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# Hardiness and undergraduate academic study: The moderating role of commitment

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## Abstract

The purpose of this correlational study was to identify hardiness components that would explain variation in the academic performance of sport and exercise undergraduate students. Data were derived from 134 students from a university in the northeast of England admitted onto the second year of their degree in 2004 on the basis of successful progression from the first year of study. Students completed the hardiness PVS III-R, a measurement of *commitment*, *control*, *challenge*, and *total hardiness*, at the beginning of their second year of study, and provided consent for their academic progress to be tracked. Year 2 GPA, Year 3 GPA, final degree GPA, and final-year dissertation mark determined academic success. *Commitment* and *total hardiness* were significantly positively correlated with academic success criteria. In particular, the potential moderating role of *commitment* on academic performance has implications for educators and researchers.

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*Keywords:* Hardiness; Commitment; Personality; Academic success; Undergraduate study

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## 1. Introduction

Academic achievement has been typically associated with psychometric intelligence tests (Gottfredson, 2003; Kuncel, Hezlett, & Ones, 2001) and achievement motivation (Busato, Prins, Elshout, & Hamaker, 2000; Mellanby, Martin, & O'Doherty, 2000), where the latter can be conceptualised in terms of personality characteristics (Rindermann & Neubauer, 2001). Increasingly, personality variables have become implicated in isolation, as they appear to be powerful enough on their own to explain a moderate percentage of the variance in academic performance (Rindermann & Neubauer, 2001; Sanchez-Marin, Rejano-Infante, & Rodriguez-Troyano, 2001). In particular, of the Big Five personality factors (Costa & McCrae, 1992), researchers have consistently found a positive relationship between conscientiousness and university academic achievement (cf. Busato et al., 2000; Chamorro-Premuzic & Furnham, 2003; Duff, Boyle, Dunleavy, & Ferguson, 2004; Furnham, Chamorro-Premuzic, & McDougall, 2003).

Highly conscientious students are characterized as being intellectually curious and may be more achievement oriented, hard working, and persevering (Komarraju & Karau, 2005). Such a character description fits well with the 'hardy personality' (Kobasa, 1979). Interestingly, hardiness has been shown to be correlated positively to conscientiousness (Maddi, Khoshaba, Persico, et al., 2002; Ramanaiah & Sharpe, 1999), though conceptually distinct (Sansome, Wiebe, & Morgan, 1999). In addition, studies have shown the positive influence of hardiness on undergraduates coping with university first-year stress (Maddi, Wadhwa, & Haier, 1996), student adjustment to university life (Mathis & Lecce, 1999), and student retention (Maddi, Khoshaba, Jensen, et al., 2002).

Hardiness has been conceptualised as a combination of the three attitudes (3Cs) of *commitment*, *control*, and *challenge* (Kobasa, 1979). *Commitment* (vs. alienation) epitomizes those individuals who are committed to and feel deeply involved in the activities of their lives. *Control* (vs. powerlessness) reflects a desire to continue to have an influence on the outcomes going on around you, no matter how difficult this becomes. *Challenge* (vs. security) typifies an expectation that life is capricious, that changes will stimulate personal development, and that potentially stressful situations are appraised as exciting and stimulating rather than threatening (Maddi, 2006).

The behavioural manifestations of the three hardiness attitudes can be extended to the higher education environment (see Fig. 1). The moderating effect of *commitment* on academic performance may be demonstrated by students becoming deeply involved in their studies, seeing this as the best way to turn whatever they are experiencing into something that seems interesting, worthwhile, and important. Such an attitude is likely to facilitate industriousness and a willingness to expend extra time and effort to meet academic goals. Students high in *control* ought to be able to manage their studies; for example, demonstrating good time management, prioritising those activities deemed most contributory to academic success, and taking responsibility for their own learning and development. Attitudes reflecting *challenge* should moderate academic performance by affording students the opportunity to appraise potentially stressful situations as exciting and stimulating rather than threatening. This ought to increase the likelihood of students accepting the difficulties associated with fulfilling academic course requirements and engaging in the process of working toward a degree, thus facilitating the positive process of growth through learning (Maddi, 2006).

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