



An investigation of African-American women's prestige domain interests and choice goals using Social Cognitive Career Theory[☆]



Taneisha S. Scheuermann^a, David M. Tokar^{b,*}, Rosalie J. Hall^c

^a Department of Preventive Medicine and Public Health, University of Kansas School of Medicine, Kansas City, KS 66160, USA

^b Department of Psychology, University of Akron, Akron, OH 44325-4301, USA

^c Durham University Business School, Mill Hill Lane, Durham DH1 3LB, UK

ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received 2 November 2013

Available online 7 February 2014

Keywords:

Career development

Occupational prestige

African-American women

Social Cognitive Career Theory

Vocational interests

Career choice goals

ABSTRACT

Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT; Lent, Brown & Hackett, 1994) provides a framework for understanding career development, taking into account background and contextual variables using a social cognitive perspective. Given SCCT's focus on both personal and contextual factors, it has been widely applied to understanding the career development of ethnic minorities and women. This study extends the SCCT framework by testing the SCCT career choice model with variables defined along the prestige dimension, in a sample of 198 African-American college women. Path analysis results supported SCCT propositions for the relations of prestige self-efficacy and prestige outcome expectations with prestige of vocational interests, and of prestige outcome expectations and prestige of vocational interests with prestige of choice goals. The relation of prestige self-efficacy to prestige of choice goals was fully mediated by prestige of vocational interests; the relation between prestige outcome expectations and prestige of choice goals was partially mediated by prestige of vocational interests. Contrary to SCCT, the hypothesized relation of prestige self-efficacy to prestige outcome expectations was non-significant. These findings provide preliminary evidence for the utility of SCCT in explaining the development of prestige-related career interests and choice goals among African-American women.

© 2014 Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved.

1. Introduction

In 1940, approximately 70% of African-American women were employed as farm laborers and servants; by 1980 that percentage had dropped to less than 8%, attributable to the Civil Rights Movement and decreasing educational and employment discrimination (United States Commission on Civil Rights, 1990). Although in the past four decades all women in the United States have continued to make strides towards improving their positions in the workforce, and the gender wage gap has decreased (US Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2013), these advances are not shared uniformly across racial/ethnic groups. African-American women are still more likely to be employed in less prestigious, lower-status occupations, and specifically, less likely to be employed in managerial and professional occupations than non-Hispanic White women (US Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2013). African-American women also comprise the highest percentage of US women living in poverty (25.9%; National Women's Law Center, 2012). There are also gendered wage disparities between African-American women and men, with African-American

[☆] This article is based on the doctoral dissertation of Taneisha S. Scheuermann *nee* Buchanan, under the direction of David M. Tokar. We thank Sandy Perosa, Julia Phillips, John Queener, and Linda M. Subich for helpful feedback on that project. We also thank the women who participated and many others who assisted with the project.

* Corresponding author.

E-mail address: dmt5@uakron.edu (D.M. Tokar).

women earning, on average, 91% of African-American men's wages (US Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2013). These statistics highlight the potential usefulness of investigating influences on the prestige of career choices made by African-American women, a goal pursued in the current study.

In general, the prestige of an occupation is a socially constructed, perceived construct, referring to the respect and high standing accorded to the occupation by members of a society, and encompassing a variety of attributes such as the perceived worth and power associated with the occupation (Rojewski, 2005). Occupational prestige may be conceptualized in various ways. For example, within the vocational psychology literature, occupational prestige has been characterized in terms of: (a) status; (b) occupational level; (c) level of difficulty, responsibility, and training required; and (d) earning potential (Rojewski, 2005; Sodano & Tracey, 2008). The concept of prestige has figured prominently in major vocational theories, including Gottfredson's (1981) theory of circumscription and compromise of occupational aspirations, and Holland's (1997) theory of vocational personalities and work environments (i.e., his hypotheses regarding the level of work and level of training). However, these earlier theoretical propositions have received little empirical attention (Deng, Armstrong, & Rounds, 2007; Swanson & Gore, 2000).

More recent theoretical work by Tracey and Rounds (1996) considers prestige as an integral facet of vocational interests. Specifically, they proposed a three-dimensional spherical representation of Holland's (1959, 1997) RIASEC hexagon of vocational interests. Their interest sphere incorporates Prediger's (1982) two dimensions of People/Things and Data/Ideas, and uniquely contributes to our understanding of the structure of vocational interests by adding an orthogonal third dimension of prestige. This spherical structure of vocational interests has been supported in the empirical literature, and the three dimensions defining the sphere also have been found to replicate in measures of occupational self-efficacy (Deng et al., 2007; Tracey, 1997, 2002; Tracey & Rounds, 1996). An implication of the interest sphere is that when individuals are characterized in terms of their career interests, those interests may vary from one person to another not only in terms of preferences for working with People/Things and Data/Ideas, but also in the level of occupational prestige which is desired. Such prestige preferences likely reflect one's own social aspirations, but also one's beliefs about the advantages or limits likely to be experienced due to personal capabilities and broader social factors such as money, access to education, mentors and developmental experiences, and discrimination.

The prestige component of vocational interests may be assessed both via ratings of preferences for occupational titles, and by collecting ratings of activity preferences (Tracey & Rounds, 1996). When assessed via activity preferences as done in the current study, the interest prestige scores appear to reflect the perceived effort and skill, as well as competition, associated with performing various types of vocational activities (Sodano & Tracey, 2008). Higher prestige is associated with activities requiring greater effort and skill, and with more competition.

Differences in perceptions of occupational prestige have been found between African-American and White university students (Walker & Tracey, 2012). African-Americans gave higher prestige ratings to Realistic, Social, Enterprising, and Conventional occupations than Whites, although both groups showed statistically significant, positive correlations in the 50's with a set of standard occupational prestige ratings (i.e., the Stevens and Hoisington (1987) occupational index). The magnitude of these differences was small and indicates minor differences in prestige perceptions associated with ethnicity. These small differences are unlikely to invalidate the use of prestige scores with African-American populations, especially given previous work by Tracey (2002) showing measurement invariance across gender and ethnicity for the Personal Globe Inventory-based (PGI) measure of prestige used in the current study.

1.1. Social Cognitive Career Theory

Only a few studies have examined the prestige-related component of occupational choice goals, and a comprehensive prestige model has not been previously proposed. Thus, in the current study we borrowed from the Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT; Lent, Brown, & Hackett, 1994) models of career interest development and career choice. We propose that prestige-related interests and occupational choice goals among African-American women can be predicted from their prestige self-efficacy and outcome expectations.

In its general form, SCCT provides a framework for understanding career development, taking into account background and contextual variables using a social cognitive perspective. Self-efficacy beliefs, outcome expectations, and interests all figure prominently in SCCT models. Briefly, SCCT posits that person inputs (e.g., personality) and background contextual factors (e.g., socioeconomic status) influence an individual's self-efficacy beliefs and outcome expectations (i.e., expectations of positive or negative consequences) through his or her career-relevant learning experiences. In turn, self-efficacy and outcome expectations influence the individual's vocational interests and other career outcomes such as career choice, both directly and through a sequential pathway.

Given SCCT's attention to contextual as well as internal person variables, this theory has been applied to ethnic minorities and women in both conceptual literature (e.g., Byars & Hackett, 1998) and empirical studies (e.g., Flores & O'Brien, 2002; Flores, Robitschek, Celebi, Andersen, & Hoang, 2010; Lent, Sheu, Gloster, & Wilkins, 2010; Nauta & Epperson, 2003; Navarro, Flores, & Worthington, 2007; Rivera, Chen, Flores, Blumberg, & Ponterotto, 2007). However, much of the traditional SCCT research focusing exclusively on African-Americans has been conducted in math and science-related domains (Lent et al., 2005, 2010) because African-Americans are underrepresented in STEM occupations (National Science Foundation, National Center for Science and Engineering Statistics, 2013).

Empirical studies do support using SCCT to explain STEM career development for an African-American population. For example, results from a longitudinal study sampling primarily African-American engineering students showed that their self-efficacy for completing an engineering degree predicted subsequent engineering interests and major choice goals, and that

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/886937>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/886937>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)