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Career Construction

A Developmental Theory of Vocational Behavior

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Vocational behavior encompasses a large domain of inquiry—too large to comprehend all at once, too vast a sphere of thought and action for one theory to conceive fully. Accordingly, vocational theorists and researchers usually identify a specific range of vocational behaviors that they wish to study. The question, Which units of vocational thought and action shall we study? is answered inherently by the theories explicated in this book. Each theory concentrates on a particular problem and proposes a different unit of study. So the first thing to know about any theory is what problems it addresses. This defines the scope and usefulness of the theory. The present chapter describes career construction theory by explaining what problems it addresses and which clients it can help. The chapter begins by describing the theory's place in the structure of vocational psychology and its function as a developmental perspective in that disciplinary discourse.

A Developmental Perspective on Vocational Behavior

The "individual differences" view of occupations and the "individual development" view of careers are the two grand perspectives in vocational psychology, one focusing on vocational behavior and the other on its development. Within each perspective are different

theories, whose distinctions are made compelling by the use to which they are put. Because of their overriding importance, it is worth comparing the differential and developmental perspectives within vocational psychology, starting with the individual differences perspective.

The first project for vocational psychology, pioneered by Frank Parsons (1909) at the beginning of the vocational guidance movement, concentrates on occupations and the types of people who fill them. This approach to vocational guidance identifies a few stable traits or personality types that differentiate people in meaningful ways relative to occupational requirements. It then uses tests to measure these traits and systematically match individuals to fitting occupations. Job success and satisfaction are the twin outcomes of a congruent match between a person's abilities and interests and a position's requirements and rewards.

The second project for vocational psychology, pioneered by Donald Super (1953) after World War II, concentrates on how individual work lives unfold. This approach to career counseling elicits work autobiographies from individuals and then identifies the schema and thema that shape the narrative. It uses these patterns of meaning to encourage individuals to implement their vocational self-concepts in work roles, including movement to increasingly more congruent occupational positions. This person-centered method permits counselors and researchers to recognize the processes that construct and develop an individual's career through the life course. The career perspective takes a longitudinal view of adaptational patterns; in contrast, the occupational perspective takes a cross-sectional view of personality types. Metaphorically, we might liken the differential approach to comparing the characteristics revealed in photographs of six different people and the developmental approach to noting the changes in six photographs of the same person taken at different times.

The developmental vantage point of constructing careers situates the meaning of *career* in vocational psychology—the study of vocational behavior and its development. The term *vocational* refers to the responses an individual makes in choosing and adapting to

an occupation. Crites (1969) distinguishes vocational behavior from other types of behavior by requiring that the stimulus be occupational rather than physical or social. He enjoins researchers to systematically use the word *occupational* to designate stimulus variables and the word *vocational* to denote response variables as, for example, in *occupational information* and *vocational choice*. Vocational psychology's basic unit of study is vocational behavior. The developmental perspective on vocational behavior evokes the construct of career.

Career is the development of vocational behavior over time. Instead of the stimulus-response (S-R) paradigm for studying vocational behavior, the response-response (R-R) paradigm is used for studying career and identifying the antecedents of behavioral patterns. Vocational behavior, or response, remains the basic unit of study, but instead of studying differences in vocational behavior among individuals, the career perspective concentrates on changes in vocational behavior by the same individual across time. Vocational development is inferred and career denoted by changes in vocational behavior observed across three or more points in time—the minimum required to notice a trend.

Objective Versus Subjective Career

"Life course" is the meaning sociologists inscribe on *career* when they define it as a sequence of occupations in the life of an individual. This sequence can be objectively observed, as well as analyzed for patterns. Studies that analyze occupational sequences and concatenations in careers originated in the research of Davidson and Anderson (1937) on occupational mobility. A few years later, the sociologists Form and Miller (1949) coined the term *occupational career pattern* to denote the sequence and duration of work positions occupied by an individual—a definition similar to Shartle's conceptualization of career (Shartle, 1959). He indicated that one's career involves stages, including preparation, participation, and withdrawal from one's occupation.

At about the same time that Davidson and Anderson (1937) and Form and Miller (1949) were studying objective careers, other sociologists were studying subjective careers. These studies involved life histories and were originally called "own story" research. Sociological life-history research seeks to draw an intimate portrait of the sequence of events in the course of a person's life and illuminate how this sequence expresses a trend in behavior. During the 1930s, life-history research was enthusiastically promoted by the University of Chicago Sociology Department, led by Clifford Shaw (1930, 1931). Shaw's use of the term *career* focused explicitly on the subject's point of view, particularly how individuals conceptualize their social roles and interpret their experiences. This subjective perspective on private meaning stands in contrast to the public pattern of occupations in a work history. It coincides with Hughes's definition (Hughes, 1958) of *subjective career* as an evolving notion from which people see their lives as a whole and interpret the meaning of their attributes, actions, and experiences. It is this subjective meaning—the one individuals use to orient themselves to their society's occupational structure—that Super (1954) assessed with a technique that identified the preoccupations (for example, themes) that shape a career and the concept that Miller-Tiedeman and Tiedeman (1985) denoted. They suggested that career should be defined as the meaning one places on behaviors related to their careers.

The premise of career construction theory is that *career* denotes a reflection on the course of one's vocational behavior, not vocational behavior itself. This reflection can focus on actual events such as one's occupations (objective career) or on their meaning (subjective career). From this perspective, a subjective career is a reflexive project that transforms individuals from actors of their career to subjects in their own career story. It tells one's "own story," usually by emphasizing a sense of purpose that coherently explains the continuity and change in oneself across time, which is similar to McAdams's conception of identity (McAdams, 1993).

All of this is to say that the developmental approach shares with the differential approach an interest in how individuals fit into different occupations at a particular point in their lives. Yet the developmental approach emphasizes how individuals fit work into their lives. Harry Dexter Kitson, one of the first vocational psychologists, recognized the potential value that life history research might add to vocational guidance. Kitson (1926) proposed that researchers study vocational histories, which eventually propelled his protégé, Donald Super, to launch an influential program of research to construct and test his theory of vocational development. This commitment to learning about how careers unfold led, in due course, to three of Super's major contributions: the Career Pattern Study, a classic book, and a theory of vocational development (Savickas, 1994a). The momentous Career Pattern Study (Super, 1985) followed the careers of one hundred 9th-grade students for more than twenty years and produced four books, scores of journal articles, three psychometric inventories, and dozens of dissertations. The second major product was an authoritative book titled *The Psychology of Careers* in which Super (1957) refocused vocational psychology by expanding its attention to occupational choice as an event to include career decision making as a process. The third product of Super's study of careers was his journal article titled "A Theory of Vocational Development" (Super, 1953).

Career Construction Theory

The ten propositions in Super's original (1953) statement of vocational development theory have been repeatedly modified for clarity and expanded to incorporate new research (Super & Bachrach, 1957; Super, 1981; Super, 1984; Bell, Super, & Dunn, 1988; Super, 1990; Super, Savickas, & Super, 1996). Students of career development should read Super's initial (1953), definitive (1984), and final (1990) statements of his theory, as well as Salomone's (1996) critique of the theory's evolution. The developmental theory of

constructing careers, described herein, is an undated and expanded version of Super's theory of vocational development. In crafting this update of the theory, I have adopted Super's suggestion that "self-concept theory might better be called personal construct theory" (Super, 1984, p. 207). Career construction theory adheres to the epistemological constructivism that says we construct representations of reality but diverges from the ontologic constructionism that says we construct reality itself.

A second important update is the switch from an organismic worldview to a contextualist worldview—one more attuned to conceptualizing development as driven by adaptation to an environment than by maturation of inner structures. Careers do not unfold; they are constructed. Viewing careers from constructivist and contextual perspectives prompted several innovations, the most noticeable being the replacement of the maintenance stage in vocational development theory with the management stage in career construction theory. In the end, these changes have more tightly integrated the segments of the theory and incorporated contemporary developments from mainstream psychology.

Career construction theory consists of the following sixteen propositions:

1. A society and its institutions structure an individual's life course through social roles. The life structure of an individual, shaped by social processes such as gendering, consists of core and peripheral roles. Balance among core roles, such as work and family, promotes stability, whereas imbalances produce strain.
2. Occupations provide a core role and a focus for personality organization for most men and women, although for some individuals this focus is peripheral, incidental, or even nonexistent. Then other life roles such as student, parent, homemaker, "leisurite," and citizen may be at the core. Personal

preferences for life roles are deeply grounded in the social practices that engage individuals and locate them in unequal social positions.

3. An individual's career pattern—that is, the occupational level attained and the sequence, frequency, and duration of jobs—is determined by the parents' socioeconomic level and the person's education, abilities, personality traits, self-concepts, and career adaptability in transaction with the opportunities presented by society.
4. People differ in vocational characteristics such as ability, personality traits, and self-concepts.
5. Each occupation requires a different pattern of vocational characteristics, with tolerances wide enough to allow some variety of individuals in each occupation.
6. People are qualified for a variety of occupations because of their vocational characteristics and occupational requirements.
7. Occupational success depends on the extent to which individuals find in their work roles adequate outlets for their prominent vocational characteristics.
8. The degree of satisfaction people attain from work is proportional to the degree to which they are able to implement their vocational self-concepts. Job satisfaction depends on establishment in a type of occupation, a work situation, and a way of life in which one can play the types of roles that growth and exploratory experiences have led one to consider congenial and appropriate.
9. The process of career construction is essentially that of developing and implementing vocational self-concepts in work roles. Self-concepts develop through the interaction of inherited aptitudes, physical make-up, opportunities to observe and play various roles, and evaluations of the extent to which the results of role playing meet with the approval of peers and

supervisors. Implementation of vocational self-concepts in work roles involves a synthesis and compromise between individual and social factors. It evolves from role playing and learning from feedback, whether the role is played in fantasy, in the counseling interview, or in real-life activities such as hobbies, classes, clubs, part-time work, and entry jobs.

10. Although vocational self-concepts become increasingly stable from late adolescence forward, thus providing some continuity in choice and adjustment, self-concepts and vocational preferences do change with time and experience as the situations in which people live and work change.
11. The process of vocational change may be characterized by a maxicycle of career stages characterized as progressing through periods of growth, exploration, establishment, management, and disengagement. The five stages are subdivided into periods marked by vocational development tasks that individuals experience as social expectations.
12. A minicycle of growth, exploration, establishment, management, and disengagement occurs during transitions from one career stage to the next, as well as each time an individual's career is destabilized by socioeconomic and personal events such as illness and injury, plant closings and company layoffs, and job redesign and automation.
13. Vocational maturity is a psychosocial construct that denotes an individual's degree of vocational development along the continuum of career stages from growth through disengagement. From a societal perspective, an individual's vocational maturity can be operationally defined by comparing the developmental tasks being encountered to those expected, based on chronological age.
14. Career adaptability is a psychological construct that denotes an individual's readiness and resources for coping with current and anticipated tasks of vocational development. The adap-

tive fitness of attitudes, beliefs, and competencies—the ABCs of career construction—increases along the developmental lines of concern, control, conception, and confidence.

15. Career construction is prompted by vocational development tasks and produced by responses to these tasks.
16. Career construction, at any given stage, can be fostered by conversations that explain vocational development tasks, exercises that strengthen adaptive fitness, and activities that clarify and validate vocational self-concepts.

The next three sections of this chapter explain these propositions, first by addressing developmental contextualism (propositions 1–3), then vocational self-concepts (propositions 4–10), and, finally, developmental tasks as the nexus of career construction (propositions 11–16).

Developmental Contextualism

Individuals construct their careers in a particular social ecology. This context is multilevel, including such variables as the physical environment, culture, racial and ethnic group, family, neighborhood, and school. Historical era represents an additional contextual dimension in career construction. As a social activity, work links the individual to the group because it provides a way of connecting to, cooperating with, and contributing to one's community. The link is actively encouraged by institutions such as the family, school, and religious institutions, and by the media; all communicate to infants and children within a given culture a more or less unified view about how social relationships should be conducted and how life should be lived. Thus people are embedded in environments that affect them. A male born into an Asian family living in Manhattan might be encouraged to become a physician or an engineer while a female with the same genetic potential living in Harlem

may be socialized to become a waitress. Of course, this situation is often unfair to an individual and detrimental to the community.

Development in a Social Context

Although initial statements of vocational development theory ignored the fact that careers evolve in a social context, starting in the 1980s there was a push to elaborate theory to situate careers in social context and define their relation to historical era, geographic location, race, and culture. Vondracek, Lerner, and Schulenberg (1986), in articulating a new model of vocational development, emphasized that careers develop in a particular time and place. Previous theorists had recognized that careers evolve in response to societal demands, but these theorists had concentrated on an individual's responses to societal tasks. Vondracek and his colleagues redressed this oversight by amending career theory to highlight the context of development, especially the stimulus demands of a particular culture in a specific historical era. They asserted the importance of social ecology in their life-span approach to careers called developmental contextualism. This view synthesizes the ideas that "contextual change is probabilistic in nature, and that development proceeds according to the organism's activity" (p. 32). The result is that, in the model of developmental contextualism, the individual's own organization and coherence interact with contextual opportunities and constraints to produce development. While the context shapes the individual, the individual shapes the context. Based on this principle of reciprocity in development, Vondracek and his colleagues articulated two recommendations of great import. First, they urged that career professionals appreciate plasticity in development, that is, the potential for change in the individual and in the context. Second, they enjoined career professionals to view individuals as producers of their own development and, as a consequence of this belief, to help clients consciously influence their own development.

The Concept of Life Space

One very important dimension of the context in which careers develop is social roles, that is, the duties and rewards a culture assigns and ascribes to its members based on variables such as sex and race. The term *life space* denotes the collection of social roles enacted by an individual, as well as the cultural theaters in which these roles are played. The work role, albeit a critical role in contemporary society, is only one among many roles that individuals may occupy. While making a living, people live a life. The social elements that constitute a particular life space coalesce into a pattern of core and peripheral roles. This arrangement of roles, or "life structure," organizes and channels the person's engagement in society, including occupational choice. Usually two or three core roles hold a central place, and other roles are peripheral or absent. For example, a medical student indicated that her major roles are student, child, and sibling. These three roles constitute the core of who she is; they are fundamental to her identity and essential to her life satisfaction. She values and finds meaning in her peripheral roles as a friend, companion, and church member, yet she can vacate these peripheral roles, and sometimes does, when her core roles require more of her time.

A person's core roles interact to reciprocally shape each other. Thus individuals make decisions about their work role, such as occupational choice and organizational commitment, within the circumstances imposed by the social roles that give meaning and focus to their lives. To understand an individual's career, it is important to know and appreciate the web of life roles that connects the individual to society. Accordingly, counselors must determine the constellation of roles that an individual plays and the relative importance placed on the work role. Sometimes examination of a life structure will reveal that the career problem is not occasioned simply by a work-role transition, such as college graduation, but that the problem is spun in another strand of the web. For example,

some students' indecision problems are wrapped in their role as children because they cannot make a choice for fear of disappointing a parent. More often than not, career clients seek counseling when they are changing elements in their life structure or rearranging the pattern of roles. During such a transition, individuals redesign their lives as they adopt new roles, drop outdated roles, and modify continuing roles. Although career counseling is a major intervention in its own right, it should be embedded in the larger intervention of life planning so that it fully responds to the particulars of a client's concerns and circumstances (Brown, 1988; Hansen, 1997; Savickas, 1991a). Rather than automatically privileging the work role in promoting "career development," counselors must concentrate on fostering "human development through work and relationships" (Richardson, 1999).

Vocational Self-Concepts

Having discussed social context and life roles, I turn now to the "person" half of the person-environment transaction. Propositions 4–7 deal with vocational behavior from an objective perspective. By *objective* I mean the consensus, shared by members of a society, that (1) defines an occupation's requirements, routines, and rewards, (2) judges an individual's abilities and interests, and (3) matches people to positions. This rational paradigm (Parsons, 1909) for guiding people to fitting occupations has been one of vocational psychology's most significant contributions to the human sciences. To save space, I do not discuss these propositions herein but refer readers to other theories that concentrate on these ideas, such as the preeminent statements of person-environment psychology devised by Holland (1997) and by Lofquist and Dawis (1991).

Here I concentrate on the phenomenological perspective of vocational self-concepts in propositions 8–10 of career construction theory. In concentrating on the development and implementation of vocational self-concepts, these propositions provide a subjective, personal, and ideographic framework for comprehending career

construction—one that augments the objective, public, and normative framework for comprehending vocational behavior.

Development of a Self-Concept

A self consists of symbolic representations that are personally constructed, interpersonally conditioned, and linguistically communicated. Perceptions of the self originate with the awareness that one is distinct from the mothering person. Although newborns display consciousness, or the ability to direct attention, they require several months to become self-conscious in directly attending to themselves. Infants form the idea of a self and develop that self-idea by viewing themselves as an object, particularly in social situations. Ironically, to develop a self that resides inside the body, individuals must view the self from the outside. This view leads to objectification of the self in the form of self-perceptions, which the individual interprets and invests with meaning using the tool of language. A forming self-concept can be viewed as a collection of percepts that is neither integrated nor particularly coherent. The child draws on this disjointed repertoire of attributes and fragmented selves as needed in different situations. This accounts for a child's rapidly changing interests and ambitions. Later in childhood and early adolescence the individual, through reflection, generalizes the rather concrete self-percepts into more abstract self-descriptions and then weaves them together to fabricate a more or less unified and cohesive self-concept. Thus reflective self-awareness constitutes the process that develops a self-concept and self-descriptions compose its content. Once formed, an organized self-concept functions to control, guide, and evaluate behavior. The self-concept also organizes the way in which the individual processes and understands new self-percepts, until disconfirming percepts force a revision in the self-concept.

Role of Parents. The content that constitutes vocational self-concepts originates in the home as children learn to view themselves

and the world through their parents' eyes. Children look to their parents as guides when they begin to explore how they will prioritize social roles and rewards. For example, the dramatic play of dressing in parents' clothes and imitating them is particularly influential as an architect of the self. The prototypical concepts learned from observing and imitating parents are elaborated as children extend their interaction into the wider environment of the neighborhood and school. When children engage in play, hobbies, chores, and schoolwork, they form self-perceptions and make social comparisons that build the attributes and characteristics that will constitute their vocational self-concepts, as well as conceptions of the work role. Childhood play is particularly important in learning about and forming preferences for the roles and rewards that can be pursued in the community theaters of work, love, friendship, leisure, and spirituality. The imagination and initiative shown in behaviors such dressing in costumes, imitating characters in books and movies, and participating in games enables children to learn about both themselves and their society. Unfortunately, the guiding lines drawn by parents and by cultural scripts also produce preoccupations and tensions. Career construction theory asserts that the themes that will eventually structure a career emerge as an individual turns these tensions into intentions.

Role Models. The process of transforming a preoccupation into an occupation relies greatly on identifying role models who show a path forward from the family to the community (Lockwood & Kunda, 1997). In what may be considered a very important career choice, children choose role models who portray solutions to their problems in growing up. As children imitate desirable qualities of their models for self-construction, they rehearse relevant coping attitudes and actions, form values about and interests in certain activities, and exercise abilities and skills as they engage in these activities. Playing selective roles, with increasing attention to the results, enables a reality testing that strengthens or modifies vocational self-concepts. Furthermore, choosing and pursuing hobbies

accelerates reality testing, because hobbies lay halfway between play and work (Freud, 1965). Of course, schoolwork also contributes mightily to the growth of vocational self-concepts, particularly through the influence of one's student-role self-concept.

Classification of Self-Concepts

Super worked to make more precise and operational the overly mystical language of phenomenology used in traditional discourse on self-concept. Devising a scientific lexicon for vocational self-concepts made his theory more useful because it identified different aspects of self-concepts and organized them into a taxonomy. Super (1963) started by describing the self-concept as a "picture of the self in some role, situation, or position, performing some set of functions, or in some web of relationships" (p. 18). Then he asserted that people have multiple self-concepts, not just one self-concept, thus distinguishing between a self-concept and a self-concept system. Within their multidimensional self-concept system, or self-structure, individuals have conceptions of self in each life role they enact. These distinct self-concepts, which are activated in different roles, remain stable in particular types of situations and relationships, and facilitate information processing during decision making (Tunis, Fridhandler, & Horowitz, 1990).

Having articulated the self-concept system in general, Super concentrated next on a particular self-concept. He defined a *vocational self-concept* as the conception of self-perceived attributes that an individual considers relevant to work roles. Finally, he devised a taxonomy to classify the elements that constitute vocational self-concepts.

One important outcome of this taxonomic work was the distinction between, on the one hand, attributes called self-concept dimensions (for example, gregariousness and dogmatism) and, on the other hand, characteristics called self-concept metadimensions (for example, consistency and stability) that describe the arrangement and structure of self-concept dimensions. The usage typical of writers on self-concept can be criticized for confusing dimensions

and metadimensions—a confusion that has resulted in use of the term *self-concept* as a synonym for, and even instead of, the term *self-esteem*. Career construction theory asserts that self-concept dimensions influence the content of choice alternatives, whereas the metadimensions shape the process of choosing. Particularly useful in comprehending decisional processes are the metadimensions of esteem, clarity, consistency, realism, complexity, and efficacy. In this regard, research (Super, 1982) has shown that those who lack self-esteem are less likely to make good matches between vocational self-concepts and occupational roles. Similarly, it is difficult to see how people who have vague self-concepts can adequately picture themselves in any occupational role. A person whose self-percepts are contradictory—who sees herself, for example, as both gregarious and solitary or as friendly and hostile—must also have difficulty translating that inconsistent self-concept into fitting occupations. One whose vocational self-concept is unrealistic is likely to make unwise choices, and one whose concept of self is limited to a few dimensions seems likely to have an inadequate basis for making matching decisions. And finally, an individual with weak self-efficacy for career construction may avoid making choices and remain undecided or indecisive (Betz & Taylor, 1994).

To this point, I have stressed the role of the family, neighborhood, and school in providing self-ideas to fill developing vocational self-concepts. Implicit in this discussion has been the view that the content of self-concepts emerges from the interpersonal world that children inhabit.

Career Choice Within Social Networks

The social networks that engage individuals impose cultural scripts about gender, race, ethnicity, and class that condition the development of children's vocational self-concepts. Career attitudes and aspirations are tightly tied to the social practices in which they are forged. Ignoring this contextualist idea of "habitus" leads to an exaggerated belief in agency. Although self-determination plays a

role, careers are deeply grounded in "status identity," that is, an individual's internal representation of his or her location among unequal social positions. Linda Gottfredson (1996), in her sociological theory of vocational development, sagaciously describes how the social order, with its gender and class differences in employment, shape children's occupational aspirations. She explains how society encourages children to circumscribe the range of occupational alternatives that they consider and how, in making compromises between the vocational self-concept and the social order, they learn to let conceptions about an occupation's prestige and sextype overshadow their own vocational interests.

Thinking about the development of vocational behavior from the self-concept perspective led to Super's heuristic postulate (Super, 1951) that in expressing vocational preferences, people put into occupational terminology their ideas of the kind of people they are; that in entering an occupation, they seek to implement a concept of themselves; and that after stabilizing in an occupation, they seek to realize their potential and preserve self-esteem. This core postulate—that vocational self-concepts interact with work roles—leads to the conceptualization of occupational choice as implementing a self-concept, work as a manifestation of selfhood, and vocational development as a continuing process of improving the match between the self and situations.

Viewing occupational choice as an attempt to implement a self-concept (see Super, 1951) was a simple formulation, yet the notion of translating one's self-view into occupational terms and then preparing for and performing in that occupation had, and still has, widespread appeal. It fits the developmental model in portraying a career as a sequence of matching decisions. With a changing self and changing situations, the matching process is never really completed. The series of changing preferences should progress, through successive approximations, toward a better fit between worker and work. Thus a career can be viewed as the life course of a person encountering a series of social expectations and attempting to handle them in such a way as to attune her or his inner world to the

outer world. The overriding goal toward which career construction moves is a situation in which the occupational role validates the individual's self-concept, or as Super states, "The occupation thus makes possible the playing of a role appropriate to the self-concept" (1963, p. 1). Ideally, an occupational role enables an individual to cooperate with and contribute to the community in ways that both substantiate and confirm that individual's self-concept. In this manner, an occupational role enables an individual to become the person he or she wants to be, and, in fact, likes.

Developmental Tasks in Career Construction

The previous sections have introduced the two variables that interact to produce careers, namely, self and society. The essence of constructing careers lies in recursive transactions between vocational self-concept and work role—a process prompted by community expectations about how life should be lived. As an individual extends the self into the community through enacting work roles, there must be effective transactional adaptation for both to flourish. The vocational self-concept, usually in the form of integrative and self-defining narratives, guides adaptation by negotiating cultural opportunities and constraints. Each transaction should both strengthen the group and improve the individual's adaptive fitness. In pursuit of these twin goals, the transactional adaptations required to mesh vocational self-concept and work role produce vocational development.

The never-ending process of transactional adaptation and career construction evolve in probabilistic ways. These alternative pathways are socially constructed, conditioned by local situations, and contingent on time, place, and socioeconomic status. In the United States during the second half of the twentieth century, the approach Super (1957) took to recounting the social tasks of vocational development concentrated on one main path through life. His recital of career stages highlights changes in goals across five periods of life as an individual moves from one stable condition to

another stable condition. Each stage has a different goal, and the name of a stage indicates that goal: growth, exploration, establishment, maintenance, and disengagement. Each career stage can be further delineated as a sequence of major developmental tasks. Although the career stages emphasize change, the vocational development tasks within them detail how stability is reestablished and continuity maintained. These vocational development tasks are expectations imposed by society and experienced by individuals as career concerns. Success in adapting to each developmental task results in more effective functioning as a student, worker, or retiree and lays the groundwork for progressively mastering the next task along the developmental continuum. At each age, vocational development tasks and career concerns should mesh, and the degree of mesh indicates level of vocational maturity. Skipping a task in the normative sequence may result in difficulties at a later stage. For example, failure to explore during adolescence can cause unrealistic occupational choices in early adulthood. Let us examine in detail the ontogenetic progression of the five career stages, each with its own set of vocational development tasks.

Career Stage One: Growth

The years of career growth, generally defined as ages four to thirteen, involve forming a vocational self-concept. This life stage has been the subject of thousands of psychological studies, many pertinent to vocational behavior. Only a select few, however, have been incorporated into conceptual models of vocational development. In practice, career researchers, with their interest in continuity and change, have concentrated on four lines of development (Freud, 1965), which I call concern, control, conception, and confidence. Each of these developmental lines brings forward into adolescence a syndrome of attitudes, beliefs, and competencies that are critical in determining how people choose their work and construct their careers (Super, 1990; Savickas & Super, 1993). I conceptualize the four syndromes as constituting response readiness and coping resources for dealing

with the four major tasks of vocational development that society imposes on children:

1. Become *concerned* about one's future as a worker.
2. Increase personal *control* over one's vocational activities.
3. Form *conceptions* about how to make educational and vocational choices.
4. Acquire the *confidence* to make and implement these career choices.

1. *Career concern* is the line of vocational development rooted in dependence on parents and plotted by the coordinates of interpersonal trust and intrapersonal hope (Erikson, 1963). Recent scholarship directed to constructing a relational theory of vocational development has focused on how attachment to parents enables infants to initiate and children to form a conception of self and other people that extends into later life in general and into occupational life in particular (Blustein, 2001; Flum, 2001). Infants and children who establish secure attachments to their caregivers learn to trust themselves and other people. This positive conception of both self and others forms an "internal working model" of human relationships that enables children and adolescents to feel secure as they explore the work world and daydream about their place in it. Later, as adults, this felt security allows individuals to interact positively with mentors, supervisors, and coworkers (Hazen & Shaver, 1990), as well as to commit themselves to their occupations and stabilize in their organizations (Meyer & Allen, 1997).

In contrast, insecure attachments produce negative conceptions of self or others (Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991) that characterize three less adaptive styles of career construction: (1) a preoccupied style (negative self, positive others) of anxiety and ambivalence regarding vocational development tasks, (2) a dismissive style (positive self, negative others) of dissocial attitudes toward vocational development tasks, and (3) a fearful style (negative self, negative

other) of career indifference. The secure attachment style fosters a future orientation and optimism, as well as daydreaming about possible selves and alternative futures. These childhood behaviors prefigure an adolescent's acquisition of foresightful attitudes toward anticipated tasks of vocational development, as well as competence at planning how to master them. If one is not (or does not feel) safe, then surviving the present is more compelling than planning tomorrow. Adolescents who are unable to plan their work and work their plan are less likely to transform their occupational daydreams into reality. The fundamental function of concern in constructing careers is reflected by the prime place given to it by prominent theories of vocational development, denoted by names such as Ginzberg's *time perspective*, Super's *planfulness*, Tiedeman's *anticipation*, Crites's *orientation*, and Harren's *awareness* (Savickas, Silling, & Schwartz, 1984).

2. *Career control* is the line of vocational developmental rooted in independence from parents and plotted by the coordinates of interpersonal autonomy and intrapersonal willpower (Erikson, 1963). This developmental line has been, and remains, the subject of extensive research in vocational behavior, including studies of locus of control, causal attributions, sense of agency, assertiveness, and decisional styles, competencies, and strategies. Much of this extensive literature on the initiation and regulation of intentional behavior is brought to bear on vocational behavior in a model of self-determination devised by Blustein and Flum (1999). Suffice it to say, for our purposes here, career control is a major developmental construct—one particularly important to viewing individuals as producers of their own development. During childhood, proactive behaviors such as making decisions, delaying gratification, negotiating, and asserting one's rights increase a sense of interpersonal autonomy and personal agency. These behaviors prefigure an adolescent's attitudes of decisiveness and competence at making career choices. Individuals who do not feel in control allow luck, fate, or powerful others to make their career choices.

3. *Career conception* is the line of vocational development rooted in interdependence with other people and plotted by the

coordinates of interpersonal initiative and intrapersonal purpose (Erikson, 1963). This developmental line starts when the curiosity that prompts children to explore who they are and what they want eventually leads to questions about the meaning of life and how it should be lived. Conceptualizing how life should be led includes forming ideas about how career choices should be made. Career concepts, as well as the considerations and convictions that accompany them, involve the expectations and explanations that individuals use to comprehend how to make choices and construct their careers.

These conceptions affect choices by determining the bases for choosing. For example, some people believe that "you should choose the occupation that you are good at," whereas other people believe that "you can become anything you want as long as you try hard." Once employed, some people believe that "you must stick with the job you have chosen"; others believe that "if you stay too long in a job, the boss will take you for granted." Research on people's assumptions about career construction has focused on career choice misconceptions (Crites, 1965), ordinary explanations (Young, 1986), and career beliefs (Krumboltz & Vosvick, 1996). Exploration of how choices are made in one's family and culture, followed by an interrogation of these processes, prefigures adolescents' contrivances for making career choices and fund of information about self and occupations. Distorted career conceptions can derail the career choice process, leading to decisional difficulties such as indecision and unrealism. Adaptive conceptions about the career choice process lead to suitable and viable choices throughout one's career, not just during adolescence.

4. *Career confidence* is the developmental line rooted in feelings of equality with other people and plotted by the coordinates of interpersonal industriousness and intrapersonal confidence (Erikson, 1963). Self-confidence denotes the anticipation of success in encountering challenges and overcoming obstacles (Rosenberg, 1979). Confidence can move one from play acting to setting goals and actualizing roles. In career construction theory, confidence denotes feelings of self-efficacy concerning one's ability to success-

fully execute a course of action needed to make and implement suitable educational and vocational choices. Career confidence arises from solving problems encountered in daily activities such as household chores, schoolwork, and hobbies. Moreover, recognizing that one can be useful and productive at these tasks increases feelings of self-acceptance and self-worth. These behaviors and feelings prefigure adolescents' confidence about constructing their careers and competence at problem solving. The resulting career confidence facilitates performing behaviors that lead to developmental task mastery.

Progress along the four developmental lines discussed herein arises from the daily experiences of children. For example, an experience such as saving part of the money earned from household chores to purchase a birthday present for a friend lets a child rehearse and develop a future orientation and the willpower to delay gratification, as well as plan a strategy and feel confident about pursuing it. At the end of childhood, the four development lines coalesce into the ABCs of career construction—attitudes, beliefs, and competencies. When development is on schedule, adolescents approach the tasks of the exploration stage with a concern for the future, a sense of control over it, adaptive conceptions about how to make career decisions, and the confidence to engage in designing their occupational future and executing plans to make it real. In addition to these developing dispositions and increasing competencies, individuals enter adolescence with a collection of self-percepts and identifications with idols, images, and ideals. The next career stage requires that they activate their dispositions and competencies to weave these images into a cohesive representation of the self and then use that fabric to clothe the vocational self in an occupation.

Career Stage Two: Exploration

The years of vocational exploration, generally defined as ages fourteen to twenty-four, involve fitting oneself into society in a way that unifies one's inner and outer worlds. During the years of exploration, society expects young people to learn who and what they

might become. Over time, adolescents should gradually translate their vocational self-concept into a vocational identity—one substantiated by "the tangible promise of a career" (Erikson, 1963, pp. 261–262). Society presents this task to individuals in the concrete form of expectations to make an occupational choice. As indicated by its name, the chief coping behavior of this stage is vocational exploration, that is, attempts to acquire information about the self and about occupations in order to make the matching choices that construct a career. This information-seeking behavior provides experiences and expertise for dealing with the three vocational development tasks that move an individual from occupational daydreams to employment in a job: (1) crystallization, (2) specification, and (3) actualization.

Crystallization. The first task of the exploration stage—*crystallizing vocational preference*—requires that individuals explore broadly to form tentative ideas about where they fit into society. Exploration-in-breadth is a quest for a more complete sense of self—a search that also develops the attitudes, beliefs, and competencies needed to crystallize a vocational self-concept. Tiedeman and O'Hara (1963) explain that vocational exploration propels a process of differentiation by which one conceptualizes new distinctions about role-related self-attributes. When individuals look at their own "me," they develop their self-concepts. Each look invites further differentiation of self-percepts. Self-differentiation is fostered by educational and leisure experiences and can be accelerated by psychometric testing that helps individuals draw an objective portrait of their vocational interests, occupational abilities, and work values. During adolescence, differentiation expands the number and increases the abstractness of dimensions used for self-description. In due course, the differentiated percepts and identifications must be integrated into a stable and consistent structure.

As self-clarity increases, so should clarity about the world. The formation of occupational conceptions follows the same developmental course as self-perceptions, which Neimeyer (1988) charted

well. First, through differentiation the adolescent characterizes various occupations according to their requirements, routines, and rewards. After sufficient differentiation of occupations, the adolescent integrates the distinct occupations into a cognitive map of occupations, usually articulated by fields of interests or levels of ability. This process of integration can be facilitated by learning a preexisting schema such as Holland's hexagon (Holland, 1997) or the world-of-work map that Prediger (2001) described. These schemas specify the location of occupations in a common social space, thus helping individuals synthesize and interpret the occupational information they have accumulated.

Following the unification of self-percepts into a vocational self-concept and the unification of occupations into a cognitive map, the next step is to match, initially randomly and later systematically, the vocational self-concept to fitting positions on the occupational map. These trial matches are experienced as occupational daydreams about possible selves (Dunkel, 2000). Visions of possible selves instill the courage needed to enter the adult world. The more attractive possible selves become the focus of exploration. In addition to drawing more exploration, these important possibilities sensitize the individual to relevant information and feedback. Using the self-knowledge and occupational information gained from reality testing, the individual forms provisional preferences for a select group of occupations.

Mastering the task of crystallizing preferences is facilitated by the ripening of the attitudes, beliefs, and competencies brought forward from the years of career growth. Recall that the lines of development involved career concern, control, conception, and confidence. Development along the four lines progresses at different rates, with possible fixations and regressions. Delays within or disequilibrium among the four developmental lines produce problems in coping with the task of crystallization—problems that career counselors diagnose as unrealism, indifference, indecisiveness, and indecision. Moderate disharmony among the developmental lines produces individual differences in readiness to crystallize and explains variant

patterns of development. Strong disharmony produces deviant patterns of development. Accordingly, the four developmental lines sketch a framework that can be used to assess career adaptability and diagnose vocational decision-making difficulties.

The assessment framework arranges variables from the four developmental lines into a structural model that can be used to recognize individual differences in the readiness and resources for the task of crystallizing preferences. The variables in the structural model of career adaptability are dichotomized into dispositions and competencies. Dispositions refer to attitudes and beliefs that orient an individual's frame of mind, response tendencies, and inclinations toward constructing career choices. The dispositions include career concern, control, conception, and confidence as they emerge from the growth stage and develop during the exploration stage.

The cognitive competencies, that is, comprehension and problem-solving abilities, denote the resources brought to bear on making career choices. In the structural model, the competencies are knowledge about self and occupations, as well as skill at relating the two through matching, planning, and problem solving.

The development and use of competencies is shaped by the dispositions, with each disposition facilitating development of a particular competency. Concern generates planning competence; control enhances decisional competence; conception engenders knowledge of self and occupations; and confidence breeds problem-solving competence. The cognitive competencies modulate career choice behavior, whereas the dispositions, lying between competence and action, mediate the use of competencies (Savickas, 2000a). These cognitive competencies are measured by the *Career Maturity Inventory* (Crites & Savickas, 1996), whereas confidence about executing the corresponding behaviors is measured by the *Career Decision-Making Self-Efficacy Scale* (Betz & Taylor, 1994).

Specification. As tentative preferences are formed and readiness for making choices increases, the individual encounters the second developmental task of the career exploration stage. *Specifying an*

occupational choice requires that individuals explore deeply to sift through tentative preferences in preparation for declaring an occupational choice. Exploration-in-depth requires that role playing become more purposive and reality testing become more systematic. It can include obtaining further education and training, as well as moratorium periods used to explore self and world through travel and work experiences. Eventually, advanced exploration results in specifying a particular occupation that one wants to enter and making a commitment to do so.

Specifying an occupation choice involves more than just the psychological activity of mentally comparing and suitably coupling self and occupational concepts. It consists of constructing a story that engages the larger sociocultural context by organizing self-percepts and then positioning the resulting self-concept in society. An individual's career story crystallizes how that person sees him- or herself in relation to the world. Vocationally relevant traits such as abilities and interests constitute the substance of this story, yet the story's essence is the narrative theme that shapes the story's meaning, continuity, and distinctiveness. The theme imposes narrative structure on the choices made and, in so doing, constructs a unified self from an individual's often-contradictory views, baffling behaviors, and inconsistent desires. This unity makes the vocational self-concept whole by stating its ruling passion and describing how the occupational choice transforms this lifelong obsession into a profession. The theme also stakes a claim to uniqueness, an assertion that distinguishes "me" from others in the same community and identifies the way in which "I" can be a resource for the group (Hogan, 1983). The declaration of an occupational choice confirms who we are and wish to become. Moreover, the choice announces the controlling idea for our working lives, sometimes even revealing a secret we have hidden. The career story we tell authorizes entry into the adult world of work and enables us to add our voice to it. The more we tell the story, the more real we become. In short, translating private vocational self-concepts into public occupational roles involves the psychosocial process of vocational identity formation.

Berzonsky (1989) describes three distinct behavioral strategies by which people construct, maintain, and revise their psychosocial identities. When applied to the formation of vocational identities, these strategies represent three different patterns of dispositions and competencies for thinking about self in relation to the world of work.

The *informational* style uses exploration and problem-focused coping to integrate role models into a cohesive and unitary whole and then make suitable and viable choices. The informational style springs from secure attachment in the growth stage and leads to identity achievement. It can be conceptualized as steady development and application of the dispositions and competencies in the structural model of career choice. There are, of course, individual differences in the rate and trend of this steady development.

The *normative* style, often leading to identity foreclosure and pseudo-crystallization of vocational preferences, conforms to the prescriptions and expectations of significant others. This style springs from a preoccupied attachment and seeks to preserve the existing identification as part of a family. Rather than explore the self, individuals who use the normative style protect the self from external threats by adhering to the family's occupational specifications. In cultures that prioritize individual desires over family needs, the normative style may be conceptualized as delayed development of adaptive dispositions toward career construction, thereby inhibiting the use of choice competencies and forgoing performance of choice behaviors. The *avoidant* style overuses delay and procrastination in an effort to ignore, for as long as possible, problems and choices. Those who use the avoidant style prefer emotionally focused coping and seem to lack role models. This style springs from negative perceptions of others that leads to diffuse identity and, if self is also evaluated as negative, to a disorganized identity. Diffuse and disorganized identities generally produce unstable work histories. The avoidant style can be conceptualized as disrupted development of both dispositions and competencies.

Actualization. The third and final task of the exploration stage—*actualizing an occupational choice*—requires that the individual realize a choice by converting it into actions that make it a fact. Actualizing

a choice usually involves trial jobs in the specified occupation. The initial occupational position allows individuals to try on the occupation for fit and then move to other positions so as to zero in on a suitable job. The period during which choices are actualized is often referred to as the school-to-work transition (Blustein, Juntunen, & Worthington, 2000). The quality of vocational coping behavior during that transition appears to be more important than actual success in the first, second, or even third job.

The critical vocational coping behaviors during the disjunctive transition from school to stable employment consist of actions that move one to increasingly more congruent occupational positions (Super, Kowalski, & Gotkin, 1967). The goal of this movement is to arrive at a situation in which the person can function optimally, or at least effectively. The ideal progression starts with *developing skills* that prepare one to enter an occupation through further schooling, training, or apprenticeships. This training should be followed by *experimenting* with a series of related jobs in a process of elimination that leads to a more or less permanent position. Having found such a position, the individual begins the process of *stabilizing* to make the job secure. Obviously, this progression can be delayed or disrupted by maladaptive attitudes, beliefs, and competencies for crystallizing preferences, by vocational identity styles that distort the specification of an occupational choice, and by external barriers that thwart actualizing a choice. These delays and disruptions can be manifested in *drifting* from one unsuitable position to the next, *floundering* performance in a position, or *stagnating* in an inappropriate or blind-alley job. In the Career Pattern Study (Super et al., 1967) about one-third of the participants drifted and floundered during the bulk of the seven years after high school; another one-sixth started off drifting and, after three or four years, began to stabilize. At age twenty-five, 80 percent were stabilizing. Consequently, effective coping with the tasks of the exploration stage should not be conceptualized as predicting early stabilization in a position; rather, it ensures continuing movement to more congruent positions, with eventual establishment in a suitable and viable position.

Career Stage Three: Establishment

The years of vocational establishment, generally defined as ages twenty-five to forty-four, involve the implementation of a self-concept in an occupational role. The goal of the establishment years is to effect a cohesion between one's inner and outer worlds. The work performed, in addition to making a living, should contribute to making a life. It should be a vocational manifestation of self—ideally, a manifesto that proclaims the passions that move one and the proclivities that direct this movement. When work is just a job done for hire—a travail—then outlets for self-concepts must be sought from other life roles in the theaters of family, friendship, and leisure.

The three vocational development tasks of the establishment stage outline how society expects one to both hold a job and be held in community. Implementation of a self-concept first means stabilizing in an occupational position that allows self-expression. Stabilizing requires that one take hold of a position and make one's place secure by assimilating the organizational culture and performing job duties satisfactorily. The middle years of the establishment stage involve consolidating one's position by demonstrating positive work attitudes and productive habits, as well as cultivating congenial relationships with coworkers. Consolidation includes refinement of the self-concept in response to the requirements of reality. Refinements in one's conception of self add depth and substance to one's life story and enhance its viability by clarifying purpose, recognizing subtleties and imperfections, and increasing coherence. Refining one's self-portrait can reveal, for the first time, glimpses of an untapped potential for leadership, creativity, entrepreneurship, or adventure. This vision may lead individuals to face the third task of the establishment stage, namely, advancement to new or different responsibilities. With a refined view of self, they may seek better opportunities for self-expression in their current organization, other organizations, or even in different occupations. Advancement can sometimes come from a lateral move if the movement increases person-environment fit.

Whether or not one advances to more responsible positions, late in the years of establishment most every worker, at one time or another, thinks about what remains of her or his work life. Sometime during midlife, individuals reach a point where taking care of what they have established, that is, maintaining, becomes more important than advancing in new directions. This concern introduces the next career stage: *maintenance* in Super's vocational development theory or *management* in career construction theory.

Career Stage Four: Maintenance or Management

As individuals begin to concentrate on maintaining what they have established, they typically encounter the midlife question: Do I want to do this for the next twenty-five years? Essentially, they ask themselves and their family and friends if they should hold on or let go. This vocational development task of renewal requires that individuals reevaluate work experiences and revise their vocational self-concept accordingly. This is a question of re-finding, not refining, the self. If reevaluation leads them to change organizations, occupations, or fields, then they must recycle through exploration and establishment by crystallizing and specifying a different choice and then stabilizing in a new position (Williams & Savickas, 1990). If they decide to remain in the established occupation and organization, then they enter the stage of career maintenance, generally defined as ages forty-five to sixty-four or from midlife to retirement. Society expects mature adults to hold steady in the positions they occupy by remaining interested in their work and committed to their organization. The goal of this maintenance is to sustain oneself in an occupational role and preserve one's self-concept.

Because the chief task of maintenance is self-concept preservation, the focus is on style of maintaining one's position, not on coping with a predictable sequence of age-related tasks. Super (1984) conceptualized three styles of positive functioning during the maintenance stage: (1) holding, (2) updating, and (3) innovating. In *holding* a position, individuals must meet the challenges presented by

competing workers, changing technology, increasing family demands, and diminishing stamina. To conserve what they have established, if not improve it, individuals must continue to do what they have done before, and do it well. This requires that they avoid the stagnation of just holding on until retirement. Stagnating—a negative style of maintenance—implies that the worker *holds on* by exerting minimal effort, responding obsequiously to authority, and bending the rules. *Updating*, the second style of maintaining, involves more than just doing tasks; it means striving to do tasks better by keeping current in the field and renewing skills and knowledge. Workers who stay fresh remain committed to meeting normative expectations and achieving goals. *Innovating*, the third maintenance style, means breaking new ground by doing tasks differently, doing different tasks, or discovering new challenges. Of course, the ground they break may lead innovators to construct a new path—one that leads to changing jobs. Each of these three positive styles of maintaining vocational self-concepts during later adulthood (doing tasks, doing tasks better, and doing different tasks) can create a successful and satisfying life, especially when harmoniously integrated with other life roles.

Many readers may be wondering why they do not know more people who are maintaining their positions. This raises an important point. An increasing number of workers are recycling through exploration and establishment, then losing their positions and doing it again, and then yet again. The social expectation that older adults maintain a productive society harkens back to bureaucratic organizations wherein the worker, once stabilized, was expected to put in thirty years and retire. The maintenance stage is the mainstay of careers that unfold in bureaucratic organizations. However, today, as many of the large organizations that sustain career maintenance disappear, fewer people experience the maintenance stage as it was once conceptualized. Some workers experience a shortened version of the maintenance stage; others experience only a brief period of stability before being forced to recycle to new positions; still others are perpetual establishers who enjoy the adventure of starting anew.

One wonders if the maintenance stage itself is disappearing, as the corporations that once provided lifetime employment shift to new methods of organizing their labor (Collin & Young, 2000). New models of protean (Hall & Mirvis, 1993) and boundaryless (Arthur & Rousseau, 1996) careers are emerging in conjunction with the revised psychological contract (Rousseau, 1989) between employer and employee. With a new focus on constructing and managing careers (Savickas, 2000b; Watts, in press), these models emphasize resilience and starting over, not maintenance and preservation. Given these social changes, I have replaced the maintenance stage in Super's vocational development theory with the management stage in career construction theory.

Career construction theory asserts that coping with change and managing transitions involves re-exploration and re-establishment. Having secured a new role, the individual typically recycles—a minicycle—through one or more of the career-stage maxicycles (Super, 1984). Thus the high school graduate entering her first job usually progresses through a period of growth in the new role, including exploration of the nature and expectations of that role. She becomes established in it, manages the role if successful, and then experiences disengagement if, with further growth, she becomes ready to change jobs or even switch occupational fields. Similarly, the established worker, frustrated or advancing, may experience growth and explore new roles and seek to get established in one of them. As workers manage their careers, they sometimes wish they could experience a long period of maintenance in which their future, with a solid pension, was secure. But now even the role of pensioner is being reconstructed by societies that once viewed age sixty-five as the time of mandatory retirement.

Career Stage Five: Disengagement

The career stage of disengagement (sixty-five and older) involves the vocational development tasks of decelerating (reorient vocational self-concept), retirement planning (disengage vocational self-concept),

and retirement living (reflect on vocational self-concept; life review). After a long period of maintenance, workers eventually experience a decline in energy for and interest in their occupation. Accordingly, they start to disengage from it by decelerating, that is, slowing down on the job, starting to turn over tasks to younger colleagues, and contemplating retirement. In due course, retirement planning becomes a central activity that leads eventually to separation from the occupation and commencement of retirement living with its challenges of organizing a new life structure and different lifestyle. The developmental tasks of retirement living, such as life review, are best addressed in gerontology textbooks, not books that tell the story of careers.

This story of the career stages, with their maxicycles and minicycles, tells a grand narrative about psychosocial development and cultural adaptation. Maybe no one individual ever lived all of it, yet the narrative serves as an organizing story that people use to understand themselves and others. Nevertheless, Super's account is not *the* account; it is *an* account of vocational development tasks for one culture in one historical era. It was written at midcentury to portray the then-current corporate culture and societal expectations for a life, especially a male life. Other accounts are being narrated today as the global economy, information technology, and social justice challenge dominant narratives and rewrite the social organization of work and the meaning of career. These rich narratives chronicle untold stories and voice complexity. Although postindustrial societies are revising master narratives about work, the new story lines for contemporary lives are far from being clear, coherent, and complete. These new stories, rather than focusing on progress through an orderly sequence of predictable tasks, will increasingly focus on adaptability for transitions, especially coping with changes that are unexpected and traumatic.

Evaluations of Career Construction Theory

Career construction theory embodies the essential elements in the functionalist system of psychology. It emphasizes empirical research, focuses on relations among variables, stresses the provisional and

tool character of its propositions, and avoids premature attempts at stating explanatory postulates and devising logico-deductive superstructures. The theory addresses functionalism's main concern, that is, adaptive patterns rather than personality traits, in asking two central questions: What do people do? and Why do they do it? (Marx & Hillix, 1963). To answer these questions, the theory formulates data-oriented propositions that, as a series of summarizing statements, remain closely tied to empirical findings. The theory then organizes these propositions into an interpretive schema that aims to be heuristic, not predictive.

A review of the theory's evaluation by critics necessarily concentrates on prior versions of career construction theory, namely vocational development theory and life-span, life-space theory. In general, evaluations of the theory conclude that it provides a useful description of vocational behavior and its development—one that incorporates research findings from the main streams of psychology and sociology and summarizes these results in the form of propositions (Borgen, 1991; Hackett, Lent, & Greenhaus, 1991; Osipow & Fitzgerald, 1996). These two strengths relate to the theory's greatest weakness. Although it easily incorporates mainstream research and comprehensively describes vocational development, the theory's propositions lack the fixed logical form needed to test its validity and generate new hypotheses (Betz, 1994; Brown, 1990; Swanson & Gore, 2000). More often than not, the theory is invoked retrospectively to explain and interpret research findings, not to structure a study prospectively (Hackett, Lent, & Greenhaus, 1991). Nevertheless, the theory does successfully provide a cogent framework for *post hoc* interpretation and integration of empirical facts.

Most reviews of the empirical research on the theory (for example, Hackett & Lent, 1992; Osipow & Fitzgerald, 1996) reach three conclusions: (1) the data generally support the model, (2) the developmental segment is well documented, and (3) data relative to the self-concept segment generally agree with the theory. The data about success in earlier tasks predicting success in later tasks have been viewed as more equivocal (Hackett & Lent, 1992), yet the problems of selecting appropriate predictive validity criteria for

these studies suggest that the results are stronger than first believed (Savickas, 1993a). Reviewers have expressed concern that each year only a few new empirical tests of the theory are published (Osipow & Fitzgerald, 1996; Swanson & Gore, 2000). In recent years, these research studies have concentrated on the vocational development tasks, exploratory behavior, vocational identity, and the school-to-work transition. Also there have been important applications and extension of the theory to gender and sexual orientation, as well as to other cultures such as South Africa and Australia (Swanson & Gore, 2000).

Given the current status of career construction theory, I believe that three topics merit priority for future research. First, there is a pressing need for a project that delineates specific aspects of the vocational self-concept and how they relate to vocational behavior (Betz, 1994; Super, 1990). This project would aim to improve definitional specificity and organizational parsimony among the self-concept dimensions and metadimensions. For example, such work could investigate how career self-efficacy relates to vocational self-concept metadimensions such as self-esteem, clarity, consistency, and realism. It should also relate vocational self-concepts to vocational identities by building on the foundation of contemporary research about identity style. Finally, it could prompt a switch from studying self-concepts to investigating the process of self-conceptualizing by applying the narrative paradigm of career as story (Savickas, 1998).

A second research priority calls for linguistic explication and operational definition of career adaptability (Savickas, 1997a). This construct has improved the theory in recent years, from envisioning mainly a maxicycle to involving minicycles of growth, exploration, establishment, management, and disengagement, linked in a series within the maxicycle. With the addition of the adaptability construct, the process of transition through re-exploration and re-establishment merits greater attention. Discontinuities in psychosocial adaptation frame the dialectic of development, which occurs when encounters between an individual's thesis and society's antithesis produce a new synthesis. Development of potentials and

construction of new meaning arises from actively adapting to changes and difficulties in the real world. Research on transitions and the dialectic they engender, beginning with the school-to-work transition, should apply the metatheoretical model of selective optimization with compensation (Baltes & Baltes, 1990) to examine the actual mechanisms of vocational development and career construction (Savickas, 2001; Vondracek & Porfeli, in press).

The third research priority requires extensive attention to diverse groups as well as socioeconomic factors (Osipow & Fitzgerald, 1996). The original statement of vocational development theory (Super, 1953) was formulated at midcentury during an era when many men spent a career in one company and many women worked as homemakers or in sexually segregated occupations. Accordingly, practitioners have, on occasion, rightly criticized the theory for emphasizing white men to the neglect of women and racial-ethnic minorities. This criticism seems valid from our perspective at the beginning of the twenty-first century (Richardson, 1993; Savickas, 1994b). Additions to the original theory, including perspectives such as developmental contextualism and constructs such as role salience, respond to the gender context of work, better comprehend women's careers, and increase the theory's usefulness for multicultural and cross-cultural research and counseling. To continue enhancing the usefulness of career construction theory, research and reflection must identify its biases and rectify the resulting distortions. Similar to the careers it conceptualizes, the theory itself must continue to innovate, not stagnate.

Application of Career Construction Theory

The assessment and counseling model that stems from career construction theory is designed to help individuals develop and implement their self-concepts in their society. Its mission is to help clients construct a career path that moves them toward the community, not climb a career ladder that elevates them above it (Savickas, 1993b). This section explains the constructivist career counseling model by

first describing its assessment methods, then discussing its counseling interventions, and finally illustrating its application using the cases of K and E.

Assessment

Constructivist career assessment begins with an intake interview that identifies the vocational development tasks that concern the client. These career concerns can be identified during the interview or by administering the *Adult Career Concerns Inventory* (Super, Thompson, & Lindeman, 1988), which measures degree of concern with the tasks of exploration, establishment, management, and disengagement. Once identified, assessment of the client's concern proceeds through four phases that, in turn, focus on (1) life space, (2) career adaptability, (3) vocational self-concept and career themes, and (4) vocational identity, including work values, occupational interests, and vocational abilities.

Assessing Life Space. The first phase in the assessment model locates the career concern in a client's life space. A counselor should initiate this assessment by determining the cultural context that embeds the client's career concern. Part of this assessment should turn the spotlight from the stage on which the career story is performed to the audience—imagined and real, internal and external—that reacts to the unfolding drama. Following this discussion of relational resources and significant others, attention should focus on the client's life structure and the salience of the work role. If the work role appears important in that structure, then further vocational development and occupational assessments will mean a great deal. However, if the work role appears unimportant to a client, then progressing to assessment of adaptability, vocational self-concept, and vocational identity may not be meaningful or accurate because occupations and their roles play little part in that client's life. When circumstances suggest that the work role should be more important, then career orientation is called for (Savickas, 1991a); if not, then

counseling may concentrate on preparation for other roles, such as those of parent, homemaker, or volunteer.

Assessing Career Adaptability. After situating the career concern in the client's life space, the counselor turns to assessing the client's adaptive fitness for coping with that concern. Generally, adaptability assessment evaluates dispositions toward and competencies for making educational and vocational choices (that is, crystallizing, specifying, and actualizing) or implementing them (that is, stabilizing, consolidating, and advancing). Career adaptability can be efficiently measured in high school students using the *Career Maturity Inventory* (Crites & Savickas, 1996) and in college students using the *Career Development Inventory* (Savickas & Hartung, 1996). Alternatively, counselors can assess career adaptability by using a structured interview (Savickas, 1990). In such an interview, I use four general categories of questions to elicit information about the client's dispositions and competencies. I start by asking clients how often and what they think about their future. Then I assess their career concern by listening for responses that show optimism, awareness of imminent and future tasks, and involvement in actively preparing to deal with these tasks. Second, I ask how they have made important choices and negotiated transitions in the past. Then I assess career control by listening for responses that indicate the audience for their career story, self-determination beliefs, attitudes of decisiveness and compromise, and decisional competence for handling the developmental task, transition, or problem that concerns them. Third, I ask about the alternative strategies they have considered for coping with their career concern. Then I assess career convictions by listening for responses that show a curious attitude and information-seeking behavior, as well as reveal decisional styles and strategies. I also ask clients to tell me what they know about their preferred occupation and how it suits them. Then I listen to the response to assess the fund of occupational information and matching competence. Fourth, and finally, I ask clients to describe how they solved an important problem they have faced.

Then I assess career confidence by listening for self-efficacy beliefs and problem-solving competence. This assessment of career choice dispositions and competencies allows me to understand how clients construe their career concern, as well as their readiness and resources for coping with it. If the concern is about stabilizing rather than choosing, then I assess dispositions toward and competence for adapting to an organizational culture, performing job tasks, forming congenial relationships with coworkers, maintaining productive work habits and attitudes, and planning to advance both within one's organization and career (Dix & Savickas, 1995). This assessment of work adaptation can be performed using data elicited from an inventory such as the *Career Mastery Inventory* (Crites, 1996) or in conversations about work (Hirsch, Jackson, & Kidd, 2001).

Having collected data about the client's life space and career adaptability, the first half of the assessment is finished. Attention turns naturally from assessing the *process* of career construction to assessing its *content*, as contained in vocational self-concepts and expressed in vocational identities.

Assessing Vocational Self-Concept and Career Themes. The third step in constructivist career assessment investigates vocational self-concepts and career themes. In contrast to the assessment of vocational identity with objective, quantitative measures, the assessment of vocational self-concepts relies on subjective, qualitative methods (Watkins & Savickas, 1990). The constructivist career assessment model examines two perspectives on subjective experience: (1) a cross-sectional view of vocational self-concepts and (2) a longitudinal view of career themes. The view from the cross-sectional perspective on self-concepts may be looked at through adjective checklists (Johansson, 1975), card sorts (Hartung, 1999), or the repertory grid technique (Neimeyer, 1989). These methods reveal the content of a self-concept, as well as the attributes used to construe occupations. As an alternative to elicitation methods, counselors can use procedures such as those devised by Mathewson and Rochlin (1956) to appraise clients' vocational self-concepts directly from their oral behavior during an interview.

To complement the cross-sectional view of self-concept content, the longitudinal perspective characterizes themes that organize this content for the purpose of autobiographical reasoning. Biographical themes provide an architecture to guide thinking about the continuity of a self across the past, present, and future. The essence of a career theme does not lie in reporting past experiences. To the contrary, themes interpret past facts to make them fit present needs. Themes illuminate what experience alone cannot; they convey a message that supports present goals and shapes the future. As such, themes are "created meaning" that resides in the present and explains the essential impulse of the self. Accordingly, career-theme assessment uses an individual's autobiography to identify threads of continuity in the work history, then uses this fabric to interpret the past, explain the present, and foresee the future. Counselors can use autobiographies (Annis, 1967; Mumford, Stokes, & Owens, 1990) and genograms (Okiishi, 1987) to elicit career narratives. In addition, the career-theme interview (Savickas, 1989), included in the case materials reported for K and E (see Chapter Two) was designed specifically to prompt autobiographical reasoning and produce career narratives. The five questions, in conjunction with three early recollections, produce narratives that express psychological truths and lessons learned from self-defining events during different career periods.

To identify patterns and projects from these career-defining stories, the counselor tries to learn about the origin of the career theme, the career path's trajectory and turning points, and prior experiences that might apply to the current concern. To do this, I use a method called extrapolation based on thematic analysis (Super, 1954; Jepsen, 1994). As an example of thematic analysis in constructivist career assessment, Savickas (2000c) has shown how articulating the connection between the problem stated in the first early recollection and the solution portrayed by the role models identifies the thread that weaves a career theme. Other techniques for thematic analysis of career autobiographies have been elaborated by Cochran (1997), Jepsen (1994), and Neimeyer (1989). The themes in a client's career narratives, especially those that

maintain consistency across repeated tellings, will figure prominently in her or his vocational identity.

Assessing Vocational Identity. The fourth step in constructivist career counseling uses traditional person-environment procedures, such as interest inventories, to draw an objective picture of a client's vocational identity and then to sketch out how particular occupations might validate that identity. Counselors who do constructivist career counseling typically measure interests with the *Self-Directed Search* (SDS; Holland, 1985) or *Strong Interest Inventory* (SII; Harmon, Hansen, Borgen, & Hammer, 1994). The RIASEC summary code from the SDS or the SII and the occupational scales in the SII indicate "degree of resemblance" to workers employed in different occupations. Rather than measuring expressed interests, resemblance scores suggest identifications, if not possible identities. These indicators of similarity paint an objective picture of a client's vocational identity—a life portrait that can be appreciated best in the light of the client's unique vocational self-concept and career themes. Accordingly, counselors seek to comprehend how the objectively identified occupations might manifest a client's vocational self-concept and career themes.

Integrating Data and Interpreting Narrative. As a transition from assessment to intervention, the counselor organizes the data about life space, career adaptability, vocational self-concept, and vocational identity and interprets them to the client. Depending on the counselor's style, this interpretation may take the traditional form, which presents results from each assessment separately, or it may take an integrated form, which blends all of the interview data and test results into a narrative (Crites, 1981). I prefer an integrative interpretation that realistically and sensitively narrates the client's "own story." The narrative should reconstruct the client's character with greater agency and self-consciousness, as well as focus the script on a generativity plot of imagined steps along existing thematic lines. The narrative should be told in dramatic form,

using metaphoric language to describe the client's career concern, and then situated in the context of the client's life space. Having described the predicament and its setting, the narrative then portrays the protagonist, balancing how an "audience" sees the client (vocational identity) and how the client views the self (vocational self-concept). The story leading the client to the current predicament is presented as yet another example of the client's career theme. Finally, the predicament is again linked to the career theme in speculating about the client's possible selves and future scripts.

Speculation about the future always includes at least three alternative scenarios. In the first scenario, the client remains the same by doing nothing—making no choices or adjustments. In the second scenario, the client follows his or her theme and does what he or she has usually done in the past. The third scenario depicts the client actively mastering the tasks being encountered and anticipated and, in so doing, better implementing the self-concept. This third scenario concentrates on self-development by portraying how particular variations or key changes in the career theme might be useful, as well as by delineating the coping attitudes, beliefs, and competencies that could be effective in handling the developmental task, transition, or problem. How counseling can modulate career themes and attune career adaptability is described in some detail so that the client can make an informed choice when the counselor invites the client to collaborate in constructing a better future for the client.

Discussion of the assessment results, whether in integrative narratives or in test score interpretations, necessarily leads to counseling. At their best, assessment and counseling blend into and overlap each other. Excellent presentation of the assessment work involves the client in reflecting on vocational self-concepts and work roles, considering career themes and developmental tasks, and estimating interests, values, and talents. When the client is involved in this self-interrogation, she or he develops some self-understanding and even self-acceptance; thus counseling has begun and assessment has merged with intervention.

Counseling

Constructivist career counseling engages clients in autobiographical reasoning that articulates their vocational interests as a psychosocial link between self and society (Savickas, 1999). It seeks to write and rewrite a career story that relates vocational self-concepts to work roles. The career narrative should explain how clients can use occupations to become more complete (Savickas, 1993b). As stated earlier, this means helping clients fit work into their lives rather than fitting people into occupations. In general, constructivist career counseling helps clients construct and manage their careers so that they may experience self-fulfillment at work and contribute to the welfare of the community. In particular, constructivist career counseling fosters self-concept clarification and implementation, along with handling the developmental tasks. It helps clients articulate and integrate their vocational self-concepts and career themes, clarify and validate their vocational identities, relate their preferences to the opportunity structure, and increase their realism in making educational and vocational choices. Relative to handling the encountered and anticipated vocational development tasks, constructivist career counseling helps clients form adaptive attitudes, beliefs, and competencies.

The narrative paradigm for constructivist career counseling helps clients to author self-enhancing and generative career autobiographies, especially vocational stories that allow them to see clearly what is at stake, what the alternative choices are, and what decision needs to be made (Savickas, 1992). Connecting today's indecision to yesterday's experiences and tomorrow's possibilities serves to clarify meaning, allow comprehension, and enhance the ability to choose. This central task of enhancing narratability requires that counselors help clients rewrite and edit their career narratives in a way that invests work with personal meaning and charts a future course. When discussing a career transition, the counselor helps clients to personalize their experience of discontinuity by fitting the problem into the larger pattern of meaning. This narrative shaping of transitional dis-

continuities engenders meaning that bridges the separation, reduces confusion, and resolves doubt. The reward for looking at the past to construct a story about the present is the ability to move forward into the future.

The constructivist career counseling model regards narrative work as "bricolage," that is, constructing something new with whatever is at hand. The accumulation of everyday experiences provides the building blocks with which to construct careers. The source of materials for new construction, or for deconstruction and reconstruction, are old events that are transportable to the new situation, as well as current and concrete stories of daily survival. Using biographical bricolage (Savickas, 2000c), clients apply ordinary language and concrete thinking to make sense out of the work world and construct career narratives that authenticate their choices and improve their adaptive fitness. This is the process of career decision making as experienced by individuals; it is one of roundabout means, not the technical rationality prescribed by Parsons's paradigm of "true reasoning" (Parsons, 1909).

The interview is the counselor's prime procedure for enabling career construction through narrative means, as well as for creating a safe space from which clients can seek growth and exploratory experiences. Meaningful conversation brings change. During the conversation, constructivist career counselors apply the narrative paradigm by using generic counseling processes such as coaching, educating, facilitating, guiding, influencing, mentoring, modifying, organizing, planning, and restructuring (Stone, 1986). These counseling processes should be selected and applied systematically, because some counseling processes work better than others in preparing clients to cope with different developmental tasks (Savickas, 1996). For example, guidance may work better for crystallizing a group of vocational preferences to explore, whereas coaching may work better for conducting a job search. Constructivist career counseling, of course, also uses homework assignments that help clients form new attitudes, beliefs, and competencies. These assignments or experiences can include consulting pamphlets and books, viewing filmstrips,

interacting with computerized guidance systems, talking with school or college officials, observing workers discuss or demonstrate their occupation, taking an exploratory course, joining an occupationally relevant club or association, shadowing someone at work, performing volunteer work, and working at a part-time or vacation job.

Case Studies

The career stories of K and E (see Chapter Two) serve to show the contrast between the informational and avoidant styles of forming a vocational identity and constructing a career. E displays the informational style, supported by well-developed career concern, control, conceptions, and competence. In contrast, K displays the avoidant style, in his case showing underdeveloped concern and confidence with somewhat better developed control and conceptions. Both of these lives merit a novel, but herein they receive only a paragraph.

For economy of presentation, I state my impressions without the qualifications and tentativeness that I employ during a counseling interview. In counseling, my overriding goal is to be useful to the client, not be right. The following narratives about K and E are created meaning, not discovered fact. Their "truth" is grounded in their utility to K and E. Maybe career conversations that discuss the following ideas would be useful to K, as he tries to crystallize vocational preferences, and to E, as she tries to specify an occupational choice.

The Case of K

K evinces the avoidant style in his emotional approach to coping, procrastinating, and academic underachieving. There are indications that K can work hard; for example, his SAT score in mathematics is 10 points higher than his verbal score. It is not apparent what career concern K brought to the counselor. It appears that a counselor has solicited K's "own story" for use in this book rather than K seeking career counseling.

K's degree of career control suggests he has developed some autonomy and sense of agency in negotiating his situation; never-

theless, he prefers structure from others, as suggested by his accepting a friend's recommendation that he attend college and by his work in the organized environment of a library. Achievement through conformity is common among only children; frequently they are independent yet still need reassurance. K holds vague conceptions about how to make a career choice and convictions concerning preferred roles and rewards. He reports an interest in technology and architecture, maybe because they structure his creativity. His father's Investigative-Realistic vocational personality type and his mother's Conventional-Realistic type suggest the possibility that K might resemble an IRC type, which is consistent with the interview data.

The career theme interview reveals a vocational self-concept that portrays someone who is on the move and likes to learn. His line of movement seems to go from being scared to being excited. His choice of role models indicates that he wants to develop from procrastinating and moving hesitantly to being an initiator of activity. He wants to launch new projects and even lead, yet also wants a partner available to provide reassurance and structure. His competence at self-knowledge and occupational information appears weak, and he now uses an intuitive decision-making style.

In counseling, I would invite K to stop skating across the top of life. I would encourage him to take hold, to explore other ways to move—ways that use his talents and gratify his needs. The first goal would be to help him take initiative; I would, at first, provide structure and reassurance as he explored technology occupations, especially jobs wherein he could design movement, maybe of vehicles or other machines that move. I would deal with the anxiety that makes him procrastinate and reinforce any initiative he showed. And I would be sure to help him envision his career theme as moving from a preoccupation with being scared by new challenges to an occupation in which he is excited about taking initiative, learning, testing his abilities, designing technology, and solving problems. I would also make sure he understood the importance of recruiting a mentor who will provide structure and encouragement. I would prompt occupational exploration by discussing his interest in architecture and then reviewing occupations classified as IRE and RIE as

well as RIC and IER. We would build a plan of exploration and make an appointment to meet in two weeks to discuss the results of his information-seeking behavior. In the end, I would hope he became better able to structure his own initiative and more courageous in moving forward in life.

The Case of E

Whereas K feels anxious about constructing his career, E worries. E evinces the informational approach to constructing her career. She shows adaptive fitness in her concern, control, conceptions, confidence, and competence. Her concern is with "narrowing" her ambition. Unlike K, E wants in now but fears being left out. Her ambition shows in wanting "more" for her life and in "pursuing" a double major in history and religion—two activities that require attention to details and doing the correct thing (in contrast to the problem solving required in math and science). Similar to other oldest children with two siblings, E is dutiful and rule-oriented. However, E is also a "conscientious rebel" who dislikes the current state of affairs in the United States, where sexism and racism limit the opportunities and thwart the activities of much of the population. She wants to move from her preoccupation with feeling sad about being left out of "a man's world" to moving to an occupation in which she can enact her compassionate vision, be a pioneer, work for change, and yet balance other life roles and keep stress low. To do so she needs to turn her tension into intention. She is conflicted about staying versus going. Staying put in a traditional role makes her depressed, but running off in a pioneer role scares the people who care for her, so for now she stays put. She needs to integrate these two—to learn to be a pioneer without scaring other people, maybe in a structured job such as a professor of law or history.

E and I would start exploration by discussing occupations classified as ESA and SEA. In the end, she needs to realize that her project in life is to fight for the rights of those whom society leaves out and to use her intellect to work as a conscientious objector to sexism and racism. In counseling, I would also invite her to explore

the purpose that crying serves in her life and to discuss the power of her sensitivity, as well as its potential for becoming depression. She needs all the courage she can muster to be a pioneer who fights the good fight yet does not sacrifice herself in the process.

Readers who want to read more case examples may consult reports by Savickas (1988, 1989, 1995a, 1995b, 1997b), as well as detailed descriptions of constructivist career counseling methods and materials written by Bimrose (2000), Cochran (1997), Csikszentmihalyi and Beattie (1979), Peavey (1998), and Savickas (1997c). I invite the reader to add to this literature.

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