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# the career development of 10 year olds

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The lifelong nature of career development described by Super et al. (1957) and others seems to be widely accepted. Theorists generally agree that career development begins in childhood and continues throughout adulthood. Despite this consensus, however, studies of the career development of children are relatively few in number, and only a small number of studies could be located that focused on the relationship of the career development of preadolescents to their family situations (Lavine, 1982; Marjoribanks, 1981). The current study was designed to provide information on the career development of children approximately 10 years of age and to explore the relationship of that career development to the children's family dynamics and self-image.

By 10 years of age, most children have passed through the Fantasy stage of career development when career preferences typically are linked to a desire for mastery and are moving into the Interest stage, in which enjoyable activities provide the basis for career aspirations (Super et al., 1957). Career goals tend to be more realistic than are those of younger children and begin to reflect values as well as interests. Children in the latency or preadolescent years tend to be less rigid and stereotyped in their thinking about appropriate sex role behavior than are both younger and older children, and this contributes to a broadening of occupational options and a receptivity to new ideas (Seligman, 1980). By the age of 9 or 10 years, children typically have a relatively clear and differentiated concept of themselves (Minuchin, 1977), with most in this age group relatively free of the self-doubts and anxieties common during adolescence. Erikson (1963) labeled the crisis of the middle-childhood years "Industry versus Inferiority." Self-confidence and the learning of new skills and tools have developmental importance during these years, with significant implications for the child's maturation into a productive and self-assured adult worker.

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The foundation for future achievement seems to be established during these years, and by the fifth grade, future high and low achievers can be differentiated (Solomon, Scheinfeld, Hirsch, & Jackson, 1971).

More than 30 years ago, Roe (1956) hypothesized that parent-child interaction and family dynamics had an impact on children's occupational preferences. Since then, numerous studies have focused on the relationship between family background and career development, adding another dimension to the study of career development (Brook, Whiteman, Persach, & Deutsch, 1974; Marjoribanks, 1984, 1985; Otto & Call, 1985; Schrock, 1981; Splete & Freeman-George, 1985; Weeks, Wise, & Duncan, 1984).

Although these studies have helped us broaden our understanding of the impact of family background on career development, most of the relevant literature focuses on the career objectives and patterns of adolescents and adults and emphasizes the parents', rather than the children's, perspectives of their family environments. The current study sheds light not only on the career development of 10 year olds but also on the children's perceptions of the relationships between their career development and their family backgrounds.

## METHOD

The primary purpose of the current study was to examine the career development of preadolescent children and to assess how the children's career development was related to their perceptions of their families, their self-image, their career awareness, their interests, and their work/family aspirations. The current study is part of a larger study that also included 5 year olds and 15 year olds. Data on the relationship between career development and the family dynamics of the 5 year olds has already been published and is used as a basis of comparison in this article (Seligman, Weinstock, & Owings, 1988). Twenty-four 5 year olds participated in the previously published study.

## Participants

Participants in this study were 24 children (17 girls and 7 boys) between the ages of 9 years, 6 months and 10 years, 6 months. Of the children, 16 were in fourth grade, seven were in fifth grade, and one was in sixth grade. Participants included Black, White, and Oriental children, selected from both private and public school settings, with most coming from a middle-class socioeconomic background.

The following demographic and background data were obtained from the children:

*Families.* One child lived with a single parent; the others were in two-parent households.

*Mothers.* Eighteen children reported that their mothers were employed outside the home, whereas 6 mothers were full-time homemakers. All

children whose mothers were employed could provide information about their mothers' occupations, with 17 being able to name the occupations. All 24 perceived their mothers as enjoying what they were doing. Interestingly enough, only 19 of the 5-year olds reported that their mothers enjoyed their work or home lives.

*Fathers.* All 23 of the children living with fathers reported that their fathers were employed outside the home. Only 1 child was unfamiliar with the nature of the father's work, as compared with 6 of the 5-year olds who did not know the nature of their fathers' occupations. Therefore, nearly all of the 10 year olds were familiar with both parents' activities, unlike the 5 year olds who were more familiar with their mothers' than with their fathers' activities. Of the children, 20 perceived their fathers as feeling positively about what they were doing; 16 of the 5 year olds had perceived their fathers as enjoying their work.

## Procedure

Each participant was seen individually for approximately 1 hour. All data were collected by the same investigator to maximize the uniformity of the procedures used. Once some rapport was established with a child, the investigator administered a structured questionnaire, consisting of a maximum of 47 questions. (Some questions were not asked if negative replies were given to previous questions.) The researchers developed the questionnaire after reviewing the literature on children's career development; the questionnaire was designed to provide a broad picture of the children's future career and family plans, knowledge of occupations of interest, perceptions of their parents' aspirations for them, impressions of their parents' careers, and the children's interests and abilities. The questionnaire included a 36-item questionnaire that had been administered to the 5 year olds plus 11 questions that would not have been appropriate for the younger children.

After responding to the questionnaire, the children completed the Kinetic Family Drawing (KFD), a projective drawing developed and described by Burns and Kaufman (1970, 1972) and updated by Burns (1982). Children were given a pencil and a sheet of white paper and were asked to draw a picture of everyone in their family, including themselves, doing something. Participants were encouraged to draw whole people rather than stick figures.

The drawings were scored according to the guidelines provided by Burns and Kaufman, which are designed to yield information on self-image as well as on many aspects of the artist's family (e.g., distribution of power, cohesion, differentiation, patterns of relating). Two people with graduate degrees and schooled in the Burns and Kaufman system did the scoring. Discrepancies were discussed and resolved between the scorers to maximize reliability. Validation studies suggest that the KFD is successful in discriminating differing family styles and assessing family dynamics (Annunziata, 1984; Layton, 1984; Mostkoff & Lazarus, 1983).

In addition, the children completed *What I Like To Do* (WILD), second edition, developed by Meyers (Bonsall et al., 1975), which measures the interests of children in Grades 4 through 7. It assesses four areas of children's interests (play, academics, arts, and occupations) using 150 pairs of items; children indicate which of each pair they like more. (A fifth area, reading, is assessed by asking respondents to report what they like to read about and to list recent reading.) *What I Like To Do* offers ease of administration as well as content validity, although studies of the validity of the second edition have been limited. Few other inventories, however, are available to measure the interests of this age group.

## RESULTS

All 24 children completed all three measures. We used both summative and statistical analysis in organizing the data obtained. Information on the children's interests and plans, though not statistically analyzed, can help school counselors to develop a profile of the career development and awareness of this age group. The following discussion summarizes the information obtained on the children's career development:

*Activities and Education.* Like the 5 year olds, all children were able to describe activities they enjoyed doing and could report their favorite activity or subject in school. Preferred pastimes included (in order of frequency, followed by number of children reporting each activity) playing sports (11), playing with others (6), making arts and crafts (6), reading (5), playing with pets (4), and learning (3). (Each child was allowed to provide up to three answers to this question.) Sports and pets were more important to the 10 year olds than they were to the 5 year olds, whereas interest in television was less for the older group. Mathematics was chosen most often as both the favorite and the least preferred academic subject; clearly, 10 year olds have strong feelings about mathematics.

The children were asked how well they did in school. Answers were coded on a 1–5 scale, with 1 = *excellent* and 5 = *poor*. The 10 year olds, like the 5 year olds, had positive impressions of themselves as students, with 11 children rating themselves “excellent” (1) and 10 rating themselves “good” (2). No children rated themselves as being poor students.

All 10 year olds had a response when asked to project how far they would go in school, unlike the 5 year olds, of whom only 10 could answer this question. The 10 year olds expressed ambitious educational goals; only 2 said they would probably not continue their educations after high school. Eight expected to complete a 4-year college degree, 9 expected to receive a master's degree, and 5 anticipated receiving doctoral or law degrees. Therefore, the 10 year olds expressed clearer and more ambitious educational goals than did the 5 year olds, who had little understanding of the relationship between education and career aspiration.

*Future Occupational Plans.* The children were asked what they thought their future jobs or occupations would be, what appealed to them about

those occupations, what they expected to do in those jobs, and how much education they would need for those jobs. All 24 ten-year olds named future occupational goals, compared with 19 of the 5-year olds. Although occupational preferences expressed by preadolescent children tend to change, 16 of the 10 year olds expressed only one occupational interest. Occupational preferences varied and included doctor (5), writer/reporter (4), football player (2), lawyer (2), painter (2), pilot, pet shop owner, craftsperson, singer/dancer, actor, secretary, construction business owner, and others. On the surface, these occupations bear considerable resemblance to those chosen by the 5 year olds, although "teacher" has dropped from the list. Both groups chose some powerful and highly visible roles (e.g., football player), and nearly all chose occupations they had encountered.

The interviews, however, indicated a stronger connection among interests and occupation aspirations on the part of the 10 year olds than on the part of 5 year olds. Hobbies of the 10 year olds were often closely connected to occupational daydreams, and 17 of the children gave interest-related responses to the question of what they thought they would like about their preferred occupations. For example, the prospective pet store owner stated, "I like animals," whereas future reporters expressed an enjoyment of writing. Half of the children seemed to have a good understanding of the nature of the jobs they had selected, whereas half had vague or inaccurate understanding of the jobs. Unlike the 5 year olds who had little understanding of the education needed for employment in their chosen occupations, 20 of the 10 year olds were knowledgeable about the academic preparation required to enter their chosen career roles.

*Parental Expectations.* When asked what occupations the children thought their parents wanted them to select, 8 of the children reported an aspiration they thought their mothers held for them, and 9 cited an aspiration they thought their fathers held for them, unlike the 5 year olds, only 4 of whom reported parental aspirations for them. Either the parents' hopes for their children have evolved as the children matured or the children have become more aware of parental goals for them (or a combination of the two). Most of the children felt positively about their parents' aspirations for them and perceived their parents' attitudes as supportive, encouraging, and open. Four children, however, reported feeling negatively about maternal expectations, and 3 felt negatively about paternal expectations. Most of the negatively perceived expectations were for the children to enter specific, high-achieving occupations (e.g., doctor, lawyer). One girl, however, expressed disappointment that her parents expected her to become a homemaker.

*Career Development.* Career development as a process was evident in the responses of the 10 year olds. Of the children, 13 perceived themselves as learning about careers through school and outside activities. Half of the children believed that they had already made choices in school that would have an impact on their future careers. Of the children, 12 reported that their occupational goals had changed in the past few years. Exploration of the shifts in occupational preference indicated a change from a mastery-related choice to an interest-related choice for 6 of the children. Of the



children, 16 reported that another person had had a major influence on their career aspirations (5, fathers; 3, mothers; 1, both parents; 7, someone other than a parent). This influence was communicated by teaching skills, role modeling, and discussion of specific careers. A total of 5 independent children cited themselves as having the strongest impact on the development of their own career aspirations. After-school jobs and activities also contributed to the children's career development; 8 had part-time jobs (e.g., babysitting, paper routes, mowing lawns, walking dogs), and 13 were involved in after-school activities (e.g., sports, scouting).

*Family Plans.* The children were asked about their personal as well as their occupational aspirations. All but 2 of the children expected to marry, compared with only 14 of the 5 year olds. Anticipated age at marriage was realistic, with 11 expecting to marry between the ages of 20 and 25 years and 7 expecting to marry between 25 and 30 years. A total of 20 reported wanting to have children, whereas 4 were not interested in childbearing, compared with only 16 of the 5 year olds who anticipated having children. Although 11 of 20 children indicated that they would like to have two children, the desired number ranged from one to six. It is interesting that the older children were more inclined toward marriage and children than were the younger ones, perhaps simply because those options seemed more possible to them. Neither age group expressed a clear preference toward having children of one sex over the other. Most of the children envisioned combining career and family and had fairly realistic ideas about how they would do that (e.g., hire a maid, use day-care programs, stay home until the children are of school age). These attitudes are consistent with those of the 5 year olds. The answers to this group of questions suggest that 10-year-old children have fairly realistic conceptions of family life as well as careers and perceive themselves as having a range of options.

## Analysis of Data

To analyze the data in a meaningful way and to maintain consistency with statistical procedures used for analysis of data gathered on the 5 year olds, we established seven data fields or clusters, with items in each cluster drawn from both the interview and the KFD. The clusters were designed to provide an objective and quantifiable measure of the children's perceptions of themselves and their families and to allow correlation of those variables with aspects of the children's career development. Content areas of each cluster are indicated later in this article. Items in each cluster were scored "0" or "1," depending on whether they were absent or present in the responses obtained from each child. Addition of scores in each cluster yielded a total score for each cluster for each child, and we analyzed relevant pairs of clusters using Kendall's correlation coefficient. The seven clusters included the following information:

1. *Professional Orientation*—based on children's expression of professional occupational and educational goals and their perceptions of the goals their parents held for them

2. *Career Maturity*—based on children's having a career in mind, having an accurate understanding of the nature and requirements of that career, having positive feelings about school and their own academic achievement, and having knowledge of their parents' careers
3. *Family Orientation*—wanting to marry and have children
4. *Positive Family Environment*—based on the Burns and Kaufman scoring system of the KFD, reflecting an active, positive, and cooperative family with drawing showing closeness, nurturance, and communication, with no barriers present
5. *Self-Image*—based on a positive and prominent drawing of the self, identifiable as the child's sex, and on a positive self-evaluation
6. *Father Positive*—based on a positive, prominent, and active father drawing, with the father placed close to the participant
7. *Mother Positive*—based on a positive, prominent, and active mother drawing, with the mother placed close to the participant

Statistical analysis yielded significant ( $p < .05$ ) correlations between self-image and mother positive and between family orientation and mother positive clusters. A weaker correlation ( $p = .059$ ) was noted between family environment and self-image. These data suggest that, for the 10 year olds, a positive relationship with the mother is important in the child's development of a positive self-image and in promoting the child's interest in marrying and having children.

These findings become particularly interesting when compared with the information yielded by the study of 5 year olds (Seligman et al., 1988). For those children, both mother positive and father positive clusters were significantly correlated with family environment, with the father positive exerting a stronger influence. For the younger children, a positive relationship with the father also was significantly related to both professional orientation and family orientation, which were significantly correlated with each other.

It seems that for children between the ages of 5 and 10 years, the father's influence becomes less important and the mother's more important. Family influence on professional goals seems to decline, perhaps reflecting the children's growing independence as well as the growth of role models and sources of information outside of the family. Family orientation and professional orientation are no longer significantly correlated at age 10, perhaps another indication of increasing individuation as well as of reality testing and specificity of goals.

Further information was provided by a comparison of the 15 scores on the WILD profile with the seven previously cited clusters. A significant positive correlation ( $p < .05$ ) was obtained between the father positive variable and scores reflecting an interest in active play and in the performing arts, suggesting that a strong father-child relationship promotes or is promoted by outgoing and physically active behavior on the part of the child. Children who indicated a strong positive relationship with their mothers seemed particularly interested in the social sciences and current events,



perhaps suggesting that maternal influence is related to an interest in people and interactions. Children with high scores in positive family environment were, not surprisingly, particularly interested in social rather than solo play. No significant correlations were obtained between any of the occupational interest scales on the WILD and the seven clusters, confirming the earlier view that the families of 10 year olds are only one of multiple determinants of children's career interests.

## DISCUSSION

The data suggest that, by the age of 10 years, children have done quite a bit of thinking about their future and can articulate clearly their career and family aspirations. Most are knowledgeable about their parents' careers as well as about the nature and entry requirements for their own career aspirations. As anticipated, career goals are increasingly determined by interest as the children mature. For children between the ages of 5 and 10 years, parental influence on career aspirations seems to decline as the child is exposed to other influences. Similarly, the importance of the child's relationship with the father seems to decline, perhaps because the children are less influenced by power and mastery needs and have become more self-aware and introspective. Maternal influence on self-image and children's plans for their own families has increased.

## LIMITATIONS

Although the results of this study seem to coincide with and expand on those of earlier studies, the limitations of this study should be borne in mind. The sample size was large enough to yield statistically significant findings but was a relatively small and homogeneous group. Most of the children came from a middle-class background and from "intact" homes. All lived in a suburb close to a large city and probably had considerable exposure to a broad range of occupational roles, particularly those of a professional nature. Ability to generalize the findings of this study to children from lower class and rural backgrounds, then, should be done with considerable caution. Children from those backgrounds probably have less information on professional careers and on the relationship between education and occupation. In addition, children from single-parent homes may well manifest different relationships of family dynamics to career development. For example, the mother, usually the custodial parent, may become a greater influence on career development during a child's earlier years and may diminish as a career influence by the time a child is 10 years of age, whereas men outside of the home may become a more prominent influence.

Validation studies on the instruments used are sparse and present another limitation in this study. In light of these limitations, we encourage readers to view the results of this study as suggestive rather than conclusive, particularly with groups that are demographically different from the group studied here.

## IMPLICATIONS

At the same time, this study does have a number of implications for school counselors and career development specialists. Important growth is clearly taking place in both the career development and self-images of preadolescents. Elementary school counselors can use information on the career development of this age group to guide their career education programs and to help families understand both the impact they have on their children's career development and the nature of that development.

The current study suggests that promoting a positive home environment as well as strong parent-child relationships, especially with mothers, is extremely important in development of self-esteem in children approximately 10 years of age. Elementary school counselors should seek to become familiar with the home and family situations of the children they counsel and should reach out to troubled families, making referrals as needed.

Parental influence on children's academic and social interests and patterns as well as on their thoughts about marriage and childbearing seems strong, but parental influence seems to be only one of many influences on career aspirations. Preadolescent children are exploring and testing out their interests and abilities, and schools should offer them opportunities to develop their interests and become aware of careers that reflect their interests.

Children in this age group have clearly given thought to their futures, have some clear goals and interests, and are not too young to benefit from career education and information. At the same time, counselors should bear in mind that children should not be pushed into making early occupational decisions. Most 10 year olds have not made enduring career plans. It is the verbalization of career goals, rather than the commitment to those goals, that has been studied here.

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