

THE EFFECTS OF PARENTAL INFLUENCE ON  
THEIR CHILDREN'S CAREER CHOICES

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## Abstract

An exploration of parents' critical role in their children's career choices and aspirations was the primary focus of this paper. This includes a brief history of past career counseling techniques, which began in its formative years by assessing the client's personality to determine proper occupational fit. It has now progressed to the postmodernist view that bases vocational interest and aspirations on constantly changing life roles. Previous research that examined parental influence on adolescent's career choices, as well as research on the effects of socioeconomic status, gender, and race was included. The paper concluded with how career counselors and parents may use the strength of parental influence upon young adults to provide more effective career development techniques and create stronger partnerships with the young adult's primary stakeholders.

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## CHAPTER ONE

### *Introduction*

“Because the world is making such drastic demands upon the coming workers, every thoughtful man and woman, every teacher and reflecting parent, is planning ways to fit the children for the life and needs of this new century.”

This statement, which is still just as relevant today, was written by Meyer Bloomfield in his book *Finding One's Place in Life* in 1917 (p. 150). Since the early 1900's, Career Development or Vocational Guidance as it was then known has increasingly garnered more and more attention and respect. In essence, “career counseling is a specialty within the profession of counseling, one that fosters vocational development and work adjustment of individuals at each life stage by engaging them in life planning aimed at the psychosocial integration of an individual's abilities, interests, and goals with the work roles structured by the community and occupations organized by companies...[and] assist a developing and deciding individual to make suitable and viable choices” (Savickas, 2003, p. 88). Why examine the influence of parents on career choice on young adults? In the past (and even now for many), it was assumed that an individual going through late adolescence would be developing their independence and slowly eliminating his or her family's constraints as he or she formed his or her own identity into the larger world. In effect, the person would make career decisions, based on his or her own interests, research, and/or occupational goals with limited influence from others. However, this picture fails to include the notion that not every decision will happen so autonomously for the individual. In fact, even when young adults move away from home (for college or for work), their family will likely still have a strong influence upon them on two significant life events—marriage and their career (Larson, 1995).

The importance of parental influence upon their children's career choice is consistently important, even across gender and racial lines. Although schools, peers, and the student's community all have an impact on the young adult's self-identity and career choice, the parent's expectations and perceptions of vocational fit for their children have been found to be the key roles in shaping their career choices (Ferry, 2006). In one study (Creamer & Laughlin, 2005), this influence has been so strong as to override the influence of teachers, faculty, and career counselors, who likely know more about the career field in question but were not as well-known and/or trusted as the student's parents for this type of decision. The use of a systems model when conducting career counseling sessions, especially with adolescents, appears to be a quite useful strategy, especially as, "the counselor's ability to think systematically may be the only key available to the client who is unconsciously bound by forces in the family from which the client needs to be freed in order to select and pursue a career that can provide independence and autonomy as well as satisfaction and fulfillment," (Bratcher, 1982, p. 91). When a career counselor looks at the variables of a family system one can detect how individuals may be so influenced by known or unknown family relationship forces. A counselor may even need to take into account how these dynamics potentially affect the client's career decision-making ability, as clients often come in for career-related assistance (job searching tips, resume reviews, etc) but will seldom come in stating his or her parents are pressuring him or her into a certain vocation or using their parental influence to keep the young adult at home (Bratcher, 1982).

This paper will examine the importance of parental input on a person's ultimate career path. It will also focus on how using techniques learned from family systems theory can lead to more effective career counseling.

## CHAPTER TWO

### *Brief History of the Career Development Process: Then and Now*

Starting at the beginning of the vocational psychology movement, the Objectivist Theory is “generally identified as a scientific and logical match between a person’s traits and the demands of the work environment,” (Chen, 2003, p. 204). Objectivists believe that occupational matches can be measured and predicted (mainly through scientific assessments) and will logically state what type of career choice best fits that person. This type of thinking was dominant in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. Frank Parsons, the designated founder of the vocational guidance movement (Baker, 2009; Parsons, 1909), opened the doors to the practice of matching one’s self to one’s job traits, a process that continues to this day (Niles, 2001).

Parsons’ work was the foundation for what is now known as *Trait-And-Factor Theory* (Parsons 1909; Sharf 1997). The theory assumes that all *individuals* have unique interests, abilities, and values, while each *occupation* has unique characteristics related to tasks, skills required, and rewards. As the oldest and most widely used of the career development theories, Trait-And-Factor theorists believe that these unique characteristics of both individuals and jobs can be measured objectively and will produce the highest amount of satisfaction for both workers and employers when they are correctly matched together (Ireh, 2000). This approach is much more assessment based and pays limited attention to a client’s emotional or motivational states. In essence, the client narrows their occupational search by gaining an understanding of their career aptitude and interests based on one or more vocational interests inventories.

Based on those results, the counselor then assists the client in finding occupations where his/her reported skills and interests have the strongest match, thereby placing the client into an area where they have the greatest likelihood for success. For example, if a client's assessment(s) demonstrate his or her highest interests and abilities are with people, he or she should not go into careers where he or she is primarily working with data/materials or one that has limited interaction with other workers or clients.

John Holland's subsequent work (1966; 1973) was based on shared psychological features, such as skills and personality. From his testing, Holland eventually came to the conclusion that every person or occupation can be broken down into six categories, known as *RIASEC* codes: (*Realistic*—skilled trades/technical occupations; *Investigative*—scientific occupations; *Artistic*—artistic/literary/musical occupations; *Social*—educational/religious occupations; *Enterprising*—persuasive occupations; and *Conventional*—clerical/business occupations) (Figler & Bolles 2007; Holland & Lutz, 1968). Assessments based on Trait-and-Factor Theory, where a person's thoughts and behaviors were assumed to stay fairly constant over their lifetime, continued to strengthen as more and more tests were created to match a person's personality and skills to a specific job.

Assessment tools, such as *Holland's Self-Directed Search* (Holland, 1997) were designed to test a client's internal thoughts and feelings toward certain occupations and then compared them to coded job fields. Once you matched the person's scores with the jobs that matched those particular traits, the person would then presumably be happy doing that type of work. Specifically, assessments like the *Self-Directed Search* ask a series of questions that eventually provide a total number score for each of the six

categories (RIASEC). The highest number represents the person's strongest interests and favorite activities. The three highest scoring categories together constitute an individual's three-letter code. For example, an Enterprising person may score highest in the E (Enterprising), second highest in the S (Social), and third highest in the C (Conventional) categories for a code of ESC. The U.S. Department of Labor (DOL) eventually adopted Holland's coding system for its job classification system, which now provides individuals the opportunity to match their codes with specific jobs. If the ESC client were to look for possible job matches, they would find a list of occupations that includes: Business Manager, Financial Planner, Travel Guide, Sales Agent/Manager, or Telemarketer. While this guide is good, it can be problematic for some. For example, if a person's interests and abilities were focused on occupations such as an Artist or a Piano Teacher would be in opposition to this person's interest and abilities they would not be proper considered areas of placement for future career choices since they did not score high in the Artistic category.

In contrast, Donald Super proposed that people are much more fluid than the static nature assumed by Trait-And-Factor theorists (Super, 1957). He posited that, "The [Matching Model] assumes that the adolescents or adults who are assessed are all sufficiently mature vocationally to have mature and stable traits" (Super, 1983, p. 557). However, various career counselors have noted that many students are unable to voice their true skills or sometimes even understand them from a lack of vocational maturity. Although still valid for career exploration purposes, matching assessments like Holland's should only be a small step in the counseling process according to Super (1983).

Donald Super went on to develop the concept of the *Life-Career Rainbow* (Super, 1980) as a visual picture of how a person plays multiple roles throughout his or her lifespan. These roles may overlap each other and vary by degrees of intensity, emphasizing that roles and perceptions change throughout one's life and, thereby, so does one's values and career choices. For instance, a young college student may hold a variety of roles, including but not limited to: son/daughter, student, spouse, parent, worker, and citizen. Depending on the individual's goals and values, the person's views of his or her career choice(s) will vary as greatly as the roles he or she are currently playing (Super, 1980).

Another leading theorist for career counseling, John Krumboltz, developed the social learning theory of career decision making (1979), based on the idea that the development of career interests is the result of an infinite number of learning experiences. What individuals observe from these experiences ("I'm good at baseball" or "I'm bad at math") develops into their general observations and personal beliefs. Abilities and emotions (along with environmental and cultural factors) either positively or negatively reinforce certain activities. Individuals will naturally gravitate toward areas that they feel are emotionally positive or are rewarded by their peers/society (Krumboltz, 1993). The consequences of these experiences and observations create an inner belief (whether realistic or not) that individuals then use as their template for making further career decisions. This potentially "falsified" belief in one's abilities (or non-abilities) is why Krumboltz believed counselors, who only provide assessments during sessions, are missing a major function of their role. "...Despite the general assumption that values are stable and unassailable, they can change as a result of new experiences: to presume their

intractability could be to the detriment of many youth. Thus, tests that presume that measured characteristics are static rather than changeable tend to channel people toward a particular career based on limited past experience, not on what they might learn in the future” (Krumboltz & Worthington, 1999, p. 316). Consequently, such a static view of a person’s traits may, in fact, be counterproductive in helping him or her explore emerging career options.

In the current approach to career counseling, clients now receive a more *constructivist type* approach from their counseling sessions, which is “a view that a human beings are active agents who individually and collectively co-constitute the meaning of their experiential world” (Neimeyer, 1993, p. 222). The client’s current interests, job experiences, and career successes and failures are all elements that are examined through a more *narrative approach* to determine a person’s occupational ideology. This narrative approach is used by counselors to help clients articulate and clarify their life themes, whereby the counselor then assists clients in framing these experiences into a continuous life story (Savickas, 1995). “Narratives that situate career indecision in the context of a life theme, with its central preoccupation and corresponding plot, serve to clarify choices and enhance the ability to decide (Savickas, 1995, p. 370).

A constructivist is more inclined to examine how the client assembles his or her reality or how he or she interprets what is happening in his or her world (Campbell & Unger, 2004). There are many such examples of these socially constructed realities where subtle (or not so subtle) discrimination may be affecting a client’s perception of the world. A young female who does not see any female engineers in her hometown, who is pressured by her parents to pursue careers in more gender-biased roles (such as

nursing or secretarial work) and who does not receive any supportive messages from her teachers or friends to pursue such a career path, will not typically believe that becoming an engineer is a possibility for herself. This reality that she has shaped for herself has multiple barriers, preventing her from being open to other “non-traditional” careers.

A post-modern therapist can consequently examine the various barriers that may prevent a client from considering or achieving these alternative choices. Common barriers that individuals cite as reasons for not pursuing alternative vocational choices are: limited financial resources, limited education, lack of specific skills in an area, and/or societal prejudice. A counselor who uses this narrative approach helps reconstruct a client’s understanding of their reality and assists them in creating a larger personal narrative that allows them to pursue their preferred future goals once the barriers are removed (Campbell & Unger, 2004).

In the last few decades, career counseling has evolved from a pure trait-and-factor practice into a form of counseling where assessment results are seen as merely providing pieces of information used to form a more holistic picture of the client that includes defining the individual’s reality through a narrative history with the counselor (Brott, 2001). One of the primary factors in this change is due to the significant differences in this postindustrial age. Campbell and Ungar (2004), in their article, quoted Vance Peavy (2001) who stated, “There is no longer a predetermined path or a logical linear progression from school to the workplace to retirement. Rather there is an opportunity to design a work life which is satisfying to the individual and which can be redesigned as needs, interests, and life experiences change” (p. 18).

Ultimately, this paper will examine an often neglected element of today's college and high school career counseling: how a client's career choice is influenced by his or her parents and the subsequent effects of that influence. Using a *systems* based approach for career development, counselors will be able to view their clients in the context of their whole lives as active members who are constantly re-shaping their future. Systems theory may even offer the best perspective when dealing with an individual's culture or ethnic background in relation to his or her career development, as the theory views the broader range of supports and barriers outside of just the individual when considering future goals and needs (Arthur & McMahon, 2005).

#### *Historical Overview of Parental Influence on Career Choice*

Parental dynamics and interactions (e.g. attachment, enmeshment, etc.) have long been *assumed* to play a significant role on their children's career development (Bratcher, 1982; Roe, 1957; Zingaro, 1983). A plethora of research investigations and articles related to parental influence have been published on these topics. However, there is still an inadequate amount of work to combine these articles or provide the empirical research and analysis needed to understand the depth of a family's influence upon a son's or daughter's vocational choice (Whiston & Keller, 2004a). Regrettably, less than two hundred empirical studies have been conducted since Roe first advanced the idea that the family plays a part in individual's career choice over 50 years ago (Keller & Whiston, 2008). This lack of conclusive evidence has led vocational psychologists and career counselors to "function with the underlying belief that people could make decisions that reflected their own dreams, passions, and talents in the world of work, unencumbered by family issues, cultural mores, racism, classism, and sexism," (Blustein, 2004, p. 604).

Since the 1980's, family therapists and career counselors have unearthed more information about the significant influence parents have on their children's development of vocational choices later in life (Kinnier, Brigman, & Noble, 1990; Lopez & Andrews, 1987; Sebald, 1989). Even though adolescents actively begin demonstrating their independence from their parents in their high school years, these young adults are still very much dependent on their parents for their career growth (Peterson, Stivers, & Peters, 1986). In fact, parents tend to create the strongest impression on their adolescent's vocational choice more than any other group including counselors, teachers, friends, or even people working in the identified occupation of desire (Bardick, Bernes, Magnusson, & Witko, 2004; Kotrlik & Harrison, 1989).

Hans Sebald (1989) uncovered in his longitudinal study on career choices making among adolescents, that they look to their parents as well as their peers in equal measure but separated which group they would talk to by the nature of the issue. For mundane issues such as what clothes to wear, what social events to attend and who to date; the peers were the dominant advisors. However, when the adolescent required information on topics such as career planning they looked to their parents an overwhelming majority of the time (Sebald, 1989, p. 944). Even with parents stating that their assistance with their child's career development is an important parental task (Young & Friesen, 1992), this influence has continued to be underutilized or even ignored by many school's counselors thereby neglecting one of the adolescent's most powerful resources (Downing & D'Andrea, 1994; Polson & Jurich, 1980). Even today, counselors at the college level resist the idea of working directly with parents when counseling their students, regarding

career and academic advising, mainly to avoid possible interference and to protect student's confidentiality.

As family systems began growing in popularity during the mid-to-late-twentieth century, Walter Bratcher was one of the original authors to discuss how this theory could be used to gain insight into career decision-making by young people (1982). He subscribed to the notion that the family is the most powerful system to which human beings can belong and that the family is constantly fabricating the direction and choices of one's individual life, as well as relentlessly feeding back information over one's lifetime (Bratcher, 1982). Young people, who find a healthy independence from the family during adolescence and young adulthood, may give rise to a more confident career search and experimentation that is needed by individuals to examine possible occupations. However, *family dysfunction* (relationships that are either enmeshed or severely disengaged [Minuchin, 1974]) may hinder an individual's *self-efficacy* (belief in one's ability to succeed) in vocational searching or decision making (Ryan, Solberg, & Brown, 1996). Families that are enmeshed are ones in which members are excessively dependent on each other (i.e., have trouble making decisions on their own and/or relating to others outside their family) and families that are disengaged where members are much more isolated and typically lack of affection and guidance (Bowen, 1985; Kinnier, Brigman, & Noble, 1990; Nichols & Schwartz, 1995).

Joseph Zingaro (1983), another early voice advocating the benefits of family therapy as a tool for counselors in treating career indecision with clients, described how often the problem was not a young person's attempt to decide between one career choice and another, but it was the actual decision making that was the issue. For the indecisive

person, any decision implies movement away from familiar surroundings (including his or her parents), not movement towards a new goal (Zingaro, 1983). He goes on to discuss how a client, who is undifferentiated (i.e. unable to separate their emotions or the influence of others upon their own decision making), may have a difficult time making career choices as he or she cannot separate his or her parent's expectations versus his or her own goals and expectations (Zingaro, 1983).

Additional family systems dynamics, that may reduce a client's ability to make effective career-related decisions, are family patterns of interaction that include: *over-involvement* of parents in their children's educational or career plans; *over-concern* by the parents; and *cross-generational coalitions* where one parent (or even one grandparent) unites with a child to take sides against the other parent. This creates an unbalanced system where one parent's authority over the child is now negated because of the coalition between the child and other parental figure (Haley, 1976; Larson, 1995; Nichols & Schwartz, 1995). For instance, if the father is pushing his son into a career as a doctor but the son and mother disagree with that path (regardless of the appropriateness of this career), the father will have a very difficult time influencing his son's career choice, while the mother undercuts his parental authority by siding with the child.

In discussing these three dynamics Lopez and Andrews (1987) provided examples of indecisive students who would consistently talk to their parents about their career anxieties. It appears that most are looking for answers, while almost simultaneously telling the career counselor about how over-involved their parents are in their vocational development. The ending result is frustration for the parents and students who continue to repeat this ineffectual cycle of career decision-making. Lopez and Andrews (1987)

hypothesized that this type of career indecision creates a system where the parents then must become over-involved in their child's career, while the youth effectively becomes helpless and delays the typical parent-child separation. Additionally, this indecision could result in a detouring of problems within the family or a role-reversal where the child is attempting to delay leaving, possibly even to stay and care for one or both parents. In instances where the dominant dyad is not the husband and wife but is an intergenerational dominance where the power holders of the family could be the husband and daughter, the wife and daughter, or even brother and sister; one is now dealing with a cross-generational coalition (Nichols & Schwartz, 1995). Evidence of a cross-generational coalition in an American family is frequently linked to a dysfunctional family system with potentially overt or covert marital problems that are being routed through the career explorer and manifesting itself as difficulty choosing a vocation (Lopez & Andrews, 1987).

As an example of this type of marital dysfunction, consider an 18 year-old, only child who is having trouble deciding if he wants to continue his education by beginning college or if he should live at home and start working. The son believes he needs to continue analyzing the situation over the summer, carefully weighing the pros and cons until the correct choice finally presents itself. Upon hearing about his son's indecision, the father becomes very upset as he feels a college degree is the only way his son will be able to ultimately find decent work or a decent salary in the workforce. The father tells the son he cannot wait the whole summer to decide because it will be too late to start school and he must make a commitment to a college now. However, the mother takes the

son's side and supports his choice to hold off on making a decision. She agrees with her son that this is a big decision and he should take his time to analyze all the issues.

By having one parent side with their child's indecision and actively standing against the other spouse, who is taking on the opposing role, this action effectively delays or halts the child's progress towards leaving the home to enter higher education or the workforce. However, from a family or system's perspective, these actions are only the surface behaviors. With more questioning, a therapist may find out that the son is anxious about going to college as well as living away from home, so he is choosing a path (indecision) that effectively delays his ability to develop his own identity. The father, feeling pressure from his friends and peers who are all sending their children to college, believes his son may not be successful without a college degree which to the father may mean he was not a successful parent. The mother, on the other hand, is anxious about her only son's moving away, which results in her being left alone in the household with her husband without a buffer for the first time in almost 20 years.

These conscious or unconscious thoughts then manifest themselves into battle lines where the mother supports the son in direct opposition to the father, thus creating a cross-generational coalition that maintains the family's status quo (son at home, providing a buffer between the parents which inhibits their ability to work on their own relationship), at least for the time being. Stating that a young adult's career decision (or non-decision) should be viewed as the outcome of a broader exchange between the young adult and his or her family (and not just as a single or distinct achievement by the individual), Lopez and Andrews (1987) went on to argue that these decisions were either

successful or unsuccessful, based on the family's ability to transition through these interactions effectively.

As children begin to transition into adulthood through the formation of their own identity, the more comprehensive view of parental influence regarding the child's career development is preferred, from a counseling standpoint, as it takes into account the entire context of the adolescent's decision-making (Chen, 1997; Grotevant & Cooper, 1988; Middleton & Loughhead, 1993). A recent investigation revealed that "Parenting does not occur in a unidirectional manner, but rather, parenting occurs as a part of a larger multilayered system of daily life" (Bryant, Zvonkovic, & Reynolds, 2006, p. 152). Additionally, even though parents have been typically thought of as positive influences on their children's career decision-making, it is also possible that parents are negatively affecting their children's vocational development as well.

The pressure for career success or the support for only a narrow range of occupations could inhibit the adolescent's ability to explore alternative careers that would be of greater fit to the individual (Middleton & Loughhead, 1993). For instance, if parents state they will only pay for college if the child goes into a certain majors (e.g. law, engineering, or medicine), if they overtly tell the child that he or she is *expected* to graduate with a specific degree and take a position at a bank or law firm, or if they subtly reinforce the value of certain jobs while discounting other occupations ("Being a teacher is nice, but nobody wants to work with crazy kids for no pay anymore.") are all ways in which a parent can negatively narrow their son's or daughter's career choices from an early age.

Parent's financial concerns and expectations also play a part in their direct or indirect influence on their children's career choice by adding their own biases and attitudes into particular occupational fields ("You need a job at a big business, not some nonprofit company helping the poor if you want to have a family in the future.") Additionally, parents must also be aware of their indirect communication they are sending to their children (Rainey & Borders, 1997; Young, Valach, Paseluikho, Dover, Matthes, Paproski, & Sankey, 1997). "In the case of career education, what the parents do and how they act is a much more powerful influence on the adolescent than what they say" (Polson & Jurich, 1980, p. 262). Furthermore, the young adult's understanding of his or her parent's expectations will influence their own career decisions, depending on whether the adolescent feels the need to go along with their parent's views or to rebel against them (Mau, Hitchcock, & Calvert, 1998; Penick & Jepsen, 1992).

From a family therapy perspective, when an adolescent or young adult is in the process of *differentiation*—the ability of a person to maintain their own sense of self while remaining emotionally connected to the family along with a family's aspirations for their child play a significant role on how the client makes decisions (Alderfer, 2004; Bowen, 1985). She goes on to comment, "Adolescents who cannot separate effectively from their families are not free to make choices based on information and their own desires but are more likely to do what they think their family expects of them" (Alderfer, 2004, p. 573). The concept that a child must feel they have a safe and secure relationship with his or her family from an early stage to develop the necessary curiosity and be able to explore the world of careers freely stems from attachment theory (Ainsworth, 1989; Kracke, 1997). Specifically, "this enables the child to venture further away from his or

her secure base to explore an expanded world and to connect with...a wider variety of people, including strangers” (Ainsworth, 1989, p. 708), which is a significant part of an adolescent’s career development. By talking to teachers, employers, college officials, and other adults, teens are able to gain a much broader perspective of what types of occupations are available and where they feel they have the strongest interest.

However, if they are from a dysfunctional family structure that inhibits them from feeling secure enough to venture from their home, then they will have a much more limited foundation upon which to build. According to Alderfer (2004), “the emotional system is the glue that keeps the family together. If it is too strong, differentiation is often characterized by high anxiety and an inability to leave home to pursue appropriate adult development tasks...If the glue is too weak, differentiation is premature and false. Adolescents leave or are forced to leave home before they have completed the development tasks of their stage in life. They have little or no familial connection and usually are not thinking of the future in terms of careers but rather of survival” (p. 573). From this family-oriented perspective, the developing foundation to link attachment theory to successful career exploration in young adults throughout their lives has been steadily increasing in the career advising world (Ainsworth, 1989; Blustein, Walbridge, Friedlander, & Palladino, 1991; Ryan, Solberg, & Brown, 1996).

One of the crucial ideas regarding attachment theory is that the relationship one has with his or her significant others (generally one’s primary caregivers) will enable the young person to feel comfortable and secure in exploring the world around them, if the caregiver(s) have been responsive and have instilled a sense of emotional support (Ainsworth, 1989; Bowlby, 1988; Bretherton, 1992). In Ketterson and Blustein’s (1997)

research, they ascertained that higher quality relationships with one's primary caregivers correlation with higher levels of exploration by their children. Likewise for "dysfunctional families, those in which independence of thought and feeling are perceived as threatening the integrity of the family, are likely to discourage the young adult from developing a sense of psychological separateness, which, in turn, would likely inhibit the necessary career decision-making and implementation tasks" (Blustein, et al., 1991, p. 40).

## CHAPTER THREE

### *Research Issues in Career Choices*

As previous studies have demonstrated, parents tend to hold the strongest influence on their adolescent or young adult's career choice. However, even while examining the context of the family, there are other agents that also play a part in how that influence may shape the individual's career decision-making process. Again, there are only a small number of studies that have investigated the larger context of an individual's career development but the three most often cited variables on a family's influence are: socioeconomic status, gender, and race.

#### *Socioeconomic Status*

“If one were permitted only a single variable with which to predict an individual's occupational status,” according to Schulenberg, Vondracek, and Crouter (1984), “it surely would be the socioeconomic status of that individual's family of orientation (p. 130). This statement is based on the concept that parents from different social classes develop their own social and cultural values based on their current social class. The parents subsequently pass on these social class values to their children preparing them for a similar occupational roles within that particular class structure (Wright & Wright, 1976). Socioeconomic status is defined as a family's current income, the parent's current occupation(s), the status associated with their occupation, and the parent's highest educational level (Brown, Fukunaga, Umemoto, & Wicker, 1996). As Brown and his team (1996) pointed out, social class affects occupational choices by providing tangible resources (money, transportation, higher quality schools, etc.), as well as the values and expectations, of that social strata on their children's career choices. Carrying this concept

even further, whereas middle-class parents generally emphasize initiative and autonomy, those parents from the lower economic classes tend to encourage conformity. These lessons translate into what early work experiences the youth may have, what skills they develop, and eventually the kinds of work they will do as an adult (Bryant, Zvonkovic, & Reynolds, 2006; Hill, Ramirez, & Dumka, 2003; Wright & Wright, 1976). In a study focused on social class white collar workers (non manual labor) were found to aspire for and maintain white collar jobs, while a parallel result was found for those identified as blue collar (manual labor)—they too sought to maintain their blue collar statuses (Jacobs, Karen & McClelland, 1991).

An additional variable that occurs as a result of a family's socioeconomic status is the financial stress that parents will feel more often in a working-class or lower-class environment, which may translate into more conflicts about careers between the adults and the adolescents (Conger, Ge, Elder, Lorenz, & Simons, 1994). Analyzing the responses of 5-14 year old students from families that were classified as middle-class or poor, Weinger (2000) found that those from middle class valued their parent's income, felt it would help them obtain their professional career, and saw themselves in similar professional roles as their parents. However, the low income students did not feel their parents would naturally finance their education, nor did they have high-level, professional careers images of their parents after which they could model themselves. Although this study is not directly focused on young adults, it does convey the early messages that children adopt about their career options, based on their parent's influence from a socioeconomic viewpoint.

Unfortunately, the research concerning the impact of a family's social economic status is ultimately divided. This lack of consensus is partially due to the limited research in this particular area, as it is rarely the main focus of a study (Brown, et al., 1996), but also because of the lack of details given by researchers about their participants' social class when they are taken into account (Whiston & Keller, 2004b). Although most researchers agree that there is an impact on vocational choice based on parental income and status (Mau & Bikos, 2000), there are likely many other psychological and social elements that are subsets of a family's class standing that also affect their influence, such as community and school influences (Brown, et al., 1996; Teachman & Paasch, 1998).

Heppner and Scott (2004) argued that this significant omission on the part of researchers may be due to *classism*. Although in the United States, racism and sexism has been vilified, classism tends to still be acceptable. This ideology may be the product of the values and beliefs in the American culture that state all people are free to achieve as much as they desire. Consequently, social class is considered to be a choice and not an intrinsic position. As Blustein noted (2004), career development research has tended to limit itself to studying, "the working lives of people who have some choice in their education, training, and vocational options" (p. 608), which may also help explain the much larger body of research with middle-class participants. In the end, social economic status affects an individual's identity development which then, subsequently, affects his or her perception of the world (and vice versa) and the choices he or she eventually makes, regarding their career (Heppner & Scott, 2004).

### *Gender and Career Choice Issues*

The word “gender” is defined *as the behavioral, cultural, or psychological traits typically associated with one sex* according to the Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary (2009) and provides the foundation for this section on gender related studies within the career development field. “Gender role socialization is one of the earliest, and thus potentially one of the most powerful, forms of socialization. The effect of gender role socialization is far reaching; a significant consequence is that young people may only perceive a narrow gender-based range of future options, particularly in relation to education and career opportunities,” (McMahon & Patton, 1997, p. 368). For instance, “Mothers advising daughters that ‘It’s important to establish yourself in a career before you raise a family’ both constitutes and perpetuates particular gendered understandings between paid work and childrearing,” (Medved & Brogan, 2006, p. 162). These types of powerful messages, that start within the family, help lay the foundation of how young people will view their future career options, especially when the messages contain either overt or covert biases based on one’s gender (Medved & Brogan, 2006). Such messages, communicated from adults to children, which focus on a person’s ability due to their gender, may also increase or decrease a child’s perception of his or her own skills or aptitude in certain areas (Kurtz-Costes, Rowley, Harris-Britt, & Woods, 2008). This section will review the research conducted on how one’s gender possibly affects their career aspirations, relations with parents, as well as how real or perceived gender stereotypes affect career decision-making. Subsequently, this section will also address how racial identification affects the choice of careers.

Regarding career aspirations, Wilson and Wilson (1992) found male adolescents aspire to higher level careers than female adolescents, which was consistent with much of the findings completed around similar studies over the past few decades (Fortner, 1970; Herzog, 1982; O'Brien, Friedman, Tipton, & Linn, 2000). This may be due to early socialization where boys, "generally perceived that school activities were beneficial in relation to career planning, engaged in career planning earlier than did girls, and were more active in it than girls. This difference may be related to young women's continuing perceptions that a job is an interim activity between school and marriage and motherhood," (McMahon's & Patton's, 1997, p. 373). Part of this perspective may come from the routine socialization of women who are constantly and consistently exposed to messages that her life should revolve around caring for a family and her career plans are secondary (Cook, Heppner, & O'Brien, 2002). Although women's career choices have increased dramatically since the 1960's and 1970's (Betz, Heesacker, & Shuttleworth, 1990; Hakim, 2006), women still find their occupational choices limited, in comparison to men's choices (Gadassi & Gati, 2009). In fact, various occupations are still very much dominated by one sex (Cejka & Eagly, 1999). Using the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (2008) information on occupations held by sex of respondent, in this case the percentage of women in the labor force, one can see that certain occupations, such as *Landscapers* (8.6% female) and *Auto Mechanics* (10.6% female), are almost totally filled by males. In contrast, such as *Child Care Services* (95.3% female) and *Nursing Care Facilities* (87% female) are dominated by female workers. From a career counseling perspective, as well as data from the BLS, may demonstrate how "large numbers of college students continue to choose majors and occupations incongruent with their measured interests...it appears

that women who make traditionally female career choices continue to be underutilizing their abilities in comparison to other women” (Betz, Heesacker, & Shuttlesworth, 1990, p.275).

Using a sample from pre-school aged students to high school seniors, McMahon and Patton (1997) surveyed 55 young people on their perceptions of work and their knowledge about influences and gender differences. They found that both males and females, from 4 years to 18 years old, consistently presented gender-stereotypical perceptions of occupations in certain industries. Boys were found to be especially critical of other boys who were working in stereotypical female jobs (e.g. a male cook or male nurse) (McMahon & Patton, 1997). Lauver and Jones (1991) found similar results in their earlier study of 467 females and 426 males from 9<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> grades in rural high schools in Arizona. The young girls picked occupations of both traditionally male and traditionally female roles, whereas the boys picked positions predominantly of the traditional male variety (such as an electrician or probation officer). Because the occupations were controlled for status/prestige (a possible factor in why males may not choose traditionally female-type roles), Lauver and Jones proposed that recent pushes for gender equality may have been a factor in the diversity of adolescent female’s choices (1991) but that career stereotypes still exist for males. Potentially, young females are being influenced by their mothers (who may now hold less traditionally ‘female’ jobs), their education (recent pushes to decrease gender stereotyping in schools in both lectures and in books), and by the media (positive female characters performing more traditionally ‘male’ jobs like doctors, detectives, and even superheroes) may all be contributing to the broadening of female’s career aspirations. However, males are not

receiving a similar message influencing their career choices of taking on traditionally 'female' occupations. This may account for some young women's feeling more empowered to try various occupational roles, while still leaving young men to pursue the same types of jobs they were pursuing 20 to 40 years ago.

Kniveton, in his 2004 research, discussed how parents are the ones providing the strongest influences on their children's career development through support and advice related to their own experiences. Citing previous studies (Creed & Patton, 2003; Spitz & Logan, 1990), Kniveton believed in the theory that not all people feel they have free choice when it comes to choosing a career (i.e. a lack of *direct* control over their lives). He used a relatively short questionnaire. The items were all measured with Likert type scale responses to interview 348 young people (174 males/174 females; ages 14-18 with a mean of 16.7 years) to help explore who these young adults felt were helping them with their career exploration. The data were examined, first, through the whole sample and, later, were subdivided to examine the results through birth order and gender. The study demonstrated that males, more than females, were interested in obtaining a job but that most other considerations were about equal between the two groups. However, males prioritized the *money aspect* of working while females prioritized the *enjoyment of work* as opposed to other possible responses for working (e.g. "doing something you are good at," "helping others," or "working conditions") that were all ranked much lower by both males and females. The results of Kniveton's study also showed that parents had a much larger influence than that of the teachers, with the same sex parent being the most influential over the adolescent. In a similar vein, Rainey and Borders (1997) demonstrated through their study of 276 seventh- and eighth-grade female students that

the mother-daughter relationship (specifically the separation and attachment aspects) in early adolescence is significant “based on a variety of measures, that mothers strongly influence the development of daughters’ attitudes towards women’s rights and roles in society” (p. 167).

Additional studies of females in later adolescence have generated similar findings amongst the mother-daughter relationship and career exploration (Blustein, et al., 1991; Paa & McWhirter, 2000) including Rollins and White (1982) who stated from their study that the mothers are significant influences in developing the socialization and attitudes of their daughters. Based on their five year longitudinal study of 207 women (who were high school students during the first phase of the study), O’Brien, Friedman, Tipton, and Linn (2000) found that “attachment to mother had a significant direct effect on career self-efficacy, and career self-efficacy again influenced career aspiration,” (p. 309). Additionally, they speculated that a young woman’s attachment to her mother during her high school years may likely be significant since the mother is usually the primary caretaker who is more involved with the daughter than the father, giving the mother more opportunity to verbally encourage the daughter to explore career possibilities (O’Brien, et al., 2000).

If females are primarily influenced by their mothers, which parent assumes the role of primary influencer of the male children? According to researchers Boatwright, Ching, and Paar, (1992), they discovered that not only is the mother the most influential parent for their *daughters* but the mother is also the most influential for their *sons*, too. Although much previous research has demonstrated the significant effects of parental socialization, Smith (1981) concluded that parental influence needs to be divided between

the mother and father, in order to avoid any muddled data and to gain a more defined picture of who is the primary influencer. In fact, Smith's results were similar to Kniveton (2004) and Boatwright's et al. (1992) in that adolescents tended to agree more with their mother than their father on future goals and other beliefs. Smith also believed that the majority of time a mother spent with the children may play a large role in why the mother carries such a large influence in the eyes of the children (1981). In Otto's (2000) sample survey research of 362 high school juniors (of various schools in North Carolina), he found that, even though females have *more* conversations with their parents than their male counterparts, both sexes view their mother as the most aware of their career abilities and aspirations. Otto also found that 79% of the adolescent women and 73% of the adolescent men identified their mothers as being the most helpful when providing career advice. In contrast, fathers were identified as being helpful 60% of the time for males and only 53% helpful to females.

#### *Race and Career Choice Issues*

Arbona and Novy (1991) examined the issue of career aspirations for White, Black, and Mexican-American students and how racial socialization, instead of gender socialization, may play a part in their exploration. They studied 866 students who were incoming freshman to a predominantly White university in the southwest. The sample breakdown was as follows: 126 Black students (29 males/97 females), 107 Mexican-American students (52 males/55 females), and 633 White students (328 males, 305 females), with the ages between 16-19 years old and the mean age being 17.8. Arbona and Novy used a chi-square analysis to determine the association between students' ethnicity and gender and their career aspirations and expectations. Results suggested that

there were few differences in career aspirations and expectations among Black, Mexican, and White students. Changes in society from earlier studies (Melgoza, Harris, Baker & Roll, 1980; Sewell & Martin, 1976) may be demonstrating a break-down in previous ethnic stereotyping for freshmen. Interestingly, although minority youth have been shown to have similar career *aspirations* as in the Arbona and Novy (1991) study (and some studies even finding that Black adolescents have *higher* aspirations than White adolescents – Wilson & Wilson, 1992), many ethnic youth have been shown to have decreased *expectations* of achieving their goals, in comparison to their White counterparts (Constantine, Erickson, Banks, & Timberlake, 1998; Fouad & Byars-Winston, 2005; Lauver & Jones, 1991; Weinstein, Madison, & Kuklinski, 1995). For these minority youth, who desired similar high-status occupations, many did not believe that they are realistically achievable due to particular barriers that face the youth. However, this belief may be the outcome of more structural influences (socioeconomic status, quality of school attended, etc.) rather than cultural influences (Constantine, et al., 1998).

Studying the contemporary parent-youth relationships, relative to career development (from the perspective of the youth), was Otto's (2000) intention in his study of 362 juniors in a cross-sectional group of six high schools in North Carolina. The breakdown of the students who completed the survey was as follows: 159 (44%) were male, while 203 (56%) were female, and 94 (26%), were African-American, and 208 (74%) were White. Most responses provided on the survey were completed using a four-point Likert-type scale (e.g. response items could be "very different," "mostly different," "mostly similar," or "very similar" or the responses could be "never," "rarely,"

“sometimes,” or “often” [p. 113]). Results of Otto’s study indicated that many of these youth not only agreed with their parent’s viewpoints on careers and goals (81% feel they are similar) but that the parents were the primary source for career-related information. After separating the groups by race; Otto found that 80% of both African-American and White youth said their ideas of what career they should enter was similar to their parent’s ideas. Both groups were also very similar in terms of discussing their career plans with their parents most often (56% African-Americans vs. 46% of Whites), as well as primarily speaking with their respective mothers first (83% African-American and 81% White). Keisha Love (2008) discussed how researchers have shown young adult African-Americans report much more intimate, secure, and closer relationships with their parents than do Whites, which equated to stronger attached relationships for Blacks, and may be indicative of Otto’s (2000) findings where African-American youth discussed their career aspirations on a more frequent basis with their parents than did the White respondents.

Smith’s (1981) study found that previous research, that did not separate the mother and father, were, in fact, ‘masking’ some of the effects of familial influence upon the child’s career choices. In his study, Smith examined the rates at which adolescents agreed with each parent’s career and educational goals. Data was collected through a questionnaire from 6<sup>th</sup>, 8<sup>th</sup>, 10<sup>th</sup>, and 12<sup>th</sup> grade students in South Carolina and Georgia. In total, there were 2, 321 students supplying all information, with 14% of those participating from South Carolina were Black, while 68% of those participants in Georgia were also Black. A full-range of socio-economic status was accounted for with both Black and White students in both states. Smith found that that 51% of the Blacks and 58% of the Whites agreed with the maternal perceptions of their career goals. However,

sixth and eighth grade students did have somewhat higher levels of agreement with their mothers than did tenth and twelfth grade students, possibly indicating the adolescent's growth and autonomy from his or her parents as the student matures. Extending the focus on parental relationships, Whiston and Keller (2004a) stated that, "there are some preliminary findings that parental support may play an even more critical role in the career development of African-American and Latino/Latina adolescents and young adults than it does in Caucasian or European American's career development" (p. 556).

*Parent's Role in Promoting Career Choices by Gender*

In one international study (Galambos & Silbereisen, 1987) completed in [West] Germany, found that because parents have *lowered expectations* for the success of their daughters than for their sons, the females in their study also tended to carry these lowered expectations. The researchers also noted that fathers tended to treat their children in a more sex-differentiated way than the mothers did. For example, fathers would encourage their sons to be more independent, to compete harder, and to achieve more challenging goals, whereas the fathers would not encourage similar behaviors in their daughters.

This type of gender biased socialization was similarly discovered in Kniveton's (2004) study, where he found a large percentage of students stated that their parents often gave advice in a gender-stereotyped way (e.g. females were advised into stereotyped female roles such as nursing or clerical positions while males were encouraged to obtain more typically "masculine" roles such as a doctor or police officer). Gender-socialization of this nature has been the subject of numerous studies over the years but has only recently been examined with regards to adolescents and their career development (McMahon & Patton, 1997). Primarily, the majority of research that focused on the

socialization of males versus females generally did not examine its direct impact on the career development of the children. Among those studies that did focus on career development, they typically centered on older adolescents (high school graduates and older), often missing the impact socialization may have on career choices from a much earlier age. Phipps (1995) in her study found that children, as young as five years old, could identify specific career aspirations. Phipps believes a new focus on the gender socialization and the career orientation of adolescent and younger subjects will give career counselors a much clearer picture of the issues and complexity around their client's career aspirations.

When Middleton and Loughhead (1993) examined how parents were influencing their children, they classified parents into three main categories: positive involvement; non-involvement; and negative involvement. Parents, who were positively involved with their children's career development and career choice, were enthusiastic about their children's career exploration and were emotionally and/or verbally supportive of the young adult's individual goals. Non-supportive parents, on the other hand, were "...unaware of what to do, how to help, or that their involvement is desired at all" according to Middleton and Loughhead (1993, p. 166). A negatively involved parent was in a much more precarious situation where the adolescent felt anxiety or resentment, regarding career decisions based on parental attitudes. Parents in this category may have overtly pressured their son or daughter to focus on a particular career path which went against what the child believed was best for themselves.

For many counselors, it was the parent's intentions that were important, when working with clients, as these are the ways in which parents communicate to their

children (Young & Friesen, 1992). In Young and Friesen's study (1992), they found that parents (even though many stated they were not intentionally directing their children's career choices) "implicitly suggested and actually implemented goals of their own as parents" (1992, p. 204).

Although parents might not consider some of their actions as intentional, there are many examples of parents' suggesting their children try out for athletic teams, academic organizations, or even bringing an adolescent to a local university campus to have the child consider possible future careers or educational pursuits (Young & Friesen, 1992). Again, it is up to the counselor to help the client determine and label these outside influences, while simultaneously figuring out if they are helpful or harmful to the young adult's development and make adjustments as necessary.

By using a systems based approach with clients, a counselor will be much more effective at finding the various pressure points around a client's career indecision. Consequently, the counselor is in a better position to assist the client with understanding the true nature of the choices being considered, while reducing some of the emotional anxiety that may be coming from various systems in the client's life. It is also important to note that as children grow into young adults the gendered advice and expectations that they have learned from parents and teachers helps to influence the male and female child's expectations of themselves (Eccles & Wigfield, 2002). By helping young people think critically, examine multiple pieces of information (not just listening to one source), and helping them develop contacts outside their immediate family/close friend network, young adults will have a more diverse set of experiences from which they can draw when

considering career options. The added advantage of such an approach may also help to diminish the power of career stereotypes (Creamer & Laughlin, 2005).

In a similar fashion, Boatwright, Ching, and Paar (1992) offered some tips for the parents of minority youth. There were two important tips: (1) placing their children into college-prep courses while in high school thereby setting higher expectations for these youth; and (2) to begin career and/or higher education discussions with their son or daughter at a much earlier time (e.g. junior high) to also help set parental expectations.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### *Limitations of Current Approaches*

Although there has been a general acceptance that families play a significant role in a person's career choice (Osipow 1983), the research into this topic has been uneven and sporadic. Much of this is due the very nature of what constitutes career counseling and how or what role does the family play as an influence on this choice? In their review, Schulenberg, Vondracek, and Crouter (1984) stated some of the limitations to this area of research. One limitation is the amount of research that "centers around the predominant empirical focus on vocational outcomes, rather than the vocational developmental process" (p. 129). The actual acquiring of an occupation is significant to many researchers, as it is a tangible result to possible effective counseling outcomes. However, there is little research towards the developmental *process* of career counseling which may actually be more important to the client's overall development. Learning about one's likes and dislikes, values, and career aspirations are all part of career counseling, even if a job does not immediately follow the counseling.

Another limitation of the empirical research is the lack of treating the family as a whole functioning unit that has multiple and interdependent influences on a client's career choice (Schulenberg, et al., 1984). Many studies focus on only a small piece of an individual's total environment (like race or family income) but disregard other potentially significant factors such as family size, birth order, values, religion, culture, etc. Ultimately, future research will be more effective if a fuller context is taken during the initial study so that all variables can be studied either separately or in total (such as separating out each parent's influence, but then also having the ability to combine their

overall influence). Hill, Ramirez, and Dumka (2003) discussed how frequently a study will examine a topic like ‘women’s career aspirations’ but not include minority women in the sample. Similar issues exist for other potential factors. For instance, when studies examine race as a possible variable, often researchers cloud the results with low socioeconomic status lessening the ability to generalize the impact of race on middle-to-upper socioeconomic adolescent’s career development. Does a young African-American student have difficulty developing a strong sense of self-efficacy because of his or her ethnic culture and values or is it because the parents are at a lower socioeconomic position? This may mean that the student is living in a less wealthy area, going to a sub-standard school with minimum expectations, lacking effective role models, feeling less supported by mother and father, due to the economic strain the parents are currently under, or even the lack of part-time and full-time opportunities in the area where the student lives (Hill, Ramirez, & Dumka, 2003). Of course, all of these could be factors but, without research to help separate and clarify the causative factors it would be very difficult to generalize any results. As Brown stated in his article, regarding the role race plays on one’s career development, “As central as the family is considered to be with respect to most realms of human endeavor and difficulty, there is no question that the family of origin ought to command more of our attention,” (2004, p. 593).

The third limitation cited (Schulenberg, et al., 1984) revolves around the changing roles in vocations and society’s norms. Much of the earlier research focused mainly on males (White males in particular) as the sole group to be looking for work. This sample group would have had much different supports and barriers than women or other ethnic or cultural groups who may have tried looking for similar work. A White male looking

for work in 1960 will have a much different job search process than a Black female during the same time period.

Not only could sexism and racism be factors, but socioeconomic status, education, and limited family support could be very different for each job seeker. Naturally, many of these earlier studies developed theories that do not necessarily apply to females of similar age groups. Blustein (1997) argues that researcher's questions have decidedly been too narrow and that, by asking broader questions throughout one's life role (not *specific* questions about exploration at a *specific* time), researchers will be in a much better position to record true career exploration.

For Alderfer (2004), the lack of research focusing directly on African-American, Hispanic, and Native American families and the effects of race/ethnicity on their career choices and on the dominant social system's response to them is a limitation to the research on family's influencing effects. "Family therapists do not use different theories for each racial and ethnic group, but they do attend to the effects of a social system on the dynamics of families that are not of the dominant culture. Therefore counseling, be it career, family, or a combination of both, needs to take into account the place of clients in the larger system, especially if they are in a minority position" (Alderfer, 2004, p. 576).

Bryant, Zvonkovic, and Reynolds (2006) affirm the need for research to catch up with the changing demographics through the new immigration patterns within the United States. Families are becoming much more diverse both across cultures as well as within each ethnic demographic which includes the development of a variety of parenting norms within each group. Bryant and his fellow researchers (2006) remarked, "Evidence suggests that issues of discrimination, the stress due to minority status, the decreased

acceptance of cultural norms and values, disruption in family ties, intergenerational conflict, and children's greater exposure to deviant peer influences are problems that immigrant parents must manage as they help their children to ideally flourish in their vocational development" (p. 169).

Whiston and Keller's (2004a) review of the research published since 1980 regarding family influences on career development and vocational choice, found that 20% of all the studies used a sample size that was over 85% White. An additional 32% of the studies did not define the demographics well enough to determine the race/culture of the participants. Additionally, those investigations that did sample race used qualitative methodologies and had small sample sizes. (Whiston & Keller, 2004b). One of the principal challenges for counselors in understanding the effects race and culture have on their client's career development. It is extremely difficult to generalize from the small amount of research that has been conducted mainly with Whites, to racially and culturally different populations often with separate value systems (Hartung, 2002). Many of these challenges are related to a lack of consistent definitions by the researchers or by individual respondents (Hill, Ramirerz, & Dumka, 2003).

## CHAPTER FIVE

### *Implications for Career Counselors*

The implications for career counselors, armed with this knowledge about family systems and parental influence in particular, are multifaceted. The traditional view of career counseling has been to meet with the client, conduct a skills or personality assessment, and discuss the implications of those results with the idea that the client can then make a more informed decision. This type of counseling (which is still very much active in the U.S.), assumes that individual knowledge of one's skills and preferences is the most critical basis for making a career decision, with a relative absence of consideration as to the individual's other roles and/or environment such as his or her family dynamics, race, gender, etc. (Cook, Heppner, & O'Brien, 2002). As a career counselor, obtaining at least a general understanding of family systems therapy will provide a much broader picture of the client's abilities, supports, and barriers when examining career choice with clients. "Choices are not isolated; choices are embedded within an ongoing pattern of living," (Savickas, 1995, p. 366). Instead, they are linked to how a career counselor views his or her client's presenting vocational issue as a part of their overall life pattern and merely another decision this person needs to make within a continuum of decisions. Using the entire context of the client's life to create an overall picture of where this particular decision fits, as well as who else this may affect helps to illuminate the client's current issue and assists in reducing the anxiety surrounding it (Savickas, 1995).

It is incumbent on the career counselor to delve past a client's presenting issue to understand the full context of their current problem, as well as help the client see the

other forces affecting his or her decision. "...Behavior does not occur in a vacuum...Individual's career development, by nature, emerges from a lifelong dynamic interaction between the individual and his or her environment" (Cook, Heppner, & O'Brien, 2002, p. 303). In fact, as Fouad and Byars-Winston (2005) uncovered, career counselors focused solely on just a client's individual skills and traits may end up overlooking significant external factors (such as challenges caused by his or her environment or the context in which he or she makes career-related decisions). Similarly, Alderfer (2004) posited that when career choices are being made the major issues from a family systems standpoint (differentiation of self, the family emotional system, the multigenerational transmission process, and the emotional triangle) all may help or hinder the career decision-making process for an adolescent. Alderfer continues, "For example, a young adult who is trying to decide about going away to college or staying home and working for a year may seek assistance from a career counselor to determine areas of interest for future work. In the process of the counseling, it may become clear that the client wants to go to college but is intensely anxious about leaving home and the effect it will have on the family" (2004, p. 573). A counselor focused on just the client's presenting problem would likely have missed the full context around this particular issue.

Corbishley and Yost (1989) continued with the idea that clients are often completely unaware of how their careers may impact other parts of their life and will even mistakenly self-diagnose 'career issues' that are not the true issue at all. Students feeling overly controlled by their parents may have difficulty on deciding their path more out of unresolved anger towards their parents than true indecision. Likewise, students may blame their unhappiness on their career choices when, in reality, it is their family

stress or their depression that is the actual cause for the current dissatisfaction. “An effective career counselor cannot ignore such issues such as low self-esteem, cognitive dysfunctions, ineffective coping styles, and unsatisfactory relationships, if these interfere with the process or goals of counseling,” (Corbishley & Yost, 1989, p. 45). Often in career counseling, the client presents a current challenge, regarding their education or career field, and both the client and the counselor spend one to three sessions focusing on how best to resolve that specific issue with little deviation from that task into the client’s personal life. On the other hand, a counselor who begins asking the client about his or her family, relationships, and other personal items, may receive resistance from clients who wonder how any of those topics are related to their current career issue. If the counselor, from the beginning, establishes how one individual system (e.g. career) impacts all the other systems a person is involved in (e.g. marriage, student, parents), it will lessen the resistance by the client as well as lay the foundation for viewing one’s life not as separate, individual pieces, but as a whole system where each part feeds into another.

Among social and behavioral scientists, the family is generally viewed as a variety of systems and subsystems. These systems run the gamut from fully functioning to total dysfunction. Systems issues, such as *attachment* (primarily the bond between a child its primary caregiver), *differentiation* (one’s ability to separate oneself emotions from one’s family), *learned-helplessness* (repeated conditioning that generates a feeling of helplessness, even when given an opportunity to resolve the issue), *detouring* (creating a problem in a another area to avoid another one), and *overcompensation* (happens when one part of the system needs to do more to compensate for a part that is not functioning

properly), will help guide the counselor towards more appropriate discussions, through a greater understanding of what is truly affecting the client's motivations and career decision-making ability. For instance, a client, who is not fully differentiated from his or her parents, may find it helpful to understand his or her part in the total system, as well as to understand his or her emotional reactions to the parental system (Schwartz & Buboltz, 2004; Zingaro, 1983). To accomplish this understanding, one of the first steps, in dealing with clients from a systems-based approach, is to let them know from the beginning that discussions about their career will likely impact and be impacted by external influences. Hence, conversations will also need to occur around those influences (Corbishley & Yost, 1989). Having clients express these influences, as well as the job-related assumptions they may be carrying, will help to unblock the client's stalled career progress (Krumboltz, 1993).

Additionally, the counselor may need work with the client to create scenarios by which the client will be able to test out his or her own feelings and biases, based on information gathered through research, informational interviews, and/or job shadowing. By researching and working directly with people in specific areas of interest, clients will gain a much broader perspective of what the job entails while lessening the impact of potentially false or mistaken information gained from parents or peers (Creamer & Laughlin, 2005). Although a career counselor is not trained as a family therapist, through an understanding of systems theory, both the client and the counselor may benefit in exploring some of these topics with clients who are having a hard time separating their goals from their parent's goals.

Research has continuously demonstrated that parents have been the largest influence on their children, typically the primary source for career-related information for adolescents, and a child's first role model for the world of work, as he or she observes his or her parent's behavior around their occupation (Morrow, 1995). On one hand, researchers (Bardick, et al., 2005) found that the majority of the parents surveyed (1,102 total parents with a son or daughter in junior high or high school at the time) believed their child was either not prepared at all for the next stages of their career development process (24.7%) or only somewhat prepared for the next stage (50.3%). Bardick and her fellow researchers (2005) also found that parents believed their role for their adolescent's career development was to be a source of career-related information, to teach their children about values, and to provide support and resources.

On the other hand, parents did *not* seem to feel they always had correct information or access to career-related resources to be a positive influence on their children (Bardick, et al., 2005; Downing & D'Andrea, 1994). The helplessness and lack of information that parents stated they were experiencing represents an opportunity for career counselors to partner with a young adult's largest influencer—the parents and bring them into the counseling process. Furthermore, educating the parents about the strength of their influence on their children's career choices (starting well before high school) will help the parents become better educators and stronger sources of career guidance for their children (Amundson & Penner, 1998; Keller & Whiston, 2008; Paa & McWhirter, 2000). Parents, who are more informed about career options and their high degree of influence (especially at a time when parents may routinely feel their teenager is not listening to their advice), will be able to provide a more structured foundation for

students to feel safe while exploring careers. Parents may also gain more confidence and become even more positive contributors towards the young adult's career development, potentially even increasing the enjoyment of the parent-child relationship during these difficult years (Amundson & Penner, 1998; Middleton & Loughead, 1993; Polson & Jurich, 1980).

One example of how counselors can inform parents about current career development practices is by holding career development information sessions at the young adult's respective schools or universities as an 'open house' for parents to learn about counseling resources, job searching strategies, employment trends, career exploration practices, and other such techniques (Paa & McWhirter, 2000). This type of active marketing of a counselor's career services may even be more important to particular groups of young people, such as women or minorities who may have additional barriers inhibiting their career paths (Guindon & Richmond, 2005). "Another potentially useful strategy would be to offer psycho-educational programs for adolescents and their parents that would enhance open communication, nurturing, and autonomous relationships. Such preventative interventions may also bolster the natural support systems of many families" (Blustein, et al., 1991, p. 48). By reaching out to parents, as well as other schools and local businesses, career counselors may be able to develop strong partnerships with all significant stakeholders in a young adult's environment, while also providing a vast range of career possibilities and learning opportunities through direct employment sources, informational interviews, internships, job shadows, etc.

However, parents may not always be a positive influence on their children or have positive interactions with a counselor. It is important for a counselor to realize that there will occasionally be parents who do not allow their son or daughter the freedom of career choice and/or will not be fully supportive of those who are encouraging them to follow their own path. Understanding the sensitive nature of this issue and discussing it with the youth is paramount. “Does the adolescent want to confront or avoid parental demands or over-involvement concerning his or her career decision-making process? Is a family counseling approach appropriate?” (Middleton & Loughhead, 1993, p.171). Of course, a career counselor should also be wary of attempting any counseling that is outside of his or her scope of practice. The purpose of working with parents is to better utilize (as well as understand) the significant outside influences a young adult is under when making career decisions. It is not a reason to begin conducting psychological or therapeutic sessions with the family. If the counselor feels that the client may benefit from such expertise, immediate referrals should be made to the appropriate professionals (such as a qualified family therapist) as well as any consultations with fellow counselors to maintain one’s ethical standards of practice and not cross over to a realm in which the counselor has no professional training.

Regarding the lack of research devoted to racial differences and career development, Constantine and her fellow researchers (1998) offered these guidelines to assist current counselors with understanding the full context of a minority youth’s environment (supports and barriers):

1. Be aware of the ways that environmental stressors, such as violence and poverty, influence urban racial and ethnic minority youth and their ability to address career development issues. Career interventions, in part, could focus on strategies to help these youth cope with their stressors.
2. Identify vocational interventions designed to encourage urban racial and ethnic minority youth to (a) actively pursue career-related information, and (b) increase their knowledge about the education, training, and skills required to succeed in their potential career choices.
3. Carefully attend to students' career aspirations and expectations to ensure that lowered expectations for success are not inhibiting urban racial and ethnic minority youth from achieving their potential. Interventions for increasing expectations for career success may include (a) identifying occupational role models who are employed in potential careers in which urban racial and ethnic minority youth are interested and (b) helping students to map out potential career paths so that they may gain a concrete understanding of the process of career attainment. These exercises may also be important in aiding these youth to gain important perspectives about realistic careers for themselves.
4. Explore the ways that vital familial, social, cultural, and other contextual phenomena may affect the unique career development issues of urban racial and ethnic minority youth. The use of social constructionist perspectives and techniques in career counseling may be helpful in achieving this goal.
5. Design interventions to increase academic and occupational self-efficacy in urban racial and ethnic minority youth. For example, engaging youth in tasks such as conducting an informational interview or researching an occupation in a library or career center may foster feelings of accomplishment and increased confidence in their abilities to succeed in career-related activities.
6. Identify ways to involve parents or legal guardians in their children's career development process.
7. Help teachers to have realistic expectations of urban racial and ethnic minority youth by ensuring that the teachers are not underestimating these students' abilities. Vocational counselors may also wish to teach racial and ethnic minority youth how to deal with their teachers' diminished expectations for success when these students encounter these expectations.
8. Work with educators to help them incorporate vocational information and themes into existing curricula.
9. Teach racial and ethnic minority youth how to deal with and address issues such as prejudice, discrimination, and racism in their pursuit of career goals. It will be important for these youth to learn not to internalize these phenomena and to learn resilience and appropriate coping methods in the face of such adversity.
10. Involve local business leaders in identifying and instituting strategies (e.g., offering work apprenticeships or meaningful part-time Jobs) that may positively and directly influence the career development of urban racial and ethnic minority youth. (Constantine, et al., 1998, p. 88-89).

Finally, because career counseling and family therapy appear so interrelated, additional cooperative research from each discipline will likely improve both practices. When making an occupational decision, students find it difficult if not impossible to remove one's parents from their career choice. Simultaneously, the young adult, making his or her career choice, will also be impacting his or her family system. "Thus, to be effective, career counselors need to understand not only the cultural values of the client...but also the multiple contexts in which he or she lives and how society has helped to frame his or her opportunities for and barriers to success" (Fouad & Byars-Winston, 2005, p. 224). Understanding a client's source of anxiety and their reasons for their career indecision is the central aspect to career counseling and cannot be accomplished by only examining the individual, without regard to his or her family and environment (Saka & Gati, 2007).

The nature of work in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century has undergone tremendous changes. With the upsurge in globalization, enormous increases in workforce diversity and communication, drastic changes in technology, and the reduction in traditional hierarchical organizational structures imply the need for changes in the 'traditional' sense of career counseling (Guindon & Richmond, 2005). Hence there is a need to for counselors to shed some of their past beliefs in only dealing with the individual and look to broaden the client's, as well as their own, perspective of what other influences are pushing or restraining this young adult.

Certainly, the job of a career counselor is made infinitely easier when one knows how the client is being supported (and by whom) as well as where the client feels unsupported. By engaging the young adult's parents, counselors can now understand the

larger dynamic in which the decision is being made and also help create a consistent and accurate message that comes from multiple areas of the youth's life.

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