



# The effect of career interventions designed to increase self-knowledge on the self-concepts of adolescents

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## Abstract

This paper reports a study that used a quasi-experimental design to examine if a career intervention designed to increase self-knowledge enabled self-discovery or self-construction, determined by the structure of the personality inventory used. This study, situated within the theoretical model of Markus's research in self-schemata (1977), used instruments that measured the Big Five personality factors. Results showed that after only one exercise designed to increase self-knowledge, high school students in the experimental group elaborated "self-schemata" that encompassed the five dimensions corresponding to the structure of the instrument used. Findings suggested that the self-knowledge tool constituted a sort of structured "looking glass" in which young people saw themselves reflected according to the dimensions in the inventory used. © 2003 Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved.

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## 1. Introduction

This study investigated the influence of a career intervention on students' self-knowledge. The research question asked whether career interventions which aim

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to increase self-knowledge merely foster self-discovery or do they prompt a more fundamental self-construction. If they encourage self-construction, this process may be differentially affected by the structure, dimensions, and language of the particular career intervention used. For example, it is possible to postulate that young people forge different visions of themselves depending on whether the career education program uses a technique such as the *Self-Directed Search* (Holland, 1985), the *Career Genogram* (Gysbers & Moore, 1987), the *Inventory of Work Relevant Abilities* (Prediger, 1999), the *Personal Global Inventory* (Tracey, 2002), or the *Inventaire du Système d'Activités* (Curie, Hajjar, Marquie, & Roques, 1990). We could have used any of these instruments in our career intervention. For example, one approach which we could have adopted for this study would have been to use an instrument based on Holland's theory (1966). The object of the research would then have consisted in determining if the young people developed more self-schemata as regards dimensions such as "social," "conventional," or "investigative." However, in view of the hypothesis, we believed that it would be more scientifically stimulating to carry out research using a questionnaire reflecting a current movement in psychology. We thus adopted a questionnaire corresponding to the model of the Big Five personality factors. We hypothesized that young people who participate in a self-knowledge intervention that uses a questionnaire based on the Five Factors Model (FFM) of personality tend to develop more self-schemata involving the dimensions in the FFM.

## 2. Self-schemata and personality dimensions

### 2.1. Self-schemata: The theory of markus and kunda

A self-schema is an organized system of knowledge relating to a given domain. Thus, Markus (1977) considered the self as a structure of knowledge. To have a cognitive structure, it is necessary that regular interrelations or interconnections between the components organize the systems of information or knowledge. The self is made up of multiple structures, which are called self-schemata. "Self-schemata are cognitive generalizations about the self, derived from past experience, that organize and guide the processing of self-related information contained in the individual's social experiences" (Markus, 1977, p. 64). The self processes the information contained in memory to have a base for future judgments, conduct, decisions, and inferences about the self. The existence of self-schemata can be asserted when certain characteristics are present: "If a person has a developed self schema, he [or she] should be readily able to (a) process information about the self in the given domain (e.g., make judgments or decisions) with relative ease, (b) retrieve behavioral evidence from the domain, (c) predict his own future behavior in the domain, and (d) resist counter schematic information about himself" (1977, p. 65). Based on the research of Markus and Kunda (1986), it is possible to conclude that changes in the social environment may transform self-conceptions. The present study asked whether participation in a session designed to increase self-knowledge (which includes filling out a personality inventory and receiving feedback by way of a standardized summary of the

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