



# The relationship of ethnic identity, career decision-making self-efficacy and outcome expectations among Latino/a high school students <sup>☆</sup>

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## Abstract

This study explored the relation of ethnic identity to two determinants of career interests identified by social-cognitive career theory (SCCT): self-efficacy and outcome expectations. For a sample of 128 Latino/a ninth graders, the results indicated that ethnic identity had a direct and positive relationship to career decision-making self-efficacy, while its association with career planning outcome expectations was mediated by self-efficacy. These results offer support for consideration of the role of ethnic identity in self-exploration and vocational guidance with Latino/a adolescents. Limitations, implications for counseling, and suggestions for future research are discussed.

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*Keywords:* Career development; Self-efficacy; Latino/a adolescents; Ethnic identity; Outcome expectations; Social-cognitive career theory

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## 1. Introduction

Relatively little is known about the extent to which current theories of career development pertain to Latinos/as in general, and Latino/a adolescents in particular (Arbona, 1995; Fouad, 1995). Some authors have found support for the potential usefulness of the social-cognitive model of career development with Latina adolescents (Flores & O'Brien, 2002; McWhirter, 1997; McWhirter, Hackett, & Bandalos, 1998). This study examined the relationship between ethnic identity and two social-cognitive variables (e.g., career decision-making self-efficacy and career outcome expectations) in a sample of ninth grade Latino/a students.

Ethnic identity describes individual differences in “feelings of ethnic belonging and pride, a secure sense of group membership, and positive attitudes toward one’s ethnic group” (Phinney & Alipuria, 1996, p. 142). Arbona (1995, 1996; Fouad & Arbona, 1994) notes that ethnic identity formation is a critical developmental task for Latino/a adolescents, one with vital implications for vocational identity, insofar as the latter is presumed to be based on an integrated sense of self (Arbona, 1995; Fouad & Arbona, 1994; Holland, 1985; Super, 1957, 1990; Super, Savickas, & Super, 1996). Given a societal context of racial and ethnic discrimination, it has also been observed that ethnic identity may be a particularly salient domain of overall ego identity for Latinos/as (Arbona, 1995; Phinney, 1990; Smith, 1991). Consequently, Arbona (1995) suggests that one way that career development theories might better illuminate the experience of Latino/a adolescents would be to “examine to what extent the process of ethnic identity formation becomes a developmental task in itself that affects the process of resolving more directly vocational tasks” (p. 49).

It has also been observed that career-related self-efficacy may prove an important element in formulating a model of career development for Latinos/as (Arbona, 1995; Fouad, 1995). The construct of self-efficacy (i.e., belief in one’s abilities in a specific domain) has its origins in Bandura’s (1986, 1997) social learning theory. It was used initially by vocational theorists to examine women’s career development (e.g., Hackett & Betz, 1981) and more recently as an integral component of social-cognitive career theory (SCCT; Lent, Brown, & Hackett, 1994, 2002). SCCT highlights the ways in which beliefs as well as socio-cultural context influence the development of vocational interests, career choice, and job performance. Researchers working from this perspective have examined how social factors such as race, culture, and gender influence career self-efficacy beliefs and outcome expectancies, which in turn, are thought to influence career interests, goals, and ultimately, career behavior (Lent, Brown, & Hackett, 2002).

One of the seminal contributions of SCCT (Lent et al., 1994, 2002) has been to interpose the constructs of self-efficacy and outcome expectations between personal identity and the development of interests. From this perspective, interests are not simply expressions of personality. Rather, personal inclinations may be transformed into vocational interests if (and only if) people believe they can do something (self-efficacy) and believe they will be successful (outcome expectations). The authors suggest in their model of interest development that within-person variables may directly influence both self-efficacy and outcome expectations, and in addition, that self-efficacy beliefs will directly influence outcome expectations (therefore, potentially

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