



THE RELATIONSHIP OF VOCATIONAL IDENTITY TO ACADEMIC ABILITY,
LOCUS OF CONTROL AND SELF-ESTEEM

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"THE RELATIONSHIP OF VOCATIONAL IDENTITY TO ACADEMIC ABILITY,
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ABSTRACT

This thesis describes two studies of the vocational identity construct as assessed by the Vocational Identity scale (Holland, Daiger and Power, 1980). Vocational identity is a new element in Holland's revised Theory of Careers (Holland, 1985), and refers to the degree to which an individual possesses a clear and stable self-image of vocationally relevant attributes, such as goals, interests and talents.

Chapter One reviews some of the major theories of career development, including those models which focus on self-constructs. Holland's revised approach is described as an important example of the latter. The main hypothesis of the first investigation then follows, namely that individuals in mid-adolescence who possess a well developed, or differentiated, vocational identity, tend to be less external in their attributions and more positive in self-esteem, compared with their less differentiated counterparts. Sex and academic ability were also included as major variables in the first study. It was expected that both could have a moderating effect on the main variables, and that in particular, external orientation in locus of control would be associated with below average academic ability. Additional scales assessing orientation to the future, job knowledge and occupational self-confidence were included to assess the validity of the measures of vocational identity, locus of control and self-esteem. The specific scales used in the first study are discussed in Chapter Two.

The first study is described in Chapter Three. The six measures specified above were administered to eighty seven subjects in Year 10 distributed across three academic streams in a high school located in Adelaide. The vocational identity, locus of control and self-esteem scales were re-administered three weeks later in order to establish indices of test-retest reliability. Adequate reliability estimates were generally obtained, although there was some concern regarding the reliability of the locus of control scale for use with subjects of below average academic ability.

Analysis of variance was undertaken to assess the significance of the difference in ability group means, with sex as a second independent variable. There were no significant differences among the three academic ability groups with respect to vocational identity, a result which is interpreted as being consistent with Holland's views. Students of higher academic ability tended to be less external, as predicted, but this effect was significant only on the first occasion of testing. Significant group differences were also obtained for occupational self-confidence, and job knowledge. Boys also obtained higher self-esteem scores than girls, but only on the first administration, and there were no other sex effects of note.

For subjects considered as a whole, the correlations between variables were generally as predicted. In accordance with the main hypothesis, subjects who were more differentiated in vocational identity also tended to be less external, and more positive in self-esteem. This result was generally considered as supporting Holland's notion that the individual's level of vocational identity is a partial indicator of the degree of psychological adjustment. Further inter-correlations supported the validity of the vocational identity and self-esteem scales; and although the correlation of locus of control with job knowledge was not significant, there was indirect evidence supporting the validity of the former measure.

A noteworthy complication was that when the corresponding inter-correlations for the three ability groups were separately calculated, it was found that two values for the lower ability subjects ran counter to the findings applying to the whole group. For lower ability subjects, the association between vocational identity and locus of control was not significantly different from zero, contrary to the main hypothesis, and in addition there was a moderate negative (but non-significant) correlation between vocational identity and orientation to the future. The last result was considered important, in that it suggested that the vocational identity measure may not be valid for students of lower academic ability.

The second investigation is described in Chapter Four. Two hundred and eleven Year 10 students distributed across four schools were tested. The sample comprised mainly students of higher and lower academic ability. Vocational identity, locus of control and orientation to the future scales were administered, together with a questionnaire assessing work attitudes and employment beliefs, and

salary aspiration, in an attempt to explicate the differences between the higher and lower ability groups in the first study.

Analyses of variance were performed, by academic ability group, school and sex. No academic ability effects were found in the case of vocational identity, but the higher ability group was less external than the lower ability group, as before. There were few significant differences among the academic groups with respect to the variables assessed by the questionnaire; however, the higher ability group had greater expectation of obtaining a job on completing their main studies, and had greater salary aspirations, as predicted. A depressing picture emerged concerning the total group's perceptions of the scope and duration of youth unemployment.

Consistent with the main hypothesis, subjects who were more differentiated in vocational identity tended to be less external. This result applied to the group considered as a whole, and for the higher ability cohort. Similarly, in support of the validity of the vocational identity scale, this measure correlated positively and significantly with the orientation to the future scale. In contrast, the correlation between vocational identity and locus of control was not significant in the case of the lower ability group, replicating a similar finding in the first study. However, the unexpected negative correlation between vocational identity and orientation to the future found for the lower ability group in the first study did not re-occur; the corresponding association for this group in the second study was positive. It was concluded from the results of both studies that there was evidence to support the reliability and validity of the vocational identity measure for use with average and above average students in the later years of high school.

Regression analyses for the prediction of vocational identity for the two ability groups considered separately suggested that attitudes to the world of work moderate the relationship between vocational identity and locus of control. For the higher ability group, it was found that locus of control, orientation to the future, job expectation and views on the duration of youth unemployment were significant predictors of vocational identity. In contrast, no predictor was found to be significant in the case of the lower ability subjects. Sex of subject was not a significant predictor for either group.

From the results of the regression analyses, and the findings of the two studies considered collectively, it is argued that a "work depression factor" associated with lower academic ability, moderates the relationship between vocational identity and locus of control, and between vocational identity and job expectation. This factor does not suppress the formation of vocational identity, but inhibits the development of an internalised locus of control, produces more pessimistic views concerning the possibility of obtaining employment, and renders individuals less confident in occupational settings. The conclusion follows that Holland's construction of vocational identity as an informal index of psychological and career adjustment may not be completely applicable for students of below average academic ability. Chapter Five considers these conclusions in relation to career counselling.

This thesis contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in any University. To the best of my knowledge and belief, the thesis contains no material previously published or written by any other person, except where due reference is made in the text of the thesis. I consent to the thesis being made available for photocopying and loan if applicable if accepted for the award of the degree.

Paul Malone

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