

# Career autobiography and critical analysis psychology essay



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The focus of this paper will be to attempt to critically both compare and contrast Hollands Theory of Vocational Personalities in the Work Environment and Super's Self-concept Theory

Both theories seem to have their roots to some extent in personality theory exemplified by the work of Holland, whereas Super's theory is based on developmental psychology. The main thrust of both of the theories seems to be concerned with the descriptions of how career decisions of individuals evolve (Amundson, Harris-Bowlsby, & Niles, 2009).

The theoretical treatment provided to career development by Super concerns how the self-concept is shaped. He asserts that each phase of life exerts its own particular emphasis on individual behaviour. Thus he suggests that it is possible to chart, the activities of a vocational sort expected of an individual in a western culture (Super 1990). This raises several questions such as: how can this theory be reciprocated for an individual from an Eastern based culture? Also, is the development model generalizable to women? Given the unique aspects of women's experiences including workplace discrimination (Stoltz-Loike, 1996). Some research has questioned whether women's careers can be adequately explained by developmental theoretical models developed with male samples. No support was found for Super's career stages. For example by age 30, women changed their focus from either career to family or vice versa, which is markedly different for men (Ornstein & Isabella 1990).

Holland's career model is based on the assumption that individuals can be categorized according to six personality types, and to six corresponding ideal

environments, where job satisfaction will result from a congruence of an individual's personality type and of job environment (Reardon & Lenz, 1988). There are many assumptions being made here by Holland, such as: he asserts that individuals who choose the same occupation are similar in personality, and individuals actually choose the occupations that correspond best with their personality. However, job choice in reality is never solely based on best fit with that of the personality of an individual.

In respect to career modification only Super's theory considers how career development may be corrected or how it may be facilitated in the normally developing individual (Super 1990; Reardon & Lenz, 1988). The trait factor of Holland's theory fails to discuss the role of family as an influence in respect to career development, whereas, in Super's theory the family plays a critical role in the individuals formation of self-concept (Amundson et al., 2009).

Many individuals in today's economic climate do not experience an uninterrupted ascent up the corporate ladder as described by Supers developmental career theory. Instead, many individuals today travel career paths that are often discontinuous and go beyond the boundaries of a single occupation (DeFillippi & Arthur, 1996).

Holland's diagnostic terms are questionable, in the respect that they purport to indicate individual traits or characteristics that exist in individuals.

However, the fact that such a diagnosis is made and purports to 'measure' a certain characteristic is no guarantee of truth. Another concern is that clients are provided with labels, for example: an individual could be labelled as an ABC type of individual, who should work in an XYZ type environment. This

assessment may force such an individual to crystallize these self concepts  
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(Taylor 1986). This raises a fundamental question as to who in this relationship of client-counsellor gives voice to the client.

## **Part B: a career genogram**

Research currently provides support and a rationale for examining family influences on individual career development. According to Jacobson (1999) the relationships between an individual and his/her family in career development are seen as very important. The influences are said to affect attitudes of individuals in respect to that individual's purpose in life and to their career aspirations and goals.

The genogram that is provided is a graphical representation of a three-generation family tree of my family. The genogram maps my family structure, it also provides where known: relevant educational, occupational, information concerning each member. As a tool it can be useful in highlighting patterns of possible family influence and themes.

I am one of three sons born to Lawrence James Bentley and Veronica Ledbetter. I am currently a high school teacher and hold a PhD. I am an avid fitness fanatic and when possible love to travel. My parents divorced when I was 11 years old. My mother remarried a man called Arthur Ledbetter better known as Jim. He retired from a position as a university lecturer and has since written many books on cricket statistics. He is interested in many sporting avenues but was a very keen participant in playing cricket in his youth. He holds a bachelor's degree in education. My mother met Jim whilst she was studying for her bachelor's degree also in education. She has never had any real interest in sport but has had a passion for literature and

painting. She retired from teaching over six years ago and has since become a part time Magistrate. My father was a self employed sheet metal worker, who had no formal education. He was a competent cricketer and liked to travel. He died three years ago from cancer. Both of my parents never knew their fathers. My mother's father served as a general infantryman (GI) in the US army and returned to his homeland at the end of World War Two. My father's father served as an infantryman in the British army. He deserted his family during the course of the war. Both of my grandmothers were housewife's who did not have any formal qualifications. They saw their roles as looking after their families and did not pursue a career in paid employment.

My brother Mark holds a bachelor's degree in social work and has been employed in the field of social work for over 20 years. He has been a keen cricketer and also an avid runner. My youngest brother Richard works as a clerk in the British civil service, he has a higher national diploma and is a keen fisherman. My wife Narelle is a practising clinical nurse who holds a bachelor's degree in nursing science. When young she played tennis. She loves travelling and reads profusely.

### **Part C: a critical reflection of my life history to date**

The focus of this paper will be to attempt to critically reflect on my life history with a discussion regarding how well the theories of Holland and Super as well as the genogram that has been provided explain the influences on my career path and resonate with the decisions that I have made.

According to Malott & Magnuson (2004), family genograms can provide an opportunity for explicating possible influences and patterns that develop

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over generations and time across generations. With this in mind I considered some questions for reflection and discussion. In respect to: prominent gender roles, my family member's definition of success, to whom in my family I am most similar too, and who in my family I would most like to be like.

The genogram seems to be a useful tool as it shows a range of emerging patterns: from a number of males that have served in their respective countries armed forces and a significant number of family members that have both formal and degree level qualifications. I myself became a member of the UK's armed forces and have had a lifelong love of learning. I have learned that my career values involve: personal satisfaction, honesty and integrity, providing a service to the community and lifelong learning. These values have in part been formed during my childhood, influenced by my immediate family, schooling and from the society that I have lived in. I have to question therefore how authentic they are for me. My career preferences and choices also on reflection seem to have come from influences within my family. I have realized that I seem so much like my parents and have to some degree followed in their footsteps. Ironically though, I have always tried to be unlike them. I disliked my father both on a personal and on a professional level. I always considered that he had attributes that were at odds with mine. As a business man I considered that he took advantage of individuals and was only concerned with making money. Therefore, I think that I aspired to be more like my mother and stepfather. My present occupation as a teacher of design and technology reflects in a sense a mirror image and a mix of both my mother's and father's occupations. As my mother was a teacher and my father was a gifted sheet metal worker.

In respect to the career development theories my career development seems on the surface to resonate with both Holland and Super. However, I have had a plethora of very different careers such as: serving as a combat engineer in the British army, being a member of the AFP, employed as a carpenter and joiner, working as a production worker, a coffin maker and currently as a teacher. This is supported by DeFillippi & Arthur, (1996), who purport that many individuals in today's economic climate do not in fact experience an uninterrupted ascent up the corporate ladder as described by Supers developmental career theory. Instead, many individuals today travel career paths that are often discontinuous and go beyond the boundaries of a single occupation. According to Super's theory the family plays both a critical role in an individual's formation of self-concept and has an influence in respect to career development Amundson et al., 2009). This does not resonate with my family in respect to my actual career development, as both my father and mother were mortified that I had dared to consider a career in the British army at the age of 16. The main reason that I had for joining the army was that my family was very dysfunctional and I longed for a sense of belonging to something. The army therefore, seemed like an adopted family of my choosing. Although most of my career choices seem to have been based on financial concerns I would have to agree in part with Supers assertion that the choice of an occupation for an individual is an attempt by that individual to actualise a particular self image (Guichard, 2001). For example I value honesty and integrity, providing a service to the community and lifelong learning. These types of values are espoused in the Australian Federal Police of which I became a member.

## **Part D: how the exercise will help with my future work as a career development practitioner**

I am much more mindful of the writings of the authors that I have read in respect to their particular career development models, and I will be more critical of their espoused ideas that they present, especially in terms of how these ideas will possibly fit with my own students. The issue here is of the need to empower my respective clients. I will need to continually critically reflect, and recognise the complexity of the relationship between work, leisure and well being. I will need to question the theories, and counselling actions of career development practitioners. Moreover, my knowledge of my clients in the client-counsellor relationship will be crucial. This pertains to a claim from Edwards and Payne (1997) that career counsellors must be critically self-reflective and self-aware of their power reference base in the client-counsellor relationship, and also be fully acquainted with the theories and discourses that they are practising. For example narrative therapy, intrinsically deconstructs the client-counsellor power dynamics and gives voice to the person (Besley, 2002).

Furthering my knowledge about career development will help me to enable my students to examine the actual notion of what career development is, as being much more than a notion reduced to a process of occupational awareness and career planning. I will hopefully be able to focus students away from the thought that they are simply on a conveyor belt, in a system that is perpetually preparing them to become so called useful members of society.



Put another way, career development in schools are presently subsumed into a model that is focused on the labour market, in that they are preparing students to gain lawful employment. This view is supported by (Irving, 2010) who contends that current government policy places significant emphasis for education to provide students with lifelong learning and the acquisition of skills for ensuring that tomorrow's workforce is steeped in the correct behaviours and values. Moreover, education career workers are seen as being key players in this regard. This particular exercise will help me to reflect on this issue, so that I hopefully will not become an unknowing, complicit agent in perpetuating this government priority.

From its earliest beginnings, vocational psychology has been deeply committed to logical-positive science. Where science has striven to objectify the world, counsellors have objectified interests, values, and abilities with inventories, and used these inventories to guide individual clients to where they supposedly would fit in organizations. Career development professionals therefore have participated fully in the societal move to increase domination of the subjective by the objective.

I will need therefore, to advocate each client in a client-in-context, as opposed to subduing the individual through the discursive practices of a vocational scientist-practitioner. I will need an approach to career development that is reflexively and critically aware of its particular discursive practices, integrates the narratives and discursive engagement of practitioner-in-context and client-in-context, and one which seeks to open new horizons for the client that hopefully transcends the diagnostic process according solely to a client's interests, values, needs, and abilities.

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