

WORKER STATUS, RESPONSIBILITY, AND CAREER MATURITY OF COLLEGE STUDENTS

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ABSTRACT

There is a lack of research comparing part-time, full-time, and non-working students with regard to their sense of personal responsibility and career maturity. This study used personal responsibility and career maturity as dependent variables and worker status and sex as independent variables. A sample of 162 traditional age (≤ 24 , $M = 20.90$; $SD = 2.5$) undergraduates (62% women, 67% Caucasian) from a regional southwestern university was administered a General Information Questionnaire, the Student Personal Responsibility Scale-10 and the Revised Career Maturity Inventory. Results (3 x 2 ANOVA) showed that part-time workers were more responsible and they displayed greater career maturity than full-time and non-working students. Young female students displayed higher levels of career maturity than the young male students, but did not differ on personal responsibility. Sex was not found to be a factor in relationship between worker status and career maturity or personal responsibility.

[E-mail at <sangeeta.singg@angelo.edu> for a copy of the Student Personal Responsibility Scale-10 (SPRS-10).]

INTRODUCTION

Half or more of all college students participate in the labor force and work an average of 25 hours per week (Horn & Malizio, 1998; Orszag, Orszag, & Whitmore, 2001). Because of the rising costs of a college education, many undergraduates work to pay for their basic expenses such as tuition, room, and board (Canabal, 1998; Horn & Malizio, 1998). During the last couple of decades, the academic community has become increasingly concerned about these students combining employment and school. Previous research has focused mainly on the impact of student employment on academic performance and yielded mixed results (Canabal, 1998; Ehrenberg & Sherman, 1987; Gleason, 1993; Hammers & Haller, 1983; Marlowe, Koonce, Lee, & Cai, 2002; Pritchard, 1996). Because this trend of working students has become well established in the 21st century, the recent findings are increasingly revealing a positive relationship between employment and academic performance, especially for part-time workers (e.g., Canabal, 1998; Marlowe et al., 2002). Although, the positive correlation between part-time work and academic performance has been

explained indirectly by some in terms similar to greater sense of personal responsibility and career maturity (Berker & Carroll, 2003; Canabal, 1998; Ehrenberg & Sherman, 1987; Horn & Malizio, 1998; Marlowe et al., 2002; Orzag et al., 2001; Stern & Nakata, 1991), no attention has been given to examining students' worker status directly in relation to these variables. For example, Orzag et al. (2001) state that part-time work provides work experience and fosters discipline that aids academic performance and future job prospects.

Our study tried to answer the question, "Are working students more responsible in their everyday life situations and do they have greater career maturity in terms of attending school and holding a job at the same time?". Therefore, the independent variables of the present study were worker status and sex and dependent variables were student personal responsibility (PR) and career maturity (CM). Because previous studies found that women tended to get better grades than men (Marlowe et al., 2002), we used sex as another independent variable.

Previous research with student personal responsibility has shown it to be significantly related to several academic variables including academic performance, procrastination, credit card debt, college indecision, self-monitoring (Singg, & Ader, 2001; Singg, Holscher, & Perez, 2004; Singg, Ledesma, & Baker, 2002; Singg, & Potter, 2002; Thomas, Harvey, Davis, & Singg, 2000; Thomas, Harvey, Davis, & Singg, 2001). Because holding a job requires discipline and a sense of responsibility, it was logical to include the variable of student personal responsibility in the present study.

Career maturity has been a focus of extensive research with diverse populations for some time (Rojewski, Wicklein & Shell, 1995) and has been defined as the person's ability to make a realistic and stable career choice with awareness of what is required to make an appropriate career decision (Levinson, Ohler, Caswell, & Kiewra, 1998). Factors that influence career maturity include age, ethnicity, sex, socioeconomic status, and educational level. Regarding sex differences, studies have found inconsistent results (Rojewski et al., 1995). Career maturity has also been found to be positively related to academic-performance (West, 1986).

Our research explored differences among non-working, part-time working, and full-time working students on personal responsibility and career maturity. Also of interest were differences between men and women and interaction between worker status and sex on the two dependent variables. Age was controlled by using traditional-age students (24 years old or younger).

METHOD

Participants

The sample consisted of 162 undergraduate traditional-age ($M=20.90$; $SD=2.5$; 38% men and 62% women) students enrolled at a regional southwestern university. There were 67% Caucasians, 23% Hispanics, 4% African Americans, and 6% reporting to be other. Of these, 28% of the participants were freshman, 26% sophomores, 23% juniors, and 22% seniors. The average hours students worked per week was 19.78 ($SD=15.74$), which was lower than the national average of 25 hours.

Instruments and Procedure

Volunteer undergraduate students of 25 years of age or younger were administered a

General Information Questionnaire; the Student Personal Responsibility Scale-10 (SPRS-10; Singg & Ader, 2001); and the Revised Career Maturity Inventory (R-CMI; Bazargan, 2002).

The SPRS-10 was used to determine how young college students accepted responsibility in everyday life situations. The scale contains 10 positively or negatively worded items with scores ranging from 10 (low) to 40 (high) that are answered on a 4-point scale. Responses range from most always like me to mostly never like me. Some items are scored in reverse order. The scale has an internal consistency coefficient of .74. The SPRS-10 showed a significant positive correlation ($r = .49$, $p < .01$) with the well established Conscientiousness (C) Scale of the NEO Personality Inventory-Revised and it was positively related to academic performance ($r = .21$, $p < .01$) and self-esteem ($r = .23$, $p < .01$).

Revised Career Maturity Inventory (R-CMI) was used to measure the student's attitudes toward career related decisions and the attitudes necessary to succeed in a career. Crites (1978) who originally created the Career Maturity Inventory, suggests using this test for assessing career development, career maturity, and career education. Each question in the R-CMI asks the respondent to answer how he/she felt about going to school and working based on the following answer types: Agree, Not so Agree, Disagree, and Not Applicable. Each question is scored with 1 point for the answer that represents an aiding attitude in obtaining and maintaining productive employment. Responses considered as a hindrance toward attaining and keeping employment are given a score of 0.

RESULTS

Data were analyzed using the 3 x 2 (worker status x sex) factorial analysis of variance (ANOVA). The ANOVA results showed significant differences among three worker status groups on SPRS-10 with highest mean score for part-time

workers ($F_{2,118} = 3.75, p = .026$). The mean SPRS-10 scores were as follows: nonworking students $M = 28.43$ ($SD = 3.98$), part-time workers $M = 30.91$ ($SD = 3.93$), and full-time workers $M = 30.55$ ($SD = 2.87$). For pairwise comparisons, the Tukey/Kramer Procedure showed a significant mean difference only between part-time workers and non-workers ($t = 6.08, p < .05$). No significant mean differences were noted between non-workers and full-time workers ($t = 2.11, p > .05$) and between part-time and full-time workers ($t = .14, p > .05$).

The results were also significant for R-CMI with again highest mean score for part-time workers ($F_{2,118} = 4.26, p = .02$). The mean R-CMI scores were as follows: nonworking students $M = 41.80$ ($SD = 7.46$), part-time workers $M = 46.97$ ($SD = 5.08$), and full-time workers $M = 43.09$ ($SD = 7.28$). Again, when the Tukey/Kramer Procedure was employed, a significant mean difference was found only between part-time workers and non-workers ($t = 9.45, p < .05$). No significant mean differences were revealed between non-workers and full-time workers ($t = .13, p > .05$) and between part-time and full-time workers ($t = 4.21, p > .05$).

The ANOVA results showed no significant difference between men and women on SPRS-10 (Men $M = 29.23, SD = 3.66$; Women $M = 30.70, SD = 3.97$; $F_{1,118} = 3.75, p = .068$). However, significant difference between men and women was found on R-CMI ($F_{1,118} = 8.27, p = .005$) with greater R-CMI mean score for women 45.92 ($SD = 5.63$) as compared to men ($M = 41.88, SD = 6.63$). No significant interaction was found between worker status and sex on either SPRS-10 ($F_{2,118} = 1.07, p = .35$) or R-CMI ($F_{2,118} = .29, p = .75$).

DISCUSSION

The results of this study provided evidence that regardless of their sex, young college students who work part-time tend to display greater sense of personal responsibility in their everyday life situations and display greater career maturity than those students who do not work. These findings are in line with the findings about how work affects academic performance. For example, previous research showed that part-time workers had a more positive or no adverse effect of work on their academic performance (Ehrenberg & Sherman, 1987; Horn & Malizio, 1998). It might be because part-time students do not overburden themselves with work responsibilities that might interfere with school work.

Part-time workers displaying greater career maturity as compared to non-workers coincides with Patton's (2001) conclusion based on her review of the career psychology research literature. She concluded that part-time work contributes to the development of young people and they exhibit greater career maturity than those who do not work.

Although no significant interactions were found between worker status and sex (which was the primary reason for using sex as an independent variable), data yielded some interesting findings with regard to this variable. We found that young men and women do not differ in their sense of personal responsibility, however, women do demonstrate higher levels of career maturity than men. This finding is consistent with some previous research which showed women having an advantage over men in some aspects of affective or cognitive career maturity due to sex differences in overall maturational rates (cited in Rojewski et al., 1995).

Because our sample was not randomly selected, although subjects were obtained from multiple disciplines, the external validity of our study is limited. In spite of this limitation, our research showed consistent results for both student personal responsibility and career maturity that part-time workers display greater sense of personal responsibility and greater career maturity than those who do not work while going to school. Working part-time might be a positive factor in students' life. Therefore, it appears that to achieve better understanding about what impact employment has on undergraduates' academic performance, future research should take into account the variables of personal responsibility and career maturity as well.

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