



The effects of Korean college students' self-identity on career decision-making self-efficacy

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Preparing for a career is a key task that should be completed during the transition period from adolescence to adulthood. With a sample of 160 Korean college students we analyzed the effect of self-identity on career decision-making self-efficacy and examined the roles of college adjustment and social support as mediators in this relationship. The results showed that college adjustment and social support both mediated the effect of self-identity on career decision-making self-efficacy. College students with a stronger sense of self-identity adapted more positively to college life and perceived more social support, which led to higher career decision-making self-efficacy. Although our focus was on Korean college students, our results have practical implications for the enhancement of all college students' career decision-making self-efficacy.

Keywords

career decision-making self-efficacy; career planning; career preparation; self-identity; college adjustment; social support

Generally, college attendance is a context in which individuals in emerging adulthood prepare to enter the workforce while maintaining their identity as students. Preparing for a career is a key task that students should complete during this transition period from adolescence to adulthood (Ghosh & Fouad, 2017). Hackett and Betz (1981) defined *career decision-making self-efficacy* as the belief that one can successfully complete the tasks necessary for making career decisions, such as collecting information about specific jobs, goal setting, plan formation, practice or participation in problem solving, and self-evaluation (Betz, Klein, & Taylor, 1996). Career decision making itself depends on an individual's psychological and practical readiness to make such decisions. Previous researchers have shown that self-doubt, confusion, and anxiety are psychological obstacles that hamper college students' career decision-making process, and that *self-identity*, that is, the recognition of one's potential and qualities in relation to one's social context, is essential to overcome such challenges (Martincin & Stead, 2015). The stronger the sense of self-identity college students have, the better they are able to choose a career.

To understand the relationship between self-identity and career decision-making self-efficacy, researchers should consider environmental factors, such as college adjustment and social support (Garcia, Restubog, Bordia, Bordia, & Roxas, 2015). *College adjustment* refers to the process by which students familiarize themselves with new norms and systems in a college context, as they build relationships and strive for academic achievement (Baker & Siryk, 1989). Previous researchers have reported that students who adapt positively to college life are advantaged in terms of efficient preparation for their career (Strayhorn, 2012). *Career-related social support* refers to the extent to which individuals perceive the possibility of obtaining from their social relationships various resources for career-related behavior, including care, understanding, communication, motivation, and the assistance of others, such as family, friends, teachers, and neighbors

(Guan et al., 2016). Although social support has a significant impact on the career decision-making self-efficacy of college students who are seeking to develop their career (Fouad, Ghosh, Chang, Figueiredo, & Bachhuber, 2016), previous researchers have not addressed how social support is related to self-identity and career decision making.

Therefore, we analyzed the effect of Korean college students' self-identity on their career decision-making self-efficacy, and examined the mediating effects of college adjustment and social support in this relationship. We proposed the following research questions:

Research Question 1: How do college students' self-identity, college adjustment, and social support affect their career decision-making self-efficacy, after controlling for gender and age?

Research Question 2: How do college adjustment and social support mediate the relationship between college students' self-identity and career decision-making self-efficacy?

Method

Participants and Procedure

We used typical case sampling, a purposive sampling method, to recruit typical college students from middle class communities in South Korea. Participants were 160 undergraduates (87 women = 54.4% and 73 men = 45.6%) at two universities in Incheon, South Korea. Their ages ranged from 18 to 25 years ($M = 21.13$, $SD = 2.57$). We introduced our study to students in several large courses. Participants were informed of their rights and assured that their participation in the survey was voluntary and that their responses would be kept confidential. We distributed the questionnaires, asked the participants to answer them immediately, and then collected the completed forms.

Measures

Career decision-making self-efficacy. We measured career decision-making self-efficacy using the Career Decision-Making Self-Efficacy Scale-Short Form (Betz et al., 1996), which was translated into Korean by K. H. Lee and Lee (2000). The reliability and validity of the Korean version have been confirmed (J. W. Lee & Choi, 2015). The scale consists of 25 items (e.g., "How much confidence do you have that you could make a plan of your goals for the next 5 years?"), which participants rate on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 = *strongly disagree* to 5 = *strongly agree*. Cronbach's α was .90 in this study.

Self-identity. We measured self-identity using the Korean Adolescent Self-Identity Scale-Short Form (A. C. Park, 1996), which has been confirmed to be reliable and valid (Koo, Kang, & Baek, 2013). The scale consists of 28 items (e.g., "I am confident in my decision making."), which participants rate on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 = *strongly disagree* to 5 = *strongly agree*. Cronbach's α was .91 in this study.

College adjustment. We assessed college adjustment using the Student Adjustment to College Questionnaire (Baker & Siryk, 1989), which was translated into Korean by Kim (2005), who also confirmed the scale's reliability and validity. The scale consists of 67 items (e.g., "Are you satisfied with your academic performance?"), which participants rate on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 = *strongly disagree* to 5 = *strongly agree*. Cronbach's α was .92 in this study.

We measured social support using the Social Support Scale (J. W. Park, 1985), which has been confirmed to be reliable and valid (Hwang, 2015). The scale consists of 12 items (e.g., "I feel my friends take care of me."), which participants rate on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 = *strongly disagree* to 5 = *strongly agree*. Cronbach's α was .87 in this study.

Data Analysis

To answer the first research question and determine whether self-identity, college life adjustment, and

social support significantly affect career decision-making self-efficacy, after controlling for gender and age we conducted a hierarchical multiple regression analysis with SPSS 23.0. To answer the second research question and test the two proposed mediation models, we conducted two series of regression analyses as proposed by Baron and Kenny (1986).

Results

The means and standard deviations for the study variables were as follows: self-identity ($M = 3.44$, $SD = 0.56$), college life adjustment ($M = 3.27$, $SD = 0.42$), social support ($M = 3.24$, $SD = 0.50$), and career decision-making self-efficacy ($M = 3.48$, $SD = 0.51$). The skewness (-0.31) and kurtosis (-0.37) of the main variables indicated no violation of the normality of distribution assumption. An examination of the correlations between self-identity, college life adjustment, and social support showed that the independent variables were moderately correlated ($r = 0.42$ – 0.66 , $p < .01$). As the variance inflation factors were within acceptable limits (1.33 – 1.99), multicollinearity was not an issue.

Hierarchical multiple regression analysis was conducted with career decision-making self-efficacy as the dependent variable and the other factors as independent variables. The regression model in Stage 1, with gender and age as the independent variables, did not show a significant relationship with the dependent variable. In Stage 2 the self-identity ($\beta = .21$, $t = 2.34$, $p < .05$), college adjustment ($\beta = .28$, $t = 3.24$, $p < .01$), and social support ($\beta = .24$, $t = 3.25$, $p < .01$) variables in the regression model were significant predictors of career decision-making self-efficacy. Together, the independent variables accounted for 34.5% ($\text{Adj. } R^2 = .35$) of the variance in career decision-making self-efficacy.

We then conducted a series of regression analyses to examine the mediating effects of college adjustment and social support in the relationship between self-identity and career decision-making self-efficacy. The regression model at Stage 1 demonstrated that self-identity had a significant impact ($F = 119.40$, $p < .001$; $t = 10.93$, $p < .001$; $\beta = .66$) on college adjustment. The regression model at Stage 2 demonstrated that self-identity had a significant impact ($F = 55.68$, $p < .001$; $t = 7.40$, $p < .001$; $\beta = .51$) on the dependent variable of career decision-making self-efficacy. At Stage 3 the multiple regression analysis that included both self-identity and college adjustment as independent variables showed a significant effect on career decision-making self-efficacy ($F = 36.78$, $p < .001$), and the effect ($\beta = .29$; $t = 3.27$, $p < .001$) of self-identity on career decision-making self-efficacy was smaller than it was in Stage 2. We conducted Sobel's (1982) test to verify the effect of self-identity on career decision-making self-efficacy via the mediator of college adjustment and obtained the result of $z = 6.28$ ($p < .001$).

Regarding the mediating effect of social support, the regression model at Stage 1 demonstrated that self-identity had a significant impact ($F = 38.87$, $p < .001$; $t = 6.24$, $p < .001$; $\beta = .44$) on social support. The regression model at Stage 2 demonstrated that self-identity had a significant impact ($F = 54.68$, $p < .001$; $t = 7.40$, $p < .001$; $\beta = .51$) on the dependent variable of career decision-making self-efficacy. At Stage 3 the multiple regression analysis that included both self-identity and social support as independent variables showed a significant effect on career decision-making self-efficacy ($F = 37.34$, $p < .01$), and the effect of self-identity ($\beta = .29$; $t = 3.89$, $p < .001$) on career decision-making self-efficacy was smaller than it was at Stage 2. We conducted Sobel's (1982) test to verify the effect of self-identity on career decision-making self-efficacy via the mediator of social support, and obtained the result of $z = 4.46$ ($p < .001$).

Discussion

Our results showed that both college adjustment and social support mediated the effect of self-identity on career decision-making self-efficacy of Korean college students. Our finding that self-identity, an internal psychological variable, directly affected career decision-making self-efficacy supports previous findings that college students with a stronger sense of self-identity have higher career decision-making self-efficacy (J. H. Lee, Lee, & Lyu, 2011; Martincin & Stead, 2015). Further, college adjustment and social support indirectly

mediated the effect of self-identity on career decision-making self-efficacy. This shows that a stronger sense of self-identity leads to better college adjustment, which results in higher career decision-making self-efficacy. In addition, students with a stronger sense of self-identity perceived more social support, which led to higher career decision-making self-efficacy. Previous researchers have reported that career decision-making self-efficacy is directly influenced by college adjustment (Strayhorn, 2012) or social support (You, 2013). However, we found that these variables had an indirect effect by mediating the relationship between self-identity and career decision-making self-efficacy.

As self-identity is primarily shaped and developed from early childhood to late adolescence, it is difficult for students to make positive changes during the relatively short time they spend at college. However, social support and college adjustment, which are environmental variables, can be improved by professional intervention. Our results underscore the important role of constructive social interaction between college students and supporters and mentors among their families, friends, peers, and university personnel, including faculty members (Baier, Markman, & Pernice-Duca, 2016; Soria & Stubblefield, 2015), in enhancing students' career decision-making self-efficacy.

College students with ample social support are able to become immersed in exploring career options and prepare efficiently for job opportunities by using information and resources (Ghosh & Fouad, 2017). College professionals should facilitate undergraduates' adaptation to the new college environment that involves academics and interpersonal relationships, and also help them to develop a sense of belonging and attachment to the college. To achieve more active intervention, colleges may consider using cooperative learning groups, student organizations, student counseling centers, and freshman seminars. Further, faculty members can offer undergraduates dedicated career planning courses (Fouad et al., 2016) to promote students' engagement, occupational exploration, career decision making, and skill building.

There are some limitations to this study and further research is required. As we used typical case sampling with a small sample, our results cannot be generalized to a wider population. Another limitation is that we relied on self-report measures as the sole means of assessment. Future researchers should take into account factors such as a representative national sample and multiple data sources. In addition, future researchers could focus more on other confounding variables (e.g., college context) that drive the relationships between our study variables. Nevertheless, we have contributed to the literature on college students' career decision-making self-efficacy and to the ultimate goal of helping students achieve career progression.

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