

Extending the Reach of Vocational Psychology: Toward an Inclusive and Integrative Psychology of Working

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This article, which represents a contribution to the 30th anniversary issue of the *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, seeks to extend the reach of vocational psychology by charting the course for an integrative and inclusive psychology of working. Building on Richardson's (1993) foundation of work as a location for counseling psychology practice and inquiry, I employ a sociopolitical analysis and a theoretical and methodological framework to further the development of a psychology of working. The goal of a psychology of working is to include the work lives of all citizens in our scholarship, not simply the well educated and affluent. Using both a moral and intellectual rationale, I present several key elements of an inclusive and integrative psychology of working that emerge out of the strengths of current vocational psychology, such as the focus on diversity and the advent of feminist thought. The article concludes with a discussion of how a psychology of working can serve to advance the integration of existing social scientific studies of work as well as to promote greater application of our efforts in practice and public policy. © 2001 Academic Press

By most standards, vocational psychology is a vigorous and relevant scholarly domain, with sophisticated research studies, elegant theories, and a rich set of implications for counseling and assessment practice. The strengths of vocational psychology are evident in the development of new theoretical models (e.g., Lent, Brown, & Hackett, 1994; Reardon, Lenz, Sampson, & Peterson, 2000), important new psychological measures of interests and related attitudes (e.g., Betz, Borgen, & Harmon, 1996), and exciting practice directions (e.g., Meara & Patton, 1994; Patton & McMahon, 1999). However, building on the quiet rumblings and criticisms that have appeared in journals and books (e.g., Carter & Cook, 1992; Helms & Cook, 1999; Peterson & Gonzalez, 2000; Richardson, 1993; Savickas, 1995), I believe that our field is in need of a major transformation. The rationale for this transformation is based on the observation that we have developed an elegant science about the work lives of a small proportion of individuals who live in relative affluence in Western countries. Yet, our research has essentially neglected the work lives of the rest of humanity who work primarily to fulfill their basic needs

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and/or to care for their children and other family members. Building on the position advanced by Richardson, I believe that our field has not adequately attended to most of the people who work on our planet for whom questions of job satisfaction are secondary to the fundamental desire to secure their place of residence and obtain nourishment. In this 30th anniversary issue of the *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, I seek to expand on Richardson's recommendations by offering a sociopolitical analysis and a wider theoretical and methodological framework to strengthen the nascent infrastructure of an inclusive psychology of working.

For this assignment, the authors of this special issue were asked to focus on "the study of vocational behavior and its development in careers, particularly emphasizing issues of occupational choice and work adjustment" (M. Savickas, personal communication, August, 2000). As I propose in this article, I believe that our mission needs to be expanded considerably to generate an inclusive and integrative psychology of working. My argument is based on both moral and intellectual considerations. The basic assumptions of much scholarship in our field are that people exercise volition when making vocational choices and that they have an opportunity to express their self-concepts in the world of work (Holland, 1997; Super, 1957). In my view, the notion that people seek out occupations that are consistent with their interests and values represents one of the few mutually consensual tenets that scholars from diverse theoretical positions can endorse (Brown & Brooks, 1996). However, the opportunity to express one's inner values, interests, and abilities at work is actually a very recent phenomenon in human history. As work tasks expanded and automation reduced the need for manual labor in many industrialized nations, a small minority of the human population developed vocational lives that have allowed for meaningful self-expression consistent with interests and abilities. However, most people in the world engage in work that is often not intrinsically interesting and may even be denigrating to their self-concepts (Smith, 1983; Thomas, 1999). Rather than continuing to focus on the work lives of well-educated and affluent middle- and upper middle-class workers, I propose that we apply the evident talents of our field to the rest of humanity, who very likely struggle with many aspects of their work lives. To continue to ignore workers whose lives do not follow the career narrative of the latter part of the 20th century would risk creating a line of inquiry that does not serve the full breadth of human experience.

From an intellectual perspective, extending the reach of vocational psychology to the realm of a psychology of working may help our field become conceptually richer, more explanatory, and ultimately more applicable to a wider array of individuals. In addition, a psychology of working has the potential to provide the overarching rubric that may allow for greater integration between vocational psychology, organizational psychology, and other related lines of inquiry in the social sciences (e.g., occupational sociology and labor economics). Furthermore, the movement from vocational psychology to a psychology of working will foster greater appreciation of diverse methodologies as well as an appreciation of new theoretical ideas. The transformation that I advocate does not seek to disavow the

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