

Career search self-efficacy: The interaction effect between gender and career services

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The present study investigated gender differences in career search self-efficacy of graduating college students. The differences in four types of career search self-efficacy, job search efficacy, networking efficacy, interviewing efficacy, and personal exploration efficacy, were examined based on gender and the previous use of career services. One hundred twenty three male and female college students who were graduating in two months completed Career Search Efficacy Scale. Due to the moderate negative skewness, the scores of career search self-efficacy measures were power transformed. Whether they already received job offers or not was controlled as a covariate. The result of MANCOVA indicated the main effect of the use of career services and the interaction between gender and the use of career services on career search self-efficacy. Women who used career services showed higher scores on four types of career search self-efficacy measures than those who did not. Men did not show significant differences based on the use of career services. These results suggest the relationship between career search self-efficacy and the use of career services is stronger for women than for men, possibly implying that the relative importance of career services may be based on gender.

Key words : Career Search Self-Efficacy, Gender Differences, Career Services

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Women's career development is one of the areas that have been vigorously studied in vocational psychology. The increase in the number of women in the work force has directed researchers' attention on unique factors in the women's career behaviors that are distinguished from those of men. In particular, many studies have focused on the observation that women's vocational activities are confined to certain fields which limit their abilities and potential and are often less prestigious (Betz & Schifano, 2000; Lyness & Thompson, 1997; McGuire & Reskin, 1993 Straits, 1998).

Career related self-efficacy has been extensively studied to explain the limited range of women's career choice (Hackett & Betz, 1981 Post-Kammer & Smith, 1985). Career related self-efficacy, originated from social learning model of self-efficacy (Bandura, 1986), is self-efficacy expectations for specific occupations or career fields. Career researchers have considered career related self-efficacy as a cognitive factor that mediates gender role socialization and the heavy concentration of women in confined career fields (Hackett & Bet, 1995).

As proposed by Bandura (1986), career related self-efficacy expectations develop through performance accomplishments, vicarious learning, emotional arousal, and verbal persuasion. Career related self-efficacy theory proposes that women's socialization emphasizes feminine gender roles, limiting the opportunities for women to develop self-efficacy in activities that are not compatible

with these gender roles, which, in turn, reduces interests in and consideration of nontraditional career fields for women (Hackett & Betz, 1981). This proposition that career related self-efficacy of women leads to gender segregated occupations or career fields has been repeatedly confirmed with empirical methods (see Hackett & Betz, 1995).

However, career related self-efficacy can provide only a partial portrait of women's career choice. Although career related self-efficacy may determine the range of occupations or career fields to be considered, the actual choice would be also dependent on the availability of one's access to those occupations or fields. Especially for women who are in the process of finding a job, career search process may be more important in explaining the patterns of career choice. For this reason, gender differences in career search can be also crucial in understanding occupational gender segregation.

The studies on career search have centered on the use of formal and informal career search methods of men and women. While the formal search methods use the publicized employment information, such as ads in newspapers, on the internet, or through employment agencies, the informal search methods primarily rely on social network. In particular, women's use of informal search methods, or networking, has been claimed to contribute to the concentration of women in certain career fields (Drentea, 1998; Straits, 1998). Compared to men's network, women's

network is less diverse and influential, mostly composed of personal ties to other females. As a consequence, women's use of informal search methods steer women into female dominant fields.

The empirical findings on this proposition are equivocal. Studies targeting both college students and the general public showed that men were more likely to use informal search methods, or networking, than women (Huffman & Torres, 2001; Straits, 1998). However, women's use of informal search methods has been found to perpetuate occupational segregation by gender because women's network consisted mainly of other women in female dominant fields (Drentea, 1998).

The above findings are seemingly incompatible, yet it is understandable when human agency that drives one's behavior, or one's confidence in using networking is considered. Women may use less of networking because they do not feel confident in successfully using networking. It may also affect the quality of their network, as they would rely more on personal relationships and would feel less confident in expanding their network through developing professional relationships. Granovetter (1982) argued that the effective network should be heterogeneous, consisting of members beyond the immediate circle of contacts.

Thus, it proposes that the internal human agency needs to be considered to fully understand the gender differences in the use of

career search methods. Previous studies were more concerned with the descriptive patterns of career search methods than with the internal functioning which may lead to these differential search patterns. The investigators attempted to explore this internal agency by applying the self-efficacy theory to career search.

Career search self-efficacy refers to efficacy beliefs in conducting a series of career search activities (Solberg, Good, Fisher, Brown, & Nord, 1995). The scope of these activities ranges from understanding personal interests to effectively using job search methods and interviewing for a job. Career search self-efficacy is a strong predictor of career search behaviors (Kanfer, Wanberg, & Kantrowitz, 2001; Solberg, Good, Fischer, Brown, & Nord, 1995). It is also an important social cognitive factor that is associated with individual preference in specific career search behaviors, such as networking (Wanberg, Kanfer, & Banas, 2000).

Unfortunately, research on gender differences in career search self-efficacy is scant. As stated earlier, most of the studies focused on gender differences in career search behaviors (Drentea, 1998; Huffman & Torres, 2001; Straits, 1998). However, Ryan, Solberg, and Brown (1996) noted the implication of gender in career search self-efficacy by arguing that the role of parental attachment and family dysfunction on career search self-efficacy is more important for women than for men. The study by Van Hooft et al. (2005) also found that men reported greater

global job search self-efficacy than women. The weaker self-efficacy in job search was also confirmed by a study conducted in Korea (Chang et al., 2004).

As these studies investigated career search self-efficacy as a global concept, it would be the next step to look at different aspects of career search self-efficacy, such as self-efficacy for formal and informal search methods. As stated earlier, gender differences in career search methods, especially networking, can be better understood by considering self-efficacy for different career search methods. When gender differences in self-efficacy for different types of career search methods are explored, it can provide better insight on the underlying mechanism behind their descriptive patterns.

In investigating gender differences in career search self-efficacy, the effect of career services would be an important factor to be considered. Although previous studies have implied that women's self-efficacy for career behaviors would be relatively low compared to men due to the socialization process, it has been also documented that career self-efficacy can be improved with interventions (Betz & Schifano, 2000; Sullivan & Mahalik, 2000). In particular, Sullivan and Mahalik's study (2000) showed female college students who were in a career group achieved improvement in career decision making self-efficacy while female students in control group did not. As career search self-efficacy is closely related to career decision making self-efficacy

(Solberg, Good, Fischer, Brown, & Nord, 1995), a similar effect of career interventions on career search self-efficacy is expected.

The current study aims to expand the literature on women's career development by examining graduating college students' career search self-efficacy based on gender and career services. The investigators targeted graduating college students, as career search self-efficacy would be more relevant to those in the search process. The first goal of this study was to examine gender differences in career search self-efficacy. Gender differences in career search self-efficacy have not been extensively studied. Additionally, investigating self-efficacy in different types of career search activities may expand current understanding of career search behaviors of women. As career search self-efficacy is a strong predictor of career search behaviors (Kanfer, Wanberg, & Kantrowitz, 2001; Solberg, Good, Fischer, Brown, & Nord, 1995), it may also help to explain gender differences in career search behaviors (Huffman & Torres, 2001; Straits, 1998).

The second purpose of this study was to assess the gender differences in career search self-efficacy in relation to the use of career services. Social cognitive model (Bandura, 1986) and empirical studies (Betz & Schifano, 2000; Sullivan & Mahalik, 2000) suggest learning experience can improve self-efficacy. Thus, it is expected that those who used career services would report stronger career search self-efficacy

than those who did not. However, it would be more important to explore if the effect of career services interact with gender, affecting career search self-efficacy. Career self-efficacy theory argues that women's low career self-efficacy is due to the limited access to learning opportunities that would foster self-efficacy. Considering that women has less resources for strong self-efficacy, career services may be more important in improving women's career search self-efficacy than men's.

Hypothesis 1. Women would report lower career search self-efficacy than men.

Hypothesis 2. There would be interaction effect between gender and career services on career search self-efficacy. In other words, the differences in career search self-efficacy between those who used career services and those who did not would be greater for women than for men.

Method

Participants

Participants were 123 graduating college students from a large Midwestern university in the US. All of them planned to graduate within 2 months at the time of their participation. The sample consisted of 57 females (46%) and 66 males (54%), and most of the participants (106 students, 86%) were within the age range of 21

and 23. The majority of the participants identified themselves as Caucasians (116 students, 94%) and reported that their parents completed college or higher degree (88 students, 72 %). Participants majored in various fields including business, art and science, agriculture, journalism, engineering, and human environmental studies.

With regard to career services, 84 participants (68 %) reported that they used career services (i.e., career exploration courses, career counseling, career assessment, or other types of career services), and the rest 39 participants (32 %) did not have experience in using career services. At the time of their participation, 75 participants (61 %) said that they were still engaging in career search, while 48 participants (39 %) reported that they already received an offer.

Instruments

Career Search Efficacy Scale(CSES)

Career search self-efficacy was measured with CSES (Solberg et al., 1994). CSES includes 4 subscales, focusing on different types of career search self-efficacy. Job search efficacy assesses efficacy beliefs in performing traditional job search tasks, reflecting efficacy for formal search methods. Interviewing efficacy concerns the particular skills for job interviews and informational interviews. Networking efficacy involves confidence in using networking for career search, or informal search methods. Lastly,

personal exploration efficacy reflects efficacy beliefs in examining personal interests and values. The CSES is composed of 35 items using 10-point Likert-scale ("very little (0)" to "very much (9)"), and each subscale score can be computed by a mean score of the corresponding items. The higher score reflects stronger efficacy.

Solberg et al. (1994) reported Cronbach α .97 for the full CSES and the range of .87 and .95 for subscales. Factor analysis confirmed the internal structure of the CSES, and the convergent validity was demonstrated with the strong correlation between the CSES and Career Decision Making Self-Efficacy Scale (Solberg et al., 1994). For this sample, reliability was estimated at Cronbach α .95 for job search efficacy, .93 for interviewing efficacy, .93 for networking efficacy, and .89 for personal exploration efficacy.

Demographic information

Participants also completed a questionnaire which asked demographic information such as age, sex, ethnic background, major, and college. The questionnaire also asked whether they used career services before and if they received a job offer at the time of their participation.

Procedure

Data was collected during the month of April in 2004. Participants were recruited in classes where the majority of students were seniors in

accordance with the IRB guidelines. Participants were informed of their rights as research participants, the nature of this study, and an incentive (a random drawing for two 50 dollar rewards). The signed informed consent and the completed questionnaire were separated upon the submission. Debriefing information was sent via e-mail to the participants who completed the survey.

Statistical Analyses

The differences in career search self-efficacy depending on gender and career services were examined with multivariate analysis of covariance (MANCOVA). Gender (female and male) and career services (the previous use of career services and the absence of career service use) were included as independent variables, and career search self-efficacy scores were dependent variables. As the investigators were concerned about the possible effect of the individual difference in the current career search status (those who were still in career search process and those who received a job offer), it was assigned as a covariate to statistically control its effect.

Results

The dataset was examined for accuracy of data entry, missing values, normality, univariate

and multivariate outliers, and multicollinearity. This preliminary examination indicated moderate negative skewness of the distributions of the scores of four efficacy measures (skewness indices ranging from -1.57 to -1.19, kurtosis indices ranging from 1.40 to 3.47). As MANCOVA requires the assumption of normality, the scores were power transformed by squaring each score (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2001). After the transformation, the normality of the distributions was improved, as indicated by skewness indices between -.82 and -.51 and kurtosis indices between -.38 and .44. Thus, the squared scores of job search efficacy, interviewing efficacy, networking efficacy, and personal exploration efficacy were used in the subsequent analyses.

A 2 X 2 MANCOVA was performed on four measures of career search self-efficacy with the independent variables of gender and the previous use of career services and the covariate of the current career search status. Box's test was not significant ($F_{30, 13786.04} = .96, p > .05$), meeting the statistical assumption of homogeneity of variance-covariance matrices (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2001). The Wilks' Lambda criterion was used to

test the significance of the differences in the combined measures of job search efficacy, interviewing efficacy, networking efficacy, and personal exploration efficacy. The result showed that the combined four measures of career search self-efficacy were not significantly different by gender ($F_{4, 115} = 1.28, p > .05$) but by the previous use of career services ($F_{4, 115} = 3.25, p < .05$). Moreover, the interaction effect between gender and the previous use of career services was significant ($F_{4, 115} = 4.31, p < .01$). The effect of the covariate on the combined measures of career search self-efficacy was not significant ($F_{4, 115} = 1.34, p > .05$). The result of MANCOVA is shown in Table 1.

Subsequently, univariate analyses of covariance (ANCOVA) were performed on each measure of career search self-efficacy. The respective results for four measures of career search self-efficacy were similar to each other, indicating the significant main effect of career services and the interaction effect between gender and career services. The result with each job search efficacy, interviewing efficacy, networking efficacy, and personal exploration efficacy as a dependent

Table 1. Multivariate Analysis of Covariance of Career Search Self-Efficacy

Effect	Wilks Lambda	$F (df = 4, 115)$	Partial Eta Squared	Observed Power
Covariate (search status)	.96	1.34	.05	.41
Gender	.96	1.28	.04	.39
Career Services	.90	3.25*	.10	.82
Interaction	.87	4.31**	.13	.92

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$

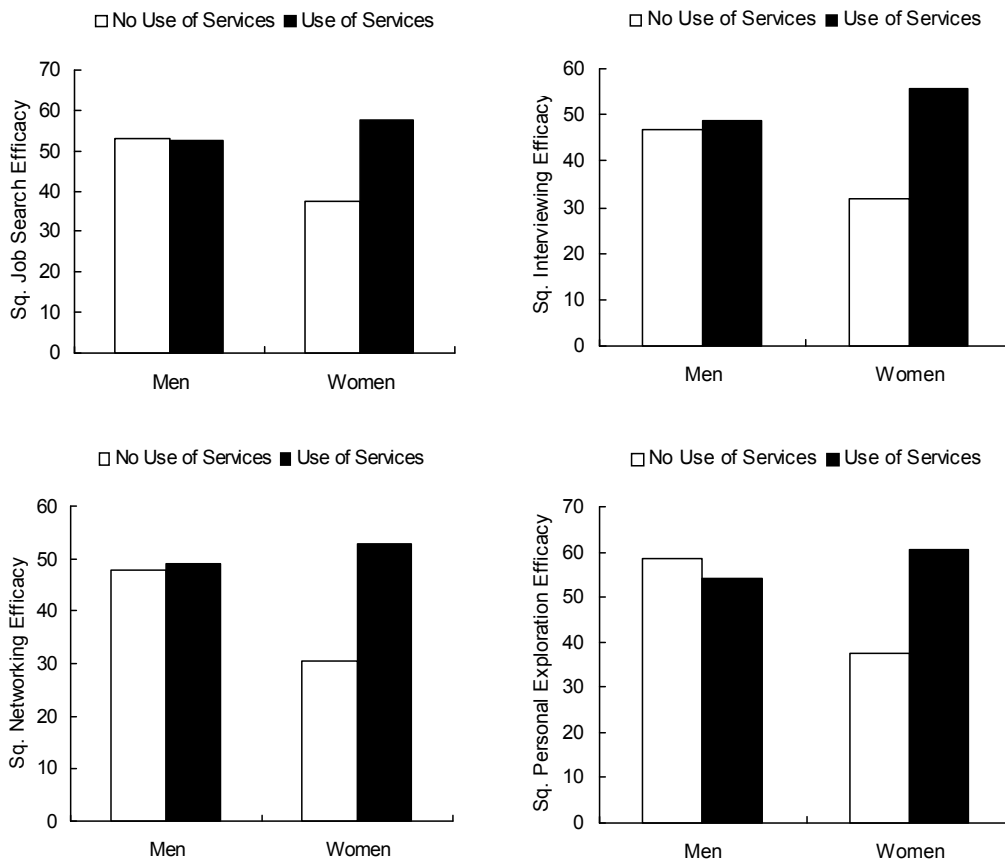


Figure 1. Mean scores of job search, interviewing, networking, and personal exploration efficacy for men and women who used and did not use career services.

variable showed that those who used career services had greater efficacy than those who did not ($8.12 \leq F_{1, 118} \leq 12.70, p < .01$). In addition, Men did not show the difference in efficacy based on their previous use of career services, but women who used career services reported significantly greater efficacy than women who did not use services, representing the significant interaction effect ($8.05 \leq F_{1, 118} \leq 17.31, p < .01$). The effect of the covariate

(i.e., the current career search status) was significant only for interviewing efficacy ($F_{1, 118} = 4.54, p < .05$) and networking efficacy ($F_{1, 118} = 4.36, p < .05$). Figure 1 illustrates the mean scores of job search, interviewing, networking, and personal exploration efficacy of men and women who used and did not use career services. This clearly shows that only women who did not use career services reported lower self-efficacy in job search, interviewing,

networking, and personal exploration than the other groups (i.e., women who used career services, men who used and did not use career services).

Discussion

This study examined the effect of gender and career services on career search self-efficacy with graduating college students. The investigators were especially interested in gender differences in self-efficacy for different types of career search activities, and the effect of career services on reducing gender discrepancies in self-efficacy.

The results offered partial support for the hypotheses of this study. The first hypothesis about gender differences in career search self-efficacy was not supported. The levels of career search self-efficacy were not different between men and women, which is inconsistent with the previous finding (Chang et al., 2004; Van Hooft et al., 2005). As expected, those who used career services showed greater efficacy beliefs for all types of career search activities including both formal and informal (i.e., networking) methods. Although gender itself did not create differences in career search self-efficacy, the significant interaction effect between gender and career services (Hypothesis 2) may offer further insight in explaining the lack of gender effect on career search self-efficacy. When only those who did not use

career services were concerned, women showed weaker efficacy beliefs in career search activities. However, women who used career services reported stronger career search self-efficacy, and this was similar to that of men who used career services. Unlike women, men did not show differences in career search self-efficacy depending on whether they used career services or not.

The effect of gender and career services was found for self-efficacy for all types of career search activities. Based on the previous literature on career search methods of men and women (Drentea, 1998; Huffman & Torres, 2001; Straits, 1998), the investigators were interested if there would be differential patterns for four types of career search self-efficacy. Unfortunately, all four types of career search self-efficacy showed similar patterns. It appears that the comparison of self-efficacy for formal and informal search methods adds little insight on the previous studies on gender differences in career search methods. Especially, the fact that this study did not measure career search methods employed by the participants limits the power to explain this finding. Thus, the future studies may wish to include other relevant variables such as the types and the intensity of career search methods.

The overall findings of the current study can be understood in the context of social cognitive theory (Bandura, 1986) and gender socialization. As discussed, career researchers adopting self-efficacy theory have argued that gender

socialization process limits women's access to certain experiences and information that are necessary for developing strong self-efficacy for career development (Hackett & Betz, 1995). Thus, women are likely to have weaker career search self-efficacy than men in general. However, the adequate interventions, such as career services, may help to increase women's efficacy beliefs in career search. In addition, the effect of career services is greater for women than for men because men are afforded with diverse opportunities to develop career search self-efficacy even without career services.

This proposition is indirectly supported by previous studies. It has been documented that career interventions can effectively increase women's self-efficacy for a specific interest domain (Betz & Schifano, 2000) or for career decision making (Sullivan & Mahalik, 2000). More importantly, Mau and Fernandes (2001) found that men and women were not different in using career services, but women were more satisfied with the career services. It implies that women's experience in career services is more positive than men's, resulting in increased their confidence in career behaviors.

However, this study is limited, in that it cannot offer causal explanations. Thus, it is necessary to confirm this proposition by a quasi-experimental design which can assess the effectiveness of career services for men and women by measuring the changes in career search self-efficacy. This study also used an

aggregated term of career services, combining career counseling, career assessment, career courses, or other types of career services, providing little understanding in individual characteristics that might have been related to different types of career services. Future studies may differentiate different types of career services to advance the understanding of gender and career services in relation to career search. In addition, the timing of the data collection may have an effect on career search self-efficacy. As the data was collected one month prior to the participants' graduation, it is likely that they already engaged in various career search activities and that their experience in career search activities might lead to overall increase in career search self-efficacy (Bandura, 1986). The negative skewness of the distributions of career search self-efficacy measures may reflect this. Further studies may be conducted with different time schedules. Finally, this study was conducted with a specific sample. They were graduating colleges students from a large university in the US, and most of them were Caucasian Americans. Thus, the generalizability of this study is limited.

In summary, gender appears to be an important factor in understanding career search, and career services have greater meanings for women than for men. It should be noted the relations of gender and career services with career search self-efficacy suggests that gendered experience is crucial in understanding career search self-efficacy and that proper interventions

can lead to changes in self-efficacy. Thus, career specialists who develop and render career services may need to pay close attention not only to gender itself, but also the individuals' experiences in the gendered context.

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구직 관련 자기 효능감: 성별과 진로서비스 이용간의 상호작용을 중심으로

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본 연구는 대학 졸업예정자들의 진로서비스 이용에 따른 구직 관련 자기 효능감의 성차를 조사하였다. 구직 관련 자기 효능감으로는 구직 효능감, 사회지지망 사용 효능감, 인터뷰 효능감, 자기 탐색 효능감의 네 영역이 포함되었으며, 이들이 성별 및 진로 서비스 이용 경험의 유무에 따라 어떠한 차이를 보이는지가 검증되었다. 미국 남녀 대학 졸업예정자 123 명이 연구에 참여하였으며, 구직 관련 자기 효능감 척도가 사용되었다. 척도의 점수가 다소 부적 편포를 보였으므로 정상 분포에 가깝도록 변환된 점수가 분석에 사용되었다. 이미 졸업 후 직업이 결정되었는지의 여부는 공변량으로 통제되었다. 다중 공변량 분석 결과, 성별 자체는 유의미한 주효과가 없었으나, 진로 서비스 이용 경험의 유무의 주효과와 성별과 진로 서비스 이용간의 상호작용 효과는 유의미하였다. 여성의 경우, 진로서비스를 이용하지 않은 집단은 이용한 집단보다 네가지 유형 모두의 효능감 수준이 낮았으나, 남성은 진로서비스를 이용하지 않은 집단과 이용한 집단 간의 차이가 유의미하지 않았다. 이 결과는 진로서비스의 효과에 있어서 성차가 있음을 시사한다.

주요어 : 구직 관련 자기 효능감, 성차, 진로 서비스