At-Risk Urban High School Students’ Commitment to Career Choices

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The purpose of this study was to examine the commitment to career choices process for at-risk urban high school students. Data from 189 at-risk urban high school students were sampled. Results indicated that students’ level of commitment to their career choices was related to their vocational identity, their need for occupational information, their perceived barriers to occupational goals, and the number of occupations they considered. The tendency to foreclose was related to the adherence to career myths. Implications and limitations for career theory, research, and practice are addressed.

One of the major developmental tasks of late adolescence and early adulthood is the commitment to career choices process (Blustein, Ellis, & Devenis, 1989; Erikson, 1968; Harren, 1979; Jepsen, 1984; Sharf, 1992; Super, 1957, 1984, 1990). This process, which entails the development and specification of vocational options, generally culminates in a strong attachment or commitment to career choices (Gottfredson, 1981; Harren, 1979; Jordaan & Heyde, 1979; Super, 1957, 1984, 1990; Tiedeman & O’Hara, 1963). During this process, an individual must be able to tolerate the ambiguity, confusion, and anxiety of exploring a variety of potential careers (Fuqua & Hartman, 1983; Jordaan, 1974; Jordaan & Heyde, 1979). Although a number of investigators have begun to examine the salience of the commitment to career choices process for college students (Betzi & Serling, 1993; Blustein et al., 1989; Stead & Watson, 1992), there has been a lack of systematic research exploring the correlates to the commitment to career choices process for at-risk urban high school students. Relevant to at-risk urban high school students are the limited resources available to these adolescents (e.g., lower school funding), the stressors associated with being at risk (e.g., lower socioeconomic status; McWhirter, McWhirter, McWhirter, & McWhirter, 1995), and the lack of working role models (Lougead, Liu, & Middleton, 1995). Thus, successful navigation through the developmental tasks toward a stable commitment to career choices becomes formidable. Although past studies have attempted to create career programs and interventions for this population (Lingg, 1995; Loughead et al., 1995), it seems critical to understand more clearly the career choices process for at-risk adolescents.

Blustein et al. (1989) defined the commitment to career choices process as consisting of two independent constructs or variables. The first construct, vocational exploration and commitment, refers to individuals’ openness to exploring various career options before committing to specific career choices. Vocational exploration and commitment has been found to be associated with college students’ vocational choice crystallization (Blustein et al., 1989). The second construct, tendency to foreclose, refers to individuals’ tendency to prematurely commit to career choices without a “thorough period of exploration and provisional commitment” with regard to potential career choices (Blustein et al., 1989, p. 346). For example, adolescents who believe strongly that only one occupation is meant for them would indicate a strong tendency to foreclose. Tendency to foreclose has been found to be associated with college students’ vocational choice crystallization (Blustein et al., 1989). Both of these constructs have been shown to be related to college students’ levels of career indecision, fear of commitment, self-esteem, and traditional career roles.
trait anxiety, and ability to remain functional under stress (Betz & Serling, 1993).

Although previous investigations have provided evidence for the usefulness of the constructs underlying the commitment to career choices process for college students, understanding how these constructs relate to at-risk urban high school students is limited. Blustein et al. (1989) suggested that this is a critical next step for research in this area. Urban high school students, who are considered at risk, deal with a variety of issues unique to their situation that are arguably quite different from those of a general college student population. Thus, a primary purpose of the present investigation was to extend the understanding of the commitment to career choices process by examining this process and other salient career variables in at-risk urban high school students.

The commitment to career choices process reflects one's certainty about career choices and implies self-confidence and a stable sense of vocational future (Blustein et al., 1989). These notions of certainty, self-confidence, and a stable sense of vocational future also appear to be directly related to the construct of vocational identity. Holland, Daiger, and Power (1980) defined vocational identity as the stability of one's career personality, goals, interests, and talents. It seems reasonable to suspect that a greater degree of certainty about one's career choices would likely be related to a more stable sense of vocational self or identity. Thus, in the present study, we predicted that at-risk urban high school students who were less open to vocational exploration and uncommitted to career choices would have a less stable vocational identity. Furthermore, we predicted that students who were more likely to foreclose prematurely on an occupational choice also would have a less stable vocational identity.

In the context of at-risk urban high school settings, students are often forced to make vocational decisions regardless of their intention to go to college or to identify options for employment, while simultaneously contending with poverty, unstable family structures, and inhospitable school environments (McWhirter et al., 1995). Indeed, these additional obstacles or barriers would seem to be related to the students’ levels of vocational exploration and commitment and their tendency to foreclose. For example, adolescents who come from impoverished families may have realistic concerns about their ability to pay for a postsecondary education. Furthermore, day-to-day survival and meeting primary physical and emotional needs may be of greater concern than seeking out information about careers (Loughhead et al., 1995). Even if such students are interested in examining career opportunities, it may be that their school environment lacks adequate resources for this exploration to occur. Subsequently, they may not have opportunities to fully consider long-term career goals. In their social cognitive career model, Lent, Brown, and Hackett (1996) suggested that external barriers may influence individuals’ perceptions of their self-efficacy with regard to making career choices. As such, in the present study, we anticipated that students who were less open to vocational exploration and commitment and who tended to prematurely foreclose on career choices would (a) tend to perceive more obstacles to achieving their desired career objectives, and (b) be in need of more vocational information.

In addition to the need for vocational information, it is possible that some vocational information may be misperceived by some adolescents. In particular, it has been documented that high school students have the propensity for believing in career myths (i.e., incorrect beliefs and attitudes pertaining to the career choice process; Dorn & Welch, 1985; Lewis & Gilhousen, 1981; Petitpas, 1978; Rosenberg, 1977; Thompson, 1976). Ostensibly, the adherence to career myths could inhibit or negatively influence the commitment to career choices process. For example, if individuals believe that "time will tell what is the best career for me," they may be less likely to commit to, or be certain about, their career choices. Furthermore, if adolescents believe that men and women should only enter "traditional careers," they may be more likely to prematurely limit their career choices (Betz, 1994). Thus, in the present study, we predicted that students who were less open to the vocational exploration and commitment process and who were more likely to prematurely foreclose on career choices would be more likely to adhere to career myths.

Besides the existence of career myths, the commitment to career choices process seems to be related to the number of occupations an individual considers. In particular, it is likely that a less open stance for exploration and commitment and a more maladaptive foreclosure of career options may be related to a circumscription, or restriction, of potential occupations, especially for those who are at risk (Gottfredson, 1981). In fact, there is evidence to suggest that college students who were more committed to career choices, and who had a tendency to prematurely foreclose, were likely to have considered a lower number of occupations (Blustein et al., 1989). However, this phenomenon in at-risk urban high school students is unknown. In the present study, we predicted that students who were less committed to their career choices (i.e., vocational exploration and commitment) would consider a greater number of occupations than those who were more committed to examining their career options. Alternatively, we anticipated that at-risk urban high school students who prematurely foreclosed on their career options would consider a lower number of occupations than those who were more open to examining their career options.

In summary, the overall purpose of this study was to examine the extent to which the commitment to career choices process (as defined by the constructs of vocational exploration and commitment and the tendency to foreclose) predicts career-related variables for at-risk urban high school students. Specifically, we hypothesized that students who were less open to the vocational exploration and commitment process and who had a greater tendency to foreclose would (a) have a less stable vocational identity, (b) perceive more obstacles impeding their career objectives, (c) perceive the need for more vocational information, (d) be
more likely to adhere to career myths, and (e) consider a lower number of career options.

**METHOD**

**Participants**

Participants in this study were 189 students from an urban high school in the northeast region of the United States. These students were identified as at risk because of their predominantly lower socioeconomic status and the limited resources of the school they attend. One-hundred and two (54%) of the participants were female and 85 (45%) were male; 2 participants did not specify their gender. The mean age of the sample was 16.04 years (SD = 1.17, range = 14–19). Eighty-eight (44%) of the participants identified themselves as African American, 64 (36%) as White, 16 (9%) as Asian American, 8 (4%) as Latino or Latina, and 17 (9%) did not specify their race or ethnicity. The grade levels were as follows: 57 (30%) in 9th, 36 (19%) in 10th, 63 (33%) in 11th, 30 (16%) in 12th grade, and 3 participants (2%) did not indicate their grade level.

**Variables**

**Vocational exploration and commitment and tendency to foreclosure.** The Commitment to Career Choices Scale (CCCS; Blustein et al., 1989) is a 28-item self-report instrument used to measure the commitment to career choices process. The CCCS consists of two subscales that are relevant to the career choices process: Vocational Exploration and Commitment (VEC) and Tendency to Foreclose (TTF). The VEC subscale contains 19 items that assess individuals' progress from a highly clarified and committed phase to an uncommitted exploratory phase (e.g., "I have a good deal of information about the occupational fields that are most interesting to me"). The TTF subscale contains 9 items that assess the extent to which individuals limit career choices (e.g., "I believe that only one single occupation is right for me"). Ratings are based on a 7-point Likert scale from 1 = never true about me to 7 = always true about me. Blustein et al. found the internal consistency for the subscales to exceed .91 for the VEC and .78 for the TTF; they also reported both 2-week and 4-week test–retest reliability coefficients that exceeded .82 for these subscales. Validity indexes for the CCCS have been demonstrated across a number of studies (e.g., Betz & Serling, 1993; Blustein et al., 1989; Blustein et al., 1994; Stead & Watson, 1992). With this sample, the Cronbach's alpha coefficients were .86 (VEC) and .71 (TTF).

**Vocational identity, need for occupational information, and barriers to occupational goals.** Vocational identity, need for occupational information, and perceived barriers to occupational goals were assessed by the three subscales of the My Vocational Situation (MVS; Holland et al., 1980), a 26-item self-report measure. The first subscale, Vocational Identity (VI), contains 18 items and assesses the extent to which one possesses a clear and stable picture of one's goals, interests, personality, and talents (e.g., "I am confused about the whole problem of deciding on a career"). The Occupational Information (OI) subscale contains 4 items that measure the extent to which an individual needs vocational information (e.g., "I need the following information: What kinds of people enter different occupations?"). The Barriers to Occupational Goals (BOG) subscale measures the extent to which one perceives external barriers to attaining one's occupational goals (e.g., "I don't have the money to follow the career I want most"). Items for the VI subscale are rated as true or false, and items for the OI and BOG subscales are rated as yes or no. For scoring purposes, items rated true or false are scored as 1 or 0, respectively. Items rated as yes or no are scored as 1 or 0, respectively. Higher scores on these subscales indicate a less stable vocational identity (VI), greater need for occupational information (OI), or more perceived barriers to occupational goals (BOG). The MVS has demonstrated construct validity across a variety of populations, including high school students; the internal consistency for the subscales were found to be .86 for VI, .39 for OI, and .23 for BOG (Holland et al., 1980). For this investigation, the Cronbach's alpha coefficients were .83 for VI, .48 for OI, and .57 for BOG.

**Number of occupations considered.** The Vocational Preference Inventory (VPI; Holland, 1985) is a self-report instrument that was adapted for this study to measure the frequency of occupations considered. The VPI lists 160 occupations about which students indicate their interest, dislike, or indecision. The occupations are distributed across Holland's model of vocational interest clusters (i.e., realistic, investigative, artistic, social, enterprising, and conventional). For the purposes of this study, the total number of occupations in which participants indicated interest or indecision was used to assess the frequency of occupations being considered. With the present sample, the Cronbach's alpha coefficient was .98. In terms of validity, the VPI has been shown to have construct and criterion-related validity (Holland, 1985).

**Career myths.** The Survey of Career Attitudes (SCA; Woodrick, 1979) is a 50-item self-report instrument used to assess adherence to various career myths. Sample items include "Once I have chosen a vocation, I probably should not change" and "The earlier in life that I make a career decision, the better it will be for me." Respondents indicate whether they agree or disagree with each of the items. The scale addresses the following 13 categories of career myths derived from the career literature: (a) Career decisions cannot be changed once they have been made, (b) certain careers are best for only one gender, (c) college is the best route to a career, (d) experts know what careers are best for people, (e) there is a perfect job for each person, (f) time will tell what is the best career, (g) the harder a person tries, the quicker he or she can make a career decision, (h) work is the most important thing in a person's life, (i) career planning is an exact science, (j) a person can succeed at anything he or she wants, (k) happiness is contingent on career success, (l) a person's worth is measured by

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the career he or she has selected, and (m) interests and aptitudes are synonymous (Dorn, 1987; Dorn & Welch, 1985). The overall sum score of the instrument was used for this investigation. Construct and criterion-related validity for the use of the SCA in high school students have been demonstrated (Dorn, 1987; Dorn & Welch, 1985; Woodrick, 1979). Furthermore, career myths have been found to parallel Ellis's (1962) concept of irrational beliefs (Dorn & Welch, 1985) and to be unrelated to a measure of social desirability. The Cronbach's alpha coefficient for the present sample of high school students was .69.

Demographic variables. A demographic questionnaire was administered to gather information about participants' gender, race or ethnicity, age, grade level, and intention to attend college immediately after graduating from high school.

Procedure
Volunteer participants were sampled from an urban high school in the northeast region of the United States. Questionnaire packets were distributed to 9th, 10th, 11th, and 12th graders as part of their participation in a series of classroom exercises designed to enhance their vocational development. Only the pretest data were used in this investigation. Informed consent was obtained; thus, participants could withdraw from completing the paper-and-pencil measures at any time. To ensure anonymity, we collected no identifying information. Of the 223 questionnaire packets distributed to potential participants, 189 were returned completed and usable (85% response rate).

Design
The design for this investigation included two predictor variables and five criterion variables. The predictor variables were the participants' scores on the VEC and TTF subscales of the CCCS. The criterion variables were (a) participants' scores on each of the MVS subscales (i.e., VI, need for OI, and BOG); (b) the number of occupations being considered by the students (as assessed by the VPI); and (3) participants' adherence to career myths (as measured by the SCA).

RESULTS
To examine the relationships between the predictor (VEC and TTF) and criterion (VI, OI, BOG, VPI, and SCA) variables, we performed a series of multivariate (Hypotheses 1, 2, and 3) and univariate (Hypotheses 4 and 5) multiple regression analyses. These analytic procedures were used to control for experimentwise error and the intercorrelations among the criterion variables (Lunneborg & Abbott, 1983; Stevens, 1986). The criterion variables that were conceptually related (i.e., the MVS subscales) were grouped together such that three separate overall analyses were performed. We conducted follow-up analyses to examine specific relationships between each predictor variable and each criterion variable. It should be noted that in cases in which statistical significance was reached, the effect size came close to or exceeded what has been found to be a median effect size in the counseling literature (i.e., $\eta^2 = .07$; Haase, Ellis, & Ladany, 1989). The effect sizes for both the multivariate and univariate results indicate the proportion of variance in the criterion variables accounted for by the predictor variables (Cohen, 1988; Haase, 1974; Haase et al., 1989). Descriptive statistics for the predictor and criterion variables are shown in Table 1.

Hypotheses 1, 2, and 3: Commitment to career choices (VEC and TTF) and VI, OI, and BOG. A multivariate multiple regression analysis indicated that the overall proportion of the variance in the students' ratings of vocational identity, need for occupational information, and perceived barriers to occupational goals accounted for by the VEC and TTF scores was significant (Pillai's trace = .42), $F(6, 252) = 11.24$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2_m = .21$, where $\eta^2_m$ is the multivariate effect size. Because multivariate significance was reached at the .05 level, follow-up univariate analyses were conducted (Haase & Ellis, 1987). Results of the multivariate and univariate analyses are presented in Table 2.

Examination of the follow-up univariate $F$ tests from the full model suggested that the VEC and TTF scores significantly predicted students' ratings of vocational identity, need for occupational information, and perceived barriers to occupational goals. To determine which of the predictor variables contributed uniquely to the variance of each of the criterion variables, we conducted follow-up multivariate and then univariate $F$ tests for each predictor variable (i.e., VEC and TTF). In these reduced model analyses, we tested each predictor variable holding the other one constant.

In Reduced Model 1 (see Table 2), the multivariate multiple regression analysis examining the VEC and the com-

**TABLE 1**

Descriptive Statistics for the Predictor and Criterion Variables

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>$M$</th>
<th>$SD$</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Predictor variables</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vocational Exploration and Commitment</td>
<td>63.90</td>
<td>20.21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tendency to Foreclose</td>
<td>34.64</td>
<td>9.76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Criterion variables</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vocational Identity</td>
<td>8.26</td>
<td>4.49</td>
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<td>Occupational Information</td>
<td>2.80</td>
<td>1.08</td>
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<tr>
<td>Barriers to Occupational Goals</td>
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<td>1.17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of Occupations Considered</td>
<td>38.50</td>
<td>32.70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Career Myths</td>
<td>22.81</td>
<td>5.63</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. Vocational Exploration and Commitment and Tendency to Foreclose refer to the two subscales of the Commitment to Career Choices Scale (Blustein et al., 1989); Vocational Identity, Occupational Information, and Barriers to Occupational Goals refer to the three scales of the My Vocational Situation Inventory (Holland et al., 1980); Number of Occupations Considered refers to the frequency of careers endorsed on the Vocational Preference Inventory (Holland, 1985); and Career Myths refers to the total score on the Survey of Career Attitudes (Woodrick, 1979).
combination of all the criterion variables was found to be significant. Follow-up univariate analyses indicated that VEC scores contributed uniquely and significantly to the proportion of variance accounted for in vocational identity scores. Specifically, VEC scores indicating less commitment were related to students' greater occupational information ratings. In other words, VEC scores were related to more perceived occupational barriers. Because significance was not reached at the multivariate level, no univariate analyses were examined.

In Reduced Model 2, the multivariate multiple regression analysis indicated that the TTF scores were not significantly related to the combination of the variables vocational identity, need for occupational information, and perceived occupational barriers. Because significance was not reached at the multivariate level, no univariate analyses were examined.

Hypothesis 4: Commitment to career choices (VEC and TTF) and career myths. We used a multiple regression analysis to test if both the VEC and TTF explained a unique proportion of the variance in perceptions of career myths. A significant overall multiple $R^2$ of .11 was found for the full model, $F(2, 96) = 6.06, p < .01, \eta^2 = .11$. Follow-up analyses demonstrated that the TTF significantly accounted for a unique amount of the variance in career myths, $r(97) = 3.25, p < .01, b = .32, \eta^2 = .10$. Specifically, students who were more likely to prematurely foreclose on career options also adhered to a greater number of career myths. No significant relationship was found between the VEC and career myths, $r(97) = -1.65, p > .05, b = -.16, \eta^2 = .03$.

Hypothesis 5: Commitment to career choices (VEC and TTF) and occupational interests. The final objective of this study was to determine if ratings on the VEC and TTF were related to number of occupations considered. We used a multiple regression analysis to test if both the VEC and TTF explained a unique proportion of the variance in the number of occupations considered. A significant overall multiple $R^2$ of .05 was found for the full model, $F(2, 133) = 3.56, p < .05, \eta^2 = .05$. Follow-up analyses demonstrated that VEC scores significantly accounted for a unique amount of variance in the number of occupations considered, $r(134) = 2.65, p < .01, b = .22, \eta^2 = .07$. In other words, students who were less committed to occupational choices considered a greater number of occupations. No significant relationship was found between tendency to foreclose and number of occupations considered, $r(134) = -.38, p > .05, b = -.03, \eta^2 = .00$.

Additional Analyses

The inability to control for potential third-variable confounds is an inherent limitation in field research (Cook & Campbell, 1979; Heppner, Kivlighan, & Wampold, 1992). In an attempt to explore if the demographic variables (potential third-variable confounds) might influence the predictor (VEC and TTF) and criterion (VI, OI, BOG, VPI, and SCA) variables, we conducted a series of bivariate correlations (for the continuously distributed variables) and analyses of variance (for the categorical variables). To control for Type I error and yet retain a reasonable estimate of potential moderating variables, we used a .01 per-comparison alpha rate. Results indicated that students who had lower intentions of attending college were significantly more likely to be uncommitted to their career choices, $r(169) = -.27, p < .01$, and perceive barriers to attaining their occupational goals, $r(144) = -.23, p < .01$. Gender, race/ethnicity, age, and grade level of participant did not differ significantly on any of the predictor or criterion variables.

**DISCUSSION**

Overall, the results supported many of the hypotheses. Consistent with the hypotheses, the results indicated that at-risk urban high school students' level of vocational ex-
Exploration and commitment to career choices was related to their vocational identity, need for occupational information, perceived barriers to occupational goals, and the number of occupations they considered. Furthermore, tendency to foreclose was significantly related to career choices. Contrary to the a priori hypotheses, vocational exploration and commitment was not found to be significantly related to career myths. Also, tendency to foreclose was not found to be significantly related to vocational identity, need for occupational information, perceived obstacles, or number of occupations considered. Thus, it appears that, in combination, the vocational exploration and commitment and the tendency to foreclose constructs contributed to the understanding of the primary dependent variables of this study.

In terms of the hypotheses related to vocational exploration and commitment, the results showed that students who were less open to the vocational exploration and commitment process were less stable in terms of their vocational identity, reported a greater need for occupational information, and perceived more barriers to their career goals. Thus, at-risk students who tended to be uncommitted to their career choices also tended to have difficulties in other vocational areas. The interplay among commitment, identity, and need for information may reflect the inherent conflict that many adolescents experience, including those who are at risk. Perhaps it is developmentally appropriate for adolescents to be unclear about and uncommitted to their career choices and vocational identity, in addition to needing more occupational information. However, the ability to act on these needs may be uniquely compromised in some at-risk environments because of perceived and realistic barriers, such as limited financial resources and insufficient academic support (Munson, 1992). These issues should be taken into consideration in the development of effective career counseling interventions. For example, counselors of high school students may wish to develop and implement programs and curricula that encourage students to explore a wide range of realistic career possibilities (i.e., increase students’ level of vocational exploration and commitment). These interventions will in turn influence and facilitate the crystallization of students’ interests, skills, values, and aptitudes and provide the needed vocational information. The unique challenge to counselors of students who are at risk is to engage them in these interventions while concurrently attending to overcoming students’ perceived barriers (Swanson, Daniels, & Tokar, 1996). For the counselor, it may be difficult to determine if an at-risk student’s low level of commitment is developmentally appropriate or problematic. Longitudinal research is needed to determine if these at-risk adolescents are indeed progressing in a typical developmental fashion or if their uncommitted posture reflects a developmental crisis point for them. Nonetheless, counselors need to be adept at differentiating developmentally appropriate from developmentally maladaptive processes and then providing relevant interventions.

Vocational exploration and commitment was also found to be related to the number of occupations students considered, with lower commitment to career choices being related to a greater number of occupations considered. This finding suggests that individuals who are uncommitted to specific career choices may maximize their options by considering many career alternatives. This phenomenon is not surprising given that uncommitted exploration is a normal, temporary developmental stage (Rojewski, 1994), particularly for early adolescents (Sharf, 1992; Super, 1957, 1984, 1990). Conversely, students who had a clearer and more committed career posture tended to consider fewer number of occupations. Perhaps at-risk students limit the number of occupations they consider not because of commitment to a career but because of perceived and real-life barriers. This posture may be problematic if reaching clarity of choices is based on limited occupational information. It may be the case that students could make more congruent career choices if they were encouraged to be more open about their career options, which in turn would result in consideration of a greater number of occupations. Thus, counselors should explore with at-risk students the reasons for considering a limited number of career options (e.g., lack of information about nontraditional careers) and then intervene accordingly. Furthermore, high school counselors could encourage students to be open to engage in work experiences and participate in college-bound or other vocational programs that may increase their potential career options (Lingg, 1995; Loughead et al., 1995).

Regarding the tendency to foreclose and career myths hypothesis, the results illustrated that students’ tendency to foreclose prematurely on career options was significantly positively related to their adherence to a greater number of career myths. This finding indicates that students who have a tendency to foreclose prematurely may possess many maladaptive beliefs about the career choices process. This result has particular implications for counselors who work with at-risk urban high school students. Specifically, counselors may want to assess the extent to which these students’ beliefs may inhibit them from exploring career opportunities. They also may want to identify career interventions that will focus on the factors underlying their tendency to foreclose (e.g., dualistic or simplistic thinking; Tetlock & Suedfeld, 1988) as well as altering these students’ potentially misguided beliefs (Krumboltz & Nichols, 1990). Examining the impact of home, family, and school influences may provide these counselors with valuable information about the perceptions, experiences, beliefs, and expectations of at-risk urban high school students. In addition, counselors need to be aware of the myths to which at-risk urban high school students are susceptible and should intervene proactively to prevent these myths from being internalized. In particular, it is important that career counselors assist these students in exploring their maladaptive beliefs in a developmentally and culturally sensitive fashion (Pinkney & Ramirez, 1985).

In an attempt to explore if other variables might have confounded the results of this study, we examined the relationship between some characteristics of the sample (e.g.,
age and gender) and the predictor and criterion variables. Only one variable, intention to go to college, was found to be related to the variables under study. Specifically, at-risk urban high school students who had fewer intentions of attending college were likely to be less committed to their career choices and perceived more barriers to attaining their occupational goals. One explanation for this finding is that the perception of real or imagined barriers may contribute to an uncommitted posture while simultaneously decreasing the students’ intention to attend college. For example, students who may not have the financial means to attend college may not consider college as a realistic or feasible option. Thus, these individuals may not be motivated to commit to preferred career choices. Future researchers may wish to consider the importance of intention to go to college as a factor related to the career choices process for at-risk urban adolescents.

Overall, the results of this study seem to extend the applicability of the commitment to career choices constructs to at-risk urban high school students. However, the study’s findings must be tempered in light of several limitations of the design. First, causal connections between the primary variables cannot legitimately be made. For example, it is unclear if actual barriers to occupational goals may lead one to being uncommitted to career choices or if an uncommitted posture may lead one to perceive occupational barriers. Second, the influence of other potential variables needs to be explored. Specifically, it is possible that mental health or developmental issues may interact in some fashion with adolescents’ career choices process. For example, if psychological or mental health needs (e.g., depression based on stressful environmental circumstances) are not addressed, career exploration may not be particularly important to such students. Third, some of the scales used in this study have not been used extensively in urban high school settings. Although this study provides some preliminary reliability and validity data regarding the use of these scales with at-risk urban high school students, future researchers may wish to continue assessing the applicability of the vocational constructs examined with this population. Furthermore, the internal consistencies of the OI and BOG subscales of the MVS were lower than desired. As such, the certainty that these scales measure the desired constructs in at-risk urban high school students is limited, and more information is needed pertaining to their usefulness with this population (Healy, Tullier, & Mourtou, 1990). Finally, the career variables under study were examined solely from the students’ perspectives. Perceptions from significant individuals in the students’ lives such as teachers and family members may also provide valuable insights into the students’ commitment to career choices process.

In conclusion, the constructs related to the commitment to career choices process seems to extend from the college population to at-risk urban high school students, albeit in a complicated fashion. This study found evidence to suggest that understanding students’ vocational exploration and commitment and the tendency to foreclose may be useful for counselors who work with students on career-related issues. Finally, it is important for researchers to continue to examine the relevance of problematic versus typical developmental issues in the context of understanding the commitment to career choices process across various populations.

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