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## The role of career adaptability and courage on life satisfaction in adolescence



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### ABSTRACT

The present study aimed to extend understanding about the relationship between career adaptability, courage, and life satisfaction in a sample of Italian adolescents. It was hypothesized that courage partially mediated the relationship between career adaptability and life satisfaction. Specifically, 1202 Italian high school students with an age from 14 to 20 years ( $M = 16.87$ ;  $SD = 1.47$ ), of which 600 (49.9%) boys and 602 (50.1%) girls, were involved. Using a multi-group approach across gender, it was found that courage partially mediated the relationship between career adaptability and life satisfaction in boys and girls. Results suggested the relevance of career interventions to promote career adaptability and courage for strengthening life satisfaction in adolescence.

Western European societies are characterized by fast modification of work environments, rapid technological changes, economic and social insecurity and instability, unemployment, due notably to the worldwide financial crisis, globalization, and migration flows. As a result of these social phenomena, adolescents tend to perceive their future to be full of risks (Schoon, 2007), and thoughts about the future constitute one of the main fears and concerns among other domains (e.g., relationships with parents and peers). Adolescents can experience anxiety and distress about the future, that might affect their psychological health and their levels of life satisfaction, so that Lange (2013) highlighted that job insecurity, as the perceived risk or fear of future unemployment, has a detrimental impact on personal well-being. This perception may occur especially among adolescents in countries such as Italy, where the rate of youth unemployment and precariousness is higher than other EU countries (EUROSTAT, 2016).

The Life Design, developed primarily to help individuals to construct their career life in the current changing societies, is a paradigm for career counseling based on the epistemology of social constructivism and considers career development as the result of a dynamic interaction of person and environment. It stimulates persons to reflexively imagine and construct a life arranged with viable and multiple roles to guarantee well-being and adaptive functioning (Savickas, 2015). Central to the life design paradigm is the concept of career adaptability, that is an essential resource to help individuals plan their uncertain future, face adverse working conditions, adapt to changes of the job market and job conditions, and therefore increase their well-being (Savickas, 2015). In this current socio-economic context, particular relevance is also given to the propensity of individuals to behave courageously and persist despite perceived risks (behavioral courage), as this resource seem to be a strength when making difficult career choices despite fears

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related to the future, and a resource related to personal well-being (Bockorny, 2015; Ginevra & Capozza, 2015). Based on these premises, the constructs of career adaptability and behavioral courage and their relationship to life satisfaction are below examined.

### 1. Life satisfaction

Life satisfaction is described as a subjective component of quality of life. It is considered as the cognitive dimension of subjective well-being, that is the conscious cognitive judgment of own life in relation to a series of personally set criteria (Schallock & Felce, 2004).

Although life satisfaction has been studied extensively in adults (Diener, Suh, Lucas, & Smith, 1999) and less extensively in adolescence (Huebner, Suldo, Smith, & McKnight, 2004), it has been found that having a positive cognitive judgment of own life is positively related to better emotional, social, and behavioral health (Sun & Shek, 2013), enhanced social relationships, and increased academic engagement and achievement (Lewis, Huebner, Malone, & Valois, 2011; Suldo, Thalji, & Ferron, 2011). The relevance of life satisfaction during adolescence has been shown by longitudinal research (e.g. Suldo & Huebner, 2004) founding that life satisfaction negatively influences future externalizing behaviors in the face of stressful life events and therefore operates as a buffer against some effects of adverse life events.

### 2. Career adaptability

Career adaptability is a self-regulatory, transactional, and flexible competency for coping with developmental tasks, present and future changes in the career context, promoting adjustment and successful transition across the career lifespan (Rossier, 2015; Rudolph, Lavigne, & Zacher, 2017). It is characterized by four Cs: *Concern* is the individual ability to connect past with present and to be positively projected toward the future. *Control* is the tendency to think of the future as manageable. *Curiosity* refers to the exploration of possible selves and social opportunities. Finally, *Confidence* allows for standing by one's own aspirations and objectives despite difficulties (Savickas & Porfeli, 2012). Overall, career adaptability promotes individual's ability to tolerate and handle uncertainty and to cope with and organize educational and career future-fears (Rossier, 2015). As found by Pouyaud, Vignoli, Dosnon, and Lallemand (2012) career adaptability is negatively correlated with fear of failing in one's academic or professional career and positively correlated with school motivation, suggesting that adolescents with higher levels of career adaptability perceive themselves as more engaged with their future and less afraid to fail in achieving their future goals.

A meta-analysis by Rudolph et al. (2017), based on the career construction model of adaptation (Savickas & Porfeli, 2012), and using 90 studies across several countries, found that career adaptability, directly and indirectly through the role of adapting responses (adaptive behaviors and beliefs to handle career development tasks and changing career conditions), predicted positive career related outcomes (adapting results). These adapting results refer for example to career decidedness (Ginevra, Pallini, Vecchio, Nota, & Soresi, 2016), broader range of career interests and fewer internal and external barriers (Soresi, Nota, & Ferrari, 2012), and subjective well-being (Rudolph et al., 2017). Regarding this latter, Santilli, Marcionetti, Rochat, Rossier, and Nota (2016) provided support of the relationship between career adaptability and life satisfaction, that was partially mediated by a positive orientation toward future (hope and optimism) in 12–16 years old Italian adolescents and fully mediated in Swiss adolescents. Moreover, Buyukgoze-Kavas, Duffy, and Douglass (2015) observed that all four dimensions of career adaptability correlated with life satisfaction; and career concern and control linked to life satisfaction through the role of sense of control in career decision making and life meaning.

### 3. Courage

Although traditionally courage has been portrayed as a trait or a stable disposition, recent several approaches have considered it as a type of act or behavior. Norton and Weiss (2009) defined courage as the persistence despite having fears that is the perpetuation of effort despite the subjective feeling of fear. According to Rate, Clarke, Lindsay, and Sternberg (2007), four primary features of a courageous behaviors are: (1) intentionality; (2) deliberation; (2) coping with warning, risk, or obstacles; (3) a noble or worthwhile purpose. Unlike trait courage, behavioral courage is malleable and affected by other constructs and dimensions. For example, Hannah, Sweeney, and Lester (2010) posited that courageous behavior is impacted by a series of personal strengths and resources (e.g., resilience, optimism, hope, openness to experience), social forces (e.g. normative influences), and personal values and beliefs (e.g. loyalty, valor) that reduce the fear experienced and/or increase the likelihood that the individuals behave courageously despite fears.

Recent studies have begun to examine the role of behavioral courage on career related outcomes, suggesting that courageous behaviors influence positive work behavioral outcomes, personal identity, prosocial behaviors (e.g., Howard, Farr, Grandey, & Gutworth, 2016; Koerner, 2014). Additionally, it has been found that adolescents with higher levels of courage are likely more motivated to reach their plans and to think and implement different solutions for achieving them, have more coping skills to achieve them, reducing the feeling of fear (Ginevra & Capozza, 2015; Magnano, Paolillo, Platania, & Santisi, 2017). Although few studies have been conducted on the relationship between courage and life satisfaction, it was found that courage, beyond psychological capital (hope, optimism, resilience, and confidence), positively contributed to life satisfaction, as a dimension of the entrepreneurial success (Bockorny, 2015).

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