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Effects of a Program to Correct Career Myths Among University of Nebraska Undergraduates

David L. Erickson

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EFFECTS OF A PROGRAM TO CORRECT CAREER MYTHS AMONG UNIVERSITY OF NEBRASKA UNDERGRADUATES

by

David L. Erickson

A THESIS

Presented to the Faculty of The Graduate College in the University of Nebraska In Partial Fulfillment of Requirements For the Degree of Master of Arts

Major: Educational Psychology and Social Foundations

Under the Supervision of Dr. James W. Pinkney

Lincoln, Nebraska

December, 1983
Research for this thesis could not have been conducted without the assistance of a number of individuals. Their generous help is greatly appreciated.

Dr. James Pinkney has been a continuing source of inspiration and information. He not only introduced me to the topic of career myths but served as an advisor through every step of this research. His expertise in career counseling, research design, and statistics was particularly helpful.

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Thanks are also due to Gary Oliver and Alexes Hernandez who were kind enough to let me use their classes for experimentation.

I would also like to express my gratitude to my supporters on the home front for their financial and emotional assistance: Helen M. Erickson, Emil Mayer, Suzanne Murdock, and the late Jane Erickson.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chapter</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS</td>
<td>ii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TABLE OF CONTENTS</td>
<td>iii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LIST OF TABLES</td>
<td>iv</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>CHAPTER</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I. INTRODUCTION</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General Problem Statement</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Review of Literature</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hypotheses</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II. METHODOLOGY</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subjects</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Procedures</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instruments</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>III. RESULTS</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IV. DISCUSSION</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discussion of Results</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Implications</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summary</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conclusions</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>REFERENCES</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>APPENDICES</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>APPENDIX A--Career Myths Program</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>APPENDIX B--Questionnaire</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### LIST OF TABLES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TABLE</th>
<th>PAGE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Comparison of Norms on the SCA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Changes in SCA Scores</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The career myths concept was developed in recent years to explain one type of difficulty that counselors have in helping clients implement a rational plan of career decision-making. Career myths are those incorrect or self-defeating career-related beliefs or attitudes which either 1) serve to inhibit the client from making a career decision, or 2) cause the client to make a premature decision, i.e., without sufficient regard for self or occupational information. Adhering to such misconceptions can adversely affect client emotions by creating a situation in which career options are extremely limited or unattractive.

Pinkney (n.d.) has outlined some of the negative consequences of believing in career myths:

1. Myths can delay decision making until it is impossible to do so logically.
2. Myths can support negative emotions such as helplessness, vulnerability, or depression.
3. Myths can encourage bad decisions and planning.
4. Myths can be a reason for inactivity, delay avoidance, or impulsive behavior.
5. Myths frequently assign all control of career development to external contexts (the job market, the employer, fate, etc.).

Theoretically, the career myths concept is viewed largely within the framework of rational-emotive therapy (RET). Since career myths represent a type of irrational
belief system, RET would suggest that it is the role of the counselor to identify any existing misbeliefs in the initial interviews, dispute these beliefs, and provide more rational alternative attitudes. Then it is feasible to begin or continue the career planning process. Varying lists of the most commonly-held myths have been devised to assist with this identification process.

General Problem Statement

The area of college student career development has been an important concern of both counselors and college student personnel workers because of the ramifications career choice has on personal and academic life. In the course of college career counseling it is not unusual to discover that students adhere to certain misconceptions about the world of work or about the career counseling process. These career myths have been recognized as a major impediment to rational decision-making. Though the career myths concept was originally recognized in the counseling context, there is evidence that such misbeliefs are also prevalent among those students who do not seek counseling (Woodrick, 1979). Since career myths represent a potentially significant obstacle to career development, an outreach program aimed at correcting these attitudes in non-clients is considered feasible. Challenging the defective components of a student's career belief system could lead to
"a more open examination of career planning as a process that is future oriented and flexible" (Pinkney, 1981, p. 2).

The central question of this research has been, can career myths be effectively corrected in a short-term outreach setting? Literature on career myths has focused on identifying and correcting specific myths within the counseling setting. The position here is that, in terms of college students, it may be even more beneficial to disabuse such misbeliefs in an outreach setting in order to positively impact more students earlier in their college careers. Such a program would enhance student development by providing a more realistic framework for career decision-making.

A related question of interest was considered: what effect does level of commitment to college major have on the student's adherence to career myths? If career myths are an impediment to choosing a college major, as they are with selecting a career, will commitment to major be a predictor of adherence to career myths, or vise versa? In practical terms, are students who want to change majors or need to declare a major likely to be those most in need of assistance with faulty career attitudes?

The importance of the first research question relates to the general applicability of career myths programming to educational settings. If the experiment demonstrates improved conceptions of career decision-making, there could be either a direct application of the techniques used here
to undergraduate classes or the modification of these techniques to other types of outreach. Instead of a lecture to intact classes using an RET-type of logical disputation of career myths—the method proposed here—many counselors would appreciate such options as conducting a workshop for a more intensive treatment of misbeliefs or lecturing groups which have been assembled expressly for the purpose of treatment. Assessing the relative efficacy of various types of outreach procedures must await further analysis.

The importance of the second research question relates to the type of students who might best be targeted in any career myths intervention. Are those students who are least committed to their major most likely to show the greatest adherence to career myths? If so, it would be imperative to focus on uncommitted or undeclared students.

Criticism of traditional one-on-one counseling provided a basic rationale for advocating an outreach program on career myths—that such counseling does not make effective use of the counselor's time and that prevention of problems is more effective than remediation. Using a growth and prevention model, Drum and Figler (1973) propose that outreach should focus on resolving adolescent developmental problems. One of the most pervasive of these developmental problems is selecting a career (Munley, 1977). If career myths are the obstacle to career decision-making that they appear to be, correcting such misbeliefs could play a
valuable role in preventing the emotional dysfunctions usually associated with career indecision. Emotional growth would be enhanced to the extent that a more realistic appraisal leads to a problem resolution at a later date.

Review of Literature

There has been little empirical investigation of career myths. Previous literature has been limited to defining the concept and its ramifications, delineating various specific myths, designing a module to assist in the self-correction of career myths, and establishing a career myths scale (Thompson, 1976; Carney, 1978; Woodrick, 1979; Lewis & Gilhousen, 1981). The realization that misconceptions can negatively impact career decision-making arose out of the observations made by career counselors and out of the clinical application of rational-emotive therapy to career counseling.

A survey of career myths literature largely supports the contention that those misconceptions which negatively impact the career decision-making process are best seen within a rational-emotive framework. Career myths may be regarded as variants of the irrational belief system of Ellis--some career myths have a reference point in his system; other misbeliefs have a different origin (Woodrick, 1979). Whatever the myth, the treatment is similar to that of RET: dispute the misconception and provide a more
rational alternative belief (Carney, 1978).

Carney's (1978) article on "Removing Attitudinal Blocks to Career Decision Making" places career-related misbeliefs firmly within an RET framework. Modifying Ellis' ABC system somewhat, Carney sees the following sequence: a particular activating event (A) leads to either a rational or irrational career-related idea, belief, or attitude (B); if this attitude is irrational, a negative emotion or feeling (C) will result; this negative emotion will lead, in turn, to either one of two behaviors (D)--1) irrational approach behavior, making a premature decision or a decision based on faulty criteria, or 2) irrational avoidance behavior, dropping out of the decision-making process. In addition to explicating this process, Carney's article outlines a self-directed activity, based on RET principles, which "is designed to help students examine and restructure their beliefs about the career selection process" (p. 2).

Dryden (1979) advocates the application of RET to career counseling. According to Dryden, a basic cause of indecisiveness in career planning is adherence to one or more of the irrational beliefs specified by Ellis. Dryden's system complements that of Carney. For, while Carney sees misconceptions as fitting into the ABC framework of RET, Dryden perceives each career-related misbelief as generated from specific irrational beliefs as stated by Ellis.

RET has also contributed to the views of Thompson
Both articles elaborate on a number of misbeliefs commonly encountered in career counseling. Thompson, as with Carney, sees misbeliefs as adversely impacting both emotions and behavior. But he carries this idea one step further than Carney by indicating what kinds of emotional reactions and decision-making problems typically are associated with specific misconceptions. Lewis and Gilhousen perceive career myths as producing a situation in which the client is unable to place self or occupational information in realistic perspective. Misconceptions create a paradox, or contradictory set of directions, which hinders effective decision-making.

Both Thompson's and Lewis and Gilhousen's articles are important because of the depth with which they treat each career myth, giving examples of how self-defeating attitudes operate to sabotage logical decision-making processes. Though Lewis and Gilhousen were the first to use the term "career myths" in print, Thompson's article was the first to fully describe the concept.

At the suggestion of R. A. Lewis, Charles P. Woodrick's (1979) dissertation at Texas A&M University involved the development and standardization of a scale to measure adherence to career myths. His 50 item Survey of Career Attitudes (SCA) was validated using college students outside of the counseling setting. As a part of his analysis he examined the relationship of career myths to such concepts
as irrational beliefs (RET), locus of control (Rotter), and occupational interest patterns (SCII). Again, RET served as a theoretical underpinning for the career myths concept.

Although the following two articles regard misconceptions as an impediment to career counseling, they do not use an RET perspective. Dolliver and Nelson (1975) recognize that various faulty assumptions about career counseling held by clients and counselors usually leads to false anticipations, and, consequently, disappointments with the career planning process. Their idea is rather simple: adhering to false assumptions about counseling builds up expectations of definite results with minimal effort expended by either party. Using a social learning and transactional analysis perspective, Rosenberg (1977) examines the learned and socially reinforced "games" that some clients play with the counselor. The "game" in this context is a behavior which is used to either forestall making a career decision or to shortcut the normal decision-making process. Typically motivating each game is a "dynamic" or self-defeating attitude(s). Since some of these attitudes are career-related, they can be referred to as career myths.

The career myths concept has also been applied to specific groups of people. Bolles (1978) has discovered seven common myths about the job market that hinder the job hunter. Figler (1979) notes ten prevalent misconceptions about career decision-making as they relate to
liberal arts students. At the University of Nebraska there has been some interest in Black and Chicano career myths (Pinkney, 1981; Simpson-Kirkland, 1981; Ramirez and Pinkney, 1982).

What conclusions can be drawn from this survey of career myths literature? Publications have been largely descriptive, outlining the problem and methods of treatment. There has been no empirical assessment of career myths. The purpose of this review, therefore, has been to define the parameters of the concept and show how it relates to a potential experiment: viz., the modification of career myths in an outreach setting:

1. Career myths are a type of irrational belief system closely related to such systems proposed by RET. As such, career myths may be corrected by educational means. In the counseling context it is necessary to dispute these misbeliefs using active-directive methods of therapy, the rational therapist favoring a confrontational approach. But as applied to an outreach setting, a persuasive lecture would be more appropriate, especially given the fact that certain members of the group may not subscribe to any given career myth being discussed. Such a persuasive presentation, however, would include an RET-like logical disputing of misbeliefs within the limitations of a lecture format. This could take the form of outlining the myth and its associated emotional and decision-making problems, present-
ing contrary factual evidence, and providing a more rational alternative set of beliefs. This format was suggested by Carney's (1978) self-directed exercise. In fact, RET, being a didactic kind of therapy, is ideally suited for outreach procedures (Ellis, 1980).

2. What are the implications of Woodrick's SCA and suggestions for further research? Since the SCA quantifies extent of belief in career myths, it can be used to determine any change in level of adherence to these particular misbeliefs. This allows for an assessment of outreach programs designed to correct career myths. In short, the SCA is an ideal dependent variable for measuring attitude change in a controlled setting.

3. In the career counseling context there is a necessary activating event motivating the client to seek a career decision. When a career myth is present, this pressure to make a decision creates a negative emotional reaction which impedes the decision-making process (Carney, 1978). However, in terms of outreach, unless the group is or has been assembled for career-related purposes, there will be no necessary activating event influencing all or most students to seek career planning--some subjects may have already made a career choice; others may not be ready to choose. In short, the outreach group is just as likely to adhere to career myths, but with less pressure to make a decision than are counseling clients. Is this signifi-
cant in terms of the outreach group's certainty of major? In terms of criterion-related validity, is the SCA predictive of students' commitment to major?

Hypotheses

Three hypotheses will be tested; two relate to the effects of the program as a whole and one relates to the relationship between commitment to college major and pre-test SCA scores. Because outreach can focus on only a limited number of possible career myths, it is necessary to differentiate between those career myths which were covered in the treatment program (hypothesis 1) and those items not covered (hypothesis 2).

Hypothesis 1. From pretest to posttest subjects' SCA scores will not change significantly for those career myths relevant to the treatment program.

Hypothesis 2. From pretest to posttest subjects' SCA scores will not change significantly for those career myths irrelevant to the treatment program.

Hypothesis 3. There will be no significant relationship between level of commitment to college major (as measured by questionnaire) and pretest SCA scores.
CHAPTER II

METHODOLOGY

Subjects

The population used for this study was undergraduate students at the University of Nebraska. Two intact classes were employed: Educational Psychology 337, Principles of Interpersonal Relations, served as the treatment group and Educational Psychology 237, Introduction to Human Relations, the control group. Portions of two class sessions were used for testing from each course and participation was voluntary. Human Relations courses were used for this research because of their availability to this experimenter and because of the potential diversity of majors within these courses.

In the treatment group 27 subjects completed all experimentation; in the control group, 36 subjects. The number of subjects completing experimentation would have been significantly higher had class attendance been more consistent. There was no attempt to randomize subjects because intact classes were used.

To what extent were treatment and control groups comparable? General personal information collected by questionnaire during testing indicated similarities in college majors but differences in sex, age, and class standing. This was expected given the different course
levels. In terms of college majors, the treatment group had 19 different majors, the control group 18 majors—with business and agriculture majors ranking first and second in both groups. Males accounted for 37% of the treatment group and 55% of the control group. Though the age range was virtually identical, in the treatment group most students were 21 to 22 years old; in the control group most students were 19 to 20 years old. Class standing was also disparate: seniors constituted the majority of students in the treatment group, while sophomores represented the plurality of students in the control group.

The strong point of using these Human Relations classes for experimentation was the similar range of college majors in both groups. The weak point was the group differences in sex, age, and class standing. Since intact classes had to be used, the treatment was assigned to the more advanced class. This was done in order to maximize treatment effects.

**Procedures**

A pretest-treatment-posttest design, with treatment and control groups, was used in this study. The same procedures were followed for both groups except for the independent variable—lecture content. Research was conducted over part of two class sessions in each group. During the last 15 minutes of the initial class session the pretest measures—
the SCA and questionnaire—were administered by this experimenter. The first hour of the next class session—one week later—was devoted to the treatment and posttest. Treatment consisted of a 45 minute lecture given by an associate, immediately followed by the posttest administered by this researcher.

The independent variable in this experiment was lecture content. The treatment group received a persuasive lecture on career myths outlined by this researcher (Appendix A) and delivered by Dr. Katharine Brzezinski-Stein, a counselor at the University of Nebraska Counseling Center, who has had considerable experience in outreach. The aim of this lecture was to logically dispute four common career myths, based on the RET-inspired methods of Carney (1978), and using additional information provided by Thompson (1976), Woodrick (1979), and Lewis and Gilhousen (1981). The four myths discussed during the lecture were the myth of exactitude, the perfect job myth, the myth of finality, and the myth of college as vocational training (see Appendix A). The theme of the lecture was that adherence to these misconceptions often results in needless emotional upset and poor career decision-making.

A lecture on study skills served as a control procedure. This presentation was delivered by Michael Osterbuhr, a graduate student in Educational Psychology, who has done considerable lecturing on study skills for the
Educational Learning Center. The lecture consisted of the following areas: the SQ3R method of study, time management and scheduling, and note taking. The theme of the presentation was that better use of one's time may be made by using more efficient methods of study.

Instead of a simple test-retest procedure, an attention placebo treatment was used as a control in order to equalize conditions in both groups. A study skills program was utilized in the control group because it did not address career myths or career choice, yet was a subject which many of the students would find of use and attend to.

Because the treatment program was limited to 45 minutes, it was necessary to deal with only a limited number of career myths--four of the thirteen Woodrick (1979) notes in his factor analysis. In evaluating the effectiveness of the program it was necessary to separate those career myths covered in the presentation from those not dealt with. This dichotomization was reflected in the hypotheses. Separate analysis was made of those career myths that were expected to change because they were treated during outreach (hypothesis 1) and those that were not expected to change because they were not treated (hypothesis 2).

In this research the chief method of control was to vary lecture content. To the extent that career myths and study skills are conceptually independent of one another, the research design has attempted to control and measure the
extent to which belief in career myths can be altered by an outreach presentation.

Instruments

Two instruments were used in this research. First, Woodrick's (1979) Survey of Career Attitudes-III was used as the primary dependent variable, measuring adherence to career myths and change in adherence to career myths. It was employed in all three hypotheses. Second, a questionnaire (Appendix B) was developed by this researcher to measure subjects' perceived commitment to college major (hypothesis 3) and subjects' assessment of their own attitude change as a result of the program (posttest). This latter measure was used as a supplement to the SCA. The questionnaire was also used to collect demographic data on the subjects.

The SCA is a paper and pencil scale consisting of a series of 50 career-related statements with which the subject is instructed to either agree or disagree—in this case by writing the letter "A" indicating agreement or "D" indicating disagreement in the space provided next to each statement. Since the SCA is the major instrument used in this research, it becomes particularly important to establish its validity and reliability. The only assessment of this instrument has been undertaken by Woodrick himself. He employed a number of procedures to develop, standardize, and
evaluate the SCA, and had favorable results. The third and final version of the SCA was tested on 622 subjects, using students from introductory classes with a variety of majors (Woodrick, 1979). The following is a summary of Woodrick's findings:

1. Item discrimination indices, correlation coefficients between an item and all other items on a scale, were established for the SCA. Only two of 50 items had item discrimination indices not significant at the .01 level. Therefore, 48 of 50 "items appeared to have adequate item validity" (p. 41).

2. Internal consistency reliability, "an estimate of reliability" based on "an average correlation between all of the items within a test," was 0.7388 (pp. 41-42). This reliability level was considered to be adequate.

3. Factor analysis revealed 18 factors, 16 of which were related to the career myths concept. He concluded that items measuring adherence to career myths did "not represent a unidimensional or general factor . . . adherence to one career myth does not necessarily imply belief in other career myths" (p. 46). Factor analysis also provided "construct validation for the theoretical concept of career myths as identifiable and quantifiable variables affecting the career decision-making process" (p. 46).

4. Normative distribution of the SCA revealed a "variability . . . adequate to justify its use as a
measurement devise" (p. 47). Table 1 provides a summary of Woodrick's normative data.

5. Construct validity studies indicated the following relationships: a) There was no significant relationship between the SCA and the Marlow-Crowne Social Desirability Scale ($r = 0.0836$). This shows that "subjects' responses to the SCA-III items were not affected by socially desirable response sets" (p. 51). b) The SCA "was negatively correlated with Rotter's I-E Scale" ($r = -0.2252$) (p. 51), i.e., those individuals with an internal locus of control were more likely to adhere to career myths than those with external locus of control. c) Belief in career myths (SCA) was positively correlated with the irrational belief system outlined by RET (Irrational Beliefs Test) ($r = 0.2909$). d) Correlation of the SCA with the Strong-Campbell Interest Inventory showed no significant correlation with five of the six occupational interest patterns, the exception being a negative correlation with the Artistic category.

Lending credence to the SCA's reliability, the normative distribution computed by this researcher closely resembled that of Woodrick. Table 1 compares the norms for the two universities.

The questionnaire constructed by this researcher consisted of two parts—a request for general information about the subjects themselves and an attitude survey relating to their commitment to major and changed attitudes
toward career decision-making (if any).

Table 1
Comparison of Norms on the SCA

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<th>Texas A&amp;M University</th>
<th>University of Nebraska</th>
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<td>N = 74</td>
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<td>range = 5 - 41</td>
<td>range = 9 - 34</td>
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<tr>
<td>mean = 17.7689</td>
<td>mean = 17.6622</td>
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<tr>
<td>SD = 5.5533</td>
<td>SD = 5.4827</td>
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*a based on raw scores (total number incorrect)
b based on all subjects' pretests

The first part of the questionnaire requested each subject's name (because of the need to match pretest and posttest materials), sex, class standing, college major, and age. These demographic data were needed to judge sampling adequacy—the similarity of treatment and control groups and the similarity of these groups to what is known about the general student population at the University of Nebraska.

The remainder of the questionnaire was in the form of a Likert-type scale measuring several attitudes. That is, subjects were asked to circle the number which best indicated their attitude toward each statement: 1. strongly agree; 2. somewhat agree; 3. cannot say; 4. somewhat disagree; 5. strongly disagree. Statements #1, 2, 4, and 5 relate to student attitudes toward their major; of these
items, only #4 directly relates to the issue of commitment to major. As such, it was the only one used in the analysis of hypothesis 3. Statement #3, concerning perceived need for career counseling, was asked for another research purpose. As a supplement to the SCA, administered only on the posttest, statements #6 and 7 deal with the subject's own perceived change in attitudes about career decision-making as a result of the outreach program.

Though the SCA seemed adequate to the task of measuring change in adherence to career myths, a supplementary instrument was thought necessary because the SCA has not been used in empirical research. Since outreach was aimed at increasing attitude awareness, and since no measure of career myths other than the SCA existed, it was decided to develop a scale to measure the subject's own awareness of changed attitudes. It was expected that the more improvement in SCA scores from pretest to posttest, the more agreement with the statements measuring the subject's awareness of change. In short, though hypotheses 1 and 2 will be judged on the basis of SCA scores, results from statements #6 and 7 on the questionnaire will either strengthen or weaken the overall conclusions.
CHAPTER III

RESULTS

A series of $t$ tests were used to analyze SCA scores and questionnaire items relating to the first two hypotheses. The hypotheses, which were stated in null form, were either accepted or rejected at the $.05$ level of significance. A correlational analysis was used to assess hypothesis 3.

Hypothesis 1. From pretest to posttest subjects' SCA scores will not change significantly for those career myths relevant to the treatment program.

The null hypothesis was rejected for hypothesis 1. As seen in Table 2, there was no significant difference in mean pretest SCA scores for relevant items between treatment and control groups ($t = 1.52$, $df = 61$, $p > .05$). On the posttest there was a significant difference in mean scores between treatment and control groups ($t = 4.87$, $df = 61$, $p < .05$). Examination of Table 2 reveals that there was a significant improvement in SCA scores in the treatment group relative to that of the control group. Following treatment fewer career myths were endorsed by the subjects.

Hypothesis 2. From pretest to posttest subjects' SCA scores will not change significantly for those career myths irrelevant to the treatment program.

The null hypothesis was rejected for hypothesis 2. As seen in Table 2, there was a significant difference in
pretest SCA scores for irrelevant items between treatment and control groups ($t = 2.19, df = 61, p < .05$). On the posttest there was no significant difference in scores between treatment and control groups ($t = 1.19, df = 61, p > .05$). A post hoc, within subjects' statistical test (Sandler, 1955), indicated a significant difference between the pretest and posttest control group scores for the irrelevant SCA items ($A = 0.733, df = 35, p < .05$).

As a supplement to the SCA, questionnaire items #6 and 7 (Appendix B) were also analyzed. These items assessed self-perceived changes in career planning attitudes. The lower the score on this posttest measure, the greater the student's perception of changed attitudes. Mean scores showed a greater perception of change in the treatment group (4.704) than the control group (6.528). However, the $t$ test indicated no significant difference in attitudes between treatment and control groups ($t = 1.157, df = 61, p > .05$).

Hypothesis 3. There will be no significant relationship between level of commitment to college major (as measured by questionnaire) and pretest SCA scores.

The null hypothesis was accepted for hypothesis 3. A product-moment correlation coefficient was calculated to assess the relationship between question #4 on the questionnaire and pretest SCA scores. A rather weak correlation was observed ($r = 0.0615$). Converted to a $z$ score (0.5257) the relationship falls within the area of acceptance. This
indicates that level of commitment to major is not predictive of level of adherence to career myths.

Table 2
Changes in SCA Scores

<table>
<thead>
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<td><strong>Items irrelevant to treatment</strong></td>
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<tr>
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<tr>
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<td>3.000</td>
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<td>Control</td>
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</table>

a Treatment-relevant means based on 22 items; irrelevant to treatment means based on 28 items.

b df = 61

*p < .05
Discussion of Results

The basic premise of this research was that a short-term outreach program would change attitudes about career myths. The results of this experiment have been ambiguous.

Taken together, hypotheses 1 and 2 deal with the effects of the treatment program. It was expected that the null hypothesis would be rejected for hypothesis 1 and accepted for hypothesis 2. In more precise terms, in regard to treatment-relevant items, SCA scores would show a significant improvement in realistic career attitudes for the treatment group relative to the control group, while, in regard to those items irrelevant to treatment, SCA scores would show no significant improvement in either group.

Analysis of data for hypothesis 1 leaves a favorable impression of program effects. A comparison of the $t$ tests for the pretest and posttest clearly suggests that the treatment program did positively affect attitudes in the treatment group. However, analysis of $t$ tests for hypothesis 2 confounds this interpretation, because, instead of an improvement in either group, there was a significant improvement in scores in the control group. While it is easy to explain the results of hypothesis 1 in terms of program effects, there is no ready explanation for the
control group's improvement on SCA items irrelevant to treatment.

Since the reasons for the results of hypothesis 2 are not readily apparent, some possible explanations are offered. 1) There could have been a sensitization effect to the SCA. By taking a career myths inventory subjects may have begun to think about career issues during the week before the posttest. Introspection on the part of the control subjects may account for their improvement on SCA items irrelevant to treatment. In this regard it must be remembered that treatment and control groups were somewhat dissimilar and therefore may have reacted to the SCA differently. 2) It is possible that something was said during the study skills presentation which impacted on those career myths irrelevant to treatment. 3) The SCA may not be that reliable an instrument. Test-retest reliability of the SCA has never been measured. It should be noted that the control group's SCA scores improved on the treatment-relevant items too.

The effects observed in hypothesis 1 are further vitiated by the data relating to students' perception of changed attitudes. Data indicate no significant difference in perceived attitude change between treatment and control groups. This contradicts the improvement in performance level on the SCA, especially for the treatment group.

Again, there is no obvious explanation for this
contradictory result. Perhaps attitude change may not have been great enough for the students to perceive. Or, stated another way, the program may have had an impact but not involved the subjects--students may not have been attending to treatment or control content, or seeing how it would affect their own career decision-making. It should also be noted that the control group's syllabus stated that the lecture for that night would deal with career issues--this may have confused some students in this group.

There was no particular expectation regarding the outcome of hypothesis 3. The weak positive correlation between SCA scores and commitment to major indicates a general lack of predictability regarding the relationship between career myths and commitment to major. However, it should be noted that this lack of a significant correlation may be due to the relative absence of truly uncommitted students in the sample; there were three undeclared students out of a total of 74. Consequently, what was being compared was largely a number of more or less committed students.

Hypothesis 1 was the most important of the three hypotheses because it dealt with the SCA items presented in the outreach program. Analysis of the data relevant to this hypothesis show that it is feasible to impact career myths by use of short-term outreach. However, the results of the analysis of hypothesis 2 are ambiguous and open to conjecture. The same may be said of the questionnaire data
relating to perception of changed attitudes. Analysis of hypothesis 3 demonstrates no significant relationship between commitment to major and SCA scores; but an improper sampling of students may have been used to test this hypothesis.

Implications

The principal implication of this research is that further experimentation needs to be undertaken, but with more rigorous control exercised over the variables than was utilized in this study. Verification of the promising results of hypothesis 1 should be undertaken before there is any widespread application of the career myths intervention.

There are a number of limitations in this study which weaken the interpretation of treatment effects. In order to strengthen any future research more stringent control would need to be exercised over the kinds of subjects that are utilized. To properly determine outreach effects more comparable treatment and control groups are needed. Unless such variables as age and class standing are controlled, it is questionable to assume that the outreach presentation was the most significant cause of changed attitudes. Either more comparable intact groups must be compared or subjects must be randomized. An even better design would also include a test-retest condition, since the SCA has never been assessed on this basis.
Another recommendation would be to experiment with a more appropriate target group. If attitude change is important to career choice, and major declaration is perceived largely as a manifestation of this choice, any program to correct career myths should logically focus on those students who are beginning college or who are undeclared as to major. Freshmen or undeclared students would be those in greatest need of assistance because of their likely relative indecision regarding careers.

Liberal arts students are another appropriate target group because they are more likely to be undecided about career goals than non-liberal arts students. Unlike most other majors, any given liberal arts major does not typically translate into a specific occupation. Therefore, even those liberal arts students committed to their major will not necessarily have a specific career goal in mind. As with freshmen and undeclared students, liberal arts majors are likely to be in need of assistance with career decision-making.

Experimenting with freshmen or undeclared students might also clarify the issue of commitment to major. The results of hypothesis 3 may have been inconclusive because of the restricted range of commitment within the sample. In order to determine the degree to which level of adherence to career myths is related to commitment to major, a more diverse range of commitment is needed than was exhibited.
by the subjects of this experiment.

A related issue may also be addressed: whether commitment to major has any impact on willingness to alter belief in career myths. Fretz (1981) had advanced the view that subject attributes are often a significant factor in the effectiveness of career interventions. If certainty of major is looked at in terms of commitment to a particular course of action toward a career goal, major declaration may be a significant variable in one's willingness to alter career-related beliefs. By examining subject characteristics which influence attitude change one may be able to modify outreach to better target those students most likely to change belief in career myths. The issue of certainty of college major is significant, not only because of its potential interrelationship with career myths, but because of the problems that lack of commitment to major creates for students, especially in terms of academic motivation (Chase and Keene, 1981). A career myths intervention could even be part of a broader outreach program assisting the undeclared student in arriving at an early major declaration.

Summary

College counselors consider career myths to be a major impediment to rational career planning. Though originally recognized in the counseling context, Woodrick (1979) has presented evidence that career myths are also prevalent
among the general student population. If career myths are the obstacle to career decision-making that they appear to be, using outreach to correct such misbeliefs may be a feasible option for counselors to consider.

The main goal of this study has been to test the hypothesis that career myths can be effectively corrected by short-term outreach. A pretest-treatment-posttest design, with treatment and control groups, was used. The independent variable was lecture content—a career myths presentation in the treatment group and study skills presentation in the control group. The dependent variable was Woodrick's Survey of Career Attitudes, supplemented by two questionnaire items designed to assess students' perception of changed attitudes (administered on posttest only). Students from two Human Relations classes were utilized as subjects: 27 subjects from the treatment group and 36 from the control group completed all testing. There was no attempt to randomize subjects because intact classes were used.

The second goal of this study has been to determine the relationship between career myths and commitment to college major. That is, what effect does commitment to major have on adherence to career myths? Are uncommitted students more or less likely to subscribe to career myths than committed students? This information would be useful in targeting those students with the greatest need for the program. One questionnaire item was utilized in assessing commitment to
major and compared with pretest SCA scores.

The results of hypotheses 1 and 2, dealing with treatment effects, were anomalous. T tests of treatment-relevant SCA items (those dealt with in the outreach program) indicate a significant improvement in the treatment group's scores relative to the control group's (hypothesis 1). However, for the SCA items not dealt with in the outreach program, the t tests show a significant improvement in the scores of the control group relative to that of the treatment group (hypothesis 2). There is no ready explanation for the results of hypothesis 2. The t test for the questionnaire data indicate no significant difference in perception of attitude change between treatment and control groups.

The results of hypothesis 3 indicate a very weak positive correlation between SCA scores and perceived commitment to major. Adherence to career myths, in other words, cannot predict or be predicted by an individual's perception of his/her own commitment to major.

**Conclusion**

In spite of the anomalies of the research results, the outcome of hypothesis 1 stands out as meaningful. The chief implication of this hypothesis is that it is possible to impact college students' career belief system by means of a persuasive lecture. Since the supporting data did not
verify this outcome, and since treatment and control groups were not comparable, a new study with tighter controls should be undertaken. Freshmen, undeclared, or liberal arts students should be the target group(s) for any further investigation of career myths intervention because they seem to represent the most appropriate groups for any treatment. It was also suggested that any career myths intervention be considered as part of a broader program related to career planning or making a decision about a college major.
REFERENCES


APPENDIX A

CAREER MYTHS PROGRAM

1This program was adapted from the following materials: Carney (1978), Thompson (1976), Lewis and Gilhouseen (1981), Woodrick (1979).
I. Introduction: the process of making a career decision.

A. The college years are a time during which many of us are concerned with career planning and decision-making.

B. Career planning should be regarded as a rational decision-making process.

1. Knowledge of range of possible careers;
2. Knowledge of one's interests and abilities;
3. Decision-making involving a narrowing down of a relatively large number of potential career options based on one's interests and abilities.

C. However, the rational nature of this planning process is sometimes undermined by the erroneous attitudes that we hold about the world of work or about career decision-making.

1. All of us adhere to a mix of true and false conceptions about career-related issues.
2. Adherence to factually incorrect ideas about careers may be self-defeating.
   a. They may cause us unwarranted anxiety;
   b. They may cause us to procrastinate--discouraging us from making any career decision;
   c. They may cause us to make decisions which are unrealistic.

D. Tonight I shall discuss some of the misconceptions most common to college students in order to indicate:

1. Why each of these myths is incorrect;
2. How each of these myths will adversely affect you;
3. What would be a better alternative belief.
II. Misconception of Exactitude

A. Description of the myth

1. The basic idea is that vocational planning and decision-making are highly scientific and that the end product is an exact vocational plan.

2. If the student provides the correct data, then the test or counselor will provide the right answers.

3. People who believe this myth might say the following:
   "Somewhere there is a test or an expert who can tell me what to do with the rest of my life."

B. Facts contradicting this belief

1. The large number of occupations in existence limits the ability of tests and experts to provide any easy answers.
   a. Most interest inventories and aptitude tests sample no more than 200 of the approximately 20,000 occupations listed in the Dictionary of Occupational Titles.
   b. Likewise, the knowledge that any given career counselor may have about careers will be similarly limited.

2. Statistics reveal that the best indicator of what a person will do occupationally is what the person says he/she will do—not what the tests say.

3. Career counselors (and the tests they may give) help you to find trends in your occupational personal style and teach you how to gather current and accurate information so that you can make up your own mind.

C. Negative effects of believing this misconception

1. The exactitude myth creates a dilemma:
   a. According to the myth, responsibility for making a life's decision rests largely on the expert's recommendations.
b. In actuality, vocational decision-making is essentially a process of exploration by which the individual chooses from a diverse set of options.

2. Individuals who believe the exactitude myth are likely to be lulled by a false sense of security and become discouraged when it comes time to make vocational plans and deal with the decision-making process.

D. A more rational belief

1. Instead of believing in the exactitude of occupational tests and experts, a more rational belief would be:

"What I do with my life will always be my choice. I'll solicit feedback about my interests and talents from others and from tests to get some areas for exploration, but what I do with that information is really up to me."

2. There are no scientific solutions to the problem of choosing a career--career planning is a process of exploring one's own interests and abilities as they relate to a diverse number of career options.
III. The Perfect Job Myth

A. Description of the myth

1. There is a single right career for everyone.

2. People who believe this myth might say the following:

   a. "Somewhere out there the right job is just waiting for me. All I have to do is keep looking until I find it."

   b. "There is a single right career for me."

3. The perfect job myth is related to a more general misbelief—viz., that there exists a right, precise, perfect solution to the problems of human living, and that failure to find this perfect solution will result in personal catastrophe.

B. Facts contradicting this myth

1. Finding a single right career is an impossible goal when we consider the complexities and instabilities of the world of work.

   a. The Dictionary of Occupational Titles lists some 20,000 occupations grouped according to skill requirements. Certain groups of these occupations share common skills.

      i. Thus, any given individual may have talents and interests to perform well in a variety of occupations.

      ii. The odds indicate that most students try out several jobs or work settings during their lifetime.

   b. The perfect job myth presupposes a stable job market in which an individual's talents, abilities, interests, personality, and values neatly match appropriate vocational slots.

      i. Rather than one perfect job, there are a variety of alternative careers in which one can be equally satisfied and fulfilled.
ii. An individual's values change over time--what was once considered an ideal vocation may become a bore.

2. Logically, the notion of a perfect job is indefensible.

a. Hypothetical situation:

i. Imagine that you have a thoroughly enjoyable college major . . . and this major leads to a great job offer . . . so great that you think it's the perfect job.

ii. Then someone offers you an even better job at $10,000 more a year--in an even more ideal location.

b. An analysis of this situation reveals that what was perceived as the right job was really somewhat less than perfect.

c. Achieving perfection is logically impossible because there is always room for improvement in any given occupational setting.

d. Human beings are not static; we are always growing and changing.

C. Negative effects of believing this misconception

1. When it comes time to make a career decision the perfect job myth creates a dilemma.

a. This particular myth implies that if you make a career choice then it had better be the right one.

b. However, how can anyone be certain that he/she will make the right decision?

2. When placed in a situation such as this we tend to be overly cautious and at least somewhat anxious of making a mistake.

a. Consequently, we may tend to avoid making a commitment to a plan of action--we procrastinate.

b. And when we do make a reluctant commitment, we probably will still be overly cautious and anxious.
D. A more rational belief

1. Those individuals not believing this myth would recognize that even the best prospective career will have some deficiencies but that making a commitment is a necessary part of becoming an independent individual.

2. A more rational self-statement:

"I can't assume that my choice of a career will last for a lifetime. Part of the enjoyment of my own growth will be in recognizing my need to change as I develop new skills and interests and trying new things through work, including the changing of my original occupational goals. The most reasonable assumption is that I will be making another career decision in five years. What I will most likely be doing then is correcting the inadequacies of the career decision I originally made, making my original career goal even better."
IV. The Myth of Finality

A. Description of the myth

1. Vocational decision-making is an event which takes place at a single point in time and once a decision is made, it is final.

2. The more specific the vocational goal, and the sooner the vocational decision, the better.

3. The following statements typify this myth:

   a. "The choice of a college major or an occupation is practically irreversible. Once you make a decision, you can't or shouldn't change your mind."

   b. "If I change majors or careers I have failed."

   c. "I have too much time and money invested in my present career choice to change now."

B. Facts contradicting this belief

1. Adaptive change is falsely equated with quitting or indecision.

   a. There are many valid reasons for people to change their minds about career choices.

      i. Changing values;

      ii. Realization of having made the wrong career choice;

      iii. Economic necessity.

   b. Changing college majors or careers is an acceptable feature of American life.

      i. Several surveys of college students have shown that 30 to 50 percent of an entering freshmen class will have changed majors at least once by graduation.

      ii. It is estimated that the average person changes careers five to six times during his/her life.

2. Our parents have modeled career finality for us—but values and circumstances have changed.
a. We may believe this myth because our parents may have acted this way in their careers.

b. But when our parents entered the labor market in the 1940s or 1950s prevailing work values were different.
   i. Some people made a trade-off--in return for a boring or onerous job they received job security and satisfactory pay.
   ii. The labor market was also more static than it is now.

c. Whether we choose to make this type of sacrifice it is up to us.
   i. There are three basic reasons why people remain at a career year after year:
      1) they love their job;
      2) they are bought off by a high enough rate of pay;
      3) they are trapped by circumstances beyond their control.
   ii. Since being trapped is not as likely for young, single, college educated people we are looking at a situation where we should either love our work or we should earn enough to compensate for its inadequacies.
   iii. Failing that, we can always change our career.

d. What we want from a career is largely ours to determine and strive for:
   i. Self-fulfillment;
   ii. Creativity;
   iii. Money;

C. Negative effects of believing this misconception

1. A dilemma is created for those people who have made an unsatisfactory career decision.
a. They are dissatisfied with the choice they made,
b. But they feel that by abandoning their career or college major they will lose all the time, money, and effort already invested.

2. However, not changing an unsatisfactory career may be more costly in the long run than any short-term losses.
a. There is some short-term risk of losing what one has invested.
b. However, there may be hidden, intangible costs for not leaving a career:
   i. Personal stress;
   ii. Poor performance;
   iii. Job dissatisfaction.

3. People are usually continually assessing their career choices using a cost-benefit type of analysis.

D. A more rational belief

1. Modification of one's career goals may be simply a sensible way of adapting to changes in one's own values or to changes in external circumstances.

2. A career decision should not necessarily be considered final. Rather:

"Regardless of how carefully I plan an occupation or academic choice, there is always some risk of dissatisfaction because I cannot know all the consequences of that choice. Therefore, I'll need to study the prospects carefully, follow the belief that commitment and action are better than inaction, and prepare to review and perhaps renegotiate my decision at a later time."
V. The Myth of College as Vocational Training

A. Description of the myth

1. People who believe this myth see a specific college major as leading to a specific type of career.

2. That is, the goal of college is to provide a specialized type of training which translates into a particular type of job upon graduation.

3. Adherents of this myth might say the following:
   a. "My choice of a major will determine my future career."
   b. "The sole purpose of college is to provide students with specific job skills."

B. Facts contradicting this myth

1. There is no 100% correspondence between the field a student majors in and the career he or she later may enter.
   a. Several studies have indicated that, within several years after graduation, at least 50% of all college undergraduates are employed in careers not directly related to their majors.
   b. Employers sometimes utilize the college degree as a screening devise, irrespective of major, for reducing the number of job applicants who must be considered for hiring purposes.

2. After graduation, many students utilize the general skills they have acquired rather than the ones specific to their major.
   a. This is often necessary because some majors do not directly align to any occupational categories.
      i. Certain majors emphasize the learning of specific skills which are directly applicable to certain occupations--egs., engineering, business, teaching.
      ii. Other majors emphasize general skills which may be only indirectly related to any occupations--egs., English, speech communication.
b. It is these nonvocationally-oriented majors that offer more flexibility of job opportunity. The more specific and technical the training, the more limited the types of careers to choose from.

3. Whatever one's major, the most valuable skills that a college student may learn are often the general skills which may be applied to a variety of occupations.

a. Examples: the ability to communicate with clarity; the ability to understand a situation from several points of view; the capacity to understand technological decisions in human terms; the ability to think critically and creatively.

b. We are more flexible in our career planning when we recognize the potential we have in all areas.

C. Negative effects of believing this misconception

1. By believing that one possesses only those skills which relate to one's college major, the individual sees his or her abilities in very limited terms: necessary flexibility in marketing one's talents is lost.

2. When it comes time to seek employment, such individuals are left to the uncertainties of the job market.

a. Some fields of study (esp. liberal arts) do not directly translate into many specific job categories.

b. Those individuals majoring in programs directly related to specific jobs (e.g.s., teaching and business) sometimes are faced with job shortages.

3. Those individuals who equate a college major with certain job skills normally do not recognize the general skills that may be applied to a diverse number of career options.
4. The tangible result of this misconception is unemployment or underemployment and the emotional and financial stresses associated with either condition.

D. A more rational belief

1. College should not be viewed as simply training in a particular vocation.

2. The following statement represents a better attitude:

"College prepares me for a broad range of occupations. The general skills which I obtain are applicable to many different occupations. If the occupation for which I studied is unavailable upon graduation, I will consider other options that utilize other talents that I have acquired in college."
VI. Conclusion

A. Making a commitment to vocational goals is an important part of our personal development.

1. The college years are an opportune time to make such plans.

2. Career decision-making is a largely subjective procedure--so it can be expected that any plans that are made may eventually be modified.

B. The role of attitudes is important in making satisfactory career choices.

1. Irrational, erroneous beliefs may adversely affect our ability to make good decisions.

2. Misbeliefs may also cause us emotional difficulties such as
   i. Procrastination;
   ii. Unwarranted anxiety;
   iii. Depression;
   iv. Feelings of helplessness.

C. From our examination of career myths we can make the following generalizations about career decision-making:

1. Career counseling and testing may not give us any exact answers, but rather some general areas to explore which then must be narrowed down until we reach a decision.

2. It is wrong to assume that there is a single, right career for any of us, since we have too many possible careers to which our talents and values can be effectively applied.

3. Once we make a career decision it should not necessarily be considered final, because there are many valid reasons for changing career plans.

4. A college major may not necessarily determine the career you seek, since the general skills you acquire are applicable to many types of jobs.

D. There are a number of other common career myths which we did not cover tonight.
APPENDIX B

QUESTIONNAIRE
QUESTIONNAIRE

This questionnaire is part of a research project for the Educational Psychology Department. Please answer all of the following questions. All responses will remain confidential. Your name is asked only because of the need to match materials.

Name: ____________________________

Sex: Male ______ Female ______

Class standing: Freshman ________ Sophomore ________
                 Junior ________ Senior ________ Grad. ________

College major: ____________________________

Age: ________

Please read each statement below and indicate how much you personally agree or disagree with the statement by circling the number that best describes your response.

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<th>Strongly Agree</th>
<th>Somewhat Agree</th>
<th>Cannot Say</th>
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<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
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1. I am satisfied with my present college major. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
2. I am likely to change majors in the near future. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
3. If I were to consider changing my career plans, I would seek the assistance of a career counselor. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
4. I have made a serious commitment to my college major. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
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<td>I believe that my present college major will be beneficial in getting a good job.</td>
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<td>As a result of this presentation, my attitudes toward career decision-making have changed.</td>
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<td>As a result of this presentation, the career decision-making process has become clearer to me.</td>
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