



FAMILY IMPACT ON CAREER DECISION-MAKING BEHAVIOR

Mary-Catherine McClain and Brittany Melvin, Florida State University

Until recently, career practitioners working with college students often focused on a single client rather than exploring how the context (e.g., families) of one's environment impacted career planning and the overall career development process (Paniagua, 1996). In addition to the family systems literature, which conceptualizes an individual being interconnected with other family members to produce a functional whole, postmodern career theorists have developed theoretical frameworks to predict how family roles and related factors influence career paths (Mitchell & Krumboltz, 1996). For example, home represents the first workplace (e.g., chores) and young adults commonly follow in their parents footsteps, whether that results in taking over the family business or adding to a family's generation of doctors or lawyers (Evans & Rotter, 2000). Agarwala (2008) found that the most significant influence on the career choice of Indian students was the father. Likewise, parent's perceptions of their children's interests and abilities and their specific expectations for their child's success can influence choices, beliefs, and career actions. Similarly, because college students typically seek approval and family support regarding specific career decisions, these students will likely experience a struggle if their career decision does not align with familial expectations. It should also be noted that individuals expressing inadequate emotional support from their families are more indecisive when making career decisions (Chope, 2000).

CIP THEORY, FAMILY IMPACT, AND CAREER DECISION-MAKING

The cognitive information processing (CIP) theory represents a theoretical and empirical approach that can be used to explicitly examine how families may positively and/or negatively influence career behaviors related to problem-solving and decision-making. Parrillo (2008) showed that attachment theory and CIP theory converge on the belief that an individual's perceptions and thoughts are the foundation for behavioral and emotional responses to experiences. More specifically, CIP theory terms any thoughts which have an adverse effect on career decision-making abilities as dysfunctional career thoughts and (Sampson, Reardon, Peterson, & Lenz, 2004; Sampson, Peterson, Lenz, Reardon, & Saunders, 1996) further contends that these thoughts stem from a maladaptive career schema (Sampson et al., 1996). External conflict, a specific domain of dysfunctional career thoughts, describes the struggle an individual experiences when attempting to balance his or her career decision-making ideas with that of his or her family (Sampson, Peterson, Lenz, Reardon, & Saunders, 1996b). Other aspects of external conflict include the inability to constructively apply significant others' feedback and the deference of one's career decision to the notions of significant others.

Several research studies have been conducted which link CIP and familial factors in career decision making. For example, research shows that individuals with more secure attachment styles had less maladaptive career thoughts, and individuals with higher levels of attachment avoidance showed higher levels of external conflict (Van Ecke, 2007). Also, those high school students who believed their parents respected them and were proud of them had lower levels of dysfunctional career thoughts (Parrillo, 2008). Level of familial conflict is also related to maladaptive career thinking (Parrillo, 2008; Dodge, 2001). Dodge (2001) contends that less family conflict allows for college students to autonomously make decisions while assertively managing parental feedback. Finally, social support (i.e. parents and family) has been shown to affect the career thoughts of collegiate athletes by 13% (Rodriguez, S. 2009).

CASE STUDIES

- 1) Laura is a 20 year old African-American senior at a large southeastern public university. She is considering a speech language pathology major and reports family as a significant negative factor in her career decision. Other factors affecting her decision include: financial stability, number of jobs available, interest in field of study, ability to do work, and ability to complete college coursework. Furthermore, her External Conflict score on the Career Thoughts Inventory was a 15 (T=>80).
- 2) Sarah is a 19 year old African-American sophomore at a large southeastern public university. She is considering a career as a psychiatric nurse practitioner. She lists parents, family, friends, and boyfriend (all significant others) as positive influences on her career decision, and her Decision Space shows family as a central factor in the decision, anchoring all other factors. Other factors listed include: income, job availability, community, expectations, difficulty and years to obtain degree. Sarah had an External Conflict score on the Career Thoughts Inventory of 5 (T=58).

TOOLS, INTERVENTIONS, AND STRATEGIES

- 3) Tools and Interventions
 - a. Assessments: Career Thoughts Inventory (CTI); Decision Space Worksheet (DSW)
 - b. Choosing A Major Family Guide:
<http://www.career.fsu.edu/IMAGES/PDFS/Guides/ChoosingAMajorGuideForFamilies.pdf>
- 4) Strategies
 - a. Conversation Starters:
 - i. Explore a student's personal strengths, likes, dislikes, and values
 - ii. Inquire about preferred career settings, such as working indoors or outdoors
 - iii. Examine whether the individual likes to be around people or alone
 - iv. Encourage volunteer work, internships, and part-time jobs

- v. Show techniques for researching a variety of careers (e.g., www.onetonline.org)
 - vi. Share family occupations by creating a career genogram
 - b. Consider Exploring: acculturation, language, religion, attitudes about work, and family work rules (Chope & Consoli)
 - c. Use the counseling process to facilitate: healthy interpersonal boundary development, increase assertiveness skills, and foster conflict resolution skills (Dodge, 2001).
- 5) Tips
- a. Family can be a positive or negative factor in career decision-making
 - b. Our recent data shows that external conflict levels may not significantly differ among ethnic groups

FOR FURTHER READING

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