

ARE CAREER MATURE STUDENTS MORE COMMITTED TO THE CAREER CHOICE PROCESS?

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OPSOMMING

Die huidige studie ondersoek die verhouding tussen die toegewydheid aan die proses van loopbaankeuse en die loopbaanvolwassenheid van 123 Blanke eerstejaar sielkunde-studente. Die resultate dui op 'n hoogs beduidende statistiese verhouding ($p < 0,01$) tussen loopbaanvolwassenheid en die "Vocational Exploration and Commitment" sub-skaal van Blustein et al. (1989) se "Commitment to Career Choices Scale". Verder dui die resultate ook op 'n statistiese beduidende verhouding ($p < 0,05$) tussen loopbaanvolwassenheid en die sub-skaal genaamd "Tendency to Foreclose". Geslag is nie beduidend in verband tot enige van die bevindings gestel nie.

ABSTRACT

The present study examines the relationship between commitment to the career choice process and the career maturity of 123 White first year psychology students. The results indicate a statistically highly significant relationship ($p < 0,01$) between career maturity and the Vocational Exploration and Commitment subscale of Blustein et al.'s (1989) Commitment to Career Choices Scale and a statistically significant relationship ($p < 0,05$) between career maturity and the Tendency to Foreclose subscale. Gender is not significantly related to the findings.

According to Super's (1983) career developmental theory, university students are in the exploration phase of their career development. During this phase their exploratory activities should help them to crystallize, to specify and to implement a career choice. Super regards such career exploration as an important determinant of career maturity, i.e. the readiness to make an effective career decision.

Similarly, Blustein (1989) has argued that the greater the amount of career exploration undertaken by an individual, the greater the likelihood that the individual will be committed to a career choice. Thus, as students learn more about themselves and the world of work, they find themselves in a better position to make decisions and plans concerning their careers. Such exploration of and commitment to a career choice should result in greater career maturity, as the tasks prescribed for career maturity arise out of exploration behaviour. For example, two critical elements of effective career decision-making are the gathering of information about oneself and about careers.

Blustein, Ellis and Devenis (1989) postulate that career commitment represents a continuum from uncommitted to highly committed phases. Blustein (1989) has operationally defined career commitment both in terms of the individual's commitment to career exploration as well as the nature of such exploration. Blustein suggests that as individuals move from late adolescence to early adulthood, they progress from a phase of relative uncommitment to a level of firm commitment to their career choices. Individuals may differ, however, in their tendency to foreclose on career choices, which ranges from an openness to the experiences that are inherent in the commitment process to a closed, dogmatic and dualistic approach to such experiences.

There has been little research that has examined the possible relationship between career maturity and the commitment of an individual to the career choice process (Brown, 1991; Hackett & Lent 1992). The aims of the present descriptive-exploratory research are to (1) examine the relationship between career maturity and commitment to career choices, and (2) determine the influence of gender on the relationship between career maturity and commitment to career choices. Gender is

considered an important variable as women's career development is affected by structural (e.g., discrimination) and cultural (e.g., sex role socialization) factors (Cook, 1993; Fitzgerald & Betz, 1994).

METHOD

Sample

The sample consisted of 123 White first year psychology students at a South African university. Biographical information indicated that the sample was exclusively middle class. Students ranged in age from 17 to 28 years, with a mean age of 19,0 years ($SD = 1,3$). There were 79 females and 44 males. Differences in group sizes for gender were not considered important as the analysis was conducted separately for each gender group.

Measures

Career maturity can be defined as the readiness of individuals to make appropriate career choices and was measured by the Career Development Questionnaire (CDQ; Langley, 1992), an instrument based on Super's theory and standardized for South African students of all population groups. Langley (1992) has reported satisfactory construct validity and reliability information for the CDQ on a national sample of 5350 students, with internal consistency reliability coefficients higher than 0,90 for the total score. High scores on the CDQ indicate greater career maturity.

The Commitment to Career Choices Scale (CCCS; Blustein et al., 1989) was developed to define operationally a two-dimensional model of commitment to the career choices process. The scale measures the dimensions of Vocational Exploration and Commitment (VEC) as well as the Tendency to Foreclose (TTF) on such exploration. Vocational Exploration and Commitment can be defined as the progress of an individual in attaining commitment to career choices with low scores on the VEC subscale indicating greater exploration and commitment. Tendency to Foreclose can be defined as how individuals approach the tasks of committing to career choices with high scores on the TTF subscale indicating greater foreclosure. Most of the TTF items reflect the individual's belief that there is only one right career choice for the individual. The construct validity of the CCCS has been supported for use in South Africa (Stead & Watson, 1992; Stead, Watson, & Mels, 1994a, 1994b). Internal consistency coefficients (Cronbach alpha) have been reported on a sample of 190 white undergraduate students, ranging from .75 to .89 for the VEC subscale and .82 for the TTF subscale.

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Statistical Analysis

Pearson r correlations were used in the present study to determine the degree of relationship between career maturity and career commitment according to gender. Such a statistical procedure seemed appropriate as both measures provide data on an interval scale of measurement.

RESULTS

The results indicated that there statistically significant correlations between the CDQ and the VECS for males ($r = -0,53$, $p < 0,001$) and females ($r = -0,50$, $p < 0,001$). There was no statistically significant relationship between the CDQ and the TTFS for males ($r = -0,05$, $P > 0,05$) but the relationship was significant for females ($r = 0,31$, $p < 0,01$). Using Fisher's (1974) z transformation of r , there were no significant differences ($p > 0,05$) between the correlations of the CDQ and the two CCCS subscales according to gender. Therefore, the total Pearson r correlation were employed resulting in statistically significant relationships between the CDQ and the VECS ($r = -0,51$, $p < 0,001$) and the CDQ and the TTFS ($r = 0,19$, $p < 0,05$).

DISCUSSION

The results suggest a qualified answer to the title's question. Career mature students appear more committed to the career choice process. This commitment reflects extensive vocational planning and exploration. Thus commitment to career choices seems an important dimension of career maturity. Such commitment encourages the career development tasks of crystallising, specifying and implementing a career choice.

Career mature students also tend to foreclose on the career choice process. This finding requires some explanation as a negative relationship between the TTF subscale and the CDQ could be expected. Among other aspects, low scores on this subscale indicate an individual's tolerance towards the ambiguities and cognitive dissonance that the career exploration process often elicits. Blustein (1988) has suggested, however, that high levels of commitment are not necessarily associated with a diverse period of exploration.

In fact, Blustein argues that the tendency to foreclose may be advantageous when students wish to adhere to their initial career choice for various reasons such as a high degree of clarity about one's aspirations. Thus the present sample may be committed to a course of study which they feel confident about and, as a consequence, they may have foreclosed appropriately on further exploration. It is possible that such foreclosure would have been a more limiting factor at earlier stages of the commitment process. Blustein, Ellis and Devenis (1989) have suggested that individuals who foreclose at an earlier phase of the commitment process may be unwilling to consider a fuller range of occupational options, thus circumscribing their exploratory behaviour.

The finding that gender was unrelated to any of the constructs supports previous research which has failed to find gender

differences amongst South African university students on a variety of career constructs. Future research needs to look at specific dimensions of career maturity, as evidenced in career maturity subscale scores, in order to gain greater insight into how aspects of career maturity and aspects of commitment to career exploration may be related.

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