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The Relationship between Identity Processing Style and Academic Performance of First Year Psychology Students

RENÉE ZENADIA RAMDIN

A research project submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Education (Educational Psychology) by coursework and Research Report in the field of Psychology in the Faculty of Humanities,

University of the Witwatersrand,

Johannesburg.

2009

DECLARATION

I declare that this research report is my own, unaided work. It has not been submitted before for any other degree or examination at this or any other university.

_____

Renée Zenadia Ramdin

_____

Date

DEDICATION

To my dearest husband Rajin, your patience, endurance and undying support made writing this report manageable.

To my wonderful children, Jasmine-Nadine and Michael Lance, the many hours I spent on my laptop was time stolen away from you.

To my loving parents, Daniel and Ethel, by God's grace I was able to complete this in your "living years".

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I give thanks and praise to my heavenly Father who took care of my every need to the minuscule detail. If it was not for Him I would be nothing. He set in motion everything from start to end and gave me wisdom, patience, understanding and a host of unforgettable people who played a part in me completing my report. I leaned on His shoulder and He took care of the rest.

I would like to express the deepest appreciation to my supervisor, Mr Joseph Seabi who has continually and convincingly conveyed a spirit of passion in regard to research. He also never failed to be understanding, always portraying a humanness that made my task of completing this thesis more bearable. He was helpful beyond belief. Data and analysis would have been a nightmare for me if he didn't do what he did. Thank you doesn't seem enough and words don't seem sufficient. Without his guidance and persistent help this thesis would not have been possible.

I would also like to thank Dr Esther Price for helping to power my efforts in 2009.

In addition, I say thank you to my classmates and a special thank you to Val-Lyn McQuade and Maria Ramaahlo who became more than just classmates in 2009 and supported me through my most trying times.

Lastly, I would like to acknowledge my family for being the greatest family ever. You are the epitome of what a family should be. If I have to mention all the things I am truly thankful for, I might end up writing another thesis. So, thank you very much for everything. Now that it's all over, I'll be there for you like you've been there for me.

ABSTRACT

Academic performance of first year university students in the international arena as well as locally, has been a point of concern for all stakeholders because of high dropout rates and failure. Although many explanations for this have been offered and accepted, all have located the problem external to the individual. This study examined the interplay between interpersonal and intrapersonal factors on academic performance of first year university students in South Africa. A sociocognitive perspective was employed by an investigation of student identity processing styles as a means to explain academic performance. A mixed sample of 419 first year psychology students at a South African university was randomly chosen. Berzonsky's Identity Style Inventory (ISI3) was used to categorise students' identity processing styles which was then correlated to students' mid-year examination results. Although similar research was conducted overseas, the findings of the present study did not match previous results. Unlike any other known study the correlation between normative processing style and academic performance of first year university students was statistically significant but was negative. There was significant difference only between informational and normative identity processing styles on academic performance and between informational and diffuse-avoidant processing styles on academic performance. It was found in this study that culture and race played a role in student identity processing styles and in turn influenced student academic performance in the first year of university. A discussion of results, educational implications of findings, limitations of the study and recommendations for future research are included at the end of this study.

Key Words: Identity processing styles, informational, normative, diffuse-avoidant, academic performance

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