à objectifs limités, thérapie de groupe brève, comportement dans les études, test d'anxiété, anxiété d'examen, gestion du stress

## INTRODUCTION

This lecture is elaborating on an earlier lecture in the context of PSYCHE; three years ago in Copenhagen, we gave a theoretical background for the choice of group-dynamic group therapy (including Focal Group Therapy) especially for this target group, students, departing from the theme "attachment and separation".

The present lecture will cover the next topics:

- 1) The contextual embedding of the activity "Focal Group Therapy" on the studentpsychological services of the university;
- 2) A definition of this form of group therapy and in brief a sketch of several characteristic features;
- 3) Some examples of what Focal Group Therapy can mean for individual members in the group, in the form of case studies;
- 4) The presentation of the results of the study on the effects of these groups.

## CONTEXTUAL EMBEDDING OF FOCAL GROUP THERAPY

For a few years we have seen a trend in Holland at several Studentpsychologist bureau's towards choosing a shorter form of group therapy than usual, the so-called Focal Group Therapy, for those students for whom group therapy was indicated. Several considerations have played a role in this process; here we will mention two considerations that are related to the current academic climate in the Universities: First of all, it's important to state that short lasting forms of individual and group therapy are better connected to the current academic situation. This situation is being characterised by a limited period of study, tight study schedules that change per term and a (much more) mobile student who finds it difficult to commit for a longer period of time. As a consequence of this, students apply themselves much sooner because they can't afford long study-standstill. Once they have applied for help themselves they want help fast, to prevent further standstill.

Secondly, another development in the academic situation can be observed, one that relates more to content instead of time: we see a change of focus on primarily cognitive skills to a focus on communicative skills. In many studies students nowadays have to work together for a considerable amount of time in groups or they have to prepare presentations frequently. This larger focus in the education on communicative skills makes the student aware earlier that he has interpersonal problems for which he then tries to find help. In the present situation the student comes across possible problems sooner.

These evolutions have of course stimulated the development of Focal Group Therapy, which in our opinion offers an optimal relation between intensity and time-span.

## DEFINITION OF FOCAL GROUP THERAPY

Focal Group Therapy is a short lasting group therapy where the basic model of the group-dynamic group has been maintained; basically this means that, with exception of the first stage, there is no set program in the form of a script. The group itself tries to find a way to constructively work on the problems that have been brought in. The group process itself is hereby seen as an important therapeutic means.

Focal Group Therapy is characterised by working on one or two central goals, which are discussed and determined by each group member before and at the beginning of the group therapy. During the meetings these goals are regularly referred to, and are simplified by working with large pieces of paper on which the goals are written. In each session these papers are hung up in the group therapy room.

Another characteristic of this form of group therapy is that the therapist has a much more active role than in the traditional group-dynamic groups. This is necessary to lead the group through different stages that are important for an optimal working climate. This activity expresses itself in:

- offering a lot of structure during the early phase, where the individual goals are central



- in the use of active or clarifying techniques, like the making of a family card per group member
- in the naming of mutual themes
- in the focussing on the here and now
- in the naming of limitations in time, which becomes important especially towards the end of the meetings and which activates separation themes.

All of this takes place from the viewpoint of the optimistic expectation that it is possible for change to take place in a relatively short period of time. Not solving the problem is the main issue but the breakthrough of stagnation is important here – after the therapy the student has to continue working on his problems himself.

In a short-term group therapy the same stages can be identified as in longer dynamic groups (Poey, 1985). So after the first stage we can expect a second stage in which the major task is the establishment of cohesiveness; the therapists are less active now and withdraw from a central direction-providing role and place much more responsibility on the members. In this stage the tasks are usually met with resistance, competition and testing of the therapists. Once cohesiveness has been established, the group has reached the third stage, the working group stage; usually characterised by a supportive atmosphere that encourages members to reveal their problems, explore their dynamic roots and receive feedback more freely. During this stage the role of the leaders is mainly one of process facilitators. In the last stage the therapists are more active: the tasks of this stage are to summarise what has and what has not been accomplished and saying goodbye. The therapists keep the members focussed on these tasks by explicitly mentioning the number of sessions, which are still left.

Focal groups vary in the number of meetings between 12 and 20. The number of participants lies between 8 and 12. 2 therapists usually guide the group, which is really necessary in view of the intensive character of this form of therapy. The meetings take place on a weekly basis and last one and a half-hours. In Groningen and Nijmegen we have so far worked with 15 meetings, followed by a follow-up meeting 3 months later.

The central goals are not the same for every group member, but because we are dealing with people who are in the same phase in life, the problems usually include: separation from the parents and autonomy, identity and contact with others, most of it related to problems with studying as stagnation, motivation, choice of study, problems with working together or not being integrated in the academic environment.

Students are directed towards “group therapy” if they have problems on a social level and problems in the contact with other students or with teachers. When a student is placed in this specific group it is important that there is a reasonable assessment about the possibility of the student to profit from this relatively short form of group therapy.

This means that we carefully handle the well-known inclusion- and exclusion-criteria. For example we make sure that particularly those clients who have not processed the second separation-individuation phase that takes place during adolescence, will be able to enter the group, but we are careful with those who have early childhood disorders.

## Case 1

Dennis, 22 years of age, is a student of social sciences, he is studying now for the third year, but has a delay of one year. He comes from a family, in which the parents are running a medical

At the same time he does not dare to talk about this with them because of feelings of guilt. Besides that, it was very uncommon in the family to express negative feelings. Development in

practice, father being the physician, mother the receptionist. Dennis is the only son, he has three younger sisters. Recently he has left the parental home to go and live on his own.

The main problems Dennis presented were insecurity, fear of failure and study stagnation.

After the intake and a short amount of individual sessions the counsellor and Dennis agreed the choice of the focal group for further treatment.

The problems in relation to studying are concern not to have passed a number of exams, test anxiety and avoidance behaviour: postponing difficult exams to the next year. He also has a tendency to be a perfectionist. Earlier in his school career there was also a history of fear of failure and stagnation.

Social problems: feelings of insecurity, preoccupation with the question what other people think of him, not being able to react spontaneously, not being able to disclose himself. This has severe repercussions on his participation in study workgroups. He has only a few friends, he had an intimate relationship for a few months but was not able to handle this.

Family background: D. describes the situation in his family as tight and close but also talks about the responsibility he was given at a very early age, sometimes the feeling that he had to take on a parental role, because of the fact that his parents were very occupied with their practice. Afterwards he blames his parents for this.

therapy: The central goals he wrote down were the following: not thinking so much any more about what other people think of me, learning to react more spontaneously and not always be so demanding of myself! Starting as a quiet group member at first, the mechanism of his study behaviour was a topic. It turned out to be safer for him not to prepare for an exam and not passing it than to prepare and not pass it! Next it became clear using the family map how much his tendency to be perfect and demanding on himself was connected to his high responsibility in his childhood. After a few sessions he was able to confront his parents with these matters which gave him great relief but also the problem that they responded too quickly with understanding him and telling him he was right! During the second phase of the sessions he began under pressure of time to disclose more of himself, which surprisingly pleased him very much! This was a starting point for not worrying each time preceding social situations and learning to react more freely. He could handle the feedback the other members gave him that he was always comparing himself with those with the highest grades and his tendency to make a competition of all kinds of activities. His first evaluation was that this group therapy was too short for him: once he was feeling fine and actually seeing progress we had to stop; but in the final evaluation he told the group that he was feeling alright about this, he had come into a process which he could manage on his own.

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## Questionnaires (for a survey of the questionnaires used in this study see the next chapter)

On the measures of negativism, somatic complaints, and shyness, a decrease can be observed to a more moderate level; on the measure of self-awareness, and coping with new

Evaluation: on studying there is no actual stagnation, but the studying itself is the same as it was before; on interpersonal functioning and sense of self D. reports an improvement. Opinion of the therapist is

situations an increase can be seen, indicating a higher level of autonomy.

that prognosis is good because of less worrying behaviour and improved participation in working groups.

## Case 2

Alice, 26 years of age, is a student of language. She has been studying now for four years.

Presentation of problems: Alice complains about a lot of stress and she also worries very much. She is not able to make choices and after she has made one, she thinks the other possibility might have been better. She herself uses the term obsessional thinking and acting. For instance she needs to perform certain rituals before she goes to sleep.

Problems in studying: She has a tendency to be a perfectionist; she has a high level of ambition, in her studies as well as regarding her ambitions for making music. These high demands of herself cause stagnation, she cannot concentrate anymore and is procrastinating. She has a delay of 9 months in her study-program.

Family background: The family has been severely disrupted by problems of her younger brother. He became increasingly violent and was sent to a psychiatric hospital for about a year. After he was given medication the situation became more stable. This episode has lasted for many years, between the age of 9 - 17. Her sister could not handle the situation and left home. She has accused her brother and father of sexual harassment and psychological abuse, but later on she withdrew the accusation. However, she did not come home anymore. Alice is feeling very sorry for her parents. She thinks her parents do not deserve this and she tries to compensate by doing her very best; then there is at least one child her parents can be proud of. Alice suffers herself because of the burden of the  
able to sympathise with the others and  
at

family on her shoulders.

Social contacts: She experiences no problems in her social contacts. She has a number of friends and also a steady relationship. Her boyfriend has many problems himself, so he cannot give her much attention, she mainly gives attention to him.

Development in therapy: At first she had a small number of individual sessions. It was difficult for her to connect with the therapist, she was very rational. During therapy the relationship with her sister improved. She was also beginning to get a better understanding of the symbiotic relationship with her mother: with everything she did she thought of what her mother would think of it. Therapy made her more aware of her feelings and how she suppressed them. In Focal Group Therapy she was initially very active and took the initiative; she was doing her best, but was mainly taking care of the other group members. She was a perfect therapist. Later on she began to feel more selfish and was only talking when she felt the need to. The group members respected this behaviour, taking care of herself, and she started to enjoy this. In her relationship with her mother and her boyfriend she acted the same; she became more distant and could focus more on her own feelings. She became more and more comfortable because it was not so imperative anymore to do her best for other people. She was also taking it easier in her studies. Gradually she was changing more in the group, she stayed with her own story but could now feel compassion for the other members, without becoming over-involved. She was

the same time stay with herself.

## Questionnaires

On the measures of negativism, somatic complaints and shyness a decrease can be observed from high levels to average levels; on the measure of self-awareness an increase is to be seen, but the measure of coping with new situations remains low, so it is too early to speak of an increase of autonomy.

Evaluation: on studying A. reports an improvement, specification: she is studying with more pleasure. On interpersonal functioning and sense of self A. reports also an improvement. She indicates that Focal Group Therapy has been a very positive experience to her.

## RESULTS STUDY FOCAL GROUP THERAPY

We have done a study in which our main purpose was to investigate changes in some relevant parameters, without being too pretentious. Because we don't have control groups we cannot see the results as giving hard evidence for effects; with encouraging enough results we are planning to repeat the investigation on a more systematic basis. We have asked all our members of 5 focal groups to fill in some questionnaires before starting with group therapy and at the end of group therapy. All groups had the same length, the interval between the assessments for all 30 members was 5 months.

We have used a number of tests, which I will mention briefly here:

- 1) The NVM, (a shortened version of the MMPI), consisting of 83 items among 5 scales, *Negativism*, *Somatic complaints*, *Shyness*, *Psychopathology* and *Extraversion*;
- 2) The Dutch Autonomy Scale, 50 items measuring 3 aspects of autonomy, namely, *Self-awareness*, *Interpersonal sensitivity* and *Coping behaviour in new situations*;
- 3) The Study Management and Academic Results Test, measuring two general cognitions, one concerning studying in general, the capacity for studying and enjoying studying, *Academic Competence*; and one concerning the preparation of tests/exams and coping with stress, *Test Competence*. Furthermore two study habits are being measured, *Time management* and *Studying strategically*;
- 4) The ILS, a list referring to motives, orientations and attitudes students can have towards studying with 5 scales: *Job-oriented*, *Intrinsic Motivation*, *Certificate-oriented*, *Test-oriented* and *Ambivalence*;
- 5) Integration within the Institute of Higher Education; 10 questions taken out of a research project of student drop-out, which discriminated significantly between those who stayed at the university and those who dropped out, divided across the categories of *Self-confidence*, *Social Integration* and *Academic Integration*
- 6) For two groups additionally the NEO PI R, measuring the BIG 5: *Neuroticism*, *Extraversion*, *Openness*, *Altruism*, and *Conscientiousness*.

On the NVM we have the following interesting results:

*Negativism* is dropping significantly in the comparison pre-test-post-test, pre-test values being high, post-test values being average or slightly above average compared with the norm group of the general population.

*Psychosomatic complaints*: also a significant decrease, from a high pre-test level to an

average post-test level;

*Shyness*: also a significant reduction from a high level to a level which is above average; *Psychopathology*: no significant reduction, but the pre-test scores were already on an average level;

*Extraversion*: remains on an average level.

On the Autonomy Scale we have the following observations:

*Self-awareness* rises significantly, although still not reaching normal values (5.1 for normal population).

*Interpersonal sensitivity* remains on the same rather high level, (meaning not too sensitive) but splitting up the different groups shows us results which can be regarded as regression to the mean, or reaching an optimum. (No significant results here)

*Coping with new situations*: here we don't see any significant change. The initial values vary from low to average and remain the same.

On the ILS we have the following observations:

All 5 scales have *high initial values* and the scores remain about the same. This fact came as a bit of a surprise to us. Apparently we thought too soon that our group therapy clients with study stagnation would also have motivational problems, while the opposite is true!

On the SMART we see the following results:

*Academic Competence* has an initial average level and remains that way.

*Test competence* has an initial low level while post-test scores are significantly higher, a change from below average to above average. This is a particularly interesting result because of the four scales of the SMART this is the one predicting success in studying the best.

*Time management* stays on a slightly below average level.

*Studying strategically*: little pre-test-post-test changes to be observed, differences in initial levels varying from low to high. Previous research has demonstrated that the predictive validity of this scale is doubtful so we will not give much attention to this result here.

The 10 questions (Integration)

*Academic self-confidence* shows a slight increase, but no significant change. The initial values are about average.

*Academic Integration*: all 4 questions show an increase, which is only significant in question 6: The contact within the institute of higher education has a positive influence on the planning of my career. Initial values are about average.

*Social integration*: Low initial values, which don't show a significant change. Looking at the content of the questions we can observe that they are not very susceptible for change in the short term. For the purpose of this investigation we need other assessment scales.

## NEO PI R

Interesting here is the significant reduction in the scores of Neuroticism, furthermore the increase in Conscientiousness is noticeable; only a trend, no significant change, but we would like to investigate this further, here we have only a limited number of measurements. This dimension could have some impact on study behaviour as for

instance study discipline.

## CONCLUSION

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Looking at the initial values of the questionnaires a picture arises of a Focal Group Therapy client who has many problems in the field of stress, passive avoidance behaviour, feelings of dissatisfaction, withdrawal from the contact with other persons and psychosomatic complaints. There is no severe psychopathology to be observed. Furthermore these clients tend to be not so autonomous. Regarding their study behaviour these students, while in most cases having a delay in their study program, appear to be well motivated. However they have a below-average test competence and also slightly below average scores on time management. Their academic self-confidence and academic integration is about normal but their social integration seems to be poor.

After group therapy the stress-related problems have been reduced, there is less dissatisfaction, less psychosomatic complaints, while there is more approach to other people.

At the same time the students tend to become more autonomous as indicated on the score of self-awareness. Moreover their test competence increases to an above average level.

This last finding in our opinion is a strong indication that this approach, short-term group therapy, which is broader than a training in stress-management, can also have an impact on problems in the field of study behaviour and test anxiety.

Of course we have to be cautious and not take the results as hard evidence; but we think the results are promising enough to continue our research and improve the research-plan with adding a control-group and looking for some new instruments to assess some concepts.

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## TESTS

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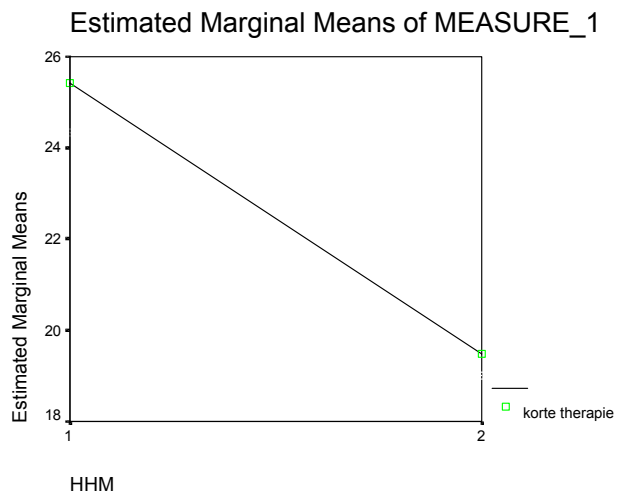
Autonomy-scale: M. Bekker, Swets and Zeitlinger, Lisse, 1993

ILS: v. Rijswijk and Vermunt, University of Tilburg, Sectie Onderwijs-en Opleidingspsychologie

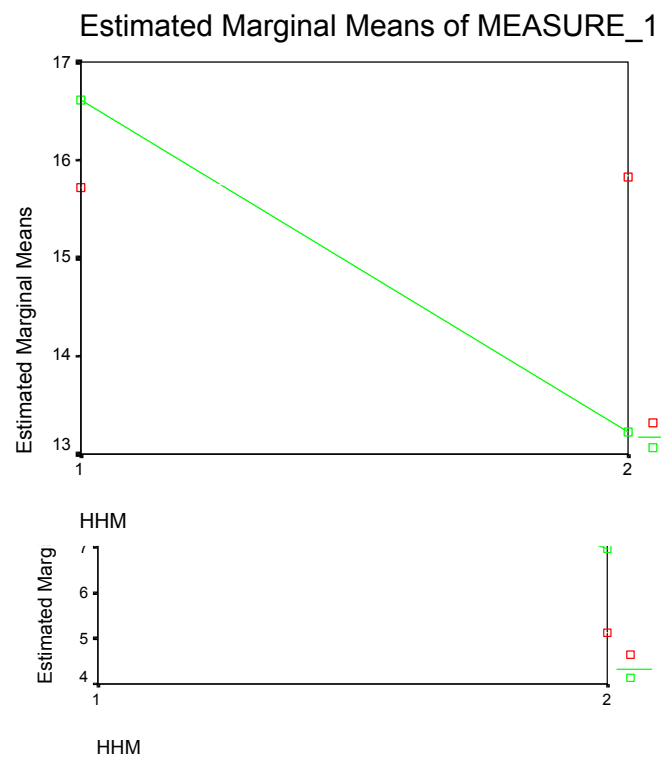
SMART: R. Topman, University of Leiden, Studieondersteuning, 1996/1997/1998

Integration: J.Prins, Studie-uitval in het hoger onderwijs, Nijmegen, 1997.

## APPENDIX: GRAPHICS OF THE MAIN RESULTS

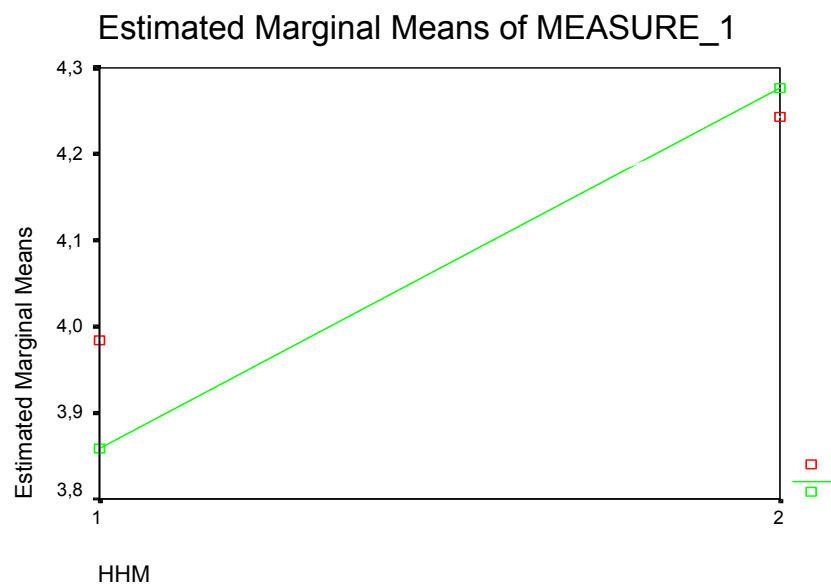


Pre-test-post-test NVM Negativism

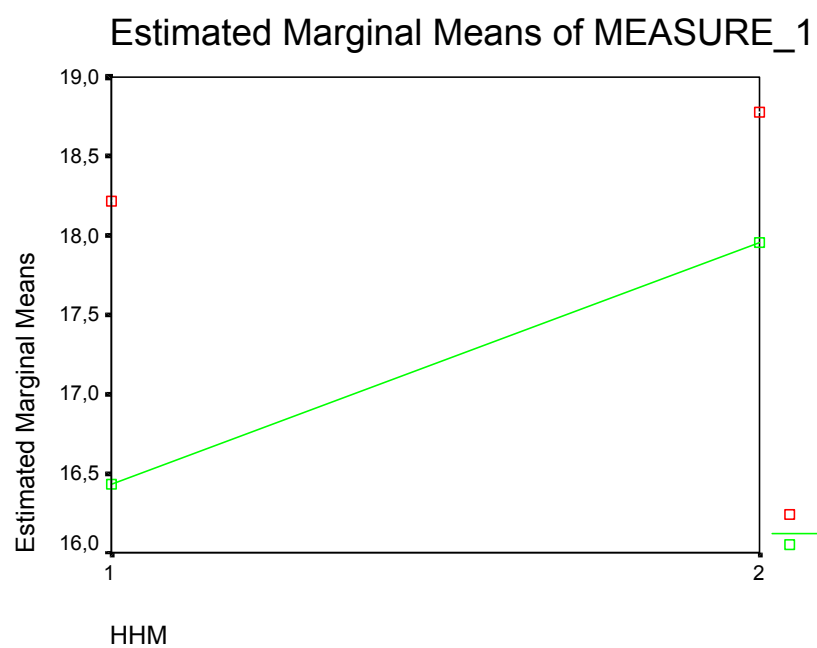


Pre-test-post-test NVM Shyness

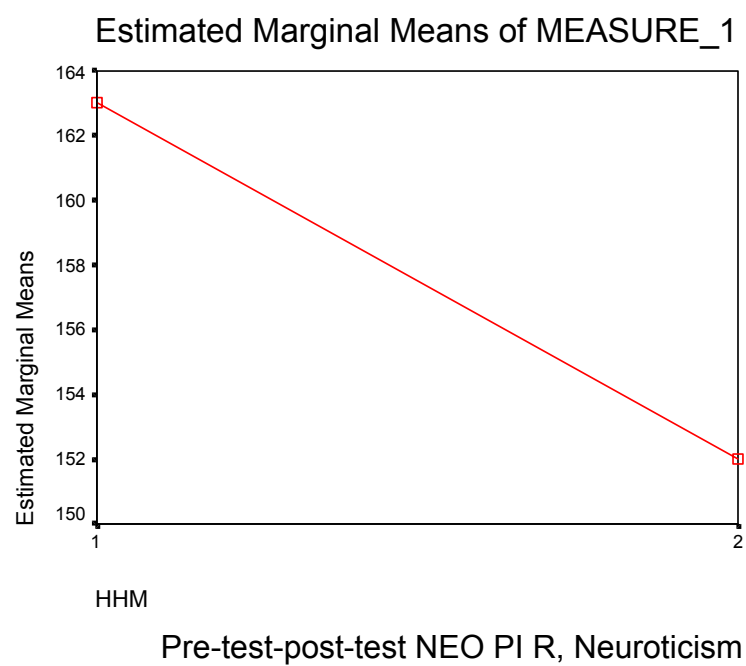




Pre-test-post-test Autonomy scale Self-awareness



Pre-test-post-test SMART Test-competence



# COGNITIVE AND EMOTIONAL ANTECEDENTS AND CONSEQUENCES OF ACHIEVEMENT GOALS IN 1ST YEAR UNIVERSITY STUDENTS

## ANTÉCÉDENTS COGNITIFS ET AFFECTIFS ET CONSÉQUENCES DES OBJECTIFS DE RÉUSSITE CHEZ DES ÉTUDIANTS DE 1ÈRE ANNÉE

Jean Paul Broonen |

### ABSTRACT

Local models linking some central cognitive, motivational, and emotional factors of academic achievement in university first year students were presented. An achievement motivation framework comprising academic mastery goals and performance goals was proposed with particular attention allocated to the hypothesized partitioning of both achievement goals in approach and avoidance orientations (Elliot & Church, 2001). Results revealed distinct empirical profiles for mastery-approach goals and mastery-avoidance goals but not for performance goals. A cultural hypothesis was proposed to explain this phenomenon. The study also examined the role of some antecedents (anxiety and competence expectancy) of achievement goals and how these goals influence procrastination, lectures attendance, and exams results. A series of multiple regressions indicated that competence expectancy was a positive predictor of mastery-approach goals and performance goals. Anxiety was a positive predictor of mastery-avoidance goals and performance goals. Mastery-avoidance goals were positive predictors of procrastination. Lectures attendance was facilitated by mastery-avoidance goals and performance goals. Exams results were positively predicted by performance goals. These results were discussed. Other statistical analyses were recommended for developments of this framework.

Key words: academic achievement, motivation framework, procrastination, anxiety, competence expectancy

### RÉSUMÉ

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Cette communication présente des modèles locaux d'analyse des liaisons entre quelques facteurs cognitifs, motivationnels et émotionnels essentiels de la réussite académique chez des étudiants de première année universitaire. Le cadre théorique de référence proposé est celui de la motivation d'accomplissement qui comporte des buts de maîtrise et des buts de performance à l'université, une attention particulière étant portée à la partition hypothétique de ces buts en une orientation approche et une orientation évitement (Elliot & Church, 2001). Les résultats mettent à jour des profils distincts pour les buts de maîtrise-approche et les buts de maîtrise-évitement, mais non pas pour les buts de performance. On propose une hypothèse culturelle pour expliquer ce phénomène. L'étude examine aussi le rôle de certains antécédents (anxiété et attentes de compétences) des buts d'accomplissement et la manière dont ces buts influencent la procrastination, l'assistance aux cours et les résultats aux examens. Une série de régressions multiples montre que les attentes de compétences constituent un prédicateur positif des buts de maîtrise-approche et des buts de performance, et l'anxiété un prédicateur positif des buts de maîtrise-évitement et des buts de performance. Les buts de maîtrise-évitement sont des prédicateurs positifs de la procrastination. L'assistance aux cours est stimulée par les buts de maîtrise-évitement et les buts de performance. Les buts de performance constituent des prédicateurs positifs des résultats aux examens. Ces résultats sont discutés. On suggère pour finir que les développements de ce cadre d'analyse passent par une analyse statistique d'un autre type.

Mots clés: réussite universitaire, cadre de motivation, procrastination, anxiété, attentes de compétence

## INTRODUCTION

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This paper presents partial results of the first step of a study including seven waves of data collected by questionnaires in first year students in psychological and educational sciences (University of Liège) designed to establish a general model trying to link several aspects of cognitive, emotional, motivational and volitional factors supposed to be central in academic achievement. Only some results of the first set of data collected in December 2001 will be presented here. This wave was focused on variables that could predict, and perhaps explain, exams performances on January 2002.

Prediction and explanation of academic performance remain extremely difficult. Holistic models (e.g., Rott, 1996) display a heuristic character very helpful in clinical practice. These models open large avenues from which experimental and ecological hypotheses can be explored. However variables are so numerous and interconnected that only local models can be tested. For instance Borkowski et al. (1995) highlighted the interaction of the following cognitive, motivational, and self-processes: knowledge of oneself (including one's goals, possible selves, and sense of self-worth), domain-specific knowledge, strategy knowledge, and personal-motivational states (including attributional beliefs, self-efficacy, and intrinsic motivation). Together these components are assumed to influence performance. Pintrich (2000) outlined a model incorporating

student entry characteristics, social aspects of the learning setting (e.g. the interactions between students and teachers), several motivational constructs derived from expectancy-value and goals theories (expectancies, values, and affects), and various cognitive constructs (e.g. learning strategies, self-regulatory and metacognitive strategies). The cognitive and motivational constructs are supposed to influence each other as well as being influenced by the social context. In turn, both the cognitive and motivational constructs are assumed to influence students' involvement with their learning and achievement outcomes. Pintrich stressed the relative paucity of research on how motivational factors as goals, achievement values, efficacy beliefs, and control beliefs can influence students' change in their mental concepts. The most recent embodiment of the motive-as-goals tradition is achievement goal theory (e.g. Dweck, 1986, Ames, 1992, Urdan, 1997) where theorists focus on a particular class of behaviours, those involving competence. According to Elliot & Trash (2001) a goal is construed "as concrete cognitive representations that serve a directional function in motivation by guiding the individual toward or away from specific possible outcomes" (p. 143). An achievement goal is a cognitive representation of a competence-based possibility that an individual seeks to attain. In the Elliot and colleagues' hierarchical conception, achievement goals are differentiated on two basic dimensions: according to how competence is defined and according to how competence is valenced. Competence may be defined differently as a function of the type of standard or referent that is used in evaluation. Three standards for evaluation may be identified: an absolute standard, an intrapersonal standard, and a normative standard. That is, competence may be evaluated according to whether one has understood the task at hand (absolute competence), or fully developed one's skills (intrapersonal competence), or performed better than others (normative competence). The other dimension is valence which represents the approach-avoidance dimension (McClelland et al., 1953). Individuals may aspire to attain competence or may strive to avoid incompetence; this approach-avoidance distinction was explicitly incorporated into the earliest achievement motivation conceptualisations. Elliot & Harackiewicz (1996) proposed an integrative achievement goal conceptualisation that incorporates both the contemporary performance/mastery and the classic approach/avoidance distinctions. Combining the two general dimensions produces four basic types of achievement goals: a mastery-approach goal, a mastery-avoidance goal, a performance-approach goal, and a performance-avoidance goal. The partitioning of mastery orientation was experimentally evidenced by Elliot & McGregor (2001).

These goals have to be separated from work avoidance goals (e.g., Meece et al., 1988) commonly defined in terms of trying to get away with putting minimal work or effort into achievement task. According to Elliot & Trash (2001) "these goals seem to represent the absence of an achievement goal in an achievement setting, rather than the presence of a particular type of achievement" (p. 150).

The basic contention of the theory is that depending on their subjective purposes, achievement goals differentially influence academic results via variations in the quality of cognitive self-regulation processes. When performance goals are properly parsed into their respective approach and avoidance components, the evidence suggested, in the American literature, that performance-approach goals enhanced graded performance and performance-avoidance goals proved inimical to graded performance.

The American literature is highly inconsistent on consequences of mastery-approach on exams performances with a modal result, particularly in research with undergraduates, that mastery goals are unrelated to performance outcomes. However Church et al. (2001) found a positive correlation while in a previous study (Elliot & Church, 1997) no effect was found. Mastery-avoidance goals were found to be unrelated to exam results.

Relationships between achievement goals and intrinsic motivation is an unresolved issue. Intrinsic motivation is manifest in the enjoyment of and interest in an activity for

its own sake. This framework, most theorists contend that mastery goals are facilitative of intrinsic motivation by fostering perceptions of challenge encouraging task involvement, generating excitement, whereas performance goals are posited to have negative effects by instilling opposed effects (perceptions of threat, etc.). But Elliot and Church (1997) proposed and evidenced another set of predictions derived from the approach-avoidance achievement goal framework: both performance-approach and mastery goals are focused on attaining competence, and these approach orientations may engender a functionally equivalent set of processes that foster intrinsic motivation. On the other hand the performance-avoidance goal, focused on avoidance incompetence, ought to evoke processes that are antithetical to the very nature of the intrinsic motivation construct. This pattern was analysed before the finding of the distinction between mastery-approach and avoidance goals. Link between intrinsic motivation and exam performance is not clear. Elliot and Church (1997) found no correlation, but Church et al. (2001) found a positive correlation.

The present research used the heuristic potential of Elliot and Church's framework though I suspected that because of the differences between the American universities system and the Belgian one – in Belgium entry to university is free<sup>2</sup> and there is no numerus clausus –, the importance of performance goals would be lower. A first hypothesis was that the partitioning between the four types of goals would be observed. I also predicted that performance-approach goals would be positively correlated to exam performances while performance-avoidance would be negatively correlated. Mastery-avoidance goals would not be correlated to exam performances. Prediction concerning mastery-approach goals was more difficult since previous results provided controversial results.

Among antecedent variables my model included competence expectancies, a cognitive variable that is presumed to orient the individual toward the possibility of success or the possibility of failure, and also exerts its influence on achievement behaviour indirectly, via its effect on achievement goal adoption (Elliot, 1997). Competencies are thus portrayed as an independent determinant of achievement goals. Alternatively, competence perceptions may be conceptualised in many achievement goal frameworks as a moderator of achievement goal effects. In this study, only the role of competence expectancies as antecedent of goals achievement was tested.

An emotional variable, anxiety, was proved in numerous studies to have deleterious effects on students' self-regulation. In this framework I wanted to examine the effects of negative achievement tendencies at the personality level (cf. Pintrich, 1989) of achievement goals. Elliot and McGregor (1999) found that anxiety trait which focuses exclusively on examination settings (whereas fear of failure measures focus more broadly on achievement-relevant contexts in general) is a positive predictor of performance (approach and avoidance) goals. I also hypothesised a positive correlation with mastery-avoidance goals.

Finally, the past decade has witnessed a renewal of interest in the nature and consequences of procrastination (cf. in this Conference Schouwenburg) as one of defensive strategies of self-handicapping which translate into diminished achievement (Rhodewalt, 1990; Martin et al., 2001). This diminution takes many forms, including achieving inconsistently, i.e. sometimes performing well and at other times poorly, depending on how likely failure is perceived to be the outcome (Thompson, 1993). Diminished achievement in turn is likely to be accompanied by heightened anxiety. Procrastinators with high neuroticism scores and elements of perfectionism find that studying actually increases their anxiety rather than reducing it. Emotional exhaustion and burnout are also possible consequences of their excessive use of these failure-avoiding strategies, as well as reducing interest in achieving. Procrastination may be considered as a personality trait or a self-regulatory process (Lay, 2000). As a personality trait, procrastination refers to the failure to act on intentions within a

<sup>2</sup> Except in Applied Sciences.

temporal framework. It involves the avoidance of the execution of an intention, serving the purpose of avoiding a threat temporally, in order to protect one's well-being in the short term. Van Eerde et al. (2000) developed a scale which is supposed to measure procrastination more as an assessment of reactions in a particular type of reaction – namely in work and study, when meeting a deadline – than as of general, or trait, procrastination though both are not independent. In the present study, I tested the hypothesis that procrastination as a cognitive regulatory process is influenced by negatively valenced goals, that is mastery-avoidance and performance-avoidance goals, and by work avoidance.

## METHOD

### Participants and Achievement context

A total of 283 (68 male and 215 female) students enrolled in the first year at the Faculty of

Psychology of the University of Liège participated in the research.

### Procedure

Participants' achievement goals, work avoidance, competence perceptions, anxiety, procrastination, well-being in studies, and intrinsic motivation were assessed in a session conducted in the end of the first semester and took

place immediately after class, with the professor absent from the room. Participants were assured that their responses would in no way influence their course grade. Coding names guaranteed confidentiality.

### Measures

**Achievement goals** In an achievement goals questionnaire adapted from Elliot et al. studies was used to assess participants' adoption of mastery-approach, mastery-avoidance, and performance-approach achievement goals in their courses at the Faculty (21 items). Participants used 1 (strongly

**Competence expectancies** One item assessed participants' expectations of competence: the expected score on a scale of all possible scores in each of the five exams to be presented on January session.

**Procrastination** I translated the van Eerde & Garst' (2000) procrastination scale

disagree) to 7 (strongly agree) scales to indicate their responses. Work avoidance was assessed by 3 items. Well-being in studies was assessed by three items. Intrinsic motivation Participants' interest toward their studies was assessed by two items and their motivation for knowledge by three other items.

which was proved to have good psychometric qualities. Anxiety as a personality trait was measured by an Anxiety scale adapted from Depreeuw et al. (1996). Lectures attendance A measure of class attendance was constructed by simply asking students how many sessions they attended in each class during the first semester.

Exams performances January exams performances were used as a measure of performance attainment (numerical values from 0 to 20).

## RESULTS

### Factor analyses

A principal components factor analysis with varimax rotation was conducted on the items including achievement goals, work avoidance and intrinsic motivation especially to test the validity of partitioning the mastery and performance goals into separate approach and avoidance components. The analysis yielded 5 factors with eigenvalues exceeding unity, and the factor solution accounted for 61.52% of the total variance. Factor 1 accounted for 20.39 of the total variance and included performance-approach and avoidance goals items. Factor 2 accounted for 19.16% of the total variance and consisted of 3 items relating to well-being in studies and 2 items of intrinsic motivation (interest in psychology). Factor 3 did not represent a single factor. Knowledge motivation was included in factor 3 and interest motivation in factor 2.

A principal-components factor analysis was also conducted on the items of the procrastination scale and on the items of work avoidance to determine whether they represented distinct constructs. This analysis indeed yielded two

3 accounted for 9.26% of the total variance and comprised mastery-approach goal items and 3 items of intrinsic motivation items (pleasure to know). Factor 4 accounted for 7.43% of the total variance and consisted of the mastery-avoidance goal items. Factor 5 accounted for 5.26% of the total variance and consisted of work avoidance items.

This analysis and Cronbach's alpha (see Table 1) provided strong support for partitioning the mastery goal orientation into separate approach and avoidance components as expected according to American studies. These goals were clearly operative (the full range of scores was used). On the contrary, approach and avoidance components were not distinct in the performance goals. Intrinsic motivation

No item loaded below .70 and .80 respectively. The resultant alpha proved the two scales were highly reliable (alpha = .92 and .83).

Finally a principal-components factor analysis was conducted on the items of the anxiety test scale to determine whether they represented a single construct. This analysis indeed yielded a single factor which accounted for 52.91%



factors. The first one included the 8 items of procrastination which accounted for 56.48% of the variance and the second one the items of work avoidance which accounted for 10.88%.

and no item loaded below .71. The resultant index proved highly reliable ( $\alpha = .89$ ).

## DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS

Table 1 displays the means, standard deviations, and ranges for all variables. Participants tended to adopt mastery-approach goals. Mastery-avoidance goals mean score was also above the scale midpoint. Contrary to American studies and as expected, performance goals (approach and avoidance confounded) mean score was largely below that point. Work avoidance was not a major attitude.

Students tended to feel that their study choice was the right one and reported that they were very interested in psychology. Procrastination and anxiety were reported by respectively 37 and 38% of participants. Students reported relatively high competence expectancies, since they thought that they would succeed in each exam (except in the first one).

Table 1

Variable	M	SD	Observed range	Possible range	Cronbach's alpha
Mastery-approach goals & Intrinsic motivation (knowledge)	4.90	.97	2-7	1-7	.74
Mastery-avoidance goals	4.32	1.24	1-7	1-7	.76
Performance-approach and avoidance goals	2.89	1.47	1-7	1-7	.91
Work avoidance	2.70	1.47	1-7	1-7	.83
Anxiety	3.51	1.35	1-67	1-7	.89
Procrastination	3.39	1.53	1-6.75	1-7	.92
Well-being/Intrinsic motivation (interest)	5.78	1.29	1.33-7	1-7	.82
Competence expectancies exam 1	11.41	2.39	0-15	0-20	
Competence expectancies exam 2	12.43	2.45	0-18	0-20	
Competence expectancies exam 3	12.58	2.72	0-18	0-20	
Competence expectancies exam 4	12.58	2.05	0-16	0-20	
Competence expectancies exam 5	12.32	2.24	1-18	0-20	
Lecture 1 attendance **	25	7	0-30	0-30	
Lecture 2 attendance	25	7	0-30	0-30	
Lecture 3 attendance	25	8	0-30	0-30	
Lecture 4 attendance	21	9	0-30	0-30	
Lecture 5 attendance	21	8.70	0-30	0-30	

N= 283

\*\* Hours

## ZERO-ORDER CORRELATIONS FOR THE PREDICTOR VARIABLES

Table 2 presents the zero-order correlations for the predictor variables used in the regression analyses. As predicted by the theory (Elliot & McGregor, 2001) mastery-approach and mastery-avoidance goals were slightly positively correlated. Performance goals and mastery-avoidance goals were also positively correlated. Anxiety was positively correlated to mastery-avoidance goals as predicted by the theory (Elliot & McGregor, 2001), but not to work avoidance. Procrastination was inversely correlated to mastery-approach goals, but positively correlated

to mastery-avoidance goals. This finding is coherent with the Elliot & McGregor's general hypothesis that this latter type of goals has a more negative pattern of consequences than the former. Competence expectancies and lectures attendance were inversely correlated to work avoidance and to procrastination, but positively correlated to performance goals. Competence expectancies were also slightly positively correlated to mastery-approach goals. Impression to be well oriented in studies was positively correlated to mastery-approach goals and negatively to work avoidance, procrastination, and anxiety.

**Table 2**

*Zero-order correlations for the predictor variables*

Variable	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1. Mastery-approach goals								
2. Mastery-avoidance goal.	.14 .017							
3 Performance-goals	ns .000	.36 .000						
4. Work avoidance	-.23 .001	-.27 .000	ns					
5. Competence expectancies**	.15 .03	ns	.24 .000	-.23 .001				
6 Well-being & interest	-.27 .00	ns	ns	-.52 .000	.24 .001			
7. Anxiety	ns .000	.49 .000	.33 .000	ns	ns	-.18 .005		
8. Procrastination	-.17 .008	.14 .033	ns	.60 .000	-.27 .000	-.35 .000	.21 .001	
9. Lectures attendance***	ns .001	.21 .001	.26 .000	-.26 .000	.30 .000	.18 .005	.13 .047	-.25 .000

\*\* Mean (5 exams) \*\*\*Mean (5 classes)

Each of the achievement goals was independently regressed on competence expectancies and/or anxiety. Competence expectancies were a positive predictor of mastery-approach goals and a negative one of work avoidance. Anxiety-trait was a positive predictor of mastery-avoidance. The regression of performance goals on the antecedents model yielded a significant effect for the overall model,  $F(2,20) = 24.93$ ,  $p < .0000$ ,  $R^2 = .19$ .

Significant effects were obtained for both anxiety,  $t(1,200) = 5.75$ ,  $p < .0000$ ,  $\beta = .37$ , and competence expectancies,  $t(1,200) = 4.30$ ,  $p < .0001$ ,  $\beta = .27$ . In sum, individuals with high competence expectancies orient towards the possibility of success and presumably adopt approach forms of self-regulation without anxiety (mastery-approach goals) or with anxiety (performance goals).

## REGRESSION ANALYSES: ACHIEVEMENT GOALS AS PREDICTORS

### *Procrastination and achievement goals*

Regressing procrastination as a process on a model including mastery-approach, mastery-avoidance goals, and work-avoidance yielded significant effects for the last two variables:  $F(3,232) = 47.02$ ,  $p < .0000$ ,  $R^2 = .37$ ; work-avoidance,  $t(232) = 11.00$ ,  $p < .0000$ ,  $\beta = .59$ ; mastery-avoidance goals,  $t(232) = 2.62$ ,  $p < .01$ ,  $\beta = .14$ . A model including competence expectancies augmented the percentage of explained variance  $F(3, 201) = 45.10$ ,  $p < .0000$ ,  $R^2 = .39$ . Significant effect was then also obtained for competence expectancies,  $t(1, 201)$ ,  $p < .01$ ,  $\beta = -.14$ . In sum, the absence of achievement goals, mastery-avoidance goals, and low competence expectancies were predictors of behavioural and cognitive procrastination reactions in response to the specific setting of a requirement of studying for exams.

### *Lectures attendance and achievement goals*

The regression of lectures attendance on the antecedents performance goals, mastery

avoidance goals, and work avoidance revealed significant effects for the three variables,  $F(3,229) = 13.42$ ,  $p < .0000$ ,  $R^2 = .14$ . Work avoidance goals were a negative predictor  $t(229) = -4.34$ ,  $p < .000$ ,  $\beta = -.27$ ; performance goals and mastery-avoidance goals were positive predictors,  $t(229) = 2.55$ ,  $p < .05$ ,  $\beta = .17$ ,  $t(229) = 2.39$ ,  $p < .05$ ,  $\beta = .16$  respectively. Students who displayed performance goals and mastery avoidance goals tended to attend lectures more frequently and students who adopted work avoidance goals tended to attend lectures less frequently.

### *Predictors of exams results*

Table 3 presents significant positive correlations between 4 exams results and competence expectancies, mastery-approach goals and lectures attendance. Exams performances were negatively associated with work avoidance and procrastination. According to the theory, no significant correlation was found between mastery avoidance goals and the dependant variable. Neither well-being in studies nor anxiety were related to exams results.

Table 3  
Zero-order correlations with  
exams performances

	Exams results	
Competence expectancies	.32	.000
Work avoidance	-.23	.001
Performance-Approach and Avoidance	.24	.00
Mastery-approach	.15	.03
Mastery-avoidance	ns	
Procrastination	-.18	.013
Lectures attendance	.24	.001
Well-being in studies	ns	
Anxiety	ns	

## Regression analyses: Exams results and achievement goals

The regression of exams performances on the antecedents model – work avoidance, performance, and mastery-approach goals – yielded a significant effect,  $F(3,202) = 8.20$ ,  $p < .0000$ ;  $R^2 = .10$ . A significant positive effect was obtained for performance goals,  $t(202) = 3.37$ ,  $p < .000$ ,  $\beta = .22$ . A distinct significant negative effect was obtained for work avoidance,  $t(202) = -2.89$ ,  $p < .005$ ,  $\beta = -.19$ . No significant effect was obtained

for mastery-approach goals. The possibility of an effect of competence expectancies on exams performances cannot be excluded.

Introduction of this antecedent in the equation produced indeed an effect:  $F(3,171) = 11.01$ ,  $p < .0000$ ,  $R^2 = .15$ . Work avoidance and performance goals remained significant and competence expectancies were a positive predictor,  $t(171) = 3.53$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $p < .05$ ,  $\beta = .26$ .

## DISCUSSION

The present study reported partial results on the interplay between some antecedents and consequences of achievement goals in first year university students before first semester exams. As predicted, results provide support for partitioning mastery goals

into approach and avoidance components. Contrary to prediction, the approach/avoidance dichotomy was not found for performance goals. I suspect that cultural differences between American students and European ones may have an influence on this phenomena: most of our students did not adopt performance goals since mean scores or 78% of participants were below the midpoint of the scale while in the American studies performance-approach scores are above and performance-avoidance scores only just below, that is higher than in our data. If performance goals do not have so strong a meaning as in the competitive American universities (Covington, 1999), it is likely that the approach-avoidance dimension vanishes.

The interplay between cognitive, motivational, emotional variables and behaviours is highlighted by the following findings.

Competence expectancies were positive predictors of mastery-approach goals, performance goals and procrastination, and negative predictors of work avoidance. Anxiety-trait was a positive predictor of mastery-avoidance goals and performance goals.

Mastery-avoidance goals and work avoidance were positive predictors of procrastination, but probably for different reasons: mastery-avoidant students procrastinate because of fear of failure while work avoidant students simply do not want to make efforts. The correlation between anxiety and mastery-avoidance on the first hand and the absence of correlation between anxiety and work avoidance on the second hand support that interpretation.

Performance goals and mastery-avoidance goals were positive predictors of lectures attendance, and work avoidance a negative predictor. Work avoidance was a negative predictor and performance goals a positive predictor of exam results. It is likely that performance goals, which are when adopted under girded by fear of failure coupled with achievement motivation, promote positive academic behaviours (see the positive link with lectures attendance) that eventuate in high levels of achievement. The absence of consequence of mastery goals on exam results confirms Elliot & Church (1997) results.

As components of intrinsic motivation could not be dissociated from those of mastery-approach goal or well-being in studies, no analysis was conducted about this variable.

Of course the above regression analyses are correlational by nature. Only experimental designs where researchers systematically vary each of the factors while holding others constant could precise the causal relationships between variables. However, in this field paradigm, another step of the research would be to test a global model where antecedents and consequences of goals are analysed simultaneously. The role of moderator of some variables like competence expectancies ought to be included in the model. Nichols (1983) proposed that performance goals have deleterious effects on achievement outcomes at low but not high levels of expectancy. This can be reached by using a structural equation modelling to assess the fit of the hypothesized model to the data. This is the next step of my research programme.

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## AN INVESTIGATION INTO THE CAUSES OF STUDENTS' DROP-OUT IN A SAMPLE OF GREEK UNIVERSITY STUDENTS

## UNE ENQUÊTE CONCERNANT LES CAUSES DU DÉCROCHAGE UNIVERSITAIRE SUR UN ÉCHANTILLON D'ÉTUDIANT GRECS.

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### ABSTRACT

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The aim of the present study was to examine the causes of dropping out in a pilot sample of 138 students of the University of Piraeus.

For the purpose of the study a semi-structured questionnaire was used.

Findings indicated that academic performance has had a strong relationship with students' retention. Dropping out is influenced by students' characteristics, financial and/or vocational reasons and lack of academic preparation. Besides, the main difficulties that seemed to hinder the students' learning process were postponement, time management, poor concentration skills and stress.

Based on the findings of the research, suggestions are made of how to deal with this phenomenon. The action that the counselling centre of the University of Piraeus has undertaken is also discussed.

Key words: academic performance, retention at university, procrastination

### RÉSUMÉ

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Le but de la présente étude est d'examiner les causes de l'absentéisme (du Drop-out) sur un échantillon pilote de 138 étudiants de l'université du Pirée.

Pour la réalisation de l'étude un questionnaire demi-structuré a été utilisé.

Les résultats ont indiqué que le rendement académique avait une forte relation avec le décrochage des étudiants. L'absentéisme (ou le Drop-out) est influencé par les caractéristiques individuelles, par les raisons financières et/ou professionnelles et par le manque de préparation académique. En outre, les difficultés principales qui ont entravé l'apprentissage des étudiants étaient les délais, la gestion du temps, les qualifications de manque de concentration et l'angoisse (ou le stress).

Parallèlement, cette étude contient des propositions en ce qui concerne les moyens de faire face à ce phénomène. Enfin, l'action que le centre consultatif de l'université du Pirée a entreprise, a été traitée également.

Mots clés: performance universitaire, assiduité à l'université, procrastination



## INTRODUCTION

Extensive research has been conducted on retention in higher education using different methods and approaches. However most of the research has been conducted at four-year colleges and universities rather than community colleges. Most of the retention studies, have focused on particular areas of research such as the effect of students' expectations, career decision- making, students' financial aid, and the institutional environment. Some researchers have concentrated their efforts on special student populations and others have evaluated several factors in order to predict students retention.

Pascarella, Smart, and Ethington (1993) studied the persistence rates of 825 students from 85 different community colleges over a nine-year-period. Academic and social integration were significant predictors of persistence for males and females. Socio-economic status was an important factor for females, and institutional commitment of satisfaction was significant for males. Less than 26% of the variation in degree attainment was explained in the study.

Other studies have examined student expectations and the way they have been related to students' attrition. The researchers found out that when the college expectations of students are met, the students' persistence or intention to persist is increased (Bank, Biddle and Slavings, 1992; Braxton, Vesper and Slavings, 1995).

There is a significant relationship between students' expectations and attrition focusing on students' declared major during their experience at a university (Foote, 1980). Lewallen (1993) carried out a research on the relationships between career decision-making and student's persistence. There is some evidence that a student's declaration of a college major or career relates to retention. His conclusion was that there isn't any relation between being initially undecided and retention when institutions of varied Carnegie classifications is the focus of the study.

There are also studies that refer to the relationship between institutional environment and students' attrition. Studies conducted in this area have indicated that students' feelings of alienation may be greater in large universities than in smaller educational institutions. Men seem to experience more alienation and express more uncertainty than women in their decision to continue their studies (Tomlinson-Clarke & Clarke, 1996). Regardless gender differences institutional communication, fairness in policy and decision making, and participation are positively related to social integration and have significant indirect effects on attrition rates (Barger & Braxton, 1998).

Special student populations such as minorities, and older working adults present high drop-out rates. Researchers have found out that persistence rates are lower for adults at four-year institutions who work more hours and are part-time attenders (Naretto, 1995). A supportive social environment is positively related to the retention of older adults (Ashar and Skenes, 1993).

Minority students experience stress related to academic achievement, which is correlated with lower grades. A study of Hispanic students at several community colleges (Solis, 1995) showed that satisfaction with instruction and academic experiences were related to students' commitment to attend. Family support and future job prestige increased students' motivation to persist.

In conclusion, it could be mentioned that several factors lead students to drop-out of colleges and universities. Various circumstances and the educational environment as well can influence participation and persistence rates. Educators have little control over the circumstances of students' lives but they can influence their students' decisions through lectures, student activities and campus events.

## THE DROP-OUT PHENOMENON IN GREECE

Each year 15.000 students in Greece abandon high school. This number is not far away from the other European Countries. During the decade 1985-1994 over 200.000 children dropped out of school.

The majority of the state members of the European Union are interested in this phenomenon, because of the augmented demands in qualifications that young people must have, as a result of the international and economical competition.

There are no state documents about students who drop out of university in Greece.

There is only one study which was carried out by the Greek Pedagogical Institute about high school drop-out (Paleokrassas et al., 1999). The main findings of the research are:

- Half the students who drop-out don't attend the first class of high school at all, even though the attendance of the high school is obligatory
- About 90% of the students come from families of a very low social-economical level
- About 60% of students have faced learning difficulties at primary schools
- About 40% of the students work in their parents' business

Due to the fact that no research has been carried out in Greece to investigate the drop out phenomenon in Universities, the counselling centre of the University of Piraeus took the initiative to conduct this study. We have taken into consideration that although there is a lack of exact numerical estimations the drop-out rate of universities in Greece is high.

## METHOD

Research planning: The present research took into consideration the findings of a previous one conducted by the counselling centre, searching for the Profile of the Student of the University of Piraeus (Kounenou et al., 2000). The findings of the previous study have given important elements of the difficulties that the active students face in regard with their study performance and expectations of academic life.

Purpose: The purpose of the present study was to:

- explore the academic characteristics of non- active students
- investigate the causes of their graduation delay
- identify their expectations from academic life
- make suggestions of dealing with the drop-out phenomenon within the university setting

## Instrument

A semi-structured questionnaire was designed, consisting of 12 open questions and 28 closed questions. 19 closed questions were concerned with the general characteristics of the sample (e.g. age, department), 10

questions were concerned with academic characteristics and 11 questions were concerned with the reasons that affect their study positively or negatively, their expectations and the causes for study delay.

## Subjects

The sample of the present study consisted of 700 students of the University of Piraeus. The results are based on a pilot sample of 138 non-active students.

University of Piraeus has 9 departments of 4 years duration:

- Department of Economics
- Department of Business Administration
- Department of Statistics and Insurance Science
- Department of Banking and Financial Management
- Department of Industrial Management
- Department of Maritime Studies
- Department of Informatics
- Department of International and European Studies
- Department of Technology

We have defined as non-active those students who have not finished their studies within a period of six years since they have been enrolled in the University. The participation in the study was voluntary and anonymous. The sample was chosen by chance from the tables provided by the computer service of the University. All the students who have entered University before 1994 were listed on those tables. The questionnaires have been sent and received by post. A total number of 700 questionnaires have been sent to the sample. We have received 138 filled-in questionnaires. 63 came back without answers due to change of the recipient's address.

## Data Analysis

Analysis is based on descriptive statistics provided

by SPSS /10.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

## Characteristics of the sample

The sample of the study is distinguished to 44.9% female and 55.1% male. 50.8% of the students are single, 49.2% are married and 74 % of the married students

have at least one child. The majority of the students (74%) are full-time workers. 6.5% of them work in a field relevant to their studies.

TABLE 1 CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SAMPLE

SEX	MALE	FEMALE
	55,1%	44,9%
FAMILY STATUS	SINGLE	MARRIED
	50,8%	49,2%
OCCUPATIONAL STATUS	EMPLOYED	UNEMPLOYED
	87% ,(74% full time)	13%

Characteristics of drop-out.

80.8% of the sample have dropped out of their studies and they do not have any kind of contact with the university setting. 19.2% still have some contact with the university services. The type of contact is distinguished to:

- Regular attendance during exams period (27.1%)
- Contact with fellow students (15.8%)

- Contact with various university's services (12%)
- Attendance of the lectures (5.3%)
- Contact with arrays (1.5%)

More women (55.3%) have dropped-out than men (47.3%). This characteristic is consistent to the general characteristics of the sample

TABLE 2 CHARACTERISTICS OF DROPPING OUT

NO CONTACT WITH THE UNIVERSITY	SOME CONTACT WITH UNIVERSITY
80,8%	19,2%
	<i>TYPE OF CONTACT</i>
	REGULAR ATTENDANCE DURING EXAM PERIOD <b>27,1%</b>
	CONTACT WITH FELLOW STUDENTS <b>15,8%</b>
	CONTACT WITH VARIOUS UNIVERSITY'S SERVICES <b>12%</b>
	ATTENDANCE OF THE LECTURES <b>5,3%</b>
	CONTACT WITH ARRAYS <b>1,5%</b>

Time of dropping-out

- 12.1% of the sample dropped out during the first year of the studies

- 25.2% dropped out during the fourth year of the studies
- 21.5% dropped out of studies after the expected duration of

- 20.6% dropped out during the second year of the studies
  - 20.6% dropped out during the third year of the studies
- their studies had expired (4 years).

**TABLE 3 TIME OF DROPPING OUT**

1 <sup>ST</sup> YEAR	2 <sup>ND</sup> YEAR	3 <sup>RD</sup> YEAR	4 <sup>TH</sup> YEAR	5 <sup>TH</sup> YEAR & PLUS
12,1%	20,6%	20,6%	25,2%	21,5%

## Negative factors that affect studying performance

The results of the analysis of this variable are presented in comparison with those provided by the previous research "Profile of the student of the University of Piraeus". We have assumed that the results of the previous study concern the characteristics of the active student population. In the present study indifference seems to be present in 17,5% of non-active students, while in the previous one indifference was a major concern for the 53% of the active students. In her review of literature regarding students' drop-out in higher education, Koumi (1999) noted that discontent with the school environment and more precisely lack of interest are important factors for drop-out. This lack of interest is a contributing factor to poor school performance and adjustment. According to Gottfried (1985), intrinsic motivation facilitates learning and achievement, since students who have been intrinsically motivated engage in activities that enhance learning.

They pay more attention to instructions, study and practice new information and skills, organize knowledge and relate it to what they already know and above all they apply new skills and knowledge in different contexts. Along the same lines Pintrich and Garcia (1994) found that students who use strategies like elaboration and organization are more likely to do better in terms of grades in assignments, exams and papers, as well as overall course grade. In addition, students who attempt to control their cognition and behaviour through the use of planning, monitoring and regulating strategies do better in these academic performance measures.

Being motivated to do academic work leads to better academic performance and may contribute to students' retention as well. This relationship however needs clarification by future research.

**TABLE 4 FACTORS THAT AFFECT NEGATIVELY STUDYING PERFORMANCE**

FACTOR	NON-ACTIVE STUDENTS	ACTIVE STUDENTS
INDIFFERENCE	17,5%	53%
PROCRASTINATION	32,1%	43%

<b>STRESS</b>	<b>15,3%</b>	<b>25%</b>
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There is also differentiation between the two studies regarding procrastination (32,1% non-active students, 43% active students) and stress (15,3% non-active students, 25% active students). Procrastination is especially common in the academic domain (Ellis, Knaus, 1997; Solomon & Rothblum, 1984). The tasks that induce procrastination include writing term papers, studying for examinations and keeping up with weekly assignments (Solomon & Rothblum, 1984). It is also associated with missing deadlines, test anxiety and low cumulative grade-point averages (Wolf & Johnson, 1995; Kay & Silverman, 1996). Saddler & Buley (1999) noted that the academic environment presents several unique challenges that contribute to students' procrastination for scholastic tasks such as one's reasons for engaging in learning, beliefs that outcomes are contingent with efforts and abilities, expectancies for success and scores on anxiety measures. Ferrari et al. (1995) describe additional cognitive distortions that contribute to academic procrastination such as students' overestimation of time required for school tasks and their miscalculation of available time for studying.

In research literature a direct link has not been found between procrastination and drop-out rate. However, the researchers have tried to make indirect links. Pascarella, Smart and Ethington (1993) conclude that academic integration is one of the most significant predictors of persistence for males and females. Procrastination on the other hand, can be seen as a feature of poor academic integration.

Kassotakis (1999), referring to the causes of students' drop-out in secondary education, notes that psychological causes such as fear, insecurity, low self-esteem, poor self-image, lack of self-awareness are only some of them. Koumi (1999) asserts that students' drop-out is related amongst others to low school performance which is associated with academic procrastination.

It seems that research is needed to investigate the relationship between such

a common issue in the academic domain as procrastination and students' attrition.

**As far as the factor of gender is concerned, no major differences were found regarding time management difficulties (29,3% men, 29% women), indifference (17,3% men, 17,7% women), stress (10% men, 14,5% women), and difficulty in concentration (10,7% men, 17,7% women).**

Difficulty in concentration is, amongst others, a stress-related symptom that can contribute to poor academic performance and possibly to student attrition. Anxiety has long been identified as a factor that has debilitating effects on school performance (Gottfried, 1985; Hembree, 1988). According to Convington (1992), emotional factors such as stress and tension directly affect performance. Poor performance is thought to result from self-defeating thoughts that interfere with test preparation and test taking. During study, self-defeating thoughts interfere with information processing. High anxiety students have deficits in judging whether they are ready for an exam (Convington, 1992), in organizing information into more meaningful ways (Steiner, Wiener & Cromer, 1971), and in blocking out class disruptions and their own worries (Eysenck, 1988).

Differences between the sexes have been found for the variable of difficulty in personal relationships (16% men & 25,8% women). From the review of the literature it can be said that more research is needed to refine the relationship among procrastination, time management, indifference, lack of concentration and students' drop-out as well as the interplay among these factors.

The results regarding the factors that positively affect students' studies are:

- wish to obtain their degree (44,5%),
- facilitation offered to working students' population (41,6%),

- interest for the study's object (43,1%).

As far as the active students' population is concerned, the findings of our previous study were different regarding the factors of:

- difficulties in personal relationships (80% active, 19% non-active),
- mood (60% active, 20,6 non active),
- motives (50% active, 27% non active)

**TABLE 5 FACTORS THAT AFFECT POSITIVELY STUDYING PERFORMANCE**

FACTOR	PERCENT
WISH TO OBTAIN THEIR DEGREE	44,5%
FACILITATION OFFERED TO WORKING STUDENTS' POPULATION	41,6%
INTEREST FOR THE STUDY'S OBJECT	43,1%

Regarding the expectations that the students have had during the first years of their studies and those expectations that have been met, the findings show that students expect to:

- obtain their degree (66,4%),
- achieve personal fulfilment (48,9%),
- acquire specialization (44,5%),
- read books and take notes (39,4%),
- have new experiences (37,2%),
- communicate and build good interpersonal relationships (35%).

From the expectations referred above, those that have been basically met according to students' opinions are:

- personal fulfilment (28,6%),
- new experience (20,1%),
- communication and interpersonal relationships (20,7%).

With regard to students' opinion about the causes of their study's delay, the findings of the present study refer mainly to their professional duties (65,7%) and the insufficient organization of their department (46%). The last finding is in accordance with the results of other studies which show that the quality of the experience that the students have from the educational process within the university is positively correlated with the time they need to finish their studies or not (Tinto, 1997). Other reasons that impede the completion of their studies are difficulties in attending lectures (43,1%), family duties (40,1%), difficulty with the subject (32,8%).

**TABLE 6 STUDENTS' EXPECTATIONS DURING THEIR FIRST YEARS OF THEIR STUDIES**

EXPECTATION	PERCENT	EXPECTATION THAT HAVE BEEN MET
OBTAIN THE DEGREE	66,4%	
ACHIEVE PERSONAL FULFILLMENT	48,9%	28,6%
ACQUIRE SPECIALIZATION	44,5%	
TAKE BOOKS AND NOTES	39,4%	
GET NEW EXPERIENCE	37,2%	20,1%
COMMUNICATE AND BUILT GOOD		

INTERPERSONAL RELATIONSHIPS	35%	20,7%
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Despite the difficulties that the students faced in the process of finishing the studies' program, the majority of them are satisfied by the object of the study (86.3%).

Also, most of the students believe that the acquisition of a degree will positively influence their professional future (83.5%) and their personality (8.7%).

## SUGGESTIONS

Over the past thirty years psychologists and educators continue to seek a better understanding of why students drop out of university and have studied many variations in the relationship between counselling and student success.

In their review of the literature Turner & Berry (2000) conclude that a positive relationship exists between students' use of counselling centre services and higher student retention. Turner & Berry (2000) in their study explored the impact of counselling on academic progress and retention, using both objective and self-reported measures from records of counselling clients (n=2365) and the general student body (n=67026) during 6 years at a USA state university. Their major finding was that counselled students showed superior retention compared to peers. Results also showed that counselled students, although at risk due to personal problems persisted toward graduation at rates equal to their peers. Wilson et al. (1997) found that counselled students showed retention rates superior to their comparison group of students waiting to receive counselling.

On the other hand Cornish et al. (2000), based on the results of their study, assert that the number of extremely distressed students presenting at counselling centres has gradually been increased. These students run the risk of dropping out.

Consequently, university counselling centres play a major role in facilitating students to maintain or improve their academic performance and increase their retention rates.

Based on our counselling experience in the counselling centre of the university of Piraeus and following research findings, our goal is to plan and implement interventions to address – amongst others – the issues referred to above (academic procrastination etc.), utilizing a wide-ranging, holistic approach that incorporates personal and academic components.

As Boylan et al. (2000) note, a major challenge for the counselling centres is targeting the cognitive and emotional concerns that affect students' attitudes and behaviours regarding learning in the academic environment, time management and academic procrastination.

The services provided by the counselling centre of the university of Piraeus in order to help the students to cope with the difficulties referred to above are the following:

### Volunteer Student Network

The Network of Volunteer Students was established and has been active since April 2001 with the initiative of the Counselling Centre. The Network is an innovative service in which students from all the departments of the University participate.

The aim of the Network is to assist students who have difficulties in attending lessons for several reasons (disabled students, foreign students, working students), by



providing them with lecture notes, books or specific instructions related to the lessons. The necessity of such a kind of service appears as a result of a research that was carried out by the Counselling centre "The phenomenon of non active students in the University of Piraeus" (2001). One of the findings of the research was that the non-active students didn't attend the lessons owing to family, health and economic reasons. The evaluation of the Network is satisfactory. Many non-active students have used the help that the Network provides.

#### Counselling Centre & Internet

It is possible for everyone who wishes to contact the Centre and discuss his/her thoughts to visit our web page.

All the services outlined above address directly or indirectly the issues we discussed in the present study:

For example individual counselling can help students to raise their self-awareness and identify difficulties that hamper their academic achievement. In our work as counsellors, we have noticed that many students are unaware of the extent of their academic procrastination, especially as it relates to the "trigger" points that impact their ability to set and achieve relevant academic goals.

Group Counselling, individual counselling and seminars help students to improve their self-regulation skills and stress-management skills.

The acquisition of self-regulatory strategies assist students to regulate their cognition, motivation and behaviour and so to achieve their goals and perform better (Zimmerman et al., 1996).

Stress-management skills enable students to set realistic, manageable goals, to gain insight into themselves and the stress-related consequences associated with their procrastination and ultimately, their academic achievement.

Such prevention and intervention strategies help students to self-regulate their academic work, motivate themselves, and counteract the stresses inherent in Academic Life.

Our future research goal is to investigate a neglected research area regarding the drop-out phenomenon: To measure the ongoing impact of our service on student retention and graduation when compared to rates within the overall student body.

We believe that this piece of research will show once again the need for the existence of Counselling Services as an integral part of the University Services.

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## LONELINESS AND ATTACHMENT REPRESENTATIONS IN ADOLESCENTS AND YOUNG ADULTS IN THE CONTEXT OF PEER RELATIONSHIPS

### REPRÉSENTATIONS DE SOLITUDE ET D'ATTACHEMENT CHEZ DES ADOLESCENTS ET JEUNES ADULTES DANS LE CONTEXTE DES RELATIONS AVEC LES PAIRS

Marta Bastos & Maria Emília Costa |

#### ABSTRACT

Based on a life-span attachment perspective, the present study attempts to the exploration of the relationship between adolescents and young adults' loneliness and representations of attachment in peer relationships. A total of 389 university students from several faculties of Porto University, ages between 17 and 27 years old, completed a multidimensional measure of loneliness (an adaptation of the Loneliness and Aloneness Scale for Children and Adolescents (LACA, Marcoen, Goossens & Caes, 1987) and of the Social and Emotional Loneliness Scale for Adults (SELSA; DiTommaso & Spinner, 1993)), and a measure of peer attachment (the Inventory of Parent and Peer Attachment, IPPA, Armsden & Greenberg, 1987). Results indicated that securely attached individuals experienced lower levels of peer-related loneliness than the insecure ones. Implications of these findings are discussed in terms of the potential usefulness of attachment theory as a framework to understand the experience of loneliness.

Key words: loneliness, attachment, peer relationships, adolescence, young adulthood.

## RÉSUMÉ

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Cette investigation étudie les associations entre le sentiment de la solitude et l'attachement aux pairs on les adolescents et les jeunes adultes. Une mesure multidimensionnelle de la solitude (une adaptation de la Loneliness and Aloneness Scale for Children and Adolescents (LACA, Marcoen, Goossens & Caes, 1987) et de la Social and Emotional Loneliness Scale for Adults (SELSA; DiTommaso & Spinner, 1993)), et une mesure du style de l'attachement (le Inventory of Parent and Peer Attachment, IPPA, Armsden & Greenberg, 1987) ont été recueillies à un échantillon de étudiants de la Université de Porto. Les résultats montrent que les adolescents au style d'attachement secoure ont un moindre sentiment de solitude vis-à-vis de leurs pairs. Les implications des résultats sont analysées selon la théorie de l'attachement comme un cadre théorique pour l'étude de la expérience de la solitude.

Mots clés: solitude, attachement, relations entre pairs, adolescence, vie de jeune adulte

## INTRODUCTION

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Based on a life-span attachment perspective, the present study attempts to explore the relationship between adolescents and young adults' loneliness and representations of attachment in the context of peer relationships. Adolescents and young adults are particularly vulnerable to loneliness, due to the developmental changes in the attachment organisation and to the consequent transformation of parent-child relationships (Weiss, 1991). The entrance to the university world enhances these challenges for students, because it implies several changes concerning the individual's educational, social and environmental world. During this transition we can observe a concomitant escalation of the needs of intimacy, and simultaneously, an emerging drive for independence, autonomy and individuality from parents. By studying the relationship between loneliness and attachment, we hope to raise awareness and provide new orientations and guidelines for student counselling and psychotherapy.

## LONELINESS

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Loneliness is typically defined as “the unpleasant experience that occurs when a person’s network is deficient in some important way, either qualitatively or quantitatively” (Perlman & Peplau, 1981, pp. 31). It is conceived as a subjective experience, not synonymous of objective isolation, which means that: “People can be alone without being lonely or lonely in a crowd” (Peplau & Perlman, 1982, pp. 3).

Following the work of Weiss (1973), Marcoen, Goossens and Caes (1987) and DiTommaso and Spinner (1993), it was decided to use in the current investigation a multidimensional perspective of loneliness, that differentiated the general experience of loneliness on the basis of relationship-specific indices of loneliness - parental loneliness, peer loneliness and romantic loneliness - according to the principal relationships that adolescents and young adults construct. Secondly, the concept of loneliness was broadened to include individual’s attitudes to aloneness. Two different clusters of reactions to be alone can be distinguished. The “aversion to aloneness” is characterised by a fear of being alone or/and by feeling uneasy when lacking the company of others. The “affinity to aloneness” regards an experience of positive feelings when being alone, a constructive time positively correlated with identity development and personality adjustment (Larson, 1990, 1999). This positive attitude is defined as Solitude, which refers to “any active and constructive use of time spent alone” (Marcoen & Goossens, 1993, pp.198). These two attitudes should not be conceived as apposite poles on a single underlying continuum, but rather as representing distinct constructs for adolescents (Goossens, Marcoen, Hees & Woestijne, 1998).

The peer setting was chosen because we have assumed that, as youths move through adolescence, this is the context where they spend more time. Larson (1999) argued that although in the peer setting feelings of loneliness are rare, the adolescents who feel lonelier are more likely to show symptoms of depression, lower self-esteem, lower grade point averages, and more problem behaviour. Chronic feelings of loneliness constitute a high risk for development and are strongly related to a large variety of psychological disorders, such as anxiety, depression, anorexia nervosa and bulimia, alcohol and drug abuse, and suicide (Perlman & Landor, 1999). Loneliness in this context is a significant risk factor, possibly because it is an indicator that the cultural imperative to social attachment has not yet been fulfilled (Larson, 1999).

According to the attachment theory there is a universal human need to establish close enduring emotional bonds to feel secure and explore one's self and the world with confidence (Ainsworth, 1978, 1989; Bowlby, 1969, 1973). Although traditionally the term attachment has been used to describe the affective bond between infants and their primary caregivers (Ainsworth, 1978), over the years this narrow definition of attachment was broadened to include other developmental periods and other attachment figures. By adolescence, interactions with peers began to become important sources of intimacy, feedback about social behaviour, social influence and information, and ultimately, attachment relationships (Ainsworth, 1989; Hartup, 1992). The growing push for autonomy from parents may create a healthy pressure to use peers as attachment figures, so that attachment needs can be met while establishing autonomy in the relationship with parents. From this perspective, adolescence is a period where attachment relationships are gradually transferred from parents to peers. This transfer involves a transformation from hierarchical attachment relationships (in which one primarily receives care and support from a caregiver) to reciprocal attachment relationships (in which both receives and offer care and support) (Allen & Land, 1999).

In our research we've used Bartholomew and Horowitz's (1991) four-category attachment model defined by combining Bowlby's definition of internal working models of self and others (Bowlby, 1973, 1980). Bartholomew and Horowitz (1991) have distinguished two patterns characterised by comfort in becoming intimate with others: the secure pattern, defined by a positive self and others model (low anxiety and low avoidance), and the preoccupied pattern defined by a negative self model and a positive others model (high anxiety and low avoidance). Two other patterns are marked by a hesitancy to become intimate to others: a fearful pattern defined by a negative self and others model (high anxiety and high avoidance), and a dismissing pattern, defined by a positive self model and a negative others model (low anxiety and low avoidance).

## OVERVIEW AND MAJOR HYPOTHESES

Studies that have investigated the relationship between loneliness and attachment have provided general support on the influence of the quality of the attachment experiences on loneliness feelings. DiTommaso and Spinner (1993) found that secure individuals report less emotional and social loneliness, when compared to those who classified themselves as insecure in adulthood. Goossens et al. (1998) observed that securely attached adolescents (classified according to de Wuffel's (1986) attachment) experienced lower levels of parent- and peer-related loneliness when compared to insecure ones. However, to date, no study has been reported that has examined the specific relationship between peer attachment and peer-related loneliness.

Our hypothesis is that the quality of peer attachment will influence peer-related loneliness, by influencing adolescents' representations of self, others and interpersonal relationships (Bowlby, 1973, 1980), the quality of peer relationships (Cassidy & Berlin, 1999), and peer acceptance and social competence (Allen & Land, 1999).



It is expected that fearful and dismissing adolescents will have higher scores on peer-related loneliness, since both of them have a negative disposition towards other people and avoid close contact with others as a result of their expectations of adverse consequences. The dismissing group, however, should be less vulnerable to loneliness when compared to the fearful group, because they don't need the others' acceptance to maintain a positive self-regard (Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991).

Preoccupied individuals, in turn, thanks to their unique high scores on reliance on others, on crying in the presence of others and on the use of others as a secure base (Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991), should be less vulnerable to loneliness when compared to fearful and dismissing individuals. The preoccupied group reaches out to others in an attempt to fulfil their dependency needs. Secure individuals should have the lowest loneliness scores due to their unique capacity to construct adequate, satisfying and intimate relationships.

It is predicted that peer-related loneliness will decrease from late adolescence through adulthood, with a concomitant increase of parental loneliness. By late adolescence, peers and romantic partners assume prominent status in the attachment hierarchy and in the adolescent social world, by replacing parental figures as the predominant source of emotional security (Hazan & Zeifman, 1999; Steinberg & Silverberg, 1986).

Finally, affinity for aloneness should increase during the transition from adolescence to adulthood, with a concomitant decline of aversion to aloneness, as a sign of increased emotional maturity and psychological development (Marcoen & Goossens, 1993).

Gender differences across attachment and loneliness are expected, at least in some dimensions, as a result of Portuguese gender roles differentiation, culture and definition.

## METHOD

### PARTICIPANTS

The sample consisted of 389 university students, age ranged from 17 to 27 years old (mean=21; s.d.=1.64). In the sample, 69.9% were female

and 30.1% male, proportions that are more or less representative of the Portuguese gender distribution in university.

## INSTRUMENTS

## DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION

The participants provided information on age, gender, marital status, and

some other variables, which were not used in the present study.

## LONELINESS

The instrument presented is a self-report questionnaire based on two main measures: the Louvain Loneliness and Aloneness Scale for Children and Adolescents (LACA; Marcoen et al., 1987) and the Social and Emotional Loneliness Scale for Adults (SELSA; Ditommaso & Spinner, 1993). The LACA is a 48-item measure that comprises 4 subscales: Loneliness in the relationships with parents (L-Part), loneliness in the relationship with peers (L-Peer), aversion to aloneness (A-Neg) and affinity to aloneness (A-Pos). The SELSA is a 36-item measure that assesses emotional (romantic and family) and social loneliness. 12 items from this scale were used to assess romantic emotional loneliness (L-Rom). Subjects were asked to respond to the full measure in a 5-point likert type scale (totally agree to totally disagree).

Principal components factor analysis yielded five orthogonal, theoretically interpretable factors, consistent with their original structures, with 4 item exceptions, that seem to be due to language translations and acculturation factors.

Internal consistency estimates (Cronbach alpha) and intercorrelations for these subscales, presented in Table 1, revealed good levels of internal consistency (alphas ranged from .75 to .95), and minimal sub-scale overlap between the five subscales, indicating that they are tapping somewhat different aspects of the experience of loneliness and aloneness. Despite the negative correlation found between the A-Neg and A-Pos scales, these should not be considered opposite, because each probes for nearly independent aspects of the evaluation of aloneness, representing two distinct constructs.

## ATTACHMENT

The Inventory of Parent and Peer attachment (IPPA; Armsden & Greenberg, 1987) was used to determine the quality of attachment to peers. The IPPA is a 25 item self-report questionnaire designed to measure specific working models of attachment, by assessing the positive

Principal components factor analysis yielded two orthogonal, theoretically interpretable factors, different from the authors' three factor structure, labelled as: Trust and Communication in peer relationship (TCP), and Alienation in peer relationship (AP). As can be seen in Table 1, the reliability of the measure reveals

affective/cognitive experiences of good communication and trust in the accessibility and responsiveness of attachment figures and the negative affective/cognitive experiences of anger and/or hopelessness resulting from unresponsive or inconsistently responsive attachment figure. Subjects were asked to respond in a 5-point likert type scale (never true to always true).

good internal consistency for all subscales (Cronbach alphas of .93 and .72). The magnitude of the correlation between the two dimensions, show some subscale overlap, suggesting that the factors are not independent. The pattern of factor loadings suggests a partial confirmation of the notion of positive and negative affective/cognitive dimensions of attachment, as suggested by Armsden and Greenberg (1987).

Table 1. Inter-Correlations and Internal Consistency for Loneliness and Attachment Subscales

Subscales	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Alpha
1.L-Romantic	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	.95
2. L-Peer	.199**	--	--	--	--		--	.90
3. L-Parent	.120*	.184**	--	--	--		--	.90
4. A-Neg	.169**	.185**	.009	--	--		--	.85
5. A-Pos	.193**	.281**	.061	-.124**	--		--	.75
6. TCP	.003	-.560**	-.138**	.081	-.181**	--	--	.93
7. AP	.203**	.631**	.156**	.083	.391**	-.632**	--	.72

\*\*  $p < 0.01$

\*  $p < 0.05$

## PROCEDURES

Subjects responded to the questionnaires in regular university class sessions. They were informed in an introductory letter of the objectives of the study and asked for voluntary participation. The instruments were administered, along with other measures and according to standard instructions. The questionnaires were presented in different

sequences, to control for order effects.

## RESULTS

Initial analyses examined correlations between loneliness subscales and attachment dimensions using SPSS .10 (Table 1). The highest correlation found was between the L-Peer subscale and the two attachment dimensions, showing the critical importance of attachment to peers to the loneliness felt in this domain.

### GENDER AND AGE EFFECTS

One-way ANOVAs revealed significant gender effects for peer-related loneliness (L-Peer), parent-related loneliness (L-Parent) and aversion to aloneness (A-Neg). No significant results were found for the attachment dimensions. Means and standard deviations

for these comparisons are given in table 2. Females scored significantly higher on the L-peer scale than did males, which score significantly higher on the L-parent scale. On the A-Neg subscale, females show higher negative attitudes to aloneness than males.

Table 2. Means and Standard Deviations for Loneliness and Attachment Subscales as a function of Gender

Subscales	Male sample		Female sample		F
	M	SD	M	SD	
L-Romantic	2.468	1.086	2.416	1.128	.1780
L-Peer	1.966	.6015	2.146	.6942	5.949*
L-Parent	2.208	.6223	2.2025	.5801	7.733*
A-Neg	2.979	.5866	3.105	.5530	4.106*
A-Pos	3.160	.5952	3.190	.5090	.2510
TCP	3.763	.4838	3.853	.5697	2.215
AP	2.136	.5316	2.247	.5546	3.3285

\*  $p < 0.05$

Age effects were calculated for two age groups (17-21 and 22-27 years old). One-way ANOVAs revealed significant effects for the L-parent and the A-Neg subscales. Means and standard deviations for these comparisons are given in table 3.

As can be seen, the youngest group score lower than the older on L-parent loneliness. With regard to aversion to aloneness, analysis indicated that the youngest group score higher than the older group. No significant effects were found for the attachment dimensions.

Table 3  
Means and Standard Deviations for Loneliness and  
Attachment Subscales as a function of Age

Subscales	17 – 21years old		22 – 27 years old		F
	M	SD	M	SD	
L-Romantic	2.4590	1.1064	2.3720	1.1351	.5000
L-Peer	2.1109	.6669	2.0504	.6841	.6680
L-Parent	2.0201	.5513	2.2171	.6756	9.129*
A-Neg	3.1144	.5555	2.9625	.5762	6.027*
A-Pos	3.1822	.5305	3.1793	.5499	.0020
TCP	3.8317	.5310	3.8146	.5806	.0800
AP	2.2154	.5479	2.2113	.5554	.0050

\*  $p < 0.05$

## INDIVIDUAL DIFFERENCES IN ATTACHMENT

In order to examine the individual differences in attachment, an exploratory categorisation of subjects was made. Exploratory clusters analysis using K-means cluster was performed on the attachment dimensions, revealing four differentiated groups. Bartholomew's (1990, 1991) theoretical conceptualisation of attachment, guided the interpretation of the cluster solution. Table 4 presents the means of the attachment dimensions of the four patterns on the final cluster solution.

Differences between the four clusters on the attachment dimensions were identified through MANOVAs and follow tests are indicate in table 4. Attachment classifications were distributed as the following: 103 participants were classified as secure (25.1%), 179 as preoccupied (47.1%), 90 as dismissing (23.7%) and 8 as fearful (2.1%). This higher percentage of preoccupied individuals was also observed in Portuguese university students by Matos (2002), with other attachment questionnaires.

Table 4. Peer Clusters and results from a multivariate analysis of variance

Subscales	Clusters			
	Secure	Preoccupied	Dismissing	Fearful
TCP	4.3780 <sub>a</sub>	3.8551 <sub>b</sub>	3.2771 <sub>c</sub>	2.2422 <sub>d</sub>
AP	1.6214 <sub>d</sub>	2.1979 <sub>c</sub>	2.8127 <sub>b</sub>	3.5357 <sub>a</sub>

Note: Means with different sub-scripts are significantly different from one another at  $p < .05$  (Sheffé test).

## ATTACHMENT PREDICTING LONELINESS

In order to explore the validity of assigning subjects to differently defined attachment groups, loneliness differences across attachment were analysed. A one-way analysis of variance was performed to explore attachment style differences in peer-related loneliness.

Significant effects were found for the attachment clusters. Post-hoc comparisons using Scheffé test indicated that the secure and the preoccupied group score significantly lower on the L-Peer scale than the fearful group, with the dismissing group falling in between (Table 5).

Table 5. Means on the L-Peer subscale for the Attachment clusters

Subscale	Clusters			
	Secure	Preoccupied	Dismissing	Fearful
L-Peer	1.6233 <sub>c</sub>	2.0251 <sub>c</sub>	2.6061 <sub>b</sub>	3.6771 <sub>a</sub>

Note: Means with different sub-scripts are significantly different from one another at  $p < .05$  (Sheffé test).

## DISCUSSION

The purpose of the present study was to demonstrate the potential utility of a multidimensional approach to adolescent loneliness. The five aspects of loneliness and attitude towards being alone could be clearly distinguished.

Concerning gender differences our findings are contrary to almost all studies that found boys to be lonelier than girls (see Koenig & Abrams, 1999, for a meta-analysis). Girls' major loneliness feelings on the peer relationship can be associated with the fact that, during adolescence, males replace family time with time spent alone, whereas females replace it with time spent with friends (Larson & Richards, 1991; Montemayor, 1982). The results found an aversion to aloneness, replicated the results found by Marcoen and Goossens (1993) where girls tend to feel more negatively about being alone than boys, which seems to reinforce Larson and Richards (1991) hypothesis. Differences in relation to parental loneliness seems to retract traditional Portuguese families, that are more likely to foster autonomy and independence on boys and more likely to protect girls from exploration and to allow more emotional expression and dependence.

The non-significant age affects across peer relationships alerts to the relative stability of peer attachment and of peer-related loneliness across adolescence and young-adulthood. Normative age-trends were observed in the parental relationship and in aversion to aloneness. It seems that by late adolescence the relationship with peers is already stabilised, in contrast to the relationship with parents where some turmoil can still be found due to the process of separation-individuation.

Our findings show that the attachment theory can be used as a framework for understanding the experience of loneliness in peer relationships. As hypothesised, quality of peer attachment was highly negative correlated to loneliness. Low loneliness levels of secure and preoccupied adolescents can be due to their capacity to feel comfortable with intimacy, which protects them from emotional isolation, and consequently, from feelings of loneliness. Preoccupied individuals' higher dependence on others for establishing an internal self-regard (Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991) is illustrated by their high levels of TCP (even lower than the secure group), and can explain their tendency to score higher than the secure group on peer-related loneliness.

Fearful and dismissing individuals' avoidance of intimacy, characterised by their lower scores of trust and communication with peers, seems to be the cause of their higher loneliness levels. In Bartholomew and Horowitz (1991) study, dismissing and fearful prototype ratings were negatively correlated with self-report and friend-reports ratings of sociability. The higher alienation scores report by the fearful group can be associated with its unique higher levels on peer-related loneliness. Angelic and Grigoris (2002) using the IPPA attachment inventory and the UCLA loneliness scale, found a positive association between the alienation subscale and loneliness levels. Contrary to dismissing adolescents, fearful adolescents strongly depend on others to maintain their positive self-regard, but concurrently avoid them in order to minimise eventual disappointment. In this way, they probably suffer more loneliness, because they simultaneously want and avoid closeness.

It is difficult to compare these findings with other studies linking attachment to



loneliness (Man & Hamid, 1998; Kobak & Sceery, 1988; DiTommaso & Spinner, 1993), because none of them have measured these two constructs in the context of specific relationships. Goossens et al. (1998) observed that the subjects classified (according to de Wuffel's attachment model) as securely attached to their parents, score significantly lower on peer-related loneliness than the insecure ones. In a second sample, the authors examine that secure adolescents score lower than did avoidant and anxious-ambivalent adolescents, with dependent attached individuals scoring in between. These results seems to converge with ours, giving some empirical proofs of the convergence of the De Wuffel's attachment model with the four categories of the Bartholomew and Horowitz model (1991), as suggested by Goossens et al. (1998).

Although with some limitations, this study suggests, in support of previous findings, the possibility of using attachment theory as a framework for examining feelings of loneliness in adolescents and young adults. Attachment theory seems a promising perspective to helping us understand students' vulnerabilities to loneliness and aloneness, by providing useful information about how the individual sees himself and the world, how he reacts to separation and isolation, and how he copes with aloneness.

The peer cluster interpretation was exploratory and needs to be replicated, in order to be validated. Further research is necessary to extend these results, analysing the specific association between attachment and loneliness in different relationships.

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## ATTACHMENT AND ANXIETY IN THE UNIVERSITY CONTEXT: SEPARATE PATHWAYS?

## ATTACHEMENT ET ANXIÉTÉ DANS UN CONTEXTE UNIVERSITAIRE: DES CHEMINS SÉPARÉS ?

Joana Cabral & Teresa Garcia |

### ABSTRACT

A holistic, processual and developmental approach is suggested for the phenomenon of achievement anxiety, namely in the context of college education. Since this relationship comes as a novelty in the field of achievement anxiety this paper firstly aims to enlighten the train of thought that led us to the proposed conceptualisation of the phenomenon. Principally and primarily we intend to clarify the particular mediating relationships that, in our opinion, support and consubstantiate the relationship between attachment and achievement anxiety. Some variables (e.g., competence self-concept, attribution styles, ...) have widely been identified as being associated with achievement anxiety, this approach directs attention towards the underlying structural dimensions. Attachment styles have been viewed as individual factors that may facilitate/impede developmental and adjustment processes, namely, in this case, adjustment to University. Considering the academic context as a stressful/challenging situation implying coping processes and mechanisms of affect regulation, this study aims to explore the relationship between anxiety and attachment as well as the mediating role of coping styles and affect regulation, both of which are pressing elements involved in the transition and adjustment to this context. Investigation tends to show anxiety as a polymorphic phenomenon that may manifest itself in a variety of academic investment patterns (e.g., learning strategies) and emotional experiences. This being the case, it is anticipated that the above-mentioned relationship may explain the emotional experiences and a predisposition to different learning strategies of the different types of students prone to anxiety (classification proposed by Covington, 1985; 1992)<sup>3</sup>.

Key words: attachment, achievement anxiety, coping styles, affect regulation, anxiety

### RÉSUMÉ

<sup>3</sup> This investigation is still in a preliminary stage. Even though there are already some exploratory hypotheses, we made the choice to focus this paper on the more conceptual aspects, since (as we mention above) this approach risks seeming a somewhat unusual and unsubstantiated one. We hope that in the near future we will have a new opportunity to present more concrete results of our research.

Un abordage holistique, processuel et développemental du phénomène de l'anxiété de réalisation est proposé, concrètement dans le contexte de l'enseignement supérieur. Des niveaux débilissants d'anxiété semblent avoir un effet corrosif sur la capacité de réalisation, faisant en sorte que les méthodes d'évaluation traditionnelles représentent une mesure qui sous-estime l'effort et les apprentissages de nombreux élèves. Cet abordage traduit un accent plus centré sur les dimensions structurelles et sous-jacentes aux variables largement identifiées comme étant associées à l'anxiété de réalisation (e.g., auto-concept de compétence, styles attributionnels,...). On parvient à considérer les styles d'attachement comme des facteurs individuels qui peuvent faciliter/difficulter les processus de développement et d'adaptation, notamment, en ce qui concerne l'adaptation à l'Université. En envisageant le contexte académique comme une situation de stress/défi qui fait appel à des processus de coping et à des mécanismes de réglage émotionnel, on cherche à exploiter autant la relation entre anxiété et attachement, que le rôle médiateur des styles de coping et le réglage émotionnel, facteurs primordiaux dans ce contexte de transition et d'adaptation. L'investigation tend à présenter l'anxiété comme un phénomène polymorphique pouvant se traduire en plusieurs patrons d'investissement (e.g., stratégies de réalisation) et d'expériences émotionnelles. Ainsi, on anticipe que les relations auxquelles il est fait référence contribuent à expliquer les vécus émotionnels et les orientations pour les stratégies d'apprentissage pour les différents types d'élèves enclins à l'anxiété (typologie avancée par Covington, 1985; 1992).

Mots clés: attachement, peur de l'échec, types d'adaptation, régulation des affects, anxiété

## INTRODUCTION

The frequency and reoccurrence of anxiety in the academic context is certainly undeniable, as it is one of the principal problems identified in college students – which is one of the reasons for why this phenomenon has caught the attention of so many authors and has been the focal-point of various studies.

Keeping in mind the close relationship between anxiety and the perception of threat (Covington, 1992), achievement anxiety has been closely compared to a fear which is related to or based on a potential or probable failure of the self (see Covington, 1992; Fontaine, 1990; Smith et al., 2002) and as such, the threat itself (e.g., any situation in which the self is exposed to or undergoes some kind of evaluation) can be seen as the foundation or starting point for the development of achievement anxiety.

This brings us to the first question:

## WHAT IS IT THAT MAKES FAILURE SO THREATENING?

As lack of success and failure are frequently (and socially) associated with incompetence and lack of capacity, the situations in which the possibility of failure exists (e.g., public exposure, tests/exams and/or other kinds of evaluation), can be interpreted as threats to the extent that, the higher the probability of failure or low achievement (e.g., a high level of difficulty), the higher the perceived danger to the individuals self-worth (which might be questioned if he fails). Hence, by putting one's self-worth at risk, one is also risking an attack to one's self-esteem. So, is failure itself the real threat or is the perceived danger more related to the meanings and perceptions attributed and associated with failure?

The fear-of-failure seems to stem from the (negative and pessimistic) anticipation of performance in a given situation or task with which the student is confronted. In this way, by estimating the probability of success or failure, the student (judging himself by a set of information, such as personal experiences and social representations) builds expectations related to his achievement (thus anticipating the level of his performance), and those same expectations, in turn, depend on his competency self-concept (Covington, 1992; Fontaine, 1990; Hancock, 2001; VanZile-Tamsen, 2001).

It is clear that the perception of threat is not only subjective but also relative, that is to say, it depends largely on one's personal interpretation and appraisal of failure and success (Dweck, 1999; Maehr & Braskamp, 1986 cit. in Smith et al., 2002; Fontaine, 1990). In other words, the meaning attributed to both success and failure, as well as the threatening nature of the latter and its impact on one's perception of self-worth determines how the individual interprets situations in which he is being evaluated: either as a threat or as a challenge (Covington, 1992). Hence, it is not only the actual fact of failure (e.g., a low grade that doesn't correspond to the personal effort invested in the task) that is particularly threatening, but also (and principally): the individual's personal goals and representations; his personal theories of success and failure; and his perception of self-efficacy and self-concepts of ability and competence.

Investigations in this area tend to support the (undeniable) centrality that the competency self-concept and/or perceptions of efficacy assume in the dynamics of achievement anxiety (see Covington, 1992; Fontaine, 1990; Smith et al., 2002). Generally speaking, it has become evident that personal experiences, perceptions and expectancies of capacity play an important and mediating role in the relationship between achievement motivation (that is to say, the tendency to pursue success vs. the tendency to avoid failure) and anxiety.

Under-valuing of one's own competence and ability results in increased levels of insecurity related to one's results and performance (e.g., these kinds of students tend to perceive lower probabilities of success whereas failure is more readily perceived as the most probable scenario) and, consequently, in the intensification of anxiety.

Low self-confidence, over-valuing of external appraisal as well as a lack of effort and investment in academic tasks are only some of the most frequent characteristics of these anxious students. (Keeping in mind of course that all of the mentioned characteristics don't necessarily have to be present in the same student.) So, in order to protect their self-esteem, these students tend to avoid failure at all costs and, in doing so, they also try to avoid confirming their low achievement expectations - even though, usually the opposite occurs.

Avoidant orientated students tend to perceive performance situations as a threat, whereas achievement orientated students usually interpret those same situations and academic tasks as challenges. As mentioned before, the failure avoidant student

frequently presents negative expectancies of success and, simultaneously tends to anticipate failure. In order to avoid failure they are more likely to adopt passive strategies and escape/avoidant behaviours (Covington, 1992; Smith et al., 2002; VanZile-Tamsen, 2001). Even though their main goal is to avoid confirming their low and negative expectancies, in the end, these same expectancies tend to confirm themselves, which in turn, leads to the increase of anxiety and maintenance of self-protective strategies, thus acting as self-regulating mechanisms for the maintenance of achievement anxiety (Fontaine, 1990; Hancock, 2001).

Even though achievement expectancies (or, more specifically, the competency self-concept) aren't the only factors involved in the development of achievement anxiety, one can conclude that its role in the genesis, maintenance and dynamics of this phenomenon is, nonetheless, crucial and fundamental. As such, understanding what lies beneath the construction and organization of personal theories of competency is obviously of great importance.

This brings us to yet another central question:

## WHAT MAKES THE ATTACHMENT THEORY SUCH A RELEVANT FRAMEWORK FOR THE UNDERSTANDING OF PERSONAL THEORIES OF COMPETENCY AND, CONSEQUENTLY, FOR THE UNDERSTANDING OF THE ACHIEVEMENT ANXIETY PHENOMENON?

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It's generally and consensually accepted that attachment orientations are important configurations for one to interpret their surrounding reality. Investigations show that these frameworks are not only present in the relational dimensions but in other life-dimensions (e.g., Lopez, 2000).

If these attachment styles are intimately related also to perceptions of competence and capacity and if it is based on these (perceptions) that we anticipate the probability of success and failure then it is likely that one's actions and approaches (to pursue success or, in this particular case, to avoid failure) largely depend on those perceptions. Basically, the question here is to recognize the inevitable and inseparable interaction between cognitive, emotional and behavioural phenomena. Over the past years, a series of theories and investigations in this field, have unanimously led to an increasing tendency to use the cognitive-emotional or cognitive-affective binomial. The attachment styles and internal working models could be one of the most essential and relevant foundation for significant processes and dynamics involved in these binomials. Generally speaking, studies tend to show a prospective and transverse influence of these dynamics and conceptions on psychosocial functioning (Kenny & Donaldson, 1991; Lopez, 2000; Lopez et al., 2001; Matos & Costa, 1996; Lopes, Rocha, & Guimarães, 1998; Searle & Meara, 1999)

In supposing that attachment influences the quality of a variety of adjustment and developmental processes, pondering about its influence on the adaptive and functional quality of the strategies used by the student to deal with academic challenges, seems to us of crucial importance. Recent investigations go beyond the relational dimensions which are commonly and automatically associated with attachment orientations. In fact, existing studies already start to focus on the influence of the security of attachment, and the actual attachment styles, on processes that aren't directly or necessarily relational - such as, for example: college adjustment, stress, satisfaction, psychological symptoms and supervision support in the professional context (e.g., Schirmer & Lopez,



1998 cit. in Lopez, 2000; Rice et al., 1995).

Therefore, if the professional dimensions represent the focal point of an adult's active life as well as playing an essential role in the development of his self-esteem, self-confidence and perceptions of personal competency, we can assume and consider that academic tasks and challenges are, in the same way, central to the college student, and play the same role in the construction of his self-concepts. If it firmly stands that attachment orientations can be the decisive foundation of how one understands and constructs personal meanings about the world and its demands and challenges, as well as how one perceives one's relationship and ability to deal with and respond to his environment (Lopez et al., 2001; Matos & Costa, 1996; Ognibene & Collins, 1998), then, we should start to consider the way these personal theories and representations reverberate on the behavioural dimensions of our actions. It may seem logical (and even automatic) to try to understand what underlies the differential ability to cope with challenges, demands and adjustment during the life-span (or in other words, why secure individuals tend to be developmentally, adaptively and functionally more advantaged than insecure individuals). But, even though this deduction may seem a logical and reasonable one, it risks leading to some undesired and less positive consequences. In this particular case, by adopting such a perspective we risk neglecting the importance of this approach. By focussing our attention on the subjacent dynamics and processes it is possible to do a lot more than simply understand them. This approach, which we call progressive, allows us to expand on the already explanatory, comprehensive and valuable theory of attachment. Understanding how the internal working models (and their underlying conceptions about the world and others) influence psychosocial functioning, is the same as understanding the structure of their cognitive-emotional dynamics which influence, and intervene, in the way the individual establishes his relationship with the outer world as well as with its threats and demands - this is a direction for future investigation also suggested by Lopez (2000).

Basically, the question is to focus on and develop a perspective that clarifies the already proved transversal influence of security aspects in attachment structures. The goal is to clarify the way in which one's personal resources (namely the sense of personal security and confidence; the sense of competency and self-worth; exploratory skills; and emotional resilience) influence one's (social, emotional and psychological) functioning and ability to prepare oneself to respond and deal with life tasks and challenges. At present, we can verify that investigations in the domains of attachment (and its respective influences and relationships) are looking for new answers. New answers in the sense that they are more processual. If we began by asking: If there is an existing relationship between the security of attachment and the psychological/emotional well-being of the college student? Or: If different attachment styles facilitate adjustment or if they make it more difficult?

After having discussed the existence of these relationships and influences, the questions asked are different; namely: What underlies these relationships?

## DYNAMIC PROCESSES UNDERLYING THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN ATTACHMENT STYLES AND THE QUALITY OF COLLEGE ADJUSTMENT AND PSYCHOLOGICAL WELL-BEING?

Investigations have already proved the existence of a relationship between attachment styles and the quality adjustment, as well as psychological processes (e.g.,

Fuendeling, 1998; Kenny & Donaldson, 1991; Lopes, Rocha, & Guimarães, 1998; Lopez et al., 2001; Matos & Costa, 1996; Rice et al., 1995). Other studies support the existence of a relationship between the attachment theory and both coping and affect-regulation mechanisms – which in turn are related to psychological and emotional functioning (Fuendeling, 1998; Lopez et al., 2001; Ognibene & Collins, 1998). Thus, we seem to be missing, so called connection studies that connect the two different types of studies.

In the proposed progressive approach, our main goal is to identify processes that mediate the relationship between attachment configurations and both adaptive processes and/or experiences of psychological distress. A considerable number of studies have consistently shown that different attachment styles orientate and predispose the individual's preferential tendency to select different activities and strategies to cope with stressors (e.g., Fuendeling, 1998; Lopez et al., 2001; Ognibene & Collins, 1998). What these numerous and consistent studies tend to suggest, is the existence of coping styles, which are clearly dispositional in their nature and that seem to be determined depending on different attachment styles. But attachments' influence, certainly doesn't limit itself to the quality of the response to external demands and challenges, rather, its influence seems to reach even more elementary and basic levels of functioning – such as the elaboration of emotional experiences (Fuendeling, 1998; Searle & Meara, 1999). That is to say, what we are really dealing with are cognitive-emotional processes. We defend that, in this case, it is these variables that allow us to understand the differences in the idiosyncratic ways that students react and deal with the challenges, threats and demands with which they are confronted during their journey through college. The importance of considering attachments' influence on the configuration of affective regulation processes becomes more than clear. Investigations supporting the existence of this same relationship are important in the degree that, on one hand, these differential qualities are associated with the valence of the internal working models and, on the other, because of the fact that those differences have shown themselves to be significantly influential in the selection of coping strategies.

Finally, we arrive at the destination of the line of reasoning that we've been defending. The main assumption underlying all our hypotheses is that: based on internal working models, attachment configurations predispose the individual to form uniquely an idiosyncratic emotion-regulation configurations as well as dispositional coping styles. In turn, these mediating processes orientate the individual to structure distinct forms of understanding and being, and it is these relational/interactive forms that define the differential quality through which we adapt and respond to the challenges we confront ourselves with.

One question may remain: "what does all this have to do with achievement anxiety?". In our opinion, the response to this question is simple and direct: Everything! It is certainly undeniable that when speaking of the concept of achievement anxiety, one refers to a multidimensional, heterogeneous and dynamic phenomenon – as Covington's Model (1992) defends and supports. As such, it isn't possible to define one prototypical and unique kind of anxious student. In sequence, it doesn't seem viable to define cognitive and emotional experiences (i.e., their perceptions and worries related with success and insuccess), nor the way in which these experiences express themselves in different investment patterns and study strategies (once again in a prototypical way). The general tendency has been to keep in mind and attend to the uniqueness and idiosyncrasies of each student, considering the possibility that they react and cope with tasks in different ways depending on if the task is seen as a threat or as a challenge (Covington, 1992).

The relation we are trying to establish – between achievement anxiety and attachment styles – is in our opinion, based, essentially, on two principal factors. The first refers to the competency self-concept and perceptions of self-efficacy, seeing as these are central dimensions in the achievement anxiety dynamics (Covington, 1992; Fontaine, 1990; Smith et al., 2002) and because these self-concepts are closely related to the

internal working models. It is based on these internal models and representations of the self that we anticipate that each college student, each with their unique valence of these models and different attachment styles, differ and vary in their cognitive-emotional dynamics.

The second factor refers to different types of investment patterns. In this case, just as in the first, it is supposed that the differences in these dynamics differentially direct the student to prefer and adopt certain investment patterns and motivational orientations. Investigations in the domain of achievement anxiety and academic investment tend to clearly show that the different strategies and approaches, as well as the consequent levels of success and the quality of performance, are associated with different types of perceptions and expectancies of self-competence and self-efficacy (Covington, 1992; VanZile-Tamsen, 2001).

Our proposed perspective and conceptualisation of anxiety dynamics in the academic context, is based on another assumption. If the above mentioned context plays a primary role in the life, identity and self-esteem of the college student, then the respective and implied tasks can be seen as both challenges and/or threats (depending on the subjective appraisal of that task), and consequently, as potential stressors (Cleto & Costa, 1996). In this sequence, it becomes increasingly evident that coping mechanisms may be crucial processes and tools in dealing with academic tasks and demands. The previous assumption leads to yet another central presupposition of our conceptualisation; we propose a narrow parallel between coping and study strategies. In a way, it seems most likely to us that study strategies and achievement patterns may be little more than coping styles and strategies applied specifically to the academic context. So, if achievement anxiety can be seen as a reaction to the anticipation of failure and as a manifestation of the fear of this threat, and if these anticipations emerge from one's personal theories and conception of competency, it makes sense that they are closely related to the internal working models and, consequently, to attachment orientations. If, on the other hand, the concepts of self and perceptions of competence represent the foundation for the selection of coping strategies, one can expect that attachment orientations are also able to explain the uniqueness and differential quality of the way students study or approach, prepare and invest in tasks, such as tests/exams, projects and presentations.

From what has been said up till now, it is evident that coping and affect-regulation mechanisms aren't mere mediating variables in the attachment/achievement anxiety relationship but also and principally mechanisms and dimensions that allow us to understand the processual aspects of the anxiety dynamics. In other words, these processes and attachment styles are the ones that help us understand the interaction between emotional, cognitive, motivational and behavioural factors involved in what we refer to as achievement anxious patterns.

## PROPOSED RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN ATTACHMENT AND ACHIEVEMENT ANXIETY PATTERNS – THE SPECIFIC MEDIATING ROLE OF AFFECT REGULATION AND COPING STRATEGIES

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Even though our goal isn't to focus on the mentioned relationship between the processes and mechanisms that characterize coping and affect-regulation, neither is it our purpose to centre our attention solely on the dynamics and strategies related with motivational and achievement orientations and their respective dimensions, maybe it would make some sense to briefly summarize these interactions:

We believe that affect-regulation mechanisms are present in emotional and/or motivational dimensions, namely: 1) in the subjective appraisal of threat and its accompanying personal experiences of fear, preoccupations and emotional tension; 2) in the subjective and idiosyncratic interpretation of results and their emotional and disruptive consequences (such as guilt, fear, embarrassment or feelings of inadequacy); 3) in the attention directed to the consequent levels and intensity of these personal emotional experiences and/or defensive-repressive outcomes; 4) and in the motivational approach and achievement goal management/manipulation (for a more detailed conceptualisation, see Fuendelling, 1998; Searle & Meara, 1999) .

In turn, the coping styles are clearly more related with the more behavioural dimensions of achievement anxiety: depending on expectancies of competency and efficacy, these strategies tend to be either more escape/avoidant and passive or achievement approaching and active (e.g., Fuendeling, 1998; Greenberger & McLaughlin, 1998; Harvey & Byrd, 2000; Heppner et al., 1995; Lopez et al., 2001; Lopez et al. 1998, Ognibene & Collins, 1998; VanZile-Tamsen, 2001).

Considering that the main underlying factors, in both the cognitive-emotional dynamics as well as in behavioural and motivational ones, are the internal working models and the resulting personal conceptions of competency, we maintain that these are likely to be related to the structural and maintain operational dimensions of attachment. It is based on these factors and their valence that we propose that one can anticipate anxious configurations related to academic achievement patterns.

The achievement anxious patterns that we propose ultimately don't differ much from the types of anxious students or "failure prone students" suggested by Covington (1992). According to this author, it is important to understand the unique aspects of the way in which different students (each with their own specific competency self-concept) cope with their worries and their anxiety. The specific combinations of coping strategies that help one deal with a low competency self-concept, as well as the anticipated and threatening fear of (self) failure, could correspond to different types of anxious students.

Our goal is to try to understand the dynamics involved in the particular functioning of each of these types of students, always keeping in mind the more structural variables, namely, focusing on their attachment orientations and, more specifically, on their internal working models. So as to better understand this, we took into consideration the mediating role of coping processes and mechanisms of affect-regulation so as to relate different attachment styles with achievement anxiety.

At the risk of seeming to forget to acknowledge the complexity of this connection it is important to mention that we don't consider this relationship - between a given attachment style and a given type of anxious student - to be a simple one! However, we defend the emotional-cognitive dynamics that emerge from attachment patterns can significantly and preferentially predispose the individual to certain emotional experiences and motivational achievement strategies, which can be more clearly associated with a given style or type of student.

## JOHN, PETER AND MARIA: THREE 'LIVING' EXAMPLES

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We must acknowledge that our intervention and practical experience played a central part in the construction of the proposed relationships. Dealing with university students, allowed us to be closer and more conscientious of the difficulties, challenges and demands with which they are confronted, as well as the personal and emotional

resources implied in the same. Furthermore, it was based on these 'real-life' cases that the dynamics between achievement and anxiety and attachment became increasingly clear to us. The following practical examples may more coherently support these abstract theories which we have been discussing.

The confluence of the cases in which difficulties and worries with relational and academic aspects coincide, could no longer be considered a mere coincidence and, as such, the need to interpret these supposed causalities became increasingly clear. Our clients' narratives and their respective underlying meanings and rationale seemed to us undeniable clues supporting our notion that these simultaneities could, very likely, represent the unequivocal existing relationship between the already mentioned dimensions. Generally speaking, the common characteristics of the problems presented by our clients tended to indicate a vulnerable sense of self. It became evident that our clients' 'torments and agonies' were largely based on insecure attachments which, on the one hand, manifested themselves as insecure and negative conceptions of oneself and others and, on the other, expressed themselves as insecure relationships with their various life-areas – more specifically, with relational and academic aspects.

John's discourse revealed and was marked by risk as well as his imperative need of protection from the same. As he himself admitted, his discourse and personal functioning patterns were common in the achievement and relational areas of his life.

In respect to achievement patterns, when confronted with a given task (e.g., an exam) both John and Peter tended to perceive that task as a threat instead of a challenge. We seem to be dealing with subjective and personal appraisal processes which are clearly based on a negative conception of self (Fuendeling, 1998; Greenberger & McLaughlin, 1998). Both clients presented fearful attachment orientations and negative internal models of self (Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991). As mentioned before, these conceptions may also include and manifest themselves through perceptions of competency as well as self-efficacy expectancies. The perceived threat that the academic tasks/demands represent (e.g., being publicly exposed and risking being seen as incompetent) is accompanied by cognitive-emotional experiences, which in turn, can lead to the phenomenon of anxiety. As such, these academic tasks caused John and Peter to experience such things as: feelings of fear and anxiety; worries about their performance; anticipation of failure and negative public exposure. In consequence to all these negative anticipations and expectancies, just like we saw in John's case with respect to the relational dimensions, the strategies preferred by these students tended to be passive and avoidant so as to escape these painful experiences. Based on a fearful approach, John and Peter tended to devalue and avoid achievement. Both clients suggested that effort and academic investment were frequently perceived as risky because these active strategies implied keeping up hope of success and were incentives for high competence expectancies. So, these kinds of expectancies were extremely anxiety provoking especially as, in the case of lack of success, the painful impact of failure would inevitably be considerably more intense and would be seen as proof or evidence of incompetence.

It is certainly much safer to rely on the argument that one didn't study or invest enough effort than to actually risk trying and investing effort in the task; because in the case of failure, the only possible interpretation and 'logical explanation' for these students is of incompetence and lack of capacity.

Both John and Peter presented low competency self-concepts and negative conceptions of self and accordingly had a tendency to adopt achievement patterns that were characterized by escape/avoidant and passive/repressive strategies. In Covington's (1992) conceptualisation these students would clearly fit into the failure avoidant category. Such avoidant strategies mean that these students invested little effort and didn't involve themselves too much in their study, which consequently ends up leading to negative results and/or poor performance. In other words, these students' approach expresses self-regulation mechanisms which maintain the balance of this

system and which lead to the maintenance of anxiety. Even though the reliance on passive and avoidant strategies may protect self-esteem, it doesn't allow one to unconfirm negative conceptions of competency and self-efficacy (Fontaine, 1990; VanZile-Tamsen, 2001). In summary, in John and Peter's case, failure represents a threat to their vulnerable self-concept and is interpreted as proof or sign of their (perceived and feared) incompetence. In turn, the investment of effort and involvement in academic activities and study are seen as risky since these active strategies increase the probability of being confronted with evidence related to their incompetence or lack of capacity.

Just as in the cases of John and Peter, Maria (who presents a preoccupied attachment orientation) also has negative conceptions of herself. However, just as do the relational approaches, achievement patterns differ between these two types of insecure attachment. Based on her low competency self-concept, Maria presents reduced expectancies of self-efficacy that lead her to perceive academic tasks as threats (just like John and Peter do). But on the other hand and on the contrary to John and Peter (who protect themselves by avoiding and escaping tasks as well as by relying on passive strategies), Maria seems to be stimulated by the perceived threat and fear of failure. This mobilizing effect is so intense that even though constantly doubting her capacities, Maria ends up becoming a 'slave' of her own anxiety as she adopts active and obsessive strategies. In comparison, this exaggerated and over-investment approach also seems to show up in the relational areas of her life. Even though experiencing intense fear and worry with both rejection and loss, someone (like Maria) with a preoccupied attachment style (Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991) tends to invest intensely in relationships. So as to cope with their fears (of loss and rejection) they often tend to base their relationships on dependency and fusion. In sequence to this and in respect to the academic dimensions, Maria fears failure in such a way that she invests intensely in these tasks so as to avoid failing. The reason Maria gives for her over involvement is that she has to study a lot more than her classmates since she doesn't (perceive herself to) have their level of capacity. Once again, we consider that the unique aspects of affect-regulation mechanisms and internal working models that characterize this attachment style are the factors that best explain this 'obsessive' approach - which Covington (1992) would define as Overstriving. For example, Maria seems to be extremely preoccupied with her imperative need to create a competent image of herself that is based on her need for approval. Furthermore, in her case, the threat of failure is clearly and evidently associated with her fear of social rejection. On the other hand, her difficulty in the defensive-repression of her disruptive worries and negative emotions may explain why the process of psychological distancing from the threat of failure is a difficult one for Maria. In turn, her inability to defend herself from the disruptive consequences of this perceived threat expresses itself as a constant and persistent pressure to avoid it. Unlike John and Peter (who have lower levels of achievement), Maria's grades are considerably above average. Even so, this positive feedback isn't effective enough to deconstruct and unconfirm her low and negative competency self-concept. Maria actually admits not having rational motives for her anxiety, nonetheless, she suffers and can't seem to escape her high levels of emotional tension and anxiety each time the examination season is near (if not throughout the whole year)!

Lastly, we shall conclude with a final question to ponder on... a question to which we humbly hope this paper to some extent was able to contribute to finding a possible answer:

Seeing that the multidimensional, developmental, and holistic approach of achievement anxiety is consensually accepted, can the intervention with the college student be thought of without taking these features into account?

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## DOING ONE'S PHD – A DRAMATIC INTERPLAY OF COGNITION, MOTIVATION AND EMOTION

## ECRIRE SA THÈSE DE DOCTORAT — UNE INTERACTION DRAMATIQUE ENTRE COGNITION, MOTIVATION ET ÉMOTION

Helga Knigge-Illner |

### ABSTRACT

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To write one's doctoral thesis means not only completing demanding and scientifically intensive work. For PhD students it also brings with it a process of personal growth in which they have to cope with experiences that threaten their self esteem, develop new competencies and find a new identity. This process seldom proceeds without problems. On the contrary it often results in mental blocks, procrastination and mood swings.

The external conditions of their work and living conditions, such as social isolation at work and prolonged social dependence, can impede progress. However, it is predominantly the subjective pressures on PhD students, their inner conflicts and high ego-involvement, that make gaining a doctorate difficult and demanding. How these demands are experienced will be shown through case examples and discussed with regard to the requisite developmental steps for achieving autonomy and independence. In counseling groups of PhD students the following strategies have proved very beneficial: Project and time management, creative and scientific writing and presentation skills. These strategies are also successful with undergraduate students who have problems with final exam theses.

Key words: doctoral thesis, creative and scientific writing, cognition, motivation, emotion

## RÉSUMÉ

Ecrire une thèse, cela ne signifie pas uniquement mener à bout un projet de recherche scientifique ambitieux. Ce travail entraîne un processus au cours duquel les doctorants doivent surmonter des expériences menaçantes, développer leurs compétences et se construire une nouvelle identité. Ce processus se déroule rarement sans problèmes. Bien au contraire, il déclenche souvent des blocades de travail, des crises existentielles ou des sautes d'humeur.

Les conditions de travail et de vie très particulières — comme l'isolation sociale lors des recherches et la prolongation de la dépendance sociale — compliquent ce processus. Mais le plus souvent ce sont les hautes exigences du doctorant envers lui-même, ses conflits intérieurs et sa forte implication du moi (Ego-Involvement), qui rendent cette phase si difficile. Plusieurs cas seront examinés pour illustrer comment ces exigences sont vécues lors de cette phase, et par quelles étapes de développement le doctorant doit passer avant d'acquérir une plus grande autonomie.

Dans les groupes de doctorants, plusieurs stratégies se sont avérées utiles pour résoudre les problèmes survenant lors de cette phase: la gestion du temps et du projet, les ateliers d'écriture scientifique et des exercices pour présenter les résultats des recherches. Ces stratégies permettent aussi d'obtenir de bons résultats avec des étudiants ayant des difficultés avec la rédaction de leur mémoire.

Mots clés : thèse de doctorat , écriture créative et scientifique, cognition, motivation et émotion

## INTRODUCTION

Writing a dissertation not only means working on a scientific project and ultimately writing a book. It means much more: It includes admission into a specific life phase in which students must greatly change. They have to develop their cognitive competencies as well as their personalities. In a process of psychosocial development they have to find new identities and, in the end, they have to adopt new social roles. Being a doctor means being a fully recognized scientist in a special field of science. The happy ending of this process is not easily attained. Generally a long, hard struggle with many problems confronts students. A considerable number of PhD students lose this struggle. In Germany we have a rather high doctoral dropout rate of about 60 per cent.

Doctoral students suffer from a broad range of problems. They have working difficulties, problems with their living situations and mainly with themselves:

- They frequently don't cope with their work although they actually work permanently. They write hundreds of slightly different versions of the same thought and remain unsatisfied with the results. And finally they develop writing blocks.

- Being quite unsure of what is scientifically sustainable and convincing, they do not dare to write down their thoughts. Instead of writing them down, they flee into ceaseless reading and studies and tend to postpone writing.
- Their motivation often changes, sometimes going up and down between euphoric peaks and depressive moods.
- They often get caught in self-doubt and a fear of failure.

PhD students do not get much attention at German universities. They are not integrated into a special course of studies. And in most cases they even do not get much assistance from their supervisors. They are a very neglected group. Thus, as psychological counsellors, we may assume that there is a strong need for counselling in this particular field. My workshops and groups for PhD students at the Freie Universität Berlin try to answer their needs.

Let us first have a look at the process of writing one's dissertation and especially at the critical conditions of the situations in which most graduate students live and work (Knigge-Illner, 2002).

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## THE BEGINNING OF THE PHD PROJECT AND ITS TURNING POINT

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In the beginning, the task of doing one's PhD seems to be attractive and inviting: It gives students the opportunity to choose their own scientific subjects along the lines of their interests and to dive into the realms of science, where they are called on to prove their intellectual abilities. This is a true challenge for those seriously motivated by scientific interests and not only by the wish to create better conditions for their future careers.

Also attractive is the way of living as PhD students. They are free from the regular tasks of this phase of life, like striving for a good job position, starting a family – all these tasks being postponed for the future. They are free to realize their individual concepts of life like artists or writers of fiction. And they also have the freedom to organize their time and work as they prefer. Not being integrated into any formal institutions, they are almost absolutely entirely independent in organizing themselves.

Consequently these conditions lead to positive and rather high motivation. The first phase of doing one's dissertation is fascinating and pleasant. Dealing with new theories and interesting scientific results, reading as much as one wants, being creative in getting new ideas and conceptualising one's own approach – these really are stimulating and satisfying activities. This is a kind of play phase with the pleasure of manipulating material - in this case mental material - in other words, putting things together and building new constructions like children do with bricks (Winnicott, 1971).

But this part of the first phase ends abruptly, when students start becoming aware that they have to meet certain rules and conventions if their ideas are to be acknowledged. This contact with the reality of scientific standards causes them some problems. These standards demand

- Very intensive work
- A high degree of self-discipline and self-management
- Adapting - or better, submitting - to given conventions and to the directions of their supervisors.

Once the students recognize these demands, the second phase begins: They have to work seriously on a substantial scientific project. In the following process they are

called on to get a grip on their subject, to determine the objectives of their work and to come up with results. So they confront the task of organizing and managing their project and their everyday work. Many of the students are not well prepared for this. Often this is the first time that they have to manage such a large project. They lack the required capabilities. In this second phase working on the dissertation runs the risk of turning into a stressful and self-torturing affair.

## CRUCIAL CONDITIONS IMPEDING THE WORKING PROGRESS

What are the conditions responsible for this threatening turning point?  
The following factors are crucial ones:

- Working predominantly alone with no or little contact with colleagues
- the ambiguity and uncertainty of social roles
- the lack of social feedback which results from postponing conventional social roles
- intensive ego-involvement and tendencies to high aspiration levels
- the difficulties of attaining autonomy in the process of adaptation to the scientific community itself.

These conditions are partly determined by objective external factors concerning PhD students' working and living situation and partly by their subjective internal tendencies to react to their special situation.

## BEING A SOLITARY WORKER

Working on one's dissertation necessarily demands long phases of working alone in one's study room or sometimes in the library. Students often appreciate the opportunity to work independently and in a self-determined manner within their own interests. But they can also feel lonely and isolated. They often miss communication and social contact.

They lead the life of a hermit – far from the regular lives of other people, as for example Janine told me in an interview: "I felt as if I were in a kind of retreat, a

feeling like being taken out of time. Life took place only in my head, totally separated from the real life outside. But sometimes I felt all alone and that nobody was interested in me. Nobody would take notice if I wasn't there" (Knigge-Illner, 2002, p. 23). It can be really fascinating for them to be totally taken by the inner world of their research subject. On the other hand, there is the danger that they will lose contact with reality. That could result in losing adequate standards for scientific work as well, and in becoming distant from pragmatic principles.

## THE LACK OF FEEDBACK

There is another disadvantage: Being

More than that, he is a distant authority,

mostly alone with their work, they lack feedback and acknowledgement for their work in progress. So by lacking social contact, they also miss a very important source of self-confidence and a helpful device for controlling their findings and judgements.

Sometimes, when a student feels unsure of his or her view of a problem and is afraid of taking the wrong way, a partner with whom to discuss these problems is greatly missed. The student longs for a supervisor who could give some clues and advice. But mostly the supervisor – the “dissertation father”, as we call him in Germany – is not around when the students need him.

whom they very seldom visit. Although needing advice from their supervisors, students shrink away from such a meeting.

As Myriam reported, she always got very excited when she visited her supervisor. During the first meetings she was bathed in sweat when she talked to him about her ideas. She was afraid of disappointing him when she revealed her potentially silly thoughts.

PhD students do not have many sources that can reinforce their self-esteem. Their social conditions are so also rather poor.

## UNCERTAINTY OF SOCIAL ROLE

Their in-between-status – not being a student anymore, but also still not being a fully acknowledged scientist – gives them an unsure position. Their future is still uncertain, because the doctoral degree does not guarantee a future scientific career. Doing one's dissertation is not considered true employment. For other people – family members and friends of the same age who have started their professional careers outside the university – it is not easily understandable what a PhD student is really doing. So they often are asked by family members what they are doing, and their parents especially want to know when they will finish their work. PhD students really hate this question. They don't know how long they need to complete their work. Or they avoid announcing a final deadline. People often suspect that the student won't succeed with his or her work and runs the risk of being a potential failure. This could be the reason why some of the students withdraw from social activities and adopt the role of outsiders who do not share the regular everyday interests of their friends and neighbours.

not derive much prestige from the monetary basis of their social status. The conditions for attaining a stable and positive identity are so far rather poor,

PhD students often don't have time for their friends and even for their partners. They often neglect their main relationships and risk their private happiness.

As Janine reported, she really wondered how her boyfriend could have endured the unsatisfying situation with meetings only every second or third weekend and with her permanent complaints about her work when they were together. She told me that she had given up her earlier plans for starting a family. She was afraid she wouldn't have enough time to bring up a child if she went on with her scientific career.

In most cases the regular tasks of this phase of life – like starting a family and establishing social roles for themselves – have to be postponed for the future. So PhD students lack important, gratifying sources for reassuring their feeling of identity too (Bohleber, 1996).

If they are not studying under scholarship conditions, they have to earn their livings usually through simple jobs. With small incomes, they can only afford a low standard of living. Consequently they do

but PhD students nevertheless really have a strong sense of identity, as I came to know.

Where does this come from?

## VERY HIGH EGO-INVOLVEMENT

PhD students usually have high ego-involvement while doing their dissertations: They are highly motivated: they feel challenged to do very good work and to give their best efforts.

While interviewing them, I met ambitious aspirations like the following:

- They want "to deepen their knowledge" and "become an expert in their special field".
- They want "to come to new and original findings, important results and fascinating views".
- They wish "to create their own little work" in writing a book.

Their inner goal is to prove their intellectual competence in doing their dissertation. Usually they also try to attain rather demanding scientific standards.

They attribute a very high value to their scientific work and place their dissertation into the centre of their lives. All other things – even personal relationships – become secondary.

So the dissertation plays the leading role in their lives – a much too important role, I think, because it can lead to some negative effects.

One disadvantage of their strong motivation is a tendency to overestimate the scientific demands and to expect too much from themselves. As a result of their high ego-involvement, they run the risk of losing the necessary detachment from their work and even losing a realistic view.

## CLOSE ATTACHMENT TO THEIR DISSERTATION

They usually maintain a close attachment to their dissertation. They are striving to meet the aspirations of their "ideal selves" and realize themselves through their work. Consequently their dissertations turn out to be about their own egos and elicit narcissistic feelings. They put a lot of energy even into trivial work, which sometimes only results in minor improvements. They stick to their products and cannot separate from older versions of their dissertation. They are preoccupied with their theses; even if they intend to enjoy their leisure time, their thoughts circle around their work, always accompanied by

a bad conscience. Their self-esteem depends to a high degree on their experiences of success and failure with their work. As they tend to overestimate both sides, this process underlies frequent variations in self worth.

Most PhD students are acquainted with these emotional ups and downs between "just being great" and at other times "feeling totally incapable" of bringing their projects to an end at all. Self-doubt and fear of failure are the other sides of their high aspirations and the expectancy to be perfect in their work.

## VULNERABILITY TO CRITICISM

Their intense identification with their work makes the students vulnerable to critical reactions from outside, especially from their supervisors. Experiences with criticism can arouse strong feelings and cause dramatic courses of action.

One of the students in my course told me how she experienced the criticism of her supervisor when he returned the first version of her dissertation to her. She saw many remarks written in her manuscript, and she got really angry about it. She couldn't read them at first. After she had overcome her initial aversion, she read his remarks intensively, complained about his pedantic way and finally was in the mood to give up. It cost her more than half a year before she could go on with her

dissertation. Much later she discovered that his remarks had not been all that negative and destructive, but she had been hurt very deeply by his criticism. The fear of getting negative dissertation feedback leads students to avoid or postpone its presentation. They try to avoid negative feelings of shame and embarrassment associated with bad impressions of their presented achievements. So they first try to make it unassailable by endless revisions before they are ready to present the work to the public. And they try to prevent possible criticism from outside by developing a strong tendency for self-criticism. They have great difficulty in lowering their aspirations and assessing their abilities on a realistic level.

## COPING WITH INNER STRUGGLES

It seems to belong necessarily to the project of writing one's dissertation that students have to fight their inner struggles. Their self-doubts and their fears of possible failure are the opposite sides of their high aspirations and inadequate self-evaluations. Apparently this belongs to the process of becoming a doctor, to be confronted with the borders of one's intellectual ability and creativity. Nobody seems to be spared this self-doubt.

But controlling one's aspirations and self-assessments is also a necessary step in order to come to a realistic view of both: the project with its real demands on the one hand and the available ability that characterizes the real self on the other. This task is a precondition for the next step: going outside into reality to test if the work really meets scientific standards.

## THE RELATIONSHIP WITH THE "DISSERTATION FATHER" – STRUGGLING FOR AUTONOMY

The relationship with their supervisor, in German their "Doktorvater" – meaning dissertation father – mostly proves as difficult as the relationship with the dissertation itself. It is characterized by

her function as the scientific authority and representative of university, has to judge if the candidate is competent enough to be appointed as a doctor. That gives the supervisor real power and places the PhD



struggles and unsatisfied wishes. The dissertation father, or supervisor, in his or dependency often develops which comes from a father-son-kind of relationship. This parent-child pattern is also reflected when the supervisor is a woman. The image of the dissertation mother is more or less characterized as paternalistic too. The student not only wishes to receive the supervisor's acknowledgement as an authority and member of the scientific community, he or she longs even more for the supervisor's "fatherly" attention and expects praise. In the inner world of the student, the supervisor sometimes acts as a severe figure and sometimes as an admired model whose footsteps they try to follow. When they work alone in their study rooms, the supervisor often is the person whom they address within their thoughts when they are writing. They want to be close, so that he or she can assist them with their questions. Janine described this situation in the following way:

"Sometimes when I felt totally unsure; I wished I could talk to her, and she would tell me what was right or wrong and would help me out of this terrible situation. The rare discussions with her were extremely important for me. Her words gave me the feedback I really was craving for. They encouraged me a lot." (Knigge-Illner, 2002, p. 47). But Janine made some critical remarks too: "After several months of working alone, she was for me the only anchor connecting me with life outside. Now I think I gave her an exaggerated importance; every single word from her was tremendously important. It totally dictated my well-being. She was so great and I felt so little." (p. 47). The supervisor's importance results from his or her function as an authority figure whose demands one would like to meet. Students tend to project their own aspirations and standards on this person and want his or her assurance of their competence. And they want to be loved by the supervisor, too. In this way they give him or her the power to influence their own feelings of self-esteem very deeply.

student in a dependent role. But parallel to this hierarchical constellation, a further

Negative experiences, like being criticised wrongfully or getting less attention than other candidates, may turn into aggressive feelings against the supervisor. The group offers them the opportunity to express their ambivalent feelings towards their supervisor openly and to work on their conflicts with him or her. The feedback from the group is very helpful in obtaining a more realistic view. By their furious complaints to other people, they carry out verbal attacks against his or her perceived superiority. For some of them, it is a hard struggle to become more independent. It's a long developmental process.

Janine experienced a turning point when she no longer felt so dependent on her supervisor's reinforcement. It appeared when she thought: "Now I'm ahead, she can't tell me what is wrong or right, any more, because I am superior in my field of knowledge. I know better than she does what the right way of argumentation is." (p. 47). But that point does not always lead straight on to a happy end. For some students the struggle just begins with this point. The supervisor won't always prove to be very understanding, sometimes acting in a strict authoritarian way. The supervisor can make a certain way of argumentation as the central condition, as in the example of Paula: She intended to focus her discussion about exam anxiety mainly on cognitive anxiety theories. But her supervisor insisted on a very broad discussion of the psychodynamic theories, too. Paula tried to propose a compromise, but he wouldn't accept it. They had several very unpleasant meetings arguing about how to define the subject of her dissertation. Finally she decided to choose another professor as her supervisor.

Doing one's PhD is also a process of psychosocial development, in which students have to take off from an authority, make their own way and find their own more or less independent position. It is a process of emancipation, in which students have to face hard conditions of reality and cope with their inner struggles too. This process demands a considerable amount of courage and self-assertiveness. Earlier

experiences with their real parents can greatly complicate this process.

## THE COUNSELLING CONCEPT

The previous description of the situation and the problems of PhD students resulted from our experiences with this group of clients. They have motivated us to develop a concept for group counselling. For several years we have run workshops especially for doctoral candidates. They cover six weekly sessions, followed by monthly meetings up to one year. Our workshops are open for all students seeking help with their working project. Consequently our groups are rather heterogeneous: Most students have the normal problems of the dissertation process, as described above, a few of them suffer from more serious psychological conflicts and disorders.

The basic objectives of my counselling concept intend to improve defined skills of students, so that they are able to cope with the critical conditions and demands of their work and life situations and to give them the opportunity to gain in self esteem and self assurance. To this end they learn some helpful strategies and get the opportunity to practice defined behaviours. Exercises and experiences within the group are intended to help them succeed with their working project as well as to progress with their psychosocial development.

Naturally, students also get the opportunity to talk about their difficulties and to experience the healing effects of contact with other students in the same situations. Talking about their problems gives them more insight into their emotional and often irrational behaviours. So they may discover, for example, the destructive influences of their extremely high aspirations. Or they are confronted with their avoiding behaviour in response to their anxiety about going the wrong way with their research.

A further objective of my counselling concept aims to promote a more rational attitude to their working project. With this intention I especially recommend using the strategy of project- and time management.

The most important aspects of the workshop program are:

- Project and time management,
- Creative and scientific writing and
- Exercises in presentation.

During the monthly follow-up sessions after the end of the workshop, the participants' individual questions and problems are given special emphasis.

## PROJECT AND TIME MANAGEMENT

Time management should help students to develop their organizational skills and especially their abilities for self-management.

The principles of systematically planning objectives and working steps

in front of a huge mountain of work, students are open to adopt these recommendations. Even if time management is not totally new for them, they are very interested in its principles, hoping to acquire a tool to improve their

as well as controlling the outcome are very helpful for turning initially global ideas into realistic work projects. Sitting helplessly

The big advantage of time management is that it permanently calls for decisions; decisions about the goal, the next step and the criteria for attaining the goal. It encourages the students to take control instead of letting it go. Being obliged to estimate the amount of time they need for every working step in advance, they learn to use their time more economically.

working behaviour.

Another positive effect is that they are also called on to control their aspiration levels and to decide if they really want to invest the necessary time into their work. They also use the group as a controlling instrument for themselves and their work, announcing the objectives they want to attain by the next group meeting. This really helps them to realize their goals.

## CREATIVE AND SCIENTIFIC WRITING

Because the problems of PhD students often result in writing difficulties like writing blocks or endless revisions and rewritings, I let them experience the stimulating effects of creative writing exercises. In this way they learn how to get rid of their inner censor and discover their creative potential. Through techniques like Free Writing, Clustering and Mind Mapping they gain more confidence with their own ideas, and they improve their writing skills. Writing techniques are even helpful to find one's own language and come to one's own opinion.

Exercises such as the following are very stimulating for learning to defend one's position: Students are given the task of writing a very positive review about their work, starting with given initial phrases like: "Really brilliant is his/her..." or "Never before it has been proved so convincingly that...."

Reading their text out loud generally encourages them to be more assertive.

Students in my groups like these exercises very much and use them regularly with their work at home. Some of them have become real fans of the clustering method.

## EXERCISES IN PRESENTING THEIR DISSERTATIONS

Through role playing exercises students are encouraged to present their thoughts and concepts – even in an unfinished state. They are, for example, asked to give a short talk about an aspect of their dissertation after a very short preparation time. Or they have to give an interview to a radio reporter about the actual state of their findings. Or we play a situation in which one group member has to present his or

her project in order to get a grant for it and another one takes the role of being either a benevolent or a very severe reviewer.

Through this training, they develop more self-assertiveness and differentiate their abilities in presentation – both of which are useful predispositions for the formal disputation of their dissertation in front of the scientific public at the end of their work.

## FINAL REMARK

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In my follow up interviews after they had completed their final exams, students reported that they had profited a great deal from these strategies. Accompanying their developmental processes during a phase of more than one year, I got the impression that they had greatly gained in competence and in self-esteem too.

A group counselling concept combining the two objectives – giving PhD students insight into their behaviour on the one hand, and improving their abilities for managing their project on the other hand, seems very efficient..

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# EXAMINATIONS, PERFORMANCE EXPECTATIONS, COGNITIVE APPRAISAL, AND PSYCHOLOGICAL HEALTH IN GREEK UNIVERSITY STUDENTS

Evangelos C. Karademas, Anastasia Kalantzi-Azizi, & Georgios Efstathiou |

## ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to examine the psychological impact of a common academic stressful encounter, that is an examination period, on a student population, as well as to investigate the ways that certain factors interact within this process. Our study took place at the Schools of Philosophy and Physics at the University of Athens and 291 students participated in it. Measures were referring to psychological health, self-efficacy expectations, cognitive appraisal, and coping strategies. The questionnaires were completed in three phases: three months and one week before an examination period, and one week after the completion of this period. According to the findings, psychological health was negatively and significantly infected by the stressful encounter, especially between females. Prior health levels, certain coping strategies for dealing with the examinations (tension reduction, social support, and positive approach), threat, and self-efficacy expectations regarding exams were the most important variables in predicting health status during the examination period. The importance of these findings for designing and implementing effective intervention programmes for dealing with the examination stress was also discussed.

Key words: psychological health, self-efficacy, coping strategies, academic context, stress management

## RÉSUMÉ

Le but de cette étude était d' examiner l' impact psychologique de la période des examens, moment particulièrement stressant sur une population des étudiants, et d' étudier les manières dont certains facteurs agissent les uns sur les autres au cours de ce processus. Notre étude a eu lieu dans les écoles de Philosophie et de Physique de l' Université d' Athènes et 291 étudiants y ont participé. Les évaluations se rapportaient à la santé psychologique, aux attentes d'une efficacité personnelle, à l' évaluation cognitive et aux stratégies d'affrontement. Les questionnaires ont été remplis en quelques trois phases : trois mois avant une période d' examen, une semaine avant et une semaine après l' accomplissement de cette période. Selon les résultats, la santé psychologique a été négativement et sensiblement affectée par le stress des examens particulièrement chez les femmes. Le niveau antérieur de santé, certaines stratégies pour faire face aux examens (réduction des tensions, support social et approche positive), la menace et les attentes d'une efficacité individuelle concernant les examens étaient les variables les plus importantes de l' état de santé pendant la période des examens. L' importance de ces résultats pour concevoir et mettre en application des programmes pertinents pour traiter l' effort aux examens a été également discutée.

Mots clés: Santé psychologique, efficacité personnelle, stratégie d'affrontement, contexte universitaire, management du stress

## INTRODUCTION

University students are faced with a whole range of stressful problems and situations. New developmental demands, the need for adaptation to a new and demanding educational process, the relationships with other students, as well as anxiety regarding future perspectives and career, are situations highly distressing for the student population. Students also have to deal with a series of difficulties, such as assignments, examinations, and other study demands during daily academic life.

These difficulties are often related to the development of a series of psychological problems, such as depressive symptoms, poor self-esteem, anxiety, procrastination and drop-out (Kalantzi-Azizi, 1996). Of course, the relationship between stress and health is well examined and documented (see for example, Dohrenwend, 2000; Karademas & Kalantzi-Azizi, 2002).

Our purpose through this study was to closely examine the interactions between a common academic stressful encounter (the examination period), students' psychological health, coping, and several cognitive factors (self-efficacy and appraisal variables), in order to gain a better understanding of these relationships.

Psychological stress has been conceptualised in three main ways (Baum, 1990). Stress has been treated as a stimulus (focusing on stressful stimuli or stressors), as a response (focusing on people's reactions to stressors), or as a process that includes stressful stimuli and reactions. This approach also adds an important dimension: the transactions (interactions and adjustments) between the person and the environment

(Lazarus & Folkman, 1984a, 1984b). According to this approach, stress is rather a process in which a person evaluates the situation and influences in an active way the impact of a stressor through behavioural, cognitive and emotional strategies. According to Sarafino (1999), stress is the condition that results when person-environment transactions lead the individual to perceive a discrepancy between the environmental demands and the person's resources. Within this perspective, Lazarus (1966, 1993) and his co-workers (Lazarus, Averill, & Opton, 1970; Lazarus & Folkman, 1984a, 1984b) focus on cognitive appraisal as a key variable.

Cognitive appraisal is an assessment process by which people assess two factors: whether a situation threatens well-being (primary appraisal), and whether there are resources available for dealing with this situation (secondary appraisal). In 'primary appraisal', a situation is judged as being irrelevant, benign-positive, or stressful. Stressful appraisals conclude in three kinds of appraisal, that is, harm, threat, and challenge (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984a, 1984b). Harm represents damage already done. Threat refers to the potential for harm and it is experienced when the person anticipates future harm or loss. Finally, challenge refers to the potential for gain even under difficult circumstances.

In 'secondary appraisal' the person evaluates available resources and options in order to cope with the stressful situation.

Cognitive appraisal depends on several environmental, situational, and inter-person factors, such as self-efficacy, hardiness, sense of coherence, beliefs about self and environment, values, etc. (Kaplan, 1996; Holahan, Moos, & Schaefer, 1996).

Of great significance for the stress and coping process is the concept of self-efficacy expectations. According to Bandura (1997), self-efficacy expectations are judgements about how well an individual can organise and carry out courses of behaviour necessary to cope with prospective situations involving ambiguous, unpredictable and stressful elements. Self-efficacy determines whether coping behaviour will be initiated, how long it will be sustained, and how much effort will be expended. Self-efficacy expectations are part of the broader cognitive appraisal that take place in the stress process (O' Leary, 1992).

The purpose of the present study is: (a) to examine the relationship between certain appraisal factors and psychological well being in the presence of a stressful encounter (the examination period); (b) to examine the ways that these appraisal factors interact.

## METHOD

Two hundred and ninety one (291) university students participated in the study (201 were females and 90 males). Their average age was 22.71 years (SD = 2.31). The participants were coming from the School of Philosophy and the School of Physics at the University of Athens.

Psychological health was assessed by the 28-item version of the General Health Questionnaire, as adapted in Greek (Moutzoukis, Adamopoulou, Garyfallos, & Karastergiou, 1990). GHQ is a well known and extensively validated screening questionnaire, and it provides a global index of psychological health. In general, higher scores indicate the presence of more symptoms.

Self-efficacy expectations for dealing with the examination period was measured by a 10-item questionnaire comprising of two factors. The first factor, 'examination self-efficacy', assesses how capable the student thinks he/she is in order to deal effectively

with an exam (e.g., “capable of achievement during an exam”, “capable of being relaxed during an exam”). The second factor, ‘study self-efficacy’, assesses the degree of capability in order to study effectively for the forthcoming examinations (e.g., “capable of achieving a high performance”, “study adequately in order to achieve”). Coping was measured by the Ways of Coping Checklist (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984a) as adapted to the Greek population (Karademas, 1998). The Checklist consists of 6 factors. Each factor represents a cognitive and/or behavioural strategy in order to deal with a stressful situation. Students were asked to assess how frequently they used each item regarding the difficulties they met during the last examination period. These factors are: I) ‘positive approach’ (in this factor two components-strategies loaded, namely, problem solving (7 items, e.g., “I knew what had to be done, so I doubled my efforts to make things work”), and positive appraisal (3 items, e.g., “Changed or grew as a person in a good way”)), II) ‘Denial/passive acceptance’ (8 items, e.g., “Went on as if nothing had happened”), III) ‘Social support’ (5 items, e.g., “Talked to someone to find out more about the situation”), IV) ‘Self-isolation’ (4 items, e.g., “Avoided being with people in general”), V) ‘Seeking help from God’ (2 items, e.g., “I prayed”), and VI) ‘Tension reduction’ (3 items, e.g., “Got away from it for a while; tried to rest or take a vacation”). Scores were calculated by summing the ratings. Higher scores indicate more frequent use of each strategy.

Appraisal was assessed by evaluating the degree to which participants felt threatened or challenged by examinations. They were asked to indicate on a five-point Likert-type scale (0 = not at all, 4 = a great deal) the extent to which they felt each of a series of six emotions regarding exams. These emotions are grouped into two appraisal categories (Folkman & Lazarus, 1985), that is, threat (worried, fearful, anxious), and challenge (confident, hopeful, eager). Participants were also asked to evaluate the reasons why the forthcoming examinations might be stressful, that is the stakes they had to deal with.

Participants completed the questionnaires three times: in the middle of the spring semester (three months before the examination period), a week before exams, and one week after the completion of the examination period. At the first administration, students were asked to complete the GHQ. At the second, they were asked to complete the GHQ again, the self-efficacy questionnaire, and the threat, challenge and stakes scales. Ways of Coping with the problems raised in relation to the recent examination period and, once again, GHQ was assessed at the third administration. Participants were not aware of the purpose of the study until after the end of the third administration.

## RESULTS

Table 1 presents the means and standard deviations of the GHQ scores for the two genders at the three administrations, as well as paired t-test for the differences between means. A significant increase in symptoms reported is noted for both genders



just before the examination period. However, this increase disappears just a week after the examination period. Differences are more obvious between females.

Table 1  
GHQ scores at the three stages of the study

	GHQ score			t-test		
	3 months before examinations (a)	at the examination period (b)	the after examination period (c)	a-b	b-c	a-c
overall	22.95	25.95	23.33	4.70***	3.65***	0.42
males	18.82	20.44	18.89	2.03*	1.99*	0.25
females	24.60	28.42	24.97	4.26***	3.14**	0.27

\*  $P < 0.05$ , \*\*  $P < 0.005$ , \*\*\*  $P < 0.001$

Table 2 presents the means, standard deviations, and the correlation matrix between all variables included in the analysis. According to the table, GHQ score at the examination period is highly correlated to self-efficacy, threat, challenge and stakes (Pearson  $r = 0.25 - 0.54$ ;  $P < 0.001$ ). With respect to coping strategies, GHQ score is significantly correlated to positive approach ( $r = -0.25$ ;  $P < 0.001$ ), and tension reduction ( $r = -0.32$ ;  $P < 0.001$ ). Between GHQ score before and after the examination period there is a Pearson  $r = 0.57$ ,  $P < 0.001$ . Both examination and study self-efficacy expectations are positively related to positive approach ( $r = 0.29$  and  $0.46$ , respectively;  $P < 0.001$ ), and negatively related to self-isolation ( $r = -0.24$  and  $-0.21$ , respectively;  $P < 0.001$ ). Self-efficacy expectations are also highly related to threat, challenge and stakes ( $r = -0.25$  to  $0.50$ ;  $P < 0.001$ ). Regarding the relationship between coping strategies and emotions, among others we found that positive approach is related positively to challenge ( $r = 0.31$ ;  $P < 0.001$ ) and negatively to stakes ( $r = -0.19$ ;  $P < 0.005$ ); self-isolation is related positively to threat ( $r = 0.18$ ;  $P < 0.005$ ) and stakes ( $r = 0.19$ ;  $P < 0.001$ ) and negatively to challenge ( $r = -0.14$ ;  $P < 0.05$ ). Tension-reduction is related negatively to threat ( $r = -0.25$ ;  $P < 0.001$ ) and stakes ( $r = -0.20$ ;  $P < 0.001$ ).

Table 2  
Means, standard deviations, and intercorrelations of the variables of the study

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)	(10)	(11)	(12)	(13)
1. Prior GHQ score	1.00												
2. Exams GHQ score	0.57***	1.00											
3. Exams self-efficacy	-0.29***	-0.47***	1.00										
4. Study self-efficacy	-0.32***	-0.40***	0.60***	1.00									
5. Positive approach	-0.22***	-0.25***	0.29***	0.46***	1.00								
6. Denial/ acceptance	-0.02	-0.07	-0.17**	-0.10	-0.07	1.00							
7. Social support	-0.02	0.12	-0.07	-0.01	0.29***	-0.04	1.00						
8. Self-isolation	0.10	0.15*	-0.24***	-0.21***	-0.13*	0.30***	0.08	1.00					
9. Help from God	0.06	0.11	-0.12*	0.06	0.21***	0.04	0.17**	0.13*	1.00				
10. Tension reduction	-0.23***	-0.32***	-0.23***	0.15*	0.11	0.13*	-0.03	0.02	-0.08	1.00			
11. Threat	0.32***	0.54***	-0.43***	-0.23***	-0.04	0.05	0.13*	0.18***	0.27***	-0.25***	1.00		
12. Challenge	-0.18**	-0.25***	0.35***	0.50***	0.31***	-0.09	-0.01	-0.14*	0.08	0.08	-0.11	1.00	
13. Stakes	0.24***	0.38***	-0.47***	-0.45***	-0.19**	0.05	0.08	0.19***	0.01	-0.20***	0.48***	-0.33***	1.00
Mean	29.95	25.95	10.12	8.61	19.04	6.26	8.91	3.49	2.49	4.84	5.57	5.01	9.10
Standard Deviation	11.26	12.01	2.64	2.60	5.43	2.70	3.56	1.97	2.02	1.70	2.90	2.44	4.68

\*  $P < 0.05$ , \*\*  $P < 0.01$ , \*\*\*  $P < 0.001$

In order to determine the size of the relationship between GHQ score and appraisal variables, after controlling for prior psychological symptoms and coping strategies, we

performed a forward stepwise hierarchical regression analysis of GHQ score at the examination period on prior GHQ score (entered on step 1), coping factors (entered on step 2), and threat, challenge, and self-efficacy (entered on step 3). Results are presented in Table 3. An overall 56% of the variance in GHQ score was explained. Prior GHQ score accounted for the 34% of the variance, and coping strategies for another 9% of the variance. An additional 13% was explained by two appraisal variables, that is, threat and examination self-efficacy. The  $\beta$ -coefficient for threat was positive, and negative for self-efficacy.

Table 3  
Regression of the GHQ score at the examination period on prior GHQ score, coping and appraisal variables

	$\beta$	T	R <sup>2</sup>	F	d.f.
Step 1			0.34	116.40**	1, 228
Prior GHQ score	0.58	10.79**			
Step 2 (coping)			0.43	43.03**	4, 225
Tension reduction	-0.24	-4.56**			
Social support	0.17	3.29*			
Positive approach	-0.14	-2.58*			
Step 3 (appraisal variables)			0.56	46.61**	6, 223
Threat	0.27	5.10**			
Examination self-efficacy	-0.18	-3.35**			

\*  $P < 0.01$ , \*\*  $P < 0.001$

## DISCUSSION

It is interesting that the impact of examinations, as a stressful encounter, had a significant effect on psychological health, as assessed by the GHQ. Participants reported a significant increase of symptoms, even though most of them are familiar with exams and examination periods. It is also interesting that this increase in symptoms disappeared just after the termination of the stressful period. The GHQ score decreased at the pre-exams levels. It is obvious that a stressor can effect psychological health even for a short period of time. The relationship between stress and health is known and based on sound theoretical and research ground (Dohrenwend, 2000; Kasl, 1996). However, the way that different kinds of stressors

(single, repeated, chronic, etc.) interact with other factors in their effect on health and functioning are not well examined. Therefore, more research efforts are needed. For example, it would be interesting to examine the impact of a single but repeated stressor, such as exams, on health and functioning over a long period of time and determine whether its effects last only for the impact period or if it can cause more permanent problems.

Our data also suggest that appraisal variables play an important role in the person-environment interaction: challenge and strong self-efficacy expectations are related to less symptoms, more frequent use of 'positive approach' and less frequent use of 'self-isolation'. On the other hand, threat and weaker self-efficacy are related to more symptoms, more frequent use of 'self-isolation' and less frequent use of 'positive approach' and 'tension reduction'.

With respect to the coping strategies used, three of them, namely, positive approach, tension reduction and social support, appear to be more related to health outcome. According to the correlations, the more frequent use of problem solving and positive appraisal, and the more frequent use of ways for reducing tension (such as, relaxation) are referred, the less symptoms are reported. Other studies also support that problem solving and positive appraisal are coping strategies that may facilitate adaptation and well-being (Zeidner & Saklofske, 1996). Surprisingly, social support predicted GHQ score in a positive manner. The type and/or the timing of the social support offered in interaction with the type of stressor might be the reason for its negative impact on psychological health.

There are several limitations to this study. For example, the study does not take into consideration other types of cognitive appraisal (such as, harm or loss).

Although, this is a basic research study, it can provide us with some practical ideas regarding the formulation of intervention programmes in favour of our students. The study demonstrates the importance of self-efficacy expectations in the stress and adaptation process. Thus, an intervention programme that would address the issue of the enhancement of examination related self-efficacy expectations could help students manage their stress more effectively and achieve a higher performance. Such programmes have already been developed with success. For example, Kalantzi-Azizi, & Karademas (1999) have developed a group intervention programme for students based on an effort to enhance self-efficacy through its four principle origins, that is, enactive attainments, vicarious experiences, verbal persuasion, and physiological state. The intervention programme utilised cognitive-behavioural techniques and strategies, such as, cognitive education, relaxation, guided imagery, homework assignments, role play, daily records of events, thoughts and emotions, cognitive restructuring. The aim of the programme, which was proved to be effective, was to improve students' psychological health, through the enhancement of self-efficacy expectations. Other intervention endeavours could also rely on our findings: The reduction of ambiguity regarding examinations (e.g., dates, ways of assessing etc.), more accurate ways of assessing and grading, and the enhancement of problem solving abilities could result in the decrease of threatening emotions that, according to our data, are responsible for a reduction in well-being. Such efforts could be parts of prevention programmes organised and implemented by Counselling Services for Students.

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## CAREER GUIDANCE IN HIGHER EDUCATION: RESEARCH DATA RELATED TO CASE STUDIES

## ORIENTATION PROFESSIONNELLE DANS L'ENSEIGNEMENT SUPÉRIEUR: RÉSULTATS D'UNE RECHERCHE MENÉE À PARTIR D'ÉTUDES DE CAS

M. Rosario Lima & Helena M. Guilherme |

### ABSTRACT

A research concerning "Guidance and Career Development with University Students" was developed with a sample of 1204 university students from the first and second years. Subjects like transition from secondary school to higher education, entering higher education and students' adaptability were emphasized.

A follow-up study, with only the psychology student's group, was provided three years later, which means there are results from the same individuals, and also information about the kind of needs and doubts they were feeling, at two different moments: when they started to study Psychology and, therefore, entered a new environment and when they were finishing their studies.

This study intends to present research data obtained through some case studies' analysis and their contribution to help the student, the counsellor and the interaction between them.

Key words: student guidance and counselling, transition from school to higher education, students' needs, career choice, life span approach

### RÉSUMÉ

Une recherche concernant "Orientation et développement de la carrière à partir d'étudiants universitaires" a été développée à partir d'un échantillon de 1204 étudiants universitaires des premières et secondes années. Les sujets les plus abordés ont été la transition de l'école secondaire à l'enseignement supérieur, l'entrée dans l'enseignement supérieur et l'adaptation des étudiants.

Trois ans plus tard un "follow-up" a été donné à l'étude, seulement à partir de group des étudiants en psychologie, ce qui signifie qu'il y a des résultats venant des même individus et aussi des informations sur les besoins et doutes qu'ils ont ressentis, en deux différents moments: quand ils ont commencé à étudier la psychologie, découvrant un nouvel environnement, et quand ils ont terminé leurs études.

Cette étude prétend présenter des données d'une recherche obtenue a travers l'analyse d'études de certains cas et la contribution de cette recherche à aider l'étudiant, son conseiller et l'interaction entre eux.

Mots clés: orientation et aide psychologique universitaire, transition du secondaire au supérieur, besoins des étudiants, choix professionnels, approche longitudinale

## INTRODUCTION

The choice of a career remains one of the most important life choices. It is important that people receive all the help they need (Lima & Gouveia, 2002). The career guidance practice, with its developmental approach, is increasingly available to all individuals. The evolution and enlargement of the intervention field in career behaviours' studies aim to include all ages (Ferreira-Marques, 1993). It is no longer adequate to restrict this practice to young people in secondary schools. Research shows that 50 per cent or more of all college students experience career-related problems (Herr & Cramer, 1996, p. 479).

Young adults seem to live desiring to explore and to expand their goals and, at the same time, wanting safety and protection. To establish a good balance between risking and looking for safety seems to be very important for their well-being development, considering that these students still ask themselves "Who am I?". Probably the counsellor has an important role helping them to answer this question and supporting what these answers' content can enrich their self-knowledge and relationships (Seligman, 1994, pp.336-337).

Career counselling must be seen as a profession that cares more about the relationship between the counsellor and the client than just about his role as an expert. On doing this, the counsellor introduces a subjective component as well as an emotional one to career counselling. Furthermore, he supports the counselling process on a broad range of approaches, strategies and techniques (McMahon & Patton, 2002, p. 55).

A research concerning "Guidance and Career Development with University Students" was developed with a sample of (1204) university students from the first and second years of different courses, at different higher education institutions. This research's approach was a developmental one. It considered Donald Super's theory of career



development, the well-known “Life-span, life-space” theory, one of the most comprehensive theories in use today.

Donald Super began his field research while he was working as an employment counsellor, in the 1930’s. Super’s theory evolved over a period of sixty years, through empirical research, conceptual reflections, and responses from practitioners (Super, Savickas & Super, 1996, p. 121).

In Ferreira-Marques’ opinion (2001), the way in which Super’s theory developed is particularly interesting. Super did not have the purpose of producing an integrated theory of career development but a segmental one. “A loosely unified set of theories dealing with specific aspects of career development, taken from developmental, differential, social, personality, and phenomenological psychology and held together by self-concept and learning theory” (Super, 1990, p. 199). His perspectives continue to deserve special attention as an important theory influencing research and practice. The life-span, life-space theory has been widely accepted and creatively applied by career educators and counsellors. Super’s contributions as a theoretician and researcher revealed his concern with the practice of career guidance and counselling (Ferreira-Marques, 2001, p. 19).

The students that have participated in the research (Guidance and Career Development with University Students. Study of Planning and Exploration Attitudes, Vocational Identity, Role Salience and Career Factors) were from four different areas, at four different higher education establishments: Biology, Engineering, Arts and Psychology. The research involved students that had just entered the higher education system (1st and 2nd years), students passing from the first to the second year and those that had not got academic achievement in the first and second years.

The main goals were:

- to study the relation between personal development and career development;
- to study the relation between identity and development of students’ career stage;
- to give some contribution to the practice of higher education career guidance.

This was done through the study of:

- planning and exploration attitudes;
- identity vocational concept;
- role salience;
- and career factors.

The measures used were My Vocational Situation (Vocational Identity, Occupational Information, Barriers) and Career Factors Inventory (Career Choice Anxiety, Generalized Indecisiveness, Need for Career Information, Need for Self-Knowledge), both adapted to the Portuguese language during the research, Career Development Inventory - College and University Form (Career Planning, Career Exploration), Salience Inventory (Participation, Commitment) and also a Personal Questionnaire.

Subjects like transition from secondary school to higher education, entering higher education, students’ adaptability and the need of career guidance services in Portugal were emphasized. The resulting data were statistically analysed and content analysis was also used. Two case studies were considered.

From the relation between these measures we can identify:

- independent factors defined through different roles (Salience Inventory);
- one factor defined through vocational identity and Career Factors Inventory scales;
- one factor defined through career planning and also high loadings in career exploration and professional information.

Data show how important it is to put into practice, with higher education students:

- other roles and not only the traditional role of professional work;
- the need to clarify individual goals and the vocational identity with career indecision dimensions;
- the importance of work planning and exploration attitudes and, at the same time, the needs of professional information usually identified by the students.

The comparative studies showed some differences between groups. These differences were more evident considering the students from different courses, and their meaning was partly understandable using analysis content data. The “no differentiation” and “no discrimination” between students from the first and second years of the courses seem also to be relevant, which can take the researchers to join the two samples and study just one.

## METHOD

### FOLLOW-UP STUDY

The freshmen live intensely the adaptation to a new environment, while the final year students have to deal with other situations like finishing their course; for those students the academic environment is already well known and helps them to prepare their entering into the job market (Lima, 2000).

Three years after the “Guidance and Career Development with University Students” research, a follow-up was provided, which included only a psychology students’ group and studied the same psychological variables analysed in the empirical research: planning and exploration attitudes, identity vocational concept, role salience and career factors. This means there are results from the same individuals at two different moments and information about the kind time the students were almost finishing the course (4th and 5th years).

In order to typify the sample, the following data were evaluated through the Personal Questionnaire: parents’ residence, job situation, parents’ studies, achievement in secondary school and higher education, career

of needs and doubts they were feeling at those moments:

1. when they started to study Psychology and, therefore, entered a new environment;
2. when they were finishing their academic studies and thinking about transition to the labour market.

In the empirical research, the identified individuals of the psychological sample were 189 students. But only 94 were included in the follow-up sample for several reasons, like: changing area during the course, ploughing, dropping-out or just not being present when collaboration was asked. The same measures of the empirical research were used in this study but this

- to typify the sample at the beginning and at the end of the course, analysing the same psychological variables;
- to identify needs and difficulties revealed by the students at two different moments;
- to define different kinds of practice

counsellor's help, secondary achievement, areas preferred for higher education, level of course satisfaction and preference for being in another course. The main goals of this follow-up study were:

according to those needs and difficulties in order to facilitate the adaptative behaviours the students were asked to perform at those two moments.

## CASE STUDIES' ANALYSIS

One of the major approaches in delivering career guidance in colleges and universities has been individual counselling (Herr & Cramer, 1996, p. 479). Research has indicated this approach to be one of the most effective methods of career intervention. Individual career counselling should be an interactive process in which the clinician plays an active role and it may be helpful to start the process by explaining the parameters of career counselling to the client (Whiston, 2000, pp. 137-151).

The case study method can provide insights into a variety of theoretical and practical approaches. They are useful to illustrate the interesting interaction of psychological variables at the individual level (Lima, 1998, p. 385) and often the interconnections between career and non-career issues.

Several authors suggest that career counselling is initially focused on work that is developed as one of the different life roles, not confusing "work" as an activity with "work" as an "occupation" (Richardson, 1993, p. 427). This approach enhances the career concept proposed by Super and the role salience model that emerged and developed through the "Work Importance Study" (Afonso & Lima, 1995, p. 11).

The case studies' analysis allows us to present the following conclusions:

second years. By analysing the answers to the other questions (19 – I need the following information and 20 – I have the following difficulties:...) in My

1. the students' career planning and exploration attitudes seem to be more evident during the last years and even more at the end of the course, when there is a clear concern about transition to the job market;
2. as far as the role salience is concerned, the students give importance to the student's and leisure roles not only in the first and second years but also in the end, which can reveal the importance of performing different activities. However, the ones that are really finishing the course seem to give more attention to the student's role, sometimes giving up leisure activities, thinking only about ending all the tasks they are obliged to accomplish. On the other side, and according to these data, when we analyse the commitment results (the more affective ones), these students also give more salience to the worker's role;
3. the freshmen reveal more anxiety about their choice (probably because they don't have enough information) and also more indecision, in this case along with the final year students (both groups are in periods of strong transition). However, the differences don't seem to be relevant and several studies show that the "Career Factors Inventory" is an instrument very useful in discriminating decided from undecided individuals;
  - a. the students in the 4th and 5th years seem to reveal higher vocational identity and more need of occupational information than those students in the first and
  - c. both groups of students have difficulties in choosing an occupational goal considering their academic achievement,

Vocational Situation questionnaire, we noted that:

- a. at the beginning of the studies, the students have a certain concern about their future occupation, complementary studies, chances of obtaining a job and changing their choice;
- b. at the end of the studies, the students reveal more concern about continuing their studies (like getting a master degree) and also about their future occupation;
- d. while the first and second years' students have barriers like choosing a course, entering higher education, lack of time to conciliate several activities, making a more specific choice after entering university and identifying the best vocational resources, the other students reveal a great concern about difficulties in looking for a job and doubts about the occupation they have chosen.

## DISCUSSION

Several authors support the interconnection between career guidance and personal counselling. It is not possible to separate these aspects in two different areas. We learn to look at the individual as a whole person and not as a life made up of different parts. It is a holistic perspective, reinforced by the opinion that there is a strong emotional component involved in all career problems (Santos, et al., 2001, pp. 170-171). Career and personal counselling are inextricably intertwined. Career problems have a strong emotional component and it becomes almost impossible to categorize any problem as either "career" or "personal" (Krumboltz, 1993, p. 143). Personal and career problems often correlate and interact through the process of individuation and struggle towards independence called decision making (Lucas, 1993, p. 165). How can these data related to case studies contribute to help the student, the counsellor and the interconnection between them?

The data show:

- the importance of developing and improving the practice of career guidance with higher education students;
- the importance of counsellor's practice regarding psychological help and counselling.

The practice of career counselling allows the psychologist to establish close relationships with young people and adults. This practice has extended its ability in solving career concerns and has developed in their diversity. It has also contributed to the counselling process through innovative ideas, techniques and strategies and to emphasize the convergence between life span perspective goals in career counselling and goals of other psychological fields.

Higher education students have important choices to make, concerning the different roles they can perform through their lives. Some students are still young, but most of them are already in a transition period. Therefore, the career counsellor must put into

practice the way of helping the students to exceed the usual difficulties of this stage.

The students reveal different kinds of needs, which obliges the counsellor to improve this practice and to adapt it to those needs and to the career development tasks of the students' stage (Lima, 1998, p. 28).

A good example of these different kinds of needs is given by some of the data obtained through the questionnaire analysis used in the follow-up study. This analysis was based only on four of the Personal Questionnaire's questions: "Do you feel that your course is related to your goals and expectations?"; "Identify difficulties that you are feeling in your academic studies."; "Are you satisfied with your course? Why?"; "Nowadays, what kind of leisure activities do you have?". These questions were considered as the most useful to understand the differences between freshmen and final year students. The data revealed that:

1. the first and second year students have difficulties concerning the adaptative behaviours. They refer the existence of too many people in the same class, too much work and, above all, difficulties with the teaching methods. The sophomores also point to their lack of preference for some of the subjects. In general, these students are satisfied with their choice, although the freshmen had referred the little time (one month) of permanence in the institution. These last students' goals and expectations reveal the few exploration attitudes concerning the course and occupation chosen. The sophomores have already a critical attitude about disconnection between theory and practice. On the other side, all these students develop different leisure activities;
2. the final year students, when referring to their difficulties, indicate the teaching methods, the different subjects, not having time to study and a great gap between theory and practice. Some of the 4th year students reveal not to be satisfied with their choice. They indicate, as the main reason, the lack of connection between theory and practice and between different subjects. However, in general these students also feel satisfaction about their choice and think that a relation exists between the course and their own goals and expectations. Their answers also show that the students perform less leisure activities and that they don't have time for them, considering their student role salience.

Finally, there are three matters we would like to emphasize:

1. Institutional and individual strategies adequate to the students' needs must be identified, in order to facilitate the personal development and the progress of the institutions where the students live (Teixeira & Lima, 1992; Afonso & Lima, 1995). This also means we must pay special attention to the academic level – in the beginning, the counsellor practice must be different from the one he has to perform with students finishing their academic studies.
2. On the other hand, dealing with students entering the higher education system and finishing their studies implicates helping them to get adapted to a new establishment and to what they have to study and preparing them to a new and complex world. It means making the students' well-being and satisfaction possible, as well as making their career adaptability easier.
3. At last, we would like to emphasize the importance of continuing to study these data. What we wanted to show is that the "follow-up" allows us to study the psychological variables we have spoken about as well as the measures used during the empirical research.

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## LIFE VALUES INVENTORY (LVI): STUDIES WITH HIGHER EDUCATION STUDENTS

## ECHELLE DES VALEURS DE VIE : RECHERCHE SUR UN GROUPE D'ÉTUDIANTS

Leonor Alemeida & Helena Rebelo Pinto |

### ABSTRACT

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Our contribution at the *FEDORA-PSYCHE* Conference focuses on the values evaluation, a crucial psychological dimension at the vocational development of young adults, namely with the presentation of the LVI, a new instrument whose original version was created at the USA by Crace and Brown (1996).

The use of the *Life Values Inventory (LVI)* in the higher education context was the goal of a research with a group of college students. Following a summary of the bibliography's revision about the importance of the values in the vocational development, it is presented the analysis of the scores obtained with the *Life Values Inventory*: means and standard deviations; internal consistence coefficients, by the l'alpha of Cronbach method; factor analysis and groups differences analysis defined by field of studies and by gender.

Key words: life values inventory, higher education context, values evaluation



## RÉSUMÉ

Notre contribution au *FEDORA-PSYCHE Conférence* concerne l'évaluation des valeurs, dimension psychologique centrale dans le développement vocationnel des jeunes adultes, notamment par la présentation de le *Life Values Inventory* (LVI), un nouvel instrument dont la version originale a été construite aux EUA par Crace et Brown (1996).

L'utilisation de l'*Echelle des Valeurs de Vie* (LVI) dans le contexte de l'enseignement supérieur a été objet d'une recherche avec un groupe d'étudiants. Dans la suite d'une synthèse de la révision de littérature sur l'importance des valeurs dans le développement vocationnel, on présent l'analyse des résultats obtenus avec l'Échelle des Valeurs de Vie: moyennes et écarts-type; coefficients de consistance interne, par la méthode de l'alpha de Cronbach; analyse factorielle et analyse des différences entre groupes définies par domaine de formation et selon le sexe.

Mots clés: Echelle des Valeurs de Vie, contexte de l'enseignement supérieur, évaluation des valeurs

## INTRODUCTION TO LVI

Values have long been viewed as important determinants of human behaviour (Allport, Vernon & Lindzey, 1951; Rokeach, 1973; Super, 1990). Moreover, values have been empirically linked to important aspects of organizational behaviour (Meglino, Ravlin, & Adkins, 1989), academic performance (Coyne, 1988), career decision making (Ravlin & Meglino, 1987), and marital satisfaction (Vaitkus, 1995). They have also been identified as important determinants of culturally unique behaviour (Sue & Sue, 1990), and thus are critical to the understanding of cultural differences. In spite their influence on human functioning, values measures have typically not being used by counsellors due to the absence of an empirically based, easily administered and scored values inventory. The *Life Values Inventory* (LVI) was developed Crace and Brown (1996) to fill this void.

Historically, values inventories have been developed either as general measures of values (e.g. Allport, Vernon, & Lindzey, 1951) with no direct link to life roles, or as work values inventories (e.g. Nevill & Super, 1986) with relationships to the work role only. Work values inventories encourage practitioners and others to ignore other life roles in the career planning process, which seems inappropriate given the interactions that occur among the work role and other life roles. On the other hand, inventories such as the *Rokeach Values Survey* (Rokeach, 1973) have limited utility because they provide no crosswalks to make decisions about careers, suitable marital partners, leisure activities, and so forth based on the results. The LVI is an attempt to bridge the gap between work values inventories and general values inventories by producing a values

inventory that can be used as a decision making aid by people who are grappling with decisions regarding work, education, relationships, and leisure. It is also an attempt to promote holistic thinking in the decision making process.

## VALUES DEFINITION

The first step in the process of developing the LVI was adopting Rokeach's (1973) definition of values, who defines them as standards that not only guide the behaviour of the individuals who hold them, but serve as their basis for judging the behaviour of others. Rokeach considers that needs may also serve as a guide to behaviour, but they are transitory and once satiated, they may not influence behaviour for varying amounts of time. Unlike needs, values transcend situations and are stable influences on behaviour. Finally, not only do values provide individuals with a basis for judging the appropriateness of their behaviour in the present, they also provide them with a sense of what goals they would like to attain in the future. Once developed, values become the primary basis for goal setting.

## THEORETICAL UNDERPINNINGS

Brown's Holistic Values-Based Theory of Life Role Choice and Satisfaction (Brown, 1996; Brown & Crace, 1995) underpins the LVI. This theory draws on Rokeach's (1973) theory and research, as well as some aspects of Super's (1990) theory, to explain the decision making process and the satisfaction that results from role-related decisions. The basic propositions of the theory are:

Each person develops a relatively small number of values that are organized into a dynamic values system.

Crystallized, highly prioritised values are the most important determinants of life role choices so long as values-based information regarding the choices is available.

Values are the dominant factor in the decision making process, but other factors influence decision making as well.

Because of the diverse sources of information and experiences that influence values development, it is likely that each person will have values conflicts. When competing values come into play in the decision making process, the result will be ambivalent feelings and perhaps procrastination. This hypothesis has not been tested directly.

Also, due to differences in their socialization process and the values-laden information they receive, males and females and people from various cultural

backgrounds are able to develop differing values system.

Life satisfaction will be more than the sum of the products of the life roles filled taken separately.

Life roles interact in characteristic fashions. They may interact synergistically (complementary), entropically (conflicting), or interact to maintain homeostasis (supplementary) (Super, 1980).

The salience of a single role can be determined by the extent to which that role satisfies crystallized, highly prioritised values. However, few people will have all of their values satisfied in a single role. When more than one role is required to satisfy values, the salience of values in the values systems shifts dynamically as the person moves from role to role because of the expectation that different values will be satisfied in different roles.

Success in a life role will be dependent upon (1) the congruence between the individual's values and those of others in the role; (2) role-related skills which the person has developed prior to entering the role; (3) the aptitudes possessed by the person in the role to change as the demands of the role change; and (4) the nature of the interaction of the role with other roles occupied by the individual.

Several types of values-based problems develop that require therapeutic interventions. These includes (1) values poorly crystallized and or poorly prioritised; (2) intrapersonal values conflicts; (3) intrarole values conflicts; (4) interrole conflicts that may or may not be values-based; and (5) perceptions that values satisfaction is blocked resulting in depression. This proposition has not been tested directly at this time.

## DESCRIPTION OF THE LVI

The LVI contains 42 items that measure 14 relatively independent values. It also contains several qualitative exercises that may be useful in helping people to crystallize their values. The values measured by the LVI are Achievement, Belonging, Concern for the Environment, Concern for Others, Creativity, Financial Prosperity, Health and Activity, Humility, Independence, Loyalty to Family or Group, Privacy, Responsibility, Scientific Understanding, and Spirituality.

In the process of responding to the inventory, people are asked to rate the strength of their values and to rank them by order of importance. They are first asked to rate the degree to which the beliefs contained in the 42 items are currently guides to their behaviour. The next step is to complete a series of qualitative exercises and, using the information gained from these exercises along with the data derived from the ratings, to rank their most important values. The final step is for each individual to rank the importance of the values they hope to have satisfied in each of four life roles: Job; Student; Family and Important Relationships, and Leisure and Community Activities.

## VALUES AND CAREER COUNSELLING

Career counselling should be conducted in a manner that takes into consideration the impact of the career decision on other life roles (Brown, 1996; Brown & Crace, 1995). In this process the LVI can be used to help clients (1) crystallize and prioritise their values, (2) identify the values they hope to see satisfied in their careers and other life roles, (3) determine sources of intrapersonal values conflicts, (4) identify the locus of intrarole conflicts, and (5) estimate the source(s) of interrole conflicts.

## THE PORTUGUESE EXPERIMENTAL VERSION OF THE LIFE VALUES INVENTORY AND PRELIMINARY STUDY

The research's first step was the translation to the Portuguese language of the *LIFE VALUES INVENTORY* (Crace & Brown, 1996), published at the Life Values Resources (EUA) in 1996. Although the development of the experimental version required some changes, these were minimum because the preoccupation on maintaining it as close as possible to the original one was always present.

Thus, the Portuguese experimental version includes a test register which contains the instructions and the items, as well as the answering places. In the end it was also included a sheet for the demographic data (Almeida & Pinto, 2002).

## RESEARCH DESIGN AND PARTICIPANTS

After adapting the Life Values Inventory, a preliminary study was carried out (Almeida & Pinto, 2002). This first essay had as major goals the rehearsal of the standardization conditions, namely the presentation of the instrument and its instructions, aiming to identify possible difficulties in

understanding the items' contents and to verify the average time of response. The Life Values Inventory was used in a total sample of 314 participants: 92 adult students, 159 working students and 63 workers (209 of the female gender and 105 of the male gender) with ages between 18 and 55 years old .

## SCORES PROPERTIES

To evaluate the scores obtained some procedures of data analysis were developed; the study of the distributions for each one of the 14 values: the internal consistence coefficients, by the alpha of Cronbach method, items analysis and study of the item-scale correlations, and the factor analysis.

The factor analysis adopted the rotated component matrix method.

Generally, through this analysis it was possible to verify that the scores obtained are satisfactory and similar to the ones found for the American population. However, they also point out that adaptations of certain items are still necessary.

## STUDIES OF THE LVI WITH HIGHER EDUCATION STUDENTS

Taking into account the importance of the values study for the vocational development of higher education students – which was already carried out by other researchers with other instruments – not only in the values characterization perspective but also as the core of a intervention methodology, it was considered that, studying the values with specific populations, it would be interesting to focus on the group of the higher education students.

Thus, considering the higher education students it was analysed the internal consistence, the factorial structure and the group differences.

This study corresponds to the first step of a wider project that should be developed during the school year of 2002-2003, with larger samples of students from different learning domains and school levels.

## RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS

The sample of the present study

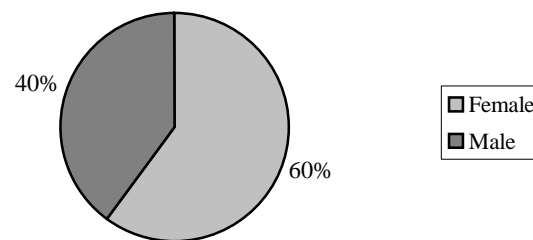
Communication Sciences, Psychology,

includes 251 participants of both genders, with ages between 18 and 55 years old (25 years old average), belonging to two educational areas, Humanistics and Technological. The Humanistics area includes the following courses:

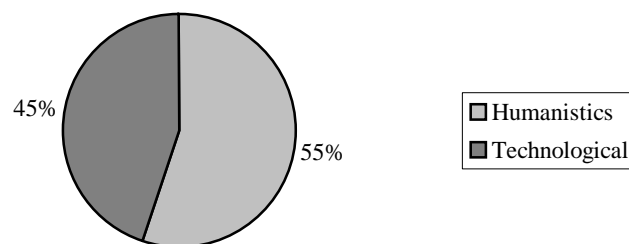
History, Local Administration, Sociology, Childhood Education. The Technological area includes Computer Engineering, Civil Engineering, Architecture, Electrotechnical Engineering, Management, Economics and Biotechnology.

Figures 1 and 2 present the representativeness of the samples defined by gender and by educational area.

**Figure 1 – Sample defined by gender**



**Figure 2 – Sample distribution by educational area**



## SCORES PROPERTIES

## INTERNAL CONSISTENCE

The alpha's Cronbach coefficients obtained for the higher education students sample are 0.59 for the value 'Humility' and 0.86 for the value 'Spirituality'. The scores are quite satisfactory (6 values presents coefficients higher to 0.70) and close to the ones obtained in the American sample.

The exception goes to the value 'Independence', with a extremely low coefficient. This result, such as low and distant from the others, suggests that a change in the items formulation is necessary. Nonetheless, it is important to refer that in American population studies the alpha of the value Independence was also the lowest one of the total scale, as presented in table 1.

Table 1- Alpha of Cronbach coefficients for the American and Portuguese samples, and for the higher education students sample

	American sample	Portuguese sample	<i>Higher education students sample</i>
Achievement	.74	.63	.61
Belonging	.77	.67	.67
Concern for the Environment	.86	.73	.73
Concern for Others	.69	.73	.75
Creativity	.86	.75	.75
Financial Prosperity	.84	.85	.84
Health and Activity	.74	.75	.75
Humility	.64	.57	.59
Independence	.55	.22	.16
Loyalty to Family or Group	.75	.64	.65
Privacy	.83	.79	.63
Responsibility	.68	.78	.64
Scientific Understanding	.80	.81	.68
Spirituality	.88	.85	.86

## FACTORIAL STRUCTURE

For the factorial analysis it was adopted the method of the rotated components

matrix. Table 2 presents the factors and the scores obtained.

Table 2 – Factor analysis of the LVI's scores for the higher education students sample (n= 251)

Factor 1	Coming up with new ideas Creating new things or ideas	.70
	Creating new things or ideas	.81
	Discovering new things or ideas	.68
Factor 2	Believing in a higher power	.90
	Believing that there is something greater than ourselves	.87
	Living in harmony with my spiritual beliefs	.80
Factor 3	Having financial success	.82
	Making money	.79
	Being wealthy (having lots of money, land, or livestock)	.68
Factor 4	Being reliable	.63
	Being trustworthy	.71
	Meeting my obligations	.60
Factor 5	Being sensitive to others needs	.70
	Helping others	.65
	Being concerned about the rights of others	.71
Factor 6	Protecting the environment	.85
	Taking care of the environment	.83
	Appreciating the beauty of nature	.45
Factor 7	Taking care of my body	.78
	Being in good physical shape	.80
	Being strong or good in a sport (being athletic)	.55
Factor 8	Being liked by others	.75
	Being accepted by others	.77
	Feeling as though I belong	.67
Factor 9	Having quiet time to think	.66
	Having control over my time	.59
	Having a private place to go	.76
Factor 10	Using science for progress	.79
	Knowing things about science	.73
	Knowing about math	.29
Factor 11	Downplaying compliments or praise	.64
	Being quiet about my successes	.64



	Avoiding credit for my accomplishments	.59
Factor 12	Working hard to do better	.61
	Improving my performance	.60
	Challenging myself to achieve	.40
Factor 13	Giving my opinion	.85
	Being independent	.17

Although only 13 factors emerge (and not 14), the factorial structure obtained with the studied sample is very similar to the one identified in the American studies that originated the Live Values Inventory and with the Portuguese experimental

version. However, one of the factors presents itself only as draft of a Value. Generally, the scores found are satisfying and suggest changes in certain items, specially in what concerns the items that set out the 'Independence' value.

## PATRONIZED SCORES AND GROUP DIFFERENCES

The raw scores of the several Values were transformed in patronized scores of mean 100 and standard deviation 20. Tables 3 and 4 present the scores obtained – mean, standard deviation, means comparison and significance

level – for each one of the groups that compose the higher education students sample – female gender, male gender, Humanistics educational area, and Technological educational area.

Table 3 – Mean and standard deviation of the patronized scores by gender

	Female gender (F) (n=150)		Male gender (M) (n=101)		Means comparison. Significance level
	M	SD	M	SD	
Achievement	12.13	1.72	12.09	2.09	F>M (.877)
Belonging	10.91	2.21	10.62	2.55	F>M (.352)
Concern for the Environment	11.97	2.32	11.32	2.17	F>M (.026)
Concern for Others	12.33	1.85	11.60	2.01	F>M (.003)
Creativity	11.39	2.26	11.61	2.37	M>F (.444)
Financial Prosperity	10.14	2.68	11.19	2.94	M>F (.004)
Health and Activity	10.19	2.58	10.88	2.91	M>F (.051)
Humility	9.47	2.34	9.50	2.12	M>F (.913)
Independence	11.73	1.67	11.64	1.90	F>M (.715)
Loyalty to Family or Group	12.19	1.92	11.38	2.56	F>M (.005)
Privacy	11.77	2.31	11.17	2.47	F>M (.049)

Responsibility	13.66	1.50	13.20	1.81	F>M (.029)
Scientific Understanding	9.14	2.57	10.52	2.38	M>F (.000)
Spirituality	11.11	3.16	9.42	3.58	F>M (.000)

For the groups defined by gender, the means comparison shows us significant differences for the majority of the values (in 9 of the 14 values): 'Concern for the Environment', 'Concern for Others', 'Financial Prosperity', 'Health and Activity', 'Loyalty to Family or Group', 'Privacy', 'Responsibility', 'Scientific Understanding' and 'Spirituality', which go alongside with one of the author's proposition: "Men, Women and individuals from different cultural environments have different socialization processes and receive different information in what regards the values and it makes that they develop different values systems" (Brow & Crace, 1996, p.2).

The variations between values go alongside the stereotypes, such as it was seen in other studies (Bridges, 1989). Attending to the means comparison of these groups, the female gender presents higher means in 9 of the 14 values considered. In this group, the 4 Values with mean values higher than 12 are: 'Achievement' (12.13); 'Concern for Others' (12.33); 'Loyalty to Family or Group' (12.19) and 'Responsibility' (13.66). The male group presents only 2 values with scores higher than 12: 'Achievement' (12.09) and 'Responsibility' (13.20).

Table 4 – Mean and standard deviation of the patronized scores by educational area

	Humanistics (H) (n=138)		Technological (T) (n=111)		Means comparison. Significance level
	M	SD	M	SD	
Achievement	11.92	1.82	<b>12.32</b>	1.94	T>H (.092)
Belonging	10.80	2.35	10.79	2.39	H>M (.989)
Concern for the Environment	11.52	2.46	11.95	2.02	T>H (.145)
Concern for Others	<b>12.30</b>	1.85	11.77	1.99	H>T (.028)
Creativity	11.28	2.29	11.72	2.29	T>H (.128)
Financial Prosperity	10.28	2.66	10.86	3.00	T>H (.107)
Health and Activity	10.49	2.48	10.50	3.03	T>H (.994)
Humility	9.33	2.23	9.68	2.28	T>H (.235)
Independence	11.79	1.68	11.57	1.88	H>T (.326)
Loyalty to Family or Group	11.93	2.09	11.78	2.41	H>T (.615)
Privacy	11.72	2.40	11.32	2.37	H>T (.180)
Responsibility	<b>13.59</b>	1.35	<b>13.30</b>	1.94	H>T (.157)
Scientific Understanding	8.73	2.41	10.92	2.70	T>H (.000)
Spirituality	10.48	3.36	10.42	3.53	H>T (.901)

As for the means comparison between the 'Humanistics' and 'Technological' educational area groups, only in 3 Values occurred significant differences between groups: 'Achievement' (0.092), 'Concern for Others' (0.028) and 'Scientific Understanding' (0.000). Also, in terms of mean scores, none of the groups prevails.

Thus, each sub-sample presents higher mean scores in 7 of the 14 considered Values. In the 'Humanistics' group, the Values that obtained means higher than 12 are: 'Concern for Others' (12.30) and 'Responsibility' (13.59). In the other group emerges the 'Achievement' (12.32) e 'Responsibility' (13.30).

## CONCLUSION

The values study has been revealing itself increasingly important in vocational research and practice; the LVI corresponds to a quantitative and qualitative approach in this domain and presents an at least interesting new instrument in psychological evaluation.

The use of the LVI in Portugal is occurring, in the aim of a research plan with several groups, whose first scores presented new adaptation problems.

Particularly, the research with higher education students was useful from the psychometric point of view, since it replicated the results of the Portuguese adaptation. In what concerns the differentiation of groups defined by gender and educational area, the data from the present study raise some interesting questions for the characterization of the higher education students' values, but they also suggest that new studies with larger samples are necessary.

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# UNIVERSITY STUDENTS' ATTITUDES TOWARDS EXPECTED ROLES IN WORK, CAREER AND FAMILY

## ATTITUDES DES ÉTUDIANTS FACE AUX RÔLES FAMILIAUX ET PROFESSIONNELS ATTENDUS DANS LE MONDE DU TRAVAIL

Cláudia Andrade & Anne Marie Fontaine |

### ABSTRACT

In Portugal, during the last decades, some important changes have occurred in family, educational and socio-professional structures. The range of young adult's choices in all spheres of modern societies, as well as their complexity, has increased and, nowadays, both occupational and family goals are perceived as very important. The balance of important projects in family and occupational settings is faced as a common challenge. Researchers have consistently found that Portuguese university students expressed a high value for both work/career and family roles. Since most young adults apparently still plan to marry and to have children it is reasonable to ask whether students share the expectations of commitment to ones career and make a later commitment to family roles. Furthermore, the relationship between attitudes toward work and career and family roles will lead to a more balanced or unbalanced position considering the future combination of both roles. This study addressed these two questions by determining (1) the attitudes towards work and career and family roles and (2) the expectations of achievement of a balanced or unbalanced combination of these roles in a sample of 331 university students (3) differences according to gender. Difference according the gender will be analysed. Theoretical implications and practical implications for psychological intervention, are discussed.

Key words: balance of work/career and family roles, gender differences

### RÉSUMÉ

Au Portugal, d'importants changements ont été observés au sein des structures familiales, socioprofessionnelles et éducatives. Ils se manifestent dans toutes les sphères de la société moderne et se traduisent par un élargissement des options de vie offertes aux jeunes adultes, ainsi que par l'accroissement de leurs exigences et de la complexité des choix qui en découlent. Actuellement, tant les objectifs professionnels comme familiaux sont extrêmement valorisés par la plupart des adultes et équilibrer des projets développés dans les deux contextes est devenu un défi quotidien.

La plupart des recherches rapportent que les étudiants universitaires portugais valorisent autant les rôles familiaux que professionnels ou de carrière. Toutefois, et bien que la plupart des jeunes prétendent encore se marier et avoir des enfants, on peut se demander s'ils ont l'intention de poursuivre ces buts simultanément ou, au contraire, s'ils prétendent investir d'abord leurs projets de carrière, en reportant à plus tard les investissements familiaux. En outre, lorsque la conciliation de ces rôles s'impose, on peut aussi se demander dans quelle mesure leurs attitudes face aux rôles professionnels et familiaux les amèneront à faire des choix qui privilégient l'un ou l'autre rôle ou au contraire des choix plus équilibrés. Finalement, ces attitudes et options ne seront probablement pas identiques pour les jeunes gens ou les jeunes filles.

L'étude ici présentée a porté sur un échantillon de 331 étudiants universitaires. Face aux questions qui ont été soulevées, elle prétend (1) mettre en évidence les différentes attitudes face à la famille, à la carrière et à la vie professionnelle d'étudiants universitaires, (2) leurs prévisions des possibilités d'adoption d'une solution plus ou moins équilibrée lorsque la combinaison de ces rôles s'imposera, ainsi que (3) les différences en fonction du genre. Les implications théoriques et pratiques des résultats obtenus pour l'intervention psychologique ont été discutées.

Mots clés: équilibre des rôles familiaux et professionnels, différences selon les sexes

## INTRODUCTION

Some important changes have occurred in the family as well as in the educational and socio-professional structures during the last decades in the Portuguese society. First there is a general increment of the level of education and a greater number of young people specially women are now reaching higher educational levels by going to the university (Morais & Carvalho, 1993; INE, 1998; Barreto, 2000). The second change has been the reduction of full time and stable jobs that brings more people to the higher education system in order to look for a better education that can lead to a higher level of opportunities of getting a job. The third change is in the field of opportunities that a modern life can carry to young people who look for a life that can bring them self-fulfilment without major responsibilities. In this context, the transition to adulthood is seen as a more complex process. In fact, the achievement of normative tasks like leaving education and entering labour force, leaving one's family to raise up a new one and cope with multiple roles are no more consensual tasks to achieve the adult status.

However, research in the field of personal goals for future adult life with Portuguese university students have consistently shown that both professional and family goals are perceived as very important to reach the adult status (Vala, 1985; Vasconcelos, 1998). As they do not want to exclude one of them, the balance of roles in family and in the labour force is seen as a common challenge for both young men and young women.

Whatsoever, the women's situation presents special features. In fact the research on the psychological context of dual-earners families has shown that women's responsibility for family chores introduce some obstacles for a real equality of opportunities both in the work and family fields (Amâncio, 1989; Amâncio, 1994; Marks & MacDermid, 1996; Milkie & Peltola, 1999). Despite this increase in women's participation in higher education, there appears to be little change in the gender role expectations concerning men's and women's roles in society. Even for dual-earners families with high education, the work role is still seen as men's primary domain, whereas women are still primarily responsible for the home and children, that seems to perpetuate social asymmetries between the gender roles (Marks & MacDermid, 1996; Poeschl & Serôdio, 1998; Milkie & Peltola, 1999). However, some young women, discouraged with the lack of any change and the persistence of gender-linked attitudes, react by assuming an image, exclusively based on work competence, which carries right, privilege and a new role close to the men's representation. This scenario is the one that invokes the women's need to achieve their own independence through the investment and success and is often associated with a need of postponing marriage and child birth (Matsui, Tsuzuki, & Onglatco, 1999; Andrade & Fontaine, 2000). On the same line some young men are today more involved in the so called domestic tasks and assume, in dual-earners families, the role of co-provider for family needs (Poeschl, 2000; Poeschl, & Silva, 2001). Also for some dual-earners families with high education, the work and family roles are balanced with the social resources support that are considered in some cases essential to achieve a self-fulfilment in both roles for men and for women. In view of these findings, we may expect that more educated young adults tend to be less traditional in the division of gender roles. However there is a persistence of gender-role internalised process during the socialization constructs scenarios where men will valorise more work roles and women will value more the balance of multiple roles.

Considering that work and family represent two central domains in the adults lives the perception of interdependence or independence between those two domains when university students anticipate their future lives can lead to examine the expectations and values they attribute to work and family roles. In the same line, the simultaneous demands and responsibilities in both domains can lead these students to anticipate their future lives in a balanced or unbalanced style according to value they attribute to the work and family roles and the expectations about their success in achieving each roles that will affect the involvement in future tasks especially in work and family field. Considering that the behaviour could be foreseen through the expectancies to reach the goal one has and the value of the goal toward which one is working, the anticipated scenarios of balance between work and family should be examined with respect to the similarities and differences in the values and expectations, as well as the anticipated strategies for coping with adults' roles demands.

The aim of our study is to observe gender differences among a sample of Portuguese university students (1) in the attitudes towards work and career, and family roles ; (2) in the values of family role, work role or a balance of both; (3) in the expectations to assume a balanced or unbalanced role; (4) to determine whether both gender anticipate the same strategies to attain the same goals, more particularly the balanced role, dominant in the Portuguese Society.

## HYPOTHESIS

### ATTITUDES TOWARD FAMILY AND WORK ROLES

Women are expected to be more orientated toward negative aspects of family life (H1) than men who are expected to be more orientated toward traditional family aspects (H2).

Women are expected to have a more negative orientation toward work and career (H3) than men who are expected to be more orientated to perceive work as a goal for life (H4).

### ROLE VALUE

Women are expected to value more family roles (H5) and both family and work roles (H6)

than men who are expected to value the work role more (H7).

### COMBINING FAMILY AND WORK ROLES

Among students who value balanced roles, women are expected to perceive to make more renouncements at a personal and couple

level more than men (H8), while men, more than women are expected to perceive more the use of couple and external resources (H9).



## METHOD

### SUBJECTS

The sample comprised 331 students, male (43 %) and female (57 %), attending public and private university institutions from the north and centre of Portugal. The mean age is 22 years old, with a

mode of 21 (ranging from 18 to 35 years). The students were attending Arts, Foreign Languages, Law, Engineering, Psychology, Management Social and Medical Sciences.

## MEASURES

### THE WORK ORIENTATION SCALE

The Work Orientation Scale, designed for this research, is a 22 items instrument, using a 4-point likert scale. Factor analysis showed two main dimensions:

negative orientation toward work and career, and work as a goal for life, with good reliability coefficients (.72 and .69) (See Table 1).

### THE FAMILY ORIENTATION SCALE

The Family Orientation Scale, construed for this research, is a 22 items instrument, using a 4-point likert scale. Factor analysis

showed two main dimensions: traditional family orientation and negative aspects of family life with good reliability coefficients (.72 and .70) (See Table 1).

### ROLE VALUE

The students' results in the two previous scales allow us to form three groups according to the importance attributed to family and

work (valuing family, valuing work or valuing both family and work roles), in order to assess their role value.

## STRATEGIES FOR BALANCING WORK AND FAMILY ROLES QUESTIONNAIRE

To assess the strategies for balancing work and family roles, a questionnaire was designed for this research. It is a 34 items instrument, using a 4-point likert scale. Factor analysis showed two main dimensions:

renouncement at a personal and couple level to reach the balance, and the use of couple and external resources, with good reliability coefficients (.84 and .81) (See Table 1).

Table 1

### *Reliability coefficients of the scales*

Scale	Dimensions	N items	Alpha Cronbach
Work Orientation Scale	Negative orientation toward work and career (e.g. Work prevents people from doing many interesting things)	16	.72
	Work as a goal for life (e.g. Life goals should be guided by work goals)	6	.69
Family Orientation Scale	Traditional family orientation (e.g. A couple is only complete when it raises its own family)	13	.72
	Negative aspects of family life (e.g. Children take a lot of time from the couple)	9	.70
Strategies for balancing Work and Family Roles Questionnaire	Renouncement at a personal and couple level (e.g. To balance family and work roles it is important to spend less time with friends)	14	.84
	Use of couple and external resources (e.g. To balance family and work roles it is important to have the support of the origin family)	20	.81

## RESULTS

## ATTITUDES TOWARD FAMILY AND WORK AND CAREER ROLES

No gender differences were found on the orientation toward family (negative aspects of family life and traditional family) (Infirm H1 and H2).

### *Role Value*

Women value family roles more than men ( $\chi^2=11.626$ , g.l. =1,  $p=.001$ ) (Confirmed H5).

No gender differences were found on the orientation toward work and career roles (negative orientation toward work and career and work as a goal for life) (Infirm H3 and H4).

No gender differences were found on valuing both family and work roles and valuing work roles more (Infirm H6 and H7).

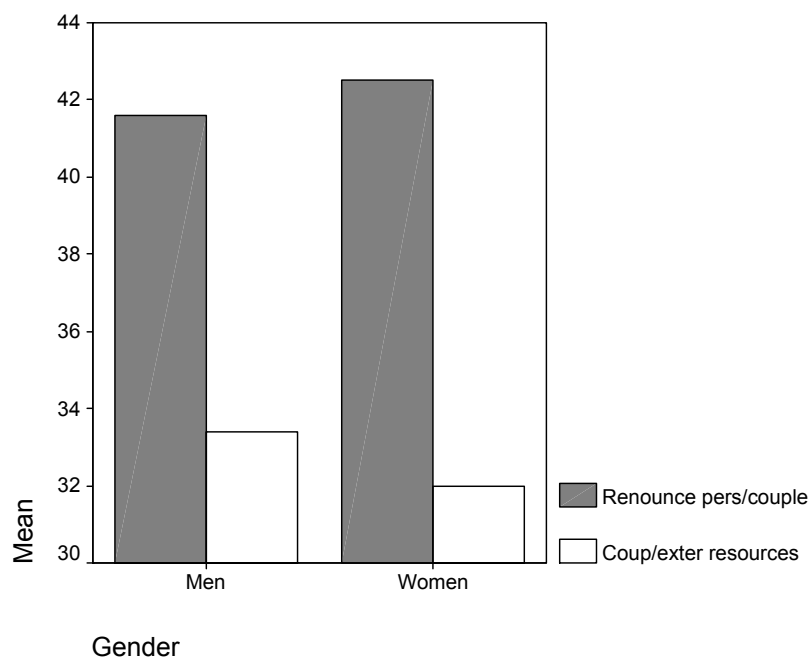
## COMBINING FAMILY AND WORK ROLES

Women assume to have to renounce at a personal and couple level more than men ( $t=-2.060$ , g.l. =319,  $p=.040$ ) (H8 confirmed) (See Graph 1).

Men assume to have to use couple and external resources more than women ( $t=3.108$ , g.l. =320,  $p=.002$ ) (H9 confirmed) (See Graph 1).

Graph 1.

*Dimensions of strategies to combine family and work roles according to gender*



## DISCUSSION

No gender differences were found concerning the attitudes toward family and toward work and career. This is particularly interesting as it contrasts with previous studies that characterized the traditional family role attitude by the tendency to support gender role specialization according to traditional patterns, with women caring for the home, husband and children, and men attending to work. How to explain that our students seem to be closer to non-traditional gender role attitude that implies a preference for role interchangeability: both men and women share responsibility for work and family roles, and both reveal to be aware of “good and bad” aspects of family and work life. One possible explanation for this fact could be the current students’ investment in their professional training as well as their inexperience both in professional and family field. This inexperience causes the maintenance of positive professional and family expectations that lead them to have attitudes toward work, career and family roles in a distant way, based on an idealistic and distant view of this reality. It is also possible that the image of youth, as a phase of freedom and exploration, without major responsibilities, can make the idea of family and work less relevant for young people and, thus both their positive and negative attitudes seem to be less influenced by social norms. As it was point on the research review, young adults do not refuse the idea of having a family with children, but they want it to be a result of a programmed option, in order to raise general economic conditions to have quality in their lives, as well as a stable familiar environment.

However, about the role value, we found that women value more family roles than men, but no gender differences were found on valuing both family and work roles and valuing more work roles. One possible explanation for the results is anchored on the

sociological background. In gender-stereotyped cultures, like the Portuguese, in spite of the generalization of the dual-working family model, the conservative values seem to be largely transmitted by families, and internalised by young people. Those values are the reference for women's self-evaluation as workers, spouses, housekeepers, and mothers. During the history, the importance of household perpetuated gender differentiation from generation to generation. The skills, characteristics and roles played by the women in this field supported the idea that domestic work and child rearing was the "right role" for them. The role value socialization transmits these cultural views of the "proper" attitudes and behaviours for each sex. The messages of parents are particularly pervasive for gender-role internalisation, as they consistently define behaviours from childhood to adulthood. Our results seem to reflect the heritage of this socialization process, as women still see themselves more orientated for valuing family role, even though their expected position on the labour market. The pressure they observe in their parents and adults in general can make women understand that, times to times, the family and work roles are competing and forming an unbalanced system. As they are responsible for family duties, they also see themselves responsible to find the solution of the problems in this domain.

For students of the present study, the strategies to achieve the balance between family and work roles is anticipated in different ways according to the gender: women revealed to be more ready for a greater renouncement than men in order to keep the multiple roles going further, while men valorise more the search of external resources, both women and men valorise the importance of the couple as a successful resource in this combination. As it was already pointed out, these empirical results provide support for the theoretical background presented as partially seeming to reflect social maintenance of family stereotyped role for women in the society, as they are valuing more family than work roles. In spite of the raise of the educational level, young women still perceive themselves as performing the double shift of familiar and professional performer and see the gender roles in an asymmetrical way. The data of this exploratory study encourage further exploration of the attitudes toward family and work roles in order to clarify their importance for the planning and the decisions of assuming a balanced orientation and to improve resources to deal with the process of transition into adulthood.

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## FRATERNAL RIVALRY IN COUNSELLING AT UNIVERSITY CONTEXT

### RIVALITÉ FRATERNELLE AU SEIN DE L'AIDE PSYCHOLOGIQUE DANS UN CONTEXTE UNIVERSITAIRE

Maria Joao Moutinho |

#### INTRODUCTION

Fraternal rivalry is a concept to which not much attention has been given in psychoanalytical literature nor in clinical psychology. Moreover, the few references found concerning this concept are connected to issues arising in group analysis.

In our clinical praxis at the University we have been able to verify the importance of this concept as a way of measuring the degree of maturity and cohesion of the self. The incapacity to live the role of rival, or indeed the very denial or even exacerbation of rivalry are quite evident amongst the students we counsel in support therapy.

The university itself is a privileged stage for projections arising from the family matrix, where one can find a displacement from parental figures to professors, and from brothers and sisters to colleagues.

Fraternal rivalry is only one aspect of Oedipal triangulation. Or could it be that there exists something of a more archaic nature in a genetic-evolutive perspective connected to the issues of identity and individuality?

Could fraternal rivalry be in fact a means to (re)experience Oedipal rivalry in a more acceptable and less blame-charged way as the individual undergoes the process of his or her structuration as a self? And finally, could it be that the non-elaboration of fraternal rivalry allows for an adequate process of socialization?

In our initial approach to these questions we will characterize and define the concept of "fraternal rivalry" as a fundamental process of personality development. Subsequently, we will approach this concept in the context of individual therapy in a university setting, an approach which case studies will help to elucidate. Finally, we will present final considerations and will try to respond the questions raised above.

#### THE "FRATERNAL RIVALRY" CONCEPT

The "fraternal rivalry" concept itself is referred to very infrequently in the literature. At best, one can find the terms "rival" and "phratry."

Investigating the etymology of the concept we discover that the word "rivalry" originates from the Latin word rivalitatis, meaning competition among two or more persons or entities. "Fraternal" arises also from the Latin fraternu, which can be applied to signify both fraternal brother or fraternal cousin.

The joining of the terms “fraternal” and “rivalry” articulates a paradox which signals a strong ambivalence: on the one hand these conjoined terms express the idea of union and harmony while on the other hand the connotations of competition, discord and confrontation also emerge.

In the framework of Judeo-Christian culture we discover in the Old Testament the story of Cain and Abel, the sons of Adam and Eve. God’s preference for Abel provokes Cain’s act of fratricide. Throughout the Old Testament this archetypal story repeats itself under the guise of Joseph and his brothers, once again due to God’s preference for the former. This preference induces Joseph’s brothers to plot against him and subsequently sell him into slavery.

When we examine world mythology and recall that myth seeks to articulate a cosmological order by establishing the organic law of the nature of things, it becomes clear that mythology has from its earliest beginnings evoked fraternal rivalry. For instance, in Egyptian mythology, Osiris, following an age of harmony and tranquillity, teaches humankind to cultivate their land. His brother, Set, driven by jealousy and envy, kills Osiris by dismembering him.

Classical mythology also deals very frequently with narratives where the theme of fraternal rivalry is present if not central. The mythical narratives dealing with the House of Thebes, founded by Cadmus and Harmonia (daughter of Ares and Aphrodite) is a case in point. This master narrative relates the drama of a family of great wealth which suffers a series of great misfortune brought on by its sons and grandsons. Nevertheless, none was as innocent as Oedipus, Cadmus’s great-great-grandson.

As we know, Oedipus, son of Laius and Jocasta, was born under the sign of an inexorable destiny. The oracle at Delphos had prophesied before his birth that he would one day murder his father and marry his mother. Subsequently, every effort was made to prevent the prophesy from becoming true. Oedipus, however, in keeping with the oracle’s decree, does indeed murder his father and marry his mother while in complete ignorance of his true identity. When the truth is at last unveiled, Oedipus blinds himself and chooses exile. Jocasta, his mother and wife, commits suicide.

Didier Anzieu (cit. Sztulman, 1979), in his psychoanalytic interpretation of myth, discusses the dramatic foreshadowing and repetition of the oedipal phantom over several generations of males in the House of Thebes.

The tragic destiny of Oedipus’s sons is a moving example of this thematic repetition. Eteocles and Polinices are cursed by their father and die in fraternal combat. Antigone, his daughter, commits suicide and Ismene is eventually murdered. The myths concerning the House of Thebes as well as their oedipal organization foreshadow and perpetuate the fate of Oedipus.

The discovery of the Oedipus complex by Freud is linked to his own self-analysis and to the death of his own father. Unlike other theoretical concepts to which he gave a definitive form, we know that he described this complex in an incomplete way. This complex, we recall, is characterized by the love of the child for the opposite sex, and the envy, jealousy and rivalry felt with respect to the same-sex parent.

In the Oedipus complex described by Freud and by subsequent analysts, fraternal rivalry is seen as no more than a displacement of the father figure to the phratry, i.e., as both more acceptable and less dangerous to the child.

A great amount of psychoanalytical literature mentions the concept of rivalry in close relation to Oedipal triangulation, although it underestimates the role of fraternal rivalry as a solution to the Oedipus complex. Can fraternal rivalry be conceived as an autonomous concept with no links to Oedipal rivalry?

Indeed, several authors seek to analyse the dynamics of the phratry to which we will presently refer.

Zimerman (2000), for example, introduces the concept of “fraternal complex,” which integrates the reciprocal influence experienced between brothers in a double investment. In the case of the first investment, he associates the ambivalent reactions of love and friendship with ones of envy, jealousy and rivalry. He subsequently



discusses the second investment in which a defensive displacement of the libido and aggressive impulses onto brothers and sisters occurs. This investment has the parental figures as its original target. The author also refers to examples of the role that brothers and sisters may play amongst themselves, for instance, the maternal role with regard to younger brothers, the “substitution role” of a deceased brother who seeks to satisfy the parents’ expectations, or the role parents attribute to a child as the “double” for another sibling.

Within the family matrix, the sons perform different roles, some of which are well known such as that of “scapegoat,” or, in contrast, the “pride-son,” who corresponds to the parental ideals, or the “insurance for loneliness” son, whose lack of autonomy vis-à-vis his parents, assures their own uncertain future. In addition, the author refers to the “identified patient” upon whom all the pathological facets of the family are projected.

For Fraure (cit. Lafon, 1979), the concept of fraternal rivalry makes sense only within the context of the parental couple, in particular in cases where the maternal figure is the fundamental organizing force of object-relations.

For this author, the phenomenon of fraternal rivalry should be studied while taking the maternal figure into account.

Fraternal experience has a significant impact upon the personality by promoting maturation, tolerance and cooperation in the individual’s web of social and family relations.

For Rabain (1985), fraternal rivalry is linked to identification issues. The earliest identification are based on the parental or fraternal image. To identify with and to rival with are therefore synonymous: the rival presents himself as an identification image. According to this author envy and jealousy are therefore linked to the strength of the primary narcissistic investment that links the child to the image of the other, either parental or fraternal.

For Lacan (cit. Rabain, 1985) fraternal rivalry aims at the realization of an identification process. The brother functions as a double that threatens and destabilizes the imaginary identity of the child in connection with his image in the mirror. This temporary introduction is fundamental for the formation of the self. The brother introduces into the narcissistic organization of the child the confrontation both with utmost similitude and unavoidable difference, thus forcing detachment from the specular prison of one who until then looked at himself as identical to himself.

By way of the “intrusion complex,” the child organizes the image of s/he has of her/himself, thereby achieving differentiation from the other. Rivalry contains within itself a rule of order permitting a libidinal investment that makes it possible for the child to assume new rules while at the same time attaining the order of the symbolic. Lacan conceives rivalry, envy and jealousy as archetypes for social feeling.

The appearance of the brother, according to Laurent-Assoun (cit. Kehl, 2000), permits the socialization of narcissism; the brother becomes a partner in a symbolic and singular link within the life of each subject. The shared experiences between brothers in daily life make it possible to break the identity illusion for the subject while at the same time producing a horizontal area of identifications between similars. This constitutes a fundamental aspect of the impulse to diversity of destiny which is continually elaborated throughout life.

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## FRATERNAL RIVALRY IN THE CONTEXT OF INDIVIDUAL THERAPY

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We now ask if it is possible to develop the concept of fraternal rivalry in the context of individual therapy carried out in a university setting?

The dyad therapist-patient inhibits the expression of affections underlying fraternal rivalry. Nevertheless, it is there in the shape of a "not said." A "not said" that should pass from a latent to manifest content in order to become conscious for the patient and therefore susceptible to ongoing elaboration. If this does not occur, there exists the risk of "poisoning" the psychotherapeutic process. The patient must (re)live this content directly in collaboration with the therapist in a transference relationship with the latter. This transference occurs relatively infrequently in the university setting owing to the short duration of therapy in general or else owing to the shortcomings of the technique itself.

## THE CASE OF HELENA

Helena is currently concluding her undergraduate studies. She often loses her voice and is unable to maintain her neck in an erect position although medical examinations have detected no underlying organic problem. It is this condition that has led Helena to seek psychological counselling following the advice of a sympathetic professor.

Helena is the second daughter of a four-sibling phratry. The oldest child is male followed by a sister two-years older than Helena, who has in turn a sister two-years younger than she. Both sisters have met with tragic destinies, the older of whom having died at the age of eighteen from epilepsy while the younger of the two has contracted a degenerative disease at the end of adolescence which has left her disabled. The brother is the only member of the phratry who has attained autonomy.

Helena blames herself for the fate of her sisters, stating that "[she] should have done something! [She] did not defend her! It was because of being struck by a wooden stick that she [her younger sister] became like that!" On other occasions, Helena has stated: "My sister was feeling very unconscious way. A period of renewed psychic growth has become foreseeable. If, on the one hand, Helena relives her fraternal rivalry with her therapist and reaches the conclusion that, "All psychologists should die! I don't want you to die! I will kill myself!", on the other hand, she will phone the

bad on the eve of her death and yet I still made fun of her, saying 'You'll see, you're going to die!' And she really did die!"

Fraternal rivalry is lived as the way to the fratricidal act. Helena has an internal world overshadowed by a sense of omnipotent guilt, where there remains no space to think the unthinkable but only to act as if her unconscious desire had actually become reality.

Thus, although Helena appears to be successfully completing a university course, it is clear that she is presently in a state of inner collapse which is sabotaging her growth process. This sabotaging has in turn taken the form of a conversion symptom. It is impossible for her to live her success or the gains accordingly because this success brings with it her unconscious guilt of having won a sibling rivalry. At the same time, Helena does not wish to humiliate her sisters because they were unable to accompany her success as if she were carrying out a "vow of solidarity with the victims" and boycotting her own growth process. As the therapy progresses, it has been possible gradually to approach Helena's feelings of guilt and anger towards her sisters. Her ambivalence is also gradually manifesting itself albeit in an

Counselling Centre to find out if her therapist is working on campus that day in the hope that her outburst has not harmed the therapist. The entire therapeutic process has been carried out in a university setting where it has been possible to come to understand her compulsion to repetition and that her unconscious fantasies were not to be repeated there.

## THE CASE OF MARIA

Maria is the daughter of a couple who had her later in life and who already had two much older sons of similar age. The pregnancy was in fact planned as an attempt to repair an unresolved grieving process in connection with the death of the second member of the phratry, a boy who was diagnosed with cancer at the age of thirteen and subsequently died seven years later. "My birth was a form of therapy!" exclaims Maria. "It was the family doctor who advised my parents to have another child because they were very depressed after my brother died. That's why I was born!" Implicitly Maria was born to fill up their emptiness; it was never a question of her being actually wanted or imagined in and for herself. She was born as the response to an urge to repair the death of a lost, highly idealized son. In short, Maria was born to substitute and perpetuate the lost son.

Maria spent a childhood characterized by social isolation though in the company of her parents, a grandmother and a grown-up brother. Until she entered primary school Maria never interacted with other children. All childhood experiences were therefore marked by the absence of any peers.

Due to the lack of horizontal models, Maria customarily played with the animals found in her mother's backyard. She spent her days playing with cats and rabbits; she even ate their food and stayed with the animals in their cages.

The absence of peers has not permitted her to rival with others and develop her self in contact with alternative models other than that of her parents.

At school Maria did not readily make friends, having always preferred to stay near her teachers. At eight she was

relinquish her attempt to repair her

diagnosed as being diabetic, an event that has accentuated her isolation and her mother's over-protectiveness.

Maria has survived this isolation since childhood by way of an almost delirious escape to a fantasy world which she imagines to exist in a faraway space and time: "It is a perfect world, a kind of Middle Ages where everything is green and calm, like Scotland," where she imagines stories with several characters in which she is observer.

Maria has always felt she was compared to her idealized brother with whom it was impossible to rival. The story of Maria's life is overshadowed by the death of a brother whom she never came to know, but who has nonetheless been omnipresent throughout her life.

She has always been a good student, having contemplated the possibility of studying medicine. Her major life project was to attend a university, a project similar to her dead brother's own unfulfilled wish.

Upon entering university, Maria lost her motivation to study and got depressed. She often misses classes to visit the graveyard located near the university campus where her brother is buried. Her brother has been in fact her fundamental reference. Once a university student, Maria had to begin separating from her brother in order to become her own self. But what can she do about the guilt she feels for being alive while her brother is not? Maria is presently addressing these issues in weekly therapy. It is in there that Maria has come to experience both the time and space enabling her to both rival with and to identify, thus making it possible for her gradually to achieve for herself an individual, separate life project. It is through this process that Maria will be able to brother's death.

## FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

Fraternal rivalry is much more than simply one more aspect of Oedipal triangulation: it permits the identification. It is a concept that has within itself a rule of order as well as permits access to the symbolic. The non-elaboration of fraternal rivalry does not allow the "socialization of narcissism," retaining the subject in a mirroring prison, where the Other does not exist or is denied.

Fraternal rivalry has led us to the notion of a fraternal function within the process of the constitution of the subject. The Other, the 'similar,' contribute decisively to the structuring process (Kehl, 2000).

The expression "fraternal function" draws our attention to the need of participation of the 'similar' in the process of becoming a subject. Therefore, we suggest that the idea of phratry, often neglected or underestimated, should become an object of study.

We are in fact in a position to designate a fraternal function operating as a part of the self's constitution. Of course, this fraternal function does not supplant the parental function. We may indeed ask ourselves whether or not the former can operate when the latter has not been successfully achieved. Moreover, it is essential not to confuse the function of the 'similar' in the constitution of the self with the participation of the phratry in the constitution of the parental function.

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IN AN ORAL UNIVERSE.

GROUP-PSYCHOTHERAPY FOR FEMALE STUDENTS WITH BODY-IMAGE-PROBLEMS

DANS UN UNIVERS ORAL

PSYCHOTHÉRAPIE DE GROUPE POUR DES ÉTUDIANTES AYANT DES PROBLÈMES D'IMAGE DU CORPS

Mette Bauer & Trine Fredtoft |

## ABSTRACT

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We have been working with students suffering from inferiority-feelings towards their intellectual capacities and their body-image.

The group-members had all been suffering from eating disorders as teenagers and these symptoms would still pop up when the young women were experiencing a crisis, an exam, a writing block etc. We see their pattern as an oral organisation dominating their experiences.

During the group-sessions the young women worked with the following themes:

Their object-relations

Their capacity to be alone

Their inferiority-feelings

Most of them did benefit from the 19 group-sessions and developed a better self-esteem, better relations and capacities.

Key words: body image problems, groups therapy, female students, eating disorders

## RÉSUMÉ

Nous avons fait de la psychothérapie en groupe pour des étudiantes ayant des complexes d'infériorité concernant leurs prestations académiques et leur apparences physiques.

Les membres du groupe ont souffert d'anorexie et de boulimie et utilisent en cas de crise (être bloquée avec sa thèse, avoir peur d'un examen etc.) les symptômes de leurs dérangements précédents. Nous voyons des troubles du comportement alimentaire comme une organisation orale qui domine leurs propres expériences.

Pendant les 19 sessions, les jeunes femmes ont travaillé sur les thèmes suivants:

Leurs relations avec des parents et des petits amis

Leur incapacité d'être seule

Leurs complexes d'infériorité physiques et académiques

La plupart des membres du groupe a amélioré ses capacités comme un résultat de la thérapie.

Mots clés: problèmes d'image du corps, thérapie de groupe, étudiantes, troubles du comportement alimentaire

## INTRODUCTION

Young women with eating-disorders think in food-metaphors. They are in an oral world and that is dominating their way of seeing other people and themselves.

We have found that young women, who have been struggling with eating-disorders, but have lost the manifest symptoms still might be struggling with severe problems in their object-relations and self-esteem. Such emotional problems often influence cognitive and academic motivation. We have found that it might be relevant to work with these problems in psychodynamic groups.

We had been seeing young women with body-image problems in our counselling centres. They often presented themselves by their inferiority-feelings. *I have no confidence in my intellectual capacities. I have a very low sense of self-worth. I am not good in making relations with men* etc. These inferiority-feelings always included feelings of being too fat, or having a wrong body or some psychosomatic problems.

The group took place in winter and spring 2002. The 6 group members were aged from 22 to 28 years old. They were all university students except one who attended a school for kindergarten teachers. They will be called Lina, Hana, Jean, Mandy, Margaret and Lola.

Already during their assessment-interviews we realised, that they all had been suffering from an eating-disorder earlier in their lives. Some had experienced anorectic periods followed by bulimic symptoms, some had been bulimic all the time. Three of them had received treatment as teenagers, but the other three had not been in treatment. None had suffered from real eating disorder for some years, but they might still use their old coping-strategies when in stressful situations (e.g. exams, final thesis,

being rejected by a boyfriend etc.). As a whole they shared a feeling of low self-esteem concerning academic capacities as well as concerning body-image and difficulties concerning object-relations.

## THE DESIGN OF THE GROUP

We have for 7 years worked with time limited groups in a modified group analytical frame-work. (See report from: Fedora Psyche Conference in Copenhagen 1999 and Dependency and Perfectionism in Psychodynamic Counselling, 2 november, 1996).

Our design of the groups is as follows:

The group should consist of max. 6 – 8 students, and be facilitated by two therapists. It should meet for one and half hours per week for a total of 18 – 20 sessions (half an academic year). After 4 – 6 months an individual follow-up interview is performed. Thereby, the therapeutic impact is prolonged, as the group keeps existing and working in the mind of the members.

According to our experiences with short term groups, we have seen, that homogeneity in a number of variables is helpful to accomplish group identity, the feeling of cohesion and a working atmosphere. For example:

The same focus of concerns, in this case low self-esteem of mind and body.

The same developmental tasks (i.e. separation, individuation etc.).

The same gender (if important),

The same occupation, (in this case studying, i.e. many reflexive choices and decisions in designing their individual educational pattern, their lifestyle, etc.)

When the group has a frame of time, which follows the time patterns of their study life, and a fixed number of sessions, one is giving a space to work and space to separate. The restricted number of sessions protect the members against fear of greed, fear of clinging on to the group/therapists, and at the same time against too deep dependency. The time limited frame also confronts the group with the reality that it will never end up being (close to) perfect. The therapists announce this from early on. Still there is space for hope, and a possibility of change.

You might say that a theme-focused, time-limited group should not be too homogeneous, but also have an optimal level of diversity as well as an optimal level of anxiety. If the group becomes too homogeneous, nothing will happen.

## TYPICAL THEMES



During the group sessions the most typical themes were: object relationships, the capacity to be alone, oral metaphors and self-esteem.

## OBJECT RELATIONSHIPS

Object relations were a theme in each session. Most often the relation discussed was a dyadic relation, often to the mother, less often the father, often a boy friend and very often they were preoccupied with an ex-boy friend. Some of the members had a tendency to idealise their parents, in others there was an ambivalent or hostile relationship. One of the girls had not seen her parents for 5 years, another was phoned by her mother about every 4 hours.

Relationships were associated with great ambivalence, often described with feelings of either being engulfed or being rejected. We saw the preoccupation with the ex-boy friends, with whom many of the girls still met and had relations, as an example of problems concerning separation and maybe also a bulimic tendency to taking in and letting go. They expressed fear of loss and abandonment, and at the same time protected themselves against new relations, which was experienced as risky and often unpleasant.

## THE MOTHER

In the group a lot of the members struggled with a separation from their mother, where they seemingly had been an object of the mothers projective identification, expected to be nice, happy, helpful and fully in contact with the mother's needs and feelings. To survive, the girls had to eagerly identify with this projection, and the result was a deficit in experiencing their own needs and feelings. The "false self" theme was evident.

We saw a extremely low ability to comfort and calm themselves in emotional or academic stressful situations. The attunement from the mother towards the child seemed to have been unstable.

All the girls reported situations where they did not feel understood, and where they needed interested and comforting

parents, instead of being rejected, sent out of the room and called hysterical. These situations were accompanied by feelings of despair and inner rage - and at the same time deep guilt because of anger and rage.

Weak ego-boundaries were manifest, fear of being invaded, feelings of being skinless, and the necessity to protect themselves were either acted out in a very bombastic way or was almost non-existent.

Their emotional attention was very much directed outwards, and the group had a hard time to try to feel and acknowledge their own inner world. Instead they were keen on acting on the expectations of others.

The relation to the mother became more elaborated. They often described situations with a very intrusive and at the same time very competitive attitude from the mother towards the daughter. Often

intrusiveness and competition was of a badly hidden bodily and sexual character. When the daughters felt anger and disgust, even nausea, these feelings were accompanied by guilt and efforts to blame themselves and to control their anger intensively. Sometimes these episodes were followed by binge eating.

the

A triangular relation was seldom seen in the family patterns. The maturation of the triangular capacity, opens the road/eases the road of separation. Separation wishes were often in the life history of the group members accompanied with severe guilt feelings.

## ENVY

From the beginning the group shared stories about criticism and disgust towards their academic capacities and disgust towards their own bodies. They revealed envy towards others bodies and fantasies about how others (girlfriends and group members) could control their study, weight and greed.

We understand envy as a more primitive feeling (dyadic) – than jealousy (triadic, and involving a third part). The emotion was reluctantly admitted as a core feeling in the group. They sent stolen glances at the bodies of each other and they dressed up eagerly for every session. They revealed fantasies about how they thought the others were totally able to control everything, and how difficult it was to meet in the group after having gained an extra kilo, or having had a bulimic fantasy or, as it showed up for some of the girls, a bulimic attack since last session. When efforts to understand the feelings behind their behaviour were

successful or their chaotic feelings and loss of control could be logically explained, they expressed great relief. After the honeymoon phase in the group, quite a lot of them revealed that their relation to their body had worsened since joining the group. We interpret this as an expression of being able to reveal and see what had been there all the time. After this, more concerns were revealed e.g. especially the fear of getting more burdened and sick from joining the group. Could it lead to anything good? Were the therapists “the good mother” or “the bad mother”? Would the group collapse or could it survive? Would the therapists engulf the group or reject it? It was perceived as only either/or for a long time. A split universe was often presented.

Slowly there was a bigger capacity to contain and hold ambivalence towards us, to sustain the imperfect, and to feel gratitude to the relief, which the group now and then actually offered.

## THE CAPACITY TO BE ALONE

From the very beginning a certain theme occurred: the capacity to be alone. In a very concrete way they were dealing with experiences with each other about living together with other students or living alone in an apartment. Mandy tells the group that she has been living in two sorts of halls of residence. She is bored by other students invading her room, she does not like to share

has found out that it is difficult to live alone. Lola is not able to be with herself without having friends coming or having appointments all the time. Margaret also fills up her free time with appointments with friends or with her former boyfriend.

In this way they told each other: *I am not quite individuated- I do not yet feel separated and grown up and at the same time I am longing to be able to be so.* The

toilet and kitchen with others. She is longing to be alone in an apartment. Hanna has just moved to a place of her own for the first time in her life and she

how much loneliness they have inside and how much defence they have to build up against the feeling of it.

At the fourth session they have a discussion about kitchens. Mandy has now moved to her apartment and she has found out that it is very difficult and ambivalent for her to have her own kitchen. She enjoys not having to eat with other people, but a kitchen all for herself scares her, because in such a kitchen you may eat and eat and never stop. Margaret shares this feeling. She thinks it is dangerous to have one's own kitchen. When there are other people present you may control your eating, but on your own you know that if you eat a piece of chocolate - it is going to be vomited up later. Lola is fond of having her own kitchen and especially her own bathroom. For her the toilet was the place to hide and vomit when she lived with her family. In this way they told each other that it is difficult to be alone because then you cannot control your greed and at the same

picture of others invading the room gives associations to their feeling of their mothers invading their psychic room. And the picture of filling up the free time reveals

time being with others makes you put them in a controlling role, which makes you feel lonely, different and exposed. They do not have the capacity to be alone but neither do they have the capacity to be with someone. They do not have a free space, a refuge.

The term *the capacity to be alone* is used by Winnicott. He points out, that the capacity to be alone is one of the important signs of maturity in emotional development and it needs the existence of a good object in the psychic reality of the individual. The lack of a stable good inner object made it difficult for our group members to be able to stay alone. And when you cannot stay alone it is also difficult for you to stay with someone.

They did gradually developed a better capacity to be alone and to be with others and to be alone together with others. They became better at listening to each other in the group and they grew better at daring to stay in relationships.

## ORAL METAPHORS

I am so afraid to be too greedy, one of the group members says in the second session talking about her new relation with a man. Another fears that her new boyfriend will eat her up. He scares her because of his demanding way of exceeding her boundaries and she wants to go and do some binge eating and vomit afterwards, she says. Another one talks about being filled with vomit and shit There is also a goldmine, but it is buried in shit and one of the others says: My mother gives me nausea.

They talked a lot about taking up too much space in the group, and in their relations to men and friends. I fill up too much with my body and my words, one will say and another characterises her body as a big

warty lump.

In this way they talked in oral metaphors. Sometimes a lot of primitive material would be poured out in the group showing how primitive ways of experience still were present in their personality in spite of their grown up, intelligent and nice appearance and behaviour.

It is characteristic for persons with eating-disorders that they often have a lack of language to describe their feelings and inner states. Instead they use descriptions without nuances or primitive pictures.

Their metaphors show a picture of the bulimic dilemma: either you will be all eaten up or you will be rejected and devaluated.

## SELF-ESTEEM

The group members talked a lot about their self-esteem. And it was obvious that they have got a very low one. Their inferiority-feelings did not only include their bodies, but also their intellectual capacities and their personal character traits. But such feelings might quickly turn into omnipotent fantasies.

-Jean tells the group that she is so afraid of being stupid that she tests herself every time she reads. She asks herself have I totally understood these lines with the result that she cannot concentrate at all. Having a very demanding father - it is so provocative for her to deliver something to a person in authority - that she withholds it rather than try to give anything at all. At the same time she puts great demands on herself.

Their inferiority-feelings were often connected with perfectionist feelings.

-Jean says: I want to work with my low self-esteem and my academic perfectionism. You may feel you are of no worth and still want to be perfect. The inferiority-position makes you want to be perfect and because of perfectionist expectations you feel inferior all the time. These polarities keep influencing each other.

It was a common trait that the group members had difficulties reading their own inner world. They were in general very focused on others' expectations and very afraid of disappointing others. Many of them had as kids been mostly nice compliant girls who occasionally could burst into tantrums, which made their parents call them hysterical. They had all experiences being called

-Mandy tells the group that she had been home visiting her parents after last weeks meeting. While at home she worked on an essay. Suddenly all her 30 pages disappeared from the computer and she was not able to conjure it up again. She was absolutely desperate. The parents reacted as they did when she was a child : they were offended, affronted by her despair and reproached her for being hysteric. When they had lunch there was no plate for Mandy because of her tantrum.

Episodes like this were rather common for most of the girls and had given them the impression that there was no room for their aggression. They felt shameful and guilty every time they got angry. In that way they had not developed a balanced way of controlling their impulses.

They had the same either-or relation to their need for attention. They did desperately want to be seen and be recognised, but they quickly felt ashamed by their need and considered it to be a question of greed. They felt ashamed and wanted to disappear.

In the group they often felt ashamed when they had been telling the group something. Now I have been speaking for a long time - I have taken enough space for myself, they would typically say, even when they had only been talking for 10 minutes. By being so afraid of aggression and their own needs they prevented themselves building up a bigger self-confidence and self-esteem, which demands knowing oneself, accepting oneself and discussing with oneself.

hysterical as kids and even as grown ups.

## THE LAST SESSION

The last session manifested some of the outcomes of the group-therapy. It was accompanied by thunder and excessive rain. One by one the group members arrived dripping wet and Margaret was so delayed by the traffic that she came half an hour late. The others expressed worry for her for the first time. Having been a little outside the group-cohesion, having been exposed to the others envious withdrawal for being so thin and good-looking, and having lost her mother so early (11 years), Margaret had been subject to special attention from the therapists. So we were worrying whether she would be able to tolerate the final session. But she came and was the one to express the most profound benefit of the group-therapy. She said: the group has in a way been like a mother to me. The group has been able to create a room for confidence, where you might express what is difficult for you. Maybe I idealize it a bit, for I have heard from all of you how difficult a relationship with one's mother may be.

She had allowed herself to recognise one of her deepest needs: the need of a mother who could care for and understand her. A need which had been rejected and put away, because as she used to say: You have to get on.

The group as a mother was a metaphor not only for Margaret but for the whole group. She was the one to express it on behalf of the group. The experience to be able to reveal some of the hidden difficult feelings and be met with understanding had served as a repair for their difficult and ambivalent relationship with their mothers, which had produced a feeling of a bad inner world and a feeling of belonging nowhere.

Lina was the one to express a change in the relation to food. She was a very expressive person who was a skilled storyteller.

Her story was called: The parcel from Funen. Her mother sometimes sent her a parcel with food. This time she received not one glass of marmalade, but many glasses of marmalade. Her first reaction was to think: now mum wants me to get fat, so I will be fatter than her when I return for summer holiday. This was told with some irony. But then she continued; But I decided, that I did not have to eat it all by myself. And she arranged a marmalade-party for her friends sharing the parcel from Funen. In this way she told the group : You do not have to eat it all or reject it. Food is not an either-or. You might eat some and share the rest with others and be happy too. Her story was received by the rest of the group with a relieving laughter. This told us that Lina had been a mouth-piece for a common experience.

Their relations to their mothers were of course also a topic at the last session. They repeated some of their antagonistic feelings towards their mothers and shared a feeling of the paradox that they were ready to forgive their fathers, but very reluctantly their mothers. We saw this as a way of telling us - their therapists - that it was difficult to forgive us for closing down the group. We pointed out that their anger could also be

related to us.

Two of the group members regretted not having used the group as much as they would have liked. They felt that they only now had got that feeling of security which might have allowed them to be more present in the group and therefore, Jean said while putting her arm down with fury, is it not fair to end it.

The group was mentioned by the therapists as a soon becoming ex-group. The members might after the termination hold on to the group by their mental representation of it. It might in this way become an inner object, which they might remember and talk with. Thereby the group was not completely lost.

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## THE TWILIGHT ZONE OR A CASE STUDY THAT LEADS TO A NEW DIMENSION...

### « ENTRE CHIEN ET LOUP », OU UNE ÉTUDE DE CAS QUI CONDUIT À UNE NOUVELLE DIMENSION

Joana Lemos |

#### ABSTRACT

In this paper, the author tries to discuss a case study that, in her words, “leads to a new dimension”. This new dimension is considered to be the “twilight zone”, where the end of a cycle happens and the preparations of new renewals occur. With this case study, the author tries to review some psychodynamic concepts, namely the one of Paraphrenia (Kraepelin), discussing two fundamental areas that makes us human (cognitions and emotions) in a different approach: Like two separate pathways that apparently don’t seem to touch one another.

Key words: paraphrenia, diagnostic classification, twilight zone, affective disorder

#### RÉSUMÉ

En cette communication, la femme auteur essayer de faire une discussion sur une étude de cas lequel, a son sens, “nous ira mener à une nouvelle dimension”. Cette nouvelle dimension, la “zone crépusculaire”, c’est la dimension où la fin du cycle arrive et la préparation des nouvelles aurores revenir. Avec cette étude de cas, la femme auteur essayer de réviser quelques concepts psychodynamiques, nommément le concept de Paraphrenia (Kraepelin), et réfléchir sur deux de notre principal dimensions humaines (cognition et émotion) autrement: Comme deux chemins parallèles que, en apparence, ne se touche pas.

Mots clés: paraphrénie, catégorie diagnostique, « entre chien et loup », troubles affectifs

*"Alice opened the door and found that it led into a small passage, not much larger than a rat-hole: she knelt down and looked along the passage into the loveliest garden you ever saw. How she longed to get out of that dark hall, and wander about among those beds of bright flowers and those cool fountains, but she could not even get her head through the doorway, and 'even if my head would go through', thought poor Alice, 'it would be of very little use without my shoulders. Oh how I wish I could shut up like a telescope! I think I could, if I only knew how to begin'. For, you see, so many out-of-the-way things had happened, that Alice had begun to think that very few things indeed were really impossible (...)"*

*From: Alice's Adventures in Wonderland (sine data)*

## DISCUSSION

A. is a youngster that came into our service claiming he was having delusions about the world and the others.

*The white walls seemed to be moving and made colourful circles and dynamic shapes; people walked in strange ways and seemed to talk a foreign language; nothing was like it had been in the past...*

In spite of being scared with this new situation, he also felt a kind of infant joy: suddenly the world was not as boring as it used to be. There were millions of shapes, colours, and features to discover and understand...

A. entered what I have chosen to call the "twilight zone" after taking LSD for a few times, began feeling strange and paranoid but also full of strength and high-spirited.

The first time I was with A. (in May of the year 2000), he explained to me that he could not fall asleep and that this happened since he was interned. When he went to bed, he started feeling very anxious, trembling and thinking that he was going to die; "I can't shut my eyes or I'll die, you know?" he says.

He is almost lying down in the little sofa we have in our counselling room, like if it was a real bed and, in spite of its small size, he seems to feel much more comfortable that way. He speaks with great difficulty, for he is very tired, sighing constantly, shaking, seeking to breathe, with his eyes wide shut.

His speech is very confused and apparently, he feels equally chaotic. The mouth cannot accompany the thoughts; it is clear to me that he is really trying to sound coherent, but that that's a job he cannot, on that moment, to accomplish. When I try to calm him down, saying to him that he doesn't have to tell me all at once, he feels a little bit more relaxed and lays his head on the arm of the sofa, preparing to fall asleep. A few seconds later, he sits down very straight, looks at me for the first time, and takes a big breath, like convincing himself that he was finally prepared to talk about what was the matter with him.

He tells me about the internment (seven months before), of how he started consuming drugs and of the subtle but yet anguished moments and feelings he began to experience. This process of pain and suffer started, in his words, when he was in high school:

He started drinking alcohol, smoking cannabis, staying out late, losing weight and then



he tried LSD. He speaks about the high feelings associated with this drug, of the feeling of being very powerful and even superior to others. "A new vision, and a much richer one", in his words.

Everything had the possibility of being another; all sounds could be arranged in such a way that could be transformed into all possible and existing tunes; all words were capable of "being stretched continuously till the infinite number zero", like he so proudly told me. This, of course, were the good feelings and when I asked him about the negative ones, he started being sleepy again, laid down and asked if he could shut his eyes. I saw this sudden sleepiness as a sign of his incapacity to think about the "dark side" of the process, for it brought to light anguishes that could not be dealt with.

To A., LSD became a kind of "goddess", for it was this drug that transformed the old boring world into the new fantastic one; like in Lewis Carroll's "Alice's Adventures in Wonderland" (sine data), he had passed the mirror and found the wonders of the new land. In addition, like in the book, he was bound to know strange characters, queens of evil, fears never yet experienced and terrible paranoia. It was only a few sessions later that he could tell me about the "twilight zone" he had entered but, every time he talked about it, he simultaneously talked about the great accomplishments, colourful visions and of the "infinite number zero". "Zero is everything and nothing at the same time, the number that, in spite of not existing in the real world, turns the real world into a possible world", in his own words.

Our counselling process began with a "strait jacket" attitude to all suffering and was slowly transformed in to a philosophical questioning and reflection of the whole world.

We did not anticipate this transformation of the process, but I think it was A. himself that, in sudden and symbolic ways, told me that there was only one way to go or he wasn't going to dive in his inner soul.

A. has very special qualities in the cognitive area, that is to say, a very bright and even rare capacity for reflection and abstract thinking. If we were to apply him an IQ test, he would definitely pass the top of the scale...

And it is here that I think we can begin to link cognition and emotion, not like we are used to, that is a complement of two areas that make us human, but, on the contrary, like two separate pathways that don't seem to touch one another. We know that this is usually thought to be an impossible accomplishment, but with A. and with a few other cases I have known about, it seems to be exactly what happens. In spite of being delusional, confused, incoherent, anxious, and in great suffering, A. astonishingly was having great academic results. Of course at first, I thought he was embellishing the real world and defending himself in a narcissist and maniac way, but when I went to confirm what he told me, I discovered that he was telling the truth.

A. was clearly psychotic but could separate emotions and cognitions in such a way that he was first on his class in some of the course subjects. In Portugal, we have a scale that goes from zero to twenty and he was getting 19s in very difficult areas of knowledge like Geometry and Topology, 18 at Computer Programming, 16 at Mathematical Programming, all of them implying high level abstract thinking and difficult reasoning. Of course, this school marks told me a great number of things about him: he was capable of reading, exercising, reasoning and studying in spite of being delirious and very sick.

He also was capable of assimilating what he studied, of controlling his anxiety in the exam situation, of cognitive reasoning and cognitive resolutions. Moreover, he was capable of having reflective thoughts about this process. When we talked about it, that is to say, when I told him that I was very happy for him, A. answered that one thing had nothing to do with the other (claiming that the academic world was a world apart from his life).

Studying is a different area; something that is not touched by his feelings but the fact is

that A. describes Mathematics and Physics like he describes a dream or a work of art. He always uses a poetic and philosophical language. For him, Mathematics and Art are not opponents because there is not such a thing as an exact science: Mathematical contents can be transformed into colours, shapes, and melodic tunes: a number is like a piece of clay or marble that can be shaped or sculpted in a million ways, all of them unique but equally reliable, at least till proof to the contrary.

In addition, there is another area of knowledge and interest that does not seem to be affected by his illness: A's capability for creating and appreciating art. In fact, not only does he play several instruments (piano, violin, and saxophone), he also paints, draws, creates mental scripts for cinema, and composes music. A few months ago, he registered in a school of jazz music and he will take classes for five years. Therefore, he is now actually doing two courses in Higher Education and doesn't seem to be having any kind of problem or difficulty in any of them.

In my graduate degree thesis, I worked on Kafka's "Letter to my father" and I concluded that art and creation played an important role in the maintenance of the author's possible mental health and as a form of insight and inner reflection. It didn't surprise me that the writing and the act of creation were a kind of working-throw of Kafka's life, but with A. I seem to find this more surprising, as I know that he has not a neurotic problem, but a psychotic one. We are dealing with very ancient anguishes and fears.

I will now advance some facts of A.'s life that seem all important for his diagnosis. In spite of A.'s entrance into the "twilight zone" had occurred only after the LSD consumption, it is clear to me that they only brought to light what already existed in him, as a seed.

He continues to have great difficulty in understanding the world and others, there is a sense of weirdness towards what goes around him, interpreting circumstances, objects and the actions of others in terms of a personal understanding, rather than along commonly held ways of thinking. It is difficult for him to be able to trust, comprehend, and/or relate to others' views.

He does not understand why others think his beliefs are bizarre, because to him they make sense; he also sees links between otherwise unrelated ideas; sometimes he still has hallucinations, seeing things that other people don't, false perceptions of movement in the visual field, flashes of colour, trails of images of moving objects, etc. (I want to caveat that probably these are related to the so called "Hallucinogen Persisting Perception Disorder" or "Flashbacks" as described in DSM IV (sine data)).

Sometimes delusions appear with no apparent context and are held with great conviction, often not altered by argument to the contrary; paranoia comes to surface, turning him over-vigilant, avoiding certain situations, frightened. If we were to diagnose A. according to DSM IV (sine data), we would find it difficult to make the right choice: we are not talking of a "Substance-Induced Psychotic Disorder" or of a "Delirium", as these disorders usually involve a temporary duration or of a "Hallucinogen Intoxication", for this implies recent use of hallucinogen.

Of course there is evidence that certain drugs can precipitate psychosis in some biologically vulnerable people but the question maintains: if the substance taken induced a psychosis which then developed into a more long-term condition, or whether the person would have developed it in any case, whether or not she had taken the substance.

I think that A. had a vulnerability prior to the consumption of LSD and a biological one, for A. was born from a risk pregnancy and was a great-premature – he was born after a 27 week gestation (six months and a half), was in the incubator for two months and has a history of severe convulsions since he was born till he was ten years old:

He speaks about one of these episodes, when he had a very high fever, perceived a paper sheet as being disintegrating itself, and of having eaten it, with the delirium. He also had a severe depression when he was only nine years old, having had psychiatric

help. Maybe the right diagnosis for A., according to DSM IV (sine data), was a mix of "Psychotic Disorder Due to a General Medical Condition" and "Substance-Induced Psychotic Disorder", which would lead to something like "Psychosis not otherwise specified" or "Atypical Psychosis".

I do think that A. is really an atypical young man, but I also think that saying that someone or something is atypical does almost the same as saying that we are having a hard time understanding him or it.

I think I do understand A. in global terms but I have difficulty in understanding the apparent total splitting of his ego in action: we are used to see psychotic clients that have a strong impairment in mental, behavioural, and emotional functioning and the only concept I found in my research bibliography that implied this non-impairment was the Kraepelin's concept of PARAPHRENIA (used by Freud in other terms and also different of the concept of "Late Paraphrenia" used essentially in the United Kingdom (Ravindran, Yatham & Munro, 1999, p. 1).

Accordingly to these authors "Kraepelin's definition implies a disorder similar to schizophrenia but with better-preserved affect and rapport and much less deterioration. It is now diagnosed relatively infrequently and is not listed in the current DSM IV or on ICD-10 but some psychiatrists recognise it and label it "Atypical Psychosis", "Schizoaffective Disorder", "Psychosis not otherwise specified" or "Delusional Disorder" for lack of better diagnostic category" (1999, p. 1).

Paraphrenia, as the authors tell us, is, according to Kraepelin, a chronic disorder similar in many respects to schizophrenia, but with no intellectual deterioration and with a much more preservation of affect, even in acute phases. It also has a much more positive treatment with neuroleptic medication, with a return to normal-thinking, delusions no longer apparent, appropriate affect, good behaviour control, improved reality testing, apparent insight, reasonably realistic planning of the future, improvement in rapport, etc. However, Paraphrenia is a chronic and paranoid illness (1999, p. 2).

A. stopped taking medication months ago (he had started it in 1999) and is nowadays relatively stable, but I continue to notice a large range of strange and bizarre features in his stance and manners, and am keenly aware of his great fragility and fragmented ego.

In one of our last sessions, A. appeared very anxious, restless, with great difficulty in expressing himself, sighing constantly, almost like the first time we saw each other. He knew a girl, made friendship with her, and ended getting involved with her physically. When he came to talk to me, he was in absolute panic but also maniac about the situation, asking me what would happen next, as if I had the ability of predicting the future, but simultaneously in total chaos and anguish for he felt that she had only "played" with him and wasn't going to want to see him again. The fact is that any situation that is unpredicted, that involves feelings and affection, and relations with others turns A. into a "twilight man".

In the Dictionary of Symbols (Chevalier & Gheerbrant, 1982), twilight is described as a symbol that has straight connection to the idea of West, to the direction where the sun lies, goes out and dies. It expresses the idea of the end of a cycle and, consequently, the preparation of a renewal.

"Twilight" is a space-time image: the instant suspended. Space and time will sink or die in another world and in another night, but the death of one is the announcement of other: a new time and a new space will follow the old ones. The going to the West is the going to the future, in spite of only being so through dark and dreadful changes. Beyond the night, new dawns are expected. The twilight masks itself and symbolises the beauty and the nostalgia of the decline and of the past. It is the image and the time of melancholia and nostalgia.

For me, A. is this image – I did not call him the "twilight man" in vain: in fact, I do feel

that A. is a space-time symbol that disappears and renews itself day by day, through the dark changes I tried to describe in this paper, and that the apparent total separation of pathways leading to cognitions and emotions, make him aware of new dawns and positive announcements. It is as if he was the instant suspended, or should I say the no moment allowed but always expected, like in the poem that opens the documentation of this Conference: Tomorrow, I'll think about the day after tomorrow...

When A. speaks about the Infinite Zero, (I recall for you, "the number that is everything and nothing at the same time, that in spite of not existing in the real world, turns the real world into a possible world"), I see the perfection never encountered but always seeded, the opposite of the non-thinking; at the end, God and, in my opinion, he is speaking of himself.

To A., the world has no limits or impossibilities, but the fact is that he has the notion that, like in Lewis Carroll's "Alice's Adventures in Wonderland" (sine data) passage I have chosen to open this paper, in spite of having the "head", the "shoulders" won't follow it. He has the ability of perceiving his own infinitude as a masterpiece that he will never be able to create...

In fact, the most common complaint he makes is the never-ending feeling of dissatisfaction and emptiness. Even Mathematics is turning boring, for the way that professors taught them seem to him to be limited and with little or no proficiency and depth. It is like there is and always will be a maladjustment between A. and the rest of the world, as the world would never understand him or him the world – one time, he told me that he felt like a "Dead or blind spot", that no one could reach entirely...

It seems to me that A. has a very rich and special inner soul, and that, in some way, he knows he cannot touch some of its areas. The feeling I get is that there are dead zones, that is zones that he cannot reach whatsoever, but that there are a number of other areas that he knows are pressure zones and that he tries to control, not by simply denying or project them (negation, projection), but by dissipating them, turning them into more abstract than real (rationalisation, sublimation). Of course even the more fragmented ego has zones almost untouched, but with A. it seems like every zone is an entry portal to "twilight zone"...

There are zones that I would describe as silence zones, others that I would describe as shadow ones, others I could call dead zones, etc. but all of them seem to be in what I have chosen to call "the twilight zone" and that A. himself calls "The infinite number zero"...

For me, A. is a youngster that has a kind of spiral instability that he can, due to a high level of abstract thinking, in a philosophical way, encode and deal with.

Whatever the answer to these questions is, I think that A. is, without doubt, a kind of melting zone, where everything and nothing become the same...

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## ACADEMIC EXPECTATION'S OF FIRST-YEAR COLLEGE STUDENTS: RESULTS BY SOME SOCIO-DEMOGRAPHIC VARIABLES

## ATTENTES UNIVERSITAIRES DES ÉTUDIANTS DE PREMIÈRE ANNÉE: RÉSULTATS EN FONCTION DE QUELQUES VARIABLES SÓCIO- DEMOGRAPHIQUES

Leandro S. Almeida, Ana Paula Soares, Rosa Vasconcelos, Carolina Machado & Natércia Morais |

### ABSTRACT

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As part of an investigation project "Transition, Adaptation and Academic Success of Students in Higher Education", financed by the Fundação Calouste Gulbenkian (Program of Support of Projects in the Educational Research Domain - 2001), and having these ideas in mind, we have evaluated 1st year students' expectations (n=1923). At the beginning of the school year (during registration in the University), the students answered the Academic Involvement Questionnaire (expectations form) (AIQ; Soares & Almeida, 2001). The AIQ assesses students' involvement expectations in five dimensions: institutional involvement, vocational involvement, social involvement, resources use and curricular involvement. Although the results showed a quite positive global pattern of student's academic involvement expectations (particularly high in the curricular and vocational involvement dimensions), it was possible to verify that female students showed a higher pattern of expectations, especially in vocational and curricular domains. This situation, in terms of its psychological and educational meaning, can put the female students in a more favourable position to achieve higher levels of academic adjustment and success.

Key words: gender differences, academic adjustment and success, academic involvement questionnaire

## RÉSUMÉ

Dans un projet de recherche financée para la Fondation Calouste Gulbenkian, nous avons évalué les attentes d'engagement académique des étudiants (ce qu'ils pensent trouver ou faire à la Université) qui sont arrivés à la Université de Minho (Braga, Portugal). L'étude considère 1923 étudiants qui sont ingressés au premier année de 45 différents graduations de cette Université et qui ont répondu, au début de l'année scolaire, au Questionnaire d' Engagement Académique (QEA – Version A : attentes ; Soares & Almeida, 2001). Cet questionnaire considère les attentes des étudiants en cinq dimensions: engagement institutionnel, engagement vocationnelle, engagement social, utilisation des ressources de l'université, et engagement curriculaire. Malgré les données montrent un type général d'attentes d' engagement académique bien positive, notamment dans les dimensions curriculaire et vocationnelle, nous avons trouvé que les filles présentent attentes d' engagement plus hautes, par exemple dans ces deux dimensions. Ces résultats peuvent signifier que les étudiants de sexe féminin sont dans une situation plus favorable pour arriver aux niveaux plus satisfaisants d'ajustement et de réussite académique.

Mots clés: différences selon les sexes, adaptation et réussite universitaire, questionnaire d'engagement universitaire

## INTRODUCTION

During the last decades, Portugal has had a Higher Education quantitative expansion, both in terms of the number of public and private institutions/courses degrees, as in terms of students population (Eurydice, 2000; ME-DGES, 1999; OECD, 2001). Usually found in developed countries, this expansion results into a greater social and age diversification of students, which increases the number of different school trajectories, vocational projects and motivations/representations (Braga da Cruz et al., 1995; Gago et al., 1995; Soares, 1999).

This quantitative change was accompanied by qualitative nature changes (Almeida, Soares & Ferreira, 2000, 2001; Balsa et al., 2001; Braga da Cruz et al., 1995; Conceição et al., 1998; Ferreira, Almeida & Soares, 2001), which justifies our present interest in students expectations when they are admitted into Higher Education. It also justifies the study of the impact those expectations have on the student's adaptation process to the university context (Soares & Almeida, 2001). According to literature in this area, expectations may affect the level of commitment as well as the cognitive and behavioural investment in which students are willing to engage. This affects the quality of adaptation and the academic performance (Baker & Schultz, 1992a b; Baker, McNeil & Siryk, 1985; Biggs & Moore, 1983; Jackson, Pancer, Pratt & Hunsberger, 2000; Soares & Almeida, 2001), justifying a greater attention from institutions.

As part of an investigation project "Transition, Adaptation and Academic Success of

Students in Higher Education”, financed by the Fundação Calouste Gulbenkian (Program of Support of Projects in the Educational Research Domain - 2001), and having these ideas in mind, we have evaluated 1st year students’ expectations, in order to analyse how those expectations differ according to some variables (for example: gender; schooling choices and residential situation).

## METHOD

### SAMPLE

A total of 1923 first-year students from University of Minho’s (UM) 45 courses participated in this research. Notice that this sample represents about 70% of the student’s population, which, in the academic year of 2001-02, have been registered to this institution (N=2741). The majority was of female gender (59.5%), between 17 and 57 years old (M=19.03; Sd=3.68). For more than half of the students in this sample, attending Higher Education meant leaving their homes (at

least from Monday to Friday, per week). Most of them came from medium social class, and the majority of parents only had the 9th grade. Notice still, that 65% of students attend their first choice course. Also, 76% of students referred that they were attending the University of their choice: University of Minho. Table I describes the sample by gender and groups of studies. The 45 courses frequented by students in the sample were organized in seven areas of studies.

**Table I – Sample by gender and groups of courses**

<b>Courses Council</b>	<b>Male</b>	<b>Female</b>
<b>Economic, Business and Politic Sciences (n=323)</b>	<b>18.9%</b>	<b>19.3%</b>
<b>Education and Psychology (n=163)</b>	<b>3.2%</b>	<b>13.8%</b>
<b>Kindergarten and Primary Teacher’s Education (n=67)</b>	<b>3%</b>	<b>6.6%</b>
<b>Social Sciences (n=146)</b>	<b>6.8%</b>	<b>11.2%</b>
<b>Sciences (n=366)</b>	<b>21.6%</b>	<b>22.4%</b>
<b>Languages and Humanities (n=132)</b>	<b>3%</b>	<b>11.7%</b>
<b>Engineering (n=393)</b>	<b>46.3%</b>	<b>14.9%</b>



## INSTRUMENT

The students' academic involvement expectations were evaluated through the Academic Involvement Questionnaire (AIQ; Soares & Almeida, 2001). This self-report questionnaire seeks to evaluate what first-year college students expect to find/do in the Higher Education institution where they have just been admitted (A form). Composed by 34 items in a four likert format (1 - never or hardly ever; 2 - a few times; 3 - quite often; and 4 - always or almost every time); the AIQ

is based in a complex conceptualisation of students' academic involvement, which includes cognitive, motivational and behaviour components. The AIQ assesses students' involvement expectations in five dimensions: (i) institutional involvement; (ii) vocational involvement; (iii) social involvement; (iv) resources use; (v) and curricular involvement. Table II describes the five dimensions of the AIQ, indicating the number of items and their respective alpha coefficient.

Table II – Description of AIQ's dimensions (Soares & Almeida, 2001)

DIMENSIONS		ITEMS	ALPHA
<i>Institutional involvement</i>	defines the student's expectations concerning the types of institutional supports they hope to receive in the Higher Education institution they attend (support services, teachers...), as well as their expectations of institutional involvement and investment	12	.91
<i>Vocational involvement</i>	defines the student's expectations in terms of achievements and the development of their goals and vocational plans	8	.85
<i>Social involvement</i>	defines the student's expectations regarding the type and quality of interpersonal relations with their peers and the establishment of more intimate relations.	6	.76
<i>Resources use</i>	defines the student's expectations regarding the existence and use of available resources in <i>campus</i> for the accomplishment of academic activities.	6	.78
<i>Curricular involvement</i>	defines the student's expectations regarding their investment in learning and in the education opportunities inherent to the chosen course.	6	.76

Higher expectations values indicate students' intentions of greater involvement in the different aspects of academic life (institution, career project, peers, available resources and course/degree); while lower scores indicate intentions of less involvement. However, students get a score for each one of the five considered areas obtaining a distinct pattern of expectations according to the analyzed dimension. For instance: a student can present higher expectations of social and institutional involvement, higher expectations of the use of available resources and lower

expectations of investment in his career project and in his course. The studies of construction and validation, which were carried out, reveal that the AIQ presents satisfactory psychometric qualities, whether it refers to its dimensionality or to the values of internal consistency (cf. Soares & Almeida, 2001). Additionally to the AIQ, we have used an Identification Form, built specifically for this research, which intended to identify students' social-demographic characteristics (gender, age), their basic and secondary schooling background (high school course and classifications) and present situation (university and degree-course options of entrance, reasons for applying to the University of Minho and kinds of anticipated problems in its attendance).

## PROCEDURES

The AIQ was applied during the students' registration in the University, allowing the observation of almost every student, who was admitted into the University of Minho in the 1st phase of the National Contest of Access to the Higher Education in Portugal in the academic year 2001-02. The students were informed about the objectives of this research

and were assured about the data confidentiality (their identification was required, given the necessity to cross-tabulate that data with subsequent information concerning their academic adaptation and scholar achievement). All the students in the sample were voluntary. There wasn't any kind of financial compensation for the participation in this study.

## RESULTS

The relationship between the students' involvement expectations and socio-demographic variables was explored using multivariate analyses (MANOVA), available in SPSS program (version 11.0 for Windows).

Table III presents the results in the five dimensions of the AIQ

(Form A) considering the students by gender, place of residence (whether they are, or not, living away from home) and course-degrees options they are attending (first, second, third or more options).

**Table III - Results in the AIQ by gender, residential situation and course-degree options**

Dimensions		Institutional		Vocational		Interpersonal		Resources		Courses	
QEA		Mean	Sd	Mean	Sd	Mean	Sd	Mean	Sd	Mean	Sd
Global Sample		31.92	5.62	26.28	3.09	19.01	2.59	18.29	2.613	19.45	2.43
Gender	Masculine	31.5	6.08	25.7	3.36	18.8	2.74	18.4	2.77	18.7	2.66
	Feminine	32.2	5.30	26.6	2.86	19.1	2.49	18.2	2.51	19.9	2.13
Residential situation	Living without parents	32.2	5.68	26.4	3.00	19.2	2.48	18.5	2.55	19.7	2.31
	Living with parents	31.3	5.41	26.1	3.22	18.8	2.70	18.0	2.64	19.1	2.50
Course option	1st option	31.9	5.66	26.2	3.90	18.9	2.58	18.3	2.59	19.4	2.48
	2nd option	32.0	5.42	26.3	3.10	19.1	2.77	18.4	2.68	19.4	2.36
	3rd or + option	31.9	5.68	26.5	3.10	19.2	2.42	18.3	2.63	19.6	2.28

As we can see in Table III, and using the medium point, in each of the dimensions in the AIQ, as a reference (30, 20 and 15 points regarding, respectively, the first, second and remaining AIQ subscales), the students showed a quite positive pattern of involvement expectations. This situation, by itself, can reveal good indicators of students' adjustment process into university context. Although, this positive pattern of results was found, it was possible to verify some differences related to the academic (course-degree option) and socio-demographic (gender and residential situation) variables considered in this study. For example, female students present a higher

average in most of the evaluated dimensions (institutional, vocational, social and curricular), with the exception of those referring to the existence and use of resources available in campus (resource use), in which male students present slightly greater means. These differences, although small in numerical terms, reveal to be, in some cases, statistically significant. In the institutional involvement dimension we found a significant interaction effect of gender x residential situation x course-degree option ( $F=4.098$ ;  $df=2$ ;  $p<.05$ ). Figure 1a and b present separately the results considering students who were living away from home.

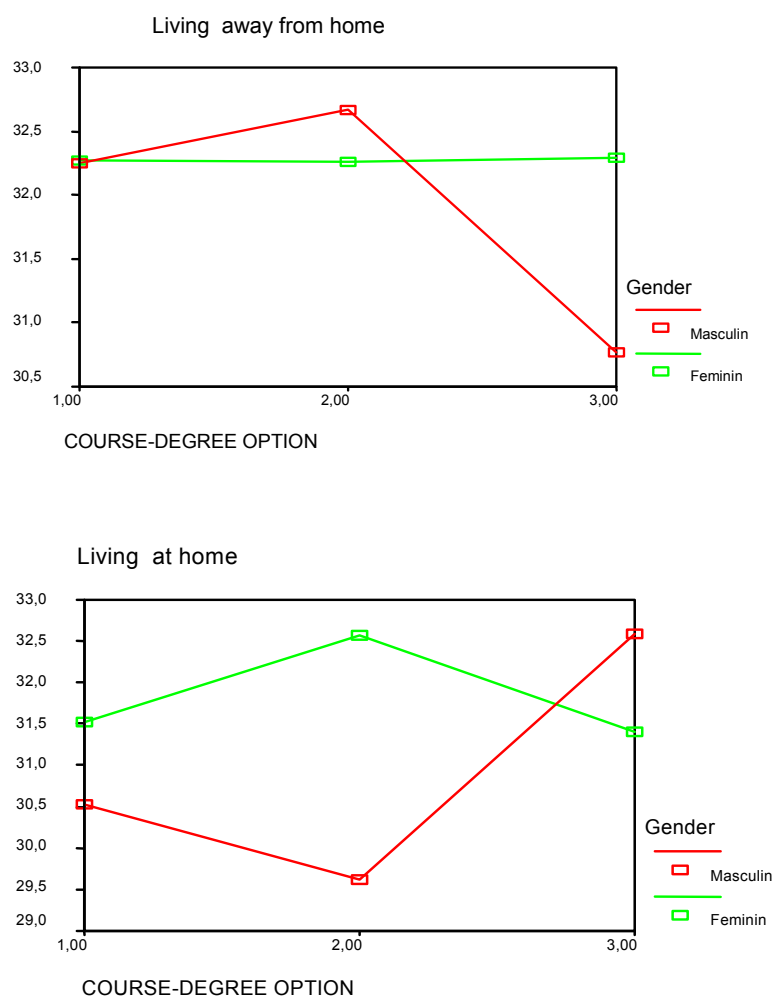


Figure 1a,b - Gender x course-degree option x residential situation interaction effect on institutional dimension

As we can see, where female students showed small mean differences when we considered their course-degree options and residential situation (values between 31.5 and 32.5), male students are more differentiated on these two variables (values between 30.7 and 32.7 considering course-degree options and the students who were living without parents; and values between 29.7 and 32.5 considering course-degree options and students who were living with their parents). Male students who were living without parents and attended a third course-degree option showed lower involvement expectations on institutional dimension. Male students who

were living with their parents and attended a third course-degree option present higher expectations than their colleagues attending a first or second course-degree option.

On the other hand, a significant interaction effect on the vocational dimension of AIQ was also found, registering a significant interaction effect between gender and course-degree options ( $F=3.196$ ;  $df=2$ ;  $p<.05$ ). Figure 2 shows this interaction effect.

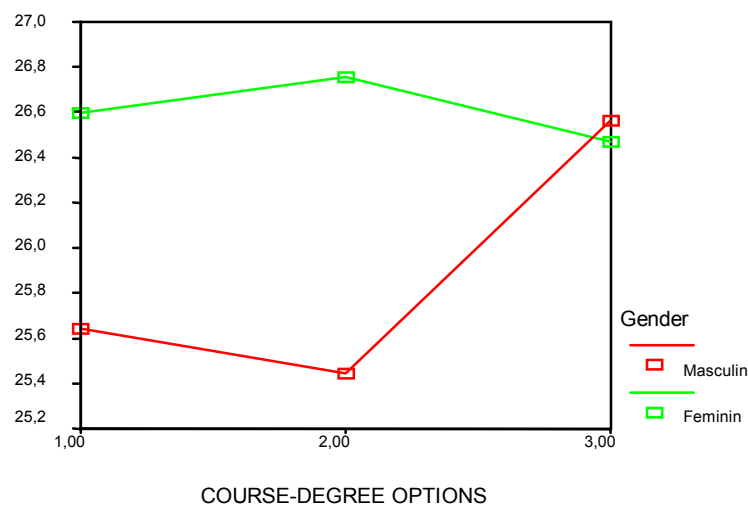


Figure 2 – Gender x course-degree option interaction effect on vocational dimension

Concerning the fulfilment and development of their goals and vocational plans female students showed higher expectations. These differences were especially evident when considering students attending a first or a second course-degree option. No differences were found when we considered students attending a third course-degree option.

Considering the other dimensions of AIQ, a significant gender effect on the resource use sub-scale ( $F=4.586$ ;  $df=1$ ;  $p<.05$ ) was found, as well as in the curricular sub-scale ( $F=54.589$ ;  $df=1$ ;  $p<.001$ ).

Female students showed particularly significant higher expectations on curricular dimension, while male students showed higher expectations on resources dimension.

## CONCLUSIONS

Analysing the results of the Academic Involvement Questionnaire (Form A - Soares & Almeida, 2001), in its five dimensions (institutional, vocational, social, resources and curricular), the results suggest that, when focusing on the medium point in each sub-scale, the students arrive to Higher Education with a quite positive pattern of involvement expectations. On the other hand, analyzing the results according to some students' academic (course-degree options) and socio-demographic characteristics (gender and residential situation), the analysis suggests that female students showed a higher level of involvement expectations. These differences favourable to female students seem to be more expressive concerning institutional, vocational and curricular dimensions of AIQ (in the first and second ones an interaction effect was registered). Despite the small differences registered, male students showed higher involvement expectations in the resource use dimension of AIQ.

Students who were living away from home and who attended a first or second course-degree option also showed a higher pattern of involvement expectations, on the institutional dimension of AIQ. Finally, no differences in the patterns in students' involvement expectations were found, according to the course-degree order of choice (except a secondary effect on the institutional and vocational dimensions). These results were unexpected, especially in what relates to the curricular variables. It would be expected that students attending their first option course-degree, would be more committed to their course, showing higher curricular involvement expectations. It also would be reasonable to expect that students attending a third option course-degree might want to be transferred to a first course-degree option as soon as possible. These results might also mean that the course-degree order of choice (first, second or third), is not a strong differentiator of college involvement expectations to some students. This situation could also be affected by the time of year when the data was collected (during the registration process at university).

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# THE IMPACT OF THE PSYCHOLOGICAL ASSESSMENT OF SOCIAL INTELLIGENCE PROCESSES AND STRATEGIES ON PSYCHOLOGICAL COUNSELLING IN HIGHER EDUCATION

## IMPACT DE L'ÉVALUATION PSYCHOLOGIQUE DES PROCESSUS DE L'INTELLIGENCE SOCIALE SUR LES STRATÉGIES DANS L'AIDE PSYCHOLOGIQUE AUX ÉTUDIANTS

Adelinda Maria Araújo Candeias |

### ABSTRACT

The main goal of this presentation is to discuss the impact of the psychological assessment of social intelligence processes and strategies on psychological counselling in higher education. In particular, we will characterize the cognitive dimension of the social intelligence construct and its consequences on assessment methods of psychological adjustment. Our analysis will focus on the pragmatic application of fundamental principles of cognitive and dynamic approach to social intelligence assessment methods. In this field, we discuss particularly how the psychological assessment of social intelligence processes and strategies could be identified in order to support psychological counselling in higher education.

Key words: Social intelligence; Psychological assessment; Ecological validity; Psychological counselling.

## RÉSUMÉ

Cette étude vise contribuer à la discussion des implications de l'évaluation des processus et des stratégies de l'intelligence sociale dans le support psychologique aux étudiants de l'enseignement supérieur. Spécialement, on trouvera de caractériser la dimension cognitive de l'intelligence sociale et de réfléchir sur ses conséquences dans les méthodes d'évaluation de l'ajustement psychologique. Cette analyse se centralisera dans l'application pragmatique des principes fondamentale de l'approche cognitive et dynamique aux méthodes d'évaluation de l'intelligence sociale. On discute, particulièrement, comment l'évaluation des processus et des stratégies de l'intelligence sociale permettre l'identification des besoins et des potentialités intra personnelle et inter personnelle des étudiants et ses implications pour l'intervention dans ce domaine.

Mots clés: Intelligence sociale; Évaluation psychologique; Validité écologique; Aide psychologique.

## INTRODUCTION

Early in the twentieth century, E.L. Thorndike (1921) referred to social intelligence as "the ability to understand and manage men and women, boys and girls - to act wisely in human relations" (p.228). We believe the study of that construct will allow us to get a clearer and more accurate representation of what personal and social adaptability are, and how subjects learn and develop their knowledge about this domain, with reference to a process of growing autonomy and awareness in the management of their life projects (personal and professional), and is one way to promote a new examination of human abilities and development, with reference to the social and cultural environment, as well to the changes in the instruments used for its assessment and methods of intervention for its promotion.

The social intelligence construct has been ignored during the last 80 years in relation to social and cultural factors, particularly western society's focus on economic and technological needs and development, in order to select the best subjects for industry and to cope with technologies, and educational orientation has focused on things like the IQ test, and on theoretical support for them.

Interest in social intelligence has recently increased, particularly because schools and organizations demand new ways of understanding and assessing human performance; today's interaction settings and new work demands imply interpersonal activities which require both social abilities and the ability to live and work autonomously in both personal and group activities. These, in turn, involve high standards of ability and social intelligence, e.g., the ability to solve interpersonal problems that may emerge from teamwork, from the management of others and from the management of one's own life. So, researchers have turned their attention to discovering components of effective living. Dissatisfaction with such theories, and with measures of human intelligence and performance, require a position somewhere between traditional



theories and assessment tests and socio-cognitive approaches that propose a close connection to the person's culture, learning and life experience in the construct conceptualization and operationalization of human cognition (Sternberg, 1998). This concern will be increasingly important if Psychology is to keep up with social and cultural changes. That is, studies of the social intelligence are becoming increasingly important if one wants to understand individuals' knowledge, thinking and behavioural processes (Kihlstrom & Cantor, 2000). Clearly, the performance of individuals on all tasks involves, at the same time, types of mental processes (reasoning, memory, perception, creativity) as well as types of contents of the task to be performed (verbal, numerical, spatial, figurative, social). Thus it is important in psychological theories on cognition to bear in mind the diversity of sources, which can cause and explain inter- and intrapersonal differences.

This work is theoretical, supported by socio-cognitive approaches to cognition and behaviour. The social intelligence construct is defined as a complementary construct, which allows us to conceptualize the interaction between large psychological categories (e.g., Ford 1995; Greenspan & Driscoll, 1997; Mayer, Salovey & Caruso, 2000). In this context, the social intelligence construct can be understood through two dimensions: cognitive and behavioural (e.g., Jones, & Day, 1997; Wong, Day, Maxwell & Meara, 1995). Although some recent studies have demonstrated a multidimensional nature to social intelligence, they provide no theoretical rationale for distinct aspects of it. But another recent study (Candeias, 2001) provides empirical support to distinguish between dimensions of the cognitive facet of social intelligence: skills for social ill/well structured problem solving and metacognitive skills for social problem solving. This study, developed with adolescents, found that the social cognitive process operates with different kinds of features and strategies, suggesting its selective use in relation to task-situation characteristics.

Given the importance of defining social intelligence, the present paper proposes a focus on the role of cognition in the socially intelligent behaviour of college students. Given the importance of a careful understanding of psychological human complexity, we elected to focus on the role of cognition in socially intelligent behaviour by examining two different dimensions of social intelligence – Cognitive and Behavioural – as a way of supporting a theoretical rationale leading to a more reliable understanding of social behaviour and social cognition complexity. The cognitive dimension focuses on the cognitive process and contents underlying interpersonal problem solving, and the behavioural dimension focuses on social effectiveness in social situations. So, this work intends to extend previous findings about the social intelligence construct and consolidate a better representation of the components of effective living among Portuguese college students.

This conceptualization about social intelligence would support the development of new proposals of psychological assessment about it, based on a socio-cognitive approach. We will focus on contextualized assessment, based on task-person-situation interaction; a cognitive analysis of process and strategies for solving interpersonal problems, and a dynamic perspective about the psychological assessment process (Candeias & Almeida, 1999; Candeias, 2002).

Our assessment approach applies a multidimensional construct of social intelligence to the study of individuals by searching for interactions between the individual's personal reading of life tasks (LT) and preferred strategies (S), as Cantor and Kihlstrom (1989, 2000) propose. Here, our aim is to identify meaningful LT during the college period, especially those that are perceived as 'problematic'. These life-task problems (LTP) "derive(s) from the specifics of the person's self-knowledge and personal experiences", (Ibidem, 1989, 37). These problems reveal unique strategies in relevant task contexts. The strategies will have particular consequences for adjustment. This study will allow us, in the future, to develop more ecological and focalized assessment instruments for

the college population, particularly extending previous instruments, already developed for adolescents as PCIS (Social Intelligence Cognitive Scale or Prova Cognitiva de Inteligência Social from Candeias, 2001).

Here, we have based our research on protocol analysis (PA) and verbal reports (VR) in order to understand the mechanisms and internal structure of the cognitive processes that produce behaviour (Ericsson & Simon, 1993). This method is based on the observation and analysis of verbal behaviour, and presupposes that, as regards subjects' own reports of their mental states and mental processes, it will allow us to elicit currently heeded information on cognitive structures that remain in memory. This assumption justifies why VR could be used as a method of assessing subjects' strategies and structures in relation to social intelligence. In this way, assessment of social intelligence will allow us to understand the dynamic interplay between the cognitive processes and contexts.

On the other hand, it is extremely important that relevant problems be used, whose content makes sense to the person, so as to maximally elicit his or her problem solving expertise in order to 'test the limits' of social intelligence (Cantor & Kihlstrom, 1987). So, we should evaluate the specific task-problem of subjects' living environment, because these contexts tend to selectively foster the growth of declarative and procedural expertise in certain culturally-valued domains, and because an individual may only perform up to optimal potential if and when those expert skills are tested in well-exercised tasks (Sbordonne, 1996; Sternberg, 1998). This will create the conditions required for developing more contextualized, reliable and valid assessment instruments, and particularly will permit us to observe and guarantee the ecological validity of applied psychology.

Although an emphasis on idiographic, context-specific assessment does not give one license to ignore fundamental measurement properties of reliability and validity (Emmons & King, 1989), we believe that social intelligence and related skills can be understood through the analysis of individual differences, if one takes into account the importance of person-situation interactions and recognizes, moreover, that some traits are likely to be ideographic rather than nomothetic (Sternberg & Wagner, 1989).

This is why we consider it important to balance open methods (especially in the initial phase of research, like this study) with standardized procedures, in order to apprehend more spontaneous forms of the cognitive process and in order to distinguish typical patterns of social development, as well to understand different components of social information processing. Therefore, we believe that with such assumptions we could develop sophisticated assessment tools that are more valid and are closer to human psychological functioning and complexity, as we explain later.

## METHOD

## PARTICIPANTS

Eighteen graduate Portuguese students of psychology volunteered to participate in the study. Of the students who were questioned, twelve are

girls and six are boys. Their average age was 19.7 years ( $SD=1.3$ ), ranging from 18 to 24 years. The study was conducted during May 2002.

## MEASURE

The open questionnaire focalized on Verbal Reports (VR) about Life Tasks Problems (LTP) and Strategies (S) to cope with them, in order to collect exploratory and qualitative data about students typical LT and S. Collected data are analyzed through the usual procedures of Protocol Analysis (PA) (Caverni, 1988; Ericsson & Simon, 1993). VR contain subjects' descriptions about LTP and S, were segmented and encoded by two judges.

Segments were encoded into coding categories through a content analysis, using an open procedure, or an exploratory procedure. We do not have any conceptual network in order to organize the content analysis. This kind of procedure has limitations, but it is proposed to collect much more information about one construct, as was our intention here. In this way, the observed verbalizations were analyzed in terms of both cognitive process and structure and context.

## PROCEDURE

Subjects were contacted in their classes by the researcher, where the purpose and procedures of the study were explained both verbally and by

a written consent form that was distributed to all students. VR were collected in a group session using a written questionnaire.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The results of this exploratory study about the social intelligence processes and strategies with Portuguese graduate students indicated that LTP refers both to personal and to academic contexts. The most frequent Academic LTP is related to time management in academic work and leisure activities, especially with the 19-20 year group. Other Academic LTP focuses on learning psychological factors (attention, concentration, achievement) and material conditions (books, reviews, materials). Personal LTP focuses on both interpersonal situations (with family, intimates, peers) and intrapersonal challenges such as living alone, coping with stress and fear and solving practical problems. These LTP are represented through cognitive, affective and behavioural features. Typical features equally present in academic and personal representation of LTP are feelings like fear, worry, disappointment, distress, confusion, tiredness and anxiety. In addition personal LTP are associated yet with feelings such as sadness, melancholy, panic, insecurity, bad mood and rebellion. The most common cognitions (both types of LTP) concerned negative conceptions about self (I'm not able to cope with...) and the need to plan academic and leisure time (plans, timetables). Typical perceptions of behavioural features pointed to academic action (study, doing research) or personal action (talk with colleagues) or to inactive conduct or conformity (avoiding people, actions, work, anything).

The most common strategies in the academic context are related with typical problem solving steps (Crick & Dodge, 1994) as defining objectives, estimating and planning timetables, making decisions, doing work/research. This representation of strategies seems to reveal a refined metaknowledge about the demands and threats of academic goals and timings, and explains stressful features of the representation of feelings, cognitions and behaviours, which illustrate academic LTP. Personal LTP involve reflexive strategies, such as thinking about consequences or trying to learn from situations, and conformity and avoidance strategies, such as waiting, thinking about happy situations and pretending that nothing has happened. Such strategies reveal that the process of growing up, namely become adult and developing and maintaining interpersonal relationships with others and regulating self-concept, which make it possible to cope with inter- and intrapersonal problems, is perceived as long-term. Here, too, the representation of strategies discloses a sophisticated and specific metaknowledge about the demands of personal life tasks.

In fact, these findings point to a context-specific representation of tasks and of strategies. Socially intelligent behaviour appears to be intimately related to its selective use in appropriate tasks and contexts and cognitive flexibility seems essential to cognitive functioning in this field.

## CONCLUSION

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This exploratory research provides evidence that, at least among the college students of this sample, one can identify two coherent dimensions of the social intelligence construct, as with the study of adolescents (Candeias, 2001). Here, socially intelligent behaviour and cognition operate with a cognitive dimension that focuses on the

cognitive process and contents underlying interpersonal problem solving, such as defining the problem, representing features about problem and forming strategies to cope with it. In turn, the behavioural dimension focuses on the self-concept concerning social effectiveness in social situations (personal and academic). So, this exploratory research will permit previous findings about the social intelligence construct to be extended, and consolidate a better representation of the components of effective living for Portuguese college students.

This research found that the social cognitive process operates with different kinds of features, strategies and context representations. Using a protocol analysis of verbal self-reports, this study suggests essentially two different kinds of life-task contexts during the undergraduate period – personal and academic. With regard to academic life-task problems, the analysis reveals a pragmatic and goal-oriented affective, cognitive and behavioural representation of features, which were appraised in general as stressful and threatening and requiring pragmatic and urgent strategies, plans and actions. It is as if pressure guides cognition and behaviour.

With regard to personal tasks, the findings corroborate the meaning and implication of the college period for personal development and autonomy, marked by extremely negative feelings and self-effectiveness perceptions. In turn, personal strategies point to action-reflection-action or conformity. This period looks like an observation-reflection-action stage between adolescence and adulthood, resembling an interlude of living with autonomy and conformity where metacognitive development and the critical analysis of existing provide the compass and dictate the direction.

The results of this study have several implications for psychological assessment and intervention. First, they provide foundations for developing a standardized assessment instrument, which makes possible more reliable and ecologically valid tools in Psychology. To fulfil this intention, we need to represent and characterize typical life tasks and strategies of socially intelligent behaviour to provide more critical assessment situations. So, future research should extend these findings to other college populations in order to collect enough data to extended standardized assessment scales (like PCIS) for this population. Finally, this kind of assessment approach could be very useful for intervention, because it could provide us with characterization of individuals' interpersonal and intrapersonal potentials and needs, which makes possible the planning and implementation of more accurate counselling intervention as well as monitoring and evaluating its effects. So, this approach will provide us with more accurate and specific information about human cognitive functioning, with reference to a process of growing autonomy and awareness in the management of one's life projects with allusion to the social and cultural environment.

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## ANXIETY DUE TO ACADEMIC EVALUATIONS: SUICIDAL IDEATION AND PERFECTIONISM IN ENGINEERING STUDENTS

## ANXIÉTÉ DUE AUX ÉVALUATIONS UNIVERSITAIRES: IDÉES SUICIDAIRES ET PERFECTIONNISME CHEZ LES ÉTUDIANTS DES ÉCOLES D'INGÉNIEURS

Hans Welling, Neuza Almeida, Isabel Gonçalves, Susana Vasconcelos & Belina Duarte |

### ABSTRACT

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The aim of the present study is to evaluate the association between suicidal ideation and perfectionism among university students during academic evaluations. The subjects will be selected among the students attending the Counselling Services of two Portuguese Engineering Schools (IST and FEUP).

The authors selected this sample following a study by Almeida, N. & Rosa, J. (1999) where several dimensions of perfectionism (identified by the Multidimensional Scale of Perfectionism - Frost et al., 1990) were found to correlate with suicide ideation in university students. This data where, furthermore, in agreement with the clinical observations of the professionals at the Counselling Services (IST and FEUP).

The authors expect there will be a high correlation between measures of "suicidal ideation" and "perfectionism", as was also found in Almeida, N. & Rosa, J. (1999).

The authors will try to propose some preventive measures such as "anxiety management", "support" and "cognitive restructuring" in order to decrease suicidal ideation among university students.

Key words: suicidal ideation, perfectionism

### RÉSUMÉ

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L'objectif de l'étude présenté ici c'est d'évaluer la association entre idéation suicide et perfectionnisme en étudiantes universitaires pendant le période académique des examens. Les sujets sont sélectionnés dans les services de Conseillement Psychologique Universitaires de deux universités portugaises d'Ingénierie (I.S.T. et F.E.U.P.).

Les auteurs ont choisi cette thématique poursuivant l'étude d'Almeida, N. & Rosa, J. (1999), où les attentes parentales et le jugement parental – deux dimensions du perfectionnisme (identifié à travers de l'échelle multidimensionnelle du perfectionnisme) ont été principalement identifiées en étudiantes d'Ingénierie.

Ces résultats sont d'accord avec les observations cliniques faites par l'équipe de professionnelles (psychologues) – (I.S.T. et F.E.U.P.). Les auteurs attendent rencontrer une haute corrélation entre les échelles du perfectionnisme et idéation suicide, comme rencontré en Almeida, N. & Rosa, J. (1999).

Mots clés: idéation suicide, perfectionnisme

## INTRODUCTION

Suicidal behaviour is a psychological disturbance associated with potentially severe mental and/or physical health outcomes. Suicidal behaviour includes "suicidal completion", "suicide attempts" and "suicidal ideation" (Reynolds, 1991). According to the WHO, the Portuguese average for completed suicide attempts is 7,96 cases for each 100,000 people. In 1995, 13,4 % of the cases reported by the Portuguese police involved youngsters aged just under 30 years (Fialho & Fonseca, 1996). In the United States, in 1980, suicide was the second leading cause of death among college students (Silver, Goldstein & Silver, 1984 as cited in Reynolds, 1991). Unfortunately, the increasing frequency of suicidal behaviours in the age group 15-24 years over the past 30 years is contrary to improvements in general health and life expectancy of individuals in the United States (McGinnis, 1987 as cited in Reynolds, 1991) in Australia (Hamilton & Schweitzer, 2000) and in Portugal (Fialho & Fonseca, 1996).

New statistics collected by the Association of University and College Counsellors confirm that stress levels among university students are on the rise, including an increase in suicide attempts: "among 600 thresholders who were tracked both in the USA and Europe for a period of five years, a full 28% had downsized their goals within that period and 50% did not believe the goals they still had, would ever be achieved" (Economic and Social Research Council Agenda, 1997 as cited in Apter, 2002). "A quarter were suffering from depression and one third admitted to having considered committing suicide" (The New York Times, 1988 as cited in Apter, 2002).

Suicidal ideation traditionally has been associated with affective disorders, such as

major depression (Pokorny, 1977 as cited in Reynolds, 1991). Recent reports, however, have suggested that suicidal ideation is also a potential psychological disturbance in adults with anxiety disorders (Weissman, Klerman, Markowitz & Quetelet, 1989 as cited in Reynolds, 1991).

A strong indicator for suicidal risk is suicidal ideation, a construct that can be seen as a precursor for other, more dangerous, suicidal behaviours (Ferreira & Castela, 1999). In fact, "suicidal ideation can be operationalized as ranging from relatively mild general thoughts about death and wishes that one were dead to serious ideation about specific plans and means of taking one's life. However, suicidal ideation is more extensive than thoughts specific to wishes and plans of one's own suicide. Thoughts dealing with the reaction of others, including other's perceptions of one's self-worth after one's death, and suicide as a means of retribution are cognitions that occur within this domain." (Reynolds, 1991).

Suicidal ideation constitutes a transition state where a behaviour is rehearsed in the mind, before being acted out (Santostefano, as cited in Fleming, Sampaio & Sousa, 1989).

Suicidal ideation may be viewed as a domain of self-statements consistent with a cognitive-behavioural focus (Kendall & Hollon, 1981 as cited in Reynolds, 1991). "The construct of suicidal ideation may be defined as thoughts and ideas about death, suicide, self-injurious behaviors, and thoughts related to the planning, conduct, and outcome (e.g. response of others) of suicidal behavior" (Reynolds, 1988b as cited in Reynolds, 1991).

Several internal dimensions of psychological distress and well-being have been hypothesized or found to be related to suicidal ideation and suicidal behaviour in adults: depression (Bonner & Rich, 1987; Miller et al., 1986; Schotte & Clum, 1982 as cited in Reynolds, 1991; Gastel, Schotte and Maes, 1997; Kaplan, Sadock & Grebb, 1997) hopelessness (Beck, Brown, Berchick, Stewart & Steer, 1990; Beck, Brown & Steer, 1989; Fawcett, 1988; Linehan & Nielsen, 1981; Rich & Bonner, 1987 as cited in Reynolds, 1991; Young et al., 1996; Velting, 1999) and anxiety (Fawcett, 1988; Stanley, Trakman-Bendz & Stanley, 1986; Weissman et al., 1989 as cited in Reynolds, 1991)

Anxiety is, in fact, a common disabling condition, and a source of distress. It can also be

a source of serious difficulties in educational, occupational and social functioning (Montgomery, 1999).

Social anxiety and depression seem to be related to perceived competence deficits (Smári et al, 2001). Anxiety has been similarly found to be associated with academic achievement (Beidel & Turner, 1998). Young adults with anxiety are at increased risk of depression and educational underachievement (Woodward & Fergusson, 2001) and moderate levels of depression are associated with suicidal ideation (Allison et al, 2001).

Perfectionists experience increased negative affect before, during and after evaluative tasks, judge their work as lower in quality than non-perfectionists, and report the quality of their work should have been better (Frost, Marten, Lahart & Rosenblate, 1990b).

Perfectionism has been singled out as a vulnerability factor for psychopathology (Frost, Marten, Lahart & Rosenblate 1990b; Hewitt & Flett, 1991a), namely depression (Bibring, 1953; Beck, 1967 as cited in Cox & Enns, 1999; Hewitt & Flett, 1991a; Hewitt & Flett, 1993). Although a precise definition of perfectionism has been elusive, virtually all writing on this topic emphasizes the setting of "excessively high personal standards of performance, which are accompanied by tendencies for overly critical evaluations of one's own behavior" as central to the concept (Burns, 1980; Frost, Marten, Lahart &

Rosenblate 1990b) It has been linked to a host of psychological and physical disorders (Frost & Marten, 1990a; Frost, Marten, Lahart & Rosenblate, 1990b).

Some authors believe perfectionists are chained to thoughts about what they should have done better (Frost & Marten, 1990a; Frost et al., 1995). Suicidal potential identification requires a study of an ideal self that is perfectionistic and unrealistic, since the role of perfectionism (as a personality trait) has been considered a very important variable in predicting suicidal intent (Adkins & Parker, 1996; Maltzberger as cited in Hewitt, Flett & Turnbull-Donovan, 1992; Ranieri et al., 1987).

Literature on this topic presents mixed results concerning differences in the distribution of suicidal thoughts according to sex and age. According to Ferreira & Castela (1999) and Wilmote et al. (1986) females present a higher average frequency of those thoughts as compared to males. According to Ferreira & Castela (1999), younger individuals present a higher frequency of suicidal thoughts than older subjects. Hamilton & Schweitzer (2000), assessing the relationship between dimensions of perfectionism and suicidal ideation in a tertiary student population in Australia, on the other hand, report that neither gender nor age were associated with differences in the scores, suggesting that high levels of perfectionism may indicate a vulnerability to suicidal ideation.

Dias (1998) studied preoccupations frequently brought by university students to Counselling Centres operating in Universities (such as IST-UTL<sup>4</sup>, FEUP, or FCT-UNL<sup>5</sup>) and asserted those preoccupations could be understood as difficulties in the resolution of normative developmental tasks typical of the transition from adolescence to adulthood. Dias (1998) conducted research with samples of 337 students from FCT-UNL and 530 university students from several Colleges of Universities in Lisbon, and tried to understand if difficulties presented by students at University Counselling Centres were different from those of University students in general, and how they were related with psychological distress and poor academic results. Those studies were limited to the developmental tasks of separation from parents, autonomy construction, capacity for establishing love relationships, and self-esteem consolidation.

The most relevant results showed that there is a "strong relationship between developmental tasks and psychological well being", that there exists a "strong relationship between academic results and psychological well being on one hand, and the capacity of projecting oneself into the future, on the other" and, finally, that "students who had sought psychological/psychiatric help over the last year showed lower results of psychological well-being and lower levels in the dimensions of autonomy construction and capacity for establishing love relationships than those who never asked for help" (Dias, 1998).

In 1999, Almeida & Rosa studied the association between depression, hopelessness, perfectionism and suicidal ideation among university students - They found that all the variables correlated positively and significantly. Almeida & Rosa (1999) suggest that, in future studies, the interaction between stress and depression (Hewitt & Flett, 1993) and between perfectionism and anxiety (Deffenbacher et al., 1986; Hewitt & Flett, 1991a) should be examined, since in stressful situations, higher levels of perfectionism can lead to suicidal vulnerability (Hewitt & Flett, 1991b; Priester & Clum, 1993).

The aim of the present study, following the work of Almeida & Rosa (1999), is to evaluate the association between suicidal ideation and perfectionism among university students during academic evaluations. Self-confidence, casual attribution of academic success and study results were other variables the authors tried to associate with

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suicidal ideation and perfectionism.

In fact, initially, the authors proposed to study the variation in suicidal ideation in university students during the exam period, replicating in some way a study by Frost & Marten (1990), as cited in Stöber (1998).

For that purpose, the authors applied various questionnaires shortly before and after the period of exams, supposing that before students would be more anxious than after.

During the application of those questionnaires, they came to believe that that assumption might not be correct, because the circumstances differed widely among students, especially because there were many tests taking place before and after the "official" evaluation period.

This suspicion was, unfortunately, confirmed by the anxiety measures, which showed that this relation for many students was exactly the inverse. Overall, there were no differences on any measures between the first and second application.

Of course, the authors did not conclude that exam stress has no influence on suicidal ideation, but rather that there were too many methodological flaws in this research to allow an examination of the influence of anxiety due to academic examinations on the other two variables.

The authors decided to use the data of a single application of the questionnaire in order to study the relation between suicidal ideation and perfectionism in engineering students attending counselling services in their universities, keeping in mind that the small size of the sample does not permit strong conclusions.

## COUNSELLING SERVICES AT IST

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Many of the students that look for help at Núcleo de Aconselhamento Psicológico (NAP) present suicidal ideation.

The counselling team at IST systematically applies the Millon Clinical Multiaxial Inventory during all intakes, which has 2 items which refer to suicidal ideation. In 678 applications during the past 5 years 19% of the students reported suicidal ideation, and if two self-harm items are included, this percentage rises to 30%.

Actual suicide, luckily, is low. In ten years, the team working at the Counselling Centre (NAP) could only remember two actual suicides, in a student population of over 8000 students. Those students had not sought help at NAP.

## METHOD

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## SUBJECTS

The sample comprised 26 students who were, at the time of the study, receiving counselling or psychotherapy at the University Counselling Services at two Engineering

Schools in Portugal - IST and Faculdade de Engenharia da Universidade do Porto (FEUP). This clinical sample had the following characteristics:

<b>N</b>	26 Clients of Student Counselling Services
<b>Sex</b>	Male 54% ; Female 46%
<b>Course</b>	11 different Engineering courses from 2 universities (Lisbon 88%, Porto 12%)
<b>Age</b>	Mean: 23.0
<b>Study Progress</b>	5 years at University, 2 years study delay
<b>Living Situation</b>	Living with parents: 58%
<b>Romantic Involvement</b>	boy/girl-friend: 38%
<b>Professional Occupation</b>	part-time work: 27%
<b>Economic Difficulties</b>	scholarship: 31%
<b>Nº Therapy Sessions</b>	Mean: 23.6
<b>Previous Counselling</b>	46%
<b>Medication</b>	19%

## PSYCHOMETRIC MEASURES

Subjects were asked, by their counsellor/therapist, to complete the following

measures, between sessions, at a time close to their exam periods:

<b>Variable</b>	<b>Measure</b>	<b>Nº Items</b>	<b>Likert Scale</b>
<b>Suicidal Ideation</b>	Suicide Ideation Questionnaire (SIQ) <sup>6</sup>	30	0-6
<b>Perfectionism</b>	Frost Multidimensional Perfectionism Scale (MPS) <sup>7</sup>	35	1-5
<b>Anxiety</b>	State-Trait Anxiety Inventory (STAI) <sup>8</sup>	40	0-3
<b>Self-Confidence</b>	Free Questions	2	1-5

<b>Locus of Control</b>	Free Questions	4	1-5
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## RESULTS

### SCORES ON THE SUICIDE IDEATION QUESTIONNAIRE (SIQ)

This questionnaire (Reynolds, 1988 as cited in Ferreira & Castela, 1999) evaluates the seriousness of suicidal ideation among adolescents and adults. It has 30 items, with seven alternative answers, and the final result may vary between 0 and 180, the higher the frequency of suicidal thoughts, the higher the results. Since the

test has no norms for the Portuguese population, it is compared with previous findings. This comparison shows that the SIQ score for this clinical population is in the expected range, higher than non-clinical student samples, and lower than clinical samples from regular mental health services.

	<b>N</b>	<b>Population</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>SIQ-Score</b>
CURRENT STUDY	26	Counselled Engineering Students	23	40.7
Ferreira e Castela (1999)	291	Adolescents	13-21	21.3
Almeida e Rosa (1999)	364	University Students	21	25.57
Reynolds (1990)		Adults Depressed	adults	50.7
Reynolds (1990)		History of Suicide Attempts	adults	55.3
Reynolds (1990)		No Previous History of Suicide Attempts	adults	21.5
Reynolds (1991)	474	College Students		11.4

## CORRELATIONS OF SIQ WITH OTHER PSYCHOMETRIC MEASURES

The hypothesized association between perfectionism and suicidal ideation following the work of Adkins & Parker (1996), Maltzberger (as cited in

Hewitt et al., 1992) and Ranieri et al. (1987), was replicated in this study, showing in the significant correlations between the MPS and SIQ.

	SIQ	STAI-s	STAI-t	Self-E	MPS
SIQ	()	.57**	.68**	-.57**	.40*
STAI-state			.66**	-.51**	.29
STAI-trait				-.59**	.36
Self-Esteem					.04
MPS					()

\*  $p < .05$

\*\*  $p < .01$

The data do not allow for a factor analysis but a single factor is suggested, existing a strong correlation between self-confidence, anxiety, and suicidal ideation, and a little less strong correlation with perfectionism. This finding suggests anxiety is related to suicidal ideation, and that, if properly studied, a relation

between exam stress and suicidal ideation should be found, a rather probable finding since the MPS has been related to evaluation anxiety in College students (Frost & Marten, 1990 as cited in Stöber, 1998) and the well documented relationship between perfectionism and suicidal ideation.

## SUMMARY FINDINGS ON FACTORS INFLUENCING SUICIDAL IDEATION

Subjects were asked, by their counsellor/therapist, to complete the following

measures, between sessions, at a time close to their exam periods:

Influencing Factors	<b><i>FACTORS THAT DO NOT INFLUENCE</i></b>
Perfectionism (+)	Sex
Anxiety (+)	Age
N° Session in Therapy (+)	Study Results
Economic Situation (-)	Romantic Involvement
Self-Confidence (-)	Living Situation

	Locus of Control
	Medication
	Work

From these results one might wonder for a moment if therapy causes suicidal ideation, but rather the inverse causal direction seems to be true, that is that suicidal people seek and need more therapy than less disturbed people. The fact that sex and age are not related to suicidal ideation is confirmed by several studies (Reynolds, 1991; Hamilton & Schweitzer, 2000).

A most remarkable finding is that measures of social integration, such as working, living situation or romantic involvement have no relation with suicidal ideation, which contradicts most findings reported in the literature. For instance Kaplan et al. (1997) found that married people have less suicidal ideation.

## Scores on the Frost Multidimensional Perfectionism Scale (MPS)

The MPS (Frost et al., 1990) assesses both the personal and social aspects of perfectionism. It is a 35 item measure, with a five-point response scale ranging from "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree". The MPS has the following six subscales: Concern over Mistakes (CM), Personal Standards (PS), Parental Expectations (PE), Parental Criticism (PC), Doubts

about Actions (D) and Organization (O). Whereas the first five scales represent the core dimensions of the MPS, "Organization" was found to be only loosely related to the other scales (Stöber, 1998). In fact, Frost et al. (1990) recommend not to include "O" when calculating the total score. The following correlations between MPS subscales were found:

	C M	PS	PE	PC	D	O
<b>Concern Mistakes</b>		.62**	.14	.15	.52**	-.06
<b>Personal Standards</b>			.21	-.04	.26	.30
<b>Parental Expectations</b>				.54**	.03	-.24
<b>Parental Criticism</b>					.26	-.36
<b>Doubts About Actions</b>						.05
<b>Organization</b>						()

\* p < .05

\*\* p < .01



Stöber (1998) suggests that the 6 subscales should be reduced to only four underlying dimensions, therefore joining "Concern over Mistakes" with "Doubts About Actions" and "Parental Expectations" with "Parental Criticism", forming two new subscales : "Concern over Mistakes and Doubts" (CMD) and "Parental Expectations and Criticism" (PEC).

This study confirms this idea, showing a significant correlation between the referred subscales. Also an additional correlation is found: - "Concern over Mistakes" with "Personal Standards". In fact, this might be the clarification Frost et al. (1990b) needed, for the relationship between "Personal Standards" and "Concern over Mistakes". It may very well be, as they proposed, that "high personal standards are associated with psychopathology among people who are high in concern over mistakes". Should we replicate this study with more subjects, in order to evaluate test anxiety as well, we would probably find that only the CMD component of the Frost measure correlated significantly with test anxiety (Frost et al., 1995). Clinical data reported by therapists working at IST indicate that typical engineering student parents have set high performance standards for their youngsters, standards that they often fail to meet (the average number of years to

get a degree in Mechanical Engineering at IST is around 7,5, against the expected 5), frequently meaning potential loss of parental love and acceptance for the student. Stöber (1998) suggested that a combination of parental indifference/rejection and overprotection, termed "affectionless control" (Parker et al., 1979, as cited in Stöber, 1998) related to overall perfectionism. Fredtoft, Poulsen, Bauer & Malm (1996), when presenting their "short-term dynamic group psychotherapy for university students", mention some characteristics of the families of group members (mainly complaining of perfectionism, procrastination and fear of graduation) that might also be worth exploring in further studies (e.g. using self-report measures, such as the Family-Of-Origin Scale - Fernandes, Ferreira & Doria, 1995): the autonomy/dependency dimension, the degree of intimacy in the family and birth order in the sibling row. A link has also been established between suicide and a conflicted family environment (e.g. Brent & Kolko, 1990 as cited in Hewitt, Flett & Turnbull-Donovan, 1992). We also studied the subscales for the MPS: we found that this association in this sample was on one subscale only found between "Concern over mistakes" and "Doubts about Actions".

Correlation between MPS subscales and Suicidal Ideation

	SIQ	CM	PS	PE	PC	D	O
<b>SIQ</b>	( )	.55**	.19	-.09	.16	.47*	-.02
<b>Concern Mistakes</b>			.62**	.14	.15	.52**	-.06
<b>Personal Standards</b>				.21	-.04	.26	.30
<b>Parental Expectations</b>					.54**	.03	-.24
<b>Parental Criticism</b>						.26	-.36
<b>Doubts About Actions</b>							.05
<b>Organization</b>							( )

\*  $p < .05$

\*\*  $p < .01$

This matches a recent Australian study which also found that only these two subscales contributed to suicidal ideation (Hamilton & Schweitzer, 2000). Almeida & Rosa (1999), however, found that all subscales but "Organization" and "Personal Standards" were correlated with Suicidal Ideation. This difference might be caused by the different attitudes found in students from differing courses. In fact, Stöber (1998) suggests that "researchers

interested in positive perfectionism should therefore continue to include the organization subscale in their analysis", since the overall perfectionism score mainly captures negative perfectionism (CMD + PEC). This reminds a very interesting finding of Almeida & Rosa (2000), who found that students scored significantly higher on certain psychological measures depending on the course they were enrolled in:

#### Differences on Psychometric Measures by Course (Almeida & Rosa, 2002)

Course	<i><b>PSYCHOMETRIC MEASURE</b></i>
Sports	Somatization Dimension of Depression
Social Sciences	Cognitive-Affective Dimension of Depression
Arts	Hopelessness and Suicidal Ideation
Engineering	No difference between groups

Students seem to translate or express their distress in a distinct way, that seems to represent their preferred mode of functioning. Almeida & Rosa didn't find any for engineering studies. This is not a comparative study but from the association of "Concern over Mistakes" and "Doubts about Actions" with suicidal ideation we may hypothesize that engineering students' preferred register for expressing distress is that of worrying and doubting. This idea is strengthened by previous studies in which we found that one of the most prevalent personality types among engineering student is the obsessive compulsive. In fact, Reed (1985) as cited in Frost, Marten, Lahart & Rosenblate (1990b), groups perfectionism with characteristics of obsessive-compulsives, namely, their uncertainty regarding when a task is done.

The correlations between the MPS and measures of compulsivity reveal a pattern of significant relationships, the same pattern being true of "Concern over Mistakes" and "Doubts about Actions" (Frost, Marten, Lahart & Rosenblate, 1990b). From this point of view, it is not hard to understand that these dimensions might be the main influences on suicidal ideation in this population. Another relevant aspect, not addressed in our study, concerns the reinforcing role the university "culture" could play in the setting of excessively high standards for academic performance, and thus of increased perfectionism. The pursuit of excellence is encouraged at all levels of our society. Such ambitions are particularly validated in the academic community (Hamilton & Schweitzer, 2000). The way dominant culture values in IST might reinforce students' perfectionism might be worth exploring in the future.

## CONCLUSION: PREVENTIVE AND REMEDIATIVE INITIATIVES

In addition to allow for a better understanding of the interplay between perfectionism, suicidal ideation, depression and anxiety among college students, this study may generate some suggestions concerning the assessment and treatment of suicidal threat, as well as several aspects of perfectionism (e.g. procrastination). The study by Hewitt, Flett & Turnbull-Donovan (1992) indicates that "perceptions of unrealistic social expectations should be evaluated when determining initial levels of suicidal risk and the efficacy of subsequent interventions". Focus on the perceived expectancies of particular members of the student's family (since family members are often viewed as the source of socially prescribed perfectionism - Frost et al., 1990) is also thought to be necessary.

In fact, this suggestion is in accordance with clinical practice at IST - the only time a student's family is contacted at the counsellor's initiative (and always with the student's knowledge) is when there's risk of a suicide attempt.

At the same time, it may be necessary to focus directly on techniques designed to bolster the problem-solving efficacy of the socially prescribed perfectionist (Hewitt et al., 1992).

Cognitive-behavioural therapy (Burns, 1980; Beck, 1976) in general, and rational-emotive therapy in particular, practiced at NAP, might very well be suited for this population, since the thinking of perfectionists is dominated by personal imperatives, that is, thoughts about what "should" have been done differently, what "ought" to be done next time, and what "must" be done in order to complete a task satisfactorily. Fredtoft, Poulsen, Bauer & Malm (1996) developed a "short-term dynamic group psychotherapy for university students" that constitutes a rather interesting alternative/complement for the cognitive-behavioural model. Therapy groups focus on common problems among the members, i.e. perfectionism, procrastination, and fear of graduation. Authors focus on students' dependency and on their inadequate separation from parental figures, in order to help them cope more creatively with their academic problems.

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## USING SYMBOLS AND IMAGINATION AS A BRIDGE BETWEEN COGNITION AND EMOTION IN STUDENTS COUNSELLING AND THERAPY.

### COMMENT UTILISER LES SYMBOLES ET L'IMAGINATION COMME PASSERELLE ENTRE LA COGNITION ET L'ÉMOTION DANS LA CONSULTATION D'ÉTUDIANTS ET LA THÉRAPIE.

Michael Katzensteiner |

#### ABSTRACT

Three concepts were presented as a guideline for therapy and students counselling: Grawe's so-called "therapy cube", Peseschkian's five stage proceeding as well as his model of balancing the four areas of life.

In the workshop, aspects of further work in this field were developed on the basis of guided imagination.

Key words: imagination, cognition, emotion, student counselling

#### RÉSUMÉ

Trois conceptions ont été présentées comme orientation pour la thérapie et la consultation d'étudiants: le "cube thérapeutique" de Grawe, le procédé en cinq étapes de Peseschkian et son modèle de balance des quatre domaines de la vie.

Dans le séminaire, des aspects du travail dans ce domaine ont été développés sur la base de l'imagination guidée.

Mots clés: Imagination, cognition, émotion, aide psychologique pour les étudiants

## DISCUSSION

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From the view of Developmental Psychology, symbols and imagination can be associated with intuition and inventiveness, which belong to the basic forms of treating problems and conflicts. The child begins to use these instruments and thus learns to cope with the subjective sphere (needs, fantasies and experiences) on the one hand and the objective sphere of the given reality on the other hand: this process has been described as development of a transitional sphere (Winnicott, Milner). A result of this process is the ability of creative thinking, a very important prerequisite for a meaningful design of life and future.

Working with symbols is an essential part of visualisation. Symbols are seen as a means of gaining insight into subconscious patterns of thinking, emotions and behaviour, and they also mobilize the search for new possibilities. According to Peseschkian's use of stories in his Positive and Transcultural Psychotherapy symbols can be applied in a similar way. They support regression, they serve as filter, carrier of tradition and transcultural mediator, and they have a delayed effectiveness.

Imagination can occur in a slight trance as visualisation of special themes and symbols and can also be stimulated by fables and stories. In the workshop the participants could gain experience with these possibilities.

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## TRANCE EXERCISE „FOUR ANIMALS“

Close your eyes.

Breathe out three times and imagine yourself leaving this room and arriving in a wonderful landscape in front of a gate leading to a beautiful park. A guard is standing there and he or she gives you a golden brush, and if you want to, you can clean yourself from head to foot (top to bottom). And all the dust falls down, and also all troubles and worries.

Now you enter the park, and while you move along, you see trees and fountains and become aware of what you sense and feel: the wind on your skin, the fresh air, and the singing of the birds. You enjoy wandering along, and now you come to a meadow. You may sense the grass touching your feet, see the flowers and the blue sky.

And now you get to a single tree and a little river or brook. You can go there and drink and/or wet your feet or face or body.

And then you sit down under the tree. Breathe in the fresh air, breathe out, and if you wish, you can take in the colours of the sun and/or the sky, the meadow, the flowers.

Breathing out, you exhale grey smoke, and the smoke disperses. You free yourself from feelings of tiredness, anger, sorrow... and you receive new energy. Enjoy it and stay there as long as you want to.

And now ask your unconscious mind to let an animal appear, one for each of the four areas of life. First, let an animal appear for the area of BODY/SENSES, greet this creature with respect, and if you want to, ask if he or she wants to tell you something.

Do not censor if things appear that you don't like. If they are very unpleasant,

concentrate on relaxing and on positive images...

And when you are ready, get up and keep these new feelings in your mind.

Cross the meadow again, walk back to the gate, leave the park, walk through the gate and return to this room. Breathe out, stretch your arms two or three times and open your eyes.

***Workshop:***  
**Using Symbols and Imagination  
as a Bridge between  
Cognition and Emotion  
in Students Counselling and  
Therapy**

***Michael Katzensteiner***

# Overview

- **Introduction**
- **Definitions**
- **The bridge between cognition and emotion**
- **Useful concepts and models for working with symbols and imagination**
- **Application**
- **Exercises**

# Introduction

- An ancient tale ...  
from: Nossrat Peseschkian:  
*The Merchant and the Parrot*. Heidelberg:  
Springer, 1982.

# Definitions: Imagination

## Imagination

- is a way of thinking.
- Thinking in pictures invokes all senses: hearing, seeing, tasting, smelling, touching, sensing the body's position, movement in connection with emotions.

# Definitions: Imagery

**Guided imagery** evokes imagination in the context of psychotherapy.

**Mental imagery:** brief inner expeditions, lasting seconds to minutes.

**Waking dream therapy, guided affective imagery** are terms for special ps. methods

In practice, these names and other terminology, such as healing or creative visualization, active imagination, and interactive guided imagery, are often used interchangeably.

(McMahon)

## Definitions: Symbol

**Symbols can be seen as part of the language of our mind and as a bridge for communication.**

Since the imagination speaks in pictures, symbols, and metaphors, the therapist needs to understand the basic language of the unconscious mind (McMahon).



## **The bridge between cognition and emotion**

- Context and effects of imagination
- Context and effects of symbols
- Symbols and imagination as part of the „transitional sphere“

## **Context and effects of imagination**

- Imagination accompanies every thinking process
- Imagination activates one or more senses
- Imagination condenses into symbols or chains of symbols, spontaneously or through guidance
- Imagination builds a bridge to emotions

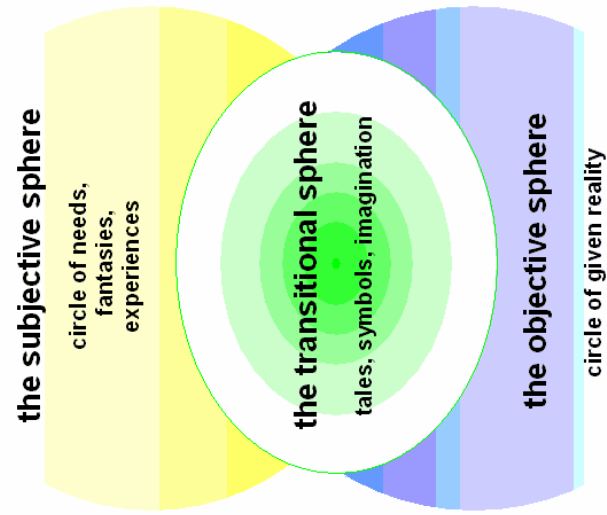
## **Context and effects of symbols**

- Symbols help to gain insight into subconscious patterns of thinking
- Symbols mobilize the search for new possibilities
- Symbols support regression
- Symbols serve as a filter, carrier of tradition and transcultural mediator
- Symbols have a delayed effectiveness

## **Symbols and Imagination as part of the „transitional sphere“**

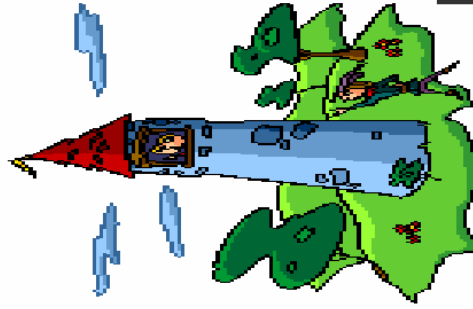
- **The essence of the transitional sphere  
(Milner, 1952)**
- **Instruments of the transitional sphere**
- **Common characteristics of the  
transitional sphere**

## The essence of the transitional sphere



# Instruments of the transitional sphere:

(the teddy bear, the play of children, fairy tales, stories in PP...)



# Common Characteristics

*a.t. P.E. Jongsma-Tieleman*

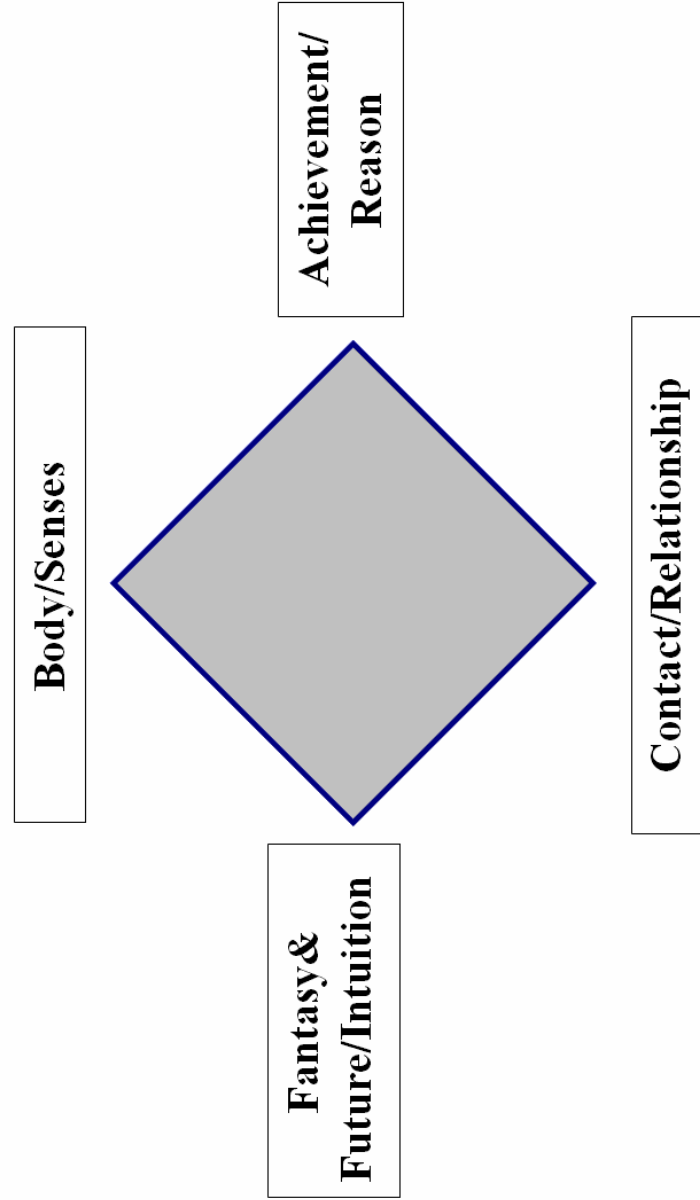
- they 'work' on a symbolic level;
- they make use of projection and splitting in a creative way;
- they provide ideal images, and in doing so they stimulate developmental transition;
- they are a play of the imagination, but they provide real experiences, with the quality of actuality.

## **Useful concepts and models for working with symbols and imagination**

- Peseschkian's Balance Model
- Grawe's Principles of Change in Psychotherapy



## Peseschkian's Balance Model



## **Grawe's Principles of Change in Psychotherapy**

- **Resource activation**
- **Problem actuation**
- **Motivational perspective**
- **Competence perspective**
- **Intrapersonal perspective**
- **Interpersonal perspective**

## Application I

- Five-stage proceeding  
(Peseschkian's Positive  
Psychotherapie)
- Five rules for therapists

## **Five stage proceeding (Peseschkian)**

- **Observation/Distancing**
- **Taking Inventory**
- **Situational Encouragement**
- **Working with Conflicts**
- **Expansion of Goals**

## **Five Rules for Therapists Using Imagery**

**(GERALD N. EPSTEIN)**

- **Do not impose your will**
- **Avoid preconceptions**
- **Avoid scepticism, personal emotional responses, and judgments**
- **Do not use the first person plural (i.e., „we“)**
- **Keep the description in the present tense**

## **Application II**

- **Note ...**
- **The Components of Guided Imagery Exercises (Kathleen McMahon)**

## **Note:**

- **Therapeutic relationship**
- **Transference and countertransference**
- **Regression**
- **Resistance**

## **The Components of Guided Imagery Exercises**

- **Induction**
- **Tempo**
- **Timing**
- **Rhythm**
- **Eduction**



**THE END IS  
ALWAYS A  
BEGINNING**