

The Relationship between Gender and College Students' Career Development

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Choosing a career is perhaps one of the most stressful and important decisions one can make in a lifetime because so much of a person's life is dedicated to the occupation. Although some may think they have control over their future, studies show that one of the most significant influences on future occupations is the exploration of the environment and the self (Adragna, 2009). Research on this topic is essential because adolescents and young adults make important decisions regarding their lifelong career which coincides with their establishment of personal identity (Bregman & Killen, 1999). Many researchers have already explored the relationship between career development and past experiences among high school and college students. These studies have concluded that factors such as parents, teachers, siblings, resources, and gender all influence career development in some way (Adragna, 2009; Helwig, 2008; Tang, Pan, & Newmeyer, 2008; Kniveton, 2004; Bregman & Killen, 1999). Career development is defined as the process of exploring, planning, and implementing postsecondary career options (Tang et al., 2008). However, several studies have not taken economic factors into consideration. The current economic state may affect career development more than one may think, as it limits financial resources and makes choosing a career that is a good fit more imperative than ever. College students may no longer be able to afford school for more than four years. This is why we further investigated influences of career development among college students. To study which factors may play a significant role in college students' career development, male and female college students ages 18 and above were surveyed at a small midwestern university regarding their personal, past experiences and their relationship with their current career path. Gender was chosen as the premise of the study because of its importance in relation to career development trends. By gaining an understanding of differences in gender throughout career development, one may gain insight into gender differences within the workplace, such as occupational separation.

Literature Review

A literature review was conducted to investigate what past experiences have influenced freshmen and sophomore college students in choosing their career path. However, most of the studies we reviewed focused on high school students' and adolescents' career aspirations. Adranga (2009), for example, published a study examining high school students' career choices. In this study, the researcher reviewed the more intimate relationships between students and their families, including parental expectations and how students themselves perceive their own abilities. In general, students with higher self-esteem and motivation were more compelled to achieve a successful career; almost all students interviewed, regardless of their self-esteem level, planned to become more successful than their parents. Yet, students were also aware of educational limitations they faced; those who applied themselves academically felt they had a better chance of following through on their aspirations (Adranga, 2009).

In a more comprehensive, longitudinal study, Helwig (2008) studied the career development and preferences of young children as they progressed through high school. The researcher interviewed 208 students in 2nd grade about their career plans, expectations, and aspirations and followed up with them every two years throughout high school and once five years after graduation. In Helwig's study, constructivism is used to explain the origins of influence on children's career choice; constructivism is defined as the act of using one's personal experiences and life events for career counseling (Helwig, 2008). Gottfredson's Stage Development Theory explains a person's career development through individual principles depending on age. Helwig's (2008) study showed how 2nd-12th graders developed and changed their career preferences. Like Gottfredson's Theory (as cited in Helwig, 2008), younger males in Helwig's study expressed the most passion about masculine careers, whereas females preferred

more feminine careers. Once Helwig's participants entered middle school, both genders preferred more masculine careers. In addition, during high school, males began to express more realistic expectations of career aspirations and expected salaries. Data collected five years after high school graduation shows the greatest influences on students' career decisions as being the mother, closely followed by fathers and high school teachers (Helwig, 2008).

Another study, conducted by Tang et al. (2008) examined the effect of various factors influencing high school students' future career plans. Tang et al. surveyed 141 students, recorded age, gender, and ethnicity and considered the educational backgrounds and occupations of their parents. Framing their research in the Social Cognitive Career Development Theory, the researchers determined that students are able to come to a career decision based upon their own personal interests and learning experiences. However, students in Tang et al.'s study were also well-aware of any lack of resources that may have prevented them from reaching their career goals. As a solution, Tang et al. recommended that school counselors make it a priority to assist students in overcoming potential barriers by investigating potential aid programs and having students personally seek assistance within the community.

Kniveton's (2004) study on high school students was conducted to explain the influences on their choice of career. In the study, Kniveton compared 174 males and 174 females ranging from 14-18 years. A questionnaire and interview was administered to these students to gather information about their family, background, and other aspects. Results suggest that there are multiple factors that may lead adolescents to their chosen career. Parents, for example, are the greatest influence according to Kniveton. Similarly, teachers, peers, and siblings also influence the career development of high school students. In addition, Kniveton points out that gender also plays a role because males in this study were highly interested in occupations that include

physical and outdoor labor, whereas females expressed interest in social jobs, focusing on working with people.

Gender furthermore may also play a role in regards to motivational factors. Male students in Kniveton's (2004) study ranked money as their first priority, while females rated enjoying their work as their top concern; secondary factors were switched around: females ranked money as their second priority, while males made enjoying their work a secondary concern. Third factors were the same for both genders, which included utilizing valuable skills and feeling satisfied in one's chosen career.

Bregman and Killen (1999) conducted a study on adolescents' and young adults' reasoning for career choice and their parents' influence. Researchers interviewed 72 students in three different age groups: 10th graders, young college students, and older college students. The study's objectives were to establish a correlation between autonomy in social development and to find differences between moral, conventional, and prudential career choices. For example, participants were given one of three scenarios based on sports, business, and college decisions that adolescents and young adults might face. Next, researchers asked the participants to determine which type of reasoning they used to get their answers. These responses were analyzed by the researchers and grouped into three categories: nontraditional career alternatives, interpersonal, parallel activity preference, and hedonistic (self-gratifying). Furthermore, students were asked to explain their thought process throughout a series of questions; results show that there is no strong correlation between gender or age and career choices, but rather between the scenarios (i.e., sports, business, and college decisions) of the students regarding career development. The researchers also found that most participants thought it was more important to alter a planned lifestyle decision for a career rather than for personal reasons (e.g., to be with a

significant other) or hedonistic reasons (e.g., to increase leisure time). In fact, most students used personal reasons as their explanation for choosing their career paths, and they used pragmatic concerns as reasons for changing a career path (Bregman & Killen, 1999).

Considering existing literature, it becomes clear that gender, parents' role/influence, and resources (e.g., counselors and career services) all play a role in a person's career development. For example, the more resources or guidance a person has, the more likely he or she is to choose a successful career path (Tang, et al., 2008). All of this literature is continually helpful to professionals working with adolescents and young adults. However, researchers must take into consideration the current state of economy and how imperative it is to keep this research up-to-date. Therefore, the present study surveyed college students at a small midwestern university and investigated whether experiences due to gender differences affected career path decisions. Perhaps by looking further into these factors, professionals working with this population as well as parents will be able to take the actions necessary to guide any child to a successful future under any circumstance.

Theoretical Framework

The Ecological Systems Theory is perhaps the most diverse of any of the family theories. This theory takes the focus off an individual and places it on a person's interactions with his or her environments (Salkind, 2005). The Ecological Systems Theory is broken up into four subsystems that build upon each other during human development. The smallest subsystem, the microsystem, only pertains to one's self and the immediate environment. A student's microsystem may be his or her parents' dining room during a family dinner. The next level up is the mesosystem, which focuses on the relationships between different microsystems. An example of this includes the relationship between an individual's family experiences and his or

her peer experiences. The third level up is the exosystem. The exosystem may involve a social setting that does not directly include the individual. For example, if a student's family is expecting a new child, this may change how the student performs in school depending on his or her adjustment to the new child. The student is affected but is not directly involved in caring for the new child. The last level of the Ecological Systems Theory is called the macrosystem. This level contains all of the previous levels and also takes the cultural context into account (e.g., social media and popular culture).

The Ecological Systems Theory is perhaps to the best framework to use to explore the question of what past experiences influence freshmen and sophomore college students' career development. Since students are constantly learning and gaining new experiences, the idea that individuals develop through their interaction and exposure to different environments is synonymous with the Ecological Systems Theory.

If one applies the Ecological Systems Theory to the research question, one is able to make a number of predictions regarding future life choice. Based on the Ecological Systems Theory, one can expect that students' experiences with their family, school, peers, media, neighborhood, culture, and other environmental factors would have profound impacts on students' decisions on what they will do with their lives. Each of these environmental influences can impact a student's chosen career path. For example, one would assume that those who have enough resources (e.g., money, supportive family/peers, etc.) would be the ones most likely to attend and finish college. Similarly, given the Ecological Systems Theory, one would expect that students who lack these types of resources are less likely to attend and finish college, choosing other career paths instead.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this study consisted of three principles: (1) to examine the relationship between past gender and experiences that influence career development with a sample of young college students, (2) to develop a reliable survey instrument that measures those experiences that influence career development, and (3) to enhance the knowledge of professionals, (e.g., teachers, counselors, and social workers) who work with this population, regarding freshman and sophomore college students' career development. Parents, moreover, may also benefit from this by learning how to positively influence their children to the fullest potential. The study's results may also be beneficial to adolescents so that they can understand why and how they develop certain career preferences.

The central research question in this study was "Are there gender differences regarding past experiences that have influenced freshmen and sophomore college students in choosing their career development?" We predicted that there would be moderate differences in gender regarding young college students' career development. Existing literature suggests that female students mature faster than male students, and therefore, females often consider career choices before males. Also, literature indicates that parents have different effects on either gender, depending on which parent the student grows up with and which parent they confide in for support with their career decisions.

Method

Participants

The site of this study was at a small university in northwestern Wisconsin. The participants consisted of 57 undergraduate freshmen and sophomore students enrolled in a general education class required at the university. Of these 57 students, 33 were males, and 24

were females. There were 50 students between the ages of 18-19, and seven who were between the ages of 20-21.

Research Design

The purpose of the study was to make inferences from a comparable larger population with regards to characteristics, attitudes, and behaviors of the sample of male and female college students (Babbie, 1990). The survey design type can be described as a cross-sectional study design, illustrating the attitudes of male and female college students at one point in time. The form of data collection was self-administered questionnaires. The rationale of using this method was that it was the most efficient method to gather data directly on campus due to low cost, convenience, and quick return of data.

The population was the university student population; the sample was male and female students in a particular general education requirement class that provided equitable amounts of males and females. The study used a non-random probability design because the sampling took place in classroom settings where all students were included. Purposive sampling was used because the purpose was to gather data on attitudes of an equitable number of male and female college students. The study was approved by the Institutional Review Board (IRB).

Data Collection Instrument

In order to identify the attitudes of young college males and females towards their career development a survey was created. The survey included required information necessary to meet ethical and legal regulations, such as implied consent, risks/benefits and instructions. It consisted of demographic questions on age, gender, and academic status. Participants were given ten closed-ended statements based on a five-point Likert scale, measuring the intensity of the respondents' attitudes ranging from one (*strongly disagree*) to five (*strongly agree*). Questions

were derived from literature and theory based on gender and career development.

The survey instrument had both face validity and content validity. Face validity refers to the instrument questions having a logical connection to the concept and research question. Because the questions addressed in the survey were informed by literature, it was determined that they clearly connected to the relationship between past experiences and career development. Content validity refers to the instrument statements' coverage of the full range of concepts under the larger topic. The questions addressed included a variety of ideas on career development. The survey was not piloted due to time restraints.

Procedure

The survey process began once the researchers were granted permission to survey students enrolled in three speech communication classes. For each of the general education courses, the procedures used were identical and all took place within the same building at the university. First, the professor introduced the researchers, and then one researcher introduced the topic and reasons for the study. Prior to survey administration, students were informed of their rights and the risks and benefits of participating. While the study focused on freshmen and sophomores, all students were encouraged to participate in the survey. Randomization was not used in order to be inclusive in the classroom. The students were then instructed to begin the surveys as soon as the researchers and the professor left the room. Once all surveys were completed, the researchers thank the participants and collected the questionnaires.

Data Analysis Plan

Once the surveys were completed, they were first checked for missing data then coded using acronyms for each variable. The independent variable on the survey was *gender* (GEN), the category used to compare groups. *Age* (AGE) and *academic status* (AST) were demographic

variables to describe the participants. Each survey statement was a dependent variable and given an acronym: *My parents played a role in my career development* (PCD); *My sibling(s) has/have influenced my career development* (SCD); *What I see on the media has influenced my career development* (MCD); *My parent's career had an influence on my career choice* (PCC); *My career goals have changed within the last five years* (CGC); *My parents would support my career choice no matter what I decide* (PSC); *My high school provided me with resources for career development, such as counselors, and/or a career center* (HSR); *The amount of money I can make has influenced my career development* (AMI); *The amount of money my family makes has influenced my career development* (AMF); *I am choosing a career with stable employment instead of something I love doing* (CSE).

To analyze the data, the data-analyzing computer program called the *Statistical Package for the Social Sciences* (SPSS) was used. The individual was used as the level of analysis. Given that groups were being compared based on gender, data analysis included frequencies, cross-tabulations, mean comparisons, and independent t-tests. A Cronbach's Alpha reliability analysis was also conducted.

Results

The frequency distribution analysis indicated that there was missing data from the surveys consisting of two surveys with missing responses. To resolve this issue, we marked the two unanswered questions on each of the surveys as "unsure" so that we could keep them in the sample. Cross-tabulations were run with the independent variable, GEN. For MCD, there was a difference between groups with the majority of females being undecided and majority of males responding strongly disagree/disagree. For PCC, there was also a difference between groups with the majority of females responding strongly disagree/disagree and majority of males responding

strongly agree/agree. Dependent variables PCD, CGC, and AMI showed more than a 10% gender difference with more males noting strongly agree/agree in PCD and AMI and more females responding strongly agree/agree in CGC. There was no difference between groups for SCD, PSC, HSR, AMF, and CSE.

Table 1

Cross-Tabulations

PCD						
GEN	SD	D	U	A	SA	Total
Male	3.2%	9.7%	22.6%	48.4%	16.1%	100.0%
Female	7.7%	11.5%	11.5%	46.2%	23.1%	100.0%

SCD						
GEN	SD	D	U	A	SA	Total
Male	38.7%	22.6%	9.7%	29.0%	0.0%	100.0%
Female	23.1%	38.5%	19.2%	15.4%	3.8%	100.0%

MCD						
GEN	SD	D	U	A	SA	Total
Male	12.9%	32.3%	32.3%	22.6%	0.0%	100.0%
Female	3.8%	15.4%	50.0%	26.9%	3.8%	100.0%

PCC						
GEN	SD	D	U	A	SA	Total
Male	9.7%	22.6%	9.7%	38.7%	19.4%	100.0%
Female	19.2%	46.2%	7.7%	19.2%	7.7%	100.0%

CGC						
GEN	SD	D	U	A	SA	Total
Male	6.5%	12.9%	22.6%	25.8%	32.3%	100.0%
Female	7.7%	11.5%	11.5%	38.5%	30.8%	100.0%

PSC						
GEN	SD	D	U	A	SA	Total
Male	0.0%	0.0%	3.1%	21.9%	75.0%	100.0%
Female	0.0%	0.0%	4.0%	28.0%	68.0%	100.0%

HSR						
GEN	SD	D	U	A	SA	Total
Male	6.5%	12.9%	9.7%	45.2%	29.0%	100.0%
Female	3.8%	11.5%	3.8%	34.6%	46.2%	100.0%

AMI						
GEN	SD	D	U	A	SA	Total
Male	3.2%	9.7%	9.7%	48.8%	29.0%	100.0%
Female	0.0%	11.5%	30.8%	38.5%	19.2%	100.0%

AMF

GEN	SD	D	U	A	SA	Total
Male	6.5%	19.4%	29.0%	32.3%	12.9%	100.0%
Female	7.7%	15.4%	30.8%	34.6%	11.5%	100.0%

CSE

GEN	SD	D	U	A	SA	Total
Male	12.9%	29.0%	38.7%	16.1%	3.2%	100.0%
Female	23.1%	30.8%	23.1%	15.4%	7.7%	100.0%

Note. (GEN)=Gender of participant; (PCD)= My parents played a role in my career development; (SCD)= My sibling(s) has/have influenced my career development; (MCD)= What I see on the media has influenced my career development; (PCC)= My parent’s career had an influence on my career development; (CGC)= My career goals have changed within the last 5 years; (PSC)= My parents would support my career choice no matter what I decide; (HSR)= My high school provided me with resources for career development, such as counselors, and/or a career center; (AMI)= The amount of money I can make has influenced my career development; (AMF)= The amount of money my family makes has influenced my career development; (CSE)= I am choosing a career with stable employment instead of something I love to do.

Table 2

Compare Means

<u>GEN</u>	<u>PCD</u>	<u>SCD</u>	<u>MCD</u>	<u>PCC</u>	<u>CGC</u>
Male:					
Mean:	3.65	2.29	2.65	3.35	3.65
SD:	.98	1.27	.98	1.31	1.25
Range:	4.00	3.00	3.00	4.00	4.00
Female:					
Mean:	3.65	2.38	3.12	2.50	3.73
SD:	1.20	1.13	.86	1.24	1.25
Range:	4.00	4.00	4.00	4.00	4.00

<u>GEN</u>	<u>PSC</u>	<u>HSR</u>	<u>AMI</u>	<u>AMF</u>	<u>SOLE</u>
Male:					
Mean:	3.65	4.71	3.90	3.26	2.68
SD:	.53	1.17	1.04	1.12	1.01
Range:	2.00	4.00	4.00	4.00	4.00
Female:					
Mean:	4.65	4.08	3.65	3.27	2.54
SD:	.56	1.16	.94	1.12	1.24
Range:	2.00	4.00	3.00	4.00	4.00

Note. (GEN)=Gender of participant; (PCD) = My parents played a role in my career development; (SCD)= My sibling(s) has/have influenced my career development; (MCD)= What I see on the media has influenced my career development; (PCC)= My parent’s career had an influence on my career development; (CGC)= My career goals have changed within the last 5 years; (PSC)= My parents would support my career choice no matter what I decide; (HSR)= My high school provided me with resources for career development, such as counselors, and/or a career

center; (AMI)= The amount of money I can make has influenced my career development; (AMF)= The amount of money my family makes has influenced my career development; (CSE)= I am choosing a career with stable employment instead of something I love to do.

Independent samples t-tests were run to compare mean scores for males and females. There were no significant mean differences between the genders.

A reliability analysis was run to indicate if the variables were a reliable index to measure the major concept, the relationship between gender and young college students' career development. When running the scale reliability in SPSS, the analyses were run across each variable. Cronbach's Alpha is a measure of reliability and was 0.301. This value indicates that survey items were not a reliable measure of the major concept; there were five variables that were negatively correlated with the rest (SCD, MCD, PSC, HSR, and CSE).

Discussion

Our hypothesis that there would be moderate differences in gender regarding young college students' career development found mixed support. Cross-tabulations indicate a few variables that show moderate differences between the groups. Independent t-tests and mean comparisons were also conducted, but they did not show statistically significant mean differences between the genders. Each variable will be discussed in terms of how the results were supported in the literature and/or by theory.

Participants varied in responses on whether the media had influenced their career development; roughly the same number of females agreed (29.2%) as males disagreed (30.3%). This finding was supported in the literature from Kniveton (2004), who discovered that the media has a profound influence on females by veering them away from science-based occupations. However, what Kniveton does not address in his study is the overwhelming amount of undecided responses within both genders. In fact, there may be several reasons for the large

number of undecided responses. One possibility is that participants did not fully understand the question. Another possibility could be that participants have never thought about how the media has influenced them before. In U.S. culture, the media is inescapable and has influenced all the participants in this study, but because the influence can be subliminal, they may not have been aware of it.

Similar response differences occurred in regard to the question of whether participants' parents' careers had an influence on their own career choice. A large majority of females either disagreed or strongly disagreed, while the large majority of males either agreed or strongly agreed. This finding received mixed support from the literature, with Adranga's (2009) study claiming that a parent's career *does* have an influence on the child's career choice. In Adranga's study, even though almost all participants planned to become more successful than their parents, there was no significant difference in the level of prestige between the jobs of students and their parents. One reason for such a large difference in responses between genders could be because males may feel a responsibility to live up to, or even exceed, the expectations or prestige of the family.

In regard to whether students thought their parents played a role in their career development in general, the majority of participants agreed or strongly agreed; however, more females agreed or strongly agreed, while males' responses were more varied across the scale. Kniveton's (2004) study found that parents have the greatest influence on their child's career development by far. Bregman and Killen's (1999) study further found that supported career choices were considered based on personal growth, while rejected choices were based on personal relationship (e.g., parental relationships). Bregman and Killen's findings juxtaposed with current social norms may help explain why not as many males as females agreed or strongly

agreed. Males may not want to admit that their parents played a role in their career development; they may want to maintain their sense of masculinity and independence by thinking they have made a successful decision on their own.

When asked whether the amount of money one can earn has influenced their career development, the large majority of participants agreed or strongly agreed. Although trends were the same, more males than females agreed or strongly agreed. Kniveton's (2004) study supports these findings and discusses motivational factors that play a role in choosing a career. In fact, Kniveton notes that males rank money as their first priority, while females prefer enjoying their work. Given the need of financial stability, it is not surprising that future earnings are taken into consideration, but Kniveton's findings may also help explain why more males than females consider their possible future income as a factor in their career development.

The large majority of participants agreed or strongly agreed that their parents would support their career choice no matter what they chose. This result parallels Adranga (2009) who asserts that families who offer support and allow their children to make autonomous career decisions generate positive identity development.

Along with parental support and guidance, children also benefit from resources provided by their school (e.g., counselors, career services). In fact, the responses of males and females to the statement on whether their high school had provided resources for career development were very similar. The majority of males and females stated that they agreed or strongly agreed on their school providing counselors or a career center for career development support. Tang et al. (2008) states various implications for school counselors to consider in supporting their students throughout high school, including providing a meaningful learning experience and self-efficacy for proper career development. The findings in Tang et al.'s study furthermore indicate the

overall importance of school counselors for students through the programs and guidance these counselors provide. The majority of surveyed participants agreed or strongly agreed that their career goals had changed in the past five years. However, female participants had a moderately larger response compared to males in agreeing, and 21.2% of males responded as being undecided on the statement. These findings actually challenged Gottfredson's Developmental Stage Theory (as cited in Helwig, 2008), which suggests that females are generally more likely to develop an understanding of their career goals and aspirations before males (Helwig, 2008). At the same time, Gottfredson's claim may explain why a number of males were undecided on the statement. In addition, another reason for the large number of undecided responses could be the ambiguity of the response options. If there would have been more options for responses, such as a seven-point scale instead of a five-point, students would have had more opportunity to respond accurately.

The majority of participants disagreed or strongly disagreed that their siblings had an influence on their career development. This contrasts with Helwig's (2008) findings which argue that siblings *can* have an impact on career development by adding a sense of competition throughout the lifespan. However, this does not account for circumstances in which the participant does not actually have a sibling. In fact, one participant noted "I'm adopted and I believe this is why my brother has had almost no influence on my career."

Participants varied in responses on whether they chose a career with stable employment rather than an occupation they feel very passionate about. For males, the majority disagreed or strongly disagreed, followed closely by undecided responses. Females showed a similar trend. Again the high number of undecided responses may be due to the lack of range in the scale for response; if the scale were open to a larger variety of responses, the results may have been

clearer. In Kniveton's (2004) study, motivational factors were ranked among males and females, and males ranked money as their first factor, while females ranked enjoying the work itself as first. Females surveyed disagreed slightly more, meaning they were more likely to choose a career they thoroughly enjoyed rather than one based on how much money they could make. This could help explain the trend of females typically choosing careers in care giving and nurturing fields which tend to have lower paying salaries.

On the survey, participants were also asked whether the amount of money their family makes influences their career development. The large majority of participants agreed or strongly agreed. However, there was also a large amount of undecided responses, with 30.3% of males and 25% of females. This particular result is of special interest because we had predicted that the amount of money a family makes would be a major determinant in if, how long, or what postsecondary school a student is able to attend based on the Ecological Systems Theory. Considering current economic times and the Ecological Systems Theory framework, it is not surprising that an individual's interaction with his or her environment affects individual choices (Salkind, 2005). In regards to participants' responses, we suspect that there may be several reasons for the large number of undecided responses in the current study. For one, it is possible that participants did not fully understand the question, resulting in participants giving a neutral response by default. Another possibility is that there should have been more qualifying questions on the survey. That is, having a larger variable scale of 1-7 could have expanded the responses.

Qualitative Analysis

There were several identified themes regarding gender differences within the qualitative comments. When analyzing the participants' current majors, we discovered that there were general differences among the genders. Females generally held majors related to art and design,

such as interior design and art education. Males, on the other hand, generally held majors related to engineering, technology, or other hands-on careers, such as construction and manufacturing engineering. The hypothesis was supported by showing moderate differences between the genders, as the groups generally maintain different career aspirations.

Another difference found within the qualitative data concerned the “ideal” occupation of the participants. Males’ ideal occupations tended to be a lot more prestigious than what they are currently studying to be. Perhaps this is because males are more concerned with status and prestige than females. Many of these answers were also sports-related occupations. Among these sports-related occupations were “sports analyst” and “professional athlete.” Females, however, tended to be more realistic about their ideal career choice, choosing higher-up positions requiring more education and/or experience that relate to their major, such as nursing, art teacher, or soccer coach. These responses are similar to Kniveton’s (2004) discussion of gender differences within career development. This discussion suggests that females mature more quickly than males in career attitudes, explaining more realistic ideal career aspirations.

Limitations

A major limitation to this study is the small sample size and the non-random design. The high number of undecided responses may be due to the use of the five-point scale instead of a seven-point scale with more variation. In addition, the numerous undecided responses may also have contributed to the low reliability.

Another limitation of this study was the sampling deadline. This posed a time restraint to the researchers and, therefore, greatly reduced the number of potential participants. Additionally, the narrow research questions may have limited insight to differences in career choice between other groups of people (e.g., age groups), as this research question only examined the differences

in career development in terms of gender.

Implications for Practitioners

The data demonstrated that there are no significant differences between gender and career development, even though a few notable differences were found. Nevertheless, practitioners may benefit from this information while working with students in choosing their future career. From the qualitative comments on the surveys, it is apparent that males have less realistic dreams in terms of careers compared to females. Perhaps, this is due to different maturation rates of males and females. School counselors will find this information beneficial in helping both males and females choose a career that is attainable and successful. The qualitative comments show gender separation between several academic majors. From this, implications for future practitioners may also include educating students on a variety of possible careers, regardless of gender, and providing enough resources to attain those careers along with encouraging them not to choose a career based on gender stereotypes.

Much of the data also illustrates the major influence of parental roles. Not only do students recognize their parents as a major influence on their career choices, but students also want to feel autonomous in making their own decisions. Because of this, it may be helpful for parents to provide support, guidance and resources, while encouraging their children to make autonomous decisions. This suggestion can also be extended to other practitioners working with children and students, such as teachers, case workers, and school counselors.

Implications for Future Research

There are several suggestions for future research on career development. For instance, in order for a future study to be applicable nationwide, a random, large sample must be included. Furthermore, it would be useful to make changes to some of the survey questions. The

Cronbach's Alpha score for this study was calculated to be .301. This value indicates that survey items were not a reliable measure of the major concept; the variables SCD, MCD, PSC, HSR, and CSE were negatively correlated with the rest. If the same survey would be used in future research, these five variables should be removed or rewritten since the respondents answered them in the opposite way they were intended.

Additionally, several different study designs should be employed, such as conducting a random design. Exploring different ways of obtaining data (e.g., interviewing students) would provide more insight on their lived experiences. Another suggestion for future research would be to conduct a longitudinal study, following individuals from adolescence to adulthood. This would allow researchers to monitor the changes in career paths throughout the lifespan and assess events that influence those changes.

Furthermore, future research may want to consider examining differences in career paths between other groups of people (e.g., age groups or academic status). Although it is important to realize the differences between genders in regard to career development, there may also be important differences in career development between different age groups, for example, giving insight to generational differences and societal growth. It may also be helpful for future research to examine the effect of modern day factors on career development, such as socioeconomic status. This would give insight to the effects of external and internal resources on career development (e.g., amount of income and resilience).

Conclusion

Given the uncertain economy and diminishing resources for students, it is imperative that students receive sound career advice as early as possible. As previous studies have indicated, there are many influential factors and differences among the genders in terms of career

development. Parental support, change of career goals, high school resources, and amount of money a student will earn are major factors influencing career development among adolescents and college students. This data is useful for the family studies field, especially for educators and parents in order to support their students' career development. The present study's findings continue to point out various gender differences within career choices, emphasizing the importance of existing and future research on this topic.

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