Proceedings of the New York State Communication Association

Volume 2010 *Proceedings of the 68th New York State Communication Association* | Article 1

4-16-2012

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Recommended Citation
Atkinson, Pat Barniak (2011) "Exploring Correlations between Writing Apprehension, Academic Rational Beliefs, and Stress and Coping behaviors in College Students," *Proceedings of the New York State Communication Association*: Vol. 2010, Article 1.
Available at: http://docs.rwu.edu/nyscaproceedings/vol2010/iss1/1

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Writing Apprehension and Academic Rational Beliefs: Exploring correlations between writing apprehension, academic rational beliefs, and stress and coping behaviors in college students

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This study explores the relationship between writing apprehension, rational academic beliefs, and stress and coping behaviors in college students. Participants (N= 86) responded to a survey constructed from three pre-existing scales: the Writing Apprehension Test, the Academic Rational Beliefs Scale, and the Ways of Stress and Coping Scale. No correlations were indicated between writing apprehension and stress and coping behaviors. A low negative correlation was indicated between Writing Apprehension and beliefs pertaining to Evaluation of self-responsibility for academic work. A low positive correlation was indicated between Writing Apprehension and rational beliefs pertaining to Work Habits. Recommendations are offered toward enhancing communication between student and mentor in a remedial writing situation. Future opportunities for research are discussed.

The ability to write effectively is integral to success in higher education. Many students find the mere thought of writing makes them anxious and make choices designed to minimize their anxiety. Writing apprehension is defined as "dispositional attitudes, existing over time and context and situational attitudes specific to particular tasks" (Rife & Stacks, 1988, p. 39). Programs to deal with writing difficulties are found at virtually every educational institution. Fearing negative feedback about their writing, some students avoid turning in written work, thereby launching a self-fulfilling prophecy. They expect to do poorly and tend to do so because their inability to cope with the associated stress does not allow them sufficient practice of the craft. The cyclical nature of this intrapersonal conflict continually affects students' choices academically (McCroskey & Anderson, 1974) and, ultimately, in their subsequent occupations (Daly & McCroskey, 1975).

Recently, this topic has seen a renewed interest with the incorporation of a composition component in the SAT examination, as well as in the area of computer-mediated communication, as blogging and texting have demonstrated pronounced effects on student writing (Todd, 2003). As such, educators have noticed subtleties in the ways different students react to the various writing challenges placed before them. While a great deal of research has been conducted on writing apprehension and general attitudes, this research will begin to explore the relationships between writing apprehension and students' beliefs about their role in their education. Using the Writing Apprehension Test

[WAT] (Daly & Miller 1975a) and the Academic Rational Beliefs Scale (Egan, Canale, del Rosario & White, 2007), a link between beliefs and apprehension is explored.

The Academic Rational Beliefs Scale [ARBS] may be an effective link to understanding the cycle of engagement a student experiences over the span of their academic careers. Addressing the irrational beliefs as a part of the process in which skills training, systemic desensitization and cognitive modification are used together to replace the "irrational beliefs in favor of some more rational beliefs" about academic writing (Allen, Hunter & Donohue, 1989, p. 58). This may pave the way for more clearly demonstrating that the state of a person's writing apprehension can be altered through re-evaluating the rational or irrational beliefs to help them to achieve greater academic progress.

Literature Review

Separately, each of the topics of writing apprehension, academic rational beliefs and stress and coping behaviors, could be used as a lens through which to view the other factors in this intrapersonal communication puzzle. A review of the literature further informs this exploration and allows a variety of topics to emerge toward the research at hand.

Writing Apprehension

Communication Apprehension [CA], a term describing feelings of avoidance of interactions with others (Bourhis & Allen, 1992) continues to be one of the most widely studied areas in communication research for most of the last sixty years. CA is conceptualized as "a causal agent in both academic and interpersonal success" (McCroskey, Booth-Butterfield & Payne, 1989, p. 100). Meta-analysis of the scope of CA research by Booth-Butterfield (1988) concludes "Communication Apprehension is cross-situationally consistent both conceptually and operationally…the field should accept as a scientifically demonstrated fact that trait CA is systematically related to fear and anxiety across all communication situations" (p. 68). Important to the applied study of communication in the educational environment, Bourhis and Allen (1992) see that a small but stable relationship exists between communication apprehension and cognitive performance and "therefore can be conceptualized as a causal agent in student success" (McCroskey, Booth-Butterfield, & Payne, 1989, p. 107).

Coming out of the work on general communication apprehension is writing apprehension. Writing Apprehension [WA] was originally defined as "the measure of anxiety about writing that outweighs the projected gain from the situation" (Daly & Miller, 1975a) and was based on McCroskey's (1970) Personal Report of Public Speaking Anxiety (PRPSA). Daly and Miller (1975a) constructed the Writing Apprehension Test which included items pertaining to anxiety about writing in general, teacher evaluation of writing, peer evaluation of writing and professional evaluations of writing (publishers and editors), letter writing, writing environments, writing in tests, and self-evaluation of writing and its

worth. Daly and Miller (1975b) then used the verbal SAT scores of undergraduates enrolled in basic or remedial composition courses and compared them with results on the Writing Apprehension Test finding that WA scores had "powerful effects on individuals' attitude toward and behavior in writing courses" (Daly & Miller, 1975b, p. 250). Links between WA and academic performance were that individuals with greater WA had lower expectations about their grades, and are less willing to take additional coursework, (p. 254), and that individuals with less WA are more likely to take advanced courses and that women experienced less writing apprehension overall (p. 255).

Daly (1977) then did a follow up experiment about how students in entry level communication courses were affected by Writing Apprehension in terms of encoding of messages (conversion from one type of communication to another), perceived message quality, and actual structural characteristics of the messages themselves. Findings suggest writing apprehension is strongly related to "satisfaction with writing assignments in English composition and human communication classes" (Daley, 1977, p. 566). A mitigating variable may be cognitive stress at the time of the writing, but the evidence was scant. The learned response of writing apprehension was likely a self-fulfilling prophecy. Writing Apprehension and studies related to performance and competency (Daly, 1977; Daly & Miller, 1975c; Faigley, Daly, & Witte, 1981) seem to indicate that students who lack adequate writing skills experience less success with written work "which might maintain the students' writing apprehension and avoidance of writing practice and feedback" (Todd, 2003, p. 19).

Subsequent work (Ruffner, 1981; Richardson, 1981) asked if WA would be different for communication majors who routinely practice writing for varied audiences. Ruffner's findings indicate that a step-wise regression yielded a 13 variable model that included psychological, stylistic and demographic variables in the assessment of journalistic writing (1981, p. 77). Richardson (1981) examined the relationship between writing apprehension and the quality of writing when aimed at a distant audience (a television station manager) as opposed to a familiar audience such as a friend relative or spouse. While the data showed no significant relationship between the apprehension and the quality of the writing between the two essays, there was significant difference between the overall quality of the writing aimed at the familiar audience without regard to apprehension (p. 27).

Rife and Stacks (1988) refined the Mass Communications Writing Apprehension Measure to identify dysfunctional writing attitudes in students enrolled in first and second year communication courses. This work used a multi-dimensional measure to explore the aspects of general affect, blank page paralysis, mechanical skills competence, evaluation apprehension, task avoidance, leadership, and well-being in relation to writing apprehension. The findings demonstrate that writing apprehension exists even among those who chose a writing intensive curriculum at a competitive institution; those who (supposedly) had an understanding of the more intensive writing requirements in a

journalism major, and yet remained susceptible to the stress of writing apprehension. Additionally, the research by Popovich and Massey (2005) found results that emphasize the importance of several factors: revision in the writing process, systematic feedback by instructors and adequate knowledge of language and mechanics as important components of effective writing. Because of the student's need to integrate both the instructor feedback and work toward improvements in skills to optimize the revision process, it follows that a student's attitude toward writing as a craft (rather than an innate talent or trait) is a significant predictor of writing ability and may alter the severity of the writing apprehensive student's experience.

Additional studies on writing apprehension, self esteem and personality (Daly & Wilson, 1980), quality and audience (Richardson, 1981) and personal writing (Walsh, 1989) found that writing apprehension was present in daily life in any number of ways regardless of situation, audience or work ethic of the writer. Onwuegbuzie (1980) estimates that 10%-25% of all people experience writing apprehension to some degree.

The themes running through the following decade looked at the dimensions of procrastination, (Onwegbuzie, 2001), writing intensity (Bennett & Rhodes, 1988) where the more apprehensive individuals produced less creative work in an effort to complete the assignment. Re-visiting the areas of the relevance of question order to outcome in the WAT, (Bline, Lowe, Meixner & Nouri. 2003) and write-to-learn strategies used in post-secondary classrooms (WTL) (Reeves, 1997; Schmidt, 2004) underscored the validity and reliability of the WAT as a measurement useful to both researchers and in classroom for use by teachers. With the increased use of technology throughout the teaching and learning process, writing apprehension among mass communication majors (Todd, 2003) was found to significantly decrease over the course of the first and second years (McCroskey, Booth-Butterfield & Payne, 1989; Todd, 2003), whereas computer apprehension increased the first year then declined over the course of the second year. The convergence of communication apprehension, writing apprehension and technology apprehension on the effective use of communication technologies (Scott & Rockwell, 1997) was found to support the relevance of computer and communication apprehension to each other, but not with regard to writing apprehension "as it was not correlated with the future use of text-based communication technologies" (p. 55). The effects of weblogs on academic writing of L-2 undergraduates (Kelly, 2008) shows a tendency toward qualitative results; that students associate improvements in writing and a positive sense of class community with the use of blogs, however, there are no quantitative findings that suggest a participants affective conditions are improved by blogging.

In summary, writing apprehension is a communication issue that affects approximately 10-25% of people. Students who experience WA in the higher education setting, regardless of major, make choices to minimize this issue in selection of both their academic coursework and career goals. Cognitive stress, writing skills and instructor feedback as well as student attitude toward the revision process may affect the level of

writing apprehension experienced by a student. A student's beliefs about the academic process itself might also factor into the cognitive process feeding writing apprehensiveness. Measuring a student's rational or irrational beliefs about the academic work may prove helpful in earlier detection of student misconceptions, allowing remedial help to be accessed sooner and likely be more effective.

Rational Academic Beliefs

Irrational beliefs can contribute to emotional problems and hinder perspective, leading to dysfunctional behaviors as seen in previous research on rational-emotive therapy (RET; Ellis, 1962, 2000). The Academic Rational Beliefs Scale (Egan, Canale, del Rosario & White, 2007) is a newly developed instrument measuring a student's academic beliefs on a rational to irrational continuum, assessing the "degree to which a student's cognition might be contributing to his or her academic concerns" (p. 175). The goal of this work was to extend previous research by specifically assessing academic beliefs among college students and translating them into a measurement tool. This tool could be used as a screening instrument by college counselors working with students experiencing academic difficulties in the areas of problem identification, treatment planning and outcome monitoring. Egan et al. (2007) agree with Walter and Siebert (1993) that "Irrational beliefs may create adjustment problems when an individual forms unrealistically high, and therefore unattainable, expectations of self, of others, or for life situations because failed expectations tend to produce feelings of disappointment and disengagement" (p. 175) and therefore, irrational beliefs set a student up for failure both socially and academically.

Developed with experienced full-time faculty and undergraduate psychology students, 47 rational and irrational belief statements were created and further narrowed down to the final 16 statements, grouped into three categories of Evaluation, Work Habits and Supports. The category of Evaluation refers to belief statements dealing with the student's evaluation of the degree of self-responsibility for their academic success. The category of Work Habits refers to belief statements dealing with the student's disposition about the preparation of academic work. Lastly, the category of Support refers to belief statements dealing with the student's perspective on the support that can be expected from faculty. Uses may include problem determination, treatment of beliefs to address academic problems and a measure to monitor change in these beliefs that may "translate into academic improvement" (Egan et al., p. 182).

The student's evaluation of his or her skills as assessed by the ARBS offers a potential new window through which to view WA, as it can be placed in the larger context of academic and personal maturity. In this way, a student may be able to see the overall picture of their academic writing issues as a state they can do something about rather than a trait or shortcoming they are burdened with indefinitely. This could lead to a better balance between problem-focused versus emotionally focused coping strategies that often prove to be counterproductive.

Stress and Coping

"Some of the most frustrating conflicts are those people fight within their own heads" (Deutsch, Coleman, & Marcus, 2006, p. 294). Coping can be defined as the cognitive and behavioral efforts an individual uses to manage specific demands or stressors (Smith & Renk, 2007; Dressler, 1991). Coping with academic, intrapersonal and interpersonal stress is a major part of the adjustment for students and can play a significant role in their success after they leave school (Edwards & Shepherd, 2007). "Research shows a strong link between social-emotional and conflict resolution skills, traditional intellectual skills (reading, writing and math), and success in the adult workplace" (Deutsch et al., 2006, p. 357). The exploration of how college students cope with the stress of writing apprehension and how they attempt to overcome this impediment to learning can be understood by employing the Transactional Model of Stress and Coping (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984b).

The Transactional Model of Stress and Coping is a process measurement that focuses on the relationship between the person and their environment during a specific stressful encounter. The individual selects coping behaviors based on their personal beliefs and the demands of the individual situation. This theory uses a series of concepts relating to the "impact of stressors on an individual and how situations are mediated in terms of the individual's appraisal of the stressor(s), and the psychological, cultural and social resources at their disposal" (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984b, p. 44). The following list is a summary of the six key parts to this model:

1. Primary Appraisal – this is the evaluation the subject makes of the event or stressor(s).

2. Secondary Appraisal – is the perceived controllability of the stressor(s) and the person's own coping resources.

3. Coping Efforts – are the strategies the subject uses to handle the primary and secondary appraisals. These efforts can attempt to manage the problem itself or change the way the subject thinks or feels about a stressful situation.

4. Meaning-Based Coping – is a way to induce positive emotions to allow focus on the coping process.

5. Outcomes of Coping – functional healthy behaviors that promote well-being.

6. Dispositional Coping Styles – are generalizations as to the ways behavior can affect the emotions and reactions to a stressor that are shown to be stable over time. They include optimism and information seeking.

In the primary appraisal, the individual evaluates the significance of the stressful event. If the threat is believed to be insignificant, then it is perceived to have insignificant impact (Lazarus, & De Longis, 1983). Worrying, denial, avoidance and seeking social support

are thought to be emotionally focused ways of coping. The difference between these coping strategies is that seeking social support includes changing how one feels about the situation. Often the psychological stress is so great that avoidance behaviors result and the person decides to ignore the threat (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984b). Problem-focused coping behaviors such as problem solving, information–seeking and problem management strategies concentrate on changing what the person believes about the threatening situation; whereas, emotion focused coping strategies encourage seeking support, expressing emotions and relaxation techniques like deep breathing and visualization (Gates, 2007). Beasly, Thompson and Davidson found that "Emotion-oriented and avoidant coping strategies typically result in negative psychological and physical outcomes" (2003, p. 95). Additional work was conducted by Folkman and Lazarus (1985) on coping strategies of college students preparing for examinations, and by Folkman, Lazarus, Dunkel-Schetter, De Longis, and Gruen (1986 b) focusing on the actual coping process influencing the outcomes of everyday stressful encounters. They found the use of "planful" problem-solving was correlated with emotional self-control. Students often respond to stress and coping by participating in behaviors such as wishful thinking, distancing, seeking social support and emphasizing positive beliefs in their abilities (Cassidy, 2005; Folkman & Lazarus, 1985; Scherer & Drumheller, Jr., 2001). This is particularly relevant to the understanding of writing apprehension over a period of time, as in the case of writing of a paper over the course of a week. Nearly all students experience this type of writing event, and this theory attempts to explain how the levels of stress change their beliefs as to their abilities over a period of time.

Dissonance between one's beliefs, abilities and perceived problems is an inevitable part of the educational experience that follows the student into their professional lives (Boster, Kazoleas, Levine, Rogan, & Kang, 1995; Socha, Razmov & Davis, 2003). Yet once students realize that temporary chaos and internal conflict are necessary to learning, they became accustomed to that aspect of their education (Sandy, 2004). Coping effectively includes win-win situations that allow for learning, personal growth and innovation. Self-generated messages, personal power, persistence and bargaining ability all factor into beliefs about how individual abilities are developed (Boster et al., 1995; Shelby, 1986).

Research in Stress and Coping demonstrates that the relationship between perceived control, negative emotions and degree of importance are key factors in determining the amount of stress produced by a given situation.

> Problem focused coping strategies tend to be employed when an individual has determined [believes] that a challenging situation is amenable to change [a state approach]….in contrast, emotion-focused coping strategies focus on dealing with the negative emotions that are the product of the stressful situation [a trait approach], where the individual has judged [beliefs] that nothing can be done to modify a challenging environment. (Smith & Renk, 2007, p. 407)

Problem-focused and emotion-focused coping strategies work together with a student's rational (or irrational) academic beliefs as they pursue their academic and personal goals "in a cognitive-motivational-relational meaning-centered mediation (i.e., appraising) in an effort to obtain data that is process-centered and holistic" (Lazarus, 2000, p. 669). Todd (2003) observes that "Students who seemed to experience difficulty in self-assessing their writing ability did not seem to strongly relate giftedness with high levels of anxiety" (p. 34). In other words, they perceive gifted students as writing easily but when a student consistently experiences writing difficulties, the perception may be that the writer may be less intelligent overall. A student who believes that writing difficulties are a state that can be changed may seek help and support. Most often this help takes the form of systematic desensitization, cognitive modification and skills training (Allen, Hunter & Donoghue, 1989, p. 58). The student who views writing apprehension as a trait they possess (like shyness) may tend to believe there is little they can do about it and may avoid, deny or use wishful thinking to maintain false hope that the situation will somehow resolve itself. This can lead to maladaptive coping strategies not supportive or indicative of the individual's true academic capabilities. This concern may also feed into the irrational beliefs students hold about their potential for success, a concern that acted as a catalyst for this research.

Researching the connections between these beliefs and the messages that fuel this intrapersonal communication conflict may positively affect the cycle of self-fulfilling prophecy in relation to writing apprehension. Particularly in the case of cognitive modification, (Meinchenbaum, Gilmore & Fedoraavicius, 1971; Fremouw & Zitter, 1978) the instructor has the opportunity to change the student's belief system about the [writing] situation, by showing the irrational beliefs as something to be discarded in favor of a more rational belief or coping statement (Allen, Hunter & Donoghue, 1989, p. 58.) This exploration hopes to offer a richer understanding of issues to be addressed when planning enhanced writing support strategies for collegiate writing centers and classroom instructors.

The Transactional Model of Stress and Coping is a communication theory using a series of concepts relating to the "impact of stressors on an individual and how situations are mediated in terms of the individual's appraisal of the stressor(s), and the psychological, cultural and social resources at their disposal" (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984, p. 44). The primary and secondary appraisals determine how important an event seems and how capable a student feels in their ability to navigate the situation with the available resources. Meaning-based coping efforts with WA may allow students to perceive this as a learning issue to be dealt with sooner rather than later. This would promote a more effective use of available remediation tools and the seeking of information and support more readily, which could help facilitate the student's attitudinal change. As part of the secondary appraisal, this also has the potential to improve academic outcomes, as planful problem solving may offer the feeling of emotional control a student needs to begin to dispel the apprehensiveness associated with academic writing. It also may support the

changing of cognitive beliefs held by the student as to their power to affect positive change in their academic careers.

Research Questions

Stress and coping behaviors play a major role in communication apprehension, and may play a strong role in writing apprehension as well. In addition, a student's sense of control over, and responsibility for, his or her academic progress is also likely to play a role in how students think about their writing. Therefore, this research will explore the links between Writing Apprehension, Rational Academic beliefs and Stress and Coping behaviors. The research questions are as follows:

> RQ 1: Is there a relationship between stress and coping strategies and WA scores?
>
> RQ 2: Is there a relationship between ARBS scores and WA scores?

Rationale

The primary objective of basic research is the understanding of life and the world in which it exists (Lazarus, 2000, p. 667). Strengthening the collaborative environment between researcher, clinician and teacher strives to create a richer academic experience for all involved, encouraging further exploration dealing with student rational academic beliefs about writing challenges, the associated stress and the combined effect on learning.

> The combination of the many stressors of college life such as planning for the future, struggling with exams and assignments, meeting the demands of challenging professors, deciding on a major, and transitioning into financial and emotional independence can be an overwhelming experience for many students (Smith & Renk, 2007, p. 406).

Emotions can affect both beliefs and behaviors. Rational or irrational beliefs, stress and coping behaviors and writing apprehension may play a role in academic success for a sizable number of students. Onwuegbuzie (1980) estimates that 10-25% of all people experience writing apprehension to some degree. Examining the factors that contribute to that apprehension in an effort to connect those factors to academic support strategies is the goal of this research.

Decades of personal experience with writing apprehension; first-hand as a student, later as a teacher and an administrator and most recently, through shared experiences with graduate-level classmates have led to the belief that this is a complex issue often masquerading as simple disorganization, a mediocre work ethic, or at best, a weak skill set.

Opening a dialogue surrounding student's rational and irrational beliefs about their writing challenges may allow affected individuals to discover more effective coping strategies earlier in their academic careers. This may promote a better writing process that will lead to better overall academic success and a higher GPA. Further exploration of this intrapersonal conflict through investigation of student beliefs underlying the situation (and how coping strategies may or may not be associated with those beliefs) could enhance the quality of the educational experience for all affected individuals. This has the potential to simultaneously elevate the self-esteem of the writer, the quality of the work itself, and contribute to the efficacy of the teacher or remedial tutor.

Method

In order to address the two research questions, a pilot study based on a self-report questionnaire was conducted. Questions focused on variables related to writing apprehension, stress and coping, and academic rational beliefs.

For the purpose of this study, the operational definitions of the variables are as follows: Writing Apprehension is operationalized as difficulty in producing written communication and will be measured using the Writing Apprehensions Scale (Daley & Miller, 1975a). Drawing on two sub-sections of the Academic Rational Beliefs Scale (Egan, Canale, del Rosario & White, 2007), Evaluation is operationalized as the degree of personal responsibility a student takes for his scholastic achievement and Work Habits are operationalized as the actions resulting from the student's work ethic. Stress and coping behaviors are operationalized as stressful person-environment relations and their immediate and long-range outcomes (Folkman, Lazarus, Dunkel-Schetter, De Longis & Gruen, 1986 b).

Participants

Participants were enrolled in various undergraduate courses at a Mid-Atlantic college in the spring term of 2009. This voluntary convenience sample ranged in age from 18 to 22 (M= 19.81, SD= 1.01). The group consisted of 34 males (39.1%) and 52 females (59.8%). Breakdown by class reported 11 freshmen (11.5%), 38 sophomores (43.7%), 26 juniors (29.9%) and 8 seniors (9.2%). Majors were categorized as: Business, 10 (11.5%), Communication, 47 (54%) and other, 22 (25.3%) with 8 (9.2%) not reporting. In total, 109 students returned the composite survey instrument. A total of 86 completed surveys were used in the correlation analysis, with 23 surveys deemed incomplete and thereby unusable.

A composite survey (using a paper and pencil format) was developed based on the Writing Apprehension Test (Daly & Miller, 1975a), Ways of Coping (Folkman & Lazarus, 1985) and the Academic Rational Beliefs Scale (Egan et al., 2007), and demographic questions.

The Writing Apprehension Test [WAT] (Miller & Daley, 1975a), a 26-item Likert type scale that measures traits associated with writing anxiety obtained a previous reliability coefficient of .93. The Writing Apprehension Test has been used in previous work dealing with self esteem and career preference. It has performed admirably as a baseline for work with written communication apprehension.

The Ways of Coping (Lazarus & Folkman, 1985), a 67 item Likert- type scale, is broken into eight sub-scales measuring coping techniques. Using the sub-scales for Tension Reduction, Seeking Social Support and Accepting Blame, the reliability coefficients for the three subscales were as follows: Tension Reduction obtained a previous reliability coefficient of .72. Seeking Social Support obtained a previous reliability coefficient of .76. Accepting Blame obtained a previous reliability coefficient of .66.

The Academic Rational Beliefs Scale (Egan et al., 2007), a 16-item Likert type scale, measures rationality of student beliefs and obtained a previous reliability coefficient of .83 overall for the development sample. Using the items for the Work Habits and Evaluation factors, the analysis was as follows: Work Habits obtained a reliability coefficient of .50-.59; Evaluation had previously shown a reliability range of .77-.80.

While it is unfortunate to abbreviate the existing scales, the size of a composite instrument containing the entirety of the Writing Apprehension Test, Academic Rational Beliefs Scale and the Ways of Coping was off-putting to the original population approached for the study. After consultation with the administrators who would be responsible for handling the survey, it was determined that they were unwilling to participate due to the amount of time a survey of this size was likely to take. The other reason for selecting only relevant groups of questions or "items" from the Ways of Coping and ARSB measurement scales dealt with minimizing stress related to the number of questions or confusion arising from the tone of some questions on the Ways of Coping.

> The authors of the questionnaire [Ways of Coping] encourage researchers to adjust it to achieve a closer match between the stress experience and the coping statements [beliefs] as was done, for example by Dunkel-Schetter, Feinstein, Taylor and Falke (1992) who developed a version for cancer patients, consisting of 49 items (slightly re-worded) that have also been used by Stanton and Schneider (1993). (web.fu-berlin.de/gesund/publicat/copchap6.htm)

A bias toward minimizing stress and maximizing relevance was based on decades of personal and secondary experience with writing apprehension as a teacher, an Admission counselor, and as a writing apprehensive student. It was reasoned that the length of the three instruments may impede the ability to gather enough responses from the newly identified volunteer sample. Being a pilot study, the decision was made to use the Writing Apprehension Test in its entirety as the base (numbers 14-39 on the Composite Survey) and add relevant items from the Academic Rational Beliefs Scale for Evaluation and

Work Habits (numbers 1-13 on the Composite Survey), plus sub-scale items from the Ways of Coping (numbers 40 - 60 dealing with Tension Reduction, Social Support, and Accepting Blame) to support the investigation. This methodology was chosen for its similarity to the work done by Frymier, Schulman and Houser (1996) "when developing an instrument to measure learner empowerment, student feelings of responsibility, personal meaningfulness, ownership, self-efficacy and intrinsic motivation in learning" (p. 186) as was done with the Learner Empowerment Scale (LES).

Procedure

After receiving Institutional Review Board approval, a composite survey was distributed to a convenience sample from the Admission office, an undergraduate communication course and the Writing Center. The composite survey instruments were collected over a seven day period and quantitative analysis was performed on the resulting data. The protection of the participants was of the utmost importance. A cover letter serving as informed consent was attached to the survey. This letter stressed the voluntary and anonymous nature of participation and informed students of their option to discontinue completion of the composite survey at any point. No identifying data was collected from the participating students. Bookstore gift cards were placed in a lottery system using numbered raffle tickets as incentives to garner participation by students.

Results

The purpose of this study was to investigate possible correlations between writing apprehension, a student's academic rational beliefs concerning their understanding of the teaching and learning process, and stress and coping behaviors that can be used during the writing process. The findings between the Writing Apprehension Test (Daly & Miller, 1975a) were paired with relevant items (Work Habits and Evaluation) from the Academic Rational Beliefs Scale (Egan et al., 2007) and relevant sub-scale items (Tension Release, Seeking Social Support and Accepting Blame) from the Ways of Coping (Folkman & Lazarus, 1985). The results of this exploratory work addressed the following two research questions:

> RQ 1: Is there a relationship between stress and coping strategies and WA scores?

Pearson product-moment correlation indicated no significant correlation between Writing Apprehension and Seeking Social Support ($r=.634$, $p<.053$), Accepting Blame ($r=.258$, $p<.125$) or Tension Reduction ($r= .456$, $p<-.084$). This seems to indicate that overall the coping strategies related to Seeking Social Support, Tension Reduction and Accepting Blame may not have an effect on a student's writing apprehension.

> RQ2: Is there a relationship between ARBS scores and WA scores?

Between the variables of Writing Apprehension and Evaluation, a low significant negative correlation was found ($r = .018$; $p < -.259$) seeming to indicate that increasing

levels of Evaluation (the degree of personal responsibility a student takes for his scholastic achievement) are associated with lower levels of Writing Apprehension. Negative correlations indicate that the values of the variables analyzed move in opposite directions. In other words, when students viewed their academic career as primarily their responsibility, they experienced less writing apprehension.

There was also a low significant positive correlation between WA scores and ARBS sub-variable Work Habits (r=.002; p<.329). In the case of positive correlations, the values of the variables analyzed move in the same direction. In this example, a student who rationally believes in being prepared and diligent can still experience writing apprehension.

Correlations

		WATOTAL	ARBSWork	ARBSEval	COPETen	COPESocial	COPEBlame
WATOTAL	Pearson Correlation	1	.329**	-.259*	-.084	.053	.125
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.002	.018	.456	.634	.258
	N	83	83	83	82	83	83
ARBSWork	Pearson Correlation	.329**	1	.068	.173	-.054	.173
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.002		.535	.116	.623	.116
	N	83	86	86	84	85	84
ARBSEval	Pearson Correlation	-.259*	.068	1	.093	-.139	.093
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.018	.535		.398	.203	.398
	N	83	86	86	84	85	84
COPETen	Pearson Correlation	-.084	.173	.093	1	.248*	1.000**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.456	.116	.398		.022	.000
	N	82	84	84	85	85	85
COPESocial	Pearson Correlation	.053	-.054	-.139	.248*	1	.248*
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.634	.623	.203	.022		.022
	N	83	85	85	85	86	85
COPEBlame	Pearson Correlation	.125	.173	.093	1.000**	.248*	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.258	.116	.398	.000	.022	
	N	83	84	84	85	86	86

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Discussion

The research question pertaining to a relationship between Writing Apprehension scores and the coping behaviors of Seeking Social Support, Tension Reduction or Accepting Blame showed no relationship to each other. The lack of correlation between Tension Reduction and WA may speak to the fact that while tension reduction may mitigate a stressful writing situation temporarily, it doesn't change the intrapersonal conflict brought on by writing apprehension, as it cannot change a lacking skill set or serve to desensitize a student to the writing process (McCroskey, Booth-Butterfield & Payne, 1989; Todd, 2003). The coping behaviors of Accepting Blame and Seeking Social Support seem to have no relation to the writing apprehensive situation or to the student's attitude.

In terms of the relationship between the Academic Rational Beliefs Scale and WA, writing apprehension may decrease as a student's level of Evaluation (of responsibility for academic work) increases. The academic rational belief pertaining to Evaluation addresses the learning process and the understanding that the ultimate responsibility for progress falls squarely on the student's shoulders. A learning curve related to the experience of successfully negotiating writing assignments and other academic achievements are accumulated over time. It would be interesting to subdivide the results by class year to determine the difference in the rational academic beliefs over time and look for any associated changes in coping behaviors as was done by Rife and Stacks (1988) in refining the Mass Communications Writing Apprehension Measure to identify dysfunctional writing attitudes in students enrolled in first and second year communication courses.

A student's writing apprehension was shown to decrease moderately as the level of Evaluation of their self-responsibility for their work increased. This could be seen as a student's unspoken acknowledgement of the fluid state of his writing apprehension as a part of the learning process. As with any process, it is necessary to further develop an individual's skill set to achieve academic success. Working with analogies to other common processes such as learning to drive or playing an instrument could help put the logic of the message into perspective for the student.

Lastly, for students who diligently practice good work habits, writing apprehension may possibly increase. Instructors who see a motivated and diligent student floundering with written work might use their insight to refocus the student's efforts toward the writing center as a way to reinforce their belief in the student's capabilities. Then the writing process can be monitored and other issues addressed, allowing the diligent student to save academic face.

Dealing with writing apprehension is an integral part of the work at every educational institution. The preceding research points in a circular fashion to the ethos of the instructor or tutor as a major predictor in the pathos of the students with regard to their self-perceptions and associated logos of their academic outcomes. If the link between

Writing Apprehension and the ARBS is seen as having merit, then writing centers (in conjunction with school counselors and teachers across the curriculum) could use the ARBS as the screening tool it was designed to be. Once identified, these students could be re-oriented to the degree of self-responsibility necessary for academic success based on their Evaluation score. Following up with students during the first two years of attendance would allow for more focused assistance in the areas of skills development and/or cognitive modification of their irrational beliefs. This may make it "possible to reduce the dropout rate for these students" (Mc Croskey, Booth-Butterfield & Payne, 1989, p. 105).

Limitations

A random sampling yielding a minimum of 400 completed surveys would have been optimal, but was prohibitive based on the resources available to this project. As is the case in such instances, the findings cannot be generalized to other populations due to the exploratory nature of the work itself and the present limitations of the convenience sample chosen.

This study has also illuminated various aspects of undertaking a quantitative research project. First, personal distribution to students in classes is undoubtedly the best mode of instrument delivery. Second, the use of the scales in their entirety and as originally designed now seems optimal. The stress and anxiety factor seems less important than originally anticipated when dealing with writing apprehension as one of three topics in the survey. Using the Community Sample questions (Folkman, Lazarus, Dunkel-Schetter, DeLongis & Gruen, 1986) from the latest model of the Stress and Coping scale is also recommended, even with a student population. The alteration of the scales for the questionnaire was the single greatest limitation. Going forward, the work would be best served by using these self-report measures in their entirety. Further research with the Academic Rational Beliefs Scale might be needed prior to its use in such a triangulation. A different instrument such as the Learner Empowerment Scale (Frymier, Schulman and Houser (1996) might be employed in its place as it also deals with measurements of student feelings of responsibility, ownership and self-efficacy.

Lastly, age, sex, class, major and writing center affiliation also seemed to be statistically insignificant in this study. If oblique rotation were applied to a Composite Survey of all three instruments in their entirety and a larger random sample was identified and tested, findings on class and sex would be of particular interest in a longitudinal version of this research. This is based on work citing the increased use of technology throughout the teaching and learning process which found writing apprehension among mass communication majors was found to significantly decrease over the course of the first and second years (McCroskey, Booth-Butterfield & Payne, 1989; Todd, 2003).

Recommendations

Based on the current work, a couple of recommendations are offered to assist writing center personnel, professors and the educational leadership shaping policy at a given institution. The use of Message Design Logic to manage communication about the importance of the state [not trait] orientation toward the writing process is an additional dimension to consider.

Strategic communication works to elicit a particular response from the listener. O'Keefe and Delia (1982) showed that in analyzing the management of multiple communication goals in interpersonal communication, [such as teaching a student writing skills while bolstering confidence in the writing-is-a-process perspective] messages are divided into four categories: the role of the person producing the messages [professor/tutor], the position taken toward the issue being discussed [this writing situation is a *state* that can and will change with practice], how explicitly the [intrapersonal] conflict is being acknowledged [by the community] and how protection of "face" is maintained in the interaction [for the student, teacher and institution].

While Conventional Message Logic achieves goals as a matter of knowing what should be said (or not) in a given situation, Rhetorical Message Design Logic requires a higher level of sophistication and deals with messages designed to change the hearer's perception of the situation, precisely altering the obstacles to goal achievement. This type of communication logic handles situational complexity pertaining to multiple goals "with messages carefully tailored to their purposes" (O'Keefe, 1988, p. 91).

One of the newest areas of collaboration with the psychological community is in the area of message design logic's effect on self-generated messages (Furutani & Kobayashi, 2009). These messages may be a part of the intrapersonal communication conflict of writing apprehension. This line of research might be furthered by attempting to increase a student's Evaluation score via strategic rhetorical messaging by the writing center and faculty. This may empower the student by accelerating academic maturity toward a more positive self-image.

The second recommendation centers on the messages given to a student who prepares adequately but still experiences difficulties with written work. Using the same rhetorically based messages, self confidence could be bolstered and reinforced for this type of student through positive personal feedback. In this case, the instructor's message would be centered on their belief in the student's abilities and respect for the work ethic and academic maturity displayed. The constructive criticism dealing with writing as the practice of a craft could be sandwiched in a message to focus the need for improvement from a skills perspective.

Future Research

The information presented in this exploratory study has implications for future research and practical applications. A future longitudinal investigation could examine the relationship between class year (as a function of maturity) and the differences in writing apprehension and coping behaviors. Another avenue for study might focus on the differences in messages of support from friends, parents, classmates, writing center personnel and even romantic partners. Research could be undertaken to see how a student's communication varies when asking for support depending on the relationship to the person. Investigating the student's attitudinal change through the various relationships might be looked at in contrast to differences in academic outcomes.

Conclusion

The exploration of correlations between how college students cope with writing apprehension and what academic beliefs they hold, along with their attempt to deal with stress and cope was the focus of this study. Leveraging the vast body of knowledge available on communication apprehension, and stress and coping behaviors employed by students and their associated cognitive belief systems will aid in the communication, education and inspiration of all who deal with these issues both personally and professionally. Through further research in writing apprehension, their beliefs about their academic life and the coping techniques students are apt to select and, the institutional support afforded these students can be refocused toward alternative solutions, emancipating writing apprehensive students by increasing the quality of the educational experience.

A more effective learning and writing process may be attainable by revisiting the application of communication theory to remedial writing situations in higher education. Messages and their impact on the quality of academic life may allow venturing on to an axiological limb to begin influencing changes in educational society. This work hopes to have added to the discussion about the relationship of these issues, creating additional research opportunities that may potentially benefit the whole of the learning process for students beginning at matriculation and continuing to serve them well beyond graduation.

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Appendix A

Composite Survey

Part I

We all have different beliefs about school. The following survey lists some of these beliefs. Please read each statement carefully and then write the number on the line in front of the question that best describes your level of agreement with the statement. Remember, there is no right or wrong answer for any question, just your honest response.

1 Strongly Disagree 2 Disagree 3 Uncertain 4 Agree 5 Strongly Agree

Example: __2___ I study best in the morning.

1) _____ Teachers should give students a good grade if they need it.
2) _____ I should be held accountable for my actions as a student.
3) _____ Teachers should have to give 'breaks" if assignments are late.
4) _____ I should attend class even if I have other things to do.
5) _____ I should have to work hard in a course to get a good grade.
6) _____ If I attend most classes, turn in assignments, and take the exams, I should get a good grade regardless of the quality of my work.
7) _____ I learn better in class when I read the assigned material ahead of time.
8) _____ It is primarily the teacher's responsibility to see I do well in class.
9) _____ I bear primary responsibility for the grade I receive in a course.
10) _____ I should prepare assignments in advance in case something unexpected occurs that prevents me from having the assignment ready to turn in on time.
11) _____ Teachers should relax standards when grading student work.
12) _____ Teachers bear primary responsibility for the grade a student receives.
13) _____ Effort should be more important than performance when determining a grade.
14) _____ I avoid writing.
15) _____ I have no fear of my writing being evaluated.
16) _____ I look forward to writing down my own Ideas.
17) _____ I am afraid of writing essays when I know they will be evaluated.
18) _____ Taking composition courses is a frightening experience.
19) _____ Handing in a composition makes me feel good.
20) _____ My mind seems to go blank when I start to work on my composition.
21) _____ Expressing my ideas through writing seems to be a waste of time.
22) _____ I would enjoy submitting my writing to magazines for evaluation and publication.
23) _____ I like to write down my ideas.
24) _____ I feel confident in my ability to express my ideas clearly in writing.
25) _____ I like to have my friends read what I have written.
26) _____ I'm nervous about writing.
27) _____ People seem to enjoy what I write.
28) _____ I enjoy writing.

29) _____ I never seem to be able to write down my ideas clearly.
30) _____ Writing is a lot of fun.
31) _____ I expect to do poorly in composition classes even before I enter them.
32) _____ I like seeing my thoughts on paper.
33) _____ Discussing my writing with others is enjoyable.
34) _____ I have a terrible time organizing my thoughts in a composition course.
35) _____ When I hand in a composition, I know I'm going to do poorly.
36) _____ It's easy for me to write good compositions.
37) _____ I don't think I write as well as most other people.
38) _____ I don't like my compositions to be evaluated.
39) _____ I'm not good at writing.
40) _____ When writing, I make a plan of action and follow it.
41) _____ I wish I could change how I feel about writing.
42) _____ I wish the writing assignment would be over with.
43) _____ I hope a miracle will happen.
44) _____ I try to forget about the writing assignment.
45) _____ I feel that in time, my writing will improve.
46) _____ I feel talking to someone about my writing helps.
47) _____ Talking to someone at the Writing Center can help me dosomething concrete about my problems with writing.
48) _____ I would ask a friend or classmate I respect for advice about writing.
49) _____ I meditate or otherwise center myself when I feel anxious.
50) _____ It is usual for me to criticize or blame myself.
51) _____ I realize I bring problems on myself.
52) _____ I resolve to do things different next time.
53) _____ I take a break from writing when feeling stressed.
54) _____ I try to ease my tension by eating, drinking or smoking.
55) _____ I exercise to relieve stress and tension.
56) _____ I usually keep my feelings to myself.
57) _____ I have had difficulty with writing prior to entering college.
58) _____ I try to keep others from knowing how bad things are.
59) _____ I have difficulty asking for help.
60) _____ I have difficulty following directions or feedback on my writing assignments.

Part II

Please provide the requested information by either circling your response or filling in the blank**.**

Gender: M_____ F_____ Age: ____ Overall GPA to date_____

Class: Freshman Sophomore Junior Senior Graduate Major: _____