Article

“What Can I Be When I Grow Up?”—The Influence of Own and Others’ Career Expectations on Adolescents’ Perception of Stress in Their Career Orientation Phase

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Abstract: The future that adolescents are growing up to live and work in becomes increasingly complex and vague, making job choice a moving target. Thus, adolescents develop and are confronted with a number of different options for what job they wish to take up and have to balance their own and their social environment’s job aspirations for them. Prior research has suggested including more dynamic approaches to understanding career choice and counseling. In this research, we therefore draw on the possible selves approach and aim at understanding how far imbalance between adolescents’ own and their social environments’ expectations for their vocational future will cause stress. In an online mixed-methods study, 163 adolescent participants, aged 14–22, reported their own and their parents’, teachers’, and friends’ emotions, future orientation, and perceived stress regarding the career choice. Results showed a variety of expectations for future careers held by participants and their social environment, as well as emotions regarding these expectations. Positive deactivating emotions (satisfaction and relief) negatively predicted adolescents’ stress and strain and the older and closer to final job choice participants were, the more they reported stress and strain. These findings suggest including adolescents’ social environment in the career choice process.

Keywords: career orientation; future time perspectives; life design; possible selves; self design; stress

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1. Introduction

Anyone who is asked “So, what do you do?” at a party will rarely reply that they are currently at a party talking to someone. Rather, in almost all contexts, people interpret this question as the question of occupation, which plays an important role in our differentiated society in terms of how we see others and ourselves. Social status and personal self-development are linked to professional activity and the exploration of different professions. Self-images are therefore a natural part of exploration in the course of child development. Children express the wish to take up professions corresponding to prestigious or individual interests at an early age [1] (e.g., princess, doctor, content creator on social media, firefighter, etc.). Ideas about work gradually take on a more serious character during adolescence. This is not only due to efforts to promote career choice at school, but also to the fact that decisions relevant to work have to be made at school itself, e.g., which courses to take or which school certificate to aim for. While in Germany it is possible to obtain a school degree at evening school even years after having dropped out of school and thus to realign one’s career, this is, of course, the more challenging and thus less attractive way.

At the same time, the adolescents’ own ideas about their self in the future must be compared with the real-world possibilities—and this has become increasingly complex; everyone will have to compare the desired with the realistic future self (i.e., do they have what it takes to follow the career they aspire to?). Furthermore, the future that adolescents

are growing up to live [2] and work in becomes increasingly complex and vague, making the future self and job choice a moving target. Prior research has suggested including more dynamic approaches to understanding career choice and counseling [3].

In this research, we therefore draw on the possible selves approach [4] and aim at understanding how far imbalance between adolescents' expectations for their vocational future will cause stress as it entails the risk of loss of resources [5]. We accordingly present research focusing on adolescents' career aspirations and expectations as influenced by their social environment and their perception of future vocational skills.

2. Theoretical Background

2.1. Self-Image

The self-image, i.e., the perception of who one is and can be, is subject to change in the course of life, especially in youth. In early adolescence, that is, with the beginning of puberty, the ability to think abstractly develops and hence the possibility to reflect one's own self and distinguish between who one is, how one perceives oneself, and how one is perceived by the environment [6]. Cognitive development and increased self-observation and reflection increasingly enable adolescents to draw a picture of themselves [7,8]. In middle adolescence, most adolescents then become aware that a self-image can contain various contradictory characteristics, which results in the instability of most adolescent self-image. The adolescent may find that his or her own perception does not correspond to the social norms of socialization, the diversification of his or her own self according to different roles assumed increases, and only in later adolescence a balance between inconsistent self-images becomes possible [6].

The construction of the self is closely linked to the expectations of the environment. Information about "how one should be" or "how one should not be" are conveyed in institutions such as schools [9]. Corresponding everyday practices are also taught in families during the socialization process. In adolescence, being confronted with these cultural notions leads to the development (and subsequently to a lifelong development) of one's own self, which determines a person's thinking, feeling, and acting [9]. Hence, individuals are influenced by culturally shaped socialization and in turn have an impact on their environment and cultural conditions [9,10], e.g., aspects of class and gender. In other words, culture and self-concept dynamically interact.

2.2. Representation of the Self in the Future

Irrespective of the actual career choice, it is of great importance for young people to know what their individual ideas of the future are as well as what and who they think they will be in that future. In research, there are many different approaches to understanding individual future prospects, which are often described as a central characteristic of mankind [11]. Future time perspectives can be understood as the extent to which individuals plan for the future and how much they enjoy thinking about future developments. The ability to anticipate future conditions and derive current actions is also part of future time perspectives [12]. People differ strongly in their future perspectives [13]. People with an extensive future perspective formulate more long-term goals than people who have less far-reaching future perspectives. These people perceive a higher degree of usefulness of current actions for the future (e.g., saving money and financing plans for pensions [12]), for example, because a period of five years seems shorter and closer to them [14–16].

Irrespective of the extent of an individual's future time perspective, all people extend their self-image into the future, drafting representations of who they could become and using these images as motivators. To describe this, Markus and Nurius [4] developed the theory of possible selves. According to this approach, every person has several representations of future selves at any point in his or her life, i.e., ideal selves that one wishes to become, realistic or probable selves we could become, and representations of feared selves, that one is afraid of becoming. These different representations of who the individual may become in the future are not only based on past experiences, but also on social influences,

such as comparisons with successful athletes or unemployed friends [4,17]. Personality development can thus be understood as a process of developing and then pursuing or avoiding certain blueprints of the future self [4]. These blueprints of the future self are subject to constant change and further development by comparison with current life circumstances, so that original blueprints of the self have to be discarded at some point [18]; e.g., a 50-year-old will have to discard the blueprint of the ideal self as a professional footballer. A person who has detailed ideas about the representations of his or her future self in a particular area can be expected to be better at predicting his or her future and personal possibilities in that area [19]. This can be assumed to also be true for representations of the self in the vocational future with adolescents in the career choice process balancing ideal, probable, and feared representations of the self, which motivate their decisions to participate in vocational counseling and training measures.

2.3. Planning for the (Vocational) Future

Due to the multitude of terms in the field, some clarifications are in order. While the term “work” can be assumed to build the basis of the term “profession”, work is less specialized and does not require a specific learning process or set of experience [20]. “Job”, as a term, is typically used for short-term employments that do not necessarily require knowledge or skills that are, for example, taught in vocational training. Rather, jobs are opportunities to make money and can be taken up in societies with high division of labor as they do not come with any requirements and are easy to learn. In contrast to a profession, jobs only cover subtasks and accordingly do not spark identification with the work or the employer [21]. Accordingly, scientific literature sees “jobs” critically and König [22], for example, describes jobs as a typical modern phenomenon of a “lifelessness” of work in the modern materialistic work environment.

The terms “career” and “occupation” can also be classified in this context. Career planning means aspiring to a profession for permanent employment which requires vocational education and training or higher education studies. This is not the case for an “occupation”, which can be a job and thus does not have to take up and filled on a continuing basis.

Today’s adolescents’ prospects for their (vocational) future are far from stable. While stable future prospects and positive blueprints of the future self are generally described as beneficial (future prospects correlate negatively with anxiety and depression) [23]. Sustainability has also been discussed with regard to vocational education and counseling. Savickas and colleagues [3] have, for example, drawn attention to the fact that 20th century career theories assuming “stability of personal characteristics and secure jobs in bounded organizations” as well as “careers as a fixed sequence of stages” (p. 240) are no longer valid. Thus, predictability of careers has decreased and “the individual feels bereft and alone in a world in which she or he lacks the psychological supports and the sense of security provided by more traditional settings.” [24] (p. 33). In past centuries, and in parts of the world today, both gender and the family in which one was born determined the profession. For sons, it was common to take over the father’s job and daughters usually prepared themselves for an occupation as a housewife [25]. Turning away from these social regulations would cause serious conflicts with the family, possibly resulting in the complete loss of this important social resource.

The social context, especially the adolescent’s family, still plays an important role in career guidance today [26]. Accordingly, the life-designing model for career interventions not only endorses the presupposition of contextual possibilities, dynamic processes, nonlinear progression, and personal patterns, but also multiple perspectives (e.g., family, peers, teachers, media). “The person should be encouraged to explore the life theaters in which the different roles may be performed and use the results of this exploration in the self-construction process.” [3] (p. 244). Given that prior research has shown the effects of competing possible selves within a person, discrepancies between one’s own ideas of the future and those that family or friends have for the person can be assumed problematic and stressful.

2.4. Prior Research on Stress during Career Choice

People are not defenselessly at the mercy of stressful factors but have individual resources that protect them from stress and strain. The relationship and interaction between stress and resources is considered in the Conservation of Resources (COR) theory [5]. It is a theory of stress and coping, which assumes that people strive to build up resistance and resources and want to maintain and increase them. For this purpose, individuals, above all, use basic resources, positive self-attitude, social capital, material resources, etc. Individuals use these resources to regulate their social relationships, to behave appropriately, and to adapt to circumstances [27]. At the same time, these resources develop and strengthen in conjunction with the social environment.

Existing research on stress resulting from career choice has shown that the assumption that career choices always cause stress for the adolescent is not tenable [28]. For those adolescents who are stressed, it can be shown that there are references to their living environment, such as the perceived economic situation, sense of control, or parental, especially maternal, support [28]. As various studies have shown, this can result in difficulties in choosing a career [29,30].

It can be assumed that stress in vocational orientation arises from interactions of the adolescent(s) with their direct environment, such as home, school, or peers, which are shaped by and shape the adolescent's personality and culture. The importance of the environment with its function as a resource for coping with stress has often been underestimated [31] and prior research has mainly focused on individuals and their vocational aspirations and decisions.

3. Short Description of the German School and Vocational Education System

In Germany, schooling is compulsory until adolescents turn 18. From about 6 to 10 years of age, all children attend primary schools. Lower secondary education (Sekundarstufe 1) starting with grade 5 is organized in different educational tracks (Hauptschule, Realschule, Gymnasium) based on primary teachers' suggestions, academic achievements, abilities, and personal and family aspirations. Students attend these schools until grade 10. After that, students can proceed to upper secondary education (Sekundarstufe II) and gain a vocational qualification or the right to access higher education is acquired (gymnasiale Oberstufe) [32].

While gymnasiale Oberstufe (i.e., upper secondary education) becomes increasingly popular with students, vocational education predominates at upper secondary level [32]. Of the 785,000 graduates in 2018/2019, 513,000 took up vocational education in one of the just less than 330 training occupations recognized under the Vocational Training Act and the Handicrafts Code (Handwerksordnung) [32,33]. Vocational education in Germany mostly takes place as a so-called dual apprenticeship in which adolescents attend two different learning sites; while more knowledge that is theoretical is taught in lessons at the vocational school (Berufsschule), practical experience is gained by working at a company. This is intended to familiarize students with both practical and theoretical learning content. Lasting two or three years, the courses lead to a vocational qualification for skilled work as qualified staff, e.g., in an "anerkannter Ausbildungsberuf" (English—recognized occupation requiring formal training) [32].

As in many other Western countries, requirements of the labor market and job offers have changed considerably over the last few decades. Younger cohorts of graduates have been found to show a tendency towards higher formal degrees [34]. At the same time, demographic changes have led to a decrease in the potential of national workforce. Thus, professions with a higher formal degree and academic professions have gained in relevance [35,36]. In the near future, jobs requiring basic or medium qualification with many routines will decrease due to rationalization of workflow [37]. Currently, there is a discussion in Germany about the skilled labor shortage that has already started to affect some sectors, especially care and many skilled crafts and trades.

4. This Research

The discussion above shows that self-image is of crucial importance for the development of an adolescent's career perspective. The choice of an occupation can thus be seen as a derivation of the current self-image on the representation of the possible self in the future, which may become a source of motivation in occupational decision-making processes and vocational training.

As mentioned above, the future that adolescents today are growing up to live and work in becomes increasingly complex and vague, making career choice more dynamic than ever. As the career choice process may become stressful for adolescents, drawing on their social environment can be a resource of advice and stability. But what if this social environments' ideas of the respective person's future do not match the person's own ideas of possible future selves? We assume that discrepancies between the adolescent's ideas and those of his or her surroundings can lead to stressful experiences.

Accordingly, the aim of this study was to explore adolescents' ideas about their future professional self and whether or not these match with ideas uttered by their social environment. Furthermore, we explored adolescents' assessment of future vocational skills and finally explored whether these affect adolescents' experience of stress and strain.

The study accordingly aimed to answer the following research questions:

Question 1: What possible selves do adolescents describe in their career aspirations?

Question 2: How do adolescents perceive significant others' (i.e., parents, teachers, friends) ideas regarding their future occupation?

Question 3: How do adolescents assess future vocational skills?

Question 4: How do future prospects and own and others' career expectations affect adolescents' experience of stress?

4.1. Sample

In the summer of 2019, the participating adolescents followed the invitation to take part in the "Dream Job Survey" via the Facebook page of the Federal Employment Agency "Das bringt mich weiter" (English: "This will take me further") and the general career information Facebook page "Einstieg" (English: "Entry"). In this respect, the participants had already been sensitized to the topic of career choice and had at least dealt with the Facebook site of the careers guidance service. In order to collect more responses, it was advertised that participants could win one of a total of 40 KeyFinders (key fob that can be located via smartphone-app). The questionnaire could be answered from all end devices (mobile phone, tablet, PC).

The sample contains the data of 163 adolescent aged 14–22 ($M = 17.68$; $SD = 1.77$).

4.2. Instruments

The online survey contained both closed and open-ended questions in order to collect data adequately for answering the research questions listed above.

To explore adolescents' possible professional selves, we included questions supported by sketched images in order to clarify the meaning of the question. This support was chosen because previous surveys found that adolescents, and especially those with learning difficulties, could not cope well with the often very abstractly formulated questions of purely verbal questionnaires.

First of all, the survey contained open-ended questions prompting participants to name their dream job (what the participants would do if they were completely free) and their probable occupation (what they should do after everything they have learned and done so far). Furthermore, adolescents were asked about what their parents, teachers, and friends think they should do as a later profession. After describing their own possible professional selves and what ideas people in their social environment suggest for them, participants were asked to state what they thought of the ideas of these three agents and how realistic they thought they were. Probabilities were to be presented in blocks of 0%, 25%, 50%, 75%, and 100%.

Furthermore, the questionnaire surveyed adolescents' emotions facing the expectations of these groups of people concerning their occupation. Participants were asked to indicate the occurrence of six positive (activating: joy, hope, pride; deactivating: gratitude, satisfaction, relief) and six negative (activating: anger, fear, shame; deactivating: sadness, disappointment, hopelessness) emotions (reliability, Cronbach's alpha $\alpha = 0.77\text{--}0.93$) [38,39] with regard to the occupational expectations of the three groups of significant others (i.e., parents, friends, teachers). The authors of the Achievement Emotions Questionnaire (AEQ) [38,39] provide this classification. It is based on the assumption that there are both positive and negative activating and deactivating emotions. This assumption is confirmed by factor analyses.

In order to assess the extent to which adolescents' occupational expectations differ from their parents' occupations, the parental occupations were recorded with an open-ended question.

The general future orientation was assessed using a German-language adaptation of the Future Orientation Scale [12] (4 items, $\alpha = 0.709$, $M = 4.28$, $SD = 1.40$; range 1 = "does not apply at all" to 7 = "fully applies", e.g., "I have established long-term goals and am working to fulfill them."). In order to be able to determine the extent of perceived stress, the German version of the ten-item Perceived Stress Scale was used [40,41] ($\alpha = 0.832$, $M = 2.91$, $SD = 0.79$; range 1 = "never" to 5 = "very often", e.g., "How often in the last month have you ... " ... felt that you were unable to influence important things in your choice of career?"). The items were linguistically slightly modified and adapted to capture the experience of unforeseeable, uncontrollable, or overstraining situations and events in the last month, in relation to the choice of occupation. Full scales (in German and English) are reported in the Appendix A.

5. Results

The presentations of the results will be organized by the research questions noted above.

5.1. Research Question 1: What Possible Selves do Adolescents Describe in their Career Aspirations?

Concerning the career aspirations of the participating young people, the questionnaire contained questions about their dream job (what the participants would do if they were completely free) and their probable occupation (what they should do after everything they have learned and done so far). In a first step, the occupational segments of the career choices described by the adolescents were determined by assigning the numbers of the occupational classification [42] for each occupation. In this classification, five occupational sectors (production occupations, personal service occupations, commercial and company-related service occupations, IT and scientific service occupations, other economic service occupations) comprise approximately 28,000 occupational titles. These sectors are in turn subdivided into 14 occupational segments, which in turn are subdivided into 37 main occupational groups. For 13% ($N = 21$) of the participating adolescents, the dream job is identical with the probable occupation, for 18% ($N = 30$) it is at least in the same occupational segment.

When asked about their dream jobs, the participants provided a wide range of wishes such as animal filmmaker in Antarctica or astronaut, to very down-to-earth wishes, such as trade specialist. Some career wishes are mentioned by several young people, above all being doctors with 13 mentions and police officers or members of special task forces with 6 mentions. Fifteen participants did not give any details and some only mentioned a field of activity they could imagine, such as "something working with animals" (4.3%) or occupations that promise a high degree of independence, such as "something self-employed" (7.5%), "something with travel" (7.5%). Some of the participating adolescents themselves were found to consider their dream jobs as entirely unrealistic (24.7%) or assigned little probability (31.8%) to them becoming truth.

5.2. Research Question 2: How Do Adolescents Perceive Significant Others' (i.e., Parents, Teachers, Friends) Ideas Regarding Their Future Occupation?

A relevant part of the survey was devoted to the question of how others see the participating adolescents' future, i.e., what the participants said about their parents', teachers', and friends' ideas about their future and how realistic they thought these ideas were. Twenty-six percent of the young people considered the realization of their teachers' ideas for their future occupation to be completely unlikely, 23% said the same about their parents', and 30% about their friends' ideas. Only 6% of the participating adolescents thought it was absolutely probable that their teachers' ideas would become truth, with 10% saying that about their parents', and 17% about their friends' ideas. Thus, it can be concluded that the participants generally did not consider the ideas for their occupational future mentioned by their social environment to be very likely.

Regarding how adolescents felt about the ideas significant others in their environment (i.e., parents, teachers, friends) expressed for their possible occupational future self, we found that participants predominantly described positive emotions (positive-activating (pleased, hopeful, proud, grateful): $M = 2.79$; $SD = 1.01$; positive-deactivating (satisfied, relieved): $M = 2.78$; $SD = 1.07$) and less often negative emotions (negative-activating (angry, fearful, ashamed): $M = 1.49$; $SD = 0.66$; negative-deactivating (sad, disappointed, hopeless): $M = 1.42$; $SD = 0.67$) about their friends' ideas for their occupational future (see Table 1).

Table 1. Emotions of adolescents concerning the ideas of others.

Emotions	Parents	Teachers	Friends
Positive-activating	$M = 2.75$; $SD = 1.00$	$M = 2.59$; $SD = 1.03$	$M = 2.79$; $SD = 1.01$
Positive-deactivating	$M = 2.6$; $SD = 1.08$	$M = 2.39$; $SD = 1.03$	$M = 2.78$; $SD = 1.07$
Negative activating	$M = 1.74$; $SD = 0.80$	$M = 1.72$; $SD = 0.73$	$M = 1.49$; $SD = 0.66$
Negative deactivating	$M = 1.70$; $SD = 0.80$	$M = 1.73$; $SD = 0.89$	$M = 1.42$; $SD = 0.67$

The teachers' ideas were also perceived by adolescents with predominantly positive emotions (positive-activating: $M = 2.59$; $SD = 1.03$; positive-deactivating: $M = 2.39$; $SD = 1.03$; negative-activating: $M = 1.72$; $SD = 0.73$; negative-deactivating: $M = 1.73$; $SD = 0.89$). With regard to the expectations and ideas of the parents, the youths also reported predominantly positive emotions (positive-activating: $M = 2.75$; $SD = 1.00$; positive-deactivating: $M = 2.6$; $SD = 1.08$; negative-activating: $M = 1.74$; $SD = 0.80$; negative-deactivating: $M = 1.70$; $SD = 0.80$).

Overall, the data showed that 42% of the participants had the same or very similar ideas about their future profession as their parents. This was again determined by assigning the numbers of the occupational classification [42] for each occupation and then forming the difference between the number of youths and the number used for their parents' expectations. The closer the value came to 0, the more similar the wishes were.

With regard to parents' occupations, 4.3% of the participants stated that their mother was unemployed, and the same percentage stated that she was a pensioner or housewife. The mothers of 9% of the participants were employed in academic professions, 58% in a profession that requires dual vocational education, and 14% had completed apprenticeships at the time of the survey. Sixteen percent of the fathers worked in an academic profession, 58% had completed an apprenticeship, 8% were working on a job that requires training, and 8% were not working at the time of the survey.

Thirty-one percent of the participants aimed for the same or similar profession as their mother, while only just under 20% of the participants aimed for the same or similar profession as the father.

5.3. Research Question 3: How Do Adolescents Assess Future Vocational Skills?

In order to learn more about the participating adolescents' ideas about the current and future demands of the labor market, they were asked to name three things they think will be necessary when they reach the age of 25 in order to get a good job and be successful

in their careers. In addition, the participants were asked whether they already had these skills or what they still needed to do in order to acquire them.

First, the answers to the open question “What three things are important on the labor market (when you are 25 years old) to get a good job?” were included in the analysis and evaluated by the qualitative content analysis according to Mayring [43]. In order to enable a comparison between success factors in the future and the present, the answers to the question “What does someone have to have in order to be successful in their job?” were examined more closely. A comparison was made with the existing category system, which proved to be appropriate and was therefore adopted for the coding of both questions. Two researchers coded all of the data separately and compared their results. In case of discrepancies, codings were discussed until the researchers agreed upon a code for the statement in question.

Three main categories, Education and Qualification, Personal Characteristics, and General Conditions of the Occupation, could be identified as factors for occupational success (see Table 2) by means of inductive category formation.

Table 2. Three main categories and subcategories of future vocational skills.

Education and Qualification	Personal Characteristics	General Conditions of the Profession
a degree is important	secondary virtues	salary
“Abitur” is important	personal competence	location of the company
a good degree	social competence	interesting or satisfying
know how	“certain something”	opportunities for advancement
continuing education	stamina	appropriate work–life balance
acquisition of technical knowledge	flexibility or openness	good relationship with colleagues and superiors
acquisition of (professional) experience	well-groomed appearance	supply and demand
	performance	
	personal commitment	

The main category Education and Qualification consists of seven subcategories. While some respondents only generally state that a degree is important (“qualifications”), other participants specify their statement by naming a specific (“Abitur”, “higher education”) or good degree (“a good degree”, “good school degree”). In addition, know-how (“ability”, “knowledge”), the examination of one’s own occupation in the form of continuing education (“always keep well informed”, “continuing education”), and the acquisition of technical knowledge (“good technical or digital knowledge”) are considered decisive. Another elementary factor in this category is the acquisition of (professional) experience (“practical experience”).

The main category Personal Characteristics contains a total of nine subcategories. Among them are mentions of secondary virtues, i.e., character traits that contribute to practical and trouble-free coping with everyday life (“punctuality”, “friendliness”, “carefulness”, “politeness”), personal competence (“discipline”, “self-confidence”) and social competence (“teamwork”, “social skills”). Many participants also consider it important to have that “certain something” (“exceptionality”), and in addition to this, to have stamina (“perseverance”), flexibility or openness (“openness to new tasks”), and a well-groomed appearance (“good looks”). In addition, it is noticeable that the participants measure the quality of the work they do by their personal performance. For many of them, it is about asserting themselves in the job, so that the performance is another factor for professional success (“my performance”, “high performance”). Finally, according to the participants, personal commitment (“ambition”, “motivation”, “passion”) plays an important role in professional success.

The third main category, General Conditions of the Profession, is made up of seven subcategories. On the one hand, the participants name the salary as the decisive factor (“money”), on the other hand, the location of the company (“nearby”). Respondents also

expect a successful job to be interesting or satisfying (“fun at work”) with opportunities for advancement (“advancement opportunities”) and an appropriate work–life balance (“family compatible”, “pleasant working hours”). In addition, it is important for them to maintain a good relationship with colleagues and superiors within the working atmosphere (“nice colleagues and bosses”). Finally, they are concerned about the necessity of the profession and a sufficient number of (training) jobs (“sufficient places”, “many vacancies”). This subcategory is titled “supply and demand”.

Regarding the assessment of the vocational competences that will be relevant in the future, the results of the study showed that the participating adolescents predominantly considered themselves to be well equipped, i.e., competent. Of the participants, 52% believe that they already have the skills and knowledge that will be needed for the future labor market.

5.4. Research Question 4: How Do Future Prospects and Own and Others’ Career Expectations Affect Adolescents’ Experience of Stress?

In order to explore how career expectations and future prospects affect adolescents’ experience of stress, we first looked at the adolescents’ emotions regarding their future career. The analysis showed that all ideas about the future career tended to evoke positive rather than negative emotions, especially the own ideas about the future career evoked both positive-activating (joy, hope, pride, and gratitude: $M = 3.22$; $SD = 0.79$) and positive-deactivating (satisfaction and relief: $M = 3.01$; $SD = 0.92$) emotions.

In order to investigate how the emotions associated with one’s own and others’ job expectations affect the experience of stress, a hierarchical multiple regression was conducted. Preliminary analyses were carried out to ensure that the assumptions of normality, linearity, multicollinearity, and homoscedasticity were not violated. Correlation analyses revealed that only the emotions relating to parental and own career expectations were relevant to the analysis. The emotions the respondents experienced in connection with the career ideas brought to them by their friends and teachers were excluded from further analysis.

In step 1, the age of the respondents was first added to the equation. In addition, based on previous analyses, an influence of the young people’s experience of stress was found to be influenced by their more or less extensive future time perspectives ($r = -0.399$, $p < 0.001$). Therefore, we added adolescents’ future time perspectives (scale according to Hershey and Mowen [12]: $M = 4.28$; $SD = 1.40$) in the first step of the analysis in order to control their individual influence.

These two variables explained 15.8% (corrected $R^2 = 0.158$) of the variance in the experience of stress. After the emotion variables were added in step two, the model as a whole explained 31.8% (corrected $R^2 = 0.318$) of the variance in the participants’ stress experience: $F(10.78) = 5.095$, $p < 0.001$. The emotions explained another 15% after controlling for age and future prospects ($\Delta R^2 = 0.218$, $\Delta F(8.78) = 3.516$, $p = 0.002$).

In the final model, only positively deactivating emotions ($\beta = -0.404$, $p < 0.05$) were statistically significant with regard to the own ideas about a probable career. Table 3 reports the full model.

Table 3. Hierarchical multiple regression of the stress experience.

		Model 1		Model 2		
Variables		B	SE	β	B	SE
Step 1	Constant	2.679	0.917		3.424	0.934
	Age	0.060	0.044	0.140	0.020	0.042
	Future Perspectives	−0.203	0.058	−0.358 ***	−0.089	0.061

Table 3. Cont.

		Model 1		Model 2			
Variables		B	SE	β	B	SE	β
Step 2							
	P occup expect posact				0.007	0.151	0.009
	P occup expect posdeact				−0.042	0.140	−0.057
	P occup expect negact				−0.147	0.161	−0.147
	P occup expect negdeact				0.092	0.147	0.108
	Own occup expect posact				0.096	0.179	0.095
	Own occup expect posdeact				−0.349	0.175	−0.404 *
	Own occup expect negact				0.066	0.179	0.053
	Own occup expect negdeact				0.209	0.139	0.220

* < 0.05; ** < 0.01; *** < 0.001. P = Parents' occup expect = occupational expectations; posact/negdeact = positive/negative de/activating emotions.

In a next step, a hierarchical cluster analysis using Ward's method (squared Euclidean distance) was conducted with the items of the stress and strain scales. This analysis revealed two clusters: adolescents in cluster 1 reported less stress and strain about their choice of career (90 persons; $M = 2.56$; $SD = 0.59$) while young people in cluster 2 reported more stress and strain (52 persons; $M = 3.64$; $SD = 0.59$, $t(140) = -10.56$; $p < 0.001$).

The parents' occupations that participants had reported were classified into four categories (see above); academic activity, if an occupation requiring a course of study was declared; specialist activity, if training is required; learning activity, if no training is required; no activity, whereby pensioners and housewives and househusbands were also included here). We found clear differences between the two clusters with regard to parents' occupations (Table 4). Adolescents in cluster 1, who reported less stress, had more parents who were academics. In this cluster, 28% of fathers were academics and 56% professionals, and 17% of mothers were academics and 66% professionals. Among the young people in Cluster 2 with adolescents reporting more stress regarding their occupational future, however, only 9% of fathers were academics and 81% were professionals. Of the respective mothers, 4% were working in professions requiring higher education, 60% in specialist jobs, 25% in apprenticeships, and 12% were reported to not be working.

Table 4. Adolescents' perception of stress and parents' professions.

	Mother Academic	Father Academic	Mother Professional	Father Professional
Cluster 1: Adolescents with less stress	17%	28%	66%	56%
Cluster 2: Adolescents with more stress	4%	9%	85%	81%

In addition to these differences, there was also an age difference between the adolescents in the two clusters; the less stressed participants in cluster 1 turned out to be significantly younger ($M = 17.92$; $SD = 1.92$) than the more stressed participants in cluster 2 ($M = 18.96$; $SD = 1.57$, $t(124) = -3.144$; $p = 0.002$).

We found no connection with the desired qualification. Nor could we find any further statistical correlations of adolescents' perceived stress with their dream career, their desired career, or the occupations of their parents.

6. Discussion

The choice of a career or occupation can be seen as a derivation of the current self-image on the representation of the possible self in the future, which may become a source

of motivation in career decision-making processes and vocational training. Today's adolescents' prospects for their (vocational) future are, however, far from stable. The future that adolescents today are growing up to live and work in becomes increasingly complex and vague, making career choice a moving target. Career uncertainty and a broad range of career opportunities can be seen as characteristic for the 21st century [2].

As prior research [44] has already shown that career decisions may cause stress and strain for adolescents, the aim of the present study was to survey adolescents' ideas about their future professional self and what expectations they perceive from their social environment, i.e., parents, teachers and friends. Furthermore, we explored what emotions adolescents reported with regard to the different job expectations and whether career expectations and personal expectations of the future have an impact on adolescents' experience of stress and strain.

Results showed that the adolescents participating in this survey were stressed at a medium level. However, a cluster analysis revealed two groups of adolescents that differed significantly in their experience of stress, with younger participants reporting less stress than older participants. The difference between the clusters could be explained by the fact that the older adolescents are closer to making their actual career choice. Furthermore, adolescents who reported less stress also reported their parents having higher academic degrees. While we cannot be certain about the reasons, there are several possible explanations. If it can be assumed that economic deprivation can lead to increased stress in children [45], it could also be assumed that increased labor force participation or higher parental income leads to less stress perception among children.

A multitude of prior research has shown that adolescents facing learning difficulties in school also face problems during the transition to work life [46,47]. These adolescents drop out of internships and studies, and face unemployment more often than others. Parallels can be identified between issues in school, which are often related to unprivileged and uneducated family backgrounds [48] and issues in working life [47]. Extensive research drawing on SCCT (Social Cognitive Career Theory) [49] for understanding academic and career development has focused on career orientation as a lifelong process starting in childhood and during school. Deliberately upgrading adolescents' internal and external resources might help them deal with even unstable and unsupportive conditions of their environment [50].

Based on the data available here, it can only be plausibly assumed that mothers with an academic degree can be equated with mothers with a high income, because no data are available on the actual income situation of the families studied. At least as far as school success is concerned, there are studies available regarding the positive effects of parents' labor market participation [51] and especially those of mothers, which see positive effects on the children solely through the higher labor market participation regardless of income [52].

Both labor force participation and the academic qualifications achieved by parents and especially mothers indicate a higher willingness to perform, which is passed on as a resource within the family [53]. This makes it easier for adolescents to adapt to external demands and to implement their own ideas, which reduces their stress in life. In addition, due to the fact that mothers are still more involved in their children's education than are fathers, and thus mothers may more strongly influence career choice via social learning.

To take a closer look at the competences listed by the young people, a qualitative analysis identified three main categories, namely, education and qualification, personal characteristics, and general conditions of the profession. Participants indicated that they are aware of the importance of the best possible school-leaving certificate for their future career. In addition, personal characteristics such as reliability and a sense of duty are seen as important for the career.

Two aspects become apparent. On the one hand, the young people appreciate that their vocational success depends on a performance-oriented attitude to values. Adolescents are aware of the individual's responsibility for his or her performance as an employee, which is

expressed in necessary qualities such as “punctuality”. At the same time, these are precisely those interdisciplinary social and methodological skills, which, in addition to the technical skills, are particularly practiced in vocational training [54]. The adolescents thus seem to be able to realistically assess the current demands on employees and do not rely on being able to convince through personality alone. The second aspect is that the abovementioned interdisciplinary competences are independent of the respective time. In this respect, the requirements of past and present work processes are projected by adolescents into the future without being interpreted in a recognizably specific future-oriented way, apart from a few mentions of specific IT and computer skills. Only a few of the participants add to these further competences that can be recognized in terms of personnel management, such as creativity, innovative ability, or social and communicative skills. The third main category, framework conditions, covers the conditions at the workplace, which young people believe are necessary for them to perform well at work. It is therefore detached from themselves and relates to the workplace as such. It should be noted especially that the skills the participating adolescents mention with respect to career success are highly culture-specific. What might be regarded in one cultural setting as proof of great independence (e.g., moving out of the parent’s house), might be viewed negatively in other cultural settings. Adolescents with a migrant background again face difficulties to realistically evaluate the skills required in professional work settings [55].

In the further qualitative part of the survey, the participants indicated a large number of dream jobs. Just less than 90% of the young people stated that they were striving to actualize their dream job, with a large proportion concentrating on the acquisition of appropriate extracurricular or school qualifications. While the participating adolescents considered their teachers’, parents’, and friends’ ideas of what they should do in their future careers to be largely unlikely, these external ideas nevertheless influenced their emotional experience, although this influence was not necessarily decisive. Prior research had, for example, already shown that adolescents do only slightly adapt their educational and career aspirations to those of their friends [56].

It was shown that the ideas of all these relevant actors in the social environment for future professional life trigger positive-activating emotions in most participants. The participants reported far less negative emotions.

Regarding the emotions caused by the career expectations of others, only the positive deactivating emotions such as relief turned out to be a significant influence on the stress experience in the regression analysis. This may speak for the importance of the environment’s affirmative support for career choice behavior. For the overwhelming majority of participants, stress is not the predominant feeling. However, cluster analysis revealed a cluster that appears more stressed and worried. In addition, a correlation between personality traits such as future orientation and the feeling of stress can be shown for the whole group. The higher the stress, the lower the future orientation. A certain form of resignation could be shown here. A connection with the theory of resource conservation described in the introduction (COR) [5] could therefore be shown—a more extensive endowment with resources and thus a well-developed future orientation, as has been shown among young people from educationally disadvantaged households, leads to less stress.

The present study has some limitations, but they do point out perspectives for future research. Under certain circumstances, a purely qualitative research approach would be more promising for such a question. Young people are often aware that their dream occupations and career tend to be unrealistic because they themselves consider the feasibility of their wishes to be rather doubtful. It can be shown here, that the proportion of those who aspire to the same or similar profession as that pursued by their parents is low.

However, other studies come to the conclusion that young people, at least unconsciously, always develop their own career aspirations on the basis of their parents’ occupation, since the social role model is the most important source of information [57]. On the other hand, especially performance orientation is passed down through the generations, what explains that young people see their probable occupation in their parents’ occupa-

tional field only to a small extent [53]. Prior research has shown that gender plays an important role in career orientation and role models affect the idea of one's professional role with respect to gender. A self-concept that does not critically evaluate these patterns will restrict adolescents' career orientation and thus inhibit chances for development [58,59]. Young women often are more family-minded and state career and family goals as equally important [55]. Further research at this point might show that the level of qualification and the willingness to make efforts in this respect is similar to that of their parents. As an example, young people who want to become lawyers with parents who are engineers can be mentioned here.

Most of the young people surveyed here obtain information about their future profession independently on the internet (45%) or from the careers advice service (31%), which can be explained in that the panel is made up of "fans" of the careers advice service's Facebook site. This behavior cannot be regarded as representative, as other studies see a much lower proportion [26]. Other studies have also shown that adolescents use the internet as a first point of reference for detailed information on professions and much less for general orientation. It nevertheless seems to have little effect on the development of a professional identity [60].

Ninety-five percent (155) of the participants also stated German as their nationality, which does not correspond to the average for this age cohort. In this respect, the results reported here must be viewed against this sociodemographic background.

It could be shown that many young people have a detailed picture of their future self as professionals. Furthermore, results showed that on the one hand they are ably equipped to assess which efforts are important overall to fulfill their career aspirations, e.g., a good school certificate. On the other hand, it has also often been shown that the idea does not go beyond a vague and roughly outlined picture.

7. Practical Implications

This study has several practical implications for career counseling. The adolescents in this study showed a remarkable relation to work practice when they pointed out secondary skills such as punctuality, motivation, etc., as important for career success. Thus, it seems that there is no need to inform adolescents about the relevance of these attitudes towards work (see Table 2). Nevertheless, adolescents who have not yet acquired these skills need to be supported, which could be a focus of career counseling.

For sustainable career orientation, it is important that decisions are made without experiencing stress or strain. This research shows that this is the case when parents hold an academic degree (Table 4). We can anticipate that this is due to higher material and financial security and higher parental income. Nevertheless, there are indications that parents with a higher degree have greater ability to assess information (which is a skill taught at university) and thus better support their child's career choice process. To secure equal opportunities, career counseling should focus on parents who are less able to assess information. These parents could act as mediators in the career choice support of their children as this study has clearly shown the relevance of parents' career expectations.

One focus of career counseling should be placed on the role of gender and cultural background and their effects for the development of a professional self. This process should also consider a client's precarious background as, for example, an economically or socially challenged family background [61] or migration (see above). There is much evidence that migrant adolescents face specific difficulties in developing a professional identity, which could be helpful for overcoming obstacles in the new home country [58]. Often, even basic information about the strongly culturally shaped job market and vocational education can be helpful.

More subjacent problems, especially concerning the professional identity of girls, can be analyzed through extent conversations. Some projects foster the development of a positive professional identity in early phases of school and career orientation. In Germany, for example, girls can use the regular and established Girl's Day to get information and

explore different professions (especially of STEM careers) that do not match classic ideas of caring and education as female professions [62].

Adolescents' concepts of their selves in their professional future that are evaluated as realistic can become a strong motivator for work engagement and career goal pursuit. As the development of the self is a process, just as the career choice, it may be useful to consider creating opportunity for adolescents to work on their self-concepts at an early stage. Some of these opportunities are school transition processes in which adolescents have a chance to question different possible school choices, and accordingly, different possible career paths.

8. Conclusions

Future research in this thematic field should therefore also take a closer look at sociodemographic and economic variables of young people in order to better understand the development of vocational self-images in their development. In order to arrive at a sustainable career orientation as well as more equality of genders and social backgrounds, these factors should be studied in future research, especially that focusing on possible selves. It would also be interesting to conduct regionally differentiated surveys, such as city or country, in order to understand the influence of the direct environment on the development of self-image against this background. In this way, intervention and support possibilities could be planned specifically in order to be able to point out alternative professional selves. In this context, Life Designing can be a helpful approach to make counseling sustainable [3,63]. Beyond that, longitudinal studies could also look at young people's career development in order to be able to analyze factors for how adolescents can be best supported to put their career aspirations into practice.

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Appendix A

Table A1. German and English version of the Future Orientation Scale [12].

	German	English
1	Ich denke gerne darüber nach, wie ich in 10 Jahren oder mehr leben werde.	I enjoy thinking about how I will live 10 years in the future
2	Ich habe langfristige Ziele entwickelt und arbeite daran, sie zu erfüllen.	I have established long-term goals and am working to fulfill them

Table A1. Cont.

	German	English
3	Es ist sehr schwer für mich, mir vorzustellen, was für ein Mensch ich in 10 Jahren sein werde.	It is very hard for me to visualize the kind of person I will be 10 years from now.
4	Die Zukunft ist für mich vage und unsicher.	The future seems very vague and uncertain to me.

Table A2. German and English version of the Perceived Stress Scale [40,41].

	German	English
	Wie oft hast Du im letzten Monat ...	How often in the last month have you ...
1	... Dich darüber aufgeregt, dass bei deiner Berufswahl etwas völlig Unerwartetes eingetreten ist?	... felt upset about the fact that something completely unexpected happened regarding your career choice?
2	... das Gefühl gehabt, wichtige Dinge bei deiner Berufswahl nicht beeinflussen zu können?	... felt that you were unable to influence important things in your choice of career?
3	... Dich in Bezug auf deine Berufswahl nervös und „gestresst“ gefühlt?	... felt nervous and “stressed” about your career choice?
4	... Dich sicher im Umgang mit Aufgaben und Problemen deiner persönlichen Berufswahl gefühlt?	... felt confident in dealing with tasks and problems of your personal career choice?
5	... das Gefühl gehabt, dass sich deine Berufswahl nach deinen Vorstellungen entwickelt?	... felt that your career choice is developing according to your expectations?”
6	... das Gefühl gehabt, mit all den anstehenden Aufgaben und Problemen bei der Berufswahl nicht richtig umgehen zu können?	... felt that you were not able to deal properly with all the tasks and problems you had to face when choosing your career?
7	... das Gefühl gehabt, mit ärger bei der Berufswahl klar zu kommen?	... felt that you could cope with the difficulties of your career choice?
8	... das Gefühl gehabt, bei deiner Berufswahl alles im Griff zu haben?	“... felt that you had everything under control regarding choosing your career?
9	... dich darüber geärgert, wichtige Dinge bei deiner Berufswahl nicht beeinflussen zu können?	... felt annoyed about not being able to influence important things in your career choice?
10	... das Gefühl gehabt, dass sich die Probleme bei deiner Berufswahl so aufgestaut haben, dass du diese nicht mehr bewältigen kannst?	... have you had the feeling that the problems with your choice of career have accumulated to such an extent that you can no longer cope with them?

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