

The gendered nature of career related learning experiences: A social cognitive career theory perspective

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Abstract

The learning experiences questionnaire (LEQ; Schaub & Tokar, 2005) was used to examine learning experiences as they relate to SCCT (Lent, Brown, & Hackett, 1994) across the Holland (1997) RIASEC typology. In particular, differences in men's and women's career related learning experiences were examined. A sample of 319 undergraduates at a public Midwestern university completed an online survey. Gender differences were observed in reported levels of some learning experiences; similar to prior findings for self-efficacy and interests, women reported more learning experiences in the Social domain, and men reported more experiences in the Realistic and Investigative domains. Results also supported that more reported learning experiences in a given domain relate to higher self-efficacy and outcome expectations in that domain.

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1. Introduction

Within the social cognitive career theory framework (Lent et al., 1994), extant research has demonstrated the impact of learning experiences on self-efficacy and outcome

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expectations in the career domain (e.g., Betz & Schifano, 2000; Diegelman & Subich, 2001; Hackett, Betz, O'Halloran, & Romac, 1990; Hackett & Campbell, 1987; Lent, Lopez, & Bieschke, 1991). Recently, Schaub and Tokar (2005) undertook a more comprehensive examination of the role of learning experiences in SCCT than had been done previously. Specifically, they used Holland's (1997) RIASEC model to operationalize in a comprehensive manner the domain of interests, and then examined for each of these six interest domains, the relations among Bandura's four types of learning experiences (i.e., performance accomplishments, vicarious learning, verbal persuasion, and physiological arousal), self-efficacy expectations, outcome expectations and interests. To accomplish their aims, Schaub and Tokar developed instrumentation to assess persons' four types of learning experiences for each of Holland's RIASEC interest domains, and adapted extant self-efficacy, outcome expectation and interest measures for the six domains. Consistent with Bandura's predictions, the four types of learning experiences for each RIASEC domain correlated in the expected directions with both self-efficacy and outcome expectations for that domain, and self-efficacy and outcome expectations for each domain correlated with interests as predicted by SCCT (Schaub & Tokar, 2005).

1.1. Gender differences in learning experiences

The previously described relations between learning experiences and social cognitive constructs have been observed to hold for samples of women and men. For example, Schaub and Tokar (2005) reported that the four types of learning experiences were similarly predictive of self-efficacy and outcome expectations for men and women for each of the RIASEC domains. In their earlier study, Lent et al. (1991) found that the four types of mathematics learning experiences similarly predicted mathematics self-efficacy expectations for men and women. In their experimental research, Hackett and Campbell (1987) found that success and failure experiences similarly affected men's and women's interest in an anagram task.

That learning experiences predict career-related self-efficacy and outcome expectations and interests in a similar manner for men and women raises questions regarding the origin of the often reported and robust gender differences in these same social cognitive constructs. Beginning with Betz and Hackett's (1981) study, women consistently have been observed to report lower levels of self-efficacy for traditionally male-dominated domains, especially those related to higher paying math- and science-oriented occupations (e.g., Betz & Gwilliam, 2002; Betz & Hackett, 1983; Lindley & Borgen, 2002; Matsui, Ikeda, & Ohnishi, 1989). Holland's (1997) RIASEC typology often is used as a framework in this research (e.g., Betz and Gwilliam; Lindley and Borgen), so that men are reported to possess more self-efficacy for Realistic and Investigative areas and women are reported to possess more self-efficacy for Social areas. Similarly, research on occupational interests consistently finds women's interests represented most strongly in Artistic, Social, and Conventional domains, and men's interests represented in Realistic, Investigative and Enterprising domains (Aros, Henly, & Curtis, 1998; Lapan, Adams, Turner, & Hinkelman, 2000; Lippa, 1998).

Differences in learning experiences thus may be the likely point of origin for observed gender differences in career-related self-efficacy and outcome expectations and interests. Gender differences in learning experiences could limit women's and men's ranges of potential careers and contribute to persistent patterns of occupational segregation

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