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EFFECTIVENESS AND USE OF COPING STRATEGIES
IN THREAT AND CHALLENGE SITUATIONS

A thesis presented in partial fulfilment of
the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts in Psychology
at Massey University

Helen Marguerite Foster
1988
Dedicated to the
memory of my father,
Gordon Lawrence Daniell
1913-1975
The present study aimed to investigate the perceived effectiveness and reported use of three coping strategies in threat and challenge situations. Eighty psychology students were given false feedback following a test, in either threat or challenge conditions. Subjects were given one of three cognitive coping strategies (fatalism, perseverance, or rational action) or no strategy, prior to a second test. The results revealed fatalism to be perceived as significantly less effective than perseverance and rational action. Repeated measures of pulse rate indicated the effectiveness of the threat and challenge manipulation, but the results for appraisal revealed those in the threat condition found the situation more challenging than threatening. Subjective measures of eight emotions showed changes over time and suggested that positive affect was more evident than negative affect. It was concluded that there are differences between coping strategies and that threat and challenge can be classified either as subjective or objective variables.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Thank you to my supervisor, Keith Tuffin, for his encouragement and discerning comments. He gave me the freedom to learn yet was always there to offer his guidance and support.

My thanks to John Spicer, for his time and guidance with the statistical analysis. Thanks also to my son Brent, who taught me the computer skills necessary for the data analysis.

My thanks to those who helped with the technical side in various ways. Mike Hughes and Tony True were always cheerful in their assistance with the technical equipment. Harvey Jones was patient and helpful as I learned to operate the word processor. My husband Ray (willingly?) agreed to the undaunting task of taping his voice for the experimental instructions.

Thank you to the first and second year psychology students who volunteered as subjects. Also to the graduate students who participated in the pilot study. Their constructive feedback was much appreciated.

Thank you to the many friends and colleagues who showed interest through their encouragement and support. I shared many hours of fun and misery with my peers, Jahna Clark, Maureen Gibbs and Karen Wood. Special thanks goes to Karen for the times we spent in our office, laughing, commiserating and occasionally working, and for listening during the many times I needed support.

Finally, thanks to those who remained in the background, yet perhaps contributed the most to my own experience of coping - my family, Ray, Brent, Wayne and Sharyn. We survived many crises during the course of this research and I am deeply grateful for their attempts to make major adjustments to their lives.
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CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION.

OVERVIEW

Coping is a term well known to the lay person, but its common usage belies the facets of coping behaviour that researchers have identified. Coping is a complex concept. There are many variables involved and although there is empirical evidence for some of these, others are merely speculative. The specific links among these variables have yet to be identified adequately. This chapter reviews the literature, focusing on the main aspects, and examines some of the discrepancies in the area. The present study attempts to investigate some of the variables that are speculative or which have inadequate empirical evidence.