Developing Self in Work and Career
Concepts, Cases, and Contexts

Edited by
Paul J. Hartung and Linda M. Subich
INTRODUCTION: RECONSIDERING SELF IN CAREER THEORY AND PRACTICE

PAUL J. HARTUNG AND LINDA M. SUBICH

Human beings possess the unique psychological ability to self-reflect. This capacity for introspection, or reflexive consciousness, extends to all human activities in all domains of life—from work to love to spirit to play—and rests “at the heart of the self” (Leary & Tangney, 2003b, p. 3). The social psychologist Roy Baumeister (1987) argued convincingly some years ago that for nearly as long as we human beings have self-reflected, we have confronted four fundamental problems of selfhood across these and other life spheres: (a) self-knowledge, or how we understand ourselves; (b) self-fulfillment, or how we construct meaningful and purposeful lives; (c) self-definition, or how we construct an identity that both distinguishes us from and connects us with others; and (d) self-in-relation, or how we interact and cope with the social contexts and conditions in which we live. Each one of these problems of selfhood retains deep historical roots in both the Eastern and Western worlds. These long-standing problems of self continue to engage scholars across psychological specialties who consider self from structural, agentic, motivational, interpersonal, emotional, ontological, narrative, and other perspectives (see Leary & Tangney, 2003a; McAdams, Josselson, & Lieblich, 2006).

Contemporary thought cutting across domains of psychological science and practice offer configurations of the self as a complex, dynamic,
cognitive–affective–action system; an interpersonal self-construction system; and a psychosocial dynamic processing system (Mischel & Morf, 2003). So conceived, we continue to confront problems of self with regard to how we use our work, our jobs, our occupations, and our careers to know, fulfill, and define ourselves as well as to relate and connect ourselves to society. Few, if any, human phenomena and behaviors shape, reflect, and define the self more so than do work and career and their concomitant activities of occupational exploration, choice, preparation, entry, adjustment, advancement, and retirement (Blustein, 2006). In this introductory chapter, we consider the self and problems of the self as constructed in work and career relative to the plan and contents of the book.

SELF IN WORK AND CAREER

The self occupies a central role in vocational psychology and career development. This role ranges from self as a potential unifying construct and central knowledge base for decision making to self as a multidimensional concept and foundational element of career theory and practice.

Unifying Construct

Pressing economic and social conditions of the information and globalization age demand that we reassess our long-standing emphasis on fitting workers to jobs and move toward empowering workers to adapt to radically and rapidly changing occupational structures (Savickas & Baker, 2005). Fundamental to this process, the fields of vocational psychology and career counseling must reinvent themselves by shifting their focus from studying career development to investigating how people manage and make meaning through work and careers. In this context, the self offers a unifying construct that may help link these fields with other social and behavioral science disciplines toward the collective goal of a unified science and practice of the self.

Know Thyself

Frank Parsons (1909), founder of the vocational guidance movement, first outlined a tripartite model of career decision making involving self-knowledge, occupational knowledge, and reasoning about the relationship between these two types of knowledge. (For a history of early career counseling, see Savickas, 2009.) Since then, scholars and practitioners have considered self and self-reflection relative to activities of occupational choice and work adjustment across the life span. Parsons’s pronouncement to “know thyself” remains central to career theory and practice.
Self-Constructs

Fueled by Super's (1957) *The Psychology of Careers*, which placed implementing self-concept at the center of work and career development, considerations of self have pervaded career choice and development theories, assessment methods, and counseling interventions that variously address multiple ancillary dimensions of self related to attentional, cognitive, and regulatory processes. These dimensions range from self-awareness, self-knowledge, self-observation, and self-concept development to self-appraisal, self-esteem, self-control, and self-efficacy, to name a few. Scholars and practitioners alike use the notion of self both to comprehend vocational behavior and its development and to assist people to construct their life-careers and enhance their experiences of work as personally meaningful and socially relevant.

Career Theory and Counseling Practice

The self pervades the very foundations of vocational psychology and career counseling (Blustein & Noumair, 1996). Indeed, self is central to the individual differences, developmental, sociocognitive–behavioral, and constructionist traditions that undergird these disciplines (Osipow, 1990). The current milieu, in which scholars and practitioners seek to build on these foundations and advance the relevance of these traditions for a global workforce, calls for a contemporary examination of the viability, vitality, and validity of the self within the predominant theories of career choice and development and the counseling practices linked to them and that aim to advance work and career in people’s lives. The central aim of this book is to provide such an examination for researchers and practitioners in the fields of vocational psychology and career development and counseling. Given the pervasive treatment of the topic across disciplines in the social and behavioral sciences, ranging from developmental and personality psychology to cognitive and multicultural psychology, readers from a variety of areas will likely find the book useful as a supplementary textbook and as a resource for research and practice.

PLAN OF THE BOOK

*Developing Self in Work and Career* considers the four problems of the self—knowledge, meaning, identity, and circumstance—within the broad domains of theoretical models, counseling methods, and social contexts of career choice and development. In so doing, the book recognizes and aims to advance the self's prominence in the psychological and social sciences, dating from William James’s (1892) late-19th-century writings to C. H. Cooley’s
(1902) and G. H. Mead’s (1934) early 20th-century sociological conceptions, to Carl Rogers’s (1951) theory and practice innovations at mid-20th century, to “the contemporary explosion of work on this topic” (Mischel & Morf, 2003, p. 15). Scholars concede that although the self has enjoyed tremendous use and study linked to an array of topics across a multitude of subfields, this knowledge now requires integration into a cumulative science and, we add, practice of the self (Leary & Tangney, 2003a; Mischel & Morf, 2003).

Acknowledging the need for integrated, contemporary perspectives on the self, the Society for Vocational Psychology dedicated its 2007 Biennial Conference at The University of Akron to examining the self in vocational psychology and career counseling. These fields constitute the psychological and counseling subspecialties concerned with advancing knowledge, improving practice, and guiding social policy about work in human life (Savickas, 2006). This conference prompted the authors to assemble for this volume an international cast of scholars and practitioners to reconsider how we think about and use the self and self-related constructs to comprehend, assess, and promote occupational exploration, choice, work adjustment, and vocational development within a 21st-century milieu of burgeoning information technology, a global economy, and a culturally diverse workforce (Blustein, 2006; Savickas & Baker, 2005). The book aims to advance efforts throughout the social and behavioral sciences that seek contextualized understandings of the self that endeavor to augment, replace, or transform the centuries-old and decontextualized “modern self,” characterized by autonomy, volition, and coherence (see Blustein, 2006; Vitz, 2006), with fresh perspectives that provide a configuration of the self relevant for today.

Toward constructing a science and practice of the self in work and career, we organized the book into three parts pertaining to historical and theoretical foundations, counseling practice methods, and contextual dimensions. Chapters 2 through 6 consider the self in work and career from the perspectives of history and predominant theoretical models of career choice and development: person–environment fit (P–E fit), developmental, sociocognitive–behavioral, and constructionist. The next four chapters offer counseling methods rooted in these theoretical models and in contemporary industrial–organizational psychology to foster self-construction through work and career. Collectively, these nine chapters deal most specifically with the problems of self-knowledge, self-fulfillment, and self-definition described by Baumeister (1987). In the final three chapters, the authors turn to examining how constructing self in work and career fundamentally requires attending to contextual dimensions of gender, culture, and class—dimensions that most squarely concern the problem of how we construct self and how self is constructed in relation to our social world.

We close this chapter by surveying the specific contents of the volume.
FOUNDATIONS

Vocational psychology enjoys a storied history and a rich tradition of theory building (Savickas & Baker, 2005). Within its history, the self in vocational psychology has evolved through distinct periods concurrent with and reflective of advances in psychological theory and practice. In Chapter 2, Mark L. Savickas situates the self in historical context dating to 19th-century intellectual, political, and religious considerations through expansive 20th-century advances in psychological theory, science, and practice, culminating in contemporary thinking about the self. Savickas points out the ambiguity that has surrounded the meaning of self in vocational psychology and moves to resolve this ambiguity by delineating the evolution of discourse about the self within the discipline. Two perspectives on self as object and as subject, Savickas notes, long fragmented vocational psychology into two camps that now enjoy a rapprochement yielding a contemporary view on self as a psychosocial project involving identity construction. This contemporary view combines both objective personality and subjective self-concept dimensions in a projective, socially situated self formed by the individual and by the community. Savickas’s historical analysis articulates the meaning of the self construct and its evolution in breadth through the field’s foundations in differential, developmental, sociocognitive–behavioral, and constructionist psychology. This analysis provides the framework for the authors of the next four chapters to examine the self in depth from each of these foundational theoretical perspectives.

Beginning with Parsons’s (1909) pioneering work and the rise of psychological testing in the early 1900s, fitting people to work environments has occupied vocational psychology throughout its history. In Chapter 3, Patrick J. Rottinghaus and Raoul Van Esbroeck consider the self from the perspective of individual differences, the founding and long-dominant epistemology of vocational psychology and career counseling that has emphasized self as a collection of traits. Rottinghaus and Van Esbroeck describe past and current perspectives on P–E fit career theory, and then extend their discussion to encompass a more dynamic and subjective definition of fit. The authors offer a prescriptive model to illustrate the complexity and connectivity of career activities and processes. In particular, they incorporate attention to personality, context, and postmodern integrative and narrative perspectives on psychology and offer strategies for applying these ideas to P–E fit interventions. In so doing, they deal most directly with the problem of self-knowledge, describing it as essential to career choice and development.

Spawned by Super’s (1957) landmark work in the mid-20th century, scholars and practitioners have conceptualized and advanced work and career as developmental processes from a humanistic point of view on self as mentally
represented and subjectively experienced in the form of a self-concept and identity. Fred W. Vondracek and Erik J. Porfeli in Chapter 4 discuss the self through the lenses of self-concept and identity formation relative to developmental models of work and career. By addressing these constructs they deal most directly with the problem of self-definition. Vondracek and Porfeli define and examine self-concept and identity constructs within the predominant developmental career models. They then link these developmentally grounded theoretical perspectives with leading-edge advances in developmental psychology to assert that advancing the future of the self in career theory and practice will likely, and optimally, involve a difficult enterprise of melding self-concept and identity constructs within a complex, comprehensive, and dynamic view of persons as self-constructing systems, an endeavor aligned with social and personality psychology (Mischel & Morf, 2003).

The 1980s witnessed the emergence of the social–cognitive perspective on work and careers, predated by cognitive–behavioral and learning theory applications to career decision making in the late 1970s concurrent with psychology’s cognitive revolution. In Chapter 5, Robert W. Lent and Nadya A. Fouad consider self from a sociocognitive perspective in general and social cognitive career theory (SCCT) in particular. Lent and Fouad discuss self-efficacy, the central self variable in SCCT, and differentiate it from other related constructs such as self-esteem and self-confidence. Dealing most directly with problems of self-knowledge and self-in-relation, Lent and Fouad explore the reciprocal interplay of self and context in career development over the life course. Highlighted are key features of a sociocognitive view of self, including self as a dynamic system that self-directs and self-regulates. A case-based illustration of social–cognitive career counseling suggests how skill development expands the client’s view of self, how accurate self-assessment clarifies the client’s self view, and how consideration of real and perceived barriers links self to context.

Constructivist and social constructionist perspectives on career emerged in earnest in the 1990s, gaining a foothold in vocational psychology with the promulgation of postmodern and narrative career-counseling methods. However, nascent constructivism in vocational psychology appeared as early as 1961 in the writings of David Tiedeman. Characterizing constructivism and social constructionism collectively as constructivisms, Audrey Collin and Jean Guichard advance in Chapter 6 a psychological conceptualization of the self that shifts away from the notion of self as a possession and toward an understanding of self as a dynamic, constructing systems—a conceptualization finding tremendous synergy with contemporary social psychology and personality psychology views on self (Mischel & Morf, 2003). Addressing most squarely problems of self-fulfillment and self-definition, Collin and Guichard explicate perspectives on the self from the conceptual frames of the construc-
tivisms, explain how scholars have transported these views to vocational psychology, and elucidate a model and counseling method for constructing self in work and career.

PRACTICE METHODS

Vocational psychology concerns the science of vocational behavior and its development as well as the practical use of theory and research findings in career intervention. Therefore, the historical and theoretical foundations of the self examined early in the book naturally find their extended applications in practical methods that aim to advance the self in work and career. The next four chapters consider career counseling methods that seek to resolve problems of self-knowledge, self-fulfillment, self-definition, and self-in-relation and thereby promote understanding, meaning, identity, and circumstance with regard to constructing self in work and career.

Counselors have long used vocational interest inventories to match people to occupations on the basis of inventory score comparisons with normative groups. Person matching innovates this traditional P–E fit approach by matching people to people in occupations based on inventory score profile similarity. Donald G. Zytowski and Catalina D'Achiardi-Ressler examine in Chapter 7 the person-match approach within the context of Markus and Nurius's (1986) possible selves construct. Zytowski and D'Achiardi-Ressler describe how possible selves are formed, their content, how they function as motivators of occupational behavior, and how they may be modified to expand or alter options considered by the individual. The authors then describe how counselors can use person matching to link clients to multiple possible selves.

Contemporary life requires workers to be more self-directed by adapting and managing their own work lives in an age of enormous flux and uncertainty rather than relying on organizations to direct and support them. Advancing this thesis, Sherry E. Sullivan in Chapter 8 uses the construct of the boundaryless career to consider the self as independent and unfettered by traditional organizational arrangements in which employees once exchanged company loyalty for job security and stability. Sullivan describes how sweeping change wrought by environmental conditions and personal factors combine to reshape career and organizational structures in the present era. Such change leaves many people searching for ways to comprehend and navigate an unfamiliar, complex, and dynamic 21st-century world of work. In response, Sullivan offers a model that counselors and consultants can use to assist people to gain self-directedness and pattern their lives with authenticity, balance, and challenge.

Offering an integrative approach to career assessment and counseling, Fred H. Borgen and Nancy E. Betz in Chapter 9 share their vision of how
personality, interests, and self-efficacy can be considered in combination to facilitate self-development in work and career. Borgen and Betz discuss these three domains of individuality first as pairs to illustrate the synergy that exists among the constructs, and then offer a theoretical integration of the triad. They go on to describe their new method for the integrated assessment of these domains of self-knowledge as a blending of idiographic and nomothetic methods, and they suggest that in so doing they take a constructivist and narrative approach to understanding the self. The authors then illustrate the application of this measurement system in a case example that moves their discussion of the self from theory to practice.

The notion of occupational choice as an attempt to implement the self-concept has held sway in vocational psychology and career counseling for nearly 60 years. This despite the fact that until the early 1950s vocational scholars and guidance personnel viewed occupational decision making and choice as a single, point-in-time event rather than a life-span developmental process. In Chapter 10, Susan D. Phillips traces the foundations of self-concept implementation to Parsons’s (1909) seminal edict “Know thyself,” through Super’s (1957; Super, Savickas, & Super, 1996) innovative emphases on growth and change over time, to more recent contextual configurations of implementing self through agentic career decision making. Weaving case studies throughout her discussion, Phillips illustrates self-concept implementation from the perspectives of fit, development, and agency. She contends that we must now build on these three perspectives by developing counseling models and methods that more fully consider and attend to people’s lived experiences as they implement their self-concepts and construct their lives through work and career. Recognizing personal and social barriers to self-concept implementation, Phillips ultimately leads readers to consider how counselors increasingly have emphasized empowering individuals to become agents of their own career decision making within the unique relational and cultural contexts of their lives.

**CONTEXTUAL DIMENSIONS**

Human development proceeds within manifold contexts. People function and develop not in isolation but in relation to the social, cultural, and physical environments in which we find ourselves. As we develop and construct our lives in work and career, significant and substantial contextual factors shape the self that we construct. The authors of the final three chapters examine the self in work and career through the contextual lenses of gender, culture, and social class. Collectively, these three chapters sensitize readers more keenly to the influences of environmental and situational factors on the self and thereby attend most directly to problems of self-in-relation.
In Chapter 11, Mary J. Heppner and Chu-Chun Fu examine gender as a contextual influence on self-construction. Heppner and Fu explore the literature on gender and work across the life span, recognizing how these constructs evolve and change throughout human life. More specifically, they consider childhood and adolescence as the point of origin of conceptions of a gendered self and the earliest emergence of a vocational self. They highlight school and peer influences and then discuss how the self in early adulthood is often shaped by the new life and work roles adopted by the individual. They take care to examine how the selves that emerge for an individual sometimes conflict, and in particular, they emphasize the potential tension between work and family and the manner in which sexual orientation may facilitate or impede career-related identity development. Finally, Heppner and Fu examine the self at middle-age and beyond as it too often is ignored in the vocational literature. Adults’ reflections on their past and future life journeys are considered through the lens of gender, with particular attention to difficult and gender-based career transitions that may change the individual’s view of self.

Culture wields a powerful influence on how we conceptualize, develop, and implement the self in work and career. Frederick T. L. Leong, Erin E. Hardin, and Arpana Gupta in Chapter 12 advance this concept by examining how person and culture interact to develop individuals’ private, public, and collective selves within the context of manifold interweaving group processes. To more fully comprehend and intervene to promote the self in work and career, Leong and his colleagues propose a cultural formulations approach that incorporates five sociocultural dimensions. Within this framework they particularly attend to the influences of cultural identity and self-construal, psychosocial factors such as opportunities and barriers, and cultural dynamics on constructing possible vocational selves. They then apply this approach in a case study that considers how counselors may better account for the cultural variables that shape clients’ development of multiple selves.

David L. Blustein, Maria T. N. Coutinho, Kerri A. Murphy, Faedra Backus, and Christine Catraio conclude the volume in Chapter 13 by examining the neglected topic of the impact of social class on formulations of the self within vocational psychology. Blustein and his coauthors address definitions of self in psychology and vocational theory and clearly articulate and critique the assumptions about job seekers’ abilities to make choices and overcome barriers that arise from these theories. The authors argue that these assumptions undergird a basic classism in theories of career development by emphasizing work as the opportunity to express one’s self without considering fully the attendant limitations such a view imposes on some members of society. In acknowledging that not all people possess the opportunity to implement self in work, the authors reframe vocational psychology’s fundamental
concepts. As a consequence, they call for theory and practice within a psychology-of-working perspective that can foster greater inclusiveness toward making the dream of self-concept implementation a reality for all people.

REFERENCES


Vocational psychology has embraced the concept of an individual self as a core construct in semblances such as Parsons’s (1909) injunction to increase self-knowledge, Super’s (1963) enjoinder to implement the self-concept, Betz and Hackett’s (1981) encouragement to increase self-efficacy, and Cochran’s (1997) edict to invest the self. Despite the centrality of self constructs in theory and practice, vocational psychologists have paid little attention to the linguistic explication of the self, relying instead on its operational definition. This habitual inattention to examining the “self” is a serious oversight because it leaves vocational psychology’s view of the self as fundamentally ambiguous. This does not mean that vocational psychology does not have a self; in fact, vocational psychology has multiple selves, at least three, each one relatively distinct and existing in isolation from its other renderings. These different models of the self flow from different epistemologies, each of which shapes a distinct approach to science and practice. To elaborate career theories and advance counseling practice, vocational psychologists at least need to articulate their three main epistemic models of the self, and maybe someday organize the relationships among these models of the self into a nomological network.
In this chapter, I seek to redress vocational psychology’s inattention to the self and address the ambiguity of the meaning of self. To begin, I offer a chronological survey of vocational psychology’s three main views of human singularity. During succeeding historical eras, different aspects of human singularity interested vocational psychologists, so they developed a new set of terms and concepts to deal with shifts in the meaning of individuality. Over time, vocational psychology developed what Kuhn (2000) referred to as *language communities*, each with its own paradigm for understanding the self and vocational behavior. Because the self is fundamentally ambiguous, adherents to each paradigm describe it with an agreed-on language and metaphors. Thus, each paradigm has a textual tradition, or way of talking about the self. As readers shall see, when they talk about individuals, differentialists use the language of personality, developmentalists use the language of personhood, and constructionists use the language of identity.

Given its three paradigms and language communities, my thesis is that vocational psychology has at least three selves: the self as object, the self as subject, and the self as project. The three paradigms differ from each other in their perspectives, presuppositions, and predominant metaphors. Nevertheless, each paradigm presents a reasonable and responsible way of organizing the world and conceptualizing the self. Each paradigm for understanding the self was conceptualized in a different historical era and gives pride of place to different aspects of human singularity. The story of the self begins with the concept of character that sustains moral order in agricultural societies.

**CHARACTER**

The self during the Victorian age was not individual; it was part of a collective made of people acting as a group. In his essay on character, Ralph Waldo Emerson (1886) went so far as to state, “Character is this moral order seen through the medium of an individual” (p. 6). As part of a collective, people strove to develop a character that coordinated with the local boundedness, cosmic centeredness, and divine constitution of their community. To do so, each person was to strive to develop the very same characteristics: honesty, responsibility, respect, fairness, helpfulness, and thrift.

Communities did not see vocational behavior as arising from an individual’s outlook or personal agency. Instead, they believed that character was a response to society’s agency. This belief is embedded in the word *character*, which comes from the French caractere, meaning a tool for engraving or sculpting. Communities stamped, impressed, and engraved character on its members by using prefigurations in the form of traditional plots, archetypal stories, theological parables, and cultural myths. Thus, a community’s prefigured
prototypes penetrated people’s raw humanity to sculpt a character shaped by virtuous habits.

These habits changed when modernism moved people from agricultural communities to industrial cities. The dramatic changes that city living wrought in cultural context and interpersonal relationships dismantled the existing social order. Urban centers required a new view of self to replace the Romantic era’s view of self as character. Character in the communal sense became untenable in the impersonal mode of urban living. Collectivist connectedness was broken in the move from sacred societies that inhabited people to secular cities that people inhabited. A person who dwelled in a city became part of an anonymous mass of people living private lives.

MODERNISM: FROM SACRED TO SECULAR

The breakdown of a larger order eventually led to new value being placed on an individual and autonomous self. Tocqueville (1969), who coined the term, defined individualism as “a calm and considered feeling which disposes each citizen to isolate himself from the mass of his fellows and withdraw into the circle of family and friends” (p. 506). Individualism emerged when democracies advanced a society of equals wherein everyone is expected to support her- or himself. In such societies, each person must think of one’s self rather than other people. This quest for personal meaning contrasts sharply with the communal imprinting of social meaning. To leave home and establish an independent self, each young person must determine what kind of life is worth living. When they arrived in the city, young people looked for available slots in which to insert their own labor into the economic engine of industry. This modern sense of self brings the freedom for individuals to go where their intelligence and interests take them. The need to know one’s own talents and traits, in turn, brings a modern interiority that looks inward for meaning (Taylor, 1989, p. x).

Thomas Carlyle (1833/1896), an early critic of industrialization, understood that “people’s creeds, beliefs, and institutions—which are all in tatters because of the enormous advances of modern thought and science—have to be tailored anew to fit the modern era” (p. 109). Carlyle succinctly stated the problem of a young person “getting under way” in industrial society as follows:

To each is given a certain inward talent, a certain outward environment of fortune; to each, by wisest combination of these two, a certain maximum capability. But the hardest problem were ever this first: to find by study of yourself, and the ground you stand on, what your combined inward and outward capability specially is. (p. 92)
While Carlyle accurately stated the problem, Western societies waited 75 years for Parsons to propose a social solution to the problem: namely, that social workers initiate a new profession that in 1909 Parsons called vocational guidance.

So, the story of vocational psychology begins with Parsons, who launched the guidance movement as a scientific method to help young people match self to situation. Similar to Carlyle, Parsons emphasized self-knowledge as a basis for choice. Parsons emphasized a unique and autonomous self that, through “true reasoning,” could be matched to a fitting occupation. According to Parsons (1909), the vital problem of vocational choice “should be solved in a careful, scientific way with due regard to each person’s aptitudes, abilities, ambitions, resources, and limitations, and the relations of these elements to the conditions of success in different industries” (p. 3). The vocational guidance movement founded by Parsons immediately sought to examine the self as a scientific object. In short order, Edward L. Thorndike (1913) defined vocational guidance as “the scientific study of fitting the individual differences of human beings to differences in the work of work” (p. 101).

SELF AS OBJECT: FROM CHARACTER TO PERSONALITY

Parsons and his cohort found their first scientist of vocational guidance in a Harvard University psychology professor named Hugo Münsterberg. Wilhelm Wundt, the founder of psychological science, was disappointed in his student Münsterberg, who insisted on advancing applied psychology and its study of individual differences rather than continuing to develop the pure science of experimental psychology. Today, it seems hard to conceive that psychology discovered “individual differences,” yet remember that the goal of agricultural communities was to stamp everyone with the same virtuous character. The rise of a smokestack economy wrought by industrialization resulted in sociological changes that highlighted individual differences. Individuals in a modern society were to become unique, distinctive, and able to stand out in a crowd. Accordingly, from 1890 onward, the science of individual differences grew strong, especially in applied psychology.

The new science of the self was, in due course, to be called personality psychology. Gordon Allport is usually credited with initiating the formal discipline of personality psychology. His textbook, Personality: A Psychological Interpretation (1937), proved pioneering in that for the first time it defined the topics that the field of personality should cover. Of note, too, in 1937 Ross Stagner published The Psychology of Personality, and a year later Henry Murray (1938) published Explorations in Personality. Until this period, authors of psychology textbooks about the self highlighted character in their book titles,
culminating in Roback’s (1928) monumental volume titled The Psychology of Character, With a Survey of Temperament. According to Nicholson (1998), Allport concluded from Roback’s book that psychology faced insurmountable problems in trying to focus on character as an object of scientific study. Accordingly, Allport initiated efforts to eliminate character from the psychologists’ vocabulary and institutionalize the word personality.

Personality as a scientific construct was initially conceptualized as an individual’s adaptive response to the demands of industrial jobs and urban living. A healthy personality portrayed a persona, or mask, that adjusted well to these demands. Adjustment became the central construct in psychology applied in schools, industry, and clinics. What had once been viewed as moral problems were now reconceptualized as scientific questions. Susman (1979) explained that psychology was attracted to personality because it referred to traits of self-representation and it was value-neutral, free of the moral load carried by character. Modernism and its science of applied psychology had now turned fully from character to personality. Carlyle’s tailor had now been re-tailored in the cloth of modernity, and the tailor’s calling card now advised individuals that they, too, needed a “good fit.”

The science of self that is called personality views individuals from the observer’s vantage point. It represents a form of essentialism that asserts that certain categories have an underlying reality or true nature that one cannot directly observe. This essence gives individuals their personality. This essentialist perspective leads to categorization and the psychology of individual differences. Differential psychology concentrates on categorizing stable traits that objectify and externalize the self. Vocational psychologists refer to traits with nouns, thereby connoting that these essences or variables such as interests are stable over time and consistent across contexts. The descriptive stability of traits provides a secure epistemic base for the predictive validity of aptitude tests and interest inventories. The psychometric approach for objectifying the self matches the stable and consistent object being assessed to known entities such as occupations. This objective measurement produces scores that note affinities and index degree of resemblance. Remember that scores on the Strong Interest Inventory (Strong, 1943) indicate similarity to occupational groups and scores on the Realistic, Investigative, Artistic, Social, Enterprising, and Convention (RIASEC; Holland, 1997) inventories indicate degree of resemblance to vocational personality types. Reports of aptitude and ability test scores objectify individuals by locating them along a normative continuum.

Vocational psychology’s personality perspective on the self as object has followed the typical evolution of a maturing scientific discourse (Ballantyne, 1995): operational definitions, empirical relationships, and theoretical explanations. The work of operational definition was to catalogue and categorize
various aspects of vocational personality by choosing which aspects to study and then constructing tests and inventories to measure those aspects. Thus, Hollingworth (1916) articulated the goals of vocational psychology as specifying the traits required in various types of work so that both the choice of the individual and the selection of the employer would proceed directly once an individual’s characteristics were known. Psychologists needed measures of interests, capacities, and aptitudes to match people to positions. So, during the 1920s and 1930s, they concentrated on the empirical study of personality. Pioneer vocational psychologists established influential research programs focused on measuring what would later be called traits. Leaders of this measurement movement included Thorndike and Hollingworth at Columbia University, Paterson and Darley at the University of Minnesota, Bingham and Scott at Carnegie Tech, and Strong and Terman at Stanford University. Measurement of individual differences was their enterprise; they had no particular interest in establishing a theory of vocational personality. The major accomplishments of measuring abilities, aptitudes, and interests is comprehensively summarized in three landmark books: The Vocational Interests of Men and Women (Strong, 1943), Minnesota Mechanical Ability Tests (Paterson, Elliot, Anderson, Toops, & Heidbreder, 1930), and Appraising Vocational Fitness by Means of Psychological Tests (Super, 1949).

The work of mapping empirical relationships within categories began after World War II, fueled by new statistical techniques such as factor analysis. Rather than concentrating on whether traits existed and which ones were important in the work world, vocational psychologists—led by Guilford (1948) and Darley and Hagenah (1955)—studied how traits relate to each other. Using factor analysis to study personality structure, they established the trait-and-factor model for vocational psychology. During the same period, Roe (1956) mapped the structure of occupations along two dimensions demarcated by eight interest fields and six ability levels.

This work on the structure of interests and the structure of occupations, in due course, led to the theory-construction era. In scientific discourse, theories usually explain interaction among categories. In the instance of vocational psychology, theories explain interactions between personality structure and occupational structure. For example, Holland’s (1997) theory of person–environment fit and Lofquist and Dawis’s (1969) theory of work adjustment explain how personality traits interact with occupational contexts to produce adjustment outcomes. During the 20th century, the overriding goal of vocational guidance rooted in the personality paradigm for understanding the self as object has been to promote the adjustment outcomes of success, satisfaction, and stability. In the middle of the 20th century, vocational psychologists formulated a second paradigm for understanding human singularity.
SELF AS SUBJECT: FROM PERSONALITY TO PERSONHOOD

Following World War II, psychology joined in the critique of individual adjustment as a societal goal. The most prominent voice within psychology was that of Maslow (1961), who wrote, “Adjusted to what? To a bad culture? To a dominating parent? What shall we think of a well-adjusted slave?” (p. 51). Humanistic psychologists concurred with the European existentialists who saw “the total collapse of all sources of values outside the individual.” As Maslow (1961) concluded, “There is no place else to turn but inward, to the self, as the locus of values” (p. 51). But humanistic psychologists in the United States refused to take up the existential pessimism of European psychologists. Instead, these third-force psychologists focused on the democratic promise of normal human development. The core imperatives of humanistic theory—to grow, to become, and to realize full human potential—fit America’s post–World War II conception of democracy and the emerging emphasis on human subjectivity. The self in an age of anxiety must be both autonomous and mature, capable of living up to ideals of democratic thought and action.

The belief that the emerging person must trust in her or his own subjective experience led to a shift from vocational guidance to career counseling. Leading this shift from guidance to counseling was Carl Rogers (1951), who advocated the view that the people are competent to direct themselves. As Rogers and his collaborators shifted their attention from the structure of being to the process of becoming, humanistic psychologists highlighted the inherent human capacity for growth, psychological insight, and self-regulation. They asserted that the emerging person must trust in subjective experience. So, humanistic psychology moved from measuring differences in objective personality to fostering development of subjective personhood. Humanists who had an interest in personality psychology became personologists, studying the person as a whole, not as trait parts, and the self as the center of one’s own life.

Led by Super, vocational personologists heavily critiqued adjustment, equating it to conformity. Super (1955) proposed moving vocational psychology from an individual-differences, or differential, model focused on stability and adjustment to a developmental model focused on change and maturation. Tyler (1978), in her book on Individuality, wrote the following about this paradigm shift: “Perhaps the most fundamental is a shift from reaction to action as the phenomenon to be studied” (p. 2). Borgen (1991) noted that this shift began the move to emphasizing agency rather than the passivity associated with the trait-and-factor approach. He marked this shift as the time when psychologists preferred to view people as actively shaping their lives and careers rather than passively adjusting to external demands.

The developmental paradigm in vocational psychology views self as a subject and calls this sense of personhood a self-concept. A person becomes
aware of self through perceptions of the self. Over time these self-percepts acquire meaning and cohere to form a self-concept. So, for Super, a self-concept is a picture of self, that is, a perceived self with accrued meanings. The conceptual meanings usually arise in some role or set of relationships; and, of course, Super concentrated on self-concepts in occupational roles. Super first suggested the importance of self-concept in career development in a 1951 article titled, "Vocational Adjustment: Implementing Self-Concept." His core postulate, that vocational self-concepts interact with work roles to form interests and shape careers, led Super to consider occupational choice as implementing a self-concept, work as a manifestation of selfhood, and vocational development as a continuing process of improving the match between the self and situation. This movement in vocational psychology from objective personality to subjective personhood corresponded well with the spirit of the 1960s as a time during which Gestalt therapists called for increased awareness of the self and humanistic psychologists promoted actualization of the self.

Self as subject followed the same sequence of discursive maturation that had been traversed by self as object. The work of operational definition again concentrated on selecting the characteristics appropriate for self-evaluation. Self-concept researchers began by using the traits already well-established by personality researchers, but instead of objectively measuring traits with tests and inventories, they used the method of subjective self-estimates advocated by Harry Dexter Kitson (1925) in his self-analysis approach to vocational guidance. Kitson (1934) was pessimistic about the predictive efficiency of trait inventories, claiming that 50% of people could succeed in 50% of occupations. So rather than relying on objective tests, he advocated self-analysis of interests and abilities. Of course, trait-and-factor psychologists such as Paterson and Darley (1936) took a human engineering view and believed that tests corrected errors of self-estimate. Research could not settle the issue because self-reports correlated with adjustment outcomes about .50; test scores correlated with the same outcomes about .50; and self-reports and scores correlated about .50 (Williamson, 1965). Objective scores and subjective self-estimates clearly are different perspectives on the self, each with evidence of its own validity. Objective measures are concerned with public norms and resemblances, whereas subjective measures are concerned with private goals and purposes.

The work of mapping relationships among self-estimates focused on the structure of self-concept. In a classic monograph, Super (1963) differentiated the content of self-concepts from their structure. He identified sets of dimensions and metadimensions that mapped this structure. The dimensions were self-esteem, clarity, abstraction, refinement, certainty, stability, and realism. Super concluded, and Nancy Betz (1994) and Douglas Hall (1971)
agreed, that dimensions such as self-esteem and self-efficacy influence how well the process of self-concept implementation may proceed. In contrast to the dimension of self-concepts, the metadimensions refer to the architecture of the self-concept system. Super named the metadimensions structure, scope, harmony, flexibility, idiosyncrasy, and regnancy. In 1980, Super expanded his self-concept theory in asserting a model of life roles in which individuals have multiple self-concepts, each pertaining to a different social role. In her influential theory of career choice circumscription and compromise, Linda Gottfredson (1981) theorized that self-perceptions progress through stages of increasing differentiation, starting with orientation to size and power (3–5 years old), then to sex roles (6–8 years old), next to social values (9–13 years old), and finally arriving at an internal unique self (14+). Gottfredson (1981) defined the self-concept as “one’s view of self” and “the totality of different ways of seeing oneself” (pp. 546–547).

The work on the structure of self-concepts eventually yielded to scientific discourse about theoretical interaction. In the instance of self-concept theory, it has been the interaction between self-concept dimensions and specific situations. The attention to context was articulated in the 1980s by theorists such as Bandura (1982) in his self-efficacy theory and by Markus and Nurius (1986) in their theory of possible selves. They argued that self-concepts are not stable, generalizable, or an average. Instead, they conceptualized the self as multifaceted and composed of numerous images, schemas, and prototypes. The core representations might be viewed as the self. This view of the self is more fully articulated in career theories that contextualize self-concept dimensions, including Betz and Hackett’s (1981) theory of self-efficacy; Douglas Hall’s (1971) description of self-esteem as a central component of career management; Holland’s (1997) inclusion of self-estimates in his self-directed search; and Lent, Brown, and Hackett’s (1994) sociocognitive theory of interests.

In giving pride of place to a subjective self, Super and his collaborators promoted fragmentation of vocational psychology’s research efforts. They repeatedly portrayed the subjective and developmental perspective on the self as the opposite of the objective and individual-differences perspective on the self. For example, they contrasted the propositional logic of trait theory to the narrative logic of life-pattern theory. Moreover, they contrasted vocational guidance using scores from actuarial methods with career counseling using themes from literary methods. Dichotomies do sometimes have an expository place in presenting a new view. Yet when carried to extremes they promote opposition and fragmentation. I consider Super’s (1954) starkly binary portrayals to be rhetorical rather than real. We would have been better served if he had emptied out the extremes and showcased how serious scholars may view the self from two complementary perspectives. Fortunately for the field
of vocational psychology, the epistemic wars rooted in needless dichotomies seems to be resolved as the field has moved from an either objective or subjective opposition to a both objective and subjective collaboration that encourages multiple perspectives on the self. One direct outcome of this rapprochement is viewing the self as a project that incorporates both an objective personality and a subjective self-concept.

SELF AS PROJECT: FROM PERSONHOOD TO IDENTITY

This epistemic rapprochement reconceptualizes the self in a more social and connected form. The first glimmerings of viewing the relational self as a psychosocial project occurred in feminist thought. In 1968, the Harvard psychologist Naomi Weisstein boldly declared the feminist manifesto as “psychology constructs the female” (p. 2). During the 1970s, feminist psychologists persistently pursued this constructionist insight. The central theme of feminist critiques of vocational psychology during that era was that psychology had mistakenly transposed malleable features of culture into supposedly ironclad facts of nature.

Starting with the proclamation that psychology constructs the female, the social constructionist paradigm views self as a process and calls self-implementation in a social role a project or an identity. Vocational psychologists such as Super (1963) and occupational sociologists such as Gottfredson (1981) had focused on self-concepts rather than self-conceptualizing. Pryor (1985) explained that developmental psychologists who held a subjective perspective on the self had focused on the self in relation to other things, such as interests and occupations, rather than concentrating on defining the self as a structure. Pryor asserted that they became preoccupied with the content of the self or self-concept rather than the self. An alternative to concentrating on the content of the self would be to concentrate on the process by which a self forms, develops, and functions. The distinction between the process of forming a self and the content of that self harkens back to the foundational work of William James.

According to James’s (1890) view of self, human beings possess both a self-conceiving I and a self-conceptual me. James posited that individuals are both subjects who think and the objects of some of those thoughts. For James, the I is the subject and the me is the object. I is the process of being a self, and me evolves as an accumulation of self-understandings in the form of linguistic self-constructions appropriated from sociocultural sources. Self-concept denotes conceptual understandings formed by I. In the language of contemporary narrative psychology, we could say that the I authors me. Thus, using the language of William James, we might reframe Pryor’s (1985) critique to say
that vocational psychologists have been focused on the content of me rather than on the process of I. However, there was one vocational psychologist who did concentrate on the self as an ego process.

As Super pursued his study of self-concepts, David Tiedeman diverged from that path as he began work on a process theory of self and career in a 1961 paper that included the terms career consciousness and career constructionism. Whereas Super investigated conceptual understandings of the me, Tiedeman aimed for a more reflective perspective on the I. As noted before, Super saw self as an object, a me of attitudes and evaluations. Super’s science of self focuses on Newtonian parts and traits that were the results of knowing the self. Tiedeman’s philosophy of self views self as an I of doing and thinking focused on getting to know the self. For Tiedeman, self-concept means process, not state or trait. He viewed the self as the supraordinate organizing principal or systematizing process of the psyche that enables people to symbolize experience into less complex and more workable forms. To indicate the systematizing and organizing process that is I, Tiedeman preferred the term self-conceptualizing, using it to denote the process of giving meaning to self-in-experience (Field, Tiedeman, & Kehas, 1963). Systematizing or self-organization creates a globally coherent pattern from initially independent components such as interest, abilities, needs, and values. The self-organization becomes increasingly complex as the whole intermittently reorganizes its parts.

In viewing life as process, Tiedeman wanted individuals to learn that conceptions of self are just that, conceptions for ordering experience and anticipating the future. Tiedeman encouraged counselors to help clients become aware of how they systematize their experiences into self-concepts. He urged vocational psychologists to concentrate on the individual’s cultivation of personal structure though self-constructing and self-organizing. Tiedeman wanted clients to become conscious of their own consciousness. In other words, he wanted individuals to understand that building a self-concept and identity was a project of self as a process.

When a self-organized system fits its environment, the individual is adapted or, in person–environment terms, the person is congruent with the position. A stable configuration of the whole, by definition, fits its environment. When the environment changes, requiring further adaptation, the person adjusts to these changes while keeping self-organization intact as much as possible. Thus, the self intermittently rearranges into a more ordered and complex pattern, each pattern attaining a temporary equilibrium before encountering the need for further self-organization. As the self stabilizes in a coherent whole, new properties may emerge. These emergent properties belong to the whole and cannot be reduced to the elements that compose it. Tiedeman conceptualized career as a quality that emerges at more complex and better integrated levels of self-consciousness. Once emerged, career through
downward causation directs and regulates lower level components of vocational behavior. Thus, Tiedeman led vocational psychology, or at least its constructionist branch, to the seminal insight that career or vocational self-consciousness is an emergent property of a self-organizing system that through downward causation imposes direction on vocational behavior.

Language plays a central role in the process of conceptualizing a self, or self-constructing. It is access to language that enables individuals to become conscious of their own consciousness, or self-conscious. This reflexivity enables them to form self-defining conceptions about who they are and narratives about what they do. From this perspective on the self, language is not a means to express thoughts or feelings that have a prior existence. Instead, language is the very site of self-constructing and meaning making. Thoughts exist by virtue of language, and, by extension, language provides words to form a self-concept. Lacking a word, one lacks that concept of self and thus lacks that component of identity. Individuals use language and words to talk their concept of self into existence. Self-concept is not an essence that unfolds into the world, it is a task—a project of the person. Self-constructing does not mean inside out but outside in. In constructing the self, an individual draws meaning from experiencing the social world, which then inhabits the self-concept. Bourdieu (1977) developed the idea of inhabiting the self-concept into the concept of habitus. He sought to avoid the philosophical problems of both objectivism and subjectivism in asserting that objective social structures and schemas become inscribed into the subjective experience of individuals, thereby forming a self-concept and imposing a social identity on it.

**SELF-AS-PROCESS FORMS IDENTITY-AS-PROJECT**

Experience provides the means and meaning through which individuals self-construct an identity. So, the self-as-process forms an identity, or self-as-project, that is fundamentally interpersonal. We probably should not use the term *self-constructing* because construction of a self is a social constructing of a self. It involves not just individual construction but co-construction through co-active collaboration with the social group and community. We are biological beings immersed in the linguistic and interpersonal practices of a community. The community's sociocultural and linguistic practices serve as sources of the self and indeed they eventually constitute identity.

Identity is an emergent quality, narrated by language, historically situated, socially constituted, and culturally shaped. Identity embeds multiple self-concepts into numerous social roles. A person narratively constructs
an identity or story of self-in-situation by digesting experience and transforming it into meaning. Identity is the content in the story of me that the self-constructing process of I imposes on my past experiences. Identity tells the story of a self in a context. For example, career is the story that I tell about the trail of me’s along the path of life. Because identity is a narrative about a self in a role or in a relationship, identity is a psychosocial construct rather than a psychological one such as personality or personhood. Identity resides at the interface between the subjective self and objective interpersonal world. In chronicling the recursive interplay between self and society, identity explains why individuals make the choices that they do and the private meaning that guides these choices. In short, stories explain our self to our self and to other people. Self-defining stories about the vocational tasks, occupational transitions, and work traumas an individual has faced from school entry through retirement reveal the essential meaning of career and the dynamics of its construction. Through self-constructing stories, individuals author an identity and construct a career by autobiographically imposing narrative continuity and coherence on their vocational experiences.

Viewing identity as a psychosocial project focuses attention on how the self as process produces identity projects as well as on how the self can reconstruct identity through career intervention. As Tiedeman taught, conceptions of self are just that: conceptions for ordering experience and anticipating the future. Career intervention can help clients become conscious of their own consciousness—or increase their vocational self-consciousness. Typically, these identity interventions use narrative means to increase the integration and narratability of career stories. In narrative counseling for career construction, clients learn that I (self) authors me (identity), and through counseling can reauthor a more vital and livable story of me. In revising identity and career stories (whether through experience or through counseling), the self-as-process repeatedly reorganizes life experiences into narratives with increasing unity, continuity, purpose, and meaning. Thus, the self intermittently rearranges identity into a more ordered and complex pattern, each pattern attaining a temporary equilibrium before encountering a new transition that raises a need for additional self-organization.

CONCLUSION

Returning to the multiple selves of vocational psychology, recall that the field has articulated at least three views of self, with each relatively distinct and existing in isolation from its other renderings. These different models of the self flow from different epistemologies, each of which shapes a distinct
approach to science and practice. The first self replaced character with personality. The self of personality is an object. In this sense, the self is objectified by placing it on a normal curve after measuring its abilities and interests. The self-as-object can also be typed by indexing its resemblance to profiles of occupational groups or RIASEC types (Holland, 1997). The self of personhood is a subject. The individual forms self-concepts by examining her or his own essential subject matter. The task then is to implement that essence in a work role and pursue actualization of the self. The self of identity is a project. The individual constructs a story that explains unity and continuity in the experiences of self in social roles and relationships. The personality object frames interventions of vocational guidance, the personhood subject frames interventions of career counseling, and the identity project frames interventions of life designing.

To clarify its theories and advance its practice, vocational psychology needs to more fully articulate its three main epistemic models of the self and in due course organize their relationships into a nomological network. The current situation has not changed from 1985, when Gottfredson concluded that there had been too little systematic analysis of what constitutes the self and there was little agreement among the different theorists who use the term. Theoretical models of the self remain piecemeal and disorganized. Rather than a further proliferation of new metaphors and models, vocational psychologists need to clarify what they mean by the self and how particular views of self shape career interventions.

REFERENCES


As we contemplate person–environment (P-E) fit in work and career, landmarks in the history of vocational psychology continue to guide our thinking. The works of Frank Parsons (1909); John Holland (1959); and Dawis, England, and Lofquist (1964) stand as pillars of vocational scholarship that have inspired leading scholars from diverse perspectives to debate the utility of P-E fit throughout the years (e.g., Crites, 1961; Rounds & Tracey, 1990; Williamson, 1939). Following the tradition of practical flexibility and the malleable nature of P-E fit (Swanson, 1996), this chapter addresses how the model can flourish within the contexts of contemporary society and advances in vocational psychology. Drawing on integrative research and theories, namely, Savickas’s (2005) career construction theory (CCT), we propose strategies for improving self-knowledge. In particular, we recommend addressing fit more precisely, comprehensively, and subjectively, and emphasizing interactive counseling processes that incorporate the dynamic nature of fit (Chartrand, 1991; Rounds & Tracey, 1990).

Advances in the measurement of individual differences as well as modifications to P-E fit theory over the years (Dawis, 2005; Rounds & Tracey, 1990) have resulted in refinements that link empiricism with contemporary vocational theories and career counseling practice. Like other bottom-up theories,
such as the five factor theory (McCrae & Costa, 2008), trait-based models may coalesce with complementary models into meaningful theory. In particular, vocational psychologists have explored theory convergence within the past 2 decades, yielding more unified theories incorporating disparate perspectives (Osipow, 1990; Savickas & Lent, 1994).

P-E fit logically describes optimal outcomes of career interventions (i.e., a congruent choice) regardless of theory or unique challenges faced by clients. As Savickas (2001) put it,

Theorists must move beyond the antagonism caused by contrasting stability-oriented and change-oriented approaches to a position from which researchers can study the ontogenesis of both general commonalities in development and unique individual difference, as well as specify their age-related interplay. (p. 303)

By synthesizing these different perspectives, we offer a more whole-brained understanding of career development and strategies for improving P-E fit over time. The subjective meaning-making process of understanding objective information about the self (Savickas, 2005; Super, 1983) serves as an integrative framework for our presentation of P-E fit. Drawing from McAdams’s (1995, 2008) levels of personality—traits, characteristic adaptations, and stories—Savickas masterfully connected these domains to career concerns situated within the canon of vocational scholarship. Examining P-E fit from the perspective of McAdams’s levels of personality provides a structure for understanding self-knowledge and how this is contextualized within an evolving sense of self.

Our chapter examines the central tenets of this approach and extends its foci on specificity and the dynamic nature of P-E fit. We consider the self relative to predominant P-E fit models, focusing on self-knowledge as a critical construct and component of career choice and development. We also consider self-knowledge with particular regard to the resurgence of personality and the rise of postmodern perspectives in psychology and explore strategies for applying these ideas to career development interventions within a P-E fit framework.

**HISTORICAL FOUNDATIONS OF P-E FIT**

The theory of P-E fit evolved from the matching men and jobs approach (Crites, 1961) and was traditionally termed *trait-and-factor theory*—the predominant perspective on vocational psychology from World War II through the 1950s. Building on Parsons’s (1909) tripartite method, Williamson (1939, 1950) advanced the importance of actuarial assessment methods and related counseling processes involved in matching people to work environments. The theoretical frameworks offered by Holland (1959, 1997) and Dawis and Lofquist
(1984; see also Dawis, 2005), combined with the shift toward interactional psychology (Pervin, 1968) in response to the person–situation controversy, further crystallized current views of this approach as P-E fit theory.

Drawing from differential psychology, this approach has always focused on practical application of state-of-the-art assessment of the person and knowledge of occupations. Contrary to misconceptions that this approach is static and simplistic (e.g., Crites, 1981), P-E fit has thrived (Rounds & Tracey, 1990) in part due to continual modification informed by advances in theory and changing societal trends (Chartrand, 1991). We examine the present status of P-E fit and describe how ongoing insights from multiple disciplines can inform its use for conceptualizing and advancing the self within a diverse and tumultuous global society.

**Trait-and-Factor/P-E Fit Tenets**

According to P-E fit theory, attaining an appropriate match between one’s personal characteristics and the tasks and rewards offered by work environments yields beneficial outcomes such as job satisfaction, stability, and sense of achievement (Holland, 1997). Proponents of the P-E fit perspective have emphasized several basic tenets, including attention to individual differences across important domains (e.g., abilities, interests, work values, and more recently, personality) and occupational requirements. Numerous differential psychology scholars (e.g., Paterson & Darley, 1936; Williamson, 1939) have proliferated trait-and-factor counseling approaches that emphasized rational and analytical problem solving, generation of alternatives, and making choices.

Scholars also have refined P-E fit counseling to include insights from the cognitive revolution in psychology to incorporate information processing (Rounds & Tracey, 1990) and personal agency (Borgen, 1991). Rounds and Tracey summarized three assumptions of P-E fit: (a) “individuals seek out and create environments” (p. 18) related to trait manifestation; (b) “Degree of fit between the person and environment is associated with significant outcomes” (p. 18) affecting individuals and environments—these outcomes of fit include satisfaction, performance, tenure/retention/turnover, and more recently mood, affect, and stress (Rounds & Hesketh, 1994); self-esteem, self-efficacy, and self-concept; and effective decision-making skills; and (c) P-E fit process is reciprocal, although multiple processes likely are operating.

**Prominent Trait Theories**

Leading P-E fit theories include Holland’s (1959, 1997) theory of vocational personalities and work environments and Dawis and Lofquist’s (1984) theory of work adjustment (TWA). Holland’s theory represents the pinnacle
of attention given to P-E fit theory. Led by Holland's consistent and focused empirical offerings that for 5 decades were received by practitioners everywhere, his hexagonal model helps explain how people and the demands and rewards of environments interact. Holland hypothesized that personality types (comprising interests, values, and ability self-estimates) and environments represent six distinct types (i.e., realistic, investigative, artistic, social, enterprising, and conventional) that people seek out and define matching environments, which hypothetically yields beneficial outcomes. His theory includes four supportive secondary constructs (i.e., calculus, congruence, consistency, and differentiation). Congruence between people and environments results in an increased likelihood of reinforced adaptive outcomes, including satisfaction and success resulting in tenure. These critical P-E fit hypotheses have received support (Holland, 1997; Spokane, 1985), but findings are not conclusive because of overly general and inconsistent Holland classification systems.

Dawis and Lofquist's TWA (1984; see also Dawis, 2005) focuses on how the degree of fit between workers’ characteristics/requirements (e.g., needs, values, abilities) and the parallel requirements of occupational environments and reinforcer systems (e.g., salary) predict adjustment to work. Chief among TWA’s 17 formal propositions (Dawis, 2005) is correspondence, which indicates P-E fit based on the “degree to which each meets the requirements of the other” (Dawis, 2005, p. 6), as well as their mutual interaction. Correspondence hypothetically yields worker satisfaction and employer satisfactoriness ultimately leading to tenure, whereas dissatisfaction fuels adjustment responses. Although originally focused on traits from an individual-differences perspective, TWA increasingly has emphasized complex P-E interactions through a process model. This comprehensive model has numerous practical implications for addressing the interlocking needs and requirements of both workers and organizations.

Theory-Driven Counseling Methods

Rounds and Tracey (1990) concluded that the trait-and-factor approach of Parsons and Williamson was the progenitor of modern problem-solving models. Attending to individuals’ degree of adjustment to the occupational environment is inherent in most career counseling approaches. Williamson (1939) offered a six-step model of trait-and-factor counseling that included analysis, synthesis, diagnosis, prognosis, counseling for treatment, and follow-up. Rounds and Tracey later incorporated insights from information-processing and problem-solving models and collapsed this process into four steps: encoding, goal setting, developing plans and pattern matching, and acting. In addition to traditional rational strategies, they acknowledged affective processes, the
additional use of qualitative approaches, and clinical information. Chartrand (1991) addressed four advances in P-E fit, including dynamic assumptions, “more comprehensive diagnostic schemes,” “explication of counseling process,” (p. 518) and greater awareness of counselor–client interactions. Rounds and Hesketh (1994) later addressed the importance of attending to P-E transactions within a cultural context.

In sum, the initially atheoretical trait-and-factor counseling approach has evolved into P-E fit theory and continues to hold a central place within contemporary theories that segment and examine interactions between facets of the self and environment. Swanson (1996) stated that P-E fit theories “provide a solid theoretical framework that can subsume all other practice orientations” (p. 103) but agreed with Rounds and Tracey (1990) that more explicit connections are necessary to demonstrate the flexibility of this perspective. We believe linkages between P-E fit theories and Savickas’s (2005) CCT afford much potential for contributing to this aim.

SELF IN P-E FIT

Personologist Dan McAdams (1995, 2008) posited multiple levels of the self, including dispositional traits, characteristic adaptations, and life narratives, and expanded them within the context of evolution/human nature and culture (McAdams & Pals, 2006). McAdams provides an organizing framework for our discussion of improving self-knowledge. We pose the following questions in our consideration of self and P-E fit: What must we know about ourselves and the world-of-work to attain congruence in our careers? and How can we define, construct, and cope with the task of career within the context of our contemporary occupational world?

Components of self include constructs addressed within the traditional P-E fit approach (e.g., abilities, interests, personality, values). Counseling methods incorporating P-E fit use both standardized and nonstandardized approaches to assessing these multiple domains of individuality. Organized by McAdams and Pals’s (2006) New Big Five system, we briefly expound on important career-related self-knowledge.

1. Evolution/human nature. “Human lives are individual variations on a general evolutionary design” (McAdams & Pals, 2006, p. 205). Biological bases of behaviors emphasize the heritability of various individual differences, including vocational interests, personality, and intelligence (Gottfredson, 1999); this aspect of self answers the career-related question: Which naturally selected characteristics (e.g., aggression, cooperation) may influence career behavior?
2. **Dispositional traits.** These universal dispositions are general, internal, relatively enduring basic tendencies to perceive, think, feel, or act in certain ways across time and situations. Traits can be assessed quantitatively, and include constructs such as the Big Five factors (i.e., Neuroticism, Extraversion, Openness to Experience, Agreeableness, and Conscientiousness; McCrae & Costa, 2008) and more detailed facets of personality (e.g., order); this aspect of self answers the career-related question: Which personal tendencies may affect career choices and behaviors?

3. **Characteristic adaptations.** Situated between traits and actions, characteristic adaptations are “motivational, social-cognitive, and developmental adaptations, contextualized in time, place, and/or social role” (McAdams & Pals, 2006, p. 208). These core dimensions of individuality are considered “adaptations because they help the individual fit into the ever-changing social environment” (McCrae & Costa, 2008, pp. 163–164). Whereas basic tendencies (i.e., traits) represent “abstract psychological potentials,” characteristic adaptations are “their concrete manifestations in the personality system” (McCrae & Costa, 2008, p. 163). This level lies at the heart of person–environment interactions and, therefore, embraces many concepts directly related to careers, including beliefs, motivations, attitudes, values, interests, developmental tasks, and goals; this aspect of self answers the question: How does a person identify qualities that matter and establish, confront, and adapt the objectives they seek to achieve in their career?

4. **Life narratives.** McAdams (2006) emphasized the central role of a life story as “an internalized and evolving narrative of the self that integrates the reconstructed past, perceived present, and anticipated future in order to provide a life with a sense of unity and purpose” (p. 11). Individuals impose meaning on their lives and construct identities through stories; this aspect of self answers the career-related question: How does a person identify themes and critical details of her or his educational, work, and personal histories, and organize this information into a unified and meaningful conception of her or his ongoing career life narrative?

5. **Culture.** Norms, practices, and customs of a culture affect the display rules for traits, timing, and content of characteristic adaptations and ultimately the structure and content of life stories (McAdams & Pals, 2006). “Culture and personality interact in their most intricate and profound ways in the fashion-
ing of narrative identity” (McAdams, 2008, p. 249); this aspect of self answers the career-related question: How do cultural factors (e.g., race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, spirituality, social class, language) affect individuals’ career thoughts, feelings, processes, choices, and behaviors, which culminate in her or his ongoing subjective narrative identity?

Research on the person, or self, side of P-E fit must move beyond a basic focus on a few key variables (i.e., interests, abilities) to incorporate advances in multiple-domain models of assessment (Borgen, 1999) and transactions with the environment (Spokane, 1985). Rounds and Hesketh (1994) called for researchers to extend the number of constructs beyond traditional variables and investigate the latent structure of matching variables underlying P-E relationships. Gati, Garty, and Fassa (1996) responded by presenting a P-E approach addressing career-related aspects beyond consideration of interests, abilities, needs, and reinforcers, including personal styles, work roles, and other matching variables related to occupational choices. Researchers have contributed to the P-E fit nomological network by addressing relations among individual difference variables and their interface with life domains such as working and learning (Borgen, 1999). Understanding how these relationships occur over time is more difficult and requires longitudinal designs and developmental perspectives (see Chapter 4, this volume).

DYNAMIC PROCESSES OF SELF WITHIN WORK ENVIRONMENTS

Some career theories in which P-E fit constitutes one of the underlying elements apply a process model of growing toward decisions or choices that are based on hierarchical and time-related “periods,” “stages,” “tasks,” or “steps.” Such theories assume that career-choice problems should be tackled in a specific sequence and during circumscribed time periods. This was the case in theories proposed by Super (1953) and Ginzberg, Ginsburg, Axelrad, and Herma (1951). Self-exploration, with self-assessment at its core, is always one of the first stages, steps, or tasks. If the normative model is not followed as prescribed, a less successful decision might result. These modern-era theories and process models view career as logical, stable, and predictable. Even post-modern-era models still follow these modern paradigms.

Interactionist scholars advanced the intellectual tradition of P-E fit by examining the transactions between individuals and their perceptions of situations and environments (e.g., Pervin, 1968). Likewise, understanding the concept of career involves a subjective interpretation that merges “dispositional continuity and psychosocial change” (Savickas, 2001, p. 311).
As in McAdams’s (1995, 2008) narrative identity model, increasing career self-knowledge involves an integrative reflection on patterns within separate levels of individuality; dispositional traits (e.g., personality) and characteristic adaptations (e.g., goals) ultimately are interpreted and ascribed meaning through unique and personalized career narratives. This emphasizes the importance of subjective interpretations in increasing self-knowledge, which further guides adaptation.

DEVELOPMENTAL PERSPECTIVES

Rounds and Tracey (1990) suggested that trait-and-factor counseling be grounded in general vocational behavior theory (e.g., Super’s career maturity model) and a more fully developed counseling-process model. Thus, we offer details of how P-E fit and developmental perspectives can work in tandem to enhance our understanding of self-knowledge. Indeed, the process aspects of the P-E fit interaction are often overlooked in critiques of Holland’s original model. Holland (1959) always attended to the developmental aspects while describing the formation of the personal hierarchy, and later described the development of personality types in more detail (Holland, 1973). Interests were no longer considered the end product of development but the force behind growing-to-stable dispositions (e.g., self-concepts, personality traits), although Holland (1973) minimized the importance of this part of the theory by stating, “These speculative statements are intended to make the theory more complete and to facilitate its study and application” (p. 11). Later developments of TWA also emphasized process aspects (Dawis, 2005; Rounds & Tracey, 1990).

Although both Holland’s theory and TWA attend to development, Super’s (1984) model accentuates developmental aspects while still addressing fit. Super considered overall life development as a maxicycle that reflects “an account of vocational development tasks for one culture in one historical era” (Savickas, 2002, p. 182). Although Savickas (2002) endorsed the idea of a maxicycle, he recognized that not all persons experience career stages similarly. *Mini-Cycles in a Maxi-Cycle* Super (1984; Super, Savickas, & Super, 1996) valued lifelong development that forms a maxicycle within which minicycles can occur, leading to the appearance and reappearance of developmental tasks. Savickas (2005) revised the original propositions and added a specific proposition on the minicycle. The circumstances, however, for the appearance of the minicycles remain the same. They are seen as occasional and triggered at the moment of career stage transitions or “each time an individual’s career is destabilized” (Savickas, 2005, p. 46). Savickas (2006) broadened the interpretation of when a new minicycle can start and proposed “a cycle of adaptation that is periodically repeated” (p. 87) and appears at transitions and...
changes. Ultimately, a new minicycle starts whenever a person is confronted with the need to make a decision. The dynamic model of career choice development (Van Esbroeck, Tibos, & Zaman, 2005) described later in the discussion puts this position at the center of the model. Consequently, this position indicates that development can be seen as a lifelong accumulation of minicycles in which the self- and environmental exploration processes, together with an ongoing revision of fit, are always present. P-E fit becomes in this way part of lifelong career development.

CAREER ADAPTABILITY AS A MECHANISM FOR FIT AND DEVELOPMENT

Differential psychology/P-E fit and developmental perspectives are complementary and yield synergetic insights. The concept of career adaptability represents a driving force linked with both perspectives that inner-vates thinking about optimal matching and career development. Savickas (1997) pointed out that the term adapt literally means “to fit,” and he later defined career adaptability as “a psychosocial construct that denotes an individual’s readiness and resources for coping with current and imminent vocational development tasks, occupational transitions, and personal traumas” (Savickas, 2005, p. 51). Within the context of TWA, Dawis (2005) drew on the individual-differences tradition to view adjustment and emphasize how fit, or correspondence, between people and their work environments is achieved and maintained, leading to work satisfaction, satisfactoriness, and tenure. In particular, TWA proposes dynamics of adjustment that can offer insights into developmental models to assist clients in the self-construction process. Career adaptability reflects key notions of Parsons’s wise decision making while offering a mechanism by which people manage careers effectively across the life span.

Self-knowledge is vital to career adaptability. Savickas’s (1997, 2005) emphasis on career adaptability, related to McAdams’s (1995, 2008) levels of personality framework, which includes characteristic adaptations, is critical to self-knowledge and relevant to features of the P-E fit approach. Savickas (2005) postulated that adaptive individuals enact four key qualities: (a) concern about their future, (b) control over their future, (c) curiosity to explore possible selves and scenarios, and (d) confidence to seek their goals. These qualities of career adaptability underscore the dynamic process linking self- and occupational knowledge toward congruence over time. Ultimately, knowledge of one’s traits, characteristic adaptations, and evolving life stories, combined with Savickas’s four dimensions of adaptability, represent adaptive strategies that enable an individual to maximize fit between an ever-changing self-construal
within complex environments. By focusing on the process of choosing, developing, or managing a career, incorporating career adaptability into counseling supplements the traditional assessment of interests, abilities, personality, and work values. This mirrors Super’s (1983) conclusion that trait-and-factor counseling is “an eminently usable method of vocational counseling” (p. 29).

**P-E FIT IN CAREER INTERVENTION METHODS**

Concentrating on the topic of self-knowledge within career interventions, we identify three different intervention formats related to the use of instruments for self-assessment: (a) assessment-based programs that build interventions around formal and standardized tests and questionnaires to develop a more objective self-assessment, (b) development programs that use a wide variety of activities (e.g., role playing, exploration activities, storytelling, informational feedback from significant others) to make a qualitative-based subjective self-evaluation, and (c) blended programs in which standardized tests as well as other developmental techniques appear.

**Assessment-Based Programs**

The career development assessment and counseling (C-DAC) model is a good example of an assessment-based program (Super, Osborne, Walsh, Brown, & Niles, 1992) that uses career development instruments (e.g., the Career Development Inventory (CDI; Super, Thompson, Lindeman, Jordaan, & Myers, 1979) along with interest and ability measures. The guidance program based on the COPSystem (Knapp-Lee, 2000) and the operationalization of TWA (Dawis, 2005) and affiliated measures also illustrate this approach.

**Development Programs**

Numerous versions of the second type of career intervention method are available. These development programs give P-E fit a central place but use nonstandardized self-evaluations and a process of qualitative self-analysis and confrontation of the results with the reflections from significant others. This process helps the participants to construct a subjective vocational self. The programs are flexible and not always rigorously executed. Only a limited number of these programs are used in a standardized way because they are often implemented by teachers and other guidance workers. The “Difficult: No Problem!” training program (Nota & Soresi, 2004) exemplifies a theory-based standardized intervention.
Blended Programs

Based on CCT, Savickas’s (1998, 2005) Career Style Interview serves as a prototypical blended intervention model by assessing the client’s subjectively constructed life-space, adaptability, vocational self-concept, and career themes. Savickas (2002) acknowledged that standardized tests can be used to “draw an objective picture of a client’s vocational identity” (p. 190). This objective picture should become part of an integration process of all data and lead to an interpretation of the client’s career story.

Program Efficacy

Empirical evidence exists for the effectiveness of each of these three types of intervention programs. Meta-analyses have concluded that all types of intervention programs may be moderately effective (Brown et al., 2003; Whiston, Sexton, & Lasoff, 1998). Although self-assessment is considered a noncritical component of such programs (Brown & Ryan Krane, 2000; Brown et al., 2003), the use of standardized tests and questionnaires for objective self-assessment does not guarantee a better outcome than development programs that allow participants to construct a subjective vocational self. In both approaches individualized feedback related to test interpretations is critical for intervention effectiveness (Brown & Ryan Krane).

Moving Beyond P-E Fit

Career development theories and the derived intervention programs inherently include P-E fit components. This does not mean that a single-step approach concentrating on “the best fit” is followed. On the contrary, the career development process in a postmodern society no longer allows this. Careers today are not logical, predictable, and stable. The ladder model and the search for “the” best alternative and “the” best fit have gone away with the industrial era. Individuals must now construe their careers as an unpredictable, lifelong evolution of small steps in reaction to a subjectively assessed environment. Individuals interact with the environment seeking an “acceptable” fit that satisfies their subjective momentary needs and expectations. Individuals settle temporarily “for an alternative that is ‘good enough’ in a sense that it meets or exceeds their threshold requirements” (Gati & Tal, 2008, p. 165). With each new subjective interpretation of the environment, perceptions of “good enough fit” must be modified.

Gati’s (Gati & Asher, 2001) prescreening, in-depth exploration, and choice (PIC) model illustrates this new approach in vocational theories. Although the PIC model remains intrinsically a fit model, it recognizes the
importance of the process that leads to the outcome. Individuals take an active role and follow a multiple-step procedure, with the possibility of returning to previous steps. Similarly, in the CCT counseling model, Savickas (2002) endorsed traditional vocational assessment techniques (e.g., interest inventories) following the identification of subjective vocational self-concept and career themes. The objective measurement and resulting occupations are not the ultimate goal but serve to operationally define subjective constructions.

A DYNAMIC MODEL OF CAREER CHOICE

Under the influence of societal changes, vocational theories move away from the original normative and descriptive models to prescriptive models. Van Esbroeck and colleagues (2005) sought to design a prescriptive model that (a) fits the postmodern characteristics of career development, (b) avoids hierarchical and time-related approaches, and (c) puts the minicycle at the center of development. They substituted “the idea of a hierarchical and time-related order in career development tasks or stages by recurrent minicycles” (Guichard & Dumora, 2008, p. 194). Each minicycle starts whenever a person has to make a career choice, and in each appear simultaneously six career-choice development activities: sensitization (i.e., awareness of processes related to the imminent need for knowledge and action required for decisions), exploration of the self, environmental exploration, exploration of self and environment interactions, specification, and decision. These activities are closely related to the traditional components in matching and P-E fit models (see Van Esbroeck et al., 2005). The minicycle can start with any of the career activities, and its cycle does not follow a preset order. A person may even not engage in all activities. How the cycle starts and develops depends on the person’s developmental stage, the specific contextual situation, and the content of the choice problem.

In addition, the activities are not independent but interconnected. Engagement and progress in one activity has an effect on the level of development of another activity. The person may not be able to distinguish in which activity she or he is engaged and may move unintentionally from one activity into another without being aware of it. Only the start (i.e., the necessity to make a choice) and the end (i.e., implementation of the decision) of the cycle can be defined as the cycle itself remains a subjective interpretation by the individual. Four sequential cycle types are identified: (a) starting loop: moving into any career activity at the beginning; (b) exploration loop: moving between the three types of exploration; (c) career activities loop: moving between the six activities; and (d) return loop: moving back from the implementation after an unsatisfactory decision.
The constant confrontation with career-decision situations helps the person to build a portfolio of experiences with the different career-choice activities. This process results in a level of development for each of the activities, and the entire profile is called the development profile of career choice. The concepts relate closely to Super’s (1984) and Savickas’s (2005) career maturity and career adaptability constructs. This dynamic model extends the linear one-dimensional approach of the traditional P-E fit and opts without reservation for a model of the disorganized, changing reality of a person’s career development in postmodern society. Guichard and Dumora (2008) described this new paradigm as “a much more relevant framework for understanding career and life paths, which are now often unpredictable and unstable and even ‘chaotic’” (p. 195).

RECOMMENDATIONS AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS

Because of its embeddedness within career theory and practice, the P-E fit perspective likely will remain omnipresent—but one hopes it will not forever be misunderstood. The self in P-E fit theory has evolved from relatively static notions to a dynamic system incorporating complex interactions over time. The apparent simplicity of P-E fit keeps it prominent in our discourse, if only as an objective framework for placing the subjectively constructed vocational self into perspective. Yet we believe more work is necessary to tap the full potential of P-E fit theory. Measurement challenges persist (Dawis, 2005; Spokane, 1985), especially regarding how to measure congruence. Congruence indices are the basis for P-E investigations, yet problems in labeling work environments, and a lack of consistency within environments and across interest measures, highlight the limitations of using Holland themes alone. Attention to environmental measurement may facilitate research on congruence. In addition to examining a more comprehensive coverage of individual differences, we must attend to their latent structure (Rounds & Hesketh, 1994) and pay greater attention to specificity of measurement (Rottinghaus, Hees, & Conrath, 2009). Further examination of moderators of P-E fit is also warranted. Finally, we encourage researchers to systematically investigate the efficacy of various test-interpretation strategies.

Research is needed as well to examine the trajectory of P-E fit transactions over time and the balance between objective and subjective components. As Spokane (1985) noted, longitudinal and time-series designs are necessary to address these complexities. Career decisions are made on a lifelong basis and fit into a process of career and life management, so intervention programs must account for personal and environmental developments and changes. A major challenge is that these developments and the interactions between them
are not linear and predictive. Even the existence of a maxicycle (Super, 1984) may no longer be taken for granted as some persons may never experience all stages or follow a pattern of continuous starting anew (Savickas, 2002). Intervention programs should equip persons with the skills and competence to construct and test their vocational selves and to come to a “good enough” fit. They also should raise awareness of inevitable changes and the interaction between objective and subjective paradigms of P-E fit.

Lifelong development cannot be assessed by objective measures of person or environment alone. Subjective responses and evaluations of one’s ever-changing self-construal within the world will always be present. These simultaneous changes require continual assessment of the vocational self, the life themes influencing vocational development, and the environment. This will follow an internal subjective process of analysis leading to subjective-based constructs. Comprehensive assessment, examining the projection of the subjective constructs onto the objective picture, will contribute to discovering the “good-enough” fit.

CONCLUSION

Parsons (1909) stressed self-knowledge, occupational knowledge, and true reasoning in rationally choosing a vocation. A century later, we have effective assessment and career information systems for increasing self- and occupational knowledge, but clients and counselors must embrace new strategies to combine this rich information wisely. A changing economic landscape and an increasingly diverse society present challenges that require innovations in practice. Many individuals face intense challenges just to meet basic needs. We must establish culturally sensitive measures and use culturally affirming strategies (see Chapter 12, this volume), and we must continue to incorporate advances in career assessment, drawing on quantitative and qualitative methods, to assist clients in creating informed and successful futures.

A P-E fit perspective may seem generalized, even simplistic, on the surface. Yet acknowledging this approach correctly and examining the dynamics and specificity from an updated P-E fit perspective is exciting, useful, and meaningful. Cutting-edge science and practice of career assessment emanate from P-E fit ideas. In keeping with the tradition of updating the basic P-E fit model (Rounds & Tracey, 1990), we examined its interface with contemporary integrative theories (McAdams, 2008; Savickas, 2005) to incorporate a convergence of ideas that enhance self-construal within the context of culture. These perspectives augment the objective P-E fit approach by examining clients’ subjective and personal interpretations of their careers through evolving narratives. By emphasizing subjective experience, we can consider
cultural and other environmental influences on fluid conceptions of the self. Navigating the meaning-making process between self and society requires a well-informed individual who is both adaptive and agentic. We recommend a more comprehensive and refined view of P-E fit, to more fully conceptualize clients within the full context of their unfolding lives.

REFERENCES


Humans construct and use self-conceptions as they regulate, guide, and evaluate thoughts and behaviors occurring in context. Most social scientists believe that these self-referent cognitions are the product of, and contribute to, coherent psychological structures, which theorists have termed self-concepts, or identities. In this chapter, we examine the history, current status, and future place of the self-concept and identity within theories of work, vocation, and career. We discuss a range of theoretical perspectives bearing on self-concept and identity, placing particular emphasis on life-span, life-space theory (Super, 1990), career construction theory (Savickas, 2002), and the meta-theoretical framework of developmental contextualism (Vondracek, Lerner, & Schulenberg, 1986). These theories represent distinct perspectives that are increasingly compatible with one another and with theoretical advances emanating from developmental psychology, such as P. B. Baltes's (1997) theory of selective optimization with compensation, Brandstätter's (1999) action-theoretical perspective on development, D. H. Ford's (1987) living systems...

In addition to discussing the potential contribution of these theoretical perspectives to the understanding of self-concept and identity in developmental career theory, we suggest that affect control theory (Heise, 1988; MacKinnon, 1994) and identity control theory (Burke, 1991) can offer additional enhancements. We conclude with a brief discussion of how recent developments in methodology enable researchers to study people as unique systems of dynamic processes and individual life trajectories. The promise of applying such methodological advances is that it would bring back a focus on intensive study of individual persons, which would greatly enhance our understanding of findings obtained through more traditional methodologies that generally require pooling data across groups of people.

DEFINITIONS

The self-concept is defined by generalized self-characteristics, self-roles, and self-emotions that cut across a wide range of more specific roles and contexts, such as family and work (Baumeister, 1999; Owens, 2003). According to Ford (1987), self-characteristics can be descriptive (e.g., “I am male”) or evaluative (e.g., “I am unloved”). Popular constructs such as self-efficacy and self-confidence represent abstracted self-evaluative conceptions of the self. Generalized self-characteristics, roles, evaluations, and emotions are born from a recurring lifelong process of self-reflection and observation that draws from, but is only indirectly associated with, daily experiences and specific life domains. Ford (1987) characterized schemas of experience as *behavior episode schemata* (BES) and asserted that BES serve as a fundamental characteristic that defines and shapes the human being. Self-characteristics, or BES; self-roles; and self-emotions interact to yield the self-concept. For example, “I am brave (self-descriptive category) because I didn’t let bullies push my friends around on the playground, and now I shelter my employees from the demands of other supervisors (schema of experience). I am, therefore, proud of myself for protecting others (self-emotions).” Schemas of experience are selectively used to the extent that they are consistent with and support the self-concept. The self-concept is, therefore, a durable abstract representation of the self that is born from selected patterns of experience and ongoing self-reflection and self-description.

Identity is defined by a subset of self-descriptions that are often bounded by life domains or roles (e.g., work and supervisor, respectively). Identity is more directly defined by schemas of experience within life domains or roles (e.g., working and providing feedback, respectively) than is the self-concept.
Owens (2003) defined identity as a tool, stratagem, or category that people use to compare themselves with others in an effort to establish communalities and differences, whereas the self-concept is a more abstracted “process and organization based on self-reflection” (p. 206). Baumeister (1999) suggested that an identity comprises three essential elements in the form of self-questions: “Who am I in this role?” “Who am I becoming in this role?” and “What is important to me in this role?”

Along the continuum bounded by abstractions of experience and actual daily experiences, the self-concept is considered to be more abstract and principally defined by a wide range of generalized self-descriptions, whereas identities are defined by a more constrained set of self-descriptions and associated schemas of experience. Whereas the self-concept is principally defined by the person and is a broader unitary psychological structure, identity is more aligned with roles; hence, identity is more relational or psychosocial, being defined by the social location of the person and his or her interactions with others in various social locations or roles (Baumeister, 1999), such as work, family, or religion (Skorikov & Vondracek, 1998), and by a hierarchy of the social structure ranging from personal to social to collective identities (Owens, 2003).

HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVES

To understand self-concept and identity in development career psychology requires an appreciation of their historical roots, how they were used in early formulations of career theory, and how they evolved over time. Although the early formulations of self-concept theory are now more than half a century old, contemporary advances in self-concept theory provide stimulating ideas for continuing research and theorizing in this area.

Self-Concept

As early as 1943, Bordin suggested that when individuals respond to interest inventories, they reveal their self-concepts in occupational terms. Super (1957), however, is usually credited with identifying the self-concept as a central psychological structure in his theory of vocational development. He asserted that an occupational choice represents one way of implementing and revealing the self-concept because work permits people to assume and play roles that bolster their self-concepts (Super, 1951, 1957, 1963b).

Super often acknowledged the scientists who influenced his thinking about development and context and who thus contributed to his developmental self-concept theory and his life-span, life-space model of career development.
(e.g., Baldwin, 1906; Bühler, 1933; Hollingshead, 1949; Sarbin, 1952). Super’s thinking about the self-concept was also influenced by Bordin’s (1943) work on vocational interests as reflections of self-concept and occupational stereotypes and by Allport’s (1943) and Lecky’s (1945) work on self-theory.

**Advances**

Although Super’s long career resulted in a number of revisions and enhancements of his early theoretical formulations, he persisted in his conviction that self-concepts are “fundamental and central” (Super, 1992, p. 47). Indeed, in his last comprehensive theoretical statement, his “archway of career determinants” has as its keystone “self” flanked by “role self-concepts” (Super, 1994, p. 66). Super’s persistence in championing the self-concept as a construct essential for understanding career development was accompanied by his disappointment that the broader field of psychology failed to acknowledge the importance of self-concept in vocational choice and adjustment as evidenced by such inattention in the works of Harter (1996), Prescott (2006), Strong and Feder (1961), Wrenn (1958), and Wylie (1961).

**Other Contributions**

Other vocational psychologists also made significant contributions, especially early in the development of self-concept theory. Most notable among these were David Tiedeman and Robert O’Hara (1963), who, among others, were participants in College Entrance Examination Board-sponsored seminars that contributed to Super’s thinking about self-concept (Super, 1963b). Tiedeman and his colleagues and students were instrumental in conducting the Harvard Studies in Career Development, which also made major contributions to self-concept theory in vocational psychology. One of the contributions of Tiedeman’s group was the recognition and discourse about the many meanings of the self-concept construct and problems inherent in using a construct that is difficult to apprehend, both conceptually and operationally. Eventually, Tiedeman restricted the use of the term to “the most personal meanings a person attributes to self” (Dudley & Tiedeman, 1977, p. 55). At the same time, it was acknowledged that such a restriction might not be effective and that perhaps another term, such as Kelly’s (1955) personal constructs would be more useful as also suggested by Super (1985).

**Identity Links to Self-Concept**

The construct of identity has not had the same prominence as self-concept in developmental career theory. This seems surprising in view of the fact that Erik Erikson (1959), often considered the founder of identity theory, stated that “in general it is primarily the inability to settle on an occupational
identity which disturbs young people” (p. 92). The study of an occupational identity has occurred for about 40 years but did not become a dominant construct until the late 1980s and early 1990s (e.g., Blustein, Devenis, & Kidney, 1989; Galinsky & Fast, 1966; Munley, 1977; Skorikov & Vondracek, 2007; Vondracek, 1995).

**Vocational Identity**

Despite the slow rise to prominence of the concept of identity, virtually all of the theorists who discussed self-concept also included consideration of vocational or occupational identity in their theories. Clearly, in the minds of the pioneers of developmental career theory, self-concept and identity were not independent but overlapping constructs that were sometimes used interchangeably. Super conceptualized identification as part of the process of self-concept formation, along with self-differentiation, role playing, and reality testing (Super, 1963a). Thus, although Super did not incorporate explicitly the construct of vocational identity into his theory, he believed that “identifying with” or “matching” oneself against individuals in certain occupations was the process that would lead to occupational choice. Tiedeman and his colleagues (e.g., Dudley & Tiedeman, 1977; Tiedeman & O’Hara, 1963) viewed career development as occurring within the broad theater of human development within the social context. Self-concept and identity formation were simply viewed as part of the organized patterns of psychological functioning that interacted reciprocally with occupational behavior and the development of work roles.

Holland (1985, p. 28) defined vocational identity as representing “the clarity of a person’s vocational goals and self-perceptions,” and he operationalized vocational identity by means of My Vocational Situation (MVS; Holland, Gottfredson, & Power, 1980). Although the MVS has been a useful measure to assess clarity or certainty of career choice, it has been criticized as being too simplistic to represent a measure for a construct as complex as vocational identity (Vondracek, 1992) and specifically excludes the exploration dimension of identity, which most identity researchers believe is an essential aspect of identity development (Luyckx, Goossens, Soenens, & Beyers, 2006).

**Revisions**

Bordin articulated a framework for vocational development whereby the intrinsic work requirements of occupations afford the individual a way of being that is consistent with the structure and dynamics of their personality (Bordin, Nachmann, & Segal, 1963). More than 20 years later, Bordin (1984)
published a major revision of this theoretical framework, giving much greater emphasis to ego (identity) development. Specifically, he proposed that the evolution of self and identity are integrally involved in the development of both personality and vocational choice. Accordingly, he stated “the roots of the personal aspects of career development are to be found throughout the early development of the individual, sometimes in the earliest years” (Bordin, 1984, p. 108). This proposition has received significant empirical support, especially in recent years (for a review, see Hartung, Porfeli, & Vondracek, 2005).

**THEORY ENHANCEMENTS OF SELF-CONCEPT AND IDENTITY**

Savickas’s (2002) career construction theory and the developmental–contextual approach to life-span career development proposed by Vondracek et al. (1986) represent major advances in career-related self-concept and identity theory, with the former being built on the foundation of Super’s work and the latter having its roots in the work of Lerner and his colleagues (e.g., Lerner & Busch-Rosnagel, 1981). Both approaches aim to extend and clarify the use of self-concept construct introduced in previous efforts to formulate career development theory, albeit in quiet different ways.

**Career Construction**

Savickas’s (2002) career construction theory (CCT) expanded Super’s life-span, life-space theory and makes two key assumptions. The first of these asserts that through their participation in socially and culturally defined roles, individuals construct self-concepts comprising symbolically represented, unified, and cohesive descriptions of their characteristics in relation to those roles. The second basic assumption is that once a self-concept has been constructed, it provides the means for organizing and guiding one’s behavior in relation to the role and conditions for which each self-concept was constructed. Because one role of fundamental importance in life is related to work, the vocational self-concept is of basic importance, functioning to guide and organize individuals’ choices and behaviors related to work.

**Propositions and Updates**

Savickas (2002) derived 16 propositions from CCT, including three that specifically deal with the development and implementation of vocational self-concepts: (a) “the degree of satisfaction people obtain from work is proportional to the degree to which they are able to implement their vocational self-concepts” (p. 155); (b) “the process of career construction is essentially that of developing and implementing vocational self-concepts in work roles”
(p. 155–156); (c) “although vocational self-concepts become increasingly stable from late adolescence forward . . . self-concepts and personal preferences do change with time and experience as the situations in which people live and work change” (p. 156). In CCT, Savickas elaborated on Super’s (1990, p. 208) suggestion that he would have preferred to use personal constructs rather than self-concepts as core features of his theory. Perhaps the most significant change in CCT is the reconceptualization of career as “a reflection on the course of one’s vocational behavior, not vocational behavior itself” (Savickas, 2002, p. 152). Another important change is what Savickas (2002) described as a “switch” from an organismic to a contextualist worldview to better capture the idea of an organism that is adapting to the environment instead of one that develops according to an invariant maturational sequence.

Limitations and Future Refinement

The model and revised propositions forwarded by Savickas (2002) appear to be less of a switch to contextualism and more of a shift toward the developmental–contextual perspective that bridges and unifies contextualism and organicism. Developmental contextualism asserts that people are both product and producers of their development because they constantly interact with the environment in a dynamic way that allows them to shape the environment as the environment shapes them. The appeal of developmental contextualism is that it synthesizes two key ideas from contextualism and organicism, respectively: “that contextual change is probabilistic in nature, and that development proceeds according to the organism’s activity” (Vondracek et al., 1986, p. 32). A developmental–contextual perspective on the self-concept suggests that the self is a reflection of the history of interactions between the context (e.g., roles and contingencies) and organism (e.g., genes and agency) as constructed and encoded by the person. If one wishes to depict humans as actively adaptive agents, engaged in constant transaction with their multiple, ever-changing environments—agents who are, in effect, producers of their own development—then developmental contextualism offers a metatheoretical basis from which to derive content-specific models of development (Lerner & Busch-Rossnagel, 1981).

Self-concept theory, with its emphasis on person–environment (P-E) fit or reconceptualized as CCT focusing on the dash in P-E fit, needs elaboration to explain adequately the dynamics of psychological and behavioral functioning in context and to explain how different aspects of the self-concept (or different self-concepts) are selectively activated across contexts. Indeed, the fundamental assumption that vocational development is a process through which a match is sought between properties of self and characteristics of an occupation is quite limiting, even when the matching process is presumably ongoing or recurring over the course of development. Given that one work setting or
occupation can satisfy many different goals, values, and interests, and one person is likely to change not only their occupation but also their goals, values, and interests suggests that the concept of a “match” is inadequate for dealing with the dynamic processes involved in finding satisfaction and meaning in different, multiple, and changing occupations and work settings.

Despite the need for clarification, elaboration, and reconsideration inherent in the basic paradigm chosen by Savickas, his theory (like Super’s) emphasizes some fundamentally important ideas, including that human cognition plays a key role in human life and that people construct career narratives and then use them to guide their behavior (i.e., they are self-constructing and self-directing). Ultimately, it is difficult to fully appreciate the potential of Savickas’s elegant, integrative, and comprehensive theoretical work within the constraints of this brief chapter.

Developmental–Contextual and Related Perspectives

The developmental–contextual metatheoretical framework was initially applied to career development in an effort to understand and study career development across the life span and within a broader conceptual framework focused on developmental processes linking person and context in a dynamic and reciprocal relationship (Vondracek, Lerner, & Schulenberg, 1983, 1986). One of the acknowledged shortcomings of the developmental–contextual framework has been its relative silence on processes of development, a shortcoming that has been addressed to varying degrees and in different ways by the theoretical formulations of a number of researchers (e.g., Baltes, 1997; D. H. Ford, 1987; D. H. Ford & Lerner, 1992; M. E. Ford, 1992). The applicability of these theoretical advances to career development has also been demonstrated in a number of previous publications (e.g., Vondracek, 2001; Vondracek & Porfeli, 2002).

Key Assumptions

Although these theoretical contributions deal with somewhat different aspects of development, they share the recognition that humans always function as a unified entity in continual transaction with their environments. Although cognition is the fundamental ingredient in the formulation of self-conceptions, it is only one of several human attributes that is influential. Other essential attributes, such as emotions (Kidd, 1998, 2004) and biological processes (Porfeli & Vondracek, 2009), are almost ignored in current vocational theory. It is inappropriate to construct separate theories of development for each facet of human change (e.g., knowledge and skill development; personal values and goals). Therefore, what is needed is a general theory of development
that can then be used as a tool for understanding the development of different aspects of being human.

Living Systems Framework

One example of such a general theory is the living systems framework (LSF; D.H. Ford, 1987). The basic assumptions of LSF, particularly as they pertain to the development of self-views, hold, first, that all human behavior always occurs at a specific time, in a specific context, serves specific purposes, and, therefore, is recalled as behavior episodes (see Ford, 1987, pp. 143–144). From specific behavior episodes, humans construct information/meaning-based cognitions, which make it possible to bring together the past (e.g., memories), present, and potential futures (e.g., goals) to serve the purposes of each future behavior episode. Second, no two behavior episodes can be identical, so the contents of each will differ and the cognitive constructions derived from those specific experiences will therefore differ. Third, every episode provides a wealth of information that may be used in constructing self-referent thoughts, but also in constructing other forms of thought (e.g., “What is it?” and “How does it work?” is different from “Can I do it?” or “Can I become it?”). Fourth, a person’s behavior in any episode is powerfully influenced by other kinds of thoughts relevant to effective behavior in that episode. Self-referent thoughts (a “self-concept”) should exert some influence, but should not be the sole or primary influence in most behavior episodes. Fifth, the issue of how human thought processes influence vocational and career development is of fundamental importance, but what is needed is a model of cognitive functioning that includes the diversity of human cognitions and the roles each of them plays in different kinds of behavior episodes (including self-referent thoughts).

The natural organization of the flow of a person’s behavioral episodes (or his or her story) is decomposed into BES, which are abstracted understandings of the causes, correlates, and consequences of similar behavior episodes. That is the fundamental nature of self-directed, adaptive behavior. If one studies the flow of a person’s behavior, it is relatively easy to identify transitions from one episode to another. It is those organized patterns of experience, or BES, that are the fundamental unit around which coherently organized patterns of psychological and behavioral construction take place. Each behavior episode will include components of self-referent concepts as part of the organization (e.g., self-efficacy beliefs about competencies) for the kinds of activities required in that kind of behavior episode. Thus, self-referent beliefs participate in guiding one’s functioning in each behavior episode, but they are not the sole and usually not even the primary component of the organizing patterns.

The use and influence of self-referent beliefs will vary across episodes, but if they play the dominant role, that is considered to be maladaptive (e.g., thus the criticism that a person is too self-centered). In fact, a person...
may construct different kinds of self-referent thoughts in different kinds of episodes, such as in a game- or problem-solving episode. So, in a sense, each of us constructs not one but multiple self-concepts and identities as components to facilitate our adaptive functioning in different kinds of behavior episodes. Martin Ford’s (1992) motivational systems theory (MST) provides a theoretical model for understanding behavior in that way.

The Future of Self-Concept and Identity in Developmental Career Theory

D. H. Ford’s LSF and its progenies MST (M. Ford, 1992) and developmental systems theory (DST; D.H. Ford & Lerner, 1992) represent important theoretical advances that have contributed to increased acceptance of complex systems approaches in vocational psychology (e.g., Patton & McMahon, 1999, 2006). They are by no means, however, the only promising theoretical advances that can promote understanding of human development in general and career development in particular. Within the personal identity literature, two cybernetic models, namely, affect control theory (ACT; Heise, 1988; MacKinnon, 1994) and identity control theory (ICT; Burke, 1991), have emerged that align well with aspects of LSF and DST.

At the heart of these four theories is the notion that humans operate as living self-constructing control systems. Like LSF and DST, within ICT a personal identity is construed as part of an ongoing feedback loop that serves to regulate and direct behavior in an effort to maintain a stable sense of identity. The feedback loop comprises four parts: (a) the identity, (b) perceptions of experience and the self, (c) a comparator function that compares the self to ongoing experience to evaluate discrepancies between the two, and (d) output in the form of judgments and actions that aim to minimize perceived discrepancies. The feedback loop, therefore, constitutes assessment, comparison, and action phases guided by the motivation to maintain identity coherence. ICT appears to be a useful model for predicting identity changes within the occupational domain (Berrios-Allison, 2005; Stets, 2004).

A cybernetic (i.e., regulatory system) model linking experience to identity has also been extended to theoretically link both of them to the self-concept. Cartwright and Graham (1984) proposed that the strength of one’s identity hinges on the congruence (or a lack of discrepancy) between a person’s self-concept and their schemas of experience. In other words, a higher degree of overlap between the self-concept and the social image will yield a stronger sense of identity. Consistent with ICT, this suggests that discrepancies between the self-concept, identities, schemas of experience, and daily experience are concurrently monitored and actions are taken to reduce discrepancies (or improve harmony) between and within all levels of human functioning. The theory and research reviewed in this chapter and applied to other areas of
career development, such as work values (Porfeli, 2008), support the continued use of cybernetic approaches to studying the change, stability, and development of career-related constructs over time and particularly during critical junctures, such as the transition from school to work and the transition from one occupation or job to the next.

Another important regulatory model integrates an action–theoretical perspective on intentional self-development with a life-span perspective on the development of the self (Greve, Rothermund, & Wentura, 2005). Brandtstädter (1999) developed this action–theoretical perspective on development and elucidated the processes and mechanisms used to adapt personal goals and aspirations to the person’s developmental circumstances. Two features of this approach prove particularly useful when considering issues of vital concern in developmental vocational theory. One feature concerns the person taking an active (purposeful) role in his or her development. The other involves the notion that individuals have the means to adapt their personal goals, aspirations, and evaluations to their developmental and contextual circumstances. This adaptive capacity is represented by the complex self-system, which “should not be understood as representing one central unit, but rather as a collection of very diverse processes, mechanisms, and structures” (Greve et al., 2005, p. x). The immense amount of information processed and integrated via these processes, mechanisms, and structures results in the individual self-concept that, in turn, guides behavior, in particular intentional actions (Brandtstädter, 1999).

The action–theoretical perspective on development posits that individuals have an impact on their context through action, and the feedback resulting from these actions helps them to organize how they think about their context and about themselves (Brandtstädter, 1999). These self-cognitions and cognitions about their various social and physical environments then guide and motivate additional actions to shape and influence personal development. Intentional action thus becomes a key driver of individual development because it creates a basis for the development of the self (Lerner, Theokas, & Jelicic, 2005, p. 36). Action–theoretical and life-span perspectives on development offer new perspectives and promising research that can lead to more advanced and improved understanding of these important processes.

Research on Self-Concept and Identity Development

The study of self-concept and identity in developmental career theory could benefit enormously from integration with the study of these constructs in the broader field of developmental science, which explicitly aims to bring the individual person and a focus on self-concept and identity back into the study of development (Bergman, Cairns, Nilsson, & Nystedt, 2000). Cairns (2000)
suggested that such a discipline must be person centered, interdisciplinary, and holistic. Its methods of research must be capable of capturing development, and in so doing, it cannot lose sight of the individual, unique, ever-changing, and adapting person. Consequently, the self is a central construct in the holistic approach of developmental science. A founder of the modern holistic approach, David Magnusson (1990) wrote that “an individual’s view of himself or herself plays a central role in the process of interaction with the environment” (p. 201). Another distinguished scholar, R. A. Hinde (2000), stated,

one’s view of oneself in a particular situation is drawn primarily from narratives that represent sequences of events [or behavior episodes, in the parlance of D. H. Ford, 1987] in that situation. Its construction is undoubtedly a complex process—the narratives may be characterized by adjectives, which may in their turn affect the narrative; and the goals, emotions, self-image, and so on to that situation must be integrated, defensive processes often being involved. (p. 111)

Note the compatibility of this view with that of CCT and possible links to LSF.

A corollary realization is that the methods and mechanics of research have undergone transformational change, in part because of the development of new research methodologies made possible by the rapid development of computing power. In addition, however, a compelling argument has been made that it is essential to bring the individual person back into the science of psychology and particularly into the study of development, including career development (Cairns, Bergman, & Kagan, 1998; Molenaar, 2004, 2008). Molenaar (2004), in particular, raised concern about the fact that the analysis of interindividual variation via analysis of variance, regression analysis, factor analysis, and so on is widely considered the standard approach in psychological research. The study of intraindividual variation, in other words, time-dependent differences occurring along a single person’s life trajectory, is virtually nonexistent. This is particularly troublesome because

almost by definition developmental processes have time-varying means and/or time-varying sequential dependencies. . . . This implies that for developmental processes the structure of inter-individual variation at the population level is not equivalent to the structure of intra-individual variation at the single-subject level. Hence the proper level required to obtain valid results about developmental processes is the level of intra-individual variation within single subjects. (Molenaar, 2008, p. 63)

Molenaar’s concern about the preoccupation of psychological researchers with the study of interindividual variation does not mean that he favors abandoning such research. What he advocates is

the dedicated study of the individual, prior to pooling across other individuals. Each person is initially conceived of as a possibly unique
system of interacting dynamic processes, the unfolding of which gives rise to an individual life trajectory in a high-dimensional psychological space. (Molenaar, 2004, p. 202)

If one is interested in truly understanding the role of self-concept and identity in developmental career theory, it should not come as a surprise that the focus of research needs to be on understanding the individual person before attempting to generate principles that cut across groups of individuals. This individual or person-focused research approach should be welcomed by intervention-oriented vocational psychologists and by career counselors, who have long complained about the lack of connection between traditional research focused on aggregate, group-level differences and their work with individual clients. Likewise, if one is interested in fostering the development of positive self-concepts and strong identities, it is likely that strategies that are developed with one individual at a time will help develop insights necessary for programmatic or policy interventions to accomplish this goal on a larger scale.

CONCLUSION

Vocational identity development and vocational self-concept development are processes that run parallel during a specific period of the life span, namely, adolescence, and there is a good deal of overlap. Both represent important self-views, and both serve a regulatory function involving relations between the person and the context within which the person is developing. Quite possibly, however, both of these constructs could be incorporated into a comprehensive, dynamic system of self-referent cognitions functionally related to each other within a sophisticated view of the whole person as a living, self-constructing system (D. H. Ford, 1987). To make this a real option, vocational psychologists must resist what Taleb (2007) called Americans’ love for simplistic explanations. In 1994, Super wrote, “Each researcher and practitioner now has a choice between Vondracek’s complexity, Holland’s simplicity, and this [his] multiplicity of simplicities” (p. 72). Frankly, when it comes to conceptualizing and researching the processes that take place in the broad area called career development, simplicity should no longer be an option. Mark Savickas, Paul Baltes, Donald Ford, Richard Lerner, and Martin Ford, among others, have constructed the developmental theories that are capable of guiding inquiry and informing practice for many years to come. It is up to us as scientists and practitioners to roll up our sleeves, resist the temptation to go for the easy answers and the easy solutions, and get to work doing what we know needs to be done.
REFERENCES


The self occupies a hallowed place in vocational psychology. Concepts such as self-concept, self-esteem, and self-efficacy abound, and all major theories of career development acknowledge the importance of self (or person) mechanisms within the causal flow of variables responsible for vocational behavior. But this is not to say that the theories agree on the role of the self, the specific aspects of self that are pivotal to career development, or even the essential definition of the self. Dictionary definitions of the self typically refer to qualities such as an aspect of personality that someone recognizes as his or her own or the combination of elements that account for the individuality or identity of a person. The importance of the self in everyday thinking and discourse is clearly conveyed by the large number of times that dictionaries list it as a constituent of other words (e.g., self-determined, self-fulfilling, self-assertion). In the career literature, the self is not often defined explicitly, yet the admonition to achieve a “clear understanding of yourself” (including interests, abilities, goals, resources, and limitations) has served as one of the guiding principles of career intervention, from Parsons (1909, p. 5) onward.

In this chapter, we view the self within the context of social cognitive career theory (SCCT; Lent, Brown, & Hackett, 1994, 2000). In the first half of the chapter, we (a) consider what distinguishes the concept of self from the
perspective of SCCT relative to that of other career theories; (b) discuss self-efficacy, the signature self variable in SCCT, as a central (although by no means sufficient) mechanism of career development; and (c) acknowledge the reciprocal interplay among self, environment, and behavior within the lifelong process of career development. In the second half of the chapter, we focus on the multiple goals and targets of SCCT-based intervention by using a case study to illustrate several theory-derived intervention methods. We focus largely on career development issues salient near or during the period of initial work entry, and refer interested readers to other sources for coverage of SCCT relative to the developmental periods of preparation for work entry and work adjustment (e.g., Brown & Lent, 2006; Lent, 2005).

SOCIAL COGNITIVE CAREER THEORY: THE SELF IN CONTEXT

Lent et al. (1994) designed SCCT as an integrative theory of the processes that give rise to academic and career-related interests, choice, and performance. Lent and Brown (2006b) added a new SCCT model to explain educational and work satisfaction. In this section, we distinguish the views of the self, cognition, and context from the perspective of SCCT from those of other career theories.

Social Cognitive Views of the Self

Earlier trait-factor theories of career development tended to view the self as synonymous with the vocational personality or person side of the person–environment (P–E) fit equation. Key aspects of the person (e.g., interests, values) interacted with features of the environment (e.g., interests of coworkers, available reinforcers) to produce outcomes of relevance to the person (e.g., satisfaction) and the environment (e.g., satisfactoriness). Person and environment were conceptualized and measured in trait-oriented terms, that is, as attributes that are relatively global, constant, and enduring over time. Emphasis was placed on how best to match person and environment to produce optimal outcomes for both of them. There was less theoretical concern with how vocational personalities develop (although broad statements about genes, early environment, and learning histories were usually invoked) or how persons could actively shape or adjust to environmental conditions. In short, earlier trait-factor views tended to see persons as relatively passive vessels of heredity and life experience that could be matched to, or acted on by, school and work environments. The goal of career counseling, then, was to use “true reasoning on the relations” of person and environment (Parsons, 1909, p. 5), so persons could seek employment in the most hospitable, or congruent, work environment.
Stasis Versus Change

Foundational trait-factor theories have contributed immensely to knowledge about vocational behavior and to the development of career assessment and counseling. Yet such theories require assumptions about the stasis and predictability of person and environment that may be debatable, particularly in the context of a rather dynamic 21st-century global economy. Recently, vocational psychology has seen increasing concern with developmental, cognitive, and constructivist models of how people develop their career-relevant attributes, how they interact actively with their environments, and how they help to shape their own career outcomes (see Brown & Lent, 2005). Contemporary views of person, environment, and their interaction in turn have led to efforts to update trait-factor theories by acknowledging more dynamic features of P-E interaction (e.g., the work adjustment process model; Dawis, 2005). It is no longer accurate to characterize the trait-factor position as only concerned with static variables or a one-time P-E matching process—although it is reasonable to ask whether this position is sufficiently flexible to guide career development in an era when work environments are becoming less predictable, career stability is increasingly challenged by macroeconomic conditions, and the need for proactive management of one’s career is becoming more pronounced.

The Self System

Following the lead of Bandura’s (1986) general social cognitive theory of human thought and action, SCCT conceptualizes a self system rather than a singular sense of self or a monolithic variable such as self-concept. This self system is quite complex and concerned with the multiple processes and variables through which people guide their own behavior or engage in self-regulation. For example, people continuously self-observe their performances and the conditions under which they occur, develop self-efficacy beliefs regarding their future performance capabilities, and formulate self-set goals based partly on their self-efficacy and personal performance standards. Efforts to meet these goals are then interpreted via evaluative and tangible self-reactions (e.g., “I did a good job,” “I deserve to pamper myself tonight”) that reward self-perceived successes (and disparage failures) and, thereby, provide a feedback loop affecting subsequent self-percepts and self-guided actions. Such a self system affords a view of thought, motivation, and behavior as dynamic and situation-specific, and it emphasizes people’s capacity to change, develop, and adapt to varying circumstances.

Self as Active Agent and Causal Partner

Social cognitive theory (Bandura, 1986) shares with constructivist theories (e.g., Savickas, 2005) the basic conviction that people help to create their
own reality through their construal processes, but social cognitive theory tends to be a bit more specific about the nature of these processes and the variables that serve them. Likewise, these positions generally share a view of people as self-organizing, active agents, rather than only as reactive to heredity or external events. However, social cognitive theory takes a perspective on causality that is relatively unique among career theories.

According to the social cognitive perspective, the transaction between person and environment is fluid and bidirectional (Bandura, 1986). In fact, social cognitive theory espouses a triadic reciprocal view of causation. Modern versions of trait-factor theory take what may be described as a partially bidirectional position on causality. That is, they conceive of person and environment as influencing one another, but they view behavior largely as an outcome of the P-E transaction. In Bandura's fully bidirectional (or triadic) model of causality, (a) personal attributes, such as internal cognitive and affective states, and physical characteristics; (b) external environmental factors; and (c) overt behavior all operate as interlocking elements that affect one another bidirectionally. Within this triadic system, people are accorded the potential for self-regulation and self-direction rather than merely adaptation to environmental events.

Differentiating Self-Efficacy From Other Theoretical Constructs

Although it is by no means the only self construct in social cognitive theory, self-efficacy has been the most visible and, particularly within the career literature, most heavily researched aspect of the larger theory. In this section, we define self-efficacy, contrast it with self variables from other theoretical traditions with which it is sometimes confused, and consider its sources.

What Is Self-Efficacy?

Self-efficacy, that is, people’s beliefs about their capabilities to organize and perform particular behaviors or courses of action, is a key element of the personal-attributes segment within the triadic reciprocal causal framework. It is partly through their self-efficacy beliefs that people assert their personal agency. Specifically, Bandura (1986) hypothesized that self-efficacy beliefs help to determine whether people will initiate a given behavior or course of action, how much effort they will expend at it, and how long it will be maintained in the face of obstacles or aversive experiences. In SCCT, self-efficacy is hypothesized to help promote academic and career-related interests, choices, performance, and satisfaction (Lent, 2005). That is, people are more likely to develop interest in, choose to pursue, do well in, and feel satisfied at school and work activities for which they believe they possess the necessary capabilities.
What Self-Efficacy Is Not

Self-efficacy is often confused with other constructs. One common misnomer is that self-efficacy is a personality trait, akin to self-esteem, that is stable across situations and life domains. In fact, Bandura (1986) maintained that self-efficacy is not a fixed, singular, or decontextualized trait but rather a dynamic set of self-beliefs that are specific to particular performance domains and that interact complexly with other person, behavior, and environmental factors. Whereas self-esteem refers to global feelings of personal worth, self-efficacy involves beliefs about personal capabilities. In other words, self-esteem involves the question, “How much do I like or approve of myself in general?” By contrast, self-efficacy asks, “How confident am I that I can perform this particular behavior?” The two differ along several dimensions, such as globality/specificity, trait/state, and content (self-liking vs. self-percepts regarding behavioral capabilities). Self-efficacy can have implications for self-evaluation and, hence, self-esteem. For example, when people view themselves as inefficacious at performing behaviors required of a central life role, they may well engage in self-rebuke, which can spill over into negative global feelings about the self. However, beliefs about personal capabilities and feelings about personal worth are not the same thing. When measured in domain-specific terms, self-efficacy tends to yield small correlations with self-esteem (e.g., Betz & Klein, 1996).

Self-efficacy is sometimes also confused with general self-confidence. Some researchers have sought to measure self-efficacy in terms of cross-situational beliefs about personal agency, or generalized self-efficacy (e.g., “I tend to do most things well”). At this most global or abstract level (i.e., without reference to specific behaviors or situational challenges), self-efficacy does blend conceptually into general self-confidence and related traits (e.g., locus of control, instrumentality). However, it is important to note that Bandura (1986) intended self-efficacy to be assessed at a more specific level (e.g., “I am confident that I can do well on my next math test”) and in ways that match the dependent variable of interest (e.g., grades on one’s next math test) in terms of content, context, and temporality. Self-efficacy measures that are well-matched to a particular criterion variable tend to produce stronger predictive validity estimates than do mismatched or global variants of self-efficacy (Bandura, 1986).

Self-efficacy also has occasionally been confused with objective skills or been assumed simply to constitute an estimate of objective skills. Self-efficacy in fact is posited to help determine how well people organize and apply their skills, but it is not merely a proxy for skills (Bandura, 1986). Research has shown that self-efficacy is distinct from ability self-estimates (Brown, Lent, & Gore, 2000) and accounts for unique variance in academic and work performance beyond objective measures of ability and past performance (Brown et al., 2008).
Sources of Self-Efficacy

Although not reducible to objective or subjective ability estimates, self-efficacy beliefs are, theoretically, derived in part from how well people perceive they have performed in the past (Bandura, 1986). The relation between past performance and self-efficacy is imperfect because people need to attend to, interpret, encode, and recall how well they have done in the past when appraising their current capabilities. Moreover, they need to weigh the nature and difficulty of the conditions under which they will be performing. Although cognitive and memory processes are subject to distortion, people nevertheless rely heavily on their (perceived) past personal mastery and failure experiences in judging what they can do in the future. Success experiences with a given task or performance domain tend to raise (and failures tend to lower) self-efficacy. In addition to past accomplishments, self-efficacy beliefs are assumed to be acquired and modified via vicarious learning (e.g., viewing the performances of similar others), social persuasion (encouragement or disparagement from important others), and physiological and affective states, such as situational anxiety.

Other Core Person Constructs in Social Cognitive Career Theory

Given the amount of research attention that self-efficacy has received, a casual reader might come to think of it as a one-factor theory of career development. It is not. Although constituting a central and pervasive mechanism of personal agency, self-efficacy operates in tandem with a variety of other person, behavior, and contextual variables. Among its other cognitive-person variables, SCCT highlights the roles of outcome expectations and personal goals. Outcome expectations are personal beliefs about the consequences of performing particular behaviors. They include beliefs about several types of outcomes that may occur contingent on one’s performance, such as receipt of material or social rewards, self-reactions (e.g., pride in oneself), and outcomes intrinsic to performing a particular activity (e.g., experiencing flow or absorption in the task itself). Personal goals refer to one’s intention to engage in a particular activity or to effect a particular future outcome. It is partly by setting and pursuing personal goals that people help to organize, guide, and sustain their own behavior, even in the absence of external rewards or under less-than-supportive conditions.

Self in Interaction With Context: Segmental Models of Social Cognitive Career Theory

Our goal thus far has been to focus on those self, or person, variables that are integral, if not entirely exclusive, to SCCT. Self-efficacy, outcome
expectations, and goals form a key triad of variables that serve as basic building blocks of career development in SCCT, highlighting the means through which career behavior is partly self-regulated. However, they do not operate in a vacuum. Each of SCCT’s four segmental models (interests, choice, performance, satisfaction/adjustment) contain additional variables that help to shape, mediate, moderate, or otherwise complement these self variables.

For instance, the models of interests and choices of SCCT take into account (a) other person inputs (e.g., gender, race/ethnicity, traits, ability) and (b) contextual affordances (e.g., family economic status, quality of education) that affect the (c) learning experiences through which self-efficacy beliefs and outcome expectations arise. Self-efficacy and outcome expectations, in turn, help to promote (or restrict) interests and, along with interests, nurture career-relevant goals. The goals that people set for themselves (e.g., to major in one subject vs. another or to forego college in favor of finding a readily available job) are also quite responsive to contextual factors, such as economic need and the wishes of significant others. Transforming interests into goals and goals into actions can be facilitated by environmental supports (e.g., family finances, peer encouragement) or hampered by barriers (e.g., poverty, peer disparagement). The outcomes of earlier decisions form a feedback loop, helping to revise or strengthen self-efficacy and outcome expectations and, in turn, fine-tuning or resculpting interests and subsequent choice behavior.

PROMOTING CAREER DEVELOPMENT FROM A SOCIAL COGNITIVE CAREER THEORY PERSPECTIVE

This section of the chapter focuses on describing key elements of career development practice from a social cognitive perspective, using the case of Ruth to illustrate the model. We address the general goals of career choice (or change) counseling and six types of career interventions that may be used in individual or group career counseling or in larger scale career interventions. Fundamentally, all theory-based approaches to career counseling share the basic Parsonian goal of helping people to select among options that are consistent with their work personalities and are, therefore, likely to yield satisfying outcomes. This goal is achieved efficiently with many clients (Brown & Ryan Krane, 2000), but there are also many instances in which the choice process is made much more challenging either by aspects of the person (e.g., flat interest profile, decisional anxiety), the environment (e.g., daunting barriers, limited supports), or both.

The relatively unique contribution of SCCT to the career-choice counseling process is its focus on such challenges, helping clients to navigate internal or external factors that can impede their decision making or their
ability to implement their choices. For example, SCCT-based choice counseling might aim to identify and help clients to reconsider work options that have been discarded or discounted because of faulty efficacy beliefs or outcome expectations (Brown & Lent, 1996; Lent, 2005). It might also help clients to identify barriers to implementing their career choices and aid them to circumvent barriers, often by identifying sources of support.

The Case of Ruth

Ruth is a 26-year-old woman who seeks career counseling for help in deciding what to do following a layoff from a position as a financial analyst at an investment firm. She identifies as multiracial, with a Caucasian mother and an Asian American father. She has two younger brothers (twins), both of whom are in medical school. Her parents live in the Northeast; both are scientists at a large company. Ruth grew up in an upper-middle-class neighborhood and excelled in high school. She was involved in social justice activities and volunteered for a sexual assault clinic and a women’s shelter for victims of domestic abuse. Her parents strongly encouraged her to attend an Ivy League college, which she did, majoring in finance because her father thought this would be a good career for her. Her college advisor helped to arrange an internship with a Wall Street investment firm, and the firm offered her a position as a financial analyst following graduation.

Ruth enjoyed some aspects of her work as a financial analyst, particularly working directly with clients. Because she previously completed an internship at the same company, she felt she knew what tasks were expected of her. She was responsible for researching companies in the airline industry, analyzing their financial information, and making recommendations to her supervisor about investments. She was paid well and able to rent an apartment in New York City not far from where she worked. She liked having the life of a single young woman in New York but also felt that she did not have enough time to fully enjoy it. She was expected to travel quite a bit and to work long hours, neither of which she liked. She was one of a few women in the firm, but this did not concern her. She felt well-mentored by her male supervisor. She was planning to begin studying for the examinations to become a certified financial analyst, which would help her in seeking promotions within the firm. These exams are taken after at least three years of experience as an analyst.

Overall, Ruth felt that she was doing well in her career. Therefore, she was shocked when her supervisor called her into his office and told her that her position was being terminated, effective immediately. In fact, the investment firm was laying off a third of its workforce. She was told to pack her personal belongings and that she would be escorted off the premises within half an hour. Ruth took 3 weeks to try to recover from the anger and hurt of being laid off,
then decided to take stock of her options. She considered looking for another job as a financial analyst, but the industry as a whole had laid off a large number of people in New York City. She could move to find another job using her research skills and financial expertise, or she could try to do something else.

Ruth began to realize that perhaps this was an opportunity to make a different career choice. She thought about the things she did not like about her past job (e.g., the travel, the limited people contact, the lack of time to develop relationships outside of work). She recalled an interest inventory she took as a senior in high school that identified her interests as primarily investigative, social, and conventional. She remembered enjoying her helping and social justice activities in high school, but she did not think these would be feasible career options for her. Although she has played with the idea of pursuing training in social work, she is not sure she would be competitive in applying to graduate programs given her undergraduate finance major. She did no volunteer work during college, and she was not sure she could overcome such deficits. She was not sure what to expect about the outcomes associated with different career options (e.g., would she have to take a cut in pay?) and did not know if there might be ways to combine some of her interests and talents. She did not know how to determine what to do next and sought help from a career counselor.

Goals and Targets of Social Cognitive Career Theory-Based Career-Choice Counseling

One overall goal of SCCT career-choice counseling is similar to other theoretical approaches: to help clients identify career goals likely to be satisfying. To make such a forecast, the client’s interests, values, and skills are considered in relation to potential career paths (Brown & Lent, 1996). A counselor might generate a list of plausible options and ask to what degree each option will likely engage a client’s interests, fulfill her or his values, and value her or his skills. Addressing such questions may not be too difficult for clients who have a well-differentiated work personality, well-developed decisional skills, and a support system ready to cheer them on to success and to provide the other financial and human capital needed to pursue their preferred path.

But what do we do for clients who do not have such advantages? What do we do when, for example, a client’s decisions appear to be blocked by faulty assumptions or incomplete knowledge about the self or potential work conditions and outcomes? What do we do when the client’s options are limited by perceived or very real barriers (e.g., a family who frowns on one’s goal) or by the absence of supports and resources (e.g., lack of needed financial backing)? Such scenarios represent the relatively distinctive goals
of SCCT-based choice counseling—to identify and, as much as possible, surmount the internal and external impediments to making, pursuing, and revising career choices (Brown & Lent, 1996).

In Ruth’s case, an SCCT counselor’s first task would be to clarify her goals for career counseling. In a broad sense, Ruth seems to want help identifying which decisional path to pursue, the one she had been on or a new one. Assuming that Ruth confirms this goal, one logical (and fairly generic) next step would be to work with her to identify options consistent with her interests, values, and skills. However, a counselor using a social cognitive approach would also be concerned about possible impediments that could block her choice making and pursuit. Such impediments fall into six categories, one or several of which could be relevant for Ruth and could, therefore, compose subgoals or targets for counseling. These categories are (a) fostering skills and self-efficacy beliefs, (b) fostering optimal outcome expectations, (c) expanding vocational interests, (d) identifying and managing barriers, (e) marshalling resources, and (f) clarifying and setting goals. We examine each in turn.

Fostering Skills and Positive, Realistic Self-Efficacy Beliefs

A central focus of SCCT is to help clients develop accurate, positive self-efficacy beliefs. If efficacy beliefs are inaccurate or based on faulty or incomplete information, they may lead to unsatisfying or unstable choices. Often, clients constrict their options because they lack confidence in their ability to undertake tasks related to particular career paths. For example, an area investigated for many years is the underrepresentation of women in engineering and technical careers. Many women restrict their consideration of technical or engineering occupations because of weak self-efficacy for completing math and science courses—beliefs based on socialization experiences that often bias access to sources of efficacy information in gender-typed domains (Betz, 2005).

Ruth did not appear hindered by weak math self-efficacy in her initial career choice of financial analyst, but it is possible her consideration of alternative options now is limited by beliefs about her skills in other domains (e.g., helping others) or about how readily she can gain access to experiences (e.g., graduate training) that would enable her to develop her skills and become employable in such fields. A counselor might explore such possibilities by (a) assessing Ruth’s self-efficacy regarding a range of career themes and basic activity dimensions (e.g., using the Expanded Skills Confidence Inventory [E-SCI]; Betz et al., 2003), and (b) exploring factors that may limit her sense of efficacy at fields that could otherwise offer good potential fit for her.

Several strategies may be used to help clients modify faulty self-efficacy beliefs (Brown & Lent, 1996). One is to help clients make more accurate attributions regarding their abilities and accomplishments. Ruth’s self-efficacy
beliefs may be founded on inaccurate beliefs about the skills needed to be successful in graduate school or the types of experiences expected by social work admissions committees. Her counselor could encourage her to get additional information to more accurately assess whether her finance background would prevent her from gaining entrance to graduate programs in social work. Her counselor could also help her to review her past academic successes and standardized test scores along with feedback she had received specifically about her performance in helping and advocacy-related contexts (in adolescence onward). If she lacks such feedback, she might be encouraged to gather it from persons who would have been exposed to her skills. Such activities may help her to revise her beliefs about her capabilities to navigate graduate school in social work or other such areas.

Another strategy may be to help Ruth gain additional experience, particularly new performance accomplishments, in areas relevant to career paths she is considering. For example, perhaps Ruth could seek volunteer experiences and trial academic coursework that could help to refine her skills and bolster her self-efficacy regarding helping careers. Because self-efficacy is domain-specific, it is important to help clients find opportunities in as close a domain as possible to the option they are considering. It may also be important to explore how Ruth is interpreting her new performance experiences. Is she, for example, attributing her successes to increasing ability (which would tend to buoy self-efficacy) or to luck (which would not)? Is she judging her progress incrementally or only against ultimate mastery standards?

Another matter for possible exploration would be Ruth’s skills and self-efficacy in relation to the process of making career decisions per se. How, for example, has she made career decisions in the past, and how confident is she in her ability to make a career decision now? Ruth seems to have followed paths that others may have set for her. She went to a college identified by her parents, chose a major that her father thought was appropriate, took an internship arranged by her advisor, and stayed with the same firm after graduation. In addition to exploring her confidence in her decisional skills, the counselor might help Ruth to consider the roles that her significant others might expect to play relative to her current decision—and what roles she would like for them to play. Such discussions may well identify cultural differences (e.g., expectations of greater familial involvement in career decisions within some cultural groups; Tang, Fouad, & Smith, 1999) that need to be honored and, potentially, reconciled.

**Fostering Optimal Outcome Expectations**

Another avenue for intervention is to help clients identify outcomes expected of various options, consider their accuracy, and possibly seek new occupational information (Brown & Lent, 1996). Clients may have vague or
unrealistic expectations of various courses of action. Helping them to clarify outcome expectations may include asking such questions as, “What are some of the positive things you could get from choosing this path?” “What might be negative outcomes of this choice?” “How will your family and friends feel about this choice?” “How would you feel about yourself as a . . . ?”

In formulating the answers to such questions, clients may need to do research to learn more about occupations and the views of significant others. Clients may need to know more about the educational and skill requirements of a given occupation, the interest patterns of its inhabitants, and its work conditions, reinforcers, and predicted outlook. Counselors may direct clients to the O*NET (http://online.onetcenter.org/) or the Occupational Outlook Handbook (http://www.bls.gov/oco), online resources for information on occupations. Other forms of information-gathering (e.g., informational interviews, job shadowing) may also be appropriate. Although a generic aspect of most career counseling, the “know your environment” part of the Parsonian equation is salient in SCCT choice counseling when clients appear to be acting on incomplete or inaccurate outcome expectations that constrain their options.

Ruth’s counselor could help her focus on the outcomes she may expect of leaving or staying in the occupation of financial analyst. She was well-paid and enjoyed aspects of the work. She enjoyed being successful and was planning on taking the Certified Financial Analyst exams, a key to advancing. Ruth may also have been trying to please her father by following his recommendation of a career path. Most members of her family have chosen scientific, medical, or business-related occupations. The counselor might ask her how her family would feel about her choosing an entirely different career, and how she would feel if they were to be disappointed. (The reactions of significant others can inform outcome expectations as well as self-efficacy, as noted earlier.) How will she feel about leaving a field in which she was successful? If she were to pursue a career in social work, what outcomes might she expect? Which occupational area would make it most likely for her to find rewarding work? The counselor might also ask Ruth the outcomes she might expect if she did not make a career decision.

Expanding Vocational Interests, Revisiting Discarded Options

A third intervention is to use assessment tools (e.g., interest inventory, card sort) to help clients identify areas of new and emerging interests or options they may have discarded previously (Brown & Lent, 1996). Of course, Ruth’s counselor could use results from an interest inventory in a more traditional way to help her understand or confirm areas in which she has higher and lower interests and to consider how well her interests fit with different career options. Ruth’s previous Holland code was investigative, social, and conventional. The Holland code for financial analyst is conventional, investigative, and
enterprising. Ruth enjoyed her work as an analyst, and her counselor could help her explore related occupations, such as credit analyst, statistician, or actuary that could allow her to use her investigative and conventional interests. The Holland code for social work is social–investigative. The investigative theme is common across both financial analyst and social work, an observation the counselor might use to help Ruth expand the range of occupations she could explore (e.g., what other investigative and social occupations might combine Ruth’s primary interests and allow her to work in a compatible setting?). Essentially, the counselor could use an interest inventory not only to identify current interest themes but also to consider occupational areas Ruth had not considered previously or may have ruled out.

Ruth’s counselor could also use additional assessment (e.g., E-SCI; Betz et al., 2003) to help contrast her interests and self-efficacy. Ruth’s E-SCI scores indicate that she has high confidence in the conventional and investigative areas but less confidence in the social area (e.g., helping skills). She and her counselor could discuss possible reasons for the lack of confidence in the social area and revisit social-theme career options that may have been discarded previously. They could also explore ways to increase her self-efficacy in social activities that, in turn, could reignite her interest in previously foreclosed options.

A vocational card sort could also be adapted to serve a similar option-expanding purpose. For example, following procedures described by Brown and Lent (1996), Ruth’s counselor could explore the reasons that she sorts particular occupational titles into the “would not choose” and “in question” piles. For example, are some options discounted because she does not believe she has the ability for them or that they would not provide reinforcers that are important to her? To the extent that her sorting decisions could be based on faulty efficacy beliefs or ill-informed outcome expectations, they could be the subject of additional exploration and learning experiences.

**Identifying and Managing Barriers**

A fourth SCCT-related intervention—and one that may be appropriate for use with all career-choice clients—is to help identify barriers that may impede one’s preferred choice (Brown & Lent, 1996). The counselor, for example, could say to the client, “Let’s try to come up with a list of things that could prevent you from following through with your choice.” The counselor then helps the client rate the likelihood that each barrier will be encountered and how significant its impact may be. In the case of likely and significant hurdles, counseling could then turn to the development of barrier-coping strategies. Some barriers, such as financial restrictions or family obligations, may indeed be realistic. On further exploration, however, others may be based on faulty assumptions or be neutralized more readily than the client had
anticipated. For example, Brown and Lent (1996) reported the case of a client who was able to surmount relationship barriers to a preferred career path by negotiating dual-career relocation issues with her romantic partner.

Ruth’s barriers clearly include the economic environment that led to a large number of layoffs in the financial industry. However, financial analysts are still being hired in some areas of the country. Her counselor could help her to appraise and cope with this barrier by, for example, having her explore the job prospects for financial analysts elsewhere, along with the pros and cons of a move that would enable her to continue in the same field. Ruth may also view her father’s encouragement to enter into a financial career as a barrier to leaving the field. The counselor could help her explore this barrier. If it is a consideration for her, the counselor might then help her to test her assumptions about how her family would react to a career change (or a relocation). Her family’s expectations of her career choices may have altered as she grew older or as a result of the economic situation that led to her layoff. Or it may be that her family will be disappointed in her choice to change careers, and her counselor may then help her to consider how she would like to respond to this barrier (e.g., rehearsing a talk with her parents or inviting them to join her for a session or two of counseling aimed at collective problem solving).

**Marshalling Supports and Resources**

A fifth type of intervention is to help clients to identify sources of support and resources and to help them pull those supports together (Brown & Lent, 1996). Ruth has a number of resources she may draw on in her career decisions. She comes from an upper-middle-class family, has an Ivy League education, and succeeded in a well-paid job for three years. The counselor may want to explore Ruth’s financial resources that may help her to seek more education or weather a protracted job search. Her family has been a source of emotional support for Ruth, and this can be a very valuable asset, particularly if Ruth remains out of work for an extended period. Ruth also appears to have a good relationship with her previous supervisor; he may be an excellent source of networking contacts and job-finding advice as she decides whether to continue as a financial analyst, either locally or elsewhere. Other supports, not readily available, may need to be cultivated, depending on the preferred career path that takes shape. For example, if Ruth decides to try out a volunteer experience related to helping or advocacy, she may profit from expansion of her support system to include peers who can serve as coping models and sources of encouragement.

**Clarifying and Setting Goals**

The sixth type of intervention, and key from an SCCT perspective, is to help clients to set career-choice goals that are most likely to guide their choice
behavior and that have a good chance of succeeding (Brown & Lent, 1996). Theory and research have identified properties of goals that are likely to strengthen motivation (Bandura, 1986). For instance, goals are most likely to be implemented if they are clear, specific, firmly held, challenging yet attainable, publicly stated, and broken into proximal subgoals (i.e., smaller goals that can be reached more immediately and that maintain momentum toward the ultimate goal). SCCT also proposes that the process of translating interests into goals and goals into actions is likely to be smoothest when people possess needed resources and supports to reach their goals (and where the goal-related barriers they face are manageable; Lent, 2005).

In Ruth’s case, it is important first to engage her in the counseling activities (e.g., assessment, information gathering) that will allow her to arrive at a choice goal that is consistent with her work personality and is accompanied by positive yet realistic self-efficacy beliefs and outcome expectations. Once she has identified such a goal (or while she is entertaining alternative goals), an SCCT-oriented counselor might encourage her to frame her goal (or possible goals) in ways that are likely to lead to successful goal pursuit. Assuming Ruth’s goal is to continue in finance, it may be valuable to state that objective to those in her support network (e.g., friends, family, former work associates), develop proximal subgoals (e.g., plan a national job search), consider how to marshal the resources she will need, and anticipate what barriers she may encounter and how to cope with them. If, on the other hand, she decides that she wants to pursue a helping career or a new path that allows her to use her finance skills in a nonprofit environment (perhaps one that offers more free time and less travel), her counselor can help her to consider the proximal subgoals, forms of support, and barrier-coping strategies that may facilitate that goal. Ideally, Ruth would leave counseling with a clearly articulated goal in mind, one to which she is committed and for which she has a workable implementation plan. Of course, a contingency plan for bumps in the road also would be prudent.

CONCLUSION

We have considered how SCCT conceptualizes the self, the role of self-regulation in career development, and the interplay between self mechanisms (e.g., self-efficacy) and environmental features in the context of education and work. We also presented a number of practical ideas that can be derived from SCCT to supplement traditional career counseling methods. Although our focus has been primarily on counseling for career choice, we believe SCCT also has useful implications for interventions that both precede career choice (e.g., career education during the K–12 years) and that follow it (e.g.,
counseling for work adjustment; Lent, 2005). Finally, we have said relatively little about assessment from a social cognitive perspective. Lent and Brown (2006a) offered guidelines for assessing self-efficacy and the other central constructs of SCCT, and there are many good examples in the literature of measures that assess social–cognitive constructs in different academic and career domains and at varying levels of specificity (e.g., Betz et al., 2003; Smith & Fouad, 1999).

REFERENCES


The core concern of vocational psychology is no longer vocational choice, as it was a century ago, or career development, as it was 50 years ago. In the 21st century, the core concern of vocational psychology has become the continuous construction of self and life design. This new focus calls for new concepts, models, and theories. This is answered in part by constructivism (CV) and social constructionism (SCN), which, by replacing the notion of having a self with that of constructing self, challenge the foundational concept of self in psychology and in its subspecialty of vocational psychology. However, the modernist conception of self is still widely held, and the notion of constructing self is not yet well defined or widely familiar. Thus, this chapter first explains CV and SCN. It then presents a model of constructing self that has been used as the basis of the fully developed and evaluated career interventions described later in the chapter.

CONSTRUCTIVISM AND SOCIAL CONSTRUCTIONISM

Constructivist psychologies have been known for more than 50 years (Raskin, 2002), yet the literature does not clearly define them. Constructivism sometimes is used generically, whereas constructivism and constructionism are used
“interchangeably” (Gergen, 1999, p. 237), “idiosyncratically and inconsistently” (Raskin, 2002, p. 2), driving Raskin to use the plural constructivisms because of their many varieties. Although these constructivisms have some characteristics in common, they have not become “a single, coherent, theoretically consistent orientation” but remained “loosely confederated” (Raskin, 2002, p. 2). What they share is the common idea that reality cannot be known directly. What we know of reality is only what we construct in our own minds: We make and make sense of our world through our construction of meaning. The key differences between the constructivisms lie in the ontological and epistemological issues of whether a “real world” exists outside the individual’s constructions and whether those constructions are products of individual agency or social processes (Botella, 1995; Raskin, 2002; for an overview, see Young & Collin, 2004). This chapter focuses on the differences between what is widely called CV and SCN, although it will not always be possible to differentiate them.

**Constructivism**

As with some of the other constructivisms, proponents of CV do not deny the existence of an external reality independent of the observer (Raskin, 2002) but instead recognize that people cannot know such a reality. This theory holds that all people can know is the model of reality that they construct through their own cognitive processes (although that may be modified through social interaction). However, individuals are not the passive objects of external forces, but “proactive agent[s]” whose prime activity is self-organization; that is, to establish and maintain order and continuity in their experience (Mahoney, 2002, p. 747). These self-organizing activities are “embedded in social and symbolic contexts” (Mahoney, 2002, p. 747), making culture, language, and relationships major concerns for CV. Individual development is “an open, active system” that changes and restabilizes itself over time to achieve a balance between “ordering and disordering processes” (Mahoney, 2002, p. 749).

**Social Constructionism**

Unlike CV, adherents to SCN do not assume the existence of a reality independent of the observer. Reality is only what individuals construct, and they do so not within their own “cognitively closed systems” (Raskin, 2002, p. 5) but through social processes, relationships, and interactions. One conclusion of this stance is that knowledge is not universal but historically and culturally specific, derived not from objective observation of the world but constructed through social interactions and processes and arising not in people’s minds
nor outside them but among them (Botella, 1995). Rather than reflecting reality (Burr, 2003), as traditionally assumed, language constitutes reality and structures thinking and meaning, and social phenomena result from interactions among people. Social practices, processes, and relationships are constructed in discourses. These are the culturally derived set of meanings and statements that work to produce a particular effect, or version of events, that shapes people’s responses. Analysis of discourse aids understanding of everyday social interactions and also uncovers the power relations that are embedded in social practices and society and woven into notions of, for example, class, race, and gender (Burr, 2003; see also Chapters 12–13, this volume).

The focus of SCN on social practices and processes rather than on intra-individual factors, entities, and structures (Burr, 2003), as is more traditional, challenges the positivist, essentialist assumptions prevailing in psychology. It has opened SCN to considerable criticism, particularly for its relativism and apparent loss of the self (see Gergen, 1999). However, the unitary nature of self had already been problematized long before SCN emerged by the distinctions between the subject, I, and object, me, that had been drawn by James (1890) and Mead (1934).

Sources of Constructivisms

To understand how the constructivisms interpret self, it is helpful to know something of the origins of the several strands that make up constructivisms. For example, the strand of mental processing and the construction of meaning is a development of the existing cognitivist trend within psychology, and it has been particularly influential in CV. Other strands originating in other disciplines and in postmodernism have been particularly influential in SCN (see Young & Collin, 2004).

Personal Construct Psychology

The cognitive turn in psychology increased the focus on mental processing, the individual’s organization and use of knowledge, for example, through narrative, and the use of language, all of which are key elements of constructivisms. This is seen in personal construct theory (PCT; Kelly, 1955), considered a “landmark in the development of constructivism” (Mahoney, 2002, p. 747). The premise of PCT is that because reality cannot be known directly, people can only make assumptions about it and then test their usefulness. Such assumptions, or personal constructs, arise from how people discriminate two poles in their experiences (i.e., people, things, or events are alike in some ways and unlike in others) and are then built up over time into a hierarchically organized system. Although such constructs are personal to the individual, Kelly (1955) recognized that social and relational factors play a part in forming
them. Hence in his fixed-role therapy clients act out the role of someone very different from themselves, and thereby try out new ways of construing and behaving, an approach that is explicitly constructivist (Raskin, 2002, p. 8).

The Social Construction of Reality

Berger and Luckmann (1966) proposed that through social interaction individuals form mental pictures of one another that develop into reciprocal roles. As those become institutionalized, it is only the end result of that lengthy process that is generally seen, and so people experience the world as an objective and ordered reality that existed before their time and will continue after them. Language imparts a coherence and stability to that reality and so reinforces the taken-for-granted meanings of everyday life.

Structuration

The interpretation that structures have a duality both “constituted by human agency” and serving as “the very medium of this constitution” (Giddens, 1976, p. 121) has also contributed to the constructivisms. Structuration is the dynamic process through which this takes place and involves “an interplay of meanings, norms and power” (Giddens, 1976, p. 161) between structure and intentional action.

Contextualism

Contextualism has influenced the emphasis of SCN on the significance of context, relationships, meaning making, and interpretation. Those holding this philosophical position understand the universe very differently from those adherents to positivism, seeing it as essentially unsystematic, with “multitudes of facts rather loosely scattered about and not necessarily determining one another to any considerable degree” (Pepper, 1942, pp. 142–143). Hence any organization perceived in the world is not inherent but attributed by human thinking. The ecological and systems approaches and chaos theory (see Patton & McMahon, 2006) are other new ways of thinking in the social sciences that emphasize holism, interrelationships, and embeddedness, and may also have had formative influences on the constructivisms and on SCN in particular.

Postmodernism

Postmodernism has been another significant influence on the constructivisms, and especially on SCN, in that it has undermined, fragmented, or dismantled basic Enlightenment beliefs in reason and led to the collapse of the Western world’s “grand narratives,” such as that of continuing progress, and to the erosion of “a firm sense of self” (Gergen, 1999, p. 195). In place
of modernism’s focus on the individual, postmodernism pays attention to community and culture and acknowledges the working of power in society and how it is constituted in language and discourse.

CONSTRUCTIVIST/SOCIAL CONSTRUCTIONIST UNDERSTANDINGS OF SELF

Some of the terms are not clearly defined or consistently used in the literature. At times identity seems to be used as a synonym for self (e.g., “the self (or identity),” Markus & Nurius, 1986, p. 956). At other times, self is perhaps being used as a psychological term and identity as a sociological one; or the two terms may be used to reflect the difference between the subject I and me, the object of self and of others.

The Modernist Self

Traditionally, the self has been seen as something that the individual possesses, a unique, discrete, decontextualized, relatively stable entity, a constellation of identifiable traits that can be studied as objects. However, Gergen (1999) interpreted this as a Western, individualist self; it is not necessarily “a fixed or ‘natural’ state of affairs,” but specific to our time, sustained by the shared understandings of our time, and “a moment in a still ongoing historical process [which] may be reconstituted as understandings change” (Shotter & Gergen, 1989, p. x).

The Constructivist/Social Constructionist (or Postmodern) Self

In contrast, the constructivist/social constructionist self is not given but constructed. It is “a complex system of active and interactive self-organizing processes” (Mahoney, 2002, p. 748), “a complex mental edifice that one constructs by the use of a variety of mental processes” (Bruner, 1994, p. 41). As Raskin (2002, p. 7) put it, drawing on PCT, self is “generated by the way a person successively construes himself or herself.” Some core constructs are generated early in infancy, before the development of language. They are thus “deeply embedded and intransigent” and “impermeable to self reflection and alteration,” and so seem to be “unfiltered truths” rather than constructions and give an enduring sense of self (Raskin, 2002, p. 7).

Embedded in Context

Self is constructed in context and through relationships. It “is not the discovery or release of some innate ‘I’; it is a construction built on other
people’s responses and attitudes towards a person, and is subject to change as these responses, inherently variable and inconsistent, change in character” (Polkinghorne, 1988, p. 150). As a consequence, the individual is “socially constituted within the boundaries of culture, context, and language . . . [and hence has] a multitude of identities that are negotiated and defined within specific interpersonal relationships” (Raskin, 2002, p. 18). Gergen (1991) referred to the enacting of many different, socially constituted selves as the saturated self, the constructivist version of which is Markus and Nurius’s (1986, p. 954) concept of possible selves, which are “the cognitive manifestation” of the individual’s “goals, aspirations, motives, fears, and threats.”

Produced Through Discourse

The recognition of context in the construction of self brings with it awareness of the part played by society, culture, and their symbolic systems; and by language and discourse. “How people talk about themselves and their world determines the nature of their experiences” (Raskin, 2002, p. 18). Self is “produced discursively, that is in dialogue and other forms of joint action with real and imagined others” (Harré, 1998, p. 68); rather than “the singularity we each feel ourselves to be,” self is “a site from which a person perceives the world and a place from which to act” (Harré, pp. 3–4).

Constructed in Narrative

Adherents to both CV and SCN consider that self is constructed through narrative: It is “a perpetually rewritten story” (Bruner, 1994, p. 53). Narrative pulls the disparate elements of a person’s life into “a single unfolding and developing story” (Polkinghorne, 1988, p. 150), a coherent, continuing, and continuously revised whole.

An Active Process

Constructing self, then, is a continuous, dynamic, reflexive process from which self emerges and is never complete. It is an active process of negotiating, organizing, synthesizing, integrating, and reflecting. Although it forms a trajectory from the past to the anticipated future (Giddens, 1991), the process of constructing it takes place in the present: “in the interactive moment . . . as the moment unfolds” (McNamee, 1996, p. 149). All we can know of the constructing present is in retrospect, but it can be understood through the narratives in which individuals (re)construe their life from the perspective of some anticipated futures.
The earlier introduction of CV into the career field was through PCT, but CV/SCN has now gained a foothold (Young & Collin, 2004) in this realm, entered alongside or via contextualism (Collin, 1997; Young, Valach, & Collin, 1996), ecological and systems (Collin, 1985; Patton & McMahon, 2006; Vondracek, Lerner & Schulenberg, 1986), narrative (Bujold, 2004), and relational (Blustein, Schultheiss, & Flum, 2004) approaches. However, although “[t]he concept of self . . . has been one of the most durable constructs in theories of career development” (Lent & Hackett, 1994, p. 77), it has been the taken-for-granted modernist view of self, decontextualized and construed in terms of traits-and-factors, which has informed most career theories. Despite a long tradition of the notion of agency and self-actualization, of “the person as active shaper of his or her career . . . researchers have often failed to capture this constructivist, agentic perspective in their choice of measures and research design” (Lent & Hackett, 1994, p. 82). What has been missing until recently has been a detailed interpretation of self from the perspectives of CV/SCN that would inform career theory, research, and practice.

A Model of Constructing Self in Career

In this section, we present a model of the dynamic process of constructing self based on such an interpretation (Guichard, 2004, 2005, 2009) to underpin the vocational interventions described later in the chapter. Some of its elements establish constructs and hold them firm, providing a basis for continuity and coherence; others destabilize and dislodge constructs, so giving the opportunity for adaptation and development, and there is necessarily a tension between the two.

Reflexivity is one element in the understanding of the self under CV and SCN. In this model there are two kinds of reflexivity anchored in views of the future self. The first type is a stabilizing factor with dual aspects. One aspect is “wanting to become like this person or persona” or “dreaming of oneself already as being this person or persona,” a process that Dumora (1990) observed in adolescents and young adults. The individual reads into the future self some of the desired characteristics of another person. The second aspect is the rejection of the representations of certain other people, or of some of their characteristics, with which the individual does not wish to identify. This first kind of reflexivity leads toward self-crystallization, to the structuring of the whole self-system from this unique future perspective.

The second form of reflexivity is destabilizing, and creates a distance from one's own past and present experiences and specific anticipations.
by looking at them from other points of view. This is captured in Peirce’s conception of the self (Colapietro, 1989), which is described as a trinity, a continuing dialogue (internal or with other people) during which the person circulates between the several possible reference points of human discourse: I, you, s/he (Jacques, 1991). This ongoing process corresponds to the core dimension of what Malrieu (2003) named a personalization activity; that is, a sense-making process of reflection on the multiple possible interpretations of past, present, and anticipated commitments. This type of reflexivity leads toward never-ending self-analysis; to seeing one’s self-system from multiple perspectives.

**Contexts and Possible Identities**

The way in which contexts are taken into account also provides stabilizing elements within the dynamic process of constructing self. Adherents to CV and SCN emphasize that self and contexts are interwoven. In this model some major contexts are conceived of as given, but they are also seen as symbolized in diverse ways and transformed via human actions, interactions, collective actions, interlocutions, and dialogues. Individuals are born into a society that is more or less differentiated (having several social fields; Bourdieu, 1977) and integrated (these social fields being more or less independent of one another). Thus, every society offers its members a range of possible identities (Dubar, 2000) through diverse social categories. It also offers modes of relating to oneself (Foucault, 1983), notably via some self-schemata closely linked to these categories, as well as biographical forms (Delory-Momberger, 2004) that represent socially accepted ways of narrating one’s life.

Although this range of possible identities is available from birth, it nevertheless evolves: People transform it through their interactions, collective actions, interlocutions, and so on, thus creating new social categories while others become obsolete. Our societies today are complex, highly differentiated, and not greatly integrated. They also evolve quickly. This has an important consequence for constructing self. Individuals’ identities (or, as they are called later in this chapter, subjective identity forms systems) are more differentiated and flexible than in more traditional settings. Therefore, one can speak of a “plural wo/man” (Lahire, 1998).

**Cognitive Identity Frames**

Individuals do not passively respond to the evolving identities supplied by society. As PCT shows, via their interactions and dialogues people develop a cognitive structure of constructs that allows them to construe themselves and others in their own personal way and to act accordingly. Again, these structures are stabilizing factors built as a consequence of individuals’ interactions
and dialogues. But, as cognitive structures, they are not quickly remodeled. Among such structures, one kind appears important in constructing self. Guichard (2001) called these cognitive identity frames. As with other cognitive frames, they can be understood as mental structures of attributes that have default values (e.g., in the cognitive frame “room,” the default value for the attribute “wall” is four). Identity frames refer to different groups or social categories, and the default values of their attributes are mainly social stereotypes (e.g., in the cognitive identity frame “nurse,” the default value for the attribute “gender” is female). These identity frames are organized into a multidimensional system of categories. Hence the range of available identities supplied by any given society (notably, social categories) generates in the minds of the members of that society a complex cognitive structure specific to each person, the elements of which are identity frames.

Identity Forms

This system of cognitive identity frames constitutes the cognitive subconscious basis of representing self and others, as well as of constructing self, by means of identity forms. An identity form can be defined as a given way of perceiving oneself and others in a particular context. Among the identity forms are some of particular importance in constructing self, including those in which individuals see and construct themselves, or subjective identity forms (SIFs). For example, in a school context, a boy may consider himself from the angle of a “high school student” SIF and will interact and communicate as such.

SIFs denote sets of ways of being, acting, and interacting in terms of a certain view of oneself in a given context. Indeed, when individuals construct themselves within a particular identity form, they appropriate it to themselves, they actualize it in a personal way in their particular context. For example, the school student does not consider himself just in the social role of school student but as 1-school student. He acts and interacts as such, he relates as such to objects (e.g., the various school subjects), to others (e.g., school friends, teachers), and to himself (e.g., in building some self-efficacy beliefs or generalizations of self-observations). According to the contexts in which individuals interact and communicate, they construct for themselves distinctive SIFs, and according to those they can act, interact, and relate to themselves in a given way in one context and differently in another context.

Thus, this model recognizes the self as dynamic and plural, an evolving system of SIFs through which individuals construct themselves. In this system, some SIFs refer to the diverse current experiences of the person, but others refer to the past or future. Some past SIFs may play an important role in the present life of an individual, having such an actuality that they constitute the thread of continuity that Savickas (2005) named a life theme. Undoubtedly,
such an SIF constitutes a major stabilizing factor of the SIFs system. Other SIFs are those that are anticipated. During any given period of an individual’s life, one (or several) SIFs may be central to his or her system of SIFs. These then play a major role in structuring the whole system. Often, they are linked to major expectations, to the construction of a major anticipated identity form, and to the interpretation of one’s major life domains from this perspective.

CAREER INTERVENTIONS

Based on this self-constructing model, workshops (Guichard, 1989, 2008) and a counseling interview (Guichard, 2009) help individuals design and redesign their lives. This process will vary according to the specific issues faced. The case of an adult who has been made redundant differs from that of the adolescent who needs a clearer view of the future. Yet these cases share a major common feature. Individuals have to develop expectations about their future that will allow them to integrate their present and past lives with certain future perspectives.

Workshops

The workshops are for groups of 15 to 20 participants (e.g., high school or college students, dropouts), and they run for approximately 15 hours, divided into at least four sessions.

Development

These workshops were developed on the basis of empirical study (see Guichard, 1993). It was observed that most young people built highly stereotyped views of occupations or professions, often oversimplified and very different from actual work activities. In addition, most often they saw their future from their current situation. For example, some high school students competed to be the best in the most socially valued school curricula and ignored for the moment all their other life domains and their personal and occupational futures. On the other hand, dropouts and students having difficulties at school were not able to establish any link between the way they saw themselves in the present and any future trade. Moreover, because occupations and professions are evolving so quickly it is not realistic to help young people envisage themselves in a given occupation or profession as, in the near future, those could change greatly. These observations led to the conclusion that these workshops should not focus on job expectations but should have at their heart current activities in the person’s various life domains and those that are anticipated both in work and outside it in the future.
Objectives

These workshops have six objectives. These are to help participants (a) identify the diversity of activities that make up an occupation or a profession; (b) recognize the importance of various life experiences, such as the development of competencies or interests, having a network of friends, and meeting key figures, both in the initial transition to work and subsequently; (c) analyze their own present situation in terms of activities, self-efficacy beliefs, resources, attitudes, and so on, in the different contexts of their present life (e.g., school, family, leisure, work experiences); (d) select some (mainly occupational) activities they would like to carry out in the future; (e) engage in present activities related to this anticipated future; and (f) integrate the previous suggestions and reflections into their current lives.

Program of Activities

The workshop program has three phases, during which participants are divided into subgroups of three. In the first phase, each subgroup is given a different pack of about 60 cards, each of which describes a task involved in a particular occupation or profession. These cards were based on interviews with three people at work who described in detail what they did during their working day. Each pack of cards corresponds to the description they each gave of their occupation or profession. This information is not given to the participants at the beginning of the session, and the participants must (a) decide how many occupations or professions are covered by their pack of cards and (b) reconstruct the stories of the working days of the individuals doing the jobs. Participants are later told that each set of cards corresponds to the descriptions of just three jobs.

During the group discussion that takes place after they have reconstructed the occupations or professions, participants usually come to three major conclusions: (a) each job appears to involve many more activities than they had thought; (b) different jobs share similar activities; and (c) certain occupations or professions, which they thought they knew about, are very different from what they had imagined. At the end of this phase, participants are asked to select some activities they would like to find in their own future job.

During the second phase, the same subgroups are given a second pack of cards. These show the narrative, elicited from the same people interviewed for the previous pack, of the various life experiences that enabled them to take up the job they have now. Each card describes an experience that has played a role in the individual’s career. Participants have to reconstruct the life route of each one of them (having discovered during the first round of card playing what the job is). In the discussion that follows these reconstructions of the careers, participants usually make three major observations about (a) the nonlinearity in the majority of careers or working life trajectories, (b) an absence
of close links between qualifications and jobs, and (c) the great diversity of life experiences that had originally prompted the acquisition of skills.

At the end of this phase, participants are asked to think of their own assets, resources, and skills and to fill out some forms before the next session. One form asks participants to spot the various (past and present) contexts (e.g., school, family, sports, odd jobs, leisure) in which they might find different resources and build (or might already have built) assets for their future. The other forms are about each of these contexts, and invite participants to describe their activities and to take stock of the competencies they have developed and the resources they might find.

The third phase helps participants think of the activities they expect to carry out in their (occupational) future, analyze their current and past experiences in terms of the assets and resources needed for different expected activities, and determine what new activities they now need to carry out to increase their chances of achieving such goals. During the first part of this phase, an assessment is made of each participant’s answers to the forms they were given at the end of the first two phases (activities they would like to find in a future job and resources they could find and assets they could develop in their various contexts). The second part of the third session constitutes an exercise for subgroups of three participants in which the case of each one of the participants is analyzed by the other two. The role of the participants doing the analyzing is to (a) help participants consider their current situation from the perspective of the activity they would prefer to undertake in the future and (b) suggest some new activities in which they could engage to increase their chances of attaining their goals. These three phases form the core of the workshops. Their other activities (notably, reflections on ways to integrate what has been discovered into the participants’ current situations) are not described here.

Constructivist Life-Design Interview

Whereas the workshops focus on participants’ past and present experiences in their various life domains from the perspective of an anticipated occupational or professional subjective identity form (considered in terms of work activities), the interview takes a different approach. Indeed, it does not pose vocational anticipations as being necessarily central to individuals’ subjective identity forms systems. Here, we outline only the key features of this interview (for a more thorough description, see Guichard, 2009).

Objectives

The goals of this interview are to help clients (a) become aware of what constitutes each of their SIFs, (b) describe the current organization of their
SIFS, (c) elicit some expected SIF (often, but not necessarily, occupational or educational) that they want to actualize, and (d) find ways (e.g., activities, interactions, resources) to increase their chances of doing so (modifying their SIFs, if necessary) and to commit themselves to progressing.

Structure

This Constructivist Life-Design Interview is similar—in its general principles and in its structure—to other career counseling interviews (e.g., Gysbers, Heppner, & Johnston, 2009). It begins with the establishment of a working alliance between counselor and client; it continues with an analysis of and a reflection on their experiences by the clients; it ends with a personal synthesis, a plan of action, and a closure phase.

Awareness

One of the first steps is to help clients become aware of their major life domains. They are asked to (a) describe their daily activities and thus discern their major current life domains, (b) remember some past activities or life experiences (e.g., in the high school they attended) that still seem to have an impact on their lives today, and (c) identify some important expectations they have for their future.

Subjective Identity Forms Analysis

The next step is to help clients map out their SIFs system. First, they have to define their major SIFs. Starting with the domains of their current lives, past experiences, and future expectations that they have mentioned as being important to them, they are asked to explore each of them. This means clarifying how they consider themselves in each of these present, past, or anticipated contexts. It also means describing their (a) actions, interactions, knowledge, know-how, attitudes; (b) modes of relating to the objects of this domain (e.g., task-approach skills); (c) modes of relating to themselves (e.g., self-efficacy beliefs); (d) modes of relating to others and interactions, and, in some cases (e) the relation of one context to another (e.g., an anticipated context). Second, clients have to define the importance to them of each SIF (which SIFs are central and which peripheral), as well as the way they view the relationships between their major SIFs (resources, obstacles, or independence). This analysis ends when clients have a clear image of the current structure of their SIFs.

Sometimes, this structure is such that a future anticipated SIF is so important that the whole SIFs system is seen mainly from its perspective. But this is not always the case. Therefore, the next task is often that of helping clients elicit some major expected SIF. In some cases, counselors have to
help clients search for their “foreclosed options” (see, e.g., Blustein, 2006; Subich, 2001; Chapter 12, this volume).

**Reinterpretation**

During the next phase, clients are asked to reread and reinterpret their present situation from the perspective of one of their anticipated SIFs. In interaction with the counselor, clients (a) identify in each of their present SIFs the various elements that could constitute a support or a barrier to the achievement of their goal, (b) determine what they could do to develop that support and neutralize those barriers, and (c) define new experiences they could have to increase their chances of achieving such a goal. At the end of this phase, an action plan is worked out that defines the terms of their commitment to specific activities or settings, and relates this commitment to all of their other life experiences.

**Closure**

At the end of the interview it is stressed that the purpose of this intervention cannot be to draw up a perfectly determined life plan but rather to help clients learn how to analyze their present situation from a desired future perspective. The actual undertaking of this project may lead to redesigning that life plan.

**Evaluation of the Interventions**

To determine whether the workshops meet their goals, they have been evaluated by means of quasi-experimental research (Guichard, 1992; Guichard, & Falbierski, 1994), and the results have been consistently positive. After the workshops, participants exhibited a clearer view of the activities involved in a job, displayed a more differentiated and positive view of themselves (e.g., mentioning more assets and competencies, having higher self-esteem), expressed a clearer representation of the factors that facilitate a transition to work, and indicated much more active involvement than before (e.g., some of them had begun a new activity, others had taken a new interest in certain school subjects).

The counseling interview has not yet been systematically evaluated. Nevertheless, early impressions are that it attains its goal of helping individuals see their present and past from the perspective of some anticipated identity form, and commit themselves to advancing this plan for their life. Examining the efficacy of the interview method is a goal for future research.
CONCLUSION

This chapter has set out a model of the process of constructing self and described interventions to support individuals in their life design. The model is based on a view of self that is very different from that which hitherto has informed much of career theory and research. Yet we observe that elements of the interventions will be familiar to many counselors, even those who do not intentionally espouse the constructivisms, nor indeed are even familiar with them. Counselors have devised their methods because they provide ways to address clients’ needs. This suggests a strong affinity between CV/SCN and practice (see Polkinghorne, 1992). Thus, although the constructivisms still appear to be radical in the career field, they may be offering the long-desired opportunity to reconcile career theory and practice (Savickas, 1994).

The interventions we have described appear to be effective responses to the major challenge of life design that faces individuals today. People have to take care of themselves and ponder questions such as, “What is a good life?” In response, they usually consider the possible repercussions of their career choices and decisions for close others. Hence their “care of self” (Foucault, 1986) is—almost always—also a “care of close others.” However, we have noted how SCN uncovers the social practices, processes, and power that shape the ways in which people construct themselves, and here it prompts the question whether the care of close others is sufficient to cope with the major crises of the world, such as global climate change, starvation, overpopulation, unemployment, poverty, and so on. Should not the care of distant others also be placed at the very heart of new kinds of constructivist/social constructionist interventions and, more specifically, of interventions that deal with career issues?

REFERENCES


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Of Donald Super’s many observations on the process of career development, perhaps the most salient to self-theory is this proposition: “The process of career construction is essentially that of developing and implementing vocational self-concepts in work roles” (Savickas, 2005, p. 46). He defined self-concept as “the individual’s picture of himself [sic], the perceived self with accrued meanings, generally a picture of the self in some role, some situation, in a position, performing some set of functions, or in some web of relationships” (Super, 1963, p. 18). In elaborating this proposition, Super assembled a list of metadimensions of self-constructs and self-construct systems. For example, regarding self-constructs, Super suggested that they may vary in certainty, clarity, and realism. Regarding self-construct systems, he suggested, for example, that they may vary in scope, harmony, and regnancy (i.e., the amount of affect attached to the self-attribution). Moreover, Super (1957) identified two kinds of self-concepts: an actual or real self and an ideal self (i.e., the self that a person would like to be).

In this chapter, we describe how the ideal or possible self concept first described by Super (1957) and later articulated by Markus and Nurius (1986) has evolved into a well-defined vocational construct. We begin by describing the construct of possible selves as advanced within the social psychology
literature. We then consider how vocational psychology has used the construct in research and practice and describe person matching as a career assessment method counselors can use to assist clients to link self to possible selves in occupations. A career counseling case illustrates practical application of person matching as an approach to augmenting traditional vocational interest and occupational self-assessment.

POSSIBLE SELVES

Markus and Nurius (1986) advanced the concept of possible selves as specific and personalized representations of goals and the self in future states. They enumerated three types of possible selves: (a) hoped-for or ideal selves that a person would very much like to become, not unlike Super's (1957) ideal self; (b) probable selves, defined as less-than-ideal selves that a person might more realistically expect to become; and (c) selves that a person might fear to become. They asserted that these selves give meaning to the future, help people work to achieve their hopes and expectations and to avoid their fears, and create concrete and vivid images of possible hopes and fears that are more motivating than vague, ill-defined images. Markus and Nurius (1986) went on to expand their theory by hypothesizing that there is a possible relationship between these conceptions of self (cognition) and the drive to become them (motivation).

Research has indicated that there appear to be diverse ways to classify such self-images. For example, Markus and Ruvolo (1989) conducted two studies that examined possible selves in reference to performance through the use of imagery. The first study included three groups of participants. In the first group, participants were asked to imagine being successful in the future because of their hard work. In the second group, participants were asked to imagine being unsuccessful in the future despite their hard work. The third group participated in a positive mood-inducement exercise. These imagery exercises were hypothesized to increase the participants' accessibility of specific possible selves. In the second study, there were also three groups of participants. In the first group, participants were asked to imagine being successful. In the second group, participants were asked to imagine being unsuccessful and imagine another person being successful. The third group participated in a positive mood-inducement exercise. Markus and Ruvolo found five types of self conceptualized from these imagery exercises and expressed chiefly as descriptive adjectives or phrases:

1. general (e.g., creative, selfish, intelligent),
2. physical (e.g., tall, blind, athletic),
3. lifestyles (e.g., active social life, having health problems),
4. abilities (e.g., able to fix things, poor cook), and
5. occupations (e.g., businessperson, teacher, police officer).

In another study examining types of possible selves, Cross and Markus (1991) examined participants’ descriptions of hoped-for and feared possible selves. They found many differences in frequency of mention of these possible selves across different age groups and between persons classified as high and low in life satisfaction. Notably, occupational possible selves were present in this study as well as in the above-mentioned study, but types of selves were differently classified.

Markus and Nurius (1986) speculated that the sources of self-descriptions or possible selves derive from previous social comparisons in which the individual’s own thoughts, feelings, characteristics, and behaviors are compared with those of role models, images, and symbols provided by the media and by immediate social experiences. More recently, there is some evidence that possible selves seem to contain motivational properties. Cross and Markus (1994) found that stating specific plans for achieving short-term possible selves increased the likelihood that they would be realized. Oyserman and Markus (1990) asserted that an expected or hoped-for self is enhanced motivationally if accompanied by a feared self in the same domain.

POSSIBLE SELVES IN VOCATIONAL PSYCHOLOGY

Counseling psychology, given its interests in career development, emphasizes occupational selves, both possible and real, as described by Super (1957) and later articulated in Marcus and Nurius’s (1986) possible selves construct. Therefore, several studies of occupational possible selves have been conducted in recent years, particularly with regard to gender differences between women’s and men’s possible occupational selves. In one study, Chalk, Meara, and Day (1994) examined occupational roles or titles as possible selves. They solicited college students’ hopes, expectations, and fears of occupations classified as masculine, feminine, or neutral. Results indicated that women rated masculine jobs as more feared than possible for them and that men rated feminine jobs as more feared than possible. In a second investigation, Robinson, Davis, and Meara (2003) examined the influence of motivational properties of possible selves on low-income women’s perceptions of the likelihood of achieving their most- hoped-for possible selves and of avoiding their most-feared possible selves. They found, among other factors, that knowing someone in the most-hoped-for occupation contributed most to the perception of achieving that self.

A third study, by Chalk, Meara, Day, and Davis (2005), examined the influence of possible selves on college women’s ratings of masculine and feminine jobs as to how much they were hoped for, expected, or feared. Respondents
feared feminine jobs more so than they expected or idealized them, and feared masculine jobs more so than they expected them, but not more than they idealized them, and they idealized them more than they expected them. Those participants who most feared masculine jobs cited reasons of job demands, competition, and uncertainty of success, whereas those who most feared feminine jobs placed importance on low status and others' disappointment.

These three studies provide some evidence for gender differences in conceptualizing possible selves. It appears that women, regardless of diverse background, feared masculine jobs, but this barrier did not preclude them from envisioning those occupations as possible occupational selves. Moreover, it appears that having a role model or even knowing someone in that feared occupation was a good predictor of being able to conceptualize the occupation as a possible self. Men, on the other hand, feared feminine jobs and often had trouble conceptualizing those feminine occupations as possible selves based on stereotypical views of these jobs. These findings have obvious practical implications for career counseling. Female clients may be able to easily envision masculine occupational possible selves if introduced to or acquainted with someone in that occupation. Male clients may be able to envision feminine occupational possible selves if presented with a male representative of a feared feminine occupational self or provided with accurate and less stereotypical information about that occupation.

CAREER INTERVENTIONS AS A SOURCE OF POSSIBLE SELVES

As noted previously, speculation on the sources of possible selves, whether as self-descriptions or occupational titles, is absent for the most part. Super (1957) suggested that self-concepts, and presumably occupational roles, emerge from an adolescent playing adult roles, as well as formal explorations in the subject matter and extracurricular activities of junior and senior high school. Contemporary media, movies, and television are surely additional sources that Super would have endorsed. Similarly, career counselors typically use formal tests and assessments to suggest possible occupations (selves) for their clients’ consideration. Virtually all interest inventories are scored for different types of interests (e.g., outdoor, mechanical) and are keyed to occupations. Results are typically phrased as, “You have interests most similar to those of [occupational title].” In Markus and Nurius’s (1986) frame of reference, occupational titles constitute possible selves. Thus, the occupations advanced from the results of an interest inventory would be similar to their “selves-in-future-states” or possible selves.

Recognizing the heterogeneity that exists among people within the same occupational groups, Kuder (1977, 1980) stated, “No two people [in
the same occupation] ever do the same thing . . . and no two careers are ever exactly alike” (Kuder, 1980, p. 5). He therefore proposed matching occupation seekers not to the composite characteristics of an occupational group but individually to a number of persons in a variety of occupations via the interest inventory Person Match. Moreover, instead of delivering the names of the inventory taker’s highest scoring occupations, Person Match would give short biographical sketches, or career stories, of the individuals whose interests most closely matched those of the inventory taker—a description of the work, how she or he entered into it, the satisfactions and dissatisfactions attendant in the work, and what the person plans to do next. Thus, the Person Match material attends more to the reality of the job than to the occupation as an abstract thing.

To carry forward Kuder’s legacy in this regard, a third-generation Kuder assessment, the Kuder Career Search With Person Match (KCS), was developed (Zytowski, 2001, 2009). The assessment uses Kuder’s familiar most–least preferred triads of activities and is scored for occupational clusters closely resembling the six Holland personality types (i.e., outdoor/mechanical, science/technical, arts/communication, social/personal services, sales/management, and business operations). Most important, beyond cluster scores, KCS compares the inventory taker’s profile of scores, without regard for gender, with the score profiles of every one of approximately 2,000 adults employed in occupations representative of the U.S. workforce. The inventory taker is provided with the occupational titles and one-page career stories of 12 individuals whose interest profiles most closely match their own; in Markus and Nurius’s (1986) terms, the respondent is provided with several possible selves.

The validity of such an approach may be intuitively obvious, but the attempt to demonstrate it empirically is sparse at best. Hartung, Borges, and Jones (2005) conducted a unique study comparing the validity of Person Match with criterion-group matching in forecasting medical-specialty choice (e.g., obstetrics, internal medicine, pediatrics) among a group of medical students. They chose a personality measure, the 16 Personality Factor Questionnaire (Cattell, Cattell, & Cattell, 1993), as the basis for matching, rather than an interest inventory, as in the Kuder system. They found that in nearly half of their subjects, the procedure yielded at least one match between a participant’s actual choice and the specialty choices of the top five Person Matches. Comparisons with the top seven matches increased the hit rate to almost two thirds. Further analysis revealed that individuals who match most highly in terms of personality profiles may not enter identical medical specialties but do tend to enter highly similar domains of practice. Although no empirical evidence explicitly supports the concept of Person Match, the following case study illustrates the clinical value of this concept when helping career seekers consider or envision their possible selves.
THE CASE OF DAWN

Dawn (pseudonym), a university student experiencing unease with her second choice of majors after only three semesters of study, was chosen to illustrate the utility of the possible selves frame of reference for a career intervention.

Personal History

Dawn is from a Midwestern, primarily agricultural state; was reared on a farm; and is the oldest of three children. She attended a high school whose graduating class numbered 35 students. She participated in many school activities, including drill team, cheerleader squad, volleyball and track, speech, chorus, band, and yearbook. She also taught Sunday school and worked periodically at a part-time job. Dawn was recognized for academic excellence; named outstanding drill team member; and won several vocal, percussion, and speech awards. She said that she enjoyed most of her classes, especially chorus, band, social studies, and English. She considered herself weakest in math and science.

A church-sponsored mission trip in her junior year of high school to the Cabrini-Green low-income housing development in Chicago stimulated an altruistic interest that, after some inquiry, she decided could be best satisfied by a major in community planning and urban development. After a year of study in this program at a public university in her state, she came to realize that this major was not the best fit to her interests or skills. She accepted an instructor’s suggestion that a major in landscape design might suit her better, but after a semester’s study she realized that the profession would require substantial time away from family, and with her felt lack of three-dimensional design skills, it was apparent to her that she should seek a more suitable major. Her counselor concluded that Dawn might benefit from an intervention shaped by Markus and Nurius’s (1986) concept of possible selves.

The Intervention

After gathering background information and talking to Dawn about her presenting concerns, she was asked to self-administer the KCS online, to generate possible selves that were consistent with her pattern of interests. Her KCS results indicated that her career interests were most salient in the social/personal services cluster (89th percentile) and the arts/communication cluster (72nd percentile). Dawn appeared to be least interested in the sales/management and outdoor/mechanical clusters (lowest quartile). When questioned, Dawn felt that this was a valid representation of her career
interests. Titles of the six most similar Person Matches in each of her top two clusters were as follows:

- **Social/Personal Services**
  - Biology and chemistry teacher
  - Human resource manager
  - Religious leader
  - Assistant school superintendent
  - Speech language pathologist
  - Hotel security coordinator

- **Arts/Communications**
  - Orchestra musician
  - Theater director
  - Communications assistant
  - Photographer
  - Actor
  - Picture researcher

To facilitate consideration of these possible selves, the authors devised a rating sheet (the M&N scale) calling for estimates of the desirability and probability of her four top-ranked Person Matches, as seen in Figure 7.1. At her request, she was allowed to substitute instrumental music teacher, a possibility she had once entertained, for the more vague communications assistant. Dawn indicated her desirability estimates by placing a check mark on a dotted line representing a continuum from feared to ideal. A second estimate, probability, was anchored by zero and 100% and indicated similarly. These graphic ratings were transformed into numerical scores for each concept by dividing the distance of the checkmark from the left end of the line by the length of the line, measured in millimeters.

For a baseline, ratings were obtained for the college major that Dawn was seeking to replace. She rated landscape architecture a 24 (moderately feared) in terms of desirability and a 0.4 for probability. In other words, although she saw the career as less than attractive, it was more pertinent that it was nearly improbable.

Regarding the Person Match occupations generated by the KCS, Dawn gave desirability ratings in the positive range to the assistant school superintendent, followed closely by human resources manager, orchestra musician, music teacher, and photographer. She indicated some fear of the roles of religious leader, theatrical director, and biology and chemistry teacher. Her probability ratings were generally higher for occupations requiring less educational attainment. The correlation between desirability and probability ratings for these titles alone was 0.43.

Dawn was then provided with the career stories of each of her top Person Matches. These are one-page self-reports by persons about such material as what they do at work, how they got into their career, what they most like and dislike about it, what they might do next, and any advice they might have for the reader. For a sample of one of the career stories, please see Appendix 7.1.

After reading the career stories, Dawn gave a second rating of desirability and probability for each of her Person Matches (see Figure 7.1). Some of the
Directions: This inventory asks you to rate several occupations for two characteristics. 1) Your feeling about the occupation named, assuming that you could succeed in getting into it, varying from feared through neutral to ideal. Place an x on the line anywhere from feared to ideal to represent how being in that occupation would feel to you. 2) Your assessment of the probability that you could successfully complete the required training, compete for a job, and maintain a career in that occupation.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Occupation</th>
<th>Desirability</th>
<th>Probability</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Biology &amp; Chemistry Teacher</td>
<td>Feared</td>
<td>Zero</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Symphony Orchestra Musician</td>
<td></td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instrumental Music Teacher</td>
<td></td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theatrical Director Performer Educator</td>
<td></td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religious Leader</td>
<td></td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Human Resources Assistant</td>
<td></td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assistant School Superintendent</td>
<td></td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Photographer</td>
<td></td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

0 = uninformed (pre-test)  x = informed (post-test)

Figure 7.1. The M and N Scale.
“informed” desirability ratings were more positive—the theatrical director and photographer—whereas some moved negatively—both music occupations and the human resources assistant. Probability ratings changed little, except that they went down for both of the music occupations and to zero for the religious leader. Reading the career stories apparently clarified some of her uninformed perceptions of some occupations. This conclusion appears to be consistent with Markus and Nurius’s (1986) assertion that concrete and vivid images are more motivating than vague, ill-defined ones.

The counselor engaged Dawn in a conversation for the purpose of highlighting her thinking about her preferences and possibilities, perhaps facilitating the making of some more confident career plans. Notably, Dawn indicated that reading the career stories made her more thoughtful about her Person Matches and made it somewhat harder to make the ratings. She said, “It’s more difficult and there’s a lot more to it.” Consistent with Markus and Nurius’s (1986) assertion that possible selves may derive from role models, Dawn explained that her attraction to the school administrator career derived from her experience “with the coolest principal when I was in elementary school.” Her high attraction rating for speech pathologist increased with the realization that she could work with a whole spectrum of ages and a wide variety of treatments. Her attractiveness rating for human resource manager increased with the perception that this individual got to do a variety of creative things. An initially moderately high attractiveness rating for the picture researcher decreased with her perception that the work could be tedious. The latter echoes Cross and Markus’s (1994) finding that stating specific plans increases the probability that one will realize career choices.

The counselor asked Dawn if she had formulated any plans. She replied that she was more certain of her decision to drop her studies in landscape architecture, and planned to take some classes in which she could explore opportunities in education and possibly health services. In an e-mail inquiring about her overall evaluation of using Person Match career stories to consider occupational future selves, she replied,

I really enjoyed using the rating sheets when evaluating my future college major. It helped to visualize my true thoughts on what area I wanted to pursue. It was very interesting seeing the difference in ratings before, when I only knew the job titles, and then when I found out what the job actually entailed, it definitely helped to narrow the options.

This case study provides support for segments of the existing theory of possible selves. Dawn was able to first conceptualize her possible selves and classify them based on a rating that ranged from feared to ideal. This initial conceptualization was based on a fairly uninformed and perhaps even stereotypical view of her possible selves as represented by Person Matches in her KCS results. When repeating this exercise, once Dawn had the opportunity to read
the life stories of these occupational possible selves, it became apparent that she was able to create more vivid images of the most probable possible selves that Dawn had earlier conceptualized for herself. Moreover, the theory also supports the concept that feared or stereotyped occupational possible selves can be contemplated as probable selves when one meets or is acquainted with someone in that occupation. In some ways, Person Match served as that “acquaintance” for Dawn. After reading the real-life occupational possible self-stories, she was able to attenuate some of the initial ratings of feared occupational possible selves.

CONCLUSION

The possible selves concept of Markus and Nurius (1986) offers a reasonable frame of reference for considering career possibilities. However, perceptions of future selves in terms of desirability and probability derived from occupational titles alone are somewhat attenuated when compared with perceptions informed by career stories obtained via the KCS. The case of Dawn illustrates how this young adult with reasonable educational experiences and a good history of performance had idealized or stereotyped some possible selves and feared others, perhaps unnecessarily. Going through the exercise of reading the Person Match career stories allowed her to provide more realistic ratings of her possible selves and narrow down her career options. It would then be reasonable to hypothesize that occupational titles generated from interest inventories are helpful if conceptualized as possible selves, but only if accompanied by realistic depictions of career alternatives.

Career counselors can consider an intervention like the one used with Dawn. Career clients who present with career interests for which they express fears, barriers, or even lack of knowledge and skill may be perfect candidates for this exercise. By giving clients concrete illustrations of occupational possible selves based on their career interests, the clients may be able to conceptualize such selves as probable occupational possible selves or at the very least articulate and confirm the reasons why they might fear these occupational possibilities. These real-life representations of possible selves also can serve as powerful tools for helping career counseling clients solidify their doubts about a particular occupational possible self. These life stories provide vivid and realistic representations of occupational alternatives, which should help clients with their career decision-making process. The case of Dawn represents a single instance of support for the use of Person Matches as representations of occupational possible selves, but future exploration of this intervention with diverse career clients may inform the use of this approach and expand the theory of possible selves.
APPENDIX 7.1. SAMPLE PERSON MATCH CAREER STORY: HUMAN RESOURCE MANAGER

As human resource manager, what role do you play in your workplace?

I’m responsible for providing human resource direction and administration for the manufacturing plant where I work. This includes (but is definitely not limited to) the recruitment of employees; compensation structure; policies and procedures; employee relations; and talent management. I’m essentially providing a support service.

Could you walk us through a typical day on the job?

My days vary. I might spend time phone screening or interviewing candidates for the company. I’ll work on updating our policies and procedures, and meet with our health and safety coordinators to ensure we’re meeting the needs of the employees. Some days, I’ll train new managers or review an employee’s performance. It’s my job to get our payroll processed and assist any employees who have questions about their benefits. That way, they’ll understand everything and make good decisions during open enrollment.

How did you break into this profession?

I began my career in human resources by working as a summer intern for a manufacturing facility. I spent the majority of my time on company events and working with worker’s compensation. I enjoyed the internship so much that when I returned to school in the fall, I added human resources as a major!

What are the educational requirements for this occupation?

It’s imperative for anyone interested in human resources to have general understanding of employment law. Some management training is good, too. Some positions require a 4-year degree, but others don’t.

What abilities or mentality allow someone to excel at this job?

Because a human resources role is so varied, someone who wants to excel needs to have not only general customer service skills but also the ability to effectively communicate and “sell” their ideas orally and in writing. It’s also helpful to be flexible with your day-to-day activities. Someone who’s afraid of change would be highly frustrated in this position!

What are some of the pros and cons of this occupation?

The pro of being in human resources is being able to work with an employee and watch them develop their professional career. My biggest drivers are employee development, helping a manager deliver a difficult conversation, or assisting in an employee’s training plan so they can achieve their full potential. It’s also great to be an ambassador of my organization. Less appealing areas of my job include times when I need to assist with performance discussions. That usually happens when an employee just isn’t “getting it.”
What next steps are you considering for your career?

I can see myself becoming a consultant in my field. I enjoy the changing events of my job and would like to share my experiences to help other companies grow and learn from my own mistakes.

Do you have any advice for someone pursuing this work?

I think the best thing for someone to understand when they go into human resources is that we’re here to support. We do not make money for the organization. Our job is to make sure that we support the operations of the company, whether it results in a profit or not!

REFERENCES


For more than a decade, changes in organizations have heralded the end of the era of stable and secure jobs. Scholars and practitioners have cautioned workers to stop relying on employers for their career development and instead to take control of their own career management by becoming more self-directed (Hall, 1996; Savickas, 2002). Where once the workplace was governed by a psychological contract in which employees exchanged loyalty for job security, a more transactional, performance-based agreement governs today’s workplace. In this new contract, firms promise little or no job security and employees reduce their organizational commitment (Rousseau, 1989). Firms are less paternalistic than in the past and provide employees with less training and career guidance. In turn, employees are becoming more self-reliant by seeking training and job experiences that will increase their marketability beyond the boundaries of a single employer.

In the past, firms used formal programs to encourage more established employees to serve as mentors to newer employees. These mentors would assist their protégés’ development and help them advance up the organizational hierarchy. Today, individuals often seek the assistance of multiple mentors and developers to help them manage the complexities of careers that may occur across the boundaries of several employers, industries, occupations, or
countries. Under the old psychological contract, firms used the aforementioned formal mentoring programs, organizational socialization techniques, and norms to motivate employees to desire the extrinsic rewards (e.g., money, corner office) offered by the firm. Under the new psychological contract, employees are seeking work experiences that will fulfill their desire for challenge, work–life balance, and being authentic to their self-concept. People are making career choices that are influenced more by their own values than the values of employers (Briscoe, Hall, & DeMuth, 2006). Individuals no longer expect their employers to be the major shapers of their career progress. Rather, today's workers are increasingly self-aware of their abilities, needs, and preferences. They know how well they fit (or don't fit) with a firm's culture and realize they are not bound to a single employer for life but can enact their careers across numerous employers and work situations.

Changes in the psychological contract have prompted fundamental shifts in conceptualizations of self in relation to work and career. Whereas in the past people often based their self-concept on their membership in the larger context of an organization (e.g., I'm a member of the IBM family), as an increasing number of individuals have become project workers, contingent employees, or have a series of jobs across multiple employers, people are basing their self-concept on their membership within a certain profession (e.g., I'm an accountant) or their employment status (e.g., I'm self-employed). Although in the past people obtained self-verification primarily from their supervisors and coworkers, today's workers are more likely to seek self-verification from fellow members of their profession, family, their community, or other important constituents.

Both environmental and personal factors have dramatically altered both career and organizational structures. Environmental factors include rapidly increasing technological advancements, growing use of part-time and temporary employees, increasing workforce diversity, and expanding global markets (for a review of these changes, see Sullivan, 1999). Concurrently, there have been great changes in family and personal factors that influence careers and conceptions about self, including changes in family structures, such as the increasing number of dual-career couples, single working parents, and employees with elder care responsibilities; increasing life spans and hence longer work lives; and people's growing recognition of the importance of personal learning, development, and growth throughout their lives (Hall, 1996). The rules of the workplace have changed, and many individuals need help in making sense of these changes and charting a new course for their careers. That is, they need guidance in becoming more self-directed.

Because individuals are assuming more responsibility for their own career management and development, it is likely they will seek the guidance and advice of others, including career counselors. This may be especially true of
individuals who find themselves in the transition from the old to the new psychological employment contract. These individuals began their work lives with one set of expectations (e.g., job security, upward advancement within a few firms) and were encouraged to internalize the values of their employers and make these values part of their self-concept. Now, these workers, as well as those entering the workforce under the new contract, are trying to make decisions that reflect their own values and permit them to be true to their self-identity.

In this chapter, I discuss the concept of the boundaryless career to explain how changes in both individuals’ physical mobility (i.e., their movement across firm, industry, and other boundaries) and psychological mobility (i.e., their recognition of many different, often nontraditional, work options) influence their perceptions of what a career means to them. Individuals are becoming more self-directed in their careers now that they realize it is easier to move across physical and psychological work boundaries. They are consciously engaging in continuous learning and reflecting on how different work assignments permit them to obtain new abilities, skills, and knowledge while increasing their marketability. They are establishing goals based on their own values and are achieving these goals on their own terms, often sacrificing traditional job rewards such as increases in salary, promotions, and status symbols. I use the Kaleidoscope Career Model (KCM) to illustrate how this increase in self-directedness has changed how people implement their self-concept through their careers. I use the KCM to examine how individuals’ values and needs are driving career decisions in contrast to the past, when individuals often were motivated to internalize and act on the values of their employers.

Examining how the changing work environment affects individuals’ self-concepts is becoming increasingly important as the number of individuals working outside of traditional organizational boundaries, whether through telecommuting, contingency employment, or other nontraditional work arrangements, continues to grow. In the past, individuals were assimilated into an organization through firm policies; formal and informal guidelines; norms; and daily, face-to-face interactions with supervisors and coworkers. Through this organizational socialization process, individuals integrated characteristics and values of the firm into their self-concept.

Through various intraorganizational communications, individuals conveyed their self-concepts to relevant others, gained feedback, and either had their self-concepts verified or made changes to bring their self-view into alignment with the perceptions of important others (Thatcher & Zhu, 2006). Organizational membership provided individuals not only with a social identity and a means for self-verification but also a social context for habitual activities. These habitual activities, such as being at the workplace from 9:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. and wearing business attire, helped people maintain a sense of
structure and coherence in their daily lives. With rapid technological and global changes, however, many people no longer work for just one or two firms for most of their careers. They can no longer rely on an organization to provide a social context for the development, verification, and reinforcement through habitual routines of their self-concept. Instead, people are working for multiple employers, interacting with many different people for varying durations of time, and often they are communicating via technology rather than face to face or on a daily basis. These individuals must seek relevant others for the development of a social identity as well as verification of their self-concept (Thatcher & Zhu, 2006). This change from organizations being the primary director of people’s careers to self-directed careers and the effect of this change on one’s self-concept is the focus of this chapter.

In this chapter, I review recent changes in thinking about how individuals enact self-direction in their careers in today’s dynamic workplace and explore the implications of these changes for career counselors (for the application of the KCM for organizational psychologists and human resources managers, see Sullivan & Mainiero, 2008). I begin by defining and delineating recent research on the boundaryless career concept and its implications for how we view the self. I then present the KCM as a specific framework that counselors and consultants can use to help clients navigate their way in the boundaryless career era. I follow with several case studies to demonstrate use of the KCM to assist individuals with different career needs, and I close the chapter with some conclusions about understanding and fostering self-direction.

THE BOUNDARYLESS CAREER

Definition

In light of increased mobility patterns, whereby people increasingly move in and out of organizations and jobs because of various environmental and personal factors as described earlier, Arthur and Rousseau (1996) developed the boundaryless career concept to explain changes in how individuals perceive and enact their careers in today’s highly complex and fluid work world. They defined the concept as “one of independence from, rather than dependence on, traditional organizational career arrangements” (Arthur & Rousseau, 1996, p. 6). In this sense, the boundaryless career differs from traditional conceptions of career that emphasize the bounded nature of work in which individuals define their vocational self-concepts in terms of the organization and derive most, if not all, of their training and development from the firm. In contrast, those with a boundaryless career tend to define their vocational self-concept independent of their experiences within a single firm.
Instead of relying on organizational norms and structures to provide guidance, individuals are making choices based on introspection and self-awareness that then drive them to behave in ways that reinforce their self-concept. They direct their own career development and training and specifically seek work experiences that will provide learning opportunities, increase their employability in any number of work situations, and enhance their intrinsic satisfaction.

Research

Initial research based on the boundaryless career concept tended to focus on careers within the boundaries of a single organization, failed to examine how individuals’ perceptions of careers had changed, and did not fully consider how careers can permit individuals to express their authentic self (Sullivan, 1999). More recently, research on the boundaryless career concept has intensified. Scholars have begun to study both objective and subjective career success as well as the relationship between physical movement and psychological changes. For example, in a comprehensive study of the boundaryless concept, mobility, and personality factors, Briscoe et al. (2006, p. 33) found no relationship between actual mobility and the boundaryless mind-set, defined as “one’s general attitude to working across organizational boundaries.” They also reported that the boundaryless mind-set and mobility preferences, defined as “the strength of interest in remaining with a single (or multiple) employer(s)” (p. 3), were significantly and positively correlated with proactive personality, career authenticity, openness to experience, and mastery goal orientation.

In response to calls for clarification of the concept (Briscoe et al., 2006; Sullivan, 1999), Sullivan and Arthur (2006) offered a reconceptualization of the boundaryless career. They suggested that a boundaryless career be defined by varying levels of physical and psychological career passages between successive employment situations. They offered a model that measures the degree of boundarylessness displayed by the individual along both physical (horizontal) and psychological (vertical) dimensions. Figure 8.1 depicts this model, illustrating that there may be many combinations of physical and psychological boundarylessness. This model suggests that instead of categorizing people as either having or not having a boundaryless career, we should examine differences in the degree of boundarylessness experienced by various individuals and implications of these differences for people’s performance, satisfaction, and self-directedness.

In sum, whereas relatively little research on the boundaryless career concept occurred in the first decade following its introduction, the past few years have witnessed much more research on discontinuous, nonlinear, more boundaryless careers. Scholarship on the evolution of the concept has also
increased in recent years. The boundaryless career concept has caused many researchers to rethink career structures, with scholars offering a number of fresh perspectives on the very notion of career. In the next section, I briefly describe the KCM as one of these newer perspectives and detail its use in career counseling.

KALEIDOSCOPE CAREER MODEL

In contrast to the linear career models that dominated much of the career research since the 1950s, Mainiero and Sullivan (2006) developed the KCM to capture how individuals are enacting their careers within today's more fluid, boundaryless era. Through the use of three surveys ($n = 109; 1,647; 1,525$), interviews ($n = 52$), and focus group discussions with 27 individuals, Mainiero and Sullivan (2006) found that women’s career patterns were discontinuous, with movement out of and back into the workforce. The women interviewed were less influenced by company standards and norms; they tended to be very self-directed. They defined success on their own terms and took responsibility

![Figure 8.1. Degrees of physical and psychological boundarylessness. Adapted from “The Evolution of the Boundaryless Career Concept: Examining Physical and Psychological Mobility” by S. E. Sullivan and M. Arthur, 2006, Journal of Vocational Behavior, 69, p. 22. Copyright 2006 by Elsevier. Adapted with permission.](image-url)
for setting and achieving their own career goals. In contrast, most of the men displayed traditional upward career paths, although their careers occurred across multiple employment situations instead of just across one or two firms. There were some men, those who were the primary caregiver for their children while working from their home or being financially supported by their wives, whose enacted careers were similar to the women’s career pattern. Younger men indicated they wanted more self-directed careers than previous generations of men. They planned to create careers that focused more on their own values and goals than the values and goals of their employers or society in general (for more details on the original five studies, see Mainiero & Sullivan, 2006; for details on generational differences, see Sullivan, Forret, Carraher, & Mainiero, in press).

Based on their research, Mainiero and Sullivan (2006) used the metaphor of the kaleidoscope to describe the adaptable and self-directed career patterns of today’s workers. Like a kaleidoscope that produces changing patterns when rotated and its glass chips fall into new arrangements, the KCM describes how individuals change the patterns of self and career by rotating the various aspects of their lives to arrange in new ways the relationships and roles that shape their self-concepts. Individuals evaluate the choices and options available to them to determine the best fit among work demands, constraints, and opportunities, as well as among relationships and personal values and interests. As a decision is made, it affects the outcome of the kaleidoscope career pattern and, consequently, how individuals go through their lives developing and adapting their choices to fit their self-concepts.

Just as a kaleidoscope uses three mirrors to create infinite patterns, individuals vary their emphasis on any one of three parameters when making decisions, thus creating the kaleidoscope pattern of their career. These parameters or motivators are (a) authenticity, in which individuals make choices that permit them to be true to themselves; (b) balance, whereby individuals strive to achieve equilibrium between work and nonwork demands (e.g., family, friends, personal interests); and (c) challenge, involving individuals’ needs for stimulating work (e.g., responsibility, autonomy) as well as career advancement. These three parameters act simultaneously over the life span with the strength of any one parameter to shape a career decision or transition dependent on circumstances and events occurring in people’s lives at that particular time. Over the course of the life span, as individuals search for the best fit that matches the character and context of their lives, the kaleidoscope’s parameters shift in response, with one parameter moving to the foreground and intensifying as that parameter takes priority at that time. The other two parameters lessen in intensity and recede to the background but are still present and active because all three parameters are necessary to create the individual’s current pattern. The original research has been supported
by subsequent, large-scale studies (n = 908) conducted by its originators (e.g., Sullivan et al., in press) and others (e.g., Cabrera, 2007, in press; Godshalk, Noble, & Line, 2007; Smith-Ruig, 2009).

**APPLYING THE KALEIDOSCOPE CAREER MODEL TO COUNSELING**

When using the KCM as a framework for discussing individuals’ career issues and uncertainties in terms of boundarylessness and self-direction, counselors assume that people are driven by three important and active career parameters (i.e., authenticity, balance, and challenge), with one parameter typically taking priority at a particular point in time. Counselors can help clients determine which career parameter is most central to them at that particular time and what trade-offs they are willing to make among the different aspects of their lives. For example, an individual may trade off salary and job challenge for increased time with family by taking a lower paying job that requires less travel. For this individual, balance represents a priority and he or she is willing to exchange pay and challenging work for more family time.

**Questions**

To help clients evaluate which parameter is of greatest importance to them as well as the interaction among the three parameters at a particular time in their lives, the counselor may ask the individual to answer the following questions: “What is most important to me right now?” “Based on my response to question 1, what trade-offs am I willing to make to fulfill my need for authenticity, balance, or challenge?” “What other factors (e.g., job market, training, elder care responsibilities) are influencing my career and my career choices?” Once the client has examined the three KCM parameters and determined which is the priority at that specific point in time, the counselor can help him or her to set goals and develop an action plan.

**Context**

Although it is vital that clients be aware of how the three parameters influence their careers and career decision making, it is also important that they consider how other factors may have a major influence on their careers. As illustrated in Figure 8.2, external factors, such as the labor market, and organizational factors, such as culture (e.g., Mainiero & Sullivan, 2006) as well as personal factors, such as personality (e.g., Tokar, Fischer, & Subich,
and family factors, such as child care demands and family interactions (e.g., Hartung, Lewis, May, & Niles, 2002), must also be recognized because they may influence individuals’ career decision making. For instance, an individual may be fully cognizant of how the three career parameters interact and influence his or her career. However, a lack of understanding of how factors in one’s life context, such as elder care responsibilities or inadequate training, limit job mobility and may severely hamper the effectiveness of the counseling process as well as any career decisions made.

Figure 8.2. The dynamic boundaryless career context. KCM = Kaleidoscope Career Model.
Cases

The next three sections offer specific examples related to each one of the career parameters. These examples, in the form of abbreviated case studies, further demonstrate how career counselors can use the KCM as a framework for assisting individuals with making career and life decisions and being self-directed in their careers. These examples also illustrate the influence of other factors (e.g., economy, firm policies) on an individual’s decision making.

Authenticity

Consider the following case of Barry, who searches for authenticity. During his early career, Barry moved from firm to firm, gaining increases in salary, responsibility, and challenge with each move. After much mobility among different firms, now at age 41, Barry says he has “settled into his niche.” He has been with his current employer for almost 10 years. Barry earns a good salary but wants more intrinsic satisfaction from his work. To make his work more meaningful, Barry has suggested many programs to the CEO, such as company-sponsored community projects as well as green business practices. The CEO has readily supported his ideas. Barry was recently shocked, however, by the CEO’s announcement of lay-offs, with many of Barry’s subordinates losing their jobs. Barry discussed this issue with his fellow executives, but not one was willing to go with Barry to discuss the lay-offs with the CEO. Barry conducted extensive research and offered the CEO a number of suggestions for stopping these lay-offs, including canceling bonuses. The CEO thanked Barry for his suggestions but replied that bonuses are an important business strategy needed to ensure the motivation and retention of his valuable executive team. Barry feels torn. He can’t quit his job because his family depends on his salary and the job provided him with the perfect mix of authenticity, balance, and challenge. Yet he feels the firm has betrayed loyal employees.

Barry’s case illustrates a number of important career issues, especially that individuals have essential needs beyond the traditional extrinsic rewards of a high salary. Barry has a very high need for authenticity; he needs his values to be in alignment with the values and actions of his employer. Barry believed he had found his niche with his current employer, but the CEO’s decision to endorse bonuses while downsizing employees has left Barry with ethical concerns.

The CEO’s support of many of Barry’s programs was helping to meet his authenticity need. With the CEO’s recent decision, however, Barry no longer

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1Although the cases are based on actual clients, the names and some of the details have been altered to protect confidentiality.
perceives an alignment between his values and the firm’s values. Barry has made several attempts (e.g., talking to fellow executives and the CEO) to bring changes that will permit the realignment of values, but these attempts have failed. Barry may benefit from a counselor’s help in understanding why he and fellow executives (and the CEO) view the same situation so differently. Examining how Barry’s needs for authenticity, balance, and challenge interact, compared to how these parameters interact among his fellow executives and the CEO, may help to clarify these differences.

Up until now, Barry’s job had fulfilled his needs, especially his need for authenticity, but he now questions how much of a trade-off he is willing to accept on this issue to be content working for the firm. Barry feels a debt of gratitude to the CEO for supporting his past ideas and programs. He knows there is the possibility of further improving the firm’s culture and work environment. A counselor can help Barry weigh the cost of the lay-off decision that has detracted from his authenticity against the benefits of the CEO’s previous (and future) support, which is consonant with Barry’s desire for authenticity. Barry’s case also illustrates that although authenticity is the priority of this point in his life, the parameters of balance and challenge are still active and influence career decisions. Moreover, his situation illustrates how a firm’s policies, even policies that do not directly impact an individual’s own employment (i.e., the layoff of others), can influence career decisions and attitudes.

Barry’s situation also illustrates the important effect of relationships, inside and outside of the firm, on career decisions. For instance, resigning from the firm may not be a viable course of action for Barry because he must consider how his actions could affect his family. A counselor can help Barry sort through the conflicting needs of the various individuals who affect his career decision-making. Barry may also benefit from assistance in determining whether there are alternatives that he has yet to consider. In addition, the counselor can help Barry recognize the trade-offs within and among the three parameters of authenticity, balance, and challenge and guide him to question his expectation that any work situation will mesh perfectly with his values.

In sum, Barry’s case illustrates how he sought authenticity and self-direction by championing policies such as an environmentally friendly workplace and how ethical issues reduced this authenticity. How individuals express their authenticity, however, varies greatly from person to person. Individuals seek authenticity through many different means. For instance, a woman may create a business to reflect her own values and beliefs or to solve a social problem, such as developing an inexpensive heating unit that can provide clean water to people in developing nations. A cashier may organize a charity walk as a way to meaningfully contribute to her community. A retiree may find personal meaning by joining the Peace Corps or going to college to gain the
education he always desired. A well-paid executive may leave her job to run for political office to bring change. Authenticity can be expressed in many different ways, and counselors can help individuals understand and fulfill their needs, through activities within and outside of their employing firm, for this important career parameter.

Balance

While Barry was in the middle of his career and focused on authenticity, Al’s quest for balance offers insights into individuals in the latter part of their careers. Al always loved the study of history. With his memory for facts and dates, it seemed natural that he would attend college and earn a degree in political science. After graduation and being on the job market for 6 months, he was able to secure a much-sought-after position with the local human services agency. He rose through the ranks, becoming a supervisor. For the most part, Al enjoyed his work and the security of being a civil servant. The salary was not large and the work was stressful, but it was meaningful work that helped those in need. Now, at age 62, he is eligible to retire from the agency, but he is unsure if the timing is right. He longs for more time with his family, but money is tight and his youngest child is still in college.

Al’s case illustrates an important point: The traditional career is not dead. Although recent academic scholarship focuses on the boundaryless career, the traditional linear career path, whereby a person works for one or two firms for most of his or her life, has not entirely disappeared. Research suggests that although some people do have more discontinuous boundaryless career paths, others, like Al, follow more traditional career paths (Mainiero & Sullivan, 2006). For example, McDonald, Brown, and Bradley (2005) found that some of the managers working in a highly structured public agency had more traditional careers. These managers experienced predictable organizational advancement, infrequent job or firm changes, and had worked for the agency for 10 or more years. So, although more people today are experiencing greater mobility and are considering a wider range of career options, there are still many people who follow relatively traditional career paths. Therefore, counselors should anticipate working with individuals with various types of career paths, some more boundaryless and some more traditional in nature. As some scholars have cautioned (e.g., Kidd, 2007), counselors should not exaggerate the changes that are occurring in the workplace and should not expect all individuals to embrace or even be aware of the boundaryless career.

This case also illustrates that many men who have worked for one or two firms for most of their adult lives have not considered career paths that deviate from the traditional, linear career form. Like Al, they may need help in recognizing alternatives beyond remaining with the organization for
which he or she has always worked or retiring from the workforce completely. Counselors may provide individuals like Al with information as well as encouragement to consider other options ranging from part-time work, to working for another organization, volunteer work, self-employment, or retraining for work in a different field. Research indicates that more people consider bridge employment as a transition between full-time employment to full-time retirement as well as other options such as multiple transitions, in which an older individual moves out of the workforce, then back in, then back out, and so on (Wang, Adams, Beehr, & Schutz, 2009). Counselors can assist individuals to seek out and prepare for these bridge-work options.

In addition, despite stereotypes that might indicate otherwise, Al’s case illustrates that men do desire balance. Although men of the World War II era and the baby boom generation have tended to demonstrate their love of family through working long hours and being good providers, later in life these men often want to spend more time getting to know their adult children and playing with their grandchildren (Sullivan & Mainiero, 2007). Also, recent research suggests that men of Generations X and Y desire more balance between the work and nonwork aspects of their lives than did previous generations of men (Mainiero & Sullivan, 2006). These younger men feel less willing to trade-off balance for career advancement and money. They often plan to follow career paths more similar to women’s than those of previous generations of men. These younger men may be more open to alternative career options (Sullivan et al., in press), and they may require counseling about how to decide among the many options open to them.

Challenge

Consider the case of Kathleen, who, at age 27, is in the early stage of her career and focused on the career parameter of challenge. Kathleen has bounced from job to job and firm to firm trying to find a good fit. She grew easily bored and impatient with the slow advancement she experienced in these various jobs. After quitting her last job, she moved back in with her parents to give herself time to look for a job that would offer the challenge she craved. She finally landed a position with a growing consulting firm. She found the job glamorous and challenging. Unfortunately, 2 years later, changes in the economy caused the firm to downsize. She was laid off. Her parents encouraged her to get a job with a large, established corporation that would be less likely to experience financial troubles. Through a connection made by her father, she obtained a position working in the quality control department of a large bank. She quickly became bored with the work. She spoke with her supervisor but was told to be patient, that she would be offered more challenging projects as she gained experience at the firm. She was
disappointed because she thought supervisors were supposed to mentor employees and help them fulfill their career dreams. The bank provides great pay and permits her plenty of time to spend with her friends, but it is not meeting her needs for advancement and challenge.

Kathleen’s case illustrates the often unrealistic perceptions of new workforce entrants as well as the influence of external factors on careers. It is not unusual for individuals just graduating from college to have an unrealistic view of what work really entails. Many universities encourage students to engage in internships because these experiences offer a realistic preview of the positives and negatives of work in general and specifics for a given employer. Many universities also use service-learning projects to help students apply knowledge while obtaining experience in working in different situations with various types of people. These projects also help students learn about volunteerism and how unpaid work can fulfill career needs, often in different ways than paid work does (e.g., Borges & Hartung, 2007). If Kathleen had engaged in internships or service learning projects, she might have a better idea of what type of work and employer would better meet her needs.

Thus, counselors should encourage their clients in high school and college to engage in internships and service learning projects to gain a more realistic picture of the world of work and types of jobs and careers. Also, because she lacked a realistic picture of organizational life, Kathleen frequently changed firms. Frequent job changes have become more acceptable in the boundaryless career environment than in the past, when individuals tended to work for a relatively few number of firms. Nonetheless, job change signals restlessness due to unmet personal needs. A counselor’s expertise can guide an individual’s self-exploration and develop strategies to attain authenticity, balance, and growth.

Like most people in the early stages of their careers, Kathleen has a very high need for challenge, yet her current job does not adequately fulfill that need. Although the job offers great pay and good balance, these factors do not offset her need for challenge, which is her current priority, and at this point in her life she is unwilling to accept trade-offs related to this parameter. Kathleen did seek out her manager’s help in achieving more challenge, but he was of no assistance.

A counselor can help Kathleen realize that a boss is not necessarily a mentor (e.g., someone more advanced in his or her career who provides instrumental and social–emotional support). Kathleen can be helped to develop an action plan for finding a mentor and expanding her network of other individuals who can provide her with guidance and information (Baugh & Scandura, 1999; Forret & Dougherty, 2001). Joining a professional organization may expand Kathleen’s network and also provide her with challenge if she assumes a leadership position within the group. A counselor can help her
explore ways in which she can fulfill her need for challenge outside of the workplace.

Kathleen’s situation also illustrates how personality differences influence career decision-making. Kathleen becomes easily bored. Her career counselor, for example, can explore with her possible ways of creating challenge at her current job. Some questions Kathleen should ask herself include, “Does the bank have an internal job board that regularly posts open positions?” “Does it offer benefits, such as tuition reimbursement, which would provide me with challenge while enhancing my knowledge and skills and making me more qualified for more demanding positions?” “Does the bank sponsor volunteer projects or opportunities for expatriate assignments that would help fulfill my need for challenge?” Kathleen likely would do well to consider what trade-offs she is willing to make to fulfill her need for challenge. For instance, if she accepts an expatriate assignment in the bank’s offices in China, is she willing to lose the face-to-face daily contact with her parents and friends?

Kathleen’s case also highlights how external factors and family influence careers. She found a good match in her position with the consulting firm. The economy, however, caused downsizing, and she was forced to leave a job that was meeting her needs. No matter how qualified a person is, external factors can cause dramatic and unwanted changes in one’s career. In addition, Kathleen’s parents are a major influence on her decision making. They have provided her with emotional and financial support, and it was through her father’s connections that she obtained her current job. Counselors often need to help clients understand how other parties influence their career decisions and whether this influence is having a positive impact.

CONCLUSION

Career counselors can use the KCM as a framework for helping individuals navigate the complex, contemporary boundaryless career environment in which self is tied not to an organization but to one’s own personal, self-directed identity. The KCM model can be integrated readily into the career-counseling process as illustrated in this chapter and as described by Kidd (2007). Kidd’s process and the KCM share many of the same underlying assumptions, including that clients must take control of their own career management and be active participants throughout the counseling process.

Counselors can use the KCM framework to help clients better understand their careers within a larger context, given that careers are affected by both internal and external factors (refer back to Figure 8.2). Counselors can help clients understand the interplay among authenticity, balance, and challenge and what trade-offs they are willing to make given the relationship among these
career parameters. The KCM provides a framework for helping counselors provide information about career transitions (e.g., layoffs and industry growth and decline within the labor market), and they can assist clients in processing and applying this information (for informational resources, see Chope, 2008). Based on the relationship among the three career parameters, counselors can help clients establish goals and action plans while recognizing potential trade-offs within the context of clients' lives.

Because careers unfold over the life span and do not occur in a vacuum, counselors may find it useful to keep the elements of Figure 8.2 in mind when working with clients. For example, individuals with different personality traits and different career attitudes may require different types and levels of assistance throughout the process. Individuals with low emotional resilience (Kidd, 2007) and low protean orientation (Briscoe et al., 2006) may have more difficulties dealing with transitions, especially unwelcome ones (e.g., being fired) than do those clients with personalities and levels of career adaptability (Savickas, 2002) that permit them to better cope with the increasingly complex and changing work environment. Likewise, those who have followed more traditional, linear career paths for most of their adult lives (e.g., Al) may not have considered alternative career options outside their employers, whereas others more accustomed to change (e.g., Kathleen) may be too impatient and too willing to switch jobs without considering alternatives within their current organizations.

Similarly, other factors (e.g., family situation) may affect careers, and counselors may wish to consider what support is being provided to the client by friends and relatives and whether the client’s partner should be involved in the counseling process (e.g., conflicts as a result of being in a dual-career marriage or distribution of household responsibilities). Career counselors may need to seek outside assistance for the client, such as connecting the client with community resources for eldercare help or finding additional counseling resources when the client is dealing with issues that extend beyond the work situation. For instance, a client who has come to a career counselor for help in managing her workplace relations and emotions while she undergoes cancer treatments may also need help from other counselors or support groups in dealing with the emotions related specifically to her illness.

There has been a call for increased research on topics relevant to practice and that can assist career counselors to more effectively help clients solve problems, increase job and life satisfaction, and enhance performance (e.g., see Subich, 2001). This chapter offers one modest attempt to bridge this gap by detailing how career counselors can apply a recognized career model to assist their clients in understanding, planning, and creating an action plan to attain personal and professional success in today’s more boundaryless and dynamic work environment.
REFERENCES


In 2000, Betz and Borgen wrote about the exciting possibilities of a combined look at personality, interests, and self-efficacy in the study of self and vocational behavior. Since then, research has addressed the issue of comprehensive career theory and assessment, including how personality, interests, and self-efficacy can be combined to help us understand and facilitate self- and career development. Advances in the measurement of these variables and concurrent use of such measures to explain career outcomes have emerged, now permitting truly comprehensive research and counseling applications. In this chapter, we review a sampling of recent research that has examined pairs of these variables, and then examine how all three variables may be looked at in an integrated fashion.

Typical self-report inventories are palettes for constructing human narratives. Good scores make good stories. Inventories with content scales, having obvious meaning, enable people to respond to phrases they understand with response scales that reflect how they see themselves. For example, using our three inventories, Jane might say she is usually shy, she would dislike arranging a family reunion, and she would not be confident in giving a speech to a social club. These responses would be elements in her self-narrative as she describes her personality, interests, and self-efficacy. Mary, on the other hand,
might say she is usually outgoing, she likes to inspire others with her leadership, and she would be confident in running for public office. The integrated pictures painted by Jane and Mary are very different. Their item responses can also be quantified and scaled to represent that Jane and Mary occupy very different niches in psychometric and psychological space. For example, they are quite opposite in a three-dimensional space defined by extraversion, interest in socializing, and confidence in public speaking. We can use their scores to write important parts of their career stories.

This perspective is not new. The objectives of comprehensive assessment and understanding of individuals were voiced 100 years ago by influential figures (Parsons, 1909; Thorndike, 1911). These objectives required assessment tools. We now have measures with unprecedented levels of comprehensiveness and precision that identify individuality and human strengths across the domains of personality, interests, and self-efficacy. As Walsh and Eggerth (2005) suggested, a major impetus for their integration has been the meta-analyses of the last decade that have produced stable insights about how variables are related across the domains of personality, interests, and self-efficacy. Holland's (1997) Big Six model of interests and Costa and McCrae’s (1992) operationalization of the Big Five model of personality, with their simplicity, clearly advanced the first phases of research and practice. More complex inventories, such as the Campbell Interest and Skill Survey (Campbell, 1992) and the Strong Interest Inventory (Donnay, Morris, Schaubhut, & Thompson, 2005), evolved as multiple-scale inventories that are organized by Holland’s Realistic, Investigative, Artistic, Social, Enterprising, and Convention (RIASEC; Holland, 1997) model but also measure other dimensions with more specificity and precision. The social cognitive perspective also has had enormous influence on career theory and assessment since Hackett and Betz (1981) introduced career self-efficacy as an adaptation of Bandura’s (1977, 1997, 2008) concepts of self-efficacy and human agency (Betz, 2007).

THE NOMOLOGICAL, NOMOTHETIC, AND IDIOGRAPHIC

The science of vocational psychology focuses on lawful relationships (i.e., nomologicals) between variables for groups of people. That nomological network is built into our theories and is closely related to the construct validity of the variables, or constructs (Cronbach & Meehl, 1955). Another similar term in psychology incorporates nomos, the Greek word for law. Long ago, Allport (1937) distinguished between nomothetic and idiographic ways of understanding people. Nomothetic research focuses on lawful relationships among constructs for groups of people. Idiographic assessment is much closer to the contemporary qualitative case study, implying the constructing of a life.
story or narrative. In Allport’s nomothetic–idiographic distinction, the former implies dimensions that apply in common across groups, and the latter means that the variables themselves are relatively unique to the individual. In our approach, we do not require the variables to be unique for each individual, but we believe we can build precise scales by nomothetic methods and use them to assess comprehensively human individuality.

Next, we highlight some of the vigorous scientific literature of the past decade that has advanced the understanding of relationships among the self constructs measuring personality, interests, and self-efficacy.

Interests and Confidence

A major advance in the use of self-efficacy theory (Bandura, 1977, 1997) in career assessment and intervention has been the postulated utility of the joint use of interests and self-efficacy in the generation of educational and career options. As will be seen, early models of the importance of both interests and self-efficacy suggested that they are moderately correlated, although the correlations varied depended on the Holland theme area represented, and correlations are small enough to suggest that each variable set provided unique variance.

Some early studies of the relationships of measures of self-efficacy or confidence to the Holland interest themes were those of Lapan, Boggs, and Morrill (1989) and Lenox and Subich (1994). In 2003, Rottinghaus, Larson, and Borgen performed a comprehensive meta-analysis of the correlations between parallel measures of interests and self-efficacy in 53 independent samples. They found that the average interest–efficacy correlations ranged from .50 (enterprising) to .68 (investigative) across the six Holland themes and were .62 (art), .73 (math), and .69 (science) for three academic disciplines. Correlations of this magnitude suggest 25% to 50% of shared variance.

In terms of causality, most researchers (e.g., Lent, Brown, & Hackett, 1984, 1994) have suggested that self-efficacy leads to interest development, and Bandura (1997) agreed. Indeed, Kahn (2001) found that research self-efficacy was a significant predictor of 1-year changes in research interests in graduate students in applied psychology programs, but Tracey (2002), using LISREL software to examine RIASEC confidence and interest scores obtained over a 1-year interval in fifth- and seventh-grade students, reported a reciprocal influence. Nauta, Kahn, Angell, and Cantarelli (2002) also performed a longitudinal study to examine causal relationships of efficacy and interests. Results of their structural equation modeling analyses indicated support for a reciprocal influence model, indicating change in efficacy led to changes in interests and vice versa.
Regardless of causality, it seems a simple model of both interests and self-efficacy as necessary for consideration of major or career options has gained considerable acceptance. Neither interests nor confidence (self-efficacy) alone is sufficient to lead to a career choice. In addition, because means of increasing self-efficacy or confidence via interventions based on Bandura’s theory (Betz & Borgen, 2006) are available, joint use of interest and efficacy measures in career assessment and counseling can be used to identify potential career options previously avoided because of lack of confidence. Across age ranges and types of criteria (e.g., occupational group membership, college major, occupational choice preferences), then, research suggests the incremental utility of both interests and self-efficacy in predicting academic and work choices.

**Interests and Personality**

The relationships between personality and vocational interests have received considerable research attention as well (e.g., Larson & Borgen, 2002; Nauta, 2004; Rottinghaus, Lindley, Green, & Borgen, 2002). The dominant models of personality and interests are, respectively, the Big Five model of personality (Costa & McCrae, 1992) and Holland’s model of interests (Holland, 1997). Recently, two independent and comparable meta-analyses of this literature (Barrick, Mount, & Gupta, 2003; Larson, Rottinghaus, & Borgen, 2002) identified several major linkages across the broad measures of personality and interests when the genders are combined.

Strong linkages are found between personality openness and artistic interests (.48 in Larson et al., 2002; .39 in Barrick et al., 2003), extraversion and enterprising interests (.41 in both meta-analyses), extraversion and social interests (.31 and .29, respectively), and openness and investigative interests (.28 and .25, respectively). In terms of effect sizes, values of greater than .25 are considered moderate effect sizes and those greater than .37 are considered large (Cohen, 1988). In addition, Larson et al. (2002) found a small but statistically significant correlation between agreeableness and social interests (.19).

More recent research has examined more specific relationships, attempting to amplify the meaning of the broader correlations. Sullivan and Hansen (2004) examined more specific relationships between personality facets and interests. The relationship of extraversion to enterprising interests was largely explained by the assertiveness facet of extraversion, and the relationship to social interests could be largely explained by the facet of warmth. The relationship of NEO openness to experience to artistic interests could be largely explained by the aesthetics facet of openness to ideas. Investigative interests were positively related to openness to ideas but negatively related to openness to feelings. Altruism and tender mindedness largely accounted for the
relationship between agreeableness and social interests. These findings show the utility of fleshing out the meaning of these higher order correlations.

These studies suggest a building nomological network. Holland’s (1997) theoretical stance about vocational types being reflections of personality types is certainly true to some degree, and the Barrick et al. (2003) and Larson et al. (2002) meta-analyses suggest it is particularly true for social, enterprising, artistic, and investigative interest dimensions.

Personality and Confidence

Paralleling research on the relationships between personality and interests has been that on personality and confidence (i.e., self-efficacy). The first studies examined personality correlates of the six Holland confidence themes, usually as operationalized by the Skills Confidence Inventory (SCI; Betz, Borgen, & Harmon, 1996; 2005). For example, Nauta (2004) reported several moderately strong relationships between Big Five factors as measured by the Adjective Checklist (ACL; Gough & Heilbrun, 1983) and the SCI. Openness correlated at or above .30 with investigative, artistic, social, and enterprising confidence. Extraversion correlated with social and enterprising confidence, and Agreeableness also correlated with social confidence. These relationships parallel those found between RIASEC interests and the Big Five, for example, Extraversion’s relation to both enterprising and social confidence (Rottinghaus et al., 2003).

In addition, generalized effects of personality have been found where personality is associated with domains of confidence not usually considered specific to the personality dimension. Nauta (2004) and Rottinghaus et al. (2003) found that openness correlated with all six Holland efficacy themes. Nauta also found small, negative relationships between neuroticism and all six Holland efficacy themes. Conscientiousness showed significant positive associations with four of six efficacy themes in the Rottinghaus sample and three of six in Nauta’s sample. Hartman and Betz (2007) also found generalized effects for confidence in that conscientiousness related to investigative, social, enterprising, and conventional confidence, neuroticism negatively related to all but artistic confidence, and extraversion related to confidence in artistic, social, and enterprising domains. Because RIASEC interests have different patterns of relationships to personality in comparison with RIASEC confidence measures, an integration of personality with Holland interests and confidence would be a useful direction of research and theory. One direction to pursue is Bandura’s (1977, 2008) view of self-efficacy as related to the tendency to approach or avoid a task. This suggests general personality dispositions, such as openness, extraversion, conscientiousness, and neuroticism (negatively), might motivate the approach to learning new tasks.
In more recent research, Hartman and Betz (2007) examined the relationships of the NEO-Five Factor Inventory (NEO-FFI; Costa & McCrae, 1992) to the Expanded Skills Confidence Inventory (Betz et al., 2003). Their results indicated conscientiousness and extraversion correlated positively with a broad range of self-efficacy domains, but neuroticism displayed a significant negative relationship with nearly all forms of career self-efficacy. These findings are consistent with Bandura’s (2008) argument that positive affect raises perceived self-efficacy and negative affect lowers it. In addition, openness to experience correlated with self-efficacy for creative and intellectual pursuits, and agreeableness was not related to career self-efficacy.

More specific dimensions of personality were examined by Borgen and Betz (2008a), who found a number of moderate to strong relationships between Healthy Personality Inventory (HPI; Borgen & Betz, 2006) personality scales and career self-efficacy. Consistent with the Hartman and Betz (2007) findings that conscientiousness related to career self-efficacy, particularly basic confidence domains on the social, enterprising, and conventional (SEC) side of the Holland hexagon, the productivity styles scales in the HPI (i.e., confident, organized, detail-oriented, and goal-directed) showed strong relationships with basic confidence scales on the SEC side of the hexagon. Like the Hartman and Betz finding that extraversion strongly correlated with confidence scales on the SEC side of the hexagon, the scales in the HPI interpersonal styles group (i.e., outgoing, energetic, assertive, though not adventurous) correlated with confidence in activities within the SEC area.

Integration Using the Career and Personality Assessments System

In considering together these diverse dimensions of self, it becomes clear that RIASEC interests have different patterns of relationships to personality in comparison with RIASEC confidence measures. Negative emotionality appears to play a role in self-efficacy but not interests, and positive emotionality has a more general role in self-efficacy versus interests. We suggest that self-efficacy, although not a substitute for measured ability, is a self variable moderately related to ability that contributes to initial approach versus avoidance behavior (e.g., choices) and, as theorized by Bandura, performance and persistence as well.

The increasing use of online career assessment and exploration systems (Betz & Borgen, 2009) suggests the possibility of providing examinees with integrated assessment results that include extensive information that is quickly integrated and communicated. The Career and Personality Assessments (CAPA) inventory is such a system and yields an instant set of college-major options based on joint considerations of interests and self-efficacy. Betz and Borgen (2009) developed algorithms, based on regression techniques, to
mathematically combine score patterns from interest and confidence inventories to yield “scores” for college-major clusters. The highest scoring majors are those with best joint fit to the individual’s pattern of interests and confidence. The online CAPA site administers the inventories and provides the majors suggestions. Ultimately, personality assessment will be added to help the individual refine choices. We envision a three-dimensional system—interests, self-efficacy, personality—of self- and career exploration using the following three inventories.

CAPA Interest Inventory

The CAPA Interest Inventory (CII; Borgen & Betz, 2008b) is a 292-item interest inventory that asks people to report their degree of interest in activities (e.g., “singing in the chorus of a musical”), school subjects (e.g., architecture), and settings (e.g., hospital). The inventory measures interests for the six Holland themes and for 35 specific interest areas. Some of these specific interest scales are displayed in the case study of Anna M. near the end of this chapter. (The CII also measures interest in six life engagement scales: extraversion, leadership, academic achievement, teamwork, wellness, and risk taking, but these broad personal styles are not covered in this chapter.) The specific interest dimensions are well connected to major field choices; many are in fact themselves college majors (e.g., mathematics, accounting, music), but almost all can be seen to be relevant to at least one if not several majors. Hence, measures of basic dimensions of interests are suggested to be uniquely useful to college major choice.

CAPA Confidence Inventory

The CAPA Confidence Inventory (CCI; Betz & Borgen, 2006; Borgen & Betz, 2008a) is a 190-item inventory measuring self-efficacy with respect to the six Holland themes and 27 basic dimensions of vocational activity. Some of these 27 basic vocational confidence scales are shown in our case study of Anna M. The confidence scales have important linkages to college major and career choices, and are related to domains of personality and interest. (The CCI also measures confidence in six life engagement scales: extraversion; leadership; academic achievement; teamwork; motivation; and risk taking.)

Healthy Personality Inventory

Enriching the study of personality has been the emerging field of positive psychology, which has had a significant impact on the conceptualization and measurement of personality (Bandura, 2008; Walsh, 2003). This focus within personality psychology suggests much greater attention to the measurement of positive personality traits in people—traits that are often said to constitute
the “healthy personality” (see Day & Rottinghaus, 2003). We built the 225-item HPI (Borgen & Betz, 2006) based on diverse adjectives that people might use to describe themselves.

The HPI contains 17 content-based personality scales that are positively oriented to identify strengths and adaptive personal dispositions. They are grouped within five kinds of personality styles: cooperative styles (trustworthy, generous), productivity styles (confident, organized, detail-oriented, goal-directed), interpersonal styles (outgoing, energetic, adventurous, assertive), intrapersonal styles (relaxed, happy, decisive, rested), and thinking styles (creative, intellectual, analytical). These five styles should not be equated with the Big Five personality domains; a study by Betz and Borgen (2010) clarifies these relationships. The 17 scales are intended to be homogeneous, focused measures of a specific content that is positively framed and readily interpreted by nonpsychologists. Borgen and Betz (2008a) published the first study of the reliability and validity of the HPI.

**CAPA Integrative System**

The CAPA system (Betz & Borgen, 2009) integrates assessment of vocational interests and career confidence (self-efficacy) and uses results to suggest college major and career options to individuals. If there are no areas in which both interests and confidence are high, then the next areas for exploration are those of high interest but lower confidence, on the theory that confidence can be increased using interventions based on self-efficacy theory (Bandura, 1997).

The CAPA system provides online administration of all three inventories (see http://www.CAPAExplore.com). Composite scores based on the actual content of majors are used to generate the best majors. The system provides immediate online feedback, including profiles for both the interest inventory and confidence inventory and the top clusters of college majors for that individual.

Each major cluster contains from seven to 15 specific majors and is easily tailored to the majors at a specific college or university. Majors suggestions also can be provided separately for interest patterns alone or confidence patterns alone. The student can follow up these majors suggestions by going to the university/college website or departmental office for that major, and then, if a major seems like a viable option, begin planning the necessary coursework. Of course, any system of this type is best used in conjunction with an adviser or career counselor, but the CAPA system is designed to be self-interpreting if other resources are insufficient. An interpretive booklet (Borgen, 2009) is also available.
Betz and Borgen (2009) compared the effectiveness of the CAPA career exploration and the FOCUS (Career Dimensions, 2007) system in increasing the career decision self-efficacy and decidedness of 960 students enrolled in a program for undecided freshmen students at a large public university. Results indicated that both systems led to significant increases in career decision self-efficacy and major decidedness in these students. The CAPA system led to proportionately greater increases in Career Decision Self-Efficacy Scale (Betz & Taylor, 2005) scores in comparison with FOCUS for the total group and for women. The systems were comparably effective with African American, Asian American, and White students.

THE CASE OF ANNA M.: THREE CAPA INVENTORIES

Anna M. is an 18-year-old White woman who is entering her sophomore year of college, majoring in Near Eastern studies. As young as 14 she was deeply interested in cultures throughout the world. The potential career of diplomat was one of the career choices she began to consider. We show some of Anna’s results to illustrate the scales of our three inventories. Anna has a richly textured and integrated sense of self, and much of her career and life persona is reflected in the many diverse scales of the CAPA assessment system. For Anna, the three inventories display her individuality in 17 personality scales, 41 general and specific interest scales, and 35 general and specific confidence scales, and with even more nuance in the matches and mismatches among these scales. We show herein a fraction of Anna’s profiles and rich life story. Other aspects of Anna’s educational and career life are presented in the Casebook for the CAPA Inventories (Borgen & Betz, 2010).

Anna’s results for the HPI are shown in Figure 9.1. Her personality strengths are shown in 17 scales, grouped under five personality styles. For nine of the 17 scales, she has scores of at least 4.0, reflecting her endorsement of those strengths. Her peak scores are distributed across the five personality styles. If those nine scales for Anna were ranked, we might say she describes herself as confident, intellectual, creative, outgoing, energetic, decisive, goal-directed, and assertive.

Note in Figure 9.1 that Anna has a differentiated pattern of strengths within each of the five HPI personality styles groupings. For example, under productivity styles she is distinctly confident and goal-directed, but definitely not as organized and detail-oriented. Just those four scales tell us much about the way Anna views her personality strengths. Similarly, she has quite different scores within each of the other sets of personality styles, and these differences augment how Anna constructs her persona.
### Cooperative Styles
- Trustworthy: 4.2
- Generous: 3.1

### Productivity Styles
- Confident: 4.9
- Organized: 3.3
- Detail-Oriented: 3.5
- Goal-Oriented: 4.4

### Interpersonal Styles
- Outgoing: 4.4
- Energetic: 4.4
- Adventurous: 3.8
- Assertive: 4.3

### Intrapersonal Styles
- Tranquil: 3.8
- Happy: 3.9
- Decisive: 4.4
- Rested: 3

### Thinking Styles
- Creative: 4.5
- Intellectual: 4.7
- Analytical: 3.4

**Figure 9.1.** Anna’s HPI results.

Figure 9.2 shows a portion of Anna’s 41 general and specific interest scales. These are her top interests, based on a ranking of the six general Holland interest scales. Her three-point Holland interest code is EAS (enterprising, artistic, and social) and her specific interest scales are ranked within each Holland group.

Looking first at Anna’s six general interests on the Holland dimensions, it is clear that her enterprising (3.9), artistic (3.5), and social (3.2) themes
Figure 9.2. Anna’s top interest scales.
are distinctly higher than her realistic (1.8), conventional (2.0), and investigative (2.1) themes. Anna’s 35 specific interest scales richly amplify the way she describes her persona. That is where her personal narrative comes to life as she enters her sophomore year of college, majoring in Near Eastern studies. Her specific interests tell us many things about her that we cannot learn from her general Holland scales. Within most of the Holland themes, she has highly differentiated specific interests that are lost in her personal story when the specific contents of her interests are averaged within the six general themes. For example, consider her eight specific enterprising interests, where the average general enterprising score is midrange (3.9) even though it is her highest general interest. The eight specific enterprising interests tell quite a different story when they are disentangled from the general picture. Anna has three specific enterprising interests that are intense: law, politics, and public speaking, with scores of 4.6, 4.5, and 4.7, respectively. These are the persuasive components of enterprising, and these are drivers for Anna as she describes her passions and constructs a life plan. (Note also in Figure 9.1 her high scores on the assertive and outgoing personality scales of the HPI.) In contrast, she rejects the business components most people associate with the enterprising type.

We discuss all of Anna’s interest profile in the Casebook for the CAPA Inventories (Borgen & Betz, 2010), but herein we touch briefly on her specific scores within her second highest theme, social (3.2). The social theme is usually attributed to helping and caring interests, but that is clearly not the case for Anna; her counseling interest score is nearly at the bottom of her six specific social interests. In an interview, Anna quickly ties her low counseling interest to her relatively low generous personality score on the HPI (Figure 9.1). She is distinctly not the average social prototype. What brings Anna’s general social interests into a second-ranked Holland theme are her very strong likes for activities involving cultural sensitivity (5.0) and teaching (4.3). These are wholly consistent with her career and educational plans.

Figure 9.3 shows Anna’s top three general confidence scales and the specific confidence scales associated with them. Like her interest profile, her results are ranked by the level of her confidence on the six general Holland confidence scales. Her confidence code is SEI (social, enterprising, investigative).

Looking at Anna’s general interests on the Holland dimensions, it is her enterprising (3.9), artistic (3.5), and social (3.2) themes that are highest. Similarly, we could compare all of Anna’s parallel specific scales to explore differences between her confidence and interest in specific activities. Each difference, or lack thereof, would amplify important details Anna could give about her life narrative. For example, in the core specific components of the investigative theme she shows decidedly more confidence than interest. Her mathematics confidence (4.4) is much higher than her interest (2.2),
and her science confidence (3.7) is higher than her interest (2.7). These large differences, which are fairly rare in any group of college students, are perfectly consistent with the way Anna sees herself, her educational history, and her future plans. She performs very well in math and science courses, and took many advanced placement courses in these subjects in high school. But she also decided while in high school that she would not pursue math and science as a career. Thus, even as a young teenager Anna was shaping her view of herself as confident in math and science but not intrinsically interested in them.

We learned from Anna’s HPI personality profile that she views herself as supremely confident (4.9). Some college students, with such a level of
confidence, might respond to nearly all the 190 items of the CCI with high confidence, and thus yield a high, flat, and undifferentiated confidence profile. Such is not the case with Anna. Her 27-scale specific confidence profile (shown in part in Figure 9.4) is clearly differentiated. Within every Holland confidence theme, she has important large differences on level of confidence on some of the specific scales. Anna may have a supremely confident personality overall, but there are still 13 of the 27 specific confidence scales where she scores below 3.5.

Clusters of College Majors With Best Fit

The CAPA system groups majors in 30 clusters, and for each cluster creates a linear composite for best fit based on specific interests. A parallel index of best fit for each major cluster is based on specific confidence scores.

Figure 9.4. Anna’s confidence and interest profile.
The best college major options to explore are then displayed as in Figure 9.4 for Anna. These high-ranking options reflect Anna's peak scores on the specific interest and confidence scales. Many of her best options are in the humanities, reflecting her peak interests and confidence in writing, public speaking, cultural sensitivity, law, and politics. Fit of major clusters for both interest and confidence are displayed; sometimes they are quite different, giving added insight to how a student might approach such a major.

INTEGRATION

Scores and stories are sometimes framed as incompatible when career theories are framed as competing paradigms (e.g., Savickas, 2005). We believe precision assessment and integrated self-understanding need both scores and stories. When a person responds to a single item in a typical content-based inventory, he or she is telling a story. For example, our confidence inventory asks with a single item how much confidence a person has to “solve problems using calculus.” The inventory is structured so the response varies on a 5-point scale ranging from none to complete. Thus, we have divided the world into five groups based on how the individuals feel about calculus. In the process, we have done some injustice to their personal stories. We also believe those five groups have quite different psychological perspectives toward avoiding versus approaching calculus (Bandura, 2008). With varying emotional intensity, the groups are telling us, “I can’t do that!” versus “I can do that!”

Our single confidence item about calculus permits the individual to give a mininarrative, although in a structured way. From single items we build scales following objective, clear-cut rules. Scattered throughout its 190 items, our confidence inventory has a total of seven such mathematics confidence items, and for a group of 1,000 college students, those seven items represent 7,000 personal stories. Typical college students spend fewer than 35 s to yield the mathematics confidence score with its seven items and its Cronbach alpha reliability of .88 (Betz & Borgen, 2009). We clearly have measured something with precision. At the group level we can study the validity of that scale to determine the real-world meaning of scores at different levels. For individuals, we can ask for an interpretation of the score; we can ask them to tell us their life stories about how they approach or avoid math tasks.

Narrative Assessment: Translating the Quantitative to the Qualitative

We know that many dimensions of personality, interest, and self-efficacy tend to be moderately correlated across domains. A group statistic like a correlation, in typical nomothetic research, tells us about abstract actuarial
expectations: variable X tends to be associated with variable Y. These correlations rarely account for more than 50% of the agreement between variables. The story for the individual can be quite different. Individuals often reside in niches of psychological space quite different from the regression lines defined by moderate correlations. In practical assessment, we must be attentive to the story of individuality that the single person is expressing to know that person's richer phenomenology. This narrative mode translates the mixes and matches among scales from a quantitative to a more qualitative, linguistic persona.

The case study for Anna begins to illustrate many of these nuances. For example, her profiles conform to nomothetic expectations when she reports generosity is not a salient personality feature, and she has lower interest in counseling and helping. On the other hand, Anna’s profiles illustrate pivotal instances in which her life story breaks from the nomothetic mold, and she has scale differences that would not be expected from the group correlation. Most striking is that she has high confidence in the math and science domains but little interest in pursuing them. These differences are at the core of Anna’s life story. At 14 she was actively making choices about her persona. Although a gifted student in math and science, she was shaping her persona as a diplomat with global cultural sensitivities. Anna may be like many gifted teenagers who have mastered certain school courses but have made a decision to narrow their interests and focus away from those pursuits. Life stories such as Anna’s can be seen in Reichenbach’s (1938) context of discovery as stimuli to discover how many other individuals may have followed a similar life trajectory. Anna’s story is a challenge to the nomothetic research that has concluded interests are stable beginning in adolescence (Low, Yoon, Roberts, & Rounds, 2005).

CONCLUSION

Writers from the nomothetic, psychometric perspective have long seen the value of understanding individuality by better assessing diverse domains (e.g., Betz & Borgen, 2000; Borgen, 1986). Much of this has been stimulated by Parsons (1909) and Holland (1959, 1997). We have worked within this tradition as we have developed new inventories to assess personality, interests, and self-efficacy. Meanwhile, perhaps stimulated by Savickas (2005) most of all, there has emerged a constructivist perspective in vocational psychology suggesting a shift from scores to stories (Hartung, 2005; Hartung & Borges, 2005). Our agenda in writing this chapter has been to embrace both perspectives. We have reviewed some mainstream nomothetic literature, but we have also viewed Anna’s story through the scores of three inventories.

The best line to illustrate the person–environment fit model is Schneider’s (1987) classic article, “The People Make the Place.” It also is a modern
metaphor for many of the other themes of this chapter. It fits with Bandura’s (1977, 2008) active agency, wherein people are shaping cognitions, learning opportunities, and encounters with environments. It fits with the constructivist and narrative perspective (Savickas, 2005), wherein people are writing stories of their life and career selves. It fits with our view of complex psychometric space, defined by precision assessment, wherein people reside in niches of individuality.

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More than a century ago, three simple words, *know your self*, helped chart a new direction in vocational choice and decision making. Easily recognized, these three words represent a partial abstraction of Frank Parsons's (1909) seminal pronouncement that launched the matching model of vocational choice and development:

In the wise choice of a vocation there are three broad factors: (1) a clear understanding of yourself, your aptitudes, abilities, interests, ambitions, resources, limitations, and their causes; (2) a knowledge of the requirements and conditions of success, advantages and disadvantages, compensation, opportunities, and prospects in different lines of work; and (3) true reasoning on the relations of these two groups of facts. (p. 5)

In the years to follow, the quest shifted away from finding out what some expert thought would be best, away from finding an assignment that fit what the economic scene needed, and even away from learning what skills might be implemented. Rather, the new direction established the *self* as a requisite foundation for vocational decision making, and much of the literature in career development since has been devoted to understanding what the *self* is,
to learning how it is acquired and known, and to gauging how best to implement it in occupational terms.

In this chapter, I present three perspectives on implementing self-concept that have emerged in the history and current practice of vocational psychology and career counseling: (a) self as repository of work-related characteristics to be matched, (b) self as developing over time, and (c) self as decision maker. Each perspective differs in terms of how self-concept is framed, how self-concept implementation is achieved, and how counselors can assist clients to connect self-concepts to work roles. In the sections that follow, each theoretical perspective is considered together with how that perspective might be seen in current counseling practice. The chapter concludes with a set of suggestions about future directions to consider in career theory and practice for self-concept implementation.

SELF AS REPOSITORY OF WORK-RELEVANT CHARACTERISTICS TO BE MATCHED

Perspectives on the self-concept begin with those models and methods that portray the self as a repository of work-relevant characteristics, such as interests, abilities, aptitudes, and values. More formally known as the trait and factor or person–environment (P-E) fit tradition, as discussed in Chapter 3 of this volume, these models and methods can also be thought of as self-concept models in that they seek to identify what the self is—that is, what work-relevant characteristics a given individual possesses—and they are particularly well-known for conceptual and assessment tools that organize and detect individual differences that have meaning for occupational participation. Holland's (1997) theory of personalities and work environments and Dawis and Lofquist’s (1984) theory of work adjustment offer prominent examples of this perspective. Holland's Realistic, Investigative, Artistic, Social, Enterprising, and Convention (RIASEC, 1997) model stands as the most widely known and used P-E fit organizational system in contemporary career development research and counseling practice.

Using the conceptual and assessment tools offered in the P-E fit tradition, once the characteristics of the self are known, the question of self-concept implementation becomes one of matching the characteristics of that self with appropriate occupations. This perspective is familiar to students of career development theory. Dawis and Lofquist (1984) would call the match correspondence, and Holland (1997) would call it congruence. The tools and counseling methods that follow from this perspective are also familiar: With increasingly refined assessments of the self’s characteristics, and corresponding assessments of the environment, counselors are able to bring to their clients
Consider the following example. Upcoming curriculum choices prompt John, a high school sophomore, to evaluate possible future career directions he might want to pursue. If he were to select those future directions now, argue his parents and teachers, his current curriculum choices would be wiser, and his subsequent postgraduation options would be more refined. His counselor offers him the opportunity to take an inventory of his interests that not only provides an assessment of the individual’s interests—considered a highly work-relevant characteristic—but also provides an estimate of how closely the individual’s interests resemble those of the incumbents of a broad array of occupations. Completing this assessment tool, and working with his counselor, John learns an organizing scheme thought to help him understand how interests can be conceptualized. The counselor assists John in mapping the interests in his own particular repertoire (within his self) and, in connecting his newly understood interests, in mapping to a number of occupational possibilities. John emerges from this experience with an increased knowledge of his characteristics (again, his self), as well as a set of guidelines about how to implement that knowledge into his future occupational choices.

This, of course, is a simplified version of the P-E fit approach, but suffice it to say that the goal of these matches is to arrive at a more or less clear and useable snapshot of one’s characteristics. In effect, counselors engaged in these practices could be considered to be helping their clients crystallize and implement their self-concepts—a notion that actually finds its home in a second perspective on implementing the self-concept.

**SELF AS DEVELOPING OVER TIME**

A second perspective on implementing the self-concept conceives of the self as not only a repository or collection of relevant characteristics but also as something that emerges, grows, and changes over time. The primary theoretical model is that of D. E. Super (1957, 1980). This life-span, life-space theory recognizes the role of individual differences and P-E fit in career choice and development but also embraces the notions of growth and change in individual vocational behavior and development over time. Super proposed that the self-concept is what develops and is implemented over the course of one’s career. In this view, the self-concept itself develops through a series of career stages beginning with the child initially developing a sense of self as separate from, but similar to, others and recognizing needs, interests, and capacity over time (the stage of growth). As childhood gives way to adolescence, the self-concept is explored, “tried out,” held up in the context of realities,
and implemented initially in the world of work (the stage of exploration). Moving on to establishment, the young adult modifies and implements the self-concept, perhaps with some floundering and trial or perhaps with commitment and stabilization. Next come stages of maintenance at mid-life and of disengagement from active workforce participation in later adulthood.

In this portrayal of the evolution of the self over the course of a career, one can certainly see the self as a repository of vocationally relevant characteristics to be matched. However, one can also see an interaction between the person and the environment that shapes what needs to be done with the self at successive points in time. Clearly, there emerges an initial differentiation of self and a later exploration and implementation. Perhaps more important, however, one can see the broader notion that what happens later (fulfillment, for instance) will be predicated on what went before. In this early stage of what comes before, there clearly exist many opportunities for successful navigation of the tasks of a life stage or, alternatively, opportunities for derailment or failure. Indeed, one can see many points of need for counseling intervention.

In addition to laying out some expected trajectories along which one might expect to see the self change over time, Super’s work also added a new sense of potentiality. It was no longer simply that one was. Rather, now one could become, or, in the language of the 1960s and 1970s, one’s self could be actualized. This heralded a new importance to the expression of self that implied a new venue for satisfaction and a new way to conceptualize and write one’s life story. That is, this perspective not only added the phenomena of time and change to notions about self but it also introduced a new level of gravity and potential to self-concept implementation. In addition, it added the possibility that those changes in self could (and perhaps should) be directed by the individual.

As Super’s theory evolved, conceptions about the course of a career were broadened to include not only those roles in which one works but also one’s roles as a child, a student, a homemaker, and so on. In portraying the breadth of life roles played by a person in many venues and at many points in time, Super (1980) sought to capture the complexities of self-concept implementation in many roles that coincide and also conflict, wax and wane in time and importance, and are taken up and set aside through a series of decisions subject to both individual and situational determinants.

A number of familiar counseling approaches have emerged from Super’s work that are evident in practice today. First, having laid out a life-long approach to vocational development, Super’s model provides counselors with a map of what needs to happen for vocational development to stay—or get back—on track. This is easily recognizable in the constructs of career maturity and career adaptability (Savickas, 1984, 2005), which provide, in essence, a measure of how well self-development is doing in its trajectory through the life stages.
From this perspective, then, the work of the counselor focuses less on helping to ascertain what work-relevant characteristics the individual possesses. Rather, counselors working from a developmental perspective focus on the ways in which self-development proceeds on track and the ways in which it may be stalling. To illustrate this process, let us return to the example of John, the high school sophomore noted earlier.

Recall that John is a 16-year-old high school sophomore whose parents and teachers are concerned about his selection of future career directions. His counselor begins by learning more about John’s sense of himself—how he understands his own interests, values, and abilities and how he sees them as different from (or similar to) those of his parents, siblings, and peers. This appraisal yields a picture of John as having a fairly well-differentiated sense of his own characteristics that is also compatible with his personal experiences and achievements. In evaluating further the extent to which John has a view of how those characteristics might fit in the world of work, it becomes clear that John’s exploration of the world of work is quite limited. Most of his occupational knowledge comes from what he sees in his daily life (school, after-school activities, church, parents’ work) or from what he observes on television. He has participated little in work-like activity, and he maintains rather idealized views of the occupations he has observed. His counselor concludes that although John’s self-concept development is mainly on track with respect to clarity and realism about his own characteristics, he has not yet tackled the remaining developmental tasks of the stage of exploration. Together the counselor, John, and his parents and teachers outline a set of exploration activities that will help John learn more about the world of work and about how his own characteristics might fit within it.

A second counseling approach that emerged from life-span, life-space theory follows from knowledge of the dimensions of career maturity (Savickas, 1984) and from the idea that those dimensions could be targeted for developmental or preventative interventions. For the dimensions of planfulness and time perspective, for instance, the counselor might focus on helping the client develop a long-term time perspective (“Let’s imagine where you see yourself in 10 years—What are you doing, where are you living, what people and activities are in your life?”), and connecting the events envisioned along that timeline to earlier events and behaviors. To enhance decision-making skills, the focus might be on helping the client learn a methodical decision-making process and practice using that process across several decision-making situations.

Finally, having laid out a perspective on career development that encompasses not only the life span but also the myriad of life spaces in which the self-concept gets enacted, the role of the counselor becomes assisting the individual in developing and implementing the self in any and all of the life spaces that are salient to him or her. This broader view of the work of the counselor
was formally tailored to career counseling in the Career Development Assessment and Counseling (C-DAC) model (Osborne, Brown, Niles, & Miner, 1997). In effect, this approach to counseling occurs in a sequence, a set of stages that, like Super’s life-stage model, suggests that the order of the activities is critical. The first step in the C-DAC approach involves assessing the individual’s roles by posing the question, “What life roles are salient for this self?” Next is an assessment of the individual’s career development status, which thereby places the work role in a life context. At this point the question is posed, “Where can we locate the development of this person’s self and career development?” or “On which career development tasks is this person working, and with what resources?” Following this process is an assessment of vocational personality, which in essence asks, “What characteristics are housed in this self?” One could consider this stage the traditional assemblage of interests, abilities, and so forth. The final stage concerns the person’s subjective self-concept—in other words, how he or she sees him- or herself, now and over time.

It is useful to recall that sense of potentiality mentioned earlier: There is a certain sense of authorship, construction, and ownership of the story told, about self-concept now and what it might become in the future. Emerging from this view is an opportunity for individuals not only to implement their selves but also to make meaning in their lives and futures (e.g., Savickas, 2005).

Consider the example of Loren, a 32-year-old woman who has come to the counselor because she wants to make some decisions about her life. She has completed college and a master’s degree in management, and is employed at a local consulting firm as a personnel trainer—a job that she enjoys and finds fulfilling and in which she sees considerable advancement opportunity. She has ambitions to progress in this area, and she thinks eventually she might open her own consulting firm. Loren also has many life roles outside of work: She is married, has one child and is expecting a second, and is active in her community, among others things by helping to develop regional sustainable marketing practices. She enjoys the fact that both she and her husband are active parents, and she finds herself increasingly interested in devoting more time to her family role. The pending arrival of her second child is what has brought her to seek help in thinking through her life–career challenges. Following the C-DAC model, the counselor sees clearly that there are at least two or three salient life roles at play and a fulfilling career and avocational life in progress. An assessment of Loren’s interests and abilities show her to be well-matched to a role in which she can exercise her social, enterprising, and artistic capabilities—a role she currently has in her paid employment. In considering how to navigate her life–career challenges, Loren and her counselor begin to take up the question of how she might create ways to express her various interests and talents across a set of life roles in the short term and how to shape those roles to provide opportunities for her in the longer term.
Before moving on to the final perspective on self-concept implementation to be considered in this chapter, it is important to note that the views of self-concept and its implementation considered thus far are certainly not incompatible with each other. Rather, as the skilled counselor knows, weaving together the best of each perspective provides a more comprehensive view of self as repository, self as developing, self as present in multiple domains, and self as shaped by experience. The picture that emerges is not so much contradictory as it is rich and emblematic of the complexities of a life and career.

SELF AS DECISION MAKER

The third perspective considered views the self as more than a repository of characteristics that has emerged and that evolves over time. In this final perspective, the self is also seen as a decision maker and as an agent of implementation. In contrast to the previous perspectives, the self in this view now has a distinctly active role in navigating decisional situations. In some ways, this seems a logical extension of the historical evolution of the theories and their constructs, where it is clear that conceptions of the self were getting more and more active, and the self was also seen as functioning more and more in a situational context that contains societal expectations and multiple life roles. The empowerment of the individual to choose, to shape, to navigate a desired life course is, by this point, firmly in place in vocational theory and practice.

In other ways, however, this perspective of self as a decision maker and agent of implementation illuminates some assumptions in those earlier perspectives that may not be fully justified. In those earlier views it was generally presumed that the self-concept was either clear and available for use or becoming such. It was also generally assumed that what was done with the self-concept (once it was clear and known) would proceed in the tradition of Parsonian true reasoning, in a largely individualistic manner, charting a predictable course through normative life stages. Observations such as these also follow the clamor of practitioners, researchers, and theoreticians who noticed not only that the self was getting more influential in charting a course of action but also that its nature and action were decidedly more complex than earlier theories had suggested (Phillips, 1997; see Chapter 4, this volume). In short, it had become quite evident that there were a number of constraints on self-concept implementation that made it other than the idealized process described earlier.

In one of the most notable constraints, it became evident that matters of self-concept implementation were quite different when the self-concept was not clear. Indeed, John Holland (1997) added the notion of identity to his model of P-E fit as a feature of the self that might make it more or less difficult to make congruent choices. For practitioners, the literature provided
new conceptualizations and tools to assess the ways in which clarity was elusive (e.g., Chartrand & Robbins, 1990) and offered opportunities for clients to enhance their self-knowledge through exploration, trial, feedback, and so forth.

However, it also became evident that there were other barriers to implementing one’s self-concept that were not due to problems of clarity but rather due to other cognitive, affective, and/or social phenomena. For example, matters of self-concept implementation were quite different when the self was not valued or not efficacious. That is, a course of action might not be pursued by individuals who have low self-esteem or who do not believe that they will be able to navigate successfully the challenges along that course. Indeed, there is considerable evidence that a clear and well-defined set of characteristics can fail to be implemented on the grounds of their perceived value. Consider, for instance, all that is known about why people do not pursue career directions that are nontraditional for their gender (see Phillips & Imhoff, 1997). In addition, the power of self-efficacy expectations and outcome beliefs is sufficient to derail an otherwise seemingly reasonable set of career plans (see Lent & Hackett, 1987).

It was becoming increasingly evident that how an individual puts together the pieces of a decision often differs markedly from the “true reasoning” advocated in early career theory and practice. The discovery that people who approach the same decisional situation might proceed in completely different ways was particularly revealing (see Phillips, 1992): One might proceed methodically; another might select the first alternative; yet another might choose on a whim, leave it to fate, or ask someone else what to do. Self-concept implementation was clearly emerging not as a simple selection of a course of action based on some set of assembled facts. Instead, brought to the decisional task is a whole other dimension of self-concept: self-as-decider. Counseling practice for this dimension initially suggested that instruction in rational decision making was the intervention of choice (Krumboltz et al., 1986), although there is also evidence that efforts to make decision makers better at whatever strategies they use can also be effective (Rubinton, 1980).

Finally, it had become apparent that one needed to consider the relational and cultural context of the individual’s self (see Chapters 11 and 12, this volume). This context includes the variety of actions of others that might impinge on the implementation of a self-concept, ranging from the simple directive of a significant other to a more complex social mandate of a collectivist culture (Schultheiss, 2003). It also includes a contextual feature of the developing self—that the individual might be more, or less, self-directed, and may seek to incorporate others into decisions in a variety of ways (Phillips, Christopher-Sisk, & Gravino, 2001). Counselors now have models of how to consider developing self-directedness in the context of the individual’s relationships, community, and/or culture (Phillips, Carlson, Christopher-Sisk,
Recall that Loren, a 32-year-old woman, has come to the counselor seeking to make some decisions about her life. Loren and her husband, who is Asian American, have talked about what having another child will do to the work–family challenges both of them experience. They have formulated a long list of things they will need to work through, and they have also talked with friends who are encountering the same challenges. Although her husband and friends are supportive about her choices, her husband’s parents have been very critical about her working at all after her first child and are now vocal about their views that she should pause her career involvement until her children attend school. In the view of her in-laws, to do differently would be against family culture and tradition. The counselor, cognizant of the individual, relational, and cultural factors at play in Loren’s situation, recognizes first that she has a fairly clear and well-defined sense of herself, and in addition that she has and is undertaking the kind of exploration that will help her make good decisions. Her self-directedness, then, is assessed as quite optimal. The roles of others, however, are more complicated. Her relational and cultural field is populated by those who provide support as well as those who provide challenge. Loren and her counselor take up the question of how to navigate the relationship obstacles that make decision making difficult, and provide opportunities for Loren to practice making decisions in that difficult relational context, as well as managing the relationships positively before, during, and after decisions are made.

Taking together the panorama of action, development, cognition, and context in this perspective, we can see that self-concept implementation is shaped by clarity, value, belief, decision-making style, and relational and cultural context. Adding these elements to those inherent in the previous views, we now have a picture of the self that is a repository of characteristics, that grows and develops over time, that seeks expression in multiple life roles, is shaped by experience, and is translated into a course of action in ways that reflect (at least) clarity, beliefs, characteristic decision strategies, and relational and cultural contexts.

SELF-CONCEPT IMPLEMENTATION AND THE FUTURE

Although it is tempting to consider the picture of the three perspectives on self-concept implementation painted here as overly complex, I would argue that it is not yet complex enough. Indeed, this picture is quite likely only moving closer to the lived experience of people implementing their self-concepts and constructing their careers. There are still parts missing to
the puzzle of self-concept, and some promising avenues are emerging now to fill in the full picture. To this end, I offer three points of discussion on the question, “Who am I?”

My first point focuses on what we already know about life stages and individual change. Although our picture of the development and implementation of self-concept clearly embraces the notion of change over the full life span, our practice (and literature) could use more attention to what this looks like (both normatively and individually) and how counselors can help. Much of our perspective on self-concept implementation arises from questions of “Who am I?” or “Who have I become?” Less prominent is the question of “Who might I become?” We know already that there is development yet to take place at all ages and stages, and we even have some ideas of the customary shape of that development. Can we help people anticipate—or shape—those futures? In particular, our understanding is not well-developed when it comes to considering what happens—or needs to happen, or could yet happen—in the life stages beyond early or middle adulthood. Indeed, with increased life expectancies and the likelihood that second careers might be taken up at an age previously thought of as a time for disengagement (Drucker, 1999), we may not yet know enough about how people’s concept of self changes over time and in response to the demands and possibilities of new life stages and tasks.

In addition to knowing more about normative possibilities, however, there are also more individualized trajectories of change that are not so much about expected life stages as they are about authoring one’s own life story. We have some ways to think about “Who might I become?” in Meara, Day, Chalk, and Phelps’s (1995) notion of possible selves, in which one constructs a connection between who one is now and who one might hope (or fear) becoming. With those links to the future, one can alter one’s current ways of being to shape a desired future. In addition, we have some documented evidence about how the reworking of family dynamics can yield a whole new way in which work roles are structured and occupations are chosen (Chusid & Cochran, 1989). With this in mind, it is clear we have more to learn about the ways in which individuals shape their own self-concepts and futures.

My second point concerns social opportunity and context. Where the questions of “Who am I?” and “Who might I become?” convey that sense of potentiality mentioned earlier, there is also the need to consider restrictions of places and circumstances and opportunity. Whether the restrictions arise from geography, access, or choice, we may also need to be able to consider the question, “Who can I become? What is plausible for me, given my circumstance?” Much as we might wish it differently, possibilities are not unlimited, and a variety of factors are at play in our choices. Although we will always continue to work to decrease barriers to opportunity, we can be assured that some barriers will remain. One of my students was fond of placing every newly
learned theoretical construct and model in juxtaposition to an imagined child of a Bolivian tin miner whose occupational field of choices was highly circumscribed. What meaning does self-concept (and its implementation) have for this person? A variation, closer to home, particularly in these current troubled economic times, is what happens to the notion of self-concept implementation for the person who has worked with satisfaction 30 years in the auto industry, for example, only to find that the plant is closing? Or one can simply think about what self-concept implementation means when an individual has children in school, a mortgage, and a commitment to live close to aging parents. Life-space conceptions of career development capture some of these complexities, but I would argue that we do not yet know enough about how to be helpful as people navigate those complexities. Moving further into the relational zone, we have more to learn about how it might be more important to know “Who does my community need me to be?” rather than “Who am I?”

My final point is to consider the question of self-concept implementation from the perspective of global change. One need only read Thomas Friedman’s (2005) *The World Is Flat* to get a glimpse of the world of work of the future. Friedman outlined how commerce of the 21st century is inevitably influenced by a global workforce and economy. Who among us has read that book and not wondered what the future he describes holds for the field of career development in general, and for the notion of self, in particular? Just as we know that we are educating our children for jobs that do not yet exist, we can also be fairly sure that we have a system of developing careers that may be poorly suited to a global economy whose career ladders, opportunities, and international distributions we have yet to know. Will the potentiality—so vibrant in our ideas of self-concept development and implementation—be relevant in that world? I try to imagine the self-concept of a well-to-do 17-year-old today (full of potential, confident of her merits, and comfortable with a lifestyle of being provided for, courtesy of parents who have the means to make many luxuries routine). How would her self-concept fare in the world in 20 years as Friedman imagines it? What would need to happen for her to be adaptable to that very different future? Studying just some of the cultures on the rise, it is clear that the kinds of questions that we have asked traditionally may well be relegated to history. Instead, the most important question might become, “What kind of worker will I need to be?” or “Who might I need to become?”

**CONCLUSION**

Returning to those three words—*know your self*—that started this chapter, it has become clear over the years that their implications remain far from simple. To know one’s self, to have a clear and accurate inventory of
one's characteristics to be matched, offers a good start. To note and to shape how that self grows and develops over time and gets expressed in an array of life roles makes questions of self-concept implementation definitely more complex—and more enriching. Helping translate all of that into a course of action in ways that reflect one's clarity, value, beliefs, decision making style, and relational and cultural contexts, then, becomes the task of the counselor.

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Gender as a social construction of self constitutes perhaps one of the most salient social identities in human interactions. The powerful influence of gender can be seen across cultures. As Eckes and Trautner (2000) noted,

All known cultures provide rich and well-differentiated sets of concepts and terms to categorize boys and girls, men and women, to separate between female and male roles, rights, and responsibilities. . . . exerting powerful, and often subtle, influence on their thoughts, feelings and behaviors. (p. 3)

In this chapter, we examine gender as a context for self-construction within the domain of work and career in people's lives. Because we recognize that these constructs evolve and change throughout human life, we also examine literature dealing with this topic across the life span.

CHILD AND ADOLESCENT ANTECEDENTS

From the moment the sonogram indicates a boy or a girl is being formed in the womb, the child's sense of self begins to be influenced by myriad contextual factors that make up his or her human ecology (Kite, Deaux, &
Haines, 2008). Even before children enter the world outside the womb, clothes of an appropriate sex-typed color have been purchased, nurseries decorated, toys purchased, and even personality traits assumed given such markers as the perceived harder kicking of the boy. Thus, perhaps the overarching critical component of the gendered context is the dramatic and pervasive role of sex-role socialization for both boys and girls. How the child interacts with and is reinforced by others from this very early age dramatically influences how the sense of self is formed and how options in life are perceived (Gysbers, Heppner, & Johnston, 2009).

Early in life, too, children begin to acquire interests, personality traits, and values (Matlin, 2007) reinforced by numerous influences, such as parents, schools, and peers. Research indicates occupational stereotyping starts even before kindergarten and becomes increasingly rigid through the early elementary school years (Matlin, 2007), consistent with L. S. Gottfredson’s (1981, 2005) theory of circumscription and compromise, wherein she hypothesizes that children’s conception of appropriate occupations become circumscribed into a narrow range of sex-typed careers usually around the ages of 6 to 9. Thus, as the self is constructed, gender-role identity and sex-appropriate career aspirations become a salient part of the self.

Other social identities, such as being lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender or of a particular social class, also affect this developing sense of self and the ensuing perceptions of appropriate career choices. For example, gender-role socialization influences the career development and occupational aspirations of gay and lesbian children in manners distinct from heterosexual individuals (Croteau, Anderson, Distefano, & Kampa-Kokesch, 1999) as gay and lesbian individuals quickly learn about the barriers and restrictions that occupations may impose on them because of their sexual orientation. The internalization of vocational stereotypes about gay men and lesbians further influences the vocational structure of opportunity and ultimately the construction of self. Social class represents another critical social identity that begins to shape the individual’s structure of opportunity early and in profound ways (see Chapter 13, this volume). Gender often interplays with class in shaping this construction, with girls and women of low socioeconomic status often perceiving a very narrow range of possible alternatives (Gysbers et al., 2009; Heppner & O’Brien, 2006).

As children grow into adolescence, the school environment profoundly shapes self-development. Numerous studies indicate differential treatment of boys and girls in the classroom, with greater reinforcement paid to boys’ contributions in class and greater attention to boys in general (Sadker & Sadker, 1994). This differential treatment, termed a “chilly classroom climate,” has been noted at the college level as well (Fischer & Good, 1994). Although some gender bias takes the form of overtly sexist remarks and jokes, much of
it appears to be more subtle, devaluing girls’ and women’s contributions in the academic community.

A central choice shaping the structure of occupational opportunities for girls has long been their participation in math and science during high school. Indeed, girls’ participation in math is often referred to as a critical filter—with girls who take more math courses having access to many more high-prestige and high-paying jobs (Betz, 2006). In recent years, however, in the United States and in other countries, much of the disparity previously apparent between girls’ and boys’ math achievement has been eradicated (Boaler & Irving, 2007). This increased achievement, however, has not led to increased occupational participation by women in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) careers; women still represent less than one fourth of the STEM labor market (Fassinger & Asay, 2006).

Although all of the factors involved in this lack of participation in STEM fields are not entirely clear, there is some conjecture that girls’ lower self-efficacy beliefs in these nontraditional career fields may be part of the answer (Betz, 2006). How girls think about and construct their vocational journey likely relates to the level of confidence they have in their abilities to successfully complete tasks needed for a particular occupation. Lower self-efficacy beliefs predict girls’ and boys’ willingness to move into these fields and to stay in them when obstacles arise (Betz, 2006). Research indicates both that women choose nontraditional STEM fields less often in their initial career selection and that they tend to drop out of these fields at a higher rate than do men (Jacobs, Chhin, & Bleeker, 2006; Watt, 2006). Thus, as women construct their sense of self, and more specifically their vocational self, it appears that their sense of self-efficacy is an influential factor in how they determine what they can or cannot become and their sense of vocational identity.

For boys, sex-role socialization is also highly salient in this developmental period. Up until recently, however, there was far more research conducted on the impact of sex-role stereotyping on girls, leading Levant (2001) to conclude, “We have a cultural blindness to the problems of boys, in part because of our assumption that males would be self-sufficient, and in part because boys are supposed to keep their problems to themselves” (p. 355). In essence, boys’ ecology is shaped by rigid norms and cultural values related to what it means to be male, which include a strong sense of self-sufficiency.

Research also indicates that boys have a narrow sense of occupational options based largely on rigidly defined sex-role stereotypes (Gysbers et al., 2009). Boys ages 7 to 9 tend to choose careers based on sex-role traditionality, and the diversity of occupations considered is consistent with their view of masculinity (Helwig, 2004). More specifically, even after Title IX and its gender-equity legislation and protections, boys and girls still have cognitive maps based on gender that dramatically affect their aspirations and dreams.
Helwig (2004), in a 10-year longitudinal study of second graders who were followed until they were 12th graders, found that both boys and girls changed their indicated interests to sex-traditional careers at ages 7 to 9.

As a boy moves from childhood to adolescence, an important task of the peer group is defining what it means to be a boy. Most boys experience strong pressure to conform to group norms through activities such as sports, clubs, or even gangs, and to work on this important definition of self in the context of the peer culture. These early pressures from peers also may be influential in the development of initial vocational choices in adolescence (Gysbers et al., 2009).

Career counselors need first to understand the gendered context of vocational self-construction and how their own biases about gender and career may influence their ability to assist clients. In addition, this early developmental period highlights how gender affects vocational self-construction and how parents, teachers, and counselors need to begin influencing this process by empowering both girls and boys to make authentic life choices. Providing role models of men and women who reflect all forms of diversity in the human condition in both nontraditional and traditional fields can be a powerful start. Helping to educate parents and teachers about the continuing power of sex-role socialization, peer influences, and the media in shaping the gendered construction of the vocational self is also critical.

EARLY ADULT VOCATIONAL SELF-CONSTRUCTION

Transitioning from adolescence into early adulthood, individuals usually undergo a phase of exploring what it means to be independent and responsible (Arnett, 2004). Exhibiting differences in their career plans and aspiration after leaving secondary school, young adults can be divided into two groups: college-bound youth and work-bound youth. The latter are sometimes also referred to as non–college-bound youth (Worthington & Juntunen, 1997). Although studies have addressed how other social factors, such as social class (Blustein et al., 2002), affect career development or the school-to-work transitions (Worthington & Juntunen, 1997) work-bound individuals face, existing literature provides little insight into how gender mediates their construction of a vocational self, demonstrating a need for future research in this direction. Thus, in this section, we focus on the impact of gender on vocational self-construction of college-bound youth or young adults in general.

The developmental years in college usher in the start of a crucial period of establishing and grounding one’s identity in multiple ways. Although parents and other family members (Schultheiss, Kress, Manzi, & Glasscock, 2001) continue to influence the decisions that undergraduates make, students often choose a major consistent with their self-efficacy beliefs (Isaacs, Borgen,
Donnay, & Hansen, 1997). Self-efficacy may refer to an individual’s beliefs regarding “career-related behaviors, educational and occupational choice, and performance and persistence in the implementation of those choices” (Betz & Hackett, 1997, p. 383).

Researchers have found that mastery experience is most influential for men, whereas vicarious experiences and social and verbal persuasion are most influential for women. Specifically, men often expressed their capabilities in mathematics-related tasks through statements such as “I was good at it” and “it came easy for me” (Zeldin, 2001, p. 114). Deriving a sense of self through accomplishments and successes at tasks, “the majority of men have always consolidated their identity needs around their technical and occupational capacities” (Erikson, 1968, p. 127). Traditionally perceived as being better at math, men may receive more attention in the classroom and have more opportunity to build the self-efficacy needed to pursue STEM careers.

Women, however, tend to build up confidence by persuading themselves that if others they know can do it, so can they (Zeldin, 2001). Thus, in effect, men gain their sense of self-efficacy through doing and women benefit more through seeing others similar to themselves successfully performing the tasks, or hearing from influential others that they could do the task. Gilligan (1982) proposed that

while for men, identity precedes intimacy and generativity in the optimal cycle of human separation and attachment, for women these tasks seem instead to be fused. Intimacy goes along with identity, as the female comes to know herself as she is known, through her relationships with others. (p. 12)

Echoing Gilligan’s identity-formation theory, women likely may attempt to establish a career and their sense of self while considering relational influences (Schultheiss et al., 2001).

Studies suggest that having secure attachment is critical in the identity-formation process, as a moderate level of attachment and separation from others gives young women in particular the confidence to engage in career exploration (Blustein, Prezioso, & Schultheiss, 1995). Women’s perception of their parents’ and boyfriend’s preferences for their career (Vincent, Peplau, & Hill, 1998), their connection and attachment to their mother (O’Brien, 1996), as well as having same-sex mentors (Lockwood, 2006) are all strong predictors of their career orientation.

Establishing a sense of self in early adulthood through pursuing a career and creating a family can be conflicting if the multiple roles seem to be incompatible. Indeed, educational goals and career aspirations of undergraduate women decline as they go through college, even when they outperform and earn better grades than their male counterparts (Gysbers et al., 2009). Women’s
desire to have a family-flexible job combined with their traditionally low intrinsic interest for math and science may lead them away from male-dominated majors (Frome, Alfeld, Eccles, & Barber, 2008). Perhaps women, influenced by the “cultural model of romance” (Holland & Eisenhart, 1990, p. 94) or “the culture of motherhood” (Stone & McKee, 2000, p. 69), have measured their self-worth or identity in terms of their romantic relationships, constructing a vocational self that prioritizes marriage and family and places career development as secondary. Unlike men who often have a singular vocational focus when constructing their vocational self, many women develop aspirations for both career and family; women are characterized as having split dreams—in other words, dreams of combining both arenas in hopes of creating a preferred lifestyle rather than a simple occupational goal (Josselson, 1987). Career development for women at this stage, especially for those who have or are considering having children, may seem less orderly and linear than it does for men (O’Neil & Bilimoria, 2005).

The interface of work–family has increasingly gained attention in the past 2 decades, as more women participate in the labor force along with rapidly diversifying family patterns and lifestyles; the image of two-parent families with children in which the husband acts as the breadwinner and sole provider with a homemaking wife no longer represents the majority of contemporary families. Having multiple roles can be a source of stress, yet researchers also have hypothesized that assuming responsibilities across settings can serve as a protective factor against depression. Particularly for women, a job serves as an additional social and relational support that may increase well-being of the self (Barnett & Hyde, 2001).

Having to balance work and family no longer seems to be a dilemma applicable only to working women (Daly, Ashbourne, & Hawkins, 2008). Being a “good provider” traditionally has been men’s primary way of identifying and contributing to their families. Today, the scope of fatherhood is expanding to include responsibilities beyond being a good provider, as Palkovitz (2002) noted:

[I]n concert with a changing culture of fatherhood that portrays fathers’ roles as a blend of involved and loving nurturance that goes beyond economic provision, gender-role socialization and teacher/moral guide; contemporary fathers characterize fathering in a multifaceted manner that encompasses each of those elements. (p. 63)

Only recently has the issue of stay-at-home-fathers (SAHFs) begun to be addressed, reflecting changes in the current workforce demography and perhaps a shift in values related to work and families by both genders. Although being an SAHF may seem incongruent with the traditional gender stereotypical male image of providing economically for their family, some men
report high levels of life and relationship satisfaction with their roles as SAHFs (Rochlen, Suizzo, McKelley, Suizzo, & Scaringi, 2008). By identifying and forming new reference groups with other SAHFs, men may be able to find support and perhaps affirmation in their newly assumed role and identity. Although possibly grieving the loss of their previous identity as workers, it seems that SAHFs may forge new selves through reconstructing their masculinity in other areas of their lives.

Entering early adulthood, career interests begin to crystallize, but construction of a vocational self for lesbians may be delayed as a result of their exploring and coming to terms with their sexual orientation (Fassinger, 1996). Boatwright, Gilbert, Forrest, and Ketzenberger’s study (1996) suggested that only after the sexual orientation identity is established can lesbians truly consider and decide career options, and they may view this delay in career development as a personal inadequacy (Fassinger, 1996). Along with confusion regarding the self and decreased self-esteem as a result of the coming-out process, the lack of work role models has been documented as impeding career development for lesbians (Fassinger, 1996).

Lent and colleagues (1994) suggested that, in comparison with heterosexual individuals, for lesbians and gay men, outcome expectation may be more salient than self-efficacy beliefs in the formation of interests and career development. Rather than asking oneself, “Can I do it?” the more crucial issue for lesbians and gay men may be, “What will happen if I do it?” (Morrow, Gore, & Campbell, 1996). Safety, rather than interests or congruence with self-efficacy beliefs, is the primary determinant of lesbians’ or gay men’s career choices (Fassinger, 1996). Despite the various barriers faced by lesbians, researchers have found that their vocational selves are more likely to demonstrate nontraditional, androgynous gender roles and have more flexibility in career choices than those of heterosexual women (Fassinger, 1996).

The literature on the career trajectory of gay men is relatively new compared with studies focusing on lesbian women. It was assumed that gay men belong to the dominant gender and thereby face fewer difficulties in career development (Trau & Härtel, 2004). Trau and Härtel (2004), however, identified themes of how gay men’s sexual orientation affects their career development and performance in the workplace, including experiencing identity difficulties because of lack of support or role models, homophobia, loss of career opportunities, and impact of disclosure in the workplace. To complicate matters further, many gay men may not realize or come to terms with their sexual orientation until adulthood, after they may have chosen careers unreceptive to their sexual identity (Prince, 1995). Compared with lesbians, gay men may experience more difficulties integrating their sexual identity with their overall self-concept because of societal intolerance of homosexuality (Trau & Härtel, 2004).
It is important that career counselors recognize the developmental significance of young adulthood because it involves transitioning into a critical period of integrating one’s own beliefs with influences of others in childhood and adolescence while beginning to explore, envision, and work toward becoming one’s aspired future self. In today’s society, where the definitions and expectations of work, family, as well as gender role seem more diverse and ever-changing, various life-changing decisions, such as exploring one’s sexual orientation or choosing to marry and have a family, may co-occur with and affect the development of one’s vocational self.

It is important to address, then, the meaning of incongruence between one’s prescribed gender role and vocational choice, as it may cause distress, for example, to an SAHF who lives in a culture that highly values men being the primary provider of the household. Depending on a client’s presenting issues and goals, the counselor’s role may be to help the client seek out resources and develop coping strategies to challenge societal pressure or internalized gendered messages to conform to prescribed sex roles. It can be empowering for clients to recognize that although rigid gender-role socialization and discrimination may affect their career-related selves and behaviors, they are still the active meaning makers in their own life story. How they choose to interpret and internalize these environmental messages can help them see themselves as active agents who can construct their own realities and truths.

VOCATIONAL SELF-CONSTRUCTION IN MID-ADULTHOOD AND BEYOND

The intersection of vocation, gender, and self remains powerful at midlife and beyond. Midlife often represents a time of self-reflection on what has been done and what one still wants to do (Lachman & James, 1997). As Neugarten (1968) noted in her landmark work on adulthood, midlife is often accompanied by a fundamental shift in time perspective: from time since birth to a perspective of time left to live. Although midlife accounts for a great portion of a person’s life, the central life roles and self-constructions of identity during this life phase have received little empirical investigation.

Much of the extant research can be traced back to the two most widely known theorists who examined adult development in the last century: Carl Jung and Erik Erikson. Of most relevance here is Jung’s concept of individuation involving “the realization, integration, or balancing of all systems of the psyche (animus/anima, conscious/unconscious, mind/body, shadow/persona to their fullest extensions” (Lachman & James, 1997, p. 5). Of specific relevance to gender identity in adulthood, if the anima (or internalized notion of femininity) has been overdeveloped in life while the animus (or internalized notion of
masculinity) has been underdeveloped, then humans attempt to bring these into a better balance—in essence, bringing the unconscious aspects of self into greater consciousness. Empirical research primarily conducted by Neugarten and Gutmann (1968) examined this gender role crossover in midlife and found support for its presence. Such research indicated that women often take on more agentic and assertive qualities and values and men more relational and communal qualities and values.

The other major theorist who delineated life tasks at middle age and beyond was Erikson (1968). In his developmental theory he described the major task of midlife and beyond as that of generativity versus stagnation. Generativity involves the midlife adult being concerned with guiding, nurturing, training, and socializing the next generation. Levinson and colleagues (1978), in their study of mentoring, found evidence for the importance of generativity in the lives of men.

The role of contextual factors in the development of gender identity, vocational identity, and an overall conceptualization of self is gaining increasing attention as well (Gysbers et al., 2009). For example, how gender-appropriate behaviors are defined is influenced by the context of any given culture. Some cultures view midlife and older women as matriarchs, sages, wise ones, and keepers of meaning, whereas other cultures render them useless and often make them feel invisible. Similarly, social class as a contextual factor influences how the individual views work and retirement, how they see using their skills in their middle and later life, and how much income they have to support their lifestyles in the last part of life. Thus, how culture and class help to define gender identity and how that conceptualization influences self-identity at midlife are critical variables in the ecology of human development.

One construct that has received attention in the popular press is the “midlife crisis,” a time when identity and previous life choices are questioned and individuals experience a substantial psychological turmoil trying to make meaning out of where they are now and where they hoped they would be at this point in their lives. The comparing of reality with career aspirations is often influenced by gender and the individual’s beliefs about how a man’s or woman’s life should be constructed. For men, fulfilling a career aspiration or replacing an immature or unrealistic dream with a more realistic one is perceived as an indicator of positive psychological adjustment (Drebing & Gooden, 1991). For women, determining that one has fallen short of earlier career goals is related to lower levels of purpose in life and higher levels of depression (Carr, 1997). Even so, some researchers, including Neugarten (1968), have found little or no evidence for major psychological turmoil or major change in personality in midlife.

Vocational adjustment in midlife represents an area of potential difficulty for many. Leong and Boyle (1997), in their study using a longitudinal data set,
concluded that “personality traits and values are predictive for job stability, job satisfaction, and career consistency for both men and women nearly 20 years later” (p. 446). This suggests that psychological traits developed earlier in life can help to create greater satisfaction at midlife in terms of vocation for men and women. Development of characteristics such as resiliency, optimism, and openness to new experience in the earlier phases of life may serve adults well in midlife as they face questions of self-identity.

Another common issue discussed in the popular media in regard to midlife individuals, particularly women, is that of the empty-nest syndrome, whereby loss associated with the last child leaving home creates a highly traumatic life experience for parents at midlife. Studies conducted on this phenomenon indicate the contrary: Midlife individuals, and women in particular, see this as a time for increased self-development that can include advancing their education or freedom to make career moves. Witkin (1991) found a more stressful issue for midlife individuals to be the refilled-nest syndrome whereby, because of economic problems, adult children return to live at home. Successfully launching children into the adult world seemed in most studies to be a source of pride and pleasure for midlife adults (Antonucci & Akiyama, 1997).

Changes in the workplace itself over the past decades have created new opportunities and barriers for men and women as they construct their vocational selves at this point in their lives. Hall and Mirvis (1995) suggested a shift from the organizational career to the protean career, which they defined as “a career based on self-direction in the pursuit of psychological success in one’s work” (Hall & Mirvis, 1995, p. 271). Since publication of their article, other authors also have suggested such a self-driven career in which continuous learning is critical, flexibility and adaptability to new skill sets are paramount, and relational and interpersonal skills so critical to working effectively on teams, rather than in hierarchies, are affirmed and valued (Gysbers et al., 2009).

How these changes in the workplace affect the gendered construction of self is important to understand. As the workplace becomes more relational and less hierarchical, Hall and Mirvis (1995) argued that women may benefit because of their typical access to a richer social network and traditionally greater interpersonal skills. Women at midlife may find that work environments now value the interpersonal traits that previously were invisible; the construction of self within the organization, thus, may feel more authentic. The more permeable boundaries of the protean work environment (Hall & Mirvis, 1995) may be more advantageous to women, who may have had greater flow between work and nonwork earlier in life, when child care and homemaking were a part of their role and self-definition. These are but a few of the structural changes happening within the organization that may influence the gendered construction of the vocational self.
As midlife and older adults seek to make meaning in their lives and reflect on the impact of major life events on their sense of self, the construct of a social clock and whether it is on-time or off-time may be salient. Major life events are often seen as markers of the passage of time, and their presence at the expected time of life can provide a strong sense of stability to the self in midlife and beyond (Schlossberg, 1984). Social clock refers to the constellation of culturally held norms about what should be expected for people at various ages. When events occur at the socially prescribed time they are perceived as on-time, when they do not they are perceived as off-time. When expected life events do not happen, they are considered nonevents (Schlossberg 1984). In examining longitudinal data, Chiriboga (1997) found adults quite able to identify nonevents (e.g., I expected to get married but I broke it off; I expected to go to Harvard Law School but did not). In general, men were more likely to feel they had accomplished major vocational life events ahead of time, whereas women were more likely to feel behind-time. The social clock illustrates the subjective nature of constructing the gendered vocational self.

Structural barriers still exist for women at all class levels and influence their career progress and success (Gysbers et al., 2009; Walsh & Heppner, 2006). Women continue to be paid less for the same work, are subjected to sexual harassment and discrimination at a rate greater than men, and continue to be stereotyped into occupational choices of lower status and prestige (Betz, 2006). Thus, the possibility of women achieving their aspirations and feeling successful in doing so is considerably less than that of their male counterparts as “a variety of cultural, personal, and pragmatic obstacles remain as invisible but effective deterrents to women’s occupational achievements” (Tomlinson-Keasey & Gomel, 1997, p. 346).

Although economic issues and health status greatly predict how individuals experience self in middle adult and later years, another important factor concerns how they subjectively view this phase of life. If people primarily have identified in life with the worker role, they may experience a greater sense of self by staying on the job as long as possible. If, on the other hand, they view this phase as an opportunity for greater self-development, self-actualization, leisure, or finding deeply meaningful and engaging activities with which to become involved, they likely will construct a new life structure to define who they are at this phase of the life journey.

Although social class issues dramatically affect the freedom and flexibility of midlife and older adults to construct vocational selves, creative problem solving can help restore dreams and empower clients to take greater charge of orchestrating the best possible life. Counselors can help clients see their vocational lives through a gendered lens and thereby help them examine choices made earlier in their lives and choices they want to make for this next phase. Strong multicultural skills in helping clients examine how their multiple
identities of gender, race, class, sexual orientation, disability status, and religion intersect with the vocational self in midlife are particularly valuable because this can be a time of powerful self-reflection and account taking. Activities such as journal writing, collages, genograms, and meditation on ideal future days can assist clients in reflecting on how they have integrated gender into the construction of their vocational roles previously and how that construction can be shaped and molded for a more meaningful and satisfying midlife and beyond.

CONCLUSION

This chapter has examined the powerful role of gender in vocational self-construction. We chose to examine this phenomenon using a developmental perspective on particularly salient factors in childhood and adolescence, early adulthood, and the middle and older years of life. It is clear from this examination that gender plays a significant role throughout the life span as individuals construct their vocational selves.

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THE GENDERED CONTEXT OF VOCATIONAL SELF-CONSTRUCTION 189


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This chapter has two main objectives. First, we review the relevant literature on culture and the self, especially in relation to vocational psychology and counseling. Second, we propose a cultural formulation approach for career assessment and counseling with culturally diverse clients modeled after the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (DSM–IV; American Psychiatric Association, 1994) cultural formulation model. Like the DSM–IV model, this cultural formulation approach comprises five dimensions: (a) cultural identity, (b) cultural conception of career problems, (c) self in cultural context, (d) cultural dynamics in the therapeutic relationship, and (e) the overall cultural assessment.

The influence of culture on the self cannot be denied, especially because the self develops within social contexts (Baldwin, 1991). Therefore, constructs such as language, gender, class, region of origin, and physical and cultural characteristics are important in defining the self for all people (see Chapters 11 and 13, this volume). The influences of sociocultural contexts on the self are powerful, but the details, sources, and boundaries of these sociocultural influences are difficult to pinpoint (Oakes & Turner, 1990).

Defining the self proves difficult because it is a multifaceted and dynamic concept. According to Oyserman and Markus (1993), the self serves
two main functions: (a) to help formalize meaning and organization across all three domains of human experience (i.e., thoughts, feelings, and behaviors); and (b) to motivate future behavior in that it allows us to formulate scripts, plans, strategies, and standards for future thoughts, feelings, and behaviors. Self and the related construct of identity are not single entities. This means that each individual has a large repertoire of selves, but only one or a few of the selves will be accessible or will be used at any one time (Oyserman & Markus, 1993). This seems synonymous with what most call self-knowledge, self-schemas, salient identities, or core conceptions. Regardless of which term is used, the self is defined by past experiences and predicts present and future behavior, thoughts, and feelings (Markus, Cross, & Wurf, 1990).

Construction of the self involves a creative and selective process, and the sociocultural context provides individuals with the tools needed to form an active self/identity (Oyserman & Markus, 1993). This means that the environment plays an active role in developing the self. The environment in this case is synonymous with the cultural and historical factors that mediate the development of the self (Cole, 1990). Examples include gender, ethnic group, cultural background, cultural values, generational status, historical perceptive, and religion. These sociocultural contexts can differ in the degrees of power they exert on the development of one’s identity. There are two ways in which these various sociocultural factors affect people: (a) They can exert their influences either implicitly or explicitly, and (b) they can be complementary to or conflicting with a person’s preexisting schema.

In this chapter, we examine how the self forms within a sociocultural context. Comprehending this process proves critical to understanding the construction of self in work and career. Fundamentally, the self forms within the context of multiple overlapping processes involving groups and collectivities (Oyserman & Markus, 1993). This is true regardless of whether an individual comes from a Western-based individualistic society or an Eastern-based collectivist culture. This social and cultural context provides a basis for how we get embedded in the various contexts of our world and also defines and explains how our world perceives us. In turn, we also use these same layers to learn how to perceive the world around us (Condor, 1991).

Arguably, we can expect there to be individual and group differences in sociocultural contexts, which in turn will lead to differences in how individuals define their self-identities (Oyserman & Markus, 1993). For example, an Asian Indian American raised in the United States will have a different self compared with an Asian Indian raised in India due to the differential effects of acculturation versus enculturation.

Oyserman and Markus (1993) described a model of social embeddedness in the process of forming the self. Factors involved in this model include family, friends, and significant others (Layer 1); neighborhood, work, and school
(Layer 2); ethnicity, gender, religion, and social class (Layer 3); and historical, economic, and national–regional context (Layer 4). These layers interact with each other and affect the outcome of the self. The end product of a socially embedded self is defined by the dynamic relationships found between the various factors in each layer. In some instances these factors can be reinforcing and reciprocal, especially when they are congruent with the values, beliefs, and messages nested within an individual’s upbringing. On the other hand, the messages from these factors can be incongruent, causing tension and confusion in the development of the self. This means that as individuals develop their self-concepts, along the way they will choose to receive some of the messages from the various sociocultural factors while rejecting others (Oyserman & Markus, 1993).

For the purposes of this chapter, the self and the effects of culture on defining and constructing that self are viewed within the context of work. Vocational aspirations and career issues are viewed as a function of the self, with sociocultural factors important in shaping those career–vocational trends. The various sociocultural factors are viewed in terms of how they lend meaning and organization to the context of vocation and career.

**DSM–IV OUTLINE FOR CULTURAL FORMATION**

Culturally sensitive models of psychotherapy, such as the cultural accommodation model (CAM; Leong & Lee, 2006), recognize the need to accommodate for culture-specific variables in clients with respect to our conceptualization of psychopathology (or presenting problems) as well as the process and outcome of psychotherapy. Consistent with this model, one of the new developments in the DSM–IV (American Psychiatric Association, 1994) was the inclusion of an appendix to help classify culture-bound syndromes within the diagnostic system. This appendix includes cultural elements through its multiaxial schema as steps toward greater cultural validity (Mezzich, Honda, & Kastrup, 1994).

We propose that the DSM–IV Outline for Cultural Formulation may serve as a useful conceptual framework for guiding the practice of career assessment and counseling. The DSM–IV Outline for Cultural Formulation consists of the following five dimensions: (a) cultural identity of the individual; (b) cultural explanations of the individual’s illness; (c) cultural factors related to psychosocial environment and levels of functioning; (d) cultural elements of the relationship between the individual and the clinician; and (e) overall cultural assessment for diagnosis and care (DSM–IV–TR; American Psychiatric Association, 2000, pp. 897–898). Our discussion of culture and self in this chapter is relevant not only to the first dimension of the outline.
in terms of cultural identity but also to an individual’s explanations and conceptualization of his or her illness (think career crisis or career problems). In the same way, an individual’s sense of self, which is culturally situated, is also implicated in his or her psychosocial environment and level of functioning in it. Furthermore, an individual’s sense of self and self-construal are clearly important factors in how he or she would relate to the counselor and influence the nature and outcome of the therapeutic relationship. Therefore, our clients’ sense of self pervades the entire therapeutic enterprise, and cultural variations in the self need careful attention. In the remainder of the chapter, we discuss the literature on culture and self as it pertains to the five dimensions of the outline.

CULTURAL FORMULATION IN CAREER ASSESSMENT AND CAREER COUNSELING

Cultural Identity

Regardless of culture, all individuals have multiple selves. Culture determines the specific content of these selves as well as which selves are chronically more accessible or salient and therefore will have the greatest impact on an individual’s behavior (Heine, 2001; Markus & Kitayama, 1991), including his or her vocational behavior. Social psychologists have delineated several ways of conceptualizing these various selves.

Private, Public, and Collective Selves

Triandis (1989) linked various types of self most explicitly to culture in distinguishing among the private, public, and collective selves. The private self refers to our beliefs about our own internal attributes—the self that exists without reference to others. The public self refers to our beliefs about the attributes or behaviors others perceive us to possess—the self that we present to others in general. The collective self refers to our beliefs about the attributes or behaviors members of specific other groups perceive us to possess—the self that we present to others depending on their group. Thus, I might believe that I am ambitious (my private self), that people think I am shy (my public self), and that my family thinks I work too hard (my collective self). Although all individuals possess all three types of self, Triandis (1989) argued that culture influences which type of self is most accessible and thus most influential. Thus, for example, the private self tends to be particularly salient among individuals in the United States, whereas the public and collective selves tend to be particularly salient among individuals in Japan.
In addition to affecting the accessibility or salience of the three types of self, Triandis (1989) also argued that culture reliably affects the content of the different selves. Because collectivist cultures tend to emphasize the importance of conformity, private self-concepts that include notions such as obedience and cooperation are likely to develop. In contrast, because individualist cultures tend to emphasize the importance of creativity and self-determination, private self-concepts that include notions such as uniqueness and assertiveness are likely to develop.

Self-Construals

Such differences in the content of the self-concept have been most clearly articulated in the concept of independent and interdependent self-construals (Markus & Kitayama, 1991). People from individualistic cultures are more likely to possess a strong independent self-construal, thinking of the self as separate from others and social contexts; as defined by stable, internal attributes; and deriving self-esteem from standing out and getting ahead. Individuals from collectivist cultures, on the other hand, are more likely to possess a strong interdependent self-construal, thinking of the self as connected to others and defined by relationships and social contexts, and thus as being more flexible and varied; and deriving self-esteem from fitting in and getting along.

These fundamental cultural differences in the self have been linked to a wide range of cultural differences in affect, cognition, and behavior (for a recent review, see Cross, Hardin, & Swing, 2009). For example, in different cultures, the same event elicits different types of emotion and the same emotion may be elicited by different events. For example, independent North Americans tend to experience strong self-enhancement motivations, whereas interdependent East Asians do not and in fact seem to experience strong self-criticism motivations (for a review, see Heine, 2001). These tendencies are explained by the East Asians’ interdependent self-construal and their more accessible public and collective selves, which motivate behavior designed to avoid bringing shame to the group.

In addition to these differences in self-construal based on ethnicity, self-construal also differs on the basis of gender. Consistent with evidence for the more relational socialization of women in many cultures, early evidence suggested that European American women were more interdependent than men (see Cross & Madson, 1997). However, more recent evidence suggests that men and women differ in the type of interdependence they endorse (Gabriel & Gardner, 1999). Women tend to be higher in relational interdependence, which involves the self in relation to specific individual others (e.g., best friend, romantic partner), whereas men tend to be higher in collective interdependence, which involves the self in relation to the groups of which one is a member (e.g., sports teams, fraternities).
Possible Selves

Finally, we also can distinguish between one’s past, current, and future possible selves (Oyserman & Markus, 1993). Possible selves include all those roles, identities, or attributes that an individual believes are available in the future, and these may be either positive (i.e., hoped-for selves) or negative (i.e., feared selves). Possible selves are thus motivating, because they provide goals that one either works toward attaining or toward avoiding. The idea of possible selves may be captured by asking, “In the universe of infinite selves, which ones do I believe are realistic for me?” Clearly, the answer to this question will be influenced heavily by culture—by the opportunities and role models available to an individual, by the barriers to certain paths encountered, and by cultural messages about the appropriateness of various paths.

Cultural Conception of Career Problems

These varying conceptions of self influence how individuals think about their careers, make career decisions, and perceive their vocational development. As argued extensively elsewhere (e.g., Leong & Serafica, 2001), most existing theories of vocational development appear to assume that the career-decision maker possesses an independent self-construal and makes career decisions consistent with his or her private self. For example, Super’s (1990) theory of vocational development explicitly posits that the “best” career choices are those that allow the individual to implement his or her self-concept. As is clear from the earlier discussion, the self-concept varies widely by culture, yet vocational theorists and counselors have tended to restrict their focus to helping individuals implement their personal interests and values in making a career choice. Similarly, Holland’s (1997) person–environment fit theory proposes that people are most satisfied with occupations that match their personal interests and abilities.

Such an approach is likely to be inconsistent and therefore less effective when working with individuals who possess a more interdependent self-construal and who tend to be influenced more by their public or collective selves. Someone for whom the private self is most salient may well be driven by questions such as, “What do I value?” “What will make me happy?” “What are my interests?” However, someone for whom the collective self is most salient is more likely to be driven by questions such as, “What does my family value?” “How can I avoid bringing shame to my group?” “What are their interests?” Evidence is accumulating that supports this hypothesis. For example, among Asian Americans, family involvement, but not interests, was a predictor of career-choice interests (Tang, Fouad, & Smith, 1999). Similarly, among Mexican American high school girls, family support, but not interests, was a predictor of career-choice prestige (Flores & O’Brien, 2002).
Unfortunately, such interdependent motivations in career-decision making historically have been interpreted from a highly independent and private self perspective as representing inappropriate levels of dependence in career-decision making. More recent theory (e.g., Leong & Serafica, 2001) and research (e.g., Hardin, Leong, & Osipow, 2001) have challenged this assumption. For example, although early studies found that Asian Americans exhibited lower career maturity than European Americans (Leong, 1991; Luzzo, 1992), the two groups did not differ in terms of vocational identity (Leong, 1991) or their career-decision-making skills (Luzzo, 1992). Hardin et al. (2001) demonstrated that the measure of career maturity used in these studies confounded culturally appropriate interdependence with career-immature dependence; thus, Asian Americans, who tend to be more interdependent, were inappropriately assessed as exhibiting dependence in career-decision making.

The assumption has been that decisions made with reference to others represent a dependent decision-making style and are somehow less “good” because the individual seems to be denying his or her own interests and needs. However, inherent in this line of thinking is the culturally biased assumption that the private and collective selves are necessarily different. As Triandis (1989) discussed, those who are acculturated in individualistic cultures tend to develop not only complex private selves but also private selves whose content reflects uniqueness and independence from others. In other words, the private selves of individualists are almost by definition different from their public and collective selves. Thus, when an individualist makes a career decision to satisfy others, it is likely that he or she is making a decision that does not satisfy him- or herself. The private selves of collectivists, on the other hand, are much more likely to reflect goals of conformity and obedience. Therefore, the private selves of collectivists are quite likely to be similar to their public and collective selves. Thus, when a collectivist makes a career decision to satisfy others, it is likely that he or she is making a decision that does satisfy him- or herself. By choosing a career that fulfills the values and needs of one’s family, for example, one is necessarily fulfilling one’s own personal needs because the private and collective selves are not inherently separate.

Cultural Context and Psychosocial Environment

Barriers

Culture not only shapes the content and salience of the various types of self directly but also indirectly through the opportunities presented to individuals. Members of many minority groups experience limited opportunities, and there is a large body of work on how such barriers affect vocational development. Gottfredson’s (1981) theory of circumscription and compromise
and the social cognitive career theory (Lent, Brown, & Hackett, 1994) most explicitly incorporate the role of such barriers in shaping vocational development. But how do such culturally determined opportunity structures affect one’s sense of self, and how does one’s sense of self affect how those opportunities are perceived?

Oyserman and Markus (1993) offered an extensive discussion of the potentially damaging effects of barriers and negative messages about individuals’ identities on their self-concepts and possible selves. Consistent with the concept of privilege (e.g., White privilege; McIntosh, 1988), Oyserman and Markus argued that unlike members of dominant cultural groups, members of many marginalized groups must expend energy reconciling negative societal messages about their current and possible selves (e.g., women are not good at math). Not only does this mean less energy is available for developing positive self-views but also that the development of specific possible selves may be thwarted. This restriction in the range of possible selves occurs both directly (e.g., by explicitly being told that women should not be ambitious or that Asian Americans should not go into theater) and indirectly (e.g., by the lack of available role models for a particular path).

A particularly vivid example of how culture affects the self-concept comes from work on how social class shapes the incorporation of literacy in the self-concept (Heath, 1982, cited in Oyserman & Markus, 1993). Heath described how, in general, middle-class families, children are read to from infancy, rewarded for reading, and taught that reading is fun. In working-class families, however, children tend to be read to much less frequently, rewarded for oral communication, and taught that reading provides information rather than entertainment. Thus, class directly and indirectly affects individuals’ attitudes toward and proficiency with literacy, which in turn affect the kinds of activities chosen, interests developed, and possible selves envisioned (see also Chapter 13, this volume).

Similarly, cultural influences and barriers have been used to explain racial–ethnic differences in academic achievement and identification. Ogbu (1989) distinguished between voluntary minorities—those who came to the United States via voluntary immigration, and involuntary minorities—those who came to the United States via slavery and colonization. Ogbu argued that because of these differing histories and sociopolitical realities, voluntary minorities (e.g., Asian Americans) are more likely to feel like invited guests and be willing to “play by the rules” of dominant culture, whereas involuntary minorities (e.g., African Americans) are more likely to feel that no matter how much they attempt to meet the demands of dominant culture, they will still face limited opportunities. This plays out particularly in the domain of academic achievement, in which many African Americans come to see the educational system as a tool of the dominant culture and de-identify with
academic achievement as a way to distance themselves from the dominant culture and reject what they perceived to be the unfulfilled promises it offers to them.

Further explaining the higher average academic achievement of Asian Americans, in their theory of relative functionalism, Sue and Okazaki (1990) argued that Asian Americans also perceive discrimination and limited opportunities in the world of work. However, the career paths that are perceived as more open to Asian Americans are those that require higher levels of education; thus, academic achievement is relatively more functional for Asian Americans because it facilitates their entry into the few career fields readily open to them. Cultural barriers, therefore, lead to the incorporation of academic achievement into the self-concept for many Asian Americans, but this also leads to its de-incorporation for many African Americans.

Social Identity

Social identities themselves are also shaped by cultural context. Oyserman and Markus (1993) noted that individuals are more likely to identify as members of a particular cultural group when in the minority: “Thus, to the extent that some Blacks or Hispanics or women find themselves in settings where they are chronically distinctive as a consequence of their ethnicity or gender, it is likely that their ethnicity or gender will become salient” (p. 200). One explanation for this tendency comes from the theory of optimal distinctiveness (Brewer, 1991, 2003), the proponents of which argue that individuals are motivated by the dual needs of affiliation and uniqueness and modify their self-identification with various groups to obtain a so-called optimal level of distinctiveness that provides sufficient feelings of belongingness to the group without losing too much differentiation. Thus, in contexts in which one’s gender or ethnicity is rare, increasing the personal salience of that identity provides a sense of belonging to the group while still optimally distinguishing oneself from the larger group. In contexts in which one’s gender or ethnicity is common, decreasing the salience of that identity in favor of some other identity (e.g., rock climber, mother) may provide for the most optimal distinctiveness. Thus, the extent to which an individual feels strongly connected to, and thus influenced by, one or more cultural identities is shaped by context.

This has important implications for one’s self-concept. What happens when the drive for optimal distinctiveness leads one to identify strongly with a minority identity that is marginalized or stigmatized? Empirical evidence suggests that optimal distinctiveness contributes to self-stereotyping, such that individuals identify more strongly with both the positive and negative stereotypes associated with their group (see Brewer, 2003). Oyserman and Markus (1993) also discussed evidence that members identified with stigmatized groups may discount or question both positive and negative feedback about
their performance. Within academic and vocational contexts, then, it may be difficult to develop an accurate sense of one’s abilities.

**Competence**

Such difficulties appropriately incorporating both realistic negative feedback and appropriate positive feedback into the self-concept may contribute to the extent to which individuals experience the imposter phenomenon in academic and employment settings. The *imposter phenomenon*, often described by highly successful African Americans in predominantly European American environments, refers to the feeling that despite one’s outward success, one is really just fooling people, is not as competent as one seems, and will soon be “found out” (e.g., Ewing, Richardson, James-Myers, & Russell, 1996). Depending on factors such as the salience of one’s ethnic identity, what messages about that identity have been internalized, and how feedback regarding competence therefore has been incorporated into the self-concept, being labeled an “affirmative action hire” by one’s coworkers may lead to reactions arising from the imposter phenomenon from feelings of anger to relatively neutral feelings.

**Culture Dynamics in the Therapeutic Relationship**

Cultural dynamics are important to consider in any counseling relationship because they can determine client–counselor fit and in turn increase the likelihood of better interventions and outcomes. Usually, various cultural factors must be considered between client and counselor to ensure that the counselor understands the issues being presented by the client and uses the best interventions to facilitate the best outcomes. An important cultural factor to consider in this regard is individualism versus collectivism (e.g., Hui & Triandis, 1986), which is closely related to the individual-level construct of self-construal (Markus & Kitayama, 1991).

Individualism is a cultural factor often associated with the Western world. Individualism emphasizes the individual’s goals over the group’s goals. Individualistic cultures, therefore, tend to foster a more independent self-construal. Much of the general counseling and the more specific career counseling literature has been grounded in an individualistic cultural context. Thus, standard approaches to establishing and maintaining a therapeutic relationship (e.g., focusing on the individual and understanding his or her unique experience) are most appropriate when working with clients from individualistic cultures with independent self-construals.

Collectivism, on the other hand, which is often associated with the non-Western world, emphasizes membership in a group, such as extended family, work group, tribe, caste, or country. For collectivists, the self is consid-
ered part of the larger group. In the same way as a body part cannot function without being part of the whole body, collectivists cannot be understood apart from the group. For therapists working with collectivist individuals, this suggests a need to pay attention to the connection the person may have with the family and/or community. In such cases, special attention will have to be given to the roles and duties that would be determined by ingroup membership.

In the therapeutic relationship, this has implications for the degree of involvement by the family and community in setting and accomplishing treatment goals. A collectivist client struggling with career concerns will likely expect and welcome involvement from family members, both metaphorically (e.g., by the therapist asking what the family’s goals are for the client’s counseling) and in reality (i.e., by inviting family members to join the client in one or more sessions). Treatment goals that are not congruent with the group’s goals would not be considered acceptable by most collectivist clients. Although a therapist who focuses on the client’s individual needs, interests, and values would likely be perceived positively by an individualist client, a therapist who fails to recognize the role of the family or other group in setting goals for counseling may lose important credibility in the eyes of collectivist and interdependent clients.

Although the counselor must be careful not to pathologize a collectivist client’s culturally appropriate interdependence as dependence, the counselor must also be careful not to assume that all family involvement is equally healthy. Some clients’ obligation and sense of duty toward ingroup members could suggest a degree of sacrifice that may not be favorable to the individual’s overall well-being. Therefore, therapists need to negotiate a balance between community and self in a sensitive manner that is congruent with the values, beliefs, and behaviors of the individual involved (Triandis, 1989).

These cultural differences in the self also have direct implications for the client–counselor relationship. To the extent that the counselor is perceived by the client as a member of an outgroup, establishing a trusting therapeutic alliance may take longer for collectivist clients than for individualist clients. In addition, collectivistic individuals display positive attitudes in their vertical relationships (e.g., father–son, mother–daughter), whereas individualistic individuals display the most positive attitudes in horizontal relationships (spouse–spouse, friend–friend). In collectivistic communities there is also greater respect and acceptance of relationships that have power differentials. Therapists need to be aware that a collectivist client may be quite comfortable and actually prefer the inherent power differential to a more collaborative, egalitarian relationship. Being aware of and appropriately accepting this more hierarchical role helps to establish credibility and a stronger therapeutic alliance.

Competition and interpersonal discourse are not considered acceptable in collectivistic communities, to the point that an emphasis is placed on
harmony and cooperation. Therefore, therapists have to be careful when using certain techniques, such as confrontation. Direct forms of communication also may be difficult for more collectivist clients, for whom directly disagreeing with or questioning the counselor would feel disrespectful. Intervention styles and techniques would have to be chosen that are culturally sensitive and effective with the nature of the client. For example, Iwamasa, Hsia, and Hinton (2006) recommended asking Asian American clients about the “feasibility” or “likelihood” of completing homework rather than simply asking them directly if they will do the homework. The former questioning style allows the collectivist client more room to indicate hesitation in completing the assignment without directly disagreeing with or challenging the counselor.

Overall Cultural Assessment

The overall cultural assessment component of the cultural formulation approach integrates the elements from the previous sections into a coherent case conceptualization that pays due attention to all cultural factors that influence the self. In formulating this overall assessment, it would be useful for career counselors to apply some of the current theories and models in multicultural career counseling. A review of the literature yields some newly developed career counseling models that take into account cultural variables and issues. Four main models provide some guidance with this final stage of the cultural formulation approach.

The integrative sequential model is grounded in a cultural context, highlighting factors such as culture, history, preferences, values, and religion. The culturally appropriate model is a seven-step model introduced by Fouad and Bingham (1995) that addresses cultural factors such as racial-identity development, discrimination, family-role expectations, gender-role expectations, and various other worldview dimensions. The developmental approach is a four-step model that integrates phenomenological methods to explore issues around career knowledge, values and interests (career developmental assessment and counseling model [C-DAC]; Hartung et al., 1998). This model is a modification of Super’s (1983) existing C-DAC model and is usually applied along three main dimensions (individual, group, and universal) with five constructs (role salience, career development, career choice readiness, career values, and career interests). The integrative multidimensional model, developed by Leong (1996), is based on an adaptation of the cross-cultural model to the career counseling process and also recognizes and integrates career issues within the context of the dimensions of individual, group, and universal. Because this model is based on an eclectic style of therapy, it can be applied to almost any career model or theory and also can be adapted to work with most culturally diverse groups, thus providing practitioners with a
complete and comprehensive model that allows for dynamic and in-depth insight into the career issues of the client (Leong & Hardin, 2002; Leong & Hartung, 2003).

Within each of these four models, emic or culture-specific approaches are helpful in explaining some of the anomalies within the well-known eurocentric career models. However, it cannot be assumed that all variances observed among racial or ethnic minorities are a result of cultural factors alone. Care needs to be taken to make sure that all culturally informed models are being applied appropriately and that all three dimensions (group, universal, and individual) are investigated appropriately to determine how they affect career outcomes as separate variables and as an interacting collection. It is evident that career counseling needs to take place within a cultural context regardless of whether clients are from ethnic minority populations. This is because every individual comes to counseling with a cultural history that needs to be recognized to ensure that career counseling will be effective and beneficial. Beginning steps have been taken to accommodate Eurocentric career models to better fit ethnic or racial minorities, other steps have been taken to develop more culturally appropriate models, and now future steps need to be taken so that culturally developed career models are more valid and appropriate for specific cultural groups or at least recognize the diversity that exists within each group.

Applying the Cultural Formulation Approach: Working With “Yong Lee”

Let us examine the following case study. An 18-year-old, single, gay Chinese American man is called into the principal’s office for getting into a fistfight with some boys from the high school football team who were teasing him. Yong is a high school senior planning to enter a degree program in engineering at a Southern university, where Christian beliefs are dominant and where members of ethnic minority groups are rare. He decided to attend this Southern university because it is near his family, and thus he would not have to move away when he attends college. Yong’s teachers describe him as bright but also as withdrawn, socially awkward, and as not applying himself to his fullest ability. Lately, they have noticed an increased loss of interest in his schoolwork and that he is failing some of his classes. He has told his school counselor that he does not care to go to college and is not sure what he wants to do with his future. He feels that he is not like other Asian Americans or his siblings who want to do well in school. Yong fears that he will fail his parents and in turn bring shame and embarrassment to everyone in his family if he does not go to college. Yong does not have many friends and does not have many hobbies except that he enjoys painting, sketching, and designing clothing. He does not like his job at a local grocery store, but he keeps it to help his family financially.
Yong is the oldest of four children and a first-generation American; his parents came to the United States to fulfill their dreams for a better future for themselves and their children. Yong has three younger sisters, all of whom are highly acculturated, popular, and doing well in school. Yong disclosed that he is not interested in women and feels attraction for other men, but he reports that this is not an option for him and that he does not feel safe talking about his same-sex attractions. In addition, recent sexual orientation–based hate crimes at the high school have made him feel shameful and fearful about disclosing his sexual orientation.

**Yong’s Cultural Identity**

The extent to which negative homophobic messages have been internalized into Yong’s private self is not clear. Yong’s feelings of being unlike other Asian Americans because he is not doing well in school speaks to a conflict between his private and public selves. Yong has clearly received the stereotypical message that others expect him to be academically successful and motivated simply because he is Asian, yet this is not consistent with his own experience of himself. Yong seems to define himself in terms of important roles and group identities (e.g., son, Chinese American). He demonstrates a strong motivation to fulfill these expected roles and distress over his perception that he is not doing so or will not do so in the future. Because of this interdependent self-construal, Yong may not experience his family’s expectations for him (part of his collective self) as necessarily incompatible with his own expectations for himself (part of his private self). Finally, based on the case description, Yong seems to be restricting his possible future selves: He does not perceive being an out gay man, an artist, or a noncollege graduate as possible future selves.

**Cultural Explanations of the Career Concern**

Yong’s competing cultural selves manifest in his lack of motivation at school, social isolation, and inability to identify a future he feels excited about working toward. Yong’s family expects him to go to college and pursue a degree in engineering. Because of his cultural values and interdependent self-construal, going against these expectations does not feel like an option to him. Yet, because his private, public, and collective selves are so intertwined, Yong does not clearly have his “own” interests and goals to pursue instead. In other words, Yong does not have any possible future selves he is motivated to pursue, leaving him stuck, lonely, and uncertain.

**Cultural Context and Psychosocial Environment**

It remains unclear to what extent Yong’s difficulties result from a lack of interest in engineering and higher education versus concerns about being
accepted. Given no evidence that Yong has ever experienced affirmation for his sexual identity but has instead experienced at best a null environment and at worst outright harassment and bias, it is not surprising that Yong is not enthusiastic about attending a university where he might reasonably expect more of the same. Similarly, attending a university as an average- to below-average-performing Asian American could potentially heighten his feelings of alienation from other Asian Americans. Leaving higher education entirely would permit Yong to avoid facing others’ daily reactions when he failed to live up to their stereotypes.

Culture Dynamics in the Therapeutic Relationship

Because Yong’s family and ethnic identity are such salient parts of his multiple selves, he may well have concerns about the extent to which seeking therapy might bring shame to his family, as well as the extent to which what he shares in therapy will be perceived as denigrating his family or ethnic group. These concerns may manifest as resistance to counseling (e.g., coming late to sessions, being guarded in what he shares). A counselor who does not recognize and respect the foundation for such resistance runs the danger of worsening the problem by pressing for deeper disclosure prematurely or pathologizing Yong’s commitment to his family as dependence or enmeshment.

Overall Cultural Assessment

Integrating these considerations requires a counselor to incorporate an understanding of Yong’s multiple selves into every phase of counseling. In terms of establishing a culturally appropriate relationship, the counselor would need to empathize with the conflict Yong must be feeling over his desire to fulfill his obligations to his family and his uncertainty about how best to do so. Especially in this early phase of the relationship, the counselor would not suggest Yong’s desire to fulfill these obligations as the source of his problems. It would also be important to affirm Yong’s sexual orientation.

The counselor may need to help Yong recognize the role of career issues in his current difficulties by checking out the hypotheses offered earlier. For example, the counselor could talk with Yong about how heterosexism and stereotypes about Asian Americans and academic achievement contribute to his uncertainty about pursuing college.

The counselor will need to be careful not to create a false dichotomy between Yong’s interests and those of his family. Rather, the counselor would likely do well to explore the extent to which the interests and values of Yong’s family are also his interests and values. As suggested elsewhere (e.g., Hardin et al., 2001), values may be particularly useful to explore to help reconcile instances of conflict. For example, Yong might discover that
values of prestige and security underlie the messages he receives that engineering is acceptable whereas fashion design is not. Yong might then be able to explore career opportunities in fashion design that carry more of these values (e.g., working for an established design house), plan his career path to facilitate realization of these values (e.g., choose a particular design school based on its reputation rather than location), or educate his parents about the realities of the field in a way that speaks to their values and concerns. Thus, the counselor may be able to help Yong talk with his parents in such a way that a career in fashion design becomes acceptable to them and Yong is not faced with choosing between what he wants and what his parents want. In addition, to the extent that Yong believes life as an out gay man is not possible, it may be helpful to provide him with access to role models of committed partnerships and families. In either case, the goal of counseling is not for Yong to prioritize his needs over those of his family but to help Yong find ways to make his needs congruent with those of his family and vice versa.

CONCLUSION

A cultural formulation approach to career counseling explicitly accounts for cultural influences and integrates them into all stages of the career counseling process. It is important to note that this approach is appropriate for use with all clients; considering a client’s multiple selves and cultural context is no less important for a middle-class, European American, heterosexual man than it is for a client such as Yong. Thus, a cultural formulation approach to career counseling enhances the work of counselors with all clients.

REFERENCES


As the first 12 chapters of this volume attest, the study of the self has been a central theme within vocational psychology for nearly a century, with its origins foreshadowed in the seminal work of Parsons (1909). In Parsons’s efforts to help working-class individuals and poor immigrants of the urban tenements of Boston, Massachusetts, find satisfying work, he focused on the importance of self-knowledge, presaging contemporary conceptualizations of the self. Embedded in Parsons’s early ideas and most other vocational psychological scholars’ work (see Brown & Lent, 2005) is the notion of choice and volition about one’s options in the world of work. Indeed, the vast majority of studies and theoretical statements about the self in vocational psychology have emerged in a relatively narrow context of individuals seeking their destiny with a relative degree of volition. In this chapter, we examine the impact of social class on formulations of the self within vocational psychology. The essence of our contribution is to reframe the fundamental concepts about the self in vocational psychology by highlighting the reality that not every job seeker has the opportunity to implement his or her self at work.

This chapter is based on a paper delivered by the first author at the Biennial Conference of the Society for Vocational Psychology, Akron, Ohio, June 2007.
We assert that current conceptions of the self within vocational psychology need to be revised when examined in light of the vast differences in social class that exist throughout the world. In short, we propose that existing self-oriented constructs within vocational psychology assume a level of volition and choice that is not common for most workers in Western nations, let alone workers in places around the world where poverty is the norm (Sachs, 2005). In this chapter, we advocate an intentional and systematic infusion of social class into considerations of the self, which we believe offers counselors and psychologists a potent means of enhancing the inclusiveness of their efforts in theory development, research, and counseling practice.

DEFINITIONAL AND CONCEPTUAL FOUNDATIONS

The Self and Social Class: Forging the Linkage

As Hartung and Subich noted in Chapter 1 of this volume, the self has been an important topic addressed throughout modern history by scholars from numerous disciplines, including philosophy, sociology, and psychology (e.g., Kohut, 1977; Leary & Tangney, 2003). Despite significant differences in theoretical understandings of the self, some common elements have emerged in recent conceptualizations. The self is generally viewed as a highly complex, internal psychological structure with the important functions of self-regulation, information processing, understanding others, and facilitating identity-formation processes (Leary & Tangney, 2003). Each of these important adaptive tasks is thought to facilitate individuals’ survival and capacity to relate effectively with others and with the external social world (Blustein & Noumair, 1996). In addition, the self is viewed as the organizing psychological structure that provides a means of integrating various elements of intrapersonal experiences that pertain to a sense of I or me (Kohut, 1977). The vocational self represents the organizing structure that links internal experiences with the occupational context, as reflected in work-based self-dimensions (e.g., one’s conceptions of one’s interests, values, efficacy beliefs, identity, hopes and dreams for the future).

A notable missing element in most current conceptualizations of the self within vocational psychology is the essential reality that most working people do not have an opportunity to fully implement their interests, values, and abilities in their work lives (Blustein, 2006, 2008; Fouad & Brown, 2000; Navarro, Flores, & Worthington, 2007; Ostrove & Cole, 2003; Richardson, 1993; Sachs, 2005). To explore this challenge, we have adopted a social-class-infused lens to expand the vision of the self. A social class perspective offers a powerful opportunity to retain the viability of the self as vocational psychology
increasingly expands its purview to encompass people with little to no volition in their work lives (Blustein, 2006).

Social Class: A Synopsis

Despite its ubiquitous presence in many general discussions about work and career within sociology and other social sciences (e.g., Lamont, 2000; Wilson, 1996), social class historically has been neglected as a significant and complex construct within the psychological study of work and careers. (See Super, 1957, for a notable exception to the trend to neglect social class and economic factors in the vocational psychology of the 20th century.) More recent contributions, however, have increasingly included thoughtful discussions of social class in psychology (Liu, Ali, et al., 2004; Liu, Soleck, Hopps, Dunston, & Pickett, 2004; Lott, 2002) and, more specifically, within vocational psychology (Blustein et al., 2002; Fouad & Brown, 2000; Navarro et al., 2007).

One of the outcomes of recent discussions of social class has been the differentiation of the terms social class and socioeconomic status (Liu, Ali, et al., 2004; Lott & Bullock, 2007). Liu and colleagues (2004; Liu & Ali, 2005) defined social class as the “individual’s position within an economic hierarchy that is determined by his or her income, educational level, and occupation” (Liu, Ali, et al., 2004, p. 8). This economic position, in conjunction with the individual’s awareness of his or her positioning within this system, defines social class. Socioeconomic status, in contrast, comprises objective indicators, such as education and occupation, and therefore is more readily measured.

The role of social class in psychological discourse has been examined in recent years with illuminating results. From a conceptual perspective, Ostrove and Cole (2003) presented a compelling argument using critical theory underscoring the central role of social class in understanding the educational process in the United States. A recent empirical study by Navarro et al. (2007) identified the essential role of social class in predicting math and science performance accomplishments. Blustein et al. (2002) found that differences in social class were predictive of very different post-high-school work trajectories, with individuals from higher social classes using nonskilled and semi-skilled jobs as stepping stones to occupational attainment. In contrast, a cohort of individuals in similar jobs from working-class and poor backgrounds tended to end up staying in jobs that did not require much skill or training. A particularly insightful perspective on the role of social class in counseling psychology (and in vocational psychology) was advanced by Fouad and Brown (2000). Their work outlined the extensive ways in which social class and race intersect to create obstacles in a variety of domains, including the work context. In a similar vein, Liu, Soleck, et al. (2004) argued that individuals
internalize important aspects of their social class in a cluster of beliefs and attitudes known as social class worldview, a construct that is reviewed later in the chapter.

When considered collectively, the emerging literature on social class forces us to reckon with a reality that many people are born into poverty, have limited access to resources, and live in oppressive societies (Blustein, 2006; Fouad & Brown, 2000; Lott & Bullock, 2007). We also believe that discussions of social class in multiracial societies (like those found in North America and many parts of Europe) must include an explicit focus on the connection between race and poverty given the reality that poverty is far more likely among people of color.

A SOCIAL-CLASS ANALYSIS OF THE SELF IN VOCATIONAL PSYCHOLOGY

Theory Convergence

Along with making their own unique contributions, the most influential career choice and development theories converge in significant ways (Osipow, 1990; Savickas & Lent, 1994). The most basic point of convergence focuses on the complex ways in which individuals seek out an optimal fit between their personalities and the characteristics of their work environments (Savickas & Lent, 1994). The key theories of career choice and development to date have generally included a formulation of the role of intrapersonal characteristics, labeled as self, self-concept, or identity, in vocational behavior (Blustein, 1994; Blustein & Fouad, 2008). These internal attributes formed the early conceptualizations of the self in vocational psychology and led to efforts to define and explicate the meaning of the self as it relates to the world of work (Savickas & Baker, 2005).

After World War II, vocational psychology and career counseling shifted toward a focus on how a work life unfolds over time, a movement pioneered by Super (1963) that launched the notion of longitudinal “careers” (Savickas, 2002). Implementing the self in the world of work formed an integral component of Super’s (1963, 1990) developmental theory; indeed, a key segment of Super's work focused on self-concept, or an individual’s learned beliefs about his or her own qualities, characteristics, and abilities (Savickas, 2002).

Holland’s theory of personalities in work environments (1997; Spokane, Luchetta, & Richwine, 2002) rests on the premise that a strong fit between individual interests and a work environment yields high levels of career satisfaction (see Chapter 3, this volume). Holland developed a self-construct, vocational identity, that describes internal knowledge about one’s personality,
values, interests, and the like, but he did not attend to social class in his theory, which regrettably represents a significant gap in his contributions.

Social cognitive career theory (SCCT; Lent, Brown, & Hackett, 2002; see also Chapter 5, this volume) focuses on the interplay among people, their environments, and their behavior as a means of conceptualizing individuals’ thoughts about themselves, their motivation, and their resulting interest development, career choice, and career direction. SCCT emphasizes the role of intrapersonal factors, as reflected in self-efficacy, goal formation, and outcome expectations, in determining how one interfaces with his or her environment in developing a career (Blustein & Fouad, 2008).

Clearly, an underlying theme of the major career choice and development theories considered in Part I of this volume is that individuals are able to implement the self (or self-concept, vocational identity, etc.) in the world of work. The capacity to implement the self in the world of work, however, rests on a number of fundamental assumptions. First, it assumes choice and volition on the part of the job seeker, which are based to a large extent on the existence of opportunities to express oneself in one’s work environment. Second, it presupposes access to education and training. In reality, differential access to resources has created a world of work in which optimal implementation of the self in one’s work life is likely not a reality for the majority of working people in the United States and throughout the world (Blustein, 2006; Duffy & Dik, 2010; Richardson, 1993).

Expanding Self in Career Theory: Infusing Social Class

In our view, then, traditional career choice and development theories need to be revised and expanded to represent the work needs and experiences of people with little or no volition in their work lives. The notion these theories espouse of implementing the self in the world of work constitutes a privilege that many people do not have. Therein, the distinction between work and career becomes relevant. Super’s (1990) notion of a sequential, hierarchical grand career narrative laid out in his life-span, life-space theory simply does not apply to all workers, particularly those forced to take any job available to them in order to earn a living (Blustein, 2006, 2008; Blustein, McWhirter, & Perry, 2005; Richardson, 1993). In contrast, work refers to activities expended in efforts to earn a living and/or in caregiving roles (Blustein, 2006). Working includes the efforts of people around the world trying to survive via labor in the economic market and via labor in caring for their families. People with volitional careers represent a subset of those who work, often a more privileged subset.

Recognizing and addressing the assumptions inherent in traditional career choice and development theories requires thinking more broadly about how the opportunity structure influences various dimensions of the self and,
consequently, its implementation in the world of work. Attempts to integrate one's vocational identity and self-concept into one's work life can be severely compromised by the obstacles presented by poverty, classism, racism, and other forms of inequity and oppression.

Duffy and Dik (2010) constructed a similar argument, focusing on the role of family expectations, religious and spiritual factors, social service motivation, and life circumstances in their efforts to contextualize factors outside of the self that play an important role in career development. Duffy and Dik also proposed that factors such as poverty, marginalization, and economic conditions can circumscribe volition, thereby limiting the extent to which the self can be implemented in the world of work. As these pervasive social forces limit access to education and training, they constrain a person's ability to choose a job or construct a career that allows for the expression of various aspects of self, such as personality, interests, goals, and unique creative energy. Given the critiques about the limitations of contemporary vocational psychology theories and practices (e.g., Blustein, 2006; Duffy & Dik, 2010; Richardson, 1993), conceptualizations of the self, and particularly the vocational self, require an expanded vision and agenda.

EMERGING SELF CONSTRUCTS IN VOCATIONAL PSYCHOLOGY: A SOCIAL-CLASS-INFUSED REINVIGORATION OF THE SELF

Self-in-Relation: Toward a Contextualized Position

Scholarly discussions of self and identity generally comprise two camps about the nature and origins of these constructs: the individualistic perspective on the self that focuses on the internal attributes of a person (e.g., Kohut, 1977) and the more contextually based perspective that emphasizes the influence of the environment on the development of self (e.g., Blustein, 1994; see also Chapter 4, this volume). When considering contextual influences on the self, it is important to delineate the definition of context within the literature. Context refers to both past and present familial, social, relational, political, and economic influences on an individual's life experiences (Blustein, 1994: Blustein & Noumair, 1996; Vondracek, Lerner, & Schulenberg, 1986). By contextualizing conceptualizations of the self, the role of social class emerges as a prominent factor that influences the construction of the vocational self and the capacity of the vocational self to be fully manifested in the world of work.

Self-in-Relation

Blustein and Fouad (2008) advanced the construct of self-in-relation as a means of describing the reality that individuals exist in the dynamic contexts
of relationships and cultural and historical events (Blustein, 1994; Josselson, 1992). Self-concept exploration and crystallization is typically described as commencing with the implementation of the self in an educational and work domain that has been chosen freely. This premise is based on theories built on a relatively homogenous population of primarily White, European American men who are sufficiently economically privileged to enjoy volition regarding their working lives.

As we expand vocational psychology beyond its historical and current focus on a middle-class clientele, the assumption that career development entails self-concept implementation becomes increasingly untenable (Blustein & Fouad, 2008; Duffy & Dik, 2010). Moreover, the vast majority of workers around the world (particularly outside of North America, the Pacific Rim nations, and Europe) do not experience much, if any, volition in their work lives (Blustein, 2008; Sachs, 2005). Encouraging a view of the self that resides within an active and complex context positions us to understand how the self may operate in situations in which choice is limited. Moreover, the self-in-relation framework provides insight into dimensions of the self that have been neglected in vocational psychology to date.

Blustein and Fouad (2008) suggested the utility of understanding how internalized aspects of the political and economic context shape experiences of the self. In addition, the notion of reciprocity in self-in-relation to the changing work context has been emphasized as a significant contribution to the career development literature (Blustein & Fouad). More specifically, reciprocity refers to the phenomenon of human interaction with the environment whereby individuals affect their context as the context in turn affects individuals’ development (e.g., Lerner, 2002; Vondracek et al., 1986; Chapter 4, this volume). Blustein and Fouad argued that the next generation of research should focus on the construct of reciprocity as related to the development and expression of intrapersonal attributes in the working context.

Reciprocity Between Self and Context

An important direction for exploring the reciprocity between self and context involves understanding how social barriers both inhibit the expression of, and shape, the self. Social class differences, along with race and gender (see Chapters 11 and 12, this volume), function as social and political filters that affect nearly all of the resources that foster volitional career development. For individuals born into poor or working-class families, access to education, decent housing, adequate health care, role models, social networks, and other essential facilitative conditions are often limited. These limitations are more pronounced for individuals of color and for immigrant populations in the United States and many other Western nations. In our view, continuing to
conceptualize the career choice process as implementing self-concept in the world of work without an explicit acknowledgement of social class, gender, and racial barriers offers an inaccurate and naive portrayal of the reality of vocational behavior for most citizens around the world. Moreover, continued neglect of the vast differences in the opportunity structure may inadvertently function to support notions that blame the victims of disadvantage (cf. Blustein et al., 2005; Richardson, 1993).

The self-in-relation construct underscores a balanced locus of causality with respect to understanding self-experiences, particularly related to the role of the self as an initiator of behavior and activities. Rather than viewing the self as the primary motivator of individual efforts (as detailed in Kohut’s, 1977, self-psychology theory), we view the self as connected in complex ways with social, political, economic, and cultural forces that will often dictate or constrain volitional behavior. As an example, consider a young woman who grows up in a poor urban community in the United States with the intention of becoming a physician. Her hopes to implement her self-concept in the work context may be compromised by a need to take jobs during high school and college, which may limit her time to study and excel in the pre-medical curriculum. Implicit and explicit forms of discouragement regarding her hope to manifest her dreams in her working life may be evident in comments she receives from teachers and professors, who might send messages that girls and women are not sufficiently skilled in science and math to succeed in a medical career.

As this example conveys, the vision of self as originator of action and driver of career exploration and development may not be viable for individuals residing in communities in which opportunities are limited. The optimal way to view these complex motivational issues is via the lens of recursive relationships, wherein both the self and the context influence each other in highly complex and nuanced ways (cf. Lerner, 2002). Another characteristic of the self-in-relation construct is that intrapersonal experiences reflect both internalized psychological processes as well as reactions to social barriers and resources. As we detail in the next section, the self-in-relation construct encourages a close examination of how individuals internalize specific aspects of the social context, including social class.

REVITALIZING THE SELF FOR THE 21ST CENTURY: INFUSING INTERNALIZATIONS OF SOCIAL BARRIERS

The barriers evoked by differences in social class, race, and gender also play a considerable role in the construction and manifestation of selected dimensions of the self. Blustein and Fouad (2008) concluded their discussion
of the self-in-relation by proposing an integration of social and political dimensions more intentionally, as these factors represent specific internalizations of selected sources of inequities. Internalization represents the transformation of external social influences, including resources and barriers, into intrapsychic structures, affecting self-experience and the capacity of the self to manage external demands and intrapsychic processes. Internalized social influences, particularly those that are pervasive and evocative to one’s sense of self cohesion, can be transmuted into dimensions of the self. Blustein and Fouad (2008) proposed two internalized dimensions of the self-in-relation: racial identity status (Helms & Cook, 1999) and critical consciousness (Blustein, 2006). We add one other dimension to this discussion: social class worldview (Liu, Soleck, et al., 2004). These three dimensions of the self represent internalizations of external social and demographic attributes that affect and interact in complex ways with the social barriers that exist within one’s life space. Moreover, the three internalized constructs provide a creative way to understand how external factors (including, but not limited to, social class) affect the structure of the self.

Racial Identity Status

Racial identity status refers to the conceptual differences in how people understand and react to racial diversity existing in society (Helms & Cook, 1999). Differences in racial identity status capture specific ways in which individuals in multicultural societies react to and internalize their racial identity in relation to the racial climate of their proximal and distal communities. Helms and Cook (1999) articulated a model in which individuals may use one or more racial identity statuses to guide their race-based interactions. The racial identity literature is clear that everyone who lives in a multiracial society experiences differences in racial identity statuses, including white individuals and people of color.

As reflected in the racial identity literature, the specific statuses provide an internalized framework that individuals use to organize their perceptions of themselves and of others in the social milieu. The literature on racial identity status has many implications for vocational psychology (Blustein, 2006; Helms & Cook, 1999). An essential implication of racial identity theory is the rich insight it provides about the complex way that social oppression affects people’s lives and their inner psychological experiences. In this manner, researchers and practitioners may have a viable means of documenting the pervasive impact of racism and may be able to help clients use diverse racial statuses to deal with complex contextual challenges.

Within many Western nations, race and social class have a powerful and insidious relationship in that people of color often find themselves
at the lower end of the socioeconomic ladder (Blustein, 2006; Helms & Cook, 1999). The infusion of racial identity into a social-class-infused conceptualization, therefore, acknowledges a core reality that individuals’ racial identity intersects with other dimensions of the self. The review of existing research on the intersection of social class and racial identity by Fouad and Brown (2000) revealed some modest effects; however, the conclusion of their integrative analysis was that far more research is need to fully explicate the nature of the relationships between racial identity and social class.

Critical Consciousness

Critical consciousness evolved as a construct from liberation theology (Martín-Baró, 1989) and liberation pedagogy (Freire, 1993/1970). Within the working context, critical consciousness encompasses the capacity of individuals to understand their context; the social and economic forces that affect their access to education, training, and work opportunities; and knowledge about how to manage these challenges (Blustein, 2006). Developing critical consciousness is important in understanding how systemic and contextual factors create barriers for the advancement of certain groups based on race, ethnicity, gender, class, and/or sexual orientation. Critical consciousness has a direct connection to social class; specifically, the focus of work on critical consciousness has been on the poor and working classes, who often do not experience much, if any, power in their lives. The notion of helping disenfranchised populations gain critical knowledge about the origins and nature of social and economic inequity provides a powerful antidote to the view that poor and working class individuals do not have the power of knowledge to combat their station in life.

Critical consciousness can empower individuals to make a more informed assessment about the lack of resources that are endemic to individuals from poor and working-class communities. Rather than viewing these conditions as a static feature of life or as a result of individual or community deficits, critical consciousness can result in a fresh perspective that provides empowerment for individuals. According to Freire (1993/1970), education is critical to liberation from oppression. Unfortunately, not all students have equal access to educational resources, as reflected by many urban students attending overcrowded and underfunded public schools. Critical consciousness can help individuals reduce self-blame for work-related struggles and also can facilitate the sort of activities that actually may result in greater volition, and optimally, greater opportunities for self-concept implementation.
Social Class Worldview

Social class worldview represents a way of understanding how individuals internalize and make meaning of their social class identity and the meaning of others’ social class identities (Liu, Soleck, et al., 2004). Liu, Soleck, et al. (2004) proposed the social class worldview model (SCWM), which consists of five domains. The first domain, consciousness, involves an awareness of one’s social class, attitudes (i.e., thoughts and emotions linked to social class), and salience (i.e., degree of importance of social class to a person). The second domain, referent groups, comprises the people throughout a person’s life who influence one’s social class worldview. The third domain, property relationship, refers to the role of materialism, such as the possessions a person values and expects to have. The fourth domain, lifestyle, denotes how a person coordinates time and resources consistent with his or her social class and context (e.g., what is considered to be normal or expected for a person to spend time with family or where to go on vacation). The fifth domain, behaviors, constitutes how social class behaviors are learned and strengthen a person’s social class worldview.

Social class worldview, then, represents another salient dimension of the self in which social messages and barriers are internalized into psychological structures. The impact of social class worldview in relation to work-related behaviors and attitudes has not been identified to date. Yet we believe that applications of the important contributions of Liu and his colleagues (Liu & Ali, 2005; Liu, Ali, et al., 2004) to the psychological study of working and the self would be very informative.

A number of the domains of social class worldview provide insight into the ways in which the vocational self internalizes social class. Consciousness, for example, represents a process by which the vocational self incorporates social class information. By internalizing a consciousness about the impact of social class in one’s work life, it is possible to consider the diverse ways in which social class knowledge can be empowering or constraining. The infusion of critical consciousness, via counseling and psychoeducational interventions, can provide a means of transforming the vocational self from the constraining pole to a more empowered pole. Similarly, referent groups have the potential to influence the construction of the vocational self. For example, individuals who are exposed to referent group members who have internalized a sense of resignation about their social class might experience a similar sense of disempowerment.

From a broader perspective, variations in social class worldview may affect how individuals develop and sustain aspirations, particularly in relation to goals that facilitate upward social mobility. In addition, the impact of social
class worldview on other dimensions of the self, such as self-esteem and self-efficacy, would seem informative for subsequent research and practice. As an example, consider a counseling client who is becoming aware of how her social class background has limited her resources and circumscribed her work-based options. By infusing social class worldview into one’s counseling, the client can learn how the various dimensions of her vocational self have been internalized, resulting in a collusion to sustain her social class status. In unpacking these elements of social class worldview, the client can become more critical of the social system, which can help to liberate her from internalized sources of constraint in her life.

According to Liu, Ali, et al. (2004), different forms of oppression, such as racism, sexism, and classism, are interrelated. Liu and his colleagues proposed that social class needs to be considered as a cultural factor, an internal psychological process, and as subjective (in that social class cannot be understood solely by the limited criteria of income or educational level). Moreover, the status and symbols of social class can vary by an individual’s worldview, even among individuals in the same social class. The SCWM offers a potentially informative and inclusive perspective for the psychological study of working in that it entails an examination of both the reality of social class differences and the resultant impact of these distinctions on internal constructions within the self.

IMPLICATIONS FOR THEORY, RESEARCH, AND PRACTICE

Perhaps the most obvious implication of this discussion about social class is that the assumption of self-concept implementation, which forms a common core of most career choice and development theories, needs to be revisited if we hope to develop a truly inclusive psychology of working (cf. Blustein, 2006; Duffy & Dik, 2010). Moreover, one can argue that the increasing instability in the world of work is creating a sense of unpredictability in the work lives of the well-educated, thereby creating an even more compelling rationale for significant revisions in conceptualizations of the self in vocational psychology.

Theoretical and Research Implications

From a theoretical perspective, the social class informed analysis presented herein suggests that a more relativistic construct, such as Blustein and Fouad’s (2008) self-in-relation construct, would be a viable means of integrating existing self-related constructs in vocational psychology. In short, the focus on poverty and lack of opportunity, as detailed in this chapter and in
other recent contributions (Blustein, 2006; Duffy & Dik, 2010; Fouad & Brown, 2000; Ostrove & Cole, 2003; Richardson, 1993), forces a reckoning with the fundamental questions of what happens to individuals’ dreams when they are denied or deferred. These questions are part of a vibrant rhetoric that has been central to debates about the nature of social and political structures, but they are also empirical questions that merit thoughtful responses. Qualitative research, in particular, would be informative in detailing how individuals find other sources of satisfaction when they cannot implement their self-concepts in the world of work. Furthermore, the cost of these deferred and denied dreams, from individual and social perspectives, is important to document as we advocate for greater equity in access to the opportunity structure.

**Practice Implications**

Counselors and psychologists can benefit significantly from attending to the overt impact and nuances of social class in their counseling work. From a broader perspective, our discussion suggests the importance of exploring the client’s array of resources and barriers early in the counseling process. Active and engaged counseling that helps clients to access resources, such as skill building and high levels of educational attainment, relational supports, and other supportive services, can provide some assistance in overcoming external barriers. The recommendations outlined by Blustein, Kenna, Gill, and DeVoy (2008), designed to enhance opportunities for individuals with less-than-optimal choices, would be helpful for individuals from less affluent backgrounds. These recommendations include enhancing clients’ work-based and academic skills, strengthening critical consciousness, facilitating empowerment, and scaffolding toward volition via activism on the part of the client and counselor. (See Blustein et al., 2008, for more details on counseling approaches that seem viable for individuals with less choice in their educational and vocational lives.)

In addition, counseling practitioners may benefit from exploring how internalizations of social barriers affect the ways in which individuals experience themselves in relation to the world of work. For clients who have faced considerable obstacles in their lives, we believe interventions that reduce tendencies to self-blame or denigrate one’s cultural, social class, or racial background are essential. For example, consider a Native American client who states that her people are not capable of moving into an upwardly mobile educational and work-based trajectory. A counselor who can debunk these myths with empathy and compassion would provide a powerful intervention that is both liberating and facilitative of greater effort to maximize skill development. Counselors also need to attend
to the complex ways that sexism, racism, and classism interact to influence the development and manifestation of the self. Practitioners who are able to affirm the reality of social oppression in a way that enhances critical consciousness optimally foster adaptive internal constructions that will be empowering.

CONCLUSION

This chapter intentionally focused on a set of issues that have been relatively neglected in current discussions of the self in vocational psychology. Although we focused on the inherent barriers that social class can create for many individuals, we did not intend to negate the sense of freedom and satisfaction that can result from the crystallization and implementation of a sense of self that represents the full breadth and depth of an individual's inner experiences. Indeed, we value the promise of self-concept implementation for individuals and their employers, and we affirm the core assumptions of most career choice and development theories about the utility of a good person–environment fit. Our goals have been to educate the reader about the need for a more inclusive study of working to help to make the dream of self-concept implementation a reality for a greater proportion of people around the world and to inspire the full talents of our discipline to work on a vocational psychology that represents the true inheritance of Parsons’s (1909) vision for poor and working-class individuals.

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