



My future self and me: Depressive styles and future expectations

Richard Thompson^{a,*}, David C. Zuroff^b

^a Juvenile Protective Association, Chicago, IL 60642, USA

^b McGill University, Montreal, Canada

ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received 27 May 2009

Received in revised form 31 August 2009

Accepted 4 October 2009

Available online 30 October 2009

Keywords:

Self-criticism

Dependency

Future expectations

Urban

High-risk

ABSTRACT

Little is known about the factors that influence the expectations youth have about their futures. The current study examined the link between personality variables (dependency and self-criticism) and expectations about social and career outcomes in a sample of 109 low-income, urban, 14-year old youth. After controlling for demographic factors and psychological symptoms, self-criticism significantly predicted each negative expectation about the future (becoming an unwed parent, going on welfare, not going to college, and not getting a wanted job). Dependency had a significant protective effect on expectations about getting a wanted job. Self-criticism appears to have a robust effect on youth expectations about their futures that cannot be completely explained by its links to psychological distress. Implications for future research and interventions are discussed.

© 2009 Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.

1. Introduction

What do youth expect their futures to be like? And what do these expectations mean for their current functioning? Until recently, these questions were rarely addressed, but research has begun to examine the role that future expectations play in the lives of youth (e.g., Harris, Duncan, & Boisjoly, 2002; Valadez-Meltzer, Silber, Meltzer, & D'Angelo, 2005). Generally, most research and theory has focused on how long youth expected to live (Hill, Ross, & Low, 1997; Valadez-Meltzer et al., 2005) and more broadly on their perceptions that the future is unpredictable (Ross & Hill, 2002). Much of this research has focused on high-risk, low-income youth, where the possibility of negative outcomes is highest.

Theoretically, beliefs that the future is unpredictable and uncontrollable tend to discourage future orientation and encourage faulty assessments of consequence and risk, leading youth to engage in a variety of risky behaviors, centering around impulsive behavior, failure to delay gratification, and sensation seeking (Ross & Hill, 2002). Early research on college students demonstrated that, in fact, those with shorter anticipated life-spans and beliefs that the future was uncontrollable were more likely to engage in risk-taking behavior (Hill et al., 1997).

Recently, evidence has emerged from both the general population and in high-risk settings that supports the importance of youth beliefs about the future. In a study that oversampled low-income urban youth, Valadez-Meltzer and colleagues (2005) found that

beliefs that one would die soon were associated with drug use and drug selling, as well as with violent behavior. In a nationally representative study, Mello (2008) found that youth expectations about occupational outcomes predicted occupational outcomes. Positive occupational expectations also predict lower rates of risk-taking behavior more generally (Skorikov & Vondracek, 2007). As well, expectations of early mortality and of failure to graduate from college predict such risk behaviors as early sexual activity, drug selling, and (for male youth) weapon carrying (Harris et al., 2002).

Although most research treats future expectations as predictors of youth risk behavior (e.g., Skorikov & Vondracek, 2007), some research has suggested that future expectations are caused by youth risk behavior (Valadez-Meltzer et al., 2005). There is little empirical evidence for this perspective, however (Skorikov & Vondracek, 2007). Rather, other factors appear to predict future expectations. Boys tend to have more pessimistic expectations of occupational outcomes than do girls (Mello, 2008), and may be more pessimistic about other outcomes as well (Mello & Swanson, 2007). However, there has been little work examining which factors predict youth expectations.

One potential predictor which has attracted surprisingly little attention is personality. In particular, personality styles such as self-criticism and dependency may predict youth expectations about their futures. Commonly referred to as “depressive styles”, self-criticism and dependency are personality variables that refer to constellations of cognition, behavior, and affect that are thought to put individuals at-risk of depression and/or psychological distress (Blatt & Blass, 1992). Self-criticism is defined as an

* Corresponding author. Tel.: +1 312 698 6932.

E-mail address: rthompson@juvenile.org (R. Thompson).

overemphasis on self-definition and control, along with harsh standards and self-loathing; dependency is defined as an overemphasis on the availability of relationships and a need for being taken care of by others (Blatt & Blass, 1992). Self-criticism is broadly associated with negative views of the self and of the world (Blatt & Blass, 1992), and with a host of social problems (Cox, Rector, & Bagby, 2000; Fichman, Koestner, & Zuroff, 1994). Thus, youth high in self-criticism are likely to have negative expectations about their future outcomes, particularly those with a social component. Part of these negative expectations may derive from realistic assessments of probabilities – such youth are at-risk for negative outcomes in a variety of domains (Blatt & Blass, 1992; Zuroff, Koestner, & Powers, 1994). However, these negative expectations may reflect more than simply an informed estimating of probabilities. Self-criticism is associated with negative views of the world that are somewhat independent of experience (Blatt & Blass, 1992). Indeed, self-criticism is associated with pessimism and perceived lack of control over academic outcomes (Shahar, Kalnitski, Shulman, & Blatt, 2006). In particularly vulnerable youth, such negative expectations may entail some risk of becoming self-fulfilling prophecies.

On the other hand, the relationship of dependency to youth expectations may be more complicated. Although dependency was conceptualized as a dysfunctional orientation and has some negative correlates, it has also been found to be associated with positive outcomes in some research (e.g., Shahar, 2008), and has usually been found to have far fewer dysfunctional correlates than does self-criticism (Shahar et al., 2006). This pattern drove research re-examining dependency, which has found that in addition to the originally conceived, dysfunctional component, there is a component that indicates a relatively healthy style of interpersonal connectedness (Rude & Burnham, 1995). Thus, dependency is not as dysfunctional as at first conceived, because it includes some adaptive aspects. Indeed, some research has indicated that the broader, original operational definition of dependency predicts high levels of social support over time (Shahar, 2008). Thus, youth high in dependency may have more positive expectations grounded in their experiences of successfully engaging social support networks to cope with problems (Henrich, Blatt, Kuperminc, 2001).

In examining the link between depressive styles and expectations, it is important to consider possible confounds. Although there has been little research examining other predictors of negative expectations, it is possible that psychological distress and psychopathology predict negative expectations. There is a large body of research on the link between depression and general hopelessness or pessimism (Jacobs, Reinecke, Gollan, & Kane, 2008). Given this possible link, and the strong link between self-criticism and depressive symptoms, it would be important to consider possible confounding effects of depressive symptoms. As well, anxiety is associated with negative expectations about the future (Miranda & Mennin, 2007), and it is possible that anxiety increases the likelihood of specific negative expectations.

These issues are likely to be critical in the lives of low-income and at-risk youth, where future expectations are especially likely to be important (Harris et al., 2002). As noted earlier, a great deal of the existing research on future expectations has been conducted with low-income and at-risk youth (e.g., Valadez-Meltzer et al., 2005). As well, research on the influence of depressive styles in low-income youth has found relatively similar effects to research on depressive styles in other youth: self-criticism is associated with depressive symptoms (Luthar & Blatt, 1993) and negative academic outcomes (Kuperminc, Blatt, & Leadbeater, 1997).

The goal of the current analyses was to examine whether self-criticism and dependency predicted negative expectations about future outcomes in a sample of urban, low-income youth, where negative outcomes are real possibilities, and where expectations

may be especially salient. In particular, it was expected that, after controlling for gender, family income, race, and psychological symptoms, self-criticism would predict negative expectations about the future. On the other hand, it was expected that dependency would predict less negative expectations about the future.

2. Methods

2.1. Study and participants

The data presented here were collected as part of the Capella Project (Thompson, 2005), one urban site within a large longitudinal multi-site study of child maltreatment (LONGSCAN; Runyan, Curtis, Hunter, 1998). About 316 families with an infant in the first year of life and living in high-risk (low-income, high rates of crime) neighborhoods were recruited for participation.

The target children and their primary caregivers participated in bi-annual comprehensive assessments through age 14 (further assessments are ongoing). Of the 316 recruited initially, 245 (77.5%) participated in a comprehensive assessment at either age 4 or 6. These 245 caregiver-child dyads were the focus of ongoing tracking and assessment efforts and comprised the base sample.

At the age 14 interview, 109 (45.3%) youth have thus far completed the Depressive Experiences Questionnaire, and comprise the analysis sample. Those who have not completed the DEQ typically have not done so because they had participated in a briefer telephone interview at this age due to distance from the study site, or because they had not yet aged into the age 14 interview. There were no demographic differences between families recruited and those who comprised the analysis sample. Descriptive information on the analysis sample is presented in Table 1. More than half of the sample was African American; the “other” race category included three somewhat disparate groups of youth: youth who self-identified as “mixed race,” Hispanic youth, and Native American youth. Half of the sample had an annual family income less than \$20,000 per year. The mean dependency and self-criticism scores were broadly similar to those found in other samples (e.g., Fichman et al., 1994; Fichman, Koestner, & Zuroff, 1996).

Table 1
Data describing the sample ($N = 109$).

Variable	M (SD) or % (N)
<i>Race</i>	
African American	65.1% (71)
White	10.1% (11)
Other	24.8% (27)
<i>Gender</i>	
Male	46.8% (51)
Female	53.2% (58)
<i>Family income</i>	
Less than \$20 K	50.5% (55)
\$20 K or more	49.5% (54)
<i>Psychological symptom counts (DISC-IV)</i>	
Generalized anxiety disorder	2.92 (2.25)
Major depressive disorder	4.06 (3.64)
Obsessive compulsive disorder	1.80 (1.76)
Social phobia	3.08 (3.05)
<i>Depressive Experiences Questionnaire (DEQ)</i>	
Self-criticism	1.93 (0.54)
Dependency	2.59 (0.65)
<i>Anticipated future</i>	
Being an unwed parent	2.48 (1.32)
Going on welfare	2.04 (1.08)
Going to college	4.56 (0.81)
Getting a wanted job	4.16 (0.86)

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/892111>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/892111>

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