PREDICTORS AND CONSEQUENCES OF SELF-HANDICAPPING AND DEFENSIVE PESSIMISM AMONG STUDENTS IN SELECTED HIGH SCHOOLS IN NAIROBI PROVINCE, KENYA

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The central problem of this study is that despite the critical role evaluation plays in an education system, students' perception of evaluation is, in most cases, negative. This is because they equate their self-worth with academic ability. Hence, evaluation scenarios in most instances is seen as a threat to self-esteem and hence a need to find strategies to cushion one from such threats. To this end, the purpose of this study was to explore predictors and consequences of two strategies that students use to negotiate achievement situations: more specifically, self-handicapping and defensive pessimism from a self-worth motivation perspective of form IV students from Nairobi Province. Consistent with self-worth motivation theory, self-handicapping and defensive pessimism were proposed as two cognitive strategies students use to protect their self-worth in the event of potential failure, and in some cases, to enhance their worth in the event of success. A set of motivational/affective factors; motivation orientation, public self-consciousness, perceived control, level and stability of self esteem/concept, views of intelligence and attributions were proposed to predict self-handicapping and defensive pessimism. These two strategies were in turn proposed to predict a variety of academic outcomes, including self-regulation and grades. The study adopted a correlational design in order to discover predictive relationships and the degree of association among variables and an exploratory design to assess students' personal reports on the nature of defensive manoeuvring. Using stratified random sampling, eight schools in Nairobi were selected. Fifty participants were randomly selected from each school to comprise a total of 400 participants who took part in the quantitative study and out of these only 40 participants, showing extreme shifts in self-handicapping and defensive pessimism, were involved in the qualitative study. Academic process questionnaire was adapted and used to measure the predictors, cognitive strategies and academic outcomes that issue from the strategies. In-depth interviews with the forty students was conducted with the aim of expanding quantitative findings about the self-protective process from students' personal perspectives, illuminating their consequences, and providing rich details about the precise nature of the many factors associated with these strategies. Data collected was analyzed using both descriptive and inferential statistics. The main techniques used to analyze data were Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient (r) and multiple regression. The major findings were that self- handicapping was predicted by ego orientation, stability of self concept, perception of control, entity beliefs and public academic self consciousness. Self-handicapping was, however, not related to external attribution for success. Defensive pessimism, on the other hand, was predicated by ego orientation, task orientation, and ability attribution for success. It was, however, not related to public self-consciousness, views of intelligence and level of self-concept. Cognitive strategies on the other hand were inversely related to academic outcomes. Based on the findings, it was recommended that students should be encouraged to adhere to more personal goals and standards as one way of minimizing the public dimension of self-worth protection. Teachers, through their teaching, should try to instill in students the notion that failure or poor performance is diagnostic and a springboard for later

success, rather than evidence of low ability and low self-worth.