Compromise, well-being, and action behaviours
in young adults in career transition

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Abstract
We surveyed 186 first year university students and assessed their level of career compromise associated with making the transition to university. Compromise was operationalised as the discrepancy between the job characteristics of ideal and expected occupations. We also assessed career well-being (satisfaction, distress), action behaviours (planning, exploration), and goal adjustment (disengagement, re-engagement). We expected compromise to be negatively associated with well-being and positively associated with action behaviours, and the relationship between compromise and the outcome variables (well-being, action behaviours) to be moderated by goal adjustment. Compromise was negatively associated with well-being, but not associated with planning or exploration, although the compromise x goal adjustment interaction was significant. Disengagement and re-engagement were not associated with well-being, although the disengagement x re-engagement interaction was significant. Disengagement was associated with planning and exploration, re-engagement was associated with exploration, and both interaction terms were significant.

Keywords: career compromise; career well-being; career action behaviours; goal adjustment; goal disengagement; goal re-engagement; career adaptability
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The task of deciding on a career is an important aspect of transitioning from childhood and adolescent roles to being part of the adult workforce (Super, Savickas, & Super, 1996). In meeting this transitional task, young people assess their own interests, abilities and opportunities, and accept or reject particular careers as possible options for themselves. They also become aware of constraints that may result in the need for compromise on desired career options: constraints that require them to give up more attractive, but less feasible, options, and pursue more practical and obtainable ones (Gottfredson, 2005). While discarding unattainable occupations and adopting new work goals is a normal part of settling on a career, there is limited research into the career compromise process; in particular, there is very little research that has examined the effects of career compromise on the individual, and virtually no research that has assessed what characteristics or strategies might facilitate or impede career progress after having to compromise on a desired career (Blanchard & Lichtenberg, 2003; Tsaousides & Jome, 2008). The current study sought to add to our understanding of career compromise by (a) testing whether career compromise was associated with career-related well-being (operationalised as career satisfaction and career distress), (b) testing whether career compromise was associated with career-related action behaviours (operationalised as career planning and career exploration), and (c) testing whether the capacity to adjust to a change in career goals (operationalised as the ability to disengage from a discarded career goal and re-engage in a new career goal; Wrosch, Scheier, Miller, Schulz, & Carver, 2003), affected (i.e., moderated) the relationship between career compromise and career-
related well-being, and moderated the relationship between career compromise and
career action behaviours. See Figure 1.

Insert Figure 1 about here

**Career Compromise**

Virtually all career theories allude to, or specifically incorporate, a process of
career compromise. For example, Holland’s (1997) person-environment fit theory of
careers proposes that individuals develop an awareness of their own abilities,
interests and needs, and seek out occupations that require their capabilities and satisfy their needs; that is, match their personality with the personality of the occupation. While individuals may be attracted to a range of occupations, they are more likely to be successful and satisfied when they select occupations that offer a good fit for their personality (i.e., they should discard options that do not provide a good person-environment fit, even if they are attractive to the individual). Second, social cognitive career theory (Lent, Brown, & Hacket, 1996) promotes the development of self-efficacy and ability/outcome contingency relationships as key drivers of career choice (i.e., holding efficacy for a particular area and believing that effort expended towards that area will bring rewards, will lead individuals to set goals in that direction), but that encountering barriers to those goals will lead individuals to re-appraise their career direction (i.e., they will compromise on a particular set goal and redirect efforts elsewhere). However, the career theory that most explicitly addresses the career compromise process is that proposed by Gottfredson (2005). Gottfredson argues that individuals are attracted initially to occupations that are, in turn, consistent with their gender, values and self-concept (i.e., individuals circumscribe or delineate occupations that are desirable), and then,
when confronted with the realities of the occupational environment, compromise on their most desirable occupations and shift their orientation to more achievable ones.

Compromising on a career goal parallels the process of goal adjustment (Wrosch, Scheier, et al., 2003) in goal setting theory (Locke & Latham, 2002). From this perspective, individual behaviour is purposeful and motivated by the goals that individuals set for themselves, or are set by others (e.g., set by curriculum goals in education settings). Goals, and behaviours associated with goals, are continually monitored (consciously and unconsciously), and when discrepancies occur between where an individual wants to be (i.e., their goal) and their current situation (i.e., what they have achieved), goal adjustment strategies are likely to come into play. These goal adjustment strategies can involve an adjustment to the goal itself (e.g., raising or lowering the goal), an adjustment to the energies expended on the goal (e.g., increasing or decreasing the behaviours associated with meeting that goal), or adjustments to both means and ends (e.g., lowering the goal and reducing the effort currently expended to meet it; Lord, Diefendorff, Schmidt, & Hall, 2010).

**Career Compromise and Well-being**

Adjusting goals downwards (i.e., compromising on a desired goal) is typically associated with reduced satisfaction and well-being, and associated with a change in behaviours around the compromised goal and any new goals (Lord et al., 2009). In relation to well-being, giving up on a cherished goal can be appraised as threatening, and thus stressful to the individual, which can result in negative feelings such as dissatisfaction, sadness and distress (Carver & Connor-Smith, 2010). This proposition is supported by the general goal disruption literature (MacGeorge, Samter, Feng, Gillihan, & Graves, 2007; Roseman & Smith, 2001), and consistent with reports in the career area. Carr (1997), for example, asked women who were in
their mid-career to reflect on their past occupational goals, and found that those who were dissatisfied with their level of achievement, vis-à-vis their original expectations, were more likely to report symptoms of depression and to have less purpose in life. Hesketh and McLachlan (1991) compared two groups of employees in the banking sector, one group who saw their job as a compromise on what they really wanted, and a second group who were not compromisers. Those who viewed their job as a compromise were less satisfied and reported more negative attitudes about their career. Using an experimental design, where students were assigned to one of four compromise conditions (none, minor, moderate, major), Tsaousides and Jome (2008) found negative associations between compromise and measures of well-being. Based on the above, our first prediction (H1) was that career compromise would be negatively associated with well-being. See Figure 1.

Career Compromise and Behaviour

Compromising on a desired goal is likely to be associated also with a change in behaviours around the compromised goal (e.g., a student withdrawing from a desired course) and around any new goals (e.g., exploring the best educational pathways to achieve the new goals; Lord et al., 2009). These relationships are reflected in the general perspective that goals are powerful motivators of behaviours (Covington, 2000; Locke & Latham, 1990), and specifically delineated in much of the career literature. The social cognitive career theory (Lent et al., 1996), for example, explicitly states that the three key motivators of career-related behaviours are self-efficacy, outcome expectations and career goals. The same authors describe these three variables as the “building blocks” of career development, as they are considered the most important variables driving the individual’s career behaviours. Thus, compromising on an unattainable career goal and establishing new goals also
has the effect of driving new behaviours for the individual. Hesketh and McLachlan (1991) found this when they compared compromisers and non-compromising graduate students in the banking industry. Compromisers reported greater turnover intentions, indicating that they did not believe they would be working in the banking sector in the future. Turnover intentions are strong predictors of actual turnover and are associated with a range of behaviours, such as job seeking, applying for jobs, and job withdrawal behaviours, such as reduced effort (Griffeth, Hom, & Gaertner, 2000).

We examined the two important career behaviours of planning and exploration, which are regarded as action behaviours in the social cognitive career theory as they underpin the mechanism for career-related agency (Lent et al., 1996). Career planning is an on-going activity that becomes more salient at times of vocational crisis or transition. It involves marshalling the information one has to formulate a course of action. This might include setting sub-goals, identifying strategies, and deciding on tasks and timelines that will be required to progress one’s vocational development (Zikic & Klehe, 2006). Career planning is associated positively with career success (Hall, 2002). Career exploration is also a lifelong process, and it too is especially important when the individual is in transition. Exploration involves the gathering of relevant information required to progress a career goal, and can include examining oneself (e.g., one’s interests and values) and examining one’s environment (e.g., finding out information about education and training, occupations and employers; Zikic & Klehe). Career exploration is viewed as an antecedent to career success (Blustein, 1997) and integral to sound career decision-making (Hartung & Blustein, 2002). Thus, we considered that having compromised on a particular career would drive re-thinking, exploration and the planning processes
associated with establishing and preparing for a new career; that is, (H2) that career compromise would be positively associated with career exploration and planning. See Figure 1.

**Intervening Variables**

Important intervening variables that might affect the relationships between career compromise and well-being and between career compromise and behaviour are the individual’s capacities, first, to disengage from a previously held goal, and, second, to re-engage in a new goal (Wrosch, Scheier, et al., 2003). Goal disengagement reflects the capacity to withdraw effort and commitment from a goal that has been identified as unattainable, rather than continuing to persevere with it when it is not achievable. The advantages of being able to disengage from unachievable goals are that repeated failures and disappointments are avoided and personal and other resources are freed up to address the revised and/or newly-set goals. Re-engagement strategies, on the other hand, involve goal revision and/or identifying new goals, becoming committed to the new goals, and marshalling the required personal and support resources in an effort to move towards achieving them. Re-engaging in new goals maintains a sense of purpose in life (Wrosch, Miller, Scheier, & Brun de Pontet, 2007).

The two processes of goal disengagement and re-engagement are considered to be somewhat trait-like, but influenced by context, and to be somewhat independent constructs, meaning that an individual can disengage from one goal while not having an alternate goal in mind, and re-engage in new goals without having discarded currently valued, but unachievable, goals (Wrosch, Scheier, et al., 2003). As goal disengagement and re-engagement are somewhat separate constructs, it is thus possible that the two constructs will interact with one another and generate different
outcomes for individuals with different levels of each, compared to the outcomes based on examining the two constructs separately. In support of this proposition, Wrosch, Scheier, et al. found that university students who were low on both disengagement and re-engagement also reported the lowest levels of personal mastery and the poorest well-being.

Recent research has demonstrated the value of understanding goal disengagement and/or re-engagement strategies in situations where the individual’s goals become unattainable. For example, Duke, Leventhal, Brownlee, and Leventhal (2002) found improved psychological well-being in older adults who were able to replace activities that were lost as a result of health problems. Wrosch, Scheier, Carver, and Schulz (2003) found better subjective well-being in students who used these goal adjustment strategies to manage the compromises and challenges of transitioning to university, and Wrosch et al. (2007) found fewer physical health symptoms in college students with more adaptive goal adjustment strategies. Thus, we considered that having the capacity to disengage from goals judged to be unattainable and re-engage in new or revised goals would be beneficial when revising career pathways.

We expected (H3a) that the capacity to disengage from unobtainable goals and re-engage in new goals would be positively associated with well-being. This hypothesis is consistent with previous studies (e.g., Wrosch, Scheier, et al., 2003), which found positive associations with well-being, although our study is the first to test the association in the career well-being domain. Second, we expected (H3b) that disengagement and re-engagement would be positively associated with career-related activities. This hypothesis also is consistent with previous studies. Wrosch, Scheier, et al. found positive associations between goal adjustment and mastery behaviours. Again, our study is the first to test the association in the career area. Third, as those
with higher levels of goal disengagement and re-engagement are likely to be advantaged in situations where goals have to be adjusted, we expected (H4a) higher levels of goal disengagement and goal re-engagement to buffer the relationship between career compromise and declines in well-being, and expected (H4b) higher levels of disengagement and re-engagement to energise career action behaviours following compromise. See Figure 1. These hypotheses are consistent with viewing self-regulatory variables as intervening between goals and the individual’s well-being and behaviour around those goals (Lord et al., 2010). There is evidence for this in the occupational area, where, for example, the (self-regulatory) capacity to seek feedback moderates the relationship between goal setting and performance (Neubert, 1998).

Consistent with previous literature regarding the interaction between disengagement and re-engagement where it has been shown that some people have an easier time disengaging and reengaging than others (Wrosch, Scheier, et al., 2003), we also explored the interaction effects between these two variables, first, on well-being and career action behaviours, and, second, as moderators between compromise and well-being, and between compromise and career action behaviours, as particular profiles may be associated with the outcome variables and/or play buffering roles. These latter examinations are somewhat exploratory as no research has tested goal disengagement and goal re-engagement as moderating variables between compromise and well-being and between compromise and behaviour.

We tested all hypotheses using a sample of first year university students. Using this sample is appropriate as the transition to university can involve many compromises to ideal career options. When commencing university, students confront many barriers and changes in person and personal circumstances, such as
not getting an offer to a desired course, not liking a desired course when offered, and the developmental changes to values and preferences driven by this life stage (Albion, 2000).

**Method**

**Participants**

Participants were 186 first year university students enrolled in a social science degree. There were 143 female (76.9%) and 43 male students (23.1%), whose average age was 19.72 years ($SD = 2.29$; range = 17-25). We asked students to indicate their typical high school grade (or equivalent): 18.3% indicated *very high achievement*, 62.4% indicated *high achievement*, and 18.3% indicated *sound achievement* (2 students [1.1%] did not provide an answer to this question). On a 5-point scale of self-reported socioeconomic status, 9.7% reported being *much better off* in comparison to other students, 21% *a little better off*, 48.4% *about the same*, 15.1% *a little worse off*, and 2.7% *much worse off* (6 students did not answer this question). Finally, 70.4% of the students reported working part-time as well as studying; 29.6% were not working.

**Materials**

**Career compromise.** Previous studies that assessed career compromise used single item questions (e.g., Hesketh & McLachlan, 1991), discrepancy scores between previously and currently held occupations (e.g., Carr, 1997), and simulated occupational discrepancy scores induced experimentally (e.g., Tsaousides & Jome, 2008). Some studies have assessed discrepancies between ideal and expected occupations and treated these as aspirational discrepancies (e.g., see Rojewski, 2005), although they parallel the measures and intent used in the compromise research.
We sought to assess a broader construct of compromise by operationalising it as the discrepancy between the job characteristics of the students’ ideal and expected occupations. Job characteristics are features inherent in all occupations, and include dimensions such as how much autonomy there is in the job and how much social contact is involved (Hackman & Oldham, 1980; Warr, 2008). Warr (2008) summarised nine job characteristics that are supported in the literature. These are the opportunities for control, skill use, externally generated goals, variety, environmental clarity, availability of money, physical security, interpersonal contact, and social position. Job characteristics act as motivators/de-motivators and are related to occupational satisfaction, work attitudes, and achievement (Fried, & Ferris, 2006).

An assessment of an individual’s perceived job characteristics can be considered a measure of person-job fit (Verquer, Beehr, & Wagner, 2003), and a measure of the discrepancy between the ideal and expected job characteristics can be considered a measure of compromise on the perceived fit with a desired occupation. Assessing compromise using job characteristics in this way provides a multi-dimensional measure of ideal and expected occupational goals and addresses criticism in the literature that using single occupational ratings generates too narrow a measure (Rojewski, 2005). To our knowledge, this is the first time that compromise has been operationalised and assessed in this manner.

First, we asked students (a) to think about the occupation they would “most like to have in the future”; that is, the occupation they would have if there were no barriers to achieving that position (This question is similar to that devised by Looft [1971] and used widely in the career literature [Rojewski, 2005]), and then (b) to rate a list of job characteristics, based on the job characteristics identified by Warr (2008), as being salient to all work settings. The students responded to ten items (e.g., “This job
would require me to use a number of complex or high level skills”, “This job would let me use my personal initiative and judgment”, and, “This job would give me the opportunity to meet people”), using a 6-point Likert-like format with end-points of strongly disagree (1) and strongly agree (6).

Second, we repeated the above procedure for the students’ expected occupation. We asked students (a) to think about the job they “really expect to have in the future”; that is, taking into consideration the barriers that may stop them achieving their most desired job (cf. Looft, 1971), and then (b) to rate this occupation on the same ten job characteristics (cf. Warr, 2008), using the same response format used for the ideal occupation.

Third, we created job characteristic discrepancy scores by subtracting the job characteristic scores for the expected occupation from the job characteristic scores for the ideal occupation. This was done separately for each individual pair of scores (e.g., the expected occupation independence job characteristic score was subtracted from the ideal independence job characteristic score, and so on). Fourth, we converted these individual job characteristic discrepancy scores to absolute discrepancy scores (i.e., we removed the negative signs). This is appropriate as career compromise may involve accepting a career pathway that offers less of a job characteristic than is desired (e.g., too little people contact) as well as one that offers too much of a job characteristic than is desired (e.g., too much people contact).

We conducted an exploratory factor analysis on the ten individual absolute discrepancy scores. This analysis supported a single-factor structure, with factor loadings ranging from .48-.65. We used the sum of this single factor as our measure of career compromise, where higher scores indicated more career compromise. The internal reliability coefficient for the 10 items was .81.
Goal adjustment. We used slightly modified versions of the 4-item Goal Disengagement Scale and 6-item Goal Re-engagement Scale that were devised by Wrosch, Scheier, et al. (2003). First, we revised the original items so that students were responding in the context of having compromised on career goals. For example, the question, “It was easy for me to stop thinking about that goal and let it go”, was changed to, “It was easy for me to stop thinking about that career and let it go” (goal disengagement), and the question, “I put effort towards other meaningful goals” was changed to, “I put effort towards other meaningful careers” (goal re-engagement). Second, as the Goal Disengagement Scale contained four items only, we added a fifth item (“I kept thinking about how much I really wanted that career”) to broaden the domain coverage. Students responded to the items using a 6-point Likert-like format with end-points of strongly disagree (1) and strongly agree (6). Wrosch, Scheier, et al. reported internal reliability coefficients of .84 and .86 for the two subscales, respectively, and provided support for validity by testing the factor structure and examining the association of the two scales with other constructs. We conducted a confirmatory factor analysis (CFA; AMOS Version 17) on the 11 items, which supported a two-factor model, \( \chi^2(29) = 60.22, p = .009, \) GFI = .94, CFI = .98, RMSEA = .06, with item loading ranging from .33-.78 (goal disengagement) and .58-.89 (goal re-engagement). The internal reliability coefficients were .74 and .89, respectively.

Career-related well-being. We assessed two domains of career well-being: career satisfaction and career distress. Students responded to both scales using a 6-point Likert-like format with end-points of strongly disagree (1) and strongly agree (6). Career satisfaction was measured using the 5-item Career Satisfaction Scale (Richardson, Lounsbury, Bhaskar, Gibson, & Drost, 2009). This scale measures
global satisfaction with one’s career path, career progress and future career prospects. Sample items were, “I am satisfied with the way my career has progressed so far”, and, “I am satisfied with the future career opportunities that are open to me”. Higher scores represent more satisfaction. Richardson et al. reported an internal reliability of .81 for the scale, and addressed issues of convergent validity by correlating the scale with measures of general satisfaction with life.

Career distress was measured using the 13-item Subjective Career Distress Subscale from the Coping with Career Indecision Scale (Larson, Toulouse, Ngumba, Fitzpatrick, & Heppner, 1994). This subscale was designed to assess students’ degree of subjective distress in relation to their career decision making and avoidance of career thought or goal setting. Sample items were, “I often feel down or depressed about selecting a career”, and, “I tend to smooth over any career problem I have and pretend it doesn’t exist”. Higher scores represent more distress. Larson et al. reported internal reliability coefficients of .90 for the Subjective Career Distress subscale and .90 for the full measure, and addressed validity by demonstrating correlations with standard well-being scales.

A CFA on the combined satisfaction and distress scores confirmed a two-factor solution, $\chi^2(121) = 173.08, p = .001$, GFI = .91, CFI = .97, RMSEA = .05, indicating structural independence of the two scales. Item loadings ranged from .33-.78 (satisfaction) and .46-.79 (career distress). The internal reliability coefficients were .74 and .89, respectively.

**Career action behaviours.** We measured the two career action behaviours of career planning and career exploration, which Lent et al. (1996) described as the key behaviours associated with career development. Students responded to both scales
using a 6-point Likert-like format with end-points of strongly disagree (1) and strongly agree (6).

Career planning was assessed using the 8-item Career Thinking and Planning subscale of Greenhaus’ (1971) Career Salience Scale. This subscale was designed to assess an individual’s level of career relevant thoughts and planning. Sample items were, “Planning for and succeeding in a career is my primary concern”, and, “I enjoy thinking about and making plans about my future career”. Higher scores indicate more career planning. Internal reliability coefficients have been reported in the .70-.80 range (Zikic & Klehe, 2006). Support for construct validity has been demonstrated by showing associations between the subscale and the full scale, and between the subscale and job searching and career exploration behaviours (Zikic & Klehe).

Career exploration was assessed using the 6-item environmental exploration subscale of the Career Exploration Survey (Stumpf, Colarelli, & Hartman, 1983). Sample items were, “I have been investigating career possibilities”, and, “I have sought information on specific areas of my career interest”. Higher scores indicate more career exploration. The authors reported a sound internal reliability coefficient for the subscale (.88), and demonstrated validity by testing associations with other dimensions of the full scale.

We conducted a CFA on the combined planning and exploration scales. This supported a two-factor solution after we removed one item from the career planning scale, $\chi^2(32) = 100.03, p = .001$, GFI = .92, CFI = .96, RMSEA = .06, suggesting the two scales were independent. Item loadings ranged from .43-.72 (planning) and .57-.81 (exploration). The internal reliability coefficients were .78 for the 7-item planning scale, and .88 for the 6-item exploration scale.
Procedure

The study was cross-sectional and survey based. Students were recruited from first-year university classes during the final third of their first university semester. Volunteers were able to take the survey with them, complete it at their leisure, and return it to the researchers. We distributed approximately 250 surveys, and received 186 completed responses (return rate = 74%). Students received course credit for their research participation. The study was conducted under the auspices of the university ethics committee.

Results

Predicting Career-related Well-being

We used two hierarchical regression analyses to test (a) if career compromise was associated with career-related well-being (career satisfaction, career distress), (b) if goal adjustment (goal disengagement, goal re-engagement, the interaction between goal disengagement and goal re-engagement) was associated with well-being, and (c) if goal adjustment moderated the relationship between career compromise and well-being. We created the interaction terms (e.g., goal disengagement x goal re-engagement) by first standardising the variables, and then finding the products of the standardised variables. This procedure was recommended by Aiken and West (1991) to avoid multicollinearity between the interaction terms and the main effect variables. Age, gender and educational achievement had no consistent associations with any of the outcome variables; thus, were not included in the analyses.

For career satisfaction, career compromise at Step 1 accounted for 7.1% of the variance, $F(1, 184) = 15.05, \ p < .001$. At Step 2, goal disengagement and goal re-engagement did not explain significant, additional variance, $F_{chg}(2, 182) = 1.41, \ p = .25$. At Step 3, the goal disengagement x goal re-engagement interaction term
accounted for an additional 2.5% of variance, $F_{chg}(1, 181) = 5.18, p = .024$, whereas the compromise x goal adjustment interaction terms included at Step 4 were not significant, $F_{chg}(3, 178) = .54, p = .66$. At Step 3, the most parsimonious model, 11.5% of the variance was accounted for in career satisfaction, $F(4, 181) = 5.88, p < .001$, with career compromise ($\beta = -.27, p < .001, sr^2 = 7.35\%$) and the goal disengagement x goal re-engagement interaction ($\beta = -.16, p = .024, sr^2 = 2.53\%$) explaining unique variance.

For career distress, career compromise accounted for 7% of the variance at Step 1, $F(1, 184) = 13.76, p < .001$. Goal disengagement and goal re-engagement were not significant at Step 2, $F_{chg}(2, 182) = .04, p = .96$. The goal disengagement x goal re-engagement interaction term accounted for 2.7% of the variance at Step 3, $F_{chg}(1, 181) = 5.47, p = .02$, and the compromise x goal adjustment interaction terms were not significant at Step 4, $F_{chg}(3, 178) = .28, p = .84$. At Step 3, 9.7% of the variance was accounted for in career distress, $F(4, 181) = 4.88, p = .001$, with career compromise ($\beta = .26, p < .001, sr^2 = 6.71\%$) and the goal disengagement x goal re-engagement interaction ($\beta = .17, p = .02, sr^2 = 2.72\%$) both significant. See Table 1 for summary data and bivariate correlations. See Table 2 for summary of the hierarchical regression analyses.

In line with recommendations by Aiken and West (1991), we graphed the significant interaction effects to aid interpretation. We used the computation tool provided by Dawson (2011), which generates simple regression lines for the moderator variable one standard deviation above and below the mean and plots them in relation to the predictor and outcome variables. For the significant goal disengagement x goal re-engagement interaction term predicting career satisfaction,
there was little variation in career satisfaction for the high goal re-engagement group when goal disengagement was high or low. For the low goal re-engagement group, career satisfaction levels were similar to the high re-engagement group when goal disengagement was high, but as goal disengagement reduced so did career satisfaction. Those with the lowest levels of disengagement together with the lowest levels of re-engagement reported the lowest levels of career satisfaction. For the significant goal disengagement x goal re-engagement interaction term predicting career distress, when goal disengagement was low, career distress was higher for those who also had low goal re-engagement, but as goal disengagement increased, distress increased for those with high goal re-engagement, and decreased for those with low goal re-engagement. Career distress was high when goal disengagement and goal re-engagement were both low, and high when goal disengagement and goal re-engagement were both high. See Figure 2.

Predicting Career Action Behaviours

In a similar manner, we used two hierarchical regression analyses to test the same variables as predictors of career planning and career exploration. For career planning, career compromise at Step 1 was not significant, $F(1, 184) = 1.63$, $p = .20$. At Step 2, goal disengagement and goal re-engagement accounted for 8.2% of the variance, $F_{chg}(2, 182) = 8.19$, $p < .001$, with goal disengagement alone contributing unique variance. At Step 3, the goal disengagement x goal re-engagement interaction term accounted for an additional 2.6% of variance, $F_{chg}(1, 181) = 5.31$, $p = .022$. The compromise x goal adjustment interaction terms included at Step 4 were not significant, $F_{chg}(3, 178) = .19$, $p = .90$. At Step 3, 11.7% of the variance was accounted for in career planning, $F(4, 181) = 5.97$, $p < .001$, with goal
disengagement ($\beta = .29, p < .001, sr^2 = 7.56\%$) and the goal disengagement x goal re-engagement interaction term ($\beta = -.16, p = .022, sr^2 = 2.60\%$) explaining unique variance. For the significant goal disengagement x goal re-engagement interaction term predicting career planning, when goal disengagement was high there was little difference in career planning between those low and those high in goal re-engagement. As the capacity to goal disengage decreased, however, career planning decreased for both groups, but decreased disproportionately more for the low goal re-engagement group. Career planning was lowest when goal disengagement and goal re-engagement were both low. See Figure 3.

For career exploration, career compromise at Step 1 was not significant, $F(1, 184) = 2.02, p = .16$. Goal disengagement and goal re-engagement at Step 2 accounted for 5.7% of the variance, $F_{chg}(2, 182) = 5.34, p = .005$, with goal disengagement and goal re-engagement both contributing unique variance. The goal disengagement x goal re-engagement interaction term at Step 3 accounted for an additional 4.0%, $F_{chg}(1, 181) = 8.19, p = .005$, and the compromise x goal adjustment interaction terms at Step 4 explained an additional 4.3% of the variance, $F_{chg}(3, 178) = 3.00, p = .032$. When these interaction terms were tested separately, career compromise x goal disengagement and career compromise x goal re-engagement (but not the 3-way interaction term) explained unique variance. At Step 4, 15.1% of the variance was accounted for in career exploration, $F(7, 178) = 4.52, p < .001$, with goal disengagement ($\beta = .24, p = .002, sr^2 = 4.80\%$), goal re-engagement ($\beta = .21, p = .007, sr^2 = 3.53\%$), the goal disengagement x goal re-engagement interaction term ($\beta = -.15, p = .045, sr^2 = 1.96\%$), the career compromise x goal disengagement interaction term ($\beta = -.16, p = .031, sr^2 = 2.28\%$), and the career compromise x goal
re-engagement interaction term ($\beta = .17, p = .019, sr^2 = 2.69\%) accounting for unique variance. See Table 3 for summary data for these hierarchical regression analyses.

Insert Table 3 about here

For the significant goal disengagement x goal re-engagement interaction term predicting career exploration, there was little variation in career exploration when goal re-engagement was high. Career exploration for the low goal re-engagement group was similar to exploration of the high re-engagement group when goal disengagement was high, but career exploration decreased as goal disengagement decreased. Career exploration was lowest when goal disengagement and goal re-engagement were both low. See Figure 3. For the significant career compromise x goal disengagement interaction term predicting career exploration, there was little variation in the (low) levels of career exploration for the low goal disengagement group when compromise was high or low. When goal disengagement was high, levels of exploration were similar for the low disengagement group when compromise was high, but with lower levels of compromise career exploration increased. Career exploration was highest when disengagement was high and compromise was low. For the significant career compromise x goal re-engagement interaction, there was no difference between the low and high goal re-engagement groups on career exploration when compromise was low, but with higher levels of compromise, career exploration was lower for the low, but not the high, goal re-engagement group. Exploration was highest when goal re-engagement was high and career compromise was high. Exploration was lowest when goal re-engagement was low and compromise was high. See Figure 4.

Insert Figure 4 about here
Discussion

First, supporting H1, career compromise was negatively associated with career-related well-being: specifically, career compromise was negatively associated with career satisfaction (i.e., satisfaction with career direction, progress and future prospects) and positively associated with career distress (i.e., distress about the difficulty or inability to settle on a career path). These results are consistent with the general goal adjustment literature, which has shown that having to compromise on valued goals is associated with reduced satisfaction (Lord et al., 2009), and is consistent with research conducted in the career area with adults (Carr, 1997; Hesketh & McLachlan, 1991) and experimentally with adolescents (Tsaousides & Jome, 2008). Social cognitive career theory (Lent et al., 1996), which can be considered a goal-directed theory, predicts reduced satisfaction when goals are not achieved, but has yet to specifically address compromise in this process.

These results are important as they add to the small body of research that shows that disruption to career development can be associated with poorer psychological health and adjustment. While deciding upon and abandoning careers and specific occupations may be part of the normal vocational development process, these results suggest that this compromise might be associated with poorer adjustment. Many career theories stress that social adjustment and well-being in young people are dependent on them making smooth career transitions (e.g., Super, 1990). However, the focus of career theories is largely on how young people might forestall foreclosure, overcome barriers, and reduce the need for compromise (Gottfredson, 2005). By and large, career theories do not address the emotional maturity and personal coping strategies required to navigate the ups and downs of the transition to
adult employment. Additionally, there has been little empirical research examining the consequences when career development does go astray (Skorikov, 2007).

While the current study was cross-sectional, and thus, cannot tease out causal relationships between compromise and well-being, the results should alert practitioners to possible downsides for adolescents who have to give up on their ideal careers, particularly in times of transition, and should encourage researchers to give more attention to career development and adjustment connections. We examined the period around the transition to university, but young people face many other transitions where they will encounter career and life barriers as they move to and through high school and university and then enter the labour force.

Second, career compromise was not associated directly with career planning or exploration, which does not support H2. However, the effect of career compromise on career exploration (but not planning) was moderated by both goal disengagement and goal re-engagement, indicating that, for some students, career compromise might be associated with exploratory behaviours (Figure 4). For compromise x goal disengagement, career exploration was higher when goal disengagement was higher, but only when compromise was lower (in all other conditions, exploration was lower). This result supports the notion that career compromise might be considered as a stressor, which is associated with reduced career exploration, and moderated (i.e., stimulated) by having high levels of goal disengagement. A similar interpretation can be made for the compromise x goal re-engagement interaction result. Exploration was higher for those with a higher capacity to re-engage, no matter what the level of compromise. Exploration was higher also for those with lower goal re-engagement when compromise was lower, but with higher levels of compromise the level of exploration decreased for the poor re-engagers. In the case
of re-engagement, those with lower levels of re-engagement were disadvantaged when compromise was higher; that is, participants with a lower capacity to re-engage with new goals reported lower levels of career exploration when (the stressor of) compromise was higher. Career theories that include a notion of compromise on career directions (cf. Gottfredson, 2005) do not articulate mechanisms that account for the compromise process. Goal disengagement and re-engagement capacities, or their corollary of goal persistence, suggest means by which compromise is enacted, and indicates one example of how such means might affect subsequent behaviour.

Third, goal disengagement and re-engagement were not directly associated with career-related well-being. This was not consistent with our expectations (H3a), and is inconsistent with other studies that have shown positive relationships between the two goal adjustment strategies and general well-being. However, it was the case that the disengagement x re-engagement interaction term was associated with both career satisfaction and career distress (Figure 2). Career satisfaction was lowest when goal disengagement and goal re-engagement were both low. For career distress, distress was highest for those who had the lowest levels of goal disengagement and goal re-engagement, which is consistent with the career satisfaction result. It was also the case here that distress was higher for those higher on goal re-engagement and higher also on goal disengagement. This latter result might indicate that being too ready to drop old goals and re-engage in new ones is also distressing. This interpretation is consistent with the impulsivity literature, which suggests that this trait is associated with poorer well-being (e.g., Vittersø, & Nilsen, 2002). Thus, while no direct effects were found for disengagement and re-engagement on well-being, there was a small group of participants whose poor well-being (satisfaction and distress) was
associated with lower disengagement and lower re-engagement, and whose well-being (distress) was associated with higher disengagement and re-engagement.

Fourth, while disengagement and re-engagement were not directly associated with well-being, they were positively associated with the career action behaviours. Goal disengagement was positively associated with career planning, and goal re-engagement was positively associated with both career planning and career exploration; these results partially support H3b. As far as we can determine, this is the first time that the capacity for goal adjustment in this manner has been found to be associated with career-related behaviours, and suggests that planning or exploring for a career might be facilitated by such capacities. At an applied level, this opens the possibility for including goal management strategies in career interventions for young people. At the theoretical level, these relationships indicate mechanisms that might drive these career behaviours. The goal disengagement x re-engagement interaction term was a significant predictor for both career planning and career exploration (Figure 3). Planning and exploration were at their lowest when goal disengagement and goal re-engagement were at their lowest, suggesting that a small proportion of participants, whose goal adjustment capacities were both low, may be disadvantaged in their career development generally, not specifically related to when they have to compromise.

Our study demonstrated associations between career compromise and well-being (direct), and between career compromise and exploration (moderated). It also demonstrated associations between goal adjustment and well-being (moderated), and between goal adjustment and career action behaviours (direct and moderated). These results are consistent with goal setting approaches (Locke & Latham, 1990) and add to the growing literature on career adaptability/self-regulation in the careers area.
(Creed, Fallon, & Hood, 2009; Hirschi, 2009); that is, adds to the literature on how individuals manage both predictable and unpredictable challenges associated with the preparation for work (Savickas, 1997). However, the results need to be viewed in the context of the limitations of the study. First, the study was cross-sectional, and while we tested plausible, causative relationships, these need to be confirmed with longitudinal studies. Second, we tested the relationships with a narrow sample of university students, and replications need to be made with more heterogeneous samples. Third, our sample contained a disproportionate number of women (77%). Gender is an important consideration in the career development area (Patton & Creed, 2001) and future studies need to consider samples with a more equal gender balance. Fourth, we tested the associations at a particular point in time for university students, and testing the associations at other transition points would add to the career development literature. Finally, as career development is ongoing and developmental, studies need to look at how the compromise process develops and is managed over time.

**References**


Table 1

Summary Data and Inter-correlations Among all Variables; N = 186.

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* = p < .05; ** = p < .01; *** = p < .001
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Summary of Hierarchical Multiple Regression Analyses Predicting Career Satisfaction and Career Distress; N = 186.

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* = p < .05, ** = p < .01, *** = p < .001
Table 3
Summary of Hierarchical Multiple Regression Analyses Predicting Career Planning and Career Exploration; N = 186.

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* = p < .05, ** = p < .01, *** = p < .001
Figure 1. Proposed model: (a) career compromise negatively associated with career well-being, (b) positively associated with career action behaviours, and (c) both relationships moderated by goal adjustment (i.e., goal disengagement and re-engagement).
Figure 2. Effects of goal disengagement x goal re-engagement on (a) career satisfaction and (b) career distress.
Figure 3. Effects of goal disengagement x goal re-engagement on (a) career planning and (b) career exploration.
Figure 4. Effects of (a) career compromise x goal disengagement, and (b) career compromise x goal re-engagement, on career exploration.