PART 1

Theoretical Foundations
CHAPTER 3

The Psychology of Working: A New Perspective for a New Era

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Abstract

This chapter serves as an introduction to The Oxford Handbook of the Psychology of Working. The two foci of the psychology of working, a critique of existing discourses about work and career and a framework for a new perspective for understanding the psychological nature of working, are reviewed. A brief synopsis of each of the sections and chapters in this book is then presented, with a summary of how these contributions function, independently and collectively, to create the foundation for a dignified and inclusive discourse on the role of work in people’s lives. The chapter concludes with suggestions for advancing the psychology-of-working perspective.

Key Words: psychology of working, working, career development, organizational psychology, poverty, social justice, career counseling

Working is a central aspect of life, providing a source of structure, a means of survival, connection to others, and optimally a means of self-determination (Blustein, 2006, 2008; Budd, 2011; Juntunen, 2006; Richardson, 1993, 2012). Across the globe, people devote considerable time and effort in preparing for, adjusting to, and managing their work lives. Many of the major crises affecting people and communities have been and continue to be related to working (Clifton, 2011; Wilson, 1996). These crises often affect nations and states at a macro level, and have a profound impact on the course and trajectory of individual lives (Sen, 1999; Wilson, 1996). Wars, famines, and risks to personal safety have all been directly related to access to work (Clifton, 2011; Sachs, 2005); in short, lack of work is a significant cause of social and economic disruptions as well as poverty. At the same time, working, when it is dignified and meaningful, can create the foundation for a satisfying life that allows people to support themselves and their families, and to find an outlet for their values and interests in the world of work (Lent, Brown, & Hackett, 2002; Savickas, 2011; Super, 1980).

A close review of narratives, memoirs, fiction, and other forms of artistic expression underscores the centrality of work in people’s lives (Blustein, 2006; Bowe, Bowe, & Streeter, 2000; Budd, 2011; Terkel, 1974). The importance of working has not escaped the attention of psychologists in their roles as scholars, policy advocates, and practitioners (e.g., Blustein, 2008; Brown, & Lent, 2005; Fassinger, 2008; Fouad & Bynner, 2008; Hall and Associates, 1996; Savickas, 2011). The results of this attention have led to sustained studies of working, careers, and occupational well-being, yielding a rich literature encompassing a wide array of work-related issues and challenges (e.g., Brown & Lent, 2005; Duffy, Diemer, Perry, Laurenzi, & Torrey, 2012; Eggerth, DeLancy, Flynn, & Jacobson, 2012; Flores et al., 2011; Quick & Tetrick, 2010; Walsh & Savickas, 2005). In fact, much of the early work of applied psychologists (the forerunner of clinical, counseling, and industrial/organizational [I/O] psychology) was
devoted to helping people sort out their work-based plans and helping organizations select the most appropriate candidates for an ever-increasing range of jobs (Koppes, 2007; Savickas & Baker, 2005). The applied specialties in psychology (with the exception of I/O psychology) soon became infused with a focus on mental health issues, which clearly helped to expand the impact of psychology and to benefit people in need of services.

Following the trend toward increasing specialization within psychology, working, as a context for human behavior, became increasingly compartmentalized throughout most of psychology, ultimately yielding a highly insular view of a portion of our lives that takes up a significant amount of time and energy. For example, with some notable exceptions (e.g., Axelrod, 1999; Lowman, 1993; Richardson, 2012; Socarides & Kramer, 1997), working is not a central part of most psychotherapy and personality theories. Furthermore, within North America (and in many other parts of the globe), psychological practice and scholarship on working increasingly has tended to focus on those with some degree of privilege and choice. These factors, when considered together, have led many scholars to critique existing discourses and to advocate for a more inclusive perspective of the role of work in one’s psychological well-being (e.g., Blustein, McWhirter, & Perry, 2005; Harmon & Farmer, 1983; Richardson, 1993).

In this chapter (and in many chapters within this Handbook), the term “psychology of working” is used to capture both the critique of the extant foci and emphases in the work-based psychological disciplines as well as the emerging perspective that seeks to encompass the full range of working experiences for the full range of individuals who work and who want to work. As a means of enacting the inclusive agenda of this movement, I have developed this Handbook project to bring together a community of scholars and practitioners to think carefully and critically about the complex challenges that people face in their work lives across a wide array of contexts and situations.

In this introductory chapter, I describe the foundation that exists for the psychology of working and outline the potential for this Handbook to expand and deepen the emerging discourse about the role of work in people’s lives. After presenting the basic premises of the psychology of working, I then review the sections and chapters, with the intention of setting the stage for the contributions that follow. I conclude with some observations culled after reading the chapters, with the intention of highlighting future directions for scholarship, practice, and theory development.

What Is the Psychology of Working?

The psychology of working, as a perspective, can be traced to the beginning of applied psychology, which focused extensively on working, both from individual and organizational perspectives (Koppes, 2007; Savickas & Baker, 2005; Zickar, 2004). Beginning with Parsons in vocational guidance and Munsterberg and others in personnel psychology, nascent psychologists in the early part of the 20th century initiated the study of work with the intention of broadening our understanding of this essential part of life. At the same time, many of the early psychologists who studied working also had an interest in applied practice. Vocational guidance scholars and practitioners were interested in helping people make wise choices about their future with the goal of enhancing the meaning and satisfaction of their working lives. Personnel psychologists were interested in a similar array of questions regarding person–environment fit, but from the perspective of the organization, with the intention of improving productivity, worker tenure, and job satisfaction. By the middle of the 20th century, both fields burgeoned, creating impressive bodies of scholarship, thoughtful theories, and well-respected practices. While the original distinctions of vocational guidance and personnel psychology soon gave way to a plethora of disciplines and subdisciplines, the common theme among these approaches was, and continues to be, the psychological study of working. One of the challenges, however, was in establishing a conceptual framework to integrate these disciplines and reduce the artificial splits that had emerged, separating the various psychological studies of working. In addition, the artificial splits functioned to separate the study of working from that of other domains of life, leading to a circumscribed focus that has adversely affected the entire psychological enterprise.

Prior to a more detailed overview of the psychology of working, it is important to clarify what the psychology of working is not. First and foremost, it is not a theory, per se; rather, it is a perspective that grew out of a confluence of trends within psychology and within the broader intellectual world. The psychology-of-working perspective initially emerged from a critique of existing discourses about work and career that have been dominant in applied psychology and career development for the past few decades. The critique levied against traditional studies of
career choice and development as well as traditional I/O psychology helped to carve out the contours of a new and more inclusive perspective. The perspective that is emerging is early in its development; however, this Handbook is designed to facilitate the growth of an inclusive, empathic, and just approach to understanding the role of work in people’s lives.

A second and equally essential point is that the psychology of working is not attached to any one scholar or group of scholars. The psychology-of-working perspective reflects decades of sustained critique of the traditional array of assumptions and perspectives about work and career. As reflected in this volume, the psychology-of-working perspective has emerged on the shoulders of courageous scholars who have identified the inherent biases in studying and intervening in the work lives of people with a modicum of privilege (e.g., Harmon & Farmer, 1983; Helms & Cook, 1999; Kornhauser, 1957; Richardson, 1993; Smith, 1983; Zickar, 2004). In addition, these critiques continue to emerge with new ideas for the expansion of psychological considerations of working and career, often without an explicitly stated overarching perspective (e.g., Helms & Cook; Szymanski & Parker, 2003). One of the objectives, therefore, of this Handbook is to provide an opportunity for a sustained synthesis of critiques and new paradigms and perspectives.

In the sections that follow, I introduce the psychology of working by first focusing on its role as a critique of existing discourses. This is followed by a selected review of the most important attributes of the psychology-of-working perspective. When considered collectively, these two sections provide readers with a “briefing” of the major features of the psychology-of-working perspective, thereby setting the stage for the chapters that follow. Embedded in the discussion that follows is the rationale for the present Handbook and an overview of how the psychology of working can transform how psychologists, social scientists, and counseling professionals understand and intervene in the work lives of people across the full spectrum of power, privilege, and social location.

The Psychology of Working as a Critique

One of the trends in the psychological study of working over the course of the 20th century was the move from exploring working for the vast majority of people who worked and who wanted to work to the exploration of the work lives of people with some degree of volition and privilege. With some notable exceptions (e.g., Harmon & Farmer, 1983; Kornhauser, 1957; Richardson, 1993; Smith, 1983), the agendas of contemporary vocational psychology and I/O psychology, over time, have been on understanding and facilitating the work lives of people who tend to have some level of choice in how they will engage in their work lives. Within the sections that follow, I review specific critiques that have emerged from analyses of the impact of external barriers and diverse sources of oppression on human behavior and well-being.

Feminism and gender. One of the most important critiques came from feminist thinkers, who applied new ideas and political perspectives to the established norms about work and career, noting how the field had marginalized the lives of women who often faced daunting challenges in gaining access to training, employment, and dignified work (e.g., Barnett & Hyde, 2001; Betz & Fitzgerald, 1987; Brown, 2009). The feminist critique has generated a broad and more inclusive perspective that has sought to examine the connections and disconnections among various life roles (Fassinger, 2008). For example, feminist scholars highlighted the overt and covert ways that sexism constrained the development of interests and limited upward mobility for women in the workplace (Betz & Fitzgerald, 1987; Fassinger, 2008). The feminist critiques have also evoked thoughtful dialogues on the hegemony of market work over care work (Richardson, 2012). In addition, feminist scholars have creatively explored the complex relationships between personal and political issues (Brown, 2009).

Race and culture. Some of the seminal critiques of career development have emerged from incisive examinations of how race and racism function to constrain opportunities for people of color in many Western cultures (Carter & Cook, 1992; Helms & Cook, 1999; Smith, 1983). In short, the critiques emerging from scholars and practitioners concerned with race and culture have highlighted how access to opportunity is unfairly distributed, in large measure, due to racism and other forms of social oppression. These critiques also have generated a growing interest in how culture frames the discourse about work and careers (Stead, 2004). By examining the impact of race and culture in the psychological study of working, we have been forced to reckon with inherent biases in traditional, Western-based perspectives of work and career, thereby generating an essential foundation for an inclusive and politically embedded psychological study of working.

Sexual orientation. The discrimination that individuals face due to their sexual orientation has
generated a necessary critique of the prevailing career choice and development perspectives and assumptions (Chung, 2003; Lidderdale, Croteau, Anderson, Tovar-Murray, & Davis, 2007). The stigma that is evoked by nonheterosexual orientations is particularly pernicious in many education and work-based settings, often resulting in significant challenges for people as they develop work-based plans and adjust to work (Croteau, Anderson, DiStefano, & Kampa-Kokesch, 2000). A key consequence of discrimination and living in fear of psychological and, at times, physical abuse is the constrictions of opportunities for a self-determined work life. As such, giving voice to the experiences of LGBT individuals in the workplace also serves to raise concerns about the viability of the traditional career narrative.

Disability. One of the most consistent critiques of the focus on volitional careers and studies of relatively well-educated workers has emerged from the rehabilitation movement (Fabian & Leisner, 2005; Neff, 1985; Szymanski & Parker, 2003). By focusing on the nature of disability and handicapping conditions, scholars and practitioners have had to confront inequities at work and have faced clients who often have had less-than-optimal levels of choice in their work lives. In fact, some of the most articulate calls for an inclusive psychology of working have been advanced by Neff (1985) and others (e.g., Szymanski & Parker, 2003), who have advocated for a contextualized study of working in people's lives. When considering the impact of disabling conditions at the workplace, we are confronted with several issues that are inherent in the contemporary vision of the psychology of working. For example, some disabling conditions constrain one's options, via social barriers that are unrelated to the way in which a given disability may affect one's work performance. In addition, the stigma that is often evoked by disabling conditions influences the ways that individuals make meaning of, and respond to, work-based challenges (Neff, 1985). In effect, the psychology of disability has set the stage for an inclusive and contextualized psychological study of working.

Epistemology. From an epistemological level, critiques of existing psychological discourses, including the discourse about work and careers, have emerged from social constructionist perspectives (Burr, 1995; Gergen, 2009). One of the hallmarks of these critiques is the questioning of existing practices, theories, and underlying assumptions about a given phenomenon or body of knowledge. Beginning with the seminal articles by Savickas (1993) and Richardson (1993), the assumptions that have formed the basis of much of the study of working, careers, and psychological practice have been identified. The social constructionist critique encourages a more relativistic understanding of knowledge, acknowledging that the assumptions that guide a field of inquiry are shaped by relationships and culture (Burr, 1995; Flum, 2001; Schultheiss, 2003, 2007). In addition, the social constructionist perspectives seek to unpack how knowledge is constructed, identifying the social and political discourses that frame how questions are asked and how they are examined. (Further details on social constructionist analyses can be found in Blustein, Schultheiss, & Flum, 2004, and Chapter 3 in this volume.)

Summary. As reflected in this brief overview, critiques have been raised from multiple vantage points, with a number of common themes. First, the study of careers, per se, while creative and substantive in its contributions, has functioned to circumscribe the range and depth of how working is studied in psychology and how individuals and organizations can achieve well-being in their working lives. Second, the prevailing discourse in the study of working and career has resulted in the relative neglect of those without as much choice in their working lives. Third, with notable exceptions, many contemporary perspectives on working and career have tended to marginalize attention to the pervasive role of social barriers in creating unequal access to work. Fourth, again with some notable exceptions (e.g., Richardson, 2012; Savickas, 2011; Super, Savickas, & Super, 1996), the psychological study of working has become increasingly insular, creating ideas and practices that are not consistently embedded in the broader fabric of life. These critiques helped to establish a foundation for the development of a psychology-of-working perspective, as reviewed next.

The Psychology of Working as a Perspective

The development of the contemporary psychology-of-working perspective can be traced directly to the contribution by Richardson (1993), who argued convincingly that psychologists needed to reframe their foci to include (1) an emphasis on working rather than careers; (2) an expansion of prevailing epistemological perspectives to embrace social constructionism; (3) attention to both care work and market work; and (4) an exploration of working from an interdisciplinary perspective. These recommendations served to integrate
numerous critiques and established a framework for an expanded and inclusive study of working. While the chapters included in this Handbook will elucidate the full scope of the psychology-of-working perspective, a brief overview of its most salient attributes is warranted in this chapter.

The role of values in the psychology of working. Prilleltensky (1997) published a seminal article arguing that psychologists need to be aware of the values that guide their work. Eschewing the notion that psychological science and practice are value free or value neutral, Prilleltensky noted that values and moral decisions permeate our work. According to Prilleltensky, psychologists ought to articulate their values and moral decisions and should be able to identify ways that these decisions are manifested in their work.

Infusing a focus on values and morals into the psychology-of-working perspective suggests several important implications. Given that working takes place in a social and political context that frames the nature of individuals’ experiences, the decisions that scholars and practitioners make about how to study work have vast consequences for individuals, families, and communities. For example, psychologists who are studying the best ways to train leaders in organizations may be asked to provide guidance on how managers can reduce grievances for violations of workers’ rights. In addition, studying the career choice and development of middle-class students attending relatively prestigious colleges manifests an inherent set of values. Of course, each of these endeavors is a legitimate expression of the applied aspects of our work, often resulting in significant positive outcomes for individuals, families, and communities. For example, psychologists who are studying the best ways to train leaders in organizations may be asked to provide guidance on how managers can reduce grievances for violations of workers’ rights. In addition, studying the career choice and development of middle-class students attending relatively prestigious colleges manifests an inherent set of values. Of course, each of these endeavors is a legitimate expression of the applied aspects of our work, often resulting in significant positive outcomes for individuals, families, and communities. However, by ignoring the question of values, we risk making decisions about scholarship and practice that may function to create and/or sustain privileges making decisions about scholarship and practice that may function to create and/or sustain privileges that guide their work. Eschewing the notion that psychological science and practice are value free or value neutral, Prilleltensky noted that values and moral decisions permeate our work. According to Prilleltensky, psychologists ought to articulate their values and moral decisions and should be able to identify ways that these decisions are manifested in their work.

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Core assumptions of the psychology of working. The psychology-of-working perspective has several core tenets that are intended to guide the study of working and the development of interventions for individuals, organizations, and communities. The list that follows is not intended to be exhaustive; rather, it summarizes the main points that have been articulated to date in the literature (e.g., Blustein, 2006, 2011; Fassinger, 2008; Fouad & Byrner, 2008; Juntunen, 2006; Richardson, 1993, 2012).

- Diverse epistemologies, including logical positivism, post-positivism, as well as social constructionism, are viable strategies to use in understanding the nature of working. Rather than creating an implicit or explicit expectation that scholarship ought to endorse a particular modality of understanding the nature of the world, the psychology-of-working perspective chooses not to reify one vantage point over another. The choice of epistemologies ought to be based on the questions that are posed and the values that are inherent in a project. Recent research on issues of relevance to the broadly inclusive study of working advocated in this Handbook has relied upon diverse epistemologies, ranging from logical positivist (e.g., Duffy et al., 2012; Eggerth, Delaney, Flynn, & Jacobson, 2012; Kenny, Blustein, Haase, Jackson, & Perry, 2006) to post-positivist (Blustein et al., 2010; Flores et al., 2011), and social constructionist perspectives (Stead & Perry, 2012).

- Work is a central aspect of life. While obvious to most readers, the central role that work plays in life, in promoting or inhibiting well-being, and in establishing the basis for healthy, safe, and nurturing communities is clearly affirmed. The argument about the central role of work in life has been constructed around extensive research (Blustein, 2008; Quick & Tetrick, 2010; Richardson, 2012) as well as an examination of narratives, memoirs, bodies of art, literature, and music (Blustein, 2006; Budd, 2011). As reflected in our early evolutionary history, working is a central organizing aspect of life, one that connects people across historical and cultural boundaries (Blustein, 2006; Budd, 2011; Donkin, 2001).

- Working is central to mental health. A related assumption that is central to the psychology-of-working perspective is that working has the potential to foster and sustain positive mental health. Considerable scholarship supports this view, including studies of the impact of unemployment and underemployment (e.g., Paul & Moser, 2009), in which mental health problems have been causally linked to the absence of working. In addition, the availability of dignified work has been associated with reductions in mental health problems, antisocial behavior, and other maladaptive behaviors (e.g., Blustein, 2006; Shore, 1998).

- The psychological study of working includes in its purview the work lives of everyone who works and who wants to work. As indicated earlier, one of the fundamental assumptions of the psychology of working is the creation of a sufficiently large and welcoming tent to include everyone who works and who wants to work (Richardson, 1993). This assumption does not exclude the traditional focus on career choice.
and development, career management, or other perspectives that have framed the psychological study of careers to date. Rather, this point is designed to embrace the full scope of working across the globe, including jobs that represent the culmination of planning and significant education as well as jobs that are taken for survival (and all of the jobs that are located between these two poles). In addition, the psychology-of-working perspective includes in its mission issues pertaining to unemployment, underemployment, and adjusting to disabling conditions that adversely affect access to work.

- **Work and nonwork experiences are often seamlessly experienced in the natural course of people's lives.** As noted earlier, psychological theory and practice has become increasingly insular, leading to artificial splits that are not consistent with the lived experience of people. As such, the relatively seamless nature of life ought to be captured in scholarship and practice about working. In contrast to the increasing compartmentalization of psychology, the psychology-of-working perspective strives to reduce or eliminate a priori categories that separate psychological discourses. The optimal discourse would be one that examines the lived experience of working, which is conveyed in the language of people talking about their lives. As conveyed in memoirs and narrative excerpts (e.g., Blustein, 2006; Bowe et al., 2000; Terkel, 1974), working is inextricably connected to the rest of our lives. We inhabit multiple roles in life and these roles intersect with each other in organized and random ways, creating a rich tapestry of life experiences (cf. Super, 1980).

  - **An experience-near understanding of the role of work in people's lives is integral to the psychological exploration of working.** To understand the complex and nuanced nature of working, psychologists would benefit from developing an empathic approach to the experiences that individuals face in their work-based tasks. Recent qualitative research (e.g., Flores et al., 2011; Foulad, Cotter, Carter, Bernfeld, & Liu, 2011; McIlveen, Beccaria, DuPreez, & Patton, 2010) has revealed deep levels of complexity and nuance in the ways in which people understand and make meaning about their working experiences, underscoring the importance of empathy and relatedness in research. In a broader sense, encouraging an experience-near connection to working has the potential to enhance counseling practice and public policy initiatives about working.

- **The psychology-of-working perspective seeks to identify how social, economic, and political forces influence the distribution of resources and affordances.** By including a focus on macro-level factors, psychologists are able to understand how working serves as one of the most vital playing fields in life, the location of both dreams and disappointments. While traditional studies of working within vocational and I/O psychology have explored and identified social and economic barriers, the psychology-of-working perspective places considerations of these resources and obstacles at the forefront of conceptualizations, research, practice, and policy recommendations.

- **The psychology-of-working perspective embraces the fact that working occurs in various contexts, including the marketplace and caregiving contexts.** As Richardson (1993, 2012) has so compellingly argued, work is not limited to employment for money, goods, or services; a truly comprehensive approach to working necessitates a focus on care work (caring for family members, loved ones, etc.), which is, and has been, a constant across time periods and cultures.

- **The psychology-of-working perspective embeds conceptualizations of working in cultural and relational contexts.** Recent conceptualizations of working that have explicitly infused cultural and relational frameworks have yielded informative perspectives about unemployment (e.g., Stead & Perry, 2012), social class (McIlveen et al., 2010), care work (Richardson, 2012), and poverty (Blustein, 2011b). In these formulations, culture and relationships are seen as the vehicle through which people make sense of, and attach meaning to, their lives.

- **As a framework, the psychology of working has the potential to enrich existing theories.** The broad and inclusive scope of the psychology of working provides an opportunity for existing career choice, career counseling, psychotherapy, organizational psychology, and career management theories to expand their impact and explanatory reach. As a meta-perspective, the psychology of working offers traditional theories with the conceptual rationale and tools to generate new formulations that can expand their relevance as the world of work continues its radical transformation.

- **Optimally, working has the potential to fulfill core human needs.** Numerous scholars have sought to identify the needs that working can fulfill (e.g., Neff, 1985; O’Brien, 1986). When considering these various taxonomies from an integrative...
perspective, the following three sets of needs have been identified (Blustein, 2006):

- Need for survival and power: Harkening back to our hunter-gatherer roots, working, at its core, is integral to our survival. In addition, working has the potential to enhance one's power in the world, via material acquisition as well as the attainment of status and prestige.
- Need for social connection: For many people, working provides extensive opportunities for relationships (Flum, 2001; Schultheiss, 2003). Furthermore, working serves as one of the major theaters for interactions with others, including relationships that are supportive as well as relationships that are problematic. In addition, working provides an informal connection to the social world via the sense of contribution that people experience in their work (Blustein, 2011a).
- Need for self-determination: At its best, working provides people with opportunities to engage in activities that are interesting, stimulating, and meaningful, thereby fostering a sense of self-determination (Ryan & Deci, 2000). In addition, self-determination can be attained via extrinsically motivating tasks that are useful in helping people attain goals that they value.

**Current Status of the Psychology-of-Working Perspective**

As reflected in these tenets, the psychology-of-working perspective offers a potentially transformative framework for enhancing and expanding the way in which work is understood in psychological research, practice, and public policy advocacy. At its core, it is an inclusive perspective that seeks to reduce the privileging of affluence in contemporary psychological discourses about working. The initial forays into the psychology-of-working perspective have generated considerable scholarship and program development efforts. While some of these contributions have been linked explicitly to the ideas embedded in the psychology of working, others reflect a more subtle shifting zeitgeist that reflects an intellectual climate that is increasingly welcoming of a critical examination of the traditional career narrative.

The social justice aspects embedded in the critiques of traditional studies of careers have informed considerable shifts across the spectrum of theory, research, and practice. For example, social justice considerations are now more explicitly infused into new texts (e.g., Hartung & Subich, 2011; Watson & McMahon, 2012), review articles and chapters (e.g., Fassinger, 2008; Fouad, 2007), and theoretical initiatives (Richardson, 2012; Vondracek, Ferreira, & Santos, 2010). In addition, an emerging body of scholarship is exploring how differential access to the opportunity structure creates a domino effect that functions to sustain inequality and injustice (Blustein, McWhirter, & Perry, 2005; Toporek & Chope, 2006).

Other initiatives emerging from the sociopolitical critique inherent in the psychology of working are evident in research on unemployment and dislocated workers (e.g., Blustein, Medvide, & Wan, 2011; Fouad et al., 2011). In addition, a number of incisive articles examining work-based immigration have used a psychology-of-working perspective, yielding important insights about irregular migrant workers (e.g., Marfleet & Blustein, 2011) as well as Latino/a immigrants entering the United States (e.g., Eggerth et al., 2012). While examinations of poverty and social class have been part of the career discourse for decades (cf. Super, 1957), recent initiatives have been more numerous and substantive, including important contributions by Diemer and Ali (2009), Noonan, Hall, and Blustein (2007), and McIlveen et al. (2010).

Furthermore, innovations in counseling practice have been generated from an explicit incorporation of the psychology-of-working perspective. One particularly compelling example is the work by Hees, Rottinghaus, Briddick, and Conrath (2012), who explored the needs of dislocated workers using ideas culled from the psychology of working. In addition, an integrative counseling perspective has been developed using the psychology-of-working framework, providing a conceptual rubric for inclusive psychological practice that integrates the full scope of clients’ issues into the counseling process (Blustein, Kenna, Gill, & DeVoy, 2008). Furthermore, Richardson’s (2012) recent articulation of a model for counseling for work and relationships, while emerging from a broad array of conceptual and theoretical vantage points, includes many of the salient features of the psychology-of-working perspective.

Psychoeducational interventions that have been developed to intervene with client populations living in at-risk contexts also have been informed by many aspects of the psychology-of-working perspective. For example, a number of new programs that have been developed within urban educational communities have thoughtfully blended a focus on
critical consciousness and race and racism along with traditional career development interventions (Ali, Yang, Button, & McCoy, 2012; Blustein et al., 2010; Perry, DeWine, Duffy, & Vance, 2007). Within the assessment world, Duffy and his colleagues have developed a sophisticated psychometric tool designed to measure an individual’s experience of work volition (Duffy et al., 2012).

One of the most important trends that have emerged within vocational psychology is the revived use of the terms “work” and “working.” Consistent with the advice of Richardson (1993) and supported by traditions within fields as disparate as labor relations and occupational sociology (e.g., Budd, 2011), psychologists, counselors, and scholars are increasingly referring to work to capture a fuller scope of activities in both the market and caregiving contexts (e.g., Bhat, 2010; Duffy et al., 2012; Fouad, 2007; Richardson, 2012; Shen-Miller, McWhirter, & Bartone, 2012). While some may suggest that the precise term that is used is not necessarily central to the inclusiveness and relevance of our work, I believe that care should be exercised not to reify the term “career,” which may function to constrain the mission for psychologists, social scientists, and practitioners interested in working (Blustein, 2006).

As this brief review of the conceptual framework and initial research/program development initiatives of the psychology of working has revealed, a groundswell of new ideas, practices, and policy recommendations is emerging from all quarters of psychology and the helping professions. The perspective that has been advanced is now taking shape and is poised to foster important innovations in research, theory, practice, and public policy. To facilitate this growing transformation in how psychologists and related professionals think about and intervene in the work lives of their clients and communities, I have solicited contributions from scholars who have joined this effort to take this perspective to the next level of depth and impact. The chapters of this Handbook, which are summarized next, provide clear, knowledge-based foundations for the continued exploration of the psychological nature of working.

Overview of the Handbook

The Handbook has been structured around five broad themes, based loosely on a priori considerations about working and careers derived from the literature as well as my own experience as a practitioner and scholar. The first theme is an exploration of the theoretical and epistemological framework for the psychology of working. The second theme is devoted to the context of working, with a focus on the diverse ways in which race, gender, sexual orientation, poverty, and family frame the entire enterprise of working. The third theme examines the psychology of working from the vantage point of organizational psychology and the management perspective on careers. The fourth theme is devoted to counseling practice and psychotherapy. The fifth theme is focused on public policy and community-based implications.

Theoretical Foundations

The initial section begins with the current chapter, which is designed to create the foundation for the chapters that follow. The next chapter, by Isaac Prilleltensky and Graham Stead, provides a comprehensive overview of critical psychology, which reflects an essential intellectual stream that has contributed to the psychology of working. As detailed earlier in this chapter, the diverse critiques that have stimulated the development of a more inclusive perspective convey an exemplar of critical thought. Prilleltensky and Stead provide an insightful analysis of the critical psychology movement, beginning with a critique of some of the underlying assumptions of psychological discourse. Included in the Prilleltensky and Stead chapter is a critical analysis of individualism, positive psychology, mechanistic approaches, and ethnocentrism, among other traditions, which have shaped the ways in which work is understood in psychology. Prilleltensky and Stead also have raised a number of recommendations for the development of a liberating psychology of working.

The next chapter, also by Graham Stead, furnishes an extensive examination of epistemology and discourse analysis in relation to the psychological study of working. Stead’s discussion provides a summary of various streams of ideas that have contributed to a social constructionist perspective, including relational theories, discourse and language analyses, and power. This chapter expands Richardson’s (1993) early contribution on the role of work in people’s lives, thereby enhancing the utility of careful epistemological analyses of the psychological study of working.

Another critical theoretical foundation is represented in the theories of career choice and development, which have formed the backbone of vocational psychology. In the fourth chapter, Jane Swanson explores these theories via the lens of the psychology of working, reviewing the traditional
theories along with emerging theories. Swanson’s chapter begins with a comprehensive review of person–environment fit theory, social cognitive career theory, the theory of work adjustment, and lifespan developmental theory. She follows this review by exploring theories that have been informed by the psychology-of-working perspective, social constructionist thought, narrative theory, and other critical perspectives.

**The Context of Working**

As reflected in the ongoing critiques of traditional vocational and I/O psychology, the context for working is characterized by considerable inequity, racism, sexism, ageism, and heterosexism. In short, the playing field is far from equal. In this section, several scholars explore selected social barriers with an eye toward identifying the complex ways that oppression shapes the nature and trajectory of one’s working life.

In the first chapter in this section, Lisa Flores uses multicultural and psychology-of-working perspectives to examine the impact of racism in working. In an expansive analysis, Flores highlights how racism affects work-based disparities, health, well-being, and job satisfaction. Flores builds on a perceptive review of relevant demographic data and a critical appraisal of a wide array of work-related phenomena in arguing that race is central in considerations of equity, access, social justice, and dignity in the workplace.

Building on one of the earliest critiques of the traditional career discourse, Neeta Kantamneni’s chapter discusses the role of gender in preparing for, and adjusting to, the workplace. Kantamneni reviews the complex ways that gender, gender role socialization, sexism, and discrimination affect the experience of working for men and women. Kantamneni highlights some of the notable ways in which gender-related phenomena influence both men and women, noting how socialization and sexism function to constrain the work lives of people. Kantamneni concludes with a number of perceptive recommendations for counseling practice and continued research.

Next, Mary Anderson and James Croteau present an insightful review of the literature on sexual orientation and working. Perhaps the most hidden of the diverse forms of social oppression, heterosexism has adversely shaped working environments in multiple and often insidious ways. As reflected in Anderson and Croteau’s work, the infusion of a psychology-of-working perspective has the potential to transform how we think about sexual orientation and the world of work. Their insightful and informative chapter provides a needed roadmap for a psychology of working that embraces and affirms sexual orientation diversity.

A core concern of the psychology of working is the lack of access due to constraints in the opportunity structure and poverty. Following this vantage point, Saba Rasheed Ali describes the role that social class plays in all aspects of education, training, and working. She summarizes compelling data on working and poverty, highlighting the low wages and lack of opportunity that plague the lives of the poor. Ali then reviews the ambivalent relationship that vocational psychology has faced in including social class and poverty in its theories and practices. She concludes with numerous constructive recommendations for practice, public policy work, and research that will expand an inclusive discourse on work and poverty.

Mary Sue Richardson and Charles Schaeffer then explore the literature on family and working, summarizing their ideas about market work and care work in a fully developed dual model of working. Richardson and Schaeffer’s contribution makes a compelling case that studies of working have privileged market work over care work, leading to a neglect of this essential mode of working that involves nearly everyone across the globe. The Richardson and Schaeffer argument is that balanced attention to and affirmation of market work, paid care work, and unpaid care work can foster the sorts of theories and practices that can reduce sexism and enhance the quality of life for both men and women.

The aging of the workforce is endemic in many nations around the globe, leading to challenges and transformation among workers and the workplace. Harvey and Anthony Sterns provide an expansive tour of the literature on aging and working, highlighting how an aging workforce can continue to contribute to the social and economic world. They review the literature on working and aging from organizational and self-management perspectives, respectively. In addition, they highlight the importance of creating functional and welcoming workplaces as a means of fostering a dignified and safe work life for older workers.

As indicated at the outset of this introduction, the literature on disability and working has provided one of the key foundations for an inclusive psychology of working. Ellen Fabian’s chapter continues this trajectory by providing a contemporary examination
of the literature on disability and working. Her chapter examines the complex issues evoked by disabling conditions (including, but not limited to, physical disabilities, psychiatric conditions, and developmental disabilities) from the vantage point of the psychology of working. In addition, Fabian reviews various legislative agendas designed to support people with disabling conditions as they negotiate the world of work. As reflected in Fabian's comprehensive chapter, the strength and vitality of the disabled community's advocacy provides important lessons for an expansive legislative and public policy agenda that will ensure greater equity to the resources that support dignified and meaningful work.

Organizational Implications

In an attempt to reduce artificial splits in the psychological study of working, I have included two chapters from outstanding scholars of management and I/O psychology in this Handbook. In the first chapter, Douglas (Tim) Hall and Phil Mirvis build on the long and storied history of the study of careers within the world of management with a creative application of the psychology of working to a host of challenges that have been evoked by the transformative changes in the world of work. Hall and Mirvis examine three fundamental questions in their chapter: (1) What is my work? (2) What is my work identity? and (3) What is success? Through examining these questions, Hall and Mirvis expand the discourse in career management to include a broad array of problems, populations, and positions.

Building on a critical perspective infused with values about justice and inclusion, Michael Zickar provides an essential chapter that presents a transformative discourse for I/O psychology. By embedding a critical historical perspective into his analysis, Zickar reviews selected aspects of the first century of scholarship and practice in I/O psychology, noting the roots of the profession and the challenges inherent in infusing a workers' perspective into a field that has committed itself, for the most part, to the welfare of employers and their organizations. Zickar concludes with a number of thoughtful recommendations for integrating the psychology-of-working perspective into I/O psychology with the intention of creating an experience-near study of work within organizations that affirms diversity and inclusion.

Counseling and Psychotherapy

The practices of counseling and psychotherapy have been and remain central in efforts to improve the welfare of individuals. Within the working context, counseling and psychotherapy have had a complex history that has resulted in a very rich literature on career counseling and a far less abundant literature on exploring the role of working within traditional mental health counseling and psychotherapy. The two chapters in this sections are designed to reinvigorate both the career counseling and psychotherapy disciplines. The first chapter in this section, by Sherri Turner, Julia Conkel Ziebell, and Robin Alcala Saner, expands the traditional career choice and development counseling model to embrace clients with less-than-optimal levels of volition. Turner and her colleagues initially reviewed the counseling challenges among traditionally disenfranchised client populations, including the poor, homeless, LGBT individuals, and individuals with disabling conditions. Integrating observations from their analyses of best practices with marginalized groups, Turner et al. concluded their chapter with recommendations for working with clients who face less-than-optimal options in the world of work and who may also face oppression in various contexts of their lives.

AJ Franklin and Mary Beth Medvide devote their chapter to tackling the daunting task of considering how to infuse affirming views about work, social justice, and diversity into psychotherapy theory and practice. Based on a masterful synthesis of career development theories, selected psychotherapy theories, and the psychology of working, Franklin and Medvide meet this challenge by developing a foundation for an inclusive paradigm for integrative counseling practice. Their chapter concludes with a detailed case example and recommendations designed to foster needed developments in integrative practice.

Community-Based Interventions and Public Policy

One of the key attributes of the psychology of working has been an expansion of practice outside of the consulting room and a corollary expansion of scholarship outside of the university research lab and library. In short, the social justice ethic that underlies the psychology of working is clearly focused on creating systemic changes in all of the institutions that influence the working lives of people. The first chapter in this section, by Maureen Kenny, is devoted to an exploration of the relationship between education and work. Kenny provides an exhaustive review of the crisis in contemporary education, noting the challenges that exist in
infusing work-based learning into the educational enterprise. She then reviews an extensive body of literature examining such issues as career academies, school-to-work research, career development education, and work-based issues inherent in current considerations of educational reform. Kenny concludes with a thoughtful articulation of research agendas and policies that are suggested by her review and by a consideration of the psychology-of-working perspective in relation to the needs of the education community.

The next chapter, by Cindy Juntunen and Tamba-Kuii Bailey, explores the contexts of training and employment. Juntunen and Bailey review the complex work-related transitions that adults face as they negotiate increasingly unstable education, training, and occupational contexts. Juntunen and Bailey highlight the advantages of a comprehensive array of interventions and programs that offer individuals relational support, opportunities for continued training, and broad systemic changes in their resources and affordances. The Juntunen and Bailey contribution is particularly eloquent in its use of a psychology-of-working perspective as a link between traditional vocational psychology scholarship and the real-life challenges of clients and communities.

The role of public policy in creating facilitative and/or inhibiting conditions for the attainment of a meaningful and upwardly mobile working life has received considerable attention in recent years. Spencer Niles and Edwin Herr, two of the leaders in career development and public policy, have prepared a compelling chapter that affirms the importance of a clear and compelling public policy agenda as a means of promoting social change. Niles and Herr summarize some of the most notable exemplars of policy initiatives that have fostered access to counseling services and to humane educational and work-based opportunities. They note as well the challenges that exist in creating the rationale and establishing the research framework to support public policies that will enhance opportunities for the entire array of people seeking meaningful and dignified work.

The Way Forward: Connecting the Dots

As I indicated at the outset of this chapter, I have sought to bring together a community of scholars to consider the challenges that have been raised in the psychology-of-working critique of existing discourses in our field. These chapters, both individually and collectively, articulate a perspective and a point of view that has the real potential to transform psychological studies and interventions regarding working. Moreover, the authors have creatively established the posts for an expanded and inclusive tent for scholars and practitioners interested in promoting fair and dignified work opportunities.

Once we have expanded the tent, what is the way forward for the psychology of working? In the section that follows, I consider the broad and integrative view of this collective body of work, which may help to articulate the lines between the dots.

One of the most tired (yet accurate) clichés in our field is that the world of work is changing rapidly and in unexpected ways. This observation is certainly evident in these chapters, but the impact of the changes is complicated by the growing acknowledgment that the “grand career narrative” (Savickas, 2002) is over for an increasing proportion of working people across the globe. (Indeed, I have argued elsewhere that the grand career narrative was not relevant for most working people, even during the boom period after World War II. See Blustein, 2006, for further details on this position.) So, what will replace the grand career narrative? Some aspects of the new narrative can be derived from the chapters in this Handbook.

Individual Interventions

From an individual perspective, it seems clear that people will need to be well trained, flexible, and highly motivated to manage their work lives in a context of rapid change and, for many working people, a context of shrinking or stagnant opportunities. In addition, the question of career choice will continue to be complex and dynamic. The collective perspectives derived from the chapters suggest that we probably need to consider a multidimensional perspective wherein volition will wax and wane based on economic conditions, affordances, labor market availability, individual skill sets, and other social, economic, political, and psychological conditions. Given the movement toward greater instability with respect to unemployment and underemployment, it would seem important to reconceptualize how individuals manage their work lives as well as how people can obtain support for work-based problems.

While the traditional discourses of career counseling, career management, and career development education are relevant for many, there is a need for a new set of ideas and solutions to the problems that people face in finding and sustaining dignified work. Perhaps the most complex question is how psychologists and counselors can help individuals
develop the complex and changing sets of skills that they will need to survive and optimally thrive in the new world of work. When considering the observations of many of the chapter authors, success in the world of work will require dexterity, flexibility, creativity, resilience, relational support, and high levels of literacy and numeracy skills. In addition, success at work will require a social world that affirms and creates opportunities for dignity and access in one’s work life. In my view, the literature and perspectives conveyed in these chapters suggest that the solutions that were developed for 20th-century work-based problems may not be sufficient for the problems of the 21st century. Therefore, while many will still benefit from career counseling, traditional psychotherapy, and work-based education, other interventions will need to be developed.

The skeleton of 21st-century work-based intervention is taking shape in the new models that have been introduced by Savickas (2005) and Richardson (2012). These two perspectives are constructed around the notions of change, contextualization of work, and agency. In addition, the theories by Lent et al. (2002) and other cognitively based theorists (e.g., Reardon, Lenz, Sampson, & Peterson, 2009) will be essential as counselors and other providers help clients to develop rich and useful constructions about themselves and about their educational and work lives. However, the nature of the counseling interventions will need to continue to evolve and shift as the needs of clients become more complex. For example, integrative interventions that blend work-based counseling and mental health counseling are clearly needed for clients who are caught in the maelstrom of unemployment and underemployment. In addition, counselors and psychologists will need to learn more about job search and skill development strategies as clients increasingly look for ways to become more competitive in the labor market. Although individual efforts are clearly needed, the broadened psychology-of-working perspective that is embedded in these pages points to the need for broad, systemic changes in order to create more opportunities for people, as summarized next.

**Public Policy Agendas**

In addition to the Niles and Herr chapter, several other contributions in this Handbook have articulated important public policy issues that may be particularly helpful for working people. As articulated in previous publications (e.g., Blustein, 2006; Blustein et al., 2012), a broad and concerted effort to creating full employment is essential to expand opportunities. In addition, psychologists, other social scientists, and helping professionals need to make a case with local and national leaders about the centrality of work in people’s lives (cf. Richardson, 1993). Continued efforts at linking education and work will be helpful in creating schools and educational institutions that prepare people for 21st-century jobs. Improved training and adult education are also critical to enhancing opportunities for all working people, who increasingly face a labor market that expects and rewards lifelong learning.

These ideas are not necessarily new or radical. Scholars have been advocating these policies for decades, with varying degrees of success. So, how will this Handbook help to move forward a more effective public policy agenda? In the sections that follow, I propose some ideas, derived in large measure from these chapters, that may help to strengthen our arguments and impact.

**Research Agendas**

Critical to the policy enterprise is a need for research that will inform policy challenges. As reflected in many of these chapters, a psychology-of-working agenda has the potential to stimulate more inclusive research that includes diverse epistemologies and objectives. For example, integrative research on the impact of unemployment at the individual and community levels may help to document the broad and pernicious impact of unemployment and underemployment. In addition, research that describes in detail the insidious role of social barriers such as racism, sexism, classism, ageism, and heterosexism in the workplace may help to underscore the need for policies based on values of fairness and justice.

The psychology-of-working perspective that is represented in these chapters provides ideas and assumptions about work that are inherently grounded in a value system that affirms change, justice, and maximizing the well-being of individuals and communities. The traditional discourses in vocational and I/O psychology have generally (although not always) eschewed a research agenda that has an implied or explicited political perspective. In contrast, many of the authors in this Handbook were able to articulate research agendas that embraced an explicit value system. While the values that make up the psychology of working, naturally, will vary considerably, one cohering theme is the endorsement of greater access to education, training, and work opportunities. As such, research that adopts a psychology-of-working
perspective may be able to tackle some of the thornier issues facing people at work without the implicit barrier of an elusive objectivity. This is not to suggest that scholars should become journalists or advocates without rootedness in science and scholarship. Rather, the psychology-of-working perspective that is emerging from a collective view of these chapters is constructed around the belief, as articulated by Prilleltensky (1997), that science has the potential to liberate people from oppression and to foster caring communities.

In addition to policy-based research, an integrative review of these chapters suggests the continued importance of exploratory and theory-driven research. While the topics framing this research agenda are expansive, a few themes can be discerned from the contributions herein. One theme is the exploration of the diverse ways that people construct meaning about work and about the contexts of their work lives. Building on a growing line of scholarship in vocational psychology (e.g., Ali et al., 2012; Kenny, Blustein, Chaves, Grossman, & Gallagher, 2003), continued research that identifies the internal and external resources and barriers that people face as they negotiate work-based tasks is warranted. Another theme revolves around the development of theories that are useful, relativistic, yet sufficiently structured to support further scholarship. As an exemplar, recent initiatives emerging from relational theories provide an illustration of the sort of theoretical enterprises that emerge from a more inclusive focus on working (e.g., Blustein, 2011a; Richardson, 2012).

While research and theory development efforts similar to the ones outlined above have been evident in our field for decades, a collective view of the chapters within this Handbook offers some ways of enhancing the impact of these efforts. One of the most important suggestions is to think broadly and critically about the issues and problems that are posed in research. The diverse theoretical and epistemological views articulated in these chapters provide some useful guidelines about how to unpack existing assumptions that guide the intellectual currents in a given line of work.

A hallmark of this Handbook is its disciplinary pluralism. I have explicitly sought the input of scholars interested in working from across the spectrum of psychological specialties. The vision that is conveyed by these Handbook chapters is inherently inclusive; indeed, one of the common elements in the chapters is the inclusion of literature from outside of the author’s own specialty. These sorts of integrative analyses have resulted in a body of work that has a wider reach than traditional psychological scholarship about work and careers. Building on the integrative nature of these chapters, it would seem useful for teams of scholars from various specialties within psychology and outside of psychology to collaborate and create new research and practice initiatives. The importance of culture, race, and other social identities emerged here as a central theme that warrants careful consideration in research and theory development. Given the centrality of work in people’s lives and in the welfare of communities, I also suggest disseminating results in trade publications and other popular media outlets. The classic publication by Wilson (1996) entitled “When Work Disappears,” which was published as a trade book, is an excellent example of a research-oriented contribution that entered the public discourse about work and poverty. With the broad and inclusive vision underlying the psychology-of-working perspective, it may be possible for psychologists who are writing about work to bring research findings of social relevance to the public via academic venues as well as more popular outlets.

Closing Comments

In my view, each of these chapters offers creative, insightful, and highly informative overviews of a given body of literature within the working context. While each chapter addresses a circumscribed line of work, the collective vision that emerges from this Handbook provides a clear and accessible knowledge base for the continued development of the psychology-of-working perspective. As the Editor of this Handbook, I have been humbled in attracting a roster of major scholars and leaders in their respective fields to contribute to this endeavor. My hope is that readers will be as moved as I have been in reading these stellar contributions. And, hopefully, readers will feel inspired to continue the work of these scholars and of those who preceded them in creating an expansive and socially just vision of working.

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References


Critical Psychology, Well-Being, and Work

Isaac Prilleltensky and Graham B. Stead

Abstract

Critical psychology emerged as a reaction to (a) the oppressive turn in individualism, (b) the negative repercussions of the status quo on large sectors of the population, and (c) psychology’s witting or unwitting complicity in upholding the societal status quo. The critical psychology movement questions psychology, and society, on the basis of moral, epistemic, and professional shortcomings. This chapter reviews critical psychology’s reservations about dominant assumptions in these three domains, and offers an alternative set of principles designed to advance well-being in persons, communities, psychological science, and professional practice. Following an alternative conception of well-being, this chapter applies it to the world of work. It reviews problematic assumptions pertaining to the moral, epistemic, and professional values impacting the world of work, and offers theoretical and practical recommendations for advancing the well-being of workers, organizations, and communities. Humanitarian work psychology and critical management studies offer valuable avenues for merging critical psychology with the world of work.

Key Words: critical psychology, values, epistemology, professional practice, status quo, oppression, social justice, work
By pretending to talk universally for everybody, psychology often confuses the well-being of management with the well-being of the workforce. By neglecting power differentials, psychology promotes the values and assumptions of dominant groups. And by failing to challenge injustice and the status quo, psychology benefits the privileged. These are no mere provocations or ideological pronouncements (Parker, 2007; Prilleltensky, 1994; Teo, 2005, 2009). The record shows that psychology has sided with the powerful, and has often inflicted pain in vulnerable populations, including children, women, immigrants, Aboriginal peoples, and mental health patients (Chamberlin, 1978, 1984; Clarke & Braun, 2009; Everett, 1994; Fox, Prilleltensky, & Austin, 2009; Huygens, 2009; Olman, 2006; Parker, 2007; Usher & Nicolson, 1992).

Critical psychology is concerned with the well-being of four primary entities: persons, communities, the science of psychology, and the profession of psychology. The well-being of individuals and communities is greatly affected by the availability of decent employment (Clark, 2010), the occupational environment (Fullan, 2008; Sisodia, Sheth, & Wolfe, 2007), and the world of work in general (Blustein, 2006; Rath & Harter, 2010). Consequently, the world of work is very fertile ground for critical psychologists, which is why this chapter addresses the intersection among critical psychology, well-being, and work.

The critical psychology movement questions psychology, and society, on the basis of moral, epistemic, and professional shortcomings (Teo, 2005, 2009). In this chapter we review critical psychology’s reservations about dominant assumptions in these three domains, and offer an alternative set of principles designed to advance well-being in persons, communities, psychological science, and professional practice. Following an alternative conception of well-being, we apply it to the world of work. We review problematic assumptions pertaining to the moral, epistemic, and professional values impacting the world of work, and offer theoretical and practical recommendations for advancing the well-being of workers, organizations, and communities.

Work encompasses many sectors. Most of our practical and research experience derives from the not-for-profit world. Prior to becoming academics, both of us worked in counseling and mental health services in communities and schools. In our current research, we study not-for-profit organizations and have come to appreciate the struggle of workers in this much unappreciated and undervalued field (Chetkovich & Kunreuther, 2006; Evans, Hanlin, & Prilleltensky, 2007). We have also come into contact with the teaching workforce, another trying sector (Darling-Hammond, 2010; Farber & Azar, 1999; Hargreaves & Shirley, 2009; Ravitch, 2010). Both human service workers and educators struggle to gain respect from government and the business community, who largely fund them and control their boards (Payne, 2008). In this chapter we are especially sensitive to their plight.

Critical Psychology
Critical psychology emerged in response to twin concerns about the state of society and the state of psychology (Fox, Prilleltensky, & Austin, 2009). While several strands of critical psychology exist, most of them converge in a critique of the moral, epistemic, and professional values of the profession, and their unwitting support for social structures in need of transformation (Teo, 2005, 2009). This section presents the problems. The next presents solutions.

Moral Values
Morality refers to the study and practice of doing what is right (Facione, Scherer, & Attig, 1978). Values, in turn, refer to a set of principles that can guide moral reasoning and action. Values have to be justified by a set of criteria (Kane, 1994, 1998). In our case, a key criterion is the impact of said value or principle on the well-being of the individual, the community, the profession, and the science of psychology. There are different ways to construct a set of morally justifiable values. One way is to witness the outcome of existing values on various segments of the population. Another is to imagine an ideal society and derive from such scenario corresponding values. Critical psychologists have embraced mostly the former, although it is hard to move forward without the latter. In witnessing the deleterious effects of individualism on people, communities, and the world of work, critical psychologists began questioning this Western principle.

Individualism. Historically, individualism was meant to protect the individual from the tight grip of religion and oppressive norms. Organized religion and its normative derivations were used to control, among others, women, peasants, and children. Individual desires were suppressed and conformity reigned supreme. The Freudian revolution greatly enhanced our understanding of repression and its psychological and social sequelae. This sort of individualism was liberating, freeing people from
the tyranny of religion, conformity, and oppressive traditions (Taylor, 1991).

Unfortunately, this type of cultural individualism became conflated with economic individualism and capitalism, which thrive on consumerism. The quest for personal elevation, driven by ubiquitous advertising and the allure of fame, often results in disconnection from community and meaninglessness (Sloan, 1997). The relentless pursuit of economic gain, synergistically, leads to exploitation of workers and unprecedented gains for the captains of industry (Chomsky, 1999). Perversely, the cultural individualism that was meant to liberate people from one type of conformity, such as Victorian rigidity, is handmaiden for another type, mindless consumerism to become the best, most admired, talked about, and coveted person (Cushman, 1990).

In North American culture, individualism was not bolstered by capitalism alone, but also by the Protestant ethic of self-reliance and independence. Many British settlers escaped religious persecution in Europe and thrived on the opportunities presented to them by the United States. Their contextually and historically appropriate response—self-reliance and independence from government institutions—would contribute greatly to the prevailing idea in many Western nations that people are solely responsible for their own well-being. If people succeed in life it is due to their own hard work, and if they fail it is due to their own shortcomings (Bellah, Madsen, Sullivan, Swidler, & Tipton, 1985). This is a wonderfully simplistic and seductive narrative on which many books were written, movies made, and political speeches given. “Victim-blaming” was soon to follow as an apologia for the capitalist system. Never mind if children grow up in poverty in communities infested by drug and crime; if they work hard enough, anybody can rise above adversity. This mantra penetrates invisibly every stratum and discourse in society. Blaming the victim became one of the main occupational hazards for medicine, social work, education, social services, counseling, and psychology. Instead of looking at problems holistically, contextually, and ecologically, the gaze focused on the person in front of you (Ryan, 1971).

Thus, the Protestant ethic, capitalism, and the medical model conspired to turn an originally liberating notion—individualism—into an oppressive one, not just for the poor and the marginalized, but for the many consumed with consumerism (Cushman, 1990). It has become abundantly clear since 2008 that individualism, with its attendant qualities of greed and hubris, nearly destroyed the economy. Capitalism, in its present unregulated form, greatly facilitated the financial collapse that took place.

This ever-brief analysis touched only on religion, the economy, and the helping professions, but the impact of individualism can be felt also in educational policies, the media, and popular culture as well. In fact, in North America, and in the United States in particular, it is a form of life (Bellah et al., 1985). Critical psychologists responded to the fact that individualism was becoming noxious for the individual and communities alike. The social and professional obsession with the self, disconnected from social context, turned self-liberation into self-adulation. Self-determination, unrestrained by social justice, easily degenerates into self-absorption. The self supreme, unperturbed by the need to share resources and obligations with others, became the greed monster that now graces our TV screens: Madoff, Lehman Brothers, AIG, Bank of America, Goldman Sachs, Conrad Black, and Silvio Berlusconi.

In its multifarious manifestations, individualism did become a monster. The singular pursuit of the profit motive created handy justifications for what the world witnessed in 2008. Not only was individualism devoid of restraining justice motives, it was bereft of caring, compassion, and any sense of community. Critical psychologists mounted compelling critiques of individualism and the way psychology was unwittingly supporting it by theories and practices that reinforced blame-the-victim discourses (Albee, 1990; Prilleltensky, 1994). Individualism became, in short, bad for the person and bad for the community, which is not to say that many in positions of privilege did not take advantage of it. On the contrary, the gap between rich and poor grew exponentially since the 1960s, with the top 1% of the population becoming enormously rich and the inequality gap growing enormously large (Wilkinson & Pickett, 2009). Critical psychologists aligned themselves with the rest of the population for which quality of life had diminished. To answer the three fundamental questions of critical psychology (whose values, whose well-being, and who benefits): the individualism of the well-to-do benefited primarily their own well-being, though we hasten to add that these are short-term and superficial benefits. For the privileged are not immune to isolation, competition, and the hedonic treadmill that propels them to achieve more and more, never quite achieving a sense of satisfaction (Diener & Biswas-Diener, 2008).
The status quo. The hegemony of individualism prevails through cultural, political, economic, and military power. At times, the status quo is softly maintained by stories of heroes who overcome adversity—"proving" that anybody can make it in "America"—or by derisive portrayals of the poor through victim-blaming definitions. Other times, as in dictatorial regimes, the status quo is harshly upheld by brute force. In either its soft or harsh variety, power is omnipresent in society. Even in the most democratic of societies, money can buy influence and powerful lawyers, lobbyists, and politicians. Corruption for the preservation of the status quo is not the sole province of what we call Third World countries: there is plenty to go around in First World countries as well. But the mere invocation of democracy serves to silence critics, who are portrayed as eternally ungrateful at best or as enemies of the public good at worst (Chesney, 1998). Against legal, economic, and political forces that perpetuate the status quo, critical psychologists hold up a mirror to society, and the picture is not pretty. Whereas in Northern and Western countries critical psychologists can afford to voice discontent, in other places, like El Salvador, critical psychologists are portrayed as subversives and killed by paramilitary troops. That was the fate of Ignacio Martín-Baró (1994), a Spanish psychologist and Jesuit priest who was killed with other colleagues in 1989 at his university. Martín Baró is credited with founding and fostering liberation psychology in Latin America (Quiñones Rosado, 2007; Watkins & Shulman, 2008). He claimed psychologists should work to develop a psychology of emancipation to assist the poor to overcome conditions of oppression. Today, the vision of liberation and critical psychology is advanced in the Southern continent through the work, among many others, of Maritza Montero (2007, 2009) in Venezuela and Ignacio Dobles Oropeza and his colleagues in Costa Rica (Dobles Oropeza, 2009; Dobles Oropeza, Arróliga, & Zúñiga, 2007).

It is no coincidence that critical and liberation theories of psychology have emerged in colonial contexts. In Africa, Frantz Fanon documented the psychological scars of colonization. Originally from the Caribbean isle of Martinique, he lived in Algeria and experienced French domination, with its deleterious effects on the local Black population. Fanon became an early exponent of anticolonial theory (Bulhan, 1985; Fanon, 1965; Hook, 2004; Parker, 2007). Critical psychology is very active today in South Africa and other parts of the continent (Hook, 2004). But the rebellion against the status quo in psychology did not happen just in colonial contexts.

German intellectuals in the late 1920s, 1930s, and 1940s created the Frankfurt school of critical theory, which sought to blend Marxism with social science. The blend of Marxism and social science became very influential in academic circles for decades to come. The fundamental insight that the means of communication reflect the views of the dominant class originated much critical research in sociology, political science, and psychology (Held, 1980). Erich Fromm, among others, used extensive psychoanalytic theory in his critique of the societal status quo, documenting the pernicious impact of social competition and the drive to have and to own instead of the drive to become (Fromm, 1965). After the Second World War, Klaus Holzkamp developed in Berlin a psychology of emancipation and subjectivity that assumed the official label of critical psychology in Germany (Tolman, 1994).

In other parts of Europe, especially in Great Britain, feminist and anticolonial psychologists in the 1970s and 1980s contributed to discursive critiques of the status quo, revealing the cultural codes that perpetuated racism and the oppression of women. An influential book edited by Henriques, Hollway, Urwin, Venn, and Walkerdine, Changing the Subject (1984), did much to advance discursive critical psychology. Ian Parker (2007) and his colleagues in the Discourse Unit at Manchester Metropolitan University continue to explore the ways in which psychology is an accomplice in the perpetuation of injustice.

In an effort to consolidate the various strands of critique of the status quo in psychology, Dennis Fox and Isaac Prilleltensky co-founded the Radical Psychology Network in 1993 and published in 1997 the first edition of Critical Psychology: An Introduction (Fox & Prilleltensky, 1997). The book gave voice to voices of discontent within psychology. The second edition, vastly revised, and with a new co-editor, came out in 2009 (Fox, Prilleltensky, & Austin, 2009). Both editions were meant to make critical psychology accessible and applicable to many psychologists who needed a framework to articulate their inchoate dissatisfaction with the societal state of affairs, and with psychology's role in it.

Psychology's role in individualism and the societal status quo. In The Morals and Politics of Psychology: Psychological Discourse and the Status Quo (1994), Prilleltensky analyzed how the major theories and fields of applied psychology actually reproduced
individualism and maintained the dominant state of affairs. In the preface to the book, George Albee (1994) wrote that psychologists “have accepted uncritically the assignment to preserve the status quo... [through] our identification with management in industrial psychology, or our acceptance of the belief that school failures result from the child’s individual defect rather than from problems in the school’s social environment” (1994, pp. ix–x). The book detailed the conservative tendencies within psychoanalysis, behaviorism, humanism, and cognitivism, as well as in the practice of therapy, school, and industrial/organizational psychology.

For different reasons, all these fields supported more than they challenged the status quo. Prilleltensky identified four central mechanisms for doing so. In the first instance, “values that benefit dominant segments of society are portrayed as benefiting society as a whole” (Prilleltensky, 1994, p. 35). This is evident in the history of industrial/organizational psychology, in which practices aimed at improving managerial control are propagated as equally beneficial to workers (Baritz, 1974; Islam & Zyphur, 2009; Ralph, 1983; Wells, 1987). Secondly, “social problems that originate in the structure of the socioeconomic system are discussed in terms of psychological maladjustment” (Prilleltensky, 1994, p. 35). This ideological tactic was captured in the title of Ryan’s (1971) seminal book Blaming the Victim. Misfortune is to be traced back to the individual’s maladaptive behaviors, thoughts, and emotions. In a classic study by Caplan and Nelson (1973), 80% of psychological studies dealing with African Americans ascribed their challenges to intrapersonal inadequacies as opposed to socioeconomic circumstances. A vast lexicon of deficiencies was developed in psychology to describe personal ineptitude: weak-ego, maladaptive coping mechanisms, maladjusted personality, cognitive deficiencies, and on and on (Gergen, 1990).

A related and third mechanism for the promotion of the status quo is the abstraction of human realities from their sociohistorical context, attributing socially created phenomena to “human nature” or “genetic predispositions.” Thus, gender roles are reified in nature and the intellectual performance of African Americans fixed in genetic makeup. “What has been mediated by sociohistorical process,” Sampson (1981) claimed, “is treated as though it were an ‘in-itself’, a reality independent of these very origins” (p. 738).

A fourth way in which psychology props up the current state of affairs is through dislocation, a term suggested by Sullivan as a “process whereby something new is brought into a cultural system and has the ability to mute the partial critical insight of that cultural system” (Sullivan, 1984, p. 165). Family therapy, for example, addressed the lack of context in individual therapy, but it did not go far enough in introducing a truly holistic and contextual approach to mental health. Similarly, forensic psychology was introduced to deal with deviant behavior in ways that prevent the system from looking at the social roots of crime. In the 1960s, a Washington D.C. judge, Bazelon, put it well in an address to forensic psychologists:

In considering our motives for offering you a role, I think you would do well to consider how much less expensive it is to hire a thousand psychologists than to make even a miniscule change in the social and economic structure. (Caplan & Nelson, 1973, p. 210)

Reform is not to be confused with transformation. For the social system to endure, change is inevitable. As Gross observed, “if the establishment were a mere defender of the status quo, it would be much weaker. While some of its members may resist many changes... the dominant leaders know that change is essential to preserve, let alone, expand power” (1980, p. 58). This was well captured in Lampedusa’s The Leopard, where the young nephew said to his uncle, the prince, “if we want things to stay as they are, things have got to change” (Gross, 1980, p. 58).

The 1970s and 1980s witnessed a cacophony of voices protesting psychology’s support for the system. Sullivan’s analysis of behaviorism and psychometric psychology concluded that they function as “legitimators of the status quo, that is, they render interpretations which back up or legitimate a certain socio-political constellation of power” (1984, p. 26). “Because mainstream psychology is embedded in the dominant political, economic, and religious ideologies, professional psychologists have upheld these ideologies rather than examining their impact upon the lives of others” (Braginsky, 1985, p. 881). “Because psychology seems to be unique among the social sciences in its inability to reflect on its place in the social order, it will, in this unreflective stance, function as an apologist for the status quo” (Sullivan, 1984, pp. 131–132). Ingleby claimed in no uncertain terms that psychologists’ “unwritten contract is to maintain the status quo” (1974, p. 317).

From traditional victim-blaming ideologies (Prilleltensky, 1994) to the new positive psychology...
(Ehrenreich, 2009), psychology still engages in context minimization (Shinn & Toohey, 2003): the neglect of context in accounting for psychosocial problems. The most recent incarnation of that proclivity is positive psychology, which minimizes the role of circumstances (such as social injustice) in people’s happiness (see, for example, Lyubomirsky, 2007, or Seligman, 2002). “The real conservatism of positive psychology,” writes Barbara Ehrenreich, “lies in its attachment to the status quo with all its inequalities and abuses of power” (2009, p. 170). She rightly assumes that the benefits of positive psychology may be accessible to middle-class people who are not overly bothered by inequality and injustice:

Like pop positive thinking, positive psychology attends almost solely to the changes a person can make internally by adjusting his or her own outlook … Positive psychologists’ more important contribution to the defense of the status quo has been to assert or “find” that circumstances play only a minor role in determining a person’s happiness … Why advocate for better jobs and schools, safer neighborhoods, universal health insurance, or any other liberal desideratum if these measures will do little to make people happy? Social reformers, political activists, and change-oriented elected officials can all take a much-needed rest … In the great centuries-long quest for a better world, the baton has passed to the practitioners of “optimism training,” the positive psychologists, and the purveyors of pop positive thinking. (Ehrenreich, 2009, pp. 171–172)

Indeed, Seligman (2002) and Lyubomirsky (2007), among others, claim that social circumstances account for only a very small fraction of people’s happiness. Most of success or failure in life may be attributed to genetic makeup or motivational factors, as if motivational factors may be solidly detached from the environment in which people grow up. Positive psychologists claim that happiness is determined largely by genetics (50%) and volitional factors (40%) and only moderately by circumstances (10%) (Lyubomirsky, 2007; Seligman, 2002). Although positive psychologists claim that circumstantial factors account for about only 10% of happiness and volitional factors for about 40%, we should keep in mind that the psychological and behavioral variables said to account for the 40% cannot be easily disentangled from the circumstances of people’s lives (McGue & Bouchard, 1998; Turkheimer, 1998).

In summary, critical psychology emerged as a reaction to (a) the oppressive turn in individualism, (b) the negative repercussions of the status quo on large sectors of the population, and (c) psychology’s writting or unwitting complicity in upholding the societal status quo. We saw that critical psychology scholars and activists started working in earnest in Latin America, Africa, Australia, Europe, and North America in the 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s. Today, critical psychology is a scholarly and social movement dedicated to advance justice and well-being for the people most negatively affected by the dominant social order.

### Epistemic Values

Epistemology concerns the study of knowledge. As such, epistemic values are criteria we use to elicit the most reliable portrayal of the object of study. We need to employ methods suitable to the unique nature of phenomena. Giving a career interest inventory written in English to an immigrant newly arrived from a non-English-speaking country would be rather inappropriate. We calibrate our methods to the nature of the experience we wish to explore.

Critical psychology has been concerned mainly with three shortcomings of mainstream psychology’s ways of study. According to critics, the main discipline has often engaged in mechanistic, reductionist, and ethnocentric approaches. We describe these problematic assumptions in this section. Alternatives will be offered in the next segment of the chapter.

**Mechanistic approaches.** Assuming a physics model of causation, psychology diminished the role of self-determination and agency. “It is criticized that the human subject is wrongly conceptualized as a passive and reactive machine, driven by causes, with components that can be added up (such as nature and nurture)” (Teo, 2005, p. 36). The machine metaphor is primordial in behaviorism, which studies human behavior in terms of stimulus and response, largely obviating the mediating effects of subjectivity, reflexivity, and agency (Teo, 2009). Critical psychologists object to this mechanistic approach, claiming that natural science models do not do justice to the subject of study, a much more complicated organism than others studied in laboratory and controlled environments.

**Reductionist approaches.** Related to the first concern, critical psychologists object to the atomistic approach of mainstream psychology. The totality of the human experience can be ill described by studying isolated pieces of it. Borrowing heavily...
from the natural sciences, psychology sought to emulate models that could isolate centers of behavior, emotions, or thoughts. This defies the complexity of the human subject, who behaves differently in different contexts, and who makes sense of complex phenomena before responding. As Teo observed,

It is reductionist to assume that the parts sufficiently explain the complexity of human subjectivity… The idea that studying the parts of a whole is sufficient and that the parts will fit together into a meaningful whole through additive processes is based on a limited worldview. Parts do not add up when it comes to human mental life. Critics have argued that a psychology that does justice to human subjectivity should begin with the nexus of human experience in order to understand the parts and not vice versa. (2009, p. 39)

Mechanistic and reductionist approaches are heavily influenced by methodologism, or methododlatry: the determination of the object of study based on existing measurement techniques (Parker, 2007; Teo, 2005, 2009). We study what we have tools for. Instead of creating tools suitable to the subject of study, we create research questions that suit the tools we have, such as surveys, questionnaires, and contrived social situations (Pancer, 1997).

Ethnocentric approaches. Much of mainstream psychology and career psychology in the last century came to reflect its dominant groups: European White males. Women and people from other cultures had to be measured according to this yardstick. Immigrants to the United States were evaluated, and deemed intellectually incompetent, based on ethnocentric measures (Kamin, 1974). Similar biased procedures were used to assess the “deficient” mental state of women, African Americans, and various colonized groups, like Aboriginal peoples (Prilleltensky, 1994). Examples of male, Euro, White-centric assessments and interventions abound in the history of psychology (Hook, 2004; Moane, 2011; Oliver, 2004). Feminist and anticolonial psychologists describe the pathologization of women and Aboriginal peoples by mental health professionals and the establishment (Durrheim, Hook, & Riggs, 2009; Fox, Austin & Prilleltensky, 2009; Watkins & Shulman, 2008). You cannot universalize the standard of male, White, European psychology, yet this is exactly what happened over the last century (Teo, 2005).

**Professional Values**

Moral and epistemic values inform professional practice. The moral and epistemological assumptions of psychologists get translated into action and codified in diagnostic rubrics, assessment tools, therapy manuals, and psychological reports. Individualistic, reactive, and alienating approaches developed in the mechanistic and reductionist context described above. Critical psychologists objected to these three applications in psychology.

**Individualistic approaches.** It follows from individualistic cultures and reductionist approaches that assessments and interventions would be focused mainly on individuals. This is particularly the case in trait-and-factor and related approaches in career psychology. The majority of career psychology theories draw on aspects of trait-and-factor theory, notably Holland’s (1997) career theory, Gottfredson’s (2002) theory, and work adjustment theory (Dawis, 2005). Few psychologists prior to the arrival of community psychology would venture outside their offices to engage in multilevel interventions; even school and industrial psychologists would work in their own offices within schools or plants. Infused with Protestant notions of self-reliance, conservative invocations of victim blaming, and epistemic legacies of reductionism, it was only too easy for psychologists to focus diagnosis and treatment on the individual, to the exclusion of environmental factors in the workplace, school, church, and community (Fox, Austin, & Prilleltensky, 2009; Gergen, 2009).

**Reactive approaches.** If physics was the idealized parent of psychological science, then medicine was the desired object of psychological practice. And much of medicine, as we know it, is reactive. The health system, which is probably better called the illness system, operates in wait-and-see mode. Experts wait for patients to knock on their doors, asking for assistance. Preventive and public health approaches, which look at social determinants of health, threaten the medical model, and consequently received limited support among health systems across the world (Albee, 1982, 1996). Psychology followed the medical model, and it also engaged primarily in reactive models.

**Alienating approaches.** Professional arrogance, especially in psychiatric institutions, came to characterize the mental health system. Horrific cases of abuse in mental institutions told the story of professionals becoming more and more dehumanized. Psychiatric patients became objects of control, as
opposed to partners in health (Chamberlin, 1984; McCubbin, 2009). Similar arrogance was practiced with “refrigerator” mothers whose children became autistic (Kanner, 1949), with children who had to be subdued (Olffman, 2006), and with Aboriginal peoples who had to be Westernized (Glover, Dudgeon, & Huynens, 2010). Children, women, psychiatric patients, and minorities in general became the subject of control and domination.

All in all, shortcomings in moral, epistemic, and professional values did not paint a pretty picture of psychology. Critical psychologists looked into these practices and rebelled: they did not want to be part of an oppressive system. And while critique is usually ahead of emancipatory practices, we offer in the next section some concrete alternatives to the dispiriting image.

A Critical Approach to Well-Being

To create a useful, effective, and liberating psychology of work, we offer a set of recommendations corresponding to the concerns of the previous section: moral, epistemic, and professional values.

Critical Approach to Moral Values

We counter the problems of individualism, injustice in the status quo, and psychology’s tacit support for the system with interdependence, justice, and solidarity, respectively.

Interdependence. The value proposition of interdependence lies precisely in balancing competing values. The problem is not just with individualism, but with any value, such as collectivism, that is promulgated in extreme form. Pushed to their extremes, self-determination becomes selfishness and collectivism turns into oppression (Prilleltensky, 1997, 2001). We maintain that personal, relational, organizational, and community well-being rely on a set of well-balanced and integrated values (Prilleltensky & Prilleltensky, 2006).

Our first proposition is that the well-being of a person relies on the well-being of his or her relationships, of the organizations with which he or she comes into contact, and of the community at large (Prilleltensky & Prilleltensky, 2006; Rath & Harter, 2010). In turn, the well-being of organizations depends on the well-being of the people who populate it, of the relationships within it, and of the community at large (Fullan, 2008; Sisodia, Sheth, & Wolfe, 2007). The same can be said for the well-being of the community at large. It is hard to imagine community wellness in a place where organizations are dysfunctional and relationships acrimonious (Nelson & Prilleltensky, 2010). As Robert Putnam (2000, 2002) has shown, communities with low levels of social capital, or relational networks, suffer from poor education, health, and welfare and have high crime rates. Similarly, communities with high levels of inequality experience more psychosocial problems such as addictions, teen pregnancy, school dropouts, and child abuse (Wilkinson & Pickett, 2009). Recent research has also drawn connections between levels of economic inequality within states and differences in rates of mortgage delinquency (Brescia, 2010). Going from the macro to the micro level, we can see that people who live in communities with high levels of unemployment experience less satisfaction with life than people in communities with higher levels of employment (Clark, 2010). Children who grow up in poor communities experience more stress in the family and less success in school and are exposed to more risk factors in their neighborhoods (Evans, 2004). Indeed, beyond social capital, unemployment, and child poverty, there are many cases that illustrate the interdependence between personal, relational, organizational, and community well-being. Children who grow up in abusive families develop certain defensive behavioral patterns that predispose them to engage in poor relationships as adults. Lack of trust may lead to interpersonal conflict at work and in the community (Prilleltensky, Nelson, & Peirson, 2001). Lack of control at work may lead to stress that gets manifested in anger at home. Crime in the community leads to isolation, which affects mental health and well-being (Prilleltensky, 2012).

To promote the well-being of each entity (people, relationships, organizations, and communities) as well as their synergistic effects, we need to articulate a set of values. To advance individual well-being, we need to foster self-determination, meaningful engagement in life, optimism, positive relationships, and opportunities for growth (Diener & Biswas Diener, 2008; Lyubomirsky, 2007; Prilleltensky & Prilleltensky, 2006). Relational well-being, in turn, relies on caring, compassion, and mutual support (Blustein, Schultheiss, & Flum, 2004; Gergen, 2009). Organizational well-being rests on values of effectiveness, reflection, and support (Fullan, 2008; Sisodia, Sheth, & Wolfe, 2007). Finally, community well-being requires support for public institutions, respect for diversity, social capital, and most of all, social justice (Nelson & Prilleltensky, 2010). These values must be in balance to achieve the synergy required to foster
harmonious relationships, personal growth, and thriving communities (Watkins & Shulman, 2008).

Political geography shows us that countries with totalitarian regimes, such as the former Soviet Union, oppressed their citizens in their quest for collectivism, whereas Western nations, like the United States, foster isolation among its citizens. In their quest for success, citizens of the latter experience loneliness (Putnam, 2000, 2002). In their quest for obedience, the former impose state will. In either case citizens lose. To balance the need for personal emancipation with the need to support other groups and the community at large, we espouse emancipatory communitarianism, or the belief that the well-being of the private citizen must be balanced against the well-being of other entities (Prilleltensky, 1997). Without a well community, or healthy relationships, the well-being of the very individual is in jeopardy. Ours is not a call to abandon personhood or creative individualism. On the contrary, ours is a call to create communities and workplaces where no individual achieves so much that others are left with little. Communitarianism without the emancipation of the individual is oppressive, and emancipation without controls reverts to individualism.

If we think of the person and the community as two poles of an ecological continuum, relationships and organizations serve as mediating mechanisms through which people support each other and foster dialogical bonds for the solution of common problems (Gergen, 2009). It is impossible to look after the community in the abstract if you do not start with relationships and organizations of concern. Workplaces need to embrace the individuality of workers and foster collective responsibility.

**Justice.** This concept is defined as the fair and equitable allocation of resources, obligations, and bargaining powers (Miller, 1999). Critical psychologists reject the status quo because it fails millions of people, because it is unjust and unfair. The economic and political edifice of unregulated capitalism rests on inequality and injustice. The more unregulated and extreme capitalism becomes, the more the inequality gap widens (Chomsky, 1999).

The main argument for the just nature of the system is that it affords equal opportunities to all. This is patently false: poor children growing up in dilapidated communities with poorly resourced schools have far fewer opportunities to go to a good college, let alone finish high school, than children from well-endowed backgrounds (Darling-Hammond, 2010; Evans, 2004; Ravitch, 2010). Faced with this inconvenient truth, defenders of the status quo point fingers to parents, accusing them of not taking advantage of the opportunities presented to them (Farber & Azar, 1999). But wait a minute, you say, these parents were once children who grew up in drug-infested neighborhoods with teen parents who had no clue how to raise children. At this point you can engage in an infinite regress blaming the parents of the parents of the parents, or you can stop and say: children who grow up in conditions of disadvantage can hardly be blamed for the circumstances of their lives, for they had no control over them.

Injustice fails not only the education of poor children, but also their health. Adler and Stewart (2009) coined the term “behavioral injustice” to address the health consequences of growing up in disadvantage. Addressing the obesity epidemic, they demonstrate that many poor people grow up in “obesogenic” environments that perpetuate the consumption of high-fat foods and limit fitness opportunities. As they note,

> Although some individuals are able to make and maintain change, the medical model largely ignores the forces contributing to the development and maintenance of obesity. Patients walk out of the health care provider’s office only to reenter the same environment that led to their weight gain in the first place. The commercial and structural forces in their environment still are powerful. These people thus may be caught in “vicious cycles” of “accelerators” of the obesity epidemic…. resulting from the interaction of an increasingly obese individual with an “obesogenic environment” that encourages an overconsumption of food and discourages physical activity. (Adler & Stewart, 2009, p. 55)

Critical psychologists question the notion that people can improve their health or work opportunities at any time “because they are free to do so.” This is to ignore the vast inequities in access to resources that define one’s opportunities in life. This is not to say that people are devoid of agency to struggle for social justice. Rather, to ignite that agency, we need to acknowledge first that the environment does not present similar opportunities to all. We agree with Adler and Stewart that it is “unjust to hold people accountable for things over which they have little control …”. This places the primary responsibility on society to provide equal opportunities for all people to be able to make the healthier choices, and it reframes the discussion as one of justice rather than blame” (2009, p. 61). Nations and communities that distribute resources more equitably and make access to healthier environments easier achieve
better levels of psychosocial health and well-being (Wilkinson & Pickett, 2009).

Stead and Perry (2012a) argued that to assist people with their career choices, there should be less emphasis on individualist and reductionist perspectives and more emphasis on multicultural, multicontextual, and community perspectives to work. In so doing, ethically based social justice perspectives can be employed, such as that of Ali, Liu, Mahmood, and Arguello (2008).

Psychology’s role in solidarity and social change. Contrary to mainstream psychology’s tacit support for the status quo, critical psychologists actively support solidarity with marginalized groups and foster social change (Huygens, 2007, 2009; Nelson & Prilleltensky, 2010; Prilleltensky & Nelson, 2002). Critical psychologists engage with the poor and marginalized in participatory, collaborative, and emancipatory ways.

Prilleltensky and Nelson (2002) describe in detail how the values of self-determination, empowerment, caring, compassion, respect for diversity, and social justice inform practice in educational, clinical, organizational, health, and community settings. In all cases, critical psychologists honor the process of empowerment and justice as much as the outcome. This means giving voice and choice to the partners with whom we work, respecting their dignity by acknowledging their strengths and power differentials, and seeking avenues to gain control of their lives in ways that enhance reciprocal empowerment and not personal aggrandizement. Two examples illustrate these principles.

Brinton Lykes (Lykes, 1997, 1999; Lykes & Coquillon, 2009), for example, has been working in Guatemala with indigenous women for many years, gaining their trust and finding ways to empower them to gain control of their lives despite great trauma caused by mass killings by paramilitary troops. Many projects have sprung from their work together, including photo voice exhibitions and recovery efforts. In authentic partnerships of solidarity, the women transform their psychosocial reality while gaining recognition of past atrocities and injustice.

Ingrid Huygens (2007), in Aotearoa, New Zealand, studied processes of Pakeha (White inhabitants) change in response to the Treaty of Waitangi. The treaty, signed in 1840 between the British crown and the Maori people, granted the Maori population rights and privileges that were never quite honored by the White colonizers. Huygens documents the process of unlearning colonization and building bonds of solidarity with Maori communities. Her research offers many lessons about the transformation of dominant groups: questioning the legitimacy of White privilege, openness to the challenges of oppressed groups, pursuit of counter-hegemonic accounts of colonization, responsibility for the outcomes of domination, and fair relationships based on recognition of past injustices (2007, p. 247).

Critical Approach to Epistemic Values
To counter mechanistic, reductionist, and ethnocentric approaches to the study of lives, organizations, and communities, we espouse holistic, agentic, and culturally appropriate methods.

Holistic and agentic approaches. Critical psychologists embrace the challenge of studying people in their context, through quantitative and qualitative means that capture their lived experience. They acknowledge that despite great social forces, people exercise autonomy and self-determination. They balance the respect for agency with respect for social forces. Choices are influenced by cultural and social messages and opportunities. As Nussbaum (2006) explains,

People adjust their preferences to what they think they can achieve, and also to what their society tells them a suitable achievement is for someone like them. Women and other deprived people frequently exhibit such “adaptive preferences,” formed under unjust background conditions. These preferences will typically validate the status quo. (p. 73)

Therefore, critical psychologists pay attention to the exercise of self-determination, but in due recognition of the social determinants of health and well-being (Commission on Social Determinants of Health, 2008; Marmot, 2004).

Culturally appropriate approaches. Multiple cultures exist within any particular community: the culture of people with disabilities, the culture of people from Morocco, the culture of LGBT folk. Instead of searching for universals, critical psychologists search for specifics, and attune their modes of help accordingly. There is profound disrespect in expecting your clients to play by your rules and follow your hegemonic notions of decorum, wellness, and happiness. This requires sincere humility and a listening stance. Critical psychologists working with poor people, for example, have developed authentic mechanisms to bridge across cultures (Smith, 2010).

Critical Approach to Professional Values
To counter individualistic, reactive, and alienating orientations, critical psychologists devise
Interventions that are multilevel, strength-based, empowering, and proactive.

**Multilevel culture and community change.** Personal well-being is a multilevel phenomenon that requires not just personal adjustments, but also environmental ones (Rath & Harter, 2010). The well-being of a worker in a factory depends not simply on his or her attitude, but also on the climate, level of compensation, fair policies, emotional support, challenging opportunities, and the like (Blustein, 2006). A healthy working environment reflects effective, reflective, and supportive policies and practices that take into account the differential level of power of workers within the organization. While an ecological approach is better than one focusing strictly on the attitudes of the single workers, we should remember that it is possible to devise multilevel interventions that are aimed at enhancing managerial control at the expense of worker well-being.

**Strength-based and empowering change.** Critical psychology interventions are not just multilevel; they are also empowering. The goal is to provide voice and choice to workers, to recognize their strengths, and to create a working environment where there is mutual respect for the needs of everybody in the enterprise. Instead of defect-finding expeditions, critical psychologists venture to find assets in people, institutions, and communities. This is reflected in the questions we ask our partners and in the interventions we co-create with them. Appreciative inquiry is one example of action research based on strengths (Cooperrider & Srivastva, 1987). Asset Building Community Development (ABCD) is another (Kretzmann & McKnight, 1993). Narrative approaches to therapy (Morgan, 2000) and resilience building in youth (Liebenberg & Ungar, 2008) also work on strengths as opposed to deficits. These approaches acknowledge people's strengths and afford them voice and choice. Strength-based practitioners create partnerships with citizens to build on their assets. They do so by asking questions such as: What have you done to cope well with adversity? How did you achieve what you have? What are some of your strengths and virtues?

**Proactive change.** Instead of waiting for workers and organizations to develop signs of problems, we espouse a proactive approach based on analyses of risk and protective factors. It is far more humane, and cost-effective, to prevent problems than to cure them. Effective strategies exist for improving organizational climate and worker well-being. Similarly, a great deal is known about policies and practices that optimize satisfaction and fairness in the workplace (Fullan, 2008; Marmot & Feeney, 1996; Maton, 2008; Sisodia, Sheth, & Wolfe, 2007). For the most part, these interventions engage the workforce in visioning and devising a better place, build vertical and horizontal partnerships across the organization, minimize competition, and create a sense of shared responsibility. Proactive interventions do not just seek positive outcomes, but also meaningful processes. A collaborative, inclusive, and effective process can be a powerful outcome in itself, as it builds trust and ownership. In the case of effective school improvement, teachers collaborate with administration, better schools help struggling schools, senior teachers mentor junior teachers, everybody shares data, and parents are invited to be part of the solution (Hargreaves & Shirley, 2009).

Overall, effective preventive interventions are comprehensive, use varied teaching methods, provide sufficient dosage, are theory-driven, promote positive relationships, are appropriately timed, are culturally relevant, use outcome evaluation, and have well-trained staff (Nation et al., 2003). These features should inform school, worksite, and community-level interventions.

**Critical Approaches to Work and Career Psychology**

To examine critical psychology and the world of work, we need to consider the extent of its application to career psychology. Career psychology is different from the psychology of working in that the former largely employs mainstream approaches to research and counseling, without challenging the prevalent status quo. Furthermore, career psychologists largely study work as hierarchical and as a series of occupational choices (e.g., Brown & Associates, 2002; Brown & Lent, 2005). The focus is primarily on the individual, with some attention to context. The psychology of working, in turn, focuses on work as a central human activity that is both sociocultural in nature and embedded in all domains of life. All aspects of work, including paid and nonpaid work, are studied in the psychology of working. Moreover, the psychology of working focuses on oppression and social barriers to work (Blustein, 2006).

**Theories**

Theories in career psychology include, among others, person–environment fit (e.g., Dawis, 2005; Holland, 1997), social cognitive career theory (Lent, Brown, & Hackett, 2002), developmental...
and lifespan perspectives (e.g., Savickas, 2002; Super et al., 1996), sociological approaches (e.g., Johnson & Mortimer, 2002), systems theory (Patton & McMahon, 1999), action theory (Young, Valach, & Collin, 2002), and most recently Blustein’s (2011) relational theory of working. Many, but not all, career theories have focused on a logical positivist approach to resolving career problems, in which the emphasis has been on examining the individual’s personality and inner thought processes, and aligning these with jobs that suit such characteristics. This is also an essentialist perspective, as the core inner traits of individuals are to be discovered and described. Essentialism focuses on core characteristics of the individual and largely separates the individual from contexts, hence the danger of blaming the victim and minimizing contexts (Burr, 2003). Essentialism is part of every career theory, traditional and recent, with the possible exception of the sociological perspective (Johnson & Mortimer, 2002). This separation is of concern to critical psychologists. There is also an emphasis on work adjustment in career psychology, as evinced in Dais’s (2005) career theory, and there is little focus in career theories on how the world of work, instead of the worker, might be adjusted. Some of the more recent career theories have focused on the importance of context, for example Young, Valach, and Collin’s (2002) contextualist career theory, and how micro and macro systems affect individual lives, for example Patton and McMahon’s (1999) systems theory of career development. There has been increased reference to career issues of women, culturally diverse people, minorities, people with low socioeconomic status, immigrants, and the disabled in career theories, but little on the importance of social justice and work.

**Career and Work Literature**

There have been implicit but no explicit references to critical psychology in career theories. Variables such as motivation, self-efficacy, self-concept, career aspirations, career maturity, emotion and cognition (almost all as inner processes), career interventions, and counseling techniques are researched in relation to the career choice process, sometimes within various contexts, such as socioeconomic status, language, race, and country (Brown & Lent, 2005). The focus is on assisting the individual from an individualist perspective.

However, despite these limitations, there has been some critical commentary from within the career literature. The importance of social justice and work has been highlighted by several authors, such as Ali et al. (2008), Blustein, McWhirter, and Perry (2005), Stead and Perry (2012a), and Watson and Stead (2002). For example, McWhirter, Blustein, and Perry (2005), argued for integrating the emancipatory communitarian approach into the psychology of work as useful in assisting people with few or no occupational choices. Watson and Stead queried what the role of practitioners is and who their clients are, arguing for mutual collaboration and power sharing in research and counseling for all people.

McIlveen and Patton (2006) provided a critical review of objective assessment and psychometrics in career development, with special reference to the work of Foucault (1977). Their argument is that through logical positivism, traditional career approaches have resulted in career constructs becoming reified (i.e., terms constructed through language are assumed to be objective and concrete), without consideration that such constructs have been constructed. Furthermore, they stated that career psychologists, through corporate sanction, “become legitimized as the controllers of individuality” (p. 23). This is reminiscent of the research of Savage (1998) and McKinlay (2002) showing how employees’ selves are managed and controlled in corporate environments, resulting in what McKinlay referred to as “dead selves” (p. 595). McIlveen and Patton believed that counselors should acknowledge their power in the counseling relationship and become critically and reflexively aware of their discourses in the career field.

While career counselors assist many clients, it is through career counseling discourse, in association with psychological discourse, that people become categorized, diagnosed, and documented. Following Foucault (1977), they become “normalized,” and these are some of the powerful discourses to which McIlveen and Patton (2006) refer to. What is important to note here is that the traditional, so-called “objective” discourses in the career psychology literature are not the only ones available. There are many other discourses. However, alternative discourses often get marginalized. This is why Foucault (1977) referred to power and knowledge as intimately connected. It is through discourses that knowledge gets accepted, often through respected authors, organizations, and institutions. These are not necessarily the most useful or even most desirable discourses available, and they are not universally factual and objective. They are only deemed so within the regime of truth purveyed within a particular discourse. This is
one reason why critical psychologists view knowledge as local and contextualized.

An explicit statement of critical psychology in relation to the psychology of work-based transitions will be published as a special issue of the *Journal of Career Development*. In the special issue, the editors, Stead and Perry (2012b), stated that there has been a paucity of distributive justice and equity in the resources provided to people in work transitions. Furthermore, they claim that the focus in career psychology has been less on structural and societal problems and more on adjustment of personal problems. Prilleltensky and Stead (2012) reflect on the adjust/challenge dilemma in which the following choices are present in the counseling process: (a) adjust and challenge the system, (b) focus on adjustment but do not challenge the system, (c) challenge the system and do not adjust to it, or (d) neither challenge nor adjust to the system. The consequences of each choice are discussed in relation to the well-being of people and communities. Blustein, Medvide, and Wan (2012) argued that traditional discourses in career psychology have served not only to marginalize the unemployed but also to reinforce oppressive practices in public policy, research, and practice in relation to unemployment. They believed that career psychologists have seldom critically examined research on the individual in relation to unemployment or located unemployment within a combination of political, social, and psychological domains. Using a case study methodology, Ali, Yang, Button, and McCoy (2012) conducted a career education program among ninth-grade high school students in rural Iowa. The program was informed by critical psychology approaches in emphasizing collaboration involving the researchers, school personnel, and students in the research process. The program focused on personal and environmental barriers to academic and career planning facing the students. Finally, McWhirter and McWhirter (2012) provided an informative analysis of career guidance in Chile, not only offering a critique but also suggesting ways in which vocational guidance could be transformed to the benefit of Chilean youth living in difficult economic conditions. Additional examples of commentary on political factors in relation to work on a national level may also be found in studies in Portugal (Santos & Ferreira, 1998) and South Africa (Nicholas, Naïdo, & Pretorius, 2006).

Although career psychology is an inherently cultural enterprise, it marginalizes cultural and cross-cultural psychology in its literature (Stead, 2004, 2007). As Stead and Bakker (2010a) argue, theorists need to acknowledge the role cultural beliefs play in their theories’ construction and applicability to a diverse range of cultures within and outside the United States. Closely related to social constructionism is discourse analysis, which is emerging as an alternative way to conceptualize career psychology and the psychology of work. Discourse analysis comprises a variety of perspectives, with its critical variant (e.g., Foucault, 1977; Hook, 2004) being anti-essentialist and anti-humanist and focusing on language and power, which are seen as two sides of the same coin, in constructing meaning and realities. The Foucauldian perspective focuses on who is being served and why various people or groups benefit at the expense of others. It is interested in how discourses can be taken for granted and accepted in some contexts but can be oppressive in other contexts (Stead & Bakker, 2010a). Blustein, Schultheiss, and Flum (2004) provided a relational perspective of career and work using social constructionism. They stated that a goal of the relational approach to the psychology of work would be to “construct generative discourses that challenge existing traditions of knowledge and suggest new possibilities for practice and policy” (p. 435). The relationship approach highlights the narrative approach. They claimed that the relational approach would be more integrative of people’s diverse life domains than current research on career. The relational approach moves from intrapsychic processes to relationally embedded contextual domains.

Stead and Bakker (2010a, 2010b) argued for discourse analysis as an approach to critically evaluate the epistemological and ontological assumptions in career psychology. Discourse analysis, they argue, can be employed to analyze individual and institutional ways of communicating, and how some bodies of knowledge become marginalized. The emphasis is on how discourses are socially constructed, who benefits from such discourses, and whose approaches are marginalized. One example is the marginalization of qualitative research in favor of quantitative research in the career psychology literature. For example, Stead et al. (2012) content analyzed 3,279 articles from 1990 to 2009 in 11 major international and U.S. journals that published articles on careers and work. They reported that 55.9% of articles provided quantitative methods, 35.5% were theoretical/conceptual, and only 6.3% employed qualitative or mixed-methods research.

The data showed from 1990 to 2009 the number of quantitative empirical articles continued to increase relative to qualitative and mixed-method
critical psychology, well-being, and work

mainstream psychology (Adler, Forbes, & Willmot, 2008). While recognizing the potential of collaborative enterprises in fostering human flourishing, CMS deals with the barriers that contemporary organizations and the theories that support them erect in frustrating human potential.

What CMS addresses is the needless frustration of this potential that occurs when, instead of enabling human flourishing, organizations incubate and normalize stress and bad health, naturalize subordination and exploitation, demand conformity, inhibit free communication, erode morality, create and reinforce ethnic and gender inequalities, and so on. Instead of being progressive forces for emancipatory change, mainstream theory, as well as the everyday practice of organization and management, become reactionary means of conserving forms of exploitation and oppression institutionalized in the status quo. There is, in this sense, good reason to introduce, develop, and apply critical perspectives on management and organizations. (Alvesson, Bridgman, & Willmott, 2009, p. 8)

Like critical psychology, CMS questions taken-for-granted assumptions in management. Three of these unquestioned assumptions are the naturalization of dominance, the paragon of productivity, and the lack of reflexivity. The first one concerns the unquestioned acceptance of White male-dominated work environments. The second deals with the presumption that all human interaction in the workplace ought to be evaluated on the basis of the bottom line. Relationships are worth it only insofar as they generate money. This instrumental approach to human relations perpetuates the objectification of human beings in the workplace. The final critique, concerning the lack of reflexivity, feeds the previous two: it is precisely the lack of self-reflection that enables dominant groups to proceed with oppressive approaches without guilt or self-recrimination (Alvesson, Bridgman, & Willmott, 2009).

In a series of telling case studies, Wolfram Cox, Le’Trent-Jones, Voronov, and Wier (2009) apply critical theory to organizational conflicts and dilemmas. Their collection of case studies demonstrates the usefulness of narrative, discourse, and power analyses in dissecting the often-diverging sets of interests that plague workplaces. The growing literature on CMS promises to open new avenues for studying organizational development and human flourishing.
Conclusion

Critical psychology and critical approaches in general have much to offer to the psychology of work. The main contributions may be divided into deconstruction and reconstruction. The former entails the dismantling of oppressive practices through methodic questioning of assumptions. The latter pertains to building relationships and structures within the workplace and society that foster the values of self-determination, cooperation, respect for diversity, and social justice. To achieve the goals of deconstruction and reconstruction, we need to challenge psychology and allied professions to challenge the societal status quo. The psychology-of-work approach and critical management studies are aligning with emancipatory approaches that put people ahead of profit. Humanistic work psychology promotes the principles of collaboration, service, and social justice. Career psychology, while closely attached with mainstream psychology, is also beginning to question some of its assumptions.

A critical psychology approach to work reminds us that the well-being of employees and community members, not just management and corporate leaders, is important. Furthermore, it brings attention to the values and aspirations of all people, not just dominant groups. If the entire community is to benefit from a psychology of work, we had better make sure that all the voices are heard, that rights and obligations in the world of work are fairly distributed, and that the well-being of workers is not devoid of justice. No wellness without fairness.

References


Kretzmann, J. P., & McKnight, J. L. (1993) Building communities from the inside out: A path toward finding and mobilizing a community’s assets. Chicago, IL: ACTA Publications.


The purpose of this chapter is to describe social constructionism and demonstrate its usefulness to the psychology of working (e.g., Blustein, 2006). This chapter is not a comprehensive overview of social constructionism, but reflects my perspective of what may be useful for the psychology of working. It is difficult to provide a concise explanation or definition of social constructionism as there is no one agreed-upon definition or even summary of what social constructionism comprises. It is not a theory or a perspective linked to one author or one definitive book but a collection of approaches that have more or less similar ways of understanding the social sciences. The following major sections are included: what is social constructionism, historical and recent developments, discourse and language, power/knowledge and normalization, relational self, narrative, criticisms of social constructionism, and possible research directions.

**What Is Social Constructionism?**

To understand social constructionism, it may be helpful to first explain what views many social constructionists subscribe to and those with which they disagree. Cushman (1995) provided eight of what he called "basic propositions" of social constructionism. In these propositions he emphasized that individuals are socially constructed in culture and history. Specifically, people are embedded in a matrix of language, symbols, rituals, moral understandings, power, and privilege. By "construction" is meant how we describe, categorize, or label people. We draw constructions from, for example, psychological, political, legal, economic, and religious discourses. Constructions occur within discourse. According to Foucault (1972), discourses are not merely words that designate objects, but are "practices that systematically form the objects of which they speak" (p. 49). In this sense, discourse refers to institutionalized ways of communicating in which
objects are ordered in a way that makes sense to its practitioners. So the discourses of the psychology of working are different in some ways from the discourses on working found in, for example, organizational psychology, economics, or politics.

Discourses employ their own terminologies and ways of construction, based on whose interests they serve. These discourses are also based on regimes of truth and are useful in that they result in actions on people. Once people are described or labeled, various things may happen to them. Take race, ethnicity, and culture, for example. These terms are constructions, as there is no agreed-upon way to allocate all people to these groups and there is no clear explanation as to how these groups differ from each other (Stead, 2004). However, they are very real in discourses and actions are taken toward people based on these constructions in work environments.

Burr (2003) believed that the following are commonly held beliefs of social constructionists: (a) there is a critical perspective toward taken-for-granted, “obvious,” or “innocent” knowledge, (b) our understanding of the world is historically and culturally informed (i.e., knowledge is local and temporal, and universal knowledge claims are suspect), (c) knowledge is created and sustained by social relationships, and (d) knowledge and action are intertwined (i.e., words do things). Lock and Strong (2010) listed five general tenets of social constructionism: (a) meaning and understanding are central to human activity, (b) meaning and understanding start with social interaction, (c) ways of meaning-making are embedded in culture, time, and space, and vary in different contexts, (d) people do not possess predefined characteristics or traits, and therefore there is a skeptical view of essentialism (i.e., that individuals have a core nature that can be discovered; Burr, 2003), and (e) a critical perspective.

Gubrium and Holstein (2008) pointed out that social constructionism is not synonymous with qualitative research, phenomenology, grounded theory, ethnomethodology, or constructivism, although there is some overlap with each of these domains. Social constructionism is sometimes assumed to be either a subset of constructivism or a synonym for constructivism, and both assumptions are problematic. While there are similarities between these two approaches, such as their mutual interest in human relationships, as is the case with social constructivism, social constructionists eschew the belief in inner mental processes that continues to be part of constructivism (Sparkes & Smith, 2008). The term “constructivism” is sometimes used in vocational psychology to bridge these positions, but once discourse of the inner mind is present, “social constructivism” may be the underpinning approach. Young and Collin (2004) clarified the similarities and differences between social constructionism and social constructivism in the vocational psychology literature. An understanding of social constructionism’s development and current usages may provide a better understanding of what this approach means.

**Historical and Recent Developments**

To understand social constructionism it will be helpful to briefly trace some of its historical developments. (These developments are provided more comprehensively in Lock and Strong, 2010.) One of the earliest perspectives allied to social constructionism is that of Niccolo Machiavelli (1469–1527), an Italian best known for his 1513 political treatise *The Prince*. He wrote about how rulers might maintain their political power through strategizing and wielding power. He did not view rulers as possessing power, but focused on how they used power in relationships. This was and still is very different to commonsense notions of power, which is assumed to be a possession or trait of some people (Clegg, 1989). The notion of power as situated in networks of relationships, rather than within people, is prominent in the work of Foucault (1980). Another Italian, Giambattista Vico (1668–1774), criticized rationalistic Cartesian perspectives. He questioned knowledge as being timeless and also believed that those who construct things understand what they have constructed in ways that those who did not create them cannot. Vico entertained the notion of phenomena being constructed, which predated an important perspective of social constructionism.

The Age of Enlightenment, also known as the Age of Reason, flowered in the 18th century as a reaction to power invested in royalty and the wealthy and was a critical evaluation of traditional beliefs. The importance of freedom, democracy, rational thinking, reason, science, and individuality was extolled. In this era, empiricism became highly valued, as found in much of vocational psychology today, but the Romantics and Postmodernists later questioned its knowledge claims. The Romantic era of the 19th century was a reaction to the focus on rational thought and emphasized feelings, emotions, and the unconscious, as evinced in psychodynamic approaches and humanism (Gergen, 1991). Empirical observations and measurement were not considered the only ways of understanding, and metaphysical perspectives were valued. Romantic
expressions, such as self-fulfilment, self-actualization, and the unconscious, continue to be found in vocational research and counseling.

**Reaction to Positivism**

Much of the theory and literature of vocational psychology is driven by positivism. One may also safely assume that social constructionism has developed many of its viewpoints as a reaction to positivism and empirical methods. Logical positivism can be traced to the works of Francis Bacon (1561–1626), who problematized Aristotle’s deductivism (i.e., theories are first developed and thereafter facts are gathered to fit these theories) and stated that theories should be empirically derived from observable phenomena. Positivism, which is closely linked to Enlightenment thought, became established by the “Vienna Circle” in the 1920s, which comprised academics such as Rudolf Carnap, Otto Neurath, and Hans Hahn, among others. This group rejected metaphysical thought as being meaningful and stated that scientific knowledge is best obtained through rational thought, empirical observation, and experience. They emphasized the importance of objectivity and the value-free nature of scientific inquiry (Mouton, 1993).

The tenets of positivism have been challenged in the physical sciences (e.g., Feyerabend, 2010; Kuhn, 1962) and the social sciences (e.g., Danziger, 1990; Teo, 2005). Both Kuhn and Feyerabend pursued the notion that there is no singular paradigm or method in scientific discourse and argued that science is not entirely bound to logical empiricism and rational inquiry. “We find, then, that there is not a single rule, however plausible, and however firmly grounded in epistemology, that is not violated at some time or other . . . [and that this is] both reasonable and absolutely necessary for the growth of knowledge” (Feyerabend, 2010, p. 7). While social constructionists believe that positivism is given an inordinate amount of attention in the vocational psychology literature (see Stead et al., 2012) and are mystified by some of its standpoints, most social constructionists do not advocate the demise of positivism and quantitative methods. They believe that there should be an ongoing dialogue between different approaches (see Burr, 2003; Gergen, 2009b; Holstein & Gubrium, 2008). To call for the demise of a research tradition would be to advance foundationalism, in which one believes in the secure and definitive position of one’s approach and therefore considers other approaches as fundamentally wrong (Gergen, 2001).

**Wittgenstein and Derrida**

Wittgenstein (1953), a British philosopher, was influential in social constructionism in that he believed that meanings reside in various discourses and contexts and therefore are not definitive and universal. He did not view language as representing reality, but as reality construction in human interaction. Derrida (1976), a French philosopher, argued that the meaning of a sign (e.g., a word) is never fixed but alters depending on the discourse employed and the context. Nothing is fully present in a word, as it is dependent on the meanings of other words ad infinitum. Therefore, definitions of terms such as “psychology of working” and “social justice” are dependent on the meanings of each word in that definition, and these meanings are dependent on other meanings, and so on indefinitely. As language is unstable and never fixed, a definable core self (e.g., finding your true self) must therefore be a myth, as people are described through language. One may argue that definitions employed in the psychology of working or vocational psychology are useful within their respective discourses, or their regimes of truth, but they are never unalterable and always open to revisions and various interpretations.

**Foucault**

The works of Foucault (1972, 1977, 1980) are often allied to social constructionism, owing to Foucault’s emphasis on knowledge creation through social discourses in cultural contexts, rather than through internal cognitions (Burr, 2003). Foucault also emphasized how power is ubiquitous in social interactions, rather than internal to a person, and that power and knowledge are two sides of the same coin. He saw knowledge as constructed through power, and thus “regimes of truth” (such as the received perspectives of vocational psychology and the psychology of working) are created rather than being objective and universal truths.

**Recent Developments**

Social constructionism garnered much attention with Berger and Luckmann’s (1966) book *The Social Construction of Reality: A Treatise in the Sociology of Knowledge*. Berger and Luckman were sociologists, but their work spread to psychology and related fields. The focus was on how language and social interaction are employed in knowledge construction. More recently, Russian authors such as Mikhail Bakhtin and Lev Vygotsky have contributed to social constructionism. Vygotsky and Luria (1993) believed that it was through relationships
with others that higher mental functioning emerged and that cultural tools are essential to constructing psychological processes. A particularly influential social constructionist in psychology is Kenneth Gergen, whose article “The social constructionist movement in modern psychology” (Gergen, 1985) was seminal in directing psychologists to an alternative approach. He continues to be prolific in the field (e.g., Gergen, 2009a, 2009b).

The vocational psychology literature includes many discussions based on social constructionist thought, such as Blustein, Schultheiss, and Flum (2004), Cohen, Duberley, and Mallon (2004), Coupland (2004), McIlveen and Patton (2006), McIlveen & Schultheiss (2012), Richardson (2004, 2012), Stead (2004, 2007), Stead and Bakker (2010a, 2010b, 2012), and Young and Collin (2004). There have been various foci, such as relational perspectives, culture, assessment, self, and meanings of work. Richardson (1993) provided a relatively early perspective on work in people’s lives and argued that diverse methodologies for a multiplicity of work locations should be entertained. She believed that social constructionism is well positioned to research power, race, class, and gender, developmentally and in work contexts. Recently, Richardson (2012) emphasized the role of discourse and language in knowledge creation in work environments.

Social Constructionism and Epistemology

Epistemology is that branch of philosophy that examines the basis and nature of knowledge and how we know what we purport to know. There are many ways to know the psychology of working, such as empirical perspectives (i.e., what we experience with our senses is what we know, and so the mind acts as a mirror to the world), rationalist perspectives (i.e., the experience of the world comes from within a person, who also has innate thoughts to begin with), and poststructuralist perspectives (i.e., what we know is constructed through language and discourse). Social constructionists fall into the latter group as they believe that only through agreement and negotiation can we describe anything. Knowledge is viewed as being in a state of flux and is based on discourses to describe people and things, rather than knowledge being determined objectively. Social constructionism has the capabilities to liberate research from relatively fixed and predetermined ways of knowing and allows dominant discourses to be challenged and alternative discourses to be explored. Thus, a critical reading of taken-for-granted discourses is encouraged and provides a useful means to further explore the psychology of working.

Language and Discourse

Language and discourse are sometimes used synonymously, but they differ. Language may be viewed as the structure, connectedness, and meaningfulness of one’s statements. Following Foucault (1972), discourses are systems of rules, practices, and beliefs that determine how people and objects are constructed, defined, and explained. Our perspectives of work, poverty, and oppression depend on the languages and discourses employed, and these may include, for example, positivist, constructivist, and social constructionist languages and discourses. Social constructionists believe that one’s language and discourses encourage one to view the world in various ways and emphasize that how we construct the world is closely related to history and culture. Whether work is viewed as paid and unpaid or is anything that requires unwilling or willing effort, or is synonymous with career and job, depends on social interaction and negotiation—that is, how we view work becomes intimately connected to the discourse(s) we employ. In place of an objective, value-neutral study of work, there are negotiated discourses, which are sometimes referred to as the politics of representation, and therein is power in discourse. Power is not only repressive but is also productive; it seduces one by the knowledge it provides. Through the politics of representation, certain perspectives and terminologies are favored and others marginalized or ignored. In this way, discourse produces knowledge (Foucault, 1980). The roles played by discourse and language will be described in relation to meanings of work and metaphors.

Meanings of Work

According to the Shorter Oxford English Dictionary (Trumble & Stevenson, 2002), work is anything that is done, as in a deed, an action, or a proceeding. This is a rather broad definition and has resulted in not only differing meanings as to what constitutes work for purposes of research, but also different terms for specificity, such as vocation, career, occupation, and job. Such terms and meanings are negotiated. I am unsure how the terms “vocation,” “career,” and “work” precisely differ from each other or whether “vocational psychology” is much different from “career psychology,” although in my experience editors and reviewers prefer one to use one of these terms consistently or, when using both terms,
to provide a definition of what these terms mean. It seems to me that these terms mean whatever a given author wishes them to mean. Researchers allocate their own meanings to the terms as they see fit within the theoretical approaches, cultures, and contexts they are writing. The dominant meanings of these terms proceed from discourses of power and acceptance by others. The subjectivity of such terminology is revealed when the meanings of these terms differ and change.

The fact that this book is not about the psychology of careers or occupations but of the psychology of working is testimony to how language and negotiation dictate what we view and how we view it. By using the term “working,” this book is more receptive to discussing, for example, work as paid and unpaid, oppression and discrimination in work, unemployment, and the working lives of those from lower socioeconomic environments. It is likely less interested in focusing only on hierarchical career development, commonly known as the “career ladder,” and the work trajectories of the wealthy and upper middle class. This does not mean that by referring to the psychology of working and not to career or occupation, one is providing a more accurate or objective account of work, but rather a perspective that may be contextual, useful, and sensitive toward social justice concerns. The psychology of working, as I understand it, is particularly concerned with injustice in relation to work and the well-being of people within work in its broadest meaning. The world does not come with a guidebook on how to interpret it. That is left to us to fashion, and as we cannot transcend the world and view it objectively or in its totality, we are left to our perspectives, which are intimately linked to discourse, history, and culture. Ultimately, I am left with interpreting the psychology of working as you are, and while there are probably many similarities in our interpretations, there are some or perhaps many differences.

**Metaphors**

The term “work” is often used in relation to metaphors, which are not only expressive but commonly used in most discourses. What is interesting about metaphors is that they are hardly pointers to a so-called “objective reality,” in that they refer to one thing but ask you to think of something different (Sarup, 1993). They allude to something and are commonly used in research articles on work. For example, we may be asked to examine the world of work through a cultural lens and use the building blocks of knowledge to create the scaffolding for a better understanding of the glass-ceiling effect and the inner processes of individuals. A common metaphor in psychology and vocational psychology is discovery, such as a “discovery-oriented approach.” To discover something is to find a foundational truth or something “objective,” rather than what is more likely occurring in vocational psychology, namely a construction. Metaphors and other figures of speech cannot be avoided as they are too embedded in everyday language and discourse. Some of the metaphors used in the psychology of working tend to dichotomize (e.g., full-time work/leisure time), or seek to indefinitely build on knowledge for a universal psychology, or focus on inner mental states and the external environment (also a dichotomy) to provide insight into the meanings of work. Social constructionists prefer metaphors in keeping with relationships and connection, or what Bird (2000) refers to as the language for the in-between—a language of movement and activity in contexts. It is a language of not clearly separating terms such as self, family, and work, as if they were isolated entities. It is the language of studying work as activities throughout one’s daily life, and not being affected by discrete domains.

The use of fresh metaphors in understanding work will broaden and enrich our perspectives, rather than us relying on the commonly used metaphors in vocational psychology. This is evinced when reviewers of journal articles require a predetermined scientific language to be employed. Having submitted social constructionist and discourse analysis manuscripts to psychology journals, I am frequently asked to use the language and metaphors of traditional psychology or positivism to describe these perspectives and to employ reductionistic definitions of the many seemingly different terms that I use. How is one to define social constructionism or the self in a sentence or two? This does not permit alternative perspectives to flourish, but limits the proliferation of knowledge and maintains power within the mainstream regime of truth and knowledge.

**Power/Knowledge and Normalization**

Foucault (1980) provided a perspective of how power and knowledge interact in social relationships. He saw power and knowledge as two sides of the same coin and referred to power/knowledge. Foucault’s thesis was that people’s characteristics are constructed and subjected to discourse within culture and time. Through their *subjectification* (i.e., the subjective allocation of descriptors to
individuals), people become objects of knowledge that are described, statistically catalogued, and studied. Foucault (1972, p. 17) famously stated, “Do not ask who I am and do not ask me to remain the same: leave it to our bureaucrats and our police to see that our papers are in order. At least spare us their morality when we write.” Perhaps this is a thought that may well be applicable to psychologists’ diagnostic dispositions. Considering people as objects of knowledge is vastly different from pre-Enlightenment eras, when ordinary people were below the surveillance radar and were barely described, with only the nobility and wealthy being allocated such privileges. Foucault (1980) acknowledged the realities of hierarchical power but did not view power as situated inside a person. He saw power as manifested through discourses in relationships with others and power becoming visible through resistance. If there is no resistance, it is probably domination but not power, according to Foucault (1980). He did not view power as only negative, as power also produces knowledge. Power produces mainstream perspectives and marginalizes other perspectives in vocational psychology.

Foucault outlined how power can transpire in working environments. In Discipline and Punish, Foucault (1972) referred to Bentham’s panopticon, a hypothetical tower in which guards could observe prisoners at all times but not vice versa. The guards’ continual surveillance results in the self-gaze of each prisoner, thus leading to self-regulation and responsibility. For Foucault, this is how power transpires in society, in schools, prisons, hospitals, workplaces, and so on, namely via institutional surveillance leading to self-surveillance. There have been some management studies reporting on surveillance. Savage (1998) researched management and employee relationships in the Great Western Railway in Britain from 1833 to 1914. He reported that while workers were previously punished and fined, this changed in that the workers in the latter half of the 19th century were motivated and disciplined to work their way up the career ladder through self-monitoring and self-regulation. This proved to be a more “effective” way to improve employee productivity and to develop a modern work culture. Grey (1994) employed case studies of young trainees in an accounting firm. He reported that trainees who conceptualized their selves in terms of their work viewed disciplinary techniques as assisting their progress in the workplace. Job appraisals were viewed as a benevolent way of furthering their career aspirations. Instead of workers viewing employee ratings as intrusive and annoying, they were perceived as an acceptable technique to assist workers to realize their “true potentials.” In an analysis of Scottish banking 20 years prior to 1914, McKinlay (2002) found that employee conformity through self-regulation to the banks’ cultural expectations facilitated promotion but resulted in what he referred to as the banker’s “dead selves.” McKinlay viewed this as the enmeshment of bureaucratic and self-regulation to produce a highly controlled working environment.

Through power, knowledge about people and things is created, such as theories about work, categories (e.g., diagnoses), and assessments. Through powerful discourses, certain knowledges become marginalized and other knowledges elevated. This is particularly noticeable in the vocational psychology literature, where Stead et al. (2012) reported that among 11 journals that published 3,279 career- and work-related articles between 1990 and 2009, 55.9% of the articles reflected quantitative research methods and 6.3% qualitative research methods. The remaining articles were conceptual/theoretical.

The role of power/knowledge is underscored when vocational psychologists focus on the individual. It is the individual who is encouraged to adapt, adjust, and find solutions to the presenting problem, be it unemployment, work dissatisfaction, or poverty. For Foucault (1977), counseling can become a normalizing judgment, in which the individual is required to self-regulate in keeping with social norms. This is also noticeable in the assessment process, where test manuals include average scores and norm tables, so that the counselor and client can judge the extent to which the client deviates from the norm. Vocational psychology traditionally focuses on the individual using an array of terminology, discourse, assessments, diagnostics, interventions, psychological associations, regulatory bodies such as ethics committees, and so on, in what Rose (1985) referred to as the “psychological complex.” The ultimate effect of disciplinary power is self-regulation, in which people become what Foucault calls “docile bodies.” That some people are unemployed or poor is the result of a larger system of societal discourse and culture and not merely reflective of so-called individual weaknesses or shortcomings. To focus solely on the individual and his or her deficits is to uphold the status quo, which runs counter to the psychology of working perspectives.
Relational Self

Theories of vocational psychology have traditionally viewed career decision making as best occurring when there is a suitable fit between one’s self and the requirements of a job (e.g., Dawis & Lofquist, 1984; Holland, 1997). It is said that once you understand who you are in terms of various characteristics, such as abilities, interests, self, and personality traits, then you would be best suited to jobs that match these traits. This has its origins in the work of Frank Parsons (1909) and is rooted in trait-factor and person-environment fit theories, including those of Holland and Super (see Brown & Associates, 2002). Social constructionists question essentialism, which emphasizes a unique inner self. This means that they do not view an individual as having an internal, core nature that is waiting to be discovered (Burr, 2003). Essentialism is closely linked to humanism and much of current psychological thought. In contrast, social constructionists view selves as continually being created in and varying between relationships with others over time (e.g., Burkitt, 2008; Gergen, 1991; Stead & Bakker, 2010b). Therefore, the self is not seen as a fixed and stable entity, but as flexible, fragmented, and changing depending on the situation. From a social constructionist perspective, a “fragmented self” does not refer to a psychological disorder but to a self continuously in the process of becoming.

While we cannot literally see a person’s self, it is widely assumed that we can infer an inner self from a person’s actions. This is a product of Enlightenment thinking and the Protestant work ethic. As Gergen asks (2009b), how do we know that actions do in fact reflect an inner mind or self? It is arguable that commentaries on the “nature” of an inner self are only interpretations. Social constructionists believe that the self is constructed in relationships through discourse. Our thoughts, feelings, and beliefs emerge from language, and discourse in relationships. According to Bauman (2002), the inner thoughts that people are thought to have are no more than recitals of public rhetoric, the discourses commonly found in one’s culture(s). When we theorize and think about work, we are inextricably entwined in the discourses on work that we choose to employ, discourses that are culturally and historically bound. Terms like “self-determination” and “agency,” as reflecting an inner self that drives the individual to do things, thus become problematic. It may be more appropriate to refer to a person’s “selves,” as they vary in time and context. A person does not behave in the same way in all situations but in relationships in different contexts.

While social constructionists have long emphasized the relational aspects of the self, vocational psychologists have been promoting relational research as a way to overcome decontextualized research in vocational psychology. Relational research also emphasizes the importance of relationships in developing career awareness, searching for work, functioning productively in the work environment, and managing work-based crises, such as unemployment. The perception of a self-sufficient, self-driven worker whose working life is based on rugged individualism is viewed as outdated, decontextualized, and reductionistic by social constructionists in vocational psychology. Rather, a relational perspective of people co-constructing their work lives with others is underscored. Relational support and networks are important for general psychological health and in work environments with stress and anxiety. Moving the locus of self as inner to a relational domain also relieves the individual of solely taking responsibility for work-related issues or being focused on self-regulation. Such a perspective also situates the psychology of working in relationships in contexts and communities (Blustein, 2006). Richardson (1993) proposed a new discourse for people constructing their lives in market work, personal relationships, and personal care work. She argued for a narrative approach in research and counseling to enable people to co-construct and examine alternative meanings in their lives. In so doing, the landscape for studying work is broadened to include care work and also those with few or no work-related choices (Blustein, 2011).

The Other

One way social constructionists view the construction of meaning is through “the other.” While it is useful to explain what someone or something is, we are also aware of what it is not. This is also what Sampson (1993b) refers to as the “absent standard” or the “serviceable other.” The “other” is constructed to be serviceable to the dominant group and, according to Sampson, is represented only through the dominant group’s discourse. For example, females are often defined through the discourses of males. The poor are frequently defined and described through the discourses of the middle class and the wealthy. Through difference, meaning is constructed and meanings are created within discursive frameworks (Hall, 1997/2001; Sampson, 1993a, Sampson, 1993b). Difference is largely created through the power of certain discourses, in that categories are developed to enhance the one domain.
at the expense of the other. Few of these categories are “real”; rather, they are constructed to suit a group of people. Such categories commonly found in the psychology of working literature are gender, socioeconomic status, race, ethnic group, work/leisure, and an array of DSM disorders. Selves are also constructed with the other in mind, and the serviceable other serves to sustain a self and give it meaning. Selves are built on their relationships to other selves (Sampson, 1993a), and so hard-working, male, upwardly mobile, financially independent, and confident selves have their contrasts, such as the unemployed, the poor, and those with low confidence, to sustain them and give them meaning. The dominant conception of self becomes constructed through discourses defining the selves of others. A consideration of the construction of the other has implications for unfair and oppressive practices in working environments, in that these constructions often need to be challenged with a relational way of understanding work replacing them. Through relationships, narratives are constructed, as discussed below.

**Narrative**

Social constructionists generally are deeply suspicious of meta-narratives, a term Lyotard (1984) popularized to indicate the search for a universal theory, namely narratives that encompass all narratives by reconfiguring them in one universal language or mode of understanding. Marxism is one example of a meta- or grand narrative. Science in the form of positivism is generally suspicious of local narratives as being too subjective but, as Lyotard points out, science is dependent on the narrative as a starting point to explain its theories and principles. Social constructionists are especially interested in local narratives, the narratives of ordinary people to explain their lives, and in this way the marginalized or “the other” may not be erased through an overriding dominant narrative.

Social constructionism does not endorse a specific counseling therapy or research method. However, it does question therapies linked to the medical model, those that focus on cause and effect, and therapies that emphasize interiority (i.e., one’s problems residing inside the mind). This would include psychoanalysis and cognitive therapies, among others. Social constructionists question the taken-for-granted and wonder how else it could be (Gergen, 2009a), and so alternative but rigorous perspectives are sought. Traditional constructions of therapy and research need not necessarily be that way, and social constructionists wonder how else we might view the client’s or research participant’s concerns. Narratives can structure seemingly disparate occurrences, simplify events and provide meaning, and legitimize certain narratives and marginalize others (Preuss & Dawson, 2009). In narrative therapy and research, one generally encourages the participant to provide a narrative of the problem or issue at hand. The participant provides a plot; this could, for example, be his or her struggle to find employment or difficulties relating to others in the workplace. As narratives are based on memories, they can be selective, and no narrative is an absolute truth. Therefore, counselors and researchers explore with a client or research participant other ways of constructing the story by examining, for example, “missing links,” contradictions, or dichotomies to determine the discourse being used. While interviews are clearly an important part of work narratives, other means of data collection can include archival sources, e-mails, photographs, film, and music.

Narrative approaches are accepting of social constructionist perspectives and social constructionism’s emphasis on meaning making, not through truth or an absolute reality but through language and discourse. It is believed that through language and discourses, we constitute and describe our worlds. How we view theories, the literature, research methods, or clients’ reflections is conducted through stories. Examples of narrative constructivism in the career literature include Bujold (2004), Guichard and Lenz (2005), and McIlveen and Patton (2007).

It is important to note that narrative constructivism overlaps considerably with narrative constructionism (e.g., see Strong & Paré, 2004; White & Epston, 1990) in its interest in the narrative and social interaction, but there is an important difference between the two. Narrative constructionism avoids references to inner processes or personal scripts while focusing on the narrative through social interaction (Sparkes & Smith, 2008). It eschews narratives as reflecting the deep recesses of one’s inner self but examines the relational, sociocultural interactions that make up narratives. Instead of placing the narrative within the individual, it is situated in relationships with others (i.e., co-construction), and so agency, emotions, and memories are performed as social interactions, as performances, and as narratives (Sparkes & Smith, 2008). An example of the narrative in vocational counseling is Campbell and Ungar (2004), and there is also an interesting study on workaholism by Boje and Tyler (2009). There are
many references where one may employ narrative constructionism in therapy (e.g., White & Epston, 1990) and in research (e.g., Clandinin, 2007; Riessman, 2008). For example, in a therapeutic context, White and Epston emphasized challenging the client’s dominant problem narrative, externalizing this narrative, and separating it from the client to enable an alternative story of the client’s problem. This is based on the assumption that a client’s problem is never reduced to one narrative of the problem (i.e., the dominant narrative). Regarding research, Riessman offered a variety of analytic methods to interpret texts that can be, for example, pictorial, cinematic, and written. The analytic methods she proposed are thematic analysis, structural analysis, dialogic/performance analysis, and visual analysis.

Criticisms of Social Constructionism

Various misunderstandings and criticisms of social constructionism appear regularly in academic literature, such as the meaning of reality, relativism, moral relativism, and agency, and these are addressed below.

Reality

Critics often state that social constructionists deny that there is a reality out there and that they believe that we cannot be sure that events even happened. This is a misguided criticism. Gergen (2009a) pointed out that to consider reality being “out there” is already based on preconceived notions of an inner and outer world. Indeed, poverty, pollution, unemployment, and death are very real. Once we begin to discuss what these terms mean to us, we provide discourses based on our views, and the terms above do not reside in only one perspective or discourse. To say that there is only one way to view whatever issue you may think about is to close curiosity and dialogue. Using unemployment as an example, who counts as unemployed is a contested point, and what unemployment means and how it should be studied and limited is varied and situated in many discourses such as economics, law, politics, sociology, religion, and psychology. That a person does not have paid work is obvious, but how we define and situate the unemployed in discourses is another matter.

Relativism

Perhaps the most common criticism is the belief that social constructionists view everything as relative and that all ideas are of equal worth. Rather, social constructionists view all ideas as situated in discourses, which in turn are situated in culture, time, and space. There are thus no foundational or fundamental truths on which to compare perspectives. As we cannot transcend this world or offer an objective opinion on it, we remain unable to speak definitively on it. However, within certain discourses in which realities are created, such as the language of statistics, moral discourses, or the language of the psychology of working and vocational psychology, there can be truths, and therein one can perhaps compare and evaluate various perspectives. However, where there are differing paradigms within a subject area, it may be difficult to make comparisons, as would be the case between person-environment fit approaches and social constructionism. But such perspectives are always compared to a criterion that has no absolute foundation, only a regime of truth within a discourse. What is of interest to social constructionists is how powerful discourses contribute to the status or marginalization of perspectives in vocational psychology and how such discourses are acted upon. (See Agger, 2007, for an informative and entertaining discussion on relativism.)

Moral Relativism

Social constructionists are often criticized for being morally relativist. Critics complain that social constructionists do not take moral stands to destroy oppression, eradicate unfair labor practices, eliminate poverty, and fight for the values decent societies should adhere to. This is as if hitting something will destroy it once and for all. As Gergen (2009b) points out, the production of good can create the very conditions for evil, and vice versa. This view has been present in Eastern philosophies for millennia. The short answer to the complex question of moral relativism is that social constructionists encourage dominant views to be vigorously challenged and questioned. Religious, political, and social values, of which there are many, are all important in challenging the status quo and that which compromises people’s well-being. Social constructionists are certainly not indifferent to these voices. Social constructionists may individually argue for one perspective, but they will avoid stating the moral superiority of their values. Critics of the “moral shallowness of constructionism are seldom interested in establishing just any value commitment…but typically demand commitment to their particular values” (Gergen, 2009a, p. 169). According to Gergen, social constructionists would prefer to be involved in a mutual exploration of the issues at hand in which dialogue is present in therapy rather than distance is desired. There are many competing voices arguing for ways to solve societal ills, such as
unemployment, labor and employment practices, management and worker disagreements, strikes at work, poverty, and so on. To do nothing about these issues is problematic, but to use social constructionism to defend the superiority of one view and the concomitant solutions to the problem is to misunderstand social constructionism. Gergen states that he knows of no one who claims that all moralities are equal. He argues for moral pluralism, rather than moral relativism, in which a preferred morality might be sought but alternative traditions are not eliminated. For example, topics concerning social justice and the psychology of working are of interest to social constructionists. There is thus an acceptance of diverse views and responsible relational dialogue, both characteristic of the psychology of working.

Agency
Another prevalent criticism of social constructionism concerns agency. Agency is found in most career theories and is generally viewed as an internal state. It is believed that people make their own decisions in relation to work, but we are seldom informed about how people use available discourses in making decisions. The notion of agency is grounded in the individualism of the Enlightenment and in Western cultures. We find it in statements such as, “Which occupation do you intend to pursue?” From an essentialist perspective, our intentions are internal and we make our own decisions. From a social constructionist perspective, our intentions are about identifying a performance (Gergen, 2009b). Choosing an occupation is a well-known performance. Performances come from a rich and available cultural catalogue of discourses. By seemingly deciding for ourselves to follow a certain occupation or intending to make a work-related decision, we are selecting among a variety of available performances rather than delving into our minds for answers. There are multiple rationales for making decisions, and we draw from these available options. Our intentions are not conceived in our minds but in available discourses. In this way the agency/determinism debate is relinquished with a focus on action and relationships, a focus on culturally available performances. Thus, an emphasis on the interiority of the individual is replaced by a focus on discourses and relationships when utilizing social constructionism in the psychology of working.

Possible Research Directions
There are many possibilities for conducting research from a social constructionist perspective, and a few possibilities are presented. Research could analyze different discourses present in the psychology of working, such as work discourses by academic school of thought, culture, gender, social class, family members, and for what purposes and who benefits from them. Such discourses may be verbal, textual, or image-based. The context in which these discourses occur and the effects of these discourses (i.e., what discourses do) would be important considerations. Social constructionist researchers would be aware that whatever data are obtained, they do not represent the interviewee's individual thoughts; rather, the data are co-constructed by the interviewer and interviewee and situated within the larger societal and cultural discourse arena. An analysis of why certain vocational psychology discourses are accepted and others marginalized would also be informative. In a similar vein, one may examine how power and resistance operate in the discourses of work.

There has been recent research on immigration and work (e.g., Flum & Cinamon, 2011), which lends itself to social constructionist research. The relational aspects of immigration and the social and contextual barriers of this work transition could be studied. For example, how do family and work relationships interact initially and over time, and how is relational support at work enacted?

While discourses and relationships are important areas for social constructionists, documents, pictures, videos, and buildings are also researchable. For example, Durrheim and Dixon (2001) examined racism as spatiotemporal interactions over four historical periods. Possible studies could include the employment of space for interactions in work settings, such as schools, office areas, hospitals, and universities. How we construct others is arguably related to how we construct buildings and spaces, and also with whom and how we interact with others in these places.

Research into unemployment has not been well represented in the vocational psychology literature. A possible line of inquiry could be how discourses on unemployment serve to support the notion that low levels of unemployment are acceptable or even desirable. Another line of research could be how management discourses may preclude unemployed people from being hired.

Conclusion
Social constructionism emphasizes discourse and language and how these function in relationships with others to produce knowledge. Its focus
References


Abstract
This chapter reviews traditional or foundational theories of career development, as well as recent and emerging theories, using a critical lens informed by psychology of working and other new paradigms. The primary portion of the chapter is a review and critique of the traditional theories, followed by a discussion of the distinction between theories of career development and theories of career counseling, as well as the historical intersection of career and noncareer counseling. Three emerging perspectives are then presented as contemporary approaches to changing views of career and work.

Key Words: career choice, career counseling, psychology of working, career development theories

Traditional and Emerging Career Development Theory and the Psychology of Working

Jane L. Swanson

Vocational psychology had its origin in the work of Frank Parsons, as documented in his 1909 book *Choosing a Vocation*. Parsons defined the importance of understanding oneself, understanding the occupational world, and using “true reasoning on the relationships of these two groups of facts” (Parsons, 1909, p. 5). Theories of career choice and development emerged from Parsons’ work, beginning with trait-and-factor approaches and evolving throughout the 20th century into a number of competing explanations of vocational choice (Swanson & Fouad, 2010). These theories are reviewed in the first portion of the chapter.

Recently, Fouad (2007) outlined five assumptions underlying vocational psychology theory and research, assumptions that are in flux or even nearing extinction. Because these assumptions are relevant to the present chapter, they are discussed here to frame consideration of the traditional theories.

1. Everyone Has the Ability to Make Work Choices
   Traditional/foundational theories typically do not question whether or not individuals have volition regarding any aspect of choice. In fact, these theories developed out of recognition that individuals had increasingly diverse choices and, therefore needed assistance in sorting through the multitude of options available to them in an expanding world of work and a growing economy, such as Parsons’ work at the beginning of the 20th century (Zytowski, 2001) or in the education and employment of veterans after World War II (Whiteley, 1984). This is particularly true for theories with their origins up to the late 20th century, including theories proposed by Holland and Super, and the Theory of Work Adjustment (TWA). In contrast, theories developed in the 1980s or later, such as Gottfredson or Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT), incorporated constructs that reflected environmental constraints on choice. The question of volition is at the forefront of changes within theories of career choice and development, particularly Blustein’s psychology-of-working approach.

2. Work Is a Contained Part of People’s Lives
   The foundational theories took as their primary aim the world of work, and rarely made connections...
to the other aspects of individuals’ lives. This focus was undoubtedly rooted in the fact that the world of work was dominated by men (specifically middle-class and white men) in the mid-20th century. Work was a male domain, and family and home belonged to women. Questions regarding work/nonwork interface did not begin in earnest until women were evident in the broader sphere of working, and, further, in the pursuit of careers. As women entered the working world, their nonwork responsibilities did not change substantially (Hochschild, 1989), thus creating the dual roles that led to study of the intersection of the two domains. Conversely, being male required consideration of work decisions and career choices; being female allowed one to avoid those choices if so desired. The social revolution brought about by women's entry into the world of work required changes in career theories. Super’s acknowledgment of a variety of life roles was the first step, and contemporary discussions of market work and personal work provide rich explication of these ideas (Richardson, 2012).

3. The World of Work Is Predictable

The world of work perhaps has never been as predictable as we believe it to be; however, recent changes have radically altered the landscape, locally, nationally, and globally (DeBell, 2001, 2006; Fouad & Bynner, 2008). DeBell (2001) described the “new world economy,” characterized by increased globalization, an expanding gulf between the rich and the poor (and a shift in jobs), instability in businesses due to mergers and acquisitions, restructuring of work itself, and rapid and unpredictable technological changes. Theories of vocational choice and development, and their application with clients, must have sufficient flexibility to account for the unpredictability of the future. A similar critique was offered by Savickas et al. (2009), that current theories are “rooted in assumptions of stability of personal characteristics and secure jobs in bounded organizations” and must be “reformulated to fit the postmodern economy” (p. 240).

4. An Individual Will Make One Decision Early in Life

This assumption is clearly no longer sustainable, and it has not been for quite some time. More pertinent to the present discussion, though, is that the traditional/foundational theories have accommodated and explained multiple choice points throughout the lifespan (such as TWAs focus on the process and outcome of work adjustment, and Super’s notion of recycling of stages). However, by focusing on choice points (such as career counseling for choice of academic major in higher education), the application of these theories has perpetuated the outdated notion of a single decision early in life. A future direction for the foundational theories is to explicitly address this issue.

5. Career Counseling is Short Term and Focused on Providing Information

While not as directly relevant to a critique of traditional theories (see later section regarding theories of career development vs. theories of career counseling), the continued belief in this assumption prevents counselors and clients from fully engaging in central issues raised within emerging and contemporary theories. As Savickas et al. (2009) noted, “counselors have to face the fact that information about traditional career paths becomes more and more questionable and hazardous” (p. 242).

Fouad’s (2007) identification of these five assumptions followed a comprehensive review of recent research in vocational psychology, which she characterized as having a strong tradition of being grounded in theory and a contemporary focus on contextual factors. As these assumptions continue to change, she encouraged theorists and researchers to turn their attention to new questions (Fouad, 2007).

Traditional Theories of Vocational Choice and Career Development

Traditional/foundational theories of career development are typically divided into three broad categories, which also reflect the evolution of these theories during the 20th century: (1) person–environment fit, (2) developmental, and (3) social cognitive. Parsons’ (1909) work led to trait-and-factor approaches, which evolved into the person–environment fit theories of Holland and TWA. Super's life-span, life-space theory provided a rich alternative that incorporated developmental concepts, and was shaped by Savickas into career construction theory; Gottfredson also applied developmental concepts in describing circumscription and compromise regarding occupational choice. Social cognitive career theory (Lent, Brown, & Hackett, 1994) applied Bandura’s concepts of self-efficacy and outcome expectancy to the prediction of vocational interests, choice, performance, and satisfaction. As will be discussed in a later section, the evolution of these theories throughout the 20th century included greater attention to contextual issues and environmental
constraints, leading to the emergence of paradigms, such as the psychology of working, that offer a more inclusive account of individuals’ work experiences.

Person–Environment Fit Theories

Two primary theories are considered person–environment fit theories: Holland’s vocational personality typology (Holland, 1959, 1997; Nauta, 2013) and the Minnesota TWA (Dawis, 2005; Swanson & Schneider, 2013). Both of these theories evolved from earlier trait-and-factor counseling (Chartrand, 1991; Rounds & Tracey, 1990), which in turn was based on Parsons’s (1909) social reform efforts at the turn of the 20th century. Further, both TWA and Holland’s theory (as based on Parsons) may be described as “matching models” (Betz, 2008), in which vocational choice is maximized by specifying important characteristics of the individual and the environment, and then attempting to find the best match or fit between individual and environment. These theories are “anchored in the psychology of individual differences” (Juntunen & Even, 2012, p. 6). The specific characteristics of individuals and environments that are considered to be important vary by theory. An additional component of matching models is that the degree of fit is quantified in some manner, and fit may then be used to predict central outcomes, such as the person’s satisfaction or tenure (i.e., length of time in the work environment).

Both TWA and Holland’s model evolved within the discipline of vocational psychology, yet they share a conceptual foundation with the broader study of person–environment psychology. This perspective is built upon the assumption that there is a reciprocal relationship between people and their environments: people influence their environments, and environments influence the people in them (Walsh, Price, & Craik, 1992). Work is but one of many environments in which people interact (others include school, family, intimate relationships, and living environments), all of which influence and are influenced by the individuals in them. Vocational psychology—its science and its practice—has embraced the tenets of person–environment psychology (Swanson & Chu, 2000), as evidenced by the TWA and Holland models of person–environment fit.

Holland’s theory has had a profound impact on vocational psychology since its introduction in 1959, in part because of the accessibility of the underlying premises and terminology. The primary premise is that career choice is an expression of one’s personality, resulting in members of a given occupation having similar personalities to one another, and, thus, creating a characteristic work environment. Holland defined six broad vocational personality types—Realistic, Investigative, Artistic, Social, Enterprising, and Conventional—each described by prototypic interests, self-concept, values, potential competencies, and preferred work activities and environments (Holland, 1997). Four working assumptions underlie Holland’s theory: (a) most individuals can be described by their resemblance to these six types; (b) environments also can be described by their resemblance to these same six types; (c) people search for environments, and environments search for people, that provide a good match; and (d) personality and environment interact to produce behavior. Thus, both persons and environments can be described by one or more types, and these types may be used to quantify the level of person–environment fit, which may then be used to predict important outcomes such as satisfaction and tenure. Types develop as a “product of a characteristic interaction among a variety of cultural and personal forces including peers, biological heredity, parents, social class, culture, and the physical environment” (Holland, 1997, p. 2).

Holland also described several secondary constructs and postulates related to how the types interact to predict behavior, including calculus, congruence, differentiation, consistency, and identity. Calculus refers to the structural arrangement of the six types, portrayed as a hexagon with the distance between types inversely proportional to their theoretical interrelations. Adjacent types share more in common than do opposing types. The remaining four secondary constructs describe the relationships between types within people or environments and between persons and environments. Congruence, which occupies a central role in Holland’s theory, serves as the mechanism for quantifying the match between a person and an environment in terms of the six types and is used to predict important outcomes such as tenure and satisfaction. Differentiation refers to the degree of definition of an individual’s or environment’s types; consistency is the “internal coherence” (Spokane, 1996) of an individual’s or environment’s types; and identity refers to the degree of clarity and stability of an individual’s or environment’s types. These four secondary constructs were hypothesized by Holland as useful in predicting vocational outcomes, such that an individual who is congruent, differentiated, consistent, and high in identity would be predicted to be more
satisfied and better adjusted than an individual who is incongruent, undifferentiated, inconsistent, and low in identity.

The hexagonal structure of the six types serves two crucial functions in Holland’s theory: defining the degree of consistency in an individual’s or environment’s types and defining the degree of congruence between an individual and an environment. Moreover, “Holland’s hexagon” is well known and frequently used by career practitioners and clients, and serves as the foundation for presenting results of interest inventories and for organizing career information.

TWA, as reflected in its name, has as its primary focus the process of adjustment to work environments, including the characteristics of a person that predict his or her satisfaction with the work environment as well as his or her level of satisfactoriness within the work environment (Dawis & Lofquist, 1984). TWA consists of two models—a predictive model and a process model (Dawis, 2005). The predictive model focuses on the variables that explain whether or not individuals are satisfied with their work environments, and whether or not they are satisfactory to their work environments, which in turn predicts individuals’ tenure in their work environments. The process model focuses on how the fit between individuals and their environments is attained and maintained.

The predictive model represents the core of TWA and is focused on predicting whether or not work adjustment occurs. TWA proposes two sets of parallel characteristics: (1) an individual has a set of needs and values that may be met by rewards available in the work environment and (2) the work environment has a set of job requirements that may be met by the skills and abilities that the individual possesses. Each of these intersections of an individual and his or her environment is described by the term correspondence, or its lack, discorrespondence. If a person’s needs are met by his or her work environment, then the person and environment are in correspondence; if not, then they are in discorrespondence. This determines the individual’s level of satisfaction with the work environment. Likewise, if the work environment’s requirements are met by the person, then the person and environment are in correspondence; if not, then they are in discorrespondence, which determines the individual’s level of satisfactoriness to the work environment. Said another way, an individual has needs and the work environment has rewards; if needs and rewards correspond, then the individual is satisfied. Likewise, an individual has abilities and the work environment has ability requirements; if abilities and ability requirements correspond, then the individual is considered satisfactory.

If an individual is both satisfied and satisfactory, then the individual and his or her environment are in a state of harmonious equilibrium, and work adjustment has been achieved. If, however, the individual is dissatisfied, unsatisfactory, or both, then a state of disequilibrium exists, which serves as a motivational force propelling some type of change to occur. Thus, dissatisfaction serves a central motivational role in TWA. Adjustment behavior may take one (or more) of four avenues (Dawis, 2002). A dissatisfied individual has two possible choices: attempting to change the environment, in terms of the number or kinds of rewards that it provides, or attempting to change himself or herself, in terms of the number or kind of needs that he or she requires. Ultimately, an individual must decide whether to stay in the current work environment or leave for another environment. If individuals are unsatisfactory, they have two possible choices: increasing their level of skill or expanding their skill repertoire to meet the requirements of the environment, or attempting to change the environment’s expectations. Moreover, the environment has several possible actions, with the ultimate outcomes of retaining or terminating the individual. Although TWA focuses on both the individual and the environment, the theory clearly emphasizes what the person experiences: the term satisfaction refers to an individual’s satisfaction with his or her job, whereas the term satisfactoriness refers to an individual with whom the work environment is satisfied. Tenure occurs when an individual is both satisfied and satisfactory (Dawis, 2005).

In addition to these basic predictions, TWA proposes a number of moderating relationships and variables. The twin processes of correspondence, satisfaction and satisfactoriness, influence one another: an individual’s level of satisfaction with his or her work environment is predicted to influence his or her level of satisfactoriness to the work environment, and, conversely, an individual’s level of satisfactoriness is predicted to influence his or her level of satisfaction. Another type of moderator variable included in TWA is personality style, which describes how an individual characteristically interacts with his or her environment. TWA proposes four styles: celerity (the speed with which an individual initiates interaction with the environment), pace (the intensity of an individual’s response to the environment), rhythm (the pattern of an individual’s
responses, such as steady, cyclical, or erratic), and endurance (how persistently an individual responds to the environment). These style variables also can be used to describe the environment.

The process model adds to TWA’s ability to predict work adjustment by focusing on how adjustment occurs and how it is maintained. As noted earlier, discorrespondence between a person and his or her environment serves to motivate behavior; the process portion of TWA defines the parameters and outcomes of that motivational force. TWA proposes that individuals’ adjustment styles characterize how they react to the occurrence of discorrespondence. Adjustment style consists of four variables: flexibility (the amount of discorrespondence an individual will tolerate before reaching a threshold of dissatisfaction leading to either active or reactive adjustment behavior), active adjustment (when an individual acts upon the environment in an effort to decrease discorrespondence), reactive adjustment (when an individual acts upon himself or herself to reduce the amount of discorrespondence), and perseverance (the length of time that an individual is willing to persist in a dis correspondent environment after engaging in adjustment behavior). Adjustment styles are relevant to the environment too. All four of these adjustment-style variables are hypothesized to vary among individuals and work environments, and they are important factors in predicting adjustment behavior.

Developmental Theories

Developmental theories of career choice focus on the sequential nature of influences on interests and aspirations, as well as the sustained progression of these influences from childhood throughout the lifespan. In contrast to the person–environment theories, developmental theories incorporated a broader set of contextual factors, including the intersection of work and other life roles, and the influence of gender and socioeconomic status on career choices (Swanson & Fouad, 2010). Two such theories were proposed by Super and Gottfredson.

Super’s Life-Span, Life-Space Theory

Super “revolutionized the field of vocational psychology” (Betz, 2008, p. 365) by viewing choice of vocation as a developmental process over the lifespan, rather than a single point in time. A hallmark of Super’s theory is that vocational development is a process of making a series of decisions, culminating in vocational choices that represent an implementation of one’s self-concept. Vocational choices are viewed as successive approximations of a good match between the vocational self and the world of work.

Super’s theoretical propositions included a focus on developmental contextualism and social context, as well as an acknowledgment of differences among individuals and among occupations, as explicated in person–environment fit theories. Super proposed five specific stages (Growth, Exploration, Establishment, Maintenance, and Disengagement) of career development, with specific tasks to be mastered at each stage. These five stages were viewed as “maxicycles” that occurred over the course of a lifetime, as well as “minicycles” that occurred during transitions and re-decision points. The Growth stage (ages 4 to 13, or childhood to early adolescence) encompasses four tasks: becoming concerned about the future, increasing personal control over one’s own life, convincing oneself to achieve in school and at work, and acquiring competent work habits and attitudes (Super et al., 1996). During the Exploration stage (ages 14 to 24, or adolescence to early adulthood), the three primary tasks are crystallizing, specifying, and implementing a career choice (Super et al., 1996). The Establishment stage (ages 25 to 44, or early to middle adulthood) entails entering and becoming established in one’s career and work life; the tasks of this stage include stabilizing, consolidating, and advancing in one’s chosen career. Maintenance (ages 45 to 65, or middle adulthood to retirement, renamed Management by Savickas, 2005) involves maintaining the gains achieved at work; primary tasks are renewal, holding, updating, and innovating. The fifth and final stage, Disengagement (over age 65 or during the retirement transition), commences when an individual retires or otherwise disengages from the workforce.

Super characterized the stages as linear and predictable but not invariant; that is, individuals typically go through these stages, but not everyone progresses through them in the same manner or at fixed ages. Each transition between stages is characterized by a “minicycle,” or a recycling through the stages of growth, reexploration, and reestablishment. The age ranges are the approximate ages at which most individuals encounter each stage. Within each stage, Super proposed characteristic developmental tasks. Mastery of these tasks allows individuals to function effectively in their life roles within that stage and prepares them for the next task. Super proposed this concept of career maturity to describe an individual’s readiness or ability to master the developmental tasks and cope with stage-related
transitions; the term career adaptability, later introduced to more accurately reflect adult career issues (Savickas, 1997; Super & Knasel, 1981), is defined as “readiness to cope with changing work and work conditions” (Savickas, 1994, p. 58).

A fundamental aspect of Super’s theory is that vocational choice is an implementation of the self-concept, which includes objective and subjective views of the self. Individuals construct their careers in a continuing self-evaluation within their social context: “They begin by considering work roles that fit their self-concepts, their self-concepts are shaped by feedback from the external world (e.g., parents, teachers, employers), and in turn, the evolving self-concept begins to be implemented in different work roles.

Super considered the development of vocational choices within the context of other life roles: “While making a living, people live a life” (Super et al., 1996). Super delineated six specific roles that individuals might hold (child, student, homemaker, worker, citizen, and “leisurite”), often concurrently and interactively. His “life-span, life-space” theory acknowledged that these roles occur at different times and in different combinations throughout an individual’s life, and thus the salience of different roles will vary among and within individuals. Life space corresponds to the roles that one fulfills at various times in life, and life span denotes the stages described earlier; an individual “lives in the intersection of the two dimensions” (Super et al., 1996, p. 128).

GOTTFREDSON’S THEORY OF CIRCUMSCRIPTION AND COMPROMISE

Gottfredson’s theory (1996, 2005) focuses on the developmental narrowing of vocational choices through the process of circumscription and compromise. Circumscription occurs as the range of considered occupations decreases through the application of sex type, social class/prestige, and finally, interests. Compromise then occurs as an individual confronts questions of accessibility to occupational paths, and thus eliminates options. Although Gottfredson’s theory has received little independent support, it continues to garner attention among practitioners and is important because of the inclusion of gender roles and social status, thus representing a “link between developmental theories and later theories that included sociocultural influences” (Juntunen & Even, 2012, p. 24). Unique contributions of this theory are the roles of compromise and circumscription, and the resultant self-defined social space (Gottfredson, 2005).

Gottfredson (1996, 2005) developed her theory of circumscription and compromise to explain why individuals’ vocational expectations, even when they are children, vary by sex, race, and social class. Gottfredson differs from Super in that she views vocational choice first as an implementation of the social self and only secondarily as an implementation of the psychological self. Inherent in this approach is the circumscription of psychological variables, such as interests or values, by social variables, such as gender or social class. Gottfredson focuses on cognitive development as children grow in awareness of themselves and their social place in the world and begin to eliminate vocational options that are not compatible with their evolving self-image. Gottfredson proposed four development processes to account for the observed reproduction of differences in occupational perceptions and choices by sex, race, and social class: cognitive growth, self-creation, circumscription, and compromise.

Cognitive growth. Over time, children develop increasingly complex cognitive structures that allow them to process occupational information and determine the quality of matches. However, children begin to narrow their options and make other decisions that directly affect their career choices long before they have developed sufficient cognitive complexity to do so satisfactorily.

Self-creation. Gottfredson discussed the concept of self-creation to address the relative influence of genetic factors and environmental influences. Repeated experiences consolidate an individual’s genetically based characteristics, turning them into “traits” that gain stability across a variety of situations. However, adolescents rarely have sufficient experiences to draw upon when they are making choices related to education and career.

Circumscription. Circumscription is the process by which children narrow the “zone of acceptable alternatives” or “social space” by progressive elimination of unacceptable alternatives, or those that conflict with one’s self-concept. In her four-stage model of circumscription, Gottfredson suggested that elimination of alternatives is progressive and irreversible (except under unusual circumstances) and mostly occurs without conscious awareness. In Stage 1 (ages 3 to 5), children develop an orientation to size and power and categorize people in simple ways, such as big versus little. They recognize observable physical differences between men and women, which increases in Stage 2 (ages 6 to
8), when children develop an orientation to sex roles. In this stage, children use sex appropriateness to define their vocational aspirations and construct their tolerable-sex-type boundary, in which they rule out occupations that do not conform to their sex-type expectations. Stage 3 (ages 9 to 13) entails orientation to social valuation, in which children become aware of occupational status hierarchies and now view the range of occupations along the two dimensions of prestige level and sex type. Children establish their tolerable-level boundary to eliminate occupations that are unacceptably low in prestige and their tolerable-effort boundary to eliminate occupations that they perceive as too difficult to attain. By the end of Stage 3, the full range of occupations has been whittled down to those that are of the appropriate sex type, that have high enough prestige, and that are not too difficult. What remains is a child's zone of acceptable alternatives (or social space). In Stage 4 (ages 14 and older), adolescents become aware of the need to consider their vocational choices, and they develop their orientation to the internal, unique self. Here, interests, values, and abilities are clarified, and occupational exploration occurs within the zone of acceptable alternatives as circumscribed in earlier stages. Stages 1 through 3 are focused on rejecting unacceptable alternatives, with greater attention to the social self; Stage 4 is focused on identifying which of the acceptable alternatives are most preferred, with greater attention to the psychological self (Gottfredson, 1996). Stage 4 thus begins the process of compromise.

Compromise. Vocational aspirations can be viewed as the product of accessibility (choices that are most realistic) and compatibility (person–environment fit), and idealistic aspirations may give way to realistic ones. Compromise entails the modification of alternatives due to inaccessibility, leading to the acceptance of less attractive alternatives. Gottfredson (1996) suggests that sex type, prestige, and field of interest are the three dimensions considered in the process of compromise, and in a specific order such that sex type is least likely and field of interest most likely to be compromised. In other words, the dimensions that are established first developmentally, those closest to the core of self-concept, are maintained longer.

Gottfredson’s theory explicitly addresses the impact of sex-role socialization and other societal factors that influence the development of occupational aspirations. As such, it offers a complementary perspective to Super's theory. On the other hand, Super's theory was designed to span a much broader scope of career behavior than does Gottfredson's theory and, thus, is a more comprehensive theory of lifespan career development. Gottfredson's theory has received relatively little attention from researchers, despite its intuitive appeal to practitioners. One reason for the minimal attention is likely related to the difficulty in assessing perceptions in early childhood and in measuring the important constructs in the theory (Fassinger, 2005; Swanson & Gore, 2000). Further, the dimensions of sex type, prestige, and interest are difficult to consider separately from one another (Phillips & Jome, 2005). Some support has been shown for the revised theory regarding different degrees of compromise (Blanchard & Lichtenberg, 2003).

**Social Cognitive Career Theory**

Until recently, SCCT (Lent, Brown, & Hackett, 1994, 2000) would have been classified as an “emerging” theory; however, it has generated a substantial amount of research attention in the 20 years since its introduction and is now considered a stalwart among theories of career choice and development. SCCT grew out of an effort by Hackett and Betz (1981) to apply Bandura’s (1986) concept of self-efficacy to the career choice process. Self-efficacy expectations—or “people’s judgments of their capabilities to organize and execute courses of action required to attain designated types of performances” (Bandura, 1986, p. 391)—are thought to influence the development of interests, choices, actions, and performance.

Another of Bandura’s constructs incorporated into SCCT is outcome expectations, or people’s beliefs about the outcomes of consequences of events. In the context of career choice, outcome expectations influence the development of interests, choices, and actions by focusing on what individuals perceive they will gain by pursuing specific career paths. SCCT differs from earlier theories in its focus on the personal constructions that people place on events related to career decision making (Lent, Brown, & Hackett, 2000). Based on Bandura’s concepts, as well as early work by Hackett and Betz (1981), Lent et al. (1994, 2002) developed a unified social cognitive framework to explain and predict career behavior. Specifically, their three-part model links interests, choices, and performance based on Bandura’s social cognitive model. A recent, fourth, model focuses on work satisfaction (Lent, 2008; Lent & Brown, 2006).

Basic to all of the models, Lent et al. (1994, 2002) propose that performance accomplishments,
verbal persuasion, vicarious learning, and physiological states and arousal forge an individual’s self-efficacy expectations, which are conceptualized as situation-specific. Lent et al. (1994, 2002) also propose that demographic and individual difference variables (such as sex, race/ethnicity, and socioeconomic status) interact with background and contextual variables to influence learning experiences that play a role in forming self-efficacy beliefs. Those self-efficacy expectations, in turn, are related to outcome expectations that individuals have about the outcomes of behavior.

In the model pertaining to development of interests, outcome expectancies and self-efficacy beliefs both predict interests (Lent et al., 2002). Interests (together with self-efficacy beliefs and outcome expectancies) predict goals, which in turn lead to behaviors related to choosing and practicing activities, which then lead to performance attainments.

Lent et al. (2000, 2002) also propose that background and contextual variables, termed contextual affordances, help to explain why an individual does not pursue an area in which he or she has strong interest. Background and contextual variables may serve as perceived barriers, or supports, to entry or to outcome expectations. Lent et al. (2000, 2002) conceptualize two types of contextual affordances, those that are much earlier (distal) than the choice and those that are closer in time (proximal) to the choice. Examples of distal influences may be factors that either constrict or facilitate the development of self-efficacy and outcome expectations (e.g., gender-role socialization, impoverished learning environments), while proximal barriers and supports affect the implementation of choices (e.g., anxiety about moving, financial support to go to college). Barriers and supports may be objective or subjective; what is important is an individual’s perception of the barrier.

The choice model (Lent et al., 2002) proposes that person inputs (e.g., gender, race, disability, personality, and predispositions) and background context together influence learning experiences, which influence self-efficacy beliefs and outcome expectancies. As already described, these influence interests, which influence choice goals; goals influence actions, and actions influence performance attainments. Lent (2005) notes that the process of making a career choice involves choosing a goal (e.g., becoming a scientist), taking action to implement that goal (completing courses in a biology major), and the subsequent consequences of those actions (successful graduation in biology). The performance model predicts the level of performance as well as the persistence an individual has in pursuing goals (Lent et al., 2002). This model proposes that past performance accomplishments influence self-efficacy and outcome expectancies, which in turn influence performance goals; these lead to performance attainment level. In other words, past performance influences self-efficacy beliefs along with the expectations individuals have about the outcomes of their future behavior. These expectations affect the goals that people set for themselves, which then affect the level of performance they attain. The choice and interest models involve the content of career choices, such as the field or specific occupation in which one would like to work, while the performance model predicts the level of performance toward which one aspires within one’s chosen field (Lent et al., 2002).

Finally, the satisfaction model (Lent, 2008; Lent & Brown, 2006) posits the roles of self-efficacy expectations and work conditions/outcomes in predicting an individual’s goal-directed activity; all three constructs predict work satisfaction.

Summary and Critique of “Traditional” Theories

The history of the traditional theories in vocational psychology includes evolving conceptualizations: Parsons’ work in 1909 led to a trait-and-factor approach, which evolved into person–environment fit. Super proposed life-span, life-space theory as an alternative, which was further shaped by Savickas into career construction theory. We are currently in the midst of another paradigm shift into contextual and relational approaches.

A common criticism of traditional theories is the lack of attention to the larger sociocultural context within the scaffold of the theory. As a consequence, the examination of these contextual factors, including the adequacy of extant theory in explaining vocational behavior for a broad range of individuals, was instigated by scholars other than the original theorists. At times, such efforts were not welcomed by the theorists themselves, perhaps because they distracted from the core concepts and the ability to explain behavior for most people. Generally speaking, these traditional theories have held up to scrutiny (Betz, 2008; Juntunen & Even, 2012), and authors of emerging perspectives recommend continuing to use the contributions of these theories as foundation to the newer approaches (Blustein, 2006; Savickas, 2011).

Despite the initial inattention to contextual factors, the structural elements of the theories
themselves do not limit subsequent attention to these factors. For example, person–environment fit theories were built upon the foundation of individual differences (Dawis, 1992), which presumably would be fertile ground for explication of the broad diversity of people’s experiences, yet may have been obscured by the task of assessing individual differences, which was accomplished primarily to yield scores for further prediction (Savickas, 2011). Developmental theories focus on the unfolding of self and the interaction of self with career choices, which again presumably would be amenable to description of diversity of individuals’ experiences, yet the emphasis has been on describing the universality of developmental paths. SCCT departed from earlier theories by building in distal and proximal contextual variables, in a way that allowed a more complex interplay between individual factors (such as self-efficacy and outcome expectations) with environmental factors (such as supports and barriers, background affordances). For this reason, SCCT has served as a bridge between the traditional theories and the emerging paradigms.

For clients who come to “traditional” practice settings, such as college/university counseling centers, these traditional theories continue to provide utility, because essentially they are the theories designed to explain the work lives of individuals seeking higher education to enter the middle-class occupational and organizational structure. However, structural changes in specific occupations and in the general world of work may undermine the utility of the theories even in these traditional settings. Other theories are necessary to understand broader experience, particularly as the variables of choice or volition, work and life roles, and economic factors depart from the traditional viewpoint. Moreover, traditional theories have had little expansion outside of the traditional bounds, which may be better addressed by newer perspectives such as those offered by Savickas, Richardson, and Blustein. Work by these three scholars is presented in subsequent sections.

**Theories of Career Development and Theories of Career Counseling**

A discussion of traditional theories of career development is not complete without a related discussion of theories of career counseling; these two sets of theories are not as logically connected as one might think. Theories of career development are devised to explain some aspect of vocational behavior, such as initial career choice, work adjustment, or lifespan career progress. Theories of career counseling, on the other hand, have the goal of providing counselors with direction for how to work with clients, and are similar to a discussion of theoretical orientation, or one’s philosophical stance regarding the nature of personality and of therapeutic change. Most of the prominent theories of career development have relatively little to say about the most effective way to work with clients, although they do provide a guide to what should be considered the most important fodder for work with clients, such as maximizing the fit between individuals and their current or future work environments, or assisting clients in expressing their self-concepts through work and other life roles. On the other hand, many theories of career development have spawned theories of career counseling, such as the Person–Environment Correspondence model, which is an outgrowth of TWA (Eggerth, 2008; Lofquist & Dawis, 1991), or the Career Development and Assessment Counseling model, an application of Super’s life-span, life-space theory (Niles, 2001; Super et al., 1992). More recently, Savickas’s (2005, 2013) adaptation of Super’s theory into Career Construction theory has been further developed into the Life Design theory of career counseling (Savickas, 2011, 2012).

As noted by previous writers (Osipow, 1996; Savickas, 2011; Subich & Simonson, 2001), the evolution of theories of career counseling is relatively recent; the distinction between theories of career development and theories of career counseling has been traced to a conference held in the early 1990s (Savickas & Lent, 1994). Although Parsons’ (1909) book *Choosing a Vocation* launched theories of career development as well as the practice of career counseling, theoretical explication of these two tracks developed relatively independently. Other models of career counseling include those proposed by Critics (1981), Yost and Corbishley (1987), Peterson, Sampson, and Reardon (1991), Spokane (1991), and Issacson and Brown (1993); readers are referred to Subich and Simonson (2001) for more information about each of these models. As they noted, the “call for the development of theories of career counseling has become the anthem of the field” (Subich & Simonson, 2001, p. 258).

Two contemporary models warrant particular mention: Gysbers, Heppner, and Johnston’s (2003) career counseling model and Fouad and Bingham’s (1995) culturally appropriate career counseling model. The Gysbers et al. (2003) model of career counseling has two major phases: (1) goal or problem identification, clarification, and specification
and (2) client goal or problem resolution. At the core of the model is the working alliance between counselor and client, which consists of agreement on the goals and tasks of counseling and formation of a bond between counselor and client (Bordin, 1979). The Fouad and Bingham (1995) model includes assessment of the impact of cultural variables in each of seven steps of career counseling, and examines five spheres of influence of cultural variables on career issues (core, gender, family, racial or ethnic group, and dominant group). These two models have received sustained attention and may provide useful frameworks for emerging theories of career counseling.

“Career” Versus “Personal” Counseling

The artificiality of the schism between “career” and “personal” counseling has been documented by many previous writers (Haverkamp & Moore, 1993; Heppner & Davidson, 2002; Juntunen, 2006; Richardson, 1996; Robitschek & DeBell, 2002; Swanson, 1995, 2002; Whiston & Rahardia, 2008). The origins of this distinction lie in the separate historical traditions underlying career counseling and psychotherapy and have been maintained to the current day, despite efforts to soften the sharp edges that divide these modalities. For example, Haverkamp and Moore (1993) argued that the implicit definition of personal counseling is too broad, consisting of anything not directly related to career, whereas the implicit definition of career counseling is too narrow, consisting primarily of initial career choices of young adults and neglecting adult work adjustment or the intersection of work and nonwork roles.

On the other hand, some authors have warned against what might be called the “over-therapizing” of career counseling (Brown & Krane, 2000). Moreover, Heppner and Davidson (2002) warned that career issues (and career psychology generally) risk becoming “watered down” if too fully integrated with noncareer issues and foci in counseling. Evidence relevant to their warning comes from two sources: related to vocational overshadowing, or the tendency of therapists to overlook career concerns when there are co-occurring personal concerns (Magee & Whiston, 2010; Spengler, 2000; Spengler, Blustein, & Strohmer, 1990), and literature related to negative attitudes toward career counseling by trainees and faculty alike (Gelso et al., 1985; Heppner, O’Brien, Hinkleman, & Flores, 1996). These two phenomena would seem to work in tandem, such that the devaluing of the activity of counseling that focuses on career issues would increase the likelihood of ignoring those career concerns in favor of other presenting issues, resulting in clients’ career concerns not receiving the attention that is warranted.

At least three frameworks or conceptual realignments (Blustein & Spengler, 1995; Richardson, 2003, 2006, 2009; Robitschek & DeBell, 2002) have been proposed to attempt a rapprochement among the “career” versus “personal” dimensions in counseling and training. All three of the frameworks are conceptually intuitive, yet they also represented a profound shift in thinking about work and foregrounded the later emergence of 21st-century theories (as described in the next section). First, after reviewing what they labeled “substantive distinction versus subtle differences” in the career and personal domains, Blustein and Spengler (1995) proposed “domain-sensitive counseling,” in which the two practices of career and personal counseling are integrated into a comprehensive framework that is sensitive to the domain—career or noncareer—in which a client’s problems arise (or at least initially present themselves). In this framework, a counselor is capable of intervening across either domain as needed.

The second framework was articulated by Richardson (1993, 1996, 2009) as a paradigm shift for the field of vocational psychology, namely from the study of career development to a study of work in people’s lives. She traced the evolutionary progression of the “false split” that has occurred between career and personal counseling, beginning with a “split” between normal and pathological personality functioning, leading to a further split in a consideration of aspects of the self into different domains of functioning, including the occupational domain, which led to the practice of vocational guidance and counseling. A further split then occurred by the shift of focus from “vocation” to “career,” as the aspect of self connected to vocation was now situated outside of the self, in the structure of the occupational world. Discussion of “career” was defined less by self and more by occupational alternatives. As Juntunen (2006) paraphrased Richardson’s position, “by focusing on career as an activity that is external to the person (because it is regulated by the occupational structure), we negate the central role of work in human experience” (Juntunen, 2006, p. 345). Richardson (1996) also commented on the split between the public (career) and the private (personal)—a distinction that may underlie the greater stigma, and desire for privacy and
concealment, associated with “personal” counseling than career counseling (Ludwikowski, Vogel, & Armstrong, 2009). The third framework was offered by Robitschek and DeBell (2002), who proposed that vocational/career issues be considered as primary issues and contextual factors in counseling. They argued not for a reintegration of vocational psychology into counseling psychology, but, rather, for a larger paradigm shift. In this new paradigm, vocational issues would “provide another facet to understanding the multiple life roles and complex contexts in which we live” (Robitschek & DeBell, 2002, pp. 801–802). Thus, instead of defining counseling *per se* as either “career” or “personal,” clients would bring primary issues and contextual factors to counseling; some clients would have primary issues that are vocational in nature, and the counselor would explore other contextual factors relevant to those issues; for other clients, vocational issues would be among a variety of contextual issues surrounding a nonvocational primary issue.

In addition to these paradigm shifts, a number of authors have offered conceptual and practical suggestions regarding the integration of work and personal issues within counseling. For example, Robitschek and DeBell (2002) offered several suggestions for implementing their new paradigm, in order to reduce the artificial distinction between the two domains, and Juntunen (2006) outlined the benefits of integrating work and nonwork (personal) issues in practice settings that are not specifically designated as career counseling. A common theme is the importance of assessing work-related issues with every client, beginning with intake forms and continuing through therapy, and to be attuned to the interaction of work and life roles.

**From Traditional to Emerging Theories: 21st-Century Views of Work**

In the past decade or more, substantial changes have occurred within the field of vocational psychology (Fouad, 2007; Juntunen & Even, 2012). Theories of career development (or vocational choice) have shifted from a focus on the individual, to an explicit recognition of contextual factors, to a person-in-complex-social-and-economic-systems perspective. Among the newer paradigms, different foci have emerged, including equal valuing and explicit consideration of work and relationship, market and care work; embedding work within a relational context; expanding consideration of the experience of *work* beyond that of *career*; and attention to co-construction and postmodern perspectives.

These changes have been viewed as paradigm shifting (Richardson, 2012), in the sense of Kuhn’s (1962) description of the progress of scientific knowledge. According to Kuhn, these shifts occur in a nonlinear way, represent often-radical departures from previous views, and open up new perspectives to understanding phenomena that previously would not have been considered valid. Generally speaking, a major thrust of the paradigm shift in vocational psychology has been from a positivist epistemology, in which individuals are defined “objectively” as a set of traits that are discoverable and quantifiable through psychometric assessment or other forms of empirical observations, to postmodern epistemologies such as constructionism, in which individuals define their own meaning and construct their own stories.

The history of vocational psychology is strongly tied to the emergence of the psychometric movement in the first half of the 20th century (Dawis, 1992), and measures of vocationally relevant constructs assumed a central role for researchers and practitioners. These measures were built upon and reinforced the positivist epistemology: interests, values, and abilities were viewed as unobservable yet very real traits that could be revealed through the use of well-constructed scales. Used in career counseling, the scores produced by interest and other inventories often were treated as infallible indicators of something to be uncovered and confirmed by the counselor and client (Reed, Patton, & Gold, 1993).

In spite of this apparent paradigmatic shift, there are clear continuities with history. Juntunen and Even (2012) noted the responsiveness to social change that characterizes the history of vocational psychology, beginning with Parsons’s (1909) landmark work that launched the field. Parsons responded to contemporary real-world issues resulting from social, political, and economic changes occurring at the outset of the 20th century (Swanson, 1996), and the newly emerging and contemporary perspectives (including the psychology-of-working approach) fit well with that trend.

Blustein (2011) and others have called for new theoretical perspectives that “encompass an expanded vision of working along with an integrative understanding of the complex, reciprocal relationships between work and other life domains … [and] how people make meaning of their interactions with others and with the broader social world” (p. 2). These
newer approaches would seem particularly relevant for those individuals caught in the changing world, perhaps those outside of the traditional practice settings noted earlier.

The current zeitgeist in theories of work/life/career encompass a number of overlapping yet distinct approaches, including relational perspectives (Blustein, Richardson), narrative approaches (Richardson, Savickas), social constructionism epistemologies (Blustein, Savickas), and more expansive definitions of “work” (Blustein, Richardson). These approaches corroborate Foud’s (2007) five assumptions as described at the outset of this chapter and have provided expanded and contemporary views of the role of work in people’s lives.

Some of the new perspectives, such as boundaryless or protean careers (Arthur & Rousseau, 1996; Hall, 1996), have decoupled the worker from his or her employing organization, casting the individual as owning his or her career rather than having it owned by the organization. This has led to a view of the individual as agentic and as exerting volitional choice. However, much of this original writing was from the perspective of industrial/organizational psychology, in which a preexisting or ongoing relation between a worker and his or her organization was a given. In other words, discussion of boundaryless or protean careers does no more to include those individuals outside of a traditional career ladder than any other existing theory. These approaches, however, do address issues related to structural changes in the world of work.

On the other hand, writing within the realm of traditional vocational psychology has often suffered from a lack of recognition of the impact of economic and labor market factors. Yet, these factors have considerable bearing on the progression and experience of work/career. Another factor in the emerging perspectives, a welcome addition, is explicit recognition of the role of economic and market influences. Vocational psychology has had as its primary focus the individual, yet has often neglected the economic and social realities in which individuals engage in work and career.

The word “career” has an interesting history (Blustein, 2006). Super introduced it but did not intend to have it supplant “vocational.” As Blustein (2006, p. 12) noted, Super “inadvertently placed the notion of work into a context that was embedded deeply in a lifestyle that was, for the most part, characteristic of relatively well-educated and often affluent people within advanced Western countries.” Super’s intention, however, was to emphasize the range of work-related issues across the lifespan. In common parlance, the term “career” is used to describe a much broader range of occupational paths than that intended by scholars and theorists. For that reason alone, perhaps it is time to either retire the word “career” (much like Richardson’s [1996] proposal to retire the term “career counseling”) or, alternatively, to reclaim the meaning of the word to denote a narrower and more carefully drawn definition. Reclaiming the word would allow for more precision in research regarding lifespan patterns of working, similar to Savickas’s (2002) reminder that much research purporting to focus on “career development” is more accurately described as “vocational behavior.”

Three recent conceptualizations represent significant departures from the traditional paradigms: Savickas’s (2011, 2013) career construction theory and life design paradigm; Richardson’s (2012) model of counseling for work and relationships; and Blustein’s psychology of working. These approaches have broadened the scope of discourse and drawn upon perspectives outside of vocational psychology, as well as outside of psychology.

A major impetus for these new models is the changing nature, or “new social arrangement,” of work (Savickas et al., 2009, p. 239). Recent conceptualizations of “work” have expanded to include unpaid work such as caregiving and volunteer activities, in an attempt to capture the multiple forms that work may take in an individual’s life. For example, work has been defined as “an instrumental and purposive activity that produces goods, services, or social relations which have both social and/or personal value” (Richardson, Constantine, & Washburn, 2005, p. 60). Similarly, Blustein (2006, p. 3) defined working as entailing “effort, activity, and human energy in given tasks that contribute to the overall social and economic welfare of a given culture.”

How work is conceptualized, perceived, and structured has received much attention in recent years. Individuals’ labor force experiences will be substantially affected by current and future societal trends, including globalization and innovations in technology (DeBell, 2006; Niles, Herr, & Hartung, 2002), and changes continue in the nature of “work” itself, with a redefinition of work roles, work/family boundaries, and the general manner in which work occurs. Relatedly, the manner in which “careers” are structured is undergoing conceptual shifts, such as the idea of “boundaryless” or protean careers (Arthur & Rousseau, 1996; Hall, 1996).
and changes in the psychological contract between individuals and their employing organizations, away from lifetime employment and mutual commitment. Another factor is that the nature of the workforce itself is undergoing dramatic changes, in terms of increasing diversity in age, race/ethnicity, sex, sexual orientation, disability, and factors that motivate employees (Bobek & Robbins, 2005; DeBell, 2006; Niles, Herr, & Hartung, 2002). Further, the psychological contract that existed between employer and employee has weakened to the point of vanishing, with increasing numbers of part-time, contingent, freelance, and otherwise insecure workers, who are hired for “projects” rather than “jobs” (Savickas, 2011). All of these changes have far-reaching implications for theories of career and work, as well as models for assisting individuals in planning their work lives.

In addition to changes in the nature and structure of work, there are significant changes in the epistemology and discourse concerning working and vocational behavior. Epistemology, or the philosophy of knowledge, concerns questions about how knowledge is defined (How do we come to know? What is our source of knowledge?), which also applies to the methodology or practice of knowledge. Traditional theories of career choice and development rest on a positivist epistemology, which was the prevailing philosophy of science at the time the theories were initially proposed. Positivism holds that the purpose of science is to pursue knowledge by focusing only on what is observable and measurable. Science is the way to uncover the truth, which operates on a deterministic set of laws of cause and effect (Trochim, n.d.). Positivism relies on a base of knowledge that is observable and testable (Blustein et al., 2012). Post-positivist epistemology, in contrast, entails “a wholesale rejection of the central tenets of positivism” (Trochim, n.d.).

Within vocational psychology, postmodern epistemologies have challenged the status quo of the positivist paradigm. A predominant post-positivist approach is social constructionism, which emphasizes the “inherent relativism of knowledge, reality, and human experience” (Blustein et al., 2012, p. 245). In this view, knowledge is created through cognitive processes and social interactions, rather than by individual objective observation, and how an individual understands the world is embedded in culture and history (Juntunen & Even, 2012; Young & Collin, 2004). As Savickas et al. (2009, p. 246) described, “Positivist research on careers concentrates on decision making and declaring a choice. The comparable process for the social constructionist perspective is articulating intentions and anticipations regarding possible selves and life in the future.” Thus, the postmodern or post-positivist perspective redirects attention to understanding how people construct meaning about their careers and assisting them in designing meaning (Richardson, Constantine, & Washburn, 2005; Savickas et al., 2009; Young & Collin, 2004). The three emerging frameworks described in the subsequent section have all been influenced by, and contributed to, the postmodern epistemologies such as social constructionism.

**Career Construction Theory and the Life Design Paradigm (Savickas)**

The origins of career construction theory are found in Super’s life-span, life-space theory, and vestiges of Super’s theory remain in Savickas’s formulation. Career construction theory explains the processes through which “individuals construct themselves, impose direction on their vocational behavior, and make meaning of their careers” (Savickas, 2013, p. 1). The primary concept is *self-construction*, which begins during childhood as individuals are first actors and then become agents, and later authors, of their own lives and careers. Career construction theory draws from McAdams and Olson’s (2010) view of personality development, which views individuals as driven by adaptation to their environment, versus by “maturation of inner structures” (Savickas, 2013, p. 2).

Savickas argued for a reconceptualization of how careers are constructed given societal changes in the way that work is structured. In the 20th century, “career” as articulated by Super meant a path through one’s work life, which could be objectively defined and was evident to others. In contrast, the 21st-century view is of boundaryless, protean careers, which require subjective construction by the individual and adaptation to changing conditions. Career construction theory “views career as a story that individuals tell about their working life, not progress down a path or up a ladder” (Savickas, 2013, p. 6). Although people have “objective” careers, they also construct subjective careers with which to impose meaning and direction on their behavior. This subjective career story carries an individual throughout transitions.

Savickas (2005, 2013) described the “four Cs” of career concern, control, curiosity, and confidence. *Career concern* refers to a future orientation and recognition of the importance of planning for
tomorrow, which is characterized by planfulness and optimism, versus career indifference, which is characterized by apathy and pessimism. Career control entails the ability to have control over one’s own choices (not independence per se), versus career indecision, which is characterized by confusion, procrastination, and impulsivity. Career curiosity follows self-control, as an individual becomes inquisitive about his or her interests and occupational alternatives. The important role of curiosity is reflected in the attention paid to exploration in other theories of career development (Savickas, 2013). A lack of curiosity leads to unreality about self and environment. Career confidence reflects self-efficacy or anticipating success regarding education and career. Lack of confidence may lead to career inhibition. These four processes have some developmental trajectory, in that it would seem necessary to express concern prior to experiencing control, which would in turn be a necessary condition for curiosity and confidence. Savickas (2013) described these four Cs as dimensions that may progress at different rates, and “dis-equilibrium between the four developmental lines” could produce problems that would be labeled as indifference, indecision, unreality, and inhibition.

Savickas (2011, 2012) recently proposed a career counseling model. In discussing the evolution of theories/approaches, Savickas (2011) described distinctions among the three types of interventions (vocational guidance, career education, and career counseling), linking these terms to the three perspectives on the self and to the historical progression of theoretical perspectives in vocational psychology. Vocational guidance focuses on scores and traits and is concerned about matching and occupational fit, à la Holland’s theory. Career education focuses on stages and tasks and is concerned with readiness and vocational development, à la Super’s theory. Savickas reserved the term career counseling for his own life design paradigm, with a focus on stories and themes, and with designing work life via career construction theory.

Counseling for Work and Relationships (Richardson)

The second emerging framework was articulated by Richardson (1993, 1996, 2009, 2012) as a paradigm shift for the field of vocational psychology, namely from the study of career development to a study of work in people’s lives. She traced the evolutionary progression of the “false split” that has occurred between career and personal counseling, beginning with a “split” between normal and pathological personality functioning, leading to a further split in a consideration of aspects of the self into different domains of functioning, including the occupational domain, which led to the practice of vocational guidance and counseling. A further split then occurred by the shift of focus from “vocation” to “career,” as the aspect of self connected to vocation was now situated outside of the self, in the structure of the occupational world. Discussion of “career” was defined less by self and more by occupational alternatives. As Juntunen (2006) paraphrased Richardson’s position, “by focusing on career as an activity that is external to the person (because it is regulated by the occupational structure), we negate the central role of work in human experience” (Juntunen, 2006, p. 345).

Richardson (2012) has addressed the intersections of work and relationships, most recently describing the four major social contexts of market work, personal care work, personal relationships, and market work relationships. Market work is akin to the traditional view of work, defined as the work that people do for pay; Richardson’s definition also includes work that people do within educational institutions to prepare for paid work. Personal care work is work done in one’s personal (nonpaid work) life to care for oneself and others (including care for dependents, relationships, and communities). Personal relationships encompass interpersonal relationships outside of work, with family and friends, whereas market work relationships include relationships within the market work context, such as supervisors, colleagues, and teachers.

Richardson (2012) traced the two predominant paradigms within vocational psychology: vocational choice, as first articulated by Parsons (1909), and career development, as epitomized by Super. Both paradigms offered solutions to individuals’ work preferences and societal labor market needs at specific times in history. First, Parsons’ model preserved the deeply ingrained individualism of American culture with its belief in free will while at the same time meeting the needs of the labor market during a time of industrial turmoil and economic hardship” (p. 195) and evolved into a scientific matching model that provided a structured mechanism for making a vocational choice. Second, Super’s idea of career “fit the demands of the maturing industrial economy” (p. 196) and placed vocational choice within a larger developmental sequence, with stages that came before and after that choice.

These extant paradigms were not without limitations, despite their contemporary utility.
The vocational choice paradigm “masked the ways in which ‘choice’ was, in fact, very limited or even non-existent” for some individuals, who did not have the luxury of choosing among jobs or vocational paths (Richardson, 2012, p. 195). A focus on choice thus “perpetuates a belief in free will, that the individual is the master of his or her fate, and that any problems or limitations are the fault of that individual” (p. 196). The career development paradigm kept choice a central concept and added a “verticality” component by emphasizing the upward progression of careers over time. The concept of “boundaryless” careers (Arthur & Rousseau, 1996) further highlighted the aspect of choice by focusing on individuals’ ability to define their own careers regardless of organizational structures. “What is being masked is not only lack of choice but also the deteriorating conditions of market work” (Richardson, 2012, p. 197).

The limits of the extant paradigms are what lead to paradigm shifts; Richardson (2012) argued for a paradigm shift that would reflect and be responsive to changes in the nature of people’s lives and in the nature of work. Her view that career counseling “has become overidentified with and trapped in the occupational structure” (Richardson, 1996, p. 356) led her to propose that the label of “career counseling” be retired, and to suggest an alternative label of “counseling/psychotherapy and work, jobs, and careers.” More recently, she has discussed the practice of “counseling for work and relationship” as a mechanism for conceptualizing the interrelatedness. She described two central shifts in thinking: a shift from discourse about “career” to discourse about “work,” and a shift of focus beyond the occupational domain to a broader consideration of multiple, interrelated social contexts (Richardson, 2009).

Previous scholars have addressed issues related to the complex intersection of work and nonwork roles in people’s lives, building models of role spill-over, role conflict, and role enhancement. However, the majority of this literature rests firmly in the camp of market work (Blustein, Medvide, & Kozan, 2012)—namely, from an industrial/organizational perspective—which may focus on organizations’ perspectives and goals and overlook individuals’ perspectives and goals.

Psychology of Working (Blustein)

An understanding of the objective and subjective nature of work and working has been informed by a number of disciplines, both within and outside of psychology. The psychology of working, as described by Blustein (2006, 2008, 2011), represents an expansion of the epistemological lens traditionally evident in vocational psychology, from the study of the psychology of careers to a psychology of working. “Career” has been defined as “the individually perceived sequence of attitudes and behaviors associated with work-related experiences and activities over the span of the person’s life.” (Hall, 1976, p. 4). As Blustein (2006, p. 3) noted, however, our concept of “career” is “deeply embedded in a sociocultural framework that is relevant to only a minority of individuals around the globe”—those characterized by status and achievement. A key feature of Blustein’s perspective is explicit recognition that not all individuals have choice or volition related to work and careers; in fact, there is considerable variability in individuals’ experiences regarding volition, and poor and working-class individuals may experience little choice regarding their working lives (Blustein & Fouad, 2008; Liu & Ali, 2008).

“Working” is thus a more universal and inclusive term than “career.”

FUNCTIONS OF WORK

Blustein’s (2006) perspective focused on three fundamental human needs that are potentially fulfilled by working: need for survival, need for relatedness, and need for self-determination.

Need for Survival (and Power)

Need for survival is attained through work via the power gained through the exchange of work for money or for goods and services. Although this view of work is closely linked to the study of work by economists, Blustein (2006) argued that there are important psychological implications as well. Further, work as a means of fulfilling survival needs may also confer or enhance social status. Prestige, status, and power as functions of work, according to Blustein (2006), have been “woefully neglected in contemporary discussions of careers” (p. 22), although some scholars have included prestige in explaining occupational choice (such as Gottfredson, 2005).

The need for survival becomes increasingly evident in difficult economic times, as access to work becomes even more scarce and the impact of unemployment (and underemployment) on mental health becomes more pervasive (Goldsmith & Diette, 2012; Paul & Moser, 2009; Swanson, 2012). Richardson (2012) commented that the context of market work is one of radical change, but also of “deteriorating conditions”
(p. 193) such as erosion of wages, health insurance and pension benefits, increased income volatility and wage inequality, and poor labor conditions.

Need for Relatedness

Work also provides a means of social connection, both in terms of a link to the “broader social milieu” and in development of interpersonal relationships (Blustein, 2006). Further, the changes in the structure of work, noted earlier, alter the availability and nature of interpersonal relationships (Juntunen & Even, 2012) and warrant further research attention.

Need for Self-Determination

Finally, work provides a mechanism for achieving or implementing self-determination. Self-determination has been explicated in the work of Deci and Ryan (Deci & Ryan, 1985; Ryan & Deci, 2000), which describes the process by which activities that are extrinsically motivating are internalized. Blustein (2006) noted that self-determination offers a broader perspective than existing literature on job satisfaction, which may not capture the experience of poor or working-class individuals.

RELATIONAL THEORY OF WORKING

Blustein (2011) has further explicated the need-for-relatedness function of work into an expanded “relational theory of working.” Based on this theory, Blustein outlined a series of research directions, including understanding the experiences of relationships and work, the role of relational support in choice and transitions, and the intersection of “care” or personal work and market work (Richardson, 1996, 2009; Schultheiss, 2006).

Summary

The “traditional” or foundational theories of vocational psychology and career development—represented by person–environment fit, developmental, and social cognitive perspectives—continue to provide useful predictions about vocational behavior as well as practical guidance to practitioners working with individuals seeking career assistance. However, sole reliance on these theories can no longer be justified, given economic and societal changes in the way that work is structured and experienced, and the growing recognition of individuals excluded from the theories’ purview. The emerging perspectives of Blustein, Savickas, and Richardson offer great promise and warrant additional study. Moreover, the extent to which concepts from the foundational theories may be retained and integrated with concepts from the emerging theories is an important avenue for theorists and researchers.

Such future expansion and integration of foundational and emerging theories would benefit from explicit attention to the assumptions noted by Fouad (2007), described at the beginning of this chapter. Identification of these assumptions underlying 20th-century notions of career development also leads to consideration of each assumption’s converse—namely, the lack of volition in making work choices, the important connections of work to other arenas of individuals’ lives, the unpredictability of the world of work, the multiple career- and work-related decisions an individual will make throughout life, and a revisioning of career counseling as broader and more integrative—which will guide theorists, researchers, and practitioners as they adapt to 21st-century realities of work.

References


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