Career decision-making in college students: A path analysis of early childhood attachment, gender, age, and socioeconomic status

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Introduction & Literature Review

Career indecision has been linked to higher rates of burnout, lower psychological well-being (Edwards & Dirette, 2010), and a less developed sense of identity (Holland & Holland, 1977). Attachment has long been known as a vital factor in childhood development and healthy development into adulthood (Bretherton, 1992); parental unavailability or unresponsiveness can lead to barriers in healthy development, and even to psychopathological behaviors later in life. Previous studies have explored and found a significant influence of parental attachment on career decision-making (Blustein et al. 1991; Lopez & Andrews, 1987), as well as gender differences between males and females, in specific their attachment to the opposite-sex parent (Lopez, 1989).

Additionally, studies have indicated that demographics like the socioeconomic status (SES) and age impact the level of difficulties in career decision-making during the transition into adulthood and later in life (Hsieh & Huang, 2014; Zhou & Santos, 2007).

Career decision making is of importance especially in the student population as they move into new careers for the first time.

Methods

The sample consisted of 309 students from a mid-size university in the southeastern United States. 47.9% of the participants were female and 52.1% male; 89.9% White/Caucasian, 3.6% Black or African American, 3.2% Asian, 1.1% Hispanic or Latina/o, and .7% Multiracial.

The majority of participants belonged to the middle class (52.1%), followed by the upper middle class (21%) and the lower middle class (19.7%). 4.2% identified themselves as lower class, and 2.3% as upper class.

My Vocational Situation (MVS; Holland, Daiger & Power, 1989): assesses difficulties in career decision-making over three subscales.

Adult Scale of Parental Attachment – Short Form (ASPA-SF; Michael & Snow, 2019): measures the perceived type of parental attachment to each parent. The subscales differentiate between a safe (MS/FS), a dependent (MD/FD), parentified (MD/FD), a distant (MA/FA), and fearful (MF/PF) attachment style of each sex parent.

The Adult Scale of Parental Attachment and MVS were each administered to the parents of the sampled students; the taking of the self-report MVS measure was completed by the student.

Results

The model tested was for two different samples, one including only male participants and the other females. The results showed a good model fit for both samples. The model fit for the female sample resulted in χ²(39N=149) 62.31; CFI = .97; RMSEA = .06; TLI = .92; and NFI = .93. The model fit indices for the male sample were χ²(39N=159) 65.96; CFI = .97; RMSEA = .07; TLI = .91; and NFI = .93.

According to Cohen (1988), standardized path coefficients with absolute value less than .10 indicate a small effect, those with a value of .30 a medium and ≥90.27 value of .50 a large effect.

Conclusions/Recommendations

The sample consisted of a majority of Caucasian students, which is not representative for minorities, who can experience differences in career barriers (Wright et al., 2012). Future research should focus on exploring the differences in how attachment relationships are manifested in different cultures, as well as how shifting gender roles can affect the accessibility of attachment figures in early life and the function of attachment in career development. The role of mindfulness should be explored in future studies as it has been proposed to be associated with career decision-making.

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Selected References