

Starting out: Personality and online support effects on career agency and occupational engagement in young adults



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INTRODUCTION

Personality variables play an important role not only in seeking careers advice from different sources but also in feeling supported and engaging in career exploration. For example, the relationship between self-esteem and career exploration is stronger when individuals are proactive (Cai et al., 2015). Greater indecisiveness is associated with participants being less informed (both about their own preferences and the environment; Germeijs, Verschueren, and Soenens (2006). Highly indecisive students tend to have greater difficulties making and committing to career decision while less self-efficacious individuals are often less effective at using their social network to their advantage (e.g., Baker, 2009). Several environmental factors also contribute to career decision-making. These include, for example, having access advice and support online from career professionals or one's social network. Such support has the advantage that is immediately available and can be used when convenient for the advisee (Watts and Dent 2010). In addition, it allows individuals to seek information from peers online (Baker, 2009). Other sources of advice include lecturers, advisers and parents in one's personal network (Greenbank, 2011). Students have a tendency to talk to people in their own network, those who they felt more comfortable with but generally consult their parents and lecturers more extensively compared to their friends, extended family and careers advisers. What is unknown at the moment is the degree to which these sources of advice serve different purposes: to gain emotional support and feedback from family and friends about their own personality and perceived suitability for careers, while they may seek more impartial advice from experts and careers advisers (as this advice may not be influenced by family expectations).



STUDY AIMS:

The research examined: (1) The role of personality (proactive personality and indecisiveness) as a predictor of career agency. (2) The degree to which information seeking about careers (from different sources) is linked to career agency. (3) The influence of role models on perceived career support and occupational engagement.

HYPOTHESES

(1) Proactive personality predicts higher career agency in young people. More proactive individuals are more likely to search for career information as they are more motivated to plan ahead. (2) Indecisiveness predicts lower levels of career agency in young people. More indecisive individuals will have difficulties deciding on what they want, which therefore also negatively impact their career agency. (3) Access to information/advice from specific parties increases career agency (family members; advisers / experts). The assumption is that greater access to information from family or advisers/experts, the higher the career agency will be. (4) Having access to role models online predicts higher career support and occupational engagement. Individuals with access to online role models will feel more supported during career exploration processes and become more involvement with, commitment to, and satisfaction with their efforts into their chosen field.

METHODS

PARTICIPANTS AND PROCEDURE

The sample included a preliminary sample of 162 high school and undergraduate students at three educational institutions in Northern England and the American Midwest. Participation was voluntary and announced in class and research portals. Participants were eligible for research credit in their respective institutions. All data was collected using an online survey as part of a larger research project. It is a between-subjects design.

MEASURES

Proactive personality – Six items from the Bateman and Crant's (1993) Proactive Personality Scale ($\alpha=.787$, $M=31.87$, $SD=4.76$).

Indecisiveness – Four items from the Indecisiveness scale by Jones (1989) ($\alpha=.759$, $M=15.09$, $SD=5.20$).

Career agency – Seven items from the scale by Rottinghaus et al. (2012). This scale measures perceived capacity for self-reflection and forethought to intentionally initiate, control, and manage career transitions ($\alpha=.784$, $M=19.46$, $SD=3.14$).

Information availability (general and online) – Participants nominated the people they were most likely to contact in person or online if you need information and advice in order to make a decision about their professional future. Options included: Friends, colleagues, family members, romantic partners, advisers / experts from organizations, clubs etc.

Career Engagement – We used nine items from the Occupational Engagement Scale (Cox et al., 2014; $\alpha=.786$, $M=31.17$, $SD=5.68$).

Access to role models (online) – Dichotomous query (yes/no) regarding the use of social media (e.g., social network sites such as Facebook, LinkedIn) to connect with potential role models / follow news and status updates about or from potential role models.

Career Support – Used four items to measure perceived emotional and instrumental support (Rottinghaus et al., 2012; $\alpha=.889$, $M=12.67$, $SD=2.47$).

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RESULTS

Regression was used in order to test the first three hypotheses, including age and gender in the first step.

PERSONALITY AS A PREDICTOR OF CAREER AGENCY (HYP. 1 AND 2)

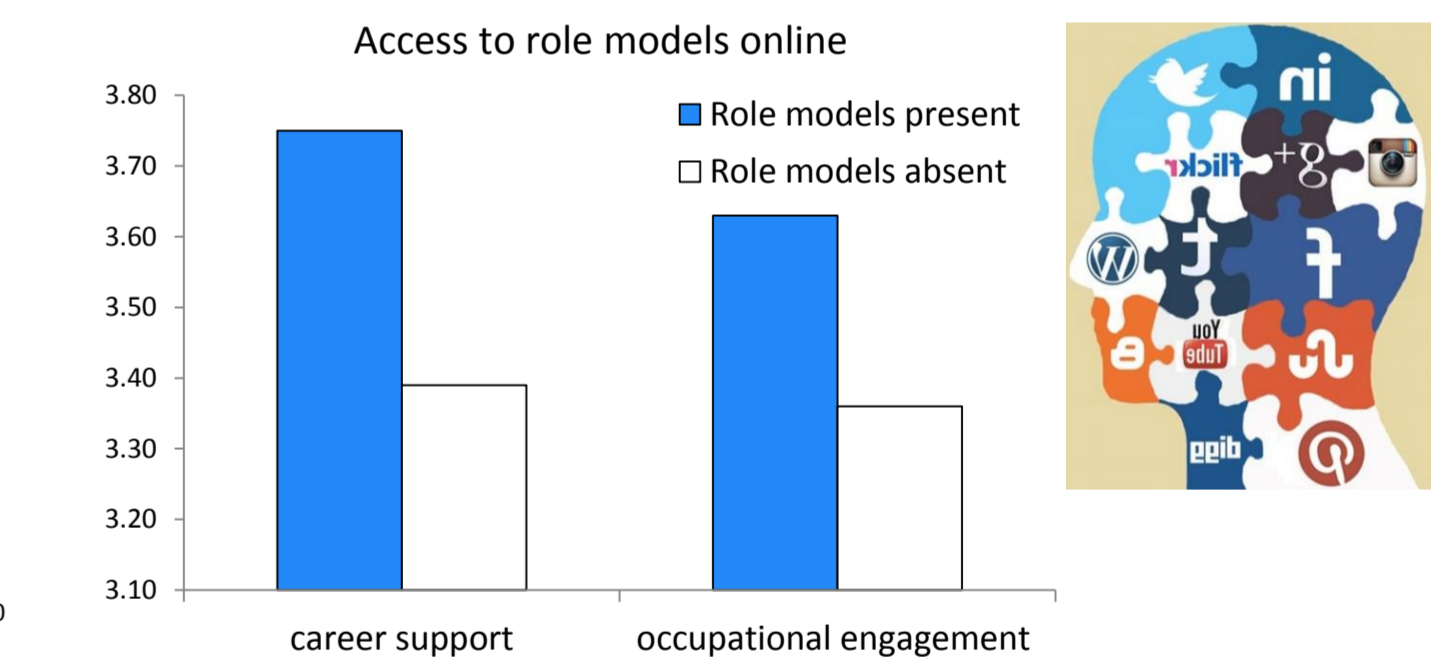
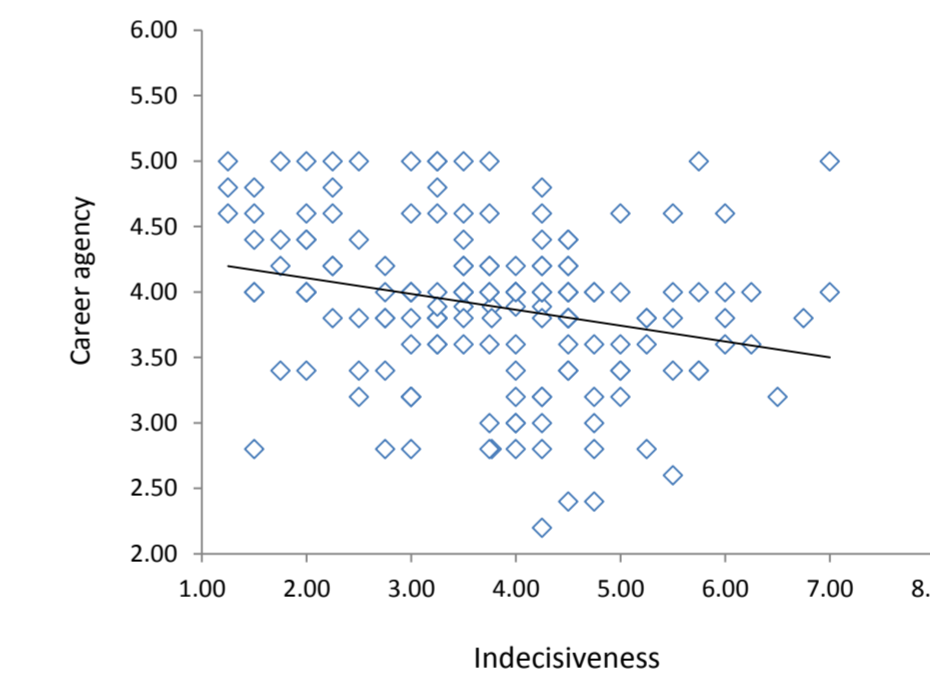
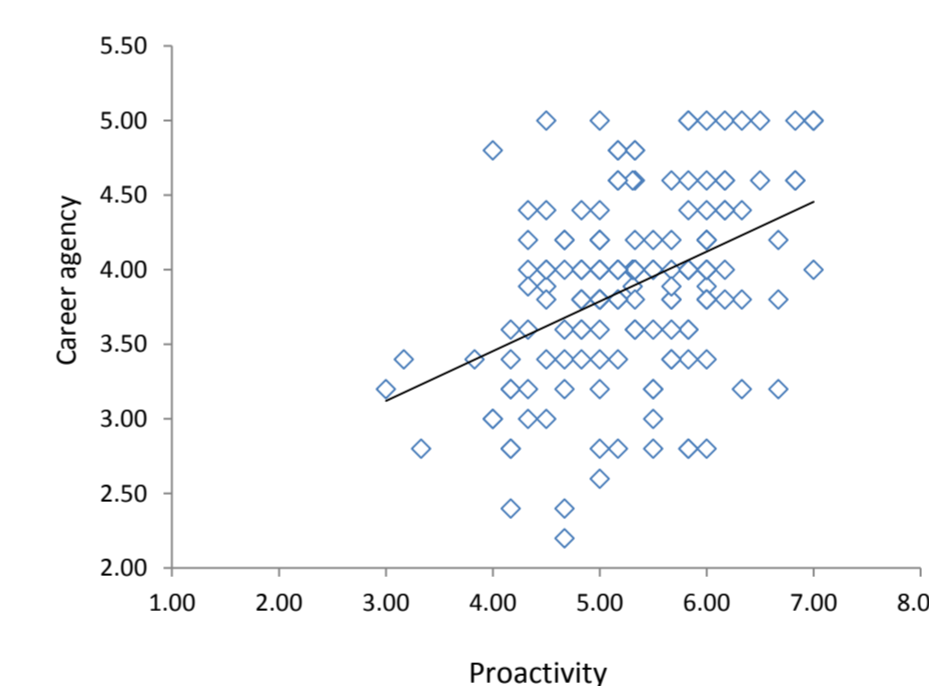
Proactive personality was a significant positive predictor of career agency ($b=.326$, $\beta=.410$, $t=5.409$, $p<.001$), supporting Hyp. 1. Indecisiveness was a significant negative predictor of career agency ($b= -.096$, $\beta= -.207$, $t= -2.556$, $p=.012$), supporting Hyp. 2.

ACCESS TO INFORMATION/ADVICE FROM SPECIFIC PARTIES AS A PREDICTOR OF CAREER AGENCY (HYP. 3)

Access to information from family members was a significant positive predictor of career agency ($b=.110$, $\beta=.174$, $t=2.129$, $p=.035$). We then followed the same analysis in order to determine whether or not access to information from advisers / experts predicts a higher level of self-reported career agency. We observed a similar finding. Access to information from advisers / experts was a significant positive predictor of career agency ($b=.232$, $\beta=.253$, $t=3.259$, $p=.001$). However, we found no significant effects to suggest that access to information from friends, colleagues or family were predictors of perceived career agency. These findings support the role of advice on career agency (Hyp. 3).

ACCESS TO ROLE MODELS ONLINE AS A PREDICTOR OCCUPATIONAL ENGAGEMENT AND CAREER SUPPORT (HYP. 4)

We ran an Analysis of Covariance to determine whether access to a role model online predicted the likelihood that individuals would feel as though they had higher career support and higher occupational engagement. We observed a significant difference in career support between individuals with or without access to role models online ($F(1, 150)=6.070$, $p=.015$). Participants reported higher career support ($MN=3.75$, $SD=.74$, $n=57$) compared to when participants had no such role models in their network ($MN=3.39$, $SD=.94$, $n=95$). We also observed a significant difference in occupational engagement depending on the presence of online role models in one's network ($F(1,146)=6.129$, $p=.014$). Individuals with online role models also reported higher occupational engagement ($MN=3.63$, $SD=.71$, $n=54$) than participants who had no such role models in their network ($MN=3.36$, $SD=.57$, $n=94$). These findings suggest that those who have access to role models may feel as though they can identify with someone in that network and seek support regarding career decisions. Those who do have access to role models may invest more effort to engage in behaviours relating to career exploration, seeking advice if they feel they have a role model to approach for support.



PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

Career advisers may wish to take proactive personality and indecisiveness into consideration when guiding advisees to explore their own career. More proactive individuals are more likely to search for career information as they are more motivated to plan ahead, so may not need as much guidance and support in working to achieve their own goals. On the other hand, more indecisive individuals may need additional support in searching for information. They may also benefit from help that helps them define their own goals and the steps required for a successful transition from education into regular employment. The research highlights the importance of seeking advice from both family members and advisers / experts as they may provide different forms of support. Those who seek advice from family know they are getting advice that is personally tailored to the situation, and may possibly feel reassured when their family support their choices. Advice from advisers / experts, however, may be more impartial and offer more insight into career options that the advisee may not have considered to date. In addition, also have access to more other information than those in the immediate environment of the advisee. This may then also serve to confirm decisions, or lead advisees to consider more alternatives. The results emphasise the benefit that can be gained from having online role models that may be available to further support career exploration activities. Advisers may wish to suggest networking opportunities or groups (not just face to face interactions) to advisees in order for them to connect with others in their situation and those who have succeeded in their chosen field. Those who do have access to role models may feel supported in making informed decisions and therefore engage in the process of pursuing opportunities and carry out activities related to achieving their goals.

Future research could assess access of information from different online sources such as online advisers / experts and information sources that do not require face-to-face situation. It may also be worthwhile to collect data at more than one time point, possibly during an important transition periods (education to work transitions, mid-life career transitions) to map information needs and responsiveness of advisees to different options depending on the circumstances at the time (as this may depend on how urgent certain decisions may need to be made).