

DEVELOPMENT OF THE STUDENT PERSONAL RESPONSIBILITY SCALE-10

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The 10-item Student Personal Responsibility Scale (SPRS-10) was developed to assess students' acceptance of personal responsibility in their day-to-day living. The scale showed an acceptable level of internal consistency and positive correlations to the Conscientiousness Scale of Neuroticism, Extraversion, and Openness Personality Inventory-Revised (NEO PI-R), academic performance, self-esteem, and retention.

Keywords: Student Personal Responsibility Scale, scale development, validity, reliability.

Lack of personal responsibility is considered one of the main causes of American school failure (Hwang, 1995). Different researchers have used different terms for responsibility (Schlenker, Britt, Pennington, Murphy, & Doherty, 1994; Wolfe & Johnson, 1995). In order to provide a coherent framework, Schlenker et al. (1994) proposed a triangular model of responsibility in which responsibility is described as the combined strength of the three elements: *prescriptions* (rules for conduct), *events* (units of action), and *identity* (actor's roles, qualities, commitments, and pretensions). According to this model, personal responsibility is likened to a psychological highway that engages the self-system and increases determination to accomplish prescribed goals. Following this reasoning, it was expected that, if the prescriptions for the student's identity were highly internalized, then the personal responsibility would be high, which might relate to an event of a high grade point average

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(GPA) effecting a positive self-evaluation, which, in turn, might be related to high self-esteem.

The existing measures of responsibility were examined and found to be either part of comprehensive personality inventories or irrelevant to student life. In only one study was a measure used, the Personal Responsibility (PR) Scale, which was more appropriate for college students (Martel, Mckelvie, & Standing, 1987). However, the sample size was small and the scale had 30 items. The authors attempted to develop a shorter, area-specific scale to measure student personal responsibility by using a larger sample. Two studies to achieve this goal are described below.

METHOD

PARTICIPANTS

The participating undergraduates, between 18 and 26 years of age, (pilot study $N = 52$; second study $N = 281$) were obtained from the psychology department subject pool at an American regional southwestern university. A 3-year follow-up was conducted with the second study participants to check on their enrolment status. The sample consisted of 60% women, 72% of whom were Caucasian, 75% freshmen and sophomores, and 90% single with M age = 19.9 ($SD = 1.9$).

MEASURES TO TEST VALIDITY

A well established scale from the Neuroticism, Extraversion, and Openness Personality Inventory-Revised (NEO PI-R; Costa & McCrae, 1992), the 48-item Conscientiousness (C) Scale, was used to test the construct validity of the Student Personal Responsibility Scale (SPRS). The authors selected the C Scale because, theoretically, it measures the general domain of personal responsibility and the NEO PI-R appears to work well for college students or persons of college age who do not attend college (Costa & McRae, 1992). Also, it is considered a useful supplement to ability measures as a predictor of academic and later-life success (Costa & McRae, 1992).

Academic performance was used to test the predictive validity of SPRS and was operationalized as grade point average (GPA). The Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (RSE) was used to measure self-esteem. Rosenberg (1979) reported this 10-item Likert-type scale to have good reproducibility and scalability. GPA and self-esteem were selected because they represent variables which are theoretically and empirically considered to be correlates of student personal responsibility (Baumeister, 1997; Martel et al., 1987; Wolfe & Johnson, 1995).

PROCEDURE AND RESULTS

Fifty-two undergraduates in the pilot study completed the 28-item SPRS. Eight weeks later they completed the SPRS again. The participants in the second study ($N = 281$) completed the General Information Questionnaire, the 20-item SPRS, the C Scale of the NEO PI-R, and the RSE Scale. Three years later, these 281 students were followed via the university registrar's office to see if they were currently enrolled or had graduated.

ITEMS FOR THE STUDENT PERSONAL RESPONSIBILITY SCALE

Twenty-eight items in the pilot study believed to measure personal responsibility of a student in relation to academic and social situations were generated. Each item was rated 1 (*most like me*), 2 (*somewhat like me*), 3 (*very little like me*), or 4 (*mostly unlike me*). The eight items with lowest item-to-total correlation coefficient were deleted, leaving 20 items in the scale. The pilot study results for the SPRS showed an alpha coefficient of .76 and an 8-week test-retest reliability coefficient of .74. Seven items of the SPRS and PR Scale by Martel et al. (1987) coincided. The scores on the 20-item SPRS ranged from 20 (low) to 80 (high).

Age was controlled in both studies, and the results of independent t tests using SPRS scores for sex, ethnic background, and marital status were found not to be significant in the second study. The 20-item SPRS showed an alpha coefficient of .77 in the second study. A significant positive correlation between the scores on the SPRS and the C scale of the NEO PI-R was also found ($r(280) = .56, p < .01$). However, there were 10 items with item-to-total correlation under .30, which resulted in another reduction leaving 10 items in the scale (SPRS-10). The Alpha coefficient for the SPRS-10 was .74. A significantly high correlation between the 20-item SPRS and SPRS-10 indicated equivalency of the two scales ($r(280) = .80, p < .01$). The SPRS-10 showed also a significant positive correlation with the C Scale ($r(280) = .49, p < .01$). Sample items from the SPRS-10 are: (1) *I turn all my assignments in on time*; (2) *At home or at college I do my fair share of the household chores*; (3) *When I borrow something, I fail to return it*; (4) *I am often late for class or work*; and (5) *I miss appointments I have made if I'd rather not go*. A copy of the SPRS-10 can be obtained from the first author.

Both scales were further compared on the basis of their correlation to academic performance and self-esteem. The results were similar in both cases. Both versions showed significant ($p < .01$) positive correlations to GPA and self-esteem, lending further support to the validity of the two scales. The correlations for self-esteem were .34 (SPRS) and .23 (SPRS-10); correlations for the GPA were .21 (SPRS) and .19 (SPRS-10).

The 20 items of the SPRS and the 10 items of SPRS-10 were further subjected to principal components factor analysis (statistical table is available upon request from the first author). The first three eigenvalues of the correlation matrix for the SPRS were 3.96, 1.58, and 1.28, and for the SPRS-10 the eigenvalues were 3.04, 1.08, and .99. An examination of scree plots for the scales suggested that only one factor should be extracted in both scales. The fact that a single factor explained 39.63% of the variance in the case of the SPRS and 30.39% of the variance in the case of the SPRS-10 appeared promising for future validity studies.

A 3-year follow-up was conducted to see if there was a relationship between personal responsibility and retention. A 2 (SPRS-10 scores, the median split: 31 or less, $n = 132$; 32 or more, $n = 149$) x 2 (*enrolled/graduated*, $n = 138$; *not enrolled*, $n = 143$) Chi-Square test revealed a significant relation between personal responsibility and retention ($\chi^2 = 5.52$, $df = 1$, $p < .05$), indicating 60% of currently enrolled/graduated students scored higher on responsibility. However, the number of transferred or dropped-out students making up the *not enrolled* group was not available.

DISCUSSION

The present results are consistent with the triangular model of responsibility proposed by Schlenker et al. (1994). Student personal responsibility involves certain prescribed behaviors that lead to goal achievement (academic success), which influences self-evaluation (self-esteem via transfer of information from the event to the actor), which – in turn – may strengthen the link between prescribed behaviors and academic success. The statistical results showed that a student's personal responsibility (prescriptions) is connected to his/her GPA (event) and self-esteem (identity) and that students exhibiting higher responsibility are more likely to remain in college.

The authors have attempted to specify and operationalize the concept of student personal responsibility with the help of the SPRS-10 in the hope that any change in this dimension of a student's personality due to some intervention could be assessed. However, some limitations of the two studies leading to the scale development must be noted. The scale might be meaningful mainly for the college population. Also, some possible intervening variables were not controlled, for example, how strongly a participant identifies with the student role, achievement motivation, and social desirability factor. It might also be mentioned that the usual tendency of people toward favorable self presentation might have inflated the responsibility scores of less-responsible participants the most. Future researchers could test the SPRS-10 with high school students as well. Research designed to determine what helps to build responsibility in college students would be useful, especially in relation to retention.

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