

Family Interaction Patterns as Predictors of Vocational Identity and Career Decision-Making Self-Efficacy

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The present study explored the relations of perceived family-of-origin interaction patterns (e.g., quality of family relationships, family-supported goal orientations, and degree of control and organization in the family) to vocational identity and career decision-making self-efficacy. A sample of 210 college students completed family-of-origin and vocational self-report measures. Using standard multiple regression analyses, significant variance was accounted for in vocational identity scores by achievement orientation in the family. Significant variance in career decision-making self-efficacy scores was accounted for by a number of family variables including achievement, intellectual-cultural, and moral-religious emphasis orientations and degree of family conflict and expressiveness. The findings suggest that family-of-origin interaction patterns may play small, yet significant roles in the formulation of clear and stable career goals and the promotion of self-confidence in regard to completing career planning activities. These findings warrant further empirical examination of the family systems approach to young adult career development. © 2002 Elsevier Science (USA)

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The influence of family-of-origin factors on individual vocational outcomes and career decision-making processes have often been implied by most major career theorists (Blustein, Walbridge, Friedlander, & Palladino, 1991; Herr & Lear, 1984; Schulenberg, Vondracek, & Crouter, 1984). While Roe (1957) was one of the first theorists to directly examine the effects of family-of-origin factors, her hypotheses about parental influence on children's interests have failed to receive empirical support (Hagen, 1960; Trice, Hughes, Odom, Woods, & McClellan, 1995). Other major career theorists, including Super (1957), Gottfredson (1981), Holland (1997), and Adler (Watkins, 1984) have mentioned the influential role of family-of-origin factors on individual career behaviors. Despite these widely held theoretical assumptions and perhaps anecdotal evidence in career counseling, the extent to which family contextual variables influence or relate to career development processes and outcomes continues to receive limited empirical attention (e.g., Arbona, 2000), often yielding inconclusive and elusive results (Larson & Wilson, 1998; Whiston, 1996).

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The call for more systematic empirical research focusing on the role of family related factors in career development has increased in recent years (e.g., Schulenberg, Vondracek, & Crouter, 1984; Blustein et al., 1991; Johnson, Buboltz, & Nichols, 1999). Most empirical studies examining the role of family contextual factors appear to fall along three theoretical lines of inquiry—(1) birth order and family configuration using Adler's theory (Leong, Hartung, Goh, & Gaylor, 2001; Watkins, 1984; Watkins & Savickas, 1990; Watts & Engels, 1995); (2) application of attachment theory to career development (Blustein, Walbridge, Friedlander, & Palladino, 1991; Blustein, Prezioso, & Schultheiss, 1995; Felsman & Blustein, 1999; Ryan, Solberg, & Brown, 1996); and (3) the family systems approach to career development (Brachter, 1982; Eigen, Hartman, & Hartman, 1987; Guerra & Braungart-Rieker, 1999; Johnson et al., 1999; Larson & Wilson, 1998; Lopez & Andrews, 1987; Zingaro, 1983) and career counseling interventions (e.g., Bradley, 1984; Bradley & Mims, 1992; Moon, Coleman, McCollum, Nelson, & Jenson-Scott, 1993; Morrow, 1995; Okiishi, 1987).

The family systems perspective applied to career development proposes that the ability to make appropriate vocational decisions for young adults may be directly influenced by the quality of family interactions, boundaries, and emotional interdependencies perpetuated within the family. In theory, it may be the family unit, rather than the young individual, that may determine the array of career options appropriate for the individual (Brachter, 1982). Whether the family or individual decides, Zingaro (1983) suggested that individuals with career decision-making problems also tend to have low levels of differentiation from parent's expectations regarding occupational or career paths. Lopez and Andrews (1987) further suggest that career decision difficulties may be symptomatic of the individual's struggle to make decisions that may be contrary to family-of-origin's subtle or powerful messages regarding individuating from the family. Although these theoretical ideas represent an emerging area in career development theory, the limited empirical research testing these ideas may be one possible reason why most career theory texts continue to omit these assertions.

While limited in scope, there are a number of empirical studies that have examined the extent to which family interaction patterns (or dynamics) relate to various career variables including: vocational identity (Johnson et al., 1999; Lopez, 1989; Penick & Jepsen, 1992), career indecision (Eigen, Hartman, & Hartman, 1987; Kinnier, Brigman, & Noble, 1990; Whiston, 1996), career decision problems (Larson & Wilson, 1998), and career decision-making self-efficacy (Whiston, 1996).

Several published studies have reported promising empirical support for the relations between vocational identity and family interaction patterns among college and high school students. Lopez (1989) tested a model predicting college students' vocational identity scores using trait anxiety, academic adjustment, and family variables—marital conflict, conflictual-independence (or degree to which students reported freedom from excessive guilt, resentment, and anger in the relationships with both parents), and emotional independence (or degree of freedom from excessive needs for parental approval, closeness, or emotional support). Lopez (1989)

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