The Impact of Parental Style on Career Interests

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What is this research about?

Career decision-making may be more complex than previously assumed. It seems individuals do not take a rational, systematic and independent approach to career development (Whiston & Keller, 2004). Family processes, such as provision of a supportive environment and parental expectations, could have a great influence on young adult's career interests. This study attempted to understand how parenting style can affect student's motivations for choosing particular careers and what those motivations might mean long-term.

How might parenting style impact career aspirations?

"In order to understand the role of the occupation in the life of the individual we must first have some understanding of the individual and of his needs (Roes, 1956, p. 23)." Two lines of research have proposed that the satisfaction or frustration of innate, psychological needs early in life have important implications for later life. Parenting style, and the resulting level of need fulfillment, plays a role what needs will be motivators later on, where interests will lie and overall well-being.

Attentive, Warm & Supportive Parents	=>	Need Satisfaction	=>	"People-oriented" or intrinsically motivated interests

Research conducted in the 1950's suggested that warm and attentive parents have children that grow up to be more "people-oriented" in their career interests (Roe, 1957). Recent research with self-determination theory (SDT) has shown that autonomy supportive parents have children with fulfilled needs and who, therefore, may choose careers that are intrinsically interesting to them (Ratelle, Larose, Guay & Senecal, 2005).

Rejecting, Neglecting & Controlling Parents	=>	Thwarted Need Satisfaction	=>	"Thing-oriented" or extrinsically motivated interests

Roe (1957) found that rejecting and neglecting parents were likely to have children with "thing-oriented" career aspirations (Roe, 1957). Likewise, SDT research has shown that controlling parents have children that are extrinsically motivated and may even seek status, power and materialism to compensate for unfulfilled needs (Kasser, Ryan, Zax & Sameroff, 1995).

What is Parental Autonomy Support?

Parents that acknowledge their children's perspectives and encourage them to choose their own activities and how they go about doing them are autonomy supportive (Assor, Roth & Deci, 2004; Soenens et al., 2007). Controlling parents pressure their children to act in a certain way or to choose specified goals (Assor, Roth & Deci, 2004) through contingent rewards, conditional regard, etc. Often mothers have a different parenting style than fathers, so we measured the students perceptions of both.

Other studies have shown…

…that **Autonomy Supportive Parents** have kids (and grown up kids) that are likely:	…that **Controlling Parents** have kids (and grown up kids) that are likely:
✔ to be satisfied in their needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness (Deci & Ryan, 1991)	✘ to seek approval through status, materialism or other symbols of worth (Ryan & Deci, 2000; Kassar, Ryan, Zax & Sameroff, 1995)
✔ to be more motivated (Ryan & Deci, 2000) and energized (Ryan & Deci 2008)	✘ to have unstable self-esteem (Assor, Roth & Deci, 2004)
✔ to be healthier (both mentally and physically) Ryan & Deci, 2000	✘ to perceive parents as disapproving and resent them (Assor, Roth & Deci, 2004)
✔ to be better performers (in school and at work) (Ryan & Deci, 2000; Gagne & Deci, 2005)	✘ to have poor wellbeing (Assor, Roth & Deci, 2004)
✔ to internalize the values of their parents (Assor, Roth & Deci, 2004)	
✔ to persist in science curriculum (Ratelle, Larose, Guay & Senecal, 2005)	

Parental Autonomy Support is *not* directly related to Career Interests.

Variables related to career interests.

Career Interests	Mother Autonomy Supportive	Father Autonomy Supportive	Need for Autonomy is Satisfied	Need for Relatedness is Satisfied	Need for Competence is Satisfied	Empathic Concern for Others	Able to Take Perspective of Others	Empathic Fantasy	Materialistic Values
Science									
Professional	.015	.036	-.078	.013	-.015	.096	.075	✔ .164*	✘ -.294**
Skilled	-.048	-.012	-.103	.004	-.070	.018	.017	.134	✘ -.202**
Technical									
Professional	.004	.025	-.071	.002	-.080	.088	.015	.137	-.126
Skilled	-.122	-.027	✘ -.175*	-.034	-.097	-.010	-.025	.122	✘ -.213**
Business									
Professional	-.020	.096	.031	-.014	✔ .165*	.010	-.083	-.009	✔ .330**
Skilled	-.073	.003	-.043	-.057	.075	-.080	✘ -.170*	-.020	✔ .245**
Clerical	-.137	.025	✘ -.181*	✘ -.149*	-.030	-.138	✘ -.161*	-.103	✔ .247**
Art									
Professional	.003	-.074	.069	.032	.018	.120	.071	✔ .343**	✘ -.149*
Skilled	-.064	-.044	.019	.024	-.036	.059	.032	✔ .247**	-.033
Service									
Professional	.091	.111	.097	✔ .187*	.041	✔ .374**	✔ .225**	✔ .214**	✘ -.255**
Skilled	-.068	.084	-.067	-.031	-.044	.041	.084	.105	✘ -.196**
Consumer Economics	-.084	.032	✘ -.200**	-.083	✘ -.183*	-.013	.000	.065	-.141
Outdoor	.015	.019	-.078	.005	✘ -.172*	.042	✔ .145*	✔ .227**	✘ -.298**
Communications	-.021	-.006	.143	-.007	.057	.088	.046	✔ .184*	-.077
Mother Autonomy Supportive	1	.334**	✔ .420**	✔ .297**	✔ .197**	✔ .202**	.120	-.034	-.114
Father Autonomy Supportive	.334**	1	✔ .362**	✔ .268**	✔ .294**	✔ .195**	.120	-.059	-.023

* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed)   **Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)

Parental Autonomy Support is related to need satisfaction & well-being.

Parenting Style	Vitality	Somatization	Anxiety
Mother Autonomy Supportive	.141	✘ -.222**	✘ -.173*
Father Autonomy Supportive	✔ .164*	✘ -.217**	✘ -.235**

✔ Means the two variables are related to one another in a positive direction. Higher levels of one is likely to be associated with higher levels of the other.

✘ Means the two variables are related, but in a negative direction. Higher levels of one would be associate with lower levels of the other.

Methods

Survey data were collected from 187 undergraduate psychology students at SUNY-Albany University. Students rated their mother and father's autonomy supportive vs. controlling styles. The survey also assessed student's general need satisfaction, materialistic values, empathy and well-being.

A career interests survey was used to determine what types of activities the students were interested in doing at work. Specific activities were listed and students were asked to rate how interested they would be in doing each activity.

For Example: How interested would you be in… doing a job that involves driving a big rig down an ice covered road?

1. Very interested   2. Somewhat Interested   3. Not at all interested

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Bottom Line

Career interests were not directly related to parenting style in this study. That means parenting style may or may not directly affect what career a child pursues. However, parenting style may impact the motives with which children pursue the careers they do choose and those motives might lead to ill-being in the long run.

Particular career interests were related to needs satisfaction, empathy and materialistic values. For example, business career interests were associated with materialism.

The implications of this study are important for parents, teachers and guidance counselors, who should seek to understand underlying motivations for career aspirations before providing young adults career development advice. Materialistic reasons for career pursuits, for example, have been linked to ill health. True interest and intrinsic motivation for a career is likely to mean better well-being, no mater what career is chosen.