



Vocational and overall identity: A person-centered approach in Italian university students



Laura Aleni Sestito ^{a,*}, Luigia Simona Sica ^a, Giancarlo Ragozini ^{a,c}, Erik Porfeli ^b, Gina Weisblat ^b, Tiziana Di Palma ^a

^a Department of Humanities, University of Naples "Federico II", Italy

^b Department of Family and Community Medicine, Northeast Ohio Medical University, OH, United States

^c Department of Political Sciences, University of Naples "Federico II", Italy

ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received 10 July 2015

Received in revised form 7 October 2015

Accepted 8 October 2015

Available online 13 October 2015

Keywords:

Overall and vocational identity

Italian University students

Cluster analysis

VISA validation

ABSTRACT

Establishing a vocational and overall identity involve defining life altering plans and associated commitments to pursue and achieve them and are, therefore, among the most central aspects of the developmental tasks of late adolescents and emerging adults. In the Italian context, young adults' opportunity to develop coherent and fulfilling future plans are strongly threatened by the current distressed economic climate in Italy. Assuming these features of the Italian context can produce specific identity patterns, the present study aimed to contribute to the understanding of overall and vocational identity processes in Italian emerging adults and to explore the relationship between the two domains of identity using a person-centered approach. The study is composed of two parts. The first study assessed the psychometric properties of the Italian version of the Vocational Identity Status Assessment (VISA) in a sample of university students from Italy ($N = 560$). The second study included a cluster analytic approach in order to explore the configuration of both vocational and overall identity domains. The findings suggest that the Italian version of the VISA is a promising tool for assessing vocational identity dimensions in the Italian context. Furthermore, unlike the previous literature, we found different patterns of vocational and overall identity in Italian university students. The findings suggest that the current socio-economic Italian situation may be hindering students' progress toward achieving a vocational identity, especially for freshmen.

© 2015 Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved.

1. Introduction

Establishing vocational and overall identities are among the most central developmental tasks of the late adolescent and emerging adulthood periods (Porfeli, Lee, Vondracek, & Weigold, 2011). Vocational identity is conceived as a domain-specific aspect of overall identity, providing young people with a framework to regulate the pursuit of their academic and career objectives (Hirschi, 2012). People exhibiting an advanced identity status show greater career planning and decidedness (Wallace-Broschious, Serafica, & Osipio, 1994) and more advanced identity (Kroger, 1988; Meeus, 1993; Skorikov & Vondracek, 1998). Numerous studies also confirm the positive association between vocational and overall identity (Nauta & Kahn, 2007; Savickas, 1985; Skorikov & Vondracek, 1998) founding that engaging in occupational exploration and making occupational commitments promote identity development from childhood through adulthood (Flum & Blustein, 2006; Kroger, 2007). Work experience was found to be the primary influence on overall identity development for college students, workers and unemployed (Danielsen, Lorem, & Kroger, 2000). Vocational identity is,

* Corresponding author at: Department of Humanities, University of Naples "Federico II", Postbox: Via Porta di Massa, 1, 80133 Naples, Italy.
E-mail address: sestito@unina.it (L. Aleni Sestito).

therefore, believed to be a defining feature in adolescent and young adult life, a leading aspect of global identity development, and fostered by work experience (Schwartz, 2007; Skorikov & Vondracek, 2011).

Adolescents tend to leave behind a vague sense of self as a “worker”, inspired by childhood images of stereotypical or idealized work activities, and move toward an adult identity that is more concrete, realistic and alive in the real world of work, following a developmental model of vocational identity that is potentiated by developing a sense of industry and positive view of the world of work (Porfeli, Lee, & Weigold, 2012) and generally proceeds establishing a long-term intimate relationship with a romantic partner and family formation.

Despite the general regularity of vocational identity development exhibited on the population level across the late adolescent and emerging adulthood period, appreciable variability is observed in the pathways and timing of vocational identity progress from person to person and across different cultural and socio-economic contexts. Career progress as a series of jobs and titles becomes re-defined as an ever-expanding repertoire of skills and a multiplying professional network. This shift brings new opportunities and challenges associated with lifespan identity development.

In particular, emerging adults in the modern era may experience a prolonged period of moratorium as they explore major life roles in the absence of making solid commitments (Crocetti & Palmonari, 2011). This experience may be particularly pronounced for college students who tend to delay these transitions more so than their age mates who do not pursue higher education (Crocetti Rabaglietti, & Sica, 2012). Moreover, college students may demonstrate a greater diversity of identity statuses revolving around identity diffusion, disengagement and indifference (Sica, Aleni Sestito, & Ragozini, 2014) and these statuses may be adaptive within political-economic conditions, like those in Italy, limiting job opportunities and viable career pathways.

Thus, the impact of the globalization and global economic changes on the nature of work and career and how that may relate to changes in vocational identity processes and structure (Ashkenas, Ulrich, Jick, & Kerr, 1995) serves as a backdrop for the present study. Opportunities in the modern labor market include a proliferation of new careers and contracts, and the flexibility to redefine one's self and career in a way that is becoming increasingly accepted and, in some cases, normative and even admired (Arthur & Rousseau, 1996). The global economy presents challenges to identity and career in terms of job security and predictability. Increasingly, employers are backing away from the role of the caregiver, developing employees for the long term and focusing their employee development and compensation plans on the basis of performance in the here and now (Guichard, Pouyau, de Calan, & Dumora, 2012).

The contemporary post-industrial society has become gradually more complex, more “fluid” and less stable (Giddens, 1991). The coexistence of different cultural patterns, lifestyles and social norms, leading to the modernization and globalization processes (Larson, 2011), seem to signal to young people the need for multiple and flexible developmental trajectories requiring continuous monitoring of and adaptations to specific career and work skills and the need for their continuous development across the lifespan (Côté, 1997, Côté, 2000).

1.1. The Italian context

In this study, we recruited university students given that it is widely known that they were facing a particularly difficult Italian job market (Istat, 2014). Indeed, the majority of Italian young adults, even after concluding their prolonged training period, experience additional periods of employment instability, insecurity and uncertainty (Berton, Richiardi, & Sacchi, 2009; Boeri & Galasso, 2007; Iezzi & Mastrobuoni, 2010). The Italian context is conceived as a prototype of Southern European countries in which young adults' opportunities to develop coherent and fulfilling future career and overall life plans are strongly threatened by the current socio-economic distress in Italy (Leccardi, 2006). Main problems that affect Southern European youth include high rates of unemployment (ranging approximately from 35% to 55% in the last quarter of 2012; Eurostat, 2014); a large number of youth being “Not in Education, Employment, or Training” (NEET; Bynner, 2012; Bynner & Parsons, 2002; Whittaker, 2008); widespread job insecurity; and a deep-rooted crisis of confidence in educational institutions and employers.

Many cross-cultural studies have focused on the peculiar trajectories of the transition to adulthood of Italian young people as compared to those in other countries. In particular, some studies with university students found that the delayed transition to adult life has a particular impact on global (Aleni Sestito, Sica, & Ragozini, 2011; Crocetti, Luyckx, Scrignaro, & Sica, 2011; Crocetti, Scrignaro, Sica, & Magrin, 2012) and vocational identity (Aleni Sestito, Sica, & Nasti, 2013). Coined the Italian Delay Syndrome (Livi Bacci, 2008), the delayed transition has led to a pattern of maladaptive outcomes (Sica et al., 2014) and delayed normative identity development; this also may increase identity instability and could be a determining factor in postponing the achievement of important vocational and personal commitments to multiple life domains in emerging adulthood (Crocetti, Rabaglietti, Sica, 2012). Thus, in this study we assume Italy as Prototype of Southern Europe countries, in which the general processes of identity development and the transition to adulthood may lag behind and manifest differently than they do in other countries. In doing so, we adopt the identity status paradigm (Marcia, 1966; Marcia, Waterman, Matteson, Archer, & Orlofsky, 1993) and assess the extent to which contemporary vocational identity status (Porfeli et al., 2011) and personal identity (Luyckx et al., 2008) measures are (a) associated with each other, (b) how identity status models reflect the identities of Italian young adults, and (c) how the resulting overall and vocational identity statuses are associated with each other.

1.2. Vocational and overall identity statuses

The cluster analytic approach is based on the identity status paradigm (Marcia, 1966; Marcia et al., 1993). By combining Erikson's identity processes of *commitment* and *exploration*, Marcia identified four identity statuses: *achievement* (commitment

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/886746>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/886746>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)