RORSCHACH INDICATORS OF RESILIENCE IN ADOLESCENTS

I.E. ODENDAAL

B.A.(Ed); B.Ed. (Psych); M.Ed.; M.Ed. (Psych)

A thesis submitted in fulfillment of the requirements for the degree

PHILOSOPHIAE DOCTOR

in

EDUCATIONAL PSYCHOLOGY

NORTH-WEST UNIVERSITY

Faculty of Humanities

(VAAL TRIANGLE CAMPUS)

PROMOTER: PROF. DR L.C. THERON

CO-PROMOTER: DR M. BRINK

VANDERBIJLPARK

2010
DECLARATION

I wish to declare that this study, Rorschach indicators of resilience in adolescents, is my own work, that all sources used were acknowledged by means of complete references, and that this thesis was not previously submitted by me at another university.

Signed                                                                 Date

_________________________                                                                 _______________
Accredited Member: South African Translators’ Institute

PO Box 2395
CRESTA
2118
Tel.: +27 (0)11 791 6924
Cell: +27 (0)84 779 5969
Email: hencol@discoverymail.co.za

18 October 2010

To whom it may concern

I hereby declare that I edited the thesis dealing with how the Rorschach Comprehensive System (RCS) could be interpreted to explore how personal constructions, consisting of latent and conscious schema, informed the transactional resilience of six Black South African adolescents, written by Isabel Odendaal. I am an accredited editor with the South African Translators’ Institute (SATI Member No.: 1000193).

Yours sincerely

Hendia Baker
APTrans (SATI)
APEd (SATI)
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I wish to express my sincere thanks to:

• God for a life full of gifts, challenges and lessons to learn;
• Prof. L.C. Theron for her dedication and guidance;
• Dr M. Brink for years of serving as a mentor and enriching my life with her wisdom, knowledge and insight;
• Mrs Louise Kirchener who did more than just serving as the co-coder of my study by being a true friend at all times;
• Dr Gloria Marsay, my study partner of several years, for her support and guidance;
• My husband and children for their support and patience;
• Mmes M. Schaller and E. Pelser who were always available to check my language usage;
• The six participants who were willing to share their courage and life stories with me;
• Mmes H. Steenkamp and I. Lombard of the Human Resources Department and members of the advisory panel for identifying the participants in my study;
• Mr Bartie and staff for always being prepared to assist me.
• Mmes H. Pretorius, M. Esterhuizen and Y. Engelbrecht who were always available to find the sources that I needed;
• Mrs H. Baker who attended to the language in this study; and
• Mrs W. Brune for transcribing all the interviews.
SUMMARY

The main focus of this study was to explore how personal constructions, consisting of latent and conscious schema, and obtained from a culturally sensitive interpretation of the RCS, informed the transactional resilience of Black South African adolescents. This study was motivated in view of limited knowledge available about the (i) processes that are generic to the resilience-promoting transactions of Black South African adolescents and (ii) to potentiate insight into an adolescent’s construction of personal meaning of her conscious and unconscious experiences that may not always be easily recognised in her overt behaviour or by self-report measures often used in South African resilience research.

Six Black South African adolescents aged 14 to 16 years volunteered to take part in this multiple case study. The participants were identified as resilient by an advisory panel consisting of learners and educators at an English-medium school in the Vaal Triangle area. In this essentially qualitative study, qualitative data obtained from an unstructured individual interview, unstructured observations, and a follow-up interview were integrated with the data obtained from a culturally sensitive, conceptual interpretation of these Black adolescents’ Rorschach protocols. The structural, quantitative data obtained from specific indicators in Exner’s Comprehensive System were interpreted in a culturally sensitive manner and integrated with the qualitative data obtained from the Rorschach protocols. A culturally sensitive, conceptual framework for interpreting Rorschach indicators associated with adolescents’ transactional resilience was provided.

These findings indicated individual and ecological protective resources well known within South African resilience research. Findings that contributed new understanding of the transactional processes associated with Black South African adolescent resilience were also obtained. Four case-specific self-reflective strategies were identified, namely, emotional stoicism, frequent introspection, honouring the past, and adopting a new identity. These self-reflective strategies served as the participants’ unique ways of compensating for their adversity-informed schema as well as encouraging them to navigate towards the sustained support of specific significant others and resilience-promoting ecological resources. The participants indicated that attachment challenges brought about repressed feelings and specific security needs, which shaped their resilience-promoting navigation and enabled them to self-knit in a resilient way.

Keywords: transactional resilience, resilience-promoting strategies, self-knitting, protective resources, Black adolescent, Rorschach Comprehensive System, culturally sensitive
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

**ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**  
iv

**SUMMARY**  
v

**TABLE OF CONTENTS**  
vi

**LIST OF TABLES**  
xii

**LIST OF FIGURES**  
xiii

**CHAPTER 1: ORIENTATION TO THE STUDY**  
1

1.1 **INTRODUCTION**  
2

1.2 **BACKGROUND TO STUDY**  
2

1.3 **RATIONALE FOR STUDY**  
5

1.4 **RESEARCH FOCUS**  
10

1.5 **AIMS OF STUDY**  
10

1.6 **THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVE**  
10

1.7 **PARADIGMATIC PERSPECTIVE**  
14

1.8 **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**  
20

1.8.1 Literature overview  
20

1.8.2 The empirical study of investigation  
21

1.8.2.1 Multiple case studies as research strategy  
21

1.8.2.2 Participant recruitment  
23

1.8.2.3 Data collection  
24

1.8.2.4 Data collection procedure  
26

1.8.2.5 Data analysis and interpretation  
27

1.8.2.6 Rigour  
28

1.8.2.7 Ethical aspects  
29

1.9 **CONCEPT CLARIFICATION**  
29

1.10 **CHAPTER DIVISION**  
33

1.11 **CONCLUSION**  
35
CHAPTER 2: A SOUTH AFRICAN OVERVIEW OF ADOLESCENT TRANSACTIONAL RESILIENCE

2.1 INTRODUCTION

2.2 CONCEPTUALISING THE DYNAMICS OF ADOLESCENT TRANSACTIONAL RESILIENCE
   2.2.1 Two agents potentiate transactional resilience
   2.2.2 Reciprocity shapes transactional resilience
   2.2.3 Agents co-construct resilience-promoting schema
   2.2.4 Adolescence potentiates asset-development in resilience-promoting transactions
   2.2.5 Knitting the self through negotiation and navigation
      2.2.5.1 Inner organisation of the self
      2.2.5.2 Self-knitting strategies
   2.2.6 Summary of transactional resilience

2.3 PROTECTIVE AGENTIC PROCESSES ASSOCIATED WITH TRANSACTIONAL RESILIENCE IN SOUTH AFRICA
   2.3.1 The adolescent as resilience-promoting agent
      2.3.1.1 Emotional competence
      2.3.1.2 Cognitive competence
      2.3.1.3 Behavioural competence
      2.3.1.4 Summary of the adolescent as transactional agent
   2.3.2 Significant others as resilience-promoting agents
      2.3.2.1 The mother as supportive agent
      2.3.2.2 The family as primary support system
      2.3.2.3 The extended family as supportive network
      2.3.2.4 Educators as supportive networks
      2.3.2.5 Peer groups as supportive networks
      2.3.2.6 Summary of significant others as transactional agents
   2.3.3 Resilience-promoting influence of context
      2.3.3.1 Material and socio-economic resources
         2.3.3.1.1 Potentially resilience-promoting and accessible material resources
         2.3.3.1.2 Contextual mediation for health-promoting material resources
      2.3.3.2 Perennial support of communities
      2.3.3.3 Summary of context as a health-promoting influence
Addendum D: Letter of invitation for participants
Addendum E: Voluntary legal consent form for participants

**Folder 2: Participant selection**
Addendum F: Adjusted RSCA
Addendum G: Summarised scores of participants on RSCA
Addendum H: Summarised scores of participants on adjusted RSCA
Addendum I: Demographic background of participants

**Folder 3: Audit trail for unstructured and follow-up interviews, as well as unstructured observations**
Addendum J: The Youth Interview Guide
Addendum K: Preliminary content analysis of an unstructured and follow-up interview, as well as unstructured observations, of a participant
Addendum L: Provisional themes obtained from emerging patterns of an unstructured and follow-up interview, as well as unstructured observations of a participant

**Folder 4: Audit trail for culturally sensitive interpretation of Rorschach protocols**
Addendum M: Example of (i) Rorschach responses, (ii) Structural Summary, (iii) Constellations Table, and (iv) Location Sheet of a protocol
Addendum N: Preliminary content analysis of a culturally sensitive, conceptual interpretation of a Rorschach protocol
Addendum O: Provisional themes obtained from emerging patterns of the culturally sensitive, conceptual interpretation of a Rorschach protocol
LIST OF TABLES

Table 3.4: RCS indicators associated with a culturally sensitive interpretation of Black South African transactional adolescent resilience 96
Table 4.5: Confirmation of resilient participants based on (i) an average and above RES and (ii) average and below VUL scores
(Prince-Embury, 2007:30) 120
Table 4.6: Specific risks faced by participants 121
Table 4.7: Timetable of data collection procedures 126
Table 5.1: Reference guide for abbreviations and terminology used in the discussion of data presentation 139
Table 5.3: Visual summary of the process of participants’ transactional resilience 207
Table 6.1: Aims of my study 219
LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1.1: Overview of Chapter 1 1
Figure 2.1: Visual overview of Chapter Two 36
Figure 2.2: Visual summary of theoretical framework: holistic adolescent resilience-promoting transactions 47
Figure 3.1: Overview of Chapter 3 78
Figure 3.5: Visual summary of Chapter 3 105
Figure 4.1: Overview of Chapter 4 106
Figure 4.5: Sequential steps guiding the advisory panel’s formation and role 112
Figure 4.8: Steps in data analysis 128
Figure 4.10: Visual summary of the research process 136
Figure 5.1: Overview of Chapter 5 137
Figure 5.3: Visual summary of Black adolescent transactional resilience findings 201
Figure 6.1: Visual overview of Chapter 6 218
Figure 6.3: Black South African adolescent resilience in South African resilience research 225
Figure 6.4: Visual summary of study’s findings according to known and new understanding of Black South African adolescent resilience 227