

# Opportunities for Action: Traditionally Marginalized Populations and the Economic Crisis



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**This study investigated the career and work life challenges faced by traditionally marginalized populations (e.g., women; historically oppressed racial/ethnic groups; people who identify as lesbian, gay, transgender, bisexual and/or queer; immigrants; individuals with mental or physical disabilities; older individuals; and those of lower socioeconomic status) in the United States during the troubled and lagging economy that began with the economic crisis in 2008. Further, this study was designed to explore action steps that could be used to address these challenges. The results of this study suggested that although marginalized populations face many significant challenges, there are actions that career development professionals can take in the near future to address these challenges. Implications for practice, training, theory, research, social justice and advocacy are provided.**

**Keywords:** career development, marginalized populations, social justice, economic crisis, socioeconomic status

The current economic climate has taken a significant toll on millions of individuals in the United States. This economic climate was precipitated by the collapse of the housing market (Rothstein, 2012) and has significantly impacted the work experience and employment status of many individuals in the United States (Jacobe, 2012; U.S. Census Bureau, 2006, 2009, 2013). Although a broad range of populations have experienced such career development problems associated with this economic context, the economic circumstances have impacted traditionally marginalized populations more dramatically than others (Rothstein, 2012; U.S. Census Bureau, 2006, 2009, 2013). For the purposes of this study, the term *traditionally marginalized populations* was defined broadly to include many historically oppressed groups including women; certain racial/ethnic groups; people who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender or queer (LGBTQ); immigrants; individuals with mental or physical disabilities; older individuals; and those of lower socioeconomic status prior to the onset of the current economic climate (Constantine, Hage, Kindaichi, & Bryant, 2007; Savage, Harley, & Nowak, 2005; Vera & Speight, 2003).

While there is ample knowledge about marginalized populations regarding their overall career- and work-related challenges (e.g., Adams, Cahill, & Ackerlind, 2005; Badgett, Lau, Sears, & Ho, 2007; Blustein, 2006; Cook, Heppner, & O'Brien, 2002; Coombs & King, 2005; Gottfredson, 2005; Hackett & Betz, 1981; Lapour & Heppner, 2009; Schmidt & Nilsson, 2006; West-Olatunji et al., 2010), a gap exists in the literature concerning the particular challenges they face in the context of the current economic climate. This gap in knowledge leaves

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career counselors and counselor educators without an empirical foundation for addressing the particular career development needs of such populations in this troubled economic climate, making it difficult for counselors to respond to calls and implement concrete social justice interventions and actions (Hansen, 2003; Metz & Guichard, 2009; Pope, 2003). Such knowledge would make it possible for career counselors and counselor educators to take evidence-based action to address these problems and allow the field of career counseling to continue in its tradition of social action in solidarity with marginalized populations (Hartung & Blustein, 2002; Stebleton & Eggerth, 2012). As such, the purpose of this study was to investigate the career- and work-related challenges that traditionally marginalized populations face in the context of the current economic climate. Secondly, and more importantly, this study investigated actions that career counselors and counselor educators might take to address these challenges.

A unique challenge of investigating a fluid, dynamic context such as the current economic climate is the need to apply a research methodology that accounts for its time-sensitive, shifting nature. Given this context, the authors used the Delphi methodology (Linstone & Turoff, 1975; Skulmoski, Hartman, & Krahn, 2007; Vázquez-Ramos, Leahy, & Hernández, 2007). This approach to research was designed to integrate expert opinion about complex issues at the forefront of a field with experts' forecasts about what might occur regarding such issues in the future. While there is no published research about the topic of this study, the authors connected with experts who have knowledge of this issue. Specifically, the authors asked experts to describe the experiences of traditionally marginalized populations in the context of the current economic climate and to provide suggestions for ways to address these challenges. Although there would be great value in directly asking members of marginalized populations about their career development, it would take an enormous amount of time to investigate the career development challenges faced by such a diverse range of individuals within the current economic climate. This poses a problem in that, by the time such a research agenda was completed, the economic climate might have already made a significant turn for the better, thus making such studies outdated in terms of their immediate applicability. The authors certainly recognize the worth and cultural relevance of interviewing marginalized individuals themselves about their lived experiences, but they also recognize the need to collect and analyze data in a way that allows for timely implementation of the results. Therefore, the authors chose the Delphi methodology in order to collect empirical evidence in a manner that will provide concrete suggestions for action before the economic climate has shifted beyond the scope of such evidence. Before addressing the current economic crisis, however, it is important to discuss first what is known about the career- and work-related challenges that traditionally marginalized populations generally face.

## **Career and Work Challenges of Traditionally Marginalized Populations**

Although the United States provides vast opportunities for success in career and work pursuits, these opportunities are not and have not been equally accessible to all people (Blustein, 2006; Blustein, McWhirter, & Perry, 2005; Burns, 2009; Fouad, 2006; Metz & Guichard, 2009). Further, even when those who have been afforded less societal and cultural privilege are able to access such opportunities, their success and achievements may not be recognized in an equitable manner (Badgett et al., 2007; Coombs & King, 2005; Fouad et al., 2008; Juntunen et al., 2001). The following are examples that represent inequalities faced by traditionally marginalized populations throughout their career development process.

On a systemic level, social norms and structures shape traditionally marginalized individuals' experiences of career and work in ways that disadvantage them in future career pursuits (Adams et al., 2005; Gottfredson, 2005; Lapor & Heppner, 2009; Martín-Baró, 1994; West-Olatunji et al., 2010). During childhood and adolescence, marginalized populations experience a lack of support and resources for pursuing higher education (Adams et al., 2005; Blustein, 2006; Deil-Amen & DeLuca, 2010) and are less likely to finish high school (Greene & Winters, 2005), which is problematic given the relationship between educational attainment and

the likelihood of future employment (U.S. Census Bureau, 2006, 2009, 2013). Members of such populations who go on to higher education in pursuit of their career goals face further difficulties and barriers (e.g., sexism, racism, financial constraints, conflicts between their own cultures and the dominant culture; Fouad et al., 2008; Guiffrida & Douthit, 2010; Juntunen et al., 2001). During the job search, marginalized populations experience discrimination in terms of equal opportunity for employment (Stuart, 2006; Yakushko, Watson, & Thompson, 2008); and once employed, they face ongoing discrimination and barriers to success in the workplace (Badgett et al., 2007; Coombs & King, 2005; Werth, Borges, McNally, Maguire, & Britton, 2008). Such career-related difficulties have been explained through social cognitive career theory (Lent, Brown, & Hackett, 1994), which posits that contextual affordances (e.g., social networks and income) and personal inputs (e.g., gender and race/ethnicity) have a significant impact on individuals' career development and choice process (Lent, Brown, & Hackett, 2000). For example, being female (personal input) may affect one's ability to be considered qualified for traditionally masculine careers; and having a lower socioeconomic status (contextual affordance) may result in one lacking a professional network that provides adequate career networking options. While these examples and theoretical postulations do not capture the entirety of the career development marginalization that traditionally marginalized populations experience, they do illustrate the realities that such populations face in American society. These oppressive circumstances also are apparent within and exacerbated by the current economic crisis.

### **Traditionally Marginalized Populations and the Current Economic Climate**

In December 2007, the United States experienced a significant economic contraction. Due to risky subprime mortgage loan practices, many banks had to be saved from bankruptcy; they utilized public and private funds, including a federal bailout under the Bush administration. Between 2007 and 2009, the gross domestic product fell over 5% and millions of individuals lost their homes and jobs. The United States economy continues to languish as a result of this economic crash (Rothstein, 2012). Among the many systemic implications of these events, the unemployment rate increased nationally from 4.4% to 10% between 2007 and 2009. While there is a gap in the literature regarding the ways that this crisis has affected traditionally marginalized populations' career- and work-related experiences, national unemployment statistics (U.S. Census Bureau, 2006, 2009, 2013) provide partial illustration of such inequalities. For each ensuing population category, the unemployment rates will be depicted parenthetically as follows: (2006 annual rate, 2009 annual rate, March 2013 rate), in order to show the rates before the crisis began, the rates after the crisis began and the current rates in a compatible fashion. The overall unemployment rate (4.6%, 9.3%, 7.6%) masks stark contrasts in the rates for those who identified as White (4.0%, 8.5%, 6.7%), African American (8.9%, 14.8%, 13.3%) and Hispanic/Latino (5.2%, 12.1%, 9.2%), and those who reported having a disability (no data for 2006, 14.5%, 7.4%). The rates also are quite different among those who did not complete high school (6.8%, 14.6%, 11.1%), those with a high school diploma (4.3%, 9.7%, 7.6%), those who completed some college (3.6%, 8.0%, 6.4%) and those who completed a bachelor's degree (2.0%, 4.6%, 3.8%). Finally, single mothers' unemployment rate (7.1%, 11.5%, 10.7%) is much higher than that of women who report cohabiting with a spouse (3.1%, 6.3%, 4.7%). While one may assume that similar differentials might exist for LGBTQ individuals, immigrants and those of lower socioeconomic status, the United States Department of Labor does not report data in a manner that would allow such comparisons. Further, research has suggested that, in combination, such factors of identity and context as those listed above create further disparities in the unemployment rate (Ewing, Levernier, & Malik, 2005).

These patterns highlight significant concerns. There seems to be consistent disparity in unemployment rates across marginalized groups throughout the economic crisis, as evidenced by the statistics reported by the Department of Labor. Given that unemployment has a negative psychological impact on individuals (Blustein, Medvide, & Wan, 2011; Paul & Moser, 2009), this disparity in unemployment suggests the possibility that marginalized groups experience higher rates of mental health consequences. For example, Paul and Moser

(2009) conducted a meta-analysis to determine what is known about the connection between employment status and mental health status. Their work revealed a significant connection between unemployment and poor mental health.

Although these data illustrate employment and work-related concerns of marginalized populations, the data fall short of providing knowledge that would offer particular direction to career counselors and counselor educators in service of improving the career development of traditionally marginalized populations. This gap in knowledge leaves professionals without empirical foundation for addressing the particular career development needs of these populations in this economic climate, making it difficult for counselors to respond to calls for concrete social justice interventions and actions (Hansen, 2003; Metz & Guichard, 2009; Pope, 2003).

## **Career Development Interventions for Traditionally Marginalized Populations**

The National Career Development Association (NCDA, 2009b) has mandated that career counselors be competent in addressing the unique cultural and contextual challenges that their clients face. Furthermore, one of the founders of the career development and counseling professions, Frank Parsons, focused squarely on empowering poor and marginalized individuals (Hartung & Blustein, 2002), many of whom were recent immigrants (Stebbleton & Eggerth, 2012), to find stable and meaningful work. Parsons desired to work with such populations given his belief that “wealth and power were unequally distributed throughout society” (Hartung & Blustein, 2002, p. 44). Many authors have proposed that culturally and contextually relevant career development practices be used with traditionally marginalized populations (Guiffrida & Douthit, 2010; Hansen, 2003; Pope, 2003; Trainor, Lindstrom, Simon-Burroughs, Martin, & Sorrells, 2008; West-Olatunji et al., 2010). For example, Blustein et al. (2010) suggested that “career development education programs include specific attention to issues pertaining to race, culture, and ethnicity” (p. 253). While such suggestions likely have merit and relevance within the current economic crisis, they have not specifically addressed the career- and work-related challenges of traditionally marginalized populations in this economic climate. As such, the purpose of the present study was to investigate ways in which the troubled economic environment in the United States has affected traditionally marginalized populations in the service of identifying action steps that career counselors and counselor educators might take to address such issues.

## **Methods**

The present study followed the original guidelines for Delphi research (Linstone & Turoff, 1975; Skulmoski et al., 2007; Vázquez-Ramos et al., 2007), as well as the Delphi model offered by Fish and Busby (1996). This model includes recruiting experts in the target domain area and asking open-ended questions regarding their scope of expertise. In later stages of the Delphi process, participants rank the importance of each idea that the pool of experts have generated collectively. We, the authors, recruited individuals with expertise about the career development experience of marginalized populations and asked these experts to take part in the Delphi process.

There is no definite technique for choosing experts within the Delphi method (Fish & Busby, 1996; Linstone & Turoff, 1975; Skulmoski et al., 2007; Vázquez-Ramos et al., 2007). Due to the need to account for both theoretical and applied aspects of this complex topic, the authors sought to recruit both scholars and practitioners who are experts on the career development of traditionally marginalized populations (Fish & Busby, 1996). Once the study received Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval for this study, the first step in the recruitment process involved identifying and contacting individuals who are considered experts in this area.

Expertise in this area was evidenced by 20 or more refereed publications about the career development of marginalized populations, as well as a clearly demonstrated commitment to improving the lived experiences of such populations (i.e., scholarship that is intended to improve community/client career development and work contexts). For example, one of the experts targeted for this study conducted studies about marginalized K–12 students' career development, the process and results of which have direct benefits for this population. The authors chose a minimum of 20 publications for inclusion of participants in order to set a high bar for the experts, while also allowing for the inclusion of relatively new scholars in the career development field. Initial criteria were set very high because the next step in the recruitment process involved asking these experts to nominate other scholars and practitioners who also are experts in the target area. The authors used this nomination process based on the notion that such experts would be qualified to nominate other experts in their field (Fish & Busby, 1996; Linstone & Turoff, 1975; Skulmoski et al., 2007; Vázquez-Ramos et al., 2007). The authors identified four individuals who met the two inclusion criteria, and two of them agreed to participate in the nomination and data collection process. These two experts had a significant number of refereed publications (35; 54) that addressed the career development of traditionally marginalized populations. These experts consequently nominated 22 individuals, and 12 of those individuals who were identified agreed to participate in and completed this study.

Because the Delphi method relies heavily on expert opinion, the authors collected detailed descriptions of the experts' backgrounds (the experts themselves provided the ensuing terminology for gender, race/ethnicity and professional identity). Experts had a mean of 23.17 and a median of 24 years of experience in the field of career development, with a range of 4–45 years. Experts' racial/ethnic identification included two as African American, one as Hispanic, one as White/Polish American and eight as White/Caucasian. Ten identified as female/woman and two as male. Seven experts identified themselves as scholars, and five identified as practitioners. These experts' research and/or service provision was focused on a broad range of populations and backgrounds including diversity in race, ethnicity, nationality, gender identity, sexual orientation, class, educational background, age and ability status. In terms of geographic regions, one individual worked in the South, two worked in the West, two worked in the Midwest, and seven worked in the Northeast. Two experts worked primarily in a suburban context, two worked in a rural/suburban context and eight worked in an urban context.

### **Data Collection and Analysis**

As outlined by Fish & Busby's (1996) use of the Delphi method, this study involved three rounds of data collection and analysis.

**Round one.** The first round of this study was designed to capture qualitative data that reflected expert opinions. This data was collected electronically via an online survey platform. In order to create a refined data collection process, an initial survey was piloted with three individuals (a counselor educator with expertise in the career development of marginalized populations, a counselor education doctoral student who worked extensively with first-generation college students, and a counseling psychologist with expertise in the Delphi method and qualitative research). These questions were as follows:

1. What are the most significant career development and work issues experienced by traditionally marginalized populations as a result of the current economic climate?
2. What can career counselors and the career development profession do to effectively address these challenges?

The authors considered the data collected via this pilot survey and interviewed the three individuals about their experience taking the survey. Based on the feedback and responses from the pilot study, question 1 above was split into two questions, as the original question did not yield a clear differentiation between general career

development concerns and career development issues related to the current economic climate. The following three items were generated based on this pilot testing process:

1. In your own work, what are the most significant career development and work issues experienced by traditionally marginalized populations?
2. Please discuss the issues you described in the previous question as they relate to the current economic climate.
3. Please provide suggestions about how career counselors and the career development profession could effectively respond to the issues you have just described.

Given this new question format, question 1 provided a control to prevent confounding data collection, but also allowed the investigation of expert opinion about this topic.

The data collected from these three qualitative questions were analyzed using qualitative description (QD). Sandelowski (2000, 2010) described QD as a research design that stays close to the data. Researchers cannot really divorce themselves from interpretation in the analysis process; however, in QD, researchers seek low inference interpretations and use content analysis to develop thick descriptions of participants' experiences and perspectives. In other words, researchers analyze the data with the intent to giving voice to the research participants, as opposed to interpreting the data through the researchers' vantage point. As opposed to other qualitative methods such as Grounded Theory (Strauss & Corbin, 1990), the purpose of QD is not to analyze data with the goal of creating theoretical models. Rather, the goal of QD is to simply describe qualitative data in a way that is concise, rich and thorough. The authors specifically chose the QD method since their goal was to describe participants' viewpoints rather than making theoretical inferences about their viewpoints. The authors also attempted to increase the trustworthiness of the analysis by arriving at a consensus about the results of the analysis at each stage as described below.

Three researchers (the first, second, and third authors) used QD to analyze data collected by round 1 participants, all of whom possessed both privileged and marginalized identities. Of these three researchers, two were female, one was male; one identified as heterosexual, two identified as lesbian; two were first-generation college students and one was formerly homeless. Each researcher read the raw data and created codes for each discrete idea that occurred within participants' responses to the questions. These three researchers then met as a team to discuss and reach a consensus about how to delineate complete ideas and what codes should be associated with each of the ideas.

The end result was a list of codes that described each discrete idea that the respondents presented. These codes were then consolidated with other similar codes, which resulted in a list of categories. The categories represented a more complete description of the similar ideas presented across participants. Finally, these categories were organized into larger themes that better arranged the data for the purpose of review and description. No idea or category was given more or less weight in this process. Rather, the goal was to capture and describe all ideas that the participants presented with as minimal repetition of content as possible.

**Round two.** The results from the qualitative analysis of question 3 ("Please provide suggestions about how career counselors and the career development profession could effectively respond to the issues you have just described") were used to create a survey. The creation of such a survey is consistent with the Delphi method (Linstone & Turoff, 1975; Skulmoski et al., 2007; Vázquez-Ramos et al., 2007) and is intended to provide an avenue for experts to rate the relative importance of the issues they have put forward as a group. Questions 1 and 2 were not used to create a ranked survey because question 1 was used as a control question, and

results from neither question 1 nor 2 would benefit from ranking (e.g., it is not beneficial to rank the relative importance of gender or racial discrimination). Consequently, the resulting quantitative survey consisted of 18 action items, which emerged from responses to question 3. These items represented action steps that the experts proposed as means of addressing the career development challenges that traditionally marginalized populations face in the context of the current economic crisis. Experts were asked to rate each item on a scale of 1 (long-term) to 5 (immediate). *Long-term* referred to items that should be addressed within 10 years and *immediate* referred to items that should be addressed within 1 year. These data were analyzed by calculating the mean and the interquartile range (IQR; i.e., variance) for each item, which were then used in the third and final round of data collection.

**Round three.** The resulting analysis from round two was used to create a personalized survey for each of the expert respondents. Each expert received a form that gave the group mean and IQR for each action step item on the survey. This final step prompted the experts to reconsider their original answers in light of the average and variability of their expert peers' responses. This stage of the Delphi method is intended to move experts towards consensus, while avoiding group pressures that might occur in a face-to-face format. The results of this round were once again analyzed to determine the mean and IQR.

## Results

This study yielded two types of results. First, unranked qualitative categories and themes emerged based on expert opinions about the most pressing career development issues that traditionally marginalized populations face as a result of the current economic crisis. Second, ranked qualitative categories and themes were developed based on experts' suggestions for action steps to alleviate those career development issues.

### Questions 1 & 2 – Career Development Challenges

Based on the authors' qualitative analysis of questions 1 and 2, the responses to both questions fell into one of five themes: Systemic—General, Systemic—Population-Specific, Systemic Impact on the Individual, Individual—General or Individual—Population-Specific. The one exception to this pattern is that no data from question 2 fell into the Individual—Population-Specific theme. These themes and associated categories are detailed in the Appendix. The Systemic—General theme was characterized by career development issues that are embedded in systemic structures and dynamics. The Systemic—Population-Specific theme included categories that were systemic in nature, but referred to a particular population or group. The Systemic Impact on the Individual theme represented categories that detailed the effects that systemic dynamics have on individuals. The Individual—General theme contained categories that described career development challenges that individuals from all marginalized populations face. The Individual—Population-Specific theme was characterized by career development challenges that particular groups or populations face. While we could give significant time and space to analyzing these themes, the purpose of this study is primarily to inform possible action steps. As such, these results are provided in summary form (see Appendix) as context for the action steps that the experts suggested. Specifically, the reader may use them to evaluate the viewpoints, mind frames and knowledge sets of the participants who recommended these actions.

### Question 3 – Action Steps

The authors' qualitative analysis of question 3 yielded four action step themes: Practice, Training, Theory & Research and Advocacy. There were a total of 18 categories across all of these themes, which we transformed into items to create a survey for experts. As detailed in the Methods section, this survey was sent out over two rounds of data collection to determine experts' collective rating of these items and to attempt to create a consensus among these experts. In addition to the ranked items, experts also ranked the relative importance

of the four themes (Practice, Training, Theory & Research and Advocacy) that emerged from the authors' qualitative analysis of question 3. The resulting list, ranked by importance in terms of time-to-action on a scale of 1 (long-term, considered less urgent) to 5 (immediate, considered more urgent), is presented in Table 1. This table also includes averages and variations of participants' responses from both rounds of data collection. Beyond the relative importance that experts placed on these items, some interesting patterns should be noted about the final rankings. Six of the top 11 items were Practice items, which is consistent with the top ranking of the Practice category overall (see Table 2). Training-related actions were ranked first and second on the list, which suggests the high importance of training future career counselors about the plight of traditionally marginalized populations in the context of the current economic climate. While not prevalent at the top of the list, the highest ranked Advocacy item suggested that the career development profession take an inward look at its history in service of informing future actions. As one expert stated, "I often think that paying attention to the roots of the career counseling profession in terms of the social reform movements of the last century would help the current field find its passion and mission for advocacy." Theory & Research items also were not prevalent at the top of the list. Interestingly, though, the highest ranked item of this category was not about a particular theory, but rather was a suggestion to expand all theories to include traditionally marginalized populations' lived experiences. Finally, the lowest ranked item on the list had a mean of 3.45. Given the scale (1 [long-term] to 5 [immediate]), experts believed that all 18 of the items should be addressed at some point by the career counselors and counselor educators.

**Table 1***Ranked Action Steps*

Action Items	Theme	Round 2			Round 3		Final Rank
		<i>M</i>	IQR	Rank	<i>M</i>	IQR	
Increase knowledge, awareness and counseling skills in regard to contextual and cultural factors' influence on the career development of traditionally marginalized populations.	Training	4.82	0	1	4.91	0	<b>1</b>
Career counseling and programming should be culturally and contextually relevant to various traditionally marginalized populations (e.g., involving networking, mentor development, career knowledge and experiential learning) and should be developed in partnership with these populations when possible.	Practice	4.73	0	2	4.73	0	<b>2<sup>a</sup></b>
Increase knowledge of economic systems and their effect on clients' career development.	Training	4.73	0	2	4.73	0	<b>2<sup>a</sup></b>
On college/university campuses, provide career services to marginalized students and alumni by collaborating with student and alumni organizations.	Practice	4.64	1	4	4.64	1	<b>4</b>
Expand the vision of theory and research in the field of career development to include those who have been typically left out of the career development narrative.	Theory & Research	4.36	1	5	4.55	1	<b>5<sup>a</sup></b>



Advocate for the career development field to reengage with its roots in social justice through practice, training, research and theory.	Advocacy	4.36	1	5	4.55	1	<b>5<sup>a</sup></b>
Career counseling and programming should be focused on increasing self-efficacy, resilience, and client strengths, and building skill sets to overcome systemic barriers (e.g. racism, sexism, educational access).	Practice	4.18	2	10	4.45	1	<b>7</b>
New and effective interventions should be developed in order to increase critical consciousness and skill development among marginalized clients.	Theory & Research	4.27	1	7	4.36	1	<b>8</b>
Increase clients' knowledge of, and reframe beliefs about, various career paths and fields.	Practice	4.27	2	7	4.27	2	<b>9<sup>a</sup></b>
Career development professionals from marginalized groups should be represented in career services organizations.	Practice	4.27	2	7	4.27	1	<b>9<sup>a</sup></b>
Become knowledgeable about resources used to address systemic barriers (e.g., financial assistance, legal rights), as well as developing multilingual methods for communicating these resources to clients (e.g. having Spanish language materials for ESL clients).	Practice	4.18	2	10	4.18	1	<b>11</b>
Advocate for increased access to, and support for, educational opportunities for traditionally marginalized populations.	Advocacy	4.00	2	12	4.09	2	<b>12</b>
Advocate for legislation and public funding that addresses unfair structures and practices related to the career development of traditionally marginalized populations, and do so collaboratively with such populations when possible.	Advocacy	3.91	2	13	4.00	2	<b>13</b>
Advocate in general at the national and community level for the importance of work in the lives of all people.	Advocacy	3.73	3	14	3.82	3	<b>14</b>
Increase knowledge of legal regulations and protections that apply to traditionally marginalized populations.	Training	3.64	1	16	3.73	1	<b>15<sup>a</sup></b>
Develop new delivery models in order to make up for a shortage of career development professionals.	Theory & Research	3.73	1	14	3.73	1	<b>15<sup>a</sup></b>
Advocate that employers increase awareness (e.g. the value of marginalized workers), implement training (e.g. challenging occupational stereotypes and implicit biases), and develop policies that increase access and equity for traditionally marginalized populations.	Advocacy	3.45	2	17	3.55	2	<b>17</b>
Reestablish and create more programs for career counselors throughout the country; further, these programs should be designed to train future professionals to meet the unique needs of traditionally marginalized populations, particularly in relation to the local contexts of the clients being served by program graduates.	Training	3.36	3	18	3.45	3	<b>18</b>

<sup>a</sup>Item has an equivalent mean score with another item, and therefore is held equivalent in the final ranking.

**Table 2***General Theme Ranking*

Themes	Round 2			Round 3		
	<i>M</i>	IQR	Rank	<i>M</i>	IQR	Final Rank
Practice	4.82	0	1	4.82	0	<b>1</b>
Training	4.64	1	2	4.64	1	<b>2</b>
Advocacy	4.00	2	3	4.00	2	<b>3</b>
Theory & Research	3.64	2	4	3.64	2	<b>4</b>

**Discussion**

The first discussion point surrounds the experts' view on the career development challenges that traditionally marginalized populations face, both in general and in the context of the economic crisis. Experts expressed the opinion that the career development challenges that traditionally marginalized populations face occur at both individual and systemic levels. Furthermore, they suggested that there are issues relevant across all marginalized populations, as well as issues unique to particular populations. When considering these findings in tandem with the experts' broad range of research/practical experience working with diverse populations, one may assume that the action steps the experts proposed are based on wide-reaching and comprehensive understandings of the career development of marginalized populations. Furthermore, these findings align with professional understandings of career-related cultural competence (NCDA, 2009a, 2009b) and the systemic nature of social justice and social inequity issues (Lewis, Arnold, House, & Toporek, 2002).

In order to provide context for interpreting experts' suggestions for action, it may be helpful to reflect on how they viewed the nature of the current economic crisis in terms of the career development of traditionally marginalized populations. All of the participants believed that the current economy has exacerbated the challenges that this population faced before the crisis began. One expert reflected as follows:

The current economic crisis has made each of these issues [that were present before the crisis] more pronounced. Resources within education systems are stretched thinner. Support programs are triaged. Teachers are dealing with larger class sizes and fewer possibilities for connected interactions with students. Parents are stressed and anxious; many work longer hours and thus are home supervising less and have little time to advocate for their children's educational needs. Others face the health and mental health consequences of unemployment and are less able to support their children emotionally and intellectually, as well as financially.

In addition, some experts believed that the economic crisis also has resulted in unique challenges for marginalized populations that were not necessarily present before the crisis began. For example, one expert stated the following:

The realities of constrained budgets are juxtaposed with efforts to use the current situation to carry out anti-immigrant agendas in the name of preserving quality and, more outrageous, "preserving unity" (I refer to Arizona's efforts to ban Chicano and Latino studies because they are "separatist" and "foment hate").

Another expert suggested the following: “There is increased discrimination against all marginalized populations, especially those individuals of color and older workers ... Scarcity of [employment] opportunity breeds hatred, blame, resentment, distrust.”

Given the apparent credibility of these experts’ opinions, as well as their acknowledgement of general and unique features of this economic climate, the authors now turn to their opinions about action steps. Upon reviewing this list, it seems that many of these items would be relevant both before and after the economic crisis, while others may have a unique purpose within the crisis. For example, the top ranked item (“increase knowledge, awareness and counseling skills in regard to contextual and cultural factors’ influence on the career development of traditionally marginalized populations”) might be considered best practice based on common training standards (Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs [CACREP], 2009; NCDA, 2009a, 2009b) at any time; while one of the items tied for second (“increase knowledge of economic systems and their effect on clients’ career development”) might be considered a suggestion specific to the current economic crisis. As one expert asserted, “Career professionals need to be trained in macroeconomics and global business so they understand trends and can adequately train/inform their clients throughout the course of their career development.” This call for an understanding of economics is certainly not new in the career development literature (Blustein, 2006), but is not present in training standards for counselors (CACREP, 2009) or career counselors (NCDA, 2009a, 2009b).

In terms of the ranking of the general categories, it is of interest that Theory & Research was ranked lowest of the general categories. While this is speculation, the experts in this study may have believed that current theory could be expanded to include the plight of marginalized populations (the highest ranked item in this category indicated as much), and that efforts would be more appropriately focused on using current theory to better train career counselors and serve clients. For example, Social Cognitive Career Theory certainly is “flexible” enough to address this topic through the concepts of contextual affordances and personal inputs (Lent et al., 2000), and a large body of existing research does just that. So it seems that experts are more focused on putting research and theory into practice than on developing new theories and findings.

## **Suggestions for Action**

The remaining question is how this list can best be used to take action. In a general sense, this question might be better framed in terms of professional and organizational strategic planning. Given the purview of one’s career counseling practice or educational influence, how might this list aid in strategically choosing actions that can support the career development of traditionally marginalized populations? For example, career counseling centers in higher education settings might consider the Practice and Training items the most relevant and accessible items from this list. Private practice counselors working in geographic areas where English is not the most common language might act on the item suggesting that it is important to have multilingual methods for communicating these resources to clients (e.g., having Spanish language materials for English as a Second Language clients). Specifically, one expert suggested that those in private practice should “develop a library of Spanish language resources, websites, etc. relevant to educational and vocational development, options, etc.” Board members of organizations such as the NCDA might view this entire list as a model for strategically addressing the needs of traditionally marginalized populations by deploying its resources and networks to correspond with the ranking of the four thematic categories (Practice, Training, Theory & Research and Advocacy).

While this list can be used to generate actions unique to organizations and practice areas, it may also be helpful to return to some specific suggestions that experts made within these 18 categories. For example, in

regard to the top ranked item (“increase knowledge, awareness and counseling skills in regard to the influence of contextual and cultural factors on the career development of traditionally marginalized populations”), one expert suggested the following:

More education and professional development for career counselors and practitioners is also useful, especially dissemination of research and practice implications related to the specific populations. For example, many counselors or others in the field know little about the career or work issues of transgender people (especially in the context of more competition for fewer jobs, as well as increased competition once hired), and would be better able to serve and advocate for them if they themselves were more informed.

In regard to one of the items tied for second place (“career counseling and programming should be culturally and contextually relevant to various traditionally marginalized populations [e.g., involving networking, mentor development, career knowledge and experiential learning] and should be developed in partnership with these populations when possible”), one expert said the following:

At the community level, counselors may be involved in public education—in facilitating communities in identifying needs and accessing resources that may be used by the whole community, including but not limited to facilitating a forum for the voices of communities to reach policy makers as well as influence services, programs and grants.

In relation to the Training item addressing the legal rights of marginalized groups (“increase knowledge of legal regulations and protections that apply to traditionally marginalized populations”), one participant focused on training for both counselors and employers:

Career counselors need to be well educated about the regulations governing people in these groups and the kinds of protections the laws offer. Employers definitely need to be better educated about the laws as well as provided with examples of how international or disabled candidates are valued employees.

This quote also refers to another action item calling for advocacy in relation to educating employers about the value of marginalized populations.

In any case, this list should be interpreted in light of how any one individual or organization is able to address the population(s) being served. Each professional and organization has a unique array of opportunities, social networks, skill sets and constraints. Given that all items on this list were ranked to reflect relatively high importance, there is no “wrong” item from this list on which to act. Rather, by working together across contexts and organizations, it may be possible for counselors to enact all of these items by using their unique resources and talents.

## **Limitations of This Study**

This study has several limitations. First, by asking career development experts instead of directly asking marginalized populations, this study is skewed toward expert-based models of understanding and their collective assumptions. This may exclude important nuances for particular populations. Second, the majority of the experts identified as White and female, which may bias the results of this study due to factors of personal identity. Finally, the majority of the experts worked and focused their research primarily in urban contexts,

and most of them worked in the Northeast. This factor may bias the results in terms of geographic region and context due to unique family or social norms.

## Areas for Future Research

Areas for future research can be found in the Theory & Research action items suggested in this study. First, experts recommended “expand[ing] the vision of theory and research in the field of career development to include those who have been typically left out of the career development narrative.” This suggestion is an echo of previous authors’ assertions that career development theories are biased toward more privileged populations (Gysbers, Heppner, & Johnston, 2003). Models such as Blustein’s (2006) or Byars-Winston and Fouad’s (2006) might be considered efforts on this front, and researching such models is one possible method of acting on this suggestion. These models call for career counselors to place in the fore issues of context and culture, rather than considering culture an afterthought to traditional career counseling methods.

Second, experts suggested that “new and effective interventions should be developed in order to increase critical consciousness and skill development among marginalized clients.” Increasing critical consciousness is a particular suggestion that invokes the need to raise clients’ awareness of their sociopolitical position in society (Freire, 1970; Martín-Baró, 1991, 1994), and therefore is a call to develop interventions which attend to clients’ lived experiences of marginalization and discrimination. Research methods such as participatory action research (PAR; Creswell & Plano Clark, 2007; Kidd & Kral, 2005) may be particularly well-suited for such efforts, given this method’s combination of intervention and action in collaboration with clients. PAR is different from traditional research in that research participants take part in developing research questions, collecting data, analyzing data and using the results to make substantive changes in their context. For example, in a community where African American unemployment is very high (Levine, 2012), career counselors or researchers could pursue such individuals in a practice of investigation that engages them in the research process. Such a study might begin by facilitating a discussion around a question such as, “What questions should we be asking to figure out how to improve your chances for employability in this community?” A researcher might form concrete research questions to shape the study, but community members would drive the focus. All those involved would then collect data, analyze it and see what could be done with the answers to effect change.

Finally, experts suggested that “new delivery models will need to be developed in order to make up for a shortage of career development professionals.” This is a very pragmatic suggestion that may be necessary to fulfill the needs of clients in both this and any future economic crises. As such, researchers, scholars and professional counseling organizations should consider methods for collaboration in service of meeting this call. Although there has been recent collaboration in the counseling profession on this front (Hansen, 2000), there remains much work to be done. In addition to collecting experts’ suggestions, further research should be carried out that captures the voices and experiences of traditionally marginalized populations. Although asking experts about such topics provided an efficient and systematic method of inquiry within a fluid and changing context, future researchers should collect data directly from these populations.

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## Appendix

### Career Development Challenges Faced by Marginalized Populations

#### Theme: Systemic—General

##### Generalized challenges

- Systematic discrimination and stereotyping occur in terms of issues such as (but not limited to) education, training, hiring, promotion and compensation, some of which are more pronounced in certain career fields and/or geographic areas.
- Marginalized populations experience lack of, and barriers to, support and access for completing educational goals, obtaining quality healthcare and achieving career goals.
- Economic challenges, including meeting one's basic needs, are exacerbated by systemic discrimination and the growing gap between *haves* and *have-nots*.

##### Challenges specific to the economic crisis

- Traditionally marginalized populations tend to be employed in situations with poor job security, pay and benefits; be at higher risk for layoffs; and have insufficient supports to deal effectively with losing work.
- Amplified discriminatory hiring, promotion and compensation practices may occur due to scarce resources and increased competitiveness in the job market.
- Public funding and policy do not effectively address the career development problems that traditionally marginalized populations are facing in this current economic climate.
- Overall, the economic crisis has further limited access to education and employment for traditionally marginalized populations, increased the gap between the *haves* and *have-nots*, and increased the number of people experiencing economic hardship.

#### Theme: Systemic—Population-Specific

##### Generalized challenges

- Women face sexism and workplace patriarchy in regard to pay, promotion, family decisions, relational approaches to working and challenges related to other intersecting identities (e.g., race, sexual orientation).
- LGBTQ populations experience geographic discrimination, consider when to “come out” and navigate hostile work environments.
- Latina/o adolescents and young adults experience educational inequity, barriers to accessing higher education (particularly for undocumented individuals) and fewer career development opportunities in general.
- Immigrant refugees face language proficiency challenges, lack of professional networks and inadequate career development support.
- Low-income, first-generation college students lack access to financial resources, professional networks, mentors and an understanding of available career development resources; additionally, these students may receive poor financial aid counseling and subsequently enter into unnecessary debt.
- International students often face foreign cultural norms, pressure from family and potential employers' insufficient knowledge about their employability.
- Individuals with disabilities, particularly hidden disabilities such as mental illness, may encounter problems related to discrimination, disclosing their conditions and articulating strengths.
- Individuals from a low-socioeconomic status background may face significant challenges including a lack of housing, childcare, financial security and adequate educational preparation.
- College students of nontraditional ages face discrimination, particularly when there are gaps in employment or significant career field changes involved.

##### Challenges specific to the economic crisis

- Immigrants face increased difficulties in finding work, particularly in places where immigrant employment legislation has been reenforced or newly created during the economic crisis.
- Due to increased competitiveness, there is increased discrimination for people of color, older workers, those with nontraditional sexual identities, and those with disabilities.

- Unemployment rates in the current crisis are significantly higher for African Americans and Latinos in comparison to Whites.

### **Theme: Systemic Impact on the Individual**

#### **Generalized challenges**

- Facing significant career development barriers may lead to despair and lowered expectations for the future.
- Conflicts between an individual's culture of origin and work culture may lead to internal conflicts, including feelings of *selling out*.
- Being marginalized results in negative thinking, which becomes embedded in one's self-concept and decision-making processes.

#### **Challenges specific to the economic crisis**

- Scarcity of opportunity fosters negative mindsets and beliefs among and about these populations (e.g., hatred, blame, resentment, distrust) and makes the process of finding work more difficult.

### **Theme: Individual—General**

#### **Generalized challenges**

- Lowered self-esteem, self-efficacy and outcome expectations in traditionally marginalized populations can create significant problems for career development.
- These populations tend to have reduced knowledge and perception of possible career/occupational pathways.

#### **Challenges specific to the economic crisis**

- Marginalized populations are more afraid to change jobs or transition their careers in this economic climate.
- Feelings of disempowerment and loss of identity in an increasingly impersonal climate, as well as a lack of creativity in conceptualizing possible career options, have a negative effect on individuals' ability to pursue, secure and maintain work.

### **Theme: Individual—Population-Specific**

#### **Generalized challenges**

- Individuals with disabilities may have lower self-efficacy, be overly dependent on others, have unrealistic expectations and be wary of disclosing disability despite possible benefits.
- Immigrant refugees may have different notions of time and professionalism, lack important skill sets, maintain career goals that are incompatible with the U.S. job market and be more likely to take lengthy trips back to their home country that interfere with job success.
- Individuals over 30 may lack adequate understanding of technological career development resources.

#### **Challenges specific to the economic crisis**

- N/A