



Career exploration in adolescents: The role of anxiety, attachment, and parenting style [☆]

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Abstract

The aim of the study was to examine the role of parent–adolescent attachment, adolescent anxiety and parenting style in the career exploration process and in career satisfaction. Three kinds of anxiety were considered: general trait anxiety, fear of failing in one’s career and fear of disappointing one’s parents. The participants were 283 French high school students on the threshold of one of the most important school transitions. The results varied by gender. For girls, general anxiety and neglectful style were negatively related to career exploration; secure attachment and fear of failing were positively related to it. For boys, fear of disappointing parents was positively related to career exploration. Attachment to parents, authoritative style, general anxiety, and fear of failing were related to some career exploration satisfaction scores, though differently for boys and girls. The differences between boys and girls in the roles played by anxiety, attachment and parenting style are discussed.

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1. Introduction

School transitions are frequently perceived by adolescents as threatening situations (Larose & Boivin, 1998). The relationship between parents and adolescents may provide emotional support to cope with these situations. According to Bowlby (1978, 1982), secure attachment provides a secure base from which one can explore with self confidence. The provision of felt security might facilitate exploratory activity (EA) by reducing the anxiety, emotional stress, and feelings of depression and loneliness which are aroused by the school transition and the planning for a future career which are specific to adolescence (Blustein, Preszioso, & Schultheiss, 1995; Larose & Boivin, 1998; Papini & Roggman, 1992).

The last year of high school is one of the most important transitions in the French educational system. At the end of the year, students take an exam to obtain a national diploma. This diploma guarantees them entrance to college and permits them to choose the academic or vocational training which will be decisive for their future careers. This is therefore a stressful period for French youth, as they must choose the type of university education they want, and the type of work they want to do. The exploration of educational and vocational environments is an adaptive way to cope with that situation. Previous studies have shown that attachments to mother, father or peers were associated with greater levels of EA directed toward both self and environment in late adolescence (e.g., Felsman & Blustein, 1999; Ketterson & Blustein, 1997). The secure attachment of French adolescents to mother or father would be expected to facilitate their exploration of their educational and vocational environments.

Another aspect of the influence of parents on the exploration process is parenting style. Four parenting styles have generally been defined in terms of the interaction of two independent dimensions: warmth-hostility and controlling-uncontrolling (Baumrind, 1971; Maccoby & Martin, 1983). The first dimension refers to the parents' responsiveness and the amount of affection they display. The second dimension refers to the degree of supervision parents undertake with their children. On the basis of adolescents' ratings of their parents on these two dimensions, four parenting styles have generally been proposed: authoritative (warm and controlling), authoritarian (hostile and controlling), permissive (warm and uncontrolling), and neglectful (hostile and uncontrolling).

Adolescents from authoritative families have the highest adjustment scores in many areas, while adolescents from neglectful families have the lowest (e.g., Lamborn, Mounts, Steinberg, & Dornbusch, 1991). Kracke (1997) showed that authoritative style is positively associated with exploration of self and environment in middle adolescence. As far as we know, no research has studied the effect of parenting styles on EA of late adolescents. Because authoritative parents show warmth

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