

Career Exploration: A Multivariate Analysis of Predictors

Denise F. Bartley and Christine Robitschek

Texas Tech University

This study examined the multivariate relations between career exploration and its predictors in a sample of 156 female and 162 male college students. Combining all predictors of career exploration accounted for less than one-third of the variance. Results also indicated that the broad construct of ego identity exploration cannot be substituted for the specific construct of career exploration. Future research should consider potential metaconstructs in the prediction of career exploration and search for additional predictors. © 2000 Academic Press

The exploration stage is a crucial period in career development (Super, 1957). During this phase individuals initiate thoughts and behaviors that will likely lead to a future career choice. If individuals do not successfully complete the tasks of this stage, they may flounder when it comes time to enter and stabilize in an occupation. Vocational exploratory behavior, which fosters career selection and stabilization, is defined as self-appraisal and external search activities that provide information to foster the selection of, entry into, and adjustment to an occupation (Blustein, 1989; Stumpf, Colarelli, & Hartman, 1983). Exploratory activity typically dominates career development between the ages of 14 and 24 (Super, 1957).

In the past 40 years, much has been written about vocational exploration, including both theory and research. Jordaan (1963) theorized that exploration in general, and vocational exploration in particular, would be influenced by personal traits and environmental conditions. Building on these ideas, Stumpf, Colarelli, and Hartman (1983) proposed an interactive model of vocational exploration, emphasizing three discrete aspects of exploration: (1) exploration beliefs (e.g., instrumentality and preference), (2) exploration process (e.g., where and how), and (3) reactions to exploration (e.g., affect and stress). This model suggested that these three categories interact in a reciprocal manner, resulting in unique exploration experiences for each individual.

This study is based on the doctoral dissertation of Denise F. Bartley under the direction of Christine Robitschek. We thank Stephen W. Cook, Susan Kashubeck, and C. Steven Richards for their contributions as members of the dissertation committee. Denise F. Bartley is now at Texas Tech University Health Sciences Center.

Address correspondence and reprint requests to Christine Robitschek, Department of Psychology, Texas Tech University, Lubbock, TX, 79409-2051. E-mail: djcr@ttacs.ttu.edu.

Recent research with college and university students has tested many aspects of the model proposed by Stumpf and colleagues (1983) and additional propositions by Jordaan (1963) and by Harren (1979). Specifically, research has tested how career exploration relates to goal-directedness (Blustein, 1989), motivational processes (Blustein, 1988), vocational decision-making style (Blustein & Phillips, 1988), personal growth initiative (Robitschek & Cook, 1999), ego identity (Blustein, Devenis, & Kidney, 1989), exploration beliefs (Stumpf & Lockhart, 1987), career decision-making self-efficacy (Blustein, 1989; Layton, 1984), and contextual anxiety (Blustein & Phillips, 1988).

The research to date has provided empirical support for many of the early theoretical propositions regarding career exploration. This body of research, however, has thus far accounted for only moderate portions of the variance in career exploration. Given the numerous possible predictors postulated by career exploration theory, these findings likely are attributable to the fact that typically not more than two possible predictors were considered in any one study. We, therefore, investigated multivariate relations among the identified predictors and career exploration. Combining predictors allowed for investigation of the possibility that, when considered together, the predictors may account for a large portion of the career exploration variance or perhaps most of the variance. If this were the case, researchers could shift their energy from looking for additional predictors to studying possible causal relations among these variables and then applying this knowledge to career counseling. This study also assessed if there was overlap in the exploration variance accounted for by these variables, which would minimize the overall variance accounted for by these predictors. This type of finding would suggest that metafactors might account for the shared variance and, perhaps, encourage the search for additional predictors.

We expected that there would be shared variance among some of the predictors because previous research reported correlations between several constructs. For example, positive correlations were reported between vocational decision-making style (introversion-extroversion) and decisional stress (Blustein & Phillips, 1988), explorational stress and importance of obtaining preferred position (Stumpf et al., 1983), as well as goal-directedness and career decision-making self-efficacy (Blustein, 1989). Given these significant correlations, we anticipated that there would be some overlap in the predictors of career exploration. We were interested, therefore, in studying the pattern of significant predictors that would emerge from the multivariate analysis.

We conducted three analyses to study how the constructs identified in the literature combined to explain individual differences in career exploration. The first analysis assessed the relations of self and environmental exploration with all other variables previously mentioned, except the ego identity status variables. Both the identity formation and career development literatures have suggested that career exploration in late adolescence may be a part of the broad-based process of generalized exploration that serves to clarify a person's self-concept or ego identity (Blustein et al., 1989; Jordaan, 1963). As a result of this apparent

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