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The Relationship between Identity Processing Style and Academic
Performance of First Year Psychology Students

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degree of Master of Education (Educational Psychology) by coursework and
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DECLARATION

I declare that this research report is my own, unaided work. It has not been submitted before for any other degree or examination at this or any other university.

Renée Zenadia Ramdin

Date

DEDICATION

To my dearest husband Rajin, your patience, endurance and undying support made writing this report manageable.

To my wonderful children, Jasmine-Nadine and Michael Lance, the many hours I spent on my laptop was time stolen away from you.

To my loving parents, Daniel and Ethel, by God's grace I was able to complete this in your "living years".

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ABSTRACT

Academic performance of first year university students in the international arena as well as locally, has been a point of concern for all stakeholders because of high dropout rates and failure. Although many explanations for this have been offered and accepted, all have located the problem external to the individual. This study examined the interplay between interpersonal and intrapersonal factors on academic performance of first year university students in South Africa. A sociocognitive perspective was employed by an investigation of student identity processing styles as a means to explain academic performance. A mixed sample of 419 first year psychology students at a South African university was randomly chosen. Berzonsky's Identity Style Inventory (ISI3) was used to categorise students' identity processing styles which was then correlated to students' mid-year examination results. Although similar research was conducted overseas, the findings of the present study did not match previous results. Unlike any other known study the correlation between normative processing style and academic performance of first year university students was statistically significant but was negative. There was significant difference only between informational and normative identity processing styles on academic performance and between informational and diffuse-avoidant processing styles on academic performance. It was found in this study that culture and race played a role in student identity processing styles and in turn influenced student academic performance in the first year of university. A discussion of results, educational implications of findings, limitations of the study and recommendations for future research are included at the end of this study.

Key Words: Identity processing styles, informational, normative, diffuse-avoidant, academic performance

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