Psychodynamic Career Counseling

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Abstract

This paper reviews the contributions of Freud's psychoanalysis, Erikson's model of psychosocial development, and Adler's Individual Psychology to the practice of career counseling. The potential contribution of psychodynamic theories seems to have been impeded by problems in adapting psychodynamic constructs for application in career counseling. The contrast between objective and subjective perspectives on career counseling is used to analyze psychodynamic theory's current failure and future potential to influence career counseling. Attempts to replace trait-and-factor constructs with psychodynamic constructs, interpret interest inventories and ability tests from psychodynamic frameworks, and expand vocational appraisal batteries to include measures of psychological needs have had, at best, limited success. The potential usefulness of psychodynamic career counseling is not to replace the objective perspective of the trait-and-factor model but to augment it with the subjective perspective of the life-theme model.

Psychodynamic Career Counseling

Mark and I do want to talk about contemporary psychodynamic career counseling. We want to consider the practice aspect of career counseling, but before doing so, we want to first consider some of the theory/research base underlying and informing the practice of psychodynamic career counseling.

Theory and Research

To discuss the theory/research base of psychodynamic career counseling, let's draw on three psychodynamic frameworks: Classical psychoanalytic, Eriksonian, and Adlerian. Classical psychoanalytic first.

Classical psychoanalytic. Analytic theorizing about careers and vocational behavior can be broken down into what I'll term "early" and "later" thinking. Early theorizing is reflected in several articles appearing in the 1940's and '50's, in such journals as The Psychoanalytic Quarterly, International Journal of Psychoanalysis, and Bulletin of the Menninger Clinic (Hendrick, 1943; Lantos, 1943, 1952; Menninger, 1942; Obendorf, 1951). These writings discussed work as being a sublimation, work as blending both the pleasure and reality principles, and work as gratifying the instincts. As you can imagine, much of this writing was quite abstract and very far afield from career counseling. The concepts were and are hard to translate into career work in any meaningful way. Moreover, three limitations of these early papers include: (a) a heavy preoccupation with the instincts; (b) the idea that adult work behavior is determined largely by parent-child interactions in the first six years of life; and (c) minimal attention to social and cultural influences on behavior (Neff, 1965).

Later analytic theorizing about careers and vocational behavior seems best reflected in Bordin's writings (Bordin, 1980, 1984, 1987; Bordin,

Nachmann, & Segal, 1963). As you may recall, the 1963 Journal of Counseling Psychology article by Bordin and his colleagues provided a psychoanalytically-based framework for understanding vocational development. This was the first and only serious attempt to apply Freudian theory to building a model of vocations. Over two decades later, Bordin has revised his classical analytic thinking about careers to be more consistent with an ego psychology model. While ego psychology seemingly is the wave of the present and future, classical analytic theory as it relates to careers seemed to stop some 25 years ago. In our opinion, its impact on career counseling has been virtually nil because (a) the concepts remain without practical translation or application to career concerns and (b) contemporary developments in psychoanalytic psychology (ego psychology, object relations theory) have resulted in theoretical revisions of Freud's model.

But what about the research on psychoanalytic theory? I really can't be more optimistic here. for example, in Osipow's (1983) recent review, most reference material about psychoanalytic theory and careers is pre-1970. In Bordin's 1984 review, much of the research referenced again is pre-1970. Quite simply, traditional analytic theory and research seems dead in terms of what it has offered or has to offer to career counselors. And there's just not much more to be said about this. But if I'm going to provide such a negative evaluation here, what can we turn to for a more optimistic view? This is where Eriksonian and Adlerian thinking comes into play.

Erikson. We are all well familiar with Erikson's eight stages of the person. Erikson's theory seems to have much to offer career development. His framework is comprehensive and covers the entire lifespan. The potential importance of each stage for career behavior can easily be seen, as Munley

(1977) pointed out a few years back. So the trust vs. distrust, autonomy vs. shame and doubt, initiative vs. guilt stages, and so on all have potential implications for career development and career behavior. All we need do is really sit back and think how this might be so.

The identity stage, however, is the one that has occupied most theorists' attention. The identity vs. identity confusion stage involves attempts to answer key personal questions: Who am I? Where am I going? How do I fit in? As conceptualized by career theorists, individuals implement their identities by means of a career. So it's easy to see why the identity stage would be of such interest from a career development standpoint. Let me emphasize that the identity construct and identity stage have much to offer career counselors from a conceptual view; they provide a means of thinking about identity formation, how identity affects the implementation of self vocationally, and how identity affects other variables that bear upon the career choice process. Thus, the identity stage as conceived by Erikson is a highly useful and usable theoretical construct that can be applied to the career counseling situation.

Research has been supportive of Erikson's theory as it applies to career development, suggesting that identity development significantly affects various career variables (e.g., career decisiveness and career adjustment). As Munley (1977) points out, "the theory does not lead to predictions in terms of what kind of person chooses a certain kind of job, but rather helps identify personality factors associated with success in handling career development tasks" (p. 266). This statement is also true for the research. The research seems most useful in giving us a base to understand the relationship between personality and vocational development.

While Erikson's theory potentially can prove useful in some respects for career counselors, it too has its drawbacks. First, career attention has been given to the identity stage of Erikson's theory, but very limited attention has been given to the implications of the other seven stages for career development. This type of integrative work is needed if we are to develop an all-encompassing picture of how the eight stages contribute to the career development process across the lifespan. Second, little has been done to translate Erikson's theory into career counseling technique. It seems important that attention be given to developing concrete means by which the theory can be rendered more practicable in the career counseling situation. So we again have the problem of translating a personality theory into career practice.

Adler. Like Erikson, Adler's is an ego psychological theory. Adler's contributions traditionally have been regarded as practical, useful, and common sense in nature. Some of the frequently-referred-to concepts of Adler's include birth order, life style, family atmosphere, social interest, and early recollections. Recent attempts have been made to integrate Adler's thinking with career development theory and practice (McKelvie & Friedland, 1978; Savickas, 1989; Watkins, 1984). Many concepts, which have been translated into personal counseling, seem equally usable in career counseling. For example, the concept of a lifestyle type is quite similar to a trait-factor conceptualization. That family atmosphere and family relationships would affect one's schema about work and work behavior seems tenable. That early recollections would contain information pertinent to work and career seems tenable as well. The concepts of Adler, then, are much more accessible

to career counselors than previously-mentioned terms such as sublimation, instinct, and so on.

Research also suggests that the concepts of birth order, lifestyle, early recollections, and social interest have implications for understanding vocational behavior. The best we can say now, however, is that we have a tentative base supporting the relevancy of Adlerian variables to the career counseling process. In most areas, the number of research studies is still limited and, although an all-too-common statement to make, more research is needed. That recognized, let me again say that, of the research conducted, Adler's theory and its relevance for career development seems promising from a research perspective.

So Adler's theory is promising, but what are its limitations? I'd like to just emphasize one limitation, because it's consistent with what I've said before. We again have the problem of accurate and meaningful translation: that of translating a personality theory and psychotherapy approach into vocational theory and career counseling approach. Some efforts have been made to correct this problem but it is by no means resolved at this point.

And now to summarize what I've said so far. Simply this. Classical analytic theory and research offer little if anything for contemporary career counseling. Erikson's and Adler's theories fare much better, and there is a research base to support the usefulness of both. Of equal importance, Erikson's and Adler's concepts are accessible. The main problem, however, continues to be that of translating personality theory/psychotherapy thinking into vocational/career counseling thinking. This problem has been <u>the</u> major impediment to the utilization of psychodynamic theories in career counseling.

But can this be remedied or worked around? This is a question to which Mark will turn his attention.

Counseling

The dichotomy between the objective and subjective perspectives on clients' vocational choices may be used to analyze the failure of psychodynamic theory to significantly influence research and practice in career counseling. The objective view focuses on conceptions of the client formed by observers whereas the subjective view focuses on apprehending the client's conception of his or her personal experience. Although the English language does not explicitly recognize this distinction, other languages do. For example, in German personlichkeit denotes the actor's interpersonal style and the impression that she or he makes on others whereas personalitat denotes the actor's understanding of the reasons for her or his behavior (MacKinnon, 1944). In this paper, "vocational" denotes the objective perspective. We use "career" to denote the subjective perspective, following Hughes (1958, p. 63) definition of subjective career as a perspective in which people see their lives as a whole and interpret the meaning of their attributes, actions, and things which happen to them.

The Objective Perspective

Vocational guidance operates from the objective perspective. Guidance counselors help clients become more realistic and rational in making vocational choices. Vocational guidance always has been based on a community's consensually valid attempts to objectively explain individual differences in behavioral dispositions. Objective explanations use the common-sense of the group, not the private-sense of individuals.

Trait theory of individual differences sustains the contemporary practice of vocational guidance. Trait theory attributes recurring uniformities in person's social behavior to personality structure. The underlying dimensions that structure behavioral clusters are called traits. Scientific and lay observers of an actor encode their impressions of the actor's social conduct in trait vocabularies. For example, an observer might attribute a person's behavior to the trait of honesty. According to Hogan (1983, p. 60), "the primary function of trait ascription is to evaluate other people, specifically, to evaluate their potential as resources for the group." Thus, in a group that divides labor among its members, traits can be used to assign work roles.

Contemporary practitioners of vocational guidance operationalize the trait theory approach to objective vocational guidance with actuarial methods. The counselor as actuary estimates the probabilities of a client succeeding in various occupations. Counselors base these estimates on data gathered through assessment of the client with psychometric instruments that objectively measure abilities and interests. After matching a client's ability test and interest inventory results to aptitude and interest patterns that characterize various occupations, counselors can recommend fitting occupational levels and fields to the client.

The Subjective Perspective

Career counseling operates from the subjective perspective. It helps clients understand their behavior from their own point of view. When operating from the objective perspective, the counselor acts authoritatively as a representative of the community and its common-sense. When operating from the subjective perspective, the counselor elicits clients' subjective

conceptions of themselves and the world and acts as interpreter to help clients understand their selves and the meaning they give to their lives. The counselor elicits occupational possibilities, not through traits, but through facilitating self-exploration and interpreting meaning. These procedures help clients acknowledge and discuss unexamined (or unconscious) ideas and feelings they have about making vocational choices. These personal ideas and feelings compose the client's private-sense conceptions about the meaning of self, work, and life.

Private-sense cannot comprehend traits as an explanation of vocational behavior. Individuals do not use differences between themselves and others to explain their behavior to themselves. In fact, individual difference variables do not exist for individuals. Without objective feedback from teachers or counselors, people do not ordinarily sense their position relative to other people across a taxonomy of traits. What they do sense is their own needs and goals. Individuals comprehend these needs and goals as the reason for their behavior. Purpose, not traits, structure actors' causal explanations. The behavioral clusters, which from the objective perspective are explained by traits, are explained by actors as intentional action. Rather than clusters, these behaviors are perceived as patterns which over time reveal purpose.

Life pattern theory sustains contemporary career counseling. At mid-century, Super (1954) elaborated the subjective perspective on career counseling by developing "career pattern counseling." Super devised career pattern theory as an extension of life pattern theory. Essentially, the theory of life patterns states that analysis of an individual's life history reveals tendencies and patterns that can characterize that life story. The

life history approach to career pattern counseling seeks to aid the individual by identifying past and probable future patterns of development. Super developed a version of life history method which he called "extrapolation based on thematic analysis." Essentially, this method enables counselors to identify life themes by analyzing a case history. When using the thematic-extrapolation method to clinically study clients and their development, counselors act more like biographers than actuaries (Savickas, 1988).

Contemporary practitioners of subjective career counseling operationalize life pattern theory using methods from psychodynamic psychology (Csikszentmihalyi & Beattie, 1979; LaBier,1986; McKelvie & Friedland, 1978; Osherson, 1980; Ochberg, 1988; Rohrlich, 1980; Savickas, 1989; and Ulrich & Dunne, 1986). A common model for psychodynamic carer counseling emerges from all psychodynamic theories because each of these theories deals explicitly with life themes. All psychodynamic theories conceptualize people as somewhat neurotic and consider overcoming neurosis to be the most important life problem that faces each person (Hogan, 1983). A person's neurosis has a theme that various psychodynamic theorists have called a life line, life style, life plan, life drama, life plot, and life project. Psychodynamic theorists vary in how they conceptualize life theme <u>content</u> (e.g., Freud's oedipal complex, Erikson's identity confusion, or Adler's inferiority feelings). Yet, the theorists share the view that life theme <u>process</u> involves adaptation to overcome diversity. Adaptation consists of actively mastering what has been passively suffered and thus it develops the unfinished individual toward more completeness. In short, people develop by turning symptoms into strengths and strengths into social contributions. Subjective career counseling addresses turning symptoms into strengths and objective vocational guidance addresses

turning strengths into social contributions. Thus, the content of career decision making may be viewed both ways. For example, interests can be viewed as solutions to problems in growing-up and as salient personal traits that connect an individual to the community.

Psychodynamic Theory and the Objective Perspective

Psychodynamic theory falters when counselors try to use it from an objective perspective. Psychodynamic theory provides a means to understand the subjective outlook of a client, not the objective characteristics of that client. It does not blend well with the study of objects, trait theory, or actuarial methods; consequently, published attempts to use psychodynamic theory as a basis for vocational guidance impress may readers as awkward or forced. These published attempts may be classified into three categories.

The first way in which psychologists tried to link psychodynamic theory to vocational guidance was to replace interests and abilities with psychodynamic constructs. The most comprehensive attempt was offered by Bordin, Nachmann, and Segal (1963). They used ten psychoanalytic dimensions to differentiate occupations. "Assuming then, that a counselor should wish to base vocational counseling on this framework, a trait-factor approach would be used, but client modes of impulse gratification, psychosexual development, and anxiety level would take the place of interests and abilities" (Osipow, 1983, p. 42). Another example of this approach is the attempts to classify occupational differences using Adlerian constructs and the early recollection technique. Such attempts, whether pursued by Freudians or Adlerians, have played only a minor role in vocational guidance.

A second approach to linking psychodynamic theory to vocational guidance fared slightly better than attempts to devise a psychodynamic trait taxonomy

of people and occupations. In this approach, interests and aptitudes are not replaced. Instead they are interpreted as expressions of more fundamental psychodynamic constructs. Counselors are encouraged to use psychodynamic theory as a framework to interpret interest inventories and ability tests. A classic example of this approach is Goldberg and Gechman's (1976) framework for making psychodynamic inferences from Strong Vocational Interest Blank profiles. In order to go beyond objective trait interpretations of the scores, they offered a "systematic process for organizing SVIB results within a psychodynamic framework and for using this framework for making inferences about personality" (p. 286). Although Gobetz (1964) did not focus exclusively on psychodynamics, he provided counselors with many psychodynamic inferences in his interpretive syllabus for the Kuder Preference Record.

A third approach to using psychodynamic theory in objective vocational guidance has been the most successful, yet, at best, its success in influencing practice has been slight. Its slight success stems from the recognition that making psychodynamic inferences from interest inventory results may be circuitous. To be more direct, some counselors add to their vocational assessment battery a measure of psychological needs such as the Edwards Personal Preference Schedule or the Personality Research Form. In practice, counselors who administer needs inventories typically use them to explain the origin of interests. For clients with undifferentiated interests, counselors may use clients' most pressing needs to predict which interests may emerge and to prescribe exploration activities which stimulate interest crystallization. The limited success of needs assessment in improving vocational guidance and characterizing occupations has been thoroughly analyzed by Osipow (1983, Chapters 3 and 7).

Blending Objective and Subjective Perspectives

The real value of psychodynamic career counseling is to complement the objective perspective of vocational guidance with a subjective perspective for comprehending subjects' views of their vocational choices. The purpose of combining the objective and subjective perspectives in career counseling is to help clients find socially viable (objective) and personally suitable (subjective) vocational opportunities to develop their life themes through work. Viewing clients from both the objective and subjective perspectives allows counselors to consider aptitudes and interests in a matrix of life experience (Berg, 1954). Counselors who see clients from both perspectives have a better picture of clients' vocational development and career decision making. With this picture, counselors can do more than objectively describe how a client compares to the group and translate the client's interests and abilities into fitting occupations. Counselors can also subjectively explain clients' interests and abilities, not as possessions, but as solutions to problems of growing up (Carter, 1940). By combining trait descriptions and life theme explanations of interests, counselors may more effectively clarify clients' choices and enhance their ability to decide. Osherson (1980, p. 25) gave an example of how the client may be able to articulate both the objective and subjective perspectives on her or his occupational choice: "I will become an (occupational choice) with perceived role attributes (the social meaning), so that (personal meaning)."

Watkins and Savickas (in press) described assessment methods and counseling approaches that implement the psychodynamic life-theme approach to career counseling. They described how to use structured interviews, projective techniques, autobiographies, and card sorts in career assessment. In

discussing counseling, they emphasized approaches that systematically integrate the objective and subjective perspectives. For example, Ochberg described how to use psychodynamic symbols and cultural motifs to interpret the narratives that people tell about their careers. Crites (1981) blended the objective and subjective perspectives on test interpretation to devise a method of "integrative test interpretation" that helps clients mesh their "inner reality" with "outer reality". Savickas (1989) integrated Adlerian life-style therapy with Holland's typology to devise "Career-Style Counseling". Kurtz (1974) combined Transactional Analysis with vocational guidance using the Strong Vocational Interest Blank to devise a group approach.

Despite the advantages of combining objective and subjective perspectives in career counseling, it is not for every client because it requires more time than most counselors can afford to allot to every career client. Four types of clients seem to benefit greatly from adding the subjective perspective. The first type are those clients who, during intake, strike the counselor as indecisive as opposed to undecided or who seem particularly unrealistic in self-appraisal and naive about life. Interest inventories assume a certain degree of maturity in the respondent. Unrealistic and indecisive clients often need help to become more complete before they can respond to interest inventories in a meaningful way. The second type are those clients referred by other counselors as "difficult cases". We find that the subjective perspective often reveals their difficulty and frees them to develop their careers. The third type are adult clients such as mid-career changers, displaced homemakers, and discharged employees who already have an objective view of their interests and abilities. The fourth type includes culturally

different clients who may not be adequately served by an "objective" view that draws on a common-sense different from their own.

Psychodynamic theory has not yet significantly influenced the practice of career counseling. However, counselors' growing interest in applying life-theme methods to career pattern counseling (Carlsen, 1988; MacGregor & Cochran, 1988; Miller-Tiedeman, 1988; and Young & Collin, 1988)) may eventuate in more applications of psychodynamic constructs to helping clients make occupational choices and develop their careers.

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