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An Exploration of African Americans' Interests and Self-Efficacy Beliefs in Traditional and Nontraditional Careers

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Research on African Americans' career interests suggests that despite gains in education, African Americans have a tendency to major in and choose from a narrow range of occupations, namely, education and the social sciences. This study investigates several variables based on existing literature to identify the best predictors for interest in traditional occupations for 129 African American college students. Analyses show that gender and self-efficacy are the best predictors of interest in traditional occupations. African self-consciousness and perceptions of racist events are related to each other but not to interest in occupations. Results offer replication of prior research findings in self-efficacy theory that can be extended to an African American population.

Keywords: *African American college students; self-efficacy beliefs; occupational interests; career patterns*

The career development of the country's almost 30 million African Americans needs urgent attention (Brown, 1995) as a result of the occupational and economic disparities that exist in the United States. Information pertaining directly to African American career interventions and assessment is sparse (Bowman, 1995). Additionally, very few researchers have focused on the interactions of race, ethnicity, and gender with career patterns (Smith,

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1980). Although there is no comprehensive model for minority career development, Cheatham (1990) has proposed a model that examines both the Eurocentric and the Africentric worldview to obtain a more holistic portrait of the African American client. It is important to conceptualize career development from an African-centered worldview rather than a Eurocentric view that can easily pathologize African American behavior (Akbar, 1984; Baldwin, 1981; Baldwin, Brown, & Hopkins, 1989; Carruthers, 1972; Dixon, 1976; Nobles, 1980, 1986).

Baldwin's (1984) Africentric theory of Black personality proposes that African Americans have a complex structure that has both genetic and environmentally determined properties. According to the theory, Black personality is a collective-relational phenomenon. Under natural and optimal conditions, basic characteristics of African self-consciousness generate self-affirmative behaviors. However, because of socioenvironmental forces, African Americans possess differing degrees of self-affirming behaviors. The basic characteristics of African self-consciousness are (a) an awareness of one's African identity and cultural heritage, valuing the pursuit of self-knowledge; (b) recognition of African survival priorities and the true necessity for Africentric institutions to affirm Black life; (c) participation in activities that promote the survival, liberation, and proactive development of African people, defending their dignity, worth, and integrity; and (d) recognition of and opposition to the detrimental nature of racial oppression to Black survival and active resistance to it (Baldwin, 1981). There are six manifest areas in which African self-consciousness might be expressed, including education, family, religion, cultural activities, interpersonal relations, and political orientation. Research supports that higher levels of African self-consciousness have been associated with healthier psychological functioning (Baldwin, Duncan, & Bell, 1987). Okech and Harrington (2002) found a significant relationship between Black consciousness and academic self-efficacy beliefs. This study will determine whether African self-consciousness is related to career beliefs in African Americans.

One recurring theme that seems to surface in comparative career identity research is the tendency for African Americans to prefer social occupations (Miller, Springer, & Wells, 1988). African Americans also tend to major in social sciences and seek employment in social occupations (Smith, 1980). Others (e.g., Doughtie, Chang, Alston, Wakefield, & Yom, 1976) have found that African Americans score higher on Social, Conventional, and Enterprising typologies of personality and work environments, based on Holland's (1985) theory of careers. Trent (1989) found that the aspirations

of a large percentage of African American college students are clustered in career areas that provide services primarily to the African American community. Miller et al.'s (1988) research also suggests that this inclination toward social occupational environments begins to take shape as early as junior high school. The tendency for African Americans to choose social occupations remains unclear. Miller et al. postulated that African Americans may perceive social environments as being more prestigious than other environments (e.g., realistic, conventional) and more accessible than other environments (e.g., enterprising, artistic, investigative).

Researchers (Evans, 1990; Ogbu, 1978; Turner & Turner, 1975) found that African Americans perceive a smaller opportunity structure and more discrimination than do Whites, which may limit the number and range of occupations that they see open to them. Of the few studies that have focused on the career decision-making process of African Americans, most have been concerned with the perception of career decision-making barriers (Brown, 1995).

On the basis of the existing literature, it appears that African Americans prefer or are channeled by discriminatory practices into careers that are deemed as traditional working environments for women and other minorities (Evans & Herr, 1991). Bowman (1995) explained that stereotypes about the types of jobs that African Americans traditionally hold, coupled with the lack of visible role models in nontraditional fields, adds to the limited perceptions of opportunities. The concept of traditional working environments for African Americans originated from research by Littig (1968), who found that the professional aspirations of African American college students were limited to a few careers. These areas, described by Littig as protected, were those that provided services primarily to the African American community. These include careers in education, social work, and government work. Over time, these protected careers have come to be seen as traditionally open careers for African Americans. Furthermore, it is the contention of Evans and Herr (1991) that African American women may limit their career choices because of their perceptions about the amount of racism and sexism they may encounter in a profession. Thus, aspirations toward traditional working environments are viewed by these authors as coping mechanisms to survive the potential effects of discrimination in the workplace.

Researchers (Lent & Hackett, 1987) have asserted that the construct of self-efficacy may be useful in explaining the career behavior of racial and ethnic minorities. A major extension of social cognitive theory to career

behavior is Bandura's (1986) self-efficacy beliefs. According to Bandura (1977), self-efficacy beliefs are expectations concerning one's ability to successfully perform a given behavior. Self-efficacy expectations are postulated to influence choice, performance, and persistence in career-related domains (Lent, Brown, & Hackett, 1994).

Ground-breaking work by Hackett and Betz (1981) has generated a wealth of empirical research on self-efficacy and gender differences in occupational interest. Hackett and Betz postulated that low expectations of self-efficacy with respect to various career areas, particularly those that have historically been male dominated, are a major mediator of gender differences in vocational choice. Male and female participants responded to questions about their capabilities with regard to the educational requirements and job duties of 10 traditional and 10 nontraditional occupations. Consistent with prediction, these researchers found that women's self-efficacy expectations were lower than men's for nontraditional occupations and significantly higher than men's for traditional occupations. Betz and Hackett's (1981) initial investigation has been replicated and extended by hundreds of researchers (Hackett & Lent, 1992).

Post-Kammer and Smith (1986) replicated the findings of Betz and Hackett (1981) regarding gender differences in self-efficacy using a Black high school population. To the contrary, Post, Stewart, and Smith (1991) found that self-efficacy did not influence consideration of nonmath or non-science occupations in a sample of 121 Black freshmen. Only interest variables had an impact on occupations. Rotberg, Brown, and Ware (1987) found that gender, race, and socioeconomic status did not predict the range of career choice or self-efficacy expectations. Although the three studies above investigated self-efficacy with African American populations, findings have been contradictory.

The fundamental purpose of the present study is to identify the best predictors for explaining African Americans' interest levels in traditional and nontraditional occupations. Africentric theorists suggest that African Americans tend to place a greater emphasis on family and community. Yet there is no research examining the role that values such as uplifting one's people, unity, and collectivism play in career decision making (Betz & Fitzgerald, 1995). The overrepresentation of African Americans in traditional social service occupations may be a manifestation of the Africentric value of cooperation and community survival (Leong & Brown, 1995). A commonly held view is that African Americans' perceptions of barriers, such as discrimination in the workplace, have debilitating effects on their career aspirations, yet there is no empirical evidence to support this claim.

An additional aim of this investigation, then, is to empirically document the relationship among Africentric values, discrimination, and African Americans' career interests and self-efficacy beliefs.

The following research questions and related hypotheses will be examined:

1. What is the relationship among one's level of commitment to African American culture, one's experiences with racism, and one's self-efficacy beliefs to expressed interest in traditional and nontraditional occupations for African Americans?

Hypothesis 1: African self-consciousness will have a positive relationship with interest in traditional occupations.

Hypothesis 2: The experience of racist events will have a positive relationship with interest in traditional occupations.

2. What variables measured in this study will be significant predictors of interest for traditional and nontraditional occupations?

Hypothesis 3: African self-consciousness, occupational self-efficacy, and the experience of racist events will be significant predictors of interest in traditional occupations.

Hypothesis 4: African self-consciousness will contribute unique variance to the prediction of interest in traditional occupations.

Hypothesis 5: African self-consciousness, occupational self-efficacy, and the experience of racist events will be significant predictors of interest in non-traditional occupations.

Method

Participants

Respondents were 129 African American students recruited from a predominately Black university and college. Both public schools were located within a 2-mile radius of one another and had a racial composition of more than 80% African American. Of the students, 41% ($n = 53$) were enrolled at a midwestern state university located in a large metropolitan city. The remaining 59% ($n = 76$) were enrolled at a junior/community college. The sample population was 23% male ($n = 30$) and 77% female ($n = 99$). The age of participants ranged from 16 to 70 years, with a mean age of 27 ($SD = 10.12$), and mode of 19 years. The overall self-reported grade point average

was 2.95 ($SD = 0.57$), with a range of 1.50 to 4.00. The most frequently listed major (and career goal) was education (32%). The second most common was social sciences (13%).

Procedure

A cover letter explaining the goals of this study was sent to various administrators at the college and university. After obtaining permission from the appropriate instructor, the principal investigator attended the various courses to administer the surveys. Students were informed that their participation in this study was voluntary and that their responses would be confidential and reported anonymously. Of the students present at the beginning of each course, 100% elected to participate in the study. A total of 139 surveys were completed; however, 10 of the students were not African American, and their surveys were removed from the sample. The surveys were completed in classroom settings in the order in which they appear below.

Instruments

Demographic Information Questionnaire. This instrument consisted of items related to the respondent's age, gender, class rank, grade point average, college major, career goal, certainty of these choices, and parent's occupation.

Occupational Self-Efficacy. This investigator-developed instrument assessed the participant's strength of self-efficacy for 10 traditional and 10 nontraditional occupations for African Americans. The U.S. Department of Labor statistics for 1983 (U.S. Census Bureau, 1997) regarding the percentages of employed civilians by race were used as a basis for selecting the occupations. The percentages for African Americans employed in 208 occupations ranged from less than 1% to 42.4%. Occupations included in the list were based on percentages that fell 1 standard deviation below the mean (deemed nontraditional occupations) or 1 standard deviation above the mean (deemed traditional occupations). Participants self-rated their level of confidence in completing the educational, training, and job duties for each occupation using a 5-point Likert-type scale, with 1 = *not confident* and 5 = *very confident*. A self-efficacy score for traditional occupations and nontraditional occupations was computed.

Occupational Interest Scale. Participants rated their interests in the same 10 traditional and 10 nontraditional occupations for African Americans found on the self-efficacy measure above. They self-rated their level of interest in each occupation using a 3-point Likert-type scale, with 1 = *not interested*, 2 = *indifferent*, and 3 = *interested*. The scale yields two occupational interest scores, one for traditional occupations and one for nontraditional occupations.

African Self-Consciousness Scale (ASC Scale; Baldwin & Bell, 1985). The ASC was designed to measure the level of commitment to African American culture. It is a 42-item measure scored on a 8-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 = *strongly disagree* to 8 = *strongly agree*. African self-consciousness is reflected in beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors that affirm African American life and cultural heritage.

The measure has obtained test-retest reliability coefficients covering intervals from 6 to 9 months in the high .80 to low .90 range with a sample of Black college students (Baldwin & Bell, 1985; Sabnani & Ponterotto, 1992). Factor analysis conducted by Stokes, Peacock, Murray, and Kaiser (1994) found confirmation for a comparable four-factor solution as suggested by the theory. Cronbach's alpha coefficients for the ASC Scale range from .79 to .82 (Baldwin & Eugene, 1994; Stokes et al., 1994). Thus, the ASC Scale has been shown to have reasonably sound psychometric properties and construct validity (Brookins, 1994).

Schedule of Racist Events (SRE; Landrine & Klonoff, 1996). The SRE is a brief questionnaire that assesses racial discrimination in the lives of African Americans. It is an 18-item self-report inventory that uses a 6-point scale to evaluate (a) the frequency of racist events in the past year (SRE-YEAR), (b) the frequency of the racist events during one's lifetime (SRE-LIFE), and (c) the appraisal of the stressfulness of the racist events (SRE-APRSL). These ratings can be treated separately as three different subscales.

Results of the validation study (Landrine & Klonoff, 1996) revealed that scores on the SRE were independent of social class and gender, as theorized. Internal consistency reliability coefficients for the three subscales were high: .95 for SRE-YEAR, .95 for SRE-LIFE, and .94 for SRE-APRSL. Likewise, the split-half reliability coefficients were .93 for SRE-YEAR, .91 for SRE-LIFE, and .92 for SRE-APRSL. Such data indicate that the SRE is a highly reliable instrument. To obtain construct validity of the scale, Landrine and Klonoff (1996) correlated SRE with psychiatric symptoms and smoking.

Table 1
Sample Score Characteristics

Variable	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	Potential Range	Obtained Range	α
ASC	210.15	31.01	42.00-336.00	135.00-293.00	.74
INT-TRAD	17.83	4.71	10.00-50.00	10.00-30.00	.78
INT-NON	16.41	4.25	10.00-50.00	10.00-30.00	.71
SE-TRAD	32.67	9.86	10.00-50.00	10.00-50.00	.88
SE-NON	28.40	9.84	10.00-50.00	10.00-50.00	.87
SRE-YEAR	35.46	13.65	18.00-108.00	18.00-89.00	.89
SRE-LIFE	42.13	15.83	18.00-108.00	18.00-95.00	.90
SRE-APRSL	43.25	18.21	17.00-102.00	17.00-88.00	.90
SRE-TOTAL	120.60	44.03	53.00-318.00	53.00-272.00	.96

Note: ASC = African Self-Consciousness Scale; INT-TRAD = interest in traditional occupations; INT-NON = interest in nontraditional occupations; SE-TRAD = self-efficacy for traditional occupations; SE-NON = self-efficacy for nontraditional occupations; SRE-YEAR = Schedule of Racist Events for this year; SRE-LIFE = Schedule of Racist Events for life; SRE-APRSL = Schedule of Racist Events appraisal; SRE-TOTAL = Schedule of Racist Events Total.

Results

Descriptive Analysis

Score characteristics (i.e., means, standard deviations, ranges, and reliability coefficients) for the instruments can be found in Table 1.

Coefficient alpha correlations were calculated to estimate the reliability (internal consistency) for all instruments. The reliability estimates for the SRE subscales ranged from .89 to .96. Correlational analyses were performed on the three SRE subscales to obtain intercorrelation coefficients. The intercorrelations among the SRE variables were as follows: SRE-LIFE and SRE-APRSL, $r = .81, p < .01$; SRE-YEAR and SRE-APRSL, $r = .64, p < .01$; and SRE-YEAR and SRE-LIFE, $r = .83, p < .01$. Given these high correlations, a total score for SRE was entered into the regression equations. The intercorrelations among the interest (INT) variables were as follows: interest in traditional occupations (INT-TRAD) and interest in nontraditional occupations (INT-NON), $r = .41, p < .01$. The intercorrelations among the self-efficacy (SE) variables were as follows: SE-TRAD and SE-NON, $r = .71, p < .01$.

Multivariate analysis of variance, unique sum of squares method, is a more conservative analysis that was used to determine whether significant differences by gender and location or their interaction existed for any of the variables. Main effect differences were found for ASC and INT-TRAD

Table 2
Correlation Coefficients for Selected Variables

Variable	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. Age	—						
2. ASC	-.05	—					
3. SRE	.11	.21*	—				
4. INT-TRAD	.12	-.02	.11	—			
5. INT-NON	-.09	.07	.09	.41**	—		
6. SE-TRAD	.25**	.00	.09	.46**	.26**	—	
7. SE-NON	-.25**	.09	.10	.12	.47**	.71**	—

Note: ASC = African Self-Consciousness Scale; SRE = Schedule of Racist Events; INT-TRAD = interest in traditional occupations; INT-NON = interest in nontraditional occupations; SE-TRAD = self-efficacy for traditional occupations; SE-NON = self-efficacy for nontraditional occupations.

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$ (one-tailed).

scores. Gender was found to be significantly related to ASC. Men had significantly higher ASC scores than women (227 vs. 205), $F(1, 111) = 11.9$, $p < .01$. Women's interest in traditional occupations was significantly higher than men's interests in traditional occupations ($M = 18.5$ vs. 15.6), $F(1, 111) = 9.4$, $p < .01$.

There was no significant difference by location, nor was there any significant two-way interaction between gender and location. There were also significant relationships among age and SE-NON ($r = -.25$, $p < .01$) and SE-TRAD ($r = .25$, $p < .01$).

Hypothesis Testing

The results are presented according to the hypothesized relationships. Pearson correlations calculated among the variables are shown in Table 2.

The results do not support Hypothesis 1. There was no significant relationship found between ASC and INT-TRAD. Nor was Hypothesis 2 supported. Although the relationships of SRE scores with INT-TRAD were in a positive direction, the experience of racist events did not have a significant relationship with interest in traditional occupations.

Hierarchical multiple regression analyses were used to analyze the predictor model proposed in this study. Predictor variables were gender (coded as a dummy variable and entered into the equation first because of its antecedent and significant relationship to the criterion variable) and the

Table 3
Summary of Regression Analysis

Variable	<i>R</i>	<i>R</i> ²	<i>R</i> ² _{change}	<i>F</i> _{change}	β	<i>p</i>
Interest in traditional occupations						
Gender	.31	.10	.10	11.63	-.31	.00**
SRE-TOTAL	.35	.12	.03	3.65	.17	.06
ASC-TOTAL	.35	.13	.01	0.14	.04	.71
SE-TRAD	.54	.29	.17	25.47	.41	.00**
SE-NON	.59	.34	.05	8.40	-.34	.01**
Interest in nontraditional occupations						
SRE-TOTAL	.10	.01	.01	1.05	.10	.31
ASC-TOTAL	.10	.01	.00	0.03	.02	.87
SE-TRAD	.51	.26	.25	35.65	.50	.00**
SE-NON	.52	.27	.01	1.61	-.15	.21

Note: SRE-TOTAL = Schedule of Racist Events Total; ASC = African Self-Consciousness Scale Total; SE-TRAD = self-efficacy for traditional occupations; SE-NON = self-efficacy for nontraditional occupations.

** $p < .01$.

measures of ASC, SE, and SRE. Criterion variables were the interest in traditional and nontraditional occupations. The results indicate partial support regarding Hypothesis 3. Hierarchical regression using gender, SRE-TOTAL, SE-TRAD, SE-NON, and ASC as predictor variables and INT-TRAD as the criterion variable showed that three of the five variables were significant predictors of INT-TRAD, accounting for 33% of the variance in the equation, $F(3, 109) = 17.50$, $R^2 = .33$, $p < .000$. A summary of the regression analyses can be found in Table 3.

These results indicate that women expressed more interest in traditional occupations than men. The relationship between self-efficacy for traditional occupations and interests is in a positive direction. As self-efficacy for traditional occupations increased, so did interest in traditional occupations. On the other hand, the relationship between self-efficacy for nontraditional occupations and interest in traditional occupations was an inverse one. As one's self-efficacy for nontraditional occupations increased, one's interest in traditional occupations decreased. ASC did not enter into the equation; thus, Hypothesis 4 was not supported. ASC did not contribute unique variance to the prediction of interest in traditional occupations.

The results indicate partial support for Hypothesis 5. Hierarchical regression using gender, SE-TRAD, SE-NON, SRE-TOTAL, and ASC as predictor variables and INT-NON as the criterion variable showed that SE-NON was the only significant predictor, accounting for 25% of the

variance in INT-NON scores, $F(1, 110) = 37.32, R^2 = .25, p = .000$. The direction of this relationship was positive. As one's self-efficacy for non-traditional occupations increased, so did one's interest in nontraditional occupations. Gender, SE-TRAD, SRE-TOTAL, and ASC did not contribute significantly as hypothesized.

Discussion

The fundamental purpose of the study was to identify values and beliefs that affect the career interests and decisions of African Americans. More specifically, the study examined the extent to which ASC, SRE, and SE could predict interest in traditional and nontraditional occupations for an African American student population. The results of the present study indicate that gender was highly predictive of interest in traditional occupations, with African American women expressing higher levels of interest in traditional occupations than African American men. Second, stronger self-efficacy beliefs for traditional occupations were predictive of higher interest in traditional occupations. Moreover, weaker self-efficacy beliefs for nontraditional occupations predict higher interest in traditional occupations. The above findings replicate previous research spearheaded by Betz and Hackett (1981). This study also replicated findings by Post et al. (1991), who found that the only significant predictor of interest in math/science careers was math/science confidence. Thus, the results of the present study support the important contribution of self-efficacy in explaining the continued overrepresentation of African Americans in traditional occupations.

ASC and SRE failed to predict interest in traditional occupations. Cheatham (1990), in his theory of African American career development, hypothesized that the Eurocentric social order has a direct and predominate effect on the career development process, whereas the influence of the Africentric social order is tentative and indirect. The lack of significant findings of a relationship between ASC and interest in traditional occupations may be explained through the question of appropriateness of the ASC construct to work career-related activities.

With regard to the failure of racist events in the prediction of traditional occupational interests, Luzzo (1993) and others report that African Americans consistently cite racial discrimination as problematic barriers to career progress. These present findings on the SRE suggest that African American students report that racism continues to be a significant variable in their lives. However, these experiences of racism were not related to respondents' career choices. Perhaps racial discrimination is a "way of life for

African Americans beyond their ability to alter, eliminate, or avoid. . . . Consequently they may see little or no utility in attempting to do so in their career selection process" (Evans & Herr, 1994, p. 182).

Because racial discrimination is not directly related to career interest, it could be that racial discrimination weakens self-efficacy beliefs, which in turn motivates African Americans to explore interests in traditional occupations over nontraditional occupations. The relationship of racial discrimination, then, is an indirect influence, moderated through self-efficacy beliefs.

In summary, the lack of some significant findings of the Africentric construct in the present study should not automatically be interpreted to mean that one's commitment to African American culture and experiences of racism does not play a role in the career-related processes (such as interest and choice) of African American students. The issues of African Americans' self-concept (both personal and group orientation) and perceptions of racism are two complex issues. This study suggests that these relationships cannot be detected through direct and linear association to career interest. Alternative models that can better explain the indirect influences of such variables should be explored further.

There are several implications of the above findings that can be used to design counseling interventions. Given the importance of self-efficacy beliefs in the initiation and persistence of behavior, it follows that psychological interventions designed to change behavior may be appropriately focused on strengthening self-efficacy beliefs (Hackett & Betz, 1981). Additionally, because underdeveloped interests lead to a restriction in career choices (Bowman, 1995), cognitive interventions to increase students' self-efficacy may result in their developing interests outside of traditional occupations. Another recommendation on the basis of this study is for clinicians to set therapeutic goals to address the gender differences found in this research. More exploration of what fosters these differences is needed.

This study also indicates that more factors (i.e., gender, self-efficacy for traditional occupations, self-efficacy for nontraditional occupations) are influencing students' interest in traditional occupations rather than nontraditional occupations, which may be useful in directing clinical efforts to explore the sources of information that influence self-efficacy beliefs. Counseling strategies specifically designed to increase African American women's self-efficacy beliefs are recommended. The older participants in this study were more likely to have lower self-efficacy beliefs for nontraditional occupations and higher self-efficacy beliefs for traditional occupations. Interventions to increase self-efficacy beliefs and dismantle stereotyped ideas about socially acceptable careers may be even more important for older, nontraditional-age students.

Although racism's influence may not be directly related to career process variables, the negative effects of racism on the mental health of African Americans is well documented (Landrine & Klonoff, 1996). African Americans, regardless of class, report experiencing discrimination so frequently that depression, tension, and rage about racism are the most common problems presented by African American psychotherapy clients (National Institute for Mental Health, 1983, as cited in Landrine & Klonoff, 1996). Yet discriminatory practices were not accounted for in most traditional theories of career development (Osipow & Littlejohn, 1995).

Therefore, clinicians should continue to address coping strategies for dealing with such negative experiences. Furthermore, it is the contention of Gainor and Forrest (1991) that counselors would be remiss in their responsibilities if they did not consider these potential influences in African Americans' lives.

Nearly one half of the participants (45%) chose either education or a social science as a college major, suggesting that African Americans are overrepresented in these fields when compared with other disciplines. It is important, however, to consider the fact that much of the research that supports African Americans' preferences for education and social service occupations was conducted in the 1970s. Helms and Piper (1994) challenged the well-known truism that African American students are much more likely to major in education and social sciences than their White counterparts. Implications of this research are important because African Americans' tendency toward a narrow range of career options may produce little growth in the economic power of African American communities despite increased educational attainment (Gelso & Fretz, 1992).

More research is needed to examine the influence of background variables on career processes. In this study, both gender and age were found to be significantly related to several independent and dependent variables. For example, gender was related to interest in traditional occupations. Women reported greater interest in traditional occupations. Gender was also related to ASC scores. Men reported higher levels of ASC than women. Interestingly, age was significantly related to both self-efficacy variables. Older students reported higher or stronger self-efficacy beliefs for traditional occupations, whereas they reported lower or weaker self-efficacy beliefs for nontraditional occupations. It is important for researchers to be aware of such differences to systematically partition out the effect that these antecedent or preexisting variables may have on research findings.

This represents the first set of reliability coefficients for the measures of occupational self-efficacy and interest for the investigator-developed scales. Although the reliability estimates were sound (ranging from .71 to .87), the

subscale intercorrelations among the SE and INT scales were quite high, suggesting that the constructs for selecting traditional versus nontraditional occupations were not as different or as distinct entities as intended. One difficulty encountered during the scale development phase was the lack of diversity in prestige and type of occupations for traditional occupations. That is, most occupations that would be considered traditional for African Americans were in fields of employment that did not require any advanced training or college education. Typically, these jobs were also less prestigious. For example, two traditional occupations excluded from the instruments were postal worker and janitorial worker. Higher percentages of African Americans were employed in these fields than in the occupations included on the traditional occupations list (e.g., social worker, nurse, and clerk). Thus, inclusion of occupations that required some advanced training may have resulted in two scales that were more alike than different. Therefore, it appears that further research is needed to improve the instruments for use among African American populations.

Last, the generalizability of these results to other samples is limited. The utilization of differing institutions in geographical regions and African American students at predominately White universities and colleges could provide a more heterogeneous sample and therefore more generalizable results. Moreover, the lack of men in the study (only 23% of the sample were men), along with the significant gender differences found in this study, suggest that many of the findings are more applicable to women.

This study did not seek to find simplistic racial group differences in vocational choice but rather sought to explain within-group variability of African American career interests and to examine cultural influences on career development. The findings of this study implicate career self-efficacy as a promising construct that can further our understanding of the career development of African Americans (Brown, 1995).

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