

# The Psychology of Working: A New Framework for Counseling Practice and Public Policy

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The authors present the *psychology-of-working perspective* (D. L. Blustein, 2006; N. Peterson & R. C. González, 2005; M. S. Richardson, 1993) as an alternative to traditional career development theories, which have primarily explored the lives of those with choice and volition in their working lives. The major historical and conceptual features of the psychology of working are reviewed, with a focus on how this framework provides a more inclusive and, ideally, more just vision for the career counseling field. Implications for career counseling and a case presentation are provided to examine how this new perspective can inform counseling practice. A brief overview of public policy implications concludes the article.

The *psychology-of-working perspective* (Blustein, 2006) was developed in response to a clear need within the field of career counseling to address the lives of those who traditionally have been ignored or forgotten because of their social class or as a result of racism and other forms of social oppression (based on disability status, sexual orientation, immigration status, age, gender, poverty, and/or lack of access to material and social resources and opportunities). Although significant theoretical and research efforts have provided us, as career counselors, with a rich, dynamic, and insightful understanding of career-related processes and experiences (Brown, 2002; Lent, Brown, & Hackett, 2002; Savickas, 1996), our field lacks a means for an in-depth exploration of the lives of those for whom work serves more as a means of survival than an expression of talents and personality.

The psychology-of-working perspective that we present in this article is intended to function in conjunction with the more traditional career development theories (Holland, 1997; Lent et al., 2002; Super, 1980). In effect, the psychology of working is offered as a meta-perspective designed to expand the vision of counselors and scholars and to offer ideas for further theoretical development. Within this framework, the traditional theories of career choice and development (e.g., Brown, 2002) are still viable when clients present with career choice dilemmas. Our view, however, is that the range of work-related issues in counsel-

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ing is far more extensive than career choice and implementation issues and that a broader conceptual framework is warranted. For example, the existing career choice and development theories are not generally useful in relation to the majority of people around the globe who do not have access to jobs that readily accommodate their interests, hopes, and values (cf. Richardson, 1993; Smith, 1983).

In this article, we present and expand the key tenets of the psychology of working (Blustein, 2006; Peterson & González, 2005; Richardson, 1993), followed by a discussion of practice and policy implications. We believe that the psychology-of-working perspective detailed in this article will inspire practitioners to explore new roles and responsibilities in their efforts to promote career development for the full range of workers and potential workers around the globe.

## Overview of the Psychology-of-Working Framework

Most Americans spend one third to one half of their waking hours at work (Wachtel, 2006). Despite this striking reality, there has been relatively little exploration from a psychological perspective of how the context of work shapes human lives (Blustein, 2001a, 2006; Gill, 1999). Human beings tend to view time at work mostly in functional terms—"How much money do I earn? How many hours do I have to work today? Do I actually have a job?" Yet, work has the potential to be so much more than something people simply get done or produce. Work is a central part of real life, a primary factor in the overall well-being of individuals, and a key to understanding human behavior. Across cultures, race, sex, and social class, the role of work in a person's life can vary considerably, ranging from promoting health to leading to distress and strain (Quick & Tetrick, 2003). We acknowledge that career development scholars (e.g., Walsh & Savickas, 2005) and industrial and organizational psychologists (e.g., Drenth, Thierry, & de Wolff, 1998) have generated thoughtful bodies of literature focused on selected areas of vocational behavior (e.g., career exploration, planning) and organizational behavior (e.g., turnover behavior, leadership, dual-career couples). However, if we in the career counseling field are to truly understand the full scope of people's lives, we need to explore and to understand the entire experience of work for all citizens, not simply those who have choice and volition in their selection of jobs and career paths.

For a small percentage of individuals with access to educational and vocational opportunities, working may offer an additional means for self-expression and self-determination (Richardson, 1993). The focus on individuals with relative access to resources has formed the essence of the current understanding in the career counseling field of the concept of working. Indeed, much research and most of the traditional views of work and career are based on knowledge derived from explorations of individuals in the middle class, who have typically experienced varying degrees of privilege and choice regarding employment (Brown, 2002). In fact, the notion of choice itself is not a typical construct for working-class, poor, and other marginalized people (Peterson & González, 2005). To further illustrate the point, Richardson (1993) stated that within the domain of traditional knowledge about career development "there is almost no acknowledgment that poor and lower class populations, regardless of race or ethnicity, are almost totally absent from this

literature" (p. 426). It is clear there is an urgent need to develop a more inclusive perspective with respect to individuals who do not experience much, if any, volition in their work lives. Moreover, as we detail next, a perspective is needed that thoughtfully considers the intersections of work with other life roles.

As in many areas of psychological discourse, the study of working has evolved into a relatively compartmentalized and fragmented line of inquiry and modality of practice. In short, vocational and organizational psychologists have developed rich bodies of literature (e.g., Drenth et al., 1998; Walsh & Savickas, 2005) that have become increasingly circumscribed in their focus and scope. Through the psychology-of-working perspective advanced in this article, we seek to integrate compatible domains of research and knowledge, bridge the critical gaps in the career development literature, and suggest an outline for a more inclusive understanding of work. From the vantage point of the psychology-of-working perspective, working would be elevated and placed at the same level of attention for social and behavioral scientists and practitioners as are other major life concerns. The implications of a fully inclusive means of thinking about work in people's lives are substantial for counseling practice and public policy. If, as career counselors, professionals disregard the full range of experiences of working and continue to focus solely on the lives of people who enjoy choice and opportunity, we believe that such counselors ultimately do a disservice to their clients and to the field.

The development of the psychology of working owes a debt to several important movements in the career counseling field. The feminist and multicultural perspectives, both individually and collectively (e.g., Betz & Fitzgerald, 1987; Fassinger, 2005; Fouad & Byars-Winston, 2005; Helms & Cook, 1999), have informed a critique of existing practices in career development theory and practice, focusing on the fact that many of the prevailing theories are of relevance mostly to men who are typically from middle-class, European American backgrounds. In addition, the vocational rehabilitation movement has produced a number of salient critiques of the career development literature, culminating in an illuminating discourse on the nature of work behavior (Neff, 1985) and the relationship between work and disability (Szymanski & Parker, 2003). A similar set of critiques has emerged from scholars who have examined the plight of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender clients (Pope, Prince, & Mitchell, 2000) as well as client populations who are poor and otherwise left out of traditional theoretical formulations (Blustein et al., 2002). One of the most profound critiques was provided by Richardson (1993), who argued persuasively that career counselors need to expand their vision of the complex role of work in all clients' lives, not simply in the lives of the privileged. Similar critiques have been voiced more recently by Blustein (2001a, 2006) and Peterson and González (2005), culminating in a call for an expanded vision for the career counseling field.

The material presented in this article, therefore, represents a logical extension of Blustein's (2006) contributions, with the continued infusion of intellectual ideas from the aforementioned lines of inquiry that have helped to set the stage for the psychology-of-working perspective. Moreover, we expand the evolving psychology-of-working framework by delineating additional practice implications that we believe are particularly relevant in contemporary career counseling.

## The Function of Work in Human Experience

In the following sections, we review the three sets of human needs that can be fulfilled by working—survival and power, social connection, and self-determination—that are central in understanding the complex ways in which working functions in human experience.

### **Working as Means of Survival and Power**

The first function of work is to provide a means for survival and power (Blustein, 2006). Through work, people are able to meet their most basic human subsistence needs for food, water, clothing, safety, and shelter. Consistent with Maslow's (1968) theory of human motivation, only after these survival needs are met can individuals hope to achieve loftier goals like self-actualization. In developing the psychology-of-working framework, we have found that much research on working has focused on the "grand career narrative" (Super, Savickas, & Super, 1996, p. 135), which assumes that people have the opportunity to obtain work that manifests their personal interests and serves as a natural outlet for their self-concepts. We believe that although the notion of a "grand career narrative" is optimal, regrettably, it is not the reality for much of the world's population.

Closely tied to survival needs is the human need for the acquisition of psychological, economic, and social power (Blustein, 2006). Working provides access to material (i.e., money) and social resources (i.e., status, prestige, and privilege) that can foster greater power or "the condition that makes it possible for one of the actors to make his or her will or objectives prevail" (Martín-Baró, 1994, p. 62). Unfortunately, the accrual of power through work is not always an equitable or just process because individuals in U.S. society vary in their ability to access the opportunity structure, which includes access through education and training (Blustein, 2006). Moreover, obtaining access to resources is often based on the phenotypic characteristics of an individual (such as skin color or gender) rather than on his or her skill or merit (Helms, Jernigan, & Mascher, 2005; Sternberg, Grigorenko, & Kidd, 2005). Since recorded time, humanity has been plagued by various forms of structural barriers based on race, culture, immigration status, religion, gender, age, sexual orientation, and social class that have had a differential impact on individuals. Our belief is that counselors need to be fully cognizant of how these barriers affect clients so that they are able to provide maximally effective interventions that do not inadvertently blame the victims of social oppression (Blustein, 2006; Blustein, McWhirter, & Perry, 2005; Helms & Cook, 1999).

### **Working as a Means of Social Connection**

Human beings also have a strong innate need for social connection, healthy attachments, and secure interpersonal relationships (Bowlby, 1982; Jordan, Kaplan, Miller, Stiver, & Surrey, 1991). Drawing, in part, from research within the area of traditional career and organizational psychology that has increasingly focused on the interface of family life and working (e.g., Whiston & Keller, 2004), the psychology-of-working perspective underscores the significance of relationships in the experience

of working (Barnett & Hyde, 2001; Blustein, 2006; Flum, 2001). Specifically, work provides a venue for connecting to others in one's social and cultural environment (Blustein, 2006). If the relationships forged through work are supportive and nurturing, they can be instrumental in helping individuals successfully negotiate some of the challenges of working (learning new tasks or skills, dealing with work-related stresses, finding work, etc.). Additionally, for many, working can be a critical component in the construction and expression of identity (Blustein, 1994; Schein, 1990). In contrast, experiencing a sense of isolation or alienation at work can not only jeopardize an individual's job performance, but also have a markedly negative impact on an individual's psychological well-being (Quick & Tetrick, 2003; Sennett, 1998). Finally, beyond providing the opportunity for direct interpersonal engagement and identity development, work is also a means to contribute to the larger economic structure of society, thereby offering individuals a sense of connection to their broader social world.

### **Working as a Means of Self-Determination**

Another key dimension of the experience of work is the opportunity work provides to individuals for self-determination (Blustein, 2006; Deci & Ryan, 2000). Many people do not have the privilege of selecting work that corresponds with their personal interests and attributes or that is a viable forum for the expression of their self-concept. Instead, they must find a way to sustain the energy and motivation to perform jobs that can be painful, tedious, and sometimes demeaning. It is this reality faced by the majority of the world's population that we strive to acknowledge and understand with the concept of the psychology of working. Although we strongly advocate for systemic and institutional changes that will create healthier and more dignified work environments for more people, we also recognize that such change can be slow in coming. (Further details on the kinds of changes that might foster greater equity in access to educational resources and occupational opportunities can be found in Blustein, 2006.) Because many jobs that exist in the global economy are not inherently interesting or motivating, we believe that one potentially useful intervention would be to use psychological knowledge to enhance the experience of working. The self-determination theory (SDT; Deci & Ryan, 2000; Ryan & Deci, 2000) framework has the potential to inform a sustained discussion of how the work environment can be enhanced to help individuals achieve greater self-regulation so that extrinsically motivated activities might become more self-determined.

The psychology-of-working perspective incorporates the key tenets of SDT as a viable means of facilitating the internalization process for workers who are not intrinsically interested in the tasks of their jobs (Blustein, 2006). The basic notion of SDT is that people are inclined to pursue activities that are intrinsically interesting. In addition, Deci and Ryan (2000) have acknowledged that many human tasks are not inherently interesting or rewarding, thereby yielding tasks (and jobs) that are extrinsically motivating or simply unmotivating. On the basis of decades of research on human motivation, Ryan and Deci (2000) have identified a number of contextual factors that function to facilitate the internalization of extrinsically motivating activities so that they become

less onerous and perhaps even meaningful. Specifically, if individuals have opportunities for *autonomy*, *relatedness*, and *competence*, work that is initially pursued for extrinsic reasons (e.g., an income) may become more personally satisfying and meaningful (Deci & Ryan, 2000).

To the three factors outlined by SDT (i.e., autonomy, relatedness, and competence), Blustein (2006) suggested adding *value congruence* and *access to the opportunity structure* as factors that might also promote internalization and aid in self-regulation with respect to work. Value congruence refers to the degree to which individuals' personal values and goals coincide with those of their work organization or employer. Access to the opportunity structure reflects the ability of individuals to locate and make use of resources and supports that would foster successful work experiences and help with key work-related tasks (e.g., training, adapting to a work environment). We are not suggesting that the use of SDT can transform an inherently dreadful job into a source of joy and satisfaction. However, the use of SDT coupled with a careful analysis of how individual workers make meaning of their job may help to provide the knowledge to enhance the employment conditions that frame the experience of most people who must accept any viable available job to support themselves and their families.

## Implications for Counseling Practice

In Blustein's (2006) statement on the psychology of working, he outlined a number of implications for practice that are relevant to the career counseling field. In this section of the article, we summarize the most salient issues that he noted and expand on his recommendations with suggestions for new initiatives that represent natural extensions of the psychology-of-working perspective.

### **Inclusive Psychological Practice: Melding the Worlds of Mental Health and Work**

One of the central tenets of the psychology of working is that working, in all of its richness, complexity, pain, and joy, is a key component of human experience and, hence, ought to be a major focal point in counseling practice (Peterson & González, 2005; Richardson, 1993). In our view, creating a division between work-related issues and socioemotional issues does not acknowledge the lived reality of most individuals (Blustein, 2001a, 2006). Problems related to work are not always secondary to inner psychological issues or a by-product of these concerns. On the contrary, work-related issues can often be intertwined with psychosocial and interpersonal problems in a complex way (Blustein, 2001b; Flum, 2001). Consequently, Blustein (2006) proposed an integrative counseling and psychotherapeutic approach that he terms *inclusive psychological practice* (p. 276) to underscore the importance of work in the totality of human lives.

Because of historical splits within the fields of psychotherapy and career counseling, the practice of counseling related to the areas of work and careers has become artificially segmented into discrete parts (Hackett, 1993). The U.S. health care system has further fostered this fragmentation, which has led many counselors to view their clients and their clients' issues as being separate, specialized, and discrete. In reality, the

experiences of mental health and of work-related issues often overlap in complex and dynamic ways (Hackett, 1993).

We make a couple of recommendations related to integrating work-related discourse into psychological and career counseling and undertaking inclusive psychological practice. First, in line with other therapeutic approaches, inclusive psychological practice requires that a *space* be created in counseling for issues related to work (Blustein, 2006). In other words, the counselor needs to let the client know that issues related to work will be given the appropriate focus in the counseling process and that questions and concerns related to work will be regarded as valid points of exploration. (Obviously, work-related issues become secondary in times of crisis when it seems that a client's safety might be in jeopardy.) Second, the client and the counselor need to mutually agree on the goals for inclusive practice. In other words, the client should have a voice in determining how much space will be devoted to issues related to work during the counseling sessions and how these issues will be addressed. Counselors can explore how these issues play out in counseling by providing input to clients about the artificial splits within the field and how this has influenced services.

In addition to these recommendations, we outline four overarching objectives for inclusive psychological practice that will help to guide and support the more individualized goals crafted to meet a client's particular needs (Blustein, 2006). The first two objectives (fostering empowerment and fostering critical consciousness) are explored in depth in Blustein's (2006) recent book. The second two objectives (promoting clients' skill-building for the changing workforce and providing scaffolding in support of volition) represent an expansion of this work and an explicit discussion of how counselors can manage 21st-century workforce struggles and dilemmas.

*Fostering empowerment.* The first overarching goal is to help clients develop a sense of empowerment. Elaborating on the work of Richardson (2000), Blustein (2006) defined empowerment as "the development of goal-directed behaviors that also lead to mastery within relevant domains" (p. 278). One aspect of empowerment is its use to help clients become assertive in their life and to provide them with the skills, emotional resources, and confidence to identify their goals and to implement plans to make their aspirations a reality (Richardson, 2000). Indeed, Richardson (2000) argued that work can provide individuals with the means to empower themselves in their environments.

Empowerment as an objective in the context of inclusive psychological practice could involve helping clients to fully develop their talents, skills, and abilities (Blustein, 2006). In particular, workforce development research has identified that individuals must have strong basic math and writing skills and well-developed interpersonal skills, including the ability to work well in small groups, if they wish to successfully meet the needs of today's workplace (Friedman, 2005; Hunt, 1995). Moreover, the ability to tolerate change and uncertainty is a growing requirement of workers in today's global economy (Friedman, 1999; Rifkin, 1995). As the demands of work continue to rapidly change and as job stability becomes more evasive, workers must be committed to continuous skill development and must learn to be flexible.

*Fostering critical consciousness.* In addition to fostering empowerment, an inclusive psychological practice also includes fostering critical consciousness

as a viable goal for both clients and counselors (Blustein, 2006). Consistent with an ideology proposed by Freire (1993), Blustein suggested that "critical consciousness encompasses individuals' ability to reflect upon the broad structured aspects of the world and to take action on these observations" (2006, p. 280). These structural aspects, including economic, cultural, and sociopolitical factors, often function to privilege certain groups in society to the detriment of others. This type of privilege is typically not earned, and its denial is grounded in characteristics such as immigrant status or skin color.

In advocating for fostering critical consciousness, we recognize that we are deviating from those in the field who would take a value-neutral stance with respect to the counseling process (e.g., Robinson, 1984). Like Prilleltensky (1997), we believe that psychological practice is value-laden and, consequently, that practitioners need to be transparent in their ideology (Blustein et al., 2005). However, in this transparency and in fostering critical consciousness, individual client concerns, needs, and perspectives are still honored. Fostering critical consciousness in the counseling process requires the counselor to be willing to explore his or her own privilege, access to opportunities, and prejudices as these economic, cultural, and sociopolitical systemic factors are discussed and explored with the client (Prilleltensky, 1997; Sue, 2004).

*Promoting clients' skill-building for the changing workforce.* A crucial aspect of aiding clients in their search for meaningful and/or gainful employment in the 21st century is the need to help them assess and build on their employable skills. Without the necessary skills, searching for work quickly becomes frustrating and denigrating. Counselors are encouraged to work on transferable skills assessments, such as the ones described in Bolles's (2005) *What Color Is Your Parachute?* Such assessments can help counselors and clients collaborate to identify the skills needed to obtain a certain type of work. However, identifying needed skills and training can be a double-edged sword. Assessment alone and without a counselor's aid in helping the client access resources to acquire identified skills might leave a client feeling demeaned or humiliated, particularly in cases in which the resources needed for skill development have not been readily available. The psychology-of-working framework strongly emphasizes the importance of counselors incorporating case management strategies into their work at this juncture, as they help clients gain access to services (e.g., mental health services, disability and other government assistance programs, and training programs).

*Providing scaffolding in support of volition and the role of advocacy.* It is clear that one-on-one counseling alone cannot effectively ameliorate some of the more pervasive systemic and structural barriers that may arise when career counselors delve into the process of consciousness raising and empowerment with their clients. Although it is much easier to avoid these challenging and sometimes overwhelming conversations during the counseling process, this avoidance inevitably, albeit unknowingly, promotes the status quo. The psychology-of-working framework suggests that we, as practitioners, must challenge the status quo by delving deeper into the ways in which we can provide our clients with a form of scaffolding. In this case, *scaffolding* refers to the use of multiple sources of intervention, including individual counseling, social advocacy, and case management. In our view, this scaffolding may help to build the

volition needed to assist clients as they navigate the very real barriers to success that those who are not White, middle-class, male, and educated encounter as they search for work. The psychology-of-working framework therefore encourages counselors to incorporate advocacy and social justice initiatives (Aldarando, 2007; Goodman et al., 2004) into their work as their clients struggle to address these structural and systemic barriers to achieving success. This again pushes practitioners to move beyond the confines of how they have been trained and may move them into unfamiliar and uncomfortable territory. However, to remain in the current specialized counseling and assessment roles, although safer and less complicated, will continue to disenfranchise clients who do not fit nicely into the mold because of economic, social, cultural, and sociopolitical barriers.

### **Case Example: The Case of Leonard**

The following clinical case explicates some of the principles of inclusive psychological practice.

Leonard is a 45-year-old Haitian American man who has been referred for career counseling by the local Veterans Administration (VA) hospital where he has been receiving mental health counseling for symptoms of posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and depression. Leonard injured his back and neck in a driving accident while serving in the military, which left him with chronic pain, reduced mobility, and the aforementioned psychological symptoms. He has a 50% service-connected disability through the VA, which provides him with financial benefits that allow him to get by (albeit barely). Leonard is able to function relatively well in performing everyday tasks and is not psychotic or suicidal. He has continuous intrusive ideation about the car accident that led to his injuries and experiences particular psychological pain when he reflects on the accident and when he faces similar situations while driving. He was born in Haiti but immigrated to the United States when he was 5 years old. Leonard served in the U.S. military after high school and then earned an associate's degree in business from a local community college. He worked for 18 years at a local company that had recently merged with a larger company, which led to many layoffs. Leonard had been laid off about 9 months before seeking counseling, and since then he has experienced mild symptoms of depression along with PTSD. He currently lives alone but pays alimony and child support for his ex-wife and two children. Although he stated that he has been looking for work consistently, he described a few incidents that made him feel that he had been discriminated against based on his age and/or his race.

The psychology-of-working perspective would focus on helping Leonard address the following issues. A close examination of the etiology of Leonard's symptoms of depression might suggest that this depression is partially connected to his experience of being unemployed (as well as being related to his personal losses and his history of trauma). Therefore, it is crucial that counseling provides him with the opportunity to make meaning of how his employment status is affecting him emotionally. The counseling process should also afford the means to explore how his symptoms of PTSD may be triggered both in the search for work and on the job. The pressures related to Leonard's gender and his roles as father, ex-husband, and caretaker might also be explored with him.

Leonard has an excellent work history, demonstrating loyalty and dependability. Although he may think that his age and the duration of his career at his previous company are liabilities, it would be essential

for the counselor to help Leonard internalize these realities as assets in the job search. Given Leonard's experience of working for one company for many years, it would be helpful to explore issues of change and flexibility with him as he considers his future options. Because of changing workforce dynamics, it is not likely at this point that Leonard will find another big company where he can stay for many years. Therefore, it might be helpful to tap into other ways in which Leonard has demonstrated flexibility—perhaps as related to his military training or to his experience as an immigrant—that can then be used to help him develop his own tolerance for and confidence in ambiguity and flexibility.

One of the characteristics of the psychology-of-working framework is that it builds on existing models that focus on career choice and development (e.g., Brown, 2002). Therefore, the counselor may wish to use an interest assessment tool to help Leonard explore new options. In addition, the counselor may find it helpful to adapt Savickas's (2002) new career construction model in helping Leonard explore his own personal narrative and the various means by which he seeks to manifest his life story in his current job search. However, the advantage of a psychology-of-working perspective is that it would encourage the counselor to think creatively and systemically about the nature of Leonard's specific issues and the context that has shaped his life to date.

Following the recommendations to foster empowerment and to provide scaffolding in support of volition, we recommend an assessment of Leonard's transferable skills, which would offer a clearer picture of how his work history and experience fit with the current labor market needs. If it is determined that Leonard needs to update some of his skills to be competitive, the counselor is encouraged to work alongside him as he accesses the needed resources and services to achieve this.

Using a psychology-of-working perspective also emphasizes the importance of validating Leonard's concerns about racism in the workforce and helping him process how this experience has made him feel. It would be understandable for him to feel anger, frustration, hopelessness, apathy, or many other emotions regarding his experiences of discrimination and prejudice, and it is essential that the counselor does not dismiss how much these feelings may influence his job search process.

Although the counselor must work to assist Leonard to find a job in today's marketplace, it is also important to recognize and explore the very real injustices in U.S. society related to issues of race, class, gender, and the like. Leonard will most likely experience various forms of discrimination and oppression related to his status as a Haitian immigrant, his military history, his age, his race, and his lower socioeconomic status. Wading through the complex policies and qualifications related to government assistance (e.g., the VA, training programs) can be similarly overwhelming and frustrating. Although dwelling too much on these barriers might lead to paralysis in the job search process, understanding them as powerful and unjust can help Leonard to believe that he is heard and validated in a process that can leave anyone feeling demoralized and beaten down. Such discussions of larger systemic and cultural injustices will be perceived by the client as more open and genuine if the counselors are able to do their own exploration and work related to identifying what they bring to the counseling process in terms of their own privilege.

At different points in the process, as Leonard negotiates the various systems that will enable him to find work again, the counselor will most likely assume various roles as an in-depth psychologically oriented career counselor, coach, case manager, and advocate. It is exactly at these various strategic points, when clients confront larger systemic barriers and counselors move beyond their traditional roles, that the psychology-of-working framework can be *most* useful.

## Implications for Public Policy

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The emerging psychology-of-working perspective (Blustein, 2006; Peterson & González, 2005; Richardson, 1993) provides an evolving framework and an opportunity for scholars, practitioners, and public policy officials to become more cognizant of and unified within a tumultuous, complex, and rapidly changing environment and to become more multidisciplinary in scope of practice. Such future relationships and promising opportunities for research studies should undoubtedly lead to innovative new policy formulations in several areas, including education, training, and unemployment.

The observations and recommendations in the following sections are meant to serve as a helpful starting point and are by no means comprehensive in scope. (See Blustein, 2006, for further details on public policy implications.) However, we believe that it is essential for us as counselors to engage in meaningful discourse about how our work can and should inform public policy and larger systems. Similarly, the psychology-of-working framework posits the promotion of extensive social change as integral to and inextricably intertwined with the work of individual counseling and practice.

### Education and School-to-Work Policy

Regarding occupational and work exploration during adolescence and emerging adulthood, the psychology-of-working perspective has policy implications for the design of psychoeducational interventions such as school-to-work or work-based learning programs. Many students from less privileged backgrounds are faced with the need to resolve various vocational development tasks with clear contextual disadvantages. As such, interventions that promote adaptive work-based learning experiences (e.g., internships, apprenticeships, job shadowing, on-site programming) may enhance work-based and interpersonal skill development for these students, thereby facilitating the transition from high school to more meaningful and rewarding work opportunities. Furthermore, the importance in people's lives of working, which is a central tenet of the psychology of working, needs to be infused more explicitly into contemporary educational reform efforts. This issue is particularly critical for students whose lack of access to meaningful resources has left them with an inherent disadvantage in understanding the connection between doing well in school and having viable work options in their adult life (Lapan, 2004).

### Training and Development

One of the most important domains for sustained infusion of a psychology-of-working perspective is in the area of training and development of the

current and future workforce. Current efforts in training and development in the United States, such as are being implemented in welfare-to-work programs, reveal many problems related to the fact that existing programs are often constructed without clear attention to the diverse needs that working fulfills for people and without knowledge about how the participants understand and experience working (Blustein, 2006). We recommend that public policy makers explore their own goals and agendas in designing training programs for individuals who are poor and disempowered. At the same time, we advocate that training and development programs be based on best practices that affirm culturally embedded beliefs about working and that offer clients viable opportunities to be provided with scaffolding in support of volition in their work lives. In addition, using the psychology-of-working perspective implies that training and development efforts be based on a clear understanding that approximates the experience of how particular client populations actually understand and construct their views of working and training.

We also believe that training and development efforts for unemployed and underemployed workers be structured to provide the knowledge that will afford workers with labor-market-ready skills. As the literature focused on the subject of transitions to the workforce has clearly documented (e.g., Blustein, Juntunen, & Worthington, 2000; Bynner, Ferri, & Shepherd, 1997), the ability to develop their basic academic skills to their maximum potential is one of the most important achievements that career counselors can offer to clients. Moreover, enhanced interpersonal skills and tolerance for ambiguity and flexibility are critically important psychological skills that complement the basic academic skills noted previously. Furthermore, given the volatility that globalization has created within the labor market, we advocate that continued refinement of training and development policies is needed, even in times of low unemployment.

### **Unemployment and Underemployment Policy**

Because the traditional career theories (Holland, 1997; Lent et al., 2002; Super, 1980) have focused on questions of career choice and implementation, the experience of those who are unemployed has been neglected or considered irrelevant. However, the psychology-of-working framework and its required integration of issues related to both mental health and work, encourages a much needed discussion of how we, as practitioners in the field of career counseling, deal with those who cannot locate work or who are underemployed.

The incorporation of this framework into discourse, research, and practice of vocational and work-related counseling would broaden the field to include a group of people who tend to lack a strong voice. These are people who most likely cannot afford career or work-related counseling services and thus are essentially forgotten in many of our professional conversations and efforts. However, it is this group that best exemplifies the need for such a framework that seeks to bring underserved and disenfranchised groups back into the fold by increasing the awareness and the understanding of their circumstances and experiences. We believe that concerted efforts in public policy and in education and training programs are required to develop effective interventions for underemployed and unemployed individuals so that access to work becomes a right that all citizens enjoy.

## Conclusion

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The psychology-of-working perspective, through applied and research contributions, has the potential to pave a road that will inform and promote socially just and meaningful counseling practices and public policies that aim to reduce inequity in the distribution of various resources to schools and communities and to racial, ethnic, lower class, and working-class groups. In effect, the psychology-of-working framework offers both a critique of the status quo and a set of ideas for the development of a more inclusive and ultimately more useful intellectual approach for counselors and scholars who are interested in the areas of careers and working. We do not offer the psychology-of-working perspective as a panacea for all of the social ills that plague communities in the United States and globally. Clearly, more efforts are needed, both within the counseling profession and beyond, to create equal opportunities for people to access the resources needed for rewarding and sustainable work in the 21st century. We do hope, however, that this article has served its purpose of raising important questions for readers regarding their current practices and assumptions. We also extend a welcome to those who wish to join us in creating ideas and interventions that may enhance the experience of working for the vast numbers of people who toil at jobs with little hope for a better life.

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