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PREVIEW

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Personality style and ego development as related to occupational choice

Garfinkle, Diane, Psy.D.

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PREVIEW

PERSONALITY STYLE AND EGO DEVELOPMENT
AS RELATED TO OCCUPATIONAL CHOICE

BY

DIANE GARFINKLE

A Doctoral Project Submitted in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree of
Doctor of Psychology
in the Department of Psychology at Pace University

NEW YORK
1992

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As Related to Occupational Choice

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PREVIEW

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ABSTRACT

Occupational choice is an important decision that can affect one's mental health. According to Klumbies (1967), almost a quarter of 1500 therapy patients studied, described their work setting as the source of their psychological difficulties.

Many studies have been conducted to help explain why individuals choose specific vocations. The focus of many of these studies, however, has been limited. They most often examine specific traits of individuals in specific fields or examine the activities of a profession from a specific theoretical framework.

In this study, the attempt was made to examine how more global, complex, interacting aspects of psychological functioning affect occupational choice. Personality style and developmental stage orientation were considered to be such global aspects of one's individual psychology. The sample consisted of 173, mainstreamed 11th and 12th graders. The Millon Adolescent Personality Inventory was used to measure personality style. Loevinger's Sentence Completion Test was used to measure ego development. Occupational choice was coded by area and level according to a modification of Roe's Occupational Classification.

Results revealed that certain personality types are drawn to certain occupational areas. Science and Technology subjects were found to have significantly higher scores on the Introversive personality scale than Arts and Entertainment subjects. Trends approaching significance supported Anne Roe's theory on "people oriented occupations" and "object oriented occupations". There was no overall significant relationship between occupational choice level and ego development level, but a trend approaching significance indicated that the greatest percent of Post-Conformists (which is the highest ego development stage) was in the highest occupational level.

Other analyses were also performed. Results of an Anova on Millon's adolescent Expressed Concerns scale and ego development level revealed that Pre-Conformists had significantly higher scores on several of the Expressed Concern scales than either the Conformist or Transitional group, but not significantly higher than the Post-Conformist group. This can be interpreted to mean either that Pre-Conformists and Post-Conformists may have problems that manifest themselves differently, but are in similar areas or that Post-Conformists are more self aware and are more able to report their inner experiences and perceptions frankly. Conformists have been found to deny problems and elevate their virtues.

Occupational choice style was also examined in relationship to ego development level. Although there was no overall significant difference between groups, there was a trend for Conformist subjects to more often make single occupational choices than multiple occupational choices. Applying Marcia's theory of ego identity, this could mean that Conformist subjects who follow rules without questioning their inner thoughts are more often in Marcia's foreclosed status which means that they have made a premature, not well thought out commitment.

Additional analyses were performed to examine how the interaction of personality style and ego development level together affect occupational choice. In this analysis, ego development was not found to have a significant overall effect on occupational group classification. This may have been due to the relatively small sample size and young age of the subjects, representing a fairly limited range at the higher levels of development. Trends approaching significance in this study do reveal that there is credence to the idea that personality style and ego development affect occupational choice.

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Statement of the Problem

Occupational choice is a complicated decision that is affected by many psychological variables. In this study, psychological factors that affect vocational choice will be examined. Certain personality types are drawn to certain fields, suggesting that occupational preferences are related to personality characteristics. Several studies have been conducted to help explain why individual's choose their specific vocation. Research on personality factors and developmental factors will be reviewed in this paper.

The focus of many studies in this area has been on specific features or traits, rather than on more global aspects of personality. The lines of investigation have been limited in that they have primarily relied on a reductionistic viewpoint. In this study, the attempt will be made to examine more global, complex interacting aspects of personality and psychological development.

Personality style and developmental orientation reflect one's perspective or way of thinking and perceiving. Occupational choice will be examined to see how it is related

to Theodore Millon's (1982) 8 different personality styles. Development refers to forward movement that occurs through changes of differentiation and degrees of complexity. In this study, psychological development will be examined, in order to understand how it interacts with personality to affect career choices.

Jane Loevinger's concept of ego development is a broad measure of the developmental process. It refers to one's global perspective, and includes an array of interacting traits such as cognitive complexity, affective integration and depth, interpersonal relatedness, capacity for impulse control, and moral development. The Washington University Sentence Completion Test will be used in this study to assess ego development level.

Within each vocational category, jobs will be ranked on a hierarchy according to skill required. The individual's ranking will then be compared to their developmental level.

A higher level of ego development corresponds to greater complexity in thought, higher levels of abstract reasoning, a more developed sense of individuality, and strivings for self-fulfillment. Hauser (1976) suggests that occupations which require higher level thinking would be sought out by those with higher levels of ego development. His hypothesis will be tested in this study.

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Marcia's developmental theory will also be utilized in this study. Subject's occupational choosing style was recorded. There was a one choice group and a multi-choice group. Marcia's theory on ego identity was applied to subject's choosing style. Marcia refers to two dimensions, which he labels, Crisis and Commitment. Included in these dimensions are decision making modes. Individuals in the foreclosure status have not actively questioned alternatives, but have made a commitment, which is often premature and an extension of parental values. Individuals in the moratorium status are in the process of exploring among alternatives and are trying to make a well thought out decision. It was hypothesized that subjects at the conformist level of ego development who follow rules without questioning them and express their inner thoughts in terms of stereotypes and cliches would more often make single occupational choices than individuals at other stages of ego development.

It is important for all mental health professionals to understand factors that impact upon occupational choice. Klumbies (1967) found that almost a quarter of 1500 therapy patients studied, described their work setting as the source of their psychological difficulties. French, Caplan, Van Harrison, & Pinneau (1976) hypothesized that job stress, especially in the area of person-environment fit, are associated with health and illness (Osipow, 1983). Vocational choice can have long term and multifaceted effects on

adolescents' lives. As mental health professionals more thoroughly understand what elements combine to predict vocational match, they can better help patients to make appropriate career choices.

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Psychological Determinants of Occupational Choice

There have been many studies and much theorizing about the role of psychological variables in determining career choice. Personality approaches and developmental approaches will be reviewed in this paper.

Personality Approaches to Occupational Choice

Millon's Theory of Personality

In this research, Theodore Millon's theory of personality will be utilized, as it applies to adolescents. Theodore Millon (1981) conceptualizes personality in terms of ingrained and habitual ways of psychological functioning and describes these ingrained and stable traits and embedded attitudes, habits, and emotions as characteristics that comprise personality.