



## Brief report: Cross-informant ratings of self- and other-regulation at career transitions in adolescence

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### A B S T R A C T

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Individual initiative is required to successfully master career transitions in adolescence, and also parents play an important role in this process. Past research largely omitted co-agency in transition-related activities between adolescents and their parents, which could be described in terms of self- and other-regulation. The present pilot study examined adolescents' and mothers' career-specific regulatory behaviors as perceived from both agents' perspectives. 38 German adolescents rated importance and engagement in one transition-related personal goal and reported on intensity of career exploration activities. Furthermore, they reported on their perceptions of mothers' career-related behaviors and confidence in their offspring's transition management. All measures were also assessed from the mothers' point of view. Results revealed associations within and across family members' ratings that showed similarities as well as differences in perceptions of how behaviors associate. Partial correlation analyses showed that specific maternal behavior not contingent upon her general warmth associated with child behavior.

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Individuals face various transitions during adolescence that channel development in many ways (Nurmi, 2004). Two lines of research have contributed to our understanding of coping with career transitions. On the one hand, self-regulation theories describe the motivational factors to manage transitions in terms of goal-directed behaviors (Heckhausen, 1999; Nurmi, 2004; Salmela-Aro, 2009): setting and pursuing phase-adequate goals have proven beneficial for attainment of these goals (Nurmi, Salmela-Aro, & Koivisto, 2002). On the other hand, career theories examine various choice relevant behaviors (Savickas, 2005). Among them, exploration behaviors are crucial in youths' development (Porfeli, 2008).

Although relational aspects of goal pursuit have been acknowledged in self-regulation theories (e.g., Meegan & Berg, 2001; Nurmi, 2004; Salmela-Aro, 2009) little is known about how significant others in youths' lives, such as parents, impact their goals. Most previous research focused on parents' impact on aspirations (Massey, Gebhardt, & Garnefski, 2008) while studies on parental influence in the actual process of striving for short-term personal goals are scarce (Nurmi, 2004). Scholars of career development have pointed to the importance of the quality of parent-adolescent relationships in career choice (Whiston & Keller, 2004), and thus many studies regarding parental influence addressed general aspects of the relationship. However, this research strategy does not allow detecting processes of co-development—self-regulation being complemented by other-regulation (Sameroff, 2010)—since no specific regulation behaviors of parents were examined.

Some qualitative investigations have started to explore the specific mechanisms involved (e.g., Young et al., 2001), and recently, parental actions towards their offspring's career development have been examined by using a quantitative approach

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as well (Dietrich & Kracke, 2009). Going beyond general relationship measures, a focus on career-specific parental behaviors allows studying youths and parents as active agents in shaping own and others' behaviors (Young et al., 2001).

The present pilot study is part of a larger program addressing mutual influences of youths and parents at the transition from high school to either university or vocational training. It provides the first empirical example with multi-informant data (adolescents and their mothers) with the aim of comparing two perspectives of adolescents' self-regulation—i.e., importance and engagement in transition-related goals, and career exploration—and other-regulation—i.e., maternal support and confidence in adolescents' transition management. Specifically, the objectives of this study were, first, to examine to what extent the views of both family members on regulation behaviors were shared. This question is not trivial because subjective views can differ greatly (Tein, Roosa, & Michaels, 1994).

Our second aim was to examine associations between adolescent and mother behaviors within as well as across respondents. Addressing cross-rater effects, also called partner effects (Kenny & Cook, 1999), allows analyzing associations not only on the individual level, but also on a dyad level. We hypothesized that maternal support related positively to adolescent exploration and goal appraisals (Dietrich & Kracke, 2009). Mothers' confidence in their children's transition management was expected to be high when adolescents show interest and engagement in transition-related activities (Malmberg, Ehrman, & Lithén, 2005). Associations were expected within the reports of both adolescents and mothers as well as across family members. Still, it was predicted that both maternal and youth behaviors were related to maternal warmth as one aspect of relationship quality. Thus, warmth was included as control variable in the analyses.

## Method

### *Participants and procedure*

Questionnaires were administered to 123 German adolescents during regular lessons at school. Adolescents were assessed at the end of their final school year (grade 12). After finishing the higher track of the German educational system, about 60% directly continue their education, typically at university (40% of students) or vocational education (20%; Federal Ministry of Education and Research, 2007). Adolescents' mean age was 18.8 years ( $SD = .77$ ). Mothers were also invited to participate, and 38 mothers eventually took part in the study. Mothers were between 39 and 53 years old ( $M = 45.4$ ,  $SD = 4.12$ ). Of the mothers who provided information on their education ( $n = 34$ ), 21 had reached university degree and 13 had finished vocational education. This is typical for the German school system which is rather selective with respect to educational background (OECD, 2008). Analyses were performed with the subsample ( $n = 38$ , 19 female, 19 male) for which maternal data were available. Adolescents in the subsample did not differ on the variables of interest from those not included.

### *Measures*

All measures were assessed from the adolescents' and mothers' point of view. Participants were asked to rate all items on 6-point Likert scales (1 = *does not apply, not at all important, invested no effort*, 6 = *fully applies, very important, invested much effort*). Mean scores were computed to be utilized in the analyses.

#### *Adolescents' transition-related goals*

Participants filled in the revised Personal Projects Analysis Inventory (Little, 1983). Adolescents were asked, first, to name one current transition-related personal goal. Most respondents named goals related to exploratory activities (e.g., "find out what I want to study"), getting enrolled or getting started in their studies or vocational training (e.g., "have a good start in vocational training"), and doing something else (e.g., "work and travel"). Second, adolescents were requested to rate the importance of and the engagement with their personal goal. Mothers were asked to report their perceptions of how important transition goals in general were to their child and how much their child engaged in pursuing these goals.

#### *Adolescents' career exploration*

Participants reported on three facets (5 items each) of adolescents' exploration (cf. Kracke, 1997; Porfeli, 2008): broad ("I [my child] tried to find out about my [her] strengths and weaknesses in general"), in-depth exploration ("I [my child] talked to people who work in the vocation I am [she is] interested in"), and planfulness of exploration ("I [my child] compare[s] different sources of information").

#### *Mothers' career-related support*

Support was measured with the respective subscale (5 items) of the PCB instrument (Dietrich & Kracke, 2009) that was adapted for mothers' questionnaires ("My mother [I] encouraged me [my child] to seek information about vocations I am [she is] interested in").

#### *Mothers' confidence in adolescents' transition management*

Confidence was assessed by a newly constructed scale (4 items). For item wordings see the Appendix.

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