

The Transition to University Can Friends Serve as Gatekeepers

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Introduction

- lifelong learning – increasing importance of educational achievements
- getting higher qualifications includes passing several institutional transitions
- transition to university as an important turning point in a chaotic phase of life
- indecisiveness – even shortly before student's graduation
- easier admission to university – increasing number of „non-traditional“ students
- there is a need for upcoming students to have access to support systems
- students report dissatisfaction with institutional support
- in adolescence peers and friends gaining in importance

→ friendship as a significant support system for the choice of study ?

(European Commission, 2001; Freitag, 2012; Knauf & Rosowski, 2009; Newman & Newman, 2012)

Theoretical Framework

Schlossberg's model to analyse human adoption to transition

- transition as a process
- process divided into a pretransition and a posttransition environment
- Choice of study often before graduation (pretransition environment)
- for adapting to transition, various systems can be supportive
- friends/friendship as a potential social support system

Gaupp's Gatekeeping – an interactive view on the process of choice of study

- Motivation, support, exchange of information and similarity as major elements

Development tasks differ across life-stages – „non-traditionals“ generally older

- More autonomous and mature → less need for external support

(Gaupp, 2013; Heckhausen, Wrosch & Schuz, 2010; Hillmert & Jacob, 2005; Schlossberg, 1981)

Research Questions

1. Is there a relation between the perceived quality of friendship and the perceived gatekeeping function for the choice of study in the pretransition environment?
2. As theoretically proposed, can age be a moderator of the association between the relationship of the perceived quality of friendship and the perceived gatekeeping-function?

Methods

- 87 first-year students of a university in Germany participated in a cross-sectional online assessment
- The range of the participants age was from 17 to 35 with a mean of 22.3 years ($SD = 3.47$)
- Perceived Quality of Friendship (PQF, 20 items, sample item: "My friend would listen if I talked about my problems", Cronbach's $\alpha = .94$; Mendelson & Aboud, 1999)
- Gatekeeping function (GK, 4 items, sample item: "My friend supported me, following my choice of subject of study", Cronbach's $\alpha = .76$; Gaupp, 2013)
- Sex, age, number of friends and HISEI included as control variables
- Statistical analysis by SPSS – moderater-analysis by PROCESS, Model 1, Johnson – Neymann – Method (Hayes, 2013)

Results

Research Question # 1 – relation between PQF and GK?

The model was statistically significant, $F(5, 82) = 7.24, p = .000, R^2 = .31$

Multiple Regression Analyses Predicting Gatekeeping

Variable	Coefficient ^a			
	B	SE	β	t
(Constant)	.02	.88		.03
PQF	.43	.13	.33**	3.39
Sex	.24	.17	.14	1.46
Age	.02	.02	.09	.94
Number of Friends	.17	.04	.39**	4.01
HISEI	.01	.07	.01	.14

Note. a. Dependent Variable: Gatekeeping. ** $p < .01$.

Research Question # 2 – relation between PQF and GK moderated by the age of the participants?

Conditional effect of X on Y at values of the moderator (M)

Age	Effect	SE	t	p	LLCI	ULCI
17	.79	.22	3.51	.000	.4130	1.1584
18	.72	.20	3.67	.000	.3931	1.0464
19	.65	.17	3.82	.000	.3690	.9386
20	.59	.15	3.92	.000	.3386	.8372
21	.52	.13	3.89	.000	.2987	.7452
22	.46	.13	3.61	.001	.2460	.6661
23	.39	.13	3.06	.003	.1778	.6023
24	.32	.14	2.35	.021	.0948	.5535
25	.26	.16	1.66	.100	-.0002	.5167
26	.19	.18	1.08	.283	-.1037	.4883
27	.06	.23	.26	.795	-.3257	.4466
28	-.01	.26	-.02	.983	-.4412	.4302
29	-.07	.29	-.24	.808	-.5584	.4155
30	-.14	.32	-.42	.671	-.6769	.4021
31	-.20	.36	-.57	.570	-.7963	.3897
32	-.27	.39	-.69	.491	-.9165	.3780
33	-.34	.42	-.79	.429	-1.0371	.3667
34	-.40	.46	-.88	.381	-1.1582	.3560
35	-.47	.49	-.96	.342	-1.2796	.3455

The relation between PQF and GK is moderated by students' age.

Discussion / Implications

- the sample size of the survey was relatively small
 - according theories, friends can be a resource during orientation phase
 - "non-traditionals" seems to be more autonomous in their decision
 - providing situated learning situations and fostering interactive processes
- further research in the field of transition is needed

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