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PREVIEW

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**The combined use of the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator and
Demos Dropout Scale as predictors of risk for dropout status**

Uslianer, Barry Mark, Psy.D.

Pace University, 1990

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PREVIEW

THE COMBINED USE OF THE MYERS-BRIGGS TYPE
INDICATOR AND DEMOS DROPOUT SCALE AS
PREDICTORS OF RISK FOR DROPOUT STATUS

by

BARRY M. USLIANER

A Doctoral Project Submitted to
The Graduate Faculty in Psychology

in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of
DOCTOR OF PSYCHOLOGY

PACE UNIVERSITY

New York, New York

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PREVIEW

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Abstract

THE COMBINED USE OF THE MYERS-BRIGGS TYPE INDICATOR AND DEMOS DROPOUT SCALE AS PREDICTORS OF RISK FOR DROPOUT STATUS

by

Barry M. Uslianer

This study assessed personality and attitudinal variables as they related to risk for dropout status. Ninety-six male and female high school students from traditional and alternative settings completed the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator, Demos Dropout Scale, and a demographic questionnaire. A discriminant analysis using four significant variables: 1) Sensing-Perceiving Personality Type; 2) Attitude Toward School Behavior; 3) Going to College; 4) Academic Subjects, correctly classified male students for at-risk versus not-at-risk status with an overall accuracy rate of 92.1%. No significant predictors were found for female students. The results of the present study corroborate the view that male sensing-perceiving type students may be at greater risk for academic failure in the traditional high school setting. Failure to establish a relationship for female students between sensing-perceiving

personality type and at-risk status may have been attributable to an overall lower frequency of sensing-perceiving personality types in female students in the present study. The results of the study support the inclusion of the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator and Demos Dropout Scale as part of a screening battery for assessing dropout potential in entry level male secondary school students. Issues related to the development of alternative educational strategies and programs in order to forestall the disenfranchisement of the male at-risk student were also discussed.

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The high school dropout problem has become increasingly important to the nation as a whole. With the advent of new technology and the recent evidence that the American economy is unable to compete in foreign markets, government officials and educators are beginning to scrutinize our system of public education (Barber and McClellan, 1987). It is becoming all too clear, as Goodlad (1983) indicates "the quality of an educational institution must be judged on its holding power, not just on assessments of its graduates" (p.323).

The dropout presents a challenge not only to our economic health but to the nation's basic principles of equal opportunity. There has been, over the past few years, extensive documentation associated with the dropout problem and an array of individual and social costs. For the individual who fails to graduate from high school there is limited occupational and economic growth, disenfranchisement from society and, of course, a considerable loss of personal income over his or her lifetime. For society the failure to graduate with a high school diploma is associated with

increasingly higher expenditures for government assistance to individuals and families, higher crime rates, and ever higher maintenance costs for programs which are designed to employ and train individuals to become productive members of society (Steinberg, Blinde, and Chan, 1984).

The plan of research for addressing the relationship between personality variables and dropout status will be presented in this chapter. The chapter will include an overview of related research, research relevant to alternative school programs and personality attributes of at-risk students. Finally, this chapter will outline the research questions proffered regarding the relationship between personality attributes and at-risk status that will be addressed in this study.

Overview of Issues Related to the Dropout Problem

Even though there has been a substantial decrease in the dropout rate over the past 40 years the interest in the dropout issue has intensified. In 1940, more than 60% of all persons 25 to 29 years old had not completed high school; by 1980, that figure had dropped to 16% (U.S. Bureau of Census, 1985, Table 215) although, in contrast, there has appeared more research on the problem in the past 2 years than in the last 15 (Rumberger, 1987). According to Rumberger (1987) there are indications that this increased concern has several explanations. The first being a recent

increase in the trend of dropping out especially for some groups. For instance, the higher proportion of white male dropouts increased from 14% to 17% between 1968 and 1978 and then decreased by 1% in 1984. Secondly, minority populations, as a result of societal and economic factors, have always had a higher dropout rate than their white counterparts and are increasing in numbers in the public schools. The majority of students enrolled in most large U.S. cities were from minority groups as of 1982 (Plisko & Stern, 1985). Indications are that there will continue to be an increase in minority group enrollment in the public schools which could increase the proportion of high school dropouts under the present social and economic conditions. Many of the minority students sampled in a 1980 national longitudinal survey (Peng et al., 1983) cite economic pressures which force them to dropout of school and go to work in order to support a family. This factor, in addition to negative school experiences, the most salient precursor to dropping out, increases this group's likelihood of withdrawing from school (Kaplan and Luck, 1977).

Academic reform legislation, which raises the requirements for the granting of a high school diploma, are being instituted by many states (Education Commission of the States, 1983) and is a third reason for the increased concern over the dropout issue. Dropout prone students already have a tenuous commitment to school and the more

stringent academic demands may be an added incentive for leaving school prematurely (McDill, Natriello, & Pallas, 1985, 1986).

Another reason for the heightened concern over this problem is the increased use of new technologies in the work place which may require a more sophisticated educational background and skill level. This inevitably would disadvantage the dropout even further.

Finally, politics plays a key role in understanding the recent prominence surrounding this problem. Many leading education officials at all levels i.e., federal, state, and local are now compiling comparative statistics in order to judge the efficacy of the nation's educational institutions. One of the dimensions used for comparison is the high school completion rate. This information is being used to define and measure dropouts as well as to reduce its incidence.

There are many varied factors which lead a student to leave high school prior to graduation. Rumberger (1983) cites several of these in a number of major categories which researchers have identified. These groupings are: demographics, families, peers, school-related, economic, and individual.

Demographic factors indicate that the members of racial and ethnic minorities are much more likely to leave school early than are white, Anglo students with males having a slightly higher attrition rate than females. In a national

survey conducted in 1980 of high school sophomores the overall dropout rate was 13.6%. But upon scrutiny of these data the following statistics emerge: dropout rates varied from 12.2% for whites to 18.7% for Hispanics, and from 12.6% for women to 14.6% for men (Kolstad & Owings, 1986). Blacks, on the other hand, who have traditionally had a higher dropout rate than whites have demonstrated a considerable improvement in their propensity to complete high school.

The research literature has also identified family background and structure as important factors with the most notable being socioeconomic status (Kolstad & Owings, 1986; Rumberger, 1983a). Family-related factors which significantly contribute to the dropout statistics include: the parent's educational and occupational attainments, family income, speaking a language in the home other than English, single-parent families, and the limitations on educationally enriching experiences because of a dearth of materials and opportunities in the home (Erkstom et al., 1986; Rumberger, 1983a; Steinberg, Blinde, & Chan, 1984).

Peer influence, another area of possible consideration, has not been addressed to any great extent in the dropout-related literature but has proven noteworthy in other areas of educational achievement. From the related data it would seem likely that students who associate regularly with friends who have dropped out of high school

may themselves be at greater risk, just as there is a general correlation between the aspirational levels and expectations of friends (Bridge, Judd, & Moock, 1979).

School related factors contributing to the dropout problem have been extensively researched. It has been found that poor grades, low test scores and grade retention, as they relate to overall academic achievement, are associated with dropping out (Boris & Carpenter, 1984; Ekstrom et al., 1986; Wehlage & Rutter, 1986). Behavioral problems in school also appear to significantly influence the dropout rate. The behaviors which are characteristic of dropouts include: absenteeism, truancy, and disciplinary actions (Bachman, Green, & Wirtanen, 1971; Wehlage & Rutter, 1986).

Other factors which have been identified as contributing to the dropout rate include economic and individual factors as well as the organization of the schools. In a study conducted by Rumberger (1983) 20% of the students interviewed reported that they left school because they wanted to or felt they had to work to help support their families. Seventeen percent of the females left because of pregnancy and 9% because of a desire to get married. Additionally, research related to personal factors reveals that dropouts have lower self-esteem and do not feel they have control over their lives when compared with other students. Their general attitude toward school is negative. Rumberger (1983) reports that 29% of his population stated

that they disliked school. In addition, the dropout's educational and occupational aspirations are not as high (Ekstrom et al., 1986; Wehlege & Rutter, 1986).

School Organization and the Dropout Problem

Although little attention has been given to school organization in the literature associated with the dropout problem, this factor may prove to be highly influential to student outcomes. Toles, Schulz, & Rice (1986) indicate that dropout rates vary widely even when the student populations are controlled for differences in race, ethnicity and socioeconomic status. This may serve to suggest that school-related factors exert a powerful influence on the student who is contemplating leaving school prematurely or, in fact, may have predetermined his or her departure by failing to address the student's individual needs and idiosyncratic requirements for learning. Numerous studies indicate that students often dropout of school because they fail to achieve the goals set for them in the academic and social context of the school (Elliott, 1978; Gold & Mann, 1984). Natriello (1982, 1984) studied four suburban high schools and found that students who perceived the school standards to be unattainable were more likely to become "disengaged" from school. This disengagement manifests in apathy, participation in negative activities,

and absenteeism which are all precursors to early withdrawal from high school.

The potential high school dropout may be at even greater risk in light of the recent reforms proposed by several commissions appointed by the government (Education Commission of the States, 1983). The commissions studying the nation's educational institutions have recommended higher standards for course content, longer school days and a longer school year, increased learning time out-of-school i.e., more homework assigned, and higher standards for student achievement (National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983; Task Force on Education for Economic Growth, 1983). Within a traditional academic setting the potential dropout has great difficulty remaining in school with the standards that are in place now. In addition, the reforms will ultimately narrow curricular offerings and present added problems for the potential dropout. This may lead to a unidimensional classroom where instruction is organized so that academic tasks are undifferentiated and students have little autonomy in the choice of alternatives. This factor, according to Rosenholtz and Wilson (1980); Simpson (1981); and Rosenholtz and Rosenholtz (1981), may convey some negative self-perceptions since ability will be viewed as having only a single dimension with some students having high ability and others having low ability which, the authors concluded from their studies, delimited performance.

Public high schools are generally organized to support the mainstreamed academic student who is college bound. According to Goodlad (1984) "school is where one cultivates the head" (p. 67). The curriculum, as he points out, emphasizes the acquisition of facts, and problem solving skills and to a much lesser degree training in other areas e.g., vocational education. Higher grades are considered of paramount importance in the academic environment which places a heavier instructional emphasis on the conceptual and the use of linguistic and numerical symbols. The student who tends to require active learning or the experience of manipulating things and then relating them to symbols and concepts is too often thought of as a poor student or adjudged to be a slow learner (Goodlad, 1984). Students who have characteristically different learning styles as a function of their inherent personality type may be considered, in fact, to be slow when they are actually demonstrating an alternate type of intelligence which if addressed can lead to a productive academic experience.

Students who have demonstrated different styles of learning from those students in the mainstream and are at risk of academic failure may opt to enter an alternative educational environment. The alternatives to the traditional high school are outlined below.

Alternatives to the Traditional High School

Community awareness of the school dropout problem has, as noted earlier, heightened over the past few years. The public now views this problem as a serious crisis in education. Although dropout prevention and service programs are not new, school systems, social agencies and communities at large are now committed to providing more funding and greater resources to try and deal with the dilemma. The potential dropout has typically been one of many targeted groups for alternative programs in the public schools. This served to dilute concentration on the problems of this particular population. This resulted in limited information on solutions for stemming the rising tide of students at risk or for those who have already dropped out of school.

Orr (1987) describes three general approaches to the youth dropout problem. These are: compensatory education; alternative education; employment and training programs. Federal, state and local funding has been provided for compensatory education for students who are having academic difficulties arising from an economic disadvantage. These students are given reading and math assistance in order to remediate their deficient skills. Chapter 1 of the Education and Improvement Act which was Title 1 of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act prior to 1982

provided the bulk of these services through federal funding. The monies allotted for this program reached 68 percent of all public elementary schools. Additionally, in 90 percent of schools where more than half of the student body were determined to be economically needy (National Coalition of Advocates for students, 1985), individual schools were allowed to devise their own programs. These programs have not proved successful in reducing the achievement score disparity between the targeted group, usually non-white students who were in need of this program and those not in need. It has been determined that early intervention rather than grade retention can cut educational costs considerably, however, only 20-25 percent of all public school children (8-10 million students) who met the criteria for Title 1 in 1980-81 were served. The children served included only a few high school students (National Coalition of Advocates for Students, 1985). It is clear that this attempt at aiding the at-risk student through compensatory education has not provided the answer and needs to be reevaluated. In addition, a larger number of high school students need to be included in any proposed interventions.

Another attempt at dealing with the potential or actual dropout is employment or training programs. These programs have been jointly funded through federal as well as other public and private sources. Their target populations have been disadvantaged youth and adults and those who cannot