



Relation of career adaptability to meaning in life and connectedness among adolescents in Hong Kong

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ABSTRACT

This study examined relationships among career adaptability, meaning in life, and connectedness in Hong Kong with Chinese male and female Grade 9 students ($n = 543$). The results indicated that presence of meaning in life positively predicted connectedness; and in the males career concern was predicted by presence of meaning in life. Also in males, career control was predicted both by presence and search for meaning in life, while career curiosity was predicted by connectedness to school, and by presence and search for meaning in life. Career confidence was predicted by connectedness to school, and presence and search of meaning in life. In the females, career concern was predicted by presence of meaning in life and connectedness to school, but negatively by connectedness to peers. Career control and career curiosity were predicted by presence and search for meaning in life. Career confidence was predicted by presence of meaning in life. Limitations of the study are identified; and implications for future research and guidance with Chinese adolescents in schools are discussed.

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1. Introduction

A curriculum reform was implemented in Hong Kong senior secondary education in 2009, with the intention of meeting the contemporary interests, needs, abilities and aspirations of Chinese adolescents. One of the aims of the reform is to help all students develop positive attitudes towards work and life-long learning, and to understand their own career aspirations (Hong Kong Education Bureau, 2009). To achieve this aim, and to determine the most appropriate content, scope and sequence for career development programs, educators and researchers in Hong Kong have recognized the need to investigate the needs and characteristics of senior secondary students.

To provide more information on issues related to career development, the study reported here focused specifically on exploring relations among the variables of career adaptability, gender, meaning in life, and connectedness. The rationale for selecting these variables is presented below.

1.1. Career adaptability

It is now widely accepted in the field of career development studies that 'adaptability' is becoming increasingly important for adolescents and young adults in this rapidly changing world. Savickas (1997) described career adaptability as a major component within career construction theory; and defined it as 'readiness to cope with the predictable tasks of preparing for and participating in the work role, and with the unpredictable adjustments prompted by changes in work and working conditions' (p. 254).

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1.2. Influences on career adaptability

Research has so far explored *predictors* of career adaptability—with a number of variables identified, including life satisfaction, self-esteem, emotional stability (Skorikov, 2007), parental and peer supports (Han & Rojewski, 2015; Kracke, 2002; Rogers, Creed, & Gledon, 2008), goal orientation and career optimism (Tolentino et al., 2014), and hope (Santilli, Nota, Ginevra, & Soresi, 2014; Valero, Hirschi, & Strauss, 2015). Currently, research is focused on the relation of career adaptability to an individual's positive development and psychological well-being (Hirschi, 2009). In the study reported here, an individual's 'meaning in life' was chosen specifically as one of the psychological well-being variables to be examined. In particular, the aim was to determine whether students with a better established meaning in life would also display greater career adaptability, as suggested by the existential approach (Sterner, 2012).

1.3. Meaning in life

The concept of meaning in life was introduced by Viktor Frankl, who also established the well-known logotherapy, designed to help people explore the meaning of life experiences (Auhagen, 2000). Steger, Frazier, Oishi, and Kaler (2006) defined 'This satisfaction has been found to be associated with career development (Skorikov, 2007) and career adaptability (Lips-Wiersma, 2002; Santilli et al., 2014; Schultze & Miller, 2004). The presence of meaning of life also appears to act as a mediator between career indecision and anxiety (Miller & Rottinghaus, 2014). Similarly, Super, Savickas, and Super (1996) believed that meaning in life helps facilitate the role of values in career decision-making and in promoting career adaptation. Meaning in life and optimism promote a sense of well-being (Ho, Cheung, & Cheung, 2010); and meaning in life and a sense of well-being to prepare people to face any adverse events (Shek, 2012; Shrira, Palgi, Ben-Ezra, & Shmotkin, 2011). In an Asian context, meaning in life for Chinese students is also found to be significantly related to life satisfaction in personal, family, community, and work domains (Ho et al., 2010; To, Tam, Ngai, & Sung, 2014). In the study reported here, the intention was to determine whether students' meaning in life directly impacts on their connectedness and career adaptability.

1.4. Connectedness and career adaptability

Attachment theory suggests that 'connectedness' is beneficial to healthy human development (Lopez, 1995; Schultheiss, 2003). For the purposes of this study, 'connectedness' refers to the positive feelings an individual has of 'belonging' within a particular social group or situation (family, school, and friends). This feeling of connectedness can have very many benefits for a person's development, including social support, self-esteem, confidence, motivation, self-efficacy, resilience and the development of productive attitudes and values (Townsend & McWhirter, 2005). Connectedness may also be important for adolescents when they are making plans for future career path and seeking advice from others. In middle schools, Hong Kong, guidance programs often focus on enhancing students' connectedness to school, peers and teachers, as well as helping students search for their personal meaning in life.

Blustein, Schultheiss, and Flum (2004) suggested that career development—particularly the decision-making process—can be understood by reference to *social relationships*. For example, when people are making choices and decisions concerning their career path, they seek support and guidance from social networks to which they feel connected, such as family, friends and teachers. Studies have established a link between a person's connectedness with family, friends and school and the development of career adaptability (Creed, Fallon, & Hood, 2009; Hirschi, 2009). A study by Han and Rojewski (2015) further revealed that career adaptability and job satisfaction are improved by perceived social supports from family and school. The importance of involving significant people like parents and teachers directly in career guidance programs to give support and advice is stressed by Knight (2015). In the study reported herein the intention was therefore to determine whether students with stronger connectedness with friends, family and school would display better career adaptability.

1.5. Gender differences

Gender differences in career adaptability, connectedness and meaning in life have been explored previously, but the results were inconclusive. The most recent research suggests that gender differences in career adaptability are not significant (Hirschi, 2009; Tien, Lin, Hsieh & Jin, 2014; Zacher, 2014). The same result was found with Hong Kong university students (Cheung & Jin, 2015). In terms of connectedness, there may be gender differences, because boys have been found to connect strongly with personal friends (Li, 2002), but girls are more connected to classroom peers, schools, teachers and siblings (Karcher & Sass, 2010; McGraw, Moore, Fuller, & Bates, 2008). Gender differences in meaning in life are less clearly delineated. Reker (2005) found that young women scored higher than males in 'personal meaning', but Steger et al. (2006) found no significant gender difference in any aspect. In view of the inconsistent evidence found so far on possible gender differences in career adaptability, connectedness and meaning in life, it was decided that this study would attempt to establish any associations among these variables in a sample of Hong Kong adolescents. In addition, the researchers investigated the predictors of career adaptability in male and female students.

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