



Relation of interest and self-efficacy occupational congruence and career choice certainty

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ABSTRACT

A sample of 2145 adults completed the Personal Globe Inventory (PGI) as well as indicating their occupational choice and the certainty of this choice. The PGI yielded interest and self-efficacy scores and these were used with the occupational choice to calculate a congruence score for interests and one for efficacy. The prediction of career certainty by each congruence measure and their interaction was examined using hierarchical regression. The results indicated that while both interest and efficacy congruence were related to career certainty, efficacy congruence did not add to prediction above that obtained using interests congruence alone, however there was a substantial interaction. The agreement of interest congruence and efficacy congruence was related to a strong positive relation between congruence and certainty; whereas low agreement between interest and efficacy congruence was related to a non-significant relation between congruence and certainty. The results demonstrate the need to focus on both interest and efficacy and their agreement in our assessments and interventions.

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1. Introduction

Recent work in vocational psychology has focused on the utility of examining both interests and self-efficacy assessments in understanding career decision-making. Social cognitive career theory (SCCT, Lent, Brown, & Hackett, 1994, 2000) has posited specifically that both self-efficacy assessments and interests are crucial in career decisions but further that self-efficacy leads to interest development which then lead to choice. While the research has found that interests and self-efficacy are reciprocally determined (Nauta, Kahn, Angell, & Cantareilli, 2002; Tracey, 2002a), these results do not detract from the salience of each in the decision-making process. Indeed the joint usage of interests and self-efficacy assessments has become recommend in career counseling (Betz, 2007; Betz, Borgen, & Harmon, 1996; Betz, Harmon, & Borgen, 1996; Tracey, 2002b). The literature has been supportive of the benefits of using both types of measures with respect to occupational choice and major choice (Betz & Rottinghaus, 2006; Donnay & Borgen, 1999; Flores, Spanierman, Armstrong, & Velez, 2006; Tracey & Hopkins, 2001) specifically examining the incremental validity of adding one type of measure (e.g., self-efficacy) to the other (i.e., interests). Thus there is support for the additive benefits of using both sets of measures.

The research has supported the conception and measurement of interests and self-efficacy using similar models (Armstrong & Vogel, 2009; Tracey, 1997, 2002b) further enhancing their ease of use. The focus on the current study is to extend the research beyond simple additive models and look at the possibility of multiplicative models of the relation of interests and efficacy perceptions as related to occupational choice.

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Using additive models takes account of information in each that is not accounted for in the other. For example, self-efficacy adds to the prediction of occupational choice above that yielded by interests (Tracey & Hopkins, 2001). But this model neglects how each type of measure can affect the other in affecting career choice. Specifically, I hypothesize that interests and efficacy perceptions act in concert to predict occupational choice; with their interaction being a key contributor to prediction.

The specific aspect of career decision-making of focus in this study was occupational choice. The classic definition of occupational choice is that the more congruent the occupation is with interests and efficacy assessment, the better the choice as it will result in greater satisfaction and productivity. The literature supporting this is equivocal (Assouline & Meir, 1987; Spokane, 1985; Spokane, Meir, & Catalano, 2000; Tranberg, Slane, & Ekeberg, 1993; Tsabari, Tziner, & Meir, 2005). In this study I am examining occupational choice and certainty of that choice. The hypothesis is that the greater the congruence of interest with the occupation and of efficacy with the occupation, then the greater the certainty of that choice. The certainty of occupational choice is a prominent career decision variable (Daniels, Clifton, Perry, Mandzuk, & Hall, 2006; Singaravelu, White, & Bringaze, 2005; Temple & Osipow, 1994; Tracey & Darcy, 2002; Winnie Ma & Yeh, 2005). Durr and Tracey (2009) have provided some initial support for this hypothesis of the relation of career certainty with interest and self-efficacy congruence however they did so by examining interests and efficacy separately. In the current study I will examine the relation of career certainty to interest–occupation congruence and efficacy–occupation congruence in an additive manner as well as an interactive one. Does the level of efficacy–occupation congruence enhance the prediction of the interest congruence–certainty relation? I am positing that efficacy and interests act in a moderating manner, with each moderating the relation of the other with the criterion. For cases where efficacy congruence is high, the relation between interest congruence and certainty should be enhanced; whereas in cases where efficacy congruence is low, there should be a reduction in the interest congruence–certainty relation. The interaction takes into account the extent to which there is agreement in interest and efficacy scores. It is the agreement that increases prediction.

2. Method

2.1. Sample and procedures

The sample was comprised of 2145 (1103 females and 1042 males) aged 18–64 (mean = 23.6, $SD = 8.1$) who completed the Personal Globe Inventory (PGI) on the internet. Ethnic composition of this sample was: 7% Asian American, 6% Native American, 58% Anglo American, 6% African American, 13% Latino/a American, 5% Other American and 5% International. The PGI is part of the Virtual Counseling Center (VCC, <http://vcc.asu.edu>). Many taking the instrument did so as a function of being enrolled in career development classes but most of those completing the instrument found the site on their own or were referred to it by others or the media. Open access internet assessments have been found to yield diverse samples with respect to gender, age, ethnicity and geography and to yield scores similar to traditional methods (Gosling, Vazire, Srivastava, & John, 2003).

2.2. Instruments

Personal Globe Inventory (PGI, Tracey, 2002b) is comprised of several different formats. The format that is posted on the VCC is the activity version and consists of 118 different occupational activities to which the responder makes two responses, one with respect to the degree of liking of the activity (1 = very strongly dislike to 7 = very strongly like) and one with respect to perceived competence in doing the activity (1 = unable to do to 7 = very competent). The PGI provides scores on 31 different scales, the 18 scales evenly spaced around the interest globe, the six RIASEC scales, Prediger's (1982) four scales of People, Things, Data, and Ideas and finally the three dimensions underlying the Personal Globe (People/Things, Data/Ideas, and Prestige). Tracey (1997, 2002b; Tracey & Rounds, 1996) has demonstrated strong support for the structure of the scale across high school and college students, males and females, and different ethnic groups. Further this support was found regardless of the scale used (occupational title preferences, activity preferences, or activity competence perceptions). Also good concurrent validity and test–re-test reliability for all the scales have been supported (Tracey, 2002b). For the purposes of this study, the dimensional scores of People/Things, Data/Ideas, and Prestige expressed in *T* score units were used to represent both the interest and self-efficacy estimates of each individual.

As part of taking the PGI, individuals are requested to pick their occupation (or probable occupation in the event that they are not yet working) from a list of 324 occupations drawn from the *Occupational Outlook Handbook* (US Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2008). These occupations have been rated using expert raters (see Tracey, 2002b) to yield scores on the three dimensions of People/Things, Data/Ideas and Prestige. These occupational ratings were converted to *T* score units (mean 50, $SD = 10$) to enable both individuals and occupations to be placed on the same scale.

Given that most interest and self-efficacy research focuses on the basic interest circle (e.g., Holland's RIASEC model, Holland, 1997), I thought it was important to examine congruence using this basic circle as well as with prestige alone and with all three dimensions to represent the added capabilities of the PGI. *Congruence* was thus determined in three ways for both interests and self-efficacy estimates: two-dimensional, prestige only, and three-dimensional. The two-dimensional congruence was the Euclidean distance of the person's PGI score on basic dimensions of People/Things and Data/Ideas from

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