



Relation of person–environment fit to career certainty

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ABSTRACT

This study examined the person–environment fit–career outcome relation by observing interests, self-efficacy and parental support as person aspects and major and occupational choice as separate indicators of the environment. Career certainty was selected as a career outcome. Two dimensional fit indices (People–Things and Data–Ideas) were examined as was the incremental validity of adding prestige fit indices. In addition, we examined the moderation of these PE fit–outcome relations by ethnicity (Anglos vs. Latino/a's). Results revealed that the PE fit predictors were moderately related and none of the two dimensional PE fit predictors significantly related to career certainty, while nearly all of the Prestige PE fit–certainty relations were significant. Support was found for the spherical structure of work types and person variables [Tracey, T. J. G., & Rounds, J. (1996b). Contributions of the spherical representation of vocational interests. *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, 48, 85–95].

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1. Introduction

A cornerstone of the field of vocational psychology, dating back to Parsons (1909), is person–environment fit (PE fit), assisting individuals to select environments that would be optimal. Indeed, most career choice theories are based on the general notion that people perform better and are more satisfied in occupational environments that match their interests or other personal variables (e.g., Dawis & Lofquist, 1984; Holland, 1973, 1997). Despite extensive examination, attention, and application of the congruence model in career counseling and academic advising with diverse groups, the professional literature has yielded equivocal support for the validity of the congruence relation to reliably predict career-related criteria (Assouline & Meir, 1987; Tinsley, 2000a, 2000b; Tracey, Darcy, & Kovalski, 2000). Researchers (Spokane, Meir, & Catalano, 2000; Tinsley, 2000a; Tinsley, 2000b; Tracey, 2007; Tracey et al., 2000) have called for examination of potential moderating factors into question in attempt to explain the ambiguous results of such a “common sense,” heavily used notion. Theorists have identified the structure of interests and environments, common measurements of interest, psychological variables such as self-efficacy, and more recently, contextual constructs, such as culture and family, as potential contributors to the mixed findings of the predictive validity of PE fit (Assouline & Meir, 1987; Tinsley, 2000a; Tinsley, 2000b; Tracey et al. 2000). Research (Spokane, 1985; Tracey & Robbins, 2005) has demonstrated that the congruence index used may be one of the most significant factors in the PE fit relations ability to predict outcome criteria. The purpose of the current study was to further examine the PE fit–outcome relation by examining various different person domains that could moderate the relation between fit and career outcome. Specifically, we examined interest, self-efficacy and parental support as different person aspects used in defining PE fit. In addition, we examined the utility of including prestige as a salient factor in PE fit.

Most all PE fit research has focused on the match of interests to the occupation typically using Holland types. The Spokane (1985) and Assouline and Meir (1987) meta-analyses draw mostly from this area. Researchers are increasingly putting more

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weight on new PE fit relations to predict career outcomes and attempt to explain the equivocal results generated from previous research on interest-occupation congruence (Betz, 2004; Betz & Rottinghaus, 2006). The idea is that other congruence relations may account for the unexplained variance in career outcomes that interest-occupation congruence alone does not seem to explain. Self-efficacy has received extensive empirical attention with respect to career issues (e.g., Lent, Brown, & Hackett, 1984) but less as a basis of PE fit. Vocational self-efficacy is defined as one's beliefs about his or her ability to complete tasks associated with their job (Betz & Rottinghaus, 2006). The similarity between vocational self-efficacy and the work environment has increasingly been assessed as a type of "fit" (Betz & Gwilliam, 2002). Self-efficacy-environment fit continues to be linked to several important career outcomes, such as satisfaction (Betz & Rottinghaus, 2006; Donnay & Borgen, 1999). Thus, career criteria, may be better explained by not only assessing people's interest-occupation congruence, but the match between what they are good at doing and what they actually do.

Perceived parental-support is another congruence relation that has been linked to career decision-making (Whiston & Keller, 2004), especially in cultures that place high priority on familial values in life pursuits (Trusty, Plata, & Salazar, 2003; Turner & Lapan, 2002). Few research studies have assessed the predictive utility of the congruence one experiences between the occupations their parent's support and their actual occupation. One of the few published studies in this area (Trusty et al., 2003) suggested that as individuals make career decisions they may strive to not only achieve congruence between their career choice and interests, but also their career and parental support. Thus, the match between what one's parent's support and one's actual chosen field may be contributing to a proportion of the variance observed in career outcomes. If interest-occupation congruence only predicts career outcome criteria on certain occasions, as demonstrated in research (Spokane, 1985; Spokane et al., 2000; Tinsley, 2000a; Tinsley, 2000b; Tracey et al., 2000), other similarities or fit relations may be important predictors to include in assessing career outcome variance attributed to PE fit.

Most assessment of the PE fit-career outcome relation have relied upon Holland's (1997) RIASEC model as the means of matching person and environment. However, research has demonstrated that there is an independent third dimension underlying interest assessment, that of prestige (Tracey, 1997; Tracey & Rounds, 1996a, 1996b). Specifically this research has demonstrated that interests can be described as existing in three dimensions: Prediger's (Prediger, 1982; Prediger & Vansickle, 1992) two dimensions of People-Things and Data-Ideas, and prestige. There has been strong support for this representation of interests (Darcy, 2005; Long, Watanabe, & Tracey, 2006; Tracey, 1997, 2002a; Tracey & Rounds, 1996a, 1996b). Because RIASEC scales exist on the People-Things and Data-Ideas plane, all current indices of PE fit use only these dimensions. We sought to examine if prestige is an additional important component of the PE fit-career outcome relation. Prestige has been described as "one of the most prominent factors that people use in evaluating different occupations" (Tracey, 2002a, p.115). Research has demonstrated that the incorporation of a prestige dimension more accurately captures one's interests, career, and the congruence between the two (Tracey & Rounds, 1996a; Tracey & Rounds, 1996b. Tracey and Rounds (1996a), Tracey and Rounds (1996b) reported that though prestige has been noted in vocational literature as a strong determinant of career aspirations and choice, it has not been specifically included in interest research. Thus, an additional purpose of this study was to determine if incorporating a prestige dimension in the fit calculations altered the strength of the relation of PE fit to occupational certainty. Specifically, we hypothesized that adding the fit of the person's prestige to the environment prestige would increase the prediction of career outcomes above that found using more typical PE fit indices that focus on the two dimensions of People-Things and Data-Ideas (and the implied RIASEC scales).

Recent studies have begun to argue for more focus on the role of contextual variables to explain a proportion of the variance in both the congruence outcome and the usefulness of this relationship in predicting future career-related variables (Day & Rounds, 1998; Fouad & Mohler, 2004; Gupta & Tracey, 2005; Toit & Bruinn, 2002; Tsabari, Tziner, & Meir, 2005). In a recent meta-analysis, Tsabari et al. (2005) examined the connection between congruence and satisfaction with consideration of culture as a moderating variable. They (Tsabari et al., 2005) reported that, "Culture is a moderating variable for the correlation between congruence and satisfaction" (p.220), and that, "This correlation will be higher in some cultures than in others" (p.220). Constantine, Wallace, and Kindaichi (2005) found that minority group members in general might place greater priority on familial goals and needs over individual goals to be in line with cultural values that emphasize familism and communalism. Further, Brown (2004) suggested that the strong involvement of the family in directing children and adults has been viewed as reflecting the collectivistic culture of Chicano, Latino/a, and Mexican-Americans. Leal-Muniz and Constantine (2005) suggested that within the myriad of culture specific values Mexican-Americans may possess in relation to career development, parents may be viewed as either supportive or as a barrier to career development, especially if education and nontraditional career choices are not valued within the nuclear unit. The authors (Leal-Muniz & Constantine, 2005) concluded that minority adolescents' may rely heavily on parental support throughout the life course of their career, and therefore, emphasis on individual factors alone in the career counseling process, such as vocational interests, may run counter to the individual's goals to stay in line with family and cultural expectations. Such findings highlight the importance of evaluating the moderating affects of ethnicity on the relation between career predictors and career outcomes. Part of the purpose of this study, then, was to explore ethnic differences in the relation of PE fit to career certainty between a Latino/a/ Mexican-American and European-American sample.

Several key findings suggest the urgency to observe the vocational development of Latinos and Mexican-Americans in particular. Trusty et al. (2003) pointed out that the 1997 U.S. Current Population Survey by the U.S. Census Bureau identified Hispanic people comprising roughly 11% of the total U.S. population, of which approximately 63% are Mexican-American. Furthermore, Trusty et al. (2003) explained that "Hispanic undergraduate students were less economically affluent than their White counterparts, and Mexican-Americans and Puerto Ricans were poorer than Cuban American students"

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