



JOHN L. HOLLAND

INTRODUCTION

Holland's Theory (1959–1999): 40 Years of Research and Application

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During World War II, John L. Holland served in the Army for 3 years and 5 months. Working as a personnel clerk, he began to think that just a few types were required to account for much of the regularity he noticed in soldiers' occupational histories. Following the war, Holland developed a classification that research has shown does just that. He began work on his classification system at the University of Minnesota with the encouragement of his Ph.D. advisor, John Darley. At Minnesota, Holland became convinced that college students with different interests have different personalities. He generalized this conclusion to occupational groups while working as a college instructor and vocational counselor at Western Reserve University (1950–1953). Holland began studying which personalities fit which occupations by formulating personality sketches of people employed in different occupations using the scoring keys from the *Strong Interest Inventory* as his data. These interpretive character sketches eventually became the formulations in Holland's theory of personality types and work environments, first published in 1959.

In that seminal article about his theory, Holland articulated the two goals that motivated him to formulate the theory. First, he sought to comprehend and integrate existing knowledge about vocational choice. Second, he hoped that the theory would prompt further research. Within a few years after the theory was published, it became obvious that Holland achieved both of these goals, and by 1991 Borgen concluded that research on Holland's theory "is voluminous and unabating" (p. 275). From our perspective four decades after publication of the

theory, we conclude that Holland's theory has been a surpassing achievement in vocational psychology. In addition to prompting a tremendous amount of empirical research in vocational and I/O psychology, the theory has provided major breakthroughs in conceptualizing vocational interests and career decision making, constructing interest inventories, organizing occupational information, counseling for career development, and structuring career education curricula.

As Borgen (1999) recently stated, "Holland wrote the book on interest measurement. His creative contributions have been integrative for more than 35 years . . . His assertion that interests and personality are related stakes out the center ground of theoretical and counseling integration" (p. 405). Appropriately, since its publication in 1973, Holland's book entitled *Making Vocational Choices* has been by far the most cited work in the field of vocational psychology. Holland's RIASEC hexagon is the icon for vocational psychology; it even adorns the cover of the *Journal of Vocational Behavior*. More importantly, this structural arrangement of six personality types into a hexagon is one of the most well-replicated findings in the history of vocational psychology (Rounds, 1995).

On the 40th anniversary of the theory's first statement, this special issue of the *Journal of Vocational Behavior* documents and celebrates how Holland has elaborated his theory during the past four decades as well as looks ahead to further developments of the theory. This festschrift begins with an article by G. Gottfredson that discusses Holland's major contributions to vocational psychology. Gottfredson explains how Holland's approach to science enabled Holland to transform and improve the delivery of vocational assistance worldwide.

Gottfredson's overview is followed by two articles that address the bedrock of Holland's theory—*personalities in environments*. First, Hogan and Blake compare Holland's six types of vocational personalities to the Five-Factor Model of personality (FFM). They conclude that Holland's interest inventories measure *identity*, that is, a person's own aspirations, hopes, or dreams, whereas personality inventories measure *reputation*, that is, personality from the observer's point of view. Hogan and Blake offer the heuristic conclusion that Holland has provided a taxonomy of identity choices from the actor's perspective in the same way that the FFM offers a taxonomy of reputation from the observer's perspective. In the second article on personalities in environments, L. Gottfredson and Richards sagaciously concentrate on a core element of Holland's theory, one that researchers and practitioners too often disregard—the environmental formulations. They show how Holland has moved his theory toward an ecological perspective for building a science of environments.

One of Holland's best ideas was to describe occupations in terms of the psychological attributes of their incumbents, which enabled him to characterize personality types and work environments using parallel constructs and parallel taxonomies. This contribution appears to be even more important in contemporary society as the content of jobs rapidly changes (Dawis, 1996). Occupational information systems based on job content require constant updating and major

revisions, whereas Holland's method of describing occupations based on psychological attributes remains rather stable and needs only minor revisions as the world of work changes. This may be why, as McDaniel explains in his article, Holland's occupational taxonomy is used in about 50 different career information delivery systems, including two prominent systems—the Department of Defense's ASVAB Career Exploration Program and the Department of Labor's O*NET system.

In addition to organizing occupational information, Holland's theory has come to dominate the design of interest inventories, even reshaping the venerable *Strong Interest Inventory*. Borgen (1991) cited Campbell and Holland's (1972) application of Holland's theory to Strong's data as one of the remarkable advances in interest measurement because it integrated two diverse paradigms—Strong's dustbowl empiricism and Holland's conceptual abstractions. Of course the instruments developed by Holland and his colleagues, such as the *Self-Directed Search* and *Vocational Preference Inventory*, continue to be among the most popular inventories used by career counselors. Campbell and Borgen, in this issue, explain how Holland's hexagon has brought structure, organization, and simplification to interest measurement. In the next article, Reardon and Lentz discuss how counselors use Holland's model and methods in career assessment.

The article by Rayman and Atanasoff explains why Holland's theory has been so useful for practitioners. The authors also spell out the features of the *Self-Directed Search* and other tools developed by Holland that account for their success. Among these useful features are the way the classification organizes information and a transparent, self-scored inventory intended to have effects on users. Muchinsky's article also shows why Holland's theory has been so useful to I/O psychologists as they address issues of person–environment fit.

In the next article, Chartrand and Walsh remind readers why person–environment fit remains a central tenet of Holland's theory—satisfaction and success depend on the goodness of fit between the worker and the job. Chartrand and Walsh review some of the voluminous research that has examined the validity of this congruence hypothesis and then analyze the difficulties in measuring person–environment fit.

Making congruent choices stymies many individuals, causing them to seek career counseling to resolve their difficulties in deciding. Holland's continuing interest in the problem of indecision resulted in a major innovation when he reformulated the dichotomy between decided and undecided into a continuum and then linked that continuum to a new construct, namely vocational identity. Osipow discusses how Holland's construct of vocational identity emerged from his persistent attempts to conceptualize and measure career indecision.

In addition to advancing a heuristic theory, Holland has been a generative mentor in advancing the careers of his students and colleagues, as attested to by Astin in the final article in this issue. The festschrift concludes with

Holland's bibliography—a resource for the young scholars who will extend Holland's theory for decades to come. For the contributions documented in this volume and more, we thank the consummate vocational psychologist—John L. Holland.

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