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Development and validation of an instrument to assess future orientation and resilience in adolescence



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ABSTRACT

The study is aimed at providing the development and initial validation of the Design My Future (DMF), which may be administered in career counseling and research activities to assess adolescents' future orientation and resilience. Two studies with two independent samples of Italian adolescents were conducted to examine psychometric requisites of DMF. Specifically, in the first study, after developing items and examined the content validity, the factorial structure, reliability and discriminant validity of the DMF were tested. In the second study, the measurement invariance across gender, conducting a sequence of nested CFA models, was evaluated. Results showed good psychometric support for the instrument with Italian adolescents.

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The western societies in which we are living are considered at high risk ('risk society') because of social, economic, and environmental crises that are much more worrying and pervasive than those of the past century (Beck, 2013). Globalization, rapid technological advancements, job instability, precariousness, unemployment, societal changes, and the worldwide financial crisis have favored fears and worries about future in adolescence (Clinkinbeard & Zohra, 2012), especially in those European countries, such as Spain, Greece, Italy, have been affected greatly by the global economic crisis (EUROSTAT, 2015). In particular, in Italy the socio-economic crisis is putting a very great strain on youths. The unemployment rate is 42%, short-term contracts are the norm for 60% of young people in employment (EUROSTAT, 2015), the relative poverty percentage is about 13.3% and the absolute poverty percentage has reached 7.5% (ISTAT, 2014). That has of course serious repercussions for youths planning their professional future with discomfort, low tendency to plan multiple goals and improvements in own future lives, and progressive disinvestment in education (Lodovici & Semenza, 2012; MIUR, 2015).

These uncertain, complex, and unstable contexts are home to adolescents who, in the near future as adults, will be called upon to find new, complex and innovative solutions to guarantee themselves and the future generations a society able to provide well-being and satisfaction (Guichard, 2015). In addition, throughout their development, adolescents will be increasingly required to include in their personal and professional planning also the risks and changes that are typical of the

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'risk society' and to learn to cope with challenges and difficulties (Guichard, 2015; Theron & Donald, 2013). It is therefore necessary to pay special attention to the adolescent years (Guichard, 2015; Nota, Ginevra, & Santilli, 2015; Verbruggen, van Emmerik, Van Gils, Meng, & de Grip, 2015).

Adolescence can be considered as a critical time for personal and professional development. Although very young, adolescents need to identify a number of possible future objectives which will soon turn into choices and pathways for the construction and co-construction of their own personal and professional identity (Ferrari, Santilli, & Ginevra, 2014; Verbruggen et al., 2015). Some adolescents may have more issues than others in coping with the present situation, since these objectives can be manifold and pursued from different starting points and by following different paths.

For this reason, a particular attention has been focused to a series of positive dimensions during adolescence. Recently, studies on Positive Youth Development (Gestsdottir, Lewin-Bizan, von Eye, Lerner, & Lerner, 2009) have emphasized the relevance of focusing on prevention and on some personal characteristics useful to favor positive development trajectories, rather than concentrating on amending inappropriate and problem behavior (Catalano, Berglund, Ryan, Lonczak, & Hawkins, 2004). In this respect, different studies have underlined that in our current 'risk society' ability to think about multiple possible future scenarios (future orientation) and ability to cope with and resist to unexpected challenges and difficulties (resilience) have a significant role in promoting more adaptive developmental trends for adolescents (Crespo, Jose, Kielpikowski, & Pryor, 2013; Masten & Tellegen, 2012; Nurmi, 2004). In addition, these dimensions are emphasized also by Life Design approach, that was born at the beginning of the economic crisis that is damaging the Western world, aimed at examining the difficulties related to the crisis in career construction and development processes (Savickas et al., 2009).

Life Design approach

The Life Design approach (LD), based on Super's theory of vocational development, involves the new concerns and issues of today's society in a constructivist perspective (Savickas et al., 2009). LD advocates support for individuals who are co-constructing and planning present and future professional routes, going beyond the conventional theoretical models, which were more or less openly based on the matching paradigm. It underlines the importance of prevention and of working across the lifespan when planning one's professional future. Prevention is essential because it enables individuals to be ready to deal with challenging moments in their life (e.g., transitions) and so increase their likelihood of making choices that are good for them (Nota et al., 2015; Savickas et al., 2009).

In this connection, LD places special emphasis on supporting adolescents in the process of constructing and co-constructing their future professional pathways, by considering the resources that might help them cope with the complexities of the current labor market (Guichard, 2015; Nota et al., 2015; Verbruggen et al., 2015). To this aim, Watkins and Savickas (2014) maintain that people who think about their future by taking into account their current challenging experiences, who are oriented to the future, who are aware that in the future they will have to cope with difficult situations are more likely to design their life linked to their future desires and to make decisions by following their life goals. Basing their choices on their own interests, goals, and responsibilities will make it easier for them to tackle the task of self-construction.

In line with these suggestions, the LD approach also underlines the importance of resilience as a dimension to be considered in career and vocational guidance, especially when people are unemployed or are experiencing uncertainty in their career (Bimrose & Hearne, 2012; Guichard, 2015; van Vianen, Koen, & Klehe, 2015).

Taking into account the challenges of today's society, which our youths have to cope with while pursuing their future goals within the Life Design framework, we have developed "Design my future" (DMF), an instrument to assess future orientation and resilience in adolescence.

Future orientation

Thinking about the future is a key characteristic of the individuals (Nurmi, 2004). Individuals do wonder about what will happen to them in the future, they have future goals and wishes, and they face the challenge of trying to realize them. However, at times, they might find that their future did not turn out in accordance with their hopeful plans. Future orientation is the phrase most commonly used to express a person's expectations about the future and the actions they carry out related to the future (Nurmi, 2004).

A comprehensive review on future orientation suggested that it is defined individuals' subjective view of their future (Seginer, 2009). Future orientation refers to ideas, thoughts, and feelings individuals have about their future (Stoddard, Zimmerman, & Bauermeister, 2011), and regards the ability to imagine multiple possible future scenarios (Atance & O'Neill, 2001). Developmentally, individuals start to build hopes and expectations about the future at a very young age. However, this process becomes particularly important in adolescence, a time when youths are transitioning into adulthood and find it especially difficult to make plans for the present and think about the future (Crespo et al., 2013; Nurmi, 2004).

Studies emphasize that future orientation, a hopeful and purposeful sense of the future, is related to positive development in adolescence (e.g., Crespo et al., 2013; Nurmi, 2004; Seginer, 2009). For example, Oyserman, Terry, and Bybee (2002), involving 62 adolescents in a nine-week program aimed at developing their ability to imagine themselves as successful adults, observed that those who participated in the program (experimental group) had higher levels of school bonding, more concern about academic achievement, better school attendance, and fewer problems at school than the control group. In addition, Worrel and Mello (2009), involving 300 adolescents, found that a positive vision about the future was positively

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