CAREER DECISION-MAKING SELF-EFFICACY AMONG HIGHER EDUCATION WOMEN AND ITS ASSOCIATIONS WITH TYPE AND PERCEIVED QUALITY OF INTIMATE RELATIONSHIP: EXPLORING THE LINKS

by

Umair Iqbal

Psychology B.A., York University, 2013

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of

Master of Education

in the Graduate Academic Unit of Education

Supervisor: Jeffrey Landine, Ph.D., Counselling Psychology

Examining Board: Helen Massfeller, Ph.D., Counselling Psychology, Chair José F. Domene, Ph.D., Counselling Psychology Robert Baudouin, Ph.D., Counselling Psychology, University of Moncton

This thesis is accepted by the
Dean of Graduate Studies

THE UNIVERSITY OF NEW BRUNSWICK - FREDERICTON

April 5, 2018

© Umair Iqbal, 2018
ABSTRACT

A category of relational influences that continues to remain relatively unexplored in the career development context is that of intimate partnership. The present study proposed relationship status (i.e., married vs. dating) and perceived quality of intimate relationship (high vs. low) as variables that can be implicated in the prediction of career decision-making self-efficacy. A total of 68 in-relationship post-secondary female students (20 married, 48 dating) were recruited for participation. Hierarchical multiple regression revealed that, after accounting for age, relationship status and perceived relationship quality together accounted for statistically significant variance in career decision-making self-efficacy for both groups of in-relationship women. However, perceived relationship quality added to the prediction of career decision-making self-efficacy over and above the contribution of relationship status. The discussion offers explanations of the findings, describes the study’s limitations, and highlights the significance of the study’s outcomes to career counselling research and practice.

Key words: intimate relationships; perceived quality, relationship type; career decision-making self-efficacy
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank, first and foremost, my thesis supervisor, Dr. Jeffrey Landine, for his consistent support and guidance in helping me develop and concretize my topic of interest for this thesis. I greatly appreciate your responsiveness and your initiatives to provide me research-relevant assistance throughout the planning and writing phase of my thesis work.

I am also deeply thankful to my thesis co-supervisor, Dr. José Domene, for his useful statistical expertise and valuable guidance in directing me with planning a key component of my thesis work. I am grateful for your patience, your rigorous attention to detail, as well as your critical feedback in helping me develop the research methodology and propose appropriate statistical measures as pertinent to my study plan and design.

Lastly, I would like to express my most special gratitude toward my late professor, Dr. Patricia Cranton, for her provision of evaluative comments and useful suggestions based upon her review of an earlier draft of this thesis. I am much obliged to you for inspiring me to cultivate a deeper interest in research and will always remember you as an exemplary educator and mentor.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT ........................................................................................................... ii
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS ..................................................................................... iii
TABLE OF CONTENTS ....................................................................................... iv
LIST OF TABLES .................................................................................................. vi
LIST OF FIGURES ............................................................................................... vii

## 1.0 CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

1.1 Career Development as a Contextual Experience ......................... 1
1.2 Context-Focused Models: Overview and Comparisons ............... 2
1.3 Career Development in the Human Relational Context ............. 6
1.4 Family-of-Procreation Influence on Career Development .......... 10
1.5 Intimate Relationship as a Source of Social Support ................. 11
1.6 Intimate Relationships: Types and Characteristics ................ 14
1.7 Present Study: Goals and Focus ......................................................... 19

## 2.0 CHAPTER 2: REVIEW OF LITERATURE

2.1 Social Cognitive Career Theory: The Underpinnings ................. 22
2.2 Self-Efficacy: The Central Construct in SCCT ....................... 25
2.3 Career Self-Efficacy ................................................................. 28
2.4 Career Decision-Making Self-Efficacy .................................... 30
2.5 Relational Influences on Career Decision-Making Self-Efficacy ... 31
2.6 Career Decision-Making Self-Efficacy and Gender ............... 33
2.7 Career Decision-Making Self-Efficacy: A Focus on Women .... 34
2.8 Measures of Relationship Quality: An Overview ................. 40
2.9 Partner Support and Perceived Relationship Quality ............ 41
2.10 Intimate Relationship Orientations: Advancement versus Security 44
2.11 Type and Quality of Relationship: Spouse vs. Dating Partner .... 46
2.12 Synthesizing the Research: Questions and Hypotheses .......... 51

## 3.0 CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

3.1 Participants ............................................................................................ 54
   3.1.1 Sample Size ........................................................................ 54
3.1.2 Demographic Characteristics ........................................ 54
3.2 Research Instruments ...................................................... 56
3.2.1 Demographic Measures Scale ......................................... 56
3.2.2 Intimate Relationship Quality ....................................... 56
3.2.3 Career Decision-Making Self-Efficacy ............................... 58
3.3 Procedure ...................................................................... 60
3.3.1 Recruitment ............................................................... 60
3.3.2 Administration ............................................................ 61
3.3.3 Debrief .................................................................. 62

4.0 CHAPTER 4: RESULTS
4.1 Independent Samples t-Test .................................................. 64
4.2 Hierarchical Multiple Regression Analysis ............................. 64

5.0 CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION
5.1 Discussion .................................................................. 69
5.2 Limitations ................................................................ 76

6.0 CHAPTER 6: IMPLICATIONS AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS
6.1 Implications for Research .................................................... 78
6.2 Implications for Practice .................................................... 83
6.3 Implications for Intervention Design ................................... 87
6.4 Conclusion .................................................................. 90

REFERENCES .................................................................. 92

APPENDICES
Appendix A ........................................................................ 115
Appendix B ........................................................................ 116
Appendix C ........................................................................ 117
Appendix D ........................................................................ 118
Appendix E ........................................................................ 120
Appendix F ........................................................................ 122
Appendix G ........................................................................ 123
Appendix H ........................................................................ 124
LIST OF TABLES

Table 1.1 Summary of Hierarchical Multiple Regression Analysis .......... 68
# LIST OF FIGURES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Figure 1.1</th>
<th>Graphic Representation of Hypotheses</th>
<th>115</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Figure 1.2</td>
<td><em>a priori</em> Power Analysis</td>
<td>116</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 1.3</td>
<td>Standardized Residuals and Standardized Estimates of CDMSE</td>
<td>132</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 1.4</td>
<td>Normal Probability Plot</td>
<td>133</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1: Career Development as a Contextual Experience

As explained by Kenny and Medvide (2013), career development in Western countries has traditionally been conceptualized as an autonomous process grounded in individualistic values that endorse self-sufficiency and independence. Researchers have brought forth concerns associated with an emphasis on individualism that lacks consideration of the many external influences on behaviour and cognition (McMahon & Patton, 2014; Schultheiss, Kress, Manzi, & Glasscock, 2001). As part of this effort, the focus of a burgeoning line of research is the re-conceptualization of the career development process from the perspective of context-specific or relationship-oriented experiences (Swanson, 2013). These experiences include interpersonal systems and broader societal circumstances that together represent the environment or context within which an individual exists (Lent, 2013).

According to Lent, Hackett, and Brown (2000), one class of contextual factors that influences career development constitutes environmental variables called affordances. Lent et al. (2000) categorized affordances into two types: distal and proximal. Whereas distal affordances include cultural systems, gender-role socialization processes, and societal entities such as governmental organizations, proximal affordances refer to the influence from immediate social circles and interpersonal systems, such as family, peers, teachers, and counsellors. Highlighting the influence of proximal affordances, for example, Kenny et al.’s (2007) qualitative study found that interpersonal systems such as peers and family members were perceived by a sample of high-school students as providing varying degrees of supports and barriers in their attainment of
career goals. However, stressing supportive interpersonal systems as associated consistently with desirable outcomes, Kenny and Medvide (2013) postulated that “social connections can take positive and negative forms, with social support, in its varied dimensions, offering positive connection” (p. 330).

Vondracek, Lerner, and Schulenberg (1986) argued that development in various areas of life is a product of an individual’s complex interactions with both distal and proximal affordances. However, Collin and Young (2000), Blustein, Schultheiss, and Flum (2004), and Kenny and Medvide (2013) all concluded, on the basis of an extensive review of the literature, that human relationships have far-reaching implications for career development. Recognizing this as an important direction for research, Kenny and Medvide (2013) stressed that more study is warranted to understand how various types and attributes of relationships influence career development outcomes.

1.2: Context-Focused Models - Overview and Comparisons

The paradigm shift toward the re-conceptualization of career development as a contextually influenced process, as opposed to individualistic and autonomous, is evidenced by the tenets of a number of context-focused theoretical models developed in recent decades. As reviewed by Schultheiss and Wallace (2012), one of these models is McMahon and Patton’s (1995) systems theory framework that views career development as a process influenced by the dynamic interaction between an individual’s personality, his or her interpersonal relationships, and broader societal systems such as laws and norms. Young, Valach and Collin’s (1996) contextual action theory is another model that emphasizes the role of context in career development. More specifically, it describes career development as a goal-directed behaviour that is jointly undertaken with help from
significant others such as parents or teachers akin to a collaborative project in pursuit of goals.

Another context-focused model is Holland’s (1997) theory of vocational choice and adjustment that emphasizes the concepts of person-environment interaction and compatibility. In particular, Holland’s (1997) theory is notable for offering a well-defined approach to understanding the development of career interests that involves categorizing people (from highest to lowest resemblance) on a continuum comprised of six basic personality types: Realistic, Investigative, Artistic, Social, Enterprising, and Conventional (abbreviated as RIASEC). Acknowledging the influence of contextual variables, Holland (1997) postulated that the development of personality types is a product of interactions among “a variety of cultural and personal forces including peers, biological heredity, parents, social class, and the physical environment” (p. 2). As explained by Nauta (2013), the essence of Holland’s (1997) theory is that people develop interests in careers and work environments that most accurately reflect the characteristics of their individual personality type(s).

As Lent (2013) described, a model that conveniently weaves together the key tenets of a number of context-focused theories of career development is Lent, Brown, and Hackett’s (1994) social cognitive career theory (SCCT). In brief, the essence of SCCT is that “person-environment interactions form learning experiences that, in turn, influence perceived confidence in one’s abilities to perform career-related tasks and activities (i.e., career self-efficacy) and the types of outcomes one expects as a consequence of given career pursuits (i.e., outcome expectations)” (Bakken, Byars-Winston, & Wang, 2006, p. 93). Conceptualizing a mutually influencing complex interaction between contextual
variables and personal attributes, SCCT examines the ways in which inner states such as interests, abilities, and values are shaped by external conditions such as learning experiences, socially supportive resources, as well as environmental and situational barriers.

SCCT shares specific features with both systems theory framework and contextual action theory. For example, like the SCCT model, the systems theory framework proposes career development as a highly contextualized experience. SCCT views career development as partly influenced by the individual’s interactions with environmental conditions such as support systems and barriers as well as cultural and gender-relevant socialization processes (Lent, 2013). The emphasis on context is also placed in the systems theory framework that recognizes the far-reaching role of broader structures such as laws and societal norms as well as proximal factors such as interpersonal connections (e.g., family, employers, etc.) that shape the course of career development (Schutheiss & Wallace, 2012). On the other hand, the two theories differ in that whereas SCCT emphasizes the role of cognitive-level elements such as self-efficacy and outcome expectations in career development, the systems theory framework underlines the importance of personal meaning-making and story construction with regard to experiences (i.e., success, failures, and goal-setting, etc.) on the career development trajectory.

SCCT is also comparable with contextual action theory. With regard to similarities, both theories share a common interest in examining human relational influences on career development. This interface is reflected in SCCT, for example, as it recognizes that support (e.g., secure attachment, financial assistance, informational
guidance, etc.) from interpersonal systems, such as significant others, creates environmentally facilitative conditions for educational pursuits and career development outcomes (Lent et al., 2000). This notion of human relational influence is also emphasized in the contextual action theory as it recognizes career development as an experience that is largely guided by the ‘joint construction’ of career-relevant goals and actions (Schultheiss & Wallace, 2012). More specifically, like SCCT, the contextual action theory posits that progress on the career trajectory is shaped by a collaborative effort between people (e.g., couples, student-teacher dyads, etc.) involving co-construction of specific goals along with the concerted effort to achieve those goals. On the other hand, the two theories diverge in that the SCCT model includes a focus on the underlying relational mechanisms such as positive attachment styles and dynamics that influence the ability to achieve career development goals. However, the contextual action theory is concerned essentially with collaborative behaviours and career-related actions that are taken in intentional and goal-directed manner.

Comparisons can also be drawn between the SCCT model and Holland’s (1997) theory of vocational choice and adjustment. A basic tenet of Holland’s (1997) theory is congruence, according to which people are motivated to seek work environments that “allow them to exercise their skills and abilities, express their attitudes and values, and take on agreeable problems and roles” (p. 4, as cited in Nauta, 2013). The importance of person-environment congruence is also recognized in the SCCT model as it stresses the far-reaching role that interests, abilities, and values play in shaping the course of career directions from an early age. For example, SCCT posits that interest in a work environment and a specific task is likely to be sustained when people view themselves as
competent and self-efficacious in that particular environment or while performing that particular task. However, unlike Holland’s (1997) congruence model, SCCT “highlights relatively dynamic and domain-specific aspects of both people (e.g., self-views, future expectations, behaviour) and their environments (e.g., social supports, financial barriers)” (Nauta, 2013, p. 117). In this regard, SCCT offers a more refined perspective by recognizing that people’s career-relevant decision-making cognitions and behavioural actions undergo the processes of change and modification in order to respond appropriately to particular situations (Nauta, 2013). An example could be an IT employee who may cultivate an interest in a more specialized area of computer science in response to technological advances.

1.3: Career Development in the Human Relational Context

Schultheiss et al. (2001) acknowledged that “relational experiences at the heart of career progress are frequently devalued and degraded in favour of more autonomous approaches to exploration and decision making” (p. 216). Emphasizing the pivotal role of interpersonal contexts, Blustein (2015) brought into focus the critical influence of human relationships in the process of career decision-making and development. Blustein (2015), in fact, stressed the need for further exploration of the implications of human relationships in the career context, asserting that “…relationships are an inherently human experience that provides [sic] the means for people to understand themselves, others, and many of their life tasks” (p. 224). Reflecting Blustein’s (2015) views, Kenny and Medvide (2013) conceptualized human relationships as representing social connections that serve to facilitate career development through a variety of positive outcomes. These include:
Providing a sense of belonging or social integration; bolstering self-esteem or confidence through emotional support; setting expectations; offering specific advice, guidance, or knowledge through information support; and lending tangible assistance such as financial support, child care, or transportation. (p. 330)

As part of introducing the concept of the protean careers of the 21st century, Hall (1996) emphasized the growing importance of relational learning in the work context and noted that adaptability and identity learning require meaningful connections and interactions with other people. Suggesting a need to conceptualize the career development experience as one that is collaborative and interdependent, Hall (1996) asserted that seeking guidance and assistance from others offers the valuable ability to cultivate an awareness of personal resources and strengths in the career context. Hall’s (1996) propositions are similar to the views and suggestions of Josselson (1992) who emphasized the constructs of interconnection and relatedness as pivotally important to a deeper and more accurate understanding of the self that is needed for navigating through life’s challenges and tasks at various developmental stages.

Given the tendency of people to obtain career-relevant support, advice, and guidance from significant others such as family members (Schultheiss et al., 2001), Blustein et al. (2004) proposed that career decision-making is a relational-oriented process. Echoing similar views, Schultheiss (2007) discussed the central tenets of the relational cultural paradigm, a theoretical model that describes ways in which people’s career development is shaped by culturally influenced meaning-making of growth-fostering social relationships. Lenz (2016) described the relational cultural paradigm as a “psychodynamic framework for understanding human development based on the assumption that individuals’ happiness and well-being are a product of the degree to
which they participate in growth-fostering relationships” (p. 415). A key characteristic of growth-fostering relationships is that they serve to increase one’s “sense of worth [leading to] an enhanced capacity to act or be productive” (Jordan, 2010, p. 25). The tenets of the relational cultural paradigm, pertinent to career development, include “(a) the influence of the family as critical to understanding the complexities of vocational development, and (b) the psychological experience of work as embedded within relational contexts (e.g., social, familial, and cultural)” (Schultheiss, 2007, p. 192). Placing emphasis on the interaction between relationships and culture, Brown (2003) proposed that the career decision-making process is particularly influenced by relationship dynamics and processes in family systems characterized by collectivistic values.

Within SCCT, family support, as a variable with a moderating effect on career development, belongs to the larger category of proximal influences that include other types of relational support systems such as teachers, mentors, and peers (Kenny et al., 2007). As reviewed below, studies have offered substantial empirical evidence establishing positive associations between social and emotional support from each of the following interpersonal systems and specific career development constructs. For example, Metheny, McWhirter, and O’Neil (2008) found a significant positive correlation between perceived teacher support (i.e., care and guidance) and vocational outcome expectations among senior high-school students. In other studies, provision of work hope and autonomy support by teachers served as significant contributors to career achievement-related beliefs among high-school students (Kenny, Walsh-Blair, Blustein,
Bempechat, & Seltzer, 2010) and career decision-making among college students (Yakushko & Sokolova, 2010).

The positive influence of support from other types of proximal relationships such as mentors and peers has also been noted as being instrumental in the process of career development. For example, Kenny and Bledsoe (2005) explained the psychological processes through which exposure to positive perceptions of school and academic success among peers is internalized in adolescents, which in turn enables them to associate positive feelings with school and career exploration. The aforementioned finding is consistent with Flook, Repetti, and Ullman’s (2005) conceptualization of peers as an interpersonal support system to which adolescents look for advice, guidance, and direction.

Empirical evidence also exists for an equally influential role of mentoring relationships, defined as those relationships that are shared with supportive non-parental adults in school and/or work settings (Kenny & Medvide, 2013). Kenny et al. (2010), for example, noted a positive association between the perception of support from mentors and motivation toward career planning among a culturally diverse sample of high-school students. Findings establishing the positive impact on career development have also been noted in client-counsellor relationships. For example, Littman-Ovadia (2008) found that counselees’ perception of their counsellors as providers of a sense of security – that reflected warmth, trust, and encouragement of self-fulfillment – during the counselling process was significantly related to “both external (e.g., I collect data about organizations and jobs) and internal career exploration (e.g., I think about my vocational goals)” (p. 436). In view of this review of studies, the role of proximal human relationships as a
positive contextual affordance (i.e., influence) on career development should be readily apparent. Family-of-procreation is the specific focus of the present study, and existing research on this type of relational influence warrants in-depth examination.

1.4: Family-of-Procreation Influence on Career Development

Family-of-origin relationships, when characterized by positive attachment styles, represent one type of proximal influence that has been a primary focus for researchers interested in examining career development in the human relational context (Blustien, Prezioso, & Schultheiss, 1995; Gordon & Cui, 2015). There exists, however, a significant dearth of research efforts with regard to the influence of family-of-procreation relationships (Brosseau, Domene, & Dutka, 2010), defined as being made up of a person’s spouse or an intimate relationship partner (Chandrasekar & Raj, 2013). As Brosseau et al. (2010) noted, although family-of-procreation influences have been examined in various areas of life, including health and religion (e.g., Roest, Dubas, Gerris, & Rutger, 2006; Stephens et al., 2009), the areas of career decision-making and career development continue to remain relatively unexplored in this regard.

Accordingly, as the inaugural study in an emerging line of research investigating the interface between family-of-procreation and career development, Brosseau et al. (2010) examined the degree of romantic partner involvement in the determination of career decision-making difficulties among adults. Their methodology involved testing a sample of 105 in-relationship adults who responded to Gati, Krausz, and Osipows’ (1996) Career Decision-Making Difficulties Questionnaire. This questionnaire assesses struggles in the career decision-making process that arise from challenges such as lack of readiness due to dysfunctional beliefs, lack of information about various careers, and inconsistent
information due to unreliable sources of knowledge about various careers. Brosseau et al. (2010) reported that “the more that partners were perceived as being involved in the [career decision-making] process, the less career decision-making difficulty the individual experienced” (p. 36). Accordingly, in line with their prediction based upon the implications of McMahon and Patton’s (1995) systems theory framework, Brosseau et al. (2010) found the level of romantic partner involvement to be a moderating factor that provides significant variation in the determination of career decision-making difficulties.

Shedding further light on the relationship between family-of-procreation and career goals, Domene et al.’s (2012) longitudinal study of young adults brought to the fore the idea of career-related decisions as a concerted and cooperative effort between both partners in a romantic relationship. Framing their research query within Young et al.’s (1996) contextual action theory, Domene et al. (2012) addressed the question: “What kinds of projects for future work and life together do young adult couples jointly construct and pursue as they transition from post-secondary education into the labor force?” (p. 17). Their findings indicated the presence of a number of jointly constructed projects including the pursuit of future educational plans, residential relocation, and active involvement in each other’s career priorities. Considering Domene et al.’s (2012) finding of the overarching motivation between couples to support each other during life transition periods, the far-reaching role of intimate partner support in career development becomes even more evident.

1.5: Intimate Relationship as a Source of Social Support

The abovementioned findings by Brosseau et al. (2010) and Domene et al. (2012) are consistent with Cutrona’s (1996) theoretical propositions regarding the provision and
exchange of social support in the intimate relationship context. Advancing the tenet that “intimate relationships are the most important source of social support” (p. 2), Cutrona (1996) recognized the benefits of supportive interactions among intimate partners to be both event-specific and cumulative over time. Offering an example with regard to cumulative benefits, Cutrona (1996) noted that the experience of receiving support and encouragement from an intimate relationship partner over a course of time can be reasonably expected to provide an individual a sense of security and self-efficacy.

More specifically, Cutrona (1996) noted that the construct of perceived social support has a consistent positive relationship with physical and psychological well-being. More recently, perceived social support from family-of-origin (e.g., “My family really tries to help me”) was found to be positively related to career outcome expectations (e.g., “I will be successful in my chosen career”) among an undergraduate sample (Isik, 2013). This finding is very much in line with the aforementioned Brosseau et al. (2010) study that noted the perception of intimate partner involvement as having a buffering effect on people’s level of career decision-making difficulty. Accordingly, Cutrona’s (1996) considerations regarding the far-reaching benefits of perceived social support are clearly applicable to career development processes and outcomes.

Cutrona (1996) recognized the benefits of intimate partner social support as including the “fulfillment of immediate needs engendered by stressful life events (e.g., help in deciding how to deal with a difficult instructor)” (p. 10). Emphasizing the notion of a productive collaboration between partners in the face of stressful circumstances, Cutrona (1996) maintained that “couples who are able to provide support to one another during times of duress… as part of a whole rather than in emotional isolation… their
relationship may sustain less damage” (p. 62). Building upon the findings and propositions by Gove, Hughes, and Style (1983) and Russell (1988), Cutrona (1996) recognized joint identity between intimate relationship partners as a critical ingredient involved in maintaining the positive mental health function of the relationship.

Cutrona’s (1996) emphasis on the constructs of “wholeness” and “joint identity” is consistent with the aforementioned Domene et al. (2012) study that recognized the transition from post-secondary education into the labour force as a developmental period entailing intimate partners’ undertaking of career-relevant actions and decisions in a joint and collaborative manner. In fact, reflecting Cutrona’s (1996) assertion that a joint identity is a key characteristic of the relational bond between intimate partners, Domene et al. (2012) found that an important project for intimate couples during the transition to work pertained to decisions about advancing and developing their mutual relationship by, for example, becoming engaged or getting married. Moreover, Domene et al. (2012) noted a desire among couples to support each other’s career goals in a reciprocal manner, which sometimes entailed taking a “turn-taking” approach whereby couples planned timely decisions that would accommodate the goals of one partner and other decisions that would prioritize the goals of the other partner. This joint approach between couples is consistent with Cutrona’s (1996) recognition that “successful couples may adopt a strategy of ‘turn-taking,’ in which the individual who is momentarily most needy receives comfort from the other” (p. 62).

The findings by Brosseau et al. (2010) and Domene et al. (2012) need also be considered in the context of Cutrona’s (1996) propositions pertaining to the ability of intimate relationships to offer various kinds of social support. These include emotional...
support (e.g., expressions of love and empathy), esteem support (e.g., belief in another’s strengths), information support (e.g., advice and factual input), and instrumental support (e.g., provision of money, residential accommodation, etc.). Though Brosseau et al. (2010) did not define it in their study, the self-reported perception of partner involvement in one’s career decision-making may be expected to encompass both emotional support (e.g., the feeling of being admired for one’s career ambitions) as well as esteem support (e.g., feeling respected for one’s qualities or strengths as relevant to career development).

In the Domene et al. (2012) study, a frequently reported supportive behaviour among partners was instrumental assistance such as financing the partner’s further education.

1.6: Intimate Relationships - Types and Characteristics

The types of family-of-origin (e.g., parents and siblings) support reported by participants in the Schultheiss et al. (2001) study included emotional support involving expressions of courage that provided a sense of serenity and helped participants overcome the fear of committing to a career choice. Noting an important pattern in their findings, Schultheiss et al. (2001) pointed out a general tendency among the participants to report the mother as the primary source of emotional support and explained this tendency in view of the emotionally involved mother-infant attachment patterns that influence attachment styles in adulthood. On the other hand, whereas peers and siblings were identified as social integration support providers, father was identified as the primary source of career-relevant information support. Schultheiss et al. (2001) explained the latter in light of the sociocultural gender-role norms that promote the view of men as relatively more knowledgeable, active, and expert in the career domain. Based on these patterns, Schultheiss et al. (2001) suggested that the degree of positive influence that
social support has on career development may vary depending on the kinds of support offered (e.g., emotional, information, social integration, etc.), which in turn depend on the source of support (i.e., type of relationship – parental, peer, or intimate, etc.).

Applying the implications of Schultheiss et al.’s (2001) findings to the area of intimate relationship, there emerges a theoretical basis for investigating the defining characteristics as well as the strength of interpersonal dynamics inherent in specific types of intimate relationship with a goal to determine their differential degrees of positive influence on particular aspects of career development. To this end, it needs to be noted that both Brosseau et al. (2010) and Domene et al. (2012) accounted for relationship “status” in a rather generic manner that overlooked the differential influences of the perceived qualities of the various types of intimate relationship on the career-relevant constructs examined in their respective studies. Brosseau et al. (2010), for example, operationalized relationship status as being “in a committed romantic relationship (dating, common law, or married) of at least one year in duration” (p. 36). Similarly, Domene et al. (2012) aggregated the various relationship statuses together by recruiting young adults who were in a subjectively self-defined committed relationship for six months, regardless of whether they were dating, cohabiting, or married.

Although a convenient approach, the key problem inherent in clustering various kinds of intimate relationship into one generic group lies in the fact that a collective classification fails to consider the conceptualization of intimate partnership as constituting specific types of bonds with their own respective interpersonal patterns, strength of dynamics, and overall quality that make them characteristically differentiable. Failure in this regard also overlooks the need to take into account the implications of the
underlying differences in the relative perceived qualities of the various intimate relationship types on the degree of positive influence that can be expected with regard to areas of life such as career development. The foregoing concerns are clearly justified and supported by, for example, Acker and Davis’ (1992) conceptualization of the intimate relationship developmental stage (e.g., dating, engaged, married, etc.) as an indicator of relationship stability and seriousness. This view is consistent with Domene et al.’s (2012) finding that a key relationship-oriented joint project for intimate partners is to advance or move forward in the relationship by deciding to cohabit, become engaged, or get married. Accordingly, there exist specific stages (or types) of intimate relationship; each warrants separate attention with regard to the level of stability and perceived or actual quality that it entails as its underlying characteristics with predictable implications for the influence on constructs associated with various domains of life. Applying this argument to the conclusions drawn in the Brosseau et al. (2010) study, there exist reasonable grounds to conduct further analyses to investigate whether respondents in the dating relationship perceived intimate partner involvement as relatively less helpful in decreasing the level of their career decision-making difficulty than did their counterparts in the marital bond.

The need to take into account both the type and quality of intimate relationship is also justifiable in light of the notable differences in the strength of interpersonal dynamics that exist between couples in various kinds of intimate relationship. In line with Acker and Davis (1992), Ross (1995) proposed that intimate bonds can be conceptualized on a relationship continuum on which married, cohabiting, and dating individuals are ranked respectively with regard to the strength of inter-partner attachment and
commitment. Based on his finding of the experience of depression as being lowest among married individuals, Ross (1995) noted that the bond among married couples is characterized by relatively higher degrees of attachment and commitment (followed by that among cohabiters and daters, respectively). Consistent with Ross’ (1995) propositions and findings, Dush and Amato (2005) found that the level of subjective well-being – as composed of life satisfaction, general happiness, and self-esteem – was indicated to be highest among married individuals, followed by that among cohabiting individuals and dating individuals, respectively. Explaining the foregoing finding, Dush and Amato (2005) noted that “marriage involves a [relatively] higher level of commitment from partners and a stronger future orientation” (p. 623). Dush and Amato (2005) further attributed the more positive perception of the marital experience to the institutional nature of marriage, which makes it a widely accepted and supported system in the legal and religious sectors of society at large.

In addition to the far-reaching role of the “type” of intimate relationship in subjective well-being, Dush and Amato (2005) noted the “quality” of the relationship as another key factor in this regard. Measuring relationship happiness as comprised of its perceived quality and other relevant constructs, Dush and Amato (2005) found that “people in happy relationships tend to experience higher levels of subjective well-being than do people in unhappy relationships [irrespective of the type of relationship]” (p. 623). Interestingly, however, even after controlling for the effect of relationship happiness, Dush and Amato (2005) found that married individuals enjoyed the highest level of subjective well-being, a finding which they attributed to the existence of stronger
interpersonal dynamics among married couples as well as a relatively longer-term duration of the marital union.

There also exists considerable research evidence that has consistently noted differences with regard to specific measures of relationship quality reported by couples involved in the dating and marital bonds. For example, it has been noted that the perceived quality of relationship with regard to commitment among young adult couples in the dating context tends to be lower than that of their married counterparts (Wood, Avellar, & Goesling, 2008). This finding is consistent with the results reported by Hsueh, Morrison, and Doss (2009) and Machado, Martins, and Caridade (2014) in their respective investigations involving comparisons between relationship quality in the dating and marital context.

The underlying differences between specific measures of relationship quality have also been noted in the marriage and cohabitation experience, which provides further support to the argument concerning the need to examine both the type and perceived quality of intimate relationship as critical factors. For example, Brown and Booth (1996) found the self-reported quality of the relationship to be relatively poorer for cohabiters than for married couples, as reflected in a greater frequency of arguments and physical aggression among the cohabiting couples. Brown (2000) pointed out the lack of commitment among cohabiting couples to be a key problem, which compromises the quality and stability of the relationship as well as represents a factor associated with higher levels of depression among cohabiters. More recently, the foregoing findings were corroborated by Hsueh et al. (2009) who found that cohabiters reported lower relationship quality than married couples as a result of a greater frequency of arguments,
lower ability to resolve conflicts, and lower levels of relationship commitment and security. Hsueh et al. (2009) concluded that cohabitation represents a more volatile relationship experience than marriage. Drawing comparisons between experiences in the cohabitation and dating context, Hsueh et al. (2009) found that “cohabiting individuals reported more difficulty resolving conflicts but also greater relationship stability [with regard to commitment and security]” (p. 243).

In view of the foregoing findings, it should be evident that intimate relationship as a construct is characterized by specific types of bonds with their own respective interpersonal patterns and dynamics that have important implications for their perceived quality as experienced by the individuals (i.e., both partners) involved. It, therefore, follows that the specific type of intimate relationship as well as its perceived quality be recognized and explored as potentially moderating variables to understand more incisively the possible association between relationship quality perception and specific career development constructs.

1.7: Present Study - Goals and Focus

Sharing similar research interests with those of the respective studies by Brosseau et al. (2010) and Domene et al. (2012), the present study was aimed broadly at exploring the interface between intimate partner relationship and career development. More specifically, however, the present study differed with respect to its key variables of interest by bringing into focus Lent et al.’s (1994) social cognitive career theory (SCCT). As described by Kenny and Medvide (2013), SCCT “…focuses heavily on the role of contextual factors [such as social support systems] in… career decision making” (p. 329). As an investigative purpose in the present study, a key construct of the SCCT model –
namely, career decision-making self-efficacy – was examined in terms of the degree to which it is influenced by the perceived level of quality in two types of characteristically differentiable intimate relationship – that is, marriage and dating. The rationale for focusing on marriage and dating as the two relational contexts is guided by the fact that they are placed on the opposite ends of the respective relationship continuums proposed by Ross (1995) and Acker and Davis (1992); this was expected to provide greater probability of finding predicted differences with regard to their strength of correlations with the particular career development construct under study.

The present study aimed to examine more incisively the independent influence of relationship type and quality as separate contextual factors in relation to career decision-making self-efficacy. This contrasts with the approach of defining intimate relationship influences according to relationship quality (i.e., commitment and attachment), which was how the phenomenon was conceptualized in the Brosseau et al. (2010) and Domene et al. (2012) studies. By conceptualizing intimate relationship influences in a different way to previous research, it is hoped that the present study will shed new light on connections between important aspects of career development and intimate relationships.

What follows is a review of literature beginning with an examination of SCCT with a particular focus from an empirical lens on career decision-making self-efficacy as one of its key theoretical constructs. This will be discussed from the perspective of its correlations with a specific type of contextual factor as a relational influence – that is, intimate relationships. The broader discussion concerning the interface between intimate relationship and career development will permit a smooth transition into an in-depth consideration of the type and quality of the intimate relationship in marriage and dating.
as two relational contexts of focus. The culminating section in the literature review will examine (a) studies to establish career decision-making self-efficacy as a relatively more complex process for women as a result of sociocultural challenges including family-career balance, and (b) studies comparing the varying degrees of strengths and qualities of the interpersonal dynamics inherent in marriage and dating. Based upon the implications of the pertinent empirical findings in these areas, the type and perceived quality of intimate relationship will be proposed as potential variables involved in the prediction of career decision-making self-efficacy among female students in the higher education system.
Chapter 2: Review of Literature

2.1: Social Cognitive Career Theory - The Underpinnings

Introduced by Lent et al. (1994) in a seminal article that synthesized decades of research, SCCT is grounded in Bandura’s (1977) pioneering work in the areas of social cognitive theory, personal agency, and self-efficacy. Lent et al. (1994) proposed SCCT to be a “unifying framework” to delineate career development as a process resulting from an interaction between a vast array of cognitive and contextual (or environmental) factors.

As Lent (2013) explained, whereas cognitive variables include self-efficacy beliefs, outcome expectations, and personal goals, contextual variables include gender, cultural background, social support systems, and organizational barriers such as discrimination. As an implication of the foregoing distinction, SCCT views career development as a product of a complex interplay between cognitive variables and contextual factors, thereby accounting for ways in which both external conditions and internal states shape the course of career development. As Lent (2013) summarized, SCCT offers a rigorous understanding of cognition-context or person-environment interaction that influences the way people “(a) develop vocational interests, (b) make occupational choices, (c) achieve varying levels of career success, and (d) experience satisfaction in the work environment” (p. 115).

Offering a more incisive understanding of the specific tenets of SCCT, Lent et al.

---

1 As noted by Lent et al. (2000), “the terms contextual and environmental can be used interchangeably to refer to career-relevant influences that exist, or are perceived to exist, in the milieu surrounding the person” (p. 37).
(2000) placed particular emphasis on the role and implications of contextual variables and stressed their potential to directly influence career-relevant choices and decisions. More specifically, Lent et al. (2000) presented a view of the career-relevant goal achievement process as one moderated by contextual factors with respect to an individual’s ability to transform personal interests into goals and then goals into actions. Offering an example, Lent et al. (2000) explained that a student’s social interests are likely to lead her to develop the intention to pursue a social-type career; that intention transforms into a goal which, in turn, leads to the specific action of applying to, for example, an undergraduate program in social work.

However, as Lent et al. (2000) elaborated, the two foregoing processes of interest-to-goal and goal-to-action transformations are determined in large part by the moderating role of contextual influences such as social support systems. Based upon this consideration, Lent et al. (2000) formulated a hypothesis with regard to the far-reaching role of context, predicting that people’s ability to transform interests into goals and goals into actions is impeded in the presence of adverse contextual factors such as inadequate social support systems. On the other hand, “perception of beneficial contextual factors (e.g., ample support) is predicted to facilitate the process of translating one’s interests into goals and goals into actions” (p. 38). One source of empirical support for the contextual-support hypothesis is the plethora of studies in the area of family-of-origin relationships as a specific kind of attachment-based social support system that exerts positive influence on various aspects of career development among adolescents and young adults (e.g., Gordon & Cui, 2015; Kenny & Perez, 1996; Kracke, 1997; Schultheiss et al., 2001).
SCCT also recognizes the far-reaching implications of the aforementioned cognitive variables – namely, outcome expectations, personal goals, and self-efficacy beliefs – each of which warrants a description in relation to career development. Outcome expectations refer to self-held beliefs about the consequences of pursuing a particular course of action (Lent, 2013). Thus, considering outcome expectations involves brainstorming and evaluating the likely consequences of following through with a plan of action. As Lent et al. (1994) elaborated, based upon Bandura’s (1986) analyses of the implications of the physical, social, and self-evaluative consequences of behaviour, outcome expectations function to regulate people’s decisions about whether to engage in or avoid certain activities and actions. An example of a career-relevant positive outcome expectation, as offered by Lent (2013), could be the anticipation that “a medical career would offer me lots of prestige and chances to help others” (p. 118).

Deriving from social cognitive theory, Lent (2013) defined personal goals as comprised of “one’s intention to engage in a particular activity or to produce a particular outcome” (p. 119). From the perspective of the SCCT model, goals can be divided into two types: whereas choice goals refer to the specific career or activity that one desires to pursue, performance goals pertain to the level of dedication or the quality of work that one intends to achieve while engaging in a specific task. Identifying an important function of goals, Lent (2013) recognized that setting personal goals helps people organize and direct their thoughts and behaviours. This results in positive feelings such as pride and satisfaction that influence future decision-making in various domains of life including career development.
2.2: Self-Efficacy - The Central Construct in SCCT

Of the three cognitive variables under consideration, the most germane to the present study is self-efficacy, considering the robust evidence for a positive association between perceived quality of social relationships and self-reported career decision-making self-efficacy (Albaugh & Nauta, 2005; Quimby & O’Brien, 2004). In line with Lent et al.’s (1994) recognition of self-efficacy as an aspect of SCCT that has received the highest amount of empirical attention in the career literature, Albaugh and Nauta (2005) described self-efficacy as a key concept in the SCCT model. As Bandura (2001) postulated, achievement of a sense of agency as comprised of intentionality, forethought, self-reactiveness, and self-reflectiveness is a pre-condition for the development of self-efficacy. In brief, Bandura (2001) defined agency as a person’s conviction in his or her ability to influence and control environmental variables with pre-meditated intentions and actions. In other words, agency refers to “belief systems, self-regulatory capabilities… through which personal influence is exercised” (Bandura, 2001, p. 2). Offering an example, Bandura (2001) referred to a shopper’s experience of being tripped by a person and, thereby, accidentally smashing a vase. Highlighting the core features of intentionality and controllability that characterize human agency, Bandura (2001) noted that the focal person in this example does not qualify as an agent of the event.

On the basis of examining specific implications of the achievement of a sense of personal agency on cognitive development, Bandura (1994) derived the construct of self-efficacy, defined as constituting “people’s judgments of their capabilities to organize and execute courses of action required to attain designated types of performances” (Bandura, 1986, p. 391). An example is “I can make a plan of my educational goals for the next five
years.” As such, the theoretical construct of self-efficacy differs from that of self-confidence by being specific to a particular task or performance domain whose assessment includes “both an affirmation of a capability level and the strength of that belief” (Bandura, 1997, p. 382). On the other hand, a self-confidence belief (e.g., “I am extremely confident of my success in the future”) lacks the element of specificity in that it does not include an indication of the task or endeavor to which a conviction to achieve pertains (Bandura, 1997).

Bandura (1986) recognized self-efficacy beliefs about personal strengths and resources as factors that are critically involved in the determination of conscious thoughts and purposeful actions that are aimed at the achievement of a specific goal, as in the case of a student engaging in an evaluation of his or her potential and capability to complete a class project within a certain timeframe. As Morgan (2014) explained, based upon his analyses of Bandura’s (1994) propositions, the development of self-efficacy as grounded in a sense of personal agency facilitates motivation for environmental exploration that is characterized by a conviction in one’s capability to achieve or complete a task, even in the presence of adverse circumstances. For instance, consistent with Bandura’s (1997) recognition of self-efficacy beliefs as highly responsive to environmental conditions, the student in the aforementioned class project example is likely to derive confidence to complete the project from awareness of his or her prior mastery experiences. Similarly, the student may feel inspired from observing an exemplary classmate as another efficacy-building source that might be expected to instill within him or her the conviction to overcome hurdles such as lack of motivation or time management difficulties. In contrast, a person with a low sense of self-efficacy can be reasonably expected to lack conviction
in this regard and is, therefore, likely to abandon a task in the face of personal challenges and environmental obstacles. In relation to the latter proposition, as Lent (2013) clarified, it is important to note that self-efficacy pertains to an evolving and dynamic (as opposed to a fixed) set of judgments or convictions about personal capacities to achieve a specific task or goal. In other words, a person may possess a strong self-efficacy belief in his or her ability to finish reading a book in a certain time period but may, at the same time, lack self-efficacious expectation to do well in an upcoming job interview.

Bandura (1997) also identified the importance of social persuasion as a contextual source of information from which self-efficacy beliefs originate and one that influences or modifies their degree of strength. Encompassing the reception of encouragement from others, social persuasion is postulated to increase self-efficacy by instilling the conviction that one has the strength and capacity to successfully complete a task. Offering an example, Lent (2013) noted that an individual’s strength of self-efficacy belief in his or her ability to play piano depends in part on the degree of encouragement (i.e., social persuasion) provided by his or her piano teacher. It is important to note, however, that the degree of impact or influence of social persuasion on self-efficacy beliefs depends on the subjective interpretation of the feedback by the individual intended as the object of persuasion (Lent, 2013). Clarifying the foregoing assertion, Lent (2013) argued that the focal individual’s interpretation of the encouragement by his or her piano teacher as being well-intended, genuine, and realistic, for example, is an important determinant of the degree of influence this information would exert on his or her self-efficacy belief in the skill of playing the piano.

The view of interpretation as a decisive factor is consistent with Morgan’s (2014)
recognition that persuasion intended to simply instill an individual with false hope for achieving an insurmountable task is expected to result in a sharp and immediate decline in his or her self-efficacy; this may be expected due to the debilitating self-awareness of lacking the personal resources necessary to complete the task. A novice piano player in response to verbal persuasion by his or her teacher, for instance, will likely fail to develop the necessary amount of self-efficacy in his or her ability to win a music competition without having had a sufficient amount of training and preparation. It, therefore, follows that the appraisal and interpretation of social persuasion as realistic is pivotal in the development of self-efficacy beliefs. This is consistent with Lent et al.’s (2000) emphasis on the notion that it is an individual’s “perception” of contextual factors as being beneficial or supportive that functions to enable and empower him or her to successfully progress through the goal achievement process.

An important implication of the foregoing point is the heteronomous, as opposed to autonomous, nature of self-efficacy, considering its significant amenability to contextual influences such as the amount and quality of support offered by significant others, in addition to the degree of difficulty involved in a task (Bandura, 1997; Lent, 2013). Furthermore, the abovementioned considerations also suggest the notion that interpersonal relationships need to be grounded in positive relational dynamics such as care and supportiveness in order to qualify – or at least be perceived – as genuine and facilitative contextual influences on career development processes and outcomes.

2.3: Career Self-Efficacy

Recognizing the potential applicability of Bandura’s (1977) concept of self-efficacy to career development, Betz and Hackett (1981a) offered a conceptual
framework for understanding and explaining people’s career-related goals, choices, and
behaviours in the context of influences from sociocultural factors such as gender roles.
The theoretical basis for Betz and Hackett’s (1981a) conceptual framework is grounded
in Bandura’s (1977) assertion that self-efficacy belief, or the conviction in personal
capacity to successfully pursue and achieve a goal, facilitates persistence and instills
strength to face obstacles in the course of pursuing that goal.

Bringing into focus a direct implication of the foregoing assertion for career
development, Betz and Hackett (1981a) proposed that lack of self-efficacy with regard to
a career-related goal decreases the likelihood of both initiating behaviours aimed at
achieving that goal as well as persisting in such behaviours in the face of adverse
circumstances or experiences. Betz and Hackett (1981b) conducted a study in which they
developed the Occupational Self-Efficacy Scale to examine self-efficacy perceptions
among college students with regard to educational and professional requirements for a set
of common occupations. They defined career self-efficacy as “perceptions of [personal]
capabilities to successfully complete the educational requirements and job duties [for a
specific occupation]” (Betz & Hackett, 1981b, p. 399). For example, a medical student’s
career self-efficacy may include the self-held belief in his or her ability to successfully
perform surgical operations in the emergency room. It was, however, a later study by
Taylor and Betz (1983) that proposed a relevant construct – namely, career decision-
making self-efficacy – by examining the interface between self-efficacy beliefs and
career indecision for the very first time. It should be noted that occupational self-efficacy
and career decision-making self-efficacy differ in a key aspect. Whereas occupational
self-efficacy refers to self-belief in ability to complete education and perform job
functions (Betz & Hackett, 1981b), career decision-making self-efficacy refers to self-belief specifically in the ability to make decisions about education and career goals (Taylor & Betz, 1983).

2.4: Career Decision-Making Self-Efficacy

With a goal to examine the strength of relationships between self-efficacy and specific components of vocational indecision such as the degree of confidence in the ability to complete the tasks necessary to make career decisions, Taylor and Betz (1983) tested a sample of 346 college students who responded to an instrument that measured self-efficacy expectations associated with a set of fifty behaviours involved in career decision-making. The behaviours included engagement in tasks associated with specific career-related domains such as self-appraisal (e.g., “Accurately assess your abilities”) and planning (e.g., “Prepare a good resume”). Main findings included, (a) a strong negative correlation between strength of self-efficacy expectations and lack of confidence associated with career decisions, and (b) possession of high levels of confidence among college students in their ability to successfully complete the tasks required in making career decisions. In the context of their findings, Taylor and Betz (1983) proposed and explicated the concept of career decision-making self-efficacy, defining it as a person’s level of confidence in his or her ability to successfully manage or navigate completion of tasks necessary to making career decisions.

As recognized by Choi et al. (2012), an understanding of the theoretical differences between career self-efficacy and career decision-making self-efficacy is perhaps best captured in Betz and Hackett’s (1981a) domain-based perspective of self-efficacy in the career context. Specifically, Betz and Hackett (1981a) categorized career-
related self-efficacy into two distinct domains: content and process. Identifying the distinct interests of the foregoing domains, Choi et al. (2012) noted that

The content domain of career self-efficacy refers to self-efficacy in specific career fields, such as math, writing, or science; whereas the process domain of career self-efficacy centers on self-efficacy in using the necessary strategies for successfully navigating a decision-making process. (p. 444)

In the present study, as an underlying interest is to examine the overall career-relevant decision-making process and tasks that people engage in (e.g., goal-setting) rather than the careers people choose (e.g., STEM fields), career ‘decision-making’ self-efficacy is the appropriate construct of focus.

2.5: Relational Influences on Career Decision-Making Self-Efficacy

Echoing Lent et al.’s (2000) emphasis on the pivotal role of contextual factors in career choices and decisions, Lent (2013) recognized career decision-making self-efficacy as an aspect of cognition that relies on social influence as a critical determinant involved in its development and regulation. Offering empirical support to the foregoing proposition, a relatively new line of research has noted significant positive correlation between social support from specific significant others and career decision-making self-efficacy. Wright, Perrone-McGovern, Boo, and White (2014), for example, examined the mediating role of secure attachment in the relationship between social support and career decision-making self-efficacy. As their primary finding, Wright et al. (2014) noted that feelings of secure attachment (i.e., high degrees of comfort with emotional and sexual intimacy in romantic relationships) were related to the perception of greater social support and higher relationship satisfaction, which in turn facilitated both academic and career decision-making self-efficacy in the tested sample. Offering an explanation,
Wright et al. (2014) noted that secure attachments and high relationship satisfaction facilitate the view that others can be relied upon for social support in the face of academic- or career-related obstacles and difficulties.

Consistent with the findings in the Wright et al. (2014) study, results from a number of other investigations similarly underscore the role of both socially supportive and securely attached relationships in the development of career decision-making self-efficacy. For example, Turner and Lapan (2002) found that perceived parental support (i.e., the perception of the degree to which “My parents would/would not support me in pursuing this occupation”) directly predicted career decision-making self-efficacy among a sample of multiethnic adolescents. Integrating Lent et al.’s (1994) SCCT model and Bowlby’s (1969) attachment theory into a useful framework, Wright and Perrone-McGovern (2010) also found a higher level of career decision-making self-efficacy among participants who reported being in securely attached relationships, as measured by the degree of confidence in personal ability to relate intimately to other individuals.

In addition to the underlying relationship mechanisms, such as secure attachment dynamics and perceptions of relationship quality, research has also recognized an equally influential role of career-relevant support that is provided in an intentional and audible manner. These processes include advice from and/or conversation with specific significant others that are aimed at helping a person develop a sense of decision-making self-efficacy in the career domain. For example, whereas Gushue and Whitson (2006) found evidence that parental support (such as career interest approval and provision of encouragement) was positively correlated with career decision-making self-efficacy among a sample of high-school students, Patel, Salahuddin, and O’Brien (2008) noted
that help-seeking interactions with parents and school counsellors regarding career-relevant concerns significantly predicted career decision-making self-efficacy among adolescents. Garcia, Restubog, Bordia, and Roxas (2015), explaining these findings, suggested that parents and teachers facilitate decision-making by offering useful career-related advice and, as recognized by Alliman-Brissett, Turner, and Skovholt (2004) and Metheny et al. (2008), also represent valuable sources of emotional support and verbal encouragement during times of career-related difficulties and challenges. Patel et al. (2008) similarly recognized the career-related supportive role played by peers and noted that frequent engagement in meaningful conversations with peers about educational directions and professional ambitions serves to develop confidence in career choices and decisions.

2.6: Career Decision-Making Self-Efficacy and Gender

Recent research has offered mixed results as far as the gender-based differences in career decision-making self-efficacy are concerned. For example, whereas Chung (2002) and Creed, Patton, and Prideaux (2006) found no gender differences in career decision-making self-efficacy, Gianakos (2001) noted relatively higher levels of decision-making ability among women in specific aspects of career-related self-efficacy such as “gathering occupational information” and “career planning.” In line with the latter finding, another study noted that female college students reported higher levels of career decision-making self-efficacy than their male counterparts with regard to their confidence in personal ability to succeed in an engineering career (Burger, Raelin, Reisberg, Bailey, & Whitman, 2010).

Although the foregoing studies bring forth inconclusive data that preclude firm
conclusions regarding the relationship between gender and career decision-making self-efficacy, researchers have nonetheless stressed the need to explore gender-relevant implications on the career decision-making self-efficacy of women in particular. Choi et al.’s (2012) relatively recent meta-analysis, for example, failed to find a significant association between gender and career decision-making self-efficacy. However, stressing that the foregoing finding be interpreted with caution, Choi et al. (2012) argued that this result does not necessarily indicate that gender is an irrelevant factor. Rather, “this result may imply that the relationship between gender and CDSE is indirect, mediated, or moderated by various learning experiences, as indicated by the SCCT model” (p. 451).

2.7: Career Decision-Making Self-Efficacy - A Focus on Women

In line with Choi et al.’s (2012) foregoing suggestion, a deeper examination of the literature brings to the fore considerable empirical evidence to warrant studies on career decision-making self-efficacy with a gender-specific focus. Specifically, research has identified (a) career decision-making self-efficacy as a relatively more complex process for women, (b) a continuing need to facilitate women’s development of career decision-making self-efficacy through provision of positive contextual experiences, and (c) women’s relatively greater amenability to relational influences in the context of career development. Validating the foregoing considerations, the following review of the literature offers robust evidence to support and justify the need to examine women’s career decision-making self-efficacy in particular.

O’Brien et al.’s (2000) longitudinal study revealed that young adult women indicated low levels of career decision-making self-efficacy that stayed remarkably stable over the course of a five-year observation. O’Brien et al. (2000) further noted that these
low self-efficacy women chose to pursue careers that were less prestigious and more traditional than those they had aspired to pursue five years earlier as high-school seniors. O’Brien et al. (2000) attributed the foregoing findings to the significant tendency among their sample to underestimate personal potential, abilities, and intelligence to pursue their desired careers. This explanation resonates well with BarNir, Watson, and Hutchins’ (2011) recognition that “to the extent that women are more focused [than men] toward relationships, are more likely to manifest communal skills, and are better in relational skills, they may be more tuned in to their lack of abilities, as well as to the opportunity for learning from role models” (p. 288). As such, women are relatively more amenable to changes in self-efficacy belief than are men (BarNir et al., 2011). O’Brien et al. (2000) also explained low career decision-making self-efficacy among women in light of sociocultural challenges including difficulties women typically experience while striving to integrate family commitments and career pursuits. In addition, O’Brien et al. (2000) stressed the need for further investigations to determine “how the [career] plans of young women may change as they select partners” (p. 311). The need to pursue the foregoing research direction, which strengthens the argument for focusing on women’s career development, buttresses the rationale to explore intimate relationship influences on career decision-making self-efficacy among women.

More importantly, O’Brien et al. (2000) noted a failure in higher education settings to offer environments and opportunities (e.g., female role models, verbal encouragement) that may enhance women’s self-efficacy in specific aspects of their career decision-making. Quimby and O’Brien (2004) expressed similar concerns when they recognized a lack of research attention toward potentially beneficial contextual
influences on women’s career development. This notion has also been suggested more recently by Wang and Tien (2011) who acknowledged a need for exploring positive influences such as strength-centered counselling and supportive relationships for women experiencing difficulties associated with career and family life balance. In light of Lent’s (2013) explanation that self-efficacy beliefs are highly responsive to contextual influences such as social support systems, the present study’s exploration of the degree of ‘positive’ influence of intimate relationship type and quality offers a potentially useful approach to address the problem of low career decision-making self-efficacy among women.

In addition, the exclusive focus on women may also be justified in view of Gianakos’ (1995) finding that gender-role orientations significantly influence the level of career decision-making self-efficacy. Echoing O’Brien et al.’s (2000) contention that women’s career-relevant decisions are influenced more predominantly by family needs and relationship factors than those of men, Gianakos (1995) postulated that career decision-making self-efficacy among women and those with female gender-role orientations is especially vulnerable to contextual influence from relationship variables such as emotional support. As Gianakos (1995) pointed out in analyzing a key finding, “feminine persons, displaying high expressiveness and low instrumentality, may experience difficulty in selecting [career-relevant] goals where emotional support is not forthcoming” (p. 139). Similarly noting the gender-based differences in the degree of sensitivity to relationship dynamics, Cutrona (1996) noted that women – as opposed to men – are more focused on the quality of their marital relationship rather than simply being influenced by marital status with regard to relational support factors.
Cutrona’s (1996) assertion resonates well with BarNir et al.’s (2011) finding that women demonstrate relatively higher levels of responsiveness to role models in the career context, representing a specific type of proximal relational influence. Explaining this finding in view of gender-role implications, BarNir et al. (2011) noted that “women are more focused toward relationships, are more likely to manifest communal skills, and are better in relational skills” (p. 288), thereby allowing them to establish more meaningful connections with interpersonal systems in their environments. This view is consistent with Simpson and Tran’s (2006) observation that “women’s self-construals are characterized by greater relational interdependence… [such that] they tend to be more communal… [whereas] men, by comparison, tend to be more agentic” (p. 13). It, therefore, follows that relational support as a construct has great potential to function as a positive contextual mechanism to help attenuate career development challenges (e.g., low decision-making self-efficacy) among women in particular.

The aforementioned findings and postulations by Gianakos (1995), Cutrona (1996), and BarNir et al. (2011) suggest that supportive relationships are a specific category of proximal contextual variables with a potential to influence career decision-making self-efficacy among women, and this represents an emerging interest within the broader line of research examining relational influences on career development. Quimby and O’Brien (2004), for example, conducted a notable study in this regard by testing a sample of non-traditional college women, defined as female college students who were over the age of 25 (Lewis, 1988) and managing multiple roles in their academic, professional, and family lives. Predicting a positive association, Quimby and O’Brien (2004) investigated the degree to which perceived social support and its quality...
influenced career decision-making self-efficacy among a sample of 354 non-traditional college women divided into “with” and “without children” as the two treatment conditions.

In line with their prediction, Quimby and O’Brien (2004) noted that the perceived amount and quality of social support from significant others positively predicted career decision-making self-efficacy in both groups of women. The foregoing finding extends support to those reported by Flores and O’Brien (2002) who noted career expectations and aspirations to be positively influenced by perceptions of parental support among a sample of female high-school students. Quimby and O’Brien’s (2004) primary finding is also consistent with Lapan, Hinkelman, Adams and Turner’s (1999) results confirming the perceptions of parental support among female adolescents to be strongly predictive of their self-efficacy associated with the pursuit of specific career fields. Empirical evidence for women’s considerable amenability to non-human contextual influences has also been provided. Scott and Ciani (2008), for example, found a career exploration course to be especially instrumental in increasing career decision-making self-efficacy among female undergraduate students, and even more than among their male counterparts. On the basis of these considerations, there emerge theoretical grounds to conceptualize women as a more appropriate population of study due to their likelihood to derive relatively greater benefit from the practical applications of research supporting the positive role of high-quality intimate relationships in the development of career decision-making self-efficacy.

As should be evident, researchers have identified a wide array of contextual influences in the development of career decision-making self-efficacy in women. Within the empirical focus on the role of social support in this regard, one yet unexplored
construct with potentially significant influence is that of the intimate relationship. As per a literature search, the characteristics of intimate partnership, such as type and perceived quality, have not yet been examined as influential factors in relation to career decision-making self-efficacy. The only somewhat relevant study in this regard is that conducted by Albaugh and Nauta (2005); however, as they examined the relationship between women’s experience of intimate partner violence and their career decision-making self-efficacy, it fails to qualify as a study aimed at exploring the role of ‘positive’ contextual influences. Hence, the facilitative role of high-quality intimate relationships in women’s career decision-making self-efficacy warrants research attention.

In addition, as in the case of the aforementioned Brosseau et al. (2010) and Domene et al. (2012) studies, Albaugh and Nauta (2005) also failed to account for the role of the unique interpersonal dynamics that characterize specific types of intimate relationship, which may have had implications for the frequency and intensity of partner violence. For example, it has been noted that cohabiting relationships typically involve higher levels of physical aggression and violence than marital unions (Brown & Booth, 1996). Furthermore, research has also confirmed gender-based patterns such that women in cohabiting relationships report significantly higher levels of inter-partner violence than their married and dating counterparts, whereas men in cohabiting and marital unions report similar levels of inter-partner violence and higher levels than that of their dating counterparts (Brown & Bulanda, 2008). The present study, therefore, drew important distinctions between two types of intimate relationship – dating and marriage – with respect to their characteristic relational dynamics, expectations of inter-partner support, and overall perceived quality and satisfaction. This research offers a basis for
hypothesizing the differential degrees of positive influence that intimate partners can be reasonably expected to exert on women’s self-reported career decision-making self-efficacy.

2.8: Measures of Relationship Quality - An Overview

Before offering an overview of the various measures of relationship quality, it is important to understand that there exist two types of approaches to measuring intimate relationship quality: interpersonal approach and intrapersonal approach (Fincham & Rogge, 2010). Whereas the interpersonal approach is concerned with objective observations of the day-to-day patterns of interactions between a couple, the intrapersonal approach is concerned with a subjective evaluation of a couple’s relationship that involves looking at partners’ self-reported ratings on constructs such as happiness and satisfaction. Although the validity of self-reported measures of relationship quality is compromised by the possibility of distortions or limited self-awareness, “self-report does present a cost-effective and quicker means of assessment compared to more implicit measures, such as observation or computer-based tasks” (Reynolds, Houlston, & Coleman, 2014, p. 12).

A review of the literature shows that researchers have frequently measured intimate relationship quality from an intrapersonal perspective involving self-reported perceptions of a broad range of relationship constructs. Collins and Feeney’s (2000) study of support-seeking and care-giving among intimate couples utilized a perception-based instrument to measure relationship quality with regard to a number of relationship features including satisfaction, intimacy, conflict, and inter-partner commitment. Researchers have, in fact, offered more focused analyses of intimate relationship quality
by measuring it in terms of people’s perceptions of specific relationship components. For example, Hsueh et al. (2009) chose to measure relationship quality among their samples of dating and married couples exclusively in terms of the self-reported level of satisfaction. Hsueh et al. (2009) justified their choice with reference to the findings by Funk and Rogge (2007) and noted that “satisfaction has been found to provide high levels of information about individuals’ relationship… across a broad range of relationship functioning” (p. 239). Similarly, Brown and Bulanda (2008) measured intimate relationship quality in terms of respondents’ perception of two aspects of relationship commitment: “attraction to the relationship (relationship satisfaction) and attraction to the partner (love)” (p. 77). It, therefore, follows that self-reported perception of specific relationship constructs represents a promising approach to measuring intimate relationship quality.

2.9: Partner Support and Perceived Relationship Quality

Identifying inter-partner perception of various interpersonal attributes as a useful construct to measure relationship quality, Murray, Holmes, and Griffin (1996) proposed that satisfaction, as a key measure of relationship quality, is a product of idealistic rather than realistic perceptions of one’s partner. In support of the foregoing proposal, Murray et al. (1996) found that individuals (both married and dating) reported greater satisfaction and happiness with their intimate relationship when they perceived their partners to be ideal, as measured by high ratings of their partners on a number of interpersonal attributes. The important role of perception as a measure of relationship satisfaction and overall quality was also recognized by Cobb, Davila, and Bradbury (2001) who noted that “spouses who perceive partners as secure, regardless of partners’ actual security, may
be better able to work constructively on problems, be more accepting of help, and be less
critical and negative” (p. 1141). Based on the foregoing assertion, it can be argued that
positive perceptions of the quality of one’s partner and relationship may reasonably
motivate an individual to report high career decision-making self-efficacy.

Cutrona (1996) recognized intimate relationships as the most reliable and
important source of social support, defined as “the fulfillment by others of basic ongoing
requirements for well-being [as well as]… of more specific time-limited needs that arise
as the result of adverse life events” (p. 3). Based on wide-ranging empirical evidence
(e.g., Brown & Harris, 1978; Coyne & DeLongis, 1986; Leiberman, 1982; O’Hara,
1986), Cutrona (1996) argued that support offered by an intimate relationship partner is
characteristically superior to, and cannot be compensated for by, the support from other
types of interpersonal systems such as family-of-origin and peers. Emphasizing social
support as a pivotal ingredient in the sustenance of intimate relationships, Cutrona (1996)
asserted that, “mental health benefits derived from partner support may, in large part, be
derived from the positive qualities that supportive acts nourish within the relationship”
(p. 2). In this regard, Cutrona (1996) recognized a number of key underlying attributes of
supportiveness in successful intimate relationships and suggested that they were pertinent
measures of their overall quality; these include love, trust, and commitment.

The foregoing relationship attributes are consistent with three of the six evaluative
components noted more recently by Fletcher, Simpson, and Thomas (2000) as reliable
measures of perceived relationship quality. The Fletcher et al. (2000) study offers an
understanding of intimate relationship quality as a subjectively evaluated construct
comprised of specific and distinct components such as trust and commitment, each with
its origins in different theoretical models. For example, whereas the concept of trust has a theoretical basis in Erikson’s (1968) model of psychosocial development, commitment as a relationship attribute is a variable of primary interest in Thibaut and Kelley’s (1959) Interdependence Theory. On the basis of an extensive review of literature, Fletcher et al. (2000) developed the Perceived Relationship Quality Components (PRQC) inventory that assesses six constructs as distinct measures of perceived relationship quality; these are satisfaction, commitment, intimacy, trust, passion, and love. Putting Fletcher et al.’s (2000) propositions to an empirical test, Chen (2015) found high-quality intimate relationships to be characterized by a greater number of intercorrelations among the six constructs, thus supporting their claim regarding the validity of these constructs as accurate measures of perceived intimate relationship quality. As per a literature search, the PRQC inventory has not yet been examined within the context of correlations with career development constructs. Hence, the present study represents the inaugural effort in this regard. In addition, the decision to administer the PRQC inventory in the present study is guided by the evidence for its high internal reliability and face validity (Fletcher et al., 2000).

It is important to understand that the aforementioned six relationship constructs integrate to form people’s global evaluative attitude about their partner and relationship along a dimension represented by a good versus bad scale (Fletcher et al., 2000). Accordingly, distinct components of relationship quality such as commitment, trust, and satisfaction are postulated to represent essentially the same psychological construct and, as such, provide global evaluations of the partner and relationship. Based on the results of their confirmatory factor analysis, Fletcher et al. (2000) noted that people display a
tendency to be relatively consistent in evaluations of their intimate partners across the six components. However, within each component, specific evaluations may diverge as a result of variations in relationship-based factors such as the nature, type, and developmental stage of the relationship. This expectation is consistent with Acker and Davis’ (1992) recognition of the particular relationship stage (e.g., dating, engaged, married) as indicative of its degree of strength and stability. Accordingly, there exist theoretical grounds for an inquiry into whether the inherent differences in the unique interpersonal dynamics that characterize specific types of intimate relationship influence their overall perceived qualities among the rating partners along the six components identified by Fletcher et al. (2000).

2.10: Intimate Relationship Orientations - Advancement versus Security

Molden, Lucas, Finkel, Kumashiro, and Rusbult (2009) provided a useful theoretical premise that offers a basis for understanding the underlying assumptions pertaining to the characteristic differences in the quality of interpersonal dynamics that exist in the marital and non-marital intimate relationship. Molden et al. (2009) proposed two types of relationship goals: advancement-oriented goals and security-oriented goals. Advancement-oriented goals are centered on a partner’s motivation to strive toward personal aspirations and emphasize the fulfillment of his or her hopes and ambitions over the maintenance of current achievements. Example of an advancement-oriented goal is “My partner thinks I excel at attaining my aspirations in life” (Molden et al., 2009, p. 789).

On the other hand, security-oriented goals emphasize the notion of maintenance in that they are aimed at a partner’s fulfillment of current responsibilities and obligations
necessary for sustaining a strong and healthy relationship. A corresponding example is “My partner thinks I excel at living up to the responsibilities to which I am committed” (Molden et al., 2009, p. 789). As should be evident, whereas the advancement-oriented goal lacks the concern or evaluation regarding the sense of commitment and obligation on the part of one’s partner, the security-oriented goal includes it as an essential consideration.

In line with Berscheid and Regan (2005), Molden et al. (2009) agreed that relationship evaluations among unmarried couples are approached predominantly from the advancement-oriented perspective. As such, unmarried intimate partners tend to be concerned more with whether their relationship is likely to develop and grow in future while being less attentive to current investments and behaviours that maintain the security of their relationship. In addition, the focus on advancement predisposes unmarried couples to perceive partner support as being particularly facilitative in the pursuit of their individual or self-focused goals and aspirations while maintaining lower levels of mutual investment and interdependence that are important ingredients in ensuring relationship security.

In contrast, the focus on the present state, quality, and maintenance of the relationship is more characteristic of the concerns of married couples as they tend to evaluate their relationship primarily from a security-oriented perspective. Marriage as an institutionalized system leads couples to experience a dramatic increase in mutual investments in each other both materially and psychologically, making the relationship for both partners an indispensable structure on which they rely for fulfilling their social and emotional needs. As Molden et al. (2009) postulated, “married individuals more
thoroughly evaluate their relationship in terms of the security it provides and the investments they are maintaining” (p. 788).

Based on the foregoing considerations, it follows that the two relational contexts in question differ primarily with respect to the degree to which they emphasize maintaining relationship security as gauged by the partners’ ability or motivation to fulfill and respect the responsibilities and commitments involved in sustaining the relationship. To the extent that the focus on maintaining relationship security is postulated to be greater in the marital than the non-marital intimate context, there exist reasonable grounds to expect the former to be characterized by the perceptions of higher-quality relationships with respect to specific interpersonal dimensions. As recognized by Fletcher et al. (2000), these include satisfaction, trust, and commitment, among others. Representing a finding in support of the foregoing prediction, Molden et al. (2009) noted a relatively lower influence of partner support on relationship well-being among unmarried intimate couples due to their lack of focus on security-relevant goals that are more predominant in the marital context.

2.11: Type and Quality of Relationship - Spouse vs. Dating Partner

In line with the present study’s focus on relational contexts, Punyanunt-Carter (2004) identified marriage and dating as two types of intimate relationship with comparable features. It is important to understand the association between the time-based length of an intimate relationship and its level of stability. Whereas Felmlee, Sprecher, and Bassin (1990) noted a positive correlation between the length of relationship and the relationship stability in the dating context, Weigel and Ballard-Reisch (1999) found that the length of the relationship predicted neither relationship maintenance behaviours nor
positive perceptions of the relationship in the marital context. Therefore, it follows that the time-based duration of the various types of intimate relationship cannot be uniformly applied as a reliable measure of their strength or stability. In the present study, however, a time-based criterion was deemed necessary and was derived from Ammar, Gauthier, and Widmer’s (2014) specification of lasting intimate relationships as those maintained for more than three months. This was done in view of the need to ensure equivalence and comparability between the two relational contexts of focus (i.e., marriage and dating) with regard to their minimum duration.

Based on an application of Sternberg’s (1986) triangular theory of love, Acker and Davis (1992) differentiated marriage and dating on the basis of a progression scale identifying marriage to be characterized by higher degrees of intimacy, passion, and commitment. The focus on examining the varying degrees of inter-partner commitment as a measure of perceived quality in the dating and marital relationship represents a key respect in which these two relational contexts have been compared and distinguished. For example, in their large-scale analysis of results from a national longitudinal survey of adolescents and young adults in the United States, Wood et al. (2008) compared the perceived relationship quality among dating and married couples as based upon their reported levels of intimacy, care, and commitment in the relationship. Wood et al. (2008) noted a general tendency among the dating couples – both men and women – to rate their relationship quality as lower than the ratings by married couples. Endeavouring to explain this finding, Wood et al. (2008) attributed it to the relatively lower levels of mutual commitment in the dating relationship due to its widely held perception as a
casual relational bond, and thus contributing to its lower perceived quality among the respondents.

The foregoing explanation is in line with Hsueh et al.’s (2009) discussion of the implications of their study that included an examination of specific interpersonal problems typically experienced by married, dating, and cohabiting couples. Hsueh et al. (2009) noted that a primary interpersonal issue in the dating context is a lack of commitment. Hence, consistent with Acker and Davis’ (1992) postulation that “successive stages in romantic relationships typically involve some deliberate decision to make the relationship more serious” (p. 23), marriage can be conceptualized as a facilitative step for dating couples that allows them to achieve desirable levels of mutual commitment. More recently, Machado et al.’s (2014) review of empirical evidence (e.g., Brown & Bulanda, 2008; Shorey, Cornelius, & Bell, 2008) described the dating relationship as one characterized by relatively lower levels of inter-partner trust and commitment than those involved in marriage.

Comparing relationship quality between couples in long-term marital and non-marital unions, Nock (1995) found the latter to be characterized by relatively lower levels of happiness with and commitment to the relationship. In line with Dush and Amato (2005), Nock (1995) analyzed the foregoing finding by considering the role of distal and systemic factors such as societal norms and laws that govern marriage as a legal and binding contract. Non-marital unions such as dating and cohabitation lack the status of institutionalized systems and, as such, result in being perceived as more casual relational contexts that generally fail to entail comparable levels of quality in relation to marriage.

Examining the differences between marriage and dating with regard to their
specific relational patterns, Punyanunt-Carter (2004) measured the respective degrees to which they involve affectionate communication, defined as the “overt and intentional act of communicating feelings of care, closeness, and admiration for another” (p. 1155) as a way to indicate intimacy. Based on a university sample of heterosexual couples divided into the “married” and “dating” category, Punyanunt-Carter (2004) noted that the expression of supportive affectionate communication was more frequent among the married partners than among dating partners. In addition, supportive affectionate communication was found to be a significant predictor of relationship satisfaction. As Punyanunt-Carter (2004) pointed out, these findings are consistent with the postulations by Lewis and Spanier (1979) who discussed a tendency among married couples to engage in more frequent expressions of support than non-marital couples.

The findings in these studies indicating greater supportive interactions among married couples have important implications for perceived relationship quality. To the degree that married couples exhibit higher levels of supportiveness than dating couples, they can be expected to cultivate greater positive outcomes in relation to the development of specific interpersonal aspects such as trust and intimacy. In addition, the stronger relationship dynamics that characterize the marital – as opposed to the non-marital – experience may be expected to yield greater levels of inter-partner support provision in various areas of life including career development, which in turn may function to strengthen the relational bond between couples. Whereas Collins and Ford (2010) noted that perception of support and care offered by their romantic partners led individuals to develop feelings of greater trust in the relationship, Murray, Holmes, and Collins (2006) found that perception of romantic partner as a support-provider facilitated the desire to
develop greater intimacy and connectedness. The latter finding is consistent with the analyses offered by Reis, Clark, and Holmes (2004) who identified perception of partner’s responsiveness to support-related needs as a pivotal factor in an individual’s motivation to develop and maintain intimacy and closeness.

More importantly, studies have shown a strong positive correlation between provision of romantic partner support and perceived relationship quality. Kane et al. (2007), for example, noted that both male and female individuals in their sample of couples (including married, dating, and cohabiting) expressed greater satisfaction with their relationships when they perceived their partners as more supportive. This is consistent with Collins and Feeney’s (2000) finding that the perceived quality of romantic relationship was higher among raters who indicated their partners to be more responsive to support-relevant needs. In light of these results, Collins and Feeney (2000) recognized support-provision from a romantic partner as an essential ingredient in the development of felt security in the relationship. Collins and Feeney (2000) further postulated that support-provision from their partners in times of stress and adverse circumstances allows individuals to draw “inferences about their partner’s love and commitment and should be vital to the maintenance of trust and intimacy between partners” (p. 1069). Moreover, Bradbury, Cohan, and Karney (2000) recognized support-provision as a salient quality among married couples with far-reaching positive implications for the development of their married life. In their longitudinal study, Sullivan, Pasch, Johnson, and Bradbury (2010) similarly emphasized the importance of supportiveness in the marital context and noted that the degree of support-provision behaviours observed among partners early in the marriage predicted their marital
satisfaction and divorce ten years later. Accordingly, to the extent that married individuals are exposed to a greater frequency of support-provision behaviours by their partners, as compared to those in a dating relationship, the former can be expected to report a higher perceived relationship quality. Perception of being in a higher-quality relationship may, in turn, be expected to instill married individuals with confidence to report relatively higher levels of career decision-making self-efficacy than their dating counterparts.

2.12: Synthesizing the Research - Questions and Hypotheses

From a broader perspective, the foregoing review of the literature establishes social support systems as a significant contextual determinant in career development. An in-depth comparison between the key tenets of a number of context-focused career development theories brought to the fore SCCT as a conceptual model that offers an appropriate and useful framework for investigating the positive influence of social support systems on a specific career-relevant construct – namely, career decision-making self-efficacy. In light of the current dearth of research exploring family-of-procreation influences in this regard (Brosseau et al., 2010), the present study represents the very first empirical effort to propose and investigate an association between the perception of intimate relationship quality and self-reported level of career decision-making self-efficacy.

There exists a strong theoretical base for predicting differences in the reported strength of interpersonal dynamics such as commitment, trust, and satisfaction in specific types of intimate relationship (Acker & Davis, 1992; Ross, 1995) as reliable measures of the perception of intimate relationship quality (Chen, 2015). With these considerations in
mind, the present study evaluated and compared the degree of influence that is differentially exerted by the perceived quality of relationship on career decision-making self-efficacy of individuals involved in two types of intimate relationship: marital or dating. With regard to the gender of the target population, an all-female sample was recruited in view of (a) the recognition of career decision-making self-efficacy as a relatively more challenging and complex process for women as a result of sociocultural factors such as work-family balance (O’Brien et al., 2000; Quimby & O’Brien, 2004), (b) women’s tendency to be relatively more sensitive to relational influences in the career context (BarNir et al., 2011; Gianakos, 1995), and (c) a continuing need for further research examining positive and beneficial contextual influences on women’s career development (Quimby & O’Brien, 2004; Wang & Tien, 2011).

Stated below are the two research questions that were examined, each followed by a hypothesis derived from the foregoing review of literature.

**Question # 1**

Are women with higher perceived intimate relationship quality likely to report a correspondingly higher level of career decision-making self-efficacy than their counterparts with lower perceived relationship quality?

**Hypothesis**

Given that high perceived intimate relationship quality entails in large part the perception of intimate partner as being more supportive and caring, women reporting a high-quality intimate relationship will report a correspondingly higher level of career decision-making self-efficacy.
Question # 2

Are married women likely to report a higher level of career decision-making self-efficacy than their counterparts who are in a dating relationship?

Hypothesis

Given the research evidence establishing marital relationship as characterized by stronger inter-partner dynamics (e.g., commitment, satisfaction, trust, etc.), a longer future orientation, and a widely recognized institutional status, married women will report a higher level of career decision-making self-efficacy than their dating counterparts.

Overall, it was hypothesized that a considerable degree of the variance in career decision-making self-efficacy among women in the higher education system can be explained in terms of the type and perceived quality of the intimate relationship in which they are currently involved.²

² For a graphic representation of the hypotheses, please see Appendix A.
Chapter 3: Methodology

3.1: Participants

3.1.1: Sample size. Based on the results of an a priori power analysis (Appendix B), a required sample size ($n$) of 68 participants was determined. With respect to the choice of effect size ($\Delta R^2$), which is typically reported in linear regression analyses to indicate the proportion of variance in the outcome variable that is attributed to predictor variable(s), previous similar research was used as reference. Investigating contextual influences on career development, Tang, Fouad, and Smith (1999) obtained an effect size of .16 for a positive association between family-of-origin involvement and career choice among adolescents. Albaugh and Nauta (2005) as well as Quimby and O’Brien (2004) were referred to for further guidance with regard to effect size, as both studies focused on variables and target samples that are similar to the ones in the present study.

Albaugh and Nauta (2005) reported an effect size of .17 for the negative association between intimate partner sexual coercion and self-appraisal aspect of career decision-making self-efficacy among college women. Similarly, Quimby and O’Brien (2004) reported small effect sizes of .19 and .15 for a positive association between social support and career decision-making self-efficacy among college women with and without children, respectively. In view of these values, the a priori power analysis in the present study was conducted at .15 as the specified anticipated effect size.

3.1.2: Demographic characteristics. In line with the gender of focus in the respective studies by Albaugh and Nauta (2005) and Quimby and O’Brien (2004), participants in the present study comprised 68 female students enrolled at University of New Brunswick-Fredericton (UNBF) and Saint Thomas University (STU). A total of 96
students participated; however, only 68 of them met the participation eligibility criteria regarding gender (i.e., female) and relationship status (i.e., married or dating). Hence, the expectation regarding the minimum required sample size was met. Participants ranged in age from 19 to 58 years ($M = 32.6, SD = 8.5$). With regard to sexual orientation, 91.2% identified themselves as heterosexual, whereas 4.4% were bisexual, 2.9% were homosexual, and 1.5% indicated “other”. The sample was predominantly Caucasian (88.2%), with the remainder being Asian (4.4%), Middle-Eastern (1.5%), and “other” (5.9%). In terms of employment status, whereas 86.8% of the participants were employed, 11.8% were unemployed; only 1 participant reported volunteer work. In addition, 48.5% were participants with children, whereas 51.5% were those without children.

A review of the literature shows that the predominant focus of career decision-making self-efficacy studies has been student populations, as reflected in the choice of samples reported in a range of studies examined in the Choi et al. (2012) meta-analysis (e.g., Bergeron & Romano, 1994; Chung, 2002; Creed et al., 2006; Gianakos, 2001). In fact, “scores [indicating low career decision-making self-efficacy] can be used to identify students at risk for academic or decisional difficulties and, hence, those students needing career or academic intervention” (Reddan, 2015, p. 293). With these considerations in mind, an additional eligibility requirement for participation was current enrollment in an academic program (e.g., certificate, diploma, degree, etc.) at a higher education institution such as college or university. In this regard, 52.9% of the participants were masters-level students, 41.2% were undergraduate students, 4.4% were diploma/certificate students, and 1.5% (i.e., 1 student) was a doctorate-level student.
The sample was divided into two groups: married (70.6%) and dating (29.4%). Consistent with Ammar et al.’s (2014) definition of lasting relationships, a core criterion for participation was current engagement for a minimum of three months in a heterosexual or homosexual marriage or dating relationship. The relationship status ranged in duration from 4 months to 34 years ($M = 7.7$ years, $SD = 7.6$); the average length of relationship for those in the dating group was 2 years ($SD = 1.5$) and for those in the married group was 10 years ($SD = 7.9$).

3.2: Research Instruments

A demographic measures scale was completed by each respondent. Next, two research instruments were administered to measure the dependent (i.e., career decision-making self-efficacy) and the independent variables (i.e., type of intimate relationship, perceived quality of relationship).

3.2.1: Demographic measures scale. Respondents completed a 10-item demographic measures scale (DMS; Appendix C). The DMS collected information pertaining to participants’ gender identity, age, sexual orientation, cultural background, current education level, program of study, current professional status, current relationship status, as well as duration of current relationship. The foregoing measures were included in concurrence with the demographic characteristics reported in the respective studies by Albaugh and Nauta (2005) and Quimby and O’Brien (2004). The purpose of collecting demographic information was to (a) ensure diversity within the sample in specific characteristics such as age and professional status, and (b) evaluate each respondent’s eligibility to participate.

3.2.2: Intimate relationship quality. The perceived quality of intimate
relationship was measured using Fletcher et al.’s (2000) Perceived Relationship Quality Components (PRQC) inventory (Appendix D). As described at length by Chen (2015), the PRQC inventory employs a 7-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (not at all) to 7 (extremely) and is an 18-item survey divided into six 3-item subscales requiring the respondent to evaluate her current intimate relationship and partner on a set of six quality components. These are satisfaction (e.g., “How content are you with your relationship?”), commitment (e.g., “How dedicated are you to your relationship?”), intimacy (e.g., “How close is your relationship?”), trust (e.g., “How much can you count on your partner?”), passion (e.g., “How sexually intense is your relationship?”), and love (e.g., “How much do you cherish your partner?”). Examining descriptive results as part of their confirmatory factor analysis, Fletcher et al. (2000) reported each of the six subscales to have high internal consistency reliability, as evidenced by the following coefficient alphas: α = .91 for satisfaction, α = .96 for commitment, α = .86 for intimacy, α = .78 for trust, α = .86 for passion, α = .89 for love. The internal consistency scores that emerged in the present study were: α = .95 for satisfaction, α = .96 for commitment, α = .83 for intimacy, α = .90 for trust, α = .89 for passion, α = .93 for love.

Furthermore, the PRQC inventory possesses high face validity due to its consistent use of synonymous words in the corresponding set of three questions for each of its six subscale constructs as a way to elicit accurate mental representations of the particular construct in question. For example, the use of the synonymous words “satisfied”, “content”, and “happy” in the case of the “satisfaction” construct helps provide “straightforward and highly face valid measures of people’s perceptions” of the construct of satisfaction (Fletcher et al., 2000, p. 344). The PRQC inventory is also
notable for constituting an overall or global perceived relationship quality comprised of the total sum of the ratings in the six subscales. For this purpose, however, Fletcher et al. (2000) recommended using items 1, 4, 7, 10, 13, and 16 based upon their finding of a high aggregated internal reliability for these six items in particular, thus making them the most accurate representations of the six relationship quality components in question.

3.2.3: Career decision-making self-efficacy. Career decision-making self-efficacy was measured by administering the short form of Taylor and Betz’s (1983) original Career Decision Self-Efficacy Scale (CDSES-SF), as developed by Betz, Klein, and Taylor (1996) (Appendix E). Proposed by Betz et al. (1996) as a version with comparable psychometric soundness to its longer 50-item original version by Taylor and Betz (1983), the CDSES-SF is a 25-item survey that “measures an individual’s degree of belief that he or she can successfully complete tasks necessary to making career decisions” (Betz et al., 1996, p. 48).

With respect to its content and design, the 25 items of the CDSES-SF are divided into five career decision-making tasks or subscales, each containing a set of five sub-tasks rated by the respondent on a 5-point Likert scale in terms of the degree to which he or she feels confident to complete them (1 = No confidence at all, 5 = Complete confidence). Although Betz et al.’s (1996) revision of the original CDSES retained the 10-level Likert rating continuum, Betz, Hammond, and Multon (2005) tested the 5-level Likert rating continuum and concluded it to be equally reliable and valid in their normative studies. This is reflected in the reliability coefficient values ranging from .78 to .87 for the 5-level continuum in comparison to the corresponding range of .69 to .83
for the 10-level continuum. Hence, the CDSES-SF in the present study employed the 5-level continuum.

Reflecting a set of career-choice competencies identified by Crites (1978) in his model of career maturity, the five career-related tasks in the CDSES-SF, along with a corresponding example for each, are: (1) engaging in accurate self-appraisal (e.g., “Decide what you value most in an occupation”), (2) gathering occupational information (e.g., “Find information in the library about the occupations you are interested in”), (3) engaging in goal selection (e.g., “Select one occupation from a list of potential occupations you are considering”), (4) planning for the future (e.g., “Identify employers, firms, and institutions relevant to your career possibilities”), and (5) engaging in problem solving (e.g., “Persistently work at your major academic or career goal even when you get frustrated”). A total score for each respondent was calculated by computing the five subscale sums, as based on the five scores for each subscale, with higher scores reflecting a correspondingly higher career decision-making self-efficacy.

Researchers have found the CDSES-SF to consistently demonstrate high validity and reliability. For example, whereas Betz et al. (1996) noted the internal consistency coefficient for the total scale to be .94, the corresponding value reported by Gloria and Hird (1999) was within the .95 to .97 range. Betz et al. (1996) also computed the internal consistency coefficients for each of the five subscales of the CDSES-SF, noting the following values: $\alpha = .73$ for Self-Appraisal subscale; $\alpha = .78$ for Occupational Information subscale; $\alpha = .83$ for Goal Selection subscale; $\alpha = .81$ for Planning subscale; and $\alpha = .75$ for Problem-Solving subscale. The internal consistency scores that emerged in the present study were generally consistent with previous research, and consisted of: $\alpha$
=.78 for Self-Appraisal subscale; $\alpha = .76$ for Occupational Information subscale; $\alpha = .83$ for Goal Selection subscale; $\alpha = .82$ for Planning subscale; and $\alpha = .72$ for Problem-Solving subscale.

Support has also been provided for the construct validity of the CDSES-SF, as reflected in the findings by Betz et al. (1996) who reported a strong negative correlation between its subscale scores and career indecision, which was examined using Osipow’s (1987) Career Decision Scale that measures the respondent’s degree of certainty in having made a decision with regard to educational and career planning. The construct validity of the CDSES-SF is further supported by a positive correlation with career commitment or “the degree to which a person values career planning and the seeking of a meaningful and fulfilling career” (Chung, 2002, p. 278), as measured by Farmer’s (1985) Career Commitment Scale. Specifically, Chung (2002) found that a higher career decision-making self-efficacy results in greater career commitment with regard to planning and goal setting. In view of its high levels of reliability and validity, Betz et al. (1996) recognized the CDSES-SF as a psychometrically strong measure of career decision-making self-efficacy.

3.3: Procedure

3.3.1: Recruitment. Following the approval from the Ethics Review Boards at the University of New Brunswick-Fredericton (UNBF) and Saint Thomas University (STU), the initial step entailed enlisting the participation of students at UNBF, UNB-Saint John (UNBSJ), and STU through three strategies. The first strategy was to place an advertisement (Appendix F) on bulletin boards in a number of public venues across the two universities including the libraries, office buildings, student residences, as well as
dining halls. Second, the researcher submitted an electronic version of the advertisement through the UNB Portal webpage to request the Communications and Public Affairs office to post the ad under the News section. Third, the researcher personally approached and enlisted the participation of graduate and undergraduate students from the various faculties at UNBF. The initial step in this procedure constituted emailing the instructors of a number of pre-selected courses. The email sought to obtain formal and written permission to visit their classrooms during a specified time for the purpose of making a brief announcement (3 - 5 minutes) to introduce the study, its goals, and participation eligibility criteria, as well as the tasks to be completed (i.e., completion of 3 online surveys). Following the approval and permission from the course instructors, the researcher visited their classes and made the study announcement (Appendix J). At the end of the study announcement, the researcher distributed the study advertisement and requested the students to take the initiative to participate.

In terms of its content, the advertisement included specification of the participation eligibility criteria regarding gender, educational pursuit, and relationship status and duration as well as the study topic along with a brief description of what the participants will be expected to do (i.e., “fill out three short questionnaires, 2 - 3 minutes each”). In addition, the advertisement provided the direct URL link to the webpage to access and complete the questionnaires as well as the contact information, including the email and phone number, of the study researcher for further information. The advertisement also informed participants about the chance to win a $50 UNBF bookstore gift certificate as an incentive offered through participation in the study.

3.3.2: Administration. A computer-based approach was implemented for data
collection. Specifically, a publicly accessible webpage was created using the LimeSurvey software. The webpage contained the inventory package, beginning with a welcome note (Appendix G) including the study title “Relationship Quality and Career Decision-Making Self-Efficacy” as well as the researcher’s contact information. The introductory page was followed by an Informed Consent Agreement form (Appendix H), the three questionnaires (i.e., DMS, PRQC inventory, and CDSES-SF), and lastly a debrief page (Appendix I) in that order. The respective subscale titles in both the PRQC inventory and the CDSES-SF were omitted for the purpose of ensuring an objective administration. Based upon the format used by Morgan (2014), the Informed Consent Agreement form detailed aspects of the study including the study’s purpose and goals, participation eligibility criteria, as well as ethical considerations such as assurance of voluntary participation and confidentiality of the data collected. Having read and acknowledged a complete understanding of the contents of the consent form, participants were prompted to provide a check box signature as a way to indicate acceptance of the terms before proceeding to fill out the questionnaires. To ensure an ethically informed management of the data obtained, survey results were kept in a password-protected SPSS file in the personal computer owned by, and accessible solely to, the researcher and were used only for the purpose of data analyses.

3.3.3: Debrief. Following the completion of the questionnaires, participants were able to read debriefing information (Appendix I) as the final page in the online inventory package. The debrief included a “thank you” note and informed the participants of the overarching purpose of the research as being an evaluation of the degree of influence of perceived intimate relationship quality on career decision-making self-efficacy.
Experimental deception was not incorporated considering that the definitions of the study’s variables of interest (i.e., perceived intimate relationship quality and career decision-making self-efficacy) had already been provided in the consent form. The debriefing information included a description of the study’s goals in reference to the specific aspects of the variables involved (i.e., “perceived” intimate relationship quality and career “decision-making” self-efficacy) and the underlying interest in determining a link between the variables. The debrief also informed the participants that they will be notified of the $50 gift certificate draw result following the completion of data collection. Most importantly, the debrief instructed the participants to seek immediate therapeutic attention in case they may have experienced strong emotional reactions in response to the contents of the surveys administered.

As an ethical measure to respect privacy, the debrief included a link to a separate page where participants chose to provide their email addresses, should they be interested in obtaining a general summary of the research outcomes and/or in being entered into the draw to win a $50 UNBF bookstore certificate. Through implementing the foregoing measure, the researcher was able to avoid any indication as to which email address was associated with which completed package. From the set of participants who expressed interest in receiving the gift certificate, a participant was randomly chosen as the winner based on a draw result; the gift certificate was mailed to that participant following the completion of the data collection stage.
Chapter 4: Results

4.1: Independent-Samples t-Test

The current version of Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS, IBM 24.0) software was used to organize and analyze the data obtained. An independent-samples t-test was conducted to compare the two groups of in-relationship women with regard to their career decision-making self-efficacy as the outcome variable. It was found that global career decision-making self-efficacy reported by married women ($M = 105.46$, $SD = 10.30$) was statistically significantly higher than it was for dating women ($M = 98.60$, $SD = 13.29$), $t(66) = 2.29$, $p = .025$. Although the t-test indicated relationship status (i.e., whether the subject was married vs. dating) as a statistically significant predictor variable, this result was subjected to further testing and scrutiny considering that t-test as a method of data analysis does not take into account the variance contributed by other independent variables. The concern associated with the validity of the aforementioned t-test result is further justified by the finding of a moderate correlation ($r = -.44$) between relationship status and global perceived relationship quality. This correlation indicated the existence of shared variance between the two predictor variables in question; hence, another method of data analysis was warranted that could take into account the shared variance.

4.2: Hierarchical Multiple Regression Analysis

To gain a more nuanced understanding of the relationship between the predictor and outcome variables under study, a hierarchical multiple regression analysis was conducted to investigate both combined and unique contributions of relationship status and perceived quality of relationship in predicting career decision-making self-efficacy.
A hierarchical multiple regression was deemed an appropriate method of data analysis as it offers the ability to account for variance contributed by all predictor variables involved, “such that the relative importance of a predictor may be judged on the basis of how much it adds to the prediction of a criterion, over and above that which can be accounted for by other important predictors” (Petrocelli, 2003, p. 10). The regression results were examined to determine whether or not there exists statistically significant evidence to conclude that (a) perception of higher intimate relationship quality facilitates career decision-making self-efficacy among women, and that (b) married women are likely to report higher career decision-making self-efficacy than those in the dating relationship as a result of a positive influence of an expectedly higher perceived relationship quality in the former relational context.

Prior to conducting the regression analysis, it was ensured that the relevant assumptions of this statistical test were met. These include assumptions of linearity, homoscedasticity, normality of residuals, as well as independence of the error distribution (Jeong & Jung, 2016). Linearity refers to the assumption that the relationship between the independent and dependent variable is linear, which is indicated as true when “the scatterplot of standardized residuals to standardized estimates of the dependent variable presents a random pattern” (Jeong & Jung, 2016, p. 338). An inspection of the foregoing plot in the present study indicated a random pattern (Appendix K). Homoscedasticity refers to equality of variances across groups, an assumption which is met when the residuals are shown as randomly scattered around the zero point on the horizontal line in the aforementioned scatterplot of standardized residuals. Again, an inspection of this plot indicated that the criterion for homoscedasticity was met (Appendix K). Normality of
residuals, which assumes that the distribution of residuals is normally distributed or bell-shaped, is indicated when the points on the normal probability plot remain close to the diagonal line from bottom left to top right (Jeong & Jung, 2016). An examination of the probability plot showed that the normality of residuals was also met in the present study (Appendix L). In addition, it was ensured that observations between and within groups are independent, an assumption which is satisfied “if the value of d in the Durbin-Watson statistic is between 1.5 and 2.5” (Jeong & Jung, 2016, p. 338). The Durbin-Watson value in the present study was 1.77.

Hierarchical multiple regression requires blocks of variables to be entered in a fixed order as a measure to control for the effects of covariates or to examine the effects of a specific variable independent of the influence of others (Petrocelli, 2003). A total of two blocks were entered in the following fixed order using the variables involved: Block 1 (covariate: Age) and Block 2 (independent variables: relationship status, perceived relationship quality). As the dependent measure, scores for career decision-making self-efficacy were aggregated into a global CDMSE score.

As the covariate measure refers to demographics that may partly account for the association between the independent and dependent measures, age was specified as a covariate. The rationale for specification of age in this regard is supported by research showing age to be a significant independent predictor of career decision-making self-efficacy among college students (e.g., Choi et al., 2012; Kelly & Hatcher, 2013; Luzzo, 1993). Quimby and O’Brien (2004), in fact, noted that older college women are more likely to be married than to be in other types of intimate relationship. This offered a
further basis for controlling the effect of age considering that relationship type (i.e., married or dating) was one of the independent variables in the present study.

Having controlled for the effect of age, the next step in the regression analysis was to input “relationship status” and “relationship quality” as the two predictors (or independent variables) representing Block 2. The two variables were placed in the foregoing order in view of the fact that the quality of the relationship to be reported requires the existence of a relationship in the first place. The respective scores for the six PRQC subscales (i.e., Relationship Satisfaction, Commitment, Intimacy, Trust, Passion, Love) were aggregated into a PRQC global score and entered into Block 2.

In the first step of the hierarchical multiple regression (Table 1.1), age was specified as the covariate and explained 5% of the variance in career decision-making self-efficacy; however, age did not provide statistically significant variance. In the second step, after the two predictor variables (i.e., relationship status and perceived relationship quality) were included, the model as a whole explained 20% of the variance in career decision-making self-efficacy. Specifically, the inclusion of relationship status and perceived quality of relationship contributed an additional 15% of the variance in career decision-making self-efficacy; this was a significant contribution, $F(3, 64) = 5.21, p < .05, R^2 = .196$, adjusted $R^2 = .159$. Evaluating the independent contribution of the two predictor variables, only perceived relationship quality provided unique significant variance in career decision-making self-efficacy, with $\beta = .380$, $p < .05$. Contrary to the finding of the independent samples $t$-test, hierarchical multiple regression results did not indicate relationship status as a statistically significant independent variable. Specifically, relationship status did not contribute unique significant variance to career decision-
making self-efficacy in the presence of relationship quality and after controlling for the influence of age.

Table 1.1

Summary of Hierarchical Multiple Regression Analysis Predicting Career Decision-Making Self-Efficacy (N = 68)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>R</th>
<th>R²</th>
<th>ΔR²</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>SE</th>
<th>β</th>
<th>t</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Step 1</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>.211</td>
<td>.045</td>
<td></td>
<td>94.086</td>
<td>5.507</td>
<td>17.086</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>.286</td>
<td>.163</td>
<td>.211</td>
<td>1.755</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Step 2</strong></td>
<td>.443</td>
<td>.196</td>
<td>.152</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>62.419</td>
<td>17.017</td>
<td>3.668</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>.165</td>
<td>.178</td>
<td>.121</td>
<td>.925</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relationship Status</td>
<td>-1.002</td>
<td>3.639</td>
<td>-.040</td>
<td>-.275</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relationship Quality</td>
<td>.335</td>
<td>.110</td>
<td>.380</td>
<td>3.035*</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Statistical significance: *p < .05
Chapter 5: Discussion

5.1: Discussion

The goal of this study was to investigate whether there exists a positive association between perceived relationship quality and career decision-making self-efficacy of in-relationship women (i.e., dating and married) in the higher education system. Deriving from Lent et al.’s (1994, 2000) SCCT model, in which proximal affordances include positive relational influences that facilitate decision-making processes in the career context, it was hypothesized that women reporting a high-quality intimate relationship will report a correspondingly higher level of career decision-making self-efficacy. Secondly, because marriage as a relationship structure enjoys an institutional status and is founded in greater levels of commitment and a stronger future orientation (Dush & Amato, 2005), it was hypothesized that married women will report a higher career decision-making self-efficacy than those in the dating relationship as a result of the positive influence of an expectedly higher perceived relationship quality in the marital context. Overall, both relationship status and perceived relationship quality were hypothesized to provide significant variance in the career decision-making self-efficacy of in-relationship women in the higher education system.

Results revealed that relationship status and global perceived relationship quality together accounted for significant variance in career decision-making self-efficacy for both groups of in-relationship women. However, global perceived relationship quality added to the prediction of career decision-making self-efficacy over and above the contribution of relationship status. Further analyses revealed that none of the additional demographic variables (including age, current educational level, or cultural background,
etc.) was significantly correlated with career decision-making self-efficacy. The pattern of results in the present study is comparable with previous research in specific ways. For example, the Quimby and O’Brien (2004) study, which shared the present study’s focus with regard to gender and main outcome variable, found that perceptions of social support – from friends, co-workers, etc. – contributed significant variance in career decision-making self-efficacy for college women both with and without children. In another study, it was noted that high frequency of sexual coercion from an intimate partner negatively impacted specific aspects of career decision-making self-efficacy (i.e., self-appraisal, goal-selection, and problem-solving) of college women (Albaugh & Nauta, 2005). Taking the foregoing finding into account, the present study’s finding of a positive association between intimate relationship quality and career decision-making self-efficacy may be partly attributable to the absence – or low frequency – of sexual coercion experiences on the part of the sampled women.

On a more general level, the present study’s findings are consistent with previous research that indicated existence of the positive association between intimate partner support and specific career development constructs. For example, Brosseau et al. (2010) found evidence for a significant positive influence of romantic partner involvement in respondents’ career decision-making difficulty. Domene et al. (2012) found that future educational plans, decisions regarding residential relocation, and willingness to respect each other’s career priorities were some of the jointly constructed projects in which couples collaboratively engaged during the course of their education-to-career transitions. It is important to note, however, that the Domene et al. (2012) study was qualitative in nature and, as such, did not examine the significance or strength of association between
any quantitative variables. Nevertheless, results from both the Domene at al. (2012) study and the present study together underscore the idea that intimate partner acts as a significant source of influence on specific career development outcomes for young adults.

Combining the aforementioned findings with Cutrona’s (1996) recognition of an intimate partner as the primary source of social support, the present study’s finding of a significant positive association between perceived quality of relationship and career decision-making self-efficacy is explainable in view of the fact that all participants were in an intimate relationship. As participants evaluated their intimate relationship quality in positive terms, it is possible that this instilled in them a sense of safety and security as well as a feeling of being well-supported in their conviction to pursue career-related tasks and decisions. As Collins and Feeney (2000) noted, “feelings of safety and security in adult intimate relationships may depend in large part on the belief that one’s partner will be responsive to one’s needs…” (p. 1069). Some of the support-relevant expectations from an intimate partner include help with regard to career-relevant decision-making or interpersonal difficulties in social settings such as school or work (Cutrona, 1996).

In addition, the positive association between perceived quality of relationship and career decision-making self-efficacy is explainable from the perspective of Bandura’s (1997) theory of self-efficacy. Bandura (1997) recognized the perception of social support as a key environmental condition that enhances the strength of self-efficacy beliefs. One study, for example, found a significant positive relationship between perceptions of social support and general self-efficacy in a sample of female psychiatrists (Wang, Qu, & Xu, 2015). In the context of intimate relationships, relationship quality relies in large part on the perception that one’s partner is a dependable source of support-
In times of stress. In fact, “intimate partners are a particularly important source of social support… [they] are most frequently preferred interpersonal sources of security and comfort” (Barry, Bunde, Brock, & Lawrence. 2009, p. 49). Maisel and Gable (2009) found that intimate partner support was associated with greater relationship quality on measures such as connectedness (“I feel in touch and connected with my partner”) and security (“I feel that my partner is very trustworthy”). Taking these findings into account, the positive association between perceived relationship quality and career decision-making self-efficacy in the present study can be attributed to the perception on the part of the participants that their partners represent a reliable source of social and career-relevant support. This perception, in turn, may have encouraged the participants to report robust levels of career decision-making self-efficacy. This relationship is supported by Cutrona’s (1996) recognition of intimate relationship partner as the most important source of social support and one that offers “fulfillment of immediate needs engendered by stressful life events (e.g., help in deciding how to deal with a difficult instructor)” (p. 10). Similarly, Collins and Feeney (2000) recognized that “feelings of safety and security in adult intimate relationships depend in large part on the belief that one’s partner will be responsive to one’s needs and will continue to be accepting and loving through difficult times” (p. 1069). Therefore, to the extent that intimate partner is perceived as a reliable source of social support, it is plausible to infer that this perception may help facilitate career decision-making self-efficacy.

The second hypothesis under investigation predicted a positive association between relationship status and career decision-making self-efficacy. Specifically, it was hypothesized that married women were more likely to report higher career decision-
making self-efficacy than those in the dating relationship as a result of the positive influence of an expectedly higher perceived relationship quality in the former relational context. However, the foregoing hypothesis was not supported; relationship status (i.e., whether the participant was married or dating) did not contribute unique variance to her career decision-making self-efficacy. More specifically, when variance contributed by perceived relationship quality was taken into account, results revealed that relationship status did not have a significant influence on career decision-making self-efficacy. This finding can be explained primarily with reference to studies that show that the quality of specific relational features (e.g., trust, commitment, satisfaction, etc.) that shapes expectations of partner support in an intimate relationship does not depend merely on the relationship type (i.e., dating vs. married). For example, Peake and Harris (2002) found that, for a sample of couples with the relationship status of “dating,” there was a high degree of variability among the group, based on their intentions to marry. It is, in fact, quite possible for a person to be in a low-quality marital union with a completely unsupportive partner or in a high-quality dating relationship with a fairly supportive partner. The relationship type in and by itself does not influence the perceived quality of the relationship. A number of inter-partner relational processes and factors may influence the perceptions of relationship quality, which may in turn shape self-efficacy beliefs and their strengths.

The clustering of various types of relationship status (i.e., married, dating, cohabiting, etc.) into one generic group (i.e., “in-relationship”) was proposed as a key theoretical problem to be addressed in view of a number of previously reviewed studies that brought forth marital context as one that consistently enjoys higher relationship
quality than the dating context (Acker & Davis, 1992; Dush & Amato, 2005; Wood et al., 2008). Results in the present study, however, suggest that no significant variance in career decision-making self-efficacy was contributed by relationship type as a predictor variable. This is consistent with the approach taken in previous research. For example, both Brosseau et al. (2010) and Domene et al. (2012) chose to ignore relationship status in favour of focusing on relationship quality alone. Brosseau et al. (2010), for example, operationalized relationship quality as being “in a committed romantic relationship (dating, common law, or married) of at least one year in duration” (p. 36). Similarly, Domene et al. (2012) recruited participants who were in a self-defined committed romantic relationship for at least six months without attending to their status, and included dating, cohabiting, and married couples. Consistent with findings in the aforementioned studies, relationship status in the present study did not appear to impact the perceived quality of relationship.

Similarly, findings from other studies point to the fact that perceived quality of a relationship is not influenced merely by its type and that both married and dating people may experience either high-quality functioning or low-quality functioning with regard to specific interpersonal features of the relationship. Supporting the foregoing postulation, Stafford and Canary (1991) examined differences between dating and married couples with regard to the perception of relationship maintenance strategies demonstrated by their respective partners as measures of perceived relationship quality (i.e., commitment, satisfaction, and mutuality). Relationship maintenance strategies include positivity (“my partner attempts to make our interactions very enjoyable”), openness (“my partner encourages me to disclose my thoughts and feelings”) and assurance (“my partner
stresses his/her commitment to me”). Stafford and Canary (1991) found that those in a serious dating relationship perceived greater partner positivity and openness than did the married individuals. Stafford and Carney (1991) attributed the foregoing finding to the development of a less optimistic and more accurate understanding of one’s partner after marriage. Specifically, Stafford and Canary (1991) stressed that “faced with more realistic expectations about their marriage and the partner’s positivity, married persons perceive fewer attempts [on the part of their partners] to maintain the relationship through direct discussion or through cheerful and affirming behaviours” (p. 235). Taking into account this finding, it does not appear reasonable to assume that the relationship status of being married definitively leads to higher quality on various relational measures than the status of dating.

Furthermore, Punyanunt-Carter (2004) compared the type and frequency of communication patterns between married and dating individuals specifically with regard to affectionate communication, or the “overt and intentional act of communicating feelings of care, closeness, and admiration for another” (p. 1155). Punyanunt-Carter (2004) found that dating couples engaged in nonverbal and verbal affectionate communication significantly more than did married couples. On the other hand, married couples engaged in supportive affectionate communication significantly more than did dating couples. These results are relevant to those in the present study considering that previous research (e.g., Acitelli, 1992; Hecht, 1978) has noted affectionate communication as a key construct that influences relational satisfaction, which is defined as “an individual’s attitude toward the partner and the relationship, typically in terms of the perceived quality of the relationship” (Dainton, Stafford, & Canary, 1994, p. 90).
Considering that both married and dating couples reported engagement in some type of affectionate communication (Punyanunt-Carter, 2004), it cannot be inferred that married couples in general are likely to enjoy higher relational satisfaction and that, as such, only they are likely to perceive robust levels of partner support needed to indicate a higher career decision-making self-efficacy.

Taking the abovementioned considerations into account, it is possible that participants in the present study were likely functioning at varying levels of relational satisfaction as influenced by the patterns (i.e., type and frequency) of affectionate communication in their individual relationships. As a result, the predictions that married women will perceive and report a higher relationship quality and that this will positively influence their career decision-making self-efficacy could not be supported in the context of the aforementioned findings by Punyatun-Carter (2004). In fact, both of the relationship types in question can and do involve positive as well as negative perceptions of specific interpersonal features by one or both partners. Therefore, it was not realistic to qualify one of them as being consistently characterized by more positive inter-partner perceptions of its inherent quality across all relational features (i.e., trust, commitment, satisfaction, etc.) than the other. In reality, positive perceptions of the relationship quality on specific relational features may exist in any type of intimate relationship (e.g., married, cohabitation, dating) depending on the unique and distinct interpersonal dynamics that exist among a particular couple.

5.2: Limitations

A key limitation in the present study pertains to its sample size. Because a relatively small number of subjects were recruited, the generalizability of the findings is
somewhat limited. The generalizability is also compromised by the exclusive focus on women as well as the over-representation of one particular cultural group in the sample (i.e., Caucasians). In addition, the results of the present study need to be interpreted with caution in light of its failure to consider the implications of personal attributes that are recognized in the SCCT model as equally important in the development of self-efficacy (Lent, 2013). As Bakken et al. (2006) summarized, SCCT conceptualizes a mutually influencing interaction between contextual influences (e.g., parental support) and personal attributes (e.g., learning goal orientation) in predicting self-efficacy. Given that high-learning goal orientation individuals demonstrate persistence in mastering new skills, completing difficult tasks, and overcoming contextual obstacles (Meece, Anderman, & Anderman, 2006), Garcia, Restubog, Toledano, Tolentino, and Rafferty (2012) found a positive association between learning goal orientation and career decision-making self-efficacy in a sample of undergraduate students. This relationship was particularly strong when subjects reported positive perceptions of parental support. It can, therefore, be inferred that career decision-making self-efficacy is a product of an interplay between contextual factors and person-level characteristics. As an implication for the present study, it is possible that the positive association between perceived relationship quality and career decision-making self-efficacy is partly attributable to the influence of learning goal orientation of participants as an extraneous or confounding variable. In fact, considering that all participants in the present study were post-secondary students pursuing academic and professional development goals, it is reasonable to expect that they possessed moderate to high levels of learning goal orientation.
Chapter 6: Implications and Future Directions

The present study’s distinct and specific focus provide original contributions to the existing body of knowledge regarding relational influences on career development. With regard to the relationship-career interface, a primary outcome of the present study is to confirm the findings of previous research (Brosseau et al. 2010; Domene et al., 2012; Schultheiss et al., 2001) that relationship quality is a critical factor involved in aspects of career development including decision-making self-efficacy. Emphasizing the role of perception in the context of positive association between parental support and career decision-making self-efficacy, Garcia et al. (2012) noted that “parental support matters but whether it is perceived as beneficial or not rests in the eye of the beholder” (p. 30). Accordingly, with its focus on “perceived” quality of relationship, the present study offers findings that have important theoretical implications for the SCCT research concerning relational influences on self-efficacy in the career development context. In addition, the study’s outcomes possess high practical utility value for career counselling and intervention designs from a context-specific (i.e., relationship-focused) orientation.

6.1: Implications for Research

With its focus on relational influences, this study added additional empirical support to the theoretical models that conceptualize career development as a contextually influenced process resulting from an active interaction with proximal and distal relationships. In addition to Lent et al.’s (1994) SCCT model, these context-focused frameworks include Schultheiss’ (2003) relational cultural theory, Savickas’ (2005) career construction theory, Young, Domene, and Valach’s (2014) contextual action theory, Patton and McMahon’s (2006) systems theory framework of career development,
and Blustein’s (2011) relational theory of working. As Kenny and Medvide (2013) recognized, the foregoing theories represent evolving models that examine and propose the construct of human relationships as deeply interwoven into various aspects of career such as meaning making, identity, and self-exploration. Blustein’s (2011) relational theory of working, for example, is centered on the notion of human relationships as providing a basis for people to develop a coherent understanding of themselves, their cultural expectations, and their social world as governed by laws and societal norms.

Elaborating on a specific tenet of his theory, Blustein (2011) drew a connection to the SCCT model by arguing for the importance of recognizing and explaining ways in which interpersonal systems such as peers, family members, and teachers function as support-providers during times of career-relevant stresses and challenges. These include decision-making difficulties, dissatisfaction with work, and unemployment. Accordingly, in addition to contributing empirical support to the SCCT-based conceptualization of strong interpersonal relationships as “environmental supports which bolster the development of self-efficacy beliefs” (Kenny & Medvide, 2013, p. 329), the present study strengthened the assertions of a number of other theoretical models that similarly delineate career development from a relational perspective. In addition, the present study’s importance can be justified on the basis of its originality in view of the fact that this is the very first study to propose and examine the specific relational construct of perceived quality as a potentially significant variable in the context of career decision-making self-efficacy. In this regard, future research to confirm the findings of this study would contribute to the larger empirical effort aimed at exploring relational influences on career development.
Additional research-relevant implications of the present study pertain to its broader and underlying purpose of bringing into focus the far-reaching influence of ‘positive’ contextual factors on specific aspects of career development. The foregoing purpose of the study is very much in line with the recommendations put forth by Lent et al. (2000) who recognized a persistent dearth of empirical attention toward supportive or facilitative environmental conditions at the expense of the focus on the debilitating contextual influences on career development. Viewing this imbalance in research as a problem that restricts a fuller appreciation of the multitude of contextual variables involved in career choice and development, Lent et al. (2000) argued for recognition of career-relevant supports as a unique construct that does not simply denote a condition that is devoid of barriers. Rather, “it involves factors that actively promote career behaviour [such that] an individual may recognize distinct supports (e.g., peer approval, access to scholarship funding) relative to a given choice option” (Lent et al., 2000, p. 42). With these considerations in mind, the present study’s findings have confirmed the influence of high-quality intimate relationships as a specific kind of career-relevant social support system. Supporting the concerns expressed by Lent et al. (2000), the present study’s finding of a positive association between perceived relationship quality and career decision-making self-efficacy highlights positive contextual influences as a construct warranting an equal amount of empirical attention. The foregoing finding, in fact, challenges the traditionally barriers-focused efforts in this specific line of research within the SCCT model.

Extending the results of this study, in which relationship quality was operationally defined using the full scale scores of the PRQC, future research should explore more
incisively the possible associations between particular components of perceived relationship quality and career decision-making self-efficacy. Specifically, Fletcher et al. (2000) noted that “perceived relationship quality does not appear to be a completely unidimensional construct that drives all evaluative judgements along a positive-negative dimension” (p. 352). In other words, a person can perceive a high level of trust in his or her relationship but may, at the same time, lack passionate love for his or her partner. Findings in this regard are expected to pave the way for future studies to conduct more focused analyses by employing, for example, Boon and Holmes’ (1990) Trust Scale to explore the association between perception of trust in intimate relationships and career decision-making self-efficacy. The identification of the most pertinent component(s) of perceived intimate relationship quality in this regard resonates well with Cutrona’s (1996) postulation that women are relatively more sensitive to the quality of intimate relationships than are men as a result of the underlying differences in gender-based socialization processes.

Results of the present study also have important implications for the measurement of perceived relationship quality in a multicultural context. A notable direction for career counselling researchers should be to investigate the degree to which perceived relationship quality influences career decision-making self-efficacy across cultures. The foregoing direction is expected to contribute to research efforts that have drawn attention to cultural variables in career development. Mau (2000), for example, noted that students belonging to the collective-oriented cultures that place greater importance on group solidarity than individual goals and pursuits tend to rate themselves lower on career decision-making self-efficacy than do their American counterparts with a typically
individualistic cultural orientation. Further research needs to similarly explore the cultural influences on career decision-making self-efficacy within the context of the present study’s findings in an effort to examine possible associations between cultural variables (e.g., collectivism-individualism) and gender-relevant factors (stereotypes, family expectations, work-life balance).

An initial step toward the foregoing goal should be to adapt Fletcher et al.’s (2000) PRQC inventory for administration to a culturally diverse clientele as part of intake assessments to evaluate the relational factors affecting various aspects of career development. Separate analyses of scales measuring specific components of perceived relationship quality including satisfaction, commitment, intimacy, and trust have been shown to demonstrate measurement equivalence across different cultures (e.g., Gere & MacDonald, 2013). Similar analyses with respect to cultural validity need to be extended to the components of passion and love as the two additional relational constituents in Fletcher et al.’s (2000) construct of perceived quality of intimate relationship. To this end, Hatfield and Sprecher’s (1986) Passionate Love Scale and Rubin’s (1970) Loving and Liking Scale, both of which continue to be used today (Graham, 2011), should be tested for their validity across different cultures. At the same time, empirical efforts should be directed at investigating the measurement equivalence of Fletcher et al.’s (2000) PRQC inventory as a whole across different cultures along with considerations of gender-based implications. This is expected to bring forth a more complete understanding as part of analyses to determine the aggregated influence of the various components of perceived relationship quality on career development in a culture-infused and gender-specific context.
6.2: Implications for Practice

Outcomes of the present study also include the far-reaching practical utility of the findings to the practice of career counselling. With its provision of evidence supporting the positive role of contextual influences in career development, the study offers additional empirical basis for the career counsellor to bring into focus and explore in a collaborative manner, with the client, the quality of his or her interpersonal support systems. As Schultheiss et al. (2001) recommended, a systematic exploration of the characteristics and quality of close relationships “can assist practitioners by providing a foundation from which to assess and intervene in the relational lives of their career counselling clients” (p. 238). Whiston and James (2013), for example, recognized teaching interpersonal support-building skills to clients as an essential task in career choice counselling. Similarly, Domene, Landine, and Stewart (2015) emphasized the importance of working with close social relationships, including intimate relationships, in describing career counselling interventions with emerging adults, such as the women university students who participated in the present study. Support-building skills can be equally useful for clients lacking in career decision-making self-efficacy. Working from the SCCT perspective, counsellors can assist young adults to identify interpersonal systems such as mentors, friendship circles, and family-of-origin members as positive social resources for seeking encouragement and developing the confidence to pursue tasks necessary to make career decisions.

More specifically, the present study’s finding of a positive association between perceived intimate relationship quality and career decision-making self-efficacy has direct implications for the practice of counsellors working with in-relationship clients
(both men and women) presenting with career development challenges. With the foregoing association in mind, a primary task for career counsellors should be to implement strategies aimed at strengthening interpersonal dynamics between couples with the underlying goal to enhance perceived relationship quality. For example, Domene et al. (2012) suggested drawing on couples therapy interventions when conducting career counselling with couples in intimate relationships. Specific strategies in this regard may also draw from research confirming the relationship-enhancing function of positive perceptions among intimate partners. Cobb et al.’s (2001) longitudinal study, for example, found that the positive perception of self as a secure spouse contributes to the corresponding perception of one’s partner as secure, which in turn results in an overall perception of the relationship as enriching and satisfying.

Given the notable role of perceptions of self and one’s partner, career counsellors should prioritize the need to enhance the perceived quality of the clients’ intimate relationships by helping them identify the underlying causes for negative self-perceptions that may be impacting their perceptions of their partners and their overall relationship quality. Consistent with one of the key goals in emotion-focused counselling for couples (Halchuk, Makinen, & Johnson, 2010), a deeper analysis in this regard may entail an application of Bowlby’s (1969) attachment theory to explain the implications of maladaptive attachment styles, such as anxious/preoccupied, that may be contributing to perceptions of both self and one’s intimate partner as insecure. In view of the emphasis placed on the role of cognitive-level factors in the SCCT model, career counsellors should also avail themselves of the opportunity to make use of specific cognitive-behavioural techniques. These may include helping the clients challenge and replace self-
related dysfunctional cognitions (e.g., “I do not meet my husband’s expectations of an ideal partner”) that may be contributing to their relationship insecurities. This may offer a therapeutic means to help clients develop a more positive perception of themselves and their intimate relationship quality.

Bringing into focus the career development of women who must navigate through multiple roles as partners, professionals, and students, the present study offers career counsellors a rationale for examining their clients’ perceived quality of intimate relationship and its specific components (e.g., trust, satisfaction, commitment, etc.) that warrant therapeutic attention. To the extent that social support positively predicts career decision-making self-efficacy among women (Quimby & O’Brien, 2004) and that maladaptive intimate relationships function to decrease its specific aspects such as career goal-selection self-efficacy (Albaugh & Nauta, 2005), a primary task for the counsellor should be to conduct a comprehensive intake assessment that should bring to the fore the client’s relational support systems, including the intimate relationship partner (Domene et al., 2015). This should include an exploration of intimate relationships from the perspective of both their empowering and debilitating aspects as, for example, in the case of a long-term abusive relationship with a partner who offers financial support but fails with regard to provision of emotional support. Accordingly, as Quimby and O’Brien (2004) recommended, vocational interventions for women should have a two-fold focus: address barriers and strengthen social support.

In addition, the intake should include a thorough assessment of the client’s career decision-making self-efficacy in an effort to identify contextual barriers, such as multiple-role commitments and time-management difficulties, which may be affecting
the client’s confidence in her ability to pursue career-relevant tasks. A focus in this regard may pave the way for administration of Neville and Super’s (1986) Salience Inventory that measures the respondent’s participation, commitment, and value expectations in relation to specific life roles in the areas of work, home, and study. As Rottinghaus and Hauser (2013) pointed out, a primary goal of career counselling in view of the Salience Inventory results is to reduce feelings of failure and dissatisfaction by justifying the degree of participation in and commitment to various life roles on the basis of the client’s culture-based value expectations associated with each. Accordingly, assessments in this regard may bring to the fore and clarify the complex ways in which cultural values and gender-role expectations shape and define a particular client’s priorities.

A client lacking in awareness of the relative significance that she associates with her role as a spouse or a dating partner, for example, can be prompted to organize her current life roles according to an importance hierarchy. Bringing sociocultural implications into focus, the client can then be educated about ways in which her cultural background and gender-relevant expectations may be contributing to her need to prioritize certain life roles (e.g., spouse) more than the others (e.g., professional). As recognized by Ceci, Williams, and Barnett (2009) and Quimby and O’Brien (2004), women’s career aspirations and intentions are significantly guided by their family-related roles and priorities. Therefore, development of awareness regarding family-related circumstances and barriers may bring to the fore the concomitant effect that the client’s family-role priorities have on her support-relevant expectations from her husband or dating partner in the career context. Discussions regarding family-role commitments and
career goals may help to rationalize and justify the client’s decision to pursue or not to pursue higher education and/or her career aspirations.

6.3: Implications for Intervention Design

Women presenting with career-relevant difficulties arising from being involved in low-quality – or abusive – intimate relationships may find it beneficial to take part in group therapy. Drawing from the suggestions put forth by Lent (2013) as well as Kenny and Medvide (2013), women with intimate relationship challenges need to be instilled with either (a) interpersonal skills necessary to resolve conflicts with uncaring and unsupportive partners, or (b) vocational skills needed to pursue career goals independently after ending an abusive relationship. Resolution of interpersonal conflicts may entail implementation of support-building activities including empty-chair dialogue with an unsupportive partner. In addition, the counsellor may consider inviting the client’s partner to participate in therapy (Brosseau et al., 2010), in an effort to have the couple constructively explore the components of their relationship quality (e.g., commitment, satisfaction, trust, etc.) that are perhaps being compromised due to destructive communication patterns.

Given the present study’s focus on perceived – as opposed to actual – relationship quality, the process of involving the client’s intimate partner may offer counsellors the opportunity to work from a cognitive-behavioural orientation in indentifying dysfunctional beliefs on the part of the focal client that may be contributing to a negative overall perception of the relationship quality. This resonates well with Brosseau et al.’s (2010) postulation that clients should be encouraged to rely on their intimate partners as a valuable resource for obtaining objective information about themselves, which can then
be used toward improving the quality of the relationship from a more evidence-based perspective.

Albaugh and Nauta (2005) postulated that battered women as well as those with a history of experiencing psychological abuse (e.g., verbal denigration) are especially likely to “have lower career decision-making self-efficacy as a result of fewer opportunities for positive learning experiences” (p. 290). One type of positive learning experience is the enhancement of self-concept that is cultivated from being part of interpersonally strong social circles (Albaugh & Nauta, 2005). Linking this suggestion to the present study’s implications for women with experiences involving physical and psychological abuse resulting in a low relationship quality, counsellors can work with them to identify alternative interpersonal systems such as family-of-origin, close friends, and teachers or mentors who can provide a sense of self-efficacy with regard to their career-related pursuits as well as optimism about the future. The foregoing strategy is empirically sound given the recent finding that socio-emotional support from parents and teachers positively predicts career optimism through the mediating process of fostering career decision-making self-efficacy (Garcia et al., 2015).

In conjunction with exposure to high-quality social support, women assessed to be lacking in career decision-making self-efficacy can be helped through the provision of a group therapy experience akin to the one designed by Betz and Schifano (2000). The foregoing group intervention aimed to increase college women’s career self-efficacy in relation to typically male-dominated career fields through provision of social persuasion and vicarious learning experiences, identified by Bandura (1994, 1997) as critical factors that moderate the strength of self-efficacy beliefs. A similar group-based intervention can
be designed and adapted specifically for women with a difficult past with regard to intimate relationships and who are seeking to learn and develop both the interpersonal skills necessary to deal more effectively with relational conflicts as well as the vocational skills necessary to pursue their career goals. Similar to the strategies and objectives proposed by Betz and Schifano (2000), the group intervention should engage women in role-plays to help them develop the effective communication skills that are integral in interpersonal contexts including intimate relationships.

When combined with positive feedback from a leader working from an eclectic theoretical orientation integrating the SCCT model with cognitive-behavioural therapy, ongoing engagement in the aforementioned group-level activities can be expected to help women gain valuable awareness about themselves in relational contexts. A woman may, for example, learn that she finds it difficult to perceive her role-play partner as trustworthy. This may provide the leader an opportunity to challenge the woman’s thought patterns responsible for her inability to develop trust, explore how it may have affected the perceived quality of her past intimate relationship(s), as well as identify emotionally supportive interpersonal systems available in her life that challenge her deep-rooted view of people as untrustworthy. In addition, women who may have chosen to end an abusive relationship should be prompted to engage in simulated dialogues aimed at providing assertiveness training as well as organizational skills for being proactive in seeking help in case of interpersonal violence in current and future relationships.

Most importantly, the proposed group intervention should target women’s self-efficacy in the area of career decision-making as its underlying focus. In this regard, a useful direction can be derived from Bandura’s (1994, 1997) recognition of social
persuasion as a key informational source that facilitates self-efficacy. Verbal expressions of support by co-members in response to career-relevant discussions can be valuable in instilling a sense of resiliency and confidence in one’s ability to complete, for example, research-related tasks or to engage in active decision-making in the process of pursuing personal career goals. Given the influence of social support as a positive contextual factor in relation to career decision-making self-efficacy (Gushue & Whitson, 2006; Patel et al., 2008; Quimby & O’Brien, 2004), another useful strategy can be to have group members identify and work with co-members with the same or similar career goals. The presence of others with similar goals and ambitions can be conceptualized as social support with the potential to be of great value in allowing group members to cultivate a sense of belonging and identity. Specifically, the opportunity to engage in a collaborative manner with others in career-relevant tasks such as planning is likely to be instrumental in helping individual members develop a sense of confidence and direction with respect to their career goals and decision-making self-efficacy.

6.4: Conclusion

In conclusion, findings in the present study provided evidence for a positive association between perceived relationship quality and career decision-making self-efficacy of in-relationship women (i.e., dating and married) in the higher education system. A key outcome of the present study is its confirmation of the findings of previous research (Albaugh & Nauta, 2005; Brosseau et al. 2010; Domene et al., 2012; Quimby & O’Brien, 2004; Schultheiss et al., 2001) that relationship quality is a critical factor involved in aspects of career development including decision-making self-efficacy. However, results in the present study should be interpreted with caution in view of their
low generalizability that is attributable to a relatively small sample size, exclusive focus on women, and over-representation of one particular cultural group in the sample (i.e., Caucasians). As discussed at length above, findings in the present study have far-reaching implications for career counselling research and practice as well as offer an empirical basis for informing career development interventions from a context-focused perspective. As a future direction, researchers are encouraged to examine relational influences on career development outcomes from a culture-infused lens in view of the increasingly multicultural clientele in Western countries.
goals on objective and subjective career success. *Journal of Vocational 

satisfaction among young married couples. *Personality and Social Psychology 

relationships: A test of the triangular theory of love. *Journal of Social and 

and college women’s experiences of intimate partner violence. *Journal of Career 

African American adolescents’ career self-efficacy. *Professional School 

partnerships, sexual attitudes, desire and satisfaction. *Advances in Life Course 
Research, 22*(4), 62-72. doi: 10.1016/j.alcr.2014.06.001

development through the lens of social cognitive career theory. *Advances in 
Health Sciences Education, 11*, 91-110. doi: 10.1007/s10459-005-3138-y


Berscheid, E., & Regan, P. (2005). *The psychology of interpersonal relationships*. New York:


Blustein, D. L. (2015). Implications for career theory. In J. Bimrose, M. McMahon, & M. Watson (Eds.), Women's career development throughout the lifespan: An


Domene, J. F., Nee, J. J., Cavanaugh, A. K., McLelland, S., Stewart, B., Stephenson, M.,


Maisel, N. C., & Gable, S. L. (2009). The paradox of received social support.
Psychological Science, 20, 928-932. doi: 10.1111/j.1467-9280.2009.02388.x


Psychology, 16, 265-273. doi: 10.1037/h0029841


Scott, A., & Ciani, K. (2008). Effects of an undergraduate career class on men’s and


Swanson, J. L. (2013). Traditional and emerging career development theory and the


Available from https://www.amazon.com/

Appendix A

Figure 1.1: Graphic Representation of Hypotheses

Influence of the Type and Perceived Quality of Intimate Relationship on the Reported Level of Career Decision Self-Efficacy among Higher Education Women

![Graph showing the relationship between average level of career decision self-efficacy and average perceived quality of relationship. The graph includes lines for married and dating status, with labels for average level of career decision self-efficacy (1 = low, 5 = high) and average perceived quality of relationship (1 = low, 7 = high).]
Appendix B

Figure 1.2: *a priori* Power Analysis

![Power Analysis Diagram](image-url)
Appendix C

Demographic Measures Scale (DMS)

Please respond.

1) Gender Identity: Male Female Other

2) Age: _________

3) Sexual Orientation: heterosexual homosexual bisexual other

4) Cultural Background: Caucasian / African-American / Hispanic / Middle Eastern Asian / Other

5) Current Education Level: college diploma or certificate / undergraduate / masters / doctorate

6) Program of Study (e.g., Bachelors of Science):

_____________________________________

7) Professional Status: employed unemployed volunteer work

8) Relationship Status: married / cohabiting / dating / divorced / separated / single

9) Have children: Yes No

10) If married or dating, please specify for how long (years and/or months):

________________
Appendix D

Perceived Relationship Quality Components (PRQC) Inventory

Please rate your relationship partner and quality on a 7-point scale ranging from 1 = *not at all* to 7 = *extremely*.

**Relationship Satisfaction**

1) How satisfied are you with your relationship? 1 2 3 4 5 6 7
2) How content are you with your relationship? 1 2 3 4 5 6 7
3) How happy are you with your relationship? 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

**Commitment**

4) How committed are you to your relationship? 1 2 3 4 5 6 7
5) How dedicated are you to your relationship? 1 2 3 4 5 6 7
6) How devoted are you to your relationship? 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

**Intimacy**

7) How intimate is your relationship? 1 2 3 4 5 6 7
8) How close is your relationship? 1 2 3 4 5 6 7
9) How connected are you to your partner? 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

**Trust**

10) How much do you trust your partner? 1 2 3 4 5 6 7
11) How much can you count on your partner? 1 2 3 4 5 6 7
12) How dependable is your partner? 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

**Passion**

13) How passionate is your relationship? 1 2 3 4 5 6 7
14) How lustful is your relationship? 1 2 3 4 5 6 7
15) How sexually intense is your relationship?  1  2  3  4  5  6  7

Love

16) How much do you love your partner?  1  2  3  4  5  6  7
17) How much do you adore your partner?  1  2  3  4  5  6  7
18) How much do you cherish your partner?  1  2  3  4  5  6  7
Appendix E

Career Decision Self-Efficacy Scale – Short Form

For each statement below, please read carefully and indicate how much confidence you have that you could accomplish each of these tasks by marking your answer according to the following 5-point continuum. Mark your answer by writing the appropriate number next to the statement.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>No confidence at all</td>
<td>Very little confidence</td>
<td>Moderate confidence</td>
<td>Much confidence</td>
<td>Complete confidence</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Self-appraisal**

1) Accurately assess your abilities _____

2) Determine what your ideal job would be ____

3) Decide what you value most in an occupation ____

4) Figure out what you are and are not ready to sacrifice to achieve your career goals ____

5) Define the type of lifestyle you would like to live ____

**Occupational Information**

6) Find information in the library about occupations you are interested in _____

7) Find out the employment trends for an occupation over the next 10 years _____

8) Find out about the average yearly earnings of people in an occupation _____

9) Talk with a person already employed in the field you are interested in ____

10) Find information about graduate or professional schools ____

**Goal Selection**

11) Select one degree program from a list of potential programs you are considering _____

12) Select one occupation from a list of potential occupations you are considering ____
13) Choose a career that will fit your preferred lifestyle

14) Make a career decision and then not worry about whether it was right or wrong

15) Choose a major field of study or career that suits your interests

**Planning**

16) Make a plan of your goals for the next 5 years

17) Determine the steps you need to take to successfully complete your chosen degree program

18) Prepare a good resume

19) Identify employers, firms, and institutions relevant to your career possibilities

20) Successfully manage the job interview process

**Problem Solving**

21) Determine the steps to take if you are having academic trouble with an aspect of your chosen degree

22) Persistently work at your major academic or career goal even when you get frustrated

23) Change degrees if you did not like your first choice

24) Change occupations if you are not satisfied with the one you enter

25) Identify reasonable degree programs or career alternatives if you are unable to get your first choice
Appendix F

Looking for Students to Participate in a Research Study

**Topic:** Intimate Relationship Quality and Career Decision-Making…

![Self-Efficacy Image]

**Eligibility:**

Must be *(a)* in a relationship (either married or dating) for at least 3 months, and *(b)* enrolled in an academic program at a post-secondary institution

Fill out 3 short questionnaires (2 - 3 minutes each) at


!!! for a chance to win a $50 gift certificate to the UNBF Bookstore !!!

For questions and further information, please contact Umair Iqbal at

iumair686@gmail.com or call/text at 647-802-1051

UNBF REB # 2017-033

STU REB # 2017-08

122
Appendix G

Welcome

Relationship Quality and Career Decision-Making Self-Efficacy

A Research Study

by

Umair Iqbal

If you have any questions and concerns, or would like further information before proceeding to complete the questionnaires, please feel free to email Umair Iqbal at iumair686@gmail.com or call/text him at 647-802-1051.

UNBF REB # 2017-033

STU REB # 2017-08
Appendix H

Informed Consent to Participate in a Research Study

Title of Study: Relationship Quality and Career Decision-Making Self-Efficacy

Investigator: Umair Iqbal

Introduction:

You are being asked to participate in a research study that is being conducted by Umair Iqbal in partial fulfillment of the requirements for his Master of Education degree in Counselling Psychology at the University of New Brunswick (UNB), Fredericton Campus. This study has been reviewed by the Research Ethics Board of the University of New Brunswick and is on file as REB 2017-033. Provided below is important information pertaining to the goals and purpose of the study as well as your rights and responsibilities as a participant. Please take your time in deciding whether you would like to participate. Should you have additional questions and concerns that are not addressed in this form, please feel free to contact Umair Iqbal using the contact information included herein as well as in the introductory page.

Purpose of Study:

The purpose of this study is twofold: (a) to evaluate the quality of your current intimate relationship (as comprised of your self-reported assessment of various interpersonal attributes such as satisfaction, trust, and love), and (b) to measure your career decision-making self-efficacy, or the degree of confidence that you have in your ability to complete specific tasks necessary to making educational and career decisions.

Eligibility to Participate:

In order for your responses to questionnaires to be valid for the purpose of data
collection, you must meet the following eligibility criteria: you must be currently (a) enrolled in an academic program at a post-secondary institution, and (b) involved in an intimate relationship (either marital or dating) for at least 3 months.

**Description of Study Procedures:**

You will be required to complete a set of three questionnaires. The first questionnaire will collect demographic information including your age, gender identity, sexual orientation, education level, program of study, and relationship status. Next, you will complete an 18-item questionnaire measuring your intimate relationship quality followed by a 25-item questionnaire measuring your self-efficacy. Lastly, you will be prompted to read a debrief statement that will (a) reinforce your understanding of the study’s purpose, and (b) ask you to specify whether you would like a general summary of the study’s overall results to be emailed to you. To this end, you will be given the option to provide your email address.

**Confidentiality and Data Protection:**

Any personal or identifiable information required on your part will be kept strictly confidential. Your name will not be used in any reporting of the research and nor will the data be reported in a manner that would render participants identifiable in any other way. This will be ensured by including only aggregate findings in the reporting of the research results and outcomes. All data obtained will be kept safely in a password-protected digital location accessible to the study researcher only and will be promptly deleted following the completion of the study.

**Voluntary Participation:**

You have a right, as a participant, to withdraw from the study and/or withdraw any of
your data at any stage of your participation without penalty. Should you have to withdraw, your scores and any personally identifiable information will be kept in a confidential manner.

**Risks of Participating:**

Risks associated with your participation in this study are few in number and are likely to be emotional or psychological in nature. These include the possible experience of unpleasant memories in the process of evaluating your intimate relationship as well as feelings of indecisiveness or self-doubts while responding to the self-efficacy questionnaire. In case you experience any of the foregoing reactions or difficulties, you are strongly encouraged to contact the Personal Counselling Services at UNB-Fredericton (phone: 1-506-453-4820, e-mail: counsel@unb.ca), UNB-Saint John (phone: 1-506-648-2309, e-mail: mhenry1@unb.ca), or Saint Thomas University (phone: 1-506-453-7213, e-mail: counselling@stu.ca) in order to seek immediate therapeutic attention.

**Benefits of Participating:**

No personal benefits are associated with your participation in this study. Should you have an interest in the research conducted as part of this study, you may request to be emailed a general summary of its overall findings. Another expected benefit pertains to the fact that the obtained data will permit the researcher to complete his thesis study, which represents an integral component of his degree at UNB-Fredericton.

**Alternatives:**

You have a choice not to participate in this study as an alternative to participating in it.

**Cost, Payment, and/or Incentive:**

There is no payment made to you for your role as a participant in this study. However,
there is a $50 UNB-Fredericton bookstore gift certificate that you have a chance of winning as a participant, should you wish to provide your email. You will be notified of the draw result following the completion of questionnaires by all participants.

**General and Financial Conflict(s) of Interest:**
The study is being conducted independently by the researcher as a course product that represents an integral and culminating component of his degree at UNB-Fredericton. As such, the study is not being financed by the School of Graduate Studies or the graduate academic unit of the Faculty of Education at UNBF. Hence, there exists no conflict of interest between the researcher and the aforementioned entities.

**Reasons for Dismissal from the Study:**
If you either fail to follow the questionnaire instructions or do not complete the questionnaires, your scoring information will not be included in data analysis.

**Contact Persons:**
For further information regarding the purpose and specific goals of this study, please feel free to contact the study’s investigator, Umair Iqbal, at iumair686@gmail.com or 1-647-802-1051. As an alternative, you may contact the study’s primary supervisor, Dr. Jeffrey Landine, at jlandine@unb.ca or 1-506-453-4839. You may also obtain information about this research study from Dr. David Wagner, the Associate Dean of Graduate Programs in the Faculty of Education, at dwagner@unb.ca or 1-506-447-3294. Should you have questions about your rights and responsibilities as a research participant, please contact the Research Ethics Board at the University of New Brunswick (Fredericton Campus) at 1-506-453-5189, Monday through Friday, 8:15 am to 4:30 pm (Atlantic Time). You may also contact the Research Ethics Board coordinator, Danielle Connell, at St. Thomas
University (email: reb@stu.ca or phone: 1-506-452-0621), Monday through Friday, 9:00 am to 4:00 pm (Atlantic Time).

------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------

Participant Signature

By choosing the “I agree” option below, I give my informed consent to participate in this study and to have my data used under the conditions of confidentiality assured in this consent form. Also, I acknowledge that I have read and understood the contents of this consent form and have been provided answers to all my questions and/or concerns.

I agree _____

I disagree _____

Insert Date: _____________________
Appendix I

Debrief

Thank you for your participation in this research study.

The researcher would like to elaborate on the specific issues of interest that will be examined based upon the data that you have provided. As stated in the informed consent agreement, this research study seeks to measure your intimate relationship quality and your self-efficacy. More specifically, however, the questionnaires looked at particular aspects of these two constructs – that is, whereas the relationship quality questionnaire measured your individual and subjective perception of your intimate relationship and partner (i.e., your “perceived” intimate relationship quality), the self-efficacy questionnaire examined your degree of confidence in your ability to complete a variety of tasks necessary to making career decisions (i.e., your career “decision-making” self-efficacy). Therefore, a systematic data analysis of the results from all participants will allow the researcher to determine whether there exists a significant link between the perception of being in a high-quality intimate relationship and career decision-making self-efficacy among students in the higher education system.

In case you experienced strong emotional reactions such as anxiety, self-doubt, or depression in response to the contents of the questionnaires, you are strongly encouraged to seek immediate therapeutic attention by contacting the Personal Counselling Services at UNB-Fredericton (phone: 1-506-453-4820, e-mail: counsel@unb.ca), UNB-Saint John (phone: 1-506-648-2309, e-mail: mhenry1@unb.ca), or Saint Thomas University (phone: 1-506-453-7213, e-mail: counselling@stu.ca).

As stated in the consent form, your participation includes a chance to win a $50
gift certificate to the UNB-Fredericton bookstore. You will be informed of the draw
result once the data collection stage has been completed. Should you wish to be
considered for the gift certificate and/or be emailed a general summary of the study
results, you may choose to provide your email address. For the purpose of maintaining
your privacy, you will be given a link to a separate page to provide your email address. If
you wish to proceed, please click the link below.

https://surveys.unb.ca/index.php/435175/lang-en

New Page:

Enter your email address: _______________________________________

I wish to have a general summary of the results of this research emailed to me:  Yes / No

I would like to be entered to win a $50 gift certificate to UNBF Bookstore:     Yes / No
Appendix J

Study Announcement

(made orally)

Hello everyone,

My name is Umair Iqbal. I am a student pursuing a masters degree in counselling psychology here at UNB-Fredericton. My degree includes a thesis component for which I am carrying out a research study. The topic of my study is human relational influences on career development of students in the higher education system. More specifically, my goal is to examine the influence of intimate relationship type and quality on people’s career decision-making self-efficacy, which refers to the level of self-perceived confidence in personal ability to complete the tasks and make decisions relevant to career goals and pursuits. My target population is undergraduate and graduate students who are currently in either a dating relationship or marital union for at least three months. Your participation will involve responding to a set of three short questionnaires, which should take no longer than 2 to 3 minutes each to complete. The first questionnaire will collect your basic demographic information, which will be followed by a questionnaire asking you to evaluate your relationship quality. The final questionnaire will require you to respond to questions evaluating your career decision-making self-efficacy. These data will be used to determine whether there exists a significant association between being in high-quality relationships and feelings of self-efficacy with regard to career decision-making ability. As an incentive, you have a chance to win a $50 UNBF bookstore gift certificate. Please kindly take the initiative to participate by accessing the URL link provided on this ad that I am going to distribute. Thank you.
Appendix K

Figure 1.3: Standardized Residuals and Standardized Estimates of CDMSE

Scatterplot

Dependent Variable: Global_CDMSE_Score
Appendix L

Figure 1.4: Normal Probability Plot
CURRICULUM VITAE

Candidate's full name:  
Umair Iqbal

Universities attended:
York University
Bachelors of Psychology, Honours
Toronto, Ontario, Canada
2008 – 2013

University of New Brunswick
Masters of Education, Counselling Psychology
Fredericton, New Brunswick, Canada
2015 – 2018

Publications:


Conference Presentations: