



Teenage goals and self-efficacy beliefs as precursors of adult career and family outcomes



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ABSTRACT

The present study identified and examined patterns of goal importance and self-efficacy beliefs in mid- and late adolescence as predictors of work and family outcomes in adulthood. A pattern approach was applied to appropriately identify relationships among work- and family-related goal importance and self-efficacy beliefs. Using a sample of 995 individuals, five distinct patterns of work-family goal importance and self-efficacy beliefs emerged. Individuals who assigned comparable importance to work and family goals and expressed corresponding self-efficacy beliefs in adolescence were more likely to achieve career and family outcomes in adulthood than individuals who expressed a strong preference for one domain over the other. The results supported the idea that work and family can be coordinated for mutual benefit. Furthermore, findings from the pattern approach provided an integrative view of work-family motivation and goal achievement complementing findings from traditional methods such as regression analysis.

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1. Introduction

Most adolescents in the United States expect to become committed to a lifelong partnership as well as to be engaged in paid work. However, there is considerable variability in how they expect to integrate or balance the two domains (Gerson, 2010). Every person functions in a unique context that affects their confidence about their ability to achieve their work and family goals. Adolescence, and especially the period of transition into adulthood, is a critical time for planning related to family, education, and work (Nurmi, 1993; Zarrett & Eccles, 2006). For example, it has been found, that adolescents moving into adulthood engaged actively in goal setting and goal pursuit related to work, family, and health, yet how they proceeded depended on their experience of life events, such as marriage or completion of education (Salmela-Aro, Aunola, & Nurmi, 2007; Salmela-Aro & Nurmi, 1997). Adolescents adjust their goals contingent upon their perceived opportunities (Massey, Gebhardt, & Garnefski, 2008) or contextual affordances (Vondracek, Lerner, & Schulenberg, 1986). Altogether, this suggests that adolescents endorse work- and family-related goals as they develop yet differ in developmental pathways to pursue these goals.

During the last decade or so, several studies have explored the interwoven nature of work and family lives from a motivational perspective (e.g., Salmela-Aro, Nurmi, Saisto, & Halmesmaki, 2000, 2010; Wiese & Salmela-Aro, 2008). The underlying assumption of this perspective is that humans, as self-organizing living systems, are able to conceptualize their own desired outcomes (goals) and actively pursue them, thereby opening up new developmental pathways (Winnell, 1987). Although a number of studies of the development of adolescents' work and family motivations have been reported, an important gap remains. Few studies have examined how work and family goals are configured in relation to one another. For example, it is known that adolescents *in general* become increasingly engaged in pursuing age-graded developmental tasks, such as exploring work and contemplating family formation

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(Salmela-Aro et al., 2007). The relative weight placed on work versus family goals and the likelihood of achieving these goals is certain to vary widely across individuals, as well as within individuals across time.

According to Ford's (1992) Motivational Systems Theory (MST), goals, referencing the consequences one wishes to achieve or avoid, take the leading role in human motivation. Clearly defined goals are needed to direct behavior to achieve (or avoid) the consequences specified by one's goals. In addition to clearly defined goals, individuals' judgments about whether they are likely to achieve a given goal contribute to the likelihood that the goal is actually achieved. Such judgments have been referred to as *capacity beliefs* (Skinner, Wellborn, & Connell, 1990), *capability beliefs* (Ford, 1992), and *self-efficacy beliefs* (Bandura, 1989, 1997). To avoid confusion, we will encompass all of these closely related constructs when referring to self-efficacy beliefs.

Ford (1992) postulated that without a goal being actively pursued, an individual's belief about whether they have the capability to achieve the goal (i.e., self-efficacy beliefs) lacks functional meaning or significance. Thus, goals and related self-efficacy beliefs should be viewed as dynamically connected components of the individual's motivational system: Motivation to achieve a goal is determined both by one's self-efficacy beliefs and the importance one attaches to that goal (e.g., Bandura, 1997; Brehm & Self, 1989; Orbell, Johnston, Rowley, Davey, & Espley, 2001). Although the relationships between various goal dimensions and self-efficacy beliefs have been studied extensively, results have been mixed, due in part to different methodological approaches and a large variety of measures. Some studies have shown that the nature of a goal influences the self-efficacy beliefs associated with it (e.g., Bandura & Schunk, 1981; Earley & Lituchy, 1991; Stock & Cervone, 1990). Other studies have documented that self-efficacy influences the features of the goals that are chosen (e.g., Earley & Lituchy, 1991; Locke, Frederick, Lee, & Bobko, 1984; Schunk, 1990). Goals may thus be viewed as both causes and effects of self-efficacy, suggesting a dynamic reciprocal relationship between the two (Berry & West, 1993). When considered separately, evidence supports the importance of goals on the one hand and self-efficacy beliefs on the other hand, in motivating people to pursue their work and family goals.

The period from mid-adolescence through early adulthood is particularly important for goal formation and change. This stage of life is characterized by multiple developmental tasks, such as finishing education, getting a job, and forming a family, each of which may be guided by previously articulated or concurrently formulated goals. For example, Salmela-Aro and colleagues' studies explore goal changes during the transition to parenthood utilizing longitudinal research designs (Salmela-Aro, Nurmi, & Halmesmäki, 2001; Salmela-Aro et al., 2000, 2010). They reported that some young adults reconstructed life goals to match their developmental stage of becoming parents, and those who did were better off than those who focused on goals less relevant to their immediate developmental task.

Goals and self-efficacy beliefs also relate to major adult outcomes. For example, Ashby and Schoon (2010) reported that young people for whom it was important to advance in their job ended up earning more money than their peers who assigned less importance to this goal. Similarly, self-efficacy beliefs are strong predictors of salary, status (Abele & Spurk, 2009), and work involvement (Betz & Fitzgerald, 1987). In terms of family-related goals, higher childcare self-efficacy is associated with better parenting quality (Coleman & Karraker, 1997), parenting and marital satisfaction (Elek, Hudson, & Bouffard, 2003), and psychological well-being (Ozer, 1995). However, it should be noted that high self-efficacy is not always beneficial for performance enhancement (e.g., Schmidt & DeShon, 2009).

In sum, studies supporting the link between goal importance and goal achievement are relatively well established, as are studies of self-efficacy beliefs and goal achievement. Research on the combined effects of goal importance and self-efficacy beliefs is more difficult to find (e.g., Ashby & Schoon, 2010; Ford, 1992; Orbell et al., 2001) and so are studies taking into account domains of work and family at the same time. This inattention to their co-occurrence may be attributable to the greater importance of self-efficacy beliefs, as motivational drivers, once goal commitments have been made (Ford, 1992). To address the shortcomings of extant research, the first goal of the present study was to identify patterns of change in goal importance and corresponding self-efficacy beliefs in mid- and late adolescence.

Because goal pursuit is a *process* that unfolds over time, studying change over time in the configuration of family and work goals and self-efficacy beliefs represents a forward step in efforts to understand how they contribute to success (or failure) in achieving one's goals. Thus, the second goal of the present study was to explore the impacts of teenagers' work and family goals and self-efficacy beliefs on objective and subjective assessments of their work and family lives two decades later. Previous studies that have examined work-family orientations have neglected to fully account for the dynamic nature of changes in the importance individuals assign to their goals and by the confidence they have in their ability to achieve those goals (e.g., Friedman & Greenhaus, 2000; Hakim, 2003, 2006). Such changes are not only plausible but also quite likely during the teenage years because not only people change ontogenetically but also they change in how they interact with the physical and social systems (e.g., school, family) that provide resources and constraints (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006). As individuals move toward establishing their family and work roles, they create a great diversity of pathways to adulthood (Gerson, 2010; Mortimer, 2012; Mortimer, Zimmer-Gembeck, Holmes, & Shanahan, 2002).

2. Study aims and hypotheses

The present study was designed to identify and examine patterns of goal importance and self-efficacy beliefs in mid- and late adolescence (T1 and T2) as predictors of work and family outcomes in adulthood (T3). Because using a pattern approach to explore work and family goals and self-efficacy beliefs is a novel approach, no specific hypotheses were formulated regarding the specific types of patterns to be found. However, drawing from previous literature (e.g., Friedman & Greenhaus, 2000; Hakim, 2003, 2006), it was expected that motivational patterns that integrate work and family goals relatively equally would be found as well as patterns that exhibit an inclination to focus more strongly on one domain over the other. Furthermore, although specific patterns of work and family goals and corresponding self-efficacy beliefs could not be predicted, it was hypothesized that those with stronger work goal

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