HBCU Students Career Adaptability & Self-Efficacy Beliefs in the Academic Context: the Moderative Effects of Subjective Social Status

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Introduction

Students from marginalized backgrounds who attend Historically Black Colleges & Universities (HBCUs) fare better across numerous social & academic domains as compared to their peers at non-HBCU institutions (Cokley, 2002; 2003; Gordan et al., 2021; UNCF, 2012). Yet, some evidence suggest that HBCU students graduate at lower rates than the national average (Gordan et al., 2021; UNCF, 2012). This disparity is partly due to HBCU's hosting students from lower SES backgrounds that face unique barriers marked by classism & meritocracy (Gordan et al., 2021; UNCF, 2012).

Scholarship suggests that academic self-efficacy beliefs & self-efficacy beliefs to cope with barriers may inspire HBCU student's achievement & development in the face of existing barriers (Thomas et al., 2009; White et al., 2019). Career adaptability is a psychosocial resource that may influence students' self-efficacy beliefs (Hirschi et al., 2015; Savickas & Porfeli, 2018); yet no study has asked how career adaptability may relate to academic self-efficacy beliefs & self-efficacy beliefs for coping with barriers among students at HBCUs.

Present Study: We used Career Construction Theory (CCT, Savickas, 1997) & Social Cognitive Theory (SCT; Bandura, 1977) to explore:

A. The association between HBCU students career adaptability & academic self-efficacy beliefs & self-efficacy beliefs for coping with barriers in the academic context.

B. Whether subjective social status moderates the association.

Hypotheses

Referencing CCT, we hypothesize:

H1: Career adaptability (X) will positively relate to students' self-efficacy beliefs for academics & coping with barriers (Y) within the academic context.

H2: Subjective social status will positively relate to student's career adaptability & self-efficacy beliefs (i.e., a higher sense of subjective social status will relate to higher levels of career adaptability & self-efficacy beliefs).

H3: Subjective social status (Z) will moderate the association between career adaptability & self-efficacy beliefs (i.e., students with higher subjective social status will maintain a higher sense of career adaptability to support their self-efficacy as compared to those with lower subjective social status).
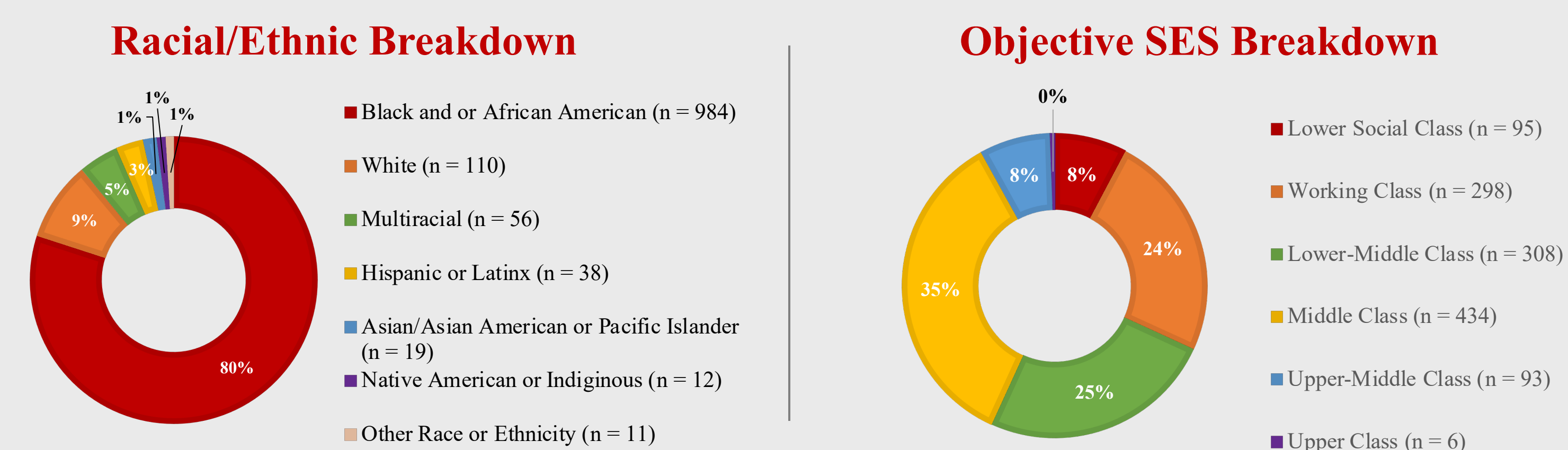
Methods

Procedure:

A sample of 1230 HBCU students were drawn from a large longitudinal mixed-method study of college internships features & their influence on student's career development conducted by the Center for Research on the College to Workforce Transition (CCWT).

Participants:

1230 junior & senior HBCU students from 5 institutions were sampled.
- 907 (73.7%) were women, 310 (25.3%) were men, & 13 (1%) were another gender or transgender. Participants mean age was 25.07 (SD = 7.92).

Racial/Ethnic Breakdown

- Black and or African American (n = 984) — 80%
- White (n = 110) — 9%
- Multiracial (n = 56) — 5%
- Hispanic or Latinx (n = 38) — 1%
- Asian/Asian American or Pacific Islander (n = 19) — 1%
- Native American or Indiginous (n = 12) — 1%
- Other Race or Ethnicity (n = 11) — 1%

Objective SES Breakdown

- Lower Social Class (n = 95) — 8%
- Working Class (n = 298) — 24%
- Lower-Middle Class (n = 308) — 25%
- Middle Class (n = 434) — 35%
- Upper-Middle Class (n = 93) — 8%
- Upper Class (n = 6) — 0%

Measures:

Career Adapt-Abilities Scale (CAAS; Savickas & Porfeli, 2012):

24-item scale measuring one's readiness to adapt to work or career-related tasks or challenges. Contains four subscales scoring four adaptability resources that shape career adaptability (concern, control, curiosity, & confidence). Items rated on a 5-point Likert scale.

Self-Efficacy Beliefs:

Self-efficacy refers to the held belief individuals' have in their ability to organize & execute specific tasks (Bandura, 1977). Participants self-efficacy within the academic context was measured via the mean of means for the two below scales.

- Self-Efficacy Beliefs for Academics (Lent et al., 1986):

  4-item questionnaire scoring students' belief in their capacity to complete academic tasks. Items rated on a 10-point Likert scale.

- Self-Efficacy Beliefs for Coping with Barriers within the Academic Context (Lent et al., 2000)
  7-item questionnaire scoring students' belief in their capacity to cope with barriers that present them in the academic context. Items rated on a 10-point Likert scale.

Subjective Social Class Ladder (Adler et al., 2000):
10-rung ladder measuring where one sees their status as compared to others within the existing social class hierarchy

Correlation Matrix:

Table 1. Means, Standard Deviations, & Intercorrelations among Measures							
	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5
1. Career Adaptability	3.92	0.66	--				
2. Self-Efficacy in the Academic Context	8.08	1.45	.41***	--			
3. Self-Efficacy for Academics	8.35	1.54	.35***	.89***	--		
4. Self-Efficacy for Coping with Barriers	7.81	1.67	.39***	.91***	.63***	--	
5. Social Class Ladder	5.14	1.80	.10***	.19***	.18***	.16***	--

*p ≤ .05, two-tailed. **p ≤ .01, two-tailed. ***p ≤ .001, two-tailed

Results

Hypothesis 1: Career adaptability positively related to:
- Academic Self-efficacy Beliefs ($r = .35$, $p < .001$)
- Coping with Barriers Self-efficacy Beliefs ($r = .39$, $p < .001$)

Hypothesis 2: Subjective social status positively related to:
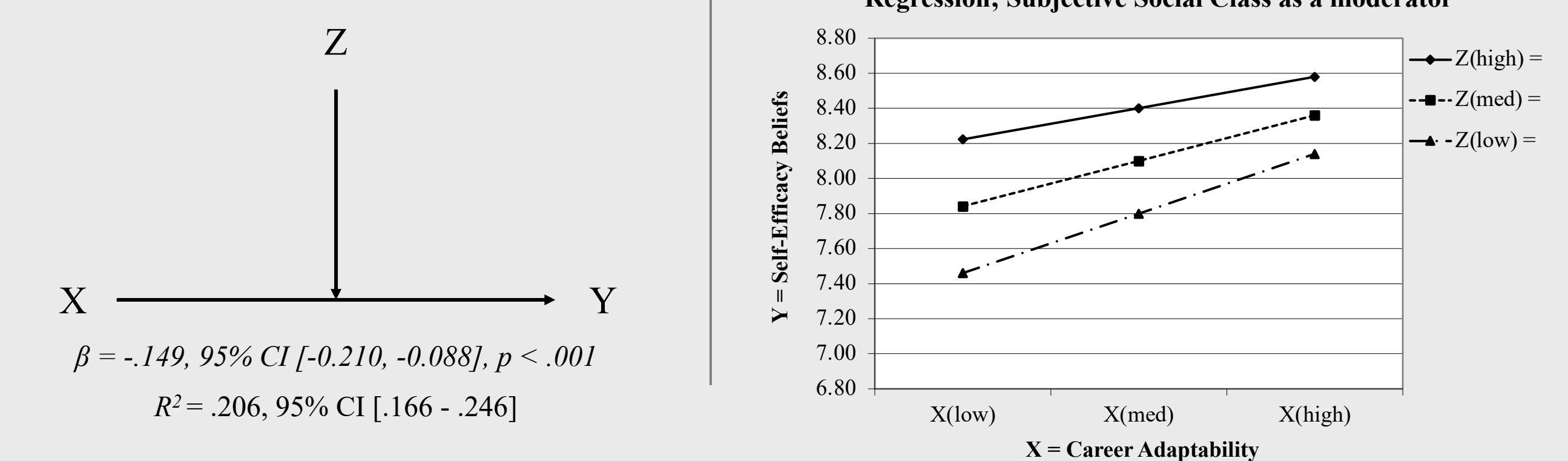- Career adaptability ($r = .10$, $p < .001$)
- Academic Self efficacy Beliefs ($r = .18$, $p < .001$)
- Coping with Barriers Self-efficacy Beliefs ($r = .16$, $p < .001$)

Hypothesis 3: Two-step hierarchal regression modeling showed subjective social status (Z) to be a negative, yet small, moderator in the relationship between career adaptability (X) & self-efficacy beliefs (Y).

Step 1:

$$X \xrightarrow{\beta = .413, \ 95\% \ CI \ [.36 - .467], \ p < .001 \atop R^2 = .170, \ 95\% \ CI \ [.132 - .208]} Y$$

Step 2:

$\beta = -.149$, 95% CI [-0.210, -0.088], $p < .001$
$R^2 = .206$, 95% CI [.166 - .246]

Self-Efficacy Beliefs-on-Career Adaptability Regression; Subjective Social Class as a moderator

Y = Self-Efficacy Beliefs
X = Career Adaptability

Conclusion

Future research would benefit from longitudinal designs to test the predictive role of career adaptability & self-efficacy beliefs in HBCU student outcomes & development.

Examining the effect of subjective contextual & interpersonal variables (e.g., social support, social capital, sociopolitical factors, racial identity, etc.,) on adaptive career attitudes & behaviors may be imperative to account for the cultural dimensions of historical marginalization within this population

Implication: Career counselors may consider inspiring students' career adaptability & understanding the complex influence social class can have on their academic & career beliefs.