



Evaluation of an intervention to increase non-traditional career interests and career-related self-efficacy among middle-school adolescents

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Abstract

This investigation evaluated the effectiveness of an intervention designed to increase adolescents' interests in non-traditional careers, and their career-related self-efficacy. Results demonstrated significant increases in career planning and exploration efficacy, and educational and vocational development efficacy among experimental group participants. Boys showed significant increases in artistic, social, and conventional interests, and girls showed significant increases in realistic, enterprising, and conventional interests. Results suggest that young adolescents' career-related self-efficacy and interests in non-traditional careers can be increased through their participation in computer assisted career intervention and group exploration activities.

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1. Introduction

Over the last several decades, research has quite consistently demonstrated significant gender differences in the development and expression of young people's occupational interests (Swanson & Gore, 2000). For example, researchers have shown that children from an early age have strong sex-typed occupational preferences, with boys demonstrating more rigid sex typing than girls (Helwig, 1998, 2002; Trice, Hughes, Odom, Woods, & McClellan, 1995). Middle school and high school aged adolescents' interests and efficacy to pursue specific occupations have been shown to correspond to demonstrated differences in men's and women's employment patterns across Holland Themes (i.e., more men work in realistic, investigative, and enterprising occupations, and more women work in artistic, social, and conventional occupations) (Gottfredson & Lapan, 1997; Lapan, Adams, Turner, & Hinkelman, 2000; Lapan, Hinkelman, Adams, & Turner, 1999; Turner & Lapan, 2002). Middle school, junior-high, and high school aged adolescents' vocational aspirations, expectations, and preferences have been shown to be associated with their sex-type ratings of occupations, with boys showing significantly higher preferences than girls for more prestigious and higher paying careers (Armstrong & Crombie, 2000; Brown, 1997; Davey & Stoppard, 1993; Lapan & Jingeleski, 1992). College age young people have been shown to express greater interests in, efficacy for, and commitment to occupations that are dominated by members of their own gender (Betz & Schifano, 2000; Chung, 2002; Einarsdottir & Rounds, 2000).

Gender differences are a critical factor to the extent that they lead young people to pursue certain career paths at the expense of others. One theory that describes how such gender differences develop is circumscription and compromise theory (CCT; Gottfredson, 1981, 2002; Gottfredson & Lapan, 1997). According to CCT, young people's occupational aspirations (and interests) are shaped by their socialization experiences. By the age of nine, children begin to circumscribe their vocational interests according to their understanding of the gender-appropriateness of various occupations. This circumscription of aspirations means that by early adolescence, when interests have crystallized, young people have decreased their "zone of acceptable alternatives," which demarcates those occupations that the individual considers preferable from those that are ruled out as incompatible with how one comes to understand oneself. This rejection of whole segments of the occupational world leads to a narrowing of the occupational options that young people consider and explore, and for which they prepare.

Some authors have addressed how to change adolescents' career interests. For example, both Prediger and Noeth (1979), and O'Brien, Dukstein, Jackson, Tomlinson, and Kamatuka (1999) demonstrated that using the results of adolescents' career interest inventories to engage them in career exploration yielded an increase in the number of careers young people considered, and improved the congruence between their career interests and potential career choices. However, although there is compelling evidence in the vocational literature that gender-typing of occupations limits adolescents' occupational options, little research has been done to explore how to intervene to address the issue of occupational gender-typing among boys and girls.

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