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# Breaking Down Barriers: A Culturally Responsive Career Development Intervention with Racially Minoritized Girls of Color



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## ABSTRACT

Career development and professional identity remain critical areas that need addressing for young girls of color. Currently, racial-ethnic minorities continue to face disparities educationally and economically. Girls of color, in particular, are subjected to "double jeopardy" as they navigate a world still ridden with racial and gender discrimination. These barriers and other social and environmental factors have negatively impacted career self-efficacy, resulting in a lack of appropriate career decision-making. Through a lens of social justice and advocacy, school counselors can act as an ally and provide culturally appropriate interventions that address these issues. Career interventions based on the specific needs of racially minoritized students are necessary to reduce opportunity gaps and increase career options. This article explores the impact on career-related variables resulting from participation in a culturally responsive career development program. FLAME, a fifteen-week after-school program, was designed and implemented to foster growth and development in career exploration and leadership as well as career decision-making self-efficacy. Results provide initial support in suggesting that culturally responsive career development programs impact the career development of minority girls, especially in the areas of student motivation and engagement and perceived career barriers.

**Keywords:** career development, minoritized, culturally responsive, college and career readiness, school counseling

Career development is a vital component of today's educational system. The American School Counselor Association (ASCA) offers counselors the ASCA National Model (2019a) as a framework for creating comprehensive school counseling programs that provide students with developmentally appropriate services with college and career readiness (CCR) as a main area of focus. To implement relevant programming, counselors should be knowledgeable about the diverse populations with whom they work. In turn, this knowledge should drive programs that meet the needs of the students. Currently missing from the literature is proper guidance on creating effective culturally relevant interventions, specifically for racial-ethnic minority girls in middle school. Evidence-based practices are needed to ensure that these students obtain the knowledge and experiences required to continue to overcome occupational barriers and be prepared for their future careers.

When considering barriers, school counselors are responsible for interrupting the pattern of normalized oppression found in education. Students learn to accept oppression as a standard way of life through experiences at



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home, school, and community (Chung & Bemak, 2012). Through a lens of social justice and advocacy, school counselors can act as allies and provide culturally appropriate interventions that address these issues (American School Counselor Association [ASCA], 2019b; Falco, 2017).

Career development, especially relative to young women of color, remains a critical area of need. In 2014, the White House Council on Women and Girls released a report, "Advancing Equity for Women and Girls of Color," which highlighted many barriers that hinder success for girls of color. Former President Obama acknowledged the progress made, but also noted the need for support to continue the advancement of equality for this population (Jarett & Tchen, 2014). In 2017, The Center for Law and Social Policy (CLASP) conducted focus groups with young women of color. From this study, seven structural barriers to equity, such as low-wage work, financial strain, educational inequality, mental health, housing instability and homelessness, exposure to violence, and the justice system, were identified as "root causes of economic marginalization" (Center for Law and Social Policy, (n.d.); West-Bey et al., 2018). These barriers have resulted in relegation, and therefore, this group is referred to as racially minoritized.

Currently, racial-ethnic minorities continue to face disparities educationally and economically. Girls of Color are subjected to "double jeopardy" as they navigate a world

still ridden with racial and gender discrimination, negatively impacting career self-efficacy and resulting in a lack of appropriate career decision-making. The Center for Law and Social Policy (n.d.) further suggests that the root cause of these barriers must be understood and named before dismantling can occur. What may be missing is the early preventative and developmental work with young girls of color as early as middle school (Wang & Degol, 2017) as this is a critical developmental period where culturally responsive interventions are needed to address perceived career barriers (Kenney et al., 2007; Orthner et al., 2013). Based on the specific needs of racially minoritized students, career interventions are necessary to reduce opportunity gaps, increase student engagement and increase career options (Kashefpakdel et al., 2016; Navarro et al., 2007; Orthner et al., 2013). Therefore, additional research is needed to understand how culturally responsive career interventions impact career and college readiness for students of color. This article explores the impact on career-related variables resulting from participation in a culturally responsive career development program as a means of addressing CCR with racially minoritized girls.

### Career Related Variables

Career self-efficacy is proven to be predictive of future career choices. Self-efficacy, however, is lowered as career-related barriers become significant in the lives of students of

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color, resulting in restricted career options (Lindley, 2006; Luzzo & McWhirter, 2001). A study conducted by Luzzo and McWhirter (2001) found that self-efficacy for coping with career-related barriers was higher for White students than for students of color. This puts students of color at a greater disadvantage with an increased number of barriers coupled with the inability to cope. Although there are many domains related to self-efficacy, this research focuses on a culturally responsive program for minoritized girls and its impact on their career decision-making self-efficacy. In addition, other variables, such as ethnic identity, academic motivation and engagement, and perceived career barriers that have been proven to influence career decision-making self-efficacy, were also examined.

Ethnic identity is an important concept to consider during the late childhood and early adolescent stage in life. Wakefield and Hudley (2007) define ethnic identity as “the sense of belonging that an adolescent feels toward a racial or ethnic group as well as the significance and qualitative meaning that the adolescent assigns to that group membership” (p. 148). Ethnic identity includes an acceptance of one’s group despite stereotypes, discrimination, and racism (Phinney, 1996). As students of color move through this developmental stage and begin to explore their ethnic identity, their career/vocational identity is being shaped as well. How parents and communities perceive career barriers, career options, and work

values is typically the foundational information from which students begin to form their own vocational identities (Gushue & Whitson, 2006). The processing of information and experiences, relative to a group in which one identifies with, is related to how the group is represented in society. Therefore, if the group is viewed negatively, it will be important to equip members with the necessary resources and skills to protect them against the consequences of those barriers (Griffith & Combs, 2015; Wakefield & Hudley, 2007). Many researchers have examined the relationship between ethnic identity and career decision making (Gushue, 2006; Gushue & Whitson, 2006; Lewis et al., 2018; Ojeda et al., 2012). Findings suggest that a positive ethnic identity results in greater self-efficacy, which in turn impacts better career decision making (Gushue & Whitson, 2006; Ojeda et al., 2012).

Another factor linked to career self-efficacy is academic motivation and engagement. When implementing programs in schools, it is important to keep the overall mission and vision of the school at the forefront which is the academic success of all students. Focusing on motivation and engagement has been found to increase academic achievement and focusing on career development is one way of increasing motivation and engagement (Lapan, 2004; Kenny et al., 2006). Many studies have found a positive connection between effective career exploration and planning, and an increase in student engagement (Kenney et al., 2006; Perry, 2008;

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Perry et al., 2010). A study conducted by Perry et al. (2010) examined whether career preparation would have a significant and positive effect on school engagement on 285 urban high school students. Results indicated that career preparation had a significant direct impact on school engagement, which in turn significantly and directly impacted grades. The implication for students of color is that academic success could increase vocational opportunities.

Lastly, perceived career barriers should be considered when examining career self-efficacy. Research has suggested that students are aware of the occupational and educational barriers that exist (Kenny et al., 2003). However, studies conducted on perceived career barriers have found conflicting results. Jackson et al. (2006), when studying minority youth from the inner city, found that higher beliefs in school and work barriers were significantly associated with lower educational and career aspirations. Mejia-Smith and Gushue (2017) studied the influence of ethnic identity, acculturation, and self-efficacy on the perception of career barriers on Latina and Latino college students. They found that students with greater self-efficacy perceived fewer barriers to achieving their career goals. Luzzo and McWhirter (2001) also found that minority women perceived notably more career and educational barriers and had lower self-efficacy to cope with such barriers.

## Perceived Barriers to Career Development

Although many studies have been conducted on the career development of racial-ethnic minority youth, there is still a need for research regarding racially minoritized girls in the middle school years (Flores et al., 2006; Kim et al., 2018). Perceived career barriers identified by students of color negatively impact the formation of vocational identity, ultimately hindering appropriate career development (Gushue et al., 2006). This includes financial constraints, gender and racial discrimination, maladaptive career beliefs, lack of educational resources, lack of career development skills, limited life and work experiences, and classism (Code et al., 2006; Gushue et al., 2006; Kenny et al., 2007; Smith-Weber, 1999). These factors are thought to limit the learning experiences of students of color.

Specifically related to the educational setting, there are additional barriers identified. Noted consistently throughout the literature are instructional barriers such as standardized testing, lack of highly qualified educators, gatekeeping from higher level courses, limited resources, lack of access to CCR related knowledge and programs, underrepresentation in gifted and overrepresentation in special education and under-resourced schools (Bates et al., 2019; Bryan et al., 2020; Mayes & Hines, 2014; Welton & Martinez, 2014). These barriers illuminate the continued opportunity gap between students of color and their White peers as well as impede the ability for minoritized students to

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achieve “academic equity” (Harris et al., 2020, p. 43).

### Role of the School Counselor

Seen as leaders in the building, school counselors can advocate for students as they address the needs of every student (ASCA, 2015, p. 19). In referencing the needs of all students, those of color and other marginalized groups are highlighted as specific targets for prevention, intervention, and remediation activities. Research has suggested that interventions used for these populations should be culturally responsive (Akosah-Twumasi et al., 2018; Harris et al., 2018; Welton & Martinez, 2013). Dahir and Stone (2012), as cited by ASCA (2015), offers suggestions on how school counselors can provide this culturally responsive counseling. A few of those suggestions include: using data to close the gap among diverse student populations, practicing culturally sensitive advising and counseling, addressing the impact that poverty and social class has on student achievement, and identifying the effects of family culture on student performance.

Although introduced for the minority gifted population, Mayes and Hines (2014) suggest how school counselors can utilize College Board’s eight components of college and career readiness. Suggestions range from identifying and addressing barriers, supporting students in aligning academic curriculum and extracurricular activities to

ability level and interest, working with students on career decision making, providing information on and guiding students and parents through the college application and financial aid process, to collaborating with stakeholders to improve the transition process from high school to higher education. These suggestions are useful for school counselors as they work to support their students of color through college and career related programming. As schools continue to close opportunity gaps, examining and revising existing programs should lead to new and innovative ways of educating children on career development, such as creative leadership and career development groups for girls of color (Learning First Alliance, 2018).

Comprehensive school counseling programs for all students should include targeted interventions based on data analysis and student need. School counselors, among other educators, are well aware that different learning opportunities must be provided to improve student outcomes for all students (Learning First Alliance, 2018). The implication is that interventions intended to assist in student success should focus on equity, indicating a need for culturally responsive programming (Learning First Alliance, 2018). ASCA prioritizes using culturally responsive counseling to engage in social justice and advocacy work for culturally diverse students (ASCA, 2015). In regard to career development, however, additional research is needed on the influence of culturally responsive programs for the

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career development of racially minoritized girls of color, specifically in their middle school years (Falco & Summers, 2017; Gushue & Whitson, 2006; Lent et al., 2018).

### Current Programs and Interventions

Many school counselors have sought the literature for creative interventions that target underrepresented populations regarding college and career readiness. Although research informed, there still lacks evidence-based programs readily accessible for school counselors to use with minoritized populations. However, with the research that has been done, many similarities and themes are common among them and are applicable to working with the middle school population.

From CCR groups to specialized interventions, the consensus is that the majority of CCR literature is generalized to racial/ethnic populations and may not effectively consider the unique needs of minoritized students. Harris et al., (2020) implemented a CCR group (SPARCK) based on a life coaching model. The model focused on six aspects: self-definition (Story), student's role in the world (Purpose) dreams and goals (Aspirations), how students are progressing towards goals (Reflection), support systems (Connect), and an action plan (Kick-Start). Aligned with ASCA's Mindsets and Behaviors, this program combines familiar work of school counselors with the integration of cultural factors to

strengthen college and career readiness. Programs such as the Youth Leadership Academy (YLA) have also been shown to impact CCR for minoritized youth. YLA is based on a positive youth development framework that focuses on three components: positive relationships with others, building life skills, and application of skills in community activities (Bates et al., 2019). The YLA specifically offered three phases: leadership development, applied internship, and culminating service. Results suggest positive CCR related outcomes for participants. Authors suggest that programs such as YLA "mitigate risk factors and build skills for vulnerable youth" (Bates et al., 2019, p. 177).

Williams et al. (2018) suggests customizing interventions based upon student need. Counselors utilized the STARS (Students That are Achieving Success) framework that utilized components from social cognitive career theory, cognitive information processing and the ASCA National Model. Specific aspects of the intervention were customized based on the external barriers relevant to the participant and both facilitator and participant worked collaboratively on established goals to overcome identified barriers. Results indicate positive trends with effect sizes ranging from small to large depending on specific factors. It is important to note that the population in this study included African American girls in the foster care system which may present unique

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variables not necessarily applicable to other minoritized girls. The study, however, highlights the need for tailoring school counseling interventions to meet the needs of the population served.

### Purpose of Study

This study examined the impact of a culturally responsive career development intervention (FLAME) on career decision-making self-efficacy, perceived career barriers, ethnic identity, and student motivation and engagement. The theoretical framework guiding this study was the Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT), which asserts that career choices are made due to the impact of several variables that can encourage or impede career development (Lent et al., 1994). FLAME emphasized the four sources of information in which self-efficacy is developed: Mastery Experiences, Vicarious Learning Experiences, Verbal Persuasion, and Physiological Arousal. Each session included at least one of the sources for self-efficacy development. Most importantly, the study was grounded in cultural responsiveness, applying a cultural context to a school counseling career curriculum designed to address the career-related needs of minoritized girls. Research previously conducted found that culturally responsive programs offer significant benefits to students of color such as academic achievement, increases in self-efficacy, and improved coping skills (Banks & Obiakor, 2015 ; Jackson et al., 2011; Lent et al., 2002). Therefore, the

current study continued this line of research by examining whether a culturally responsive program impacts the above-mentioned variables. This study added to the literature on minoritized girls, middle school career development, and the impact of culturally responsive programming while offering a potential intervention for practicing school counselors.

Given the need for evidence-based school counseling and culturally responsive interventions, we hypothesized the following: 1) participants will experience an increase in career decision-making self-efficacy during participation in a culturally responsive career development program; 2) participants will experience an increase in ethnic identity during participation in a culturally responsive career development program; 3) participants will have an increase in motivation and engagement during participation in a culturally responsive career development program; and 4) participants will experience a reduction in perceived career barriers during participation in a culturally responsive career development program.

### Social Cognitive Career Theory

Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT) proposes that contextual variables shape career choices and that these variables can facilitate or impede career development (Lent et al., 1994). In the context of working with minoritized girls, SCCT focuses on the processes in which (a) academic and career



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interests develop; (b) academic and vocational plans are created; and (c) varying levels of performance and persistence in educational and career pursuits are attained (Quimby et al., 2007). Many psychosocial factors related to career development are unique for girls of color (Smith, 1981), and SCCT provides a needed paradigm for taking these factors into account. SCCT serves as the framework for understanding the literature on the minority population of interest, as it considers “human agency” available for students to make career-related choices (Bounds, 2017). It specifically considers gender, culture, and other aspects of diversity (Lent & Brown, 2013). The theory focuses on self-efficacy, expected outcomes, and goal mechanisms and how they are shaped by barriers associated with career development (Bounds, 2017). Self-efficacy is the belief that one has in his or her own ability to perform definite career-related tasks (Lent et al., 2002) and confidence in making appropriate career decisions such as choice of occupation (Bullock-Yowell et al., 2014). SCCT suggests that limited exposure to career-related information, along with limited learning experiences, leads to a lack of self-efficacy in career-related decisions (Lindley, 2006). Further, self-efficacy is needed to mediate whether career interests, goals, and actions translate into appropriate career decision-making (Gushue et al., 2006; Mau et al., 2016). SCCT supports the notion that self-efficacy is derived from the four sources of information previously described: performance accomplishments, vicarious learning experiences, social persuasion, and

emotional states. Lent et al. (1994) suggest that people choose to engage in activities that they believe will lead to positive outcomes and develop goals from expectations set purposely to attain a certain level of performance.

SCCT presents three models in which the core variables (self-efficacy, outcome expectations, and personal goals) operate (Lent & Brown, 1996). The interaction between these variables within this model framework is what guides career development. The three models identified are Interest, Choice, and Performance. According to SCCT, career interests develop based upon adolescents' exposure and participation in activities and experiences. It is also suggested that the activities depend on cultural, social, and environmental factors. Therefore, exposure to appropriate and relevant career development activities generates an increase in a variety of interests leading to expanded career choices. According to Lent et al. (1994), career choice is heavily impacted by self-efficacy beliefs, performance outcomes, and environmental factors and with supportive environmental conditions, interests could predict choices. However, due to socioeconomic status, discrimination, lack of educational resources, and non-supportive environments, that may not always be the case for minority women. Career choice may be restricted to specific career fields wherein the ability to choose is not always present. Finally, performance is also impacted by self-efficacy and outcome expectations. It is thought that the higher the

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self-efficacy and outcome expectations, the higher the performance goals (Lent & Brown, 1996).

### Methods

#### Participants

Participants were recruited from a public middle school in a rural southwest community. The middle school demographics were 69% White, 26% Black, 4% Hispanic, and 1% Other (American Indian or Alaska Native, Asian, and Pacific Islander). The percentage of student participants on free and reduced lunch was approximately 53%. Due to the school's social class and the nature of the program, purposeful sampling was used to select the participants, which included any counselor or self-identified racial-ethnic minority girls in grades six through eight, yielding approximately 58 students that were eligible for participation. Parental consent was obtained, resulting in 34 racial-ethnic minority middle school female students with a racial-ethnic breakdown of 30 Black and four Hispanic students. The average age was 12.44 (SD = 1.07), with a range of 11 to 14.

#### Intervention

The Female Leadership Academy for Minority Excellence (FLAME) program was implemented in a rural middle school to address the need for a culturally responsive program in career development. FLAME, a fifteen-week after-school program, was designed and executed by the school counselor and facilitated by two additional

faculty members. All three facilitators were women of color. The academy provided students with career-related knowledge and tools which they applied in practice exercises. The objectives of the program were to explore potential career options; understand how race and gender may affect career options; understand the job search and application process; research and meet prominent women in particular career fields; define and understand the concept of leadership development; seek to increase self-efficacy regarding becoming future leaders in their field of choice; and to understand how self-esteem, personal values, and positive image impacts the hiring process.

The goal was to empower these young women to become future leaders in their careers of choice. Group activities included mentorship, resume writing, career exploration, mock-interviewing, shadowing experiences, creating goals and vision boards, practicing public speaking, and building leadership skills. Details of each week of the group intervention are noted in Table 1 (see page 81). Participants were exposed to several racial-ethnic minority role models in various professional careers to vicariously learn from other women of color how they overcame career barriers.

#### Procedure

This study utilized a repeated measures single group, pre-, mid-, and post-test design, to examine mean score differences over time. The group intervention took place over 15

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Table 1.  
FLAME Session Content.

Session	Intervention/Content	SCCT Alignment	Type of Engagement
1	Program Overview Data Collection	Choice Interest Performance	Cognitive Emotional Behavior
2	Discussion on barriers and self-efficacy	Choice Interest Performance	Cognitive Emotional
3	College/Career Readiness Role Model	Choice Interest	Behavior Cognitive
4	Role Model	Interest	Cognitive
5	Goal Setting	Cognitive Performance	Behavior Cognitive
6	Positive Self-Image	Performance	Cognitive Behavior Emotional
7	Role Model	Interest	Cognitive
8	Girl Empowerment	Performance	Cognitive Emotional
9	Role Model Mid data collection	Interest	Cognitive Behavior
10	Career Exploration	Choice Performance	Cognitive Behavior
11	Career Readiness	Choice Performance	Cognitive Behavior
12	Role Model	Interest	Cognitive
13	Mock Interviews	Performance	Behavior Cognitive
14	College Readiness Role Model	Choice Interest Performance	Behavior Cognitive
15	College Readiness Review of Program Final data collection	Choice Interest Performance	Behavior Cognitive Emotional

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weeks. The pre-test was given before the first week of the group intervention, the mid-test after week 8, and the post-test given after week 15. The rationale for a pre, mid, and post-test design was to determine change over time due to content presentation.

### Measures

Career Decision Making Self-Efficacy Scale - Short Form (CDMSES; Betz et al., 1996) is a 25-item scale that measures an individual's degree of belief that she can successfully complete tasks necessary for making career decisions. The CDMSES comprises five subscales: accurate self-appraisal, gathering occupational information, goal selection, making plans for the future, and problem-solving. The scale utilizes a 5-point Likert scale where responses range from 1 = "no confidence at all" to 5 = "complete confidence." Multiple studies have found the results from the CDMSES to be reliable (e.g., Austin, 2010; Betz et al., 1996) with Cronbach's coefficient alphas for the subscales and total scale ranging between .73 and .94.

Perceived Barriers to Education and Career Scale Revised (POB; Luzzo & McWhirter, 2001) consists of 32 items broken into two subscales: Career-related barriers and Educational barriers. The current version utilizes a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 = "strongly disagree" to 5 = "strongly agree." Luzzo and McWhirter (2001) report reliability statistics based upon the revised scale as a Cronbach's coefficient alpha of .90 for the total

scale and between .86 and .88 for the Career-related barriers and Educational barriers subscales. The validity of both subscales has been demonstrated in previous studies (e.g., Gnilka & Novakovik, 2017; Novakovik & Gnilka, 2015). For purposes of this study, only the career barriers subscale was used.

Multigroup Ethnic Identity Measure (MEIM; Phinney, 1992) is a 14-item scale measuring ethnic identity and consists of three subscales: Affirmation and Belonging, Ethnic Identity Achievement, and Ethnic Behaviors. The scale utilizes a 4-point Likert response system ranging from 1 = "strongly disagree" to 4 = "strongly agree." Studies have shown that the MEIM produces reliable results in both high school and college samples (i.e., .81 and .90 respectively, Roberts et al., 1999, Worrell, 2000) and has shown to have strong evidence of validity (Roberts et al., 1999).

Motivation and Engagement Survey – Short Form Revised (MES; Lee et al., 2016) is a 21-question scale that measures motivation and engagement in science. The measure is divided into three categories: (1) goal orientations (mastery, performance-approach, and performance avoid), (2) self-efficacy, and (3) three types of engagement (behavioral, affective, and cognitive). The MES utilizes a Likert-type scale ranging from 1 = "Not at all true" to 5 = "Very true." Following previous studies (Lee et al., 2016), the wording of the questions was adjusted to be more focused on general academic motivation and engagement across all subjects. For example, the item "One of my goals is to show others that

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science classwork is easy for me.” was revised to read as “One of my goals is to show others that classwork is easy for me.” Previous studies have demonstrated that the MES has been shown to have good reliability and validity (e.g., Lee et al., 2016).

### Results

Data was first reviewed for missing and incorrect information. Little’s MCAR test was conducted to determine the type of missing data. Next, with confirmed Missing Completely at Random or Missing at Random, a Full-information Maximum Likelihood was used to account for missing data. In addition, data were examined for any outliers and to ensure that assumptions of normality, linearity, and homogeneity of variance were met. Descriptive statistics, including mean and standard deviations for each of the scales and subscales, were obtained to summarize data from this sample. Next, a series of repeated measure ANOVAs were conducted to determine if mean scores differed statistically significant between time points. A series of repeated measure ANOVAs were also undertaken to determine the mean score differences between time points on career self-efficacy, ethnic identity, perceived career barriers, and student motivation and engagement. As a result of a significant ANOVA, post hoc testing was completed, using pairwise comparisons to determine which means differed and answer the hypotheses. Correlations of all study variables are noted in Table 2 (see pages 84-

86). In regard to the first and second hypotheses, there were no significant differences in CDMSE ( $p > .05$ ) or ethnic identity scores ( $p > .05$ ).

Regarding the third hypothesis, significant mean differences were found for some student motivation and engagement subscales scores. Significant results were reported for the Performance Approach Orientation (ME\_PerfApproach) subscale between pre-group and mid-group and between pre-group and post-group scores ( $p < .05$ ). Scores between mid-group and post-group were not found to be statistically significant ( $p > .05$ ). Results of the self-efficacy subscale (ME\_SelfE) suggest that there was a difference in mean scores between pre-group and post-group scores ( $p < .05$ ). However, no difference was indicated between pre-group and mid-group and between mid-group and post-group scores ( $p > .05$ ).

To account for the low reliability found on the Mastery and Behavior subscales of the Motivation and Engagement Survey, a paired sample t-test was analyzed to determine mean differences for affected subscales. A significant difference was found between pre-group and mid-group mean scores on the Motivation and Engagement Mastery subscale  $t(33) = 2.05, p < .05$  as well as between mid-group and post-group scores on the Behavior subscale  $t(33) = -2.25, p < .05$ .

For the fourth hypothesis, significant results were found for the Perceived Career Barriers scale. Mean differences were identified

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Table 2a.  
Within- and Across-Time 1 and 3 Correlations between Variables.

Measure	1	2	3	4	5	6
<b>Time 1</b>						
1. POB	--					
2. MEIM	-.04	--				
3. CDMSE	.20	.35	--			
4. MEMastery	.20	-.43	.21	--		
5. MEPerfApp	-.13	.05	.04	-.11	--	
6. MEPerfAv	-.32	.28	-.09	-.15	.16	--
7. MESelfEff	.00	-.17	.12	.51	-.04	-.18
8. MEBx	.15	-.15	.17	.51	-.11	-.42
9. MEAffect	.18	-.19	.17	.37	.38	-.34
10. MECog	.15	-.11	.05	.24	-.29	.29
<b>Time 3</b>						
11. POB	.47	.08	.12	-.16	-.32	-.14
12. MEIM	-.23	.08	-.10	-.07	.03	.11
13. CDMSE	-.03	-.20	.17	.28	.07	.27
14. MEMastery	.10	.12	.10	.22	.02	-.04
15. MEPerfApp	-.02	.16	.03	.08	.38	.13
16. MEPerfAv	-.17	.28	-.14	-.23	.38	.28
17. MESelfEff	.07	.00	.11	.33	-.25	-.04
18. MEBx	.18	-.08	-.13	-.04	.01	-.20
19. MEAffect	.29	.03	-.10	.10	.20	-.25
20. MECog	.25	-.10	.11	.12	.07	.13

Note.  $r > |.34|$ ,  $p < .05$ . POB = Perceived Career Barriers from the Perceived Barriers to Education and Career Scale Revised, (Luzzo & McWhirter, 2001). MEIM = Multigroup Ethnic Identity Measure (Phinney, 1992). CDMSE = Career Decision Making Self-Efficacy Scale Short Form (Betz et al., 1996). ME = Motivation and Engagement survey (Lee et al., 2016). Subscales include Mastery, Performance Approach, Performance Avoid, Self-Efficacy, Behavioral Engagement, Affective Engagement, and Cognitive Engagement.

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Table 2b.  
Within- and Across-Time 1 and 3 Correlations between Variables.

Measure	7	8	9	10	11	12
<b>Time 1</b>						
1. POB						
2. MEIM						
3. CDMSE						
4. MEMastery						
5. MEPerfApp						
6. MEPerfAv						
7. MESelfEff	--					
8. MEBx	.81	--				
9. MEAffect	.57	.72	--			
10. MECog	.44	.22	.19	--		
<b>Time 3</b>						
11. POB	-.22	-.20	-.13	.25	--	
12. MEIM	.21	.20	.10	.20	-.05	--
13. CDMSE	-.13	-.12	-.11	.07	.04	-.18
14. MEMastery	.14	.20	.10	-.09	-.30	-.14
15. MEPerfApp	-.36	-.23	-.08	-.34	-.05	-.09
16. MEPerfAv	-.50	-.36	-.10	-.38	-.12	-.17
17. MESelfEff	.37	.31	-.02	-.05	-.30	-.06
18. MEBx	-.09	.21	.18	-.23	-.12	.07
19. MEAffect	.17	.34	.51	-.03	.03	.04
20. MECog	-.01	-.07	-.08	-.05	-.25	-.35

Note.  $r > |.34|$ ,  $p < .05$ . POB = Perceived Career Barriers from the Perceived Barriers to Education and Career Scale Revised, (Luzzo & McWhirter, 2001). MEIM = Multigroup Ethnic Identity Measure (Phinney, 1992). CDMSE = Career Decision Making Self-Efficacy Scale Short Form (Betz et al., 1996). ME = Motivation and Engagement survey (Lee et al., 2016). Subscales include Mastery, Performance Approach, Performance Avoid, Self-Efficacy, Behavioral Engagement, Affective Engagement, and Cognitive Engagement.

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Table 2c.  
Within- and Across-Time 1 and 3 Correlations between Variables.

Measure	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20
<b>Time 1</b>								
1. POB								
2. MEIM								
3. CDMSE								
4. MEMastery								
5. MEPerfApp								
6. MEPerfAv								
7. MESelfEff								
8. MEBx								
9. MEAffect								
10. MECog								
<b>Time 3</b>								
11. POB								
12. MEIM								
13. CDMSE	--							
14. MEMastery	-.02	--						
15. MEPerfApp	.19	.00	--					
16. MEPerfAv	.14	.29	.66	--				
17. MESelfEff	.07	.70	-.08	-.07	--			
18. MEBx	-.10	-.07	.11	.09	.00	--		
19. MEAffect	-.15	.26	.10	.10	.11	.57	--	
20. MECog	.33	.15	.20	.20	.40	.13	-.03	--

Note.  $r > |.34|$ ,  $p < .05$ . POB = Perceived Career Barriers from the Perceived Barriers to Education and Career Scale Revised, (Luzzo & McWhirter, 2001). MEIM = Multigroup Ethnic Identity Measure (Phinney, 1992). CDMSE = Career Decision Making Self-Efficacy Scale Short Form (Betz et al., 1996). ME = Motivation and Engagement survey (Lee et al., 2016). Subscales include Mastery, Performance Approach, Performance Avoid, Self-Efficacy, Behavioral Engagement, Affective Engagement, and Cognitive Engagement.



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between pre-group and post-group and mid-group and post-group ( $p < .05$ ). Mean differences were not identified between pre-group and mid-group scores ( $p > .05$ ). However, although non-significant, the results indicate that POB mean scores did slightly increase between pre-group ( $m = 36.08$ ) and mid-group ( $m = 37.17$ ) then decreased for post-group scores ( $m = 32.77$ ). Results of these analyses are reported in Table 3 (see page 88).

### Discussion

In order to prepare students to become college and career-ready upon graduating high school, counselors should incorporate culturally responsive interventions in meeting those career related needs. Results of this study provided initial support in suggesting that culturally responsive career

development programs can impact the career development of girls of color, especially in the areas of student motivation and engagement and perceived career barriers.

### Career Decision Making Self-Efficacy

Pursuant to the first hypothesis, no significant differences were found between time points. Despite no statistically significant difference, the average mean self-efficacy scores increased over time for participants. For a counselor, this may suggest the intervention

may be conducive to increasing self-efficacy. The FLAME program sought to increase career decision-making self-efficacy through experiences that allowed students access to information needed to help build confidence in their career decision-making. For example, vicarious learning experiences allowed students to learn from the experiences of women of color. These role models served as

an example of future success and offered participants hope in their ability to make appropriate choices resulting in positive outcomes. Participants also had the opportunity to participate in several mastery experiences that could have contributed to increased mean scores over time. Students participated in mock interviews and received constructive feedback on their interviewing skills, which helped them become more confident in their

ability to succeed in future job searches. Activities that contributed to the reframing of negative thoughts regarding themselves and future outcomes, such as creating vision boards, were utilized to address the physiological arousal source. Normalizing anxiety regarding future career-related decisions was critical to the student's increase in self-efficacy (Scott & Ciani, 2008). The results for this study contradicted some earlier studies that reported significant gains in career decision-making self-efficacy after



**“Results of this study provided initial support in suggesting that culturally responsive career development programs can impact the career development of girls of color, especially in the areas of student motivation and engagement and perceived career barriers.”**

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Table 3.

Means, Standard Deviations, Internal Consistencies, Repeated ANOVAs and Pairwise Comparisons for Scales.

Measure	Time 1			Time 2			Time 3			F	p	Pairwise Comparisons
	M	SD	$\alpha$	M	SD	$\alpha$	M	SD	$\alpha$			
CDMSE	92.73	15.42	.88	94.38	13.01	.89	97.09	12.13	.90	1.21	> .05	None
MEIM Total	2.46	.71	.83	2.48	.68	.84	2.37	.88	.93	0.24	> .05	None
MEIM Search	2.81	.73	.54	2.72	.68	.57	2.54	.78	.77	1.61	> .05	None
MEIM Affirm	2.21	.86	.85	2.30	.86	.87	2.24	1.07	.95	0.11	> .05	None
SME Mastery	4.65	.30	.35	4.35	.84	.94	4.62	.58	.86	2.81	> .05	T1 > T2
SME Perf Approach	2.81	.95	.73	3.40	1.11	.86	3.40	1.05	.88	4.45	< .05	T1 < (T2 = T3)
SME Perf Avoidance	3.26	1.10	.86	3.56	1.18	.83	3.08	1.04	.78	1.87	> .05	None
SME Self-Efficacy	4.16	.67	.86	4.36	.59	.82	4.52	.53	.77	5.72	< .05	T1 < T3
SME Bx Engage	3.96	.66	.78	3.58	.79	.65	3.91	.53	.25	4.44	< .05	T2 < T3
SME Affect Engage	3.12	.80	.73	3.01	.83	.64	3.02	.90	.75	0.29	> .05	None
SME Cog Engage	3.46	.79	.82	3.51	.78	.60	3.72	.73	.60	1.34	> .05	None
POB	36.08	9.62	.88	37.17	9.26	.89	32.77	7.09	.83	4.34	< .05	T3 < (T1 = T2)

*Note.* CDMSE = Career Decision Making Self-Efficacy Scale Short Form (Betz et al., 1996). MEIM = Multigroup Ethnic Identity Measure (Phinney, 1992). SME = Motivation and Engagement survey (Lee et al., 2016). Subscales include Mastery, Performance Approach, Performance Avoid, Self-Efficacy, Behavioral Engagement, Affective Engagement, and Cognitive Engagement. POB = Perceived Career Barriers from the Perceived Barriers to Education and Career Scale Revised, (Luzzo & McWhirter, 2001).

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career-related interventions (Bounds, 2017; Falco & Summers, 2019; Miles & Naidoo, 2017). However, similar to this study, Kraus and Hughey (1999) examined CDMSE scores after participating in a career development intervention and did not find significant results. To strengthen the FLAME program, facilitators should consider the following activities to help build career self-efficacy. First, students can engage in career exploration that would include an interest inventory, research on various career options, college research, and career salary. This information would lead participants to complete a career action plan. Completion of this plan would allow students to practice making career-related decisions. Second, the program should focus on identifying and creating protective factors and sources of encouragement for participants. Students should leave the program with an understanding of the career-related resources available to them. Negative and self-defeating cognitions should be examined that may inhibit the development of self-efficacy beliefs. For example, self-defeating thoughts such as “I’m not good enough” or “I can never be this or I can never be that” often negatively impact career behaviors and decision making (Atta et al., 2013; Austin et al., 2010).

### **Ethnic Identity**

In regard to the second hypothesis that there would be an increase in ethnic identity scores, the results indicated no significant change in scores between the three time periods. The

MEIM examined two factors: ethnic identity search (search) and affirmation, belonging, and commitment (affirmation). Young adolescents are typically in the initial stage of development, where they have not thought about how they identify ethnically. This intervention was possibly the first consideration for understanding and giving value to their cultural group. Phinney (1992) indicated that ethnic identity was higher for college students than high school students and suggested that ethnic identity may become more assertive as students grow, mature, and age. This may indicate that scores could be lower for middle school students if findings are consistent with student development.

The purpose of the FLAME program was introductory in nature. Therefore, possibly implementing a follow-up measurement, offering students additional time to process the knowledge obtained and connect that information to their own personal cultural groups, would have been better in determining if there was growth in this area. It may have been helpful to begin the program with more information about cultural groups and increased work on understanding how students identify with their own cultural groups. For example, [learningforjustice.org](http://learningforjustice.org) offers many developmentally appropriate activities that could be included, allowing for a deeper exploration into ethnic identity. This would enable participants to make mental connections between the program material being introduced and their own experiences.

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### Student Motivation and Engagement

In regard to the third hypothesis, there was an increase in students' motivation and engagement on four of the seven subscales. Specifically, significant increases were identified for the Mastery, Performance Approach, Self-Efficacy, and Behavioral Engagement subscales. Mastery mean scores fluctuated between time points resulting in a decline from T1 to T2 and an increase in T3. Mastery orientation is viewed as a direct effort to learn and understand new material, and it is the ability to master a concept through strategies and skills. In relation to this study, an explanation for the decline from T1 to T2 could be attributed to the information presented at the beginning of the program. Weeks one and two of the intervention introduced complex material, including courageous conversations about the struggles of girls of color in the workforce and possible barriers faced. This information could have contributed to students' decrease in how they perceived their ability and motivation to learn (Usher & Kober, 2013). In turn, it may have been equally as hard to then link the importance of academic success to a future career barring the uncertainty of possible attainment.

The remaining thirteen weeks included access to pertinent career-related knowledge, motivational work toward self-growth, and experiential work that offered opportunities for students to build their self-confidence. This trend in scores implies that as students learned coping strategies and career

development skills, their confidence in their ability to be successful returned or increased. This could be due to their ability to reframe negative cognitions about school to more positive ones, or it could have been their ability to apply coping strategies directly to academic scenarios within the classroom. The same declining trend was found for the behavioral subscale, which is the "conscientious completion of tasks" (Lee et al., 2016, p. 6). A probable reason for this initial drop is that participants were introduced during week two to barriers in career attainment, issues regarding discrimination, the idea of double jeopardy, and the impact of gender and race intersection on future career choice and achievement. This may have been new information for students who never considered how race and gender are viewed as barriers to personal career choices. These discussions could have resulted in a period of disengagement as students work through overcoming obstacles and succeeding. The middle part of the program, weeks five through eight, included motivational aspects such as goal setting, positive self-image, and empowerment strategies. The remaining time in the group, during weeks 10 through 14, was spent on practice and application activities. The increase in scores from T2 to T3 on the behavior subscale could be attributed to the skills and knowledge acquired in effectively dealing with barriers and practicing career-related activities. The disengagement period was replaced with a renewed sense of motivation and engagement

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in pursuing recently created career goals. These findings are consistent with previous studies conducted on student motivation and engagement. Froiland and Worrell (2016) found in studying intrinsic motivation and engagement in a population of diverse high school students that motivation and engagement positively impact academic achievement. They suggested that the relationship between motivation and engagement is especially true for minority students, citing that “intrinsic motivation to learn provides the fuel for sustained engagement” (p. 332). Sustained engagement may lead to increased academic achievement resulting in more college or career options. This progression is crucial for students of color who have historically been subjected to negative experiences related to gaps in academic achievement.

### Perceived Career Barriers

For the fourth hypothesis, perceived barriers were significantly lower at the end of the group intervention. Regarding the stable level of perceived barriers scores for T1 and T2, at this developmental stage, students may not be fully aware of how their gender and race play a part in their future career development. This awareness increases knowledge of perceived career barriers that could be faced in the future. Information about barriers due to gender and ethnicity was discussed explicitly during several group sessions. Additionally, the beginning of the program (week two) began with a rich discussion on possible obstacles they may face and how race and

gender may impact their future career attainment. The exposure and exploration of these barriers may have resulted in a flat level of scores.

A different trend emerged as scores declined from T2 to T3. This component of the FLAME program from Weeks six to 13 allowed students to build confidence in their ability to still be successful despite possible barriers. Several specific interventions may have helped lower their perception of barriers they may face, such as creating positive vision boards, college and career readiness discussions, mock interviews and the interaction with role models. The role model component is consistent with earlier research which has previously found that discussion of various barriers in addition to how to cope with those barriers can be effective (Jackson et al., 2006; McWhirter, 1997; & Quimby & O'Brien, 2004).

Overall the findings in this study provide positive support for the use of culturally responsive programming. Although significant results were not identified for every variable examined, enough evidence exists that future research is warranted. Similar to some of the previous CCR interventions that focused on minoritized populations, FLAME shows promise for supporting the career development needs of girls of color.

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### Implications for School Counselors

A comprehensive school counseling program guided by the ASCA National Model is designed to provide developmentally appropriate interventions that meet the needs of all students. However, the model does not speak to how these interventions should be constructed to be culturally responsive (Howard et al., 2008). School counselors should first participate in training and professional development to ensure that they have the appropriate knowledge and skills to provide culturally responsive counseling. School counselors should recognize that to effectively support the needs of racial-ethnic minoritized girls, disparities between students of color and their White peers must be addressed (Garcia & Weiss, 2017). In addition to understanding the impact of environmental and cultural influences on student achievement, consideration should also be given to ideas such as disparities in resources, funding, academic preparation, and school experiences. This study, among others, suggests the need for culturally relevant work that makes learning experiences more meaningful and effective for students of color (Aronson & Laughter, 2016). Although culturally relevant teaching has been discussed in the academic realm, there is no evidence of similar conversations occurring in school counseling. As a result, school counselors are left to create their own opportunities for students to gain the necessary attitude, knowledge, and skills to overcome career barriers and build career

decision-making self-efficacy. Authors have attempted to establish the need for school counselors to engage in culturally responsive work, offered suggestions on factors to consider, as well as provide ideas and examples of interventions and programs. Based on the study's findings, additional suggestions are offered to school counselors who desire to be more culturally responsive in their interventions or who wish to include similar interventions such as FLAME, SPARCK or YLA:

1. In any culturally responsive work, you must first examine the needs of the students you serve and implement your interventions accordingly. Collect and analyze relevant data to determine exact needs.
2. Make sure you are knowledgeable regarding the racial-ethnic minority populations in your buildings. This includes cultural background, lived experiences, barriers to college and career readiness, and strengths and protective factors utilized in the intervention.
3. Specific to strengthening career decision-making self-efficacy, school counselors could include the creation of short-term goals. Having students set a current career-related goal may prove helpful in practicing decision-making skills (Falco & Summers, 2017).
4. Be specific about naming barriers. Students should be knowledgeable of the obstacles that they may face in their career pursuits as well

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as understand the career-related resources available to them.

5. Incorporate a job shadowing experience as a vicarious learning and mastery opportunity that could help bring together career-related knowledge presented within the program.

6. Consider utilizing a mentoring program. Mentoring has increased academic success, increased motivation, and decreased dropout rates (Hernandez et al., 2017).

7. Be intentional about teaching students about ethnic identity. These exercises would enable participants to make mental connections between the program material being introduced and their personal experiences.

8. Make connections with students' homes, school, and community environments. Woolley and Bowen (2007) assert that environmental factors such as home life are associated with student engagement.

9. Connect course content to career examples. CareerStart is a career program that integrates career-relevant skills and core course content.

10. Intentionally include courageous conversations regarding stereotypes, racism, and discrimination; narratives from role models about how they overcame barriers; and participation in activities where necessary skills could be developed.


## Limitations

Despite best efforts, there are limitations to the study that require mention. The current study was an extension of an existing program and therefore used the sample population and data that was accessible, which included 34 students of the 58 eligible. It should be noted that there may have been differences in students who chose to participate versus those who did not. Future research should include efforts to recruit a diverse group of role models to gain a more varied perspective. Experiences could have occurred throughout the intervention that may have impacted students' knowledge or awareness outside of the intervention, affecting post-test scores. Lastly, the intervention should be thoroughly evaluated in content and structure to ensure that it meets the needs of the participants and provides adequate focus on each of the constructs intended.

## Conclusion

As school systems continue to reform their curriculum to align with ESSA's college and career readiness standards, school counselors should utilize this opportunity to strengthen their comprehensive programming. They should be intentional in closing the gap and meeting the needs of all students, especially racially minoritized populations. To break down the barriers faced by girls of color, school counselors must address the lived experiences of these marginalized students,

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which is accomplished through the collection and analysis of data (Powell et al., 2020). This data should then be used to inform school counseling programming and interventions. As school counselors continue to focus on each of the three counseling domains, it is important to recognize that career development is receiving growing attention. Positive outcomes related to effective career development are delineated in the literature and offer counselors the support and rationale for implementing culturally responsive career development programs. The literature is also clear about the career-related barriers faced by women of color. With early prevention, young women of color can create and maintain a competitive advantage. The authors suggest that utilizing culturally responsive career development programs such as FLAME will assist in that effort. 

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