



Results-masked-review article

Looking forward: Career identity formation and the temporal orientations of young Australians

Jacqueline Laughland-Booy^{a,*}, Peter Newcombe^b, Zlatko Skrbis^a^a School of Social Sciences, Monash University, Australia^b School of Psychology, The University of Queensland, Australia

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ABSTRACT

This paper provides insights into young people's experiences of transitions from adolescence into emerging adulthood by focusing on connections between their career identity formation, time perspectives, and future outlook. The data used in this paper are based on two sets of in-depth interviews undertaken with 28 young people when they were aged 16 and again at age 22. We have identified four main temporal orientations (time perspective/future outlook combinations) and describe how those patterns correspond to proposed extensions to the identity status model as it relates to career identity. Our findings offer support for the inclusion of postponement as a process of identity formation and hiatus as an additional identity status. We also observe three temporally based expressions of career identity achievement, which we label: temporary achievement, permanent achievement, and sequential achievement.

1. Introduction

Looking forward and planning for the future is often considered a normative developmental task for late adolescents and emerging adults (Arnett, 2000; Luyckx, Lens, Smits, & Goossens, 2010). Adolescence is a period when young people might be expected to have commenced the steps towards autonomy and independence. For many young people living in industrialised countries, however, the path towards adulthood has been extended. Young people in their twenties are often still constructing a consistent and coherent sense of identity across their many life roles, and are yet to achieve many of the milestones which have traditionally been associated with adulthood. Moreover, they may still be unsure of how their future might unfold (Arnett, 2000; Luyckx et al., 2010; Schwartz, Côté, & Arnett, 2005).

Alongside this extended lead into adulthood, there have also been changes in societal expectations regarding the career trajectories young people might follow (Beck & Beck-Gernsheim, 2002; Furlong & Cartmel, 2007). Where once there were often considerable structural constraints surrounding what individuals could do when they left school (e.g., gender, familial expectations, social economic status), young people now have more liberty to select for themselves a vocational path (Furlong & Cartmel, 2007). However, with flexibility of options comes increased accountability. While an individual may have more choice, they are also expected to take greater personal responsibility for the decisions they make (Furlong & Cartmel, 2007; Guichard, Pouyaud, de Calan, & Dumora, 2012).

Selecting a vocational path is a fundamental component of overall identity formation for many young people and choosing a career assists an individual in making plans for their future (Arnett, 2000; Crocetti, Avanzi, Hawk, Fraccaroli, & Meeus, 2014; Luyckx, Seiffge-Krenke, Schwartz, Crocetti, & Klimstra, 2014). There are, however, a number of elements, which can influence career identity

* Corresponding author at: School of Social Sciences, Monash University, Clayton, VIC 3800, Australia.

E-mail address: jacqueline.laughland-booy@monash.edu (J. Laughland-Booy).

formation – including time perspective. If a person is more focused on their past or present, for instance, their career future may seem unimportant or unimaginable. Alternatively those with a strong future focus demonstrate greater imagination, motivation, and engagement with respect to the career decision-making process (Taber, 2013; Taber & Blankemeyer, 2015).

In this paper, we use qualitative methodology to explore the association between career identity formation and the temporal orientations of young people. Drawing on interview data collected from participants in an ongoing study of young people from Queensland, Australia, we investigate the interplay between participants' experiences with career identity development, their time perspectives, and future outlook. The opportunity to interview the young people across time permits a perspective of the non-static nature of career identity establishment that has previously received scant regard. As such, we offer a unique insight into the lived experiences of emerging adults as they grapple with the challenges associated with choosing a career, reflecting on that choice, and preparing for their vocational future.

2. Career identity

2.1. Identity status theory

Developing a firm identity and finding a place in society is considered one of the key developmental tasks and goals of adolescence and young adulthood. To achieve a clear self-definition of oneself is a complex process as it involves various meanings of the 'self' across multiple life domains (Arnett, 2000).

Marcia (1966) identified two processes of identity development – exploration (actively searching and weighing various identity options) and commitment (making a firm choice in an identity domain and engaging in activities towards achieving that identity). He argued the presence or absence of each of these processes results in four identity statuses: *achievement* (exploration followed by commitment), *moratorium* (exploration without commitment), *foreclosure* (commitment without exploration), and *diffusion* (neither exploration nor commitment). Contemporary theorists have expanded and refined this model. Luyckx, Goossens, Soenens, and Beyers (2006) suggest exploration and commitment each have two elements. They believe exploration involves 'exploration in breadth' and 'exploration in depth, and commitment comprises 'commitment making' and 'identification with commitment'. 'Exploration in breadth' is the consideration of various identity options, whereas 'exploration in depth' involves an intensive evaluation of current commitments. 'Commitment making' describes the selection of an identity and 'identification with commitment' is the acceptance of that identity as a part of one's self (Luyckx et al., 2006).

Furthermore, Crocetti, and associates (e.g., Crocetti, Rubini, & Meeus, 2008; Crocetti, Sica, Schwartz, Serafini, & Meeus, 2013) have proposed a model of identity that emphasises the interchange between commitment, in-depth exploration, and reconsideration. Their three-dimensional model highlights the degree to which young people will continue to actively reflect on their choices, look for new information, and consider possible alternatives. The various combinations of these three dimensions result in five status categories that expand on Marcia's (1966) original identity classifications. They include four consistent with Marcia's model along with the addition of a *searching moratorium* status, which describes an individual with high levels of commitment, exploration, and reconsideration. For this status, individuals who have made an identity commitment are seen to be reconsidering their identity choice and are actively considering alternative options that may better fit their goals and aspirations (Crocetti et al., 2008).

Recently, it has been suggested that postponement should be better acknowledged as a component of the identity formation process (Laughland-Booÿ, Skrbiš, & Newcombe, 2017; Sica, Luyckx, Goossens, Ragozini, & Sestito, 2017). Furthermore, Laughland-Booÿ et al. (2017), have proposed the inclusion of postponement as a fourth dimension of identity development. They believe this is a dimension of identity that should be better acknowledged alongside commitment, exploration and reconsideration and that by adding this dimension greater focus might be paid to varying qualitative manifestations of identity development deferral. In research they have undertaken into the experiences of young people undergoing identity development in the domain of romantic relationship formation, they identified an identity status they have labelled *hiatus* – characterised by the process of exploration followed by postponement. Young people in hiatus, have commenced the process of identity exploration, but subsequently chose to stop because they believed, due to their current circumstances, neither further exploration, nor commitment were possible. Instead, these young people had decided to defer identity development in this domain until time has passed and their circumstances had changed (Laughland-Booÿ et al., 2017).

2.2. Exploring career identity formation in emerging adults

Career is a core identity domain. Well-meaning, yet persistent questions such as "What do you want to be when you grow up", "What do you want to do when you graduate?" or, "What do you do?" reflect societal expectations within many industrial countries that young people should actively strive towards developing a strong and purposeful career identity. However, while some young people are able to negotiate this development task, not all are engaged or know with certainty the vocational path they wish to follow.

Informed by Marcia's identity status conceptualisations and the more recent adaptations to that model, research which focuses specifically on career identity formation has been undertaken. One example is the work undertaken by Porfeli, Lee, Vondracek, and Weigold (2011) to construct a measure that assesses vocational identity status. They argued that exploration, commitment, and reconsideration all have two distinct facets, which should be measured independently of each other – resulting in a total of six processes. These are in-depth exploration, in-breadth exploration, commitment making, commitment identification, as well as two variations of the reconsideration process – career self-doubt and career commitment flexibility. Career self-doubt is used to describe

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