2014

Using the Life Story to Promote Identity Formation and Career Decision-Making in an Undergraduate Population

Courtney Jane Belmonte
Virginia Commonwealth University

Jennifer Wartella
Virginia Commonwealth University

Follow this and additional works at: https://scholarscompass.vcu.edu/uresposters

© The Author(s)

Downloaded from
https://scholarscompass.vcu.edu/uresposters/48

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Undergraduate Research Opportunities Program at VCU Scholars Compass. It has been accepted for inclusion in Undergraduate Research Posters by an authorized administrator of VCU Scholars Compass. For more information, please contact libcompass@vcu.edu.
Using the Life Story to Promote Identity Formation and Career Decision-Making in an Undergraduate Population

Courtney Jane Obis Belmonte & Dr. Jennifer E. Wartella, PhD, LCP

Introduction

- Career decision-making is a difficult challenge in an undergraduate student’s life. It involves identifying one’s preferences and goals for one’s future.
- It is an important precursor to career-preparation and transition from student to employee.
- Barriers exist within this process that make it problematic. Specifically, many students lack the essential elements necessary to make career decisions.
- Identity formation is one such element that can have an important impact on career decision-making. This process involves reviewing and understanding one’s past in order to make decisions about the future.
- Most undergraduate students have not yet resolved or committed to an identity.
- A narrative approach may be one way to facilitate undergraduate life review to promote identity resolution and thus increase career-decision making.
- To explore this hypothesis, McAdams (1988) Life Story exercise was assigned to students in an undergraduate Personality course.

Research Question(s)

- Can an undergraduate class paper project (the LS paper) increase identity formation and career decision-making in an emerging adult population?
- Are students with higher in identity formation scores more likely to endorse greater career decision-making ability (and vice versa)?

Method

- **Design and Participants**
  - A within-subjects design was used within this study.
  - Undergraduate students (mostly juniors and seniors) enrolled in Psychology 309 (Personality) course were invited to participate in this study. Participants received no compensation but could decline participation at any time during the study.
  - Inclusion criteria required continuous enrollment in Psychology 309 and participants had to be at least 18 years of age
  - 20 Students completed all tasks of the study (3 male, 17 female)

- **Materials**
  - Multiple questionnaires were used to measure identity formation and career decision-making (Aspects of Identity Questionnaire - AOI-IL). Career Decision Questionnaire, Career Exploration Survey Revised (CES-R). Two questionnaires (Aspects of Identity and Career Decision) were the focus of the current analyses (Part 1).
  - The Aspects of Identity Questionnaire is a 35 item Likert scale answered on a five-point scale (Cheek, J.M., Tippin, L. R., Chen, L. C., & Underwood, M. K. (1994 (1st edition)).
  - The Career Decision Questionnaire is a 18 item Likert scale answered on a four point scale, with one short answer question that will be analyzed in later research (Aubin, E. de, Logan, R.L. (1993)

- **Procedures**
  - Students were invited to take part in a research study that examined the impact of a class assignment on identity formation and career decision-making.
  - IRB approval was obtained and students were invited, but not required, to take part in the study.
  - Research assistant conducted informed consent and distributed and collected all questionnaires.
  - All questionnaires were given at the beginning of the third week of class prior to the assignment of the Life Story Exercise.
  - After completion of the Life Story Exercise (submitted near the conclusion of the course), questionnaires were given again to students participating in the study (approximately the 12th week of classes).
  - The principal investigator (PI), or professor, stepped out of the room to remain completely anonymous about student participation. All participants were given e-IDs to keep the professor blind to their participation (to prevent any grading biases in the course itself).
  - The research assistant (RA) remained in the room to collect all the measures and answer questions.
  - The RA created and organized the data base and entered all the data points for the questionnaires.

- **Statistical Analyses**
  - The three dependent variables of interest were: personal identity formation, career formation, and career indecision.
  - A one-way repeated measures ANOVA was done to assess the relationship of the class assignment on identity formation and career decision-making.
  - SPSS version 20.0 was used to perform this analysis.

Example of Life Story Exercise (McAdams, 1998):

- Students were invited to take part in a research study that examined the impact of a class assignment on identity formation and career decision-making.
- An undergraduate class paper project (the LS paper) is due at the end of the week. The professor will analyze the paper for the presence of research variables, or a fear that their grade might be negatively impacted by their stories.
- The LS exercise submission is due on the last day of the week. This may be due to the fact that students felt uncomfortable offering their LS papers to the professor to be analyzed for the presence of research variables, or a fear that their grade might be negatively impacted by their stories.

Results

- **Statistically significant differences were found in career decision-making (students endorsed greater career decision-making upon LS completion), F(19)=2.37, p<.05 but not identity formation, although a trend toward increased identity formation emerged.**

Discussion/Conclusion

- Data reveals that students career decision-making increased following their undergraduate participation in the LS exercise.
- Students endorsed a trend of increased identity formation following participation in the LS exercise as well. This relationship did not meet statistical significance, however, likely due to low power in this study.
- As such, the LS exercise may represent a feasible and useful exercise for bolstering student identity formation, which has been identified by past studies as a potential barrier to career decision-making and ultimately, career preparedness.
- Qualitative research to further understand these relationships and determine what specific aspects (LS themes, etc.) of student LS papers may have the strongest impact on those variables that may also provide important information for solidifying identity formation and increasing career decision-making. The analysis of student LS paper’s will comprise Part 2 of this project and is planned for completion this summer 2013.
- Additional research is needed with a larger recruitment plan and students from other university courses to confirm these results and be able to generalize them to the larger undergraduate population. Anstel findings to date are quite promising for assisting undergraduates attempting to transition from student to career and may represent a first step toward resolving their reluctance to begin career preparation upon better understanding of their experiences and interests. More research is needed to continue exploring these relationships and creating a feasible intervention to help undergraduates struggling with this impending change.

Limitations

- Attrition was certainly an issue within this study (50% attrition occurred between pre and post LS study exercise submission). This may be due to the fact that students felt uncomfortable offering their LS papers to the professor to be analyzed for the presence of research variables, or a fear that their grade might be negatively impacted by their stories.
- Numerous students did not answer all items of the questionnaires, thus their data could not be used.
- Power of the population was low and limited to a specific undergraduate class; additional studies that are more inclusive of all undergraduate majors (especially those not to be taught by the PI) would likely yield less attrition and will be considered for future studies.

Acknowledgements

- Thank you to the VCU Institutional Review Board (IRB) for approving the study.

References


- The power motive. New York: The Free Press