Counseling for Work and Relationship

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Abstract
Counseling for work and relationship is a social constructionist perspective, informed by feminist and social justice values, and responsive to radical changes in contemporary lives, that fosters a shift in vocational psychology from helping people develop careers to helping people construct lives through work and relationship. The first and major proposition of this perspective is a new discourse for describing the construction of lives that specifies four major social contexts through which people construct lives. These social contexts are market work, personal care work, personal relationships, and market work relationships. Additional propositions of the counseling for work and relationship perspective are the centrality of narrative theory for understanding how lives are constructed and agentic action as a critical process in constructing lives. Implications for research, intervention, and training are considered.

Keywords
vocational development, narrative, agentic action

My aim in this article is to propose a social constructionist perspective, informed by feminist and social justice values, and responsive to radical

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changes in contemporary lives, that fosters a shift in vocational psychology from helping people develop careers to helping people construct lives through work and relationship. The first and major proposition of this perspective is a new discourse for describing the construction of lives that specifies four major social contexts through which people construct lives. The rationale for this new discourse is based on an analysis of the history of the discourse of career in vocational psychology and of work and family in social science, the shift from organicism to contextualism in developmental science, and the significance of work and relationship as major social contexts of lives. The four major social contexts are market work, personal care work, personal relationships, and market work relationships. In this proposition, the traditional attention to work and career in vocational psychology is incorporated in a broader, holistic conception of the central task of the field. Additional propositions of the counseling for work and relationship perspective are the centrality of narrative theory for understanding how lives are constructed and agentic action as a critical process in constructing lives.

Market work is defined as the work that people do for pay in public spheres of life as well as the work that they do in educational institutions to prepare for market work. Personal care work encompasses work that is done to care for the self, for dependent others, for relationships, and for communities in personal lives. This includes, for example, parenting, caring for older relatives, caring for one’s own personal needs, and volunteering in community organizations. Personal relationships comprise the ongoing relationships that characterize personal lives, such as relationships with friends, spouses or partners, parents, children, and siblings. Market work relationships refers to relationships with others such as mentors, bosses and supervisors, colleagues, teachers, and students. Thus, each of the four major life contexts may comprise a number of more specific work or relationship contexts.

This perspective takes the traditional concerns of vocational psychology and refracts them through a broadly construed social constructionist lens. Social constructionism, best considered a metatheory or metaperspective, began as a philosophical movement that sought to heal the split between social and personal reality resulting from the influence of Descartes (Rorty, 1999). It has had a powerful impact on the social sciences. In psychology, social constructionism addresses the ways in which personal experience and human development are co-constructed by personal actions and social reality as people engage with the social contexts of their lives (K. J. Gergen, 1991, 1999, 2009; K. J. Gergen & Davis, 1985). Social constructionism’s relevance for vocational psychology has been explored by Savickas (2005), Young and Collin (2004), and, most recently, McIlveen and Schultheiss (in press). In this
article, I interpret social constructionism broadly to encompass feminist standpoint theory, the social theory of Giddens (1991), discourse analysis, and the shift to contextualism in developmental theory. The three propositions of this perspective are each a product of the social constructionist lens.

Feminist and social justice values are increasingly important in counseling psychology and vocational psychology (Blustein, McWhirter, & Perry, 2005; Goodman et al., 2004; Vera & Speight, 2003). Although this upfront infusion of values is rooted in a critical and postmodern perspective that disavows the possibility of a value free science (Prilleltensky, 1997; Richardson, Constantine, & Washburn, 2005; Rose, 1996), the counseling for work and relationship perspective is especially indebted to feminist standpoint theorists (Haraway, 1997; Harding, 1991) who argue against the notion of the possibility of an objective view of reality, also referred to as the view from nowhere. Instead, these theorists posit that the reality we perceive is affected by our experience in and of the world, or, in other words, by the standpoint from which we experience the world.

My standpoint, for example, consists of being a woman with a social constructionist theoretical lens, feminist and social justice values, and a particular understanding of how radical change affects contemporary lives. For the feminist standpoint theorists, however, and for me, gender and feminist values are the most significant factors. Knowledge based on women’s experience and perspective will differ significantly from knowledge based on the male experience and perspective. In this article and in relation to the world of work, I argue that the experience of women requires, first of all, attention to the care work done in personal domains of life that traditionally has been done mostly by women. Furthermore, to pay adequate attention to this personal care work, a new discourse is required that encompasses both personal care work and market work and distinguishes between them. Work, per se, is also a term that is more applicable to the labor market experience of those less privileged in our social system who have little access to careers in the traditional sense of the word. This point made by Richardson (1993) has been, more recently, foundational to Blustein’s (2006, 2008, in press-a) sweeping proposals for an inclusive psychology of working.

Although the holistic emphasis on helping people with their lives rather than a more restricted focus on careers is an important, emerging theme in vocational psychology (Fouad, 2007; Hansen, 2001; Irving, 2010; McIlveen, 2009; McMahon & Patton, 2006; Patton & McMahon, 1999; Savickas, 2009; Savickas et al., 2009), the holism of the counseling for work and relationship perspective is especially indebted to the social theory of Giddens (1991) that addresses the impact of radical social change on self and identity.
Radical changes that have occurred in the occupational structure worldwide, shattering assumptions of stability and continuity for many in their experience of market work (Collin & Young, 2000; DeBell, 2006; Fouad, 2007), extend across all domains of life (Adams, Beck, & Van Loon, 2000; Beck, 1992; Dunant & Porter, 1996; Stokols, Misra, Runnerstrom, & Hipp, 2009; Wilkinson, 2001). Increasing numbers of people are disembedded from traditional cultures that provide established and scripted patterns of behavior regarding how to live one’s life (Beck & Beck-Gernsheim, 2002; Dannefer, 1999, 2003; Giddens, 1991). This situation leads many to experience the question of what to do with one’s life as a pressing existential dilemma. From this perspective, what to do with one’s market work is but one aspect of a larger dilemma.

Giddens (1991) argues that self and society exist in a dialectical relationship and that adaptation requires a reflexive project of the self in which self and identity are constantly in flux in response to radical change. I extend this analysis and propose that adaptation also requires a reflexive project of life construction in which lives need to be frequently revised in response to radical change. Giddens’s analysis of the adaptive demands of social change forces consideration of the larger and more holistic picture of the challenges facing people in the contemporary world. This basic insight, although clearly of interest to all psychologists and counselors, has particular relevance for vocational psychologists who have been most involved with helping people chart their directions in life, especially in relation to market work.

To focus solely on adaptation, however, is limited, especially with respect to market work. The context of market work is not only one of radical change; it is also one of deteriorating conditions, especially in the United States (Gosselin, 2007; Greenhouse, 2008; Hacker, 2006; Piketty & Saez, 2003; Reich, 2007). These conditions include loss of health insurance, decreased pension benefits, diminished wages, poor labor conditions, and increasing income volatility and inequality. Of these conditions, income inequality may be the most pernicious (Judt, 2010).

Thus, although vocational psychology has a distinguished history in documenting and countering inequalities in opportunity because of issues such as gender, race, and class, current developments suggest that a more fundamental change is affecting the structure of opportunities for all. In this case, and to the extent that adaptation implies adapting to prevailing social conditions, something beyond adaptation is required to respond to the radical changes in contemporary lives. In this article, I propose that the construction of lives through work and relationships be directed not only to helping people adapt but also to helping people construct lives that are psychologically healthy.
This emphasis is in line with broader efforts to link vocational issues to psychological health (Blustein, 2008; Dik & Duffy, 2009; Fouad, 2007), traditional commitments to the development of healthy selves in counseling and counseling psychology (Gelso & Fassinger, 1992; Lent, 2004), and the emerging field of positive psychology (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000; Snyder & Lopez, 2005). Helping people construct psychologically healthy lives directs attention to what is good for people beyond what is adaptive and opens up space for a critical analysis of the conditions of market work.

It is hoped that the counseling for work and relationship perspective will contribute to the conversation in vocational psychology regarding the search for a new paradigm in response to the changing conditions of contemporary times (Collin & Young, 2000; Duarte, 2006, Savickas, 2000; Schultheiss, 2007a, 2007b). The notion of paradigm change is daunting. Kuhn (1962) defined a paradigm as a set of interwoven assumptions and beliefs shared by a scientific community that underlies and sets the agenda for current research. A paradigm also is frequently associated with a particular language or discourse that is used to describe the central phenomena of interest in a field. Since vocational psychology is a field that includes research and intervention, paradigm change implies fundamental changes in the kinds of research questions considered, the ways in which answers to some of these questions may be pursued, and the nature of intervention. It also implies a potential change in language and discourse.

In this article, I argue that the earlier paradigms in the field, vocational choice and career development, were brilliant and successful solutions to pressing social needs of their times, at least for some significant proportion of the population. We are at a similar historic juncture in which sensitivity to a broader set of values, new epistemological understandings of the nature of reality and of human development, and radical changes in social life contribute to changing notions regarding social needs. The considerable ferment regarding new directions that is now taking place in vocational psychology hopefully will enable the field to be at the forefront of efforts to respond to these needs.

In the next section, the first and major proposition of this perspective, a new discourse for describing the construction of lives, is presented. First, the rationale for this new discourse, based on the history of the discourse of career and of work and family, the shift from organicism to contextualism in developmental science, and the significance of work and relationship as major social contexts of lives, is presented. A discussion of how to describe the life construction process follows, along with additional considerations regarding the importance of including personal care work as one of the four
major social contexts of lives. I then turn to a discussion of the next two propositions of this perspective, the centrality of narrative theory for understanding how lives are constructed and agentic action as a critical process in constructing lives. These three propositions together present a new discourse for describing the construction of lives, a theory that is useful for understanding how lives are constructed and a consideration of a critical process in constructing lives. Implications for research, intervention, and training follow.

A New Discourse for Describing the Construction of Lives

The History of the Discourse of Career and of Work and Family

Sherman’s (1988) historical study of the origins of vocational choice during the progressive era in American politics demonstrates how the notion of vocational choice that evolved in the early decades of the 20th century, usually associated with the efforts of Frank Parsons (1909), offered a “democratic rationale for the selection of workers into a hierarchically organized labor force” (p. 39). This rationale preserved the deeply ingrained individualism of American culture with its belief in free will while at the same time meeting the needs of the labor market during a time of industrial turmoil and economic hardship. Theories about how to make vocational choices and the vocational guidance associated with these theories offered a scientific way to alleviate some of this social turmoil. The related discourse regarding vocational choice helped to shape and co-construct how people thought about their relationship to market work. It came to be considered a choice based on personal factors (Richardson, in press).

At the same time, the discourse of vocational choice and the technology of matching persons and occupations, based on interests and abilities that was the foundation of vocational guidance, did not acknowledge that many people had to take whatever jobs they could get with no opportunity to engage in an idealized matching process. Thus, the paradigm and discourse of vocational choice masked the ways in which “choice” was, in fact, very limited or even nonexistent for some. The individualistic and democratic belief that people have a choice about the market work they do, even when, in many cases, they do not, was a major outcome of the early vocational guidance movement that permeated our culture.
The term *discourse*, used above, reflects the social constructionist understanding that language not only significantly co-constructs personal experience (Harre & Gillett, 1994; Shotter, 1993) but also frequently reflects social values, particularly those that are compatible with prevailing hierarchies of power (Foucault, 1980; Fraser, 1989; Henriques, Hollway, Urwin, Venn, & Walkerdine, 1998; Parker, 2002; Stead & Bakker, in press). In this case, the discourse of vocational choice was compatible with the demands of a growing capitalist economy.

Gottfredson’s (1996) more recent analysis of the circumscription of occupational choice echoes Sherman. Focusing on choice perpetuates a belief in free will, that the individual is the master of his or her fate, and that any problems or limitations are the fault of that individual. It marginalizes and ignores those who lack choice and opportunity and experience significant social and cultural constraints on choice.

Vocational choice evolved into career development, the second major paradigm of vocational psychology. Career was originally a sociological term used in the early 20th century to examine the mutually shaping interactions between persons or actors and social structures without any special reference to work or occupational structures (Barley, 1989). For example, early studies traced the careers of delinquents and drug users. However, over time, the term *career* became appropriated by scholars interested in market work and occupations and came to mean the ways in which market work was shaped by occupational structures. Furthermore, according to Barley, the notion of verticality over time became central to the idea of career. That is, careers were meant to progress over time, increasing in status, prestige, and security.

In concert with these scholars of career, Donald Super (1957, 1963, 1980), in the field of psychology, was largely responsible for crafting the transformation of vocational choice into career development. Similar to the ways in which vocational choice met a societal need in the early 20th century, so, too, did the idea of career fit the demands of the maturing industrial economy (Savickas, 2000). Super embedded vocational or occupational choice as a point or a stage in a more comprehensive developmental sequence of stages. There were stages that preceded choice, or the “implementation of self in choice” in Super’s terminology, and stages subsequent to choice. Although later developments in his theoretical statements made room for recycling through these stages (Super, Savickas, & Super, 1996), the centrality of choice in this process was preserved. The original conception of the developmental sequence also was consistent with the verticality of other career literature. In other words, careers were meant to progress over time in predictable stages. The marginalization of those with little choice and few opportunities
was further exacerbated in the discourse of a progressive, linear, and vertical career. This analysis, so far, is in line with Blustein’s (2006) formulation of the ways in which the paradigm of career choice and career development is not inclusive of the market work of all.

The most recent permutation of career discourse is the boundaryless career, defined as one in which people enact their careers beyond the boundaries of specific employers in concert with social networks (Arthur & Rousseau, 1996; Sullivan & Arthur, 2006). In the boundaryless career, frequent job changes are expected in the process of building or enacting a career. However, what is being extolled by this new version of career discourse are those who are able to cope better with the discontinuities and uncertainties of contemporary market work; what is being masked is not only lack of choice but also the deteriorating conditions of market work (Arnold & Cohen, 2008; Hirsh & Shanley, 1996).

At the same time as the paradigm of career development and its associated scientific and professional literature was taking shape, T. Parsons and Bales (1954) theorized that society was constituted by two separate and gendered domains of life. The work domain, gendered male, was the instrumental realm of paid employment that was supported by the expressive domain of family, gendered female. These two domains were complementary and functionally related to one another. Each was necessary for the other. Work and family discourse, associated with Parsons and Bales’s influential theory, identified work solely with the instrumental realm of paid employment. Family was identified as the expressive realm of relationships; the personal care work that was done in families was ignored. This discourse of work and family was influential in eradicating the experience of personal care work as work in the minds of women and men (Gerstel & Gross, 1987; Glazer, 1993). Career discourse, in turn, privileged a certain kind of paid employment or market work. Both discourses operate in tandem to marginalize personal care work as work.

The discourse of career development and of work and family that has become common everyday parlance for many shapes how people experience their market work and their family lives. Although obviously, the work of reproduction, the bearing and raising of children, caring for the sick, weak, disabled, and elderly, and unpaid or volunteer work in neighborhoods and communities continue to be done, these tasks are not recognized or valued as work, per se, by the language and discourse of career development and of work and family. Paid employment or market work, packaged into careers for some, has become the only work of value. People work at their jobs, are
fortunate if they have a career, and “keep busy” at home and in their private and personal lives.

Although the gendering of market work has been dissipated by the revolutionary changes in women’s roles in past decades (G. Collins, 2009), the genderization and marginalization of personal care work continues (Folbre, 2001; Richardson, 1993; Schultheiss, 2003, 2005, 2009; Tronto, 2006, 2009). Despite some changes in men’s participation rates in areas such as child care, personal care work continues to be mostly done by women and continues to be devalued, perhaps because it is mostly done by women. Although personal care work plays a more significant role in the extensive literature on women’s career development (Betz & Fitzgerald, 1987; Fassinger, 2005; Heppner & Fu, 2011; Schultheiss, 2009; Walsh & Heppner, 2006; Walsh & Osipow, 1994) that has emerged in response to the changes in women’s roles over the past decades (G. Collins, 2009), this literature continues to be constrained by the prevailing discourse of career.

More generally, the second-class and invisible status of personal care work has to do with the patriarchal values of a market economy that privileges economic production driven by growth and marginalizes social reproduction, or the reproduction of citizens and a social order supportive of the care and welfare of such citizens (Abel & Nelson, 1990; Gilligan, 2011; Razari, 2007; Schultheiss, 2009; Tronto, 2006). The marginalization of personal care work is in line with the continued gender-based inequities that affect women who do most of this work. The discourse of career development and of work and family both reflects and reproduces the prevailing values of the culture. Counseling for work and relationship hopes to counter the marginalization and devaluation of personal care work and of women by promoting a discourse that encompasses market work and the personal care work of both women and men.

I now turn to an analysis of a major shift that has occurred in developmental science in the past several decades and the implications of this shift for the new discourse proposed in this article.

The Shift From Organicism to Contextualism in Developmental Science

Super’s theory was also shaped by organicism, a powerful paradigm that dominated developmental science in the 20th century. The delineation of paradigms in developmental science can be traced to the work of Pepper (1942), a philosopher who described four different root hypotheses that explain how change happens. A root hypothesis espouses an understanding
of how change occurs that is autonomous and mutually exclusive with other root hypotheses. Each may also be true. That is, each way of explaining change may have some validity but is not compatible with other ways of explaining change. The two root hypotheses most applicable to understanding human development are organicism and contextualism. Each of these root hypotheses suggests a different way of understanding human development. Each constitutes a set of overarching ideas that set the stage for and shape the evolution of more specific theories.

Organicism considers the individual to be the primary unit of analysis and focuses on the, more or less, concealed underlying organic structure that characterizes a person’s stage of development. The context within which the person is developing is secondary. Organicism conceives of development as change with an endpoint in mind and expects early events to be related to later events. Developmental stage models exemplify organicism in that they describe how the organism, in both structure and function, is transformed over time in a series of hierarchical and sequential stages through the accomplishment of developmental tasks associated with each stage.

In line with this way of thinking, Super’s (1957, 1963, 1980) theory postulated stages of development and associated developmental tasks. Thus, career came to be seen as a part of a person similar to the ways in which other parts of persons were conceived at the time by theorists such as Loevinger on ego development, Kohlberg on moral development, Piaget on cognitive development, and Freud on psychosexual development. Each of these separate parts of a person has its own developmental line or set of stages of development. One of Super’s major intellectual accomplishments in the field of psychology was to put career on the same table as these other aspects of a person.

Although positioning career development within the prevailing developmental paradigm of the time was a significant intellectual achievement, it also had the effect of psychologizing career and further distancing it from its roots as a construct that bridged personal and social realities. Scholars and professionals who were working in the field and the larger public who were the recipients of career guidance and career counseling services increasingly viewed a career as a personal attribute with its own developmental unfolding (McIlveen, 2009). The personal and social realities that career was originally meant to represent became confounded and career came to represent the personal more than the social. The notion of career was psychologized in that it came to be seen primarily as a part of a person.

Similar to the success of the vocational choice paradigm, the discourse of career and career development, influenced by organicism, profoundly
influenced our cultural experience of market work. People now have a sense of personal ownership of their careers (McIlveen, 2009). In contemporary life, the sense of a career and how it is developing—or not—has become central to the identity and the self-esteem of those fortunate enough to have careers that fit the requirement of verticality described above. It is also an aspirational goal, either for themselves or for their children, for those who do not happen to have jobs that can be considered careers.

The matching technology, originally developed in relation to vocational choice by F. Parsons (1909) and elaborated more fully in the work of Holland (1997), was consistent with the broader and more comprehensive developmental paradigm based on organicism. It further contributed to the psychologizing of career and its central role in the identity and experience of many. At this point, the psychologized career has moved very far from its early roots in sociology.

Whereas organicism played a prominent role in developmental theories in the 20th century, contextualism can be considered the most influential developmental paradigm in the 21st century (Lerner, 2006). In contrast to organicism, the primary unit of analysis in contextualism is the individual in interaction with the social context. Contextualism does not posit an end point to development, views change as potentially continuous, and considers the possibilities that change may proceed in any number of different directions and that the most significant influence on the direction of change is what is happening in the present (Pepper, 1942).

Contemporary development-in-context theorists (Brandtstadter & Lerner, 1999; Lerner, 2006), influenced by contextualism, interpret it in terms of the plasticity of human development with highly divergent outcomes possible depending on the nature of the contexts within which this development takes place. Furthermore, development-in-context theorists posit the individual as an active agent producing or constructing his or her developmental course through agentic and intentional actions. Development-in-context models, not tied down by stage models and focused on the interactions and transactions between persons and contexts, are also better equipped to address the rapid and discontinuous change that characterizes contemporary lives.

Contextualism reopens the distinction between personal and social levels of reality that was collapsed in the psychologized career. It helps to reposition work as a context of development, rather than an aspect of self. That is, people develop in relation to the social contexts in which they participate; market work is one of these contexts. It is also only one of these contexts. Thus, contextualism enables a shift in focus from how careers develop to how people
Richardson

develop in relation to the multiple social contexts in which they participate. This holism is central to the counseling for work and relationship perspective.

It is important to note here that the shift to development-in-context theory has been under way for some time now in vocational psychology (Chartrand, Strong, & Weitzman, 1995; Collin, 1997; Duarte, 2006; Vondracek, Lerner, & Schulenberg, 1986). What is different here is the consideration of two contexts of work, market work and personal care work, and the conceptualization of relationships as developmental contexts as well (W. A. Collins & Laursen, 1999).

Reclaiming the distinction between personal and social reality in language and discourse about people participating in multiple social contexts enables greater attention to the ways in which social contexts shape and co-construct personal experience and lives. This is especially important with regard to market work contexts. The psychologized career has helped to blind us to some of the grossly inequitable changes that have occurred in the contexts of market work in recent decades. By enabling a clearer distinction between personal and social reality, in this case, between people and the contexts in which they work, I hope to promote the capacity for people to negotiate the challenging and disruptive conditions of contemporary life, especially those associated with market work, and to challenge or resist them if necessary.

Reconstructing development as the construction of lives through social contexts requires a conceptualization of the major social contexts of lives. This task is taken up below.

The Significance of Work and Relationships as Major Social Contexts of Lives

The counseling for work and relationship perspective is holistic at the personal level and at the social context level. At the personal level, it posits that people develop, not parts or aspects of people, as in career development. It is also holistic at the social context level in that it proposes a holistic conceptualization of the major contexts through which most people develop or, in the parlance of this article, construct their lives. The holism at the social context level, in many ways, represents a contemporary social constructionist interpretation of Super’s (1980) life-span, life-space theory of career development.

A social context can be defined at many different levels. After all, there are many different kinds of social contexts in which people participate. A group of friends, a set of family members, the people with whom one works at a job,
the passengers on a cruise ship, students in a class, and residents of a neighborhood are all examples of social contexts in which people participate. What is needed to have a holistic conceptualization of the contexts of development is a delineation of the major developmental contexts for most people.

Turning first to work, the discussion so far has focused primarily on work as a major social context of lives. Work can be defined as instrumental and purposive activity that produces goods, services, or social relations that have economic or social value (Richardson, 1993, 2000, 2005). Within this category, the new discourse proposes that there are two major work contexts, market work and personal care work. Each of these contexts consists of tasks, activities, and practices that constitute the work that is done in each context. The market work context includes the jobs, occupations, and work settings in which people are employed. It is about work done for pay in public spheres of life. Market work also includes the educational contexts that prepare people for participation in paid employment.

Personal care work contexts have to do with the work associated with the care of the self, of dependent others, of relationships, and of communities in personal lives. Although care work has traditionally referred to the care of dependent others, this definition of personal care work follows the expanded consideration of care work by Tronto (2006, 2009). Care of the self refers to those tasks, activities, and practices that are essential parts of daily living: cleaning, cooking, shopping, bathing, and so on. It can also refer to tasks, activities, and practices that nurture creative and expressive aspects of self such as playing a musical instrument or painting, when not done for pay. Care of dependent others refers to the care of children, those who are sick and disabled, and the elderly. Care of relationships refers to the kind of work that needs to be done to develop and maintain important relationships in one’s life, such as making time for friends, planning social activities, and visiting relatives. Caring for the community includes all of the possible ways in which people participate in their communities such as volunteer activities, attending church, and participating in local politics. All of these versions of personal care work contribute to the social good or what can be called social reproduction. In contrast, market work contributes to economic production.

This delineation of the two contexts of work extrapolates from the traditional commitment of vocational psychology to the importance of career as an aspect of development to the importance of work in general, encompassing both market work and personal care work as contexts through which people construct lives. Most recently, Blustein’s (2006, 2008, in press-a) psychology of working has reiterated the significance of working for meeting a wide range of important human needs from basic survival to self-direction.
and self-actualization. This commitment to the significance of work in human development is a critical contribution of vocational psychology to the study of human development.

The holistic conceptualization of social contexts in the counseling for work and relationship perspective also posits that relationships constitute a second and complementary set of social and developmental contexts. Relationships are defined as human associations characterized by ongoing connections and emotional bonds. The recognition of relationships as contexts through which people construct lives is indebted to current developments in vocational psychology regarding the relational cultural paradigm (Blustein, 2001, in press-b; Blustein, Schultheiss, & Flum, 2004; Flum, 2001; Schultheiss, 2003, 2007a). Groundbreaking research by Phillips, Christopher-Sisk, and Gravino (2001) challenged the individualism of traditional career theory by demonstrating the multitude of ways in which significant others affect career decision making. In proposing a nexus of culture, work, and relationship, Schultheiss (2007a) evocatively extends this analysis to describe the intermingling of these domains of life. Most recently Blustein (in press-b) has proposed a relational theory of working. However, the emphasis in this literature tends to be on identifying connections between work and relationships and developing a professional discourse that attends to the relevance of relationships for career development or the psychology of working. What I am suggesting here goes beyond the interdependence of market work and relationships to focus on relationships themselves as social contexts through which people construct lives.

The Stone Center theorists (Jordan & Hartling, 2002; Jordan, Kaplan, Miller, Stiver, & Surrey, 1991; Miller & Stiver, 1997) are instrumental in understanding relationships as developmental contexts. In their clinical theory, they counter the traditional story of separation and individuation that describes the evolution of persons from dependence on others to a state of relative independence of others. In contrast, they describe people developing through a network of increasingly differentiated relationships throughout life. Rather than independent, individuals so described are interdependent on others through life and are, in fact, embedded in relational contexts.

Clinical theory that addresses the role of relationships in promoting therapeutic change in counseling and psychotherapy further elaborates the ways in which relationships are critical for change to occur and, in fact, are contexts of change (Mitchell, 2000). We can extrapolate from this body of work to address the role of relationships outside of the clinical domain as contexts of development. Finally, there is an emerging literature that specifically addresses relationships as developmental contexts (W. A. Collins & Laursen, 1999).
The significance of these new understandings of relationship is reflected in an interesting shift in language. Contemporary discourse is just as likely to focus on *being in* a relationship as on *having* a relationship. *Being in* a relationship brings our attention to the relationship itself, as co-constructed by the participants in the relationship, rather than focusing solely on the person with whom one might be having a relationship. The language of *being in* implies relationship as context.

Within the category of relationships as contexts through which people construct lives, I distinguish between personal relationships and market work relationships. Personal relationships include friends, intimate partner relationships in legal marriages as well as those not yet sanctioned by law, relationships with children, parents, and other relatives, and relationships associated with the many different family forms that characterize modern life such as extended families, blended families, and families headed by gay couples. This relationship category is what most of us think of when we consider the importance of relationships in our lives.

Relationships associated with the context of market work include relationships with coworkers and colleagues, associates, mentors, bosses and supervisors, work-related social networks, teachers, and students. This category of relationships has been relatively neglected to date but has drawn increasing attention in recent years as researchers have investigated the various ways in which social capital or “the social resources that a person can access and utilize” (Arnold & Cohen, 2008, p. 29) affect career success. This research has focused on the impact of individual relationships such as those with mentors or other kinds of career or market work helpers as well as more broadly defined social networks and career or market work communities.

The categories of work and relationship contexts as described above are also overlapping. Participation in the tasks, activities, and practices associated with market or personal care work is central to the relationships we form with others in these contexts. Relationships formed in market work contexts with colleagues may evolve into personal friendships. Personal relationships may evolve into market work collaborations. The point here is that the boundaries among these four general contexts are fluid and permeable.

This discourse of work and relationships challenges the problematic discourse of career and of work and family that marginalizes personal care work and relationships in the context of market work and tends to assume a normative picture of people living in traditional families. It opens up the strait-jacket of these discourses to consider more fully the significance of care work in personal domains of life, of personal relationships that are not located in traditional or normative families, and of relationships associated with
contexts of market work. At the same time this discourse is inclusive of what is typically focused on in work and family discourse, that is, market work and traditional family relationships.

In addition to the discourse or language used to describe the major social contexts of lives, it is also necessary to describe the life construction process itself. This issue is addressed in the following section.

**How to Describe the Life Construction Process**

Contemporary life course theory helps to describe how people construct their lives through social contexts (Elder, Johnson, & Crosnoe, 2003; Elder & Shanahan, 2006). Life course theorists describe trajectories of development, with trajectory defined as

long in scope, charting the course of an individual’s experience in specific life spheres (or contexts) over time. Trajectories have to do with the evolution of social roles over time in relation to the social pathways available. The individual’s life course is composed of multiple, interdependent trajectories. (Settersten, 2003, p. 24)

Thus, instead of career we can talk about a market work trajectory that captures the dynamic quality of a path located in a social context that evolves over time. We can also talk about the trajectory of a relationship with, for example, an intimate partner, a child, or a mentor. In this language the distinction between personal and social levels of reality is maintained. A trajectory also does not imply any directionality. Trajectories may be progressive or they can deteriorate. For example, a marriage can improve over time or can fall apart. The major trajectories of interest in the counseling for work and relationship perspective are those located in the work and relationship contexts as defined above. Each of these social contexts may have multiple trajectories. Life course theory posits that these multiple trajectories are interrelated and interdependent.

Closely associated with the notion of trajectory, life course theory describes transitions and turning points in life trajectories (Elder & Shanahan, 2006). Transitions refer to a change in state that typically includes a role exit and a role entry. Examples of transitions include having a baby, moving away from home for the first time, and getting a new job. The notion of transitions is already common in vocational psychology with considerable scholarship on issues such as the school-to-work transition (Blustein, Juntunen, & Worthington, 2000; Lapan & Kosciulek, 2001) and the retirement transition.
More recently, Fouad and Bynner (2008) suggest that the study of work transitions, that is, transitions in market work trajectories, should be a primary focus in the emerging psychology of working. I extend this suggestion here to include transitions in other life contexts, such as marriage or divorce, or the responsibility of caring for a sick relative that may, in turn, affect market work trajectories.

More far-reaching disruptions in a life course trajectory that drastically change the subjective experience of that trajectory are referred to as turning points. Losing a job in late middle life is an example of a turning point, increasingly common in our economy, that can significantly alter the other life trajectories of the person who lost the job as well as the life trajectories of those people with whom this person is associated. For example, if a man loses his job in late middle life, it is likely to strain his personal and familial relationships, especially to the extent that others are dependent on his lost income, such as his partner and his children. These, in turn, may need to modify their market work trajectories. For example, a partner may postpone retirement and children may need to modify their plans for college. Similarly, a change in sexual identity is likely to be a major turning point that can radically change the landscape of a life, not only leading to significant alterations in a person’s personal relationships but also, quite possibly, having a major impact on a person’s market work trajectory. Immigration is yet another major turning point in which most, if not all, of a person’s significant life trajectories may be radically disrupted as well as the trajectories of those with whom she or he is involved.

As these three examples indicate, the interdependence of trajectories extends to encompass the trajectories of those with whom a person happens to be closely involved. Life course theorists refer to this as the linking of lives. It is interesting to note that a basic premise of the contextual action theory of career (Young & Valach, 2004) is the linking of lives through joint projects.

The interdependence of trajectories means that, in constructing lives, action in one context mutually and reciprocally shapes and informs action in other contexts. Vocational psychology, informed by a counseling for work and relationship perspective, will be just as interested in issues regarding how the multiple trajectories having to do with personal care work and personal relationships are evolving in people’s lives as they traditionally have been in issues related to market work. For example, to construct a life going forward, how to deal with the care of aging parents and problems of fertility are as important as developing a more satisfying or meaningful market work trajectory. These kinds of issues also are interdependent with and will have an impact on market work trajectories.
The contextualized discourse of work and relationships is particularly important with respect to market work. In contrast to the psychologized language of career, a discourse about market work contexts enables people to more clearly understand their market work trajectories as a product of their own efforts and actions and of the economic and social realities they are confronting. Market work trajectories are co-constructed. They are not solely a product of our own efforts, even though many with highly successful market work trajectories might like to think so. This contextualized discourse may help to mitigate some of the damage that is done to those who struggle unsuccessfully to develop satisfying and meaningful market work trajectories. Rather than consider their struggles solely the result of personal failures, a contextualized understanding of how market work trajectories are co-constructed by both personal and social forces will enable the kind of critical consciousness that is an essential ingredient for a social justice approach to vocational psychology (Blustein et al., 2005). These social forces include market work conditions as well as the ways in which these opportunities are inequitably distributed according to social locations such as gender, race, and class. In other words, paying attention to market work as a context can broaden our vision to more easily include these systemic social forces.

Some might wonder why this is necessary. After all, vocational psychology has a long and very rich literature having to with the impact of such social locations on the career development of diverse groups (Brown, Yamini-Deouf, & Ruiz de Esparza, 2005; Fassinger, 2001; Fouad & Brown, 2000; Leong, 1995; Leong, Hardin, & Gupta, 2011; Leong & Hartung, 2003; Liu & Ali, 2005). My contention here is that, despite these advances, a career, in the minds of most, remains a psychologized personal accomplishment or, in other cases, a personal failure. The language we have been using tends to blind us, and, perhaps, most especially the people we serve, to the ways in which the trajectories of market work are strongly affected by the broader social realities of market work. Conversely, I am proposing that the language and discourse of market work contexts and trajectories helps to open up our eyes and that of our clients to the social forces that co-construct lives.

**Additional Considerations Regarding the Importance of Personal Care Work**

Although the previous section emphasizes the interdependence of the trajectories of a life as they are constructed across all of the major social contexts of a life and the need to pay attention to the actions that construct these trajectories across all of these contexts, the traditional commitment of
vocational psychology to the importance of work in people’s lives (Richardson, 1993) continues to be salient in this more holistic framework. In particular, I argue that this traditional commitment needs to explicitly include the importance of personal care work contexts and trajectories. Up to this point, the discussion of personal care work has underlined the importance of discourse in either marginalizing or valuing this important aspect of the human experience. Here, I extend this discussion to address the interlocking problem of the devaluation of paid and personal care work and to consider some of the ways in which a revaluation of personal care work may be helpful to both women and men in negotiating the challenges of contemporary lives.

The devaluation of personal care work that is endemic in our culture and problematic across the world extends to the devaluation of paid care work or market care work (Heymann, 2006; Razari, 2007). The problems from the devaluation of personal and market care work, especially as women worldwide increasingly participate in the market work economy, pose challenges to all in the effort to accomplish the tasks of economic production and social reproduction. Most significantly, the devaluation of personal and market care work contributes to social inequality, both materially in terms of economic resources and in relation to deficits of care. As more women participate in market work, men and women with economic resources can afford to hire others, usually women, to help them perform their personal care work. Because of societal devaluation of care work, these paid care work positions are frequently poorly paid, resulting in oppressive or suboptimal market conditions for those who do this work and further leading to a deficit of care in the families of the women who take these positions. The international ramifications of this problem are dramatically illustrated by Hochschild (2003), who describes the care drain from developing to developed countries as women and mothers migrate for economic reasons, leaving children behind in the care of others.

Clearly, the problems of care work are daunting and extend far beyond the boundaries of vocational psychology. However, Tronto (2009), a feminist political and social theorist, suggests a course of action that is hopeful. She suggests that the expansion of the definition of care work beyond the care of dependent others to include care of self, relationships with others, and communities, a definition endorsed in this article, will enable care work to be considered more central in the political debate about the limits of growth, the value of sustainability, and the importance of the “making of livable lives” (p. 3). Although this may seem visionary and ideal, ideas of sustainability and limits to economic growth are important contemporary conversations. For
example, although developed countries have long been in thrall to the gross national product, which is an index of a country’s entire economic output and is used as a measure of progress, the Human Development Index, developed in part by Amartya Sen and used in international settings such as the United Nations, assesses progress in relation to education and health. Most recently, the new health care bill in the United States, passed in 2010, provides a mechanism for developing a host of new indicators of progress beyond economic output (Gertner, 2010). For vocational psychology to be aligned with such conversations in efforts to render all kinds of care work more visible and valued will help to counteract the “vicious circles of inequality” (Tronto, 2006, p. 6) to which the current conditions of care work contribute.

On a more prosaic level, the revaluation of personal care work by vocational psychologists as reflected in discourse that explicitly acknowledges personal care work as work may help people develop identities in relation to their personal care work that are a more significant source of self-esteem. People have long had identities associated with personal care work. For example, an identity as a parent is highly salient in the lives of most people who have children. What is different here is the translation of this identity into a work identity. Being a parent is not simply a personal choice. It also means that one is participating in a very important way in social reproduction. Being a parent has personal and social value. Working hard and doing a good job as a parent constitute a significant social contribution.

This issue of personal care work as a source of self-esteem is clearly important for women who have shouldered the major burden of care work in personal lives. Labeling these activities as work that has social and not just personal value will provide opportunities for enhancing the self-esteem of women who devote some or all of their time, at different points in their lives, to these tasks and activities. Revaluing personal care work may also help men build a broader base of work identities that will counteract some of the negative pressures of the male gender role that has overvalued their role as breadwinners and undervalued their personal care roles as fathers (Levant & Pollack, 1998). At the same time, men’s participation in care work will help to revalue it.

Explicit attention to personal care work as a significant life and developmental context for all people may be especially crucial for young LBGT populations who, despite growing access to opportunities for legal marriage and childrearing, are not as likely as or as easily as a heterosexual population to consider these roles as a potential part of their lives (Frank, 2010). Although marriage and parenthood are normative in heterosexual lives, this is not true for LBGT populations. An explicit awareness of personal care work as a
significant part of all lives may encourage young LBGT individuals to more easily consider the construction of broader, more social-connected lives along the lines of the definition of personal care work in this article. This, in turn, would hopefully help to mitigate some of the stress of developing a non-normative sexual identity.

The fostering of multiple work identities and multiple sources of self-esteem may also provide a psychological buffer for all who struggle with the unpredictability and the ravages of the contemporary market work economy (Blustein, 2008). Unemployment can have devastating effects on personal care work trajectories as well as market work trajectories, but at least the personal care work in our lives is a constant presence that provides a set of activities offering some respite from the vagaries of market work. More positively, a revaluation of personal care work and the encouragement of personal care work identities, especially along the more expanded lines proposed by Tronto (2009), will contribute to the quality of lives she so poignantly espouses.

A recognition and revaluation of personal care work will be instrumental in dealing with issues relevant to older adults, an increasingly large demographic in developed countries. Personal care work is an important resource for supporting healthy and positive aging (Aldwin & Gilmore, 2004; Hill, 2005; Rowe & Kahn, 1998; Simm-Rusinowitz, Wilson, Marks, Krach, & Welch, 1998). Although older adults may retire from market work, the construction of lives that include participation in productive and meaningful personal care work is critical for promoting the kind of flourishing that Keyes (2007) suggests should be a goal of health care policy. Older adults are also a major resource for accomplishing some of the important care work tasks in our social order, such as tutoring children and youth in schools and participating in a wide range of community improvement projects.

Finally, in revaluing and making personal care work more visible and important in people’s lives, we need to acknowledge that personal care work is contextualized, just as is market work. Personal care work is a context in which people develop trajectories with both transitions and turning points. For example, parenting children has a trajectory as does caring for elderly parents or developing and maintaining personal friendships. Personal care work trajectories can be as disrupted and discontinuous as any market work trajectory. In some cases, market work may be the buffer when personal care work poses insurmountable challenges. The point here is that there are two different contexts of work in which most people participate to varying degrees over the life span. Each is significant, both for individuals, as the contexts through which they construct their lives, and for our culture, which needs to more fully acknowledge the importance of both economic production and
social reproduction in the construction of lives worth living and of sustainable societies.

I turn now from a discussion having to do with a new discourse for describing the construction of lives to consider the centrality of narrative theory for understanding how lives are constructed. Following this section, the significance of agentic action as a critical process in constructing lives is addressed.

**The Centrality of Narrative Theory**

The second proposition of the counseling for work and relationship perspective is that narrative theory is central for understanding how lives are constructed. The relevance of narrative theory to vocational psychology is not new (Brott, 2001; Cochran, 1997; Cochran & Laub, 1994; Jepson, 1993; McIlveen & Patton, 2007a, 2007b; Savickas, 2005). In stating this proposition, I am especially indebted to Savickas (2005), who bases his theory of career construction on narrative. In this article, I extend the relevance of narrative theory to vocational psychology in two ways. First, I propose that narrative theory is foundational to understanding how lives, not just careers, are constructed. In making this extension, I focus specifically on the significance of the time dimension in narrative theory, that is, the ways in which narrative theory addresses the future and the past dimensions of experience. Second, I propose that narrative theory is especially well suited to highlighting how culture influences the construction of lives. Each of these points is addressed more fully below.

**The Time Dimension in Narrative Theory**

Narrative theory (Bruner, 1990; McAdams, 1993; Polkinghorne, 1988; Ricoeur, 1980; Sarbin, 1986) directly addresses the issue of time in human experience. Although there is a tendency to think that narrative theory mostly has to do with how people construct and reconstruct narratives or stories about what has already happened in their lives, it is the temporality of lives that is central to narrative theory, including both past and future dimensions. According to Ricoeur, experience before it is languaged, or prelinguistic experience, creates a demand for narrative to explain to ourselves what has happened and why. We are all hardwired to make sense of our experience, that is, to narrate it or tell a story about it. Then, as a result of the construction of a narrative or a story about our experience, actions emerge. These actions can be considered the story lines of the future, or the forward-moving edge of the narrative process. These actions, in turn, create the demand for further construction of narrative. Thus, the future is always emerging in actions.
taken in the present, and the past is always being constructed and reconstructed in the stories we tell about the past in the present.

It is my contention that helping people construct their lives through work and relationship is essentially about helping people construct their futures and, furthermore, that vocational psychology has always been about helping people with their future lives. Choosing a vocation or a career is taking an action that has to do with one’s future life. It is about what one wants to do in the future. By making the focus on the future explicit rather than implicit, I am proposing that constructing a life is essentially about constructing a life going forward.

Crites (1986), a narrative theorist who has paid explicit attention to the importance of time in narrative theory, considers the ability of a person to “pro-ject” himself or herself into the future to be an expression of hope. Crites also suggests that anticipating the future requires different narrative strategies than those required to recollect the past. Whereas narrative strategies regarding the past have to do with the construction of a coherent narrative that deals as comprehensively as possible with what has occurred, anticipating the future requires a far greater openness to possibilities and potential departures from past directions. According to Crites, “We understand backwards, Kierkegaard says, but we live forwards” (p. 165). Counseling for work and relationship is designed to help people live forward.

The future, however, is embedded in the past. Although the counseling for work and relationship perspective is essentially about helping people construct their lives going forward through work and relationship contexts, this forward motion is deeply connected to lives already lived. Ricoeur (1980) theorizes that past and future coexist in the present and are dialectically related. Narratives about what has happened in the past and taking actions directed toward the future are synergistic processes that feed one another and constitute the essence of narrative theory. Taking action stimulates narrative, and constructing and reconstructing narrative stimulates action. The interdependence of past and future dimensions of experience is highlighted by Polkinghorne (1988), who describes a narrative without a future orientation as devoid of hope and a future story line insufficiently rooted in a person’s past as contributing to the weakening of identity. Thus, helping people construct their lives going forward requires close attention to the construction and reconstruction of stories about past experience.

**Culture and Narrative Theory**

The construct of culture is at the heart of narrative theory. According to Bruner (1990), “It is culture, not biology, that shapes human life and the
human mind, that gives meaning to action by situating its underlying intentional states in an interpretive system” (p. 34). What this means in relation to the counseling for work and relationship perspective is that the actions that people take in constructing their lives derive their meanings from the culture or the interpretive systems in which they live. Culture is central in that it informs why people take certain actions. To put it another way, there are no actions that are not infused or shaped by the cultural surround. People from different cultures may engage in similar actions, but the subjective meanings of those actions are likely to differ, in part, because of culture. Thus, the forward-moving edge of the narrative process, the taking of action, is fully situated in culture.

Bruner (1990) also addresses the ways that culture informs the stories that people tell about lives already lived. Going beyond the idea that it is through the stories they tell that people construct self and identity, a central tenet of narrative theory (McAdams, 1993), Bruner theorizes that it is through narrative or storytelling, in general, that people organize their experience. Without the capacity to narrate our experience, we would be overwhelmed by the flood of sensory inputs of daily life. It is by narrating what has happened that we are able to make some kind of sense of our experience. It is here that culture once again is critical. According to Bruner, culture provides the set of story lines that are available to people in narrating their experience. He suggests that “narrative mediates the canonical world of culture and the more idiosyncratic world of beliefs, dreams, and hopes” (p. 52). For example, a recent qualitative study about women and sports examined the role of basketball in the lives of four female college student athletes who differed in cultural background including factors such as race, class, sexual orientation, and religion (English, 2011). Narrative analysis revealed how the meaning of sports in relation to these athletes’ particular cultural locations and its meaning in relation to the idiosyncratic personal characteristics and family circumstances that comprised their lives coalesced in the stories they told about their experience playing basketball. Although, for each of these young women, the experience of playing basketball was significant in their lives, its significance was saturated with cultural meanings. By situating narrative fully in culture, narrative theory enables vocational psychology to more fully address the manifold ways in which all aspects of culture permeate the social construction of lives.

Stories evolve and lives are constructed as people take action with respect to the social contexts in which they participate. I now turn to a discussion of agentic action, a specific kind of action, as a critical process in constructing lives.
Agentic Action as a Critical Process in Constructing Lives

The third proposition of the counseling for work and relationship perspective is that agentic action is a critical process in constructing lives. In vocational psychology, a focus on agentic action represents the ongoing evolution of theory in vocational psychology from an emphasis on content, that is, what people do or the kinds of choices they make, to process, that is, how they go about making choices, or, in this case, constructing lives. From this historical vantage point, early theory regarding vocational choice was all about content. The questions that drove theory, research, and intervention were the following: What is the nature or content of the occupation or career that best fits a person, and how can we help her or him make this match? Later evolutions of theory shifted the focus to processes of development, including the construct of vocational maturity (Savickas, 2001) and processes of decision-making (Phillips & Jome, 2005). The concept of decision-making includes both content and process, with content having to do with a set of alternatives or choices and process having to do with how one goes about choosing between these alternatives.

Most recently, vocational psychologists have emphasized the importance of agency and action in career development (Chen, 2006; Cochran & Laub, 1994; Fouad & Byenner, 2008; Kush & Cochran, 1993; McIlveen, 2009; Young & Valach, 2004). Most well known in this regard is social cognitive career theory, which posits that self-efficacy beliefs are central to agency (Lent, 2005; Lent, Brown, & Hackett, 1994; Lent & Fouad, 2011). The focus on agentic action in this article extends this work by proposing agentic action as a critical process in constructing lives and situating it with respect to power. The term agentic action, rather than agency, is used in this perspective to link it to other work on the importance of action in human development and vocational psychology (Brandstader, 1999; Brandstater & Lerner, 1999; Bruner, 1990; Young & Valach, 2004). In this case, however, the focus is on a specific kind of action, that is, agentic action. The meaning of agentic action and the problems posed by situating agentic action in a social constructionist lens are addressed below.

The Meaning of Agentic Action

The construct of action refers to behavior that is infused with intentional states encompassing intentions and aims as well as a broad constellation of hopes and fears, beliefs and desires, at both conscious and unconscious
levels (Brandtstadter & Lerner, 1999; Bruner, 1990). It is about action infused with subjectivity. It is about why we do things. Agentic action is action that has a particular quality. It is action characterized by purpose in which people pursue their aims in response to the circumstances of their lives. Cochran and Laub (1994) define it as a “combination of human intention and actions that results in making things happen” (p. 131). It is about having and using some level of personal power to influence the course of one’s life. In a world with few scripts, characterized by frequent disruptions and discontinuities, the importance of agentic action in directing lives becomes increasingly important (Fouad & Bynner, 2008). The capacity for agentic action or some kind of personal power over one’s life is also essential for psychological health (Williams & Levitt, 2007).

In the counseling for work and relationship perspective, what is most important are those agentic actions related to the construction of lives through work and relationship contexts. This might include, for example, actions such as seeing one’s college advisor, meeting with friends for dinner, scanning the newspaper or surfing the Internet for information regarding the current job market, meeting with a child’s teacher, and participating in diverse social networking sites.

Agentic action is reflexive. That is, agentic action implies that a person is able to look back on and monitor his or her own actions. In this, the self is both subject and object; that is, the one who acts is the self as subject, and when reflecting on these actions, the self who acted is object. The reflexivity of agentic action means that persons can assess and interpret their experience in the world and can modify their subsequent actions as a result of their reflections. For example, a parent who is struggling to help a toddler learn to share her or his toys is likely to try a number of different approaches before finding one that is effective. In each case, the parent will reflect on her or his experience, trying to figure out what was helpful and what was not so helpful before embarking on another attempt to help her or his child achieve this developmental milestone. A teacher trying to emotionally and intellectually engage a class of students will go through a similar kind of trial and error process. In each case, the reflexive processing of experience will generate new intentions that inform subsequent agentic actions. Martin and Sugarman (1999) note that cognitive capacities of memory and imagination are necessary for reflexive agentic action. Memory enables us to remember previous experiences and imagination allows us to imagine future possibilities.

The focus on agentic action does not supplant traditional emphases regarding choice and decision-making that will continue to be applicable and useful for many. Rather, the notion of agentic action depicted here draws our attention
to a deeper level of subjective functioning that addresses the personal experience of having some power over actions taken in relation to the major social contexts and trajectories of lives. This may have to do with the ability to make choices or decisions. It also may just have to do with a kind of purposefulness with which one goes about one’s daily life. Although some may argue that some people have choices and others do not, especially with respect to the social context of market work, a basic stance in the counseling for work and relationship perspective is that agentic action is a possibility for all, regardless of their social location and personal circumstances. At the same time, this stance recognizes that people differ in their capacity to engage in agentic action. A central task in helping people construct their lives going forward is to enhance and foster the capacity for agentic action.

The meaning of agentic action also varies by culture. Cultural psychologists have identified two different models of agentic action, one of which, independent agency, is endemic to Western culture, and one of which, interdependent agency, is more common in Eastern cultures (Kitayama & Uchida, 2005; Markus & Kitayama, 2004). In the first model of agency, actions taken are linked predominantly with the self-interested and self-expressive practices of an independent self who operates separately from others. In the second model, other people as well as the self are considered in the need to take agentic action. They also have identified cultural variations in the meaning of agentic functioning having to do with class within the United States.

The Problem of Agentic Action in a Social Constructionist Lens

The major problem with this construal of agentic action is power. Clearly some people are more socially favored than others with opportunities for agentic action inequitably distributed according to social locations. For example, the child of working-class parents in a small town in rural America lives, acts, and grows up in a very different social reality and set of opportunities than his middle-class urban counterpart. An African American college student attending a predominantly White institution confronts a different set of constraints and opportunities in constructing his or her educational trajectory than his or her White counterparts. By focusing attention on the co-construction of personal experience in social reality, a social constructionist lens must deal with power, one of the major dimensions of social reality.

There is a second way, less frequently considered by the social constructionists, that the potential for agentic action is constrained by circumstances. That is, potential agentic action is also limited by personal and psychological
problems. Depression, anxiety, and a host of other psychological problems that affect many people limit their potential for agentic action. Pollack and Slavin (1998) surmise that traumatic experience may have its most negative impact on the potential for agentic action. Williams and Levitt’s (2007) qualitative analysis of interviews with key figures, who represented diverse psychotherapy orientations, identified restoration of the capacity for agency as an implicit goal across schools of psychotherapy.

From this vantage point, considering constraints resulting from the social and psychological circumstances of lives, the possibility of agentic action can seem mostly illusory. To focus on agentic action in response to the circumstances of lives would appear to simply perpetuate the denial of social reality that informs the critique of vocational and career choice. This is a major problem. In response to this problem, many have struggled to preserve the possibility of agency in a socially constructed world (Chodorow, 1999; M. Gergen, 2001; Martin & Sugarman, 1999; Polkinghorne, 2000; Sampson, 1993). However, just as denial of the ways in which social reality is structured by power is a major dilemma, so too is the denial of the possibility of innovation and change on a personal level. It is here that the French social theorist Bourdieu (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992) is especially helpful.

Bourdieu views humans as embodied, innovative, and creative beings who struggle amid competing hierarchies of power in pursuit of reason, defined as freedom and equity. Although he posits that the social structure is embedded in our bodies and minds and unconsciously frames and constrains our actions, he also posits that it is a sedimentation that we can struggle with and against, using the power of our minds and our capacity for reflexive thinking, to interrogate the effect of such structures on our own subjective experience. In his theory, the social structure is not some abstract force affecting people. Rather, social structure is the set of social practices that characterize our lives. These are practices that we learn and in which we participate. As we participate in these social practices, we also perpetuate them. Although Bourdieu is largely concerned with socially located power, it is interesting that he describes the reflexive thinking needed to critically examine the ways in which the social structure is embedded in our minds as a kind of social psychoanalysis, similar to the ways in which psychoanalysis is designed to interrogate and examine the personal unconscious. Bourdieu’s analysis of the possibilities for enabling social change and innovation through critical self-analysis resonates with the call for critical consciousness in the social justice literature (Blustein et al., 2005; Prilleltensky, 2003; Smith, 2010).

To reiterate, we are unconsciously limited in our agentic action by our social and our personal or psychological circumstances. However, this
recognition of constraints does not need to translate into endorsing personal powerlessness. Rather, Bourdieu’s ideas suggest that the task for psychologists and counselors, especially for those whose work is primarily with individuals and groups of individuals, is to help people identify and take agentic actions in their lives, to identify the personal and social constraints that limit the set of possibilities that constrain their actions, and to work to expand the parameters in which they take action. In other words, the reflexive gaze of agentic action needs to be trained on both social and personal sources of disempowerment. This social constructionist understanding of agentic action is an important elaboration of its meaning in vocational psychology.

In the following sections, implications of the three propositions of the counseling for work and relationship perspective for research, intervention, and training are considered.

**Implications for Research**

The major implications for research considered in this section include research on personal care work, agentic action, life transitions and turning points, and research using narrative inquiry. Research on critical consciousness is also addressed. Each of these lines of inquiry is explicated below.

*Personal care work.* Research on personal care work is first and foremost among the implications for research suggested by the counseling for work and relationship perspective. Research on personal care work is needed to explore its meaning and its usefulness for both research and intervention practice. This research, in turn, will help to establish personal care work as a construct in people’s minds. The first step is to develop a taxonomy of personal care work that provides a more detailed description of the different kinds of personal care work. Based on such a taxonomy, an instrument can be constructed that assesses participation in personal care work. Research to explore the values of personal care work and its salience in relation to market work are next steps. Research in progress by Schaeffer (2010) to develop an Inventory of Personal Care Work Values modeled on Super’s (1962) Work Values Inventory addresses the values in personal care work. A measure of personal care work salience, modeled perhaps on Greenhaus’s (1973) measure of career salience, is also needed to assess the importance people attach to the personal care work in their lives. These measures will enable basic research on patterns of participation in personal care work, the values of personal care work, and the salience of personal care work across a broad range of individual differences. This kind of basic descriptive research will
highlight and make more visible an important arena of human activity. It will also enable a more sophisticated investigation of specific aspects or components of personal care work. Of special interest will be gender differences in these personal care work variables.

The literature on men and masculinity offers an interesting approach to the study of the significance of personal care work in male development. Considerable research has detailed the negative implications of traditional notions of masculinity on men’s development (Levant & Pollack, 1998; O’Neill, in press). Addis, Mansfield, and Syzdek (2010) suggest that, instead of addressing masculinity as the problem, researchers should turn their attention to the study of more contextualized sites of gendered behavior and activity. Personal care work is a prime example of a gendered social practice. Questions to be posed include a more detailed examination of factors that contribute to or limit men’s participation in personal care work. Equally as important is investigation of the impact of participation in personal care work on a man’s sense of self and masculinity. Thus, rather than considering masculinity an internal attribute or trait, research would focus on the gendered social practice of care work as a site where masculinity is constructed.

Of particular interest is research that describes the relationship between personal care work and market work for different kinds of people. Although the work and family literature tends to focus on conflict between these two domains (Bianchi, Casper, & King, 2005; Ferraro, 2003; Moen & Roehling, 2005; Schultheiss, 2006), this literature, for the most part, does not address personal care work as a separate construct. The more fine-grained analysis enabled by specific attention to personal care work may provide a very different picture of the nature of the relationship between market work and personal care work. This line of research is especially important for women, who are likely to be more burdened by the competing demands of market work and care work.

Research on personal care work may be particularly helpful in examining how people construct psychologically healthy lives in the later decades of life. As the meaning of retirement deconstructs because of loss of market work in late middle life, the economic need many people face to continue doing market work past the traditional retirement age, and increasing longevity (Laslett, 1996; Moen, 1998), the later decades of life will be distinguished by increasingly variability in the patterns of market and personal care work. Over time, personal care work, especially as broadly defined in this article, likely becomes more prominent in most people’s lives. Research on the activities of older adults that is designed to explicitly examine personal care work will be able to document patterns of participation in personal care work and
the role of this kind of work in relation to successful aging. Just as the transition to adulthood has become an extended period of exploration that we now call emerging adulthood, the transition to retirement among older adults can also be construed as an extended period of exploration in which social engagement shifts from market work to personal care work.

Agentic action. A second topic is research on agentic action. The investigation of how and to what extent people engage in agentic action in their social contexts lends itself to qualitative inquiry (Duberly, Cohen, & Mallon, 2006; Higgins & Nairn, 2006). To advance research in this area, studies cited earlier (Kitayama & Uchida, 2005; Markus & Kitayama, 2004) suggest that investigation of cultural variations in the expression of agentic action is essential. This line of research also needs to find ways to distinguish variability in the strength of agentic action. Although a basic premise of the work and relationship perspective is that all people have the potential for agentic action in their lives, individuals differ in their capacity to make things happen given similar circumstances. Untangling this kind of cultural and individual variation will be a significant research contribution. It is important to note that the identification of cultural and individual variation in the manifestation of agentic action is critical for intervention practice. To be able to foster agentic action with respect to work and relationship contexts, counselors and psychologists first need to hear clearly how their clients are expressing agentic action.

A critical question for inquiry on agentic action is the extent to which it varies in relation to social context. As McIlveen (2009) so well points out, career discourse has fostered awareness in people’s minds that they need to engage in planful and purposeful action to manage their careers. The question is whether and to what extent people engage in agentic action with respect to the other major social contexts of lives, that is, developing personal and professional relationships or their personal care work trajectories. Within this more general question, examples of more specific questions to be addressed include the following: What is the impact of losing a job on the ability to engage in agentic action to find a job? How does this differ for people in different social locations? To what extent does agentic action characterize the trajectories young people construct through emerging adulthood and how do outcomes differ for those characterized by more or less agentic action?

Another example of research inspired by the social constructionist lens is the extent to which technology has altered the possibilities for agentic action in different social contexts. For example, one might expect that awareness of, positive attitudes toward, and the use of online dating venues would affect the level or kind of agentic action expressed in relation to finding an intimate or romantic partner.
Life transitions and turning points. A third implication of the counseling for work and relationship perspective is to extend Fouad and Bynner’s (2008) recommendation to prioritize the study of work transitions in vocational psychology to encompass the study of transitions and turning points across work and relationship contexts. Beyond specific market work transitions such as the school-to-work transition, unemployment, or underemployment, these include, for example, divorce or the death of a spouse or partner, chronic or debilitating illness of self or significant other in one’s care, the transition to parenting, having a child with a significant disability, and the transition to retirement.

Of particular interest is the study of immigration that constitutes an extremely disruptive turning point in lives and that has not been, to date, a central topic in vocational psychology, though recent efforts by L. Cohen, J. Arnold, and M. O’Neill through the Career and Migration Seminars at the University of Loughborough hope to redress this situation. Immigration constitutes one of the major discontinuities of contemporary life that is rapidly increasing in velocity with estimates ranging from 75 million immigrants in 1965 to 175 million in 2000 (Ueda, 2007). It includes both the highly skilled and those with little or no education, voluntary immigrants, legal and illegal immigrants, and those forced to flee to save their lives. The holistic and contextual frame of the work and relationship perspective will facilitate research on how people negotiate this major and, increasingly common, turning point.

One central line of inquiry regarding life transitions and turning points is to investigate the role of agentic action in the negotiation of life transitions and turning points. Narrative-based approaches to qualitative inquiry will facilitate this inquiry (Clandinnin, 2007; Hoshmand, 2005; Mischler, 1995; Riessman, 2008). Besides providing rich descriptions of how people negotiate these transitions, this body of research may enable the identification of patterns of negotiation that may be helpful to others and to those who are engaged in intervention practice with people going through these kinds of difficult life transitions and turning points. Of critical interest in this line of research is attention to the interrelatedness of life trajectories, how the set of significant trajectories that characterize a life are affected by a specific transition or turning point, and how these other trajectories might or might not buffer the effects of the transition. It is important to note that this expansion of the trajectories and turning points of concern, as noted above, includes a number of health-related issues. These are issues that radically affect lives and are well within the province of the counseling for work and relationship perspective. They are also issues relevant to counseling intervention.
**Narrative inquiry.** As indicated above, research using a narrative approach to inquiry is particularly well suited to the study of the broad range of life transitions encompassed by the counseling for work and relationship perspective. It also is an approach to research that enables the examination of the interlacing of culture and personal and familial factors in human experience as described in the study by English (2011) in an earlier section. Narrative inquiry is a method that capitalizes on the role of narrative in human experience. According to Hoshmand (2005), “Human experience is narrativized in the sense that lived experience, when recounted, involves temporal and causal coherence” (p. 180). In other words, narrative inquiry is a way of knowing or an epistemology that attempts to capture how human beings make sense of their lived experience by explaining why something happened in their lives or why they behaved in a certain way, all of which is recounted in the stories they tell about their experience as these experiences have occurred in some kind of time frame. It is a valuable lens for research informed by the counseling for work and relationship perspective as its goal is to describe the human experience situated in time.

Narrative research is also a newly evolving and challenging approach to research that it is radically different from the more typical research in psychology that follows a logico-scientific method, or what Bruner (1986, 1990) refers to as paradigmatic knowing. It is also different from other kinds of qualitative inquiry that might use narrative data but do not employ a narrative method in the analysis of these data. In contrast to paradigmatic knowing, narrative research does not produce facts about human nature or human experience. Rather, the product of narrative research is a narrative that is fully contextualized. Such a product is a co-construction of researcher and research participant that results in complex accounts of lived experience involving issues having to do with the identity of the researcher, how the story or narrative was obtained, whose voice is privileged in the narrative account, and the social-historical setting and time in which the experience took place and in which it was recounted (Hoshmand, 2005; Riessman, 2008). It is an emerging mode of inquiry in the social sciences that is most promising for vocational scholars.

**Critical consciousness.** Research is needed on how critical consciousness affects the construction of lives. Although critical consciousness is central to the understanding of agentic action in this article and is discussed as a major implication for intervention practice in the next section of this article, we have little research on the effects of critical consciousness. One important study by Diemer and Blustein (2006) found a positive relationship between two measures of critical consciousness and progress in career development as
measured by vocational identity, career commitment, and work salience. The relationship between critical consciousness and indices of psychological health and well-being is another important avenue of inquiry.

**Implications for Intervention**

Counseling for work and relationship has implications for a range of intervention practices, including the specific practice of career counseling and the more general practice of counseling and psychotherapy, especially as counseling and psychotherapy is practiced by those who consider helping clients move forward in their lives as essential for successful outcomes (Summers, 2001; Wachtel, 2008) or who advocate for integrating personal and career counseling (Betz & Corning, 1993; Blustein, 2006, 2008; Blustein & Spengler, 1995; Hackett, 1993; Juntunen, 2006). It also has implications for education.

**Career Counseling and the More General Practice of Counseling and Psychotherapy**

*The need for a holistic approach.* The most important implication for career counseling is that the counseling for work and relationship perspective extends the trend toward holism in the career field toward helping people construct lives, not careers. To the extent that the general practice of counseling and psychotherapy also attends to issues having to do with helping people construct their lives going forward, counselors and therapists also need to address the full range of issues confronting clients as they engage in the major social contexts of their lives, including market work. The new discourse of work and relationship structures this holism in ways that draw specific attention to two neglected social contexts, personal care work and market work relationships. Although the importance of personal care work has been a major theme in this article, market work relationships are becoming increasing significant, as noted by Fouad (2007) and by Arnold and Cohen (2008).

The counseling for work and relationship perspective also helps to sensitize intervention practice to the interrelationship of developmental trajectories. Plans regarding market work need to take other life contexts into consideration and vice versa. For example, a young gay man who is looking for a job may struggle between good job prospects in a small city and a desire to be in a large urban center where he is more likely to find a relationship.
These are important considerations that the new discourse of work and relationship helps to highlight.

*The significance of narrative theory and agentic action.* A second implication for both career counseling and the more general practice of counseling and psychotherapy results from the centrality of narrative theory for understanding how people construct their lives going forward, especially its attention to the temporality of lives. We are always moving through time. The use of narrative theory enables a clearer and more explicit attention to the ways in which intervention needs to address how people engage with their unfolding futures through their participation in the social contexts of their lives. What narrative theory underlines is the synergy between construction and reconstruction of stories about the past and the emergence of the new story lines of the future. Thus, although the counseling for work and relationship perspective is future oriented, intervention practices informed by this perspective must also engage clients in constructing and reconstructing the stories of their pasts or lives already lived.

Intervention practices informed by the counseling for work and relationship perspective will also be especially interested in helping clients become more agentic in the actions they take with respect to the major social contexts of lives. A process for helping clients engage in agentic action, informed by narrative theory and the social constructionist understanding of agentic action described earlier, can be delineated. The first step in this process is to help clients pay attention to and become comfortable with their subjectivity, that is, with the stream of intentional states that infuse their actions and, that, in turn, shape the story lines that emerge through these actions. By directing attention to their inner subjective experience, counselors and psychologists enable clients to become familiar with the inner stream of intentional states that constitutes their subjectivity and to be cognizant of how these states affect the actions they take. Chen (2006) evocatively describes this as “enabling the client to have a reflexive dialogue with his or her subjectivity” (p. 134).

A second step is to help clients engage in the reflexive processing of experience that relies on an awareness of their inner lives. Reflexive processing of experience refers to the ability to engage in actions, to reflect back on this experience, to identify thoughts and feelings that emerge in relation to this experience, and to revise and reconsider subsequent actions depending on the nature of the experience and the subjective responses or intentional states that result from the experience. The reflexive processing of experience enables a constant reorienting of action affected by the feedback loop of experience. It is fundamental to the reflexive project of constructing a life and a self.
A third step is to help clients examine the extent to which the actions they take are, in fact, in line with what they want to do and can be characterized as agentic. It is here that both personal and social sources of disempowerment that may negatively affect or constrain the ability to engage in agentic action need to be explored. This may require inquiry directed toward personal issues that are getting in the way of agentic action or barriers resulting from social circumstances.

Social constraints operating at unconscious levels bring into consideration a fourth step, which is to challenge, when appropriate, the horizons of opportunity or the parameters of possible action considered by clients because of unconscious and culturally embedded frames of expectations. Fostering this kind of critical consciousness enables people to critically reflect on their actions, as informed by their own intentionality or intentional states, and to identify the ways in which this action itself, which seems to flow so naturally from subjective intentional states, is, in fact, shaped and informed by prevailing systems of power and hierarchy. It makes possible the expansion of horizons of opportunity.

This description of four steps in the process of helping clients engage in agentic action, especially in relation to the work and relationships in their lives, is at least one step forward in the search for counseling and psychotherapy practices that are both personally and socially transformative (Smith, 2010). Thus, although limited in scope, it addresses the critical issue of the psychopolitical validity of intervention practices raised by Prilleltensky (1997, 2003).

The question of language. The discourse of career and career development and of work and family continues to shape how people think about the work they do and their relationships. These are the prevailing discourses. The discourse I am suggesting here, especially the delineation of major life contexts of market work, personal care work, personal relationships, and market work relationships, is unfamiliar and probably seems awkward. I hope it is helpful for professionals to have a different way of organizing their thinking about the work they are doing, but clients are not likely to be interested in modifying their language systems. However, the introduction to clients of a new language and a new way of thinking about their lives as part of the counseling process may be an important way to advance the goal of fostering critical consciousness, especially its educative component. Having conversations with clients is, in itself, a powerful intervention. In an important article, Strong (2007) elucidates a social constructionist understanding of conversation in counseling as a powerful way to engage with clients in co-constructing their experience of the world. He also demonstrates its potential for addressing social justice concerns and fostering competence in clients. In
similar ways, conversations with clients that introduce the new language of the counseling for work and relationship perspective may open the window for pursuing the educative component of critical consciousness.

**Education**

*In schools.* Interventions designed to teach young people about the work of work and to prepare them for their future work lives will need to be enlarged to encompass personal care work as a significant venue of work activity, to enable young people to develop a holistic orientation toward the construction of their future lives, and to develop an appreciation for the interrelationship of life trajectories. The inclusion of personal care work as one of the major social contexts of lives will hopefully enable young people to develop the kind of balanced “lives worth living” described by Tronto (2009).

More specifically, the significance of narrative and the description of the four aspects of the process of engaging in agentic action suggest ways to build the development of skills applicable to constructing lives into a vocational curriculum. Young people at all levels can be encouraged to construct and reconstruct the stories of their lives and their thoughts about future directions, in relation to both future directions within the context of schooling as well as future directions after they leave school. They also can be taught the four aspects of the process of engaging in agentic action, with schools ideally structured to enable increasing and age-appropriate parameters for agentic action on the part of students. By developing narrative competence and learning to engage in agentic action, they will, in fact, be learning basic tools for constructing their future lives.

*An expansion of the educative component of critical consciousness.* Left out of this discussion so far is critical consciousness about the world of market work itself, a consciousness that is facilitated by shifting discourse from career to market work as context. Emphasizing opportunities, and access to opportunities in the context of market work does not directly address the structure of opportunities itself. The discourse about access to opportunities directs attention away from a more critical examination of the ways in which a society is engaging with and shaping forces that are radically affecting the context of market work (Irving, 2010; Irving & Malik, 2005) in favor of the struggle for access to the opportunities that do exist.

What I am suggesting here is to expand the notion of critical consciousness to encompass an educative component that includes critical education about social practices in market work contexts that profoundly affect people’s lives. What is happening in the world of market work is not a given; it reflects
how a society engages with and co-constructs the social forces that affect lives. Such an educative component would include issues such as the ways in which social policy does or does not provide a security net for displaced workers, the pros and cons of unionization, the kinds of supports provided for personal care work, workers’ rights, the realities of access to lifelong education, and the relationship between immigration and jobs. What is important is that we do not simply see the context of market work itself as a given and as one with which we must cope or struggle for opportunity. In democracies, citizens have a voice in how a society responds to forces affecting market work. Educating students and clients to develop their voices regarding how the social practices of a society construct and distribute market work opportunities is a vital contribution vocational psychology can make to elaborating the meaning of critical consciousness.

**Implications for Training**

The counseling for work and relationship perspective has a number of important implications for training. First, and most important, is the scope of vocational courses taught as part of most master’s and doctoral-level counseling and counseling psychology programs. Helping people construct their lives going forward through work and relationship implies educating students to help with a whole host of life issues beyond the market work concerns that have been the staple of the curriculum. Three major issues within this broad rubric that should be addressed, for example, are aging and retirement, parenting, and immigration. The definitions of market work and personal care work enable the integration of these kinds of issues into the curriculum. Within this broader scope, curriculum having to do with market work will continue to be important and central, not the least because market work has to do with the ability to support oneself or survival in Blustein’s (2006) taxonomy of needs. Market work, in many ways, is what makes possible the rest of lives.

A second implication is the need for counselors and counseling psychologists to be competent both in the vocational area as well as in the more general practice of counseling and psychotherapy. Although future oriented, the counseling for work and relationship perspective highlights the need to engage clients in constructing and reconstructing stories about the past. Whether doing career counseling or counseling and psychotherapy, both past and future concerns are relevant. Career counseling will be enhanced by the ability to engage in the more extended personal explorations associated with counseling and psychotherapy. On the other hand, the more general practice
of counseling and psychotherapy will be enhanced by expertise in dealing with people’s concerns regarding their future directions in life.

A third implication is that narrative theory should be considered a core theory in vocational courses along with curriculum designed to teach students how to engage their clients in the examination of their inner worlds to foster agentic action along the lines addressed above. In this curriculum, teaching students how to engage their future clients in the process of critical consciousness is central.

Narrative theory also provides a way to integrate multicultural concerns into the vocational curriculum as well as the broader curriculum of counseling and counseling psychology programs. As noted earlier, every narrative or story about a life is embedded in and saturated with culture. The connection between narrative and culture is especially important for training counselors and psychologists to do the kind of social justice-oriented work suggested by the counseling for work and relationship perspective. Encouraging people to reflexively examine the ways in which their social locations affect their agentic actions and subsequent goals and projects, or helping people develop critical consciousness, needs to be accompanied by an acknowledgment that agentic action is also rooted in culture. People are not just empowered or disempowered by their social locations. Social locations are also associated with cultures with which people identify and in which they want to participate. People may be very aware of how their horizons are limited by their culture and may nevertheless wish to stay within these horizons.

A fourth implication for training is that a vocational curriculum needs to provide a more comprehensive and critical understanding of the market work context. Counselors and psychologists need to know not only about the kinds of market work that are available and the ways in which social locations affect the distribution of workers but also a broader consideration of the nature of contemporary market work and how it is being socially constructed by forces such as globalization and technology, corporate and industrial practices, and government policies. This knowledge is essential for students to be able to engage in the educative component of critical consciousness, whether they are working primarily in schools or doing more indirect educative work in the broad range of counseling and psychotherapy practices.

Conclusion

In conclusion, I would like to offer some reflections on the new discourse that I am suggesting, which is likely to be the most challenging aspect of the counseling for work and relationship perspective. On one hand, career,
career development, and career construction are terms and discourse with which we and the broader public are not only most familiar, they are terms that we like. Most people associate stability, security, and success with career discourse. There probably is a tendency to cling even more tightly to this discourse in the face of the uncertainties and discontinuities of contemporary life. Discourse about market work trajectories does not have the heavily laden positive connotations of career.

On the other hand, most would agree that stability and security in market work for most people, now and for the future, are illusions. Here it would seem that career discourse might, in fact, be dysfunctional. Although discourse about the boundaryless career preserves the positive connotations of career and combines it with a positive spin on uncertainty and discontinuity, the boundaryless career can go only so far in masking uncertainty, discontinuity, and the deteriorating conditions of market work.

In contrast, discourse that includes personal care work can be liberating, especially to the extent that it acknowledges and recognizes the activities of personal care work as socially valued and socially engaged work. Most people have positive associations with the care work they either do or are the recipients of in their personal lives, even though they are not used to thinking about it as care work. It would seem that a discourse that includes market work and personal care work offers a more realistic and broader base for stability and security in lives as well as an emphasis on the kinds of values that will contribute to the construction of “lives worth living” (Tronto, 2009).

Hopefully, the old discourse with contemporary interpretations, the new discourse suggested here, and other new discourses being suggested such as life designing (Savickas et al., 2009) and integrative life planning (Hansen, 2001) will all enter our lexicon as suggestions for future directions or, in the language of narrative theory, as possible story lines in our professional futures. As time goes by, the story that will be told will reflect the efforts of all who engage with this project of charting a new course in a rapidly changing world.

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