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Jessica Sayre-Scibona
University of Connecticut, jessica.sayre-scibona@huskymail.uconn.edu

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Relations Among Remembered Parental Acceptance and Behavioral Control in Childhood, Adults' Current Psychological Adjustment, and Career Indecisiveness

Jessica Sayre-Scibona

Department of Family Studies
College of Liberal Arts

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Thesis Advisor: Ronald P. Rohner

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DEDICATION

I would like to dedicate this article to my family for all of their support and encouragement throughout my college career.

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ABSTRACT

This study tested the hypothesis that career indecisiveness among men tends to be associated with different levels of self-reported psychological adjustment and with different remembrances of parental (maternal and paternal) acceptance and behavioral control in childhood from those of women. One hundred twenty-six respondents ages 17 through 54 (*M* = 23.7 years, *SD* = 8.21 years) participated in this study. Thirty-seven where males; 90 were females. Measures used in this study included the Career Decision Scale, the Adult version of the Parental Acceptance-Rejection/Control Questionnaire for mothers and for fathers, and the Adult version of the Personality Assessment Questionnaire. Both men and women remembered their mothers as well as their fathers as being loving in childhood. Additionally, men and women remembered both parents as being moderately behaviorally controlling in childhood. Finally, both men and women reported a fair level of psychological maladjustment. And on average, both men and women were fairly indecisive about their careers. Results of analyses supported the hypothesis in that career indecisiveness among women but not men was significantly correlated with remembered maternal and paternal acceptance in childhood, as well as with self-reported psychological adjustment and age. However, only women's self-reported psychological adjustment made a significant and *unique* contribution to variations in their reports of career indecisiveness. None of the predictor variables were significantly associated with career indecisiveness among men.

Key Words: Career indecisiveness, parental acceptance, behavioral control, psychological adjustment

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Relations Among Remembered Parental Acceptance and Behavioral Control in Childhood, Adults' Current Psychological Adjustment, and Career Indecisiveness

Career indecisiveness refers to an individual's lack of certainty about or commitment to an occupation (Kaplan & Brown, 1987). Such indecisiveness is prevalent among college-age students and young adults. Little is known about the causes of career indecisiveness, but family influences -- especially parent-child relationships -- appear to be important predictors (Lopez & Andrews, 1987; Guerra & Braungart-Rieker, 1999; Hargrove, Creagh, & Burgess, 2002). Kinnier, Brigman, and Noble (1990) and Puffer (1999), for example, found in samples of young adults that the more enmeshed (i.e., attached and over-dependent) adolescents were in their families the more indecisive they were. On the other hand, the more individuated or autonomous the adolescents were the less indecisive they were. Psychological issues such as negative self-esteem (Kinnier, Brigman, & Noble, 1990), low self-confidence (Kaplan and Brown, 1987), anxiety (Fugua, Seaworth, & Newman, 1987), and a negative sense of self-efficacy (Taylor & Popma, 1990) also appear to be implicated in career indecisiveness.

Beyond this, several authors have reported important gender differences in factors associated with career indecisiveness. Indecisiveness among women, for example, has been found to be associated with a different pattern of parent-child interaction from those of men (Blustein, Wolbridge, Friedlander, & Palladino, 1991; Lopez, 1989). In this regard, Blustein and associates found that career decisiveness among late adolescent females was associated with mutual trust and positive communication with *both parents*, along with such psychological factors as freedom from guilt, anxiety, and resentment of parents. These authors also found that career decisiveness among late adolescent males tended to be associated most strongly with measures of attachment with their *fathers,* along with attitudes, values, and beliefs shared with

those of their fathers. Thus, in the research of Blustein et al. the *father-son* relationship appeared to be especially salient for late adolescent males, whereas relationships with *both parents* were important for late adolescent females. In a more recent study, Huang (2001) found that women's self-efficacy was an important factor influencing their educational and career choices whereas men's self-efficacy was important only indirectly. Finally, when studying mother-daughter relationships, Castle-Kroll (2004) found that career indecisiveness was greatest when daughters felt their mothers were unsupportive of their autonomy.

Many parenting factors associated with men's and women's career decisiveness or indecisiveness are consistent with the experience of parental acceptance and rejection. For example, perceived parental acceptance tends to include positive attachment to parents, mutual trust, positive communication, and low resentment (Hughes, Blom, Rohner, & Britner, 2005; Rohner, Khaleque, & Cournoyer, 2005). Similarly, some of the psychological factors associated with indecisiveness have also been reported to be associated with the form of psychological maladjustment known to be associated with parental rejection (Rohner, 2004). For example, negative self-esteem, low self-confidence, anxiety, excessive needs for approval, external locus of control, and a negative sense of self-efficacy are all known to be associated with perceived parental rejection (Rohner, Chaille, & Rohner, 1980; Rohner, 1986; Rohner, Khaleque, & Cournoyer, 2005).

Given the fact that variations in career decisiveness-indecisiveness are associated with different patterns of family interaction and psychological adjustment among males versus females, we hypothesize that: Career indecisiveness among men tends to be associated with different levels of self-reported psychological adjustment and with different remembrances of

parental (maternal and paternal) acceptance and behavioral control in childhood from those of women.

METHODS

Sample

One hundred twenty-six respondents ages 17 through 54 (*M* = 23.7 years, *SD* = 8.21) participated in this study. Of these, 37 (29%) were males, and 90 (71%) were females. The great majority of respondents were European American (90%); the remainder were Native American (6%) and Hispanic (2%). African Americans, Asian Americans, and an unidentified group each accounted for less than 1% of the sample. Fifty percent of respondents had completed no more than high school, but the other 50% had completed one to four or more years of college. One person was a graduate student.

Measures

Measures employed in this study included: 1) The Career Decision Scale (Osipow, Carney, Winer, Yanico, & Koschier, 1976); 2) Adult version of the Parental Acceptance-Rejection/Control Questionnaire for mothers (Adult PARQ/Control: Mother) (Rohner, 2005); 3) Adult version of the Parental Acceptance-Rejection/Control Questionnaire for fathers (Adult PARQ/Control: Father) (Rohner, 2005); 4) Adult version of the Personality Assessment Questionnaire (Adult PAQ) (Rohner & Khaleque, 2005). A demographics questionnaire was also used to gather data about gender, age, race, and grade level of respondents. Each of the self-report questionnaires is described below.

Career Decision Scale (CDS)

This scale consists of 19 items. The first 18 items are self-ratings, with item 19 providing space for an open-ended response to explain answers to previous items. In this study only items one through 18 were used. These are scored on a four-point Likert-style scale ranging from 1 (not like me) through 4 (like me).

The sum of items 1 and 2 comprise the Certainty Scale. This scale assesses the degree of certainty respondents feel about having made the right decision regarding an academic major and a career. A sample item on the Certainty Scale is "I have decided on a career and feel comfortable with it. I also know how to go about implementing my choice." The sum of items 3 through 18 comprise the Indecision Scale. This scale reveals career indecision. A sample item on the Indecision Scale includes "Several careers have equal appeal to me. I'm having a difficult time deciding among them." Because the Career Certainty scale correlated strongly but negatively ($r\ (118) = -60$, $p < .001$) with the Career Indecision scale, the two scales were combined after reverse-scoring the Career Certainty scale to create a measure of Career Indecisiveness.

Reliability of the CDS has been reported in two studies. Test-retest reliability correlations in these studies were .90 and .82 for two different samples of college students (Osipow et al., 1976). Coefficient alpha was used as the primary measure of reliability of the Career Indecisiveness Index in this study (alpha = .86).

Adult Version of the Parental Acceptance-Rejection/Control Questionnaire for Mothers and Fathers (Adult PARQ/Control: Mother and Father)

These two measures consist of 73 items each. They evaluate adults' perceptions of maternal and paternal acceptance-rejection and behavioral control experienced in childhood. Only the 60-item acceptance-rejection portion of the measure was used in this study, however. Accordingly, only it is described here. The father and mother versions of the PARQ/Control are virtually identical, except that one refers to "mother's" behavior whereas the other refers to "father's" behavior. The acceptance-rejection portion of both measures is composed of four scales: Warmth/affection, hostility/aggression, indifference/neglect, and undifferentiated

rejection, which is defined by Rohner (2005) as individuals' affectively charged belief that their parents do not really care about them, want them, or love them, but where clear behavioral indicators may be absent that the parents are neglecting, unaffectionate, or aggressive toward them.

Both versions of the measure are scored on a four-point Likert-style scale from 1) Almost Never True to 4) Almost Always True. Sample items on the father version include: “My father praised me to others” (perceived warmth/affection); “My father nagged or scolded me when I was bad” (perceived hostility/aggression); “My father paid no attention to me” (perceived indifference/neglect); “My father did not really love me” (perceived undifferentiated rejection). Scores on the acceptance-rejection portion of the PARQ/Control range from 60 (maximum perceived acceptance) to 240 (maximum perceived rejection). Scores between 60 and 120 reveal respondents’ perception of substantial parental love (parental acceptance). Scores between 121 and 139 reveal feelings of increasing but not serious love withdrawal. Scores between 140 and 149 reveal the experience of significant levels of rejection, but not more overall rejection than acceptance. Scores at or above 150 reveal the experience of qualitatively more parental rejection than acceptance.

The PARQ is available in over 30 languages and has been used in more than 400 studies in about 60 nations and ethnic groups all over the world. Analyses of the reliability and validity of the PARQ show that it is extraordinarily robust. For example, a meta-analysis revealed the mean weighted effect size of coefficient alpha, collectively across all versions of the PARQ, to be .89 (Khaleque & Rohner, 2002). The mean test-retest reliability across time spans of 3 weeks through 7 years (median 15 months) is .62 (Khaleque & Rohner, 2002). In this study, coefficient alpha for both versions of the Adult PARQ was .81.

Adult Version of the Personality Assessment Questionnaire (Adult PAQ)

This measure consists of 63 items, nine items for each of seven scales. These scales include: 1) Hostility/Aggression, 2) Dependence, 3) Negative Self-Esteem, 4) Negative Self-Adequacy, 5) Emotional Unresponsiveness, 6) Emotional Instability, and 7) Negative Worldview. Sample items include 1) "I feel resentment against people" (Hostility/Aggression); 2) "I like my friends to feel sorry for me when I am ill" (Dependency); 3) "I get disgusted with myself" (Negative Self-Esteem); 4) "I am overcome by my feelings of inadequacy" (Negative Self-Adequacy); 5) "I feel I have trouble making and keeping close, intimate friends" (Emotional Unresponsiveness); 6) "I get upset when things go wrong" (Emotional Instability); 7) "I view the universe as a threatening, dangerous place" (Negative Worldview).

Items on the PAQ are scored on a four-point Likert-style scale ranging from 1) Almost Never True to 4) Almost Always True. Scores can vary from 63 (positive psychological adjustment) to 252 (serious psychological maladjustment). Scores at or above the test's midpoint of 157 reveal the presence of significant psychological maladjustment.

The Adult PAQ has been used worldwide in over 50 studies and is available in more than 13 languages. A meta-analysis by Khaleque and Rohner (2002) of effect sizes cross-culturally showed that the overall mean weighted effect size of coefficient alpha was .86. In this study the coefficient alpha of the Adult PAQ was .92. The test-retest reliability coefficient across time spans of 12 through 18 months in the Khaleque and Rohner meta-analytic study was .76.

RESULTS

On average, men remembered both their mothers (*M = 92, SD = 26.04*) and their fathers (*M = 108*, *SD = 30.03*) to be loving. Similarly, women tended to remember both their mothers (*M = 104, SD = 43.27*) and their fathers (*M = 111, SD = 42.50*) to be loving. However, 3% of the men and 18% of the women remembered having experienced qualitatively more maternal rejection than acceptance. Nine percent of the men and 17% of the women remembered being more rejected than accepted by their fathers. Additionally, men reported both their mothers (*M = 34, SD = 6.30*) and their fathers (*M = 33, SD = 6.02*) to be moderately controlling. Likewise, women also reported both their mothers (*M = 35, SD = 7.39*) and their fathers (*M = 35, SD = 9.20*) to be moderately controlling. Despite having had more or less loving parents, both men (*M = 129, SD = 18.43*) and women (*M = 130, SD = 22.25*) reported a fair level of psychological maladjustment. Three percent of the men reported more maladjustment than adjustment, but 12% of the women self-reported being more maladjusted than adjusted. Finally, on average, both men (*M = 35, SD = 9.17*) and women (*M = 35, SD = 8.81*) were quite indecisive about their careers, with 35% of the men reporting themselves to be more indecisive than decisive; 36% of the women did the same.

As shown in Table 1, the level of reported Career Indecisiveness among men was

[Insert Table 1 about here]

unrelated to variations in their remembrances of both Maternal Acceptance (*r = .02, ns*) and Paternal Acceptance (*r = -.19, ns*), as well as to their remembrances of Maternal Behavioral Control (*r = -.05, ns*) and Paternal Behavioral Control (*r = -.12, ns*). Additionally, the level of reported Career Indecisiveness among men was also unrelated to the level of their self-reported Psychological Adjustment (*r =.24, ns*). For women, on the other hand, reported levels of Career

Indecisiveness were significantly associated with both remembered Maternal Acceptance ($r = .23, p < .05$) and Paternal Acceptance ($r = .28, p < .05$), but not with either Maternal Behavioral Control ($r = .12$, *ns*) or Paternal Behavioral Control ($r = .04$, *ns*). However, the level of reported Career Indecisiveness among women was strongly correlated with their self-reported Psychological Adjustment ($r = .61, p < .001$). Age was unrelated to any major variables for men, but it was significantly correlated with reported Career Indecisiveness for women ($r = -.22, p < .05$) as well as with women's self-reported Psychological Adjustment ($r = -.27, p < .05$) and with their remembrances of Maternal (but not Paternal) Acceptance ($r = .25, p < .05$).

Because remembered Parental Acceptance, Behavioral Control, self-reported Psychological Adjustment, and age of men all failed to be significantly associated with the level of men's self-reported Career Indecisiveness, men were dropped from further analyses. For women, however, remembered both Maternal and Paternal Acceptance along with self-reported Psychological Adjustment and age were all significantly correlated with variations in reported Career Indecisiveness. It was unclear however, whether each of these variables made a significant independent contribution to variations in women's reported Career Indecisiveness.

In order to estimate this, we regressed women's Career Indecisiveness scores onto scores regarding their remembrances of Maternal and Paternal Acceptance, Psychological Adjustment, and Age. Results of standard regression analysis showed that the linear combination of these four predictor variables was significantly related to women's Career Indecisiveness, $F(4, 75) = 13.28$, $p < .001$. The sample multiple correlation coefficient was $R = .65$, indicating that approximately 43% of the variance in women's Career Indecisiveness was accounted for by the linear combination of women's self-reports about their Psychological Adjustment, and remembrances of Maternal and Paternal Acceptance, as well as their Age. However, only self-

reported Psychological Adjustment *by itself* made a significant and unique contribution to variations in women's reports of Career Indecisiveness (Beta = .57, $p < .001$).

Discussion

Results reported here support a common conclusion that different levels of psychological adjustment and different patterns of family interaction tend to be associated with career indecisiveness among women versus men. In particular this study tested the hypothesis that career indecisiveness among men tends to be associated with different levels of self-reported psychological adjustment and with different remembrances of parental (maternal and paternal) acceptance and behavioral control in childhood from those of women. Results of analyses supported this hypothesis in that career indecisiveness among women, but not men, was found to be significantly correlated with remembered maternal and paternal acceptance in childhood, as well as with self-reported psychological adjustment and age. Forty-three percent of the variance in women's career indecisiveness was accounted for by a linear combination of these four variables. However, only psychological adjustment *by itself* made a unique or independent contribution to variations in women's reported of career indecisiveness. None of the factors assessed in this study were associated significantly with variations in men's career indecisiveness.

In effect, then, it appears that the less loving women remember their mothers and fathers to have been in childhood the more indecisive they are likely to be in adulthood. But because low remembered parental acceptance in childhood is also known to be linked to psychological maladjustment in adulthood (Rohner, Khaleque, Cournoyer, 2007) it is not altogether surprising that women's psychological adjustment is the primary factor associated *by itself* with different levels of career indecisiveness. It is also not surprising that younger, less experienced women tend to be more indecisive than do older women.

These conclusions should be interpreted with caution, however, because all information about career indecisiveness, parenting, and psychological adjustment are self-reports. From this one cannot rule out the possibility of response set being a significant contributor to these results.

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Table 1

Relations Among Remembered Parental Acceptance and Behavioral Control in Childhood, Adults' Current Psychological Adjustment, Age, and Career Indecisiveness

Variables	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. Maternal Acceptance	-	.53***	.33**	.34**	.31**	.23*	.25*
2. Paternal Acceptance	.11	-	.14	.40***	.33*	.28*	.12
3. Maternal Control	.71***	.07	-	.52***	.14	.12	.16
4. Paternal Control	.49**	.11	.71***	-	.11	.04	.15
5. Psychological Adjustment	-.20	.09	-.11	-.18	-	.61***	-.27*
6. Indecisiveness	.02	-.19	-.05	-.12	.24	-	-.22*
7. Age	.26	.16	.06	.07	- .24	-.20	-

Note: Coefficients below the diagonal are for men (maximum n = 37; coefficients above the diagonal are for women (maximum n = 90).

$*p < .05$, $**p < .01$, $***p < .001$