PSYCHOLOGICAL ADJUSTMENT DURING THE CAREER TRANSITION PROCESS: A STUDY OF MATURE AGE STUDENTS IN NEW ZEALAND.

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

Teresa Ash
1999
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

It has been a pleasure to work under the supervision of Dr Hillary Bennett during this research year. Sincere thanks for your guidance, and for being a source of knowledge and inspiration throughout the Masters programme.

I would like to express my appreciation to the focus group participants, and to the survey respondents. Many students on campus expressed goodwill and support for this study, and their ongoing interest brought the research to life.

Thanks also go to Dr Bernard Frey, and to Dr Sheila Bagby, for mentoring activities, to my fellow students in the Masters programme, and to the administrative staff of Massey University, at Albany.

Particular thanks go to my friends, you know who you are, for encouragement, role modeling, and humour. I now have time to see you.

Most especially, thanks go to my partner, Mark, who has provided unwavering support throughout an extended period of tertiary study. And to my children, Sarah, Eileen, & Kieran, who ensure a balanced and happy life.

The completion of this Masterate thesis represents the fulfilment of a personal ambition, and I thank you all.
TABLE OF CONTENTS

Acknowledgements ........................................................................................................ ii
Table of Contents ........................................................................................................ iii
Tables and Figures .......................................................................................................... vii
Abstract ........................................................................................................................ viii

CHAPTER ONE

1 Introduction ................................................................................................................ 1

CHAPTER TWO

2 Literature Review ....................................................................................................... 3
  2.1 Major constructs .................................................................................................... 3
    2.1.1 Career and career transitions ........................................................................ 3
    2.1.2 Mature student ............................................................................................... 4
  2.2 The changing world of work ................................................................................. 6
  2.3 University issues ................................................................................................... 6
  2.4 Theoretical perspectives on the career development of mature students ............... 9
    2.4.1 Super’s lifespan developmental theory ......................................................... 9
  2.5 Theoretical perspectives on career transition ...................................................... 11
    2.5.1 Models of transition ...................................................................................... 11
    2.5.2 Adaptation to transition ................................................................................. 13
    2.5.3 Personality variables: perception of psychological resources operating during career transition ................................................................. 14
      2.5.3.1 Readiness ................................................................................................ 15
      2.5.3.2 Efficacy .................................................................................................. 15
      2.5.3.3 Locus of control ..................................................................................... 18
      2.5.3.4 Social support ....................................................................................... 19
      2.5.3.5 Decision independence ....................................................................... 20
  2.6 Stress and coping .................................................................................................. 21
CHAPTER FOUR

4.1 Data screening ................................................................. 51

4.2 Qualitative data ............................................................... 51

4.3 Focus group comments .................................................... 52

4.4 Quantitative data ............................................................. 54

4.5 Correlations ...................................................................... 57

4.6 Independent samples T-tests .............................................. 62

4.7 Analyses of variance .......................................................... 63

4.8 Multiple regression ............................................................ 65

4.8.1 Results for one set of predictors ..................................... 65

4.8.2 Results for two unordered sets of predictors .................. 68

4.9 Analyses of factor structure of Mature Student Difficulty scale ................................................................. 70

4.9.1 Principal Components Analysis ...................................... 70

4.9.2 Oblimin Rotation ........................................................... 70

4.9.3 Revised Mature Student Difficulty Scale correlations ........... 74

4.10 Independent samples T-tests on revised subscales of Mature Student Difficulty Scale .............................................. 76

4.11 Analyses of variance .......................................................... 77
## CHAPTER FIVE

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>5.1</td>
<td>Identification of difficulties</td>
<td>78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.2</td>
<td>Career transition constructs</td>
<td>82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.3</td>
<td>Difficulty constructs</td>
<td>83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.4</td>
<td>Relationship between career transition constructs and identified difficulties</td>
<td>86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.5</td>
<td>Demographics</td>
<td>88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.6</td>
<td>Transition type, role salience, and recycling</td>
<td>90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.7</td>
<td>Predictive ability of variables</td>
<td>91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.8</td>
<td>Recommendations</td>
<td>92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.8.1</td>
<td>Theoretical implications</td>
<td>92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.8.2</td>
<td>Recommendations for intervention</td>
<td>95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.8.3</td>
<td>Psycho-educational interventions</td>
<td>95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.8.3.1</td>
<td>Readiness</td>
<td>95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.8.3.2</td>
<td>Future career concerns</td>
<td>96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.8.3.3</td>
<td>Stereotypes</td>
<td>97</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.8.4</td>
<td>Psycho-social interventions</td>
<td>98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.8.4.1</td>
<td>Leisure dimension</td>
<td>99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.8.4.2</td>
<td>Institutional connection</td>
<td>99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.8.4.3</td>
<td>Home/family issues</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.8.5</td>
<td>Counselling modality</td>
<td>102</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

## CHAPTER SIX

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>6.1</td>
<td>Conclusions</td>
<td>104</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Limitations and recommendations for future research</td>
<td>106</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
LIST OF TABLES & FIGURES

Table 1  Frequencies and percentages of qualitative variables ........................................ 40

Table 2  Means and standard deviations for age and hours employed variables .................. 41

Table 3  Frequencies of difficulties reported by focus group participants .......................... 52

Table 4  Means and standard deviations ........................................................................ 55

Table 5  Frequencies and percentages of grades, satisfaction with performance, and total performance scores ..................................................... 57

Table 6  Correlations .................................................................................................. 60

Table 7  Eigenvalues and percentages of variance for principal components analysis ........ 70

Table 8  Factor loadings for revised Mature Student Difficulty Scale ............................... 72

Table 9  Revised factor structure of Mature Student Difficulty Scale ............................... 73

Table 10 Revised correlations for Mature Student Difficulty Scale ............................... 76

Figure 1 Continuum of counselling interventions for mature students in career transition .... 103
ABSTRACT

Research has been conducted to identify the difficulties which mature students experience as undergraduate students, and to explore the career transition process of this population in the context of these difficulties. The research design involved a two-stage multi-method process which incorporated both qualitative and quantitative data. In order to measure the difficulties construct, it was necessary to develop a scale pertinent to New Zealand mature students. This was achieved through modification of an existing Hong Kong scale. A survey was designed in order to administer a range of scales. Pertinent measures were the difficulties scale, the Career Transitions Inventory which measured perception of psychological resources operating during career transition, the participation and commitment scales of the Salience Inventory, and the 12-item General Health Questionnaire. Global measures were used to assess perception of stress and coping in the mature student role. Demographic information was also collected. The research aim was to explore the impact of a range of variables on the four outcome measures of psychological well being, self reported academic performance, stress and coping. The sample group for the qualitative stage of the research consisted of a representative sample of mature undergraduate students from across the four colleges of Massey University, at Albany. For stage two the sample group consisted of 500 mature undergraduate students randomly selected by the administration staff of Massey University, at Albany. Five major areas of difficulty were identified in the undergraduate context. These were home/family concerns, finances, future career concerns, study skills, and support issues. The home/family, finances, and study skills domains of difficulty appeared most pertinent to mature students in this population. Home/family difficulty was associated with health indices, emerging as the strongest predictor of the psychological well being and stress variables. Study skills emerged as the most valuable predictor of the performance and coping variables. Results pointed to the psychological resources of readiness and social support as being most salient for mature students. Readiness emerged as predictive of psychological well being and coping, with social support predictive of performance. This study has both theoretical implications, and implications for career counselling interventions for mature students. Psycho-educational and psychosocial strategies at both the group and individual level are suggested as appropriate interventions.