Adolescent engagement and the post-school transition
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What is phase-adequate engagement?
When approaching high school graduation, youths’ imminent developmental task is making a decision about their next career step and taking action towards actualizing their choice.

1. How critical, thus, is on-time regulation of the career task, i.e., phase-adequate engagement?
2. What predicts whether they will stagnate?

Phase-adequate engagement constitutes of

**Developmental regulation theories**
Heckhausen et al.: (2004) described action cycles of setting, striving for, and disengagement from developmental goals. Individuals who set and strive for developmental goals which are in accordance with their developmental tasks maximize the chances of goal attainment. Adaptive and maladaptive strategies of engagement and disengagement exist for different phases in the action cycle.

Brändstätter: (2000) proposed a dual process model of coping with developmental tasks between factual and desired developmental outcomes. Two coping strategies, assimilation and accommodation, come about with different modes of information processing.

Salmela-Aro // Nurmi: (2000, 2008) aged graded norms and standards structure development. Adolescents are actively producing their development but sometimes face difficulties during goal striving and have to adjust their rules and strategies to the new situation. Adolescents strive to accomplish their goals within their social contexts. Last, youths integrate the experiences they make and make new information into their self-concept.


**Identity theories**
Luyckx et al. // Meeus and Crockett: (2008) emerged from Marcia’s (1966) proposition of two fundamental dimensions of identity development, i.e., exploration and commitment. In summary, the two theories posit that individuals initially make and later on identity or re-evaluate their commitments. Adolescents also explore in-depth to look at and compare alternative possibilities. After they are committed, individuals explore in-depth which serves the strengthening of existing commitments. Last, adolescents also manage their commitments through questioning and refining present commitments.

Kunnen et al.: (2001, 2004) asset that age graded expectations and tasks trigger commitment-relevant events which support in existing commitments. Enduring challenge may lead to identity conflict that is characterized by an increase in exploration and a decrease in the strength of the current commitment. Eventually, new commitments emerge. Interindividual differences exist in how individuals cope with identity conflicts. People advance first, later they accommodate or withdraw.

**Career development theories**
Savickas: (1982) sees the development and implementation of an individual’s vocational self-concept as a central process of career development. Vocational behavior is triggered by developmental tasks and transitions. The readiness and resources for the successful mastery of career tasks are subsumed under the concept of career adaptability. Career adaptation is defined as career planning, becoming tasks, activity and autonomously making decisions, exploring the self and the world of work as well as the fit between both, and establishing self-efficacy and self-esteem regarding the mastery of career tasks. During adolescence, exploration is the initial coping behavior for the mastery of current career tasks.

Vondracek et al.: (1984) proposed a goodness-of-fit model in career development which postulates that optimal developmental outcomes result from a match between individual characteristics and contextual demands.

**Synthesis: Towards a model of phase-adequate engagement**
When taking a holistic view on adolescents’ engagement, an integration of several conceptualizations is useful. In some instances, previous research has already established links between the theories described above. In this view, several prominent observed strategies between the development of intentional self-regulation and identity (e.g., Brandstätter, 2000; Gestsdóttir & Lerner, 2008; Schweibl et al., 2006). For instance, individuals need the ability to form abstract representations of the self (i.e., identity representations) in order to set and pursue developmental goals (Brandstätter, 2000). Moreover, exploration and commitment have been framed as means for agents’ self-development (e.g., Kräcke & Heckhausen, 2008; Nurmi, 2001, 2004) involving the development of life’s self-concepts (Baltes, 2000).

With respect to adolescents’ developmental regulation at career transitions the described models share several commonalities which can be integrated into a comprehensive perspective. This perspective can be summarized in four main propositions.

1. **Age-graded career developmental tasks and transitions trigger adolescents’ intentional efforts towards accomplishment of these tasks (Heckhausen et al., 2010; Nurmi, 2004; Salmela-Aro, 2009).**
   - Prompt identity development (Grotjahn, 1987; Kunnem & Bosma, 2000), and stimulate vocational behavior (Kräcke & Schmidt-Rohrkind, 2001; Savickas, 2005).

2. **Adolescents’ intentional efforts towards accomplishing developmental tasks can also be phase-adequate (Brandstädtter, 2009; Heckhausen et al., 2010; Kunnen et al., 2001; Nurmi, 2004; Salmela-Aro, 2009), particularly in case of contextual constraints.**
   - Phase-adequate engagement is beneficial for adolescents. It can pay off in terms of attainment of one’s career-related goals, well-being, and satisfaction with a chosen career option (Gati & Asher, 2001; Germaine & Verschueren, 2007; Heckhausen et al., 2010; Nurmi, 2004; Salmela-Aro, 2009; Savickas, 2005).

3. **Engagement as action in context**
   - Following the development as action in context paradigm (e.g., Silbereisen, Eyferth, & Rädinger, 1986; Vondracek et al., 1986), adolescents cope with the developmental task of making an occupational choice not only depending on their individual capacities, but their behavior is intertwined with the activities of others in their social context and bound to societal and institutional constraints. However, little is known about how phase-adequate engagement is complemented and affected by the behavior of significant others. Specific theoretical models of how the social context interacts with phase-adequate engagement are rare.

4. The model of phase-adequate engagement will thus incorporate a research overview and theoretical predictions for the role of proximal (co-regulation with parents and peers) and distal contexts (societal and institutional boundaries).